

Black Women's Domestic Labor at Angola (Louisiana State Penitentiary) during Jim Crow

Nathalie Rech¹

Ph.D. Candidate, History, UQAM, Montreal, Canada
Email: ed691071@ens.uqam.ca

On September 19, 1922, Beulah M., a thirty-year-old cook, saved a “small child from a vicious cow on Angola.” This event occurred only a few months after her admission to the Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP), where she was serving a life sentence for alleged murder. The infant was one of the many of the white prison staff's children raised on the penitentiary plantation nestled in a large meander of the Mississippi river. This happy-ending drama featuring a Black woman prisoner and a free white child arose from the “cohabitation” of free white households within the incarcerated population. The incident, quite unexpected in a carceral setting, prompted the penitentiary general manager to place Beulah M. on the “eligibility list” for parole and to grant her “full single good time for meritorious service,” which meant the possibility of an earlier release by a few months. Beulah's action might also have motivated authorities to assign her to be “servant” in the Camp D Captain's house in July 1923, and later to be a nurse in the nine-bedroom “Big House,” occupied by one of the penitentiary staff of higher rank. The peculiar nature of her alleged crime, the beating to death of her seven-year-old Black step-daughter, was apparently not perceived as a deterrent to entrust her to care for white children. Her courageous action toward a white child at Angola might even have been a compelling argument for her early pardon and discharge, which she received only after nine years at Angola, although her plea for a pardon had been rejected at least once before.² Beulah M.'s story is the story of a coerced African American domestic laborer in white homes, rewarded for her perceived subservience to the Jim Crow order. It exemplifies one aspect of Black women's experiences of hard labor for the state of Louisiana during the first half of the twentieth century.

Located in Angola, Louisiana, where nineteenth century settlers displaced an Indigenous village and established a slave plantation, LSP is now the largest super-maximum security prison in the country. This enduring symbol of mass incarceration is generally assumed to have been a male-only penitentiary since its founding in 1901. However, despite their presence being mostly forgotten in the collective memory, women, mostly of African descent, were incarcerated there for the first six decades of the twentieth century. This paper documents Black women's experiences of coerced labor, more particularly, those who, like Beulah M., served their penitentiary

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of International Labor and Working-Class History, Inc. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

sentence as domestic laborers for white prison staff and officials and their households. In doing so, it contributes to our understanding of state violence during Jim Crow. Arguing that Angola made domestic labor compatible with incarceration, this research claims that prison labor and the discipline that was used to turn unwilling prisoners into subservient laborers served to replicate racial and gender hierarchies existing in the outside “free world.” This article argues that as domestic workers for white households, inside or outside the penitentiary limits, Black women played a key role in the functioning of the penitentiary. They found themselves all too unwillingly involved in the “making of whiteness,” blurring at the same time the borders between the “free” and “unfree” worlds. This paper also shows historical continuities between their experiences and those of enslaved women, as well as similarities with the experiences of domestic workers in the “free world.” The white home, integrated at Angola as a carceral space, continued to be a place where racial and gender hierarchies were produced and reproduced.

Before discussing the centrality of coerced labor in the Louisiana penal system, and the part that Black women played in this profit-oriented institution, this paper provides a brief description of the female camp at Angola and of its occupants, who were surrounded at all times by male prisoners and captors. Examining the cohabitation between free white families and those incarcerated on the penitentiary plantation, this paper explores the crucial role Black women played at Angola as coerced domestic laborers. Performing a variety of tasks for Angola staff and their households, these women were experienced and skilled, most of them being domestic workers before their incarceration, a position that often triggered Black women’s troubles with the law. Benefits and risks came with these “trusty” occupations at Angola. For Black women, it meant the hope for an earlier release and some material advantages, but also an increased vulnerability to their white captors, who themselves gained status from being allotted domestic servants. Ultimately, domestic service performed in carceral settings contributed to the preservation and strengthening of racial and gender hierarchies crucial to the mere existence of the prison system in Jim Crow Louisiana.

Building on works produced by a growing number of historians interested in the lived and laboring experiences of Black women prisoners, this article promotes an intersectional understanding of incarceration and contributes to the study of gender, race, labor, and the carceral state. Through their pioneering scholarship, historians Mary Ellen Curtin, Talitha LeFlouria, and Sarah Haley have all examined how Black women toiled in the convict camps of Alabama and Georgia in occupations that did not always correspond to gender norms.³ Together with other historians of female incarceration, they provide a complex portrait of the American prison, which is often presented as implicitly male. These scholars brought new concerns to carceral studies such as health, sexuality, and resistance in addition to new theoretical concepts. Particularly critical for this paper is Sarah Haley’s concept of “domestic carceral servitude.”⁴ While it appears from parole applications that Black women’s parole might have been contingent upon the obtainment of employment within a “good white home,” Louisiana records do not allow for an exploration of domestic positions held once on parole.⁵ Instead, this article examines women’s experiences of domestic labor during their incarceration, while building on Haley’s scholarship to reveal the importance of the white home in the carceral scaffolding of Jim

Crow Louisiana. This article provides an in-depth examination of incarcerated Black women's domestic labor and takes us one step further in our understanding of the history of incarcerated Black women's labor, by looking beyond the railroad camps, brickyards, and sweatshops where historians Curtin and LeFlouria revealed the presence of incarcerated African American women, to examine the critical role Black women played at Angola in what Haley calls the "domestic carceral sphere."⁶

The Mississippi penal farm presented many standard features with Angola. Telisha Dionne Bailey's research on Parchman reveals that Black women assumed great economic importance to the state through their physical exploitation. She writes, "The Southern penal system served as a means to proliferate the plan of white supremacy."⁷ Like Parchman's, Angola prison officials exploited Black women's physical strength and working skills as much as men's. Women continuously worked in the fields besides men, or in the penitentiary tobacco factory and cannery, generating profits for the state of Louisiana. Black women also did laundry for the whole penitentiary population (like they had done in the Baton Rouge penitentiary before the Civil War), performed daily chores, and cooked within the female quarters.⁸ However vital to the daily functioning of the penitentiary, those tasks were considered "non productive" by the penitentiary officials, in contrast with other penitentiary activities deemed "productive," such as growing cotton and sugar in order to rake in profits.⁹

This article contributes to the historiography on African American incarceration, particularly research examining southern carceral spaces. Recent scholarship has helped challenge the stigma associated with Black criminality to reveal the "real story" of men and women sentenced under Jim Crow laws.¹⁰ Studies of northern prisons and reformatories are useful to understand how reform projects and rehabilitation ideals unfolded in particular ways when the incarcerated individuals were both African American and women.¹¹ Finally, this paper also adopts the argument made by historians of the nineteenth century "convict leasing" system, such as seminal work from Alex Lichtenstein and Matthew Mancini, that "convict labor made modern economic development of the South's resources compatible with the maintenance of racial domination," showing that forms of coerced labor in the twentieth century are in continuity with prior carceral models.¹²

This paper rests on archival research conducted in Louisiana, and seeks to overcome the silence of the sources on Black lives, especially when it comes to women; silence that Black women historians have abundantly demonstrated and exposed.¹³ Most of the evidence for this article comes from a database I constructed to document the lives of African American women admitted to the Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP) between 1901–1935. This archive I am building contains surviving penitentiary admission records and "convict records," its 1925–1935 segment containing information on labor assignment for 294 Black women out of 382 admitted to LSP over this period. This study also relies on lower criminal court records, Louisiana Supreme Court¹⁴ records, and newspapers, which document some of the events and circumstances that brought women to the penitentiary. In addition, pardon records provide information on clemency proceedings. Using these sources despite their inherent incompleteness and bias, this paper tells a plausible history of African American women's labor experiences at Angola where "maybes" and "one may believe" are an integral part of the story.¹⁵

