

WHO WAS BETTER OFF?  
A COMPARISON OF AMERICAN SLAVES AND ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL WORKERS,  
1750-1875

BY  
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1. WHY COMPARE ENGLISH LABORERS AND AMERICAN SLAVES TO BEGIN WITH?

The Standard Yet Problematic Comparison of Factory Workers with Slaves

Mississippi slaveowner and politician John A. Quitman "professed little respect for the northern free-labor system, where 'factory wretches' worked eleven-hour days in 'fetid' conditions while their intellects were destroyed 'watching the interminable whirling of the spinning-jenny.' . . . The Quitman plantations functioned satisfactorily, and his bondsmen were appreciative of their condition. He described his slaves as 'faithful, obedient, and affectionate.'" Quitman's comparison is still made today when debates break out over the standard of living about who was better off: slaves versus [Northern] factory workers, not farm servants. Similarly, while examining general European conditions for workers, Jurgen Kuczynski states: "It is precisely these bad conditions which justify the arguments of the slaveowners of the South, that the slaves are materially better off than the workers in the north. This would in many cases have been true." Despite its frequency, this comparison is actually problematic: It discounts the additional effects of urbanization, crowding, and doing industrial/shop work inside. In the countryside, with its low population density and work in the fields outside, people experience a different way and quality of life. The conditions of urban factory life simply are not tied to the legal status of being free or slave. This common comparison actually contrasts two very different ways of life, urban versus rural, factory versus farm, to which widely varying value judgments can be attached. As E. P. Thompson observes: "In comparing a Suffolk [farm] labourer with his grand-daughter

in a cotton-mill we are comparing--not two standards [of living]--but two ways of life."<sup>1</sup> By likening some other agricultural labor force to the slaves of the American South before the Civil War, many of the apples/oranges comparison problems are eliminated. This work shows the largely landless English agricultural workers during the general period of the industrial revolution (c. 1750-1875) had a superior quality of life of compared to the black slaves in the American South (c. 1750-1865), but that the latter at times had a material standard of living equal to or greater than the former's, at least in southern England.

### Why Do Such a Comparison?

A historical comparison brings into focus features of both subjects under study that might otherwise go unnoticed. New insights may be gained, which might be missed when highly specialized historians devoted to a particular field analyze historical phenomena stay strictly within their area of expertise. Suddenly, through historical comparison and contrast, the pedestrian can become exceptional, and what was deemed unusual becomes part of a pattern. For example, both the agricultural workers and the slaves found ways to resist the powerful in their respective societies, but their forms of resistance differed since their legal statuses differed. In the preface of his study of American slavery and Russian serfdom, Kolchin observes some of the advantages of doing such a comparison. It reduces parochialism in given fields, allows features to be seen as significant that otherwise might be overlooked, makes for the formulation and testing of hypotheses, and helps to distinguish which variables and causal factors had more weight.<sup>2</sup> A comparative topic is justified, even when it deals with phenomena long since analyzed by historians, if it wrings new insights out of the same old sources. It may expose assumptions about events or processes experts take for granted or overlook in the fields being compared. One suspects sometimes labor historians and African-American slavery historians may be letting their respective historiographical work pass each other

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<sup>1</sup>Robert E. May, "John A. Quitman and His Slaves: Reconciling Slave Resistance with the Proslavery Defense," Journal of Southern History 46 (Nov. 1980):554; Jurgen Kuczynski, The Rise of the Working Class (New York, 1967), p. 181, quoted in Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1976), p. 59; Edward P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1966), p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Kolchin, Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1987), p. ix.

like ships in the night, not knowing the valuable insights one group may have for the study of the other's field.<sup>3</sup>

Comparing and contrasting English agricultural workers during the industrial revolution and American slaves before and during the Civil War allows for the exploration of (perhaps unexpected) similarities and differences in their experiences in the same general time frame. Placing side by side for inspection two agricultural work forces who lived at the same basic time who spoke the same language seems "a natural," but specialists in both fields have largely overlooked this identification. The history of black slavery is "labor history." On a daily basis slaveholders got people to labor for them, tried to motivate them by fear and the stick, or, less commonly but ideally, by love and the carrot. Of course, fundamental differences remained between the two work forces. The blacks were not really seen as part of the surrounding society for racial reasons, while the English agricultural workers still had some real rights, despite their evident subordination. Excepting for children, farmworkers were never subjected to the supreme indignity of being flogged while on the job, but the whip was virtually the emblem of the slaveowner's authority over his or her property. Exploring the similarities and differences between these two work forces is the burden of this work.

#### What Exactly Is Compared Out of Each Diverse Group

This work compares from these groups those who lived in rural areas and did farm work as their main or exclusive occupation. Neither urban slavery in the American South nor slavery in the North before its demise are analyzed here. However, some source documents used below involve slaves who either may have lived in a small town or in both city and country. Artisans who lived in rural areas, such as blacksmiths and carpenters, receive some attention in the American case but almost none in the English. Servants are included, whether American slave or English free, whether doing domestic chores, learning husbandry, or a combination of the two, but slave domestics receive much more attention than English ones. Slaves working in industry or factories are omitted, as well as their English counterparts, since this work is about agricultural/rural workers. Workers in English domestic industry are also passed over. But cases in which substantial machinery and mills functioned on plantations, such as for rice and sugar refining, are covered since they functioned amidst a rural setting. Unless

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<sup>3</sup>Being a historian of both American labor history and of African-American slavery, Herbert Gutman is a clear exception. As explained below, Genovese in Roll, Jordan, Roll does use the insights of E.P. Thompson on work discipline when analyzing the work ethic of the slaves, but this should not be seen as typical.

otherwise mentioned, it should be assumed, as "Southern slaves" are compared with English agricultural workers, that the former live in rural areas or perhaps small towns, and that they are either field hands or servants, not urban and/or industrial workers. Since about ninety percent of the slaves did not live in cities, the vast bulk of them lived in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> Blacks without masters--"free Negroes"--are not covered here. The focus shall be on ENGLISH farm workers, not Scottish, Welsh, Irish, or "British." Exclusions and limits are necessary for what is compared here within these two large, diverse groups, since more could always be added.

