

Rebecca Greenleaf, the Intimacies of Slavery, and the Origins of the University of Maryland

Background

Enslaved black women have historically been rendered invisible. This research endeavors to acknowledge the role of one woman in particular, Rebecca Greenleaf, matriarch of the Greenleaf family, as her life relates to the founding of the University of Maryland. She was enslaved on the Eversfield plantation, where UMD currently resides.

Women's Work

Domestic labor was often performed by women and included: emptying chamber pots, supplying clean water, changing linens, opening bed hangings and window drapes, dressing the enslavers, hand washing clothes, cleaning, toiletries, accessories, textiles and furniture.

Navigating The Home

Being enslaved and forced to work in the domestic sphere would mean constant close contact with enslavers. The mental labor involved in doing so would have been just as intensive as the physical labor.

Selected Bibliography

Thavolia Glymph's *Out of the House of Bondage*; Brook N. Newmans's *Maternal Inheritance, and the Legacies of Colonial Slavery*

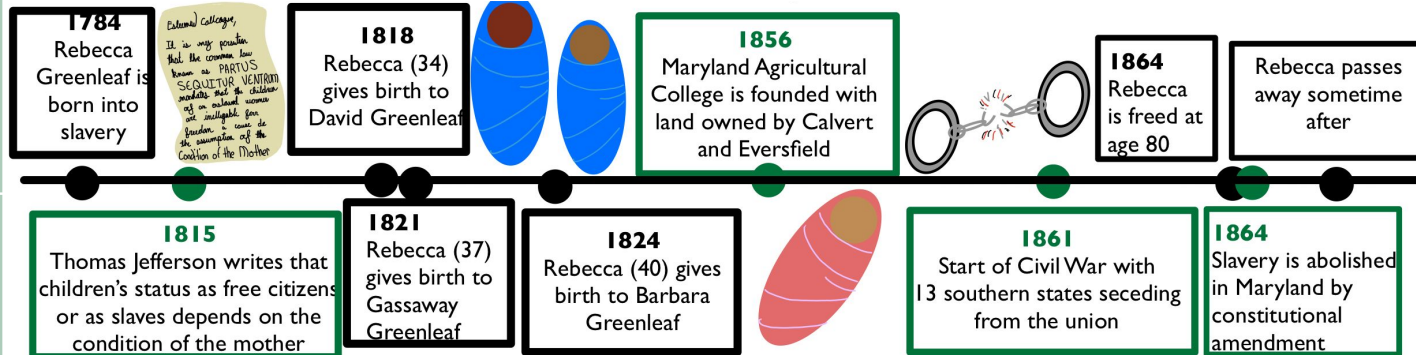
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Figure 1.
Artistic
Rendering
of Rebecca
Greenleaf.



Figure 2.
Timeline of
Rebecca
Greenleaf's life
and relevant
historical
events.



Institutionalized Sexual Abuse

The very fabric of early capitalist slave societies rested on the continued access to servile black bodies. This is most viscerally true for enslaved black women. *Partus Sequitur Ventrem*, a common law phrase dating from the early modern period, meant that children followed the condition of the mother; which is to say an enslaved woman could only give birth to enslaved children. This law justified the rape of enslaved black women to the profit of the enslaver while creating a veil of acceptability for white male enslavers to completely ignore the progeny that would come from their own debauchurous acts.

Conclusion and Future Research

Uncovering microhistories with limited primary sources necessitates the use of secondary sources and speculative research methods. Further research could take the form of an expanded full-bodied piece of historical speculative fiction like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

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