The “Forbidden City”

Well before the founding of the state penal farm in 1901, Black women were confined on Angola’s grounds. Isaac Franklin, cofounder of Franklin & Armfield, one of America’s most prominent slave-trading firms, bought this land in 1835. He put to work hundreds of enslaved African Americans to clear the swampy cypress forest and transform the land into a profitable cotton plantation. In 1860, his widow was in possession of the largest estate in the West Feliciana Parish and lived part of the year in Angola’s “Big House” served by enslaved men and women.¹⁶ In 1880, Samuel James, a former Confederate Major, bought the plantation from Adelia Cheatham, Franklin’s widow. As the sole lessee of Louisiana State prisoners after 1869, James (and later his son) exploited Black women prisoners as personal servants and “field hands” on his plantation, and sent most male prisoners throughout the State of Louisiana to build levees and railroads or to perform agricultural work. Horrific detention and labor conditions under the “convict leasing” system resulted in a high death rate, which prompted the legislature to withdraw the lease, buy the Angola plantation, and transform it into a penal farm in 1901.¹⁷

At the opening of Angola’s female quarters, Camp D, in 1901, nearly forty African American women and only one white woman were present. From 1901 to 1961, approximately two thousand women were admitted to LSP, representing around 4 percent of the penitentiary population. Women prisoners were disproportionately African American. Between 1901 and 1935, 91 percent of the women admitted were Black, and of those, 40 percent were younger than twenty-one years old. They had received sentences for “hard labor” following convictions for alleged crimes ranging from petty larceny to murder.¹⁸ Women were sent to Camp D, a group of three wood-planked buildings located a mile away from the male camps, until it was replaced in 1956 by another camp, “the Willows,” also located within the perimeter of the penitentiary. Both camps were nicknamed “the Forbidden City” to allude to the fact that men were prohibited from approaching women and their camp. However, this metaphor serves to hide the reality that women’s living accommodations were always accessible to white male staff and to some male prisoners, making them vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence. Female quarters were also segregated by race, which oftentimes meant an overcrowded Black dormitory and an underused white facility. The State of Louisiana intended to make Angola a profitable farm, which implied extracting prisoners’ labor, and in doing so, using the brutal methods of the enslavers and lessees who exploited people on this land before.

At Angola, labor was an essential feature of Black women’s incarceration and their daily schedule was centered around work with very little time left for other activities. Indeed, “hard labor” characterized incarceration at the state penitentiary in Jim Crow Louisiana, as much as the history of female prisons in the South.¹⁹ Almost always mentioned explicitly in the district court minute books or dockets, the term “hard labor” was juxtaposed with the length of the penitentiary sentence, emphasizing the physical sufferings incarceration implied. Because all Louisiana parishes did not organize for their prisoners to work locally (although several operated “convict camps” to perform public work such as road construction), judges favored

penitentiary sentences. Instead of being “idle,” men and women “would have to work on the cotton or sugar estates of the State.”²⁰

Throughout history, coerced labor has been a key feature of the penitentiary as well as of other “sites of punitive relocations” such as penal colonies.²¹ Nineteenth century early penologists considered labor both as the best way to prevent crime as well as the best punishment for crime.²² According to scholar and activist Angela Y. Davis, labor was used for the “moral re-education” of prisoners.²³ Sociologist Erin Hatton argues that “Prisoners, by virtue of their incarceration, are deemed to be fundamentally immoral, and their labor is construed as punishment, reparation, or rehabilitation for their ‘wickedness.’”²⁴ Hatton uncovers the historical construction of work and of the narrative of the “wickedness” from slavery times. Indeed, proponents of slavery portrayed enslaved people as innately lazy and immoral and considered they had to be taught to work.²⁵ Historian Daina Ramey Berry also reported that the South was often described as a “school” where “Africans may learn productive industry. . . to acquire habits of steady labor,” and develop skills, for instance the “knowledge of all the mysteries of skilful planting.”²⁶ After Emancipation, debt peonage and convict leasing served to secure unpaid or coerced work from African Americans using the same cultural narrative of “wickedness” and “idleness” against formerly enslaved men and women reluctant to be exploited to the extent that they had been during slavery.²⁷ This narrative was an integral part of the ideological construction of what Khalil Gibran Muhammad has termed “the condemnation of blackness.” New forms of coerced labor were developed with the aim of correcting the alleged moral weakness attached to the Black “criminal class,” in addition to extracting the highest economic profit possible from them.²⁸ Indeed, prisoners’ labor was also crucial to penitentiary officials; it made the institution not only self-sufficient for food and other resources, but also profitable by producing crops intended for sales, such as cotton or sugar.

At Angola, labor was also at the center of the discipline system. Coerced labor was a way to discipline incarcerated men and women, and also served as a pretext to punish them as they were frequently subjugated to the lash for their alleged “laziness” or “refusal to work.” Indeed, physical and sexual violence was central to the threat system used to extract labor from African American women at Angola. As historian Talitha LeFlouria argues, gendered violence was rampant in the South’s “convict camps” in the aftermath of the Civil War. Angola was no exception.²⁹ The brutality of the LSP, often publicly denounced, persisted (and in fact still persists) through successive waves of reforms and political promises.³⁰ If LSP officials did not express any desire to rehabilitate the alleged criminals in their “care” during Jim Crow, labor could at least redress “the evil of [Black] female loafarism” denounced by white Southerners who, since Emancipation, felt “deprived” of subservient labor.³¹

Penitentiary officials put women to work, and like in slavery times, Black women were assigned to tasks that were physically demanding and usually considered fit for men. They were also forced to perform labor traditionally considered more fit for women, such as domestic tasks for which most were already skilled. As in slavery times, women who were usually assigned to domestic labor at Angola experienced a “double duty” for they were also requisitioned during harvest or cane-cutting season.³² The fate of Black women incarcerated in Louisiana differed slightly from what

other Black women experienced in other southern states. For example, in Jim Crow Alabama, women were not sent into underground coal mines where male prisoners had to work.³³ In Georgia, however, Black women prisoners were “compulsorily defeminized” and forced to wear male uniforms while performing masculine labor.³⁴

Race combined to gender determined prisoners’ labor assignments at LSP. The differentiated tasks assigned to white and Black women ensured that white women, even incarcerated, could feel superior to their Black counterparts. In 1901, a few months after the state had started growing cotton at Angola for its own profit, a board member stated that Black women were “utilized as hoe hands. They like field work. . . . Later, the intention is to make them stuff mattresses, sew bed ticking, do the mending and keep up the clothing and the darning for the men.”³⁵ In reality, during the early twentieth century, Black women were still working in the fields of Angola, but also doing a variety of tasks such as taking care of vegetable and flower gardens or livestock (chickens, cows), or working in the tobacco factory. A few of them were gatekeepers or guards at Camp D, which means they were “trusties,” i.e., prisoners granted certain privileges.³⁶ During this same period, most white women at Angola were seamstresses. Despite its repetitiveness, sewing “stripes” (prison uniforms) was less physically taxing, and therefore deemed more appropriate for white women. In 1936, white women either sewed or worked at the camp commissary whereas Black women worked in sugarcane and tobacco fields, and did the laundry for prisoners and prison staff.³⁷ In January 1955, an incarcerated white woman was made bookkeeper for the first time, an assignment that had been until then reserved to white male prisoners. By the end of 1956, sixteen of the twenty-four incarcerated white women were secretaries, stenographers, and clerks while only five Black women worked in the mail room.³⁸ A significant number of Black women were assigned to maintenance tasks within the female quarters. At least thirty-eight Black women and two white women admitted between 1925 and 1935 were orderlies, in charge of “general utility,” “general work,” or “cellroom” at Camp D. In 1912, the National Committee on Prison Labor had acknowledged that all U.S. penal institutions exploited their prisoners’ labor to accomplish what it qualified as their “main duty,” “to maintain the convict in reasonable health and safety,” which required “shelter, a minimum of food and clothing.”³⁹ Between 1925 and 1935, over eighty Black women were assigned to laundry work at Angola. More Black women worked as laundresses during this period than any other form of labor, with the exception of field work that involved over 120 of them. In the early 1940s, the laundry was still done by hand although penitentiary officials were considering the economic potential of constructing a steam laundry.⁴⁰ In 1944, a federal survey conducted found “a small obsolete unit” dedicated to “the cleaning of women’s clothing, hospital and staff laundry, and infrequent washing of inmate bed-clothing” while male prisoners had to wash their own garments after working hours.⁴¹ Later, Black women resumed the task of washing clothes and bed-clothing for all prisoners. In one instance, in 1953, twenty-seven laundresses washed the uniforms of all of the 3,260 prisoners in three days, and in another, in one month “they handled 20,678 pounds of wash.”⁴² Luckily at that point machines were at their disposal. Laundry work came with some unexpected risks: “[Captain J.M.] Wood charged [the women doing laundry for the penitentiary population] for any article of clothes lost, but that money was

