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Dispossessed Lives

CHAPTER 3

Agatha: White Women, Slave Owners, and the Dialectic of Racialized “Gender”

To Sum up the character of Jamaican ladies, I shall conclude with this remark; that, considering the very great defects in their education, and other local disadvantages, their virtues and merits seem justly entitled to our highest encomium; and their frailties and failings to our mildest censure.

—Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*

[The] said Dudley Crofts came up to her said Father's house [her father being off the island] . . . and after dinner he the said Dudley Crofts claimed the promise which the said Deponent had before made to him and which promise this Deponent then very unhappily complyd with by suffering the sd Dudley Crofts then to commit adultery with this Depont. And which he afterward from time to time repeated with this depnt as they had convenient opportunities.

—Agatha Moore, Deposition, 1743

The reason which induced [me] to demand such a recognizance was because [of] a complaint made to [me] by the sd Daniel Moore against a Negro of [Crofts]. The negro [sic] had taken his Masters Sword which [Crofts] acknowledged to [me] he had directed him to take and went the proceeding night therewith disguised in womens Cloaths to the house of Thomas Withers Esqr where Mr Moore lived

and where the Criminal Correspondence between [Crofts] & the wife of the sd Mr Moore was carried on.

—Hon. Thomas Harrison, Deposition, 1743

On a night “between October 2 and 4, 1742,” an enslaved boy left his owner’s house alone, dressed as a woman and armed with a hidden sword.¹ He headed toward High Street to the unhappy house of Daniel Moore and his wife Agatha.² Agatha Moore was engaged in an adulterous affair with Dudley Crofts, the enslaved boy’s master. Perhaps Dudley Crofts ordered the boy to go to the Moore residence to kill Daniel Moore, the cuckolded husband. Daniel’s wife, Agatha may have urged Crofts to get rid of her husband so she and Crofts could marry. It is unknown what time the boy arrived at the Moore residence or whom he met when he reached the tree in the garden. It could have been a nurse residing with the Moore family or another male slave named Toney.³

We will never know the exact circumstances of his discovery, but the danger of being caught armed with a lethal weapon must have been terrifying. Attempts to harm a white person, instigate or participate in a revolt, or otherwise enact one’s will often led to a death sentence. Execution was usually painful and slow.⁴ Soon after the boy’s arrival to the Moore household, he was caught by someone and arrested. He may have spent at least a few days in the Cage awaiting trial by three freeholders and two justices of the peace, all white men. Always crowded, the Cage was dank in the tropical October of Barbados, but he would at least have been in the company of other slaves awaiting similar fates. If the Cage once held riotous sailors, it was now reserved exclusively for the enslaved.⁵ Perhaps these slaves consoled each other inside the cell; maybe they fought for space. Few conversations among the enslaved reached the archive in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Barbados, much less the intimate exchanges of those confined in the Cage. No records of the boy’s trial exist. Although he would be asked to answer for his presence at a household to which he was not bound, his words and name were not recorded in the archive. In the Bridgetown “slave court” he would be surrounded by white men, some of whom spoke on his behalf, and others against him. The legal system in Barbados did not allow any slave to testify or defend him/herself in a court of law.⁶ He was not allowed to testify or offer a defense. Yet the court acquitted him of all charges.⁷

Crofts Versus Harrison

The apprehension of the armed boy disguised as a woman brought the domestic woes of Agatha and Daniel Moore into public notice and subsequently to the Governor's Council, the highest court of appeals in this British colony. Agatha Moore's illicit liaison with Dudley Crofts had begun at least as early as July 1740. They were discovered in May 1741 when Daniel Moore, who had been sleeping upstairs in his own home, caught Crofts and his wife together downstairs.⁸ To aggravate matters, in the midst of the affair, on 3 May 1742, Agatha Moore gave birth to a daughter whose father was possibly not her husband.⁹ What ensued from these circumstances was a multifaceted legal web of petitions, criminal trials, and countersuits as the Governor's Council tried to sort out what, if any, crimes had been committed by the parties involved, and who would ultimately pay recompense for any damages incurred.

The Honorable Thomas Harrison, a justice of the peace for the precinct of Bridgetown, sat at the heart of this legal chaos. He presided over the investigation against Dudley Crofts for the "crime" of adultery and the separate case against the slave boy for purportedly conspiring to murder. And it was Harrison who was eventually held (ir)responsible for his handling of the proceedings.¹⁰ Gathering several witnesses to testify against Crofts for both alleged crimes, Harrison presumed Crofts' guilt and imposed on him over ten thousand pounds in security bonds. In retaliation, Crofts petitioned the Governor's Council for redress from financial and character damage. On 4 October 1743, the Governor and Council held a ten-hour session to review all depositions, petitions, and complaints related to Crofts' plea of redress and Harrison's statement defending his own actions.¹¹ Among the pieces of evidence gathered and read during the council meeting was a full deposition by Agatha Moore discussing her role in the affair. In addition, several other witnesses commented on whether Dudley Crofts purposely sent his armed and disguised enslaved boy to his rival's house or whether a member of the Moore household summoned the boy.

This chapter closely analyzes the legal deposition of a white adulteress and scrutinizes the movements of an enslaved boy in gendered disguise. Examining the domestic space of a white household, and the events of the Crofts versus Harrison case itself, allows us to historicize and theorize white female power and sexuality in this time and place. The gender and sexual

economy governing the brothel analyzed in the previous chapter also shaped dynamics within and legal judgements about this white household. Examining Agatha Moore through the optics of the brothel and enslaved women's experiences as sexualized laborers elucidates how the material and sexual economy of slavery shaped white domesticity. Both the testimonial depictions of the enslaved boy's movements and Agatha Moore's language describing her illicit sexual behavior reveal how discourse, prevailing racial and gendered ideologies about black women, and (ab)uses of power produced the violent sexual realities enslaved women and men experienced in colonial Caribbean slave societies. Put differently, I show how Agatha Moore's story cannot be separated from Rachael and Joanna Polgreen in Chapter 2: each powerfully informed and shaped the other.

Demography, Domesticity, and Sexual Dialectics

In eighteenth-century Bridgetown, like many other Caribbean port towns dependent on domestic work, enslaved women were in the demographic majority.¹² Although population statistics are rare for this period, Jerome Handler estimates that in 1786 there were approximately 62,115 slaves, 16,167 whites, and 838 free(d) people of color living in the colony.¹³ No census data exist after 1715 that would provide population numbers; but Pedro Welch has detailed percentage estimates of Bridgetown's enslaved population relative to whites and free(d) people of color before the nineteenth century.¹⁴ According to Welch, during the eighteenth century the enslaved population of Bridgetown remained relatively stable at about 16.5 percent. The free(d) population of color gradually rose from just over 20 percent in the 1740s to near 40 percent in 1812.¹⁵ In addition, the gender demographics of Barbados' white population were unique for a Caribbean colony. Unlike Jamaica and the Leeward Islands, Barbados sustained a slight majority of women within the white population by the early eighteenth century.¹⁶ In comparison to Jamaica, where white women never exceeded more than 40 percent of the white population into the late eighteenth century, by 1715, "white women outnumbered white men in Barbados by one percent, and by seven percent in 1748, leveling off at about fifty-two percent female for the remainder of the slavery period."¹⁷

