POWER, INEQUALITY, AND RESISTANCE:
RESPONSES TO SUBORDINATION
IN THE AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVE, 1800-1930

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Power is central to sociological discussions of inequality, but often remains in the background veiled by structural concerns and definitional ambiguities. This dissertation aims to center the discussion of power and inequality by focusing on how power is experienced and contested by the most vulnerable actors. Building on the case of American slavery, I turn to the voices of the enslaved themselves in one of the first sociological analyses exploring the rich and harrowing stories told by formerly enslaved narrators.

Slavery is defined by the enforced condition of natal alienation or the removal of all meaningful familial and community ties. This natal alienation contributes to the social death of the enslaved (Patterson 1982). I outline how natal alienation and social death fit into the wider discussion of inequality by tracing the recent genealogy of power within social theory from a one-dimensional view of raw physical and economic domination to more cultural and multidimensional conceptualizations. Despite the dominance endemic to slave systems, historical research grounded in the voices of the formerly enslaved emphasizes the everyday forms of resistance in which the enslaved engage; however, the everyday resistance frame remains contentious for at least two reasons: First, critics question the issue of intentionality – or the notion that subordinate actors are in “constant rebellion” (Tilly 1991:598). Second, scholars have challenged the material effect of everyday forms of resistance.
I rebuild the notion of everyday resistance through Bourdieu’s concept of an independent, but overlapping symbolic field. Symbolic contestation, to Bourdieu, is both connected to and separate from other fields, such as the economic and social. Actors struggle over symbolic resources with the tools available to them. I specify the location and content of these struggles by clarifying the centrality of micropractices of power in the maintenance of power relations and by briefly building upon theories of recognition and status. In addition to more structural and material constraints, inequality is perpetuated and contested through symbolic practices at a more proximate level. I specify a continuum for understanding the heterogeneity of subordinates’ responses, including those described by the formerly enslaved themselves.

To capture a holistic picture of the heterogeneity of subordinate response, I employ methods that facilitate casting a wide net to capture a diversity of subordinate actors’ voices. I use innovative tools developed in computational linguistics and the information sciences to systematically and formally analyze the 130 slave narratives published between 1800 and 1930 accumulated in this corpus. I specifically construct a word network map. This map reveals prominent clusters of words through their cumulative appearances in different narratives. I use the word network map as an index for qualitative exploration cross-referencing terms identified in the network with the narratives themselves.

Results indicate the presence of six emergent themes in the word network map: polemics, religion, reading and writing, crime and escape, everyday life, and the master-slave relationship. The word network map coupled with the qualitative analysis derived from it contributes to our understanding of American slavery in at least three ways. First,
the network analysis reveals the centrality of the master-slave and everyday life clusters emphasizing their role in connecting themes to one another. Moreover, the everyday life cluster, identified as the primary location of symbolic struggle, is proximate to the master-slave cluster: physical violence and symbolic struggle are linked. Second, contrary to more monolithic constructions of resistance, qualitative analyses reveal the heterogeneity of responses to the enslaved condition as narrators describe quiescence, projective agency, everyday resistance, and more formal resistance to the primary conditions of natal alienation and social death. Third, we can also observe the extent to which the master class develops parallel symbolic strategies to maintain these conditions.

I conclude by situating the notion of social death in the broader context of a moral sociology of inequality. The broader struggle for recognition offers analytic direction for the future exploration of the role that symbolic struggles play in provoking societal change. I further highlight how the incorporation of text data through the increasingly more sophisticated analytic tools can open the door for large-scale analyses of hundreds of diverse actors’ voices. Recent theoretical and analytic developments promise a more complete picture of subordination and inequality, including but not limited to enslaved life, by using broad strokes to guide our detailed understanding of the heterogeneity of response to material and symbolic forms of subordination.
Dedicated to
Jill Harrison
Mike and Linda Light
and in memory of Mary Haught.
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When cracking a new book, I always turn first to the acknowledgments section. This impulse, I tell myself, is motivated by my interest in academic genealogy and what acknowledgement sections can tell us about a book and the person who wrote it: where is this author from, who are they friends with, how did their work get funded, do they thank their family? When I am feeling particularly honest, I can admit that my temptation to read acknowledgements is motivated by my dream of writing my own someday. The hope that I could write something worthy of an acknowledgement knowing that so much in life deserves this type of platform for gratitude. I am grateful for the opportunity to finally boast about the quality of advice and support I have received while working towards the completion of this project.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

George Henry was a mischievous boy like other kids before and after him. He avoided his chores, played in off-limits garden beds, made a swing to play with, and other “little tricks.” However, George was an enslaved child living in the Virginia countryside. He encountered hardship that to a modern reader is difficult to comprehend. As a boy he saw a white teacher murdered for teaching enslaved children the alphabet. He lived under the threat of the whip, but dreamed of visiting cities and meeting important men. George saw an opportunity to edge closer to this goal in the ships along the Eastern Shore.

He worked as an enslaved sailor for many years seeing sights that both encouraged and outraged him. On a trip delivering timber to Washington DC’s Navy Yard, George and some fellow sailors were allowed to visit the Capitol, or in Henry’s words, “the centre of this so called free country.” Approaching the building, they stumbled upon an enclosure of enslaved men and women bound for New Orleans. He writes, “It was then and there I took an oath against slavery, and that I would never go to Washington unless I went with an army to take her or burn her down.” Yet, he remained enslaved himself for several more years saving money for his escape and a clean break from his master. He finally took an opportunity to run away paying fifty cents to a boy to harbor him into Philadelphia. Reflecting on these moments years later, Henry states, “But
I had considered and knew that these hands and these feet belonged to George Henry and nobody else.”

As an escaped, former bondsman living in the North, Henry’s testament speaks to the broader quest for recognition among the enslaved and highlights the quest for justice and dignity in a society resistant, and often actively opposed to, it. He describes the small transgressions of his youth highlighting the daily, sometimes mundane, acts that underscore his connection to the rest of humanity. He also describes more overt resistance to his enslaved condition. Within the antebellum South, the ultimate form of resistance in this quest for recognition was the acknowledgement that one was not property, both rhetorically and through escape.

Henry, of course, is not alone in providing voice to his condition. In fact, the American slave narrative represents the largest collection of testimony on the “horror of becoming the legal property of another human being” (Gates 1987:ix). From the early 18th to the mid-20th centuries, approximately 6,000 men and women recounted their stories of enslavement (Starling 1984). These slave narratives were not individualistic or singular histories, but a “communal utterance” or a collective story representing millions of the oppressed (Gates 1987:x). These stories share commonalities that align with Henry’s experiences. Within the slave narratives, the formerly enslaved often mention transgressive acts many of which elicited harsh punishment. They describe everyday acts that appear to violate the strict codes that governed their lives and explicit confrontation

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1 Consistent with many contemporary scholars of American slavery, I follow the convention that refers to the victims of slavery as the enslaved or as enslaved men and women. While this is occasionally rhetorically awkward, this convention, as race critical historians argue, eschews the objectification of these historical actors by highlighting the imposed status as an adjective, rather than a more encompassing noun (see White 1985 and Camp 2004 for brief discussions of this convention).
with these codes. Numerous narrators also describe non-resistant acts ranging from quiescence to subtle expressions of human agency.

Recent historical research has tried to identify acts of resistance within the everyday life of the enslaved. Relying primarily on the narrative accounts, this scholarship highlights how the enslaved opposed the conditions of their enslavement through transgression and by establishing a culture, extended families, religion and so forth that countered their subordinated position. Sociological research has much to offer this line of inquiry with an extensive theoretical tradition examining power in its multiple forms. Yet, little sociological research examines American slavery. The dearth of sociological scholarship on American slavery is surprising for multiple reasons. First, sociology has a rich tradition of analyses of power, especially as it pertains to subordinate groups. Second, sociology has a proven track-record of elucidating historical events and contributing to historical debates. Third, sociology is increasingly concerned with incorporating cultural objects, such as texts, in creative and empirically sophisticated ways. Last, and perhaps most important, sociology has offered a great deal of attention to issues broadly framed around questions of inequality, especially questions pertaining to racial inequality and justice. Within the United States, there can be little doubt that the seeds of contemporary racial inequality were planted during the 400 years of legalized slavery (Patterson 1998).

In this dissertation, I fill the gap in our sociological understanding of American slavery. I specifically focus on how sociological tools, both methodological and theoretical, help complete the picture of slavery from a subordinate position, or from the eyes of the enslaved. To do so, I extend a theory of power that incorporates multiple
responses to subordination from quiescence to overt forms of resistance. I use sophisticated linguistic tools to uncover patterns pertaining to power within a corpus of slave narratives published from 1800 to 1930 and offer a close textual analysis to illustrate how these patterns operate within the individual descriptions of the enslaved life. Through this multidimensional text analysis, I uncover the predominate themes within the slave literature and locate the primary role of everyday life and the dominant master-slave relationship in tying the narratives together.

Beyond adding to our knowledge of slavery, this project has implications for understanding power, generally, from the standpoint of subordinate groups. Indeed, this project adds to the growing body of research on resistance and American slavery and our theoretical understanding of inequality by focusing on the varied responses to subordination under conditions of extreme inequality, such as slavery. Moreover, I develop sophisticated text analysis tools and thus contribute to cultural and historical sociology by encouraging the systematic incorporation of the unique voices of actors themselves within sociological analyses.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF AMERICAN SLAVERY

Slavery in the American South has been a subject of serious historical scholarship for at least a century. Historians have developed a comprehensive understanding of many facets of slavery both culturally and as an institution. Within the past forty years, historians

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2 Scholars interested in inequality and race have a long history of erroneously confounding the complex formulation of racist practices within class analysis (West 1999). In placing slavery within a continuum of inequality, I intend to emphasize the similarities between various forms of inequality, while at the same time acknowledging the qualitative differences distinguishing racialized slave systems. Continuity exists within the struggle for power between super- and subordinates; however, the uniqueness of the American slave system in part makes it an interesting case both relative to other forms of slavery and other systems of inequality.
have turned to the analysis of the rich slave narratives – an oversight that lasted decades. Now, however, the analysis of slave narratives as been incorporated into both the historical and literary analysis of 19th century American life (Durant and Knottnerus 1999). The sheer volume of historical research on slavery prompted Orlando Patterson (1977), the foremost sociologist working on the comparative analysis of slavery, to caution against the study of American slavery within sociology.

A quick review depicts sociologists’ long, but thin history of studying slavery. Harriett Martineau, a social scientist in her day incorporated into sociology by revisionist scholars,3 was one of the most insightful analysts of the 19th century American South. In her proto-Toquevillian trek across the United States, Martineau offered special attention to the culture and practices of plantation life. She argues forcefully for the benefits of egalitarian democracy and places great hope in the moral tradition of equality within the United States to weaken divisions based on race, class, and gender (Lipset 1962). However, she levies harsh criticism on the inequalities that persisted in Jacksonian America offering her most cutting remarks for the institution of slavery: “The personal oppression of the negroes is the grossest vice which strikes a stranger in the country. It can never be otherwise when human beings are wholly subjected to the will of other human beings” (Martineau 1962: 223). Martineau’s detailed travelogue foreshadows 20th century sociology’s interest in race and institutions, particularly political and economic, which reinforce power relations in the United States.

3Although there is some debate regarding Martineau’s place in the pantheon of 19th century “founders” of sociology (see Deegan 2003 and Hamilton 2003), her explicit interest in developing an understanding of social systems and her early translation of Comte’s Positive Philosophy justify the appropriateness of including her in the discussion (see Lipset 1962).
Relatively few sociologists since Martineau have contributed directly to the sociological understanding of slavery. Those that have developed analyses of slavery focus most often on one of three issues: slavery’s role in conditioning contemporary race relations, abolitionism, or the economic effects of slavery either ante-or postbellum.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1901), for example, digs deep into changes in the economic and labor system of 19th century America to describe the nascence of the conditions experienced by early 20th century African Americans. Scholars, such as Howard (1917), turn to pre-Civil War race relations to find the seeds of early 20th century white racism. More recent research follows this lead arguing that growth of insurrections in the early 19th century, coupled with increasingly more harsh slave codes, exacerbated the racialized context of American slavery, thus laying the foundation of racial discrimination and antagonism in the contemporary U.S. (Wilson 1974). In his analysis of manumission, Budros (2004) also argues that conditions established between blacks and whites during the antebellum period had a profound influence in post-emancipation race relations. Other scholars have focused on pre- and post- emancipation socioeconomics. Bonacich’s analysis (1975) of “split labor markets” and Ruef’s analysis (2004) of the demise of the plantation as an institution fit this description filling in knowledge about slavery as a historical topic, but also using the case of slavery to create a more thorough understanding of theoretical issues. Last, sociologists have studied abolitionism within the context of social movements outlining how communication and technological advancements and religion helped spread the anti-slavery movement nationally (King and Haveman 2008; Young 2002 and 2006).
Despite the growth in cultural sociology, culture is largely absent from these three general themes addressed in previous sociological research on slavery. Orlando Patterson’s comparative work on slavery (1982; 1991) goes a long way towards filling in some of the cultural gaps in our sociological understanding of slavery. With Weberian reach, Patterson traces similarities and differences across slave societies from the ancient Greeks to the North Atlantic. He argues that slavery is defined by the “social death” of the enslaved: central to the culture and institutions of slave societies is the utter dehumanization of human chattel. Although Patterson includes some analysis of American slavery, especially in his work on freedom (1991), the unique qualities of American slavery remain under-explored. Furthermore, as Gates (1987) reminds us, no other slave cultures have the rich records of the enslaved in their own words. I discuss the implications of the inclusion of enslaved voices, particularly as it pertains to Patterson’s work, in Chapter 2.

Although limited, prior work highlights the role that sociology can play in developing a deeper understanding of American slavery, Emancipation, and Reconstruction. For example, more recent quantitative work, such as Budros (2004) and Ruef and Fletcher (2003), emphasizes the insights gained from sociological methodology. While quantitative studies, or cliometrics, have become an important and popular subfield of historical research, sociologists have gained specific purchase on a variety of statistical phenomena under-explored in traditional historical research. Sociologists, such as Young, have also contributed to our historical understanding both theoretically and by turning the sociological eye – or the observational stance grounded in theory that separates sociology from other disciplines – on historical topics, such as abolitionism,
religion, and social movements. Methodological and observational distinctions encourage unique disciplines to approach relevant topics. The importance of American slavery both historically and as the driving antecedent of contemporary race relations not only can benefit from, but demands sociological attention and methodological scrutiny.

Scholars, however, often only gloss the inverse question: what can a particular case contribute to sociological understanding. Pertinent sociological research not only contributes to our understanding of a particular case, moment of time, phenomenon, and so forth, but also contributes to our understanding of core theoretical questions or generates new theoretical questions (Abbott 2004). As Bonacich’s study of antebellum labor market’s and Young’s analysis of abolitionism among others describe, not only can sociology contribute to our understanding of slavery, but American slavery provides a case that can provide a fruitful framework for extending sociological knowledge and theory.

In this dissertation, I argue that the dearth of research on American slavery detracts from our understanding of inequality. This is both a grounded concern in so much as the legacy of American slavery has yet to run its course. It is also a more profound theoretical concern: American slavery provides a unique opportunity to study extreme disadvantage and the power relations structuring and bounding this inequality. I thus contribute to our broader understanding of inequality by exploring the role that power plays within institutionalized systems of disadvantage. The availability of rich testimony from the subordinate group within the institution of slavery in the United States allows for a more nuanced understanding for the consequences of power, how it was maintained, and how it was responded to by those on the bottom of the ladder.
INEQUALITY, POWER, AND RESISTANCE

Power is a fundamental sociological construct that weaves either implicitly or explicitly into a wide range of sociological research, from analyses of workplace inequality to discussions of stratification and politics and many more. While power is much discussed, it is rarely outlined in a satisfactory manner typically relying on more commonsense understandings of how power influences decision-making, rules, and social roles. Likely contributing to this practice, power is notoriously difficult to define. Sociologists since Weber have typically focused on a top-down approach to power: Who has power, how one gains power, how one retains it. Since Scott (1985), many scholars focusing on power have incorporated the role of weak actors in power relations: How actors without power resist the conditions imposed upon them.

Of course, sociologists for some time have analyzed forms of resistance among weak actors under the auspices of social movements and collective action (see Jenkins 1983). As actors form groups to mobilize against adverse conditions, they can generate energy based on collective action to turn the tide of their oppression or inequality. Yet, this collective mobilization demands certain criteria: the actors must have some, albeit, small space to construct their group (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Successful collective action and mobilization also demands resources that may be impossible for extremely disadvantaged groups to accumulate (Scott 1985). Do actors with limited ability to collectively mobilize have the ability to resist their conditions? What is the goal of this form of resistance if there is little hope of meaningful materialist change?
Within slave societies the enslaved only possess the slimmest of hopes to enact the criteria endemic to collective action. Attempts at mobilization in the conventional sense are carefully guarded against and severely punished. Within the American South, for example, the enslaved in many states were not allowed to legally congregate in large groups. Although enforced primarily at the master’s will and more rarely by mechanisms of the state, these protections against potential mobilization expanded during the late antebellum period as fear of insurrections grew in the aftermath of the Nat Turner rebellion (Genovese 1974).

Since the 1960s, scholars have shed light on numerous methods used by the enslaved to resist the condition of their enslavement. Some forms of resistance, such as the Nat Turner rebellion and others, align with our understanding of social movements. Actors bound together, engage their available resources, and directly confront the master-slave relationship fighting violence with violence. However, these full-scale revolts were rare: Others explore less violent forms of collective behavior perpetuated by more organized abolitionists in both the North and the South. While many enslaved men and women were familiar with these movements, the strength of the institution of slavery precluded their ability to develop an awareness of them at any profound level.

With the “rediscovery” of slave narratives in the late 1960s, historians turned their attention to other forms of resistance by focusing on power and the everyday life of the enslaved. Early manifestations of this strain of research (e.g. Rawick 1972) explore the life that the enslaved developed outside of the guise of the masters and overseers or from “sundown to sunup.” Following Scott’s (1985) work on everyday resistance among Malay peasants that identified the possibility of everyday forms of resistance, more
recent historical research examines forms of resistance that manifested in everyday interaction between the enslaved and their superiors (e.g. Camp 2004; Scott 1990). Like workers “loafing” on the shop floor, the enslaved did not always passively accept the daily tasks assigned to them or the subordinate identity ascribed to them (Burawoy 1979; Hodson 2001). Rather, the enslaved with some frequency challenged the conditions of their enslavement and often suffered the consequences of their resistant transgressions.

Critics of the everyday resistance frame challenge the quantity and material effect of these transgressions: the enslaved may have occasionally resisted their condition, but experienced little resulting material change. In fact, resistant bondswomen and bondsmen, using either formal or informal tools, likely suffered harsh retribution. By overemphasizing the ability of the enslaved to perform resistant activity, some argue, everyday resistance scholars paint an overly simplistic and optimistic picture at the expense of the harsh reality of slavery (Paquette 1991). Others claim that everyday resistance fails to distinguish between expressions of agency and everyday resistance: everyday resistance runs the risk of conflating resistance with everyday acts. In the context of slavery, these criticisms are particularly important to consider because the line between resistance and agency is extraordinarily thin – agency itself can be analogous to resistance in conditions of institutionalized extreme inequality – while the danger of misspecification can indeed underestimate the severity of disadvantage.

In chapter 2, I construct a theoretical argument about power that underscores the range of responses available to subordinate actors. This work extends general work on power (e.g. Lukes 2005) by incorporating Bourdieu’s consideration of symbolic violence (1989; 1991) and Foucault’s discussion of the micropractice of power. I argue that
everyday resistance takes place in a sphere that intersects the material and symbolic while most often confronting issues of status and recognition – roughly an acknowledgement of one’s humanity – in the symbolic sphere. I also construct a theoretical space for non-resistant responses – either in the form of quiescence of through projective agency⁴ – in the face of imbalanced power relations.

By developing a systematic sociological analysis of the American slave narrative, we gain insight into how one extremely disadvantaged group responded to the conditions of their subordination through formal and everyday acts of resistance through projective agency acts that asserted their humanity in the face of an institutionalized system of dehumanization and on occasion through quiescence. By combining methodological techniques that allow for the systematic comparison of content across dozens of narratives with close qualitative analysis, we gain greater insight into subordination, culture and power.

SLAVE NARRATIVES AS DATA

I use antebellum slave narratives to analyze subordinate response within a setting of extreme disadvantage. Slave narratives are particularly useful because they share a similarity of form consistent with other genres. As Franzosi (2004:8) writes, “Genres have their laws – and laws are always constraining.” This parallels Gates’ observation that the slave narrative is a “communal utterance” (Gates 1987:iix). While unstructured data can be cumbersome, the formal similarities of slave narratives promote formal analysis. This being said, slave narratives are not strictly uniform.

⁴ As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, projective agency is the ability of actors to imagine future possibilities for action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).
The slave narratives used in this analysis originate from the University of North Carolina’s *Documenting the South* project. This invaluable data repository consists of a wide range of historical and contemporary sources on the southern United States. The archivists have placed these texts online encouraging a broader perspective on the narrative heretofore difficult to obtain given the fragmented status of most historical collections (see University of North Carolina 2008). In this analysis, I include texts published between 1800 and 1930 (n=130).

Many of the included narratives share some formal similarities. Nearly all of the narratives begin with some variation of the phrase “I was born” and include reference to their slave status at birth. For example, John Quincy Adams, a former house servant from Virginia, writes, “I was born in Frederick county, Virginia, in 1845, and was the slave of Mr. George F. Calomese.” Unlike Adams, however, the majority of narrators do not know the exact date of their birth and are, therefore, uncertain of their age. William Walker is one of the dozens who begin their narratives with this harrowing acknowledgement: “I was born in Southampton County, Virginia. I do not know my age, for I was born a slave, and all of my ancestors were slaves.”

Many of the narratives also include letters of appreciation and support from figures within the abolitionist and religious movements (Foster 1994). These letters were meant to perform one of two functions (and most often both). First, some of the letters purport to confirm the veracity of the narrative or the trustworthiness of the narrator. These journalists, ministers, or other dignitaries either speak to the general honesty of the narrator or include reference to research used to confirm aspects of the narrative. Secondly, some of these letters also confirm the intent of the author: most often
applauding the abolitionist work of the narrator. The letters prefacing Henry Bibb’s narrative serve, for example, both functions. As a committee of external evaluators writes, “Thorough investigation has sifted and analyzed every essential fact alleged, and demonstrated clearly that this thrilling and eloquent narrative, though stranger than fiction, is undoubtedly true.” On the other hand, Lucius C. Matlack confirms the abolitionist intentions of the narrator:

The task now performed, in preparing for the press and introducing to the public the narrative of Henry Bibb, has been one of the most pleasant ever required of my hands. And I conclude it with an expression of hope that it may afford interest to the reader, support to the author in his efforts against slavery, and be instrumental in advancing the great work of emancipation in this country.

In addition to these more explicit conventions of the slave narrative genre, more abstract aspects of the form and content connect these stories. In chapter 4, I discuss formal methods for analyzing how texts relate to one another. Borrowed from work in linguistics and the information sciences, I construct a global picture of a corpus of texts in order to observe the similarities and differences in a given genre. Through a series of networks, we can gain greater insight into the predominant themes in the slave narratives. These networks uncover rich aspects of language that weave through a genre of texts.

The narratives, of course, also have distinguishing characteristics. For example, several, such as Nat Turner’s are confessions of crimes that contain autobiographical notes. Some texts, such as the 4,300 word description by the former bondwoman named Elizabeth, are short fragments of life histories. While others, such as the 145,000 word autobiography of Charles Ball, are long, detailed accounts. Each narrator in their own way elaborates the conditions of the enslaved and many describe various forms of
resistance within the institution of slavery from agentic acts to everyday acts of resistance to more overt and organized forms of rebellion.

As I discuss in greater detail in chapter 3, these texts represent a unique collection of life-stories that are, in part, conditioned by the motivation for their telling. While some were motivated by abolitionism, others focus upon the religious awakenings that led to the creation of churches or denominations. Others yet are more pedestrian tales motivated by post-emancipation neighbors or relatives. Most importantly, perhaps, besides a few oral histories relayed through editors, each of these narrators were obviously literate, some quite educated (self-educated or otherwise) in a period of time when the average enslaved person was much less likely to be able to read and write. In fact, literacy is one form of symbolic resistance that these narrators describe evoking at the risk of beating and imprisonment. Thus, we cannot assume that the events within these texts are generalizable to the enslaved population as a whole; however, the sheer number of texts used in this analysis provide the largest possible sample of slave narratives available.5

THE CHAPTERS THAT FOLLOW

In this dissertation, I examine the relationship between inequality, subordination, and power. I build upon recent cultural explanations of the role of power in maintaining inequality. I describe how the contestation of power in settings of extreme disadvantage revolves around largely symbolic resources. The content of these struggles is often recognition – or acknowledgement of subordinates’ humanity. By locating the site of

5 An additional set of interviews of former slaves were collected by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the first-half of the 20th century. While consisting of hundreds of texts, these interviews suffer from numerous additional biases, such as memory and interviewer effects. Future analyses would benefit from formal comparisons of these unique sets.
everyday resistance in both the symbolic and material realm and by specifying the content of everyday resistance as both material and recognitive, we gain greater insight into how the enslaved struggled with the conditions of their enslavement.

In the next chapter, I expand these arguments by delving deeper into how subordinate actors respond to inequality. I begin by tracing the theoretical genealogy of power and describe how these approaches parallel the history of research American slavery. I argue that multidimensional analyses of power promote the inclusion of the full spectrum of possible responses to extreme forms of inequality by resisting categorical conceptions that delegitimate alternative hypotheses a priori. At the same time, I argue that as power manifests itself in informal ways, scholars should take seriously informal or everyday forms of resistance along with more formal forms of resistance in addition to the possibility that actors do not resist at all.

