

Women's Labor, Gender Ideology, and Working-Class Households in Early Republic Baltimore

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In May 1816, four women sent a remarkable petition to Baltimore's City Council. A recent ordinance had banned the unlicensed peddling that provided these women with livelihoods. By confining all vending to several covered marketplaces, the Council hoped to regulate trade in the fast-growing city and to augment the municipal treasury with stall-rents. No longer could hucksters (as such women were known) canvas the streets reselling the vegetables, fruits, eggs, poultry, or fish they had purchased earlier at market. Each of the petitioners had paid a fine of \$1.58 for peddling produce near the waterfront. Although these "poor, necessitous, & indigent" women asked only for a dispensation to hawk their wares after market hours, they feared that the City Council would ignore their claims of hardship and continue to classify them as public nuisances. The petitioners carefully outlined their other options in Baltimore's economy:

Some perhaps taking human wants woes and difficulties into *only* a very slight consideration, will say, "why may not these women apply themselves to other ways of getting a living?" To such it may be answered, that these women have no mechanical trade, no manufacturing faculty, no stock, can obtain no employment (for the present impeded state of business has caused large Factories to cease their operations) whereby they could obtain a scanty subsistence for themselves and families. An Almshouse then if they must be fettered from possible industry, must be their final recourse.

Reliant upon "their own personal industry," these women had eked out a modest existence and provided for their "young and helpless children." But now, the petitioners argued, an unjust law threatened to reduce them to the most abject dependence, pushing them into the ranks of the institutionalized poor.¹

The hucksters attested to the limited opportunities available to poor women in the urban economy of the early republic. Although the ordinance against petty marketing applied to male peddlers as well, it closed down one of the few avenues for a woman to earn a living by her own labor. All but excluded from the trades and professions, women could not expect to find jobs in the workshops and countinghouses that lined the city's waterfront. The strongest woman had little chance finding work among the draymen and carters who unloaded the ships at Fells Point. Fewer than fifty adult women found work in one of Baltimore's new textile manufactories. Only through marriage or in-

heritance might a woman gain access to a house and the potential income from sheltering and feeding boarders. Otherwise, poor women could take in washing, finish shirts for piece-rates, or hire themselves out as domestic servants. None of these endeavors offered a reliable subsistence, particularly during cold winters, summertime epidemics, and contractions in the mercantile economy. No wonder the almshouse loomed large in the minds of the hucksters.

Although Baltimore had its share of successful "she-merchants" and female innkeepers, most adult women—particularly those without husbands—led a far more marginal existence. Like many working men, women pieced together livelihoods from irregular paid labor, reliance upon charity, informal exchanges of labor and goods, scavenging, and participation in an illicit economy.² This essay examines the survival strategies of working-class households by focusing on the economic roles of women. The best evidence of women's activities emerged at the moment of the family economy's collapse, when desperate wives and husbands petitioned local politicians, poor relief administrators, and even the state's governor for assistance. Their pleas attested to the hardship of staying afloat in an economy caught between the seasonal rhythms of mercantile capitalism and the business cycle of early industrial capitalism. The admission logs of the Baltimore almshouse show how regularly working people lost that struggle.

Relative to laboring men, working-class women faced greater challenges on account of their gender. Patriarchal property relations and prevalent cultural assumptions of female dependence bound women both inside and outside of marriage. A woman's best chance for subsistence required forming a household and exchanging her domestic labor for access to a man's wages. Women's unremunerated housework transformed the meager wages of other family members into hot dinners and warm clothing. Such labor produced more value than women and most working men could earn from wages. But, as Jeanne Boydston has argued, this value "existed only within, and was inseparable from, the institution of the family." At the same time, the demand for services in an urban boomtown converted many household tasks into marketable commodities and brought the labor of female seamstresses, laundresses, tavernkeepers, and boardinghouse operators to the cash-nexus. Still, patriarchal property law gave husbands and fathers the claim to those wages and the property purchased with them.³

The underlying logic of coverture prevented working-class women from supporting themselves with their own earnings. Women's assumed dependence within a male household pegged wages at below-subsistence levels and justified wholesale exclusion from many trades. Presumed to be secondary earners supplementing a family income, women garnered secondary wages. In actuality, these low wages made female dependence a self-fulfilling prophecy. Low

wages and exclusion further categorized women's work as degraded. In arenas ranging from the bedroom to the courtroom, male unionists, middle-class purveyors of domestic ideology, and avaricious employers decried women's labor as redundant, inefficient, and unskilled. Yet, employers had no aversion to hiring women as out-workers and factory hands. Politically disfranchised, lacking legal self-ownership, and assumed to be dependent on a male head of household, women were among the most tractable workers in the labor pool.⁴

For women, the most serious structural problem of emergent industrial capitalism was not unfettered market relations, but rather the perpetuation of older forms of coercion and confinement.⁵ The wage-economy offered women new cash-earning opportunities, but did not create an efficient labor market where women could operate as autonomous agents. Ensnared in male households, most women lacked the physical mobility to pursue higher wages in a different locale. Social strictures prevented other women from following jobs from place to place—precisely the mechanism necessary for a free market in labor. Male workers clamored for higher wages by invoking their positions as providers for needy wives and children. That rhetoric proved fruitless for working women, whose role as breadwinners appeared anomalous in a culture predicated on female dependence. Not surprisingly, Baltimore's City Council rejected the plea of the hucksters and expressed little concern that the women might end up in the almshouse picking oakum to earn their keep.

Gender ideology was a crucial determinant of women's experiences in the early republic. Although new market imperatives made women's labor increasingly valuable to household survival (writ small) and capitalist production (writ large), older patriarchal arrangements continued to limit the opportunities of working women. But in Baltimore, on the border of North and South, race further structured the struggles of working-class women for subsistence. Baltimore's demographics reflected the city's reliance upon both slave and free labor. In 1800, slaves made up eleven percent of the population, free people of color another eleven percent, and Euro-Americans the remaining seventy-eight percent. Over the next three decades, as the city's population nearly tripled, the percentage of free blacks grew dramatically, while the number of slaves remained static. African Americans totaled one-quarter of the city's population. It remained a predominantly white city, but with a black community larger than that of New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans (see Table One).⁶

The persistence of slavery in conjunction with the growth of a sizable free black community and an even larger white majority created a situation where the color line operated erratically. Baltimore's demographics worked against the racial segmentation of labor. White skin provided no immunity from drudge work or domestic service, and although slavery and racism relegated most African Americans to menial labor, white workers outnumbered black work-

TABLE ONE: Urban Populations in 1820 by Race, Sex, and Status

	<u>Total</u> <u>Population</u> (% Female)	<u>White</u> (% Female)	<u>Slave</u> (% Female)	<u>Free People</u> <u>of Color</u> (% Female)	<u>Combined</u> <u>Black</u> <u>Population</u> (% Total Pop)	<u>Ratio of</u> <u>Black Females</u> <u>to White Females</u>
New York	123,706 (52)	112,820 (51)	518 (66)	10,368 (60)	10,886 (10)	0.113:1
Philadelphia	112,772 (53)	100,662 (53)	0	12,110 (58)	12,110 (11)	0.151:1
Baltimore	62,738 (52)	48,055 (50)	4,357 (55)	10,326 (58)	14,683 (22)	0.346:1
Charleston	24,780 (53)	10,653 (50)	12,652 (55)	1,475 (58)	14,127 (53)	1.465:1
New Orleans	27,176 (51)	13,584 (39)	7,355 (63)	6,237 (61)	13,592 (50)	1.593:1

Sources: David T. Gilchrist, editor, *The Growth of Seaport Cities, 1790-1825* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1967), 35; Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), appendix A; Gary A. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 137, 143. The 1820 federal census was the first to differentiate slaves and free people of color by sex.

ers at the lowest end of the occupational hierarchy.⁷ In the working-class neighborhood of Fells Point, black and white women both lived the same hand-to-mouth existence. They resided side-by-side in waterfront alleys, they washed clothing in the same streams, and they waged the same battle to avoid the almshouse during freezing weather or an outbreak of yellow fever. To be sure, slavery gave a different composition to black families and forced them to focus their scarce resources on freeing loved ones. Moreover, black women did create their own niches in the economy, particularly as laundresses. But the hardships that characterized working-class life transcended skin color, as did the prevalent assumptions of female dependence and inferiority that froze wages at sub-subsistence levels and closed entire segments of the economy to women.

