

Course: M.A. (Sociology)

Semester: II

Paper Code: SOCY4108

Paper Title: Social Stratification and Mobility

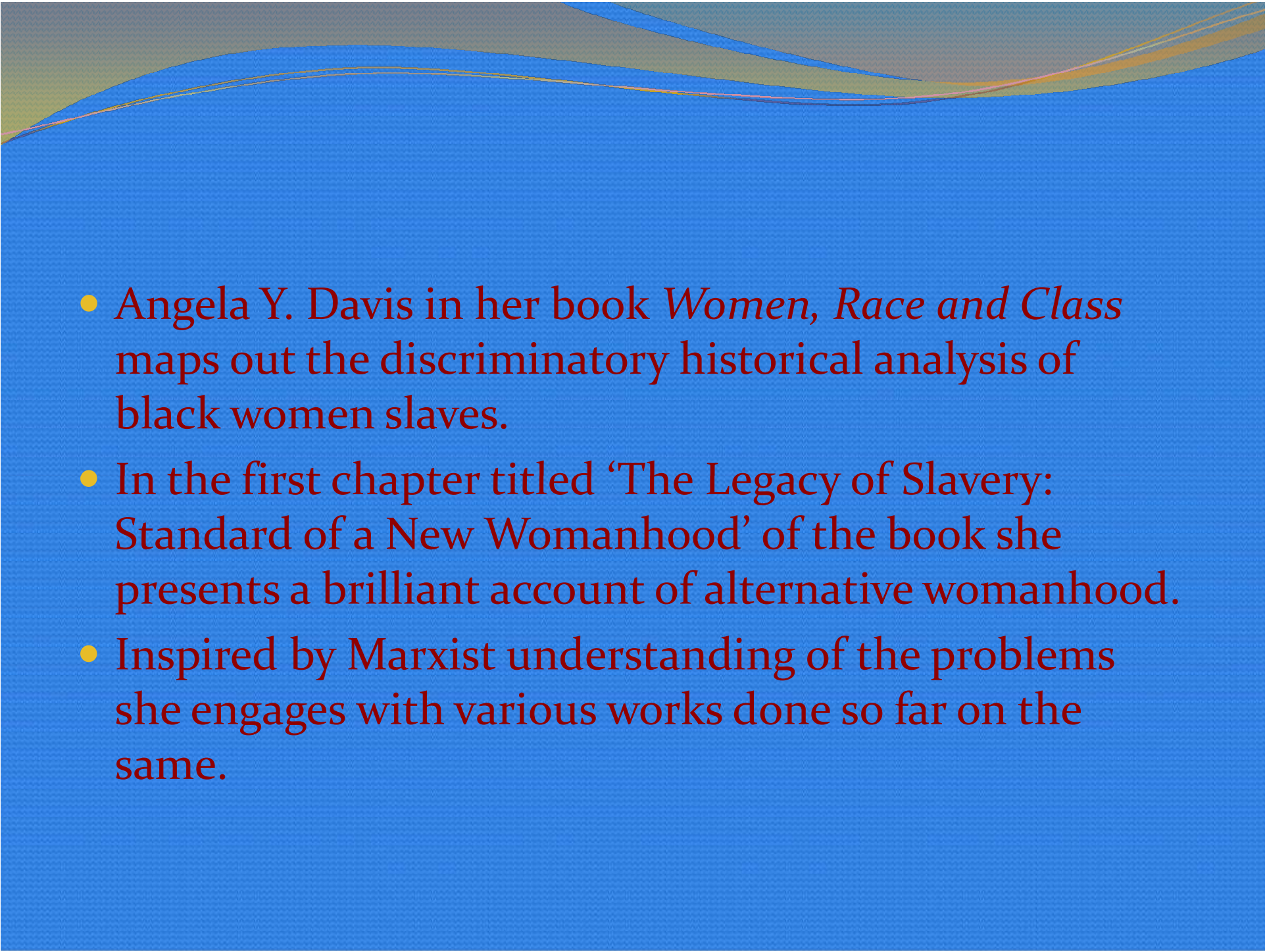
Topic Covered: Chapter 1: 'The Legacy of Slavery:

Standard of a New Womanhood' of the book

*Women, Race and Class*, Vintage Books, New York, 1983.

