

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Political Trauma

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INTRODUCTION: CAPTIVE MATERNAL THEORIZING

For black feminist theorist Barbara Christian, theory is a verb, not a noun. For those sharing the political persona of the “captive maternal,” theory becomes a shield and weapon: armor against capture, and tool for liberation. Captive maternals are ungendered protectors and nurturers of besieged communities, embodied here in black female form (see James, “Afrarealism,” “Captive,” “The Womb”). Captive maternal freedom struggles are the provenance of liberator not predator theories. Christian mapped the place of theory for those assumed by Western/non-African thought to have little capability within it:

For people of color have always theorized-but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? And women, at least the women I grew up around, continuously speculated about the nature of life through pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their world. (Christian, 68)

Despite its increasing prominence or commoditization, black feminist theorizing counters academic theory and canonical hierarchies in Western theory through its focus on and channeling of progressive activism. Theorizing, if related to liberation, functions as a verb. Embodied in the captive maternal, it is a site of production (work) and reproduction (labor). While theory may manifest as leisure for elites, for captives it resonates in struggle. Black feminist theorizing seeks to undo the appropriation of captive maternals’ generative powers and nurturing for “the community of slaves” (Davis). Paradoxically, the more captive maternals nurture, the more the recipients of their care are cushioned from and better able to tolerate bondage or emboldened to rebel against it.

The struggle for black feminist theorizing is how to leverage its analyses, which can be and often are appropriated and used for purposes other than the empowerment or liberation of black communities. The origins of square dancing in the United States offer a template for considering the “race for theory.” The state dance in thirty-one of the fifty United States, square dancing is considered to be an almost exclusively white cultural formation. However, enslaved people of African descent were forced to develop this musical and dance form to soothe and please their white enslavers. After emancipation, blacks

were largely ousted from a “whitened template”; yet some maintained pleasure in their mastery over an art form that they were forced to craft, one (re)fashioned through black enslavement and claimed as largely white property (Blakemore; Jamison).

“[U]masking the power relations of their world,” black women theorists as activists command a stage as “callers.” From a platform, with an elevated view, they can instruct the Promenade of democratic culture. The dismissal that captive maternal articulations through art, print, performance, and rebellions are limited in scope, or a self-serving lens lacking universal application for the greater good, ignores how black feminized labor is invested in most democratic structures in the Americas or nations in which black enslavement was a foundational pillar for the development not only of a political economy but also of a white-dominated democracy. With contributions that are considered fit for cultural, political, and theoretical appropriations or theft, the “raw material” for theory from the Western womb (discussed below) originates with a captive maternal. Black feminist theorizing has created movements that altered the trajectory of democracy, moving it from predatory to emancipatory, with an expansion of civil and voting rights. The 1977 Combahee Collective political treatise by black feminist activists organized against rapes and murders of young black women and girls in Boston, tragedies that police and the black community (perceiving the girls and women as sex workers) largely ignored. Following the 2013 acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s executioner in Florida, and the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, as NYPD choked the life out of Erica Garner’s father, Eric, on a Staten Island street, captive maternals mobilized into multiple formations contesting police and social violence. They used their voices to call for formations and to give directions in a movement that was choreographed and spontaneously invented. The theorizing of captive maternals forged by racial captivity and gendered labor altered the practice of democracy and the evolution of democratic thought. The polis as racial-sexual restrictive arena became the site for transformation into an anti-racist, ungendered commons.

“Western forms of abstract logic,” as conventional theory, are insulated from evolutionary change and historically have been hostile to the agency of theorizing from captive maternals. Where Western theory presents the black and indigenous as less than human and intellectually impaired (by culture or biology), it attempts to secure the stage with a white-dominant official caller, bringing order to a fray that conquest and enslavement orchestrated. Even when talking about “race” and “racism,” theorists can avoid a confrontation with critical perspectives in anti-black racism. The womb of Western theory gave birth to captive maternals as it produced philosophy and theory—and engineered a command performance with a whitened square dance.

