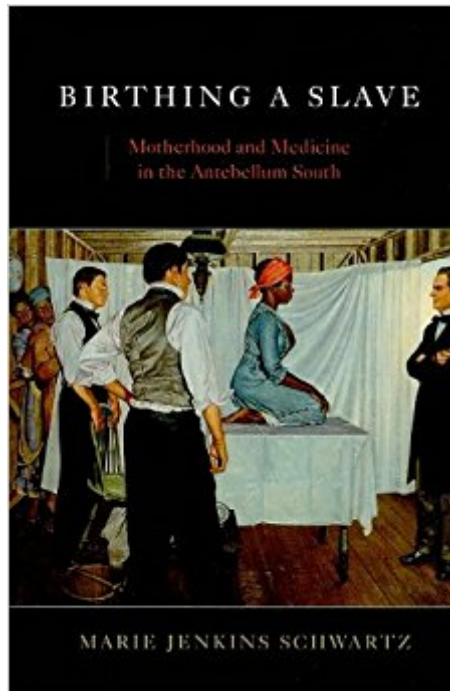


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# Birthing A Slave: Motherhood And Medicine In The Antebellum South



## Synopsis

The deprivations and cruelty of slavery have overshadowed our understanding of the institution's most human dimension: birth. We often don't realize that after the United States stopped importing slaves in 1808, births were more important than ever; slavery and the southern way of life could continue only through babies born in bondage. In the antebellum South, slaveholders' interest in slave women was matched by physicians struggling to assert their own professional authority over childbirth, and the two began to work together to increase the number of infants born in the slave quarter. In unprecedented ways, doctors tried to manage the health of enslaved women from puberty through the reproductive years, attempting to foster pregnancy, cure infertility, and resolve gynecological problems, including cancer. Black women, however, proved an unruly force, distrustful of both the slaveholders and their doctors. With their own healing traditions, emphasizing the power of roots and herbs and the critical roles of family and community, enslaved women struggled to take charge of their own health in a system that did not respect their social circumstances, customs, or values. *Birthing a Slave* depicts the competing approaches to reproductive health that evolved on plantations, as both black women and white men sought to enhance the health of enslaved mothers--in very different ways and for entirely different reasons. *Birthing a Slave* is the first book to focus exclusively on the health care of enslaved women, and it argues convincingly for the critical role of reproductive medicine in the slave system of antebellum America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This remarkably researched and thorough book on pregnancy and childbirth among enslaved African-Americans demonstrates how the most personal and intimate aspects of slaves' lives were fraught with politics and power. Schwartz, whose previous work *Born in Bondage* explored the lives of children under slavery, draws upon medical records, journals, letters, and WPA interviews to recreate a slave's progression from conception to birth. Her access into this intimate world is stunning, and she provides rich, challenging accounts. She contends that planters and doctors used "biological science and learning to uphold power relations in the South," and indicts doctors for their complicity in white brutality on black women's bodies. In turn, black women used resistance tactics that ranged from birth control to midwifery in a struggle for control over their bodies and children. Though her thesis is familiar, the narratives Schwartz weaves create a vivid, highly detailed portrait of women's lives under slavery, in turns that are both chilling (the casual brutality of slave-owners) and awe-inspiring (the strength and bravery of the enslaved). Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A fascinating history of reproductive medicine in the antebellum southern slave system when black women struggled to control pregnancy and childbirth on their own terms. Schwartz clearly and convincingly reveals the role of laboring black women--both as workers and as reproducers of the enslaved work force--as central to the American slave system. (Jacqueline Jones, author of *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women Workers and the Family from Slavery to the Present*) *Birthing a Slave* gives us a ground-level view of medicine, gender, and doctor-patient relationships under the slave system in the U.S. South. Deeply researched and engagingly written, Schwartz's book is sure to become not only an essential work in our understanding of health care in the antebellum South, but also of the wider society that framed the values defining health and sickness. (Steven M. Stowe, author of *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*) Compellingly argued and beautifully written, this book is a major contribution to women's history, the study of slavery, and the history of gynecology and obstetrics. Rich and remarkably well-researched, *Birthing a Slave* shows how struggles over reproduction, sexuality, and mothering are central to an understanding of slavery. (Steven Mintz, author of *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*) Schwartz puts slave births in the medical and social context of the times while looking at childbearing through the eyes of physicians, slaveowners, overseers, and bondwomen. This "slavery and obstetrics" book will be a valuable and most readable resource for scholars and students. (Todd L. Savitt, Brody School of Medicine at East