Course Teacher: Mritunjay Kumar Yadavendu,

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences

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- Angela Y. Davis in her book *Women, Race and Class* maps out the discriminatory historical analysis of black women slaves.
  - In the first chapter titled 'The Legacy of Slavery: Standard of a New Womanhood' of the book she presents a brilliant account of alternative womanhood.
  - Inspired by Marxist understanding of the problems she engages with various works done so far on the same.



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on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2020



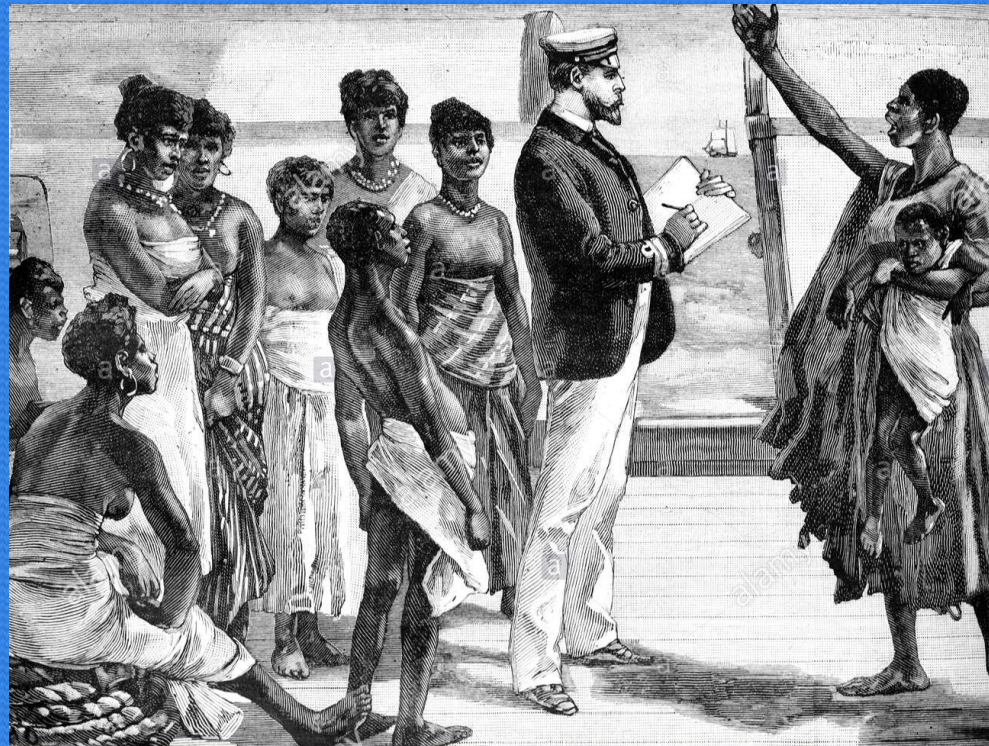


- Davis opens the debate of ongoing apathy and indifference of historians on the topic of women slaves.
- Era of 1970s saw slavery debates emerged again as a popular topic, but black women slaves issues were ignored as usual:
  - Examples: Jordan Roll's *The World the Slaves Made*; John Blassingame's *The Slave Community*; Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross*
- Apart from these examples there were few other works which were comparatively sensible in their interpretations such as Herbert Gutman's famous work *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* and in its response Stanley Elkins's work on slavery was phenomenal.



- Davis muses that this happened at the cost of historical accuracy thus it is the high time that the reorientation happens addressing the historical analysis in true sense.
- Acknowledgement of black women's role as worker is very much required:
  - “Proportionately, more Black women have always worked outside their homes than have their white sisters. The enormous space that work occupies in Black women's lives today follows a pattern established during the very earliest days of slavery. As slaves, compulsory labor overshadowed every other aspect of women's existence. It would seem, therefore, that the starting point for any exploration of Black women's lives under slavery would be an appraisal of their role as workers.”





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**On 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020**



- Stereotyped image of black women slaves under the banner of distorted womanhood need be addressed:
  - “As is so often the case, the reality is actually the diametrical opposite of the myth. Like the majority of slave men, slave women, for the most part, were field workers. While a significant proportion of border-state slaves may have been houseservants, slaves in the Deep South-the real home of the slaveocracy-were predominantly agricultural workers. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, seven out of eight slaves, men and women alike, were field workers.”



