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Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019) Pp. xiii, 174. Cloth, \$99.95; paper, \$22.95

In *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, Thomas A. Foster provides a powerful history of how sexual violations shaped the experiences and identities of enslaved men, and reveals the traumatic consequences of this on enslaved community life. Foster's emphasis on emotional and psychological abuse alongside physical exploitation allows us to better understand how sexuality infused all forms of dominance and control in American slavery.

Foster makes use of a wide range of source material to engage with the histories of sexual violation for enslaved men, as well as to consider moments of same-gender intimacy. Foster is always cognizant of the silences and dissemblance in the surviving material but insists we can, and must, read for evidence of men's exploitation. With a critical rereading of the extant slave narratives, 1930s Works Progress Administration interviews, and court records, Foster offers incisive visual analysis to illuminate the concerns with, and control of, enslaved men's sexuality. Nuanced assessments of abolitionist imagery, portraiture, engravings, sketches, and daguerreotypes are found throughout the text and allow for an expansive reading of violation. Indeed, Foster makes consistently adroit links between cultural objectification and the emotional, mental, and physical suffering of Black men in (and out of) slavery.

The focus is mostly on the nineteenth-century US South, but Foster's work spans colonial North America, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, the Middle Passage, and European metropolises. Occasionally the reader is left wondering whether structural, legal, or demographic differences across and within these spaces might have impacted such violence. Readers would benefit from using Foster's work in conjunction with Lamonte Aidoo's *Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History* (2018), which makes use of the records of the Portuguese Inquisition in Brazil to reveal "the pervasiveness of same-sex sexual violence in the everyday lives of slaves" (6). In taking such a broad approach, though, Foster is best able to underscore the quotidian nature of sexual violence for enslaved people and to assess its role in buttressing white supremacy in the Americas.

In addressing the "invasive scrutiny of men's bodies" (21) and by highlighting the punishment that exposed, violated, and systematically targeted men *as men*, Foster skillfully illuminates the sexualized terror of American slavery. Foster acknowledges Black men's desire for intimate agency but he reiterates throughout the book the structural constraints they faced. The chapters covering coerced reproduction are a sobering reminder of how enslaver's rapacious desire for profit and dominance extended into all areas of enslaved life (47). Foster also makes important arguments surrounding the nature of intimacy between enslaved men and white women, acknowledging the difficulty of unpacking the internal dynamics of some of these relations but convincingly demonstrating how "the enslaved status of black men in such interactions made them necessarily vulnerable" (78). Foster forcefully argues that the very notion of consent for enslaved men, as much as women, is flawed given the asymmetries of power in slave societies (5, 69).

Moving to interactions among the enslaved, Foster is clear that his intention is not to "equate the sexual assault of women with that of men" (2). Instead, rethinking sexual violations provides an opportunity to "more fully understand how sexual violence affected all members of the community" (3). This is vital, and for the most part Foster succeeds. The specific emphasis on rethinking Rufus, however, continues to pose questions as to power dynamics within slave communities. In Foster's reading, for example, Rose Williams is described as offering "physical resistance" to Rufus once he "started to proceed to the bunk"

(65), with an emphasis on their having been forced into such proximity by their enslaver. The language implies a fairly neutral act and positions Williams as an aggressor: “Rose used physical violence to discourage Rufus from crawling into bed with her, giving him a shove with her feet and hitting him in the head with a metal rod.” And yet this framing elides the sense of personal threat in Williams’s testimony: “He look like de wild boar. He starts for de bunk and I jumps quick for de poker” (11). Williams struck first but claimed it was more than a return to the bunk that led to the use of a weapon: “When he comes *at me* I lets him have it over de head” (11; emphasis added).

Rufus might have been responding to violence or threats from his enslaver or simply had a greater understanding of the reproductive exploitation of slavery. As Foster notes, some enslaved men were aware of procreative pressures and sought “to protect their wives and to reproduce” (67). After some seventy years of reflection, and with surely some appreciation of the “communal knowledge” (101) of sexualized violence against enslaved men, however, Williams did not feel Rufus’s behavior had been animated by such concerns. Williams knew ultimate power lay in the hands of their enslavers and stated as such to her interviewer. She insisted, however, as to the significance of gendered power dynamics in and out of slavery when explaining her decision to not only leave Rufus in freedom but to forgo intimacy with all men: “I never marries, ’cause one ’sperience am ’nough ... After what I does for de massa, I’s never wants no truck with *any man*” (119; emphasis added). To address the impact “sexually violated men [had] on their communities” (115–16), as Foster urges us to do, means that we must continue to grapple with, even to disagree over, why Rose Williams could not rethink Rufus.

The points here do nothing to discount from how significant this book is for scholars of slavery, race, and gender in the Americas, but also further afield. Foster poses new ways of thinking about power relations and sexual violence with aplomb. *Rethinking Rufus* is an important book that should be required reading for scholars and students interested in gender, sex, race, and power.

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