Exploitation Past and Present

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Jennie Lightweis-Goff, *Captive City: Meditations on Slavery in the Urban South*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 207 pp, $44.95 cloth.

While the writings of Olaudah Equiano, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin demonstrate the central role played by African Americans in these United States, efforts to show the importance of women and urban slaves to America's story are still underappreciated. To this end historian Jennie Lightweis-Goff swaps out the familiar image of a Black farm laborer for the stories of female city-dwellers toiling as hotel staff, sex workers, and domestics.

Captive City, Lightweis-Goff's latest work, reflects on three key questions:

> First, how did the South become rural, or imagined as rural by national culture?
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> Second, how did the city become sanctuary, or imagined as sanctuary, for people at the margins?
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> Third, how did African Americans become urban, or imagined as urban, in foreshortened histories that omit the nineteenth century?

Lightweis-Goff focuses her study on what she terms the southern coastal hospitality cities of Baltimore, Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans, asking readers to examine the way they view race and social class. Lightweis-Goff centers her work on the early and mid-nineteenth century, whereby she explains the varieties of labor that powered the growth and industry of U.S. cities, much of it nonconsensual and secured by theft, intimidation, and official neglect.

Captive City's account of these cities builds on Walter Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit* ("now-time.") For Benjamin, the traditional way of thinking through history (e.g., the presence of factor X and factor Y will always yield result Z) shrinks life's possibilities to what lies directly in view.

However, for change—a discovery, a peace treaty, a declaration of war—to happen, our present-day life must be spattered ("shot through") with elements of the past that color everything they touch. For Lightweis-Goff, a tourist's encounter with New Orleans street performers dancing for Mardi Gras beads opens a wormhole to the compulsory entertainment provided by nineteenth-century slaves.

Juxtaposing events from the colonial U.S., the early nation, and today, Lightweis-Goff argues that the coastal hospitality cities of the south should be considered as their own U.S. region. In comparison to more masculine inland cities like Nashville and tech-bro Austin, the hospitality cities register as feminine for their watery geographies and their reliance on hotels and tourism. To the eyes of many, the region's preponderance of Black and Brown service labor helps paint these cities as especially other. For example, Eric Gay's September 1, 2005 photograph of Milvirtha Hendricks sheltering in the Superdome from Hurricane Katrina, wrapped in an American flag presented storm-tossed New Orleans as an elderly African-American woman; in 1850, the city's representative woman would have been considerably younger. Lightweis-Goff writes:

> Cities of the deep south, especially New Orleans, developed an industry built on (1) the arrangement of plaçage, or morganatic marriage; (2) the spectacle of the so-called quadroon balls, where white men and women of color socialized; and (3) the "fancy trade" on the auction blocks, in which captive women were sold in highly sexualized spectacles for prices comparable to those paid for strong, healthy workers in cotton and rice economies.

Sold in infancy, Louisa served a Mr. Bachelor as nurse and domestic at the behest of her second owner David Cook. When Cook sold his slaves, a 13-year-old Picquet was separated from her mother and made to serve as concubine to John Williams. Upon Williams' death in 1847, Picquet and her two children were freed, and she eventually made it to Cincinnati, Ohio. Ten years later, when Louisa discovered her mother was living as a slave of Colonel Albert Horton, she wrote to them and, with the help of the Rev. Hiram Mattison, a New York abolitionist minister, succeeded in freeing her mother. Mattison interviewed Louisa extensively; in 1861 he published her story in book form, portraying her as a sexual victim in demonstrating the immorality of slavery.

The notion of cities as havens for marginalized people, specifically African Americans, is troubled by the experiences of Dolly and Louisa, who lived under constant surveillance in the hands of slaveowners and their allies. At a time when political representatives are too overwhelmed to focus on the crimes and misdemeanors performed by a president and his nominees for high office, *Captive City* makes crucial connections between antebellum slavery and service-sector employment today, linking exploitation then and now and convincing readers that more than ever, our "past" record on human and women's rights is present. A