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Rough, Foul-Mouthed Boys: Women's Monstrous Laboring Bodies

Amy E. Wendling

Introduction

If wage labor is alienating, it is also alluring, and particularly so to those who do not qualify as free to sell their labor in the nineteenth-century market: women and slaves. The allure of wage labor is not simply false consciousness on the part of subjects who are not yet free to sell their labor in the sense required by Marx. Such subjects have a special relationship to wage labor and alienation, and beyond this, to capitalism itself. If capitalism requires, constitutes, and extends new forms of exploitation, it also carries with it liberations from older forms of exploitation.

Precisely because Marx's concept of alienation has become so familiar to us, it is useful to review the origins of the concept.¹ Marx was concerned with the peoples of nineteenth-century Europe who, because they did not own any property, were forced to sell their labor on the market. He calls the class that is in this situation the proletariat. Proletarians are forced to turn most of their creative activity into a mere means for ensuring their bodily existence. This alienation, Marx claims, is made worse by the entrance of machines into production. Since machines themselves do automatically all the interesting parts of the work, they render the proletarian's activity dull and repetitive.

Marx points out that the wage labor form is itself a mark of alienation. In performing wage labor, I work not on products I will use, but for money parceled out

by the hour. Wage laborers are thus alienated not only from their activity but also from their products, since they do not enjoy the use of these products after making them. Instead, they do not receive the full value created by their labor, but only the means for bare survival.

Below I offer a partial defense of wage labor. I argue that wage labor itself was a considerable political achievement when we consider it from the perspective of subjects who were not Marx's primary concern: subjects whose labors continued to be owned and administered by patriarchal systems.² In particular, I consider women's labor and the labor of the slaves of the Southern United States during the ante-bellum years. From the perspective of these labors, I reassess the concept of alienation and the blind spots enabled when such a concept claims to express the univocal relationship of all human subjects to wage labor.

But I do this cautiously. I do not wish to suggest that these subjects of patriarchy are unconditionally liberated once their activities are remunerated by a wage. While the conditions of liberation and alienation certainly oppose one another, in lived experience this conceptual opposition is not the same as an exclusive disjunction. Indeed, both liberation and alienation may admit of degree.

For example, I might be alienated from my humanity if I do not own my body, and remain alienated in a different—though, I will argue, less fundamental—sense even after my ownership of my labor is assured. Similarly, to be liberated from the fundamental alienations of patriarchy is not to be fully liberated from exploitation at the hands of a capitalist market.

For these reasons, it is only the exclusive identification of wage labor with alienation that I wish to call into question. Wage labor is, at the very least, ambiguous: it enables the forms of alienation endured by wage-workers but also liberates from more primary forms of alienation.

I. Wage Labor and Femininity

In his famous work *Capital*, Karl Marx cites some factory statistics from 1866:

The greatest evil of the system that employs young girls on this sort of work consists in this, that, as a rule, it chains them fast from childhood for the whole of their after-life to the most abandoned rabble. They become rough, foul-mouthed boys before Nature has taught them that they are women. Clothed in a few dirty rags, the legs naked far above the knees, hair and face besmeared with dirt, they learn to treat all feelings of decency and shame with contempt. During meal-times they lie at full length in the fields, or watch the boys bawling in a neighbouring canal. Their

heavy day's work at length completed, they put on better clothes, and accompany men to the public houses.³

Here Marx invokes the end of Victorian femininity as one of the monstrous products of capitalist industrialization. The female laborers described above are monstrous in two ways. First, they exhibit aberrations of form, especially the adoption of the characteristics of the other sex. They are boys, not girls. Second, they are dirty, not clean. It is not difficult to discern that the major concern here is not with dirt itself, but rather with women's sexuality. We are told, *sotto voce*, that working-class females have the habit of expressing, and perhaps even acting upon, sexual desires. They are capable of the indiscretions of voyeurism and the perversions of scopophilia. They are no doubt prone to the various displays of loose or even aggressive sexuality that characteristically accompany drunkenness. And what else might they be doing while lying full length in those fields?

The text occurs within Marx's most substantial published account of female labor and women's history. It is located in *Capital's* Chapter XV, the chapter devoted to machinery.⁴ This is no accident. According to Marx, Modern Industry, just like any other system of production, has sociological consequences. In particular, the entrance of machines into production affects traditional divisions of labor, and especially those distributed by sex, age, and race.