#### Five Broad Areas for Comparison Purposes

In five broad categories English farmworkers and African-American slaves are compared. The first concerns the material standard of living, such as in diet, clothing, housing, and medical care. The second concerns the less quantitative but essential "quality of life" issues, such as in family relationships, education, religious activities, and having an informed outlook on life. Although through sheer ignorance and good treatment perhaps some slaves were relatively content with their lot, their satisfaction does not make their situation to be actually good. It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, a dictum which a few quantitative economic historians seem tempted to forget. Only those slaves with a "live for today" philosophy, who made themselves totally oblivious to the future, could possibly forget what masters selling their family members would do to them. Sales due to death or bankruptcy were always remained a sword of Damocles hanging over the bondsmen. Third, the sexual division of labor between men and women is compared for the English farm workers and African-American slaves. These two groups had glaring differences in this area which, perhaps ironically, declined sharply after freedom for the slaves came. Fourth, work conditions, labor discipline, and the ways the masters attempted to control their respective subordinate classes are compared, including by and through the state. Abuses at work are dealt with, such as whipping, hours of work, holidays/days off, and the incentives used by "management," broadly considered. The reality of paternalism and the quality of work relationships are examined. Fifth, the means by which the subordinate classes resisted the will of the dominant class is analyzed. How the oppressed classes wore a "mask" is considered here. Both of these groups carefully concealed, by lies, feigned ignorance, or the simple non-volunteering of information, what they REALLY thought from their "betters" to avoid punishment or exploitation. The infrequent, but spectacular, cases of revolts and mass

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<sup>4</sup>Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 31.

actions are covered, as well as union activities among the agricultural workers. Using the broad categories of the material standard of living, the quality of life, the sexual division of labor, work conditions and controls, and resistance against those in authority and their controls, the most important similarities and contrasts between these two work forces are focused upon.

This comparison uses the general time period of 1750-1875. Making for the drawing of sharper parallels, these dates allow two largely contemporary work forces to be compared who both lived in industrializing nations and spoke the same language. The nineteenth century is emphasized, partly due to greater documentation, but also because then the factors creating these two work forces' conditions peaked. The proletarianization of the farmworkers reached a height in the first half of the nineteenth century, before allotments spread more widely, mechanization became common, and out-migration had partially emptied the English countryside. Similarly, after generally experiencing a boom in the preceding thirty years, the Cotton Kingdom clearly reached an economic high point in 1860. This work emphasizes portraying the respective climaxes of the two work forces' conditions as determined by events and processes that began in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, such as the initial arrival of slaves in the English colonies and the second general wave (i.e., post-Tudor) enclosure acts. Changes from earlier conditions (pre-1750) are treated largely in passing, which makes the conditions of the slaves look better, due to the improvements in their treatment from the early colonial period, while these make the agricultural workers appear worse off, because of the negative effects enclosure and the French Wars had on their standard of living compared to (say) 1725.

Both work forces lived in industrializing countries. The South's industrial sector before the Civil War that could employ the slaves paled before what was available to rural English workers. Nevertheless, they still resided in the nation that was, by the eve of the Civil War, the world's second greatest industrial power. The North's industrial sector clearly affected them. Often Northern factories made the clothes and shoes they wore, and the tools and machines they worked with. Corresponding with the period of England's industrialization, the enclosure acts affected the laborers largely negatively. They greatly reduced the independence and social mobility the farmworkers had had. If they were willing to migrate, industry gave them an outlet from bad rural conditions. It even provided some competition for their labor that raised their wages when they stayed put, at least in northern England. Importantly, a major chronological difference separates the two groups: Freedom abruptly came to the slaves in 1865, but the improvements and changes in the farmworkers' conditions were gradual, without any radical discontinuity. Perhaps the farmworkers' gaining the vote

in 1884 was the one event that changed their lives the most, for although the Swing Riots of 1830-31 badly shook the British establishment, their effects on their lives were a pittance before the effects of emancipation on American blacks.<sup>5</sup> The mechanization of English agriculture was a long, slow process, undoubtedly hindered early in the nineteenth century by the massive labor surplus that prevailed in much of the English countryside, and even by "Captain Swing" himself. Hence, some sources about post-1875 conditions are cited for the English case, since their conditions changed more slowly, but post-1865 conditions are mostly ignored for the freedmen, although racial subordination continued by means other than bondage.

## 2. A HISTORICAL PERENNIAL: THE STANDARD OF LIVING DEBATE

### Some Theoretical Problems in Comparing Slaves and Laborers' Standard of Living

The debate over standard of living during industrialization, and the role of capitalism in lowering or raising the masses' consumption and use of various material goods, is one of historiography's greatest footballs. The Long Debate on Poverty<sup>6</sup> has an aptly chosen title! Unfortunately, for both Southern slaves and English farmworkers, no solid nationwide statistical economic data exists that could decisively settle the issue. The English (and Welsh) had no fully inclusive census until 1801, no occupational census until 1841, and no official registration for deaths and births until 1839.<sup>7</sup> American census data begins with 1790, but a mere count of people, crops grown in a given year, and their occupations is not enough to calculate per capita income.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, what the average slave received

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<sup>5</sup>Joseph Arch, Joseph Arch The Story of His Life, ed. Countess of Warwick (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1898), pp. 376-377, 389.

<sup>6</sup>R.M. Hartwell, et al, Eight Essays on Industrialization and 'the Condition of England' (n.p.: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1972).

<sup>7</sup>Phyllis Deane, The First Industrial Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 2d ed., pp. 13, 22. Of course, E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield's The Population History of England 1541-1871 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981) has revolutionized the subject of the growth of the English population during the eighteenth century by ingeniously projecting backwards from the 1871 census.

<sup>8</sup>Planter Bennet Barrow noted the taking of the "Cencus" in his Diary on May 31, 1840: "Taking the Cencus of the United States--the products, cotten corn horses mules cattle Hogs



hardly equaled what the American did! To run such calculations, it is necessary to know what the slaves alone got. The available historical evidence, such as it is, can give clues and indications of what the actual standard of living was. But, at this late date, nothing with full rational certainty capable of convincing all the disputants involved is likely to turn up. Anecdotal evidence is valuable, because it can descriptively expose the relationships within an society that an overemphasis on quantitative data can obscure. But it cannot totally settle this debate, since conflicting stories appear to support both sides, such as how kindly or harshly the "typical" master treated the "average" slave. This point leads to the next big problem in the standard of living controversy . . .

