Slavery's Ghost

The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation

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Agency

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A Ghost Story

THIS IS THE STORY of a historian and a word. The historian is Herbert Gutman, generally recognized as the progenitor (for this is also a story of ancestors—ancestors recognized and disavowed—and even ghosts) of the "new labor history" in the United States. The word is *agency*. It was not Gutman's word, but it has come to haunt, to possess, his legacy. Put more directly: this is the story of how the injunction to write the history of enslaved people "from the bottom up" was compressed into the impulse to "give them back their agency." Running through historical writing about African Americans, the concept of "agency"—the capacity of individuals to act rationally and autonomously in pursuit of their own interests (almost always defined as the pursuit of civil rights and economic choice)—has emerged as the scarcely articulated master narrative, the common sense, of African American history. The point is not to question the importance of bottom-up histories but rather to suggest that students and scholars alike should refocus their attention on the material conditions and determinations of "agency": to think of historical actors as embedded rather than autonomous. As Karl Marx famously observed in 1852, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."[1]

The story, at least as it is usually told, begins in the middle: 1964, to be precise, with the U.S. publication of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. In Thompson, Gutman found a model of how to write about the "agency" (Thompson's word) of working people, to which he would return for the rest of his life. Thompson framed his study as a response to an overly rigid and determinist version of Marxism. "The working class," Thompson wrote in describing the sort of determinism he was criticizing, "is assumed to have a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically—so many men [*sic*—a masculinist universalism to which we will return] who stand in certain relation to the means of production. Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which 'it' ought to have (but seldom does have) if 'it' was properly aware of its own position and its real interests."[2]

In place of this strict ("almost mathematical") notion of economic base–ideological superstructure determination, Thompson proposed a notion of class as a "fluency," a dynamic process by which working people came to understand themselves as related to one another as they shaped radical and sometimes impossible notions of the future out of the confrontation between their present circumstances and their past lives: "Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs." And, furthermore, specifically addressing the question of the relationship of material life to ideology (the question of "determination") and of the translation of cultural history into class consciousness: "The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms."[3]

For Herbert Gutman, those came as welcome words. In 1963 Gutman had published "The Workers' Search for Power." The essay outlined a vision of labor history that focused on workers "themselves,

their communities, and the day-to-day occurrences that shaped their outlook." Gutman later described the essay as a departure from older institutionally oriented labor history and "determinist and teleological" Marxism. Ten years later, Gutman published what quickly became the archetypical essay in "the new labor history": "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America." The essay bore the imprint of "the cultural turn" in British Marxism; while reiterating his criticism of a labor history based on the history of unions to which "few" workers belonged, Gutman adopted a dynamic notion of working-class "culture as a resource." The essay recast traditional historical chronology in its comparative analysis of three moments in the history of the United States: the preindustrial (1815–1843), the industrial (1843–1893), and the mature industrial (1893–1919). Each era, Gutman argued, saw the introduction of first-generation proletarians to factories: in succession, rural American whites, urban artisans, and European immigrants became industrial wage workers. The history of labor in the United States, he concluded, had been decisively shaped by the repeated confrontation of "pre-industrial" or "pre-modern" workers and work habits with the demands of industrialization.[4]

Gutman's vision of the history of American labor was structured by a complex notion of historical time. "Work, Culture, and Society" urged the re-framing of U.S. history around the history of labor. In place of the orthodox framing of the history of the nineteenth-century United States as a more-or-less linear progression toward the Civil War, Gutman suggested a version of American history characterized by historical comparisons across time and space. The essay ranges freely through time and is characterized by suggestive and sometimes disorienting juxtapositions between time periods and groups of workers; a discussion of the wives and children of Nantucket whalers, for example, almost imperceptibly turns into a point about Jewish glove makers in Chicago in 1920.[5]

Gutman's overall argument is framed by a notion of historical repetition: at every turn, the history of labor in the United States had been characterized by resistance on the part of workers and violence on the

part of owners. This history of repeated violence was itself structured by a notion of time: the idea that each confrontation was shaped by the sort of people workers were *before* they entered the factory, by the nested temporalities that linked the terms *first-generation* and *preindustrial*. Finally, there was the historian's own time. Toward the end of the essay, in a passage to which we will return, Gutman suggested that the process he was describing had "great implications for understanding the larger national American culture" of the 1960s and 1970s. As he did throughout his career, Gutman linked his history to his politics, drawing upon the past in his confrontation with the present much as he argued that American and immigrant workers had done throughout their history. By searching out forgotten possibilities and defeated hopes, he sought to reveal the contingency of the settled order and to model the possibility of its transformation.[6]

"Work, Culture, and Society" sought to generalize from its specific cases to a set of larger lessons about working-class history across time and place. Lowell mill girls with their "queer names" (Triphena, Plumy, Elgardy, etc.) and "outlandish fashions," journeymen tailors in the 1870s discussing "local and national politics, points of law, philosophy, physics, and religion," and Slavic steelworkers in Hammond, Indiana, kissing an ivory Christ as they "swore not to scab" in 1910 were, in effect, discrete in time and space but linked in their repetition of the same underlying process. In place of a Marxian notion of determination or historical process (the idea that the given organization of production at a time and place would shape or "determine" the ways in which workers understood their circumstances), Gutman was suggesting that American history had been structured by a set of meta-historical repetitions: culturally distinct though structurally analogous confrontations between past-rooted traditions and present conditions. Historians, Gutman wrote, should "focus on the particularities of both the groups involved and the society into which they enter. Transitions differ and depend upon the two at specific historical moments. But at all times there is a resultant tension." For Gutman, behind the ostensible historical specificity was an overarch-

ing (meta-historical) argument—a general theory according to which the specifics of time and place might be seen as the momentary hosts of a larger underlying process.[7]