First, the entrance of machines into production eliminates the need to hire a worker with the specialized knowledge of a craftsman. This knowledge has become a property of the machine itself rather than the worker. What the machine requires, then, is someone to monitor and stoke it, someone to perform abstract labor. Abstract labor is not measured by the useable products it produces but by the duration of time in which it occurs. Abstract labor is remunerated with another abstraction, a wage, rather than with the product it has made. Marx charts a shift here between an older notion of labor, where the laborer makes a useable object and then enjoys the use of this object, and the factory notion of labor, where workers and machines turn out partial objects, and are remunerated for the time they have spent doing so not with the object itself, but with a wage. For Marx, this latter type of labor is alienating, since the worker no longer recognizes his or her own activity in useable products.

The requirement for abstract, undifferentiated labor can be fulfilled by anyone, regardless of age, sex, or race. Machines lessen both the actual physical strength and the skills required by previous systems production. This means that capital can employ workers who, according to previous natural categories, had been classified as weak or unskilled. Because it can also employ such workers more cheaply, factory work quickly spreads throughout the entire populace.

Moreover, in the capitalist mode of production, "strength," "weakness," and "skill" become revealed as social rather than natural categories. The small, dexterous fingers of a woman or child become strengths, while heft and bulk may be regarded as weaknesses where the introduction of machinery into labor has rendered them superfluous. Various weaknesses, such as the tedium and minuteness of traditional women's work under guild conditions, also become strengths. This shift shows the essential malleability of the categories of strength and weakness, which change according to the dominant means of production.

It also shows the essential malleability of the category "skill." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the historical transition of types of available labor is fast and furious, supplanting the generations of unchanged agricultural labor that characterized feudalism with rapid changes in occupation and class position. For the worker, there are rapid changes in the skills required by labor within a single generation. In direct contrast to Marx's account of labor's deskilling, I want to argue that there is no such thing as unskilled labor. However, particular skills do become obsolescent, while new ones develop. The latter skills are often not yet culturally recognizable as such: for example, patience or facility with machines is a skill, even if it is not the skill of wielding a tool or the ability to exert more units of force than your neighbor. The technique of managing interactions among people is a skill, even if it is not the technique of a given handicraft.

The requirement that workers develop these new skills too rapidly in order to have work and stay alive is what Marx's idea of deskilling really encompasses. In response to constantly newer and faster machines, skills enter obsolescence at an astonishing rate. For example, the term "computer" used to refer not to the machines that populate our labs, but to the person who, prior to the invention of calculating machines, would sit in an office at a desk and add and subtract long strings of numbers. With the invention of machines for calculation, this labor and all of the skills the "computer" had honed in order to acquire and perform it were rendered superfluous.

In such an environment, the worker's accumulated habits of labor, skill and strength, even become a liability. Women were less likely than men to have acquired this sort of liability, since guild restrictions did not allow them to become apprentices to a profession. As such, they were among the optimal subjects for abstract capitalist labor, and capitalists would indeed often choose malleable female over recalcitrant male employees if such a choice was possible.

The widespread entrance of women into the wage labor force occasioned a wide variety of backlashes. Working class men resented the women that swelled the ranks of available human labor-power. Such women, available at low cost,

were not competitors; rather, they appeared as agents of obsolescence for the skilled male labor market. Among the bourgeoisie, the visible spectacle of massive female labor caused an oppositional and ideological reinforcement of women's natural weakness. One viewed women as unfit for work and indicated high social status through leisure. But this weakness was countermanded, at every turn, by the realities of working class female labor.

The working-class women of Victorian London could be seen performing not only the abstract labor of monitoring an industrial machine, but also many arduous tasks without mechanical assistance, including work in coal mines. A worker was not replaced by a machine simply because a new machine became available that supplanted the worker's function. Human labor in general was often much less expensive to buy than the mechanical labor that would have been required to replace it. This was even truer of female labor, which was cheaper still than male labor. So women were hired to do at great pains what a machine could have done quickly. Labor which, technologically speaking, was anachronistic occurred in many branches of industry. It was not in the capitalist's interest to buy an expensive machine when human labor, and especially female labor, could be had so cheaply.

Marx spells out this contradiction between the promise of a technologically progressive society and the reality of machine use when he writes:

[M]achinery, when employed in some branches of industry, creates such a redundancy of labor in other branches that in these latter the fall of wages impedes the use of machinery, and, from the standpoint of the capitalist, whose profit comes, not from a diminution of the labor employed, but of the labor paid for, renders that use superfluous and often impossible. . . . In England women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labor required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus-population is below all calculation. Hence nowhere do we find a more shameful squandering of human labor power for the most despicable purposes than in England, the land of machinery.⁵

Marx, witnessing the era of unregulated capitalism in England, sees how this mode of production perverts all valuation. Economic calculation supersedes all human beneficence. Not only do machines turn into instruments of torture, exhaustion, and death, they become more valuable than their putative human beneficiaries. Machines, supposedly the material instantiation of the Enlightenment narrative

of progress, become the instruments through which regressive conditions have been reinstated. The working class human being is worth less than he or she was in the feudal period, less than animals, less than the slaves of antiquity, and far, far less than industrial machines themselves.

