**AIHE BLAST**

Gender in Post-Civil War America

**Thursday, June 21, 2012**

**Document 1:**

**A Virginia Freedwoman Critiques the Gendered Nature of Freedom and Free Labor**

*[Franklin County, Va. October 1866]*

*A.*

*As I am entirely without a home. & have tried in every direction to get one & have failed, I know not to whom to apply except the authorities at Rocky Mt*

*I have three little children & have no husband-consequently no one to support them; as they are not large enough to earn their own living, the eldest not being but five years old, the youngest a babe four months old. I can't find anybody that will take us on any terms, & have neither father nor Mother, brother nor sister to look to. By my labor I can't feed my children, let alone clothe them, & they have been very poorly fed, & scarcely clothed atall since I left my former Master, who is now getting old & is not able to keep & do justice to his own family. I never knew to want the necessaries of life untill since I left him. I never freed myself, & was doing well before freedom came about, since which time I have & had no one to look to, for assistance & have fared worse than I ever did in all my life & now starvation, seems at length to be the price I & my helpless children must pay for freedom, a bargain I had no hand in making- freedom is to us, but permission to go naked & starve & none to help, I have been staying at different places, wherever I could get something to eat- I have been indebted to the charity of those to whom I applied for subsistence for my living up to now-but have had no clothes & as cold weather approaches I know not whither to turn my head.*

*I had a good master, but he has now to support his own family, by his own labor, & can't afford to rear my children & keep me any longer. And now to you I apply to know what I must do. All these statements I can prove if necessary by both black & white folks.*

*[signed] Gillie Arrington*

Source: Statement of Gillie Arrington, [Oct. 1866], enclosed in Lt. W. F. De Knight to Bvt. Brig. Genl. O. Brown, 31 Oct. 1866, ser. 3802, Narrative Reports of Conditions of Bureau Affairs, VA Asst. Comr., RG 105.

**Document 3 Questions**

1. What kind of problems does Gillie face? What kind of solutions has she looked for?

2. What does Gillie mean when she writes about "freedom, a bargain I had no hand in making"? Was freedom an agreement? If it was, who did have a hand in making that agreement and what does your answer reveal about the gendered dimensions of the world Gillie saw herself occupying?

3. What do we learn about such issues as race and racism from Gillie's offer to provide statements "from both black & white folks"?

4. How does Gillie's critique of free labor help us think about the relationship we see between slavery and freedom? Is Gillie a big fan of freedom? Why or why not? What does that in turn reveal about how she conceived of slavery?

5. If some of Gillie's ideas make us uncomfortable, does that mean that we as historians can disregard her words altogether? Why or why not?

**Document 5:**

**A Husband Shoulders a New, Free-Labor Duty**

*[Worth County, Georgia], March 12, 1867*

*Articles of agreement entered into this the twelth day of March 1867. between Fannie E. Lippitt of the County of Worth and state of Georgia - on the first part and Ben Holmes (Freedman) of same county and state of the second part - Witnesseth - that for considerations - hereinafter, mentioned - she the said Fannie E. Lippitt doth promise and agree to pay the said Ben Holmes on the twenty fifth day of December - next - the sum of ten dollars per month from date - for the hire of Henrietta - Freedwoman - his wife, and to furnish - rations to the said Henrietta - for the same period, And he the said Holmes - and - his wife Henrietta - doth promise and agree - that the said Henrietta - shall Cook Wash and Iron and render such other - service - as may be - reasonably required of her. promising to be respectful and obedient; In testimony whereof - both here - hereunto affixed their names - the day and date above mentioned,*

*[signed with his mark] "X" Ben Holmes*

*[signed] Fanney E Lippitt*

Source: Contract between Fanney E. Lippitt and Ben Holmes, 12 Mar. 1867, Lippitt Papers, Thronateeska Heritage Foundation, Albany, Georgia.

**Document 5 Questions**

1. What kind of terms does Ben Holmes exact from Fanney Lippitt? In other words, what kind of work will Henrietta be performing, and how and in what amount will she be compensated for that work?

2. How do the terms of this contract compare to those freedwomen were able to get when they represented themselves? (See, for example, above, Document 2, and below, Document 10.)

3. Who collects the wage at year's end, and how does that complicate our understanding of these new gender relations? What sort of historical circumstance might have prompted Ben and Fanney to include that clause in the contract? In what ways do you see this clause affecting the distribution of power between husband and wife?

4. Where is Henrietta in this conversation? What does your answer reveal about the relationship between Henrietta and Ben, and especially, how Henrietta seemed to understand that role?