In Bridgetown, these black and white female majorities influenced the sexual-cultural character of urban slave society. For example, Hillary Beckles's scholarship challenges Caribbean historiography that focuses on the

planter “patriarch” by showing that “58 per cent of slave owners in [Bridgetown] were female, mostly white . . . [and] women owned 54 per cent of the slaves in town.”¹⁸ Furthermore, he points out that “white women also owned more female slaves than male slaves.”¹⁹ The relatively smaller population of white women in Jamaica and the Leewards shaped their economic, social, and sexual opportunities in a distinctly different way than for white women in Barbados.²⁰ The demographic majorities of black and white females in Barbados makes consideration of relationships *between* women crucial to understanding the nature of slavery, the cultural constructions of sexuality, and the economic and sexual power of white women in this town. These issues together shaped both perceptions and the daily lives of urban enslaved women.²¹

Over the last few decades, scholars of slavery and the Atlantic world have turned their attention to the role of white women of various classes in plantation economies from the early modern era through the antebellum period of the United States.²² This focus has most recently included white women in the colonial British Caribbean.²³ Revising an older historiography that positioned white women as victims of patriarchal colonial societies under slavery, new scholarship interrogates white women’s power in and support of the Atlantic slave economy. These studies range from the Caribbean to England, North America and intercolonial networks, and from the colonial era through the antebellum United States.²⁴ Given Bridgetown’s demographics, a close analysis of the records white women left behind conveys how integral and intertwined they were in the relations and production of slavery as well as what benefits they reaped from racial and gender privilege. Cecily Jones delineates throughout her work “that slaveownership directly and indirectly provided white women with wealth, social status, and a measure of power.”²⁵ Pervasive race privilege also afforded poor white women elevated social status above women of African descent.²⁶

The following discussion also builds on a foundation of feminist scholarship on gender and slavery. Scholars have illustrated how integral enslaved women were to the reproduction of enslaved labor.²⁷ They have also shown how early modern Europeans used their ideas about African women to objectify and abuse their bodies through hard labor and sexual exploitation.²⁸ As recent work on colonial Barbados explains, analyzing the raced and gendered constructions of white women indicates how they, too, were implicated in and influenced by the production of slavery.²⁹ For example, probate records of white women in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries

demarcate how white women and their female relatives reproduced wealth by bequeathing slaves to daughters, nieces, and female friends.³⁰ From their economic participation in slavery—their ability to own, exchange, and bequeath enslaved people—and despite the social and legal limitations, white women gained power: economic, social, racial, and sexual.

Agatha Moore's case offers an opportunity to expand analyses of both gendered and "genderless" female bodies by illuminating the relationship between white women and enslaved women's gendered positions. As white women accumulated racialized and gendered power through slavery, enslaved women were relegated to "genderless" objects by the hegemony of "ethnicity." This hegemony became the primary means through which black bodies were captured for slave ships and the mode by which they were exchanged.³¹ If we follow Hortense Spillers's conceptualization, in this historical moment gender was a privilege of the dominant (white) class and produced in the domestic sphere of family, motherhood, and patriarchal and patronymic structures. Spillers argues that the theft of African bodies "severed the captive body from its motive will, its active desire," losing gendered distinctions through the project of commerce in human flesh.³² Moreover, in the system of racial slavery and the dehumanization that accompanied this condition "the [black] female body and the [black] male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific."³³ In this way, she argues, enslaved women became genderless. Notwithstanding the ways in which African captives made meaning of their varied and complex ethnic identities,³⁴ the imposition of "externally imposed meanings and uses" during the process of capture and commodification turned captives into sexual repositories, objects of commerce, and relentless, destructive desire.³⁵

Slavery permitted the redefinition of enslaved women by dominant groups; the power of white supremacy depended on the dialectical contours between whites and the enslaved. Through objectification, "the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness . . . resonating through various centers of human and social meaning."³⁶ This "pornotroping" and "sheer powerlessness" of enslaved women and men—that is, the fungible, hypersexualized, and infinitely breachable black body—can be read in dialectic relation to white women as wives, slaveholders, sexualized, and racialized beings. These conditions become particularly visible through the enslaved boy disguised as a black woman. His performance as a black female, I will show, enabled white men

and women to act out their transgressive desires and disrupt the codes that constructed the gendered dichotomy between white women and black women without accompanying racial denigration. Ultimately, white women served an important function in Bridgetown and gained racial and gendered privilege through exclusion of enslaved women from the “benefits of *patriarchalized* female gender.”³⁷ This term refers to gender constructed under dominant (white) patriarchy, in which the female should be a submissive, protected, nurturing, and virtuous mother. The highly sexualized social context of this slave society in which enslaved women were rented out for sex, violated by their male and female owners, and sold as real estate, enabled a woman like Agatha Moore to capitalize on the benefits of patriarchalized gender in significant ways.

White women in slave societies caught disrupting normative gender, racial, and sexual expectations could also deploy rhetorical strategies to challenge the ideologies of ruin and shame attached to their actions, and thereby assert their racialized gendered power.³⁸ More significantly, analyzing the sexual behaviors of a white female adulteress through the lives of enslaved women exposes the complexity of white female domesticity and sexuality. Patriarchy may have tethered white women to an ideology of virtue and submission, but the reality of Agatha Moore’s behavior demonstrates that the white household was not itself exempt from licentiousness and sexual desire outside of traditional white marriage arrangements. Certainly, white men forced their extramarital sexual desire on enslaved women without social stigma. Existing gender ideologies regulated white women’s sociosexual behavior in relation to white men, black men, and black women. The legal structure also delimited that white women could reproduce freedom. *Partus sequitur ventrum*, a law that made children’s status heritable through the “mother,” simultaneously cast white, enslaved, and free(d) women of color in different but related roles as producers: white women made free humans and enslaved women birthed other slaves.³⁹ This law, of course, benefited the slave-owning class in myriad ways, as enslaved women were the only ones in society who could reproduce slave status. For white women, however, this meant that scrutiny of their sexual comportment sought to prevent the birth of free black or illegitimate children who could not be heirs. To be sure, the rigid gender and sexual expectations governing white women constrained their lives. But this did not destroy their sexual agency.⁴⁰ The agency available to white women in the social shaming following nonconjugal sex rested in their ability to make certain claims about their inviolability despite

“consenting” to transgressive sexual acts. They achieved this by claiming to consent to sexually illicit acts “unhappily” or “against better judgment” in order to maintain their reputation of virtue. Sexual inviolability and consent represent agential acts and subjective statuses to which black women in the same society had no access.

Discourses of sexual behavior, whether the “virtuous comportment” of white women or the “lasciviousness” of black women, dictated the nature of sexual performance publicly and privately. As Natalie Zacek argues, “in order for a white woman to be put on such a pedestal, black and mixed-race women, both enslaved and free(d), had to assume the blame for all varieties of sexual immorality, to be denigrated universally as libidinous creatures whose innate depravity enticed white men into vice and degeneracy.⁴¹ I build on the existing scholarship concerning white women in the British Caribbean and colonial North America in analyzing the case of *Crofts v. Harrison*. This case shows how white women deployed diffuse forms of power—not just physical modes—to negate enslaved women’s sexualities and leave them vulnerable to sexual violence. We know that repeated acts of violence and terror maintained racial and gendered subjugation of enslaved men and women.⁴² Gender and racial hierarchies in slave societies required constant (re)articulation because slave resistance rendered them unstable.⁴³ These reiterations of power (that is, the ways white patriarchal power reasserted itself in the face of challenge or instability) took place during the commodification process on slave ships, at the auction block, through the force of the whip and law, and, most important here, in the realm of sexuality, sexual behavior, and sexual violence.⁴⁴ One way to pinpoint these instabilities and demarcate the reiteration of patriarchal and white supremacist power in slave societies is to track the moments of identity crisis. As the court case *Crofts v. Harrison* indicates, seemingly “stable” gender and racial identities could and did falter. Agatha Moore’s deposition and the boy’s female apparel and mobility permit us to map the ways white female (sexual) identity might be reaffirmed, especially in a situation that could bring them social shame. Furthermore, the power to “reaffirm” white female identity both shapes white female sexual agency and illuminates the negation of enslaved women’s sexual power.