never turned in.” Many Black washerwomen “complained that over a period of years their meager funds, received from home, had been sequestered in this manner.” Wood claimed: “I do that to keep them from getting careless and losing things.”⁴³ Rewards for their hard work—so crucial to the penitentiary community—came from unexpected places: Joe, one of Angola’s male prisoners, was inspired by “the girls of the Laundry” to whom he dedicated his poem: “Queen of my tub, I merrily sing While the white foam rises high And sturdily wash, and rinse and wring And fasten the clothes to dry.”⁴⁴

Domestic Labor for White Households During Incarceration

At least seventy-six women admitted to LSP over the period 1925–1935 were assigned as domestic laborers in white households at some point during their incarceration. All of them were Black. Most of the Black women caught in the web of “domestic carceral servitude” worked for a white family who resided on Angola grounds or did the laundry for the free personnel. Because of the remoteness of Angola, most staff members—whose numbers grew over time—were housed inside the perimeter of the penitentiary with their wives and children. For instance, in 1944, fifty-five white families occupied houses built by prisoners, comprising a total of 150–200 “free people” on the farm.⁴⁵ Staff were given free access to domestic laborers, who were African American men and women detained at LSP. Around thirty different staff members had a Black woman prisoner at their disposal: captains of the various Angola camps (and not exclusively Camp D), physicians, superintendents, and others. In addition, some penitentiary officials residing outside of Angola were also entitled to the same privilege. The penitentiary surgeon and the auditor both lived in Baton Rouge and worked there at the old penitentiary. The penitentiary General Manager and the successive wardens also held accommodations at the old penitentiary. Louisiana governors also exploited incarcerated labor. Seven Black women worked for Governor Huey P. Long and Governor Oscar K. Allen in the Governor’s mansion located in the State capital. These women were probably live-in domestic workers, at least after the old penitentiary closed in February 1932.

According to one source, “prisoners would do the cooking and cleaning inside the homes [of penitentiary staff and officials], cultivated flowers and vegetables in the yard, take care of the horses and pets.”⁴⁶ Unfortunately, the range of Black women’s domestic labor is missing from the historical record. One is left to wonder if they served coffee in bed like late nineteenth century prisoners had done for the James family. Did they also pull the rope to operate the Punkah fan over the dinner table in the “Big House” renamed “the Angola house?”⁴⁷ How close were their tasks to those performed by enslaved women who “spent their time feeding, cleaning, and caring for their slaveholders, serving as cooks, nurses, seamstresses, housemaids and midwives,” and who “were always ‘on call,’ and “spent the majority of their days nursing, ironing, washing, and doing a variety of other domestic chores,” including “tying up their [white mistresses’] corsets, combing their hair, bathing their infants, and running errands for or with them.”⁴⁸ The exploitation of incarcerated African American women as domestic workers on the Angola grounds and beyond fits into Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s argument about the extent in which systems of

labor coercion have appropriated women's reproductive labor, forcing them to perform "caring labor" for their very own captors.⁴⁹

Black women's skills acquired through their experiences in the domestic service trade proved valuable to the penitentiary. Indeed, almost every one of the eighty-seven women who were a "maid," "servant," "nurse" or "cook" for white households at LSP had professional experience before their incarceration: thirty-five were cooks prior to their incarceration and the others had all done housework, except for one washerwoman, one school teacher, and one seamstress. In fact, between 1901–1935, over three out of four Black women were described as domestic workers at the time of their admission to LSP. Only 0.2 percent of them were listed as having no occupation prior to their incarceration, and 2.2 percent were listed as "housewives." For these women, occupying the lowest-paid positions meant that financial security was a constant challenge, as it was for most African Americans during Jim Crow. In 1930, 90 percent of all non-agriculturally employed Black women in the South worked as domestics, while nationally three in five Black women workers reported domestic and personal service as their usual occupation.⁵⁰ By 1944, Black women made up over 60 percent of domestic workers nationally.⁵¹ For some, domestic labor was their full-time occupation and main source of income. For others, it was a way to earn extra income. This was the case for small farmers who experienced crop failure.

In the "free world," Black domestic workers' relationships with (mostly) white employers were complex. The quasi absence of labor unions or negotiating power coupled with the lack of legal protection defined the terms of household work. For instance, in New Orleans, workers' attempts to improve their wages or reduce their hours were met with great resistance from white housewives who reframed the debate around the "servant problem."⁵² Contemporary accounts reveal the insufficient wages, as well the long hours and lack of time to rest. They also highlight their exposure to racist and derogatory remarks. Their isolation within white homes made them vulnerable to sexual violence since "white employers' displays of disgust toward interracial contact in public in the age of segregation did not match their behavior in private."⁵³ Numerous sources show that Black women, often restricted by discrimination to domestic work, found it exploitative, exhausting, and unrewarding.⁵⁴ Because of this level of exploitation, some felt their "treadmill lives" were no better than antebellum slaves: "whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub, over the sewing machine, behind the baby carriage, or at the ironing board, we are but little more than pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves!"⁵⁵

This unenviable position on the labor market led some Black women to criminal courts where they were indicted for crimes against their employers. As the following cases illustrate, some domestic workers might have resorted to stealing to secure wages that they were denied, while others may have found opportunities to make the job more lucrative. In July 1930, house worker Lillian J. was accused of stealing a dress and a pair of shoes valued at \$25 by one of her employer's friends. Found in possession of the items, the seventeen-year-old was indicted. Both her employer and the state witness were Baton Rouge respected citizens appearing in society columns. Despite the small value of the items she allegedly stole, she was convicted of

grand larceny and sentenced to a term of twelve to eighteen months. Later that year, Lillian J. found herself cooking for the penitentiary general manager.⁵⁶