The discourse of women's natural weakness must have been difficult indeed to maintain in an environment where working-class females were hauling canal boats and visibly performing various other forms of hard labor.⁶ For this reason the performance of labor and femininity had to be dissociated. At the same time, among the bourgeois, the discourse and performance of women's natural weakness and unfitness for work becomes all the more insistently pronounced and performed. As the women of the nineteenth-century's working classes headed towards the factories, canals, and mines, bourgeois women's activity became increasingly circumscribed. A bourgeois woman, to mark both her class and her femininity, must always give the appearance of being leisured.

Historian Anne McClintock wisely points out, however, that the bourgeois woman's mythology was quite different from her reality. McClintock writes:

Apart from the tiny, truly leisured elite, idleness was less a regime of inertia imposed on wilting middle-class wives and daughters than a laborious and time consuming *character role* performed by women who wanted membership in the 'respectable class.' For most women whose husbands or fathers could not afford enough servants for genuine idleness, domestic work had to be accompanied by the historically unprecedented labor of rendering invisible every sign of that work . . . idleness was less the absence of work than a conspicuous labor of leisure.⁷

For such bourgeois women, domestic labors were both non-remunerated and had to be made to disappear. This means that a large portion of women's labor was necessarily rendered culturally unrecognizable as labor, since such a recognition would also have entailed an identification with the repudiated features of the working classes.

The exclusive disjunction between the concept of femininity and the performance of labor forces the progressive reformers of the Victorian era into the gender binary we see in the citation with which I opened this paper. If the definition of femininity excludes the performance of wage labor, and at its apex, mandates the performance of absolute idleness, then working-class girls are not girls at all, but boys. The concept of femininity itself is marked by class, and limited to a very narrow range of subjects who either possess or can simulate the leisure required by the concept.

Some working-class women of the period made this insight fully conscious. Let me demonstrate this by way of an anecdote that also appears in McClintock, an anecdote of a love affair between members of two, very different, Victorian classes. Domestic servant Hannah Cullwick becomes the lover of her upper-class employer Arthur Munby. Munby, himself unmarried and horrified by his sexual contact with Cullwick outside of the confines of bourgeois marriage, besieges her with marriage proposals. Stubbornly, and continually, she refuses these. In 1864, she writes of the prospect of submitting to this marriage and thereby joining the ranks of the bourgeois: "It is too much like being a woman!"⁸

When Cullwick finally agrees to the marriage, it is on her terms, and not Munby's, that the marriage will progress. Cullwick marries Munby in a secret ceremony and even consents from time to time to appear as his wife in public. But she never fully becomes a woman according to the standards of her time. In fact, she only resides with Munby for four years. More pertinently, during the whole of their marriage, Cullwick both continues to perform her assigned domestic tasks and insists that Munby continue to pay her wages for doing so. Her diary reflects that this allows her to maintain her financial and psychological independence.

This brings me to another problem with Marx's account of the alienation inherent in all wage labor. By their own accounts, women did not always, historically, experience wage labor as alienating. In fact, the wage involves a powerful recognition of the working subject's activity. In its entitlement to a wage, this activity is socially recognized as meaningful, and the person performing it is given an unmitigable social acknowledgement. Within patriarchal strictures, women's activity is not considered to be independent. Wages involve the recognition that this activity possesses a certain independence. Wage labor, with or without machines, was a way for women to gain substantial independence from patriarchy, and to begin the economic independence that would later result in the political independence extended, in waves, by liberal twentieth-century feminist movements.

Under patriarchal systems, women were for the most part excluded from apprenticeship in guilds and from the development of guild-related skills. Historically, women have also been excluded from owning property, however much labor they had mixed with it, and thus from this form of bourgeois political subjectivity. To put it bluntly, one cannot lose what one does not have. From this perspective, the alienation inherent in wage labor can only appear as a masculine lament.