In chapter 3, I briefly outline the strengths and weakness of using the corpus of nineteenth century slave narratives to analyze resistance, inequality and power. The incorporation of these narratives as historical data revolutionized our understanding of American slavery. We have pushed beyond stories based solely on elites’ perspectives to stories that included the lived experience of the enslaved. However, I also specify some of the limitations of using this particular corpus. For example, women are underrepresented within the sample.

Chapter 4 describes previous work on the incorporation of textual data into the social sciences including sociology. New techniques promote the ability to view genres in sum. Network maps, for example, offer the ability to identify emergent themes within corpora computationally. The construction of systematic and reproducible pictures of the
slave narrative genre, for example, facilitates more in-depth qualitative immersion by revealing major themes within the corpus that constitute the location of discussions of responses to the differential power arrangements that structure enslaved people’s lives. A central question of text-based research is, simply, where to begin: When exploring a set of texts the order in which they are analyzed influences how conclusions are drawn as each reading affects subsequent readings. Network text analysis offers one solution to this problem.

The next three chapters comprise the empirical core of this project. Chapter 5 introduces the two text maps guiding the analyses. These maps, based on the similarities and differences in content between the 130 texts within this corpus, offer a “satellite” view of the data as a whole. This encourages an emergent view of the data. I largely focus on the word network map that depicts the relationship between words based on their overlap within narratives. This map reveals patterns of overlapping content through the clustering of terms. The clustering of terms indicates prominent themes within the narrative corpus. These themes are largely consistent with previous research. For example, religion and the master-slave relationship are the focus of many of these narratives. However, several emergent themes and relationships expand our understanding of previous historical observations. For example, while recent attention has focused on the importance of considering the everyday lives of the enslaved, the centrality of this cluster and its proximity to the theme of the master-slave relationship suggests that these two clusters – everyday life and the master-slave relationship – drive the content of these narratives: Everyday life and the master-slave relationship ground the discussion of other prominent topics.
The two subsequent chapters use this map to facilitate a more qualitative story of the variation in responses to slavery. The terms themselves and the relationship between terms function as an index. I use these terms and themes to guide the qualitative analysis. In chapter 6, I discuss the resistant responses to subordination described within the data. These acts are embodied in both formal physical confrontations and more informal, yet transgressive actions, such as clandestine religious meetings. The thematic clusters identified in the word map focus our attention on the role that polemics, religion, crime and escape, reading and writing, the master-slave relationship, and everyday life play in the formerly enslaved narrator’s discussion of resistance. We find that the enslaved develop a range of largely symbolic tactics to resist the social death and related natal alienation enforced upon them by the master class.

In chapter 7, I explore the range of non-resistant responses including personal expressions of agency and examples of when narrators describe quiescence also tracing the thematic clusters identified in the word network map. By considering the descriptions of moments when the enslaved avoid formal or informal resistance, I develop a more complete understanding of the heterogeneity of survival mechanisms employed by the weak. The enslaved people’s efforts to address the social death imposed upon them extend beyond resistance to more personal expressions of agency and passive attempts at “getting by.”

I conclude by highlighting the importance of including the voices of the weak within analyses of inequality. I specifically describe my contribution to the growing literature on inequality that considers the range of responses to subordination. These dual tasks, inclusion of subordinate actors’ voices and outlining the variation in their voice,
follow the larger turn within sociology to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism. Following Honneth (1992), a full consideration of the heterogeneity of actors’ responses to subordination is necessary for an adequate diagnosis of inequality. Previous studies struggle with the balance between incorporating a vast array of responses while retaining the subtlety of individuals’ symbolic struggles for recognition. In this analysis I develop a set of methodological and theoretical tools that provide one solution.
CHAPTER 2:

THEORY

Any discussion of slavery is inherently a discussion of inequality. This simple point is often lost in more historical descriptions of slavery, but is important to our sociological understanding because of the purchase gained by explicating the connection between inequality in contemporary life and in its most extreme forms. Although racial inequality in the antebellum South was undoubtedly more violent, more encompassing, and more embedded within the state, contemporary inequality shares central characteristics with and, as Patterson (1998) and other have argued, is in part derived from the extreme inequality established under the American slave system. Slave narratives depict a range of mechanisms that maintain the inequality endemic to slavery from informal sources of control, such as daily surveillance by overseers, to corporal punishment and even murder. Scholars studying contemporary racial inequality also describe a range of mechanisms perpetuating inequality from everyday forms of racial antipathy, for example “public-place discrimination” (Feagin 1991) to more overt racial harassment at work (Roscigno 2008).

Power forms the foundation of the inequality continuum, ranging from everyday struggles for power to institutionalized power embedded in the state. The struggle for power is core to many areas of sociological research, although often only implicitly. In analyses as diverse as racial discrimination in employment (Roscigno 2008) and the role
of associational memberships (Cornwell and Harrison 2005; Lee 2007), the subtext centers upon how actors with fewer resources, such as racial minorities in the workplace and unions, contest their subordinate positions. The definition of power often relies on commonsense understandings. However, power is a multidimensional concept that contains less explicit or latent implications. Describing a methodology for analyzing the less explicit forms of power, Lukes (2005:50) writes: “We are concerned to find out what the exercise of power prevents people from doing, and sometimes even thinking. Hence we should examine how people react to opportunities – or more precisely perceived opportunities – when these occur, to escape from subordinate positions in hierarchical systems.”

In this chapter, I expand upon the view that power is multidimensional – sometimes hidden or latent – and describe the diversity of power relations in slave society. Previous historical scholarship on slavery remains theoretically vague about the contribution of power to perpetuating the extreme inequality that structured the lives of the enslaved. I begin by briefly dissecting Lukes (1984, 2005) influential definition of power. Interestingly, this definition loosely traces the trajectory of research on American slavery from a raw economic system to more complex and cultural structure concluding most recently with Patterson’s (1982) widely used definition of slavery as “natal

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6 While Lukes provides one of the most thorough and widely used conceptualizations of power, he (Lukes 1984:4) dismisses the notion that power, given its diverse meanings, can be defined: “[What] interests us when we are interested in power runs deep…and what unites the various views of power is too thin and formal to provide a generally satisfying definition, applicable to all cases.” Others, including Foucault (1979) and Wrong (1968), describe the difficulties in forming a comprehensive definition of power.

7 On the other hand, of course, historical research on American slavery has been much more successful in detailing power relations: actor/state, master/slave, and so forth. By situating this discussion in sociological theories of power, I hope to both clarify previous findings and locate potential ambiguities, while at the same time contributing to the broader story of inequality.
Next, I move through a series of questions generated from Patterson’s seminal definition that stem from the prospects of resistance in cases of extreme inequality. Everyday resistance – that is, informal attempts to counteract power relations if only briefly – has gained particular theoretical and analytic momentum recently within the social sciences. Yet, even here, the location, content, and mechanisms of these struggles remain relatively underspecified.

A cultural view of power, I argue, offers the possibility that everyday resistance within cases of extreme inequality takes place primarily, although not exclusively, in the symbolic sphere. In other words, power contestation need not revolve primarily over the material, but may include more status-oriented struggles. I specifically explore the possibility that the content of these symbolic struggles largely focus upon the enslaved’s quest for recognition in the face of “natal alienation.” The enslaved struggle in multiple ways to challenge the status of “social death” enforced upon them. Last, I argue that the mechanisms of this symbolic struggle are located in the micropractices embedded within power structures. The primary site of and primary tools activated in symbolic contestation are wedded to the master-slave relationship and everyday life.

Focusing on locations, content, and mechanisms of struggle allows us to distinguish between quiescence, projective agency, everyday resistance and resistance – four possible reactions to hierarchical systems often left undefined in prior research. I conclude by highlighting the importance of including the perspectives and voices of subordinate groups in analyses of inequality. Through personal stories, like slave

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8 Patterson’s definition of natal alienation, as we will see, highlights the social and cultural effect of the enforced denial of meaningful social ties. This denial of social ties results in the “social death” of the enslaved.
narratives, we can gain a more situated understanding of the power relations that structure individuals’ lives.

SLAVERY, SOCIOLOGY, AND THEORIES OF POWER

Power is an elusive and contested concept that some scholars are reluctant to use at all (for example, see Latour 1986). Yet, power is all around us: we have a sense of when we have power, how we could get power, and certainly when we are powerless. We also possess the empathy necessary to see when others justly or unjustly lack power and, perhaps only on our best days, envision a more equitable distribution of power and the resources necessary to meritocratically distribute it. After all, power is not a result, but a potential or, as Lukes (2005:70) writes, “Power is a capacity and not the exercise or the vehicle of that capacity.” Lukes’ popular discussion of power moves through three different dimensions of power.9 Each of these dimensions, according to Lukes, is a pertinent aspect of power, but research on power is incomplete without a full multidimensional consideration. Interestingly, historical analyses of slavery and the power relations undergirding it have loosely moved from one-dimensional views of raw power to a more comprehensive and multifaceted view.

In its most basic form, power is the ability for an actor to enforce his/her will in the face of resistance from other(s) (Gaventa 1982, Scott 2001, Weber 1947). Exemplified by Dahl’s (1956) classic analysis of how groups negotiate control, one-dimensional power is most often generated through the activation of resources, such as

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9 In the first edition (1974) of Power: A Radical View, Lukes is clearly responding to and extending a critique of predominant political science theories of power, namely behavioral or pluralist accounts and their critiques. In the second edition (2005), however, it is clear that Lukes’ multidimensional conception of power is more than a work of political theory, but extends to other social arenas.
votes, capital or prestige. The winners in struggles for control are those with the greatest ability to wield these resources (Gaventa 1982). As Lukes (2005) describes, this first dimension is a behaviorist account: we can observe power relations by looking at decision-making or other manifest behaviors.

This first dimension of power parallels early analyses of slavery – analyses that highlight the tools used by the master class to reinforce their hegemonic dominance (Lukes 2005; Phillips 1966; Genovese 1974). In these studies, the structure of slave society, and how it is reinforced, is dominated by the master class all but eliminating the opportunity for opposition (Camp 2002). Phillips’ (1966 [1918]) account, grounded in the prevalent racist ideology of early 20th century America (Weinstein and Gatell 1973), constructs a benign picture of slave-life. To Phillips (1966 [1918]) slaves lived in relative peace with masters and were treated, for the most part, benevolently. Although drawing opposite conclusions, Stampp’s refutation (1956) of this benevolent picture rests on many of the same assumptions (Weinstein and Gatell 1968). To Stampp, as to Phillips, American slavery was largely a “labor system” (1956: 34) The one-dimensional view typically privileges materialism focusing on the economics of raw power.

The second dimension of power, according to Lukes, centers on how powerful actors control the rules of the game (Lukes 2005). In the two-dimensional framework, “[One] exercises power in the manner the one-dimensionalists favor,” Lukes (1984:9) argues, “but also by controlling the agenda, mobilizing the bias of the system, determining the ‘key’ issues, indeed which issues come up for decision, and excluding those which threaten the interest of the powerful.” Indeed, within well-known sociological research the one-dimensional and two-dimensional frameworks often
overlap. For example, Mills (1956) largely focuses on how elites use power to achieve and defend their class interests: Class operates in the sense of both power over some other person (e.g. administrative authority), and in directing national debate.

Paternalist conceptions of slavery, whether explicitly or not, invoke this two-dimensional definition of power. The master, within this framework, established the rules of interaction in master-slave relationships. The enslaved, for their part, reinterpreted their condition to promote their humanity, but largely acquiesced to the general order. Or, as Genovese (1974: 5) writes, “Paternalism created a tendency for the slaves to identify with a particular community thorough identification with its master; it reduced the possibilities for their identification with each other as a class.” From this perspective, the only form of tangible opposition occurs in the context of slave revolts, which were very rare (Genovese 1974).

Lukes’ central contribution to a general theory of power is to recognize that power is not limited to the overt and conscious manifestations, but also includes deeper cultural and even subconscious implications. Within a three-dimensional framework, power contains the properties of the first two dimensions, but also “allows that power may operate to shape and modify desires and beliefs in a manner contrary to people’s interests” (Lukes 1984:10). The third dimension of power includes mechanisms that determine both the nature and possibilities of struggle (Gaventa 1980). Nonetheless, this struggle remains largely materialist. While the powerful may shape the desires of the powerless, the possibility of contestation reverts to economic means. In other words, the battle is ultimately fought over tangible economic or political resources.
Patterson’s seminal comparative work on slavery parallels this three-dimensional view of power. While Patterson (1982) acknowledges the materialist flavor of chattel slavery, slavery is not defined by it. In fact, in some pre-modern forms, slaves played little economic role in the functioning of society.\textsuperscript{10} Rather, slaves contributed to the master’s prestige. In this way, Patterson highlights the symbolic condition of slavery. Slavery is not merely an economic system, but a system that perpetuates a profoundly symbolic power structure embedded within the economic and political system. Bourdieu’s conception of symbolic power, discussed below, is particularly informative allowing for the consideration of a range of responses to symbolic hierarchical structures and status dominance.

**Natal Alienation**

While the most apparent characteristics of antebellum slavery revolve around labor, Patterson’s comparative work highlights the symbolic foundations connecting disparate slave societies. Patterson (1982:13) defines slavery as the “permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.” The key element of this definition that separates slaves from other dominated groups is the condition of natal alienation. Natal alienation is the forced removal of enslaved people from all enforceable ties to family and other forms of community. In this way, enslaved people are socially dead, unrecognized as a human in any meaningful sense, and isolated within society (Patterson 1982). While Patterson suggests that the restoration of natality is the hope of the enslaved who seek freedom, he does not clarify what this hope means or how it is enacted prior to

\textsuperscript{10} As Davis (2006) notes, Patterson is largely concerned with premodern slavery.
manumission (Patterson 1991). This omission likely evolves from the comparative nature of his work. The act of manumission in most slave societies was determined entirely by the master class. The enslaved were most often freed to serve as soldiers in times of war. Thus, attempts to generate a sense of natal regeneration, while probably existent, were not likely to have much of an effect.

The antebellum South, however, was not as isolated as other societies may have been. Not only was a non-slave holding society nearby, but, of course, the southern states shared a federal government with non-slave holding states. The northern states had only recently experienced the abolishment of slavery themselves making them ripe for an antagonistic view of the South both on moral and naked economic terms. In fact, the abolitionist sentiments that swept the North and undoubtedly seeped into the South, in addition to an increase in slave revolts at the turn of the nineteenth century likely influenced the creation of more stringent slave codes and more deeply embedded the slave system within an articulated and systemic racist ideology (Wilson 1974). With the increase in revolts, escapes, and the spread of abolitionism, enslaved men and women in the antebellum South likely had greater opportunity to encounter the prospects of freedom than in other slave societies.

The possibility of resistance becomes a pertinent and valuable issue when considering slavery in the antebellum South. Although Patterson’s comparative work offers little hope of any meaningful resistance, he acknowledges that the enslaved were conscious of their position and not always complacent about the prospects of escape. This raises both a theoretical and methodological question about how we decipher how and when the enslaved considered these prospects. As Lukes (2005:50) writes about the
methodological push of his multidimensional approach to power, “We are concerned to find out what the exercise of power prevents people from doing, and even thinking. Hence we should examine how people react to opportunities – or, more precisely, perceived opportunities – when these occur, to escape form subordinate positions in hierarchical systems.” Research on resistance, and especially James Scott’s work on everyday resistance, offers a popular, but contentious solution to this issue.

**POWER, RESISTANCE, AND SLAVERY**

In the 1960s, research on power underwent a dramatic change as numerous scholars, following the populist groundswell, moved beyond the hierarchical framework to incorporate the actions and reactions of less powerful, or even powerless, actors (Tilly 1991). Here, power is not unidirectional and univocal, but multifaceted and multivocal.11 One stream of this research has focused upon how weak actors use their limited resources to contest the conditions of their status in everyday interaction. Research on everyday resistance has correspondingly proliferated extending from overt political action to more mundane acts of workplace transgression (Hollander and Einwohner 2004).

Everyday resistance is the least structured form of resistance consisting of an array of tactics that are widespread, durable and coordinated, yet this form of resistance is not formally organized (Scott 1987). Developed initially as a theory of peasant movements, everyday resistance provides a concept that recognizes the

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11 Research on Sixties’ student and civil rights’ movements exemplifies this shift describing how activists confronted the structures of power using available tools, such as mass protest and civil disobedience (Gamson 1968). While students and civil rights activists largely lacked the resources of the state, they were not without resources. Rather, they mobilized forms of protest that often dealt with the symbols of power - sit-ins that challenged hierarchies, marches that placed gained media attention and so forth.
potential attempts by those outside of the civil sphere to influence the conditions of their oppression. In the case of Malay peasants (Scott 1987), everyday resistance took the form of evasion as Malay peasantry avoided taxation and chose to haggle with the local tax collectors. In the case of Southern bondswomen (Camp 2004), everyday resistance took the form of truancy with women relying on others for safe harbor and to keep each other’s secrets. Contemporary research on classroom relations describes how students use cumulative acts of everyday resistance to change the climate of the classroom (Mcfarland 2001). From the most wide-reaching to the most local, everyday resistance provides an opportunity for those with little or no power to challenge those holding all of the cards.

Critiques of the everyday resistance approach center upon the emphasis placed on acts of resistance that have little isolated effect on the conditions of oppression. Paquette (1991:684) provides an apt cautionary warning that day-to-day resistance characterized by “spontaneous, individual, and often selfish acts” does not translate into the transformation of systems. Moreover, these acts can help reinforce the power structure by creating the illusion of agency and, thereby, contributing to the false consciousness (White 1986). Scholars of everyday resistance, for example, may inflate the autonomy of slaves. While acknowledging that informal forms of resistance may eventually lead to political action, Paquette (1991:684) argues that at the same time small transgressions may encourage the resistant individual to participate in the maintenance of the master’s power (whether the master knows it or not).
Paquette’s critique is a part of a broader argument about Scott’s claim that subordinate actors are perpetually engaging in resistant acts behind the scenes or what Tilly (1991: 598) interprets as a “constant rebellion” or a type that Sivaramakrishnan (2005:351) labels “the all-knowing, strategizing, everyday resistor.” By eliding intentionality – subordinate actors are engaging in everyday resistance whether they know it or not – analysts are positioned to observe everyday resistance everywhere. This type of theoretical entrenchment evolves into the opposite side of the “Sambo” coin and suffers from a similar essentialism about the cognition of subordinate actors.

Ortner (1995:190) suggest that the “black box” of research on resistance derives from ethnographic thinness which can be alleviated by returning to actors’ voices: “Resistance studies are thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on subjectivity – the intensions, desires, fears, projects – of the actors involved in these dramas.” A true consideration of intentionality is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to obtain with historical data, but theories offering a greater range of response allow for a more complete picture of intentional and unintentional acts. I provide a more thorough understanding of how subordinate actors view their own actions and behaviors by separating resistance from other forms of agency and even quiescence.

Situating the concept of everyday resistance within Bourdieu’s theory of the symbolic forms of struggle helps to alleviate these concerns in several ways: First, Bourdieu insists that the symbolic sphere is independent, but connected to, other
spheres of power, such as the economic and cultural.\textsuperscript{12} Second, Bourdieu resists a unilateral conception of power in either direction. Thus, emphasizing the struggle of contested situations, subordinates and superordinates seesaw within a field of contestation. Within settings of extreme disadvantage, subordinates might have little promise of changing their condition, yet, as Tilly (1991) describes, it is less the physical outcome that motivates actors to resist, but the perpetuation of hope they enact through resistance. This focus on symbolic struggle does not deny the materialist flavor of power and resistance. Instances of everyday resistance may have material consequences. Certainly, the repercussions within slave societies can be wrought with cruel physical punishment and severe material deprivation, including starvation. Like institutionalized forms of resistance by subordinate groups, everyday acts of resistance often carry both a symbolic and materialist objective.

RESISTANCE AND THE SYMBOLIC SPHERE

Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic forms of struggle clarifies some of the ambiguity that forms the opening of critiques of the theory of everyday resistance. Additionally, Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power informs Lukes’ three-dimensional view in at least two important ways. First, like Lukes, power operates mutlidimensionally. But Bourdieu moves beyond largely materialist domains to include alternative fields of struggle. To Bourdieu, as Hallett (2003:133) rightly interprets, symbolic power is the “\textit{power to define the situation}” (italics his). Not only do actors contest materialist concerns, such as

\textsuperscript{12} Bourdieu goes a long way towards avoiding the materialist/ideological dichotomy that separates physical and mental forms of coercion by considering linked, but independent symbolic and economic spheres (see Mitchell 1990).
economic resources, but also contest definitions, concepts, or “the names which construct social reality” (Bourdieu 1989:20). Second, following Lukes, while privileging the structures that shape social life and their predominantly economic characteristics (Swartz 1997), Bourdieu conceives of symbolic space as a space of interaction and negotiation including both the powerful and powerless (Bourdieu 1991; Hallett 2003). As Lukes ultimately defers to the political and economic aspects of power and the extent to which culture reifies or legitimates these aspects, Bourdieu highlights the independence of symbolic power. Here, Bourdieu breaks from both Marx and Lukes by “emphasizing the role of symbolic forms and processes in the reproduction of social inequality” (Swartz 1997:82).

The emphasis on symbolic power is critical to the development of a theory of power that explicitly includes subordinate actors. Within cases of extreme inequality, such as slavery, the contest for material goods is relatively minor: The enslaved may “reappropriate” masters’ goods from time to time, but the accumulated effect of this pilfering has little consequence to the economic power of the master class over enslaved people. Yet, the act of reappropriation is not a meaningless material act, but a meaningful symbolic one. In this case as in others, such as workers “loafing” at work (Burawoy 1979), disadvantaged actors challenge the conditions of their inequality using symbolic tools. Consistent with Swidler’s conception of “cultural tool-kits” (1986), Bourdieu’s theory of practice incorporates the dispositions, or habitus, and the symbolic resources or capital that actors enliven in interaction (Hallett 2003). Actors in disadvantaged situations may only have symbolic resources at their command, but the struggle for these resources is not minor. As Bourdieu writes (1989:21), “These symbolic struggles of everyday life
and the collective organized struggles of political life have a specific logic which endows them with a real autonomy from the structures in which they are rooted” (emphasis his). Symbolic struggles are structured by the power relations embedded in other fields, such as the economic or political, but also structure these alternative fields. Again, this relationship between the symbolic and economic avoids the pitfalls of more essentialist preoccupations with either physical or mental forms of contestations (Mitchell 1990).

The relative autonomy of symbolic space does not supersede the objective condition of actors in disadvantaged positions (Bourdieu 1989; Swartz 1997). While actors may struggle in symbolic space with tools available to them, as with acts of reappropriation or loafing, they may experience little change in circumstance. Rather, symbolic power, enhanced by the accumulation of symbolic capital through previous struggles (Bourdieu 1989), legitimates and is legitimated by other forms of capital. As Swartz concludes (1997:75), “Indeed, it is the study of how and under what conditions individuals and groups employ strategies of capital accumulating, investing, and converting various kinds of capital in order to maintain or enhance their positions in the social order that constitutes as central focus of Bourdieu’s sociology.” The objective here is not to over-inflate the role of symbolic power in generating, or alleviating, conditions of inequality, but to argue that symbolic struggles constitute an interrelated, yet independent sphere from materialist or economic conditions. In his analysis introducing a symbolic power approach to organizational culture studies, Hallett (2003:146) deftly concludes, “Understanding symbolic power also empowers those who do not have power.”
The Content of Symbolic Struggle

What about content or for what is symbolic struggle? Bourdieu specifies the content of these struggles as honor or prestige, although these concepts remain relatively unclear and highly situated. The work of political theorist Nancy Fraser on recognition (Fraser 2001; Fraser and Honneth 2003) provides a more elaborate (if subtly distinct) answer. She argues that the central component of justice is the quest for recognition. She grounds her theory in the Weberian notion of status. Consistent with Bourdieu she argues (2001:24) that social status is a matter of justice and as such scholars of inequality (and those seeking justice) must examine “patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors.” Her “status model of recognition” argues that moments of misrecognition (or when a group is treated as unequal or not as peers) are “institutionalized patterns of cultural value” and not psychologically dependent phenomena: misrecognition is less about identity and more about a morally just social system.