**Document 8:**

**Clashing Ideas about Gender and Political Rights**

*[Port Royal, S.C.,] June 1, 1867*

*The people are just now in a state of great excitement over their right to vote, and are busy forming a Republican Party on the island. At their first meeting they had an informal time; at the second there was some business done. Our school was invited to sing at this one, and it seemed the main attraction. But two or three [Northern] white men - one of them Mr. [Gideon] Wells - got up and said women and children ought to stay home on such occasions. He afterwards sent us an apology, saying he had no idea of including us or our school, but only outsiders who were making some noise. Nevertheless, the idea took.*

*To-day in church Mr. [John] Hunn announced another meeting next Saturday. "The females must stay at home?" asked Demas [a black man] from the pulpit. "The females can come or not as they choose," said Mr. Hunn, "but the meeting is for men voters." Demas immediately announced that "the womens will stay at home and cut grass," that is, hoe the corn and cotton fields - clear them of grass! It is too funny to see how much more jealous the men are of one kind of liberty they have achieved than of the other. Political freedom they are rather shy of, and ignorant of; but domestic freedom - the right, just found, to have their own way in their families and rule their wives - that is an inestimable privilege! In slavery the woman was far more important, and in every way held higher than the man. It was the woman's house, the children were entirely hers, etc., etc. Several speakers have been here who have advised the people to get the women into their proper place - never to tell them anything of their concerns etc., etc.; and the notion of being bigger than woman generally, is just now inflating the conceit of the males to an amazing degree. When women get the vote, too, no people will be more indignant than these, I suppose.*

Source: Rupert Sargent Holland, ed., The Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne: Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884, pp. 184-185.

**Document 8 Questions**

1. Who was the first person to ban women from the political meetings? What does this tell us about middle-class Northerners' ideas about gender and the appropriate roles for women and men?

2. But were those ideas necessarily shared among all the Northerners who lived and labored at Port Royal? What does Laura Townes' response to the proposed ban tell us about the kind of civil and political role she admired and aspired to as a woman? Were her expectations in line with those as expressed by Gideon Welles and John Hunn?

3. How did the "advise" offered by Northerners to the former slaves affect the latter group's understanding about appropriate gender roles? Why do you think the freedmen listened? What historical events might have induced them to change their minds?

4. What is it that the black women appeared to want and to expect? What do we learn about their gendered understandings from this excerpt? How do you suppose they responded to the ban proposed by the men?

5. People choose what to write, and for a person as busy as Laura Townes, writing was by necessity a very selective process. That said, why might she have devoted an entire journal entry to the question about women's presence at political meetings when she could have written about countless other things, or not written at all?

**Document 10:**

**A Black Minister Proposes a Collective Solution to Freedom's Gendered Problems**

*Beatties pond, Lincolnton county north carolina, January 4th 1869*

*Dear Sir I take my pen in hand this morning to drop you a few lines, hoping you will agree with me in my Undertaking by the Benevolence of the people and by assisttance of the omnipotent God we elected You for our Governer for the State of N.C. we form our Selfs in Sosieties and Ligues &C and elected you, and Genrl grant, and Colfax and all of the Radicals officials and our Ligue has made a Cunclusion to write you this precep, the is a grate many Womens and Childrens and boys going a Bout working for people and dont know how to make a Bargain and they is not giting theyr Rights by a grate dail. this is going on in this Section of the Country to a full extence, and we want to know If Some of the Best men of our Ligue Could Stand as garddians for all Such people in our Reach not let them make a bargain them Selfs but Some of us go and make it for them and see that they git the money &C governer it is desspert the way Some of our Coler is treated and we hav a feeling for our Race and Coler, and we want to Stop Some of this intreatment, and If you please Sir gave us Some information a bout this all important matter, as we is a ignarent and down troden and yet opresed Race of Coler, 12 of us made this agreement in the neighborhood of Beattes Pond hopeing you will assist us in Standing gardains for Some of this Colord Race.*

*please dont think Strange my Writeing I am a poor Color man dont know much, but please try and make out this Stamering hand, and write to me by next mail. when you write please direc to Beatties Pond in Care of Samuel Lewis.*

*please write to me Soon and let us know*

*I Shill close by Saying I reman yours truly in hart*

*yours Respectfully*

*[signed] Rev. Samuel Lewis*

Source: Rev. Samuel Lewis M.E. to W. W. Holden, 4 Jan. 1869, box 3, Correspondence, Governor Holden Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

**Document 10 Questions**

1. When Samuel Lewis writes that "we form our Selfs in Sosieties and Ligues &C," of whom is he speaking? Who is the "we" in this context? How and why is it that they came together? What do your answers tell us Lewis' gendered understandings and their origins?

2. In Lewis's mind, what kind of relationship should prevail between women and men? How do you think Aima Ship might respond to this? (See above, Document 2) How about Louisa Durant? (See Unit 1, Document 9.)

3. How might employers and prospective employers respond to Samuel Lewis's proposal? Would it complicate or confirm their own gendered thinking - about black men as well as black women?

4. For analytical reasons, scholars often create categories, thinking and writing in terms of "economy," "politics," "family," "race," and "gender," and so forth as if they were independent entities. Is this how Samuel Lewis and the people of Beatties Ford experience their day-to-day lives? Why or why not?

