Thavolia Glymphm, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge; New York: CUP, 2008)

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There has been no shortage of historical material written about slavery, which makes contributing a new and useful source on the subject incredibly difficult. Thavolia Glymph accomplishes this tough task, however, with her *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*. An Associate Professor at Duke University, Glymph re-examines the role of the plantation household in slavery and white women's place within the hierarchy of slave ownership. While most scholarship casts white women as passive or reluctant participants in slaveholding, Glymph argues that "the institution of slavery was a joint production of masters and mistresses and that violence in the plantation household formed as important a part of that production as it did in the fields" (p. 16). Her argument places white women as active participants in slavery and, in some cases, as the principal holders of slaves within a plantation. By re-examining the role of southern mistresses, Glymph offers a new interpretation of the plantation household, one where civility and gentility did not exist and domestic slaves were treated as bad, if not worse, than field slaves.

Glymph details the development of the plantation household from the antebellum period through Reconstruction. She begins by outlining the nature of

domestic slavery and the brutality that often existed within the plantation home. Through her excellent use of slave narratives and mistress diaries, Glymph offers a shocking glimpse into the daily horrors of domestic slave work. She believes that household slavery's blurring of public and private spheres made for an extremely tense situation where mistresses were apt to use violence as a means of maintaining order. She argues that this caused mistresses to be more violent than masters and notes that "in narratives where slaves make explicit comparisons, mistresses are depicted as harder and crueller than masters" (p. 39).

By exposing the violence within plantation households, Glymph moves on to demonstrate how myths of domestic slavery developed. She believes that mistresses' arguments that they were 'civilizing' their servants were ways of covering up problems within the household. This civilization myth entered into the historiography of slavery in part due to the type of resistance offered by domestic slaves. Due to the nature of their tasks, household slaves were unable to partake in violent resistance, instead opting for the more subtle day-to-day form. From working slowly to sneaking extra food, Glymph argues that this type of opposition was prominent throughout the South and caused owners more stress and money than did the violent resistance occasionally offered by field slaves. Since domestic defiance appears as less overt, historians have discounted it and, therefore, the dynamics within the plantation household have also been overlooked.

Apart from resistance during slavery, Glymph believes that wartime desertion of plantations was the result violence, physical and psychological, perpetrated by mistresses. This goes against 'revisionist scholarship,' which claims that black women simply wanted to mimic the gender ideals of the planter class. Such claims are also refuted by the difficult experiences of white women during the Civil War. While the majority of her study is critical of white women's role in the subjugation of black people, Glymph concedes that the war placed white women in a near impossible situation. With few men to protect them in case of revolt and receiving undue blame for Confederate failures on the battlefield, white women exploited their role as mistresses to mask the loss of control in their lives.

The study then turns to an examination of post-war tensions between mistresses and their former slaves. Glymph believes that freedwomen undertook a number of initiatives in order to rid themselves of working in the plantation household, or at least, to minimize the amount of time they spent working for former mistresses. From working more efficiently, gossiping about former mistresses, and leaving without notice, black women continually challenged white women's authority within their own homes. This came as a surprise to mistresses who felt that ex-slaves "would be unable to survive without them" (p. 145). In addition, Glymph points out that mistresses constantly complained that former slaves were 'shirking' their responsibility by leaving the plantation, an ironic belief given that freed slaves felt no such responsibility to their former owners. In addition,

freedwomen preferred to work in the fields, not only for the distance fieldwork offered from employers, but also for the higher wages. By leaving domestic work, black women were able to make a better life for themselves while simultaneously challenging white women's notion of domesticity.

Glymph concludes her analysis by discussing the power struggle between white and black women during Reconstruction. She argues that black women openly challenged traditional notions of womanhood in an effort to "unweave the inequalities that were a part of everyday life" (p. 10). As black women increasingly left the plantation household, white women were forced to undertake domestic tasks themselves, something that most felt was beneath them. In addition, with the financial hardships of Reconstruction, some white women were forced to work for black women. This shift towards a more equal society was particularly difficult for mistresses, most of who believed that black women were "unable to meet the criteria of being 'ladies'" (p. 214). Glymph is quick to point out, however, that black women were not only challenging traditional beliefs as a means of gaining their civil rights, but also for everyday rights. She notes that little things, like being able to go to the market, seem minor in the overall fight for freedom, but are more important than historians have argued because they make day-to-day living easier. By offering insight into the daily struggles of black women to achieve a better life, Glymph emphasizes a previously underappreciated aspect of emancipation.

Out of the House of Bondage offers a unique perspective into slavery and the fight for freedom. Glymph openly challenges the existing literature on slavery and argues that life in the plantation home was just as, if not more, difficult than life in the fields. While it would be easy for her to minimize the brutality of fieldwork, Glymph beautifully outlines her evidence of violence within the home while acknowledging that no slave was exempt from aggression. By countering claims that domestic slavery was an easier or more humane form of bondage, Glymph gives voice to a previously underappreciated group of female slaves who faced the same brutality as their male counterparts.

As much as the book is about slavery and emancipation, Glymph also manages to seamlessly include analysis on women's issues. Through the discussion on black women's resistance, the argument deals as much with perceptions of southern femininity as it does with slavery. While acknowledging their hardships, Glymph's belief that white women's inability to live up to their ideal of womanhood while simultaneously placing high expectations on black women goes against previously held beliefs of southern domesticity during the nineteenth century. In addition, by placing mistresses as active rather than passive actors in slavery, Glymph challenges the notion of the "southern belle," which forces a complete re-examination of what white womanhood actually entailed. *Out of the House of Bondage*, therefore, is an important resource not only for those interested in American slavery, but also women's history.

Glymph makes excellent use of her source material, using slave narratives, diaries, and interviews to convincingly make her point. Without exploiting the violence in order to get an emotional response from the reader, she details the brutality of domestic work both during and after slavery. In addition, her clear knowledge of the vast historiography of slavery gives more weight to her challenges of previously held notions about the plantation household. It is, however, curious that with the wealth of material available, Glymph repeatedly uses a couple of plantations as examples to make sweeping statements. There are times where it appears as though she is simply picking the worst cases of violence to support her argument. In addition, the book is relatively dense, with parts that are difficult to understand and do not seem relevant to the overall argument. For example, discussion of Union soldiers helping former slaves retrieve possessions from plantations is never connected to the rest of the argument.

Apart from these minor shortcomings, *Out of the House of Bondage* is an excellent source into two major aspects of nineteenth century America, slavery and domesticity. Glymph openly and convincingly challenges the existing literature in both areas. Offering new interpretations and a reconsideration of evidence, *Out of the House of Bondage* is a fresh and unique book.