Where theories and philosophies from the “civilized” Western womb trend are hostile and predatory toward captive maternals, there is a pitted battle over the power of the caller to share or monopolize agency in theory and philosophy. It is not just political philosophy that is politicized. All theory is political; just as there is theorizing for liberation, there is theorizing for domination. Sometimes both coexist in the same time and space frame. The propertied white male founders of US democracy blended counterrevolution against abolitionist gradualism, fear of black rebellions in Haiti and the colonies, and Enlightenment philosophes’ platforms to form their democratic republic; its homage to the Athenian polis constructed a border for a frontier democracy where public and private realms were walled off but engineered so that the public sector restricted to white male rule fed upon the labor and consumption of the private sector—children, women, poor and enslaved men, all buttressed by enslaved

people of African descent, who were themselves supported by black captive maternals. “Originalists” interpret the US Constitution to restore control over the female, child, and racially fashioned captive, stripping them of agency. Historically, free (white) males of property were presumed to inherit a unique capacity for contemplating the universal, the timeless, and the sublime. That rationalized their concentration of power as domination. In reality, they disproportionately benefited from rape, violence, and terror as political phenomena. The theft of time, the trauma of rape and enslavement, the resulting incapacitations of body and mind, the debilitation of spirit—all are appended to predatory theory’s hierarchies and contested by liberatory theory’s battle to call forth theory that does not reduce the experiences of captive maternals to raw resources mined for capital, or narratives that become theory only after they are translated into Western abstract logic. When the capacity to create theory is restricted to the Western abstract mind, only those who take that route to the stage are certified to become callers who determine the steps and movements that produce art, pleasure, and enlightenment. Assertions that captive maternals are incapable of producing theory about reality that their labor cocreated solidify the dominant role of the captor as structure, boss, interpreter, and warden. Captors in their own race for dominance reengineer theorizing to mask the traumas of captive maternals, and the theft of their time and labor. Predatory “theorizing” renders the captive an “edible,” a “delectable negro[/negress]” that black queer theorist Vincent Woodard describes as cannibalized by the benevolent/malevolent master/mistress.

Arguably, captive maternals exist in all societies. Nonetheless, those forged in European/white settler democracies that amassed racial capital bear the scarification of slavery and rape. Intergenerational losses through time, theft, and trauma alter the wombs of captives (Hurley). Democracy’s promised evolutionary trek toward a humanitarian destiny depended upon exploitation and consumption of captive maternals. Hence, Christian’s “race for theory” is a response to the democratic and the dictatorial that stepped over captive maternals scrubbing floors without comprehending that their forced labor and organic theories could seek to democratize a racial democracy through civil and human rights campaigns.

Predatory democracies developed a black matrix as the underbelly of their institutions: the labor and the work that builds social platforms also enables production and performance. The captives’ unexpected ability to theorize changed the nature of captivity as they sought to abolish it. The black matrix inside the Western womb functions as a fulcrum to leverage power against predatory democracies. Atop that fulcrum sits a spectrum whose bandwidth reflects diverse political ideologies. Both the fulcrum’s leverage and the spectrum’s conflicting ideologies can tilt toward freedom or repression.

MATERNALS AS MAROONS

During the “new world” enslavement era in the Americas, captive maternals defended maroon camps established by enslaved African runaways and indigenous peoples staving off genocide. They protected and nurtured flights and fights that ensured natality: the rebirth of family, kin, community, and culture. Their maroon societies theorized and defined the borders and boundaries of democracy. In defiance of abstract logic and predatory tendencies in Western thought concerning who was human and who was not, theorizing as a verb led to a feminist maroon philosophy to counter a racist democracy terrorizing diverse populations. The maroon camp is an oppositional site seeking to

define democracy, an independent site or alternate state in which freedom is defined by the captive and war is a structural possibility.

Maroons are not refugees; their camps become their alternate states and sanctuaries. Refugee camps are also comprised of captive maternals in flight. However, refugee camps exist on the largess and under the management of hosting nations and international funders that structure and police them. In Myanmar, authorized by the head of government, former political prisoner and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Buddhist military leaders, and their soldiers terrorized, raped, and murdered Rohingya babies, children, youth, men, and mothers. Using the epithet of “black niggers” in their terrorism, they hunted the Muslim Rohingya out of Myanmar. That genocide led to a refugee site in Bangladesh where journalists recorded tortured Muslim mothers of slain and wounded children stating that they would drink poison rather than return to Myanmar. Journalists and international aid organizations offer few accounts of the mothers moving beyond survival and traumatized existence. In the narratives of Western media, their refugee camps are able to exist as maroon camps.