I wish to tread lightly here. I am not suggesting that the unqualified labor of women and children struggling for mere survival in the first generations of the industrial revolution was an equally unqualified liberation. This moment, like many historical moments, is full of ambiguity. It should be borne in mind that working

class women were allowed into the labor market only as a way of further exploiting the working class, of spreading a family wage out in order to maximize surplus value, and of dividing the working class amongst itself. We should also not lose sight of the fact that women were desirable as industrial wage workers because they could be paid less, ordered about more effectively, and were of lower social value. In isolation from kinship structures that could support them, women workers also had much to lose if they did not keep their jobs.⁹ In addition, they had less historical experience than men in moderating the demands for intense labor through various kinds of subterfuge. Factory owners were quick to exploit this. As Marx relates in a chilling assessment of female workers' vulnerability: "women and children, once set going, impetuously spend their life-force . . . while the adult male laborer is shrewd enough to economise his as much as he can."¹⁰

However, the entry of women into wage labor also marks a site of liberation. In this site, women's contact with technology conditions liberation from bourgeois strictures on femininity and from older structures of patriarchal oppression, including limitations on female skill development. The liberation is twofold. First, technology explodes the naturalistic functioning of categories like strength and skill. Second, the prospect of earning wages within the new industrial economies conditioned the liberation of women from economic dependence on *familial* patriarchy. Women's dependence on *capitalist* patriarchy—particularly wage gaps, the types of work to which women are routinely assigned, and the frequent presence of male supervision of their labor—are among those conditions that await redress even still, but which are conditioned by industrialization and the wage-based recognition of women's activity as labor.

II. Wage Labor and Race

Marx's discussion of the alienation inherent in wage labor is problematic not only in the case of women, but also in the case of other subjects whose activity was administered by *familial* patriarchy. I am thinking of the racial slavery of the ante-bellum Southern United States. Marx was familiar with the features of this slavery, since during the 1850s he worked as a European correspondent for Charles Anderson Dana's *New York Daily Tribune*, an abolitionist newspaper. The articles that Marx wrote for this newspaper were the source of his observations, sprinkled throughout *Capital*, about the non-political state of enslaved peoples in the Southern United States. Marx's specific concern about this modern form of slavery is an underappreciated source of his rhetoric about the slavery of the wage worker. In addition to expressing a general set of concerns about slaveries, including the slaveries of antiquity, as modes of production, Marx's work is definitively

in dialogue with abolitionism and, through this movement, with the situation of the enslaved peoples of the Americas.

Marx's tendency, in *Capital*, is to treat the condition of these peoples as similar to that of the wage laborers in the capitalist system. He argues that the difference between slavery and wage labor is simply a difference in the mode of extracting profit and that profit extraction is the key characteristic of both systems of domination. Marx writes, "The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave-labor and one based on wage-labor, lies only in the mode in which the surplus labor is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the laborer."¹¹

Marx also takes some pains to show that the system of slavery in the Southern States had moved away from those features that characterize patriarchal systems of production and towards those features that characterized capitalist production. He writes:

As soon as people, whose production still moves in the lower forms of slave-labor, are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilized horrors of overwork are grafted onto the barbaric horrors of slavery. Hence the negro labor in the Southern States of the American Union preserved something of a patriarchal character, so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption. But in proportion as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the overworking of the negro and sometimes the using up of his life in 7 years of labor became a factor in a calculated and calculating system.¹²

Marx is right to emphasize the global economic pressures and their influence on slave labor, and my point here is not to rebut those historical analyses that help us understand U. S. slavery and its collapse as related to changes in economic life. But I do wish to question the reduction of slavery and its collapse to epiphenomena of the global economy.

In addition, in passages like the passage above, we must be wary of Marx's premature erasure of some key political distinctions. His assimilation of slave labor as one kind among many modern ways to extract surplus value erases a political distinction that Marx himself has maintained earlier in *Capital*. There he writes, "In order that the possessor of labor may offer it for sale as a commodity, he must have it at his disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his capacity for labor, i.e., of his person. He and the owner of money meet in the market, and deal with

each other on the basis of equal rights, with this difference alone, that one is buyer, and the other seller."¹³ Though Marx will spend much of *Capital* showing how this relationship, which appears to be based on equality, is actually not so, the possession of one's labor as one's own is still a salient difference between a system of wage labor and a system of patriarchal, racially determined slavery, even when this latter has been influenced by the pressure of global economies.

As Steven Hahn claims in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, in the ante-bellum South, the recognition of a slave's economic entitlement in any form was very controversial.¹⁴ While a slave-owner was in principle entitled to the full produce of slave labor and to whatever monies might be earned by hiring out slave-labor, by the mid-1850s there were a variety of exceptions to this principle. By the mid-1850s, Southern slaves had increasingly delineated a sphere of "free time" of their own, lasting all of Sunday and at least half of Saturday. If they worked during these periods, including any overwork for their owners, they were often paid. In the provisioning system that characterized slavery's later years, masters delegated to their slaves the work of feeding and clothing themselves. With this, slaves entered into what historians call an internal economy of laboring and exchanging the fruits of their labor on the market. This occurred alongside continuing slave labor. Economic activities of exchange both among slaves and between them and their owners thus actually began prior to the formal ending of slavery. Hahn documents political struggles between slaves and their owners to eke out clear rules about free versus enslaved time. He also discusses the political struggles among slave owners, who accused one another of allowing their slaves too much economic freedom.