At this point the story gets complicated. Actually, the story has been complicated for some time (although it is not always told that way), but at this point it turns into a ghost story. For the seemingly white labor history essay "Work, Culture, and Society" was haunted by more than a set of meta-historical repetitions. It was haunted by blackness: by what Toni Morrison has termed an "Africanist presence." Why refer to this as a haunting? Gutman was quite clear about the fact that "Work, Culture, and Society" was not an essay about black people. He said so in the text right at the start. Though they "deserved" a place in a comprehensive labor history, Gutman wrote, blacks would not be "given notice . . . the focus in these pages is on free white labor." And yet, rhetorically banished as they were to its margins, African Americans kept reappearing at crucial moments in Gutman's argument. Indeed, one might say that the entire essay is orchestrated by a blackness that is only occasionally—but always at crucial turns in the argument—visible in the text. Gutman's essay emerged at the juncture between the silencing of blackness that was its stated condition of possibility and the unspoken concern with African American history that animates its purpose.[8]

Peculiarly (unless one believes in ghosts), when Gutman collected his essays for republication in 1975, he introduced them with a joke about "the lives of Brother O'Neill, his wife, and their black friend." The joke was a fairly benign version of what once must have been a rougher-edged and more titillating joke (black-worker-meets-Irish-coworker's-wife was the premise; "he seemed just like anyone else" was the punchline) and had been told by the white woman activist Mary White Ovington to the Jamaican poet Claude McKay. For Ovington, and Gutman in turn, the story was emblematic of the "common interests" among workers once "caste lines disappear." That the "common interest" in question was the shared interest of male workers—white and black—in a single woman suggests the ways in which Gutman's resolution to the dilemmas of race was through the time-

less verities of heterosex: a notion of interracial male subjectivity that brings blackness into a text from which it would almost as soon be rhetorically banished.[9]

Other images of the blackness that Gutman explicitly disavowed as the subject of his essay bolster the essay at several key junctures. Taken together, indeed, they might be said to serve as its unacknowledged architecture or, put differently, its animating spirit. The distinction between "culture" and "society" upon which the essay turns (and which Gutman used to replace the verticality of a base-superstructure notion of determination with a more horizontal and fluid account of working-class culture) has roots in a series of essays by the historical anthropologists Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz about slavery and African American culture. Gutman included a long footnote that cited the writings of black leaders Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois to argue that "the behavior and thought of rural and urban blacks fits the larger patterns suggested here in a special way" because "enslavement followed by racial exclusion sustained among blacks a culture that despite change remained preindustrial for more than merely two or three generations." He framed the conclusion to the essay with a quotation from the renowned black novelist Ralph Ellison: "Much of what gets into American literature gets there because so much is left out." "That also," Gutman noted, "has been the case in the writing of American working-class history." Indeed, expanding upon that point, one might argue that "Work, Culture, and Society" made sense, obtained coherence, at the juncture where what it said about African American history, the moments when it leaned on black history or black writers to steady its course through its argument about "free white labor," met what it left unsaid: the vexing unasked questions about black workers and black culture that haunt its edge.[10]

Perhaps the clearest of these meaning-making apparitions occurs when Gutman makes one of his characteristic efforts to link his historical analysis to contemporary political concerns by taking up the question of violence. Quoting from a *New York Times* symposium published in the aftermath of the nationwide series of black uprisings that followed the April 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.,

Gutman completed the historical circuit of his argument that "certain recurrent disorders and conflicts relate directly to the process that has continually 'adjusted' men and women to regular work habits and to the discipline of factory labor." The history of the white working class in the United States was thus recast as analytical prologue to that of black revolt in the 1960s. African Americans (disavowed as the subject of Gutman's essay) turned out to epitomize its contemporary relevance; "Work, Culture, and Society" turns out to be an essay that is finally configured around—preoccupied by—the very subject Gutman promised not to talk about.[11]

There are several ways to explain the revenant, or ghostly, blackness in Gutman's summary essay on the history of (white) work, culture, and society. Although he later attempted to shift attention from the broader context of the period in which he wrote to the more proximate intellectual influence of historians like E. P. Thompson (perhaps in accordance with his resistance to the idea of social determination), the years in which Gutman was writing "Work, Culture, and Society" were violent ones in the United States. In upstate New York, where Gutman was living, there were uprisings in Rochester in July 1964 and in Buffalo in June 1967 and again in April 1968. And so on: Hunter's Point in San Francisco in September 1966 (Gutman held a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Science in Palo Alto during the academic year 1966–67); Attica in 1971. It is hard to believe that any sentient person, particularly as politically engaged a person as Herbert Gutman, could have been any less affected by these events than by reading Thompson's bottom-up history of "the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper . . . and the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver" of the English past.[12]

And, in fact, in these years Gutman was doing a good deal of work on African American labor history. His essays on the history of black workers are pointedly anti-racist even as they stretch toward what was perhaps an unreachable aspiration: the discovery of a "usable past" of interracial-working-class solidarity and collective action in the industrializing United States. "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and

the United Mine Workers and Something of their Meaning, 1890–1900" is emblematic. The essay uses the letters of black miner, union organizer, and UMW National Executive Board member Richard L. Davis to trace the possibilities and limitations of interracial unionism at the turn of the century. Black unionists like Davis, it shows, were confronted with an extraordinary task. They faced, at once, the racism of white miners (which Gutman attributed mostly to the corporate-organized transportation of often-unwitting southern blacks to northern coal fields to serve as strikebreakers); the skepticism of African American workers, who associated unions with Democratic politics, race baiting, and white supremacy; and much of the leadership of the UMW and the American Federation of Labor (most notably the latter's leader, Samuel Gompers), who lustily, vituperatively, and repeatedly proved the skeptics right.[13]