Enslaved women are explicitly and notably absent from the incidents and the surviving documents surrounding this case. Nonetheless, this chapter shows how their experiences can—and need—to be distilled from the archive representing the affairs and entanglements of white Barbadians Agatha and Daniel Moore, Dudley Crofts, Judge Thomas Harrison, and an unnamed

enslaved boy. Scholars often “read against the grain” of archival documents to fill out the silences inherent to the archives of slavery.⁴⁵ Here the scholar attempts to subvert archival power to narrate the experiences or recover the voices of enslaved people depicted in commodified terms. Rather than reading against the grain, mining this court case for traces of enslaved women when they are not explicitly represented requires reading *along the bias grain*.⁴⁶ Like cutting fabric on the bias to create more elasticity, reading along the bias grain expands the legibility of these archival documents to accentuate the figures of enslaved women present in the society who are a spectral influence on the lives of white and black men and women. Approaching the archive in this way allows an expansive interpretation of the records while retaining the historical integrity of the documents. This expanded interpretive space articulates how the sizeable presence of enslaved women and the property relations intrinsic to slavery in Bridgetown influenced the actions of the white men and women, and the enslaved boy implicated in these events, even as enslaved women are not the subjects of this archive. Similar to fugitive Jane’s journey in Chapter 1, imagining the boy dressed in women’s clothes, walking alone at night, illuminates the significant sociodemographic presence of enslaved women in Bridgetown and the expectations of and assumptions about their bodies, public sexualities, and vulnerabilities as they moved around town. Returning to the disguised enslaved boy at the end of the chapter will further elaborate the subjection of enslaved women, the complexities of white domestic spaces, and the crisis of “gender” in this historical moment and context.⁴⁷

“The Mistress/Slave Dialectic”

In G. W. F. Hegel’s famous “Master/Slave dialectic” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), he argues that the master and slave were constituted as subjects relationally.⁴⁸ Orlando Patterson extends Hegel’s theory to the operations of slave societies, ancient and modern. He argues that a master gains his power and honor from “the subjection of his slave.”⁴⁹ The concept of honor, he contends, was central to the master/slave dialectic.⁵⁰ It was the slave’s dishonor that “came in the primal act of submission. This was the most immediate human expression of the inability to defend oneself or to secure one’s livelihood.”⁵¹ In contrast and in relation to a slave’s dishonor, “what the captive or condemned person lost was the master’s gain . . . the honor of the master was

enhanced by the subjection of his slave.”⁵² Patterson explains, “the key [to enslavement] is the total absence of any hint of ‘manhood,’ which in turn is a perfect description of the dishonored condition.”⁵³ In a clearly masculinist reading of the relationship between masters and slaves, Patterson resolutely denies the existence of the female “master” or slave owner, her power in Caribbean slave society, the avenues by which she acquired and reproduced socioeconomic freedom, and what sociosexual identity she drew from selling enslaved women’s sexuality. His analysis also masks the privileges white women enjoyed by not being sexually commodified in the same manner as enslaved women.⁵⁴

What then, constituted honor for slave mistresses? Patterson offers that “[more] often than not, the mistress of the stone hovel that passed for a great house in the Caribbean was herself a slave. Since there was no one to confirm honor, it was simply thrown to the winds.”⁵⁵ More recent scholarship refutes Patterson’s easy dismissal of slave mistresses as powerless “slaves.”⁵⁶ In fact, honor was an important aspect of freedom for white and slave-owning women. As one scholar argues, white women, “profited from slave labor and like their male counterparts sponsored an ideology which was designed to buttress the class structure.”⁵⁷ To elaborate on this configuration, the notion of honor, linked to white women’s sexuality, was connected to both perceptions and expectations of their virtue and their ability to commodify another’s sexuality and reproduce freedom.⁵⁸ Patterson ignores how enslaved women were dishonored and disempowered through violence, commodification, and sexual coercion, as well as their necessity to reproduce slavery. These identities—racial, gendered, social, and sexual—of white and enslaved women were mutually constitutive. More than the economic power free(d) women of color gained from slave ownership, white women accumulated sexual and racial power through the exchange of enslaved women’s bodies and passed this power onto their relatives.⁵⁹ Power to engage in the circulation of enslaved bodies and the ability to secure capital and manipulate legal structures to secure their family’s future enabled white women to contribute to and benefit from a gendered white supremacy in Caribbean slave societies.⁶⁰ Elite white women also gained power through laws protecting them from nonmarital rape.⁶¹ Of course, free(d) women of color also acquired power through the commodification of enslaved women’s sexuality and reproduction, but the benefits they accrued from participating in the marketing of slaves remained distinct from those of white women.⁶² Many free women of color were previously enslaved or had enslaved relatives in

close proximity, thereby risking the degradation of their social status.⁶³ The eighteenth-century ideologies of sexually available and promiscuous women of color, free or enslaved, meant that they were susceptible to racial and gendered denigration based on their constructed sexualities. As noted in the previous chapter, free(d) women of color purveyed enslaved women in brothels, an occupation deemed shameful to most white women in Barbados.⁶⁴ Edward Long, who held particularly racist and animalistic views of women of color, comments that, “they are lascivious.”⁶⁵ Consequently, he assumed that this led to the degeneration of their reproductive capacities. He claimed,

Some examples may possibly have occurred, where, upon the inter-marriage of two Mulattos, the woman has bourne children; which children have grown to maturity: but I have never heard of any such an instance; and may we not suspect the lady, in those cases, to have privately intrigued with another man, a White perhaps?⁶⁶

The privileged position white women acquired through the exchange of enslaved women’s bodies resulted in a “reputation” of their own virtue compared to those of mulatto and black women.⁶⁷ As one scholar argues, “in the West Indies . . . all white women, regardless of class origins, were elevated to a superior ‘respectable’ status.”⁶⁸ White women’s honored reputation rested on the subjugation of enslaved women as sexual objects and this reputation was constituent to their ability to commodify slaves and be themselves perceived as in need of protection. Closer scrutiny of Agatha Moore’s deposition in the *Crofts v. Harrison* case enables an elaboration of the parameters of sexual culture in eighteenth-century Barbados, thereby elucidating the limits and domination of black female sexuality at the same time.

Agatha Moore: Deposed

On 11 October 1742, Judge Harrison took a long statement from Agatha Moore regarding her role in the sexual liaison with Dudley Crofts. Neither Agatha Moore’s husband Daniel nor Crofts seemed to object to this action; Crofts was invited to cross examine her but did not show up.⁶⁹ In her deposition, related by Harrison in the third person, Agatha explains how Crofts began his seduction of her:

[Deponent] positively says that she never gave the said Dudley Crofts any hints or signs to encourage him to endeavor to seduce her . . . the said Dudley Crofts very much importun'd her to commit adultery with him which she then refused declaring she could not consent to his desires as it would be cruelly injuring to her Husband and she could not answer it on any account but he then very much pressing that the next time they had a convenient opportunity she would give him her promise she was prevailed on by him to promise she would.⁷⁰

Her deposition continues to recount the several sexual encounters she had with Crofts:

In the said month of July in the said Year one thousand seven hundred and forty [when] her Husband the said Daniel Moore being gone to Scotland [district]⁷¹ the said Dudley Crofts came up to her said Father's house [her father being off the island] . . . and after dinner he the said Dudley Crofts claimed the promise which the said Deponent had before made to him and which promise this Deponent then very unhappily complyd with by suffering the sd Dudley Crofts then to commit adultery with this Depont. And which he afterwards from time to time repeated with this depnt as they had convenient opportunities.⁷²