Hahn shows that this pre-emancipation economic activity influenced the formation of a recognizably political consciousness among pre-emancipation peoples. The symbolic political importance of this experience was fortified by John Locke's ideas about the entitlements to the fruits of one's labor. These ideas were percolating in the century after the French Revolution, and they had a life of their own in slave communities even in the highly conservative 1850s. Hahn claims that "slaves had become familiar with and could appropriate a powerful, if contested, national political discourse that exalted manual labor and associated freedom with economic independence."¹⁵

After emancipation, appeals to the superior conditions of patriarchy were a staple of White Southern conservatism. These inevitably assimilated the labors performed after emancipation for wages to those performed before emancipation under the stewardship of a caring master. In doing so, they show the dangerous edge to Marx's identification of all forms of oppression as class oppression.

Both in the immediate aftermath of emancipation and long after, the indictment of wage labor became a staple of backlash arguments that conditions for African-American peoples had been at least as good if not better during slavery. But we must recognize a real political difference in the type of toil conditioned by a system of wage labor and that conditioned by slavery. This difference is significant even if the labors themselves are substantially unchanged. More provocatively, one might argue that the labors themselves are changed by the social condition of the person who performs them: a truth that emerges particularly clearly in the example of the wealthy tourist who pays to mine diamonds on the African continent!

Similarly, we must differentiate the types of alienation or estrangement from the self that are conditioned by wage labor from those enabled by slavery.¹⁶ Against Marx's assimilation of all forms of class oppression into a single form, the systems of wage labor and of slavery are not psychologically indifferent means of extracting profit.

The effects of the discourse of entitlement to the fruits of one's labor were significant enough that after emancipation, former slaves nearly universally expected land redistribution as a part of just compensation for past labors. They expected economic compensation for their former servitude and sought to refigure this servitude as a labor entitled to just such economic compensation. These expectations were almost universally unfulfilled. We hear their echoes in the debates that continue, or fail to continue, on the question of reparations for this period of American history. The unwillingness of our government even to consider this question shows the degree to which the economic entitlement of these historical African-American labors remains a racially-fraught site of political contestation.

For these subjects of patriarchy, then, the economic recognition that occurred when one participated in wage labor was an immense liberation. The right to meet in the market and sell one's labor as an independent capacity involved economic and political recognitions that had to be won at great expense. In this way, the conditions of the patriarchal system of slavery simply did not yet meet the conditions of freely sold labor that Marx lists as requisite for participation in the capitalist world, however strongly he may wish to graft a story of economic exploitation atop the story of patriarchal exploitation. The relationship of Marx and subsequent Marxism to critical race theories has been correspondingly fraught, particularly insofar as Marx and Marxism offer only what Charles Mills calls a "class-reductivist" map of oppression.¹⁷ Such a map ignores or undermines the specificities of racism and its irreducibility to economic categories.

However, the restoration of Marx's connection to the abolitionist movements of the United States allows us to see Marx's work in another sense. I intimate

above that abolitionism is not an incidental influence on Marx's work during the 1850s, but a pivotal one. In addition to his articles for Dana's abolitionist newspaper, Marx's notebooks from the 1850s indicate that he had made careful notes on abolitionist Thomas F. Buxton's books *The African Slave Trade* and its sequel *The Remedy*.¹⁸ Marx studies African slavery in particular, and colonization in general, as bearing upon the broader field of political economy. For this reason, Marx's reliance on the vocabulary of slavery to characterize the plight of the wage worker resonates not only with slavery as a classical political category, but also with the more contemporary phenomenon of the slavery in the United States and the pressures to abolish it. While Marx's work is certainly focused on the European world, worries over slavery in the Americas may have shaped Marx's concept of social class, particularly as this concept develops in the 1850s and 1860s.

Even still, Marx's concept of economic alienation and subsequent abandonment of the project of liberal rights may not be appropriate for subjects who were not wage-laborers, but rather unpaid and unrecognized parts of patriarchal systems well into the modernity that Marx's philosophy attempts to explain. These subjects include both women and African Americans. This means that we must reconsider the critique of the liberal project and the critique of rights discourse that Marxism inaugurates from the perspective of such subjects. As Patricia Williams writes in her discussion of Marxist-influenced Critical Legal Studies:

Although rights may not be ends in themselves, rights rhetoric has and continues to be an effective form of discourse for blacks. The vocabulary of rights speaks to an establishment that values the guise of stability. The subtlety of rights' real instability thus does not render unusable their persona of stability. . . . What is needed, therefore, is not the abandonment of rights language for all purposes, but an attempt to become multilingual in the semantics of evaluating rights.¹⁹

While in this essay I have systematically conflated the position of African-Americans and women with respect to Marx's notion of alienation, such a conflation has its limits. Following the work of bell hooks and many others, we have come to understand that the historical subjection to a white, masculine patriarchy has meant different things for the white women and the racially marked subjects, including women, who live with the legacy of this patriarchy.²⁰ Racial and sexual oppression, while related, have very different characteristics. However, Marxism's disproportionate emphasis on the plight of the white male wage laborer has been a target of both feminist and critical race theorists alike, and on similar grounds. For this reason, my critique of alienation regarding wage labor as

exclusively alienating is relevantly similar for both women in general and racially marked subjects, including women.