Gutman's essay on the United Mine Workers (UMW) demonstrates a deep reading in the African American intellectual tradition; W. E. B. Du Bois, John Hope Franklin, and Pan-Africanist Rayford Logan take center stage, while European social historians E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm resort to the footnotes (three of them, to be precise). And it suggests the ferment, if not the distress, of a mind in transition. The title gradually shrinks its subject from "the Negro" to "the Career and Letters" of one "Negro," to "something of their meaning." The conclusion itself juxtaposes the aspirations and episodic successes of Davis and those like him to "the dominant influence" of the racist Gompers and the anti-unionist Booker T. Washington, suggesting—hoping?—the history of successful labor interracialism might be concealed in the still-to-be-studied recesses of local history. The essay provides less a historical legacy than a fleeting apparition: a vision of solidarity between working-class blacks and whites. It suggests that this vision—still treasured and yet so obviously, so impossibly, embattled in both the historical record and the world around him—was what was haunting Gutman's attempt to derive a general theory of (free-white) work, culture, and society in industrializing America.[14]

It might well be argued that what was actually haunting "Work, Culture, and Society" was not a ghost story where white is sometimes

black, nor even the failures of interracial labor solidarity and the emergence of black power in the United States, but *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, upon which Herbert Gutman had been working since at least 1968. *The Black Family* was Gutman's monumental effort to integrate the perplexities of race and slavery into the framework of "Work, Culture, and Society." The volume was cast as a response to what Gutman saw as a set of mischaracterizations of the history of African and African American slaves. In 1959, Stanley Elkins had published *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, in which he argued that the cultural uprooting and familial separation represented by the Middle Passage were so great that they deprived African (and later African American) slaves of the cultural and communal resources necessary to resist slavery. "The new adjustment, to absolute power in a closed system, involved infantilization, and the detachment was so complete that little trace of prior (and thus alternative) cultural sanctions for behavior and personality remained for the descendents of the first generation," wrote Elkins. "Sambo," Elkins concluded, was a not a racist fantasy but a sociological necessity and historical reality: docile, infantile, pliable slaves had populated the whole of the history of slavery.[15]

Elkins's use of this most durable and harmful of caricatures might be explained (though not explained away) by his reading of black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, his antiracist environmentalism, and his belief that analogizing slavery in the United States to the death camps of the Third Reich might aid in the elaboration of a Black-Jewish alliance in the struggle for civil rights. But it is hard to imagine that any would argue that Daniel Patrick Moynihan, assistant secretary of labor in the Kennedy administration, deserves the courtesy of a similar scholarly alibi. Moynihan's 1965 *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* argued that whites who had been beguiled by "Negro protest" into believing that problems in the black community were due to poverty and discrimination were missing the point. The period of slavery, Moynihan argued, had been characterized by the indiscriminate separation of slave families and left in its wake (in the oft-repeated phrase) "a tangle of pathology" in the black community. Broken marriages, ille-

gitimate births, female-headed households, unemployment, poverty, and welfare dependency all characterized a population that, it was ominously noted, was reproducing at a faster rate than were white people. Foremost among these problems was "matriarchy," or "the reversed roles of husband or wife," which produced social disorder, welfare dependency, and a burden of emasculating shame so great that black men might best be served by being inducted into the military, where they were proportionally under-represented.[16]

Gutman's *The Black Family* was framed as a direct response to the Moynihan report. The book used plantation account books, church records, travelers' accounts, the transcripts of Freedmen's Bureau inquests, and the narratives of former slaves recorded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s to support a vindicationist account of black family life in slavery. The majority of slaves across the South, Gutman argued, lived in two-headed households; indeed, this supposedly normative pattern was quickly reestablished even in the era of the interstate slave trade, characterized as it was by an extraordinary level of family separation. Tracking patterns of marital exogamy (marrying outside given networks), Gutman argued that American slaves had an African-derived taboo on marriages of first cousins (a practice common among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century whites). Tracking naming patterns, he argued that slaves marked a historically deep notion of community (which in some cases stretched to the African past) through the names they gave their children (especially boys). Tracking the elaboration of "fictive kin" networks (again, an African pattern), he argued that family obligations were projected outward into a larger understanding of mutuality, generalized obligation, and community. *The Black Family* was what might be termed a dialectical negation, a mirror image, of the Moynihan report: it left in place *The Negro Family*'s patriarchal, hetero-normative, and family-centered notion of human flourishing and completion, even as it reversed the significance of these terms in relation to African American history.[17]

Finally, of course, there was Eugene D. Genovese. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, published in 1974, Genovese argued

that the closing of the Atlantic slave trade in 1808 materially trans-
formed American slavery: an institution that had once relied on the
international trafficking of African slaves (a commercial modality of
social reproduction) was remade as a "domestic" institution—one
that depended upon the biological reproduction of the labor force to
ensure its survival. Concomitantly, as opposition to slavery grew both
in some regions of the South and outside it, slaveholding "reformers"
attempted to "humanize slavery" by "denouncing cruelty" and em-
phasizing the sense of obligation they felt to provide (food, clothing,
housing, entertainment—meanly measured and often subject to an
excise paid in extracted gratitude) for those whom they owned.[18]

For Genovese, this sort of "paternalism," determined within the
transformed material circumstances of southern slavery, was defined
by a set of reciprocities between master and slave that lurched from
familiarity and benevolence to cruelty and hatred. Paternalism, on
one level, obliged masters to consider their slaves as more than chat-
tel property; this humanizing of slavery was vitally important for the
enslaved people who converted privileges doled out by the master
class into customary rights. Paternalism, however, cut both ways. The
obligations and reciprocities of the master-slave relationship linked
each individual to his or her owner. For Genovese, the personalization
of these links undermined solidarity among the slaves and defined
the limits of slave resistance. In contrast to the Caribbean or Brazil,
where mass slave revolts and flight (*marronage*) punctuated the history
of Atlantic slavery, he suggested that, in the United States, a dialectic
of accommodation and resistance defused collective action in favor of
small day-to-day acts of protest. While these daily acts diminished the
worst excesses of the exploitative system in which the enslaved lived,
they did not pose a revolutionary threat to the system as a whole. For
Genovese, paternalism expressed the class relationship and antago-
nism between masters and slaves in a way that allowed slaveholders
to convert their ownership into authority, to represent exploitation as
obligation, and to attain a fitful but nevertheless consequential "hege-
mony" over their slaves.