Crofts and Agatha Moore were eventually caught together by her husband in May 1741, and subsequently Agatha was discovered writing a letter to her lover. She admitted through carefully crafted language that although she left the island after discovery by her husband, when she returned she continued to correspond with Crofts by letter. She then admitted that "having acquainted him of her Husband [soon] being gone, the said Dudley Crofts came up to this . . . house & then & there committed adultery with her, which he has never done since."⁷³ She ends her remarkable statement saying that she wrote to Crofts asking him to cease writing to her, "for that if her said Husband died, she would perform the Promise or Oath she had made to him, that she would marry the said Dudley Crofts."⁷⁴ In the midst of the affair Agatha Moore gave birth to a daughter whose paternity is uncertain given the circumstances of her sexual liaison with Crofts.⁷⁵

Governor Thomas Robinson, who made the final decision in such cases, deemed Agatha's deposition unusual, declaring, "it does not appear that any

good or Lawful use could be made of so extraordinary [a] Deposition [by Agatha Moore] which his [Excellency] said he [believed] was without Example.”⁷⁶ Agatha Moore was certainly a victim of patriarchy in this case. Her testimony relegated to supportive evidence, Agatha Moore remained peripheral to the case’s main concerns. The juridical decision hinged on which white man involved suffered the most dishonor. All the white men in the proceedings, as plaintiffs or defendants, more or less reclaimed their lives and redeemed their reputations.⁷⁷ The Council censored Judge Harrison for unfairly punishing Crofts for actions that were not against the law, and forced Harrison to resign all public positions except his elected seat of vestryman of St. Michael’s Parish. Crofts paid a two hundred pound fine for immoral behavior, but the Council vindicated him of any alleged criminal conduct and Daniel Moore resumed his business as a merchant.⁷⁸ In contrast, Agatha Moore disappears from the Barbados archive and possibly escaped further embarrassing publicity on the island.⁷⁹

The deposition disempowered Agatha Moore on multiple levels, most strikingly in how it stated what the “deponent” said, but never in her own words or through direct quotes. The traditional legal format distorted her testimony by filtering what she actually said through Judge Harrison’s third person interpretation of her testimony and transcribed by a clerk. Additionally, her physical absence from the Governor’s Council meeting, a space predominantly for propertied white men only, left her without the ability to clarify and defend herself against the language of “whoredom” which permeates this historical record.⁸⁰ Agatha Moore was likely socially ruined, despite her “honesty,” and leaving the island was probably her only recourse. Yet, on further examination of her language and position, it is clear that she was not necessarily destitute.⁸¹ The resources she managed to access in her exposed sexual conduct demonstrate her ability to harness a type of power which enslaved and free(d) women could not.

When Agatha Moore came of age, she inherited property in houses in Bridgetown from her maternal grandmother.⁸² Cecily Jones details the property laws relative to different categories of white women including married, single, and widowed. The laws in Barbados subjected white women to similar property restrictions as their peers in England, but demographic and social conditions required some legal flexibility allowing white women new economic avenues.⁸³ Coverture laws transformed married white women into the status of *femes covertas* and required that they surrender their property to their husbands on marriage.⁸⁴ This status erased wives legal visibility, “her

property rights, down to the ownership of her petticoats, passed to her husband.⁸⁵ As widows, white women reverted back to *femes soles* and regained the same rights to property and legal transactions as men and unmarried women.⁸⁶ Although primogeniture laws existed in which the children (usually sons) inherited the majority of the estate, Barbados laws from the mid-seventeenth century ensured that wives were not abandoned in their husbands' wills.⁸⁷ Most important, many factors including high mortality rates forced the Barbados legislature to accommodate married women's property claims.⁸⁸ Married women employed premarital contracts, gained their husband's permission to create their own wills, sued for annuities in the case of separation, and fought in court to secure their ownership of slaves.⁸⁹ The probate records left by Barbados widows demonstrate both their ability to retain some property through their marriages and their attempts to circumvent the laws by giving property in trust to a male friend to avoid having it seized by marriage.⁹⁰ If Daniel Moore forced Agatha to flee Barbados, she likely took with her material resources to support herself including clothes, jewelry, and possibly slaves. In addition, Agatha Moore utilized rhetorical strategies in her deposition to appeal to the patriarchal system in place, denying her own agency in order to recoup her gendered and racial standing, while, at the same time, subtly pronouncing her free will.

Claiming "seduction" by Crofts, Agatha Moore disputes her consent (and will) in the affair. She states that, "she never gave the said Dudley Crofts any hints or signs to encourage him to endeavor to seduce her" and that "[she] unhappily complyd . . . by suffering the sd Dudley Crofts then to commit adultery with this Depont."⁹¹ Moore deployed this language to elicit sympathy from the judge and council in claiming that she unwillingly participated in "immoral" behavior. Putting on record that she did not initiate the affair or the advances from Crofts allowed her the discursive room to claim innocence and a certain type of victimization through a "[discourse] of seduction." The concept of "seduction is a meditation on liberty and slavery; and will and subjection in the arena of sexuality."⁹² "Discourse of seduction" refers to the ways in which the planter class represented enslaved women as always willing in sexual encounters, despite the fact that their status as enslaved persons and the punishments that would follow disobedience toward a white person prevented their refusal.⁹³ In other words, enslaved women as objects and commodities could not legally consent or deny unwanted sexual relations, and thus "rape is unimaginable."⁹⁴ Conversely, for Agatha Moore, a discourse of seduction becomes the means through

which she can claim victimization. In her case, Agatha Moore projects seduction onto the white male perpetrator, as she claims she was seduced by Dudley Crofts.⁹⁵ Moreover, Agatha Moore's defense coalesces around the issue of consent. Her claims that she was "importuned" and "unhappily complied" implied she did not consent to the affair, even as she did not claim she was raped.⁹⁶ Her racial and gendered subjectivity as a white woman bestowed her with the power to consent or refuse sexual relations with men other than her husband. Enslaved women could not legally make such decisions with respect to their own bodies. These divergent meanings of discourses of seduction enacted on white and black female bodies mark precisely the relational or dialectical sexual configurations of female sexualities in Barbados society. The fact that Agatha Moore could speak about her "unwillingness" to engage in transgressive sexual acts and blame her "seduction" on Crofts, delimits the significant schism/chasm between the sexual subjectivities of white and enslaved women. White women could defend their "honor" in moments of domestic crisis, while enslaved women, as property (a status that implied their sexual availability to men), could neither give nor withhold consent.

Yet confounding her denial of sexual agency (elite white women were certainly not meant to assert sexual agency in the traditional sense), Agatha Moore then admits to informing Crofts of "convenient" moments when they might have sex undisturbed and promised she would marry him if her husband died.⁹⁷ This latter point lends evidence to the possibility that Crofts sent his slave boy to murder her husband to hasten the process by which he might possess Agatha Moore, thus implicating her in a deadly scheme.⁹⁸ Equally important are the ways she inhabited a status of privilege allowing her a range of discursive options to defend herself in the face of social ridicule. These options spoke to a specific type of subjection that both oppressed her as a woman and empowered her as a white woman. Unpacking the relationship between discourses of sex and power relations illuminates critical questions related to Agatha Moore's testimony in this case. As Michel Foucault asks, "[in] a specific type of discourse on sex, in a specific form of exhortation of the truth, appearing historically and in specific places . . . what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work? And, how were these discourses used to support power relations?"⁹⁹ Ideology and discourse shaped the life conditions and experiences of freedom and enslavement for everyone in slave societies. Combined, the discursive power of racial ideology worked to subjugate, mark as deviant, and make sexually accessible black women's

bodies for public consumption at the same time and in relation to the ways white women were protected via law, gender, race, and sexual norms.

