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# Scenes Of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, And Self-Making In Nineteenth-Century America (Race And American Culture)



## Synopsis

In this provocative and original exploration of racial subjugation during slavery and its aftermath, Saidiya Hartman illuminates the forms of terror and resistance that shaped black identity. *Scenes of Subjection* examines the forms of domination that usually go undetected; in particular, the encroachments of power that take place through notions of humanity, enjoyment, protection, rights, and consent. By looking at slave narratives, plantation diaries, popular theater, slave performance, freedmen's primers, and legal cases, Hartman investigates a wide variety of "scenes" ranging from the auction block and minstrel show to the staging of the self-possessed and rights-bearing individual of freedom. While attentive to the performance of power--the terrible spectacles of slaveholders' dominion and the innocent amusements designed to abase and pacify the enslaved--and the entanglements of pleasure and terror in these displays of mastery, Hartman also examines the possibilities for resistance, redress and transformation embodied in black performance and everyday practice. This important study contends that despite the legal abolition of slavery, emergent notions of individual will and responsibility revealed the tragic continuities between slavery and freedom. Bold and persuasively argued, *Scenes of Subjection* will engage readers in a broad range of historical, literary, and cultural studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hartman begins her text by refusing to inure her audience with depictions of the violated enslaved

African body in order to prove in part that Black people's pain should not be utilized in order to prove their humanity. Instead, Hartman relies on interviews, fictional and autobiographical narratives, and court cases to show when and why Black people were selectively viewed as human or nonhuman in order to bolster a racialized and masculinized idea of citizenship following emancipation.

Reconstruction-Era emphasis on racial mimicry amongst Black men and women created a racialized citizenship that was not about either equality or equity. Rather, Hartman shows how the belief that Black women were inviolable, the culture myths that Black men becoming "men" through domesticity, toil, and sites of capitalist heteropatriarchy, and more were codified to create a belief in citizenship that kept Black people from real freedom.

Saidiya Hartman is clearly a genius. This book is brilliant.

Scenes of Subjection provides a fascinating view of slavery and its effects. Hartman applies her brilliant intellect to this terribly important subject, providing the reader with insight and understanding that is sadly missing from other academic and non-academic treatment of slavery. This is a "must read."

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