Recognition, here, differs from the use of the “recognition” by Hollander and Einwohner (2005) who highlight the “visibility” of resistance or the properties of resistance acts that distinguish these acts to an outside observer. Rather, recognition is a claim, not the vehicle of the claim. While Honneth and Fraser (2003) debate the emphasis inequality scholars should place on either symbolic or materialist concerns, my focus on extreme forms of inequality avoids this theoretical controversy. In instances, such as slavery, that limit the forms of struggle, materialist strategies are not eliminated, but are less available promoting a more symbolic and status-oriented view of the content of everyday struggle.
MECHANISMS OF POWER AND RESISTANCE

By suggesting possibilities for the “where,” symbolic space, and “what,” recognition and status struggles, of more covert forms of resistance, I have left open the questions of “who” and “how.” Inequality derives from a range of sources from the state to everyday practice - from laws condemning or tacitly approving discrimination, for example, to differential treatment by store clerks or small business owners. Foucault’s discussion of power evokes this range by disentangling power from the state and describing how it links to the “micropractices” of everyday life most famously through the “gaze” of generalized others.13 14 Foucault (1978:96) recognizes the interrelationship between power and resistance declaring the ubiquity of resistance in the instantiation of power: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation in to power.” Yet, Foucault remains somewhat vague about the prospects of resistance prompting some critiques to interpret his view of power as all-encompassing and impervious to resistance on the part of subordinates (Lukes 2005).15

13 This attention to the operation of power within the microprocesses of everyday life is one connection between the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu (Abu-Lughod 1990).
14 “Wait, wait, wait,” one might say, “How can you reconcile Foucault’s focus on modernity and industrialization with the pre-industrial American South?” Indeed, the South was less industrialized than the North and much has been made of this distinction. However, there is little doubt that the South was at minimum a proto-modern society. While technological might have been stunted given the availability of the enslaved population, the plantations and the cities of the South were not devoid of the growing industrialization both technologically and from an organizational perspective. As Davis (2006:6) writes, “While slave labor has often been seen as economically backward and almost feudalistic, I stress the fact that plantation agriculture, even in Brazil, resembled factories in the field and, with its carefully structured gang labor, anticipated in many ways the assembly lines and agribusinesses of the future [emphasis mine].”
15 This view of the overwhelming oppressive characteristic of power is often interpreted in light of Foucault’s earlier work, such as Madness and Civilization. In this work, power indeed appears more all-encompassing and less subject to resistance. However, Foucault’s later work reveals a more nuanced perspective. By Discipline and Punish, most scholars seem to agree that Foucault has adopted a stance that
Despite this ambiguity, Foucault both through his elaboration of power and his more sparse discussion of resistance offers important insight into the strategies available to subordinate groups. By focusing on central components of Foucault’s later approach to power coupled with Bourdieu’s construction of symbolic struggle, we gain greater insight into the variety of mechanisms operating within the struggle for power and the actors and institutions engaged in this struggle. Here, I briefly focus on two central aspects of Foucault’s approach to power and suggest how these concepts contribute to our understanding of slavery and inequality more broadly.

**Networks of Power**

Foucault’s approach to power and resistance underwent several manifestations from a focus on resistance as a struggle against the “limits” that promote exclusion and division to the more elaborate and diffuse conception of resistance (Pickett 1996). Foucault’s later writings emphasize the growing efficiency of mechanisms of control in the maintenance of power. For example, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the transition from pre-modern forms of discipline that included more frequent acts of torture to the modern growth of incarceration as a primary means of punishment and the establishment of rigorous and widespread legal codes is attributable to the proliferation of surveillance technology embodied in Bentham’s panopticon: “[This general change] was an effort to adjust the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals; an adaptation and refinement of the machinery that assumes responsibility for and places under surveillance their everyday behavior, their identity, their activity, their apparently allows for resistance, even if the success of any given resistance movement is unlikely (see Lukes 2005 and Pickett 1996).
unimportant gestures” (Foucault 1979:76). These mechanisms were grounded in the “universal visibility” motivating Bentham’s panopticon or the “dominating, overseeing gaze” (Foucault 1980:152).

How was this visibility maintained outside of the literal technological innovations motivated by Bentham’s theories? Echoing Bourdieu, Foucault argues that power maintenance extends beyond the hierarchical structures of the state and becomes embedded in the networks that form the situated bases of power. Foucault suggests that the power embodied in the modern state is built upon a series of more local “power networks” and that the state cannot contain the full range of power relations existent in these networks. Thus, the notion of visibility and the correlated function of division does not emanate solely from state apparatuses, but manifests in the networks that structure daily interactions.

Within the previous literature on slavery, we can see this relationship between the structure and localized power in networks in the tacit approval of informal white gangs of patrollers checking the papers of traveling bondsmen and bondwomen (Genovese 1974) or in the relationship on plantations between overseers, masters, and the enslaved (Knottnerus, Monk and Jones 1999). The latter example illustrates the complexity of these power networks as masters wield power over the overseers and intervene, often only when convenient, when overseers are seen as losing control whether through excessive violence or when they fail to generate the desired rate of production.

Resistance within these power networks is not limited strictly to the elimination of power relations, but extends to the practice of power as well. As Pickett (1996:459) astutely observes, Foucault’s writings themselves are a good example of inversion of the
techniques of power as he uses the formal structures of discourse to challenge the prevailing discourse itself. In the act of writing, Foucault seeks to elaborate another space of resistance. The formerly enslaved narrators can be seen as embarking on a similar project that continues to resonate in works of African American literature, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and many others, that are viewed within the same lineage as the slave narrative (Gates 1987).

**The Body and the Reach of Power**

Foucault’s central contribution to our understanding of power is the extent to which he localizes power beyond the structural, beyond even the relational of Bourdieu to the body itself. Foucault, according to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982:xxvi), conceives the body as “the place in which the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organizations of power.” In his discussions of sex and the modern penal system, Foucault emphasizes how power manifests in the body in a literal manner:

> He is also arguing more broadly that power extends from state institutions to micro-level interactions an image evoked by the “capillary form” of power: “But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches in the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning practices, and everyday lives” (1980:39). In this way, power manifests in the most local aspects of people’s lives. The body itself becomes a central site of resistance along with other aspects of one’s identity and personality. Here, we have come full circle in some ways to Lukes’ (2005) three-dimensional view by acknowledging that power shapes
definitional aspects of social life, or the very rules that form power struggles, but we have moved beyond Lukes by expanding the terrain of such struggle to include the most local aspects of interaction.

Within American slavery, the system of inequality penetrated every aspect of enslaved men and women’s lives. Rules and relations established conditions, as Patterson (1979) describes, that challenged the humanity of the bondsman and bondswomen. A central site of the struggle over this most basic form of recognition was the body itself. However, we know that the irons and chains that were used to control the enslaved body were merely the tangible manifestations of a much more pervasive system of control.

In summary, Foucault recognizes that power and resistance are inextricably linked. Like Bourdieu, power exists in the hierarchies of society, but also in its “capillaries.” Resistance, as an instantiation of “counter-power,” similarly, operates institutionally and in the micropractices of everyday life. On the prospects of “counter-power,” Foucault (1979:219) writes, “That is why discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions.” “Counter-power” struggles against the hierarchy maintained by discipline. We see evidence of this assault against “horizontal conjunctions” maintained the racialized system of slavery practiced within the United States prior to Emancipation. Groups were identified by the physical characteristic of race by whites and great effort was extended to prevent the establishment of groups in a calculated manner as defined by Patterson and others. As Foucault suggests, we must turn to those who are the most
vulnerable to understand the local conditions of power and potential responses to subordination (Pickett 1996).

FOUR RESPONSES TO SUBORDINATION

We have considered Patterson’s definition of slavery as social death through “natal alienation” in light of several explanations that move beyond hierarchical constructions of power. This move does not diminish the fact that in the case of slavery, as an extreme form of inequality, the hope of a successful challenge of superordinate individuals and groups is severely limited. However, we have also placed constraints on the notion of resistance by extracting resistance in its everyday forms from solely the material realm by locating the primary role of the symbolic.

While more organized forms of resistance often engage both redistributive and recognition frames, acts of everyday resistance are mostly, although not entirely, a part of the symbolic struggle for recognition. By incorporating Foucault’s consideration of power within this discussion, we have further elucidated the extent to which power intersects with the most local of entities, including the body itself. Furthermore, we have identified several mechanisms, such as networks and micropractices, that help maintain power structures. In this section, I hypothesize that the responses to subordination fall into four main categories. These categories are derived from the previous discussion and are ordered from the least to the most organized.

![Figure 2.1: The Continuum of Responses to Subordination](image)

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Quiescence

Quiescence is the tacit approval of things as they are. Quiescence, here, is agnostic to the issue of whether actors are approving or disapproving of the conditions that structure their lives. In fact, actors might exhibit quiescent responses as mechanisms of survival (Dyson 2004). This response recognizes that habitus or the capillaries of power or the cultural conditions of power pervade subordinates’ responses to inequality. Actors embedded in weak positions, even the utter domination consistent with extreme inequality, do not inherently resist in every situation, nor are they predisposed to resist in every situation. In this way, potential responses to subordination are neither fixed, nor specific to any given actor. Within the slave narrative, actors who express quiescent acts or opinions, such as complementing the treatment of a particular white superordinate, are certainly not offering wholesale acceptance of the slave system, however, in these situated and specific moments, neither are they operating under a resistant frame.

Projective Agency

Like power, agency is a contested and popular concept within the social sciences (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Agency is also similarly left underspecified. In her discussion of language and agency, Ahearn (2001) settles on a broad definition of agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act.” Ahearn challenges the rigidity of the capacity to act within several alternative formulations, such as Bourdieu’s; however, her broad definition shares much in common with Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” in so much as it acknowledges that agency is a capacity constrained by sociocultural conditions via
institutions or more micropractices. While this definition of agency certainly encompasses acts of resistance, either formal or informal, for our purposes, I distinguish between agency and resistance by focusing on the aspects of agency that are not confined by intentionality – in other words, by focusing on the capacity to act and not its fulfillment.

This focus on the prospects of action aligns with a temporal construction of agency in which actors can assume multiple agentic orientations. Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) distinguish between past, present and future oriented agency. The enslaved may have highly constrained opportunities embodied in formal and informal types of resistance to plot alternative courses of action in the present and likely incorporate aspects of habitus consistent with the routinization of past behaviors structured by the slave system embodied in some quiescent behaviors. The enslaved, likely common among subordinate actors, also access the projective dimension of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998:971) define the projective dimension as “the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future.” The projective dimension of agency acknowledges that actors have the ability to conceive of alternative possible paths of action when problems arise. This form of agency is embedded in the imaginative process. In this way, this dimension of agency specifies the acknowledgement of the ability to act on the part of the enslaved, however abstract, but not to the acts themselves.
**Everyday Resistance**

As discussed at length above, everyday acts of resistance are the less coordinated acts available to those in subordinate positions that lack the resources to organize collective action. While debate lingers upon the topic of intentionality and everyday resistance, in this construction, I distinguish between projective agency and everyday resistance by intentionality. Therefore, here, everyday acts of resistance are intentional acts. Within slave societies, for example, the dominant classes’ efforts to enforce and promulgate natal alienation could make even projective acts of agency *de facto* acts of resistance: Any act or even thought by an enslaved man or woman that attempts to counteract the condition of slavery could be conceived of as an act of everyday resistance. However, I distinguish between intentional acts of everyday resistance and less tangible expressions of humanity embodied in projective agency.

**Resistance**

Resistance captures responses to subordination that are the most organized and formal. Recent work on collective action and social movements emphasize the social networks that coordinate resistant acts (Diani 2003). This level of formalization distinguishes acts of everyday resistance from resistant acts. This does not mean that resistant actors, in the case of American slavery, need to be bound together in formal organizations, such as abolitionist societies. As Rawick writes (1972:55), “Resistance flowed from the network of informal organization of that community and assumed forms that took their meanings from that community.” However, unlike everyday acts of resistance, resistant acts contain the formal properties, such as resource mobilization, central to collective action. Thus, as
Genovese (1974) notes, this form of resistance was comparatively rarer than less organized forms.

CONCLUSION

Since Rawick’s developed socio-historical treatment (1972) to quantitative studies of manumission (Budros 2004) and Southern labor markets (Bonacich 1975), sociologists have contributed to the broad historical literature on slavery. Recent work by Patterson (1998) and Eyerman (2002) deftly describe the residual effects of slavery in contemporary American race relations. The introduction of new data sources centering on slave narratives and ex-slave interviews, however, has largely passed by the discipline.

By incorporating symbolic power into Patterson’s robust conceptualization of slavery, we have the tools to consider the symbolic resistance of the enslaved in their every day life. The symbolic space of contention affords slaves in the milieu of antebellum slavery an opportunity to struggle against the conditions of their enslavement. This struggle is rarely successful and often costly, but provides moments where enslaved actors address the natal alienation imposed upon them. Given the available symbolic tools, this contestation is often “of the moment” and episodic, but the collective description of this struggle represents an achievement that, in and of itself, contributed to emancipation.

Scholars of inequality often focus on a fixed set of responses to subordination. Those interested in organized resistance focus largely on aspect of collective behavior that forms the bases of this resistance. Those interested in everyday resistance assume that resistance pervades the actions of the weak. Scholars with a structural bent may pay
less attention to responses of the weak focusing on the role of the powerful in establishing (or eliminating) the conditions of resistance. By incorporating Bourdieu’s symbolic sphere of struggle, the everyday focus of Scott, and the micro practice of power described by Foucault within Lukes’ framework, we can see that Lukes’ falls short in exploring the full implications of his multidimensional approach. While these theories may diverge in many ways, their significant overlap outlines a conception of power that demands the consideration of the variation of responses of inequality from the quiescent to the resistant.

Within the corpus of slave narratives, emergent network text analyses and qualitative exploration are likely to indicate foci that highlight the varied responses to the prevailing power structure. These responses are likely to take several forms. Previous analysis, for example, indicates the relationship between religion and the abolitionist movement in establishing mechanisms of resistance (Young 2002). As many of these texts were written under the auspices of abolitionism, we are likely to find indication of this relationship. Given the unique characteristics of the antebellum South relative to earlier slave societies, we are also likely to find acknowledgement of and resistance to the natal alienation described by Patterson. For example, we are likely to find examples of the how social ties, including familial ties, prove instrumental in escape. The data will also likely reveal moments of quiescence when the enslaved did not resist in any tangible way. Finally, such analyses are also likely to reveal the brutality and domination experienced by the enslaved. While much of this discussion has centered upon how subordinates use symbolic struggles to resist domination, torture and physical and mental abuse were prevalent within the antebellum South and often serve as justification for the
transgressions described in slave narratives. These descriptions are no less powerful when changing the focus from the abusive nature of racial slavery to the varied responses to this abuse.
CHAPTER 3:
DATA

The introduction of slave narratives as central sources in the study slavery revolutionized our understanding of American history. With the passing of time and in an effort for analytic holism, it is easy to essentialize historical actors. Actors on the margins, or the historical “extras” in back of action taking place among “star” figures, are particularly susceptible to this treatment. Prior to the 1960s, the enslaved, like the white working class and women, were largely treated, as George Rawick (1972:xiv) writes, as “the victim who never enters his own history as its subject, but only as the object over which abstract forces and glorious armies fought.” Historians in the 1960s “found” the slave narrative and allowed the enslaved to “speak” in a historical setting for the first time. This re-discovery influenced how we think about both historical and contemporary race relations.

While the North American slave narrative may be the largest collection of personal histories by the formerly enslaved and constitute a genre sharing similarities in both content and style, the collected body of slave narratives is by no means one-dimensional and the narrators are certainly not of one voice. First of all, two major sets of data split the collection. The first consists primarily of 19th century narratives written prior to or after the Civil War. Written for abolitionist societies, in periodicals, as illustrative histories, or in conjunction with histories of the establishment of African
American churches, these narratives vary dramatically in length and style. Some are likely to be heavily edited by white abolitionist movement members, others are fragmented thoughts about the quotidian elements of slave life. The second set consists of interviews collected primary by the WPA in the 1930s. This data results from semi-structured interviews by social scientists during the Great Depression. This dissertation is among the first to rely exclusively on the first set (n=130). The strength of the WPA set is well-known; however, it is less appropriate for our central goal of locating the various forms of resistance in the antebellum South due to the lengthy retrospection and the youth of the vast majority of respondents prior to emancipation.16

As mentioned in chapter 1, the 1800-1930 narrative corpus also contains particularities that are worthy of discussion.17 These particularities extend from formal differences, such as length, to substantive differences, often driven by the intent of manuscript (e.g. as an abolitionist piece or a religiously inspiration one), to demographic differences within the authorial pool. In this chapter, I explore several locations of difference in greater detail and discuss the implications of these differences. I conclude by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of this corpus for the sociological analysis of power and inequality.

16 As noted in chapter 1, future analyses will compare these two sets of narratives.
17 With a few exceptions, namely narratives from abolitionist periodicals, the narratives in this corpus correspond with the bibliography created by Andrews (2009). The texts represent the largest collection of digitized texts available. A handful of narratives have been “discovered” since 1930, but remain under copyright protection and are not available for digitization.
Geographic Differences

The issue of geographic differences within the American slave system marks an important point of contention within the historical literature. Many believe that by the 19th century, especially after the United States’ ceased participation in the African slave trade, the region became quite differentiated in terms of how the enslaved on average were treated. Following this line of reasoning, slave owners in the northern states – and in the Northern regions of the South, such as Maryland and Virginia – were less brutal to their bondsman and bondswomen than those in the deeper South. Several narrators in this sample mention these differences. For example, James Mars, who was born in 1790 in Connecticut, begins his narrative by describing regional differences: “The treatment of slaves was different at the North from the South; at the North they were admitted to be a species of the human family.”

Others, such as Charles Ball, describe the horrors of moving from the northern part of the South to the Deep South. By the 1830s, more northern states, like Virginia, were less dependent upon large-scale agriculture, in the cotton and sugar plantations in Louisiana, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and other states further south. Thus, many of the narrators in this set express fear of being moved from their homes in more northern states to the plantations in the Deep South where the work was more brutal and the whites were reputed to be more violent. Forced to march down south from Maryland by a slave trader, Charles Ball’s descriptions of the states grow increasingly more brutal. He blames this in part on the agricultural practices (i.e. no crop rotation) and on the idleness of the whites in these states. He concludes that the “general features of slavery are the same everywhere; but the utmost rigor of the system is only to be met on the cotton plantation
of Carolina and Georgia, or in the rice fields which skirt the deep swamps and morrasses of the southern rivers.”

Figure 3.1: Geographic Distribution of Narratives

Some scholars have attempted to emphasize, following observations such as Ball’s, the consistency of the “general features of slavery.” In so doing, these scholars, such as Genovese (1974), diminish the role of geographic differentiation and highlight the practices that existed across slave-holding states during the 19th century.18 These scholars argue that much of the claimed differentiation is largely a product of agricultural type demystifying the notion that more northern states were somehow “better” than those in the Deep South.

Figure 1 depicts the geographic distribution of the narratives including in this sample. Narratives were coded by the primary place of residence. Although many of the enslaved were frequently moved or lent to other whites, many of these moves were to

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18 Attributing shifts in treatment in the Lower South to the closing of the Atlantic slave trade and increasingly “stable communities” in frontier regions, Genovese, (1972:53) writes, “During the nineteenth century the difference in treatment between the Upper and Lower South became steadily less noteworthy.”
farms within the same state. I coded the longest single location of those narrators, such as Ball, who were moved across state lines. In this graph, we can see that this sample is biased towards the northern region of the South. The largest group of narrators lived primarily in Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland, although the distribution indicates good coverage of Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi as well.

**Type of Residence**

![Pie chart showing Type of Residence]

Figure 3.2: Narrators’ Places of Residence

The type of residence, as mentioned above, is an important, although certainly imperfect, indicator of the severity of physical treatment that a bondsmen or bondswomen received. Plantations were often the sites of the least humane treatment. The enslaved people living on plantations were more likely to receive more regimented and often less food, less adequate clothing, and so forth. City dwellers were more likely to receive better treatment than others in part because of the ease of the work that the enslaved in the city were forced to perform compared to the back breaking work on the plantations and farms in rural areas. As can be seen in Figure 2 and consistent with previous research (Durant
1999), the narrators in this sample lived primarily on plantations or in rural areas. Those in rural areas lived and worked in a variety of different circumstance from small shops to, most often, farms that consisted at most of a handful of other bondsmen and bondswomen. A very small number of these narratives describe city life in the antebellum United States. Although this may indicate a slight under-representation of those city-dwelling bondswomen and bondsmen, these characteristics of the slave narrative corpus are consistent with the emphases of previous historical analyses and likely relatively consistent with the distribution of the enslaved population at that time.

**Occupation**

Like the differences in the geographical location of their home or in their type of residence, the enslaved’s occupation played a major role in their interaction with whites and with other bondsmen and bondswomen. The type of work indicates a certain division of labor within the enslaved population: in the most aristocratic plantations and homes the bondsmen and bondswomen who worked as house servants were considered elite relative to field hands (Genovese 1974). Figure 3 depicts the occupations of the narrators in this corpus. Nearly 50% of the narrators worked as either field hands or laborers. The distinction between these two coded occupations is largely derived from the size of the farm upon which the narrators worked. Farm workers on smaller farms were more likely to work on a variety of tasks beyond working in the fields, while plantations had a much more specified division of labor (Genovese 1974). Nearly 30% of the

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19 However, as Genovese notes (1972:331), these “elite” servants were a comparatively small proportion of the enslaved population and, in fact, many bondsmen and bondswomen preferred field work for a variety of reasons including the fact that field hands were more likely to have less contact with “ever-demanding whites whom one had to wait on hand and foot.”
narrators worked as a servant in some capacity. House servants, of course, primarily tended to duties in the home, while general servants in this corpus accomplished a variety of tasks, such as working in inns or taverns. A small, but significant group of narrators (14%) were children prior to emancipation. Children worked on the farm at a young age and were assigned tasks relative to their age.

![Pie chart showing narrators' primary occupations.](image)

Figure 3.3: Narrators’ Primary Occupations

The occupational variation in this dataset is consistent with previous research. In his content analysis of the WPA data, Escott (1979:32), using more general categories, finds that 30.6% of the male respondents born prior to 1855 within the WPA corpus were “house servants,” 52.5% were “field hands,” 7.9% were artisans or skilled workers, and 7.5% were children.²⁰ Although we have no way of knowing precisely the occupational

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²⁰ Escott includes other birth cohorts as well, but these are less appropriate comparison groups for this analysis.
breakdown of the enslaved, these similar findings lend some confidence to the occupational distribution within this corpus.

**Gender**

The slave system was highly gendered, but with great variation. The preponderance of bondswomen on plantations spent some or most of their time working alongside men in the fields; however, women were more likely to work as house servants tending to the daily running of their masters and mistresses households (Burkart 1999). We know by now, of course, that enslaved women had sexual relationships with their masters. These relationships were often abusive and involved rape. They were the source of tension between white and black women on plantations and in cities. With the additional danger of sexual violence and the close proximity of bondswomen to their owners, the daily threat of persecution was at least as likely for women as for men.

In this corpus, only 10.7% of the narratives were written by women. This underrepresentation of women is the greatest weakness of this data and is one familiar to many historical analyses. Male writers offer a great deal of attention to specific women in their lives. In many of these narratives, mothers and other female relatives are described in detail and their importance at the center of enslaved families is emphasized. However, less specific discussions of bondswomen often are thin and result in generalizations of women as either “mammies” or as sexual victims. Describing the influence of enslaved women hold on the plantation, Allen Parker writes, “A very strong love always existed between the children and the colored mammies.” These discussions are vague and somewhat stereotypic, but are by no means unsympathetic. Even so, the male narrators
discussion of bondswoman’s experience by no means an adequate substitute for the bondswomen’s stories themselves. As Foster (1979:xxxiii) writes, “[S]lave women saw themselves as far more than victims of rape and seduction.”

Fortunately, several of the female texts in this corpus are incredibly rich and rank among the most anthologized texts. Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is widely considered to be among the most important African American autobiographies and certainly among the most widely read 19th century autobiographies (Gates 1987). Characteristic of the corpus as a whole, many of the female writers were exceptional having lived extraordinary lives. It is likely that this characteristic in part motivated the publication of their stories. An extreme example of this exceptionality, Elizabeth Keckley was loaned $1,200 to free herself and her son. Working diligently to repay this loan, Keckley found employment as a dressmaker for Jefferson Davis’s estate and eventually worked as a dressmaker for the Lincoln White House growing close to Mary Todd Lincoln. However, most of the female authors do not have relationships with the political or economic elite. Rather, like the men, their exceptionality derives from their education and from their often heroic and singular escapes to freedom.

**Subtext of Publication**

These narratives were written for a variety of different reasons. Some were written simply as a documentation of a tragic period of American history. Encouraged by friends, neighbors, or relatives, these texts are largely void of obvious ulterior motive. In other words, there is no clear reference to an external provocation for the writing of the text
other than their friends or family. The majority of the texts in this corpus, however, contain some evidence that their publication fits into broader themes.

The thematic emphases of these texts follow the era in which they were published. In his comprehensive literary analysis of American slave narratives, Foster (1979) identifies numerous eras of writing by formerly enslaved narrators. The first era, not included in this analysis, consists of 18th century narratives. These narratives were largely episodic descriptions depicting slavery more plainly as a loss of freedom and not as a dehumanized state of existence. In the 19th century texts, on the other hand, the narrators try to fulfill an objective by both illustrating the conditions of slavery from the perspective of the enslaved and outlining the case against slavery. These utilitarian and moral roles extend to the religious and abolitionist themes and, in part, divide the texts that were published prior to and after Emancipation as the moral role of the narrator turns from more overt abolitionist focus to a more religious one: While most pre-Emancipation texts certainly contain religious undertones and post-Emancipation text contain remnants of abolitionist language, Emancipation generated a clear change in the slave narrative.

As can be seen in Figure 3.4, the narratives in this analysis extend across the 19th and include several early 20th century narratives. Nearly a half of the narratives were written between 1830 and 1865 consistent with notion that this era was the “golden age” of the slave narrative (Foster 1979:61). Of the existent narratives, we can see an increase in the publication of narratives through this period; however, the voice of the formerly enslaved does not stop with Emancipation, but continues at a rate similar to or even

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21 Publication dates are an important, but imperfect indicator of the era in which the texts were written because some of the texts were published in previous additions or written prior to Emancipation. However, the vast majority of the texts in this analysis are first editions. Bibliographic information, including publication dates, are included in Appendix A.
greater than the period prior to the golden age. In sum, a thematic shift from the centrality of the abolitionist to the religious occurred after Emancipation and publication dates largely identify these themes. The fact that some texts are embedded in abolitionism or describe the establishment of Christian denominations does not delegitimize the veracity of their stories, but warrants mentioning along with other forms of variation within the dataset.