It seems that Bessie J. intended to redress wealth inequalities on a much larger scale. Arrested in 1932, she was charged with a series of burglaries performed in the houses of prominent whites in Monroe, Louisiana. She “had served as a cook in a number of the finer homes of the city and [...] had visited cooks in other homes,” becoming familiar with the houses and their contents. Bessie J. might have been one of the rare cases of “servant-thieves,” women whose domestic position was only a pretext to have access to wealthy homes.⁵⁷ According to the press, she would perform burglaries and later sell her haul in Little Rock, Arkansas, or in New Orleans, probably in the various pawn shops existing in these larger cities. Her criminal endeavors were put to an end when she “got too big for her britches” and targeted Monroe mayor’s house. Her daughter Rosella was also arrested for being her helper and might have been prosecuted by a juvenile court, although no institution for “wayward girls” existed for Black girls at the time, except for the House of the Good Shepherd in New Orleans, “one of very few biracial reform homes in the South.”⁵⁸ Convicted by the Ouachita parish judge after she pled guilty to two charges of “burglary in the night time,” Bessie J. was sentenced to hard labor for four to six years. Once at Angola, the forty-two-year-old woman was forced to perform domestic labor for the Camp C captain, and later for the warden. She would later be released on an indefinite reprieve twenty-two months into her sentence.⁵⁹

Both Lillian J. and Bessie J. transitioned from domestic work in the “free world” to domestic carceral servitude within a few weeks. Jim Crow courts seldom protected Black women like them, giving precedence to their white accusers’ words over theirs. This, Kali Nicole Gross argues, made all domestic workers vulnerable to false accusations.⁶⁰ Tera Hunter’s study on Atlanta domestic workers also reveals that: “many black women were arrested and convicted of petty theft of laundry as well as missing household goods usually on the only basis of the employer’s word alone and without due process.”⁶¹ Hunter demonstrates that “it was common for employers to rob workers of their rightful cash wages. Some used a bait-and-switch tactic to lure workers with high wages and then gradually reduced the rates once employed.”⁶²

When assigning Black women to serve white households, penitentiary officials usually preferred to exploit those who, unlike Bessie J., had not targeted white property. Because officials acknowledged the exceptional nature of their crime, alleged murderers were deemed more trustworthy in white homes than alleged thieves, the latter being considered dishonest in essence. Indeed, among the eighty-seven women serving sentences as house servants, only ten were convicted of property crimes. Despite the violent nature of their alleged crimes, they were trusted to be around white housewives and children.⁶³

These coerced and unpaid domestic laborers were tied to the white household all the while attempting to take advantage of the relative privileges afforded to them. First, they probably enjoyed some material privileges over other Black women at Angola, like access to better food than prison rations. During periods when they did not have to wear “stripes,” they might also have gotten some “hand-me-downs” from white housewives. Secondly, incarcerated “servants” were above other prisoners

in the LSP hierarchy because they had the status of “trusties,” which meant some advantages such as a greater mobility on the penitentiary plantation.⁶⁴ However, the most important privilege they could expect was almost certainly a reduction of their sentence. Since 1914, they were granted “double good time,” i.e., twice the allowance in time credits introduced by Act 112 (1890) and amended by Act 160 (1902), which meant the possibility of an earlier discharge for individuals who earned a diminution of their sentence “by working out their own salvation.”⁶⁵ Out of seventy-six Black women who performed housework for white households during their incarceration, twelve were paroled before the expiration of the sentence they had received in court (15.8 percent compared to only 17.1 percent of the Black women admitted to LSP over the period 1901–1935), fourteen (including Bessie J.) benefited from a reprieve (18.4 compared to 5 percent), eleven from a commutation of their sentence (14.5 compared to 3.1 percent), and four were pardoned (5.3 compared to 3.9 percent). Thirty-two others were discharged under the Good Time Law (which applied by default to all prisoners except short termers and recidivists). The cases of the seven women appointed to the governor’s service reveal both the extent of the individualization of sentences and the reward offered as a trade-off for their servitude: only one was discharged under the Good Time Law, the others were paroled, or received a reprieve, a commutation or a pardon. One of them, Beatrice W., was placed for the period of her ten-month reprieve “in the care of Mrs. Allen in Winnfield,” most probably Governor Allen’s wife.⁶⁶ Governor Allen kept at his service after their discharge from LSP some of the women who had been working at his mansion during their incarceration, offering them a stable source of income during the Great Depression.⁶⁷

Prisoners’ own efforts were rewarded, but securing white support was also critical to obtain an earlier release from LSP. White staff members were able to intercede with the authorities in favor of certain individuals, as Warden Walker did in 1961 for his cook Marie H., whom he described as “a model prisoner” serving a life sentence. She also received the support of a former employer for whom she had served as “domestic help in [his] home.” He wrote on his professional letterhead that he never “heard of her being in any trouble before this occasion that sent her to Angola” and carefully added: “I do not know anything about her outside life.”⁶⁸ Indeed, Black women’s freedom depended on whites’ goodwill and on how much they could meet whites’ expectations for docile servants and for “Mammys . . . of the white supremacist cultural imaginary.”⁶⁹

Domestic carceral servitude did not however constitute a protective labor category for Black women prisoners. It is unlikely that being assigned to white homes spared Black women from the violence used daily at LSP to “discipline” prisoners, in particular African Americans. However, their victimization probably stayed off record since they were not placed under their camp captain who kept track of the lashes he administered himself but under the control of other prison staff or even of their housewives. One exception is an incidence of “insubordination” punished by fifteen lashes administered by the captain of the receiving station in Baton Rouge to Virginia H., his personal cook. Virginia H., a cook by profession, did all her time in his service, without going to Angola.⁷⁰ Although there is no direct archival evidence of sexual violence against Black domestics at Angola, their isolation in white households, away from

the other women incarcerated on the plantation, made them vulnerable to it, as much as domestic workers in the “free world” were susceptible to victimization by their white employers.⁷¹

In 1943, an ex-prisoner pointed at the occurrence of violence and sexual violence against the “women . . . used as house servants and maids by various penitentiary officials and employees scattered all over Angola” when he made this vague suggestion: “The practice has been abused in more ways than one.”⁷² When working at LSP for white families, Black women also encountered the same types of risks as “house slaves” before them.⁷³

The risks imposed by Black women’s proximity to white men, women and children in their homes did not seem to worry LSP officials. On the contrary, Black women were assigned to homes where the presence of Black male “trusties” was seen as dangerous. The proximity between white female and Black male bodies caused an irrational fear of rape to white Southerners.⁷⁴ This was evident in the following exchange between Dr. Myron E. Walker, former visiting physician at Angola, and Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel and Lennox L. Moak, respectively chair and vice-chairman of the subcommittee on penal institutions in charge of studying prisons. In February 1944, the subcommittee questioned Dr. Walker on female prisoners:

Rummel: “Would you recommend the separation of the women’s department from this place here, getting it somewhere else?”

Walker: “As it is now, it probably would be the best thing.

. . .

Walker: . . . The main reason you don’t want it [the women’s camp] here on the farm is the fact that once in a while the boys and girls get together. That is understandable, and the circumstance is undesirable. There is another thing to consider. *If you get the right kind of people to come down here [as prison employees], you have to make certain inducements in their favor. A lot of people don’t like male servants in their houses alone.*⁷⁵

The penitentiary’s need to attract and retain qualified white staff, and the resultant need of white staff for Black female domestic laborers, might have played a role in maintaining the status quo for all female state prisoners in Louisiana.⁷⁶ Incidents such as the murders of Dr. Ehlert’s wife and of Captain Spillman’s wife by two Black male “trusties” reinforced the argument against having Black men working in white homes. At the same time, it reaffirmed the belief that Black female domestic workers posed less of a threat.⁷⁷

Making Whiteness

For African American women in the custody of the LSP, the practice of “domestic carceral servitude” contributed to the making of whiteness at the expense of their racial debasement. By securing the service of incarcerated Black women for their

private homes, some of the Angola employees were signaling both their Southern white male prerogative and their elevated position among the penitentiary staff.⁷⁸

Domestic laborers “were forced to enact the role of the inferior” through a variety of rituals affirming their subordination, such as using the back door, or the outside “privy,” eating in the kitchen or pretending to be grateful for leftover foods and discarded clothing.⁷⁹ It is easy to imagine that Angola prisoners had to adopt the same type of rituals to please the people they were serving like domestic carceral laborers elsewhere.⁸⁰