The Fragile Household Economy

Always precarious, the working-class household functioned as a product of mutual dependence: a poor woman needed a man's wages because she could not earn sufficient cash to purchase the necessities of life; a working man needed a woman's unpaid labor to free up his time for paid labor and to transform his wages into sustenance. This relationship worked to a man's advantage. If a laboring man had to cook his own meals, do his own laundry, and mend his own clothing, he could scarcely log enough hours at the city's brickyards or shipyards to earn a wage. Moreover, purchasing those services at market would cost several times his yearly wages. In her study, Jeanne Boydston found that the value of woman's contribution to the family economy amounted to twice the cost of her maintenance and perhaps exceeded her husband's total wages. For this reason, a Baltimore literary magazine offered the following "advice to young men" in 1800: "Get married: a wife is cheaper than a housekeeper, her industry will assist you many ways, and your children will soon share and lighten your labor."⁸

More than a decade earlier, James Alexander had followed that advice, married Mary Alexander, and established a household in Fells Point. They had three children and, in Mary's words, "behaved ourselves justly and honestly." That is, until January 1791, when Mary earned a year in prison for stealing a brass candlestick, three pewter plates, and a pair of cotton hose, collectively worth 5 shillings (about the amount a common laboring man could earn in a day's work). Regardless of whether Mary stole the items for her family's use or to exchange for supplies needed for family subsistence, her imprisonment threw the household into turmoil. As some prominent gentlemen who knew the family explained, James Alexander was "an Industrious Honest man and very poor, His wife's misconduct made him miserable indeed." With Mary gone, he had to spend two months as a housekeeper. In her petition to the governor for an early release, Mary observed that while she was in jail, James was "deprived of doing anything for his small family by his daily labour, being oblig'd

to stay home and take care of them[,] they being small." Finding this intolerable, James asked the Almshouse trustees to take his children: "he has the care of three helpless children and the only means to support both him and them is what he can earn by his labour." He added that "If his wife could be set at Liberty they might be all supported by his earnings." Mary framed her pardon plea in similar terms: she asked to be set "at Liberty that she might be able to support her poor distressed family." Both James and Mary claimed that their own work "supported" the household. James envisioned his role as breadwinner and cash-earner, whereas Mary imagined herself as the structural underpinning of the household. The Alexanders presumably reconciled those definitions and returned to a more common model of family economy once Mary received a pardon in March 1791.⁹

Other fathers had similar troubles supporting a family without a wife's labor. Shoemaker Edward Burman and his six children (ages 13, 9, 7, 5, 3, and 1) all spent a week in the almshouse in 1823. Entering the institution could accelerate a family's dissolution. When manumitted slave Charles Lee took refuge there in 1826, the overseers bound out his children Perry and Ellen as indentured servants. Bernard Matthews deposited his two young children at the almshouse in May 1824, after his wife abandoned them. Mrs. Matthews resurfaced after a year to reclaim daughter Mary Ann, but one year-old Michael stayed behind and spent all six years of his short life there.¹⁰

Husbands who believed their wives had betrayed them terminated the underlying bargain of the family economy: access to male wages in exchange for unpaid household labor. Aware that the law made them financially responsible for their wives, men provided formulaic public declarations to protect their assets from plunder by a wayward spouse. In 1818, Ely Roberts placed a newspaper advertisement cutting off his errant wife: "Whereas my wife Maria Roberts, formerly Maria Fox, hath left my bed and board, and behaved herself in an unbecoming manner, this is therefore to forbid all persons harboring or trusting her on my account, as I will pay no debts of her contracting after this date." Perhaps hoping to start a new household with another woman, Ely Roberts tacked on "n.b. I now consider myself a free agent." Just as advertisements for runaway laborers (even those offering laughable rewards of several pennies) functioned to protect masters from debts contracted by an absconding servant, these newspaper announcements shielded husbands from the creditors of their wives. Yet without a formal divorce, men could face other legal problems. In 1799, James Small succeeded in replacing his wayward wife Ann Chrisman, after she deserted him and their four children to live "in an open and shameless state of prostitution and adultery." However, the City Court considered James Small a bigamist. He avoided prosecution by arguing that Ann Chrisman's "offenses and irregularity of life" had effectively annulled their marriage. In the absence of a formal divorce, the "violation of conjugal duties

on the part of the wife" made his second marriage legitimate. Those declarations suggest that many men understood marriage as an exchange of female services for male income.¹¹

It was not a wife's disappearance, but a husband's that most often undermined the family economy. A male spouse's death, incarceration, incapacitation, or even temporary departure from town to work elsewhere sent the remaining family members scrambling. Children often took shelter in other households, while widows resorted to desperate measures to compensate for lost cash income. Not surprisingly, women serving time in prison invariably claimed that the loss of a husband drove them to criminality. When Elizabeth Cruse's husband died in 1810, she was "cast on the wide world without friends and without money to buy bread for herself and her family." Like the widows who petitioned the City Council to loosen the marketing laws, Cruse had few other income-earning opportunities. "In this state of want and affliction," Cruse stole twenty yards of linen from a neighbor. Cruse was less likely to turn the fabric into clothing than to exchange it for cash in one of the city's numerous underground pawnshops. "At any other time and any other circumstances her mind would have revolted at" committing this offense, she explained to the state's attorney in a pardon plea. The officers of the court received similar petitions every day: a poor woman of "irreproachable" character, the loss of a laboring husband, ensuing desperation, culminating in a property crime. Although hackneyed, Cruse's narrative comported with women's assumed dependence on a male wage-earner. Her pardon suggests that the Court also recognized the stark economic choices facing widowed women. Judges made far fewer allowances for unmarried women "led astray by bad company."¹²

The poverty of female-headed households attested to the hardships women faced without access to male wages. To be sure, the widows of merchants and successful artisans often assumed ownership of homes and slaves, both of which could be rented out as a constant source of income. Still, women held a disproportionately small percentage of wealth in Baltimore's waterfront neighborhoods east of Jones Falls. Though they headed as many as twenty percent of households in Fells Point and Old Town, women owned less than seven percent of the wealth in those wards in 1818; the median assessment for women was \$160, in contrast to the \$210 median for male householders. Nearly half of female-headed households possessed less than \$40 in real and personal property, making them exempt from city taxes. In comparison, only one-third of male-headed households fell below the assessment minimum.¹³ Among the working-class women who failed to appear on tax lists were the four widowed hucksters who petitioned the City Council in 1816. Also absent was Jane Otterson, whose husband John had died while at work on the city's mudmachine, dredging Baltimore's shallow harbor. Because her husband was a well-known laborer who perished in an accident, the City Council awarded

Jane Otterson \$150. That sum was smaller than what John had brought home in day-wages over the previous year. It was not enough to allow Jane to preserve their household on her own.¹⁴