- Oppressions of women and men as workers may be identical, but women are exploited more and worst:
  - “Women suffered in different ways as well, for they were victims of sexual abuse and other barbarous mistreatment that could only be inflicted on women. Expediency governed the slaveholders’ posture toward female slaves: when it was profitable to exploit them as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect, as genderless, but when they could be exploited, punished and repressed in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusively female roles.”



- There are peculiar and unique ways of exploitation of black women slaves and thus are multiple:
  - “As females, slave women were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion. If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped. Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder’s economic mastery and the overseer’s control over Black women as workers.”



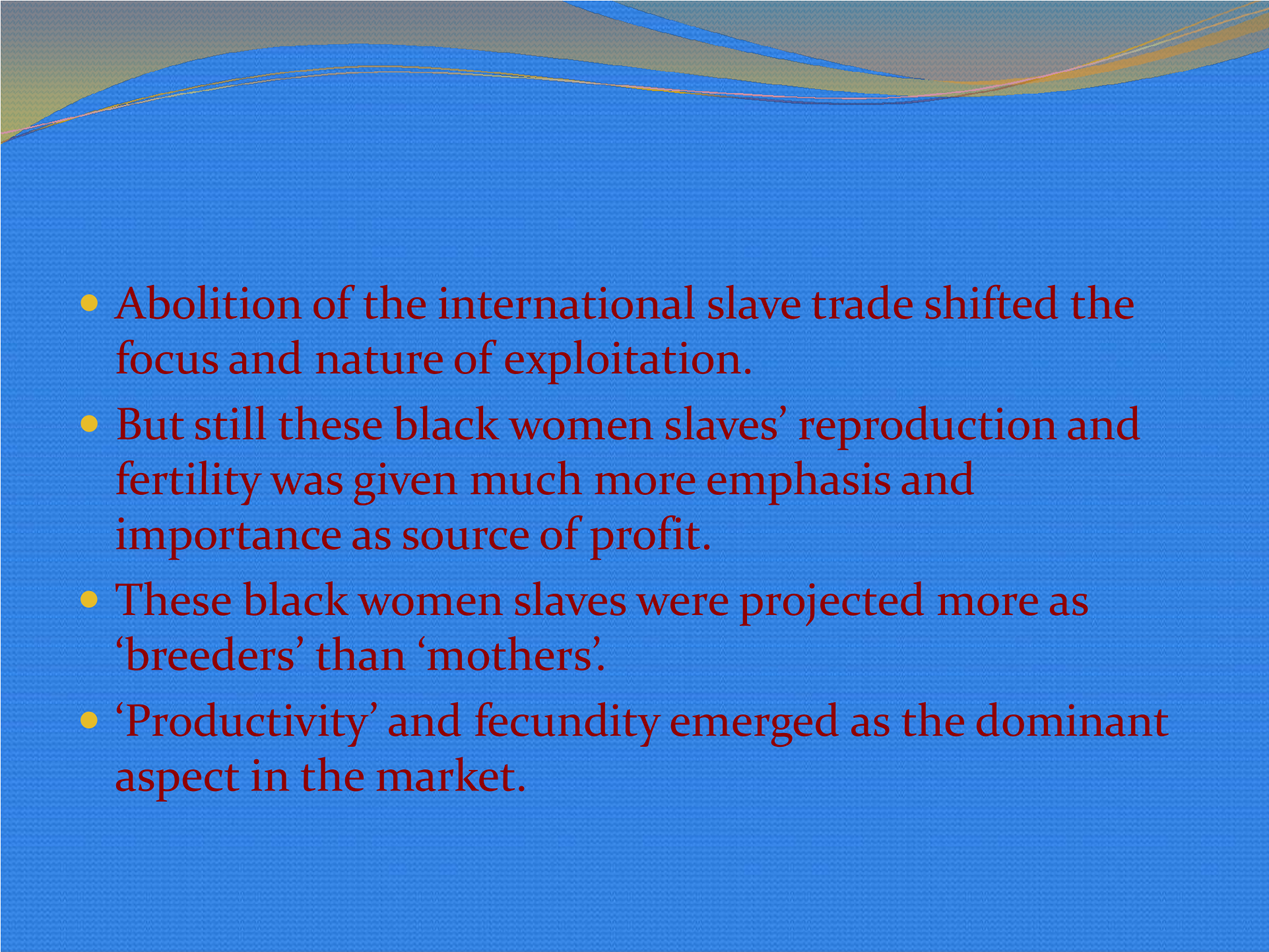


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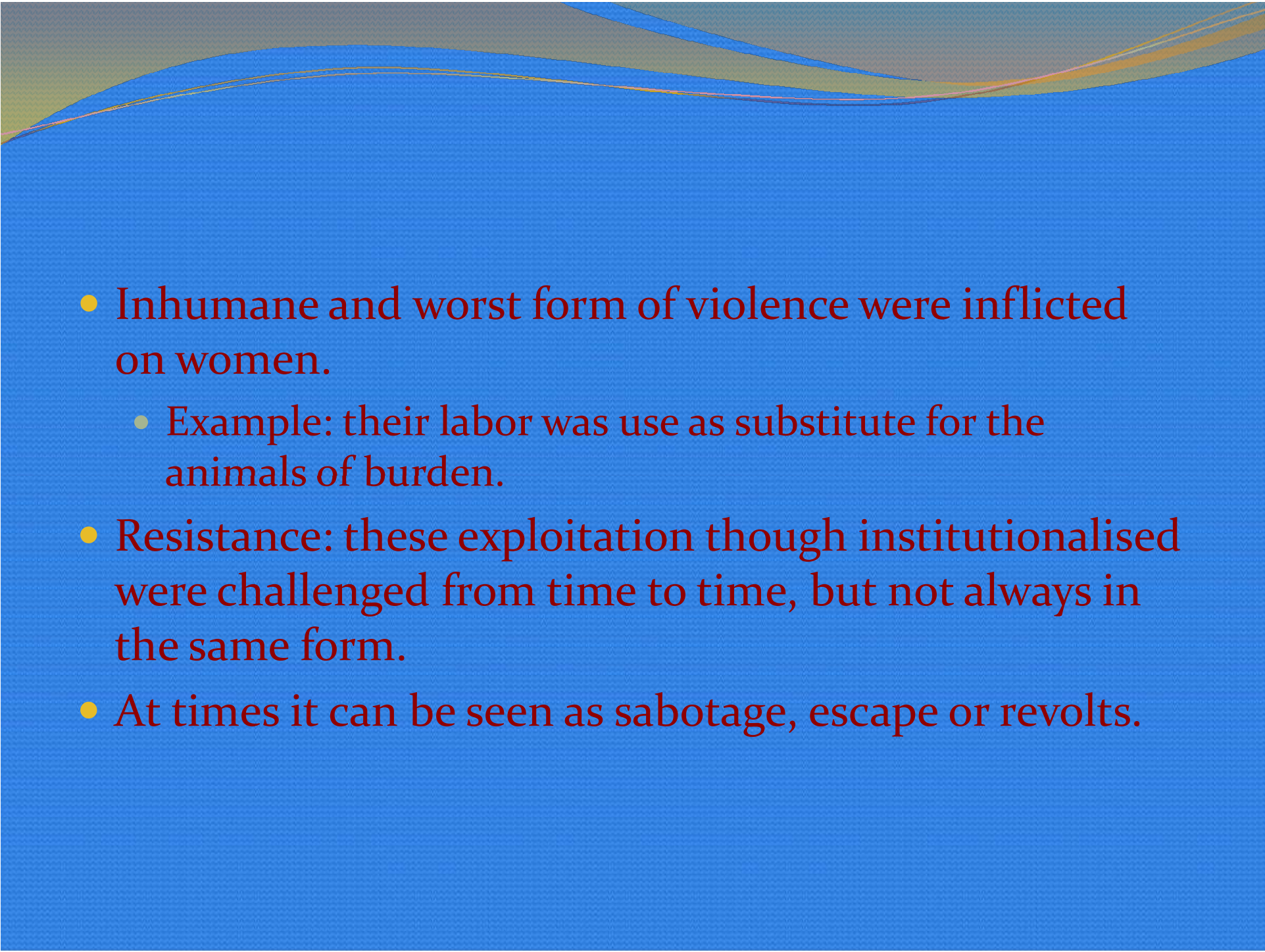
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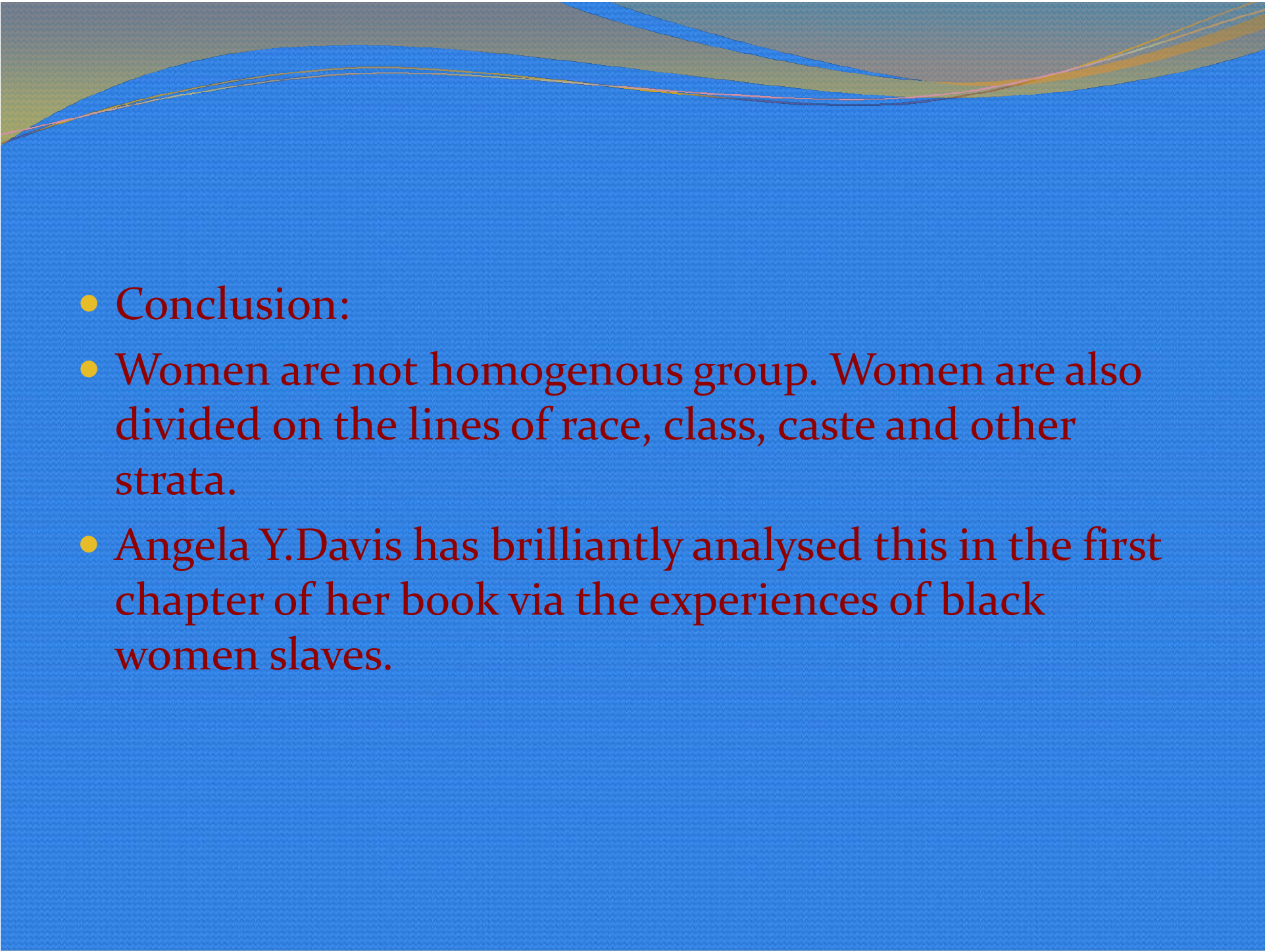


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- Abolition of the international slave trade shifted the focus and nature of exploitation.
  - But still these black women slaves' reproduction and fertility was given much more emphasis and importance as source of profit.
  - These black women slaves were projected more as 'breeders' than 'mothers'.
  - 'Productivity' and fecundity emerged as the dominant aspect in the market.



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- Inhumane and worst form of violence were inflicted on women.
    - Example: their labor was use as substitute for the animals of burden.
  - Resistance: these exploitation though institutionalised were challenged from time to time, but not always in the same form.
  - At times it can be seen as sabotage, escape or revolts.



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- Conclusion:
  - Women are not homogenous group. Women are also divided on the lines of race, class, caste and other strata.
  - Angela Y. Davis has brilliantly analysed this in the first chapter of her book via the experiences of black women slaves.



Thank you

