

Remarks by Nan Wolverton delivered upon award of the Mary Kelley Book Prize to Shannon C. Eaves at the 2025 SHEAR annual meeting

I'd like to thank committee members Amrita Myers and Lori Ginzberg for their excellent service on this committee.

SHEAR is delighted to award the 2025 Mary Kelley Book Prize to Shannon C. Eaves for her book *Sexual Violence and American Slavery: The Making of a Rape Culture in the Antebellum South*, published in 2024 by the University of North Carolina Press. Dr. Eaves is Associate Professor of History at the College of Charleston.

A long-overdue and much-needed addition to the historiography of slavery, sex, and women's lives in the antebellum South, this book is an extraordinary window into how the "weight of rape culture" was inextricably tied to the "historic and contemporary understandings of Southern honor and patriarchy." Dr. Eaves makes a compelling argument that "rape, sexual harassment, coercion, and sexual reproductive exploitation were not simply ill-fated by-products or unintended evils of the construction and maintenance of chattel slavery" but were, from the points of view of nearly all who lived in that society, foundational to the creation and continuation of the system.

Eaves has done an extraordinary job of excavating evidence of sexual assault, and she tells stories of intense violence and trauma without reducing the humanity of the victims. She casts an especially clear eye on the ways that the rape of enslaved women infused and shaped what enslaved and free persons, women and men, parents and children, all understood about their society, how it was that "the enslaved and enslavers alike came to know ... what living in this rape culture meant for their lives and the lives of others."

Congratulations, Dr. Eaves.