Husbands did not have to die to send women into economic peril. Upon her husband's indictment for a felony in 1814, Lydia Grace and her six children had to struggle to stay afloat. "I have in both single and married life until of late enjoyed a competency and saw good days," she informed the Court, "but a sad succession of disastrous events has ruined our hopes and reduced us to poverty." Likewise, when William Woolen was sent to jail for assaulting another man in 1807, his household disintegrated. His wife entered the almshouse, where she gave birth to their third child. William Woolen worried that their other children "are at the mercy of his neighbors, either to be supported by their generosity or turn'd away without the care of Father or Mother." He hoped that these difficult circumstances would earn him an 1808 early release, allowing him to resume work as a mill-hand and reunite his scattered family.¹⁵

Abandonment, intemperance, and domestic violence also disrupted a sizable number of Baltimore households. German-born Hester Halloway lived and worked in Baltimore for twenty years, until her husband deserted her in 1825. "Wanting employment," she and her two-year-old son, John Francis Halloway, spent that spring in the almshouse. Similarly, teen-bride Mary Ann Hall gave birth in the almshouse after her husband of two years, Thomas, abandoned her in 1823. Thirty-four-year-old Hetty Denson and her two daughters took refuge there on account of Mr. Milby Denson's drunkenness. Finally, Robert McCormick's beatings sent his wife Jane into the almshouse in July 1825. But without Jane, Robert and four-year-old son, John, could not subsist and joined her in the institution two weeks later. At minimum, a third of the women in the almshouse between 1823 and 1826 owned their situation to the failings of male partners.¹⁶

Many men contributed to their household economies by traveling far afield to earn wages. Seafaring men regularly left their families ashore for months at a time, but returned with wages equal to or better than what common laborers earned on land. Not rootless wanderers, most sailors maintained close but intermittent connections to home. Nonetheless, their extended absences propelled women into the role of surrogate household heads. Mariner Charles Pasture gave power of attorney to his "loving friend and wife" Biddy, so that she might collect his share of prize money or military pension if he perished on an 1813 privateering venture. The Pastures may have had a "virtual household": while Charles spent his time at sea, Biddy worked and resided as a domestic servant in the households of more prosperous families. Their arrangement proved tenable for awhile, but Biddy's proclivity to steal from her employers earned her a stint in the penitentiary in 1817. A five-foot Irish

woman with brown hair and fair skin, Biddy appeared in the almshouse in 1823 after Charles had abandoned her.¹⁷

Marriage to a mariner put many stresses on a wife left ashore, including the fear that her husband was lost at sea. After Elizabeth White heard that her husband of four years had perished during a 1798 skirmish with a French ship in the East Indies, she found a new husband. But her old husband, Benoni White, was not dead, just quite delayed. Returning to Baltimore three years later, he discovered Elizabeth had married a ship carpenter and was carrying her new husband's child. Benoni White took these developments in stride. When the City Court threatened to indict Elizabeth as a bigamist, Benoni came to her aid. Her *nolle prosequi* petition to the governor bore the signature of "Benoni White, the first husband."¹⁸

Husbands who worked far away encountered other surprises when they returned home to Baltimore. A Revolutionary War veteran of the Third Maryland Regiment, Thomas Cardiffe departed town to work in an Eastern Shore fishery for a few months. He left behind his wife Elizabeth and their three children. Having "procure[d] the necessary support for himself and Family," Cardiffe returned home in July 1793. Entering town, he was "much surprised and beyond measure distressed to find his poor children destitute of a mother's care." Because Elizabeth had no visible means of support during Thomas's absence, she had been arrested as a vagrant. Like other poor women, Elizabeth's need to feed her family took her into the streets and a watchman might have apprehended her scavenging discarded fruit behind the market or collecting rags to sell for an extra income. Without a house to call her own and without Thomas to attest to her honesty, sobriety, and industry, Elizabeth Cardiffe stood before the law no different from the common prostitutes, fortune tellers, and vagabonds whom the vagrancy statute targeted.¹⁹

African-American households regularly combined the labor of one transient and one stationary partner. Baltimore had a large population of African-American sailors, who generally received better wages and better treatment aboard ships than on land. Taking to sea, these men left their wives in make-shift households. As Rebecca Hill awaited the return of her fiancé and stepfather from a voyage, she and her mother pooled their labor and resources to subsist as a two-generation household. During the absences of their seafaring partners, Hill and her mother did laundry for other sailors and picked oakum for cash. When Hill was mistakenly jailed as a prostitute in 1796, neighbors reported that "the mother being thus deprived of her daughter's aid cannot subsist herself and children, this inclement season." Only Rebecca Hill's early release allowed the household to survive until their respective husbands returned from sea with several months' wages.²⁰

Children constituted both a boon and a hindrance to the economic well-being of Rebecca Hill's mother. Her grown daughter assisted in converting

domestic labor into cash, but her youngest children consumed more resources than they produced. Black and white working families struggled until children became old enough to contribute to household survival. Many parents found it advantageous to place children in other households as apprentices and servants. Poor relief administrators made that decision for other destitute families. Almshouse officials bound out one hundred and eight children between 1806 and 1818, and indentured another one hundred in a three year stretch from 1823 to 1826. But more commonly, parents voluntarily indentured their children. The Baltimore Orphans Court registered five hundred such indentures in 1812 alone; a decade later, the Court still processed over two hundred of these agreements annually. Race and gender structured child labor, with white boys monopolizing the craft apprenticeships that augured decent wages later in life. While some white girls secured apprenticeships with milliners and seamstresses, most girls and nearly all black children ended up as domestic servants in wealthier urban homes or on rural plantations. Apprenticeships of this sort spared poor parents the costs of child-rearing, but did not provide the children with the eventual job opportunities to support their parents in old age. In the neediest households, parents sent young children into the streets to scavenge for rags or beg for alms. Teenagers had a far greater earning potential, whether doing laundry alongside their mothers, laboring on construction sites for a quarter a day, or tending looms in one of Baltimore's five major textile mills. In 1820, one hundred and four white girls worked at the Union Company manufactory, with those older than twelve garnering a remarkable \$2.25 per week. Such jobs remained scarce, however, and most children contributed to the family economy through unpaid labor or by taking residence in another household.²¹

White skin did not protect the majority of Baltimore's working families from hardship. The uncertainties of the commercial economy pulled households apart, as did the death, disappearance, or failings of a spouse. Free African-American families—virtually all of them working-class—labored under additional burdens related to slavery's persistence in Baltimore. Slavery affected the composition of black households and dictated the allocation of family resources. A number of black families linked partners on different sides of slavery. Christopher Phillips has argued that the bulk of female-headed African-American households in Baltimore had slave husbands living elsewhere. Alternatively, female slave domestics regularly married free black laborers and artisans. If lucky, slaves used "living-out" arrangements to reside with their free spouses and children. Not all slaves could obtain such leeway from their masters, creating households that spanned significant geographical space well into the countryside. And worst of all, because slaves remained property under the law, a sale or an executed will might separate husbands, wives, and children forever. Families comprised of slave and free partners were precarious

for other reasons as well. A male slave could hardly care for his free children in the event of their free mother's death. Put in this situation in 1824, Phillis Tuston's father, a slave to a Dr. Cromwell, had little choice but to place his newborn daughter in the almshouse, where she died two months later.²²

For families bridging slavery and freedom, the household economy revolved around raising money to purchase and liberate other family members. As Stephen Whitman has argued, the proliferation of Baltimore manumissions in this era owed little to the humanitarianism of slaveholders. More important were the efforts of African Americans to scrape together enormous sums of money to free parents, children, and spouses. Purchase prices amounted to several years' worth of wages. Some slaves single-handedly raised enough money to purchase themselves, but more often the labor of free spouses and children brought the day of manumission closer. Some African-American families "sold" free members into temporary indentures in order to gain the cash to redeem a loved one from permanent servitude. Other families borrowed money from brokers who made loans against human collateral. Despite endemic poverty, black families had remarkable success in freeing enslaved relatives. One might suspect that black families remained in poverty precisely on this account: forced to channel any and all savings toward buying basic human rights for themselves, black Baltimoreans had nothing left to invest in better housing or personal property.²³

