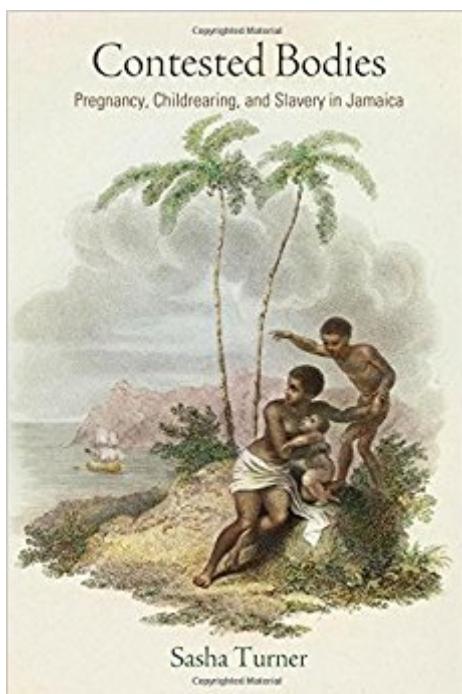


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Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, And Slavery In Jamaica (Early American Studies)



Synopsis

It is often thought that slaveholders only began to show an interest in female slaves' reproductive health after the British government banned the importation of Africans into its West Indian colonies in 1807. However, as Sasha Turner shows in this illuminating study, for almost thirty years before the slave trade ended, Jamaican slaveholders and doctors adjusted slave women's labor, discipline, and health care to increase birth rates and ensure that infants lived to become adult workers. Although slaves' interests in healthy pregnancies and babies aligned with those of their masters, enslaved mothers, healers, family, and community members distrusted their owners' medicine and benevolence. Turner contends that the social bonds and cultural practices created around reproductive health care and childbirth challenged the economic purposes slaveholders gave to birthing and raising children. Through powerful stories that place the reader on the ground in plantation-era Jamaica, *Contested Bodies* reveals enslaved women's contrasting ideas about maternity and raising children, which put them at odds not only with their owners but sometimes with abolitionists and enslaved men. Turner argues that, as the source of new labor, these women created rituals, customs, and relationships around pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing that enabled them at times to dictate the nature and pace of their work as well as their value. Drawing on a wide range of sources—“including plantation records, abolitionist treatises, legislative documents, slave narratives, runaway advertisements, proslavery literature, and planter correspondence”—*Contested Bodies* yields a fresh account of how the end of the slave trade changed the bodily experiences of those still enslaved in Jamaica.

Book Information

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"An original and timely intervention in the histories of slavery, gender, and labor. In arguing that reproduction played a crucial role across a number of political and social divides, *Contested Bodies* becomes an excellent window through which we can understand the economies (both moral and financial), culture, intimacies, protests, labor, and power in which the institution of slavery is imbricated." Jennifer L. Morgan, New York University "Contested Bodies will be required reading for those who wish to understand the intimate workings of slavery in the Atlantic world. It draws on meticulous archival research to reveal the everyday practices of reproduction among enslaved women in Jamaica, including pregnancy, birth, and the care of infants. Sasha Turner shows how, in the later period of slavery, planters' efforts to increase the numbers of children born to enslaved women along with abolitionists' attention to the exploitation of women's reproductive capacity, politicised all aspects of enslaved women's reproductive lives. Turner's work reveals the significance of struggles over reproduction not just as an aspect of women's experiences of slavery, but also as contests at the heart of the system of slavery as a whole." Diana Paton, University of Edinburgh "Contested Bodies is a path-breaking book, offering a new analysis of the impact of the end of the transatlantic slave trade on the actual persons of enslaved women and their children. It will become essential reading for those interested in the history of slavery, the history of women, and the history of the Atlantic." Kathleen M. Brown, University of Pennsylvania

Sasha Turner teaches history at Quinnipiac University.

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