Histories of Sexual Economy & Violence

Week 5
WMST 60
Professor Mireille Miller-Young
Goals of Understanding

• Define Sexual Violence and Sexual Economy
• Dissect the structures and discourses of U.S. slavery as they shape race, gender, and class formation
• Locate the roots of stereotypes and their power to shape culture and social conditions
• Understand the impact of eugenics on social life
Sexual Violence

- Violent acts, relationships, structures, and language that coerce sex or otherwise impinge on a person’s body, identity, and autonomy.
- Can be individual or systemic.
- A continuum ranging from rape to trafficking to forced sterilization, to sexual harassment and the threat of violence.
Sexual Economy

1) The convergence of sexual and reproductive relations with market and political relations.

2) Also the production and dispersal of sexual structures, discourses, practices and bodies.

For U.S. WOC, sexual economy is linked to histories of sexual violence and expropriation.
A Slave Auction -- Harper's Weekly 1851?
The Cult of True Womanhood

- Proper femininity defined by piety, moral purity, chastity, submissiveness, delicateness and domesticity.
- An ideal figuration defined by whiteness and class privilege.
Constructions of Black Womanhood:

Tainted, morally corrupt, sexually deviant, hypersexual, animalistic, barbaric, uncivilized, masculine.

1859 George v. State (Mississippi), by defining rape of slaves as a crime against property rather than a person, shows how racial and gender ideologies came together to secure institutionalized access to black women’s bodies for profit, power, and pleasure.
Partus Sequitur Ventrem

• “The child follows the mother”
• Defines slavery as black, an inherited status
• Ties black women’s sexuality to capital accumulation through expropriation of their reproduction.
• 1806- Hudgins v. Wright case
19th century stereotypical images of enslaved women, men and children