**Document 11:**

**A Southern White Woman Reflects on New Circumstances, a New Identity**

*LETTERS FROM A HOUSEKEEPER--I*

*MY DEAR CARRIE: You ask me to tell you all about my house and my housekeeping; how I have furnished my rooms, how I cook, and what we eat; How I manage my servants, and so on. Well, that is more than I can do in one letter, but I will here make a beginning, and in future letters try to give you and idea of Southern life as it is "since the war," or at least of our "reconstructed" housekeeping.*

*\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \**

*Well, this house which looks so big and grand, with its broad verandas, has only four square room, two on each floor, with a pantry off on the first floor and a dressing room on the second. When I first moved into it, it seemed sombre and gloomy, but a little scrubbing, a little whitewash, and a little paint has put a new face upon it, and I am now quite in love with the place. It looks home-like and cheerful, and I feel some pride in the part I have played in the work of transformation. You imagine me surrounded by servants, Dinah, Milly, Topsy, and the rest, with Sam for a gardener and Bill for an errand boy. My dear Carrie, you are thinking of things as they were before the war. Nous avons chang&eacute; tout &agrave; la, or rather the Yankees and the niggers have changed all that. You think us a poor, dependent, helpless set of people. So we were, perhaps, but we are no longer so. For the proof come and see us and judge for yourself. In the first place we, like thousands of others, have abandoned the out-door kitchen once universal among us. We turned ours into a wood shed, coal house and workshop. So the first thing was the put up a nice cooking range in the dining-room, which for the present must serve as kitchen and dining-room in one. I might tell you of an amusing story of the awkward negro fellow who undertook to put up the range, and after cutting two ugly holes in the chimney, failed to get the stove pipe in the flue, and the smoking we got when we attempted to build a fire - but no matter, we got it all right at last, and it draws finely.*

*Well, we "accept the situation," as the politicians say; and, as you will readily believe when I tell you, that I do my own cooking in this "reconstructed" dining-room, superseding Milly, who has been exiled to one of the cabins in the yard, and is retained merely as laundress, while Katy does the scrubbing and house-cleaning and other rough work.*

*In the dining-room I have put up dark-green paper shades to the four windows, furnished it with a pine table, a side-table, which I covered with oil-cloth, which comes a yard square, some nice, substantial chairs, a lounge, a rocking chair, a good hemp carpet, and, on the mantle, a handsome little clock. The dining-table I have covered with a home-made cloth, a piece of my own handiwork. It is made of black broadcloth, to fall over the edge of the table some eight or ten inches, and is braided with woollen braid, a lighter shade than the cloth, in a neat pattern. The woollen braid looks very well. Flannel may be used instead of broadcloth. This is the way you do it:*

*Transfer the intended design to French tissue paper; paste the edges of the paper on the cloth; sow on the orange braid (if you have two colors, say orange and green) with fine silk of the same color; tear off all the paper, and sew the remaining color of braid on close to the orange. This will make a pretty cover for a table, piano, melodeon, or on a cheaper scale, a pine table.*

*Shall I tell you how I circumvented a sly old rat whom no trap could catch and no cat pounce upon, and a countless and every where present host of little red ants at the same time, and by means of one simple contrivance? Well, I got a strong tin box made, with a suitable fastening to the cover, and a grated shelf inside, on which to keep my eatables.*

*Mr. Rat was left out in the cold. For a defence against the ants, I had it made with four legs, each of which is set in a saucer of water. This is the only sure remedy for the ant pest that I have found--and ants are a terrible nuisance here. About my qualifications as a practical cook, I suspect you are skeptical. Somebody else, who ought to know, thinks I am a famous housewife.*

*Do you not know that I have lived in Florida, "roughed it" in a log cabin, and learned how to make much out of little? My dinners might not suit a pampered epicure; but I can truly say that due justice is generally done them when on the table. Wouldn't you like to know what we had for dinner today? I am not going to tell you, but one dish I am sure must be new to you, so I will give you my recipe:*

*POTATO PAN-PIE.--I take four or five large sweet potatoes, pare and cut in small pieces, and boil till cooked through. Pour off the water and put them in a baking dish, then put in three heaping table spoonful's of sugar, a tablespoonful of butter, a little salt, an little nutmeg, and last, a cup of cold water; then make a crust like piecrust, but much thicker, and just large enough to cover the dish; cut a slit in the crust, and put it on top of the potatoes, and bake till a light brown. This dish is not a fancy one for a light dessert, but a good substantial part of a meal, and is pronounced excellent. I could fill a letter, (and perhaps I may one of these days,) with the different ways of preparing our best of all vegetables--the sweet potato, but for the present I must close.*

*Yours, as ever,*

*MARIE*

Source: Rural Carolinian 1:3 (Dec. 1869): 190-191.

**Document 11 Questions**

1. Marie writes of her "reconstructed" household. What does she mean by that? What has been "reconstructed" and in what ways?

2. In this process of Reconstruction, Marie has changed, but in what ways?

3. How has Marie's personal transformation changed the way she thinks about herself and her place in social and family life?

4. Why do you think Marie closed her letter with a recipe for sweet potato pie? What kind of message do you think she's trying to convey about not just gender, but race and labor and politics too?

5. Why do you think the editor of the Rural Carolinian chose to publish this letter? Who do you think his target audience was, and what do you think he wanted that audience to learn from Marie's letter?