Even if camps exist for decades, people as refugees hold temporary time in exile as it becomes a permanent fixture of their identities. Having survived a war of ethnic cleansing and/or genocide, they are often depicted as without political agency and political will. Their trauma and escape from it become the defining aspects of their past, present, and future; their time will be counted as “before” and “after” trauma, and transformational time within rebellion is assumed to have been removed from their existence. They become encased in the identity of survivors of torture, of outliving their relatives, including their children, who were not supposed to precede them in death. With the child-rape endemic in Australia’s camps on Naru, refugees are portrayed as having rights that were violated, or as apolitical noncombatants fleeing combatants and (para)militaries.

A refugee camp is not identical to a maroon camp, but it can harbor one. Maroon sites bordered antebellum slave democracies and contained defenders of freedom who were portrayed as combative criminals. Those inhabitants have historically been criminalized and hunted as fugitives who possessed the power to destabilize slavery and predatory existential and material capital. To become maroon, to theorize as such, register(ed) as a crime punishable by torture and death. From the first captive maternals legally branded by race in the seventeenth-century colonies to the captive maternals trapped in mass incarceration in the twenty-first century, enslaved or contained black females have spent centuries theorizing escape routes in the “new world” (and the “old” under Arab enslavement of Africans).

In democracy, monarchy, dictatorship, and totalitarian regimes, theorizing appears everywhere captive maternals labor, and with that appearance maroonage manifests. Western democracy forced captive maternals to labor to realize its boasts of superiority, only to watch said maternals engineer a black matrix-as-womb within the Western womb of abstract logic, and through that matrix build a fulcrum beneath a political spectrum that ranges from the revolutionary to the counterrevolutionary. The gradualism of inclusivity in liberal democracy allowed *de jure* citizenship regardless of race, gender, age, or “disability.” In theory, all are empowered against predatory utility and consumption, and disposability. In reality, captive maternals, as maroon philosophers or prisoners, could not rend the Western womb sufficiently to prevent its adaptability and capacity to take the generative powers of the slaves it birthed.

Tracing the idealism of democracy to the Athenian polis that she heralds as the antidote to totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt fails to acknowledge the creation and subjugation of

captive maternals as a *political phenomenon* and the maternals' reactive, protective theorizing and confrontations as polis-building. Critiques of the democracy organized to steal time and labor while inflicting (racial) pain (de Tocqueville; Guinier; Harris) seem provocative. Yet, white supremacist or nationalist democracies are artificially made through forced breeding, which becomes over time "naturally" reproduced by the conformity of the captives themselves. The violence required to stabilize chattel slavery, corporate-state convict prison leasing, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, police killings, cointelpro and political assassinations of black activists—from Fred Hampton to Marielle Franco—is cultivated alongside theories that idolize democracy. In a racist democracy, whether the United States or Brazil, the chasm between white freedom and black existence is black freedom. Existence is tolerated, freedom is denied. *Maroonage*, a political alternative created when democracy spawned racial slavery, not only defines the territorial reach of antiblack captivity but also measures the distance between the desire to survive and the desire to thrive. Christian's "theorizing" is an antidote to the Western womb only when a black matrix that can resist emerges from that womb.

Conventional theory restricts maternal captives to reproductive labor. Yet, the maternals constantly move or flee beyond constrictions. Their praxes mix political desire, emotional intelligence, and experiential knowledge. From the Latin "breeding female animal" and "mater" or mother, a "matrix" of origins can repurpose black female captivity; the mythologized American founding fathers gestated a revolution out of black captivity to create an imperial democracy.