The majority of black and white women lived within male-dominated households as daughters and wives. Women headed between 25 and 33 percent of free black households, as compared with 10 to 18 percent of white households. Rates of black and white female householding were roughly equal in Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia.²⁴ Relative to northern cities, slavery did not egregiously hinder the formation of male-headed black households in Baltimore. Interestingly, women headed far fewer black households in Baltimore than they did in other southern cities with comparable slave populations. For example, women headed 64 percent of black families in 1810 Richmond and 56 percent in Petersburg, Virginia. As Christopher Phillips has argued, Baltimore's lower rate stemmed from the unusual strength of "traditional social norms" within its black community. The "male-headed and two-parent" household became a marker of freedom for African Americans in Baltimore.²⁵ If so, gender ideology—the expectation of female dependence within a male household—linked women across racial lines. But so fragile was the working-class household that white and black men had little success asserting the prerogative of patriarchy. Household survival required working-class women to perform a range of paid labor in addition to the unpaid duties they had long fulfilled. In keeping their families intact, poor women entered the commercial economy in ways that challenged both republican and middle-class notions of female dependence.

Women's Market Labor and Household Survival

No egalitarian collective, the working-class household nonetheless relied on the economic contributions of all its members. But as Jeanne Boydston explains, women stood at the center of laboring families "whose viability depended on a complex balance of purchasing, wage-earning, borrowing, scavenging, and stealing—and whose intricate labor systems involved children as well as adults."²⁶ Although men typically earned the bulk of a family's cash in the form of wages, male breadwinners could not support their families alone. Women's wages often made the difference between subsistence and hunger. Neither marriage nor motherhood insulated poor women from paid labor. Instead, women sold to consumers the labors they continued to perform unpaid for their families: laundering clothes for sailors in port, cooking for a middle-class family, sewing buttons for a nearby tailor, or accepting a boarder in a spare room. Such work was common, but rarely gave women (even household heads) a full-fledged occupational status. City directories primarily included widows who inherited commercial establishments from their deceased husbands (see Table Two). The paid labor that most poor women performed was casual, occasionally illegal, and often subsumed in male-controlled household economy. Yet even the self-reliant women who ran taverns or peddled vegetables operated on the margins of the city's economy. Their labor came to light only when the City Council hoped to crack down upon intemperance or huckstering. Nonetheless, their income proved essential to the survival of working-class households.

Women generated cash through petty marketing or by selling their labor power. Those who fell into the first category tended to be less desperate, if only because their work demanded an initial capital investment. Female shopkeepers and tavernkeepers needed to purchase (or at least obtain credit for) a stock of goods, while their continued viability hinged on meeting each month's rent. Women who took boarders required an extra bed or a spare room. The wives of skilled craftsmen, rather than those of common laborers, had the resources to establish themselves as small-scale entrepreneurs. For instance, Margaret and Thomas Tate combined his wages as a turner with her earnings as a grocer in a converted space of their home. They divided their work evenly, and testified that "Thomas has little knowledge of what is transacted in the store." Such a disclaimer was necessary because coverture made Thomas liable for any illegal activity in Margaret's store. He faced indictment in 1806 when a rural slaveowner accused Margaret of fencing goods for one of his slaves. The law, like the compilers of city directories, glossed over the cash-generating work that married women did within the context of a male-headed household. Equally telling was the language the English traveler Joseph Pickering used to describe his 1824 stay in Baltimore. Pickering "took lodgings at a respectable ship carpenter's" for three dollars a week. It went without saying

that the ship carpenter's wife would provide the board, washing, and mending included in the deal.²⁷

Women's petty marketing also went unnoticed because much of it took place beneath the municipal regulations that structured commercial exchange. Female pawnbrokers like Ellen Barnett could ill-afford the \$200 licensing fee, nor could they easily find a patron to post a \$500 security bond. Instead, they sold pawned clothing, linens, and kitchenware out of their own homes and hoped to avoid detection by city officials. Barnett skated below the surface until one customer, late in repaying his loan and fearful of losing his collateral,

TABLE TWO: Female Occupational Structure in 1817

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Lodging (7%)			No Occupation (57%)		
boardinghouse	67		widow or blank	564	6
Innkeeper	2	1			
Marketing (9%)			Craft (2%)		
grocer	43		bandbox maker	2	
dry goods store	10		combmaker	1	
fancy dry goods	5		confectioner	1	
hardware store	1		glovemaker	1	
shopkeeper	3	2	pottery	1	
huckster	5		sausagemaker	1	
feedshop	1		segarmaker	2	
cookshop	2	4	ship colours maker	1	
oysterhouse	4	1	shipchandler	1	
tavernkeeper	6		strawbonnet maker	2	
			umbrella maker	2	
Professional (3%)			watchmaker	1	
schoolmistress or teacher	32				
			Needle Trades (14.5%)		
Service (8%)			mantuamaker	15	
laundress	14	46	milliner	15	
whitewasher		1	seamstress	95	
midwife	7	2	shroudmaker	1	
nurse	5		spinster	5	2
milkwoman	1	1	weaver	3	

Source: James Kennedy, *The Baltimore Directory for 1817-1818* (Baltimore: Kennedy, 1817). Women accounted for 996 (13%) of the 7,770 entries. African-American women totaled 65—6.5% of all women and 16% of free black households in the directory.

informed a constable that she was reselling stolen goods. The informer stood to claim one-half of whatever fine the courts levied on Barnett. A recent Irish immigrant who had first worked as a wetnurse to a wealthy family, Barnett proclaimed her innocence. Nonetheless, she served four months in jail awaiting trial, miscarrying a child during that time. At least, Barnett's harrowing experience earned her a pardon from the governor in 1826.²⁸

Like female pawnbrokers, most women tavernkeepers operated without permits—a situation that frequently brought them before the courts. During the 1810s, more women paid fines for selling liquor illegally than appeared as tavernkeepers in the city directories. Legitimate female tavernkeepers tended to hold significant property. Two Fells Point tavernkeepers, Margaret Bond and Hannah Deale, each owned a slave and each paid taxes on over \$600 worth of property in 1818. In contrast, most women tavernkeepers could not afford the prohibitive licensing fee of sixteen dollars, an amount most laboring men would need three weeks to earn in wages. Ann Johnson had purchased a license in 1807, but when it expired, she “was straining every nerve to raise a sum of money sufficient for the purchase of a new one.” She continued to serve customers under her old license, only to accumulate \$100 in fines for selling several pints of gin and whiskey. A widow with five children, Johnson could neither pay the fine nor “expiate her offense in jail” because “her children must in the meantime be thrown upon the world without a friend or protection and be left to rely upon the indiscriminate charity for a miserable subsistence.” Her vivid plea convinced the City Court to waive her fines, but many other women were not so lucky. “Aunt Juno” Clarke was one of three African-American women (and nine women in total) who faced fines and jail time for operating illegal taverns in 1816.²⁹

Huckstering provided women with the opportunity to work for themselves, but did not promise a steady subsistence. City ordinances regulated when, where, and what women could peddle, and eventually banned their activities altogether in 1816. Until that time, female hucksters had at least scraped by and defended their livelihoods vigorously. The superintendent of Baltimore's Centre Market warned of the “torrent of foul abuse and billingsgate language as the Hucksters have always in store against whomsoever dares to molest or disturb them.” But in the face of the 1816 ban, female hucksters adopted a conciliatory strategy, petitioning the City Council to substitute further regulations for an outright ban. Sixteen female hucksters signed such petitions—three times as many as were listed in the city directory. These women were primarily widows, whose property fell below the \$40 assessment minimum. Neither the petitions nor the directories identified any of these hucksters as African American, which suggests that black women did not dominate marketing in Baltimore as they did in Charleston and other southern locales. Male slaves had long hauled produce from the countryside to Baltimore's

markets, but a large number of black women hucksters would not become involved until closer to mid-century.³⁰