Just what exactly IS the "average" slave or the "typical" agricultural worker? These abstractions represent groups that experienced a great variety of working conditions, climates, lifestyles, occupations, family statuses, and masters supervising. What is "average" for slaves when comparing the relatively mild bondage of the Border States, such as Virginia and Kentucky, with the harshness of the frontier Deep South, such as Texas and Arkansas? What is "average" for agricultural workers between Northumberland, where one observer said the wages and the standard of living surpassed America's for farmworkers, as opposed to the utter misery of notoriously low-waged Wiltshire in southern England?<sup>9</sup> Theoretically, after warming up the computers armed with spreadsheet programs, adding the two together and dividing, the issue would be settled, if accurate, broad-based, quantitative statistics did exist (but they do not). Number-crunching can obscure the essential reality of an unequal or extreme situations within the working class or bondsmen as a whole. The economist who warned against wading a river with an average depth of four feet drew attention to a serious

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sheep Potatoes Poultry, quantity cloth made, Fodder hay." Edwin Adams Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846 as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, Columbia University Studies in the History of American Agriculture, no. 9 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 197. All sources quoted in this work have the literal language retained, regardless of what grammatical or spelling offenses they commit, with their original emphasis kept, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup>For conditions in Northumberland, see Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1867-68, vol. xvii, Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, first report, p. xiv. The British Parliamentary Sessional Papers are hereafter referred to as BPP. This report itself below may be called simply "Commission on Employment in Agriculture."

theoretical problem that pervades quantitative analysis when applied to the standard of living debate. Although the "average" bondsman or the "mean" farmworker are handy abstractions, they remain generalizations. It is mistaken to allow them to obscure the underlying realities of (especially) regional diversity for the farmworkers, or the widely varying treatment meted out by various masters and mistresses to their bondsmen.

### Diet and the Standard of Living for Slaves

The essence of the standard of living debate seems to be diet, and how far the masses lived above bare subsistence.<sup>10</sup> Related issues include: How much and what kinds of "luxuries," such as sugar, coffee, and tea, did the groups in question enjoy? How much and what kinds of meat did they have? Did they eat wheat, the most expensive grain, or barley, rye, oats, etc.? How coarse was the food they ate? For the American slaves, as for American Southerners generally, the main grain was corn (maize), and the main meat, pork.<sup>11</sup> The absolutely archetypal rations slaves received consisted of so many pecks of corn and pounds of pork or bacon per week. Anything adding to or replacing these items as basic foodstuffs was at least mildly unusual. As escaped slave Christopher Nichols testified to Drew: "My master used to allow us one piece of meat a day, and a peck and a half of corn meal a week." After being sold for \$1,200 in Natchez, Eli Johnson was "put on a cotton farm, and allowed a peck of corn a week and three pounds meat." Traveler Frederick Law Olmsted inquired of one white Southerner: "'What do they generally give

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<sup>10</sup>This emphasis is disputable, especially when adopting Snell's approach of examining what the poor themselves considered important. Simply put, although food is a major part of the material standard of living, it is not so important to the overall quality of life, excluding true famine conditions. The distinction between the quality of life and the standard of living is developed below. See K.D.M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 9-14.

<sup>11</sup>Olmsted commented, during his travels in eastern Texas before the Civil War: "The meals are absolutely invariable . . . The bread is made of corn-meal, stirred with water and salt, and baked in a kettle covered with coals. The corn for breakfast is frequently unhusked at sunrise. . . . Wheat bread, if I am not mistaken, we met with but twice, out of Austin, in our whole journey across the State." Frederick Law Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States, 2 vols. (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), 1:368-69. While visiting Neu-Braunfels, Texas, he found no wheat in the market. Frederick Law Olmsted, The Slave States, ed. Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 158.

the niggers on the plantations here?' 'A peck of meal and three pound of bacon is what they call 'lowance, in general, I believe. It takes a heap o' meat on a big plantation.'" Aged ex-slave Andy Anderson painfully recalled that the new overseer, Delbridge, cut rations as the Civil War began: "He weighs out the meat, three pound for the week, and he measure a peck of meal." The "meat" in question was normally from the flesh of hogs, although exceptions appeared. Once a slave in eastern Maryland, Frederick Douglass mentioned how the standard monthly rations included fish sometimes: "The men and women slaves received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal." Charles Ball similarly described Calvert County, Maryland, where

the practice amongst slave-holders, was to allow each slave one peck of corn weekly, which was measured out every Monday morning; at the same time each one receiving seven salt herrings. This formed the week's provision, and the master who did not give it, was called a hard master, whilst those who allowed their people any thing more, were deemed kind and indulgent.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, the normal bondsman and woman expected a diet that included several pounds of pork or bacon and, even more certainly, corn.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Benjamin Drew, A North-side View of Slavery The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1856; reprint ed., New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), pp. 71, 381. Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, 2:109. See also 1:102 and 2:172, 241. Testifying to the nearly universal racism of whites, North or South, racial slurs are quoted when found in the sources. B.A. Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), p. 172; Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave Written by Himself (1845; reprint ed., New York: New American Library/Penguin, 1968), p. 28; Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837; reprint ed., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), pp. 42-43.

<sup>13</sup>Further evidence for the near universality of the "standard ration" appears in Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. Kiple, "Black Tongue and Black Men: Pellagra and Slavery in the Antebellum South," Journal of Southern History, 43 (Aug. 1977) 413, n. 7; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), 1:110; Richard Sutch in Paul A. David, et al., Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study

Were the standard rations enough? Sometimes they were not, at least for some adult men. As Blassingame notes: "Equally serious was his [the slave's] dependence on the 'average' amount of food and clothing his master decided was sufficient for all slaves." What was sufficient for one man or woman may be insufficient for others!<sup>14</sup> Ex-slave Anderson added, after describing his plantation's new standard rations: "And 'twa'n't enough. He half-starve us niggers, and he want more work." Runaway slave Williamson Pease ironically commented to Drew about the draught animals' superior treatment: "Horses and mules have food by them all the time, but the slaves had four pounds of fat bacon a week, and a peck of corn meal,--not enough to last some men three days." Francis Henderson similarly commented: "Our allowance was given weekly--a peck of sifted corn meal, a dozen and a half herrings, two and a half pounds of pork. Some of the boys would eat this up in three days."<sup>15</sup> Underfeeding almost inevitably caused theft, as Pease and Henderson also observed. Harriet Brent Jacobs, alias Linda Brent, described well how miserly the rations could be doled out. Her mistress would

spit in all the kettles and pans that had been used for cooking. She did this to prevent the cook and her children from eking out their meager fare with the remains of gravy and other scrapings. The slaves could get nothing to eat except what she chose to give them. Provisions were weighed out by the pound and ounce, three times a day. I can assure you she gave them no chance to eat wheat bread from her flour barrel. She knew how many biscuits a quart of flour would make, and exactly what size they ought to be.<sup>16</sup>

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in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 235.