The privilege granted to LSP staff extended to their family members. Their wives were protected from hard physical labor because Black women were toiling in their places. African American women’s menial labor in American white homes served to reaffirm the belief of their “natural inferiority” while adding to the construction of white womanhood.⁸¹ Hiring servant labor sustained the ideal of “domestic graciousness” among white housewives who could hire another woman to perform household chores.⁸² This relieved white American women from less desirable household duties and allowed them to distance themselves from the physical labor and dirt involved; they could devote themselves to cultural, leisure and volunteer activity or, for some, to a professional career.⁸³

Angola white housewives enjoyed time for social activities, and were granted social recognition through regular appearances in newspaper society columns. As Elsa Barkley Brown has argued: “white women live the lives they do in large part because women of color live the ones they do.”⁸⁴ The Angola housewives were no exception. Having a personal servant at their disposal allowed these women to appear to their guests as perfect hostesses.⁸⁵ Fresh flower arrangements were commented on in the press when one of the Angola wives organized a reception, as if she was responsible for the care of her garden.⁸⁶ Thanks to Black women’s toiling in their homes, white Angola housewives could also promote themselves as benevolent. For instance, during World War II, Warden Bazer’s wife “and her group of ladies” devoted “their full time to Red Cross work” knitting sweaters.⁸⁷

The white housewives who had the privilege of delegating the worst of their domestic chores to an incarcerated Black woman could claim a higher status among Angola staff’s wives. “Being white meant having black help” and at Angola, the privilege of using Black women prisoners as domestics meant belonging to the penitentiary plantation ruling class, “a class in the South who knows the negro only as a servant.”⁸⁸ In reality, white housewives’ and Black prisoners’ life conditions were as opposite as they had been a century before on slave plantations.⁸⁹ The contrast between the lives of these two groups was crucial to white women’s ability to conform to southern gender norms and ideal of domesticity as well as to assert superiority over Black women whose womanhood was denied.⁹⁰

White children also benefitted from the exploitation of Black women’s (and men’s) domestic labor. JoAnn Spillman, a captain’s daughter recalled her privileged childhood at Angola in the 1940s: “It was wonderful. I was the princess and my daddy and my mother were the king and the queen, and we had servants.”⁹¹ On the penal farm, some white children had nurses to take care of them. While being deprived of the ability to care for their own children, incarcerated Black mothers had to nurture, protect, and teach good manners to white children like Black nurses

did in the “free world.” This made white motherhood more enjoyable, as the poem “Precious Gift” illustrated. In it, Mary Inez Fricklin, one of Angola’s housewives, worshipped her baby girl, “a budding rose,” all the while ignoring the challenges inherent to the care of newborn children.⁹² During the first half of the twentieth century, the stereotypical figure of the “Mammy” was a fixture of white family life and “enhanced its stability.” At the same moment, the removal of Black women from their own families to be placed in carceral spaces served to repair their “perceived excessive presence within the black home,” considered as “a source of deterioration of black life” in Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report to President Johnson’s Administration.⁹³

On the penitentiary plantation, white children “learned race” through their contact with Black caregivers. Racial identity was produced and reproduced in the white home where Black presence remained significant despite an increasingly segregated world.⁹⁴ White Southerners desired social distance from Blacks rather than physical separation, since the making of whiteness depended on the proximity and juxtaposition of hierarchized racial groups.⁹⁵ At Angola, like elsewhere in the South, the white home was “an island of racial mixing in a sea of separation,” where the Mammy embodied the “contradictions of a white supremacist ideology of domesticity.”⁹⁶

At Angola, Black women’s labor belonged to the white home. What Sarah Haley argued for the Georgia case involving the incarceration of Black women paroled to white employers also applied to Angola. According to Haley: “The white home, which had since slavery existed as a site of regulation, policing, discipline, and punishment for black women who worked as domestics, was formally incorporated into the penal sphere through the establishment of domestic carceral servitude.”⁹⁷ However, this “narrative of servitude about black women’s relationship to white families” did not go unchallenged in the “free world.” As Premilla Nadasen notes, “African American household workers were not servile, but resisted and challenged the contours of the occupation,” organizing mostly outside of labor unions modeled on industrial work, and using intimate spaces as well as public spaces to tell their stories to each other and elaborate resistance strategies.⁹⁸ At Angola, as well as in other carceral spaces during Jim Crow, women prisoners were not always submissive; their acts of resistance appear in the penitentiary records under various forms. Talking back, refusing to work, setting fires, destroying equipment, and attempting to escape were all means that they employed at great risk of painful retaliation.⁹⁹

Except for the wives of the successive Camp D captains who were employed as matrons, white housewives were seldom associated with prison work at LSP. However, they took part in penitentiary activities. For example, an investigation committee convened in 1944 found that the employee at Camp G in charge of censoring the prisoners’ mail could not read or write and that his wife was doing the work for him.¹⁰⁰ White housewives benefitted from the racial order prevailing at Angola, and participated actively in reinforcing the hierarchy between “free” and “unfree,” and between white and Black people, illustrating that non-elite whites were also adhering to white supremacy.¹⁰¹ White housewives at Angola may have seen themselves as models for their Black domestic workers, in the process demonstrating as much contempt and paternalism as the author of these lines: “Thousands of Southern white women take a genuine interest in their servants, visit them when they are sick, try to improve their home life, and endeavour in every way possible to elevate them

and make them more efficient, just as the best mistresses did in slave days.”¹⁰² They might even have perceived the occupation of “help” in their homes as an education program for the incarcerated since the penology of the time focused on the teaching of the ideal of domesticity to “fallen” women. Alderson Reformatory, the first federal penitentiary for women opened in 1927, was an obvious example of this: “beautifully located” in Virginia hills, this “cottage-prison” had the ambition to “raise [women’s] ideals, increase their self-respect, and give them a vision and a desire for right living” through its education program.¹⁰³ Whereas Alderson’s rehabilitation objective targeted mostly white women to make them better women and better housewives, Angola’s domestic service only aimed to make Black women better servants, reinforcing their subordinate status without granting them femininity or womanhood.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

A heavy toll was imposed upon Black women workers at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. This article reveals the continuity between “domestic carceral servitude” and labor conditions in the “free world” where discrimination kept Black women confined to domestic work. Despite material advantages, such as sentence reductions, the labor assignments of Black women prisoners in white households were far from being privileged treatment. Moreover, it reinforced the racial hierarchy that kept them at the bottom of the social ladder, making them “unfit” for anything except servility.¹⁰⁵ Living and laboring in white households also exposed them to forms of racialized and gendered violence. The “non productive” labor extracted from incarcerated women at Angola and beyond is another illustration of how reproductive labor was essential to the daily functioning of profit-based penitentiary plantations. Despite their small numbers, Black women’s toil in the homes of LSP staff is historically significant. Their experiences demonstrate that prisons are sites for the making of race and that the white home is an integral part of the penal system. In this scheme, white housewives and children benefitted from Black women’s coerced domestic labor, which only reinforced white supremacy and Black subordination.¹⁰⁶

Notes

1. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism of the first draft. I am grateful for the support of supervisors, colleagues, and friends who read and commented on this paper: Greg Robinson, Talitha LeFlouria, Mallory Szymanski, John Bardes, Valerie Simard, and Fran Alexander. Research for this article was supported by the Fonds de recherche du Québec Société et Culture.
2. Convict Record #13609, State Penitentiary Records, volume 19, Collection P1980-353, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as LSP Collection); Blacks Murder Step-Child in Brutal Manner Near Columbia, *The Monroe News*, August 1, 1921; “Pardon Board to Hear Pleas of 25 Killers,” *Times-Picayune*, October 10, 1926.
3. Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865–1900* (Charlottesville, VA, 2000); Talitha L. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015); Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016).
4. Haley, *No Mercy Here*, chap. 4.
5. In the title mentioned above, Sarah Haley was able to document paroled prisoners’ labor from parole records. A few years prior, Cheryl Hicks’ pioneering scholarship was the first to introduce historians to

the practice of domestic parole. Examining Bedford Reformatory archives, she demonstrated that race influenced prison authorities' assumptions about parolees: whereas white "fallen women" were paroled to factory work, Black women were sent to domestic service and subjected to employers' closer control. Cheryl D Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890–1935* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010).

6. Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*; Talitha L. LeFlouria, "Sewing and Spinning for the State: Incarcerated Black Female Garment Workers in the Jim Crow South," in *Crime and Punishment in the Jim Crow South*, ed. Amy Louise Wood and Natalie J. Ring (Urbana, IL, 2019), 130–46.

7. Telisha Dionne Bailey, "Please Don't Forget About Me': African American Women, Mississippi, and the History of Crime and Punishment in Parchman Prison, 1890–1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of Mississippi, 2015), 35.

8. Marianne Fisher-Giorlando and Kerry Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women: The History Mostly Unseen of Louisiana's Prison System, Part 1 - 1835–1901," *The Angolite* 36 (November/December 2011): 46.

9. The 1938–1940 report is the only one listing occupations of prisoners in the penitentiary. Seven white women were recorded with no occupation out of twelve incarcerated on December 31, 1939, while ninety-one Black women were recorded with no occupation out of 121 incarcerated. The same report states that "several hundred [men and women] are required for guards, maintenance and housekeeping, cooks, etc. and their labor is in no way productive." Louisiana State Penitentiary, Biennial Report 1938–1940, call number HV8338.A2, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

10. Mary Ellen Curtin, "Please Hear Our Cries,' The Hidden History of Black Prisoners in America" in Deborah E McDowell, Claudrena N Harold, and Juan Battle, eds., *The Punitive Turn: New Approaches to Race and Incarceration* (Charlottesville, VA, 2013), 33.

11. Hicks, *Talk with You like a Woman*; Kali N. Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880–1910* (Durham, NC, 2006); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York; London, 2020).

12. Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London ; New York, 1996), 5; Matthew J Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866–1928* (Columbia, SC, 1996).

13. See, for instance: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Beyond The Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History," *Gender & History* 1 (1989): 50–67; Michele Mitchell, "Silences Broken, Silences Kept: Gender and Sexuality in African-American History," *Gender & History* 11 (1999): 433–44; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*.

14. Until 1982, the Supreme Court of Louisiana was the only appeals court for criminal cases. The jurisdiction of criminal appeals, except when capital punishment was imposed after a conviction of a capital offense, was transferred to appellate circuits as of July 1, 1982, following the adoption of Acts 1980, No. 843. Source: Historical Notes, Editor's and Revisor's Notes, Supreme Court Jurisdiction provided by the Louisiana Supreme Court Library. Before 1982, and according to the Louisiana Constitution, Article 7, Paragraph 10, "the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Louisiana applies whenever the penalty of death or imprisonment at hard labor is imposed."

15. Natalie Zemon Davis quoted by Carlo Ginzburg, *Le fil et les traces. Vrai, faux, fictif* (Lagrasse, France, 2010), 446.

16. Joshua D Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America* (New York, 2021), 303–10; Joseph Karl Menn, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana - 1860* (New Orleans, LA, 1964), 226–27.

17. Mark T. Carleton, *Politics and Punishment: The History of the Louisiana State Penal System* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1971), chap. 3.

18. All statistics were produced from Angola Women's Database recording all female admissions between 1901–1935.

19. Russell P. Dobash, R. Emerson Dobash, and Sue Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women* (Oxford, 1986), chap. 2.

20. "Sentenced" *Times-Picayune*, August 23, 1904.

21. See, for instance: Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer, *Punishment and Social Structure* (New York, 1939); Clare Anderson, *Convicts: A Global History* (Cambridge, England; New York, 2022).

22. Jean-Paul Brodeur in: Sylvain Lafleur, ed., *Foucault à Montréal: réflexions pour une criminologie critique* (Montréal, 2021), 16.
23. In "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 99. Quoted by: Dennis Ray Childs, *Slaves of the State. Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis, MN, 2015), 202.
24. Erin Elizabeth Hatton, *Coerced: Work under Threat of Punishment* (Oakland, CA, 2020), 31–32. See also: Noah Zatz, "Prison Labor and the Paradox of Paid Nonmarket Work," in *Research in the Sociology of Work*, vol. 18, ed. Nina Bandelj (Bingley, 2009): 369–98.
25. Hatton, *Coerced*, 35. Hatton quotes South Carolina politician William Harper's 1853 *Pro-Slavery Argument*.
26. Dr. Daniel Lee, "Agricultural Apprentices and Laborers", *Southern Cultivator* 12, (June 1854) quoted by Daina Ramey Berry, "Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe": *Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana, IL, 2010), 16.
27. Berry, "Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe," 132–33.
28. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, 2010).
29. Talitha L. LeFlouria, "'Under the Sting of the Lash': Gendered Violence, Terror, and Resistance in the South's Convict Camps," *The Journal of African American History* 100, (2015): 366–84.
30. Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*. (Baton Rouge, LA, 1971).
31. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985), 45.
32. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1976), 339.
33. Mostly, "black women cooked, cleaned, and sewed for male prisoners at mining camps and farms; they also worked as personal servants to male wardens." The Alabama state scattered their female prisoners over the various mining camps and farms, as a result, they were often alone among dozens of male prisoners and guards, which made them especially vulnerable to sexual violence. Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*, 120.
34. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 134.
35. Sims Wisely Wonders, "After Seeing the First Convict Farm at Angola, Why the Great State Did Not Adopt the Splendid System Long Ago," *The Daily Picayune*, April 16, 1901.
36. The "Trusties" system was first implemented at Parchman, the Mississippi penal farm. Some prisoners were granted privileges and power over others, for instance to act as armed guards. Angola General Manager Henry Fuqua (who was later Governor) resorted to copy this system to cut staff positions and save money. "Convict guards" were also paid. In 1944, they were receiving two dollars a month. Source: Report of the Advisory committee to the Department of institutions, state of Louisiana, to Governor Sam H. Jones, April 27, 1944, call number HV98.L8 L68, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "Trusties" were still used through the 1960s. See one of the rare studies on the subject: William Lister McWhorter, "The Trusty: A Sociological Analysis of an Inmate Elite" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1972). McWhorter argues that this constituted an exchange system in which "trusties" were offered rewards, in contrast with the threat system used to extract labor from "ordinary" prisoners. He also argues that the "folk wisdom" used to select "trusties" was inherited from plantation culture during slavery times.
37. Marianne Fisher-Giorlando and Kerry Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women: The History Mostly Unseen of Louisiana's Prison System, Part 2 - 1901–1950," *The Angolite* 37 (January/February 2012): 38.
38. *Ibid.*
39. National Committee on Prison Labor and Edward Stagg Whitin, *Penal Servitude* (Holmes Beach, FL, 1912), 31, 33.
40. Hearings conducted by the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, Sub-Committee on Penal Institutions, February 1944, box 184.26, folder 215.6, Mss 184 Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA, 152 (hereafter cited as BGR Collection).
41. Joseph W. Sanford and Charles V. Jenkinson, "State of Louisiana, Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System," A Survey Report by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons and Federal Prison Industries, Inc., (Washington, D.C.: 1944), 50.
42. *The Angolite* 1 (May 23, 1953); *The Angolite* 1 (October 17, 1953).