![Figure 3.4: Number of Narratives by Decade](image)

Abolitionist Texts

J.C. Hathaway’s 1847 preface to William Wells Brown’s narrative exemplifies the involvement of abolitionists in the publication process. Hathaway, the abolitionist publisher of several narratives, describes Brown’s character stating that Brown has devoted himself to the cause of abolitionism. Like William Lloyd Garrison’s preface to Frederick Douglass’s narrative and other prefatory notes, Hathaway urges readers of Brown’s narrative to understand the horrific consequences of the institution and to take
an active role in bringing about its demise. Hathaway’s prefatory note is impassioned and bold ending with a quote from fellow abolitionist James Russell Lowell’s poem “The Present Crisis:”

Reader, are you an Abolitionist? What have you done for the slave? What are you doing in his behalf? What do you propose to do? There is a great work before us. Who will be an idler now? This is the great humanitarian movement of the age, swallowing up, for the time being, all other questions, comparatively speaking. The course of human events, in obedience to the unchangeable laws of our being, is fast hastening the final crisis, and

"Have ye chosen, O my people, on whose party ye shall stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandal shakes the dust against our land?"

At least 25% of the narratives in this corpus include a preface with either explicit or subtle abolitionist sentiments like Hathaway’s. These notes served several purposes. First, they signal that a given narrative is within the abolitionist framework for those sympathetic to the movement. Second, they legitimize the author for the broader audience by attaching the narrative to a more widely known figure. This legitimation was partly a response to the spread of fictional narratives on the market at the time.

Religious Texts

Another predominant subset of narratives contains a religious subtext. The authors of these narratives use the trials of their enslaved life to reflect upon their role in establishing congregations or denominations. For example, Richard Allen played a central role in the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church. Others more explicitly describe how their sufferings under slavery led to the strength of their religious conviction. Thomas W. Henry, also an A.M.E. clergyman, writes, that his

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22 At least two of the narratives, James Curry’s and the anonymous *Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave*, were published in abolitionist publications, such as *The Liberator* and *The Emancipator.*
narrative “will be found to contain many hardships and privations in this life, and will also give a faint idea, to the younger clergy of this day, how I, as one, have shouldered the burden and gone forth, pushing forward the work of Christianity in a ministerial capacity.” While almost every narrative contains lengthy discussions of religion and expressions of devotion, these texts, written after Emancipation, focus more explicitly on formal religious activity, such as preaching tours, by African American leaders central to the spread of Christianity during the latter half of the 19th century.

**Apologists Texts**

A small handful of texts appear within the slave-holding apologist vein largely portraying the enslaved life as genteel. As opposed to the majority of texts written under the auspices of a central religious or abolitionist frame, these few narrators, for the most part, approve of the conditions of their enslavement. In his short and fragmented narrative, for example, Omar ibn Said, a native African and former Muslim, describes the results of his enslavement at the hands of “the Christians.” He states that he had come to the United States “by reason of great necessity.” This necessity relates to his conversion to Christianity. After describing a hostile master, he details both his previous Islamic faith and his new found Christianity cultivated under more accommodating master, a prominent industrialist and military man:

> These men are good men. What food they eat they give to me to eat. As they clothe themselves they clothe me. They permit me to read the gospel of God, our Lord, and Saviour, and King; who regulates all our circumstances, our health and wealth, and who bestows his mercies willingly, not by constraint. According to

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23 Most of the narrators in this corpus were born in the United States; however, several, including Said and John Jea, were born in Africa.
power I open my heart, as to a great light, to receive the true way, the way of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

A handful of other narratives, such as Paul Jennings’ description of his life as a “body servant” owned by James Madison, also relate more positive stories of enslaved life.

Indicative of the uniqueness of these more apologist texts, Millie-Christine, a set of conjoined twins known as the “Carolina Twins” or “double headed girl,” describe the extent of the affection they had for their master. While they suffer greatly by nefarious whites as they are stolen traveling the South as a “magnet of attraction to the lovers of the curious of nature,” after Emancipation they remain loyal to and under the “guardianship” of their former master’s family. In fact, they return to traveling the country once this family falls into economic difficulties following the war. These are difficult to reconcile with the great preponderance of other narratives within the genre; however, they reflect the diversity of experience by the enslaved population and, perhaps more importantly, the political nature of these texts: Before and after emancipation publishers and the political groups supporting them sought to bring to light the stories of former bondsmen and bondwomen whose experiences supported their cause. While no evidence within this corpus suggests that these apologist texts were written by narrators who would forsake liberty for slavery, these few narratives standout for their positive description.

CONCLUSION
This corpus of slave narratives contains a great deal of diversity across region, occupation, and type of residence. However, there is less variation in the gender of the narrator with a large male bias and in the impetus for the writing of the texts. These
weaknesses are worrisome, but understandable: both derive from biases, the former, and motivations, the latter, consistent with the period in which these narratives were written. Scholars, such as Camp (2004) and White (1985) among others, have advanced the literature on bondswomen a great deal often focusing on texts used in this analysis. Scholars focusing on the WPA data, such as Elkins (1979) and Genovese (1979) among others, also have a better representation of women and less specific biases about the motivations for the stories in this alternative dataset.

The corpus of 130 slave narratives used in the analyses that follow represents the largest collection of narratives written both in narrative form and during the period prior to or immediately following emancipation. Thus, they remain among the best possible data for observing the perpetuation of and response to slavery in the American South. By focusing on the perspectives of the enslaved in their own words, we are able to observe a range of responses to this form of inequality.

In the following chapter, I describe several of the main tools used by scholars analyzing texts. Due to the diversity of the slave narrative genre, I argue that forming a global view of the texts is essential to forming a complete picture of how the enslaved responded to their subordinate position. This holistic picture facilitates more detailed qualitative analyses of the variation from quiescence to resistance that the narrators describe.
CHAPTER 4:

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Historical analyses of inequality have increasingly sought to incorporate the voices of the weak. This derives, in part, from the theoretical tools developed in the past several decades, and as described earlier. Sociology has long recognized the importance of capturing a diversity of perspectives when examining structural inequality – something that has become increasingly possible through advancements in technology and methodology. In my earlier theoretical discussion, I suggested that monolithic theoretical conceptions surrounding extreme inequality are problematic. Fortunately, recent methodological developments complement more holistic approaches to unstructured data. Indeed, we can both incorporate subordinate actors’ voices in their own words and develop systematic and emergent pictures of corpora derived from the voices of the weak. Slave narratives represent an ideal corpus for exploring these new methods because they are text-based and contain the similarities and differences that constitute a genre.

Below, I describe the progress sociologists and social scientists have made in developing formal methods for analyzing digital text. After a brief discussion of non-computational techniques, I describe the strengths and weaknesses of computational analyses of non-digital text or traditional content analysis. I then discuss burgeoning narrative analyses. Like content analysis, narrative techniques privilege context over computational speed. However, unlike content analysis, narrative techniques privilege
time and sequential events within the analyzed texts, thus, tightening the lens of analysis. Last, I describe word-centric text analytic techniques that privilege volume and speed over context, but retain some focus on both content and stylistic elements in texts. This final method offers the most promising range of uses within sociology because it is currently less resource dependent and moves easily between narrative and non-narrative corpuses. In this regard, I include an example from the collection of presidential inaugural speeches as a specific illustration. Finally, and related to my theoretical and analytic foci, I discuss how these techniques can be used in conjunction with close qualitative readings to better understand varied responses to subordination contained within the American slave narratives.

**USING TEXT**

The death of the novel. The death of the magazine. The death of the newspaper. The mortality of text-based cultural objects is on the rise, or is it? While paper media may be suffering a decline amid years-old premonitions of extinction, text-based media itself has never been so popular. This is somewhat counterintuitive given the promise of new virtual forms of communication, but truth be told we are not quite up to the challenge yet. Instead with Internet communication we have taken somewhat of a step backwards or at least a parallel step bringing more text information closer to our lives. We write letters in the form of email, we pass notes in the form of status updates on social networking sites, we post (and read) diaries on blogs. Digital libraries are growing exponentially bringing

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24 There are numerous examples of critics and scholars predicting the decline of print media. For a few examples, see Fitzpatrick (2006) for a description of various claims about the novel’s decline and The Economist (2006) on the obsolescence of print news media.
books directly into our homes without the threat of overdue notices (Grafton 2007). It is so pre-1980s. We are basically digital Victorians.

How well have the social sciences, and sociology in particular, adapted to this new found textuality? Any methodological review would be quite mixed. We see certain growth in hybrid fields, like computational linguistics and the information sciences, and the cross-fertilization of these fields into English through linguistics (e.g. Collins et al. 2004), political science through political psychology and discourse (e.g. Simonton 1988; Young 1996; see Cousins and McIntosh 2005 for a discussion), and sociology through social linguistics and cultural sociology (e.g. Bearman, Faris, and Moody 1999; Smith 2007, see Mohr 1998 for a discussion). We also see some interest in text within sociological areas as diverse as political sociology and social movements through the use of newspaper data (see Earl et al. 2004 for a review) and in the sociology of science (e.g. Moody and Light 2006) among numerous others. Yet, the large-scale incorporation of digital text into our analyses has not taken place.

**INTERPRETIVIST TECHNIQUES**

For sixty years, scholars have wrestled with various ways to formalize text analysis computationally (Pennebaker and Chung 2009). Whether as an attempt to organize and/or analyze content or to examine aspects of style, these scholars have shown that computational text analysis has promising academic and commercial applications. These methods, however, do not supplant the non-computational interpretivist techniques that preceded them and continue to this day. Historical, literary, and sociological methods of qualitative text analysis remain viable and important analytic techniques. In fact, the most
fruitful direction for the incorporation of computational methods into sociology likely
demands some combination of computational and well-established qualitative techniques.
Thus, I first briefly discuss non-computational methods.

Non-computational techniques are not necessarily non-formal, but rather, consist
of a series of analyst-centric methods. Centuries-old debates in literary criticism have
highlighted the various issues ranging from ways to view text, as isolated and
independent cultural objects to highly situated social constructions, the role of the author,
the role of the critic or scholar, and so forth. These debates translate into various
approaches to historical analysis as well: who writes history, what are the roles of
subordinate groups and official documents. For example, within historical research on
slavery these debates have centered upon the centrality of historical sources on framing
analyses. In other words, the documents that an analyst employs have an undoubted
effect on subsequent conclusions drawn. With the “rediscovery” of slave narratives and
ex-slave interviews in the 1960s, scholars were able to supplement the historical record
developed from official records and superordinate sources, such as plantation owners’
diaries. The history of slavery was no longer strictly “told” from sources drawn from
strong actors, but from subordinate ones as well. This obviously had a dramatic role in
expanding our understanding of American slavery buttressing already challenged
essentialist (and often racist) historical analyses by incorporating the varied voices of the
enslaved.

Within sociology, the use of “thick” description in text analysis is the most
analogous to historical and literary methods. Adapted from Geertzian anthropological
methodology, scholars using these hermeneutical methods dig deep into historical events
through close analysis of “social texts” (see Alexander and Smith 2003). For example, in his work on the civil rights movement and communication, Alexander (2006) describes the relationship between the messages that civil rights leaders, especially Martin Luther King Jr., delivered and their receipt by national news organizations. He illuminates the connection between the civil rights movement and the press by delving deep into the historical record – comments by the editors of large newspapers, speeches by King and others, and reported reactions by movement members in attendance. This detailed account is necessary in order to describe the role that the rarely explicit role the press played in extending the activists message beyond local Southern officials to a more persuadable audience.

Steinmetz (2008) offers a similar persuasive reading of German records in his analysis of 19th century colonialism. Developing the notion of ethnographic capital, Steinmetz describes how elite colonists constructed unique pictures of the colonized that subsequently effected how the colony was treated by the leadership in Germany. He uses official documents, letters and so forth to describe differences in ethnographic capital and its effect. There are, of course, countless other good examples of how particular stories and theoretical advancements could not be made without a close reading of historical texts. When one is concerned with issues pertaining to voice and communication, including anyone studying slave narratives, close historical readings are undoubtedly an essential aspect of a comprehensive analytic strategy.

Despite its many strengths, this traditional method of text analysis is not without weaknesses. Hermeneutical approaches rely heavily on decisions made by the analyst. In fact, it is the analyst’s ability to decipher elusive meanings in intricate and often lengthy
sets of data that provide the payoffs of this approach. Yet, as a consequence, it is difficult to divorce an analyst’s embeddedness in a culture, both scholarly and more broadly, from the meaning drawn from text. This problematic, of course, extends to other more structural kinds of analysis as well, but can be more easy to evaluate because structuralist approaches contain formal logics that can be replicated. Similarly, relying on breadth of knowledge as a key evaluative characteristic, interpretivist approaches can be extraordinarily time-consuming. A different set of texts can lead to very different conclusions encouraging interpretivist scholars to try and gain an understanding of a complete corpus of texts rather than sampling.

**CONTENT ANALYSIS**

Content analysis bridges the divide between traditional historical techniques and more recent advances in computational text analysis. While less emergent than computational text analysis, content analysis closely interrogates text much like a survey researcher interrogates a respondent. Content analysis consists of a set of techniques that involve coding a set of variables (demographic characteristics, events, and so forth) from a set of existing documents. Hodson (1999) describes three major steps in the research process that help situate the content analysts approach. First, the analyst judiciously selects a population of cases or texts. Second, the analyst constructs a coding device based on major concepts in the previous literature. Last, the analyst should construct measures of reliability and bias through mechanisms, such as inter-coder reliability (or the extent to which coders select the same score on a variable), that lend confidence to the research findings.
Content analyses have been popular within sociology for several decades. Using data from newspapers (e.g. Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008) to ethnographic corpora (e.g. Hodson 2004), research using content analyses reveal the strengths of this approach. Chamberlain et al. (2008), for example, use workplace ethnographies to uncover the nuanced relationship between forms of sexual harassment and organizations. With data from over 200 workplace ethnographies, the authors uncover three distinct types of harassment that vary in the workplace by organizational attributes, such as grievance procedures and job instability. Obviously, this comparison across organizational forms would be difficult, if not impossible for a workplace ethnographer to make in any systematic way. We should, however, be open to the notion that an ambitious qualitative text analyst could read this population of ethnographies and reach similar conclusions.

One key advantage of content analysis remains the ability to perform reliability and bias checks. In their study, Chamberlain and her colleagues are able to present, for example, an inter-coder reliability correlation of .79 indicating a high-level of agreement between researchers (2008: 272). The ability to have a thorough and reproducible coding scheme allows for the introduction of multiple coders into the research process thereby encouraging the incorporation of more texts. With the introduction of multiple coders, content analysts are also able to gain some check of how they are “reading” the material through reliability scores.

Although a less common technique within historical research on slavery, Escott (1979:183) uses content analysis to investigate a set of over 2,000 interviews of formerly enslaved men and women conducted by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s in order to provide a “systematic” and less “impressionistic” account of slavery. He codes these
interviews on 81 variables ranging from place of birth to whether the respondent believes in superstitions. Because computational historical techniques were in the early stages of development, Escott relies primarily on frequency tables to paint an overview of life as described by the formerly enslaved interviewees. He illustrates these findings with quotations from the interviews moving back and forth between consonances and dissonances in the respondents’ stories with the harrowing accounts themselves.

Recent research by sociologist Martin Ruef (Ruef and Fletcher 2003) resurrects Escott’s data in order to answer questions about the decline of organizational forms with the plantation system as his case. This process of resurrection is another advantage of content analysis over more interpretivist forms. Because the data is systematized it is transferable, while interpretation, whether quantitative or qualitative, is inherently the property of the analyst. Escott’s study is not without some drawbacks that more recent content analyses try to alleviate. For example, unlike Chamberlain et al. (2008), Escott coded these interviews by himself raising some concerns about reliability and bias. He is honest about this possibility and, with echoes of more interpretivist accounts, writes (1979:187), “On the whole, the author doubts that other researchers would reach completely different results. Naturally some variations would appear over 2358 cases, but the general picture would probably remain the same.”

Critics of content analysis focus primarily on what is lost during the coding process. For example, as Escott (1979) admits, coding consists of a set of decisions. He primarily focuses on the judgment required when reading texts with the coding scheme in hand – evaluating qualitative distinctions, for example, in the severity of treatment on a plantation. Some of this is resolved through the use of multiple coders, but it seems
unlikely that coding agreement of any qualitative distinctions is ever going to be perfect. With this in mind, Popping (2000) notes that there is some evidence that many important decisions made between coders are made socially as questions arise and are not confined to coder instruction sheets or the coding scheme. More importantly, perhaps, the construction of the coding scheme itself, although constructed based upon previous research, remains closely wedded to the interests and perspectives introduced by the analyst. In this way, content analysis continues to walk the line between data-driven and analyst-driven research. Recent developments in narrative and lexical analysis attempt to oscillate more smoothly between emergent qualities of text data and the interpretation of these qualities.

NARRATIVE ANALYTIC TECHNIQUES

Narrative analytic techniques describe more emergent properties of text by using computational techniques, based on either grammar or network analysis, to allow texts to speak for themselves. From a grammar or network driven perspective, these techniques focus on events, and their ordering, that structure stories. By accumulating several different versions of events, narrative analysts, like others interested in narrative discourse, seek to offer “a coherent chronological story of ‘what actually happened’” (Hall 1992:168). These techniques, however, rely heavily on decisions made by the analyst, but, as we will see, much less so than the previously discussed techniques.

For example, in his extensive description of his grammar-based narrative techniques and related research that employs them, Roberto Franzosi (2004) does not abandon content coding altogether. Rather, he uses the grammatical structure of texts to
narrow the lens of analysis. With this technique, the analyst does not need a lengthy coding sheet, nor does the analyst need a more holistic reading of the corpus. The analyst uses computer software, specifically relational database programs, to focus this lens for subsequent coding based on grammatical units, or story grammars, of subject-action-object (S-A-O). This S-A-O semantic triplet is entered and evaluated by the analyst although Franzosi’s program allows for some dictionary-building capabilities (2004:71). Unlike traditional forms of content coding, as Franzosi (2004:60) notes, “The coding categories of the grammar are functional, linguistic-based categories. They reflect properties of the text itself, rather than the researchers’ theoretical interests.” In this way, the story grammar technique moves beyond the hypothesis-driven demands of traditional coding and moves to a more emergent analysis of text.

In her recent research on 20th century policy makers in Philadelphia, Becher (2008) focuses on grammar-based techniques to describe variations in political storytelling and elite identity maintenance. First, Becher identifies 13 interviews from a corpus of 145 that pertain to urban development. Next, she locates over 700 action statements and their constituent parts within the selected interviews following Franzosi’s S-A-O method. She finds that characteristics of the texts themselves provide analytic insight into political decision-making as elites within particular groups privilege in-group members grammatically: political elites within her sample use specific names, for example, in describing in-group members and abstract names when describing others. In

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25 The extent of the “story grammar” beyond the S-A-O triplet is dependent upon the researcher. As the number of variables in the grammar grows, the story grammar begins to look more and more like the coding device described in Hodson (1999) (see Franzosi 2004:339-342).

26 In her interesting analytic strategy, Becher (2008) also uses some word count techniques as well. These techniques will be discussed in the next section.
her retrospective accounts of urban development, moreover, in-group members are much more likely to be the primary agents of positive change. While one may be able to gather these conclusions from a “thick” reading of the texts, Becher (2008) systematizes these findings allowing for both replication and comparison across political debates.

Although these grammar-based techniques preserve the actions and events of narratives and offer some attention to event ordering, the narrative structure, beyond narrow syntactical windows, is not the focus. Network analytic techniques, however, turn to the similarities in narrative structure in text corpora. The network representation of narratives promotes the evaluation of the relationship between events. As Bearman, Faris, and Moody (1999:502) write, “[O]nly when we provide a beginning and an end to a sequence of interrelated events can we understand the meaning of an event within the sequence and, by extension, the meaning of an event sequence as a whole.” In their network method (extended in Bearman and Stovel (2000) and Smith (2007)), events are connected to other events temporally indicated by narrative clauses, such that one event may be connected to another through an intermediary event.

Of course, narratives, or life stories, differ in how the narrator relays their biography. These similarities and differences reveal important insights about how events can change future identities. For example, Smith (2007) describes how two European ethnic groups, Italian and Croatian Istrians, living in New York City overcame ethnic division that still existed between their European “cousins.” As these groups encountered one another in a different social setting, the boundaries of their narrative changed. The narratives grew less dependent on the memory of violence and strife allowing the two groups to relay stories that allowed for their reconciliation. This work and others in the
network analytic vein use the relationship between events in narratives to reveal similarities and differences in the aggregated story of a particular historical phenomena. This method, therefore, allows the analyst space from the narratives – a certain perspectival distance that decreases the likelihood of analyst bias.

Narrative analytic techniques, both grammar and network-based, reinset the importance of temporality recognized by interpretivist approaches, but largely ignored in traditional content analysis. These techniques also go a long way towards automating the coding schemes that make content analyses “resource rich,” but they are not emergent techniques. Events are identified and coded, or, at minimum, extracted by hand. Many of the analyses derived from these methods consist of a relatively small sample of texts (see Franzosi 1997 for an exception). Scholars have moved towards more automated analyses of texts many derived from simple word counts. The promise of connecting these two techniques looms on the horizon as a means of efficiently analyzing the narrativity of hundreds if not thousands of texts.

LEXICAL AND OTHER WORD-CENTRIC TECHNIQUES

Lexical and other word-centric techniques turn from the analysis of events to the analysis of text corpora based on patterns in shared content or style. These techniques attempt to move beyond the description or accounting of events to the meaning behind them following Ricouer’s (1976) observation that our descriptions of events form the foundation of subsequent attempts to make sense of the world. There are two main strains of lexical analysis of texts: judge-based and word pattern analysis (Pennebaker, Mehl, and Niederhoffer 2003). Judge-based analysis consists of words that are assigned to
broader categories by an analyst or group of analysts. For example, scholars interested in
the portrayal of death may construct a dictionary of words analogous or otherwise related
to the concept “death.” On the other hand, word pattern analysis allows for the
appearance of relationships to emerge without previous dictionary construction. While
both methods are automated, word pattern analysis creates greater distance between the
analysts and the texts.

Using the emergent word pattern analysis, scholars in the information and science
studies, such as Leydesdorff and Vaughn (2006), He (1999), and Callon et al. (1983),
propose that studying the connection of thousands of words over dozens of texts can
locate the dominant patterns in a corpus, or set. Using science-based corpora, such as
scientific abstracts (Moody and Light 2006) or scientific debates (Leydesdorff and
Hellsten 2006), these scholars have developed network text analysis techniques to locate
dominant themes. These techniques follow a rich tradition within linguistics and
communications that attempt to locate meaning in a vast array of corpora (Osgood, May
and Miron 1975; Danowski 1993); however, they have not been used to analyze historical
texts in sociology.

As with the alternative methods of text analysis, lexical analysis has several
weaknesses worth noting. A primary concern among lexical analysts and critics alike is
the danger of de-contextualizing speech acts. Language and word-use are obviously
extraordinarily complex phenomena and simplifying these phenomena to their core
lexical properties removes a great amount of information. As Pennebaker, Mehl, and
Niederhoffer (2003:571) note, “Virtually all text analysis programs that rely on word
counts are unable to consider context, irony, sarcasm or even the multiple meanings of
words.” Several research strategies likely alleviate some of these concerns: First, increasing the volume of analysis both in terms of sample size and (if possible) the length of texts reduces the chance that the “noise” created by irony, context or the existence of multiple meanings. As words appear consistently dozens of times in a corpus, it is less likely to be a result of these alternatives. Second, the introduction of more information by identifying terms’ parts-of-speech promotes a more nuanced view of text data. That being said, concerns about the “noise” within unstructured data are all but impossible to allay in their entirety. Rather, like any analytic technique, research must carefully specify the purchase gained when using a specific approach. In this case, lexical techniques create roadmaps for indexing qualitative immersion. Although the given “noise” is a concern, the key is to not stray far from the text.

AN ILLUSTRATION: PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURAL ADDRESSES

The process of constructing lexical networks based on word pattern analysis is multi-stage and involved, but remains more accessible than alternative approaches, such as narrative techniques. In this brief example, I use presidential inaugural speeches to illustrate the network construction process. I focus on two networks that are generated from the word-by-text object matrix. Inaugural addresses provide an appropriate illustration because, like slave narratives, the corpus of speeches is a specific genre. Speeches by political leaders have received some attention particularly within the field of political psychology and leadership studies (e.g. Simonton 1988); however, presidential speech-making remains an understudied area (Ragsdale 1984). The available studies on political leadership build on the notion that political speech, both in terms of content and
in style, offer insight into shifts in mood and opinion, potential behavioral changes, and so forth. For example, in an early example of political rhetoric analysis, McDiarmid (1937:79) finds “striking uniformity” in the use of symbols in inaugural addresses from symbols of national identity – identified by phrases that identify the United States as the greatest democracy and so forth – to symbols of expectation – identified by phrases expressing optimism regarding the future of the nation.

Inaugural speeches are likely to stand a part in some ways from other types of political speech because these speeches are generally banal and somewhat rote solicitations of patriotism coupled with generic programmatic lists. While this obviously limits the possibility of acute psychological analysis, the relative uniformity does offer a picture of the discourse endemic to these civic occasions, while providing a broad outline of each president’s agenda.