<sup>14</sup>John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 254.

<sup>15</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 172; Drew, Refugee, pp. 131, 155.

<sup>16</sup>Linda Brent, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861; reprint ed., San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1973), p. 11. Because of its rather incredible events and novelistic "feel," this narrative has had its authenticity questioned in years past. But more recently excellent evidence for its authenticity has appeared. See Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative," American Literature, 53 (Nov. 1981):479-86. Nevertheless, the feel of a morality tale still hangs over it. It tells the story of one slaveholder who supposedly on his

So according to the slaves' own testimony, the nearly universal "standard rations" were inadequate for many of them, at least by themselves without what they could raise, hunt, or steal on their own, or what more indulgent masters might issue.<sup>17</sup>

#### Fogel and Engerman's Optimistic Reconstructions of the Slave Diet

Fogel and Engerman in Time on the Cross argue that slaves were well fed:

The average daily diet of slaves was quite substantial. The energy value of their diet exceeding that of free men in 1879 by more than 10 percent. There was no deficiency in the amount of meat allotted to slaves. On average, they consumed six ounces of meat per day, just an ounce lower than the average quantity consumed by the free population.<sup>18</sup>

Although such data as average heights and rapid population growth indicate American slaves were not seriously underfed, this result was not entirely due to their masters and mistresses' efforts.<sup>19</sup> The slaves struggled to get food on their own, such as by hunting

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deathbed shrieked, "I am going to hell; bury my money with me." When his eyes failed to close after his death, silver dollars were laid on them! This "incident," which she did not personally witness, sounds suspiciously like what this master's slaves wished and felt ought to have happened than what did in fact happen. Incidents, pp. 46-47.

<sup>17</sup>"Compensated undernutrition," the dietetic condition in which the human body operates at a lower metabolic rate due to months or years of low caloric intake, may also explain how slaves lived on such rations without great physical damage. See David Eltis, "Nutritional Trends in Africa and the Americas: Heights of Africans, 1819-1839," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 12 (winter 1982):471. This condition still makes its sufferers less energetic, less mentally alert--and more easy to control.

<sup>18</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:113.

<sup>19</sup>Some gathered evidence indicates the average height of American-born slaves was greater than their African counterparts. See Eltis, "Nutritional Trends," 453-75. For the greater natural population growth of Southern slaves as contrasted with those elsewhere in the Americas, see Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:25-29. Frederick Douglass believed "in the part of Maryland from which I came, it is the general practice,--though there are many exceptions" that the slaves were fed enough. Narrative, p. 65.

and trapping (both relatively productive in a sparsely populated/frontier region), gardening small patches of land, purchasing food using money they earned from extra work, not to mention stealing. The testimony cited above casts some doubt on the "standard rations" of pork and corn alone always being enough to satisfy at least adult male bondsmen.

Fogel and Engerman clearly make many dubious assumptions and casual mistakes while reconstructing the slave diet, as shown by Richard Sutch's searching and intensive critique of their data. Their disappearance method uses data from only 44 generally backwoods counties out of Parker and Gallman's sample of 413 counties' farm and plantation food production. They assume the slaves must have eaten most of the food produced on the plantations in their subsample because (they reason) these were too far from significant urban markets. Their subsample of this sample excluded farms and small plantations with fewer than fifty-one slaves, thus discounting the possibility of local sales of produce by the big plantations to neighboring farms and small plantations. Indeed, their subsample comes down to just seventy-seven plantations, including less than 10 percent of the total population and 1.5 percent of the total productive landholdings in the Parker-Gallman sample. With such a narrow sample focused on the largest plantations, a bias similar to U.B. Phillips's American Negro Slavery, distortions inevitably appear. Since plantations were commercial and non-subsistent by nature, they sold produce for cash. Using a subsample of them in backwoods areas more than fifty wagon miles from urban areas would not eliminate the distortions caused by local sales of produce or the driving of animals on the hoof to market. The latter point undermines Fogel and Engerman's evidence for the slaves having a high beef consumption based on their subsample since 15 percent of all the cattle in it were on four Texas farms in two counties which fell outside the fifty-mile radius. But since Texas was notorious for long distance cattle drives to market, it is implausible to think these ranches' slaves ate most of the steer raised on them! They underestimate the resident white population's consumption in these areas, such as by using conversion ratios (such as dressed to live weight) which lower how much pork the slaves ate and raise how much the whites ate in the subsampled areas. Between all the mistakes and questionable assumptions Sutch identifies, many of them omitted here, nobody should place much stock in Fogel and Engerman's arguments for a varied and nutritious slave diet.<sup>20</sup>

Much of the debate on the slave diet between Fogel and

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<sup>20</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:109-115; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross Evidence and Methods--A Supplement (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), 2:90-99; Richard Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 231-283.

Engerman and their critics like Sutch surrounds mineral and vitamin deficiencies. For example, was the phenomenon of dirt/clay eating, which still survives among Southern rural blacks in the United States today, due to malnutrition? A thiamine deficiency could easily explain some plantations' outbreaks of sudden dirt-eating frenzies.<sup>21</sup> Being high in pork and maize, the classic slave diet clearly was tailor-made for producing pellagra, just as it did among poor whites. Due to its chemically bound form, corn lacks niacin that the human body can easily use. Its high content of the amino acid leucine partially even interferes with the body's digestion of whatever niacin that is consumed. Although the body can convert the amino acid tryptophan into niacin from crude protein, the low quality fat pork slaves normally ate unfortunately was a poor source of it. Even nowadays, let alone in antebellum times, physicians had difficulty diagnosing pellagra because its symptoms seem to be like other afflictions; it also manifests itself in the early stages in disparate ways in different individuals. It normally does not develop along standard, classical lines. Nineteenth-century American doctors simply did not know about this disease, so they would think the bondsmen under their care had other diseases. The description of the "negro disease" called black tongue by Southern physicians, however, fits nearly perfectly pellagra in its earlier stages. Employing such arguments, Kiple and Kiple suggest that pellagra's symptoms manifested themselves during hard times when planters cut back on their rations. It also became operative in many bondsmen in an early, endemic form that emerged during winter and early spring, only to disappear again due to seasonal fresh fruits or vegetables entering their diet. Sutch observes that the standard ration falls way short of supplying enough niacin. It even lacks the extra protein with which the body could convert tryptophan into niacin. The unsupplemented standard ration had other vitamin and mineral deficiencies, such as in thiamine, riboflavin, and calcium. It was short even in vitamin A, since the corn and sweet potatoes of the antebellum South were evidently normally white, not yellow, in color.<sup>22</sup> Since the bondsmen likely suffered from dietary