43. "Hell on Angola. Part 7: Work Goes On In The Rain," by Sadler, *The Item*, July 13, 1943.
44. "A Poem from the Suds," *Angola Argus* 1, (March 1, 1941); *The Angolite* 1 (October 24, 1953).
45. Hearings conducted by the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, Sub-Committee on Penal Institutions, February 1944, box 184.26, folder 215.6, BGR Collection, 131. Only a few children appeared in the 1910 federal census, and less than twenty in the 1920 census. In 1958, 237 white children were living on the penal farm. Source: Census of Employees, November 12, 1958, Correspondence Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records Collection P1981-495, Folder 1958, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, LA.
46. Anne Butler Hamilton and C. Murray Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary : A Half-Century of Rage and Reform* (Lafayette, 1990), 38.
47. Cecile James Shilstone, *My Plantation Days, The Memoirs of Cecile James Shilstone, 1887-1979* (1947), 11. Manuscript on file at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola Museum, Angola, LA.
48. Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe*, 37.
49. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, 2010), 36.
50. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population. Vol.5, General Report in Occupations, chap. 3, "Color and Nativity of Gainful Workers"* (Washington, D.C., 1933); Women's Bureau and Brown, Jean Collier, *The Negro Woman Worker: Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 165*. (Washington, D.C., 1938), <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/5438>, accessed on March 28, 2022.
51. "War and Post-War Trends in Employment of Negroes," *Monthly Labor Review* 60 (January 1945), quoted in Phyllis M. Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States 1920-1945* (Philadelphia, PA, 1989), 13.
52. The New Orleans Domestic Workers' Union was founded in May 1918, and presided over by Eleonore (Ella) Pete (whose husband was president of the Black freight handlers' union). In 1918, the union had a thousand members, and was advocating for fair wages and hours. Source: Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); "Household Labor Finds New Orleans Homemakers Calm," *The Times-Picayune*, July 25, 1918; "Solution of Servant Problem? Organize Housewives' Union," *The Times-Picayune*, December 19, 1918. About the "servant problem," see: "Housewives Talk Of Scarcity Of Help," *The Times-Picayune*, October 3, 1918. In 1920, there were ten unions of domestic workers affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), located in the following cities: Los Angeles and San Diego, California; Brunswick, Georgia; Chicago and Glencoe, Illinois; New Orleans, Louisiana; Beaver Valley, Pennsylvania; Denison, Harrisburg, and Houston, Texas. The New Orleans Union, a Black organization, was composed of about 200 members. In 1923, all organizations except the union of domestic workers in Arecibo, Porto Rico, had ceased to be affiliated with the AFL. Source: Elizabeth Ross Haynes, "Negroes in Domestic Service in the United States: Introduction," *The Journal of Negro History* 8, (October 1923): 38-442.
53. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 106.
54. Black women's loathing for domestic service appears clearly in Esther Brown's story narrated by scholar Saidiya Hartman who uncovered her file in the Bedford Reformatory. Esther was a young Black woman who had occupied several domestic positions before Bedford. "At age fifteen, when Esther left school, she experienced the violence endemic to domestic work and tired quickly of the demand to care for others who didn't care for you." For further reading, see Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 232-33.
55. "More Slavery at the South by a Negro Nurse," *The Independent* LXXII (January 25, 1912): 196-200; Sophonisba Breckinridge, "The Legal Relation of Mistress and Maid, with Some Comment Thereon," *Bulletin of Household Research* 1, (1904): 7-8. See also Haynes, "Negroes in Domestic Service in the United States: Introduction." W.E.B. Du Bois also wrote that house service constituted "the last vestiges of slavery and medievalism" and acknowledged the "personal degradation" caused by racism, servility, and sexual abuse. "The Servant in the House" in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York, 1920), chap. 5. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15210/15210-h/15210-h.htm#Chapter_V, accessed July 5, 2022.
56. Convict Record #19940, volume 32, LSP Collection; "Arrest Woman on Charges of Recent Theft", *The Morning Advocate*, July 15, 1930.
57. Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 40-41.
58. LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015), chap. 5; Jessica R. Calvanico, "Carceral Girlhoods: The House of Good

Shepherd and ‘the Problem’ of the Girl in New Orleans” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2021), chap. 2.

59. Convict Record #22817, volume 37, LSP Collection; Criminal Docket Book, volume N, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court, Monroe, LA.; “Walker Glenn’s Home Is Entered at Night,” *The Monroe News Star*, May 4, 1932; “Two Prisoners Escape Chain Gang of City,” *The Monroe News Star*, June 9, 1932; “P.M. Atkins Home is Entered by Burglar,” *The Monroe News Star*, June 23, 1932; “Burglar at Glenn Home,” *The Monroe News Star*, August 12, 1932; “Burglar Enters Mayor’s Home; Makes Escape,” *The Monroe News Star*, September 12, 1932; “Solution of Six Burglaries Probable,” *The Monroe News Star*, September 15, 1932; “N* Woman is Suspect in Many Burglary Cases,” *The Monroe News Star*, September 19, 1932; “Four Prisoners Are Transferred to Angola Farm,” *The Monroe News Star*, October 27, 1932.

Like parolees, prisoners granted a reprieve were released from the penitentiary but were still on the books and had to report to penitentiary officials every month. The first parole law in Louisiana was introduced in 1914 whereas reprieve—a penitentiary prerogative rather than a procedure inscribed in legislation—was used after 1932. Reprieves were subject to cancellation the same way that paroled individuals could be returned to the penitentiary for violation of the parole. The main difference in the mechanism of reprieve was that no “best friend” was required for the reprieve. Nevertheless, this expedited process was instrumental in answering the needs of local employers, sometimes before the date of eligibility for parole, and did not require the intervention of the Board nor approval from parish judges and prosecutors. Reprieves became a tool to answer white employers’ needs, particularly those involved in farming. However, it was probably the overcrowding of the penitentiary facilities that prompted General Manager Himes to start the practice of reprieves in 1931 with Governor Huey P. Long’s approval.

60. Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 34; Kali N. Gross, “African American Women, Mass Incarceration and the Politics of Protection,” *Journal of American History* 102 (June 2015): 30.34. Philosopher Miranda Fricker argues that testimonial injustice characterizes people who are victims of prejudicial stereotypes with the effect of depriving them of credibility and “silencing” them in court whereas people holding social power benefit from an “excess” of credibility in court. See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford, 2007).

61. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom*, 133.

62. *Ibid.*, 106.

63. This also talks about the little consideration whites granted to the Black lives these women had taken. Most homicides were indeed Black-on-Black crimes. The case of Beulah M. presented in introduction is particularly striking in context of the matter: the fact that someone who was judged guilty of beating to death a seven-year-old Black girl and tried to poison her other step-daughter would still be considered fit to be around white children meant that the prison staff did not consider Black girls as pertaining to the “child” category, i.e., innocent and deserving of protection. For a contemporary reflection on the subject, see: Monique Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York, 2016).

64. For a detailed study of the status of “trustees,” see: McWhorter, “The Trusty.”

65. For details about the “Good Time Law,” see: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1912–1913, Call number HV8338.A2, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. See pages 20–27.

A decision of the Board of Control in March 1914 extended the privilege of “double good time” to the following positions: officers and guards’ cooks, officers’ waiters, guards’ waiters, head gardener, assistant gardeners, washmen, dogmen, hogmen, and tailors, which made some Black men and women eligible for the first time. Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1914–1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, LA. Quote on page 25.