Data
The data for this illustration consists of the corpus of United States presidential inaugural speeches. From George Washington’s first to Barack Obama’s recent inaugural speech, 56 speeches have been delivered. These speeches range in length from the 133 word missive by Washington on the occasion of his second inauguration to the 8,442 word speech by the Ohio Whig William Henry Harrison. These speeches obviously differ in quality ranging from Abraham Lincoln’s second, recently characterized by the Washington Post (2005) as “Perhaps the greatest speech ever given by an American,” to James Buchanan’s 1857 inaugural, described by the Post (2005) as a “craven, simpering speech.”
Constructing Lexical Networks

The construction of these lexical networks involves numerous steps worthy of explanation. I follow these same 5 steps in constructing the analyses in chapters 5. Consistent with other text analyses (see Diesner and Carley 2004; Moody and Light 2006), I (1) processed each of the texts removing extraneous information, such as symbols, numbers and html codes: only text pertaining to the speeches directly were included (i.e. bibliographic information was deleted). Next, I (2) tagged each speech with a part-of-speech (POS) tagger (Toutanova and Manning 2000). POS-taggers, in this case the Stanford POS-Tagger,\(^{27}\) identify the part-of-speech for every word in the text with high reliability. I (3) removed uninformative words, such as participles and prepositions, by comparing the text to a standard stop list.\(^{28}\)

I (4) also stemmed each of the concepts using the popular porter-stemmer algorithm (Porter 1980).\(^{29}\) Thus, the nouns “blessing” and “blessings” are subsumed under the concept of “bless.nn” (the tag “.nn” signifying a noun), yet the verb “bless” remains independent. The resulting matrix is a text by stemmed-word set. To reduce the risk of over-inflating highly common words, I (5) weight each concept using the \(tf \times idf\)\(^{30}\) model used by information science scholars (see Börner, Chen, and Boyack 2003):

\(^{27}\) The Stanford POS-Tagger can be found at http://nlp.stanford.edu/software/tagger.shtml.

\(^{28}\) These words are uninformative from a content perspective, but, as Pennebaker, Mehl, and Niederhoffer (2003) describe, they are informative when attempting determine stylistic differences between texts and authors.

\(^{29}\) I specifically use the porter-stemmer packaged in the Information Visualization CyberInfrastructure, produced by the Information Visualization Lab at Indiana University, http://iv.slis.indiana.edu

\(^{30}\) In this formula, \(tf_k\) is the term frequency for term \(k\) in document \(i\); \(N\) is the total number of documents; \(n_k\) is the number of documents that contain the term; and \(j\) indexes the terms in the corpus as a whole.
The network text analysis consists of two networks derived from this text by weighted word matrix.\textsuperscript{31} This first analysis is a text-to-text network where the nodes (or points) represent texts, in this case speeches, and the edges (or lines) represent the word correlation between the texts. While some debate exists over the appropriate measure for creating similarity scores (Klavans and Boyack 2006), due to computational ease and given the similarities in results when using other measures, I use Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Thus, if the content of two speeches is highly correlated, they will be close together within the network. This network indicates differences within the context of the corpus and provides initial evidence of the similarities and differences between texts. Speeches at the center of this network share commonalities with many other texts, while those on the outskirts will be more dissimilar.

The second network consists of the inverse of the contextual network. Here, the nodes are words and the edges are the correlation between narratives. If words appear together in different texts they will be closer together within the network. This network represents an overview of the content within these speeches. Clusters within this network indicate predominant themes within the corpus. As this network consists of thousands of words, I look specifically at highly common and correlated concepts (n=147). I render each of the networks in \textit{Pajek} (Nooy, Mrvar, and Batagelj 2005).

\begin{equation}
W_{ik} = \frac{tf_{ik} \times \log(n_j)}{\sqrt{\sum_{j=1}^{n} (tf_{ij})^2 \times \log(n_j)^2}}
\end{equation}

\textsuperscript{31} Breiger (1974) introduced the logic and matrix algebra behind these transformations to the world of social networks. Recent network techniques build upon the untransformed two-mode network, but, create intricate visualizations that are difficult to comprehend and are used primarily for measurement purposes.
Figure 4.1: Presidential Inaugural Speech Network
Figure 4.2: Presidential Inaugural Speeches Word Network

Notes:
Layout: Kamada-Kawai
Tie Strength: >.45
Node Size: Betweenness Centrality
N=147
The Inaugural Address Network

Figure 4.1 presents the speech network for the inaugural address corpus. In this network the nodes represent each of the 56 speeches and the edges represent the correlation between the speeches based on overlapping content. An important indication of face validity, the speeches of presidents who were elected more than once are graphed close to one another with the vast majority directly linked, such as George W. Bush’s two addresses in the right portion of the network or McKinley’s two speeches in the left.\textsuperscript{32} We would anticipate this level of connection as a president is obviously more likely to share similar language and discuss similar objectives as themselves than as others.

The most striking feature of this network is that it is structured by two main clusters. These clusters fall largely along temporal lines with the cluster on the right representing 20\textsuperscript{th} century texts and a largely 19\textsuperscript{th} century cluster on the left. Interestingly, Calvin Coolidge’s 1925 speech is the exception.\textsuperscript{33} Coolidge, widely recognized as a mediocre president (see Gilbert 1988), is tied to James Monroe in this network based on the content overlap of Coolidge’s address with Monroe’s 1821 second Inaugural, which is somewhat vexing because of the century that separates the two speeches.

A brief reading reveals several similarities. First, both presidents address the nation’s emergence from recent wars. They both speak of the debt procured during these conflicts and the cessation of war-time funding. They also mention strategies of funding future defense-related expenditures. Moreover, each president addresses the prospects of future conflict globally with specific attention to the centuries’ long “Old World”

\textsuperscript{32} Jefferson, Lincoln, and Grant’s speeches are the exceptions and are only two-steps distant (i.e. one other speech links the first address to the second).
\textsuperscript{33} McKinley’s presidency bridges the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.
conflicts. On future European strife, both presidents proclaim American neutrality, at least at the moment. In 1821 Monroe proclaimed, “With every power we are in perfect amity, and it is our interest to remain so if it be practicable on just conditions.” Coolidge echoes Monroe in his 1925 speech:

> It seems altogether probable that we can contribute most to these important objects [e.g. peace] by maintaining our position of political detachment and independence. We are not identified with any Old World interests. This position should be made more and more clear in our relations with all foreign countries. We are at peace with all of them.

While Coolidge’s placement among the 19th Century addresses is somewhat puzzling on the surface, examination of his tie to Monroe’s second Inaugural offers insight into the connection between these two presidential speeches and highlights the similarities in both circumstances (i.e. the country recently engaged in war with European powers) and international policy (i.e. American neutrality to future “Old World” conflicts).

Beyond Coolidge’s unique placement in the 19th century cluster of addresses, the centrality of speeches within this network offers important lessons about this unique genre of texts. Every new inaugural cycle begins a discussion about previous inaugural addresses. Second inaugurals often have the benefit of being compared to the first and often the fringe benefit of lowered expectations. But even so, with each new inaugural address, pundits and journalists reflect upon those addresses that have most captured historical and journalistic attention: These are the speeches most discussed in high school history classes and likely memorized by presidential speech writers. Prior to George W. Bush’s second inauguration, for example, the Washington Post ranked the top 10 inaugural addresses. The top-5 were Lincoln’s second, FDR’s first, Teddy Roosevelt’s, Ronald Reagan’s first, and Truman’s. With the exception, perhaps, of Kennedy’s,
Jefferson’s first, and Lincoln’s first, these inaugural addresses are widely considered among the best. However, the “best” speeches are not necessarily the most central within this network. In fact, we can see in Figure 4.1 that none of these speeches are among the most central.  

The Inaugural Speech Corpus Word Network

Figure 4.2 presents the co-word network for the inaugural speeches. In this network the nodes represent the 147 most common and correlated words. Edge strength is determined by the correlation of the words based on overlapping speeches. This graph has two major clusters as well: While less obvious than the speech-to-speech network, the cluster on the left of the network appears to capture more abstract concepts than the cluster on the left. This suggests two significant and split thematic modes within the inaugural speech corpus.

Figure 4.3 is a zoomed image of the left-hand sector. We can see that many of the words in this close-up are affiliated with comparatively abstract concepts. The terms “world” and “hope” are at the center of this sector. A small cluster at the top of the zoomed sector operates through the adjective “economic,” while the left portion of the dominant cluster contains words associated with morality: “faith,” “free,” and the adjective “moral” itself. In addition to the terms “hope” and “world,” the center of the

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34 Each of these speeches was in the *Washington Post*’s top-ten (2005).
35 The sizes of the nodes within this graph vary by their betweenness centrality. Betweenness centrality captures the extent to which a node connects other nodes to the whole and is, therefore, considered a measure of importance. Within communication networks, for example, betweenness centrality scores are indicative of the amount of control nodes have relative to one another (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Within the speech network, it is indicative of “likeness” as the edges in the graph are based on content correlation. Speeches with high betweenness centrality are, therefore, more likely to either connect unique clusters of the network or connect dense collections of nodes (e.g. speeches).
central cluster is dominated by global-oriented terms, such as “earth,” “man,” “mankind,” and “peace.”

On the other hand, as can be seen in the zoom of the right-hand sector of the word network (Figure 4.4), terms within the inaugural address corpus also cluster around more pragmatic concerns. For example, this portion of the graph contains a tight cluster of terms in the lower quadrant specific to the occasion, such as “oath,” “call,” “honor,” “constitutional,” and so forth. As opposed to the small economic cluster in the opposing sector, this sector contains a clear business cluster with terms such as “labor,” “trade” “revenue” and the term “business” itself. While the center of this sector contains some terms that are more difficult to classify, even these words, for the most part, contain a more pragmatic use in inaugural speeches than those terms in the more abstract sector.
The terms “domestic,” “duty,” and “foreign,” near the center Figure 4.4 for example, strike a more concrete tone than terms like “freedom,” “hope,” and “heart” that are near the center of Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.4: Presidential Inauguration Speeches Word Network (Right Half Zoom)
Tag key: .jj-adjective, .nn-noun, singular or mass, .nnp-proper noun, singular, .vb-verb, base form, .vbn-verb, past participle (see Marcus et al. 1993).

I use the clustering of these terms to identify emergent themes, such as “Governance” or “Morality,” within the data. These clusters of terms may be imperfect in so much as several words may not have obvious connections to the cluster label. However, I confirm the validity of the labels by moving back and forth between the texts and the map highlighting the joint appearance of these terms within the data and their
primary use within the given labeled set. This process is further indication of the value of mixing the qualitative and structural techniques: The maps function as guides for qualitative immersion.

While the speech and word networks themselves offer insight into the inaugural address corpus, we would be remiss to end any discussion of rich historical data without a more in-depth discussion of the texts themselves. In fact, one of the primary advantages of network text analysis is the ability to move back and forth between the emergent network maps and the texts. In the case of the inaugural address corpus, we can use the major divide in the word network map and the more ancillary clusters to discuss, for example, how specific presidents use predominant themes to describe their vision and hopes for their presidency. Specifically, we can use the terms and their placement within clusters as an index for more qualitative analyses. Here, I illustrate the value of these techniques by taking a closer look at Barack Obama’s recent inaugural address in light of the word network map.

Describing the symbolism of ending the Iraq War, the French philosopher and public intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy (2009) recently wrote, “The symbol is there, in any case; and, for this president-symbol, for this man who speaks in symbols like he speaks in other signs, concepts, and images, that is, of course, the essential.” The inaugural speech is almost an entirely symbolic act without the high expectation of detailed deliverables that policy-laden speeches, such as state of the union addresses, possess. Although presidents include broad objectives and may provide a few detailed policy initiatives in their addresses, the speeches typically set a loftier tone. President Barack Obama’s speech was no exception. Immediately rated, by many pundits and
observers, as an above-average speech, Obama touched upon many of the dominate themes located in the lexical network cutting a path between the more abstract ideas identified in Figure 4.4 and the more concrete ideas identified in Figure 4.5.

Given Obama’s fondness for symbols, as Lévy observes, and his propensity for rhetorical flourishes, it is no surprise that Obama frequently uses terms affiliated with the left hand sector of the inaugural theme graph: the concepts “hope,” “world,” “peace” and so forth appear among the most frequent. Within recent speeches, however, these more abstract terms are relatively ubiquitous – in his second inaugural George W. Bush used the term “hope” twice as often as Obama and used the word “freedom” an astonishing 27 times. Unlike many of the other speeches, Obama does not return to the same term, like Bush’s use of “freedom” or William Henry Harrison’s use of the term “power” over 40 times, providing cursory indication of the relative range of Obama’s message in his inaugural. If we briefly move through his speech with the thematic structure of the speech corpus as a guide we can see more concrete evidence of this range.

Typical of this particular genre of oration as indicated by the small cluster in the lower sector of Figure 4.4, Obama begins his speech with the perfunctory remarks specific to the occasion: thanking his predecessor and summarizing the importance of the presidential oath of office. Like others before him, Obama continues by making several overarching statements about the current state of American affairs discussing foreign affairs, education, and business in terms relatively consistent with the more concrete thematic strains. As he will do throughout the speech he next pivots into the more abstract thematic arena discussing a perceived lack of confidence in the America’s future. He ends this pivot with a religious image asking that “Americans choose our better
future,” which consists of returning to “the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.” Obama continues this pivoting throughout the speech. For example, in the middle of the speech, he connects the notion of economic prosperity with the abstract “common good.” As he begins to conclude, he connects the work of the government with the following decidedly more abstract notion: “[It] is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies.”

Despite these pivots and like other president’s before him, Obama leans heavily on the abstract themes of promise and hope embedded in American morality and the promise of democracy relying heavily on the symbolic, such as his citing George Washington’s speech at Valley Forge. This reliance on dramatic symbolism is particularly evident in his conclusion:

> With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children’s children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God’s grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

These two sentences alone contain four terms identified in the more abstract sector of the co-word network: “hope,” “God,” “freedom,” and “future.” The co-word network provides a means of analyzing how Obama’s speech compares with the larger thematic structure of the inaugural speech genre. Obama, true to his propensity to lean on the symbolic, relies heavily on more abstract imagery, while also, consistent with other inaugural addresses, pivoting back to more concrete concerns.
CONCLUSION AND EXTENSION TO THE ENSLAVED EXPERIENCE

Text analysis has grown increasingly more popular within the social sciences and sociology is no exception. From clear methodological statements in the hermeneutic vein (e.g. Alexander and Smith 2003) to content analyses and narrative analytic techniques (e.g. Franzosi 2004) to lexical-based analyses (e.g. Simonton 1988), previous research illustrates the variety of approaches to text analysis. Recent strategies that involve taking advantage of the digitization of text in conjunction with more traditional approaches, such as hermeneutics or content analysis, offers exciting new possibilities for the systematic consideration of hundreds of texts with thousands of pages.

Constructing a network of words or the related network of texts provides a broad structural picture of the main themes in the textual corpora, including the 19th Century slave narrative corpus. Emergent similarities and differences can be highlighted facilitating the ability to identify the location of the everyday life, the experience of subordination, and acts of contention within the corpus. These broad maps provide important insights to key traits within the individual corpora. For example, these techniques are likely to identify exemplary (and therefore central) narratives. Important and distinct sets of narratives will exist on the margins of these networks. These macro “satellite” maps will inform the increasingly more “terrestrial” story. In other words, a panoramic picture of slave narratives serves as an indexing function for more qualitative exploration.
CHAPTER 5:
MAPPING THE SLAVE NARRATIVE:
EMERGENT THEMES AS LOCATIONS OF POWER STRUGGLE

Words can never tell what I suffered, nor what mother suffered.

-Milton Clarke, Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke

Research on power requires increasing attention on the experience of inequality by those closest to power-based interaction. Historical analyses often suffer from the privileged place of elite sources due largely to issues of data availability. With the addition of slave narratives, research on American slavery has changed dramatically in the past forty years from the “Sambo” stereotype – or the notion that the enslaved were overwhelmingly passive and content – to a more nuanced understanding of bondsmen and bondswomen’s responses to the often violent subordination endemic to the institution.

Consistent with other genres, the slave narrative contains a great deal of variation. As described in chapter 3, this corpus contains texts that focus on a variety of different themes from the quotidian to the extraordinary, from issues of everyday life to acts of heroic bravery. These themes form the foundation of a broader discussion about how the enslaved responded to their subordinate position. Many of the enslaved acknowledge, such as William Walker, describe that they were treated “like cattle.” This
dehumanization that is central to Orlando Patterson’s definition of slavery extends to the brutality experienced by the enslaved, but manifests in more subtle aspects of control developed within the institution of slavery. Like other forms of inequality, the formerly enslaved narrators describe a series of responses to their condition from quiescence to overt resistance. These responses are embedded in the major themes of their stories – themes derived from their life experiences. How do we identify the emergent themes that pertain to inequality and subordination within this slave narrative corpus?

In this chapter, I take a satellite view of the slave narrative corpus using word network maps to identify the predominant and emergent themes within the set. These thematic areas serve as an index for the following chapters analyzing the varied responses to subordination described in the slave narrative corpus. Like the illustrative example in chapter 4, these thematic clusters are likely to exhibit some eccentricities; however, the words are likely to cluster around consistent themes. Many of these themes are likely to parallel previous research on the slave experience, yet the inductive nature of this technique will also likely reveal overlooked themes within the narratives and connections between themes that receive scant attention. I conclude by discussing how this network provides a foundation for understanding power relations and responses to subordination within the texts.

**NARRATIVE MAP**

The relationship between documents offers insight into how texts within a corpus relate to one another based on overlapping content. Although the word network provides the launching point for further discussion, the narrative network also provides further
introduction to the corpus as a whole and elucidates strategies for considering individual texts. For example, central texts are more likely to be representative than texts that are on the outskirts based on shared content. The position of texts does not correspond with their “importance,” but provides information often overlooked in historical analyses about how a particular narrative fits in with other narratives.

Figure 5.1 presents the narrative network for this corpus of slave narratives. As indicated in the figure’s key, nodal color is based on the date of publication with blue (darker) nodes indicating antebellum narratives and yellow (lighter) nodes indicating postbellum narratives. We can see that narratives within these two sets are spread out relatively evenly throughout the network suggesting that in terms of content publishing date does not drive divisions within the set. In fact, additional analyses of attributes indicated a similar even distribution based on potentially distinguishing variables, such as gender and type of work.

This network is relatively evenly distributed as a whole with very little clustering although the left half of the network is somewhat more dense than the right. In fact, this left-right division is the largest indication of variable-based variation in the set with a grouping of antebellum narratives written by field hands in the lower right quadrant. This grouping contains several of the narratives most identified with the slave narrative genre including the seminal Douglass narrative, which offers some verification of the importance of the Douglass narrative within the corpus.

We also see two small clusters on the outside of the graph that exclusively contains either antebellum or postbellum narratives. The postbellum cluster contains a densely connected collection of narratives by members of variations of the African
Figure 5.1: Narrative Network
Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church. Each of the narrators was a bishop in the A.M.E.
church, except for Reverend Robert Anderson. These narratives are exceptionally
religious and contain descriptions of conversions that took place during the narrators’
youth while still enslaved. The adjacent antebellum cluster consists of narrators who
escaped slavery by running away prior to Emancipation. These narrators each attempted
multiple escapes and depict the harsh treatment upon their capture. These are among the
most graphic descriptions of the horror of slavery within this corpus.

The layout of this graph suggests that these narratives share much in common
with each other and that this content, for the most part, is not driven by specific attributes
beyond the aforementioned clusters; however, this does not mean that the arrangement of
nodes is random. The existence of meaningful clusters provides initial evidence of non-
random distribution. Additionally, like the important connections between first and
second inaugural addresses in Chapter 4, the connection between John and Harriet
Jacobs’ narratives lend confidence to the validity of this approach. The Jacobs siblings
lived most of their life together and describe many of the same events, thus, we would
anticipate that they would be closely aligned within the network space. In sum, this
network describes a genre with highly overlapping content that is largely unaffected by
potential variation due to attributes specific to the texts. Even so, several pockets of
difference exist within the corpus.

36 Anderson is also the only member of the Methodist Episcopal church, the other four narrators are
members of the A.M.E. church proper.
**Narrative Centrality**

Figure 5.2 provides greater detail about the centrality of the narratives based on the correlation of the content between the narratives based on shared words.

Peter Randolph’s narrative, *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit*, published in 1893 is a relatively minor narrative relative to the more anthologized and frequently discussed narratives of Douglass, Jacobs, Truth, or Turner; however it is the most central narrative located by the lexical analysis. This high relative centrality indicates that it shares the most in common with other narratives based on overlapping content. In the narrative map, we can see that it is not central within the graph space, but is centrally located in the dense left quadrant, which is consistent with the bevy of postbellum narratives in this sector.

![Figure 5.2: Betweeness Centrality of Narrative Networks](image-url)
That being said, Randolph’s narrative has much in common with other narratives. First, it is quite long and covers a variety of topics from the mundane – descriptions of food and clothing - to the tragic – stories of severe abuse including a mass beating by the plantation’s overseer that left some men’s backs so torn that a child could “lay his fist in the cruel place.” The first fifth of the narrative deals explicitly with the his life as a bondsman focusing on his family, religious awakening, and manumission together with several pages of legal documents, such as his former master’s will, that establish the conditions of his freedom and subsequent move to Boston. The next portion of his text describes the trials and tribulations of recently emancipated African Americans and details the early stages of his preaching career through the Reconstruction. In the final sections of his narrative, he reflects more generally on slavery as an institution questioning, for example, the North’s role in its perpetuation.

These thematic foci are similar to other postbellum narratives: descriptions of enslaved life and emancipation with comparatively academic discussions of the institution of slavery as a whole. Randolph’s discussion of his path to the pulpit also resonates with the majority of other postbellum narratives. Beyond the obvious thematic variation between antebellum and postbellum narratives, the tonal differences also play some role in distinguishing the two sets as the postbellum narratives, lacking the abolitionist influence, are more accommodating and optimistic about racial conciliation with frequent reminders that whites are not a homogeneous group.37

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37 Describing general changes that occurred from the antebellum to postbellum narratives, Foster (1994:60) writes that in the postbellum texts “there was a definite attempt to downplay the horrors of the slave experience and to concentrate on the contributions of the blacks to American society.”
Although Randolph’s narrative is not particularly well-known, several of the more central narratives based on narrative centrality are more anthologized and discussed narratives. As mentioned above, Frederick Douglass’s narrative has relatively high betweenness centrality situated in the middle of the left quadrant. Sojourner Truth’s narrative also has one of the highest betweenness centrality scores sitting near the center of the network with numerous connections to other high centrality narratives. Noticeably on the outskirts of this network are several frequently cited narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Nat Turner’s *Confession*. Both of these texts, despite their historic and literary importance, are exceptional: Jacobs is uniquely literary within this set evoking aspects of the sentimental novel popular at the time (Foster 1994) and the Turner narrative adopts the formal characteristics of the legal confession that it is.

Like the inaugural speech network illustration in Chapter 4, the narrator network specifies characteristics about this genre. First, we can see that differences within the slave narratives are not determined by gender or place of residence: The network does not cluster on these attributes. Patterns do form around the “occupation” of the narrators and around the date of publication: we see a significant cluster of antebellum narratives written largely by field hands. However, postbellum and antebellum narratives overlap in other parts of the graph. This characteristic suggests that slave narratives possess a consistency in terms of content that structures the genre. Also like the speech network, we can see that the popularity of a narrative does not translate to high centrality based on

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38 As discussed in Chapter 4, betweenness centrality measures the extent to which a node is “between” other nodes via the geodesic paths within the network and is, therefore, widely considered a measure of importance (Wasserman and Faust 1994).
content. Style understandably biases the privileged place of particular narratives, such as Jacobs’ *Narrative in the Life of a Slave Girl*, within the contemporary imagination. Although much can be learned about the nature of the slave narrative genre by analyzing this narrative network, the word network map provides the core of this content-based discussion.

**WORD NETWORK MAP**

The word network (Figure 5.3) is the core of this analysis providing a thematic index for the qualitative analysis of subordination and power that follows. This network consists of the 305 most popular and highly correlated words. To be selected in the sample words had to be used more than 300 times in addition to be excluded from a standard stop list and a stop list specific to this project.\(^3^9\) As discussed in chapter 4, this important sample of words drawn from the thousands of unique words used in the corpus is both practical and informative. Sampling is practical in so much as a network with thousands of words would be all but impossible to interpret.\(^4^0\) As opposed to other network projects that sample from thousands of nodes, the visual interpretation of this graph is essential to the use that I propose. Second, a network using the population of words is confounded by words that are used sparsely and, thus, are not determinative of the set, which again is cross-purposes with the goals of this project.

As can be seen in Figure 5.3, there are six distinct thematic word clusters: religion, polemics, reading and writing, crime and escape, everyday life, and master and

\(^{39}\) The stop list specific to this project includes numbers, dates, and names that are less informative for this thematic analysis.

\(^{40}\) Appendix B shows the weaknesses of increasing the word sample, but also highlights some of the promise. Additionally, a network constructed with a larger sample of words can be used as a validity check.
slave. We can see that the graph is structured around two unique, but closely linked clusters at the center of the graph: the everyday life and master-slave thematic clusters. The placement of these clusters confirms the importance that previous scholarship places on the master-slave relationship within slave societies and on the centrality of everyday life. In fact, the everyday life and master-slave cluster tie the network together: These themes are essential to the structure of the slave narrative.

Figure 5.3: Co-Word Network

41 The title of these groupings function as a summary bore out in the close-up figures that follow; however, like the inaugural speech networks in the preceding chapter, the emergent relationship of words within the words does not always perfectly correspond to these title headings, but the majority of words which in each cluster conform to the analyst subscribed summation. In regards to the groupings themselves, a factor analysis presented in Appendix C lends confidence to the identified clusters.
Religion

Previous literature acknowledges the importance of religion within the antebellum South both as a form of social control and as a tool of informal and formal resistance. Whites went to great lengths to impose their version of Christianity on the enslaved and to prevent the spread of an indigenous Christianity created or modified by the enslaved; these attempts at social control were by and large unsuccessful. As Rawick (1972:33) notes, “While religion certainly may at times be an opiate, the religion of the oppressed usually gives them the sustenance necessary for developing a resistance to their own oppression.”