Genovese's notion of "hegemony" was derived from his reading of
the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci. At certain moments
in the history of class struggle, Gramsci argued, rule by a single class
can be enforced not by violence but through general (if unwitting) as-
sent to a limiting definition of the field of the politically possible. For
Genovese, the ideology of "paternalism" provided such a definition
of the institution of slavery: it described economic exploitation and
class conflict in the idioms of family and community. In Genovese's
formulation, much of what historians have come to term *resistance
to slavery* did not weaken the authority of slaveholders but actually
strengthened it. Malingering, shamming, stealing, and even more di-
rect forms of violent resistance such as assault, arson, and murder,
Genovese argued, localized and personalized what was actually a
hemisphere-wide class conflict. They represented local adjustments
along the fault line of class antagonism but not fully theorized and
collectivized challenges to slavery-as-such. Day-to-day resistance to
slavery was, by this argument, at best a "prepolitical" or even "apoliti-
cal" form of accommodation and at worst "pathetic nihilism."[19]

In 1976, Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese generalized the
argument about class, culture, and politics made in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*
into a broad critique of the practice of social history (including sev-
eral snarky asides about Gutman's work on the black family in slav-
ery). Social history, the Genoveses argued, had fallen away from the
explicitly "socialist or at least anticapitalist political commitment"
that had characterized the work of early practitioners and subsided
into a "neoantiquarian swamp presided over by liberal ideologues."
For the Genoveses, the proper subject of social history was the his-
tory of "classes contending for state power." The Genoveses were
particularly pointed in their criticism of African and African Ameri-
can cultural history written outside a strict notion of material deter-
mination (in which the historical form of economic organization was
taken to underlay and determine the parameters of politics and cul-
ture): "In emphasizing African origins, family life, and, in some mea-
sure, custom," the emergent emphasis on cultural history "denies the

decisive importance of the master-slave dialectic—i.e., of the specific and historical ubiquitous form of class struggle—and no amount of 'radical' emphasis on black achievement and autonomy can disguise this retreat from a class interpretation to a politically anesthetized idealism." For the Genoveses, history was the history of class struggle ("the history of who rides whom and how"), and cultural history was simply a survey of the various mediating forms of that underlying (meta-historical) struggle.[20]

In *The Black Family* and several subsequent essays, Gutman expressed and then reiterated his commitment to a nondeterminist (and vindicationist) notion of African American culture, one that sharply diverged from the Genovese's notion of paternalistic hegemony and strict material determination. "Early-twentieth-century scholars nearly all believed that slaves could learn only from their owners so that slave culture . . . was at best 'imitative.' Later-twentieth-century historians and social scientists substitute behavioral 'models' for this crude belief but still often contend that slave belief and behavior involved little more than responses to master-sponsored external stimuli." Turning specifically to *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Gutman argued that patterns of cultural affiliation (never fully specified but assumed to be indexed by naming patterns) among Africans and African Americans long antedated the emergence of the notion of slaveholding "paternalism," around which Genovese's book was framed. "Mid-nineteenth-century slaveowners—paternalists and nonpaternalists alike—therefore interacted with slaves who were the product of these earlier social and cultural developments." Where Genovese had accused culturalist social historians of allowing "the synchronic or spatial to predominate over the diachronic of narrative" (i.e., the struggle of contending classes for control of state power), Gutman responded that *Roll, Jordan, Roll* provided a "static" account of the interactions between masters and slaves, one that artificially separated enslaved people from their own history by superimposing upon it the history of their masters.[21]

The Black Family brought the terms through which Gutman understood African American history into conceptual alignment with those

he had begun to work out in "Work, Culture, and Society." For Gutman, intergenerational and quasi-kin linkages were "slave passageways through time," vessels through which the resources of African culture were drawn through the history of slavery and into the twentieth century. "What filled these passageways," he wrote in an essay spelling out the book's conclusions, "requires careful study, but their presence is indisputable and therefore restores slaves to the mainstream of historical analysis." With *The Black Family*, Gutman resolved the contradiction that had stymied his earlier work on "the black worker." While the history of "the American working class" had been riven by racism, undercut by nationalism, and gainsaid by feminism, it existed in the transhistorical analogy between the histories of native and immigrant white workers and black slaves. Each group drew upon its own cultural history—"cumulative traditions," "rules for everyday living"—as the workers confronted inequality; each transmitted their cultures through their families; each drew the past into the present as a "resource" for resistance; each was characterized by a historical process in which the roots of mutuality and collective obligation predated the supposedly determinative structures of economic exploitation. Underlying American history was a set of sociological correspondences that translated seeming differences into similarities.[22]

Over time, the debate between Gutman and Genovese became a touchstone in almost any discussion of "history from the bottom up"—a touchstone that began to magnetize social history according to two scarcely explained conditions. Gutman and Genovese used a debate about African American culture to support a contrasting set of propositions about the relationship of class to culture more generally: Gutman arguing that the history of African American culture in the New World stretched backward in time before the antebellum period and thus provided resources from "outside" the system of slavery; Genovese that African American cultural forms "emerged from the mechanisms of equilibrium within continuing class war." Because both Gutman's humanism and the Genoveses' Marxism depended upon limited and totalizing formulations of the identities of the historical subjects

they described, debates in the field were often characterized by a set of unarticulated presumptions about the race-and-sex neutrality of the working class. And because those debates were often understood as being between a version of history characterized by an emphasis on "agency" versus a version of history characterized by an emphasis on "hegemony," the question of "determination" (central to both the version of Marxism that Gutman was resisting and the one Genovese was advocating) began to fall out of view.[23]