The alternative to petty marketing was to sell one's labor to an outside employer. In particular, out-work in the needle trades brought cash to women who were young and old, single, married, and widowed, black and white, slave and free. As "The Widow's Friend" noted in the *Federal Gazette*, "Dependent females are almost limited to one branch of business—indeed, they may be said to be bound for life to the needle and thread." In the early decades of industrialization, master tailors and cordwainers subdivided production into simple and discrete components that workers drawn from outside the artisan tradition could readily complete. Entrepreneurial masters realized great profit by paying piece-rates to women instead of wages to male journeymen in the city's workshops. From their own homes, female out-workers finished shirts, stitched shoes, and assembled ready-to-wear clothing of coarse fabric (called slop-work). Far more adult women performed out-work than the ninety-five seamstresses included in the 1817 directory.³¹

Out-work trapped women in a struggle between male journeymen and their profit-seeking masters. Aspiring manufacturers saw two advantages in replacing male artisans with female out-workers. First, isolated in their own homes, female out-workers lacked the collective experience and voice that gave male journeymen political muscle; they had little hope of resisting changes in piece-rates or task specifications. Secondly, assumptions of female dependence pegged women's wages at sub-subsistence levels, which significantly reduced production costs for employers. Male journeymen fought vigorously to protect their work and wages, but their strikes sometimes only accelerated the process of out-sourcing the labor to women. When the Journeymen Tailors' Society began a turn-out and opened a cooperative workshop in 1799, masters undercut them with female strikebreakers. The journeymen observed that masters recruited "every Woman whom they are informed can make her own children's clothing." Shockingly, "the very slop makers . . . who heretofore, could hardly put together check'd shirts, and duck trowsers are now employed in making vests, breeches, pantaloons, coatees, and summer coats." Eventually the strikers went back to work for the master tailors, but their wage-rates remained at the 1794 level. In subsequent years, journeymen tailors rallied public support by criticizing masters for charging mechanics' prices for the work of women and apprentice boys "who scarcely know any thing about the business."³²

Gendered assumptions informed the journeymen's militancy. Their rhetoric contended that men's responsibility as family providers necessitated the preservation of their work and higher wages. By the 1820s, however, out-work was so prevalent that manufacturers used the argument of female dependence to their own advantage. Seeking a marketing monopoly from the City Coun-

cil, a group of twenty-one clothiers observed "that a great number of indigent females receive their daily support from [our] employ." The clothiers "could with advantage dispense with the services of those females, but from motives of humanity they continued to employ them to save them from want." Yet, they threatened "to abandon these poor females to seek support from some other source" if the City Council failed to pass the desired ordinance. Their lobbying worked, but the clothiers were wrong to assume that out-work had ever provided a sufficient support to poor women in Baltimore.³³

Out-work was less an occupation than a cash-earning activity performed in addition to other responsibilities and tasks. When Joseph Pickering visited Baltimore in 1824, he observed that women earned one shilling for each linen shirt they assembled for the Caribbean and South American markets. At that rate, a woman needed to make seven shirts a day to match what a male laborer might earn at the docks—the key difference being that the woman also cooked, cleaned, and cared for children in the space of the workday. Few women were able to garner an income comparable to a man's from out-work, judging from the frequency of gender-specific charity pleas. According to "The Widow's Friend," out-work offered income "of so small account as scarcely to defray their necessary and immediate expenses." Moreover, the work was irregular and seasonal, so that when "any interruption takes place in their business, every recourse vanishes, as it were instantaneously, leaving [female out-workers] not infrequently reduced to the greatest poverty and distress." Ironically, charity reformers saw out-work as precisely the remedy to female poverty, and the Baltimore Benevolent Society and the Aimwell Society distributed shirts for women to finish when the tailors did not. These make-work schemes sustained only a handful of women through difficult winters. In general, the piece-rates paid for out-work kept women in poverty rather than helping them to escape it.³⁴

Perhaps the largest category of women's paid labor was domestic service. In colonial Anglo-America, laboring within another family was a common experience for young females before they married and began their own households. Domestic service had also been the domain of unfree workers, including African-American slaves, European redemptioners, and apprenticed children. In post-revolutionary Baltimore, however, domestic service took on a different character. Wages came to structure a growing proportion of hiring arrangements, adult women filled a larger share of domestic service positions, and household workers increasingly lived outside their employers' homes. These changes spoke to an increased demand for domestic servants in Baltimore, as well as a shift in the supply of potential laborers. Engaging household "help" became an important marker of middle-class status, and upwardly-mobile families hired workers to perform cooking, washing, cleaning, and marketing tasks. Unfree laborers still fulfilled these roles in more elite families, but the demand

for domestic labor outstripped Baltimore's static slave population. Charity schools and the Orphans Court could not bind out children fast enough to fill these positions. Instead, adult women from the adjacent countryside and Europe formed a pool of workers who had few other opportunities in Baltimore's economy. For women without capital or access to male wages, domestic service provided a surer income than did out-work or alternative forms of self-employment. In particular, free black and Irish women found jobs in the homes of other women.

Baltimore's employers exhibited no clearcut identification of domestic labor with a particular racial or ethnic group. Newspaper advertisements for servants frequently demanded workers of a specific background, but the color line operated irregularly and domestic servants remained a diverse lot. In the early 1790s, employers purchased European women ("For Sale, The Indentures of a strong, health Dutch Servant Woman") and hired slaves for wages ("Wanted Immediately, to Hire, A Negro Wench, who understands all Kinds of Kitchen-Work"). Advertisements enunciated very specific criteria for job candidates ("a middle-aged Black woman") or showed little preference whatsoever ("Wanted. A Man or Woman Cook"). Tellingly, that same fluidity characterized the labor market for servants twenty-five years later. Closer to the 1820s, advertisements offered German women for sale, sought slave women by the day, and promised employment to women of specific ages and race. White skin and American birth did not guarantee an exemption from servitude for poor women. It was not possible to relegate domestic labor to immigrants and slaves in a booming city where the demand for servants was high and almost all working people were recent arrivals. Moreover, the urban economy offered women few alternatives for steady work.³⁵

Wages for domestic service were low, even relative to those paid men at the bottom of the occupational ladder. The traveler Richard Parkinson informed his English readers that a good household worker in Baltimore cost between eight and ten dollars a month. Male day laborers could make twice that on the city's docks. It was not the size of the wage, however, but its constancy that provided female servants with a living. Some of that income found its way into the Savings Bank of Baltimore, an institution founded in 1818 to aid "the poor and labouring classes of the community." The Bank catered to "the female domestick," and in fact more than half of the first account-holders were women. Charlotte White, an African-American servant, kept only \$30 in her account, but by the mid-1820s the majority of women maintained at least \$100 in their accounts. One of the Bank's directors bragged that women's deposits were "saved from luxury and dress." Some employers deposited the wages of their servants directly into the Bank, from whence the money could not be withdrawn without a written request ten days in advance.³⁶

The several hundred account-holders were atypical of workers in a field that employed thousands. Many domestic servants had difficulty obtaining pay at all, particularly when employers attempted to substitute clothing or food for cash. Relations between female domestics and their employers were notoriously strained and class condescension made working in another family's home as thankless as it was low-paying. Adult servant women with their own households had additional difficulties. "Being obliged to hire out in order to procure herself her own living," Nancy Higman sent her eight-year-old child to the almshouse. Mrs. Costello, a Fells Point widow, sent her two children into the almshouse in 1824 and could not afford to reclaim the younger one until four years later. The child care provided at the almshouse came at the expense of household integrity.³⁷