Prevailing ideas and expectations of sexual behavior, for both white women and women of color, enslaved and free(d), influenced the treatment and avenues of privilege for these different groups of women. Agatha Moore's deposition and her language in it represent the rhetorical space white women could exploit to feign innocence. Beyond mere rhetoric, in this moment her (sexual) subjectivity comes clearly into view. Her ability to claim seduction and disempowerment ironically spoke to her empowerment within the existing racial hierarchy. Contrary to the ways the concept of agency is used in most scholarship on slavery—as resistance to domination—Agatha Moore denied her agency, appealing to patriarchal norms of white female submission and honor in an attempt to rescue her innocence and sexual virtue. Moore thus reproduced the “discourses used to support power relations” in Barbados slave society; her innocence/guilt and her ability to speak on her own behalf expose the more subtle forms of power available to white women beyond the economic.¹⁰⁰

Agatha Moore's “shame” in her transgressive behavior meant she inhabited a position of status from which to fall. This status, although tenuous, gave her a position of power over enslaved and free(d) women in the same society. Of course, if she had been caught having sex with a black man, free(d) or enslaved, her power to evoke “unwilling consent” would be greatly reduced. In all likelihood, her ruin would have been unrecoverable unless she claimed rape. However limiting the double standard of interracial sex was for white men and women in Caribbean slave societies, a white woman's recourse to claiming rape elaborates not only her power but also the powerlessness of enslaved men, whose imminent execution followed any such encounter by the eighteenth century. All these strategies—these avenues that bespoke her status, subjectivity, and placement in the racial/gendered hierarchy—were possible because of the subjugation of black women.

Beyond the discursive strategies available to white women caught in non-conjugal sexual relationships, white women's ability to market enslaved female sexuality in the context of urban slavery further subjugated enslaved women. Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman explains that “ideologies of white womanhood were articulable and meaningful only in relation to slave women's experience: forced physical labor, “natal alienation,” reproductive exploitation, necessary dependence on extra-familial networks, enforced prostitution, and enslavement.”¹⁰¹ Just as white men controlled access to enslaved

women's bodies, white women's participation in the "jobbing" slave market—slaves hired out by task or hour—allowed them a significant degree of social and economic mobility in Bridgetown. Whether selling weaned enslaved children or their mothers' sexual services for profit, white women's preference for enslaved women in an urban context demonstrated how "the marketing of black women's sexuality . . . [was] associated directly with the economic accumulation strategies of [Bridgetown's] white women."¹⁰² In Barbadian slave society free(d) women of African descent also owned, sold, and passed slave property to their relatives.¹⁰³ The difference in these circumstances of slave ownership and the ideologies of racialized gender lay in the pervasive and oppositional ideological perceptions of white and black womanhood and the constituent factors of economic and sexual power that gave white women elevated status.

White Women and the Sexual Economy of Enslaved Women

Eighteenth-century probate records from Barbados point to these important linkages between white female economic power and enslaved women's sexual vulnerability. Recent scholarship has indicated that white women in slave societies occupied more powerful roles in the economy than previously imagined through their engagement with different markets, including the buying, selling, and hiring out of slaves.¹⁰⁴ Historians have used probate records to track white women's economic power but also to mark the ways white slave owners depended on enslaved women's reproduction and future fecundity to secure their family's economic prospects.¹⁰⁵ This situation produced a sexual power dynamic in which white women's commodification of enslaved women's reproduction and sexuality also created conditions in which white women could not be similarly commodified. In other words, because white women could buy, sell, and bequeath enslaved women's sexualized bodies, evidenced in probate records for example, their own sexual identity was protected through its links to white racial and gendered power.

However, this "security" was not infallible. White women's bodies were protected from assault only by men who were not their husbands, and then not all the time.¹⁰⁶ The concept of marital rape did not exist in the eighteenth-century British Empire and white women certainly suffered from their powerlessness in marriage.¹⁰⁷ But in legal and ideological terms they could

essentially be protected from or defended against certain forms of assault and could not be sold or traded as slaves in Barbados, providing them with a type of sexual identity, power, and honor unavailable to women of African descent. Building on the case of Agatha Moore's sexual transgressions made public, an interrogation of the probate records of elite white women who inherited, bought, and sold enslaved women, illustrates the critical and crucial relationship between the economics of slavery and the sexual power created and enjoyed by white women and reproduced through enslaved women's bodies in Bridgetown.

Bridgetown's unique eighteenth-century demographics provided space for white women to practice and reproduce the system of slavery. This practice, shaped by majority black and white female populations, enabled white women to fully utilize domestic slaves who would be considered "surplus" in the plantation setting. Enslaved women's bodies supported the economic and heritable aspects of white women's lives by being expendable in perpetuity, passed among white relatives, and used to pay for proper church burials. More important, the wills and deeds of white slave-owning women evidenced strategic manipulation of coverture and property laws at play in this temporal and geographic location. As noted above, by the first decades of the eighteenth century, white women rose to be a small majority of the white Barbados population, unlike other British Caribbean colonies in the same period.¹⁰⁸ This population of white women was decidedly urban and predominantly slave owning, and the households held mostly black women in bondage.¹⁰⁹ The intimacy of women inside these homes suggests that sexual ideologies of black and white women formed in close proximity.

White women who occupied this slight demographic majority influenced the economic, social, and sexual power of eighteenth-century Bridgetown.¹¹⁰ Hilary Beckles argues that "the linking of white womanhood to the reproduction of freedom meant that the entire ideological fabric of the slave-based civilization was conceived in terms of sex, gender, and race."¹¹¹ Many of the areas of power—racial, sexual, and economic—tethered white women's hierarchical and sexual position to that of enslaved black and free(d) women of color. Probate records and deeds reveal these multiple layers of power that certain white women (spinsters, single women, and widows) mobilized. The legal language and proposed fate of enslaved women in the wills and deeds of white women indexes several aspects of power wielded by white women to control their economic legacy and that of their daughters, nieces, and other female kin. These documents corroborate ongoing scholarship on the vital

(economic and socio-sexual) roles and privileges white women inhabited in British Caribbean slave societies, just as they reduced enslaved women to their commodifiable futurity.¹¹²

Free(d) women of color also benefited from slave ownership, social ties to white individuals, and the right to distribute their slaves to family members through wills and deeds.¹¹³ However, as in the unusual case of Rachael Pringle Polgreen, elite status was rare and existing legal restrictions on the lives of free(d) people of color created insecurities and tensions not experienced by white women.¹¹⁴ Many free(d) people were not far removed from slavery and had relatives who were still enslaved. The social and familial relationships free(d) people maintained with enslaved people resulted in backlash from the white population in various forms including legal, social and economic obstacles. Manumissions remained cost prohibitive and required a fee for annuities so that, “the freeing of slaves [was] a privilege of a small, white, wealthy elite.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, as Joanna in Chapter 2 fought to prove her manumission, many others experienced challenges to their free status.¹¹⁶ With the complicated constraints based on racial discrimination that forced free(d) people of color into precarious circumstances, it is difficult to argue that slave ownership and economic well-being marked a leveling between the races.¹¹⁷ As discussed in previous chapters, economic prosperity was rare among free(d) people and those who owned slaves participated in the system that perpetuated white supremacy. Probate records in the British Caribbean make a focus on slave ownership and economic ventures inevitable. More important, many of the documents leave out a racial designation that creates specific challenges for marking economic and social distinctions between the races. There are, however, certain codes read by historians that reveal the race of the document’s author.¹¹⁸ The examples below of white women’s wills and deeds were distinguished from those of free(d) women of color by their familial relations to elite white men, often through marriage, and their subversion of coverture laws to which white women were particularly subjected.¹¹⁹ These facts help identify white women in the records as well as illustrating the specific ways white women benefited economically from slavery and enslaved women bodies.