Gutman formalized this analytical foreshortening in a 1980 essay on what he termed "The Sartre Question." Gutman began by quoting the French philosopher: "The essential," Jean-Paul Sartre observed, "is not what 'one' has done to man, but what man does with what 'one' has done to him." And he continued by reworking this philosophical principle as a lesson about American history: "Sartre's emphasis redefines the important questions we should ask in studying the history of dependent American social classes: slaves and poor free blacks, immigrant and native-born wage earners, male and female blue- and white-collar workers, and union and non-union members . . . Studying the choices working men and women made and how their behavior affected important historical processes enlarges our understanding of 'the condition of being human.'"[24] As he sought to explain his vision of history—his legacy—in the years before his tragic death in 1985, Gutman repeatedly returned to this inclusive (and totalizing) formulation.[25]

Gutman's attempts to interpret American history from the bottom up and to alloy the working class through his General Theory culminated in the American Social History Project (ASHP), which he cofounded in 1981. The project, especially in the shape of its 1991 textbook, *Who Built America?*, extended Gutman's legacy and created a new national synthesis that privileged social and labor history. Special attention was given to the values and traditions of working peoples and the ways in which they "affected and were affected by the more familiar economic, social, cultural, and political processes that together make up the national experience."[26]

Without suggesting that every member of the American historical profession read Gutman's 1980 essay (or, still less, fully embraced the precepts that framed the ASHP), it might nevertheless be argued that Gutman's essay on Sartre crystallizes—emblematizes—the terms of translation through which "social history" was made visible to itself as a project in American universities in the 1970s and 1980s (even as the question of "determination" that had originally motivated Gutman's critique gradually faded from view). In these years, forms of insurgent knowledge—Marxism, Black Nationalism, and Feminism (and their various combinations)—were being (contentiously, awkwardly, and incompletely) institutionalized in American universities. Gutman's General Theory and its associated prescriptions—"history from the bottom-up" and, ultimately, "agency"—provided the means or terms of translation through which these various projects could be made comprehensible to the historical profession at large. These were the terms in which social history became the "cultural dominant" in the historical profession: terms that described history in a way that also prescribed the integration of women and minorities into the mainstream of the historical profession. Their fulfillment—even their partial fulfillment—was a historiographical and political achievement of lasting significance, a legacy of transformation that should be credited to Herbert Gutman as much as any other scholar.[27]

And yet these terms of alliance and ascendency were also terms of containment and cover-up. The cover-up I am describing was unintentional and incomplete. The point is not that historians stopped writing in those dissident traditions, for they obviously did not, but that the implications of what they were saying were circulated—glossed, reviewed, critiqued, credited—through an ideological medium, a commonsense, incapable of transmitting the most radical, least assimilable aspects of their message. There are moments when the mostly evanescent process I am describing can be captured in incubus. "In his argument with Stalinism and determinist Marxism," Herbert Gutman suggested in a 1983 restatement of his general theory, "Sartre put it very well. He said that the essential question for

study—this is a paraphrase—is not what has been done to men and women but what men and women do with what is done to them. That is also a Thompsonian formulation. And this is precisely what the best black writers have been writing for the past fifty years. W. E. B. Du Bois argued for this approach when he wrote *Black Reconstruction*, and it is what C. L. R. James's historical writings are about."[28]

Here we see the intellectual and ideological limits of the General Theory made manifest: the translation and subordination of the historical specificity of the African American intellectual tradition, and of other forms of historical difference (here summoned and then evacuated of meaning with the substitution of "men and women" for Sartre's "man") and even the measured British Marxism of E. P. Thompson, into a single, anachronistic lineage. Let me be more specific. Black nationalism, black Marxism, and black feminism, the traditions of Martin Delany and Marcus Garvey, of W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James, of Angela Davis and Alice Walker have long, specific, and yet complexly intertwined histories. As Nell Irvin Painter has suggested in questioning the applicability of European social theory to African American history, these traditions have been rendered as oppositions in dominant social theory: "Negro" and "human being"; "African" and "American"; "class" and "race"; "intellectual" and "activist"; "black" and "woman." And they remain active and vital traditions of inquiry. Whether you begin with the work of social historians Sterling Stuckey, Lawrence Levine, Michael Angelo Gomez, or Nikhil Pal Singh on black nationalism; Sidney Mintz, Ira Berlin, Vincent Brown, or Stephanie Smallwood on diasporic materialism; Herbert Aptheker, Robin D. G. Kelley, David Roediger, Peter Linebaugh, Marcus Rediker, or Adam Green on black Marxism; Nell Irvin Painter, Darlene Clark Hine, Deborah Gray White, Tera Hunter, or Jennifer Morgan on black feminism, you are entering a discussion of—an argument about—the specificity of African and African American cultural forms and their historical transformation, the complex determinations of racialized identity and solidarity in relation to capitalist modernity, the gendered and sexualized character of racial alienation, subjectivity, and collectivity. They represent intellectual and political traditions

evacuated of their specific meaning by the terms of Gutman's General Theory, their histories covered up by the misleadingly exclusive focus on the Thompsonian legacy of the New Social History.[29]

It must be said that the conversion of the dissident terms of radical historiography into the conventions of liberal humanism was perhaps a necessary condition of the integration of academic history departments during the Cold War. And it must be further said that Gutman's broadly liberal vision—one focused upon inclusion in the historical "mainstream" and the vindication of the "humanity" and "dignity" of the exploited and excluded—has a noble history and has done extraordinary work. Gutman's General Theory represented precisely the sort of "usable past" necessary to the progressive politics of the era in which he wrote: it framed American history as the prehistory of Civil Rights—racial integration and formal equality.