III. Wage Labor and Sexuality

Let me return to the topic of women and to the passage with which this essay opens. For the nineteenth-century bourgeois Victorian, female wage labor was accompanied by the chilling specter of female sexuality. Sexuality was a favorite bourgeois obsession, associated with laboring women and women of color, and therefore forcibly and vocally expelled from the attributes of white, bourgeois women. But this displacement was hardly simple, as Michel Foucault reminds us. In fact, the bourgeoisie drew attention to its body, its sex, and asserted their importance via the prohibitions it deliberately placed on the expression of white women's sexuality. Because of this, these prohibitions, and the performance of them, cannot be understood without reference to social class.

The critique of working class girls in Marx's text is that they do not display these prohibitions: the young girls do not express decency or shame. But nor are they supposed to do so, since working-class bodies and working-class sexuality are not important enough, in bourgeois society, to merit these forms of attention. Foucault cites Marx's *Capital* as evidence when he writes, in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, that "the living conditions that were dealt to the proletariat, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, show there was anything but concern for its body and sex; it was of little importance whether those people lived or died, since their reproduction was something that took care of itself in any case."²¹

Foucault rightly locates sexual repression in the norms of the bourgeois class. The bourgeois class used sexual repression as a way to draw attention to the bodies of its members and to highlight the importance of these bodies. Bourgeois bodies were valuable enough to warrant the extra social energies that sexual repression requires, including regimes of schooling, monitoring, and confessing oneself to the doctor. Sexual repression, at least in its stereotypical forms, is a product of the bourgeois class, and cannot be spoken of as a general phenomenon of human socialization. Foucault continues:

Somewhat similar to the way in which, at the end of the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie set its own body and its precious sexuality against the valorous blood of the nobles, at the end of the nineteenth century it sought to redefine the specific character of its sexuality relative to that of others. . . . It was here that the theory of repression . . . had its point of origin.

... [The nineteenth century discourse of sexuality] said: '[Bourgeois] sexuality, unlike that of others, is subjected to a regime of repression so intense as to present a constant danger: not only is sex a formidable secret . . . not only must we search it out for the truth it conceals, but if it carries with it so many dangers, this is because—whether out of scrupulousness, an overly acute sense of sin, or hypocrisy, no matter—we have too long reduced it to silence.' Henceforth social differentiation would be affirmed, not by the 'sexual' quality of the body, but by the intensity of its repression.²²

In this respect, a call for the extension of guilt and shame to the young working-class girls is actually an offer to make their bodies important enough for social consideration. It is an offer, on the part of the stolid reformers, to extend the class markings of the bourgeoisie.

What this offer lacks is the insight, more readily available to us today, or in any case at least less classically bourgeois, that sexual repression is not a necessary condition for highlighting a body's importance. Sexual repression and schooling in femininity are also a bizarre place to begin the re-education of the working-class. At the very least, proper nutrition and schooling in mathematics would seem more important. This shows us that even among its most progressive reformers, the bourgeoisie could not resist seeing sex, and emphasizing its preeminence, wherever it looked.

If, unlike these reformers, we today interpret the laboring, actively sexual female body as a positive rather than a negative monstrosity, we might even conclude that industrialization has conditioned certain aspects of women's liberation. These include the freedom and independence from the patriarchal family that wage labor can offer, the freedom to own and express one's sexuality outside of the narrow bourgeois confines, and the freedom from the restrictive class- and race-specific strictures of gender performance mandated by bourgeois culture. Marx claims that particular means of production determine the social features of a historical era. New configurations of gender and sexuality are exactly one such social feature of the new industrial environments, whether we read these configurations as liberating or as monstrous. They are, in fact, both: simultaneously liberating and alienating.