Married women forfeited property on marriage but retained power over servants and slaves and largely controlled the domestic business of the household.¹²⁰ It is significant that, as mentioned above, unmarried white women, or *femmes soles*, wielded different powers from their married counterparts. The status of remaining unmarried, whether through the death of a husband

or spinsterhood, allowed white women the freedom to buy or sell property including estates, pass on property to kin and friends, and give the same to whomever they chose.¹²¹ For instance, in September 1792, Elvira Cox of St. Michael left a will instructing her executors, “to sell all houses and slaves except Flora for the most money that can be gotten.”¹²² Cox then bequeathed Flora to her “Brother in Law Benjamin Alleyne Cox & Anthony Barker Esquire.” She stipulated that Alleyne Cox and Baker allow Flora to work and conduct business without interference from any heirs or anyone else purporting interest in Flora. Cox, by this document, granted Flora the ability to labor for her own purposes, freedom of movement, and choice of occupation. Presumably preferable to other arrangements, including being sold, Cox gave Flora the opportunity to experience more independent arrangements within slavery. Yet, as in some of the “generous” bequests to enslaved women in the probate records of white women, Flora was not given her freedom. Cox directed that if “Flora shall at any time hereafter be able from her labour and Industry . . . raise [a] Sufficient sum of money that shall or may be required by any Law of this Island,” then Alleyne Cox and Baker must permit and enable Flora to pay for her own manumission.¹²³ What did it mean to Flora to work for her freedom after years of serving Cox without remuneration? Seemingly Flora gained her freedom; in 1793 she baptized an enslaved woman named Frances who was listed as her property.¹²⁴ In this case, unmarried or widowed white women retained control of the lives of their slaves even in death and though Flora fared differently, Mary Ann, Betty, Matty & Molly Thomas, and Sam remained property that consolidated the financial stability of their relatives.¹²⁵

Other women mobilized their power in ways similar to Elvira Cox. In February 1794, Mary Sisnett, a Bridgetown widow, directed that Doll, Judy, and Margaret, “three Negro women slaves,” be liquidated as property and the money arising from their sale used to pay for the Christian burial and any other of Sisnett’s outstanding debts.¹²⁶ Any surplus money arising from the sale of the three women was for Sisnett’s daughter Mary Ann Sisnett. The widow stipulated that the rest of her property in land, buildings, and “thirteen other slaves” go to the Honorable Joshua Gittens and Mr. Daniel Broadbent in “trust to and for the sole and only proper use and behoof of my said dear daughter Mary Ann Sisnett and her heirs.”¹²⁷ The ongoing fate of the “thirteen other slaves” and the future wealth of Sisnett’s daughter rested in the legal power Sisnett held as a widow. The ability to manipulate coverture laws on behalf of her daughter rested on complicated legal maneuvering. In

order to protect white female economic power and control, Sisnett and many of her peers manipulated the legal barriers of coverture laws. White women deployed legal strategies both to retain property, human or otherwise, and to ensure that the property stayed in the control and for the benefit of themselves when remarrying or for their female relatives.¹²⁸ Anticipating the event of her daughter's marriage, Sisnett stated that the property in trust should be retained by Gittens and Broadbent so that the any profits pass into

the proper hands of my said daughter and not to any husband she might hereafter intermarry with during the life of such husband . . . nor shall the same or any part thereof be subject charged or liable to the control debts engagements forfeitures contracts encumbrances or intermeddling of such husband and the receipts alone of my said daughter for the same or any part thereof . . . shall be good and sufficient discharges to my said trustees.¹²⁹

Sisnett's forceful language and instructions to keep her daughter's property out of a husband's control reflect a widow's keen understanding of an economic and legal system in which white women were often left vulnerable to the whims of men. In the parish of St. Phillip on the south east coast of Barbados, widow Hannah Hayes (née Downes) was about to marry Edward Wiggins Scott in 1778. In anticipation of her own pending nuptials, Haynes arranged for her property to go to Bridgetown resident Samuel Drayton in trust. Carefully attending to the fine details of this entailment, Haynes secured her own property from coverture by giving Drayton "ownership" of her "Negro, Mulatto, and Indian Slaves . . . in consideration for the sum of ten shillings . . . [namely] Arrow and Walker [sic] men, Dolly, Prudence, Candace, Elvey, Olidah, Pallas, Fanny and Celinda (Women) Tobey, Sam, [Sammons] and William (boys) Lenora, Anna-Maria, Violet, Betty-Brown and Aggey (girls) with their increase of the females."¹³⁰ The deed specified that this arrangement was to hold her slaves and other property for the use of herself and her intended husband, "during the term of their joint natural lives" and then should pass on to any children they may produce.¹³¹ Notwithstanding the unusual instance of indigenous slaves in late eighteenth-century Barbados, Haynes convinced her intended husband to forfeit his rights to ownership over her slaves, thereby directly subverting the coverture laws. Her trust arrangement, like Sisnett's, secured her continued profit from the labor of her slaves and any of their forthcoming children, while also ensuring

that any children yet to be born could inherit directly from her. This power subverted laws intended to weaken white women's status in society and enabled them instead to wield a significant level of control over their affairs and those of their white female relatives. These trust arrangements with white men who were not relatives were agreed on by both the trustees and intended husbands and exemplifies the economic flexibility white men sometimes offered in marriage and future estate affairs.

Mary Kidney, a Bridgetown spinster, also made trust arrangements for her property, leaving "a dwelling house or Tenement in St. Michael's town" to her mother Ann Kidney. After Ann Kidney's death, the house transferred to "[Doctor] George Hastle & Thomas Hope, merchants In trust of [Mary's] sister Elizabeth Woodroffe, wife of Jonas Woodroffe during their joint lives." Mary Kidney specified the conditions under which the trust should function, namely,

that the rents and profits of the said house be always paid to . . . Elizabeth during her coverture, and her receipt shall be allowed [as] sufficient discharge in as full & effectual manner as if she was sole and unmarried and the said Jonas Woodroffe is hereby debarred & closed from any claim or demand whatsoever in and to the aforesaid dwelling house or the rents issues or profits thereof.¹³²

Kidney then passed this property in trust onto any children of Elizabeth if she should die. Whatever feelings Kidney may have harbored for Jonas Woodroffe, the main priority was to subvert her sister's loss of property through marriage coverture. These examples indicate how white women understood the law and their economic vulnerability in a patriarchal society. It also shows the avenues through which white women could secure property including slaves, for themselves and female relatives. Unlike free(d) women of color, white women could decide the futures of white and black children in starkly different ways, and the sexual futures of white *and* black women were similarly distinct in outcome—enslaved women's sexuality was linked to white women's power and profit.

