

Slavery: Then and Now
Violence

Frederick Douglass: “The wife of Mr. Giles Hicks... murdered my wife’s cousin, a young girl between fifteen and sixteen years of age, mangling her person in the most horrible manner, breaking her nose and breastbone with a stick, so that the poor girl expired in a few hours afterward... The offence for which this girl was thus murdered was this:—She had been set that night to mind Mrs. Hicks’s baby, and during the night she fell asleep, and the baby cried. She, having lost her rest for several nights previous, did not hear the crying. They were both in the room with Mrs. Hicks. Mrs. Hicks, finding the girl slow to move, jumped from her bed, seized an oak stick of wood by the fireplace, and with it broke the girl’s nose and breastbone, and thus ended her life.”

Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter: “From early morning till mid-afternoon, Maria cooked, cleaned, scrubbed, and polished. If Maria dozed off from exhaustion, or when Sandra decided she wasn’t working fast enough, Sandra would blast pepper spray into Maria’s eyes. A broom was broken over the girl’s back and a few days later, a bottle against her head... That was Maria’s workday; her “time off” was worse. When Maria wasn’t working, Sandra would chain her to a pole in the backyard without food or water. An eight-foot concrete fence kept her hidden from neighbors.” (Maria was enslaved in Texas in 2008)

Discussion Questions:

1. Violence and the fear of violence have been used throughout history as tactics to subdue enslaved people. Why?
2. What do you think is more terrifying, the threat of physical violence or the physical violence itself?
3. Mrs. Hicks and Sandra were likely thought of as decent people by their peers, yet both women perpetrated horrifying violence against teenage girls. How do you think violent slave owners see themselves?

When Sandra’s neighbor was working on his roof one day, he saw her and reported it to police. One-third of slaves in the US are freed in this way. “The Slave Next Door”