And yet, in more recent years, the General Theory's classically liberal and masculine notion of historical subjectivity—"one," "man"—and the elision or exclusion of the radical tradition in American historiography have come to haunt the profession in the guise of its most powerful word: *agency*. The space that in Gutman's early work had been filled by a sort of fill-in-the-blank deferral of historical, cultural, and sexual difference in favor of an emphasis on meta-historical similarity came in the General Theory to be filled with an underlying assumption of historical commonality, an assumption that reflected less an actual commonality than a selective reworking of various histories into a single strand. And, in our own time, in our own usage, that selective reworking has taken on the guise of a substantive account of historical subjectivity, an actually existing thing—the naturally autonomous, and intrinsically self-determining, and properly rights-bearing historical agent striving for "freedom." *Agency* has come to serve us not as a container by which disparate versions of historical subjectivity (the terms through which human beings understand themselves as historical actors) might be analyzed and compared to one another but as a crypto-liberal account of the thing itself.[30]

Ironically, perhaps uncannily, African American history generally and the history of slavery in particular have come to serve as the most

abiding hosts of this corposant liberalism. In slavery studies, the "agency" discussion has usually worked along some variant of a circuit that ties "agency" (here defined as self-willed and autonomous action—what "one" does) to "humanity" (here defined as being a self-willed and autonomous actor) to "resistance" (here defined as preserving one's "humanity" by acting in a self-willed and autonomous fashion). Let me give you an example, which comes in the form of a sentence written by an eminent historian of slavery, though I freely admit I could at one time have written it myself: "Whenever and wherever masters, whether implicitly or explicitly, recognized the independent will and volition of their slaves, they acknowledged the humanity of their bondpeople. Extracting this admission was, in fact, a form of slave resistance, because slaves thereby opposed the dehumanization inherent in their status." Herein are agency, humanity, and resistance collapsed into one another and rendered up as a sort of parable of right-minded liberalism—the history of slavery is transformed into a parable about freedom. Alienated from the specificity of its own structural determinants and cultural idioms, African American history is here refashioned as the ultimate proving ground of what individuals—agents—can do in spite of their fetters.[31]

The idea of "the agent" as the essential subject of history has habited our history reading with an anachronistic (and generally unarticulated) assumption that beneath all history there lies a liberal individual subject waiting to be emancipated into the precise conditions that characterize the lives of the imperial bourgeoisie of the twenty-first century. Pushed to the side has been any genuine consideration of historical subjectivity. By formatting the question of human action as a simply binary opposition of (liberal) agency to (untheorized) power, the dominant discussion has begged—beggared, trampled, and ignored—the question of the material parameters—determinants—of historical subjectivity, the very questions that challenged and inspired Thompson (and Du Bois, and James, and Marx, and even, at least, the early Gutman). And not only that: even the questions of "standpoint" and "identity" that emerged out of cultural history to challenge the exclusions of historical orthodoxy (Marxist and other-

wise) have been evacuated of much of their specific content (structurally determined or otherwise) in favor of this loosely liberal notion of the limits of historical and human possibility.[32]

"Agency" has transmogrified from a sort of analytical placeholder for various notions of (materially determined and culturally stipulated) historical action into a seemingly self-sufficient and exhaustive account of historical subjectivity. A question that was perhaps badly put in the beginning (structure vs. agency) but that nevertheless functioned as the occasion for a discussion of the question of "determination" and the past predicates of present action has been replaced with an even worse question. By framing our histories around the question of "autonomy" (here understood as a synonym for "agency" and even "humanity"), we have collapsed any consideration of the conditions of historical subjectivity and meaningful action into an adventitious and ahistorical binary (power vs. agency).

The "agent" as universal subject has thus been "deprived of real individual life and endowed with an unreal universality." The quotation is from Marx, who was criticizing a notion of political emancipation (citizenship) that did not attend to the social determinants of inequality. Under such conditions, he wrote, the real conditions of individual life—"distinctions of birth, social rank, education, occupation"—remained the saliens of human existence even as they were replaced as official categories of governance by the notion of officially equal citizens. The "citizen," Marx wrote, was an "imaginary member of an illusory sovereignty," a governing abstraction whose power Marx went on to compare to that of the Holy Ghost. I am suggesting that there is a parallel (a homology, actually) between the vision of historiographical equality implied by Gutman's General Theory and formalized in the apotheosis of "agency" and the (merely) political emancipation analyzed by Marx. Each hypothesizes a serial and individual version of historical subjectivity—"one," "man," "agent," "citizen"—through which comparisons can be made and differences—actually existing, continuing historical and structural differences—disembodied.[33]

One way of revitalizing our understanding of the condition of enslaved humanity is through a renewed attention to the occasions of

action: the material conditions of "agency." It has become fashionable in recent years to oppose the term *work* to the term *culture*, or *power* to *agency*, and to use the former terms to bludgeon the latter, as if an increment added to the first set of terms forced an equal and opposite diminution of the latter on some sort of sliding scale. In a strange way, these arguments are mirror images of those they seem so concerned to oppose, those that they believe have overemphasized the "degree" of enslaved "agency" and enslaved autonomy. But rather than trying to specify the terms of slaveholding "agency"— what sorts of action were available to enslaved people in what sorts of circumstances, what sorts of notions of commonality undergirded their solidarity—they have simply tried to cut it down to size. And yet, as any number of scholars (especially Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and William Sewell) have suggested, the question of "structural determination" need not be limited to the choice between a sort of turtles-all-the-way-down base-superstructure version of Marxism or a revisionist emphasis on "power" over "agency." Without accepting the untenable idea that the material conditions of human labor and reproduction directly determine the modes of understanding and expression—the ideology—through which people understand themselves and confront their circumstances, one can nevertheless attempt to imagine slave agency in a world thick with its own historical givenness. Rather than posing agency as the antidote to the indignities of exploitation (as Gutman would) or as a misleading panacea beloved of soft-minded progressives (as Genovese or countless other self-declared Real Marxists would have it), we might try to understand enslaved people's actions and ideas as, at once, fiercely determined— hedged in, limited, and shaped by the material conditions of their enslavement—and insistently transcendent—productive of new, creative, vibrant, and sustaining forms of human being, commonality, and, ultimately, solidarity.