As Jennifer Morgan has demonstrated, slave owners in the early modern Atlantic depended on the reproductive capabilities of enslaved women in the early moments of the colonial enterprise. Specifying the preference of Barbadian slave owners to purchase African women, Morgan states that "between 1651 and 1675, 46 percent of all enslaved persons arriving to [Barbados] were

female, and by the 1660s Barbadian slaveowners saw women as valuable laborers whom they easily integrated into their workforce."¹³³ White women, then, wielded and mobilized both economic and sexual power that depended on ideologically sexualized enslaved women, whose (re)production of labor and futures were profoundly controlled.¹³⁴ For instance, in August 1766 widow Elizabeth Grant of St. Michael left a will instructing her executors to distribute her property specifically among her relatives. Her distributions included leaving "Maria, a woman, Quomino and Robin, boys and Harriet a girl with all issue and increase" to her granddaughter Elizabeth. But if Elizabeth should die, then the abovementioned enslaved would go to the widow's daughter Winnifred Moore.¹³⁵ In typical probate records of the eighteenth century, white widows and spinsters left wealth in the form of slaves and their future children to consolidate the financial stability of their relatives.¹³⁶ The sexual and reproductive objectification of the "two negroe girls" proved integral to the wealth and power of white Barbadian women and their futures were often tied to the very young and yet-to-be-born white children. These circumstances further consolidated white female power in Barbados society, and in Bridgetown enslaved women's sexual and reproductive capacities were used to further the wealth and status of these young white women.¹³⁷ Consequent to this dynamic of profit, images of enslaved women as sexually available and white women as virtuous persisted throughout the eighteenth century.

The oft-cited works of Richard Ligon, Edward Long, and Elizabeth Fenwick suggest that early in Barbados's settlement and well into the nineteenth century, women of African descent were imagined by white society as sexually deviant, brutish, shiftless, and beastly.¹³⁸ These stereotyped images existed in contrast to constructions of the refinement of white women in the Caribbean. Speaking of creole white women in Jamaica, Edward Long claimed, "the women of [Jamaica] are lively, of good natural genius, frank, affable, polite, generous, humane, and charitable; cleanly in their persons even to excess . . . and fond, to a fault of their children."¹³⁹ Other writers varied in opinion on the virtuous and educated qualities of white women. J. B. Moreton, and even Long, thought white creole women suffered indulgences not allowed their metropolitan counterparts, including improper dress and too close associations with the black women domestic slaves by whom they were reared.¹⁴⁰ Moreton, a bookkeeper in eighteenth-century Jamaica, wrote extensively on white creole women who were ill-mannered and "those who receive their education amongst negroe wenches and imbibe great part of

their dialect, principles, manners and customs.”¹⁴¹ Despite varying depictions of creole white women’s virtues or lack thereof from the metropole and English men alike, sexualized and degraded images of enslaved women remained consistent. Clearly stereotyped in multiple ways, elite white creole women in the British Caribbean maintained important aspects of identity and privilege (social and economic) under which enslaved women suffered. Long wrote extensively about Jamaica’s population of enslaved women and specifically stated, “The women here, in general, are common prostitutes.”¹⁴² The implications of such thought directly affected the manner in which enslaved women were treated, sexually abused, and assigned work.¹⁴³ Ultimately, as movable property, enslaved women’s bodies often secured both the economic and social wealth of white women and their female relatives. This relationship of owner and property inevitably created, reproduced, and sustained a gendered and racial hierarchy where even lower-class white women enjoyed the social benefits of white supremacy.¹⁴⁴

Related to the gendered economics of slavery is the relationship of economics to sexuality. By virtue of their sexual commodification white society imagined enslaved women as promiscuous, immoral, and objectifiable.¹⁴⁵ Enslaved women’s reproductive potential placed their bodies in a position to reproduce the future of slavery and the white wealth this created.¹⁴⁶ More than this, the probate records display the tenuous nature of life for domestic enslaved women, who were regularly passed among owners’ relatives. Appearing to mark the altruistic nature of female slave ownership and manumission, white women’s probate provisions often exhausted enslaved women past their strength to labor before they were freed. Bessey, an enslaved woman belonging to Mary Sisnett, exemplifies the contradictory nature of “benevolence.” Sisnett asks that Bessey be treated kindly by her daughter because “Bessey has always behaved herself well to me it is therefore my request that said daughter will treat her with kindness and humanity.”¹⁴⁷ Some enslaved women gained freedom, property, and even annuities on their white female owner’s death. But many more remained vulnerable to resale and stipulated acts of freedom, and even passed to other free(d) slaves as property. The positions enslaved women inhabited as property and sexual commodities can be further analyzed by returning to the scene that opened this chapter—the enslaved boy moving through Bridgetown and the court case that brought the boy to our attention. Enslaved women made up the demographic majority of Bridgetown. Their presence in public spaces, in the domestic realm, and their status as slaves led white men and women to expect and demand

the sexual and reproductive availability of black female bodies. Ideologies of white womanhood and white female slave ownership opened up possibilities for profit and power. Finally, expectations of enslaved women's bodies in public made it possible for an enslaved boy to conceal himself dressed as a black woman.

The Boy, the Dress, and the Dagger

A closer examination of the enslaved boy sent out by his master dressed in women's clothes maps the unique demographics of Bridgetown in the eighteenth century. The boy's movements in black women's guise suggest the prevalence and expectation of enslaved women in town as public and sexually available, allowing him a certain freedom of movement. There are only a few references to the boy in the *Crofts v. Harrison* case but they provide insight into the power dynamics in eighteenth-century Barbados and the specter of racialized gender. The first mention of the boy appears in Judge Harrison's rebuttal to Dudley Crofts's complaint of financial and personal injury. Harrison, explaining why he imposed such a large bond for security on Crofts, argued that he felt Crofts was a criminal threat to Daniel Moore. He states:

The reason which induced [me] to demand such a recognizance was because [of] a complaint made to [me] by the sd Daniel Moore against a Negro of [Crofts]. The negro [sic] had taken his Masters Sword which [Crofts] acknowledged to [me] he had directed him to take and went the proceeding night therewith disguised in womens Cloaths to the house of Thomas Withers Esqr where Mr Moore lived and where the Criminal Correspondence between [Crofts] & the wife of the sd Mr Moore was carried on and as from the circumstances I had reason to believe some mischief was intended by [Crofts] against Mr Moore . . . I thought it my Duty to require proper security from [Crofts].¹⁴⁸

At issue for Harrison and the slave court case was whether Crofts instructed his slave to attempt murder or merely permitted the boy who had allegedly been summoned to the Moore/Withers house by a nurse working therein to answer a request. The next few references to this incident relate to witnesses testifying whether they heard Dudley Crofts acknowledge he

directed his enslaved boy to go to the Moore/Withers household in disguise and with a sword.¹⁴⁹ Most of the witnesses present in the initial confrontation between Judge Harrison and Crofts agreed that Crofts acknowledged in public that he allowed the boy to go. But no one could confirm whether it was Crofts' intent to murder Daniel Moore or if the boy was responding to a summons from the Moore household. Crofts, his lawyer Thomas Lake, and two other witnesses testified that the boy was summoned to the house by another male slave named John who carried a message from the nurse, beckoning him to come at night and meet her "under a tree." They argue that he took the sword, with Crofts's permission, to defend himself from possible attack by another enslaved male named Toney belonging to Mr. Withers or Mr. Moore.¹⁵⁰ We do not have testimony in the voice of the enslaved boy, only fleeting moments where white male deponents state what they heard him say. Samuel Webb, a witness called on behalf of Dudley Crofts, deposed that he did not hear Crofts say he instructed the boy to take a sword to Mr. Withers but he did hear the boy say that "a negro named John belonging to the said Withers having come to him & told him, that the nurse at Mr Withers desired he would come to her under a tree in the Garden." Webb contends that the boy took the sword by his own decision to "defend himself."¹⁵¹ The boy was eventually acquitted of all charges against him, an unusual action given his deceptive disguise and possession of a lethal weapon.

