

By Rachel Dudley

The “Medical Plantation” As a Cultural Location of Disability

In A Nutshell

- 19th century Co-
constructions of race,
gender, and disability
- The role of slave
women and disability
in the development of
modern gynecology
- Situating the
“medical plantation”
as a cultural location
of disability



Central Question and Thesis

- What ever happened to enslaved peoples with chronic illnesses and disabilities on the slave plantation?
- Case demonstrates how black female 'pathology' and disability were transformed from abnormalities and impediments to economic activity and

James Marion Sims: Who Was He?

Remembered as
“Father of
American
Gynecology”



- “Father of Modern Gynecology” and
- “Architect of the Vagina”

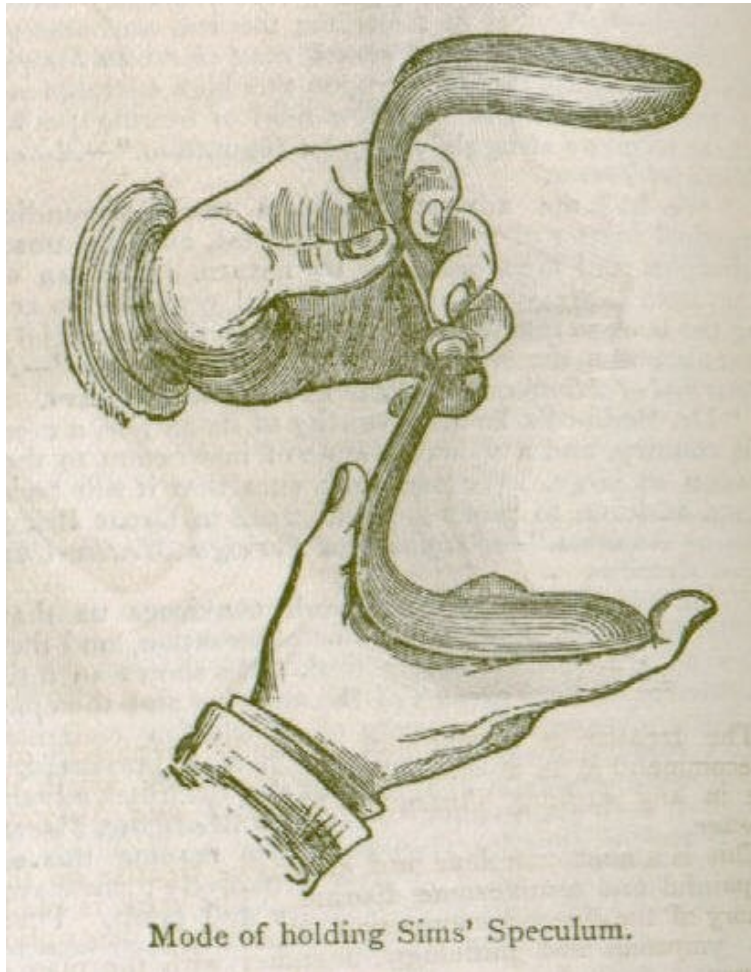
James Marion Sims...

- Experimented on slave women between 1845 and 1849 in Montgomery Alabama

Vesico-Vaginal Fistulas

- Tear between vagina and rectum
- Leading to incontinence

James Marion Sims...continued



Invention of
speculum
founded on
slave
women's
bodies

Founded Hospital...

- Founded the Women's Hospital in New York in 1855- a "charity" hos



Sims...

- Began performing live surgeries in front of other medical men by the 1870s

The Medical Showman

“Sims had a great love for the theater and everything dramatic, and he was fascinated by P.T. Barnum’s combination of master showmanship” ...
(Kapsalis 1997, 33)

The Triple Pathology of Enslaved Women and the Foundation of Gynecology

- (1) Racial Characteristics
- (2) Sex Characteristics
- (3) Visico-Vaginal Fistula

Historical Understandings of Pain

- Until Mid 1800s preserving life held higher value in medical professionalism than alleviating suffering (Pernick 1985)

Anesthesia

- Developed in 1846 by a Boston dentist

The Slave Body in Pain

- “Not only were the painful punishments administered to slave women by masters and overseers seen as a kind of “preparation” for the rigors of anaesthetized surgery, but slaves were viewed as genetically more predisposed than whites to the kind of domestication that trained them to bear pain” (Kapsalis 1997, 40)

Conclusion

- Continuing to examine disability and chronic illness on the American slave plantation through various representations:
 - Slave narratives/Literature
 - The Auction Block
 - Slave Ledgers
 - Fugitive Slave Flyers