Although the color line did not structure the broader category of domestic labor, free black women dominated Baltimore's laundry trade. In 1817, African-American women accounted for seventy-seven percent of laundresses listed in the city directory; seventy-one percent of African-American women included in the directory held that occupation. Laundry was both a form of degraded work that white women refused and a niche market that provided a decent living to its practitioners. Laundress Rachel Coale owned the most valuable house on Moore Alley, and her \$250 worth of property put her above the median wealth for both men and women, white and black, in that particular ward. West Indian women may have been especially prevalent as laundresses, working in a distinctive "almost naked" style that gained the attention of pedestrians around Harford Run. Along the lines of labor patterns in present-day immigrant communities, black women likely saw the trade as an opportunity, and trained and socialized their daughters as laundresses. Certainly, being a laundress was no life of leisure, and the trade took a toll on body and spirit. The forces at play in the segmentation of black women's labor, however, reached beyond racial proscription and also included market opportunity and familial-cultural traditions.³⁸

Just as other forms of women's work underwent commodification in the early decades of the nineteenth century, so too did their sexual labor. Prostitution was another way that both black and white women generated income for themselves. Dangerous but lucrative, prostitution could bring a woman more income in the space of an evening than she might earn in several weeks finishing shirts for a tailor. Court testimony from 1816 indicates that one "common prostitute" servicing working-class men earned \$5 for a single encounter. That the same woman brought a rape suit against a subsequent customer illustrates the dangers of the sex trade. Commercial sex constituted an incredibly variegated sector of the economy and the relationship of most working women to it remained nebulous. Poor women likely used prostitution as a stop-gap measure to survive an economic emergency. Entry in and out of the

sex trade was not difficult, especially because Baltimore's port brought a large number of transient males to town. Street-walking dominated entire blocks of the city and female proprietors rented out cheap rooms by the hour in "bawdy houses." Meandering through Fells Point in 1803, the twenty-one year-old William Darlington stopped at "a noted place for those carnal lumps of flesh call *en francais Filles de joie*." Darlington, a Congressman later in life, observed "a whole street of them called '*oakum boy*'—where many a *Tar* can, and doubtless does, dispose of his rope yarn and old cables to advantage." Any double-entendre aside, Darlington highlighted a convoluted relationship between prostitution and income. These women traded sex for raw materials that required additional labor before acquiring a cash value. Many women, not just prostitutes, sold the untangled strands of frayed ropes to paper-makers for converting into pulp. The women Darlington encountered, however, must have been among the most desperate.³⁹

As pawnbrokers, seamstresses, and even prostitutes, women generated a cash income for themselves and their households. However, the most important contribution black and white women made to their households came in the form of unpaid labor. Cooking, cleaning, and conserving the meager cash of their families was itself a full-time job. The commodification of household labor relieved many middle-class women from unpleasant work, but created the "double-shift" for poor women. In working-class neighborhoods, women juggled their cash-earning labor with domestic tasks for their own families. Much of that work involved minimizing expenditures by converting found items into goods that might otherwise be purchased at market. Poverty cast poor women into a daily scramble to procure food and fuel for their families.⁴⁰

Ann Hartnett, a Baltimore resident since 1784, attested to this hand-to-mouth routine during her several run-ins with the law. In her estimation, Hartnett had "always supported and maintain'd an honest and good character," and had the good fortune to have for a husband an "honest and reputable tradesman in a good shew of business." Still, their family economy required Hartnett to navigate the streets in search of food and fuel. Like other poor women, Hartnett kept a mental map of which grocers offered end-of-the-day discounts, which butchers gave away bones for stew, and which wharves were piled with discarded casks or shingles. The strategies of scavenging and bargaining often required women to cross the line into stealing. In 1790, Hartnett was caught attempting to smuggle a quarter of veal out of the public market. The purloined loin was worth four shillings, more than her husband might earn for a day's labor. Luckily, Mr. Hartnett had patrons in some of Baltimore's most prominent merchants, and their influence secured Ann an acquittal. A year later, Ann Hartnett again faced charges for stealing. This time, she had made off with a cartload of wood (valued at 2s 6d) from a nearby wharf. Her guilt incontrovertible and facing a six month confinement, she complained

that she had taken "nothing more than carpenters chips hewn from logs to square them." In most cases, the coopers gave the chips away freely, "it being considered of small estimation." The day in question, Hartnett and "sundry others" needed the chips "to light their fires" and so took them without permission. If these mitigating circumstances did not sway the court, Hartnett pleaded for an early release in order to "exercise the office of wife and good citizen" once again. The irony is that Hartnett's definition of wife and citizen surely entailed the type of scrounging that public authorities declared illegal. Along those lines, Eleanor Cunningham justified her purchase of two stolen oak planks as a necessary transaction for a widow of ten years "striving hard to raise three small children left her by her husband."⁴¹

Finally, poor women incorporated charity into their struggle for subsistence. Public sympathy for the needy in Baltimore ebbed in the early 1800s, but widows remained unquestionably "deserving" of relief during cold winters and economic contractions. Charity pleas invoked the image of a solitary woman huddled before an expiring fire. One newspaper editorial asked whether Baltimore's wealthier resident could "suffer the orphan child to cling to the arms of its mother, rending her heart with its cries for bread, when alas! she has none to give?" Numerous voluntary associations ministered to widows. The ladies of the Dorcas Society and the Humane Impartial Society made direct payments of one or two dollars a season to poor women. The municipal government regularly coordinated wintertime relief efforts to provide bread, soup, fuel, and cloth to poor families. Over eleven hundred families—both black and white—required public support in early 1810. Charity hardly provided women with a disposable income, but did help their families survive emergencies (see Table Three). A sizable portion of "charity" demanded additional labor from women. For example, Biddy Matthews and Ann McGuilen had to transform the flannel and muslin they received in 1810 into clothing for their families. Similarly, most of the Aimwell Society's aid came in the form of unfinished cloth for women to stitch and then sell back to the Society's agents.⁴²

In the mixed economy of poor households, charity was not qualitatively different from a cash wage, a salvaged coat, or a pilfered melon. Each contributed to the tenuous subsistence of working-class families. Marriage offered the best chance for poor men and women to stay afloat. Men and women who fell in the twenty-five to fifty years age cohort but lacked a spouse were quite visible in the almshouse population—outstripping the number of institutionalized elderly and orphans. Members of this group comprised between forty and fifty percent of new admittants to the institution during the mid-1820s.⁴³ Their failure rate in Baltimore's economy suggests the centrality of forming a household to economic viability. Exchanging unpaid family labor for access to male wages was hardly an enviable position for women. Yet relative to her

TABLE THREE: Typical Wintertime Charity Disbursements, 1810

Biddy Matthews		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Value</u>
Feb. 18	coffee, sugar	\$0.45
Feb. 22	coffee, sugar	\$0.47
Feb. 22	2 yards muslin, 1.5 yards flannel	\$0.88
Mar. 1	.25 lb. tea	\$0.025
Mar. 2	3/4 yards blue coating	\$0.75
Mar. 4	tea, sugar, shoes	\$1.50
Mar. 14	coffee, sugar	\$0.37
Mar. 14	wood (plus hauling and sawing)	<u>\$1.25</u>
		\$5.92

Ann McGuilen		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Value</u>
Feb. 16	tea	\$0.25
Feb. 18	coffee, sugar	\$0.45
Feb. 22	4 yards flannel	\$1.34
Feb. 22	2 yards muslin, 2 lbs. sugar	\$0.69
Feb. 24	1 pair shoes	\$1.25
Feb. 26	tea, sugar	\$0.47
Mar. 2	tea, sugar, shoes	\$1.35
Mar. 3	coffee, sugar	\$0.37
Mar. 6	sugar	\$0.12
Mar. 14	shoes, blanket	<u>\$2.75</u>
		\$9.04

Source: Baltimore City Archives, 1810:541

other options in Baltimore's economy, a poor woman's best chance for subsistence was via a male partner's wages. This lamentable condition both emerged from and reinforced long-standing notions of female dependence. Long after a "free-wage" capitalist economy had triumphed in Baltimore and elsewhere, gender ideology continued to limit women's competitive opportunities.