According to further testimony by witness Richard Hall, "it did not appear upon the trial of the said negro that he had made any attempts upon the House or Doors of Mr. Withers or that he offered any violence whatever, upon which he was acquitted."¹⁵² However, it is clear that Judge Harrison and the men who tried him did not believe he acted on his own accord. In this instance we might think about how "will" is both recognized and disregarded by the colonial authorities in reference to enslaved criminality. This case provides an example of how colonial slave law arbitrarily recognized the boy's humanity in order to try him for his purported criminal actions, while at the same time denying he could have enacted his own will apart from the desires of his master. That he was acquitted despite being caught armed and in disguise elucidates how the authorities' could ultimately decide when to consider enslaved people sentient beings and when to deny their humanity and will.

It is also plausible that Crofts's motive for sending the boy was murder, as Agatha Moore stated in her deposition, "for that if her said Husband died, she would perform the Promise or Oath she had made to him, that she would marry the said Dudley Crofts."¹⁵³ Did Agatha Moore, then, enable the

enslaved boy's attempt at murder by suggesting to Crofts that if he would do something to get rid of her husband she would marry him? Is this statement, so easily dismissed by Governor Robinson in later proceedings, evidence that the boy was directed to commit violence against a white man and thus, risk death himself?¹⁵⁴ Since the enslaved could not deny the requests of their owners, we might consider how the boy's actions were an enactment of his owner's will. Through his actions the boy was caught as an accessory to Crofts's sexual desires, entangled in Crofts's sexual interactions with Agatha Moore and his desire to possess her. Since "the notion of will connotes more than simply the ability to act and to do; rather, it distinguishes the autonomous agent from the enslaved," the boy could not refuse or disobey directions and was forced to participate in his own possible demise by being caught in a white household under questionable circumstances.¹⁵⁵ In other words, sexual agency for the enslaved was exercised in this instance, by becoming a vehicle for white men and women to act on their sexual desires. This is the fungibility of the enslaved exemplified, as they could be forced to carry out their owner's crimes with no opportunity to refuse, and under threat of death for their actions by either their owner or the colony. He faced danger both in resisting his master's will and in attempting to murder or bring harm to any white person, which carried the sentence of death.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, the absence of testimonial discussion as to why the enslaved boy donned women's clothes points to the fungible condition of enslaved people and how racialized gender functioned in this colonial slave society.¹⁵⁷ In one way, this lack of concern addressed the enslaved boy's nonthreatening gender behavior. In "womens cloaths" he did not elicit a (sexual) threat to white masculinity. But there is more at stake here. In addition to the slave boy's unremarkable attire, we might ask what social expectations allowed a disguised enslaved "woman" to approach a white household at night? Urban enslaved women served white people in various capacities. They were domestic servants, nursemaids, wet nurses, sex slaves for personal hire or service in a brothel, washerwomen, and market women. If the enslaved boy had been instructed to murder Daniel Moore (a likely possibility despite his acquittal), an enslaved woman who was a stranger to a household would have been more easily admitted than an enslaved man. Black women comprised the majority of household servants, and interactions between white men and black women occurred frequently. It would not have been odd for a female slave to arrive at a stranger's house to deliver washing or market goods. Furthermore, black women's access to public space marked a

difference in gendered and sexual expectations for enslaved and white women.¹⁵⁸ Elite women were not allowed in public unaccompanied, especially at night. Their sexuality was hidden, protected, and defended in the name of honor and virtue, which were at the very heart of white female identity. The frequency with which black women traversed urban spaces suggests how they were perceived as sexual agents, lascivious, and “unwomanly.” As objects of commerce for different types of (sexual) labor, enslaved women were not associated with virtue, nor were their sexual identities protected from harm. As Long discusses in reference to enslaved wet nurses and domestic slaves, “there is scarcely one of these nurses who is not a common prostitute, or at least who has not had commerce with more than one man.”¹⁵⁹ In contrast, Long’s observations about the roles white women occupied demonstrate varied perceptions of black and white womanhood and their implied sexualities. He states that, “the domestic life of [white] women, which prevents them from exercising abroad as much as the other sex, naturally inclines them to love those active amusements which may be followed within doors.”¹⁶⁰

Enslaved women’s mobility outside the domestic realm evoked a certain type of freedom elite white women could not exercise. Yet, the enslaved boy’s movements and performance in female dress, through town and at night, expose the ways enslaved and black women’s seemingly unfettered mobility often made them more vulnerable in this slave society. White women were protected by law and domestic enclosure, while enslaved women were required to perform a particular type of public availability resulting in danger. Dudley Crofts, through his enslaved boy, exploited this understanding of black women’s public exposure and position, sending him out to perform the normative embodiment of black womanhood as publicly visible, unchaste, lascivious, sexually wanton, and available to serve.

Another way to consider the circumstances and consequences of the boy’s surreptitious movements is to understand the intimacy of whites and enslaved in the domestic sphere. As the court case makes clear, there was a dispute between two white households, which no doubt caused anxiety among the enslaved laboring in each house. White strife and the breakup of households had profound effects for those bound to their owners.¹⁶¹ White unrest might lead to liquidation of assets and in turn to slave sales or labor reassignment. Many white families had relatives on country estates and were involved in sugar production. Slaves could be moved around from town to country if households were in flux. The enslaved people residing with Crofts

and the Moore/Withers household likely felt a palpable fear. Moreover, despite racial rules of conduct, particularly those that regulated the behavior of enslaved and free(d) people, household slaves served their owners intimately, and thus at least some would have been aware of Agatha Moore's sexual infidelities.¹⁶² Perhaps, the stress of the situation led the enslaved of each household to threaten each other. The boy may have been caught in a trap set by the "white" nurse, who in trying to protect her family charges in the Withers/Moore home, sought to stop the affair between Crofts and Agatha Moore and used the armed boy to bring the situation to public notice.¹⁶³

The crucial point here is the ways enslaved subjectivity (subjugated and criminalized), male and female, enabled particular types of social, racial, sexual, and gendered power for white men and women. Key to understanding this, in the absence of a comparable archive for enslaved men and women, is a discussion of the labor and sexual roles they performed in the context of a colonial port city such as Bridgetown. In addition, establishing the singularity and similarities of this site and court case to other Caribbean contexts further illuminates the specific relations of power deployed through sexuality in such slave societies.¹⁶⁴ Agatha Moore's, and other white women's sexual agency and ability to deny their consensual participation in non-conjugal sex was predicated on the sexual exploitation of enslaved women. Indeed, the performance of black womanhood enabled the boy to walk around at night based on assumptions about black women being out in public spaces. By interrogating the relations of power—economic, gendered, racial, and sexual—we expose important nuances of white women's relationship to patriarchy in slave societies. In this context, the movements of a boy dressed as a girl/woman relates directly to white women's sexualities and social power. The preceding court case makes clear that even in circumstances of intimate exposure, white women had avenues of physical and material, if not emotional, escape and cultural capital with which their reputations could be at least marginally repaired in instances of "fornication" and even in cases of rape.¹⁶⁵

Conversely, within the context of urban slavery, many enslaved women were hired out to itinerant sailors, military men, and single local men for domestic roles that included sexual access to their bodies. In such circumstances, these domestic intimacies may have created impossible situations for those abused by the men who "rented" them. These domestic intimacies and spaces were constituent to the relations of production and violence that defined slavery and in town, were the sites where the dynamics of power were enacted. The range of legal codes passed to control enslaved behavior made

resistance to domestic violence a life and death decision. Over the course of the eighteenth century many acts of enslaved defiance were punished by death by the noose, fire, or gibbet. For enslaved offenses considered “heinous,” colonial authorities emphasized the criminality of the enslaved and created a public spectacle as a lesson to others who might be contemplating a challenge to abuse. As we will see in the next chapter, these urban public spectacles provided reminders of the extant power mobilized by colonial rulers in the lives and deaths of the enslaved.