Within the slave narrative corpus religion plays a central role in the symbolic power contestation in part structuring slave society. We see evidence of the role that Christianity plays in pacifying the enslaved population in testimonies, such as Omar ibn Said’s, that praise the master class for assimilating the enslaved into the Christian church.
We also see the extent to which the enslaved use religion as a coping mechanism viewing the potential for escape and freedom in the afterlife. Last, the texts, particularly the postbellum religious narratives, describe how aspects of religious participation challenged the natal alienation imposed upon them by whites. Describing the effect of his successful ascension to leadership within his church, Elijah Green writes, “Many of the whites there thought me not capable of managing the ordinances and other pastoral duties of the church more than to preach … They seeing in my actions that I possessed some quality of manhood, and that if I could not rule I would not be ruled, yielded to my purpose.”

**Polemics**

At least by the 1830s, plantation owners and other slaveholders aggressively tried to stop the distribution of information from abolitionist sources in the North (Camp 2004; Rawick 1972). Laws were enacted to shut off the flow of information and these laws and more local plantation policies were evoked with greater frequency as the abolitionist movement gained momentum. In this way, the political space of the enslaved was a subject of contention. The power relations in the antebellum South precluded the ability of the enslaved to mobilize in any large sense – even Nat Turner’s rebellion consisted of about 70 resistors at most (Stampf 1956). Nonetheless, the formerly enslaved narrators within this corpus outline elaborate political perspectives using didactic and polemical language in an effort to educate their readers exhibiting a relatively sophisticated political consciousness.
The polemics cluster is a cluster of abstract terms that narrators use to explicitly decry the horrors of slavery. Terms, such as “cruel,” “suffer,” “flesh,” “treatment,” often demarcate more abstract condemnation of the slave system, as opposed to more explicit descriptions of torture attached to words such as “lash” and “whip” or “iron” and “chain” that can be found in the closely linked “master-slave” thematic cluster at the center of the graph. The noun “prejudice” and the verb “educate” underscore the polemical tone of this cluster.

**Reading and Writing**

Enslaved literacy was a contentious topic in the antebellum South. Laws forbade teaching the enslaved to read and write although enforcement of these laws by slaveholders was
varied both dependent on the master and occasionally on the master’s evaluation of the enslaved person. Describing the consequences of learning to read and write in Georgia, William Heard writes, “We did not learn to read nor to write, as it was against the law for any person to teach any slave to read; and any slave caught writing suffered the penalty of having his forefinger cut from his right hand; yet there were some who could read and write.”

Despite the danger of punishment for those attempting to become literate, many of the formerly enslaved went to great lengths to educate themselves often depending on sympathetic whites or clandestinely listening into lessons of white schoolchildren. Other terms within this cluster, such as “book,” “memory,” “history,” and “observe,” underscore the role of literacy and the act of telling the story of slavery from the position of the enslaved. Reading and writing become important and contested responses to subordination. In many ways, the writing of narratives itself becomes a central aspect of resistance to natal alienation – the most clear expression of personhood.
Crime and Escape

Crime and escape were inextricably linked: Escape itself was one of the most enthusiastically enforced crimes within the American South and aided by the complacency or complicity of northern actors and states. As can be seen in Figure 5.6, crime and escape is one of the six prominent thematic clusters identified by the text analytic techniques. The “crime and escape” cluster is linked most closely to the “everyday life” cluster and is most distant is on the opposite side of the network from the religion cluster which highlights at least two characteristics about this data. First, this arrangement offers further evidence of the religion and escape motifs indicative of the antebellum and postbellum split. Religion is certainly important to the antebellum texts.
and crime and escape are discussed in the postbellum texts. However, the majority of the antebellum texts emphasize crime and escape to a greater extent than the postbellum texts and vice versa. Additionally, the placement of these clusters speaks to the use of these themes within the text themselves. Religion is often invoked as a more covert means of resistance as the enslaved congregate in hidden sanctuaries at night to build their collective religious identity, while running away was a public, visible, and direct act of resistance.

Figure 5.6: Co-Word Network (Crime and Escape Zoom)
Tag key: .jj-adjective, .nn-noun, singular or mass, .nnp-proper noun, singular, .vb-verb, base form, .vbn-verb, past participle (see Marcus et al. 1993).
In addition to terms that are affiliated with emancipation, such as the verb “escape,” this cluster contains terms denoting the criminal justice system, such as “trial,” “prison,” and “crime.” Prison and crime overlap throughout these texts with the ideas of emancipation. The relationship between crime and escape resonate in Louis Hughes’ description of his third attempt to escape from his master in Mississippi. After being caught trying to abscond, Hughes was beaten in an effort to force him to falsely admit complicity with the Yankees who were gaining ground in the area. He was subsequently sent to the prison for those “whose crime was a too great love for personal freedom.” The disciplinary code within the American South and, for most of this period, the North linked the notion of escape with crime as illustrated by this emergent thematic cluster.

**Everyday Life**

At least since Rawick’s analysis of enslaved people’s lives from “sundown to sunup,” historians have explored the everyday lives of American slaves. This shift from more work-centric to cultural perspectives was likely due to the incorporation of enslaved people’s voices through slave narratives, particularly the WPA interviews. The corpus of 19th century narratives in this analysis provides a focal thematic strain on day-to-day (or night-to-night as it may be) life.
The everyday life, along with the Master-Slave, cluster connects disparate aspects of the slave narrative corpus and many of the passages that use terms identified in these clusters connect to other themes. As we will see in the following chapters, themes overlap organically: Rarely when a narrator is discussing religion, for example, is religion the sole focus of the discussion; rather the discussion might implicitly underscore the hope of freedom in the Christian afterlife. The everyday life theme is no exception to this trait. In fact, as its place in the broader network suggests, terms affiliated with the everyday life theme are more likely to be integrated into other thematic discussions.

**Master and Slave**

Although these thematic clusters generally fall into the resistance frame, the power relationship between master and the enslaved is central to the thematic structure captured
by the word map. In Figure 5.9, we see the last of the six thematic cluster, the master-slave cluster. This cluster, as mentioned above, is close linked to the everyday life cluster and shares words pertaining to everyday life as well. However, as can be seen particularly in the bottom portion of the zoomed image, terms, such as “master,” “slave,” “mistress,” “lash,” and variations of the word “whip,” are clustered with a frequency unobserved in the other thematic clusters. This cluster’s central position in the network underscores the importance of this power relationship and the tools, such as the lash, of its maintenance.

Figure 5.9: Co-Word Network (Master and Slave Zoom)
Tag key: .jj-adjective, .nn-noun, singular or mass, .nnp-proper noun, singular, .vb-verb, base form, .vbn-verb, past participle (see Marcus et al. 1993).
In his highly central narrative, Reverend Phillip Randolph describes the relationship between the master and the enslaved:

[A] state of war constantly exists between the master and servant. The one would enforce obedience to his every wish, however wrong and unjust... The latter feels the restraint and writhes under it; he sees the injustice, and at times attempts to assert his rights; but he must submit either to the command or the lash; obey implicitly he must.

In this passage and others throughout the corpus, the narrators describe the overwhelming power differential within slave societies. Here, Randolph describes how the enslaved may explicitly “attempt to assert his rights,” yet these attempts are undoubtedly going to fail. Physical violence underscores how this type of extreme inequality is reinforced and perpetuated, but the threat of violence embedded within the slave system can preclude the necessity of using physical violence. That being said, nearly one-hundred percent of the texts describe hot whites resorted to violence in the maintenance of power.

CONCLUSION

This thematic map provides a vehicle for discussing responses to power relations within the slave narrative corpus. While other themes undoubtedly exist within these texts, text-analytic techniques provide a formal mechanism for identifying the most prominent themes. Moreover, these techniques promote reproducibility and the incorporation of dozens of disparate texts lending confidence in the results. While these thematic clusters are unique, there is a good deal of overlap, both in terms of the placement of terms (i.e. the dense concept-oriented overlapping between the everyday life and master-slave themes) and within the narratives themselves. The narrators may discuss how religious
figures aided their emancipation or how attendance at clandestine prayer meetings constitutes a criminal activity. For example, Henry Bibb describes how aspects of crime and escape and religion intersected as his master, the Deacon, wanted to amplify his transgressions in order to intensify his punishment for running away: “The Deacon had declared that I should not only suffer for the crime of attending a prayer meeting without his permission, and for running away, but for the awful crime of stealing a jackass, which was death by the law when committed by a negro.” Bibb’s statement identifies the crime of running away with other crimes, including those aspects of the slave code that forbade the free practice of religion.

In the following chapters, I use the aerial view as a guide for analyzing responses to subordination as described by the formerly enslaved narrators. With careful attention to the broad themes identified in the emergent analysis, we have guideposts to understanding power within this corpus. Responses to the condition of subordination vary dependent upon the themes evoked by the narrators as described within this chapter, yet these themes rarely operate in isolation. Rather, the themes overlap in telling ways: religion and crime, literacy and master-slave relations, everyday life and polemics and so forth. The terms identified within these analyzes indeed help index the thematic foci within the texts.

The narrators within this corpus describe a range of responses to subordination. These responses are often embedded in the thematic clusters (or the combination of clusters) that structure the genre as a whole. Not only do these themes resonate within the context of resistance, but we can see how these themes drive definitional aspects of slavery. In other words, embedded within the dominant themes within the corpus is the
core contestation over the view that the enslaved are natally alienated. The imposition of natal alienation is challenged polemically in overtly political ways and embodied in the micropractices of power, often centered on the body, which maintained the system of slavery at the most local levels of interaction.
CHAPTER 6:
RESISTING SOCIAL DEATH:
FORMAL AND EVERYDAY RESISTANCE
IN THE LIVES OF THE ENSLAVED

*Is not cunning always the natural consequence of tyranny?*

-Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*

Formal and everyday acts of resistance are the primary means of actively challenging power relations. After all, resistance is *the* resource the weak have to confront the powerful (Piven and Cloward 2005). Previous research that focuses on cases of extreme inequality largely focuses on either formal or everyday resistance and rarely discusses the relationship between the two. This oversight leaves a noticeable hole in how social scientists understand both power and resistance leading to at least two sources of confusion. First, the consideration of either formal or everyday resistance in isolation prevents the ability to observe how these forms of resistance relate to one another. Second, studies privileging everyday forms of resistance often assume that resistance operates as a given making the differences in resistant forms difficult if not impossible to identify.
Take, for instance, the most popular and widely read slave narrative, *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Douglass offers a detailed discussion of his life from childhood through violent confrontations with an infamous slave-breaker to his escape and work as an abolitionist. His narrative can be read as the birth of a social movement leader; however, it is difficult to determine when this “birth” occurred. As a child he was placed in the Auld household in Baltimore. His new mistress benevolently began to teach Douglass to read, but was admonished by her husband who said, as Douglass writes, “Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world … [If] you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him.” At this moment, Douglass knew the “pathway from slavery to freedom.” Master Auld’s racist admonition planted the kernel of resistance through education and literacy that Douglass pursues at every opportunity.

Later, Douglass is placed on the plantation of an infamous “nigger-breaker” – one who “breaks” bondsmen and bondswomen of insubordination – because of transgressive acts while in Baltimore, such as letting his master’s horse runaway to another plantation because the enslaved were fed more substantially there. Mr. Covey, the “breaker” and a religion “professor,” was extraordinarily cruel, violently overworking Douglass and others. This violent treatment did “break” Douglass, but also functioned as another turning point. Through this treatment, as Douglass writes, “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.” Douglass experiences this transformation through direct confrontation by fighting Covey: “This battle with Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood.”
Last, Douglass tries to and eventually succeeds in escaping to the North noting during a failed attempt that he and his fellow escapees “did more than Patrick Henry” because they had little chance of gaining liberty and faced almost certain death if they failed. In the end, he describes attending abolitionist meetings as a free man and states that he “never felt happier than when in an anti-slavery meeting.” Eventually he is compelled to speak despite the fact that he always “felt himself a slave” and was reluctant to talk in front of whites. From that point forward, he was an active member of the speaking tours that were essential to the spread of abolitionism. Although determining the actual moment that Douglass became what we now know as a social movement actor is, in the end, arbitrary, these events underscore the varied forms of resistance employed by Douglass as he struggles against the “social death” that ultimately maintains his enslaved condition. His contestation with powerful superordinates includes both formal and everyday forms. This chapter explores this variation as the enslaved challenge their subordinate condition.

While it is often difficult, if not impossible, within the slave narrative to systematically account for how everyday acts of resistance lead to more direct acts, scholars have inferred that the persistent tenor of everyday resistance among the enslaved within the American South established the conditions for more direct resistance. Evidence within the slave narratives suggest that many actors built upon covert resistances to more direct action, particularly as it pertains to running away. Certainly Douglass’s famous narrative describes such a trajectory from early attempts at self-education to more localized resistance, like workplace transgressions, to escape and finally to his ascension as a leading abolitionist. We further see in Douglass’s case the
movement from symbolic acts to more directly economic and political forms of contestation.

I explore below the varied forms of formal and everyday resistance as described by the enslaved. I focus on the emergent thematic clusters identified in the previous chapter by using the word network map as an index for qualitative immersion. To establish a complete picture of resistant responses to subordination, I also analyze the maintenance of power by the master class. Observing the micropractice of power – the focus on the body, the centrality of oversight, and so forth – and the responses to it, helps differentiate contestation over recognition within the symbolic sphere from more materialist struggle. I conclude by highlighting how discussions of power and inequality benefit from exploring the intersection between the symbolic and material contestation and how these forms of contestation affect the types of resistance in which the enslaved engage.

**ANALYTIC STRATEGY**

How do we begin a more in-depth exploration of rich textual data? In traditional analyses, scholars must make a consequential decision based on theory in addition to the perceived importance of text and in all likelihood the availability of the material. Given the cumulative nature of knowledge acquisition, this decision likely influences subsequent reading of texts. Each new reading cannot be independent from previous readings. So, if a scholar begins their analysis by reading Harriet Jacobs’ narrative, subsequent narratives will naturally be compared and contrasted with the Jacobs’ text.
This ordering becomes particularly important as we try to comprehend larger and larger corpora by moving beyond a handful of texts to dozens, hundreds, and even thousands.

With the increasing availability of social scientific textual data in electronic form, the question of navigating large corpora becomes more immediately relevant. In Chapter 4, I offered an illustration of a set of potential best practices that helps alleviate concerns about biases endogenous to standard strategies of knowledge accumulation in the face of large corpora. We can mobilize techniques developed in computational linguistics and the information sciences to understand and organize complex text data to gain greater purchase on social scientific textual data. Like the inaugural speech example, we can use word network maps to guide qualitative discussion.

The networks modeling the slave narratives (Figures 5.1 and 5.3) provide insight into the structure of the slave narrative corpus by, for example, locating central narratives and identifying six emergent thematic clusters. However, with rich and powerful textual data, such as this collection of slave narratives, it would be shortsighted to end with the structural approach. In this chapter and Chapter 7, I use the network maps as an index for qualitative immersion.

I broadly frame the discussion of responses to subordination around the prominent themes identified in the word network map. I analyze, for example, the role of religion as a location of symbolic forms of struggle. The network approach draws further attention to the relationships between these thematic arenas. I emphasize these relationships in the qualitative analyses. Therefore, the discussion of religion and symbolic struggle includes a discussion of religion’s link to everyday life and the master-slave relationship. I also use the word network map as a literal index to dig deeper into these profound stories.
including many exemplary passages that contain guidepost terms located through the structural analysis. Taking advantage of the structural maps as a research tool encourages a wide view of the slave narrative corpus.

EVERYDAY LIFE, THE MASTER-SLAVE RELATION, AND RESISTANCE

As we saw in the co-word network (Figure 5.3), the everyday life cluster and the closely connected master-slave cluster form the center of the thematic structure of the slave narrative corpus. Much of the overlap that we will see in other themes, centers upon how other thematic aspects of the narratives operate through either the theme of everyday life or the master-slave relationship. The emergence of the master-slave thematic cluster at the center of the word network underscores the role of this micro power relationship in structuring the lives of the enslaved. While maintenance of the power structure within the American South certainly occurred multidimensionally from the state and economic forces through deeply engrained cultural mechanisms, to the lives of the enslaved as described in the slave narrative corpus, the power relationship that held real sway in their lives was that between themselves and directly superior whites, such as their master and mistress, overseers, and local watchmen. The responses to subordination described by the enslaved are often dictated by this relationship as well: How the everyday practice of power is maintained at the local level influences the enslaved’s response.

Violence and the Maintenance of Power

First and foremost, the master class used violence to maintain their power over the enslaved. The body of the enslaved was the primary location of the physical
manifestations of power maintenance on behalf of whites. This physical brutality extended to any and every possible transgression, intentional or not, on the plantations and farms of the antebellum South depending on the whims and the humanity of the individual members of the master class. Yet, work is the arena that is most frequently described as the site of violence by the formerly enslaved narrators included in this corpus.

John Thompson, for example, was enslaved together with many others by George Thomas, a wealthy landowner in Maryland. Thomas would whip his bondswomen and bondsmen without any provocation and demanded that overseers on his farm maintain the same violence prompting Thompson, in his antebellum narrative, to describe Thomas as “inhuman as he was rich.” Again, the whip was not merely a tool of punishment for criminal transgression, but was a violent disciplinary weapon.

As the practice of power from the master’s position is maintained in everyday life, so are the various forms of resistance, particularly those symbolic forms of transgression affiliated with everyday resistance. Varying from simple acts of transgression, such as loafing at work, to more dramatic attempts at communication with loved ones to directly confrontational acts of formal resistance, the formerly enslaved narrators describe an array of resistant responses, as Francis Fedric writes, to subordination that are embedded in everyday life:

Slaves are all of them full of this sly, artful, indirect way of conveying what they dare not speak out, and their humor is very often the medium of hinting wholesome truths. Is not cunning always the natural consequence of tyranny?

Within this corpus there are many descriptions of events that primarily illustrate the symbolic contestation of power between the master and the enslaved in everyday life.
In an astonishing example of both the extent to which the master class denied communication between loved ones amongst the enslaved and the patience of those seeking to maintain these connections, Solomon Northrup, in his antebellum narrative, describes his attempts to write a letter to loved ones in the North:

My great object always was to invent means of getting a letter secretly into the post-office, directed to some of my friends or family at the North...I was in slavery nine years, and always watchful and on the alert, before I met with the good fortune of obtaining a sheet of paper...I appropriated a sheet, concealing it in the cabin, under the board on which I slept.

The vigilance of the master class made the mere sending of letters a years-long task on the part of the enslaved. As Northrup exhibits, the enslaved had to confront this vigilance with their own type of watchfulness and a commitment to find cracks in the micropractice of power on the part of the masters, mistresses, and overseers. Northrup’s efforts also illustrate how the simplest of everyday tasks, such as writing and sending a letter, have criminal implications within the American system of slavery that require concealment from superordinates’ constant gaze.

**RELIGION AND RESISTANCE**

Within the antebellum South, religion was a primary area of contestation as the master class attempted to control the enslaved population’s access to religion and manipulate biblical understanding to reinforce the enslaved’s subordinate position. The enslaved, in turn, developed a “hidden transcript” clandestinely meeting in the woods under the cover of darkness and building their own type of Christianity focused on the emancipatory aspects of the bible (Scott 1990). These secret religious meetings offered an alternative
story about the bondsman and bondswoman’s place in the world. This power struggle, therefore, is among the most explicit examples of symbolic contestation that largely involves covert or everyday resistance on the part of the enslaved. The role of religion as a location of contestation within the antebellum South has been known for some time. However, few studies discuss the relationship between the everyday and often clandestine practice of religion with the political place of religion within abolitionism and during the Reconstruction despite the fact that these functions intertwined and reinforced one another.

Many of the enslaved explicitly recognize the role of religion as a primary arena of contestation describing how the master class used religion as a tool to reinforce their subordinate position. Some masters and overseers would use religious ideology to dehumanize the enslaved echoing the “bestialization” described by Davis (2006) as central to the maintenance of social death. Francis Fedric, for example, describes how his master would gather the young together, ask them to look out over the plantation, and identify the cows in the pasture, the sheep and the mules. Next, he would say, “Look, you niggers! You have no souls, you are just like those cattle, when you die there is an end of you; there is nothing more for you to think about than living. White people only have souls.”

Other whites used more subtle religious interpretations to reinforce the subordinate position of the enslaved. After all, numerous biblical passages do appear to confirm the notion that the enslaved should passively accept their place within society’s
hierarchy. As Amanda Smith, among others, admit they were taught that the greatest sin was disobedience. At the same time, the enslaved fostered their own religiosity in secret spaces away from the ever vigilant white gaze. Reflecting on the practice of religion during slavery, Friday Jones, a postbellum narrator from North Carolina, describes these acts of avoidance:

We had to have secret prayer meetings on Saturday nights, and some would have to watch for the patrolmen and hard task-masters, to keep from being surprised, while the others prayed and sang. When the enemy was seen the watch would give the alarm; we would then close the meeting and make our escape, in order to keep our backs from being slashed and salted down.

The effort to keep the enslaved from practicing their religion was widely enforced with violence. In one particularly harrowing account, Francis Fedric, a Virginia house servant, describes how his grandmother was tied to a peach tree and flogged forty lashes by her own son, who was forced to work as an overseer, for “the crime of attending a prayer-meeting.” This attempt to control the religious practice of the enslaved was not, according to Charles Ball among others, likely the result of most masters wanting to prevent their chattel from seeking solace in spirituality, but rather fear that they “may imbibe with the morality they teach, the notions of equality and liberty, contained in the gospel.” Religion was seen as directly tied to formal types of resistance, such as running away and insurrection.

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42 In his discussion on the Bible and race, the theologian Peter J. Gomes (1996:89) writes, “With such an array of texts and precedents extending throughout all of the scripture it would not be hard, even today, to make a biblical case for slavery. Nowhere does the Bible condemn it; everywhere in the Bible it is the practice.”

43 Henry Bibb, for example, similarly notes that “slaves were not allowed to assemble for religious worship. Being more numerous than the whites there was fear of rebellion, and the overpowering of their oppressors in order to obtain freedom.”
Furthermore, the formerly enslaved narrators recognize the hypocrisy of the master class’s religion noting that religious “professors” and leaders were owners and likely to be no more or less cruel than less overtly religious slaveholders. Asking “Is this Christianity? Is it honest or right? Is it doing as we would be done by? Is it in accordance with the principles of humanity or justice?” Henry Bibb lists no less than four former owners who were active in the church and describes how the enslaved were averse to the “pro-slavery doctrine” of obedience preached on his Kentucky plantation. William Craft, making a similar observation about pious slaveholders, makes a distinction between “true Christianity” and “slave-holding piety.”

These anecdotes and observations underscore the relationship between several thematic areas identified in the previous chapter as the practice of religion intersects with crime and the maintenance of natal alienation embodied by act of forcing a son to physically abuse his mother. Nonetheless, the enslaved confronted the natal alienation and risked punishment to practice their religion building an alternative “hidden transcript.” In discussing these secret attempts to foster an independent religious community, the relationship between transgression and punishment are common and bear the characteristic of intentionality consistent with resistant acts in general, but are explicitly non-confrontational consistent with the covert nature of everyday resistance.

POLEMICS AND RESISTANCE

Many of the slave narratives in the corpus were also political texts with the narrators directly addressing the power relations that structured their subordination. The polemical aspects of both the postbellum and antebellum narratives are often somewhat distinct
from the story either embedded in prefatory statements or attached essays. On the other hand, some narrators do report thoughts and conversations that relate to this thematic cluster within the retrospective accounting of their life. The polemical accounts are direct observations of the prejudice and cruelty of the slave system running counter to the “Sambo” generalization promoted by earlier scholars of slavery. These narrators engage this theme promoting the notion that the enslaved were cognizant and critical of the prejudice buttressing the slave system and understood the sophistication of the racial antagonism reinforcing their subordinate position.

Henry Bibb, a Kentucky laborer while enslaved, offers numerous polemical passages on the horrors of slavery. He observes, like contemporary historians and other narrators, the “bestialization” endemic to slavery stating that the enslaved were subject to being “bought and sold like an ox.” Yet, beyond this bestialization, he writes that what separates the enslaved from free people is the ability to resist the torment maintaining the slave system: “But unlike other men, he is denied the consolation of struggling against external difficulties, such as destroy the life, liberty, and happiness of himself and family.” Condemning the fugitive slave laws in the North later in his narrative, Bibb explicitly states that the key difference between British Canada and the United States is that the British “recognize no such thing as property in a human being.”

Bibb and others strike a polemical tone by explicitly accounting for the realities of the slave system. One of the central components of this polemical theme is the identification of the cruel treatment experienced by the enslaved in the hopes that their audience will bear witness to these realities. William Walker, for example, claims that the cruel treatment on his Louisiana plantation was so severe that local planters were worried
about an epidemic of escapes in their area. While aiming to show the “cruelties incident to the system” of slavery, James W. C. Pennington also defines his master’s treatment by labeling him a “perpetualist:”

He was opposed to emancipation; thought free negroes a great nuisance, and was, as respects discipline, a thorough slaveholder. He would not tolerate a look or a word from a slave like insubordination. He would suppress it at once, and at any risk. When he thought it necessary to secure unqualified obedience, he would strike a slave with any weapon, flog him on the bare back, and sell. And this was the kind of discipline he also empowered his overseers and sons to use.