Conclusion

In arguing for gender as the crucial determinant of women's economic possibilities, this brief discussion has given less attention to the important issue of identity—the way people situated themselves within a larger matrix of

sexual, racial, ethnic, and religious affiliations and loyalties. Certainly race structured women's experiences in Baltimore, but not to an extent that gave poor free black and white women significantly different lives. Both encountered an economy predicated on female dependence, one that offered few opportunities for women to subsist outside a male-dominated household and to escape poverty. How black and white women constructed identities for themselves in the absence of strong material differences remains a pressing question to consider. In Baltimore's waterfront neighborhoods, poverty undoubtedly made it more difficult to claim the prerogatives of feminine respectability, and for Euro-American women specifically, to lay a claim to "whiteness."⁴⁴

To highlight gender, however, raises other questions about how historians should evaluate women's struggle for economic viability. Historians have rightfully depicted the resourcefulness and fortitude of the women who first navigated industrial society. Whether creating a vibrant counterculture to middle-class domesticity or selflessly insulating their families from the worst depredations of a ruthless capitalism, women were intimately bound to the economic transformations of the early nineteenth century. Recent studies have brought dignity and complexity to painful but easily forgotten lives. Yet as Deborah Valenze has recently admonished, the focus on women overcoming adversity draws attention away from issues of power: "We hardly notice the agents at work: specific interests utilizing women's so-called traditional skills within an exploitative setting."⁴⁵

Present in American cities both with and without slavery, a pervasive gender ideology of female inferiority and dependence made women vulnerable to the exploitation Valenze cites. But ideology alone did not circumscribe women's opportunities. "Specific interests" redirected women's labor to serve the needs of an industrializing economy. Elected officials, court officers, charity workers, male unionists, and employers found concrete ways both to mobilize and appropriate the labor of poor women. Following this path from the state level (the compulsion of women's labor in penal institutions, for instance) down to the household "struggle for the breeches" will lead historians to a gendered narrative of industrialization—one that acknowledges the insufficiency of "free-labor" to describe women's work within nineteenth-century capitalism.

Notes

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1. On marketing regulations in early American cities, see William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), ch. 3. Baltimore City's market regulations had long targeted hucksters, but were enforced irregularly and evaded easily. See *Ordinances of the City of Baltimore* [1797] (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801), 82-97; *Ordinances of the City of Baltimore* [1805] (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1807), 53-70. An 1807 law empowered the mayor to license "poor persons" to vend from tables or baskets on public footways. Those licensed would also require the consent of the nearest property-owner to use the sidewalks to market "fruit, cakes, nuts, and such other articles as have heretofore been customary for persons of that description to sell." *Ibid.*, 146. No subsequent list of licenses or fines reflects the implementation of this act. At the behest of the superintendent of the Centre Market, the City Council revived an anti-huckstering statute in 1816. See *Ordinances of the City of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Warner, 1816), ordinance 12. For Superintendent Robert Lawson's complaint in 1816, see Baltimore City Archives, 1816:467. For the women's petition, see 1816:327. The records at the BCA, Baltimore, Md., are itemized within each year. My citations include year and item number.

2. The literature on the market labor of urban women is substantial. See Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Boydston, "The Woman Who Wasn't There: Women's Market Labor and the Transition to Capitalism in the United States," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Summer 1996): 183-

206; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Claudia Goldin, "The Economic Status of Women in the Early Republic: Quantitative Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (Winter 1986): 375-404; Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan For Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 27-37; Paul Gilje and Howard Rock, eds., *Keepers of the Revolution: New Yorkers at Work in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 244-80; Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984); Patricia Cleary, "She Merchants' of Colonial America: Women and Commerce on the Eye of the Revolution," (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1989); Susan Branson, "Women and the Family Economy in the Early Republic: The Case of Elizabeth Meredith," *JER* 16 (Spring 1996): 47-71.

3. Boydston, *Home and Work*, 128-141 (quote on 134); Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

4. Historians of Europe have constructed compelling narratives about the contradictions of women's labor in a capitalist society. See Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in 19th Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture: The Textile Trade and French Society, 1750-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). This thread in American history runs through Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as 'Other': Redefining the Parameters of Labor History," *Labor History* 34 (Spring-Summer 1993): 190-204; Amy Dru Stanley, "Home Life and the Morality of the Market," in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expres-*

sions, 1800-1880 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 74-96.

5. On the relationship between free and unfree labor in capitalist systems, see David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58; Jonathan Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 214-221; Richard B. Morris, "Labor Controls in Maryland in the Nineteenth Century," *Journals of Southern History* 14 (August 1948): 385-400; Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor and Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Amy Dru Stanley, "Beggars Can't Be Choosers: Compulsion and Contract in Post-Bellum America," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1265-1293. None of this work really speaks to issues of women's labor.

6. To compare Baltimore's black community with those elsewhere, see T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth-Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 40-62; Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Bernard E. Powers, *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994); Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1981).

7. For more on Baltimore's labor market, see Seth Rockman, "Working for Wages in Early Republic Baltimore: Unskilled Labor and the Blurring of Slavery and Freedom," (Ph.D. diss., UC-Davis, 1999), esp. chapter 2.

8. Boydston, *Home and Work*, 128-141; John Colvin, *The Baltimore Weekly Magazine, Complete in One Volume...* (Baltimore: William Pechin, 1801), December 20, 1800.

9. Governor and Council (Pardon Papers), s1061-5, folder 82, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md.

10. Baltimore City Almshouse Admissions and Discharge Book, 1814-1826, ms. 1866.1, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Md., entries from July 9, 1823, March 8, 1826, May 28, 1824.

11. *Baltimore American*, September 11, 1818; Pardons, s1061-8, folder 50.

12. Pardons, s1061-15, folder 11. This last observation is from my reading of several hundred petitions from Baltimore City women 1790-1828.

13. In this prosopographical and statistical analysis, I have linked city directories, tax assessment lists, and the federal census. *City Directories* [all reprinted in Shaw-Shoemaker, *Early American Imprints*]: Cornelius W. Stafford, *The Baltimore Directory for 1802* (B. Butler, 1802); Cornelius W. Stafford, *The Baltimore Directory for 1803* (B. Butler, 1803); James Robinson, *The Baltimore Directory for 1804* (B. Warner & Hanna, 1804); James McHenry, *Baltimore Directory and Citizens; Register for 1807* (B. W&H, 1807); William Fry, *Baltimore Directory for 1810* (B. Dobbin and Murphy, 1810); James Lakin, *The Baltimore Directory and Register for 1814-1815* (B. O'Reilly, 1814); Edward Matchett, *The Baltimore Directory and Register for 1816* (B. Wanderer Office, 1816); James Kennedy, *The Baltimore Directory for 1817-1818* (B. Kennedy, 1817); Samuel Jackson, *The Baltimore Directory... June 1819* (B. Matchett, 1819). *Assessment lists*: BCA, Baltimore City Assessor Tax Records (1800-1827), RG4, S2, microfilm reels 195-197, 221-223. *Federal Census*: Baltimoretown and Baltimore City returns, 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830. For 1790, see *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: Maryland* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1907; reprinted Accelerated Indexing Systems Inc., 1978). For subsequent enumera-

tions, see National Archives, microfilm, M32, reel 9 [1800]; M252, reel 13 [1810]; M33, reel 42 [1820]; M19, reel 54 [1830].