The black matrix-as-fulcrum leverages theory into political power. Against Western womb theory, a sovereign captive maternal theorizes maroonage as revolutionary rather than escapism. The black matrix can also turn the generative powers of the anti-revolutionary captive maternal on the political spectrum: from the revolutionary ethos of former black panther Assata Shakur through the liberalism of FLOTUS Michelle Obama to the reactionary conservatism of Condoleezza Rice, who backed the Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, the spectrum stabilized by captive maternals reflects varied ideologies that confront or ignore political trauma inflicted on marginalized peoples. Emotional and physical labor can reproduce black captives who stabilize a tyrannical democracy or black captives who revolt against tyranny. Repression does not inevitably lead to rebellion; rebellion is not inherently transformational. The captive's work and labor can unseat the master/mistress or serve them tea.

The *black matrix* as a fulcrum can leverage against the Western womb. Negatively viewed by some as the terrain of criminality and violence, a site that produces the anti-social and the criminal, terrorism is practiced against the birth site of maroon philosophy, which nonetheless functions to liberate democracy. The captive maternal was born not in nature but in ectogenesis, in an artificial environment of imperial and racial capital, femicide, and forced breeding. The violence of Western womb theory is tied in part to its manufacturing of the artificial and the predatory. Maroonage theorizing, using Audre Lorde as a reference, (1) escapes an artificial womb of pornographic violence, (2) seeks erotic powers in a black matrix partial to freedom, and (3) steals self into maroonage philosophy. If the *raison d'être* for the captive maternal is to seek her own survival and pleasure in freedom and the flourishing of family, kin, and community, then the "mammy," resilient citizen, and revolutionary all have escaped the confinement of Aristotle's deliberative faculties that sought to rival nature by creating an ectogenetic womb.

WESTERN WOMB THEORY

The deliberative faculty of the soul is not present at all in the slave; in a female it is present but ineffective.

—Aristotle, *Politics*

Aristotelian predations shape Western theory. Patriarchal enslavement places Aristotle's "deliberative faculty of the soul" as the apex for philosophy and theory. The capacity for consciousness to think critically and comprehensively is attributed solely to those who are neither captive nor female; the signifier of the awakened mind is the sine qua non that defines the fully human. Told that they lack such intellectual capacity, slave and female are forewarned that their tenuous links to "human"—in a world dominated by humans—will be their demise in social and political life. If there must be a "master," then there must be a "slave." This seems a recurring theme in Western womb theory.

In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève writes, "Hegel says that the being that is incapable of putting its life in danger in order to attain ends that are not immediately vital—i.e. the being that cannot risk its life in a Fight for Recognition, in a fight for pure prestige—is not a truly human being." Kojève fails here to see how the "slave" as female racial captive risks the lives of self and progeny.

Embedded and embodied in Aristotle's legacy is a womb for theory for Western philosophers. As a site legitimizing and structuring violence and trauma, it transfers labor and time from the captive maternal to consumers and "superior" humans, the master/slave dynamic. Aristotle's three-part construct is as follows: theorist is free male-as-human; non-theorist is slave-as-antihuman; and defective-theorist is nonslave female-as-semi-human. The "natural order" ignores that (1) action is part of theorizing—the "slave" is created by an act of *enslaving* (not by biology or ontology); (2) ungendering the slave veils power differentials among the enslaved. "Black" often means "black males"; "black females" often refers to cisgendered females; violence disproportionately targets black transgendered women and girls. Adult dominance over children rarely enters the discussion of theory. Violence is not solely traceable and attributed to the Western womb (see Sun Tzu below). But Western womb theory as an empire at war with its shackled issue has the capacity to make violence not only otherworldly but also a testimony to the shining achievements of democracy-as-capital consumption.

The Western womb incubates violence alongside idealism for democracy as an emancipatory and expansive project. The authoritarian womb makes no pretense of its predations and the expendability of populations. Both feed on trauma and time theft from the captive maternal, but only one is supposedly designed to evolve for her protection. Aristotle's three-tier humanity is not only a blind spot; it is also the height of the psychological "illusion of knowledge" in which one's view of the world is a projection of one's need to feel confident within it. The world is not a safe space or place, particularly for captive maternals.