Pennington, Bibb, Walker, and others incorporate a polemical tone in their narratives to clearly identify the cruelty of the slave system. While these accounts are retrospective, they directly confront the power relations within the slave system and allow their readers to witness the cruelty essential to its maintenance.

Although this project focuses primarily on the American South, it is important to note that racial discrimination and antagonism did not stop at the Mason-Dixon line, nor did it stop at the United States’ border. Having escaped to Canada from Kentucky, Francis Fedric, the former house servant, describes walking into a barbershop to get a shave. The barber refuses to shave him claiming that he would inevitable lose clientele. Fedric observes that prejudice persisted in Canada and “a distinction, and badge of inferiority” still clung to him. The presence of prejudice outside of the South is echoed by many other narrators including, David A. Smith, who established benevolence societies in Ohio and elsewhere to assist fellow African Americans “devoured on every side by the wolves of slavery, prejudice and ostracism.” Similarly, Henry Ossian Flipper, the first African American cadet to graduate from West Point in 1877, acknowledges the existence of prejudice among his fellow cadets. Jacob Arter, in one of the early twentieth
century postbellum narratives, strikes a polemical tone writing about the military service of African American as well. He states that despite injustice and prejudice African Americans have willingly volunteered to serve in the protection of the country: “In all the wars of the country of any note the Negro has had a part.”

Interestingly, the polemical characteristic of the slave narrative is included in both antebellum and postbellum narratives although the nature of the argument shifts from abolitionist-based to an understanding of the persistence of prejudice and the hopes that African Americans will be recognized for their contributions.

**READING, WRITING, AND RESISTANCE**

Like the explicit political nature of many of the texts in this corpus, literacy is a common theme within these narratives; however, the issue of reading and writing is much more difficult to classify in relationship to the forms of responses to subordination. Learning to read and write is obviously a personal act, but one that places the actor in a more expansive community. Many of the writers describe how literacy made them feel “more human,” these claims in previous analyses might have been subsumed under the broader everyday resistance label, but are more adequately conceived as agentic responses to subordination. At the same time, several authors, like Douglass, recognize that confronting the laws preventing literacy amongst the enslaved is a transgressive act of counter-power.

The fact that reading and writing was negatively sanctioned by most slaveholders is widely known (Escott 1979; Genovese 1974). The punishment for literacy was often severe, but depended upon the whims of the master. This point is made by M.F. Jamison
who describes how literacy amongst the enslaved was illegal and could result in the loss of sight by those caught reading. He goes on to state that, while the opportunity to read or write was severely limited, “very much depended upon the kindness of their owners” in terms of enslaved people’s opportunities to educate themselves. Although the maintenance of illiteracy was one of the central means of maintaining the status of bondsmen and bondswomen, many of the narrators describe their attempts and others to confront this form of debasement. Emma Ray Smith describes her father’s youthful attempts at self-education:

He studied in the field, or in the old log cabin, at night by the light from the old fireplace. In the field while resting the horses, he would take off his hat in which was hidden the spelling book and while he was pretending to be looking in his hat for vermin which were quite plentiful at that time, he was studying the words he was learning. He would then go on to the end of the row, spelling as he plowed.

Others describe the dangers of literacy and attempts to gain information about political developments. For example, Harry Smith describes how in the early 1860s “some of the lower classes of whites” would come by the slave quarters to read news about the coming war to the enslaved. Watchmen would look for approaching members of the master’s family, overseers, or unsympathetic whites for if the interloping whites were discovered they too would receive “fifty lashes.”

Related to the polemical theme, some narrators also discuss issues of literacy as pertaining to quality or intent of their manuscript. These statements usually reflect the humble origins of the writer and describe the desired audience. For example in the preface of his postbellum narrative, former laborer Charles Thompson states that he hope his book will be read by people of all races, but also explains that he avoids colloquial
language in order to “to help educate the blacks in the use of proper language.” The brief prefatory statement to William Webb’s narrative states that his work was actually dictated to his wife because he could not read and hopes that the proceeds of his book will help fund his education.

CRIME, ESCAPE, AND RESISTANCE

One of the most fascinating emergent characteristics uncovered by the text-analytic network techniques is the identification of the relationship between crime and punishment within the slave narrative corpus. The act of escape itself, of course, was considered a major crime and the enforcement of the crime of running away extended to the North. Escape was a dramatic form of direct resistance often involving numerous people, fellow slaves, free blacks, and benevolent whites both in the North and the South. Other crimes were also affiliated with escape and were associated with other types of transgression: Theft, for example, sometimes occurred in the process of running away and also served as a common everyday act of resistance as the enslaved attempted to take a little bit of what they considered theirs. Thus, crime was affiliated with both formal and informal forms of resistance.

The most infamous and violent example of formal resistance in this corpus is Nat Turner’s, The Confessions of Nat Turner. The Turner rebellion coupled with the other early 19th century resurrections had a profound influence on master and slave relations, both legally and more locally. As Wilson (1974) suggests, the slave insurrections of the early 19th century helped further engrain racial antagonism into the power structure within the slave system. In Confessions Turner describes that a message from God
motivated him to gather a group of bondsmen to begin a resurrection in Virginia. This narrative rightly stands on the outskirts of the narrator network (Fig 5.1) because of its exceptionality both in terms of violence, due to its status as a confession, and in Turner’s unwillingness to except his position as less than divinely sanctioned. He describes how in his youth he was able to remember events that took place prior to his birth and how he learned to read and write almost instantly.

Later, he describes how he ran away from an overseer only to return thirty days later after reflecting on the passage exhorting submissiveness in the bible. Later yet, he has a revelation in which “white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle.” He further saw that when he saw a divine sign, a solar eclipse, he was to gather a band of bondsmen to, as he states, “slay my enemies with their own weapons.” Turner’s narrative is another example of the intersection of multiple thematic areas – the religious, master and slave, crime and escape – but the focus of the text is his desire to fulfill the prophecy that he experienced and incite fellow bondsmen to fight their captors.

The immediate effect of Turner’s formal resistance was noticeably mixed as a handful of narrators express finding pride in the brazenness of Turner’s actions, while others report more intense regulation of enslaved people’s behavior as a result of the rebellion. Harriet Jacobs, for example, writes that the insurrection caused a commotion in her town in North Carolina as the whites expressed consternation because the enslaved population was “contented and happy” upon hearing the news. On the other hand, describing in his 1840 narrative how he learned to read on the coattails of his master’s son when his mother bought him a book of hymns, James Curry writes, “Before Nat Turner's insurrection, a slave in our neighborhood might buy a spelling or hymn-book,
but now he cannot.” Fields, a formerly enslaved Virginia laborer, condemns Turner’s actions as they resulted in increased vigilance on the part of whites: “[We] poor colored people could not sleep at nights for the guns and swords being stuck in at our windows and doors to know who was here and what their business was.”

As opposed to the extraordinarily rare acts of formal resistance, theft was among the most common forms of everyday resistance often with the understanding that minor theft was a means for the enslaved to somewhat settle the score. Allen Parker, in his postbellum narrative, explicitly discusses the ethics of theft in the antebellum South acknowledging that these ethics might seem “out of place” in another context. He writes, “The negroes at the south seemed to think that everything that they could get hold of belonged to them.” Parker justifies this sentiment in economic terms: the enslaved worked for nothing more than room, board and clothing “earning” approximately the equivalent of $3.50 per month. Thus, Parker concludes, “The slave could hardly be expected to feel the same regards for his master's rights as he would have done had he been a free man, properly treated and justly paid.”

Numerous narrators provide evidence of the link between crime and escape beyond the obvious illegality of running away itself. In often took clever forms of transgression to facilitate escape. Successfully running away often required, for example, at least some small financial reserves. Mattie Jackson, a female house servant from Missouri, determined to escape purloins money from her master:

I finally came to the conclusion that as the laborer was worthy of his hire, I thought my wages should come from my master's pocket. Accordingly I took twenty-five dollars. After I was safe and had learned to write, I sent him a nice letter, thanking him for the kindness his pocket bestowed to me in time of need. I have never received any answer to it.”
Suicide as Resistance

While it is difficult to determine whether suicide is a form of resistance in the minds of the enslaved, the master class was clearly threatened by suicide and treated it as a criminal act shaming successful suicides in an attempt to control the spread of suicide on their farms and plantations. The narrators that discuss suicide view it as a proactive form of escape. They generally are mournful for what they perceive as a high suicide rate amongst the enslaved, but are sympathetic to those who take their own lives.

Charles Ball, in his antebellum narrative, writes at the greatest length on the topic of suicide. He states that “self-destruction” was much more common than one is led to believe. “Proprietors” have a great fear of suicide both because they want to avoid the blame associated with driving someone to kill themselves and also because suicides set a “dangerous example.” Therefore, the masters do all they can, according to Ball, to prevent suicide first and foremost treating suicide victims as “the worst of criminals” and denying them Christian burials. Ball concludes that “no one can attach blame to the slaves on many of the cotton plantations of the south, when they cut short their breath, and the agonies of the present being, by a single stroke.”

Several narrators profess thoughts of suicide when experiencing particularly brutal treatment or the “agonies of the present” that Ball describes. In his narrative, James Lindsay Smith, for example, is punished for “daring to think” when the captain of a boat to whom he is lent asks him to make more tea. He is stripped and beaten with “cat-o’-

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44 Camp (2004:58) briefly describes both the difficulties in determining suicide victims reasoning for taking their own lives through the illustrative case of a woman who was “driven to the deepest despair” – whether her suicide was the result of personal difficulties or her status as chattel – and the clarity of her slaveholder’s feeling towards suicide – suicide was a loss of profit.
nine-tails” causing him to think about escaping to drown himself in the James River:
“The captain had punished me so much that I was tired of life, for it became a burden to me.” Smith and others, such as Ball, think about taking matters into their own hands to avoid torturous treatment.

**Crime, Escape, and the Micropractice of Power**

The micropractice of power have been close to the surface of this discussion of the relationship between formal and everyday forms of resistance and we have seen several reasons to label escape as a formal form of resistance. First and foremost, it directly confronts the relationship between the status of the enslaved as property. This characteristic within American slavery plays a predominant role in the social death central within the specific nature of chattel slavery. This is also how Davis’s notion of bestialization is distinguished from Patterson’s more comparative definition of slavery. Unlike the majority of other slaveholding societies, the American bondsman and bondswoman were often literally compared to other farm property, such as cattle. Thus, while escape contains elements of the symbolic as the runaway comes to terms, however imperfectly, with their status as a freed person. Yet, escape is also direct, intentional and inflicts tangible material damage on the master class.

Moreover, escape was often a social act. Even in the case of nonpermanent escapes – when bondsmen and bondswomen escape to the woods for a limited period of time with the intention of returning – runaways typically required help from free and enslaved blacks and from benevolent whites. In sum, the majority of escapes were overtly confrontational of the power relationship maintained by the slaveholders and their
cohorts, all of them contained symbolic and materialist characteristics, and were social acts involving other actors willing to risk harsh punishment.

The most famous example of the social aspects of escape is Harriet Jacobs’ long effort to runaway to the North. Jacobs suffered years of emotional and physical torture at the hands of her master. When her master threatened to use her children as bargaining chips in his aggressive sexual pursuit, she determined to flee. She first goes to her grandmother’s house. Her grandmother, a free black, lives in the town adjacent to her master’s farm. But, her first encounter is with Sally, a friend of the family who lives with her grandmother who lets her into the house to gather some of her clothes. She stays the first week with a friend who lived in the woods outside of town. Next, she is concealed in the home of a benevolent white woman, who had long been acquainted with her mother. The husband of this woman “held many slaves, and bought and sold slaves.” The woman herself was a slaveholder. Harriet stays in a storage room in the mistress’s house for weeks with no contact with anyone other than her friend Betty, a cook in the mistress’s household, until the mistress is suspected of providing her housing. With this heightened threat, Harriet’s family makes an astonishing decision: Harriet was to move with help from another family friend, Peter, into a secret attic space in her grandmother’s house. Harriet stays in this small space for nearly seven years. Eventually, with the help of her uncle and Peter she absconds on a boat to New York. Dozens of others, including numerous relatives who were imprisoned as bait, were involved in Harriet’s years long escape. The collective cunning of this effort is remarkable, but, after all, as Harriet writes, the enslaved often must resort to cunning: “It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants.”
While no other narrator describes such elaborate and lengthy concealment, many other narrators report similar support by family and friends in their attempts at escape. In his antebellum narrative printed in the abolitionist newspaper, the *The Emancipator*, an anonymous “runaway slave” describes how a free black steward helps him secretly board a boat to Boston and feeds him what he can on the trip. When the narrator offered this steward what little money that he had, the steward told the narrator that “he did not carry me away for the sake of money.” Like many other escaped former bondsmen and bondswomen, this narrator’s journey was hardly over once he reached Boston. A network of concerned African Americans helped this anonymous narrator establish himself in his new life in the North.

Other escaped bondsmen and bondswomen report only small, but instrumental acts of kindness that helped them reach the North. Moses Roper, for example, receives assistance mostly through his own deceit, yet, even he is offered food and a place to rest from some sympathetic free blacks on his escape to New York. To these narrators the effort to escape required an incredible amount of self-determination. They were often isolated and had few people to turn to. But nearly every antebellum narrator escaped, whether through the elaborate assistance provided Harriet Jacobs, or the small offerings of bread provided Moses Roper, received assistance from friends, relatives, and sympathetic strangers. While the practice of power on the part of the master class required a network of overseers, patrollers, and other whites, both in the North and South, intent on the maintenance of the slave system, the escape effort, an attempt to redefine these deeply engrained power relations, also required a network of sympathetic people willing to risk their own freedom to help the enslaved.
CONCLUSION

Incorporating enslaved narrators’ voices into our understanding of American slavery revolutionized how we think about the slave experience negating the theories of 19th and early 20th century pro-slavery historians and mid-century historians who argued that the enslaved were by and large content. Returning to the corpus of slave narratives armed with sociological theories and methods offers much needed insight into how the enslaved used resistance and specifies what they were resisting against within the extreme in equality that structured slave society.

Within the antebellum South, formal resistance, such as Nat Turner’s rebellion, was extraordinarily rare; however, this lack of formal resistance does not preclude the possibility of the enslaved contesting the natal alienation and social death reinforced in the micropractice of power. Although the strategies of informal resistance were often bound by the techniques employed by the master class to reinforce their position, the enslaved engaged in symbolic struggle with the means available to them.
Yet, during that time, the body alone was prostrated in that degraded situation—the mind—
the image and the best gift of God to man, was always elevated—it spurned the shackles,
and soared to Heaven, where it reeled in Elysium; in blissful concert with its Creator.

-William Hayden, *Narrative of William Hayden*

The frame of everyday resistance often weakens the likelihood of or precludes the ability
for actors to exhibit alternative responses to subordination. Many critiques of Scott’s
work on everyday resistance revolve around the assumption by Scott and others that
actors are resistant despite alternative explanations (Paquette 1990; Tilly 1991). These
critiques particularly focus upon the issue of intentionality: If an actor is not purposefully
transgressive then it hardly can be labeled resistance in any tangible sense. I argue that
taking a broader view of the continuum of responses to subordination allows space for
alternatives including projective forms of agency and quiescent acts.

The projective dimension of agency, as discussed in Chapter 2, consists of the
imaginative capacity of actors to conceive of different responses to problems in the
future. Projective agency connotes the promise of "narrative reconstruction," or the
notion that actors have the ability to conceive of alternatives to the dominant narratives
structuring the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:993). Within the context of slavery, agency is less bounded by the fulfillment of action, but can have implications for the self-conceptualization of the enslaved. Thus, whereas resistance, both formal and everyday, demands that actors directly seek change, agency can denote the desire to act, share in a common sense of humanity, and so forth.

Like other people, the enslaved were inclined to privilege their own circumstances relative to others. This notion that “I didn’t have it as bad as others” is common to scholars of inequality ranging from Marxist notions of false consciousness (see West 1999) to research on the legitimation of inequality (Della Fave 1980). In his narrative Douglass makes this argument with utmost clarity:

Moreover, slaves are like other people, and imbibe prejudices quite common to others. They think their own better than that of others. Many, under the influence of this prejudice, think their own masters are better than the masters of other slaves; and this, too, in some cases, when the very reverse is true. Indeed, it is not uncommon for slaves even to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each contending for the superior goodness of his own over that of the others.

Few scholars have taken seriously Douglass’s observations. On the one hand, an earlier generation scholars promoted the “Sambo” stereotype that the enslaved were largely content and quiescent with the implication that they were less capable of understanding their own subordination (Elkins 1958). More recently, scholars have focused on the everyday resistance frame implying that the consciousness of the enslaved was centered on methods of counteracting their subordination (Scott 1990). While the more recent work discredits the earlier “Sambo” theories, the resistance frame remains incomplete.
Below, I analyze alternative responses to the resistance frame described within this slave narrative corpus. Like the varied forms of resistance, these responses are also embedded in the thematic structure of the texts particularly in the everyday construction of the master-slave relationship and through religion which operated both as a conforming force and a mechanism for evoking agency or the sense that one is meaningfully capable of connecting with broader humanity. Like other subordinate actors, the enslaved possess a repertoire of possible reactions to their subordination. Each of these reactions contributes to their ability to get through the day and survive their circumstances as best they can. By making a priori assumptions about these responses, research potentially homogenizes the enslaved experience in one direction or another, from passivity to more extreme resistance. Broadening the scope of analysis to hundreds of lengthy narratives encourages viewing the diversity of experience described by the formerly enslaved themselves. I conclude by highlighting how the antebellum South’s status as a liminal historical space facilitates a diverse understanding of responses to subordination.

THE “GOOD MASTER”
Consistent with Douglass’s observations, many of the formerly enslaved narrators contrast the relative benevolence of their masters with the inhumane treatment of others’ masters. As Douglass writes, enslaved people are as likely to make prejudicial judgments as others. As we saw in the word network map (Figure 5.3), the concepts of “master” and “slave” are closely connected in the middle of the network providing indication of the centrality of the master-slave relationship within the thematic structure of the slave
narrative corpus. Statements regarding the “good master” cut to the core of the master-slave relationship as many of the narrators use the relative kindness of their master (or one of their masters) with the inhumane treatment of others’ masters (or one of their other masters).

Allen Parker offers a detailed portrait of life on the farm of a “good master.” Living in North Carolina, Parker worked on Darias White’s plantation. He drove mules for the White’s lumber operation that fed the growing shipbuilding industry in the antebellum South. White, Parker relates in his postbellum narrative, “took good care of his slaves and was never known to whip one.” Many of the enslaved men were allowed to camp out in the woods as they preferred and received small annual cash bonuses for good work. As Parker concludes, “Had all masters been like Darias White there would been far less trouble with the slaves, as under such masters they were generally happy and contented.” Parker contrasts White’s treatment with Elisha Buck, his subsequent master, who was a “mean poor white.” Buck did not provide adequate food for his bondsmen and bondswomen and was not averse to whipping as punishment for transgressions, such as theft.

Even Harriett Jacobs, who writes about the cruelty inherent to the slave system as effectively as any other narrator, concedes that one encountered, on rare occasions, “humane slaveholders.” As evidence, she describes a family in her hometown that consisted of a young woman and the bondswoman and children that she inherited. These people formed an unlikely family and were extraordinarily close. So close that the young mistress offered to manumit the bondswoman; however, as Jacobs writes, “They refused to take their freedom, saying that she had always been their best friend, and they could
not be so happy any where as with her.” Even a seemingly happy story, of course, rarely ends happily under these conditions. The quiescent family who found solace in the happy relationship between themselves and their mistress was turned upside down when the young mistress married a man who shared the values more common to the slaveholding class. While he was known as a “good master” because he kept his enslaved people better clothed than most and used the lash less frequently. According to Jacobs, he separated the family for profit. Briefly hinting at the effect that slavery had on whites, Jacobs concludes, “Had it not been for slavery, [the master] would have been a better man, and his wife a happier woman.”

A handful of the postbellum narrators continued living with their former master’s families after Emancipation. Lucius Henry Holsey, a former house servant who lived in Georgia, continued working on his plantation for a year after the war because the plantation owner was “kind to his slaves.” Millie-Christine, the conjoined twins from North Carolina, lived with the family of their former slaveholder for years after Emancipation and returned to work in traveling shows when this family fell on hard economic times after the former slaveholder’s death. Emma J. Smith Ray confirms that some of the formerly enslaved people with “good masters” stayed on the plantation citing the difficulties “getting used to the change.”

While many of these statements suggest a certain level of quiescence in so much as there is a tacit understanding that the enslaved people living under “good masters” are more compliant, this is an obviously relative level of both “goodness” on the part of the master class and quiescence on the part of the enslaved. Narrators describe “good masters” abusing the enslaved and the enslaved on their plantations commit acts of
resistance against their condition. Disentangling the extent to which members of the master class were actually “good” in a modern sense is hardly worthwhile; however, the notion of the “good master” does offer further insight into the heterogeneity of the tactics that the enslaved developed to live within the American system of slavery.

GETTING BY IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF THE ENSLAVED

As analyzed in the previous chapter, the master-slave relationship was reinforced and maintained in the everyday micropractice of power. Everyday life, at the core of the thematic structure, ties together much of the action within the narrative corpus; hence, it is no surprise that the formerly enslaved narrators often describe less explicit responses to their enslavement within the context of everyday life. While the narrators describe many occasions of resistance, either formal or everyday, they also worked on the farms and in the houses. Many took pride in their contribution to the running of their master’s business or plantation focusing on how hard the enslaved people worked. Underscoring the importance of merely surviving the condition of slavery, the cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson (2004:480) writes, “Many black folk were not able to outwardly resist, not simply for fear of reprisal but because to do so would have undermined their long-term plans of survival and liberation.” Getting through the day was a viable act of self-preservation and the pride that the narrators describe is consistent with contemporaneous attempts to maintain “dignity at work.”

Keeping in mind that the vast majority of the formerly enslaved narrators focus largely on the torturous means that slaveholders and overseers used to extract the most labor possible from their bondsmen and bondswomen, several of the narrators developed
a sense of pride in their work that indicates a level of agency inconsistent with the notion of dominance promulgated by the powerful in the antebellum South. To “get by” these narrators competed with whites in an attempt to earn their respect at work. The fact that this respect was often impossible to achieve offers evidence that the establishment of a superior work ethic was directed towards the enslaved’s self-opinion – analogous to the imaginative construction of an alternative vision of the self – more than the opinions of others.

George Henry, for example, describes how work contributed to his self-worth. As a child working in the plantation nursery, Henry recognized that he wanted for fulfilling jobs. He writes, “I was determined to do none of their mean, low, occupations around houses. I aspired to something higher.” In his postbellum narrative, he describes his rise in leadership positions overseeing parts of a farm and finally becoming an enslaved sailor. In each position, he works harder than both the blacks and the whites with whom he works. He was determined in particular to prove that he was equal to the whites: “I was determined to let them see that though black I was a man in every sense of the word.”

Other narrators, particularly skilled laborers, used their work ethic to gain the respect of others. William Hayden, for example, parleys the respect that he has built as an excellent rope spinner in the country and a competent “man of all work” into some freedom of movement and also convinces several whites to teach him how to read. James Lindsay Smith, a shoemaker, earns his own shop and also gains freedom of movement. He saves some of the money that his business makes and buys a suit stating that he “was
always proud and loved to dress well.” He later uses some of the money that he saved to escape to Hartford, Connecticut.

As a general strategy in developing a sense of agency given the constraints against such development, the offering of respect is one means the enslaved used to exhibit social action. Like developing self-respect in a culture resistant to it, bondsmen and bondswomen had some control in how and to whom they gave respect. False respect, or the acknowledgement that respectful acts were not earnest, was a response to the enforcement of respect, often through disciplinary means, that exhibited this control. Accordingly, offering false respect was one means that the enslaved used to “get by.”

William H. Robinson provides an example of false respect. When a master was known to be humane it was common for the enslaved population to earnestly mourn his death. However, the sale of Robinson’s father, much adored amongst the enslaved people on his North Carolina plantation, prompted the bondsmen and bondswomen to turn against their master. Upon his death, they felt little, but were obligated to show emotion. They placed saliva on their cheeks to shed “crocodile tears.” As Robinson writes, “This may appear very deceptive, but had we not made some demonstration of grief our very lives would have been in danger.” This form of deception can hardly be labeled everyday resistance as the enslaved conform to expectation. Yet, the seemingly quiescent behavior is not without purpose; rather, by providing false respect to their deceased master, the enslaved avoid unnecessary abuse by maintaining the official transcript that the enslaved should admire the master class.
Entertainment as Pacification and as Expression

The enslaved people’s willingness to participate in and seemingly enjoy entertaining activities, such as dances and parties, is one of the primary justifications for the “Sambo” stereotype. Why would a person so thoroughly dehumanized find the spirit to dance or court or participate in general revelry? We see that many of the enslaved are highly skeptical of master’s attempts to provide entertainment. Some of this reservation, especially within the more religious narratives, is, in general principle, highly critical of drinking and dancing, others question the intent of the masters’ encouragement of these parties. Regardless, as Genovese (1974:570) writes, “The slaves enjoyed the illicit parties most of all.” These parties were transgressive and widely considered acts of everyday resistance, but sanctioned entertainment is more difficult to classify.45

Although masters used alcohol and celebrations, particularly annual Christmas parties as portrayed by Frederick Douglass and others, to reinforce docility and the power structure, many of the narratives explain the establishment of spaces at home and in the woods where the enslaved escaped oppression for brief periods evoking their independence. In his postbellum narrative, Isaac Williams describes the dances on his Virginia plantation as the “sunshine of slave life.” When his master had company, he would gather together the enslaved people on his plantation for a “jolly dance” featuring banjos and a dance competition. While these dances, as Williams notes, allowed the enslaved to briefly put “dull care away and think not of its darker and gloomier shadows”

45 Dancing itself was not off-limits in the reinforcement of the master-slave relationship as masters often derived pleasure from watching the enslaved people dance. As John Brown describes, dancing was also used to assess the health of the enslaved on the auction block: “They must answer every question, and do as they are bid, to show themselves off; dance, jump, walk, leap, squat, tumble, and twist about, that the buyer may see they have no stiff joints, or other physical defect.”
of enslaved life, it is impossible to avoid the fact that these dances served the master class in the micropractice of power.

