

*Slave to the Body* is the first comprehensive study of body-politics in the Old South. The book investigates how black and white, male and female bodies were defined and thereby brought into existence as distinct corporealities. The making and unmaking of Southern bodies took place in a variety of fields such as medicine, sexuality, religion, beauty, fashion, or sports – and it resulted in a hierarchy of corporeality in which blacks were much more embodied than whites, and in which white men and black women marked the opposite poles of this typology of embodiment. The dualism of black hyper-bodies and white no-bodies determined modes of social control. While whites were regulated in modern disembodied ways, slaves were controlled in pre-modern ways via the inflicted flesh. The despotic power whites exercised over blacks was inefficient in many ways, but reformatory experiments failed, because Southern whites were unable to think blacks differently. Images of black hyper-corporeality were so persuasive that white Southerners were incapable of creating less embodied, more efficient and more tolerable modes of control. In this sense, Southern whites were slaves to their own body-texts.

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