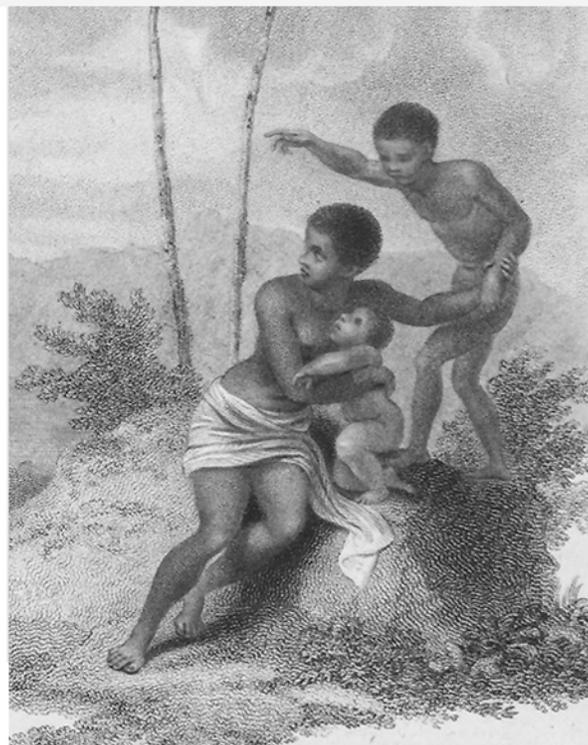




ATLANTIC
HISTORY

UCLA

Negotiating Slavery and Motherhood on the Terrain of Feelings



04
Feb.

Dr. Sasha Turner

February 4, 2021
12:30 - 2:00pm

This presentation centers on the story of Abba, an enslaved woman who was the mother of an unusually large family in eighteenth century Jamaica. Abba had been pregnant thirteen times. She had ten live births and one still birth. We come to know Abba's story through the diaries of Thomas Thistlewood, notorious among scholars of slavery because of his practice of diarizing how he daily tortured the enslaved. In addition to her large family, Abba stands out in the diaries because, despite Thistlewood's notoriety as a sadistic enslaver, he whips Abba only three times in almost thirty years of claiming power over her life and body. By contrast, Thistlewood was exceptionally generous to Abba providing her with well needed material goods to support her family and permitting her to perform spiritual rituals, outlawed a felony, to grieve the death of her children. Reading Abba's life against the 18th Century burgeoning culture of sensibility, including Thistlewood's own displays of sympathy and grief to white community members, this discussion explores Abba's deployment of feelings in negotiating her condition. How did Abba's displays of feeling mirror Thistlewood's, and what did Abba seek to gain by consistently exhibiting feelings in Thistlewood presence?

*Dr. Sasha Turner is an associate professor of history at Johns Hopkins University. She is the author of *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*, which examines the struggles for control over biological reproduction and how central childbearing was to the organization of plantation work, the care of slaves, and the development of their culture. She completed a PhD at Cambridge University and teaches courses on the Caribbean and the African Diaspora, women, piracy, colonialism, and slavery.*