William Walker penetrates his master’s reason for allowing the enslaved people on his plantation to dance when he had company. Walker states that Dick Fallon, his master, “delighted in having such sports among his slaves, for it gave the impression to the score of his contemporaries, whom he brought to see them, that he was just and kind to them.” Even when having fun, the enslaved were providing entertainment to the master class.46

As whites engaged in the maintenance of the slave system were drawn to the Civil War, cracks in the centuries-old racialized power structure began to show. Enforcement of the ever vigilant forms of discipline became impossible. Needless to say, many bondsmen and bondswomen took advantage of this liminal space exhibiting more overt forms of agency or, as M.F. Jamison describes in his postbellum narrative, literally bringing the “hidden transcripts” typical in the period from sundown to sunup to light:

While the war was raging, the blacks were giving themselves over to balls and dances. I can remember when we would walk ten miles, dance all night, and go home after daylight next morning. The time of patrolling negroes had passed. All men who were fitted for such mean work found a better place for it on the field of battle among their comrades who were bleeding and dying while the negro was frolicking and flying.

As those whites “fitted to such mean work” were drawn from patrolling to war, the enslaved were able to walk home from their dances in the daylight without threat. To the extent that “social death” characterized the slave system in the antebellum South, Jamison’s description sheds light on a possible “rebirth.”

46 Interestingly, the tension between race and entertainment resonates to this day and forms a central critique by contemporary African American artists. Spike Lee, for example, interrogates the relationship between white audiences and black entertainers in films like Bamboozled (Holden 2000).
RELIGION, QUIESCENCE, AND AGENCY

Religious practice amongst the enslaved was not limited to the acts of congregation consistent with the notion of everyday resistance, but was also private and personal. As the enslaved looked towards religion for the ability to survive the cruelty of slavery or hoping for peace in the afterlife, they are not resisting in either the formal or informal sense described in previous research, but exhibiting a level of agency that was often denied them legalistically, culturally, and through force. While these more private religious practices contained elements identifiable as part and parcel with symbolic contestation and fit within the broader notion of recognition, the intention of these acts were not by and large resistant. In fact, it is equally plausible that these more personal religious moments fulfilled a twin purpose by helping enslaved people “get by,” while also wedding the enslaved to a variant of the master’s religion (Patterson 1982).

Prayer and Agency

Many of the enslaved narrators contrast the religion of the enslaved with the piety of the master class deriding the bigotry embedded in their master’s religion. While many of the narrators describe the informally resistant act of clandestinely holding religious meetings in the woods, others describe more personal acts of devotion. While these acts may have been negatively sanctioned by the master class, their intent, according to many of the formerly enslaved narrators, was hardly based upon the master-slave relationship. Rather, they were often expressions of personal liberation in the eyes of their god or the hope of liberation in the afterlife. Through these expressions, the narrators use religion to describe
an alternative vision of the natal alienation maintained by whites and encounter a personal devotional community often involving only themselves and god. As Elizabeth Keckley writes, “I was born a slave…therefore I came upon earth free in God-like thought, but fettered in action.”

Like Keckley, Elizabeth, in her antebellum narrative, describes the solace that she sought in personal devotion. Her parents, enslaved in Maryland, were very devout Methodists and offered Elizabeth religious instruction from an early age. When she was eleven, she was moved from the farm upon which her family lived to a farm several miles away. Shortly thereafter, Elizabeth walked miles in search of her mother who told her that she had "nobody in the wide world to look to but God." Her mother’s statement has a tremendous effect on how Elizabeth confronts her enslavement through religious devotion despite the lack of spirituality on her new farm:

I lived in a place where there was no preaching, and no religious instruction; but every day I went out amongst the hay-stacks, where the presence of the Lord overshadowed me, and I was filled with sweetness and joy, and was as a vessel filled with holy oil.

Reverend David Smith, who became an active participant in the establishment of the A.M.E. church in southwestern Ohio, writes, “I knew very well, if God was able to deliver me from the corrupt influence of the world and the power of Satan, that he was able to deliver me from this slave-holder.” William Hayden also states that the “body alone was prostrated in that degraded situation – the mind – the image and the best gift of God to man, was always elevated – it spurned the shackles, and soared to Heaven, where it reveled in Elysium; in blissful concert with its Creator.”
Beyond the hope and peace that some of the enslaved sought through prayer and personal devotion, many narrators express hope that solace will be found in heaven. Unlike bondsmen and bondswomen who actually commit suicide, those enslaved people who contemplate a heavenly life, reunions with displaced children and deceased relatives, equality, and justice, find solace in an alternative reality. Separated from her mother, Louisa Picquet, for example, becomes engaged in religion with the understanding that her mother was “a Christian woman” and that they were likely to meet in heaven.47 J.D. Green’s narrative, among others, relates a similar story. While a young boy, Green’s mother is sold to another slaveholder. Green writes, “Before parting she advised me to be a good boy, and she would pray for me, and I must pray for her, and hoped we might meet again in heaven.”

“O Lord make us obedient servants”

The master class used religion to pacify the enslaved accenting biblical passages that promote obedience. Many religious whites, including ministers, felt fully justified in being slaveholders. Further, they felt compelled to enforce their version of Christianity, both through force and the slave code, as described in the previous chapter, and through preaching itself. In Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave published in 1838 serially in the Emancipator, the anonymous former bondman describes how preachers would stop enslaved men and women on the road and preach to them about how they will

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47 Picquet, exceptionally within this corpus, did not have to meet her mother in heaven, but was serendipitously reconnected with her mother, who was still enslaved, and exchanged letters for years as she attempted to buy her freedom. With donations from various abolitionist societies, Picquet eventually succeeds in purchasing her mother’s freedom for $900.
go to hell if they do not obey their master. He writes that he “never heard them tell about heaven.”

Some of the enslaved inevitably followed the religious practices that were enforced upon them. Omar ibn Said, as mentioned in Chapter 3, describes happily converting to Christianity under the leadership of whites. However, several of the formerly enslaved narrators express resentment of the use of religion by the master class condemning the obedience on the part of the enslaved population derived from scripture. William Walker, for example

Some of his serfs would congregate in sacred worship, and they were imperatively commanded not to forget to pray "O Lord, make us obedient servants," a command which they strictly obeyed, not only to satisfy the demand of their rulers, but to satisfy the demand of their consciences. Filial duty was born in them, and human affection had been taught them from the lips of babbling brooks and from the fragrant smell of lilies and roses.

The tools of oppression that the master class employed in order to maintain the power structure central to the slave system extended from brutal physical violence to more subtle forms of cultural and symbolic control embedded in religion. At the same time, it was common for the enslaved to develop an alternative story eschewing the theme of obedience promulgated by the pro-slavery preachers. Not limited to communal acts of everyday resistance, the narrators describe a space for personal religious practice. Like the offering of respect and the notion of self-respect, many enslaved people used religion to construct a personal perspective that superseded the dehumanization defining the slave system.
CONCLUSION

The enslaved people’s responses to subordination were as diverse as one would expect of a heterogeneous group. Given the extreme power imbalance within the slave system the repertoire of possible responses was smaller than less controlled subordinates. Yet, the enslaved did not simply vacillate between acceptance and various forms of resistance. Rather, the narrators describe a range of behaviors, responses, and strategies to deal with their subordinate status. In the previous chapter, we focused upon the formal and informal styles of resistance that the enslaved employed in the severely one-sided power struggle. In this chapter, we have seen that, while the enslaved were dramatically constrained in the options available to them, bondsmen and bondswomen had alternative repertoires to draw from. From the violent resistance of Nat Turner to less resistance responses, the enslaved dealt with their condition in ways they deemed best for their survival.

This antebellum period may be the most unusual period in the history of slave systems making Patterson’s under-emphasis of this moment particularly vexing. No other slave system within Patterson’s comparative analysis was so deeply challenged from both outside and inside the system. The relative ease of the transfer of information in this antebellum South and the proximity of a non-slaveholding society in the North increased the knowledge that the enslaved had about alternatives to their condition. Particularly as the consequences of the Civil War spread, the enslaved lived in a liminal state, the grip of the master class began to wane as the disciplinary tools weakened, with fewer overseers, patrolmen, and so forth available to maintain the status quo power relations. The enslaved had varied responses to this state as well: some maintained relationships with their
masters, others joined the Yankee forces, and others ran away with less fear of reprisal.

In his later work, Patterson embeds the concept of freedom in the slave condition. Without slavery, according to Patterson, modern notions of freedom would not have developed. In Patterson’s conceptualization, enslaved status is predicated upon the liminality enforced by the master class: like Simmel’s “stranger,” enslaved people are both a part of and a part from society. The master’s authority rests on this liminality as he “in a godlike manner mediated between the socially dead and the socially alive” (Patterson 1982:46). However, the antebellum South itself represents a liminal period in the history of slavery as illustrated by the varied responses to subordination described by the formerly enslaved. The master class’s authority was on the wane as abolitionism gained strength and the likelihood of civil war increased.

Although enslaved people possessed limited ability to confront the dominance maintained by the master class, they activated the tools available to them from rare examples of formal resistance to passive attempts to get by engaging in a largely symbolic form of contestation. Within the micropractice of power in the antebellum South, the enslaved struggled with the master class over notions of recognition attempting by largely informal means to deny the natal alienation imposed upon them.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Power operates multidimensionally and is contested in multiple arenas from the materialist to the symbolic. Power contestation is also multidimensional and heterogenous evolving from the tools available to subordinate groups. While previous studies have observed the importance of tools embedded in everyday life, critics of the everyday resistance frame have criticized the binary opposition between the mental and physical forms of contestation (Mitchell 1990) and the notion that subordinate actors are in a “constant rebellion” (Tilly 1991:598).

The symbolic sphere, following Bourdieu, provides an independent yet linked space of struggle for those holding few tangible resources. In fact, as Henry Louis Gates (1998:2) writes, slave narratives themselves and other African American literary forms played an instrumental symbolic role in confronting the cultural legacy of slavery: “The production of literature was taken to be the central arena in which persons of African Descent could establish and redefine their status within the human community.” Under the condition of social death, we can see these slave narratives as symbolic artifacts of the regeneration of a natally alienated people. These cultural tendrils reach into contemporary African American art forms and, to this day, remain a primary source of voice identifying racial and class injustice.
My analysis turned towards the voice of a subordinate group to ascertain the heterogeneity of responses or survival strategies in an extremely imbalanced power setting. In the antebellum South, enslaved people contested the primary symbolic condition of their enslavement, natal alienation in multiple ways. Taking a satellite view of this corpus as a whole confirms the focus of previous historical research on the domains of religion and master-slave relationship, while also uniquely highlighting more quotidian attempts to symbolically counteract the denial of humanness within slave society. Recent historical research has brought attention to the resistance of slaves within the antebellum South (Camp 2004). By connecting theories of resistance to the broader theories of symbolic struggle, we can see that symbolic contestation does not take place within the everyday milieu alone. Rather, symbolic contestation pervades other arenas as well. Contestation on the part of the enslaved is often fleeting, but is not trivial despite the reaction of the powerful. The narrators nearly unanimously relish fleeting moments of defiance despite the consequences.

Symbolic contestation is by no means a one-way street. Symbolic tools are not used by the disadvantaged alone, but are activated by the dominant to legitimate their privileged status. Analyses of everyday resistance often gloss over the countervailing power of the dominant within the symbolic sphere. In other words, everyday resistance is more appropriately conceived as everyday struggles for power (Sivramakrishnan 2005). Within the slave narrative corpus, we see that within each of the thematic clusters masters attempt to assert their symbolic and material domination. The formerly enslaved narrators describe intense emotional and mental gamesmanship on the part of masters in addition to physical abuse and torture. These attempts often reassert the natal alienation of the
enslaved following attempts to deny it. For example, in addition to legal and overt disciplinary techniques, the master class constructed a religious script focusing on obedience as the enslaved tried to develop a counter-script structured around freedom and justice.

The word network maps that structure much of this analysis provide direction in analyzing the different thematic clusters contained within the corpora. This thematic structure not only reconfirms previously established historical conclusions and point to new directions, but also encourages the incorporation of texts that are largely ignored in previous analyses. While the elegantly written and widely available narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and so forth necessarily provide the foundation for the analysis of the slave narrative, much is lost by not taking a more comprehensive assessment.

**POWER, INEQUALITY, AND A MORAL SOCIOLOGY**

With increasing frequency, research on racial inequality has focused attention on the manifestation of power in everyday interaction. While perhaps only implicitly, this turn towards the everyday hinges parallels theoretical positions grounding this analysis. First, this research generally confirms the importance of the localized struggle embedded in the micropractice of power. The notion of “color-blind” racism certainly conforms to this view recognizing that the maintenance of power is increasingly reproduced through more covert means. This does not elide the role of the state and other structural constraints that maintain power structures. Rather, highlighting the micropractice of power promotes the consideration of how inequality is maintained at more proximate levels.
Secondly, recent research on inequality often centers upon the symbolic aspects of the power struggle perpetuating status hierarchies. Recognition, or the process by which people seek to maintain integrity through the approval, tacit or otherwise, from others, forms the string connecting everyday practice of power to the everyday maintenance of dignity. Although certainly constrained by structural factors, the giving or receiving of respect plays a central role in our daily interaction with others. Like our ability to observe power in action, so can we see and experience the exercise of recognition: fellow drivers cut us off on the road, check their telephones when we are speaking with them, and so forth. When these interactions are determined or influenced by attributes or, more pointedly perhaps, our sociological selves, we may feel particularly disconsolate. Hence, black males troubling observation that whites avoid walking on the same side of the street as themselves is read as part and parcel with disrespect (Feagin 1991). Particularly egregious forms of disrespect, or the denial of recognition, are negatively sanctioned by employment law as modern American society has acknowledged the importance of protecting certain highly specific forms of recognition.

Research increasingly uses the metaphor of slavery and “social death” to highlight the consequences of the denial of rights and social ostracism. On this connection, Honneth (1992:192) writes, “The experience of social degradation and humiliation jeopardizes the identity of human beings to the same degree as the suffering of illnesses jeopardizes their physical well-being.” This metaphor, therefore, belies an analytic perspective: As we can diagnose physical maladies, so we can diagnose societal maladies. Developing the notion of a “moral sociology,” Honneth observes that the claims to economic deprivation and social injustice are predicated upon individuals
recognition that their dignity has been deprived. He concludes (1992:200) that a
recognitive theory of morality is similarly predicated upon sociological and historical
analyses that “are capable of showing that moral progress is born of the struggle for
recognition.”

My analysis of inequality contributes to this broad project of establishing a moral
sociology by specifying the means that subordinates develop to contest differential power
relations. Despite material and symbolic domination, the enslaved mobilized available
tools to resist dominant scripts whether through projective action, everyday forms of
resistance, or more formal resistance. Other reactions to inequality are likely to vacillate
between these forms as well exhibiting the static state of quiescence − either compliance
or acknowledged form of “getting by” − engaging projective action by recognizing future
possibilities, actively engaging in everyday resistances, and occasionally fomenting the
conditions of formal resistance.

INEQUALITY, CULTURE, AND TEXT

It is becoming increasingly apparent that building a complete picture of inequality will be
impossible without a thorough consideration of how inequality is both experienced and
resisted by subordinate actors. Tools that facilitate the incorporation of larger samples of
individuals’ descriptions of their lives in their own words are likely to contribute
broadening the frame of the social scientific analysis of inequality. The “democratizing”
effect of taking a macro-level view is one of the main strengths of the network text
analytic approach. By using this approach to develop a systematic qualitative analysis, I
provide a formal path for the incorporation of diverse texts. Thus, the theoretical and
methodological emphases of my analysis attempt to lead parallel rows each of which lead toward the integration of disadvantaged actors’ voices into studies of inequality. While qualitative studies, and particularly urban ethnographies, have long shown the importance of understanding subordinate actors in their own words and settings, macro studies of inequality have been less successful, or interested, in doing so.

Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic contestation provides a setting and identifies theoretical tools that broaden the study of inequality encouraging a more comprehensive view of the powerful and the powerless. At the same time, as texts, such as government documents, web pages, field notes, and so forth, are increasingly found in computationally readable form, new types of text analysis will encourage the formal analysis of actors’ experiences and interpretations of inequality.

The incorporation of structural approaches to culture may, on the surface, appear antithetical to recent moves in cultural sociology. In the last decade, sociology has experienced a renaissance in cultural research. The cultural turn has pushed fields from social movements, to social stratification, to social networks to consider the ways in which individuals construct systems of meaning in their lives. Here, increasing attention is being placed in extending hermeneutical approaches to understanding cultural phenomena. The interpretivist bent emphasizes the autonomy of culture and the centrality of meaning (Alexander and Smith 2003). In a related proposition, Mohr (1998) pushes cultural sociologists to develop methods of measuring “meaning structures” or the overlapping patterns that emerge from cultural artifacts. He describes these methods as consisting of the development of formal tools for understanding culture. He suggests that network methods are one method for uncovering the meaning structures connecting texts.
These structural techniques, however, do not preclude the necessity of the closer “thick”
description endemic within the interpretivist school. After all, these Geertzian methods
were among the first to clarify the idea that culture consists of “webs of meaning that
compel action” (Alexander and Smith 2003) – an image that parallels more structural
conceptions regarding cultural networks.

My analysis of slave narratives is an initial attempt to bridge these two faces on
the new wave of cultural sociology. The structural approach is useful in so much as it
takes advantage of patterns across texts and new technology to broaden scope of vision
allowing for the incorporation of a larger sample of texts and the reduction of potential
selection biases. At the same time, hermeneutic approaches emphasize the rich character
of the data and form the substantive focus of analyses in this mold. As such, walking
hand-in-hand, the structural and interpretivist paint a more complete picture of enslaved
life by using broad strokes to guide our understanding of the heterogeneity of response to
the material and mental subordination enforced by the slave system.

TELLING SOCIOLOGICAL STORIES WITH NARRATIVE DATA
This discussion of slave narratives and power only touch the surface of potential uses of
formal text analytic techniques in the social sciences. We are likely witnessing the
earliest of stages of the incorporation of formal text analyses in the social science as
techniques and programs continue to grow increasingly more translatable from highly
innovative fields, such as computational linguistics, through standardization in those
fields and the development of stable, intuitive platforms. Several promising directions
present themselves given the current state of the approach from further exploitation of the
narrative-to-narrative network and the development of techniques that take advantage of the formal similarities of genres.

First, the coupling of analytic techniques offers a promising new direction. For example, scholars have used theoretically motivated word counting strategies to access political leadership and discourse (Becher 2008; Simonton 1988), but these characteristics of text are likely to be influenced by the overall place of the text within the broader structure of the corpus as well. For example, in the context slave narratives, we could analyze the frequency that scholars mention overt forms of torture perpetrated by the master class. This dictionary-formed word count could function as a dependent variable in a standard regression. The centrality of the narratives and/or the place of the narrative within the graph (i.e. Euclidean distance) in addition to content-coded demographic variables discussed in Chapter 3 could provide important independent variables helping to explain the types of narratives that are more likely to discuss torture. This type of coupling holds promise in offering more thorough pictures of genres.

Second, advancements in optical character recognition, or the ability to create machine-readable text from non-digital letters, books, and documents, increase our capacity to incorporate any document of social scientific importance into formal analyses. With in the context of the slave narrative genre for example, the best source of the WPA interviews of formal enslaved people exists in the original typed interviewer reports. These data are currently available as scanned images, but are not yet machine-readable. The opportunity to include these data as a comparison to the published narrative corpus could identify potential effects of biases within the two corpora. For example, the WPA data has a much larger sample of women. The under-representation of female narrators in
the published narrative corpus is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, drawback to the
published narrative corpus. As OCR technology becomes increasingly successful at
recognizing dialect, print anomalies, and so forth, the practical incorporation of these less
structured data sources becomes more promising.

Third, the techniques used in this analysis were agnostic to the structure of the
narratives. While this corresponds to my thematic focus, genres are recognized by both
their formal and thematic similarities. Within narratives in particular, the order in which a
story is told contributes to the way we interpret its content. Accounting for the temporal
ordering of stories constitutes another level of computational difficulty. Several aspects
of the preceding analyses offer clues to advancing in this direction. For example, the
ability to locate grammatical properties of text foretells opportunities to deconstruct text
using grammar. Pulling apart properties of action and mapping those actions through
narrative corpora offers a promising new take on more hands-on narrative analytic
techniques. By incorporating structural properties of narratives in the future, we can take
more complete advantage of the properties of text to tell social scientific stories.

Describing the rise of networks analysis in sociological analysis, Emirbayer and
Goodwin (1994:1417) state that “analytic concerns are shifting back once more to those
questions of interactional fields and contextual determination that had been so central to
sociologists before the “variables revolution” of the 1940s. This project evidences this
shift to the consideration of contextuality. One of the great triumphs of the “variables
revolution” was the ability to incorporate characteristics of large, diverse populations into
social scientific analysis. Text analytic techniques serve a similar function while
maintaining the influence of this contextual turn by facilitating the large-scale
interpretation of actor’s stories in their own words. With a rich history of qualitative and quantitative methods, sociology is perhaps the best suited discipline in the social sciences to navigate the multimethodological promise of text-centered analysis.
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APPENDIX A:

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APPENDIX B:

EXPANDED WORD NETWORK

The word network that functions as the primary map in Chapter 5 contains a limited number of terms in order to increase the legibility of the diagram. This characteristic of the graph could be problematic if increasing the size of the network dramatically alters the results in so much as the addition of words changes the thematic clustering. A successful reduced image employing highly frequent and connected terms should appear as a skeleton relative to the larger graph: In other words, the broader “fleshy” graph should exhibit less defined characteristics of the reduced graph.

Figure B.1 presents an expanding word network. In this graph, I have included the words that occur in the corpus over 100 times. As this graph thousands of nodes and millions of ties, I only include edges that are greater than .5. The network, thus, consists of a component of 1,693 words that are correlated with at least one other word by a correlation of .5 based on overlapping narratives. Consistent with Herr et al.’s (2007) analysis of co-acting within the population of commercial films, I use the VxOrd layout algorithm for this graph. VxOrd is a “forced-directed ordination algorithm” that maximizes distances between weakly connected or unconnected nodes (Davidson, Wylie, and Boyack 2001).48 I have removed the lines in the displayed graph to increase the

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48 I specifically use the Network Workbench Tool (NWB Team 2006) to construct the VxOrd layout and render the graph in Pajek (Nooy, Mrvar and Batagelj 2005).
legibility of the larger network. I have also listed the top 200 words included in the graph and drawn several lines from key words to their respective nodes in the graph.

In this graph we can see many of the characteristics of the smaller graph consistent with the notion that smaller graph is a more legible, skeletal version of this larger, fleshier graph. For example, we see a large central cluster that contains sectors consistent with the everyday and master-slave cluster in Figure 5.3. A cluster with many of the terms affiliated with religion also appears in the south-west portion of the graph and a cluster affiliated with crime and escape in the north-west sector. We also see some of the effects of increasing the “noise” in the graph as terms such as “field” are pushed out of the central cluster. Last, this graph illustrates some of the information loss that forms the primary weakness of node reduction as can be seen in a small cluster of words connected to the term “war.” Several of the postbellum narratives offer important discussions of the Civil War and splitting the genre would likely identify this “war” cluster within the postbellum set. But, as this discussion primarily revolves around power in the antebellum system of American slavery, this loss is less consequential.
Figure B.1 Expanded Word Network
APPENDIX C:

FACTOR ANALYSIS

A central concern of more emergent networks analysis is the question of whether groups located using emergent methods are actually present. Using an alternative, non-networks based approach is one way of confirming the validity of the clusters that appear in the network. Figure A.1 presents the results of a factor analysis on the narrative-by-word correlation matrix. I specifically use the default principal components analysis techniques within the SAS statistical package. I also rotate the data orthogonally using the varimax technique consistent the goal of increasing interpretability of the data (Goldberg 1997).

The networks in Figure A.1 indicate the factor loadings for specific words in the co-word network seen in Figure 5.3. The size of the nodes varies by the loading of the corresponding works on each of the factors. These factors provide strong confirmation of the validity of the clusters identified in the network analysis. Factor 1, for example, identifies the large overlapping Master-Slave and Everyday Life clusters. Factor 2 corresponds with the Reading and Writing cluster with some bleeding into the Master-Slave cluster. Factor 3 specifies this Reading and Writing cluster. Factor 4 identifies the separation between the Master-Slave and Everyday Life clusters. Factor 5 specifies the Crime and Escape cluster. Factor 6 corresponds with the Religion cluster in the bottom sector of the co-word network. Factor 7 identifies a connecting cluster between the
northern and southern regions. Last, Factor 8 corresponds with the Polemical cluster in the right-hand sector of the co-word network.

In sum, the factor analysis and the illustrative networks in Figure C.1 lends a good deal of confidence to the clusters identified through the emergent lexical network analysis.

**Figure C.1: Factor Analysis of the Co-Word Network**
Figure C.1 (Continued): Factor Analysis of the Co-Word Network