The free theorist—propertied, leisured, empowered—accumulates the time, space, and pleasure of captives. "Lesser humans" are deemed to have a limited capacity for consciousness and thus are relegated to reproductive labor in the private realm of field, factory, household, garden, and nursery. Underground culture is sought out to feed civic democracy, yet stripped of its revolutionary chaos. For as Western womb theory sutures racial-sexual violence to organize social and political development, it channels disruptive chaos or fugitive flight with trauma. Forced labor, rape, enslavement, and genocide

continue to build worlds where “slaves” and “females” create the space and leisure for sovereigns. Aristotle’s fractured humanity of fully human (free male), partially human (free female), and antihuman (ungendered slave) masks all agency by naturalizing erasure. Aristotle’s theory-as-noun meets Christian’s theory-as-verb; if “terrorism” is understood from the perspective of the act of terrorizing, not just the experience of suffering, then there is a clash of civilizations of theory. Aristotelian “slaves” lacking deliberative faculties were defeated in war that is terror. In Plato’s cave, perhaps hiding from capture, watching the shadow play inside means lost opportunities to dialogue with captive maternals fighting to create alternative worlds outside the cave. It is the prohibition of alternative that safeguards the interests of captive maternals that damages liberatory theory.

Contemporaneous to Aristotle, thirteenth-century Chinese militarist Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* describes executing the emperor’s two favorite concubines for jeopardizing his employment due to their coquettish recalcitrance to lead captive women in battle field exercises. Sun Tzu had boasted that he could turn the women into soldiers; his double homicide (femicide) had the tacit approval of the emperor. Chastened by the murders, the remaining women impeccably performed their drills. Impressed by their training, the emperor hired rather than beheaded Sun Tzu. Noting that self-knowledge is a prerequisite for battle, *The Art of War* gives no indication that surviving women turned grief and trauma into deliberations on revenge or flight. The women’s telling of time would reasonably become altered by the violence they witnessed and survived. The stealing of captive time and the traumatizing of survivors are key features of political domination and trauma.

TIME THEFT AND TRAUMA

Extraction of resources from the captive maternal is a form of evisceration. The captive maternal herself is probably viewed as a natural resource; assaults on black female anatomy and psychology, what philosopher Janine Jones describes as “plunder,” seek to consume captive maternal capacity and autonomy.

The “state of nature” is a state of war, in a Hobbesian sense, until a social contract is established to civilize all parties. No such contract was offered in good faith to ungendered captive maternals. The accumulation of captives and territory produced trauma that altered the balance of power as the promissory for life itself. Imprisonment and captivity dog the lives of all captive maternals. Some live under slave status (caged till the date of emancipation or demise of their “owner”), penal status (duration of legal sentence from conviction until pardon, escape, or death), or maternal status (the duration of the neediness of those one nurtures and their post-mortem life span memorialized as slain children or kin). Wealth supposedly improves health outcomes, but black mothers face increasing maternal and infant mortality rates regardless of income status.

If the #MeToo campaign redresses the sexual assault and violence of powerful white males by focusing on the victimization of influential white females, the rapes in Libya, Italy, Niger, and Sudan against black females, perpetrated by Arabs, Europeans, and Africans, barely register in the national or global press.

Movements against racial captivity and rape are continually created by the women and girls most affected. Such women were traumatized after the legal abolition of slavery when the thirteenth amendment codified slavery or involuntary servitude through conviction and incarceration; then the fourteenth amendment, which was to guarantee civil rights for freed blacks, was gradually repurposed by the Supreme Court to grant political

personhood to corporations that often tended to disenfranchised black masses; the fifteenth amendment, the right to vote, was eviscerated through felon disenfranchisement, poll taxes, gerrymandering, and voter ID laws. Like the lost ark, the “lost amendment” US prisoners struck for during the 2016 election—a law to abolish the thirteenth amendment’s legalization of slavery—entails the legal right to theorize rebellion, an endeavor outlawed and punished from the founding fathers to the FBI and Homeland Security (whose new “black identity extremist” index delegitimizes black freedom from captivity and deflects from white-supremacist violence).

The economies of pleasure and domination in democracy are tied to bondage of various forms facing the captive maternal. With power understood in its pornographic rather than erotic forms, to use the distinction established by Audre Lorde, the captive maternal necessarily has to reinvent herself in the world through struggle and theorizing.