Marx's own attitude towards working-class and other female bodies is somewhat more difficult to discern. As with other passages in *Capital*, Marx's own view cannot be straightforwardly identified with those passages he cites, since he often cites passages critically. Still, we may safely say that Marx, always looking for

revolution in a more traditional form, preferably with barricades, does not always spot the subtle liberations carried by capitalism itself, even though he knows that they will be there. Even if Marx himself has not realized this, the seemingly solid structures of sexual difference are among those solid things which capitalism melts into the air.²³

As for sexual difference, Marx claims in 1846, in *The German Ideology*, that the division of labor that forms the genealogical template for all subsequent divisions, including class divisions, is the natural division of labor between men and women.²⁴ But still by the 1860s, Marx has not seen one key consequence of his own analysis of the capitalist mode of production: thanks to industrial life's minimization of the importance of nature, this division is being undone. A girl at work is not, necessarily, a rough, foul-mouthed boy. She might simply be a rough, foul-mouthed girl: or, better still, a rough and foul-mouthed hybrid creature, a creature whose very existence challenges the rigid norms of Victorian gender.

While I am therefore wary of what seems to be Marx's uncritical rehearsal of some of these norms in his of portrayal of women in *Capital*, other, earlier texts of Marx's on women's history suggest that he had some idea of the changes in systems of sex oppression that were consequent to industrialization. In July of 1852, Marx began work on a set of excerpt notebooks on women and their status under patriarchal systems of rule.²⁵ These excerpts would never be polished by Marx himself into a text, although they form some of the background research that Engels develops in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.²⁶ In these excerpts, Marx makes notes on historians that have charted the changes in women's conditions over time: from patriarchy, to primitive patriarchies, to courtly love, and finally, to the conditions for women laborers in industrializing England. Marx cannot have made such notes without reflecting on women's condition as essentially historical, and greatly variant, in different economic eras.²⁷

This variance is why Marx's most substantive accounts of women in *Capital* are connected to his understanding of machine production and its effects on social life. When we look beneath the Victorianism of *Capital* and into Marx's corpus as a whole, we find that what Marx has actually accomplished is quite a bit more radical than it first appears. He has begun to sketch the connection between machine labor and modifications in the importance of sexed divisions of labor common to previous eras. He has understood that what we today call gender is at work within a broad system of social meaning, corresponding only loosely to natural designations, and influenced by social class in its deployment.

Conclusion

In spite of my critique of the applicability of Marx's concept of the alienation inherent in all wage labor to subjects whose work was—and is—non waged, I do not wish to suggest that the concept of alienation itself has no value. Wage labor clearly can be an alienating and degraded expression of human activity, especially when the bar for what this activity ultimately should encompass is set as high as Marx sets it.

In the utopian vision of *The German Ideology*, Marx claims that all human beings ought to have a diversity of tasks on a single day, tasks that actualize the human mind and develop the human body, tasks that are not repetitive and boring, tasks the performance of which is an end-in-itself, and a lot of free time in addition to these tasks. Marx envisions the end of all unrewarding labors, waged and otherwise, and in the *Grundrisse* he offers his readers the alluring prospect that these will be replaced with full automation.²⁸ This will leave *all* human beings, who will no longer be readily identifiable by class, race, or sex, with free time to pursue artistic and scientific projects.

It is from this perspective that Marx can be critical of the liberal, bourgeois notion of political entitlement mobilized by John Locke. In Locke's formulas, political entitlement derives only from the recognizable performance of labor. Political status is a by-product of economic activity, and the human being is most readily recognizable in the characteristic activities of labor and exchange.²⁹ Marx envisions political entitlement derived not from the performance of labor, but from a shared humanity. And he thinks that regarding human activity as primarily the activity of labor and exchange is a stunted way of portraying the human condition, its possibilities, and its modes of self-actualization.³⁰

But in such claims, Marx is clearly thinking far beyond his contemporary context. For in Marx's society, recognition of one's labor as wage labor was hardly universal in extent. One lingering paradox of Marx's work, then, is that this work attempts to critique liberal society before the political transition to this form of society was fully complete. In fact, Marx writes a critical analysis of liberal society at a time when patriarchy, including feudal patriarchy, has hardly been fully eliminated. For, as we have seen, the bourgeois norm of wage labor is enticing for the female subjects of the mid-nineteenth century. For the enslaved peoples of the American South, wages themselves are still a battle that has to be won, and at considerable cost. And in this regard, we should recall an observation Marx offers in 1844's "On the Jewish Question." There Marx acknowledges that the bourgeois claim that the worker is entitled to wages for what she or he produces is still a giant step forward from patriarchy, even if it will not be the "final form of human emancipation."³¹