One might extend the emphasis on the material life (landscape, labor, reproduction, death) to a broader revaluation of culture and community in slavery, what I have elsewhere called "the condition of enslaved humanity." Slaves' love took the form of sharing food because

they were starving; they succored the wounded because they had been beaten; they sheltered the escaped because they were being hunted; they talked about the departed because they had been sold away. These specific forms (and others like them) were hosts of the slaves' "agency," which was neither separable from the particular forms of their enslavement nor reducible to them. Those circumstances gave their actions material shape but did not exhaust their meaning or liquidate their force. Slaves acted in solidarity because they recognized their fellow slaves not as "agents" but as family members, lovers, Christians, Africans, blacks, workers, fellow travelers, women, men, and so forth. Even as their enslavement provided the specific occasion for their action, it occasioned the expression and ethics of care and practices of solidarity that transcended and actively reshaped their enslavement. Martin Delany, the prominent mid-nineteenth-century abolitionist and stalwart black nationalist, imagining the organization of a "general insurrection" of slaves in his 1861 novel *Blake*, described the dialectics of suffering and solidarity, the process by which the historical and material given-ness was worked into the lived experience of enslaved solidarity like this: "Such is the character of this organization, that punishment and misery are made the instruments of its propagation . . . Every blow you receive from the oppressor impresses the organization upon your mind." In Delany's formulation, the spirit of solidarity and resistance among slaves was a direct reflection of the given circumstances of their enslavement.[34]

In closing, let me be clear: in imagining the transubstantiation of "agency" into its material aspect, I am not questioning the importance of writing history "from the bottom up." Nor am I attempting to readjust the sliding switch away from "agency" and toward "power" or away from the oppressed and toward the oppressors along some abstract spectrum of historiographical favor. Nor, finally, am I suggesting that we should stop trying to think about the relationship between present and past in ethical terms. Quite the contrary. It is simply that I think that we can do better than "agency" (at least in its crypto-liberal guise) as a way of working toward the goals of a better, closer understanding of historical subjectivity, a more nuanced understanding of historical

power, a more trenchant ethics of historical practice. Indeed, standing as we do at the juncture of seeming fulfillment of the promise of "civil rights" and the radical intensification of inequality—global inequality, racial inequality, class inequality, gender inequality, generational inequality, ecological inequality—standing at the juncture of the Age of Obama and the "global financial crisis," it is not simply that we can do better—we must. "Political emancipation," Marx wrote in a passage that reflects the terrific promises and incised limitations of both our history as it has been written and the history we are living, "is, of course, a big step forward. True, it is not the final form of human emancipation, but it is the final form of human emancipation within the hitherto existing world order. It goes without saying that we are speaking here of [something greater]: real, practical emancipation."[35]

in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, ed. Thomas J. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41.

7. Blight, *Douglass' Civil War*, 208–209.

Agency: A Ghost Story

1. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International, 1963), 15. Born in New York City in 1928 to Jewish immigrant parents, Gutman grew up within a liberal, left-leaning family. He flirted with communism and campaigned in 1948 for the Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry Wallace (who sought to end racial segregation, extend voting rights to all African Americans, and grant universal health care). Having studied at Columbia for his masters degree, when he wrote about labor's demands for public works during the depression years of the 1870s, Gutman subsequently enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, where he worked on the history of American labor during the Panic of 1873. Madison, during the years when Gutman was there, was home to some of the nation's foremost historians of labor and class, and it was in this environment that Gutman honed his intellectual agenda and his commitment to writing a "new" social history of the American working class. After teaching in New Jersey during the tumultuous early years of the civil rights movement, Gutman joined the faculty at the State University of New York, Buffalo, in 1963.

2. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 10. For the debates about Marxism and history in which Thompson was engaged, see Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 48–59.

3. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 9–10.

4. "Interview with Herbert Gutman," in Herbert G. Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the History of the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 342–343; Herbert Gutman, "The Workers' Search for Power: Labor in the Gilded Age," in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 70, 91. For Gutman's later comment on Marxism, see "Interview with Herbert Gutman," 342–344; Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815–1919," in Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 5–7, 13–19, 39, 55. The essay was originally published in the *American Historical Review* 78 (1973): 531–588.

5. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 71, 22–23. See also "Interview with Herbert Gutman," 337–339.

6. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 67–74. See also "Interview with Herbert Gutman," 346 ("the central value of historical understanding is to transform

historical givens into contingencies") and Gutman, "Historical Consciousness in Contemporary America," in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 395–412.

7. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 27, 46, 65, 74–75.

8. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6. See also Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 12–13, 58–59n41.

9. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*, xiii–xiv. Interestingly, Gutman had used the exact same joke to close the preface he wrote for Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, eds., *The Black Worker: The Negro in the Labor Movement* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), xiii; Mary White Ovington, "The Negro in the Trades Unions of New York," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27 (May 1906): 96.

10. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 16–17n14, 58–59n41, 74. As dissonant as this passage seems today, one must pause and remember that for Gutman the term *preindustrial* was a form of high praise. Having paused and remembered that, one might then move on to see his usage as a demonstration of the larger point of this essay (stop reading here and return to the text if you're enjoying the suspense): Gutman was stretching the terms of his analysis to the point that they ruptured into dis-synthesis. The given set of terms surrounding African Americans in the modern world simply did not allow for a valorizing resignification of the idea of blacks as temporally delayed and developmentally static (in the way that the set of terms surrounding "immigration," at least in the case of Europeans, arguably did).

11. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 67–68.

12. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 12. "Nor was it [the shift to the focus on "slave belief and behavior"] simply a response to the civil rights and black power movements. In these same years, historians studying subordinate classes other than Afro-Americans grew increasingly dissatisfied with the prevailing reactive models used to explain their belief and behavior." Herbert Gutman, "The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: A Revised Perspective," in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 357.