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<sup>21</sup>William D. Pierson, "White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression, and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide among New Slaves," Journal of Negro History, 62 (Apr. 1977):153. He also notes that clay eating could be used to feign illness, which suddenly makes it a labor discipline issue. Fogel and Engerman cite Twyman in denial of this interpretation: Time on the Cross, 2:99. But Sutch strongly rebuts their claims that this practice does not occur due to vitamin deficiencies, noting their selective quotation of Twyman. See David, Reckoning with Slavery, pp. 277-79, n. 129.

<sup>22</sup>Kiple and Kiple, "Black Tongue," 411-28; Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 270-81. In Fogel and Engerman's defense, however,

deficiencies, at least during winter and early spring when forced to survive on the easily stored items of the standard ration and/or under harsher masters and mistresses' more restrictive diets, this casts doubt upon Fogel and Engerman's rosy reconstruction.

#### The Slave Diet as Crude, Coarse, and Boring

Besides being likely vitamin deficient, the slave diet was obviously crude, coarse, and boring. As Frederick Douglass commented: "Not to give a slave enough to eat, is regarded as the most aggravated development of meanness even among slaveholders. The rule is, no matter how coarse the food, only let there be enough of it." Victoria McMullen remembered her slave grandmother described the average slave's diet this way: "But the other slaves didn't git nothing but fat meat and corn bread and molasses. And they got tired of that same old thing. They wanted something else sometimes." Mary Reynolds recalled during slavery days what she was fed: "Mostly we ate pickled pork and corn bread and peas and beans and 'taters. They never was as much as we needed." Although monotonous, this diet showed her master at least gave more than just the stereotypical "hog and hoeecake" diet. As Olmsted observed: "The food is everywhere, however, coarse, crude, and wanting in variety; much more so than that of our [Northern] prison convicts." The restricted food types they received, the crude cooking equipment they used, and the sharp time limits imposed by both sexes working a "sunup to sundown" work day all combined to produce a dreary diet. As actress turned reluctant mistress Fanny Kemble observed at her husband's rice plantation:

They got to the fields at daybreak, carrying with them their allowance of food for the day, which toward noon, and not till then, they eat, cooking it over a fire, which they kindle as best they can, where they are working. Their second meal in the day is at night, after their labor is over, having worked, at the very least, six hours without intermission of rest or refreshment since their noonday meal.

Since the adults of both sexes worked such long hours of hard labor in the fields, the cooking equipment consisting generally of fireplaces or open fires, and relatively few or no metal pots, forks, knives, and spoons being available, crudely prepared meals inevitably followed. Solomon Northrup, a free man sold into slavery, said slaves often lacked the motivation to hunt after

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it should be noted Eltis found a nutritional survey of Nigeria of the 1960s that indicated Africans got lower amounts of riboflavin and thiamine than Southern slaves. They also had lower calorie and protein intakes. See "Nutritional Trends," 470.



work because "after a long and hard day's work, the weary slave feels little like going to the swamp for his supper, and half the time prefers throwing himself on the cabin floor without it." Little time remained for the slave woman, if one applies unrealistically the contemporary Victorian middle class' ideology of the separate spheres to this situation, to spend long hours bringing supper's food up to some elevated level of gustatory delight. John Brown, once a young slave in southern Virginia, described how simply slaves often prepared their food: "We used to make our corn into hominy, hoe and Johnny-cake, and sometimes parch it, and eat it without any other preparation."<sup>23</sup> If issued unground, just grinding/pounding the corn into something cookable took enough effort and time itself. Nevertheless, the slave diet's fundamental problem was the lack of variety in what slaveowners issued their human chattels to begin with, not the lack of time originating in long days of field work by both sexes that reduced the number of domestic chores, including cooking, that could be done.<sup>24</sup>

Setting up communal facilities army-style was one partial solution to slaves without enough time to cook. Kemble mentioned that one old woman in a shed boiled and distributed the daily allotment of rice and grits on her husband's Georgia rice-island plantation. Francis Henderson, who escaped from the Washington D.C. area, said slaves cooked food on their own, but often lacked the time to do so: "In regard to cooking, sometimes many have to cook at one fire, and before all could get to the fire to bake hoe cakes, the overseer's horn would sound; then they must go at any rate." Frequently he had to eat on the run and could not sit down to eat due time constraints. During harvest, this problem was solved by cooking everything at the big house "as the hands are wanted more in the field. This was more like people, and we liked it, for we sat down then at meals."<sup>25</sup> But the cost of

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<sup>23</sup>Douglass, Narrative, p. 65; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 26, 120; my emphasis, Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:241; Frances Ann Kemble, Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839 (New York: Harper & Bros., Publishers, 1863), p. 65; Solomon Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, eds. Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (1853; reprint ed., Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), p. 153; Brown is found in F.N. Boney, "The Blue Lizard: Another View of Nat Turner's Country on the Eve of Rebellion," Phylon, 31 (winter 1970):356.

<sup>24</sup>See also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 549; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 284-85.

<sup>25</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 18. Note how similar Henderson's experience was to what household servants in Georgia Kemble saw who had "even less comfort [than field hands], in one respect, inasmuch as no time whatever is set apart for their meals, which

removing this burden this way was still greater regimentation and further weakening of the slave family's role by reducing their freedom as part of individual households to make decisions about consumption, i.e., how dinner was cooked.

