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Autore	Glymph Thavolia <1951->
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-- Making "better girls": mistresses, slave women, and the claims of domesticity -- "Nothing but deception in them": the war within -- Out of the house of bondage: a sundering of ties, 1865-1866 -- "Makeshift kind of life": free women and free homes -- "Wild notions of right and wrong": from the plantation household to the wilder world.

Sommario/riassunto

The plantation household was, first and foremost, a site of production. This fundamental fact has generally been overshadowed by popular and scholarly images of the plantation household as the source of slavery's redeeming qualities, where 'gentle' mistresses ministered to 'loyal' slaves. This book recounts a very different story. The very notion of a private sphere, as divorced from the immoral excesses of chattel slavery as from the amoral logic of market laws, functioned to conceal from public scrutiny the day-to-day struggles between enslaved women and their mistresses, subsumed within a logic of patriarchy. One of emancipation's unsung consequences was precisely the exposure to public view of the unbridgeable social distance between the women on whose labor the plantation household relied and the women who employed them. This is a story of race and gender, nation and citizenship, freedom and bondage in the nineteenth century South; a big abstract story that is composed of equally big personal stories.