13. Ira Berlin, "Herbert G. Gutman and the American Working Class," in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 25–31; Herbert Gutman, "Peter H. Clark: Pioneer Socialist, 1877," *Journal of Negro Education* 34, no. 4 (Autumn 1965): 413–418; "Preface," in Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, eds., *The Black Worker: The Negro in the Labor Movement* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), vii–xiii; "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning, 1890–1900," originally published in Julius

Jacobson, ed., *The Negro and the American Labor Movement* (New York, 1968), 49–127, reprinted in Herbert Gutman, ed., *Work, Culture, and Society*, 121–208; "Labor in the Land of Lincoln," in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 117–212. The last of these was written in these years but remained unpublished until after Gutman's death in 1985.

14. Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," 121–208, esp. 194 (and n110), 195, 204–208. Gutman's account of Davis, the UMW, and "inter-racialism" generally was debunked by Herbert Hill in "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1988): 132–200. For this ongoing and critical discussion (as well as some discussion of "race and class" beyond the history [or not] of "inter-racial" labor solidarity), see Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: The Life and Times of a Black Radical*, originally published 1979 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," *Signs* 14 (1989): 610–633; Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (May–June 1990): 95–118; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1990); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), and "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001): 3–32; Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

15. Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), xviii; Ira Berlin, "Herbert G. Gutman and the American Working Class," in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 41–44; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 88–89.

16. Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (March 1965), www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-moynihan.htm. Moynihan was not alone; E. Franklin Frazier described the slave family as fatherless or mother-centered, in *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

17. See also Gutman, "Black Family: A Revised Perspective," esp. 359–370. Gutman's essentially liberal and comparative strategy for vindicating the history of African Americans had precedent. As early as 1952, historian Kenneth Stampp had called for a "completely objective study" of slavery without any preestablished assumptions of racial inferiority. His 1956 study *The Peculiar Institution* embodied this perspective. It began with a clear statement that guided his approach: "The slaves were merely ordinary human beings, that innately Negroes *are*, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less." Or, conversely, "It would serve my purpose as well," Stampp continued, "to call Caucasians black men with white skins." In other words, he seemed just like anyone else. During the era of black power and cultural nationalism, scholars challenged Stampp's race-blind liberalism, particularly its enabling assertion that slaves were "culturally rootless people." Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1956), vii–ix, 364; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-bellum South* [originally published 1972], rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Thought and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

18. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 71–75.

19. Ibid., 598, 659. The following paragraphs are based upon my twenty-fifth anniversary review of *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, "A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five," *Common-Place* 1, no. 4 (July 2001), www.common-place.org.

20. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History: A Marxian Perspective," *Journal of Social History* 10 (Autumn 1976): 205, 214, 212, 219, 213, 215.

21. Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 32, 311 (see also 316); Fox-Genovese and Genovese, "Political Crisis of Social History," 207.

22. Gutman, "Black Family: A Revised Perspective," 364.

23. Fox-Genovese and Genovese, "Political Crisis of Social History," 213.

24. Herbert G. Gutman, "Labor History and the 'Sartre Question,'" in Gutman, *Power and Culture*, 326. For Gutman's vision of "a general social history of the American people," see "Interview with Herbert Gutman," 348 (likewise 335).

25. "Interview with Herbert Gutman," 346; Gutman, "Black Family: A Revised Perspective," 358.

26. American Social History Project, *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), x–xi.

27. I am using the term *cultural dominant* in the way suggested by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–128.

28. "Interview with Herbert Gutman," 346.

29. Nell Irvin Painter, "Southern History across the Color Line," in her *Southern History across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1–14 (including a paean to Herbert Gutman on 5–6); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Thought and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Michael Angleo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1963); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000); Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1994); Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

30. For the sort of process I am describing, in which alternative and oppositional sets of terms are contained, though never fully and never finally, within a hegemonic set of terms, see Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 107–127, esp. 114.

31. Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xxii. Morgan's usage is especially interesting for framing a book that self-consciously attempts to resist the "romanticized" terms of histories of slavery written from "the bottom up" (see xxiv); evidence, I would suggest, of the extent to which the "agency" discussion magnetizes even efforts to escape its conventions. Speaking of twice-told tales, see Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Fall 2003): 113–124; "Freedom's Servant: Slavery, Freedom, and Reparations as a Theory of History," *Raritan* (Fall 2007).

32. See William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). On the question of "determination," see also Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, esp. 75–89, 145–212; Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in his *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2005), 87–128.

33. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/. For the development of the question of historical subjectivity into an engagement with and critique of Marxism itself, see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Singh, *Black Is a Country*. In addition to the politico-liberalism that immanently formats its version of historical time, it might be argued that the new social history's version of spaces was concomitantly formatted by the parameters of the nation-state. Gutman's work and the "new social history" in general are characterized by a sort of pointillist nationalism in which American history might eventually be composed of its various physically bounded community studies. Gutman's quest for a general theory of labor history was immanently structured by his desire to reclaim the term *America* for its immigrants and its working people. And yet, in spite of this noble premise, it unfolded in seemingly willful ignorance of the spatially dynamic and imperial aspect of American economic development: of the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, Indian Removal, the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, the Vietnam War, the work of William Appleman Williams, etc. The present turn toward transnational approaches to American history reflects a general sense of the exhaustion of framing parameters of social history.

34. Johnson, "On Agency," 115; Walter Johnson, "White Lies: Human Property and Domestic Slavery aboard the Slave Ship *Creole*," *Atlantic Studies* 5 (August 2008): 256–258; Martin R. Delany, *Blake or the Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller, originally published 1861–62 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 40. Exemplary of

renewed emphasis on material life in this historiography of slavery are: on repro-
duction, Morgan, *Laboring Women*, and Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave:
Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 2006); on the landscape and material space, Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer
to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel
Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining
Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caro-
lina Press, 2007); on labor, Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves
in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University
Press, 2005), and Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cam-
bridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); and, on death, Brown, *Reaper's Garden*.

35. Marx, "On the Jewish Question"; Supreme Court of the United States, No.
05-908, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, et al.*,
www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/05-908.ZS.html.

Abraham Lincoln, Colonization, and the Rights of Black Americans

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