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Notes

1. Moishe Postone's stress on the continued importance of the theme of alienation in Marx's later work is certainly accurate. See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 31. However, the *locus classicus* of Marx's account of alienation is his early work, and in particular *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. See Karl Marx, "The Manuscripts of 1844" and "On the Jewish Question," in *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (MECW), 1843–1844, Vol. 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975).
2. Patriarchy is a complicated concept. In this paper, it is used primarily in its feminist sense, where it refers to the political oppression of women by men, including paternalism. I also use patriarchy to describe the political oppression of slaves and ex-slaves of African descent by whites, particularly insofar as this included a resistance to the economic autonomy of nineteenth century African-American peoples. Marx himself uses the concept of patriarchy in yet a third sense: to describe the relationships of patronage and serfdom of the feudal period. While it would be worth both contrasting these types of patriarchy and tracing their relationships, doing so is simply beyond the scope of my work here.
3. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, Vol. 1., trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress, 1887), p. 437.
4. Chapter XV in the English edition of the first volume of *Capital* has the title "Machinery and Modern Industry." The chapter corresponds to Chapter XIII in German editions of the work, where the title is "Maschinen und große Industrie." The English version of *Capital* follows the reorganization of the work that Marx performed when bringing out the French edition, where the chapter on machines is also Chapter XV. "Le machinisme et la grande Industrie." For a good French-language reader's edition of *Capital*, see Karl Marx, *Le Capital: Critique de l'Économie Politique, Livre Premier*, trans. Joseph Roy (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1978).
5. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 371–372.
6. For a parallel insight that looks at arduous women's labor in the meatpacking industry in the United States at the turn of the century, see Roger Horowitz, "Meatpacking" in *Gender and Technology*, ed. Nina E. Lerman, Ruth Oldenziel, and Arven P. Mohun (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 267–294, p. 279.
7. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 162.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 177. I will be unable to give proper attention here to the importance of class in the crafting of the concept "woman." As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us:
Sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions. This is why there are as many ways of realizing femininity as there are classes and class fractions, and the division of labor between the sexes takes quite different forms, both in practices and in representations, in the different social classes.
See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 107–108.
9. With Marx, we are justly skeptical about family values and other "bourgeois claptrap" that romanticizes family structures that are only possible for a privileged few. See *The Communist Manifesto*, in *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 223. However, we can maintain, alongside this skepticism, the recognition that kinship structures have sometimes been a haven from the individualism of a capitalist economy: for example, when sharing resources allows kinship groups to absorb vicissitudes of employment among their members. Witness also the appropriation of the term "family" by queer theorists and by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons to describe the self-selected kinship groups that try to replicate some of the features of the familial haven without replicating its oppressive, patriarchal structure.
10. Marx, *Capital*, p. 650.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
14. Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2005).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
16. See, for example, Orlando Patterson's discussion of "natal alienation" in *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 5. According to Patterson, the natal alienation of the slave is expressed in his or her status as a socially dead person. This form of political exile may have been incompatible with the recognition implied by economic activity, leading to the tensions described by Hahn.
17. Charles Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 105.
18. Karl Marx, "Exzerpte aus Thomas Fowell Buxton: The African Slave Trade" and "Exzerpte aus Thomas Fowell Buxton: The remedy; being a sequel to the African Slave trade," in Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA²), *Vierte Abteilung, Exzerpte, Notizen, Marginalien, Band 9, Exzerpte und Notizen, Juli bis September 1851* (Berlin: Dietz, 1991), pp. 494–501.
19. Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 149.
20. See bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1999).
21. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 126.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 128–129.
23. I play here on language used by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 207.
24. Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (MECW), 1845–1847, Vol. 5 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 44.

25. Karl Marx, Excerpt from Heft XIX, Unpublished excerpt notebooks, London (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History (IISG), Archival Collections, 1852), Call Nos. B. 59, B. 61.
26. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (London: International, 1972).
27. Marx drew the vision of women's history and character that he employs in *Capital* and other late texts from the figures contained in the excerpt notebooks: J. G. Eichhorn (1799), John Millard (1753), J. Jung (1850), J. A. de Leger (1803), Dr. William Wachswoth (1850), C. Meiners (1788–1800), Thomas de L'Ac (1773), W. Alexander (1782), and Druman (1847). See Marx, unpublished excerpt notebooks, 1852 (see note 25, above). Many of these figures belong to the *Querelle des Femmes* genre that characterized European letters from the fifteenth century onwards. As Gary Kates argues in *Monieur d'Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), "Recent scholarship on the *Querelle des Femmes* literature has focused almost exclusively on the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century participants have been overlooked by scholars. . . . But . . . the *Querelle des Femmes* did not disappear after 1700; if anything, it became even rarer, arguing like Simone de Beauvoir that women are not born, but made. The whole *Querelle des Femmes* genre may have been increasingly constrained by the bourgeois gender norms of the nineteenth century, the very norms under discussion in this paper.
28. Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973).
29. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: a Critical Edition*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
30. See Postone's *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* for a scholarly development of this thesis in the form of an interpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse*.
31. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," p. 155.