Part of the struggle is the sexual fetish that encases her in democracy. In the mid-twentieth-century south, Vernon Johns, the fiery forerunner and mentor of Martin Luther King Jr., who was removed as pastor from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church because of his confrontations with white supremacy and more conservative black middle-class parishioners, confronted white police officers raping black women and girls. Johns allegedly placed on Dexter’s church marquee in bold letters the title of his forthcoming Sunday sermon, after a heinous rape of one of his parishioners: “When the Rapist Is White.” Captive maternal trauma would expand the title: “When the Rapist Is the State.”

Trauma is also found in the violation of black female fertility through surrogacy rulings (Allen) and antiblack abortion advocacy. Former secretary of education William Bennett under President Ronald Reagan responded on his 2005 Morning America Talk Show to a caller’s query that to “abort black babies before they are born” is the most efficient way to end crime; Bennett admitted in the same conversation that his “final solution” or genocide would be unethical (he failed to note that to end crimes against racial captives and rapes of most whites would require aborting white babies). Yet, political fertility is also a factor to consider.

Captive maternal theorizing about trauma is less about keeping time or score and more about inculcating meanings into life. Captive maternals’ labor creates the meanings and measures of time as captive maternals manufacture time for others, providing respite, space, and quiet to think, while captives undertake the mundane chores and deprivations tied to survival of structure. Western theory created the captive maternal to transfer time through appropriation and theft from the laborer to the consumer-captor.

Time is critical in the accumulation of capital and the distribution of punishment. The captive permits the enslaver to be free of reproductive labor, of menial chores and domesticity, of soiling and washing and soiling again hands in garbage, toilets, food production, and sanitation (what the largely unseen cadres of workers perform daily on campuses).

For communities, black time exists as captive time and nonblack time as free time. The prison language of doing hard time while black reflects the racial horrors of incarceration but also suggests the precarities of captive maternals crossing in and out of formal incarceration. Penal culture reflects society; the social order mirrors prisons.

When time and trauma are interwoven into political resistance, captive maternals will alter the former using time to derail mechanisms of trauma and terror. A black mother with a child lynched by the police or state will tell time differently—counting from before the murder and after the murder. A black mourning mother who becomes an active protagonist to minimize state violence will layer another form of counting time upon their loss—before

resistance and after resistance began. Decades before the killing of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner and the acquittals of their killers, black captive maternals in defiance mobilized against self-deputized police who were licensed to murder with impunity. Mamie Till held a 1955 open casket funeral for her lynched fourteen-year-old Emmett. Several months later, Rosa Parks's arrest following her refusal to relinquish a seat on a segregated Montgomery, Alabama, bus created a movement that chose Martin Luther King Jr., a young, obscure pastor, to be its titular leader. In 1976, Soweto maternals buried their massacred black South African school children who were gunned down while chanting and singing refusals to learn the dead white language of Afrikaans from their captors. **The anti-apartheid movement that continued to grow was amplified by captive maternals.** The movements sparked by black captive maternals across the globe transform trauma and time theft into political power. This act of grace relates to but may differ from the religious expression of grace as sacrifice and forgiveness. The community of captive maternals bringing comfort to grieving mothers, families, and communities is not a "church" codified in state power or canon.

CONCLUSION

The Western womb created a feminized captive caretaker it could not fully control. Captive maternals with the tools and risk-taking willingness to build a fulcrum would leverage theory toward independence. In the December 2017 Alabama senate race, 98 percent of black women and 93 percent of black men, subjugated in a southern state run by white elites, voted to elect Doug Jones with a slim percentage of white voters. Jones had prosecuted the Klan murderers of young maternal activists in the civil rights movement, and four black girls were killed in the 1963 Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. In that close election, 63 percent of white women and 72 percent of white men voted for an accused pedophile, the Republican candidate Roy Moore, endorsed by President Donald Trump, despite the credible public testimonies of white women who wept while stating that they had been preyed upon by Moore when he was a district attorney and they were high school students.

In determining the outcome of one of many elections by tilting democracy toward civil rights and away from predator politics, captive maternals in Alabama served society despite the fact that the greater democracy would not easily seek solidarity with captive maternals.

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