14. Widowhood either increased a woman's poverty or increased her chances to own assessable property. It depended on the husband's occupation and wealth. For Jane Otterson, see BCA, 1817:278, 627.

15. Pardons, s1061-16, folder 69; s1061-13, folder 2.

16. Almshouse Admissions Book, September 5, 1823; March 2, 1825; December 9, 1825, July 2, 1825.

17. Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). The essays by Creighton, Norling, Jeffrey Bolster, and Ruth Wallis Herndon are particularly useful for understanding the connection between sea and shore and the problem of gender roles in seafaring families. For the Pastures, see Baltimore County Court (Chattel records) 1813-1814, MSA, c298-4, pp. 47, 509; Almshouse Admissions Book, June 22, 1823; Maryland Penitentiary (Prisoners Record) 1811-1840, 2275-1, MSA, November 25, 1817.

18. Pardons, s1061-9, folder 50.

19. Pardons, s1061-6, folder 45.

20. Pardons, s1061-7, folder 35.

21. For child indentures, see Baltimore County Trustees of the Poor (Proceedings), 1806-1818, c402-1, MSA; Almshouse Admissions Book (for 1823-1826); Stephanie Cole, "Servants and Slaves: Domestic Service in the Border Cities, 1800-1850," (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1994), appendix B. On mill girls in Baltimore, see Lynda Fuller Clendenning, "The Early Textile Industry in Maryland, 1810-1850," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 87 (Fall 1992): 251-266. Clendenning counted only 366 children working in Baltimore-area mills in 1820.

22. Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 91-96; Almshouse Admissions Book, April 26, 1824.

23. Whitman, *Price of Freedom*, 90, 98, and chapter 5.

24. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 162; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 163.

25. Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 93; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 224; Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 100.

26. Boydston, *Home and Work*, 128.

27. Pardons, s1061-12, folder 53; Joseph

Pickering, *Emigration or No Emigration: Being the Narrative of the Author...* (London: Longmans, Reese, Orme, Brown, and Greene, 1830), 9.

28. BCA, 1819:467; *Baltimore American*, December 22, 1818; Pardons, s1061-25, folder 87.

29. For license lists and fines, see Baltimore County Court (Miscellaneous Court Papers) 1801-1802, MSA, c1-28, folder 428; Baltimore City Court of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery (Docket and Minutes), MSA, 1810, c183-6; 1816, c183-9; BCA, Early Records of Baltimore (1795), RG2 S1, book 1, item 28; also 1799:188; 1805:384; 1807:360. Pardons, s1061-14, folder 16.

30. BCA, 1812:547, 1816:326, 327, 467. Robert Lowell, "Loose Idle, and Disorderly": Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Marketplace," in David Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 97-110; Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Loucountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Richard Parkinson, *The Experienced Farmer's Tour in America* (London: G & J Robinson, 1805), 433-34; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 110, 203.

31. On out-work, subcontracting, and the transformation of the artisan economy, see Charles Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution, 1763-1812* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Tina Sheller, "Freemen, Servants, and Slaves: Artisans and the Craft Structure of Revolutionary Baltimore Town," in Howard Rock, Paul Gilje, and Robert Asher, eds., *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 17-32; Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Noonday Press, 1989); Jonathan Prude, "Capitalism, Industrialization, and the Factory in Post-Revolutionary America," *JER* 16 (Summer 1996): 237-255; Richard Stott, "Artisans and Capitalist Development," *JER* 16 (Summer 1996): 257-271; Clendenning, "Textile Industry in Maryland," 262; "Widow's Friend," reprinted in *Baltimore American*, February 23, 1805.

32. Steffen, *Mechanics of Baltimore*, 118, 221-2.

33. BCA, 1823:236. Joan Scott highlighted

the absence of gender in the traditional study of labor disputes. More recently, Anna Clark and Sonya Rose have written labor histories that illustrate how the quest for sole breadwinner status propelled male unionism through the 19th century. These works make a strong case for reading conflicts over seemingly neutral issues like wage rates and hours through the lens of gender analysis. See Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), esp. chapter 4; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*; Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*; Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Mary Blewett, *Men, Women and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

34. Pickering, *Emigration or No Emigration*, 25; *Baltimore American*, February 23, 1805. BCA, 1811:562-72. Matthew Carey, "Report on Female Wages, 1829," in *Miscellaneous Essays*, volume I, (Philadelphia: Carey, 1830; reprint New York, Burt Franklin, 1966), 266-72; Joseph Tuckerman, *An Essay on the Wages Paid to Females...* (Philadelphia: Carey, 1830), 35; Cole, "Servants and Slaves," appendix A. For early newspaper advertisements, see *Maryland Gazette*, October 11, 1794; January 29 and February 5, 1793; and March 27, 1794. For later ones, see *Baltimore American*, March 5 and May 10, 1816; July 15 and 21, 1819.

36. Savings Bank director quoted in Stansell, *City of Women*, 164. "Savings Bank Circular, 1818," Broadside Collection, MHS; First Fidelity Bank Collection, Account Book 1824-1826, MSA sc4313-9-223; Signature Book 1818-1853, sc4313-3-59.

37. Baltimore County Trustees of the Poor (Ground Rent Record), 1810-1819, MSA, c332-1, loose insert; Almshouse Admissions Book, November 23, 1824; January 5, 1825; May 4, 1826. On class relations and domestic service, see Cole, "Servants and Slaves"; Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Carol Lasser, "The Domestic Balance of Power: Relations between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England," *Labor History* 28 (Winter 1987): 5-22.

38. *The Baltimore Directory for 1817*; BCA, Tax Records, reel 196, ward 10; 1817:253. In the 18th century, enslaved women in the West

Indies developed a distinct style of washing that struck European observers such as Moreau de Saint-Méry as sexual. The migration of several hundred slave and free women from St. Domingo after 1793 brought many of those cultural expressions to Baltimore. See David Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," in Gaspar and Hine, eds., *More than Chattel*, 259-278; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 72-3. See also Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy' My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44-73.

39. [William Darlington], "Journalissimo of a Peregrination to the city of Baltimore: performed in the year domini 1803," William Darlington Papers, New York Historical Society; Pardons, s1061-17, folder 117. For an overview of the sex trade, see Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), esp. chapter 3.

40. On domestic production, see Boydston, *Home and Work*, 132.

41. Pardons, s1061-5, folder 18; s1061-6, folder 24; s1061-8, folder 60.

42. For changing poor relief practices in Baltimore, see Rockman, "Working for Wages," chapter 5. For a catalog of voluntary organizations in Baltimore, see Dennis Rankin Clark, "Baltimore, 1729-1829: The Genesis of a Community," (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University, 1976). *Baltimore American*, January 25, 1805; BCA, 1810: 540, 541; 1811: 562-572.

43. Roughly 850 of 1880 new admittants fell into this cohort. An unscientific reading of their admission records links household breakdown to the desperation that brought one to the almshouse. See Almshouse Admissions Book, *passim*.

44. The historical literature on working-class "whiteness" has given little attention to working women's role in the enunciation of white identity. Cf. David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Similarly, studies of working-class women have also ignored the issue. Most notably, see Stansell, *City of Women*. In contrast, scholarship on black women and the intersection of race and gender is strong and growing. See essays in Gaspar and Hine, eds., *More than Chattel*; Patricia Morton, ed., *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating*

Perspectives on the American Past (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996). For an effort to integrate identities of race, gender, class, and status, see Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, chapter 7.

45. Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Ox-

ford University Press, 1993); Pamela Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Stansell, *City of Women*; Deborah Valenze, review of Pamela Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, in *American Historical Review* 102 (October 1997): 1159.