Carolina University)An impressive blend of medical and social history exposing the vested interests of southern slave society in the reproductive health of African American bondwomen. Schwartz's meticulous research illuminates health issues--such as cancer, infertility, and menstruation--that have received little to no attention elsewhere in scholarship on medicine and slavery. (Sharla Fett, author of *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*)This remarkably researched and thorough book on pregnancy and childbirth among enslaved African-Americans demonstrates how the most personal and intimate aspects of slaves' lives were fraught with politics and power. Schwartz, whose previous work *Born in Bondage* explored the lives of children under slavery, draws upon medical records, journals, letters, and WPA interviews to recreate a slave's progression from conception to birth. Her access into this intimate world is stunning, and she provides rich, challenging accounts. She contends that planters and doctors used "biological science and learning to uphold power relations in the South," and indicts doctors for their complicity in white brutality on black women's bodies. In turn, black women used resistance tactics that ranged from birth control to midwifery in a struggle for control over their bodies and children...The narratives Schwartz weaves create a vivid, highly detailed portrait of women's lives under slavery, in turns that are both chilling (the casual brutality of slave-owners) and awe-inspiring (the strength and bravery of the enslaved). (Publishers Weekly 2006-05-22)*Birthing a Slave* is exhaustively researched, engagingly written, and persuasively argued, and it skillfully blends social and medical history. The volume is a major contribution to the literature of slavery, and it will have a wide appeal and enrich the work of a variety of scholars, especially those interested in the South and slavery, health and medicine, and women. (James O. Breeden *Journal of American History* 2007-03-01)As Schwartz convincingly demonstrates, the history of reproductive health touches upon nearly every debate that has dominated slavery studies over the past seven decades: resistance and agency, hegemony, paternalism, family, culture, and religion. For its historiographical reach, analytical breadth, and archival depth, *Birthing a Slave* will be of great interest to scholars of African American history, southern history, women's history, and the history of medicine. This book is impeccably researched and beautifully written. Schwartz has admirably tackled a sensitive subject with analytical grace and narrative skill. While it may not be the right book to savor over a morning coffee, *Birthing a Slave* is social history at its finest. (Hilary Moss *Common-Place* 2007-01-01)Outstanding primary source research supports Schwartz's fine work. Moreover, the book's creative organizational scheme traces the physical territory that medical practitioners and slaveowners tried to possess by separating the book into the bodily concerns that slave women faced over the course of their reproductive lives. Schwartz's first-rate narrative, her exceptional

primary source investigations, and unique format make *Birthing a Slave* an excellent contribution not only to the history of medicine but also to the history of American slavery...Schwartz's text is likely to become a classic in the history of slavery and medicine. Specialists in the history of slavery, medicine, or gender will surely appreciate it. Finally, it would be a welcome addition to a course dedicated to the history of medicine, the history of women in medicine, or gender history (Karol Kovalovich Weaver *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 2007-07-07) This is a good book, well researched, and filled with useful information. (John S. Haller *American Historical Review* 2007-04-01) This study adds much to our understanding of obstetrical and gynecological practices on slave women and the complexities and impersonality of the master-slave relationship. (Steven Case *North Carolina Historical Review* 2006-10-01)

This book made such an impact on me, it truly changed what "I thought I knew" about the 19th century. If anyone asks me what book I would recommend on this subject- the first book I would mention is Marie Schwartz book, "*Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine*." The subject is difficult and very painful to read about, but I think it's a must read for everyone. I don't lightly say this about books, but this book really shook me to the core, its one of those kind of reads that you aren't the same after reading it. Bravo to the author, and many thanks for writing it!

I bought this book for research purposes for my final college paper. It was so helpful and interesting to read that I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in southern history and motherhood. It was an extremely well written book. I'm a history major and it's more common that I find books that are dry and hard to read, but this book is far from that. I found it to be quite enjoyable.

wonderful read!

Eye opener to the slave life.

Excellent read!

This book is amazing and is a easy read

This is a VERY GOOD HISTORICAL ACCOUNT of the holocaust in America!!! (based on other books). More sickening is that this is still happening TODAY (if you understand)!!!

Doesn't really dig in to the salient issues of feminine health and the racial issues. Hell they used us as guinea pigs.

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