66. Convict Record #19774, volume 32, LSP Collection; Convict Record #20748, volume 33, LSP Collection; Convict Record #20952, volume 34, LSP Collection; Convict Record #21660, volume 35, LSP Collection; Convict Record #22871, volume 37, LSP Collection; Convict Record #24054, volume 39, LSP Collection; Convict Record #24819, volume 40, LSP Collection; Louisiana Supreme Court docket number 31,412, Collection P1986-89, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, LA.

The governor’s wife residence in Winnfield is confirmed in her obituary; <http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/winn/obits/a/all363.txt>, accessed June 4, 2021.

67. Four Black women, all former LSP prisoners, were mentioned on the payroll of the executive department for the governor’s mansion. Source: *Times-Picayune*, June 21, 1934. Historian Sarah Haley dedicated a

paper to Mary Prince Fitzpatrick, a Black woman incarcerated in Georgia in the 1970s who became a nurse for Amy Carter, Jimmy Carter's young daughter, during his term as Georgia governor. Fitzpatrick's domestic service, which represented her "only alternative to confinement in a cage" started during her sentence and Carter's gubernatorial term, and continued after she was paroled to join the Carter family in the White House. Haley demonstrates that Carter's exploitation of Fitzpatrick and also his reframing of her story as a "modern-day Cinderella tale" served to reinforce his benevolent public image—and therefore his political interests—all the while diverting public's attention away from the neoliberal carceral build-up at the expense of Black lives trapped in state "cages." Sarah Haley, "Care Cage: Black Women, Political Symbolism, and 1970s Prison Crisis," *Souls* 20 (March 2018): 58–85.

68. Pardon - Working Papers, box 17, Collection P1991-044, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, LA.

69. Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 126.

70. Convict Record #18590, volume 30, LSP Collection.

71. On this topic, see: Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington, IN, 1997); Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living in, Living out: African American Domestic in Washington, D.C., 1910–1940* (Washington; London, 1994).

72. "Blueprint for New Angola," *The Item*, Dec 31, 1943 (by Sadler, a former white male prisoner).

73. Working in the slaveholder's home could bring a variety of material advantages over field work: access to better food, clothing, and housing, as well as a lesser exposure to disease, heat exhaustion, snake bites, or other injuries that constituted daily risks in the fields. These privileges came at a price, as bondwomen working in white homes were particularly exposed to sexual violence and sexual exploitation. Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe*, 43–44.

74. Historian Robert Chase found the same "anxiety" over the use of "houseboys," i.e., Black male domestic servants in Texas penal farms. Robert T Chase, *We Are Not Slaves: State Violence, Coerced Labor, and Prisoners' Rights in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2020), 90.

75. Hearings conducted by the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, Sub-Committee on Penal Institutions, February 1944, box 184.26, folder 215.6, BGR Collection, 79–80.

76. Female prisoners were not removed from Angola until the creation of a female penitentiary in 1961. First managed by the Angola warden, St-Gabriel became an independent institution after a few years of operation and is still known today under the name Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW).

77. For a detailed account of the incidents, see: "Information on Tragedy at Angola State Farm Received," *State Times Advocate*, November 12, 1913; "Convict Murders Wife of Doctor; Then Kills Himself," *The Times-Picayune*, November 12, 1913; "Mrs. Ehlert Buried," *The Times-Picayune*, November 13, 1913; "Coroner's Inquest on Angola Tragedy," *The Times-Democrat*, November 13, 1913; "Mrs. Ehlert Murdered at Angola," *The True Democrat*, November 15, 1913; "Posse Beats Woods for Killer of Angola Camp Captain's Wife," *The Shreveport Times*, October 21, 1948. See also Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 37–47; Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 124–40.

78. Evelyn Nakano Glenn argued that domestic service was one of the important similarities between African Americans' situation in the South and other disenfranchised groups such as Mexicans in the Southwest, and Japanese people in northern California and Hawaii: "In areas where racial dualism prevailed, being served by members of the subordinate group was a prerequisite of membership in the dominant group." Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18 (Autumn 1992): 8, 15. Quote on page 8. As W.E.B. Du Bois noted in 1920, "the ability to hire at least 'a maid' is still civilization's patent to respectability." Du Bois, *Darkwater*. In 1937, 70 percent of the rich class reported hiring some help. Numbers for other groups were 42 percent of the upper middle class, 14 percent of the lower middle class, and 6 percent of the poor. *Fortune* magazine quoted in Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt*, 8.

79. Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work," 8, 15. Quote on page 9.

80. Chase, *We Are Not Slaves*, 92–93.

81. Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work," 32.

82. Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt*, 182–83. Palmer also found evidence that employers and domestic laborers agreed on which were the least desirable tasks: washing clothes, washing dishes, and taking care of children on evenings and weekends, and that domestics were more likely to perform those least desirable tasks. Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt*, 70. Scholar and activist Silvia Federici points out that, as a result of the neoliberal international division of labor since the 1980s, large numbers of women from developing countries

have been employed as domestic workers in western countries (including in the United States) to relieve western women from their domestic chores and allow for their massive entry into the paid labor market perpetuating earlier trends. Silvia Federici, "Reproduction et lutte féministe dans la nouvelle division internationale du travail," *Revue Période*: <http://revueperiode.net/reproduction-et-lutte-feministe-dans-la-nouvelle-division-internationale-du-travail/>. First published in: Dalla Costa, M., and Dalla Costa, G., eds., *Women, Development and Labor of Reproduction, Struggles and Movements* (Asmara, Eritrea, 1999).

83. Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work," 7.

84. Barkley Brown, Elsa. "What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics." *Feminist Studies* 18 (summer 1992): 295–312. Quoted in Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black And White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 18.

85. See for instance: "Miscellaneous Shower Held in Angola Home for Beverly Chambers," *State Times Advocate*, August 12, 1952.

86. See for instance: "Mr. and Mrs. Blalock Honored at Gathering at Winkler's Home," *State Times Advocate*, June 29, 1946.

87. "Many in W. Felician Will Aid Red Cross," *State Time Advocate*, January 9, 1942.

88. "Experiences of the Race Problem by a Southern White Woman," *The Independent* (1904).

89. "Like a beaten army, hoes shouldered, the convicts trudge back to camp [after a long day of work in the field]. Along the road are the houses of the free employees, with their wives and daughters fanning themselves on well-screened galleries. From within the houses comes music. Their clothes are clean, freshly-laundered; at their elbows are glasses of ice water, and in their kitchens well-cooked meals in variety." *Hell on Angola*, published in *the Item*, July 9, 1943 and in *the Angolite*, September/October 2008.

90. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 13–14; Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 160, 189.

91. Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 38–39.

92. Published in the *Times-Picayune*, August 3, 1930.

93. Haley, "Care Cage: Black Women, Political Symbolism, and 1970s Prison Crisis," 70.

On the Mammy image, see Cheryl Thurber, "The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology," in Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Theda Perdue, eds., *Southern Women: Histories and Identities* (Columbia, SC, 1992): 87–108.

94. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (Brantford, Ontario, 2004), 94.

95. Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, 15.

96. Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 87–88.

97. Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 189.

98. Premilla Nadasen, "Domestic Worker Organizing: Storytelling, History, and Contemporary Resonances," *Souls* 18 (2016): 156.

99. Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*. For historical examples of resistance deployed by incarcerated Black women, see, for instance: Haley, *No Mercy Here*.

100. Proposal for a Survey at Angola, undated, box 184.26, folder 215.1, BGR Collection, 6.

101. On this topic, see: David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London; New York, 1999 [1991]).

102. Weatherford W.D., *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions & Needs* (New York, 1911), 38.

103. *Hearings 70th Congress 1928–1929*. Federal Penal Institutions. Special Committee on Federal, Penal and Reformatory Institutions (Washington, D.C., 1929).

104. Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 176.

105. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 62.

106. Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 181.