

This is Our Home: Slavery and Struggle on Southern Plantations

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Whitney, Stewart Nell. *This is Our Home: Slavery and Struggle on Southern Plantations*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2023. PAPERBACK. \$29.95 ISBN 9781469675688. pp. 272

A poignant examination of Black homemaking in the face of enslavement, *This is Our Home* explores the unconventional methods in which Black men and women retained personhood on plantations by way of prescribing meaning to places meant to oppress. Whitney Nell Stewart asserts that the three main narratives created by historians do not truthfully show plantations as homes for both whites and Blacks. The first narrative she confronts is the notion that the Black population, needing a home, wished to have slavery reinstated. The second narrative Stewart addresses is the idea of plantations revolving around white families in their “Big Houses.” The third narrative focused solely on the brutality taking place on plantations, excluding the homemaking practices of both Blacks and whites. Stewart argues that these narratives are false and do not reveal the agency enslaved people had in creating their own homes in spite of white aggression.

Focusing on the five plantations: Montpelier, Stagville, Chatham, Patton Place, and Redcliffe, *This is Our Home* embodies plantation life in the nineteenth century. Stewart defines the home as universal, deeply personal, timeless, and historically contingent. Stewart challenges historians who assumed that homemaking was an impossibility and highlights how Black homemaking was never entirely thwarted by white slave owners. The connective force – the home – is prominent and its importance to each respective enslaved population made clear. Functionally, southern plantations were home, yet this idea did not extend to the greater the

United States. The entire country was not home in terms of a nationalistic identity. Instead, the perimeter of the plantations is what the Black population prescribed meaning to.

This history is not thought of by Stewart as being in the past. Obtaining freedom did not change the perception that home was a privilege resigned for the white elite; this is a sentiment that still lingers far after slavery's end. The plantation, of course, while under the dominion of white slave owners, did not completely restrict Black homemaking; however, Black men and women were also not recognized as tenants. Rather, they were seen as property on the land itself. For Whitney Nell Stewart, the South is home, and it is this personal attachment to land that is a reoccurring theme throughout the text. *This is Our Home* is not only an amalgamation of white and Black stories from slavery onward, but also a new interpretation on how scholars can think about Black agency.

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