The Colored Insane: Mental Illness and 19th Century African American Life

Using Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and 19th-century archival materials from Georgia Lunatic Asylum, this talk explores how racialized psychiatric discourses came to bear on black women’s lives during and after slavery. The talk will unpack how conceptions of race, gender, and insanity shaped black women’s distinct experiences and perceptions of mental illness and psychiatric incarceration. I argue that nineteenth-century medical discourses made black women mad by both constructing disorders and inflicting real psychological harm within asylums, plantations, and society writ large.

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