#### Differing Diets for Slaves with Different Positions

Since masters and mistresses were "respecters of men," they treated different slaves--or groups of slaves--differently.<sup>26</sup> In particular, the household servants and drivers and their families were apt to receive better material conditions, in exchange for (inevitably) the tighter controls and supervision due to being in the white owner's presence more. (This is the classic trade-off of a sincerely practiced paternalism). The bleak picture of field hands subsisting on "hog and hominy" diets did not apply to all their neighbors dwelling in the quarters. Not having just to subsist on the standard rations, servants benefited from the leftovers of their master and mistress' table, as Kemble observed. Mary Boykin Chesnut's servants mobbed her while visiting near her husband's father's plantation, wanting her to come home. Her cook said, when asked if she lacked anything: "Lacking anything? I lack everything. What is cornmeal and bacon, milk and molasses? Would that be all you wanted? Ain't I bin living and eating exactly as you does all these years? When I cook fer you didn't I have some of all? Dere now!" Her complaint was, in part, "Please come home, so we could eat better again!" Freedman Edward Jenkins of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, told Armstrong how house servants gained from their owner's meals: "What de white folk had ter eat, de servan's had also, when de white folks done eat dey fill." Although his parents were field hands, aged freedman Tony Washington remembered his mistress made him "the waiter-and-pantry" boy. This job allowed him to get extra food, including leftover alcohol, as he nostalgically remembered:

Dey [the visiting white gentlemen] set down ergain, an' Massa say: 'Sonny, bring de glasses!' I'd bring de glasses, an' de brandy from de sidebo'ahd. Dey know how ter treat dey liquor in de old days an' nobody git drunk. Co'se, I got er little dizzy once when I drink all dat de gen'lemans lef' in dey glasses--heh heh!--but Missus say she gwine tell Massa ter whip me if'n I do dat ergain!

Sam Jackson benefited from having relatives in the right places

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they snatch at any hour and in any way that they can--generally, however, standing, or squatting on their hams round the kitchen fire." Journal, p. 66; Drew, Refugee, p. 156.

<sup>26</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 370.

in "the big house." He enjoyed reminiscing about his boyhood job's perks:

I was de waitin'-boy fo' de table. Don' you know, in dem conditions, I had a sof' bed ter lie in? Yaw . . . did I git plenty ter eat? Jus' guess I did. De waiter-boy allays got plenty, an' when his Maw was house-woman, an' his Auntie de cook, guess he goin' go hungry? Ho!<sup>27</sup>

By having family members close to the master or the mistress, this slave child avoided the customary lack of good treatment ("investment") most received from their owners because they were too young to work in the fields.

Further evidence of tiers within slave society in the quarters, as reflected by differences in diet, comes from archeological investigation. At Thomas Jefferson's Monticello estate, investigators found bones deposited from different animals, domesticated and wild, in different parts of his estate. Although the differences in bones buried between Building 'o' and the storehouse, both areas mainly for slaves, could be explained by some other mechanism, apparently higher quality cuts of meat were eaten at the former but not at the latter. As Crader notes: "Meaty elements such as lumbar vertebrae, the pelvis, and the front and hind limbs also are present, elements that virtually are absent from the Storehouse assemblage."<sup>28</sup> Differences between the secondary butchery marks, caused by removing the meat at the cooking stage, appeared between Building 'o' and the storehouse's artifacts. (Primary butchery involves taking the animal apart at the joints after its slaughter). The bone marks found at the site of Building 'o' are like those that would be produced by the way the whites at the mansion ate, but are completely absent from the Storehouse's assemblage of bones. The master, as well as his evidently better-off slaves, ate their meat as roasts, while the worse-off slaves stewed their meat in pots, with the bones chopped up much more.<sup>29</sup> The evidence Crader

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<sup>27</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 314; Mary Boykin Chesnut, A Diary from Dixie, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949), p. 24; Orland Kay Armstrong, Old Massa's People: The Old Slaves Tell Their Story (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1931), pp. 31, 109, 110.

<sup>28</sup>Diana C. Crader, "Slave Diet at Monticello," American Antiquity, 55 (Oct. 1990): 700.

<sup>29</sup>Evidently, the habits of excessively chopping up the bones affected even the master's table sometimes. Kemble said her slave cook/butcher had such "barbarous ignorance" that she challenged "the most expert anatomist to pronounce on any piece

literally unearthed may indicate that Jefferson's domestic servants consumed the big house's leftovers at their homes in the quarters, which gave them a somewhat better diet than the field hands.<sup>30</sup>

#### The Slaves' Role in Procuring Their Own Food

Slaves could seek additional food, if they were able and willing to put time into it after a long day working for their masters and mistresses, by hunting, trapping, fishing, and tending their own plots of crops. Some masters banned these activities, but the slaves might still go secretly hunting (at least) anyway. As freedwoman Jenny Proctor of Alabama recollected: "Our master, he wouldn't 'low us to go fishing--he say that too easy on a nigger and wouldn't 'low us to hunt none either--but sometime we slips off at night and catch possums." A strong majority still permitted their slaves extra ways to get food, showing a strongly different spirit from the English rural elite's about almost anyone else hunting besides themselves. Northrup stated why: "No objections are made to hunting, inasmuch as it dispenses with drafts upon the smoke-house, and because every marauding coon that is killed is so much saved from the standing corn." After nearly tripping over a huge pile of oyster shells on her husband's cotton-island plantation, Kemble later commented: "This is a horrid nuisance, which results from an indulgence which the people here have and value highly; the waters round the island are prolific in shell-fish, oysters, and the most magnificent prawns I ever saw. The former are a considerable article of the people's diet, and the shells are allowed to accumulate." The slaves also set out somewhat ineffective traps for birds at the upstream rice-island estate. A neighboring master shot and killed an old man of Douglass' master in Maryland while "fishing for oysters" for the trivial offense of trespassing on his land. In this way they "made up the deficiency of their scanty allowance." Hunting could be of critical importance to the bondsmen's diets. Archeological evidence from the Hampton St. Simons island plantation had 17.6 percent of the bones gathered from wild animals, while one at Cannon's Point had an amazing 89.8 percent by number of bones

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(joints they can not be called) of mutton brought to our table to what part of the animal sheep it originally belonged." Her eventual solution was to teach him how to butcher it properly, demonstrating on the carcass of what her cook pronounced "de beutifullest sheep de missis eber saw." See Kemble, Journal, pp. 196-98.

<sup>30</sup>Crader, "Slave Diet," 698-703, 708-10, 713-15. Jefferson had distributed the largest amounts of fish to various more favored slaves, including some domestic servants, and some very old field workers.

(44.5 percent by estimated meat weight) from such fauna. These percentages sharply contrast with the 2 percent or less figures from Monticello, the Hermitage, and the plantation at Kingsmill.<sup>31</sup> Hence, depending the environment and slaveowners' provisions (or presumed lack thereof), hunting, fishing, etc. could be just a minor way to supplement the slaves' diet, or a mainstay perhaps required for survival.

Many slaveowners allowed their bondsmen to cultivate small patches of land, similar to the allotments that English agricultural workers tended. The slaves often benefited little from them, because this extra food was eventually obtainable only by working on their gardens after having put in a full day's work for someone else, thus increasing their real workweek. As aged ex-slave Mary Reynolds of Louisiana recalled:

Sometimes Massa let niggers have a little patch. They'd raise 'taters or goobers. They liked to have them to help fill out on the victuals. . . . The niggers had to work the patches at night and dig the 'taters and goobers at night. Then if they wanted to sell any in town, they'd have to git a pass to go.

Some masters stopped their slaves from having gardens, as ex-slave Jenny Proctor remembered. Although this practice was common, Olmsted noted, various planters prohibited it "because it tempts them to reserve for and to expend in the night-work the strength they want employed in their service during the day, and also because the produce thus obtained is made to cover much plundering of their master's crops, and of his live stock." Planter Bennet Barrow allowed his slaves to have gardens, but stopped them from selling anything grown on their plots because it created a "spirit of trafficking" which required of them "means and time" they had no right to possess. Further, he added:

A negro would not be content to sell only What he raises or makes or either corn (should he be permitted) or poultry, or the like, but he would sell a part of his allowance allso, and would be tempted to commit robberies to obtain things to sell. Besides, he would never go through his work carefully, particularly When other engagements more interesting and pleasing are constantly passing through his mind, but would be apt to slight his work.

But by allowing animals such as pigs and chickens to be raised by

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<sup>31</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 90; see also p. 84; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 153; Kemble, Journal, pp. 20, 216; Douglass, Narrative, p. 42; Crader, "Slave Diet," p. 698. See also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 487-88.

their bondsmen, other slaveowners were more generous. Fanny Kemble noted that the blacks of her husband's rice-plantation could raise as many domestic birds as they wished, but no longer had permission to raise their own pigs. Some slaves were free to grow even cash crops on their "allotments." Overseer John Mairs wrote to Mrs. Sarah Polk about how much cotton her hands had raised for themselves, which was marketed with the rest of the plantation's output: "Youre servents crope of coten in 1849 was about 8400 lbs of sead coten."<sup>32</sup> Hence, the practice of giving plots of land to slaves to raise some of their own food or crops was common in the South, but slaveowners many times placed major restrictions on it.

### Variations in What Food Different Slaveowners Provided to Their Slaves

Much variation arose in what food and how much of it slaves had from master to master and plantation to plantation. On the one hand, enough disturbing cases of slaves who rarely or never got any meat appear to cast some doubt on the utter universality of the "standard rations." After all, would Louisiana have a law requiring slaves to be fed (Olmsted believed) four pounds of meat a week if slaveowners were already doing it? He added also: "(This law is a dead letter, many planters in the State making no regular provision of meat for their force)." Frederick Douglass noted Master Thomas Auld in Maryland allowed him and three fellow slaves in his kitchen less than half a bushel of cornmeal a week, "and very little else, either in the shape of meat or vegetables. It was not enough for us to subsist upon." Thomas Hedgebeth, born free in North Carolina, worked on some farms there. As he recounted to Drew:

I have known that the slaves had not a bite of meat given them. They had a pint of corn meal unsifted, for a meal,--three pints a day. . . This is no hearsay--I've seen it through the spring, and on until crop time: Three pints of meal a day and the bran and nothing else.

After being beset by a minor mob of children begging her for meat, Kemble later wrote that at the rice plantation her husband

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<sup>32</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 90, 121; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:238-39; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409. See also pp. 51-52. Barrow's diary entry for March 19, 1842, p. 253 indicates he let them have their own pieces of land: "All hands repairing their Gardens;" Kemble, Journal, pp. 47-49; John Spencer Bassett, The Southern Plantation Overseer as Revealed in His Letters (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1925), p. 187. See also pp. 203, 210 for discussions by this overseer concerning paying her slaves.

owned: "Animal food is only allowed to certain of the harder working men, hedgers and ditchers, and to them only occasionally, and in very moderate rations." A neighboring plantation owner told her somewhat offhandedly that a meatless diet was a good social control device: "He says that he considers the extremely low diet of the negroes one reason for the absence of crimes of a savage nature among them; most of them do not touch meat the year around." John Brown remembered as a slave child in Virginia that: "We never had meat of any kind, and our usual drink was water."<sup>33</sup> Contrary to what some may think, this evidence indicates that the corn in the standard rations was more "standard" than the pork!

Other slaves enjoyed a more luxurious, or at least varied, diet. For example, Thomas Jefferson's slaves had at least a diversity of meats in their diet. They received .5 to 1.5 pounds of beef, 4 to 8 fish, and 4 to 4.5 pounds of pork per month per man or woman. Judging from archeological remains at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, Jefferson's Monticello, and the Hampton Plantation in Georgia, beef may have been more significant in the slave diet than commonly believed. Aged freedwoman Harriet McFarlin Payne recalled in the quarters: "Late of an evening as you'd go by the doors you could smell meat a-frying, coffee-making, and good things cooking. We were fed good." Although admittedly this coffee may have been ersatz, McFarlin's account still shows these slaves were far removed from the basically corn and water diet Brown described above. Although now seen as a proven public health menace, the giving of tobacco to slaves by planter Bennet Barrow demonstrates they received more than the bare necessities. In Louisiana Olmsted encountered a plantation that to a minute degree made up for the almost inhuman hours of grinding season: It issued extra rations of flour and allowed the sugar refinery's hands to drink as much coffee and eat as much molasses as they wished. Tobacco rations were regularly dispensed year around, and molasses during winter and early summer. Cato of Alabama remembered as a slave his mistress on Sunday gave out chickens and flour. He also had vegetables and dried beef for eating later. Plowden C. J. Weston, a South Carolina rice planter with several plantations, prepared a standard contract for his overseers which included standard rations (some weekly, some monthly, some in only certain seasons or conditional upon good behavior) of rice, potatoes, grits, salt, flour, fish or molasses, peas, meat, and tobacco. Some masters also issued (appropriately) buttermilk to the often lactose-intolerant slaves. Many slaves got their hands on alcohol through their own earnings or by selling property stolen

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<sup>33</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:241; Douglass, Narrative, p. 66; Drew, Refugee, p. 278; Kemble, Journal, pp. 134, 278; Boney, "The Blue Lizard," 356.

from their masters.<sup>34</sup> So although Fogel and Engerman's rosy perceptions of the slave diet have some support, the weight of the literary sources available fails to sustain their case overall, thus implying the existence of flaws in their quantitative sampling methodology. The slaves usually "enjoyed" a spartan diet--although their poor white neighbors perhaps often were only somewhat better off--but a number had more than the standard rations through having more progressive and/or indulgent masters and mistresses and/or unusual opportunities or abilities to get food on their own.

#### The Diet of English Farmworkers: Regional Variations

Turning to the English agricultural workers' diet, strong regional variations must be remembered. In the same way the Border States usually treated their slaves better than the Deep South partially because of their ability to more easily escape to the North, the English farmworkers living in areas north of the Midlands lived better than their brethren to the south, where the most desperate rural poverty prevailed. Additionally, the grain-growing arable districts in the southeast, due to greater seasonal variations in employment, normally had worse conditions for their generally more numerous inhabitants than the pastoral, shepherding, dairying districts in the southwest. Sir James Caird's dividing line, drawn from the Wash (north of East Anglia) across England through the middle of Shropshire, quite accurately divides the high-wage north from the low-wage south. In the north, because farmers as employers faced the competition of mine operators and factory owners for labor, they had to pay higher wages. Otherwise, low wages would provoke farmworkers to "vote with their feet," causing them to migrate to nearby booming urban areas benefiting from the economic expansion produced by the industrial revolution. Even the likes of E.P. Thompson admits that the real wages of laborers in such areas probably "had been rising in the decades before 1790, especially in areas contiguous to manufacturing or mining districts. 'There wants a war to reduce wages,' was the cry of some northern gentry in the 1790s." By contrast, in the south, outside of London, a city of trades dominated by skilled artisans which also contained relatively little factory employment, few nearby urban areas possessed employers competing for unskilled labor. The increasingly overpopulated southern English countryside during this period (c.

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<sup>34</sup>Crader, "Slave Diet," 704-5; for Payne's and Cato's testimony and the evidence for buttermilk, see Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 84, 112, 127, 147; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:320. Olmsted spotted while in Mississippi one slave woman smoking a pipe! Cotton Kingdom, 2:69; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 25-27; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 370-71. For more on slave theft, see pp. 338-40 below.



1750-1860), and the very understandable reluctance of rural laborers to relocate long distances, enabled the gentry and farmers to successfully ratchet down wages to levels often barely above subsistence, especially for married men with large families. According to Brinley, in 1850-51 southern England's average weekly agricultural wages were eight shillings, five pence, about 26 percent lower than northern England's. By James Caird's calculations, the difference was 37 percent.<sup>35</sup> Under the old poor law (pre-1834), parish relief increasingly became a way of life for many of the rural poor, especially during winter months in arable counties due to their strongly seasonal swings in agricultural employment. The subsidizing of wages directly out of parish relief funds raised by local property taxes ("the poor rates") put mere bandages over the deep wounds ultimately inflicted by the decline of service, the enclosure acts, and population growth. Unfortunately, such "solutions" as the Speenhamland system, which gave supplemental allowances from parish relief funds to members of families commensurate with the rise and fall of bread prices, only served to depress wages further. The grim picture of southern farmworkers' families depending year around mostly on the (frequently irregularly employed) father's wages of ten shillings a week or less and little else besides parish relief sharply contrasts with the northern agricultural workers' much higher wages, the greater availability of work for wives and/or children, and the frequent survival of service (the hiring of (unmarried) farm servants under one year contracts).

The agricultural workers south of Caird's wage line often endured truly desperate material conditions. A majority of them probably had a lower standard of living than the moderately better-off slaves. In particular, meat had largely fallen out of the diets of southern English farmworkers. Remembering as a child how scarce meat was in Warwickshire, Agricultural Labourers' Union organizer and leader Joseph Arch (b. 1826) commented:

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<sup>35</sup>For regional wage variations, see John L. Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850 (New York: Longman Group, 1986), p. 48, and the frontispiece of James Caird, English Agriculture in 1850-51, 2d ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1852); In southern Lancashire, James Caird (p. 284) found that "native labour is so scarce that the farmers declare they could not get on at all without the aid of the Irish." See also pp. 511-13; Thompson, Making, p. 219; Brinley Thomas, "Escaping from Constraints: The Industrial Revolution in a Malthusian Context," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 15 (spring 1985): 746; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 511. Brinley cites this source, but how he derives the 26 percent figure remains obscure.

Meat was rarely, if ever, to be seen on the labourer's table; the price was too high for his pocket,--a big pocket it was, but with very little in it . . . In many a household even a morsel of bacon was considered a luxury. Flour was so dear that the cottage loaf was mostly of barley.

He then discusses how scarce potatoes were in "country districts"--or at least in 1830s Warwickshire. (For the growing dependency of the English on potatoes, see pp. 33-35). Locally only one farmer, a hoarder in 1835, had grown them. Similarly, a "Rector and Conservative" described the status of "bacon, [which] when they can get it, is the staff of the laborers' dinner." A careful rationing exercise accompanied its appearance, which befit male privilege, or female self-sacrifice, depending on one's perspective: "The frugal housewife provides a large lot of potatoes, and while she indulges herself with her younger ones only with salt, cuts off the small rasher and toasts it over the plates of the father and elder sons, as being the breadwinners; and this is all they want."<sup>36</sup>

#### The Southern English Agricultural Workers' Diet Was Poor, Often Meatless

William Cobbett, the great Tory-turned-radical journalist and gadfly, saw up close the poor, largely meatless diet of southern farm laborers. While travelling in Hampshire, he noted the "poor creatures" who "are doomed to lead a life of constant labour and of half-starvation." After mentioning the snack of a pound of bread and a quarter pound of cheese he and his young son ate came to five pence, or almost three shillings, if they had it daily, he wondered:

How, then, Gracious God! is a labouring man, his wife, and, perhaps, four or five small children, to exist upon 8s. or 9s. a week! Aye, and to find house-rent, clothing, bedding and fuel out of it? Richard and I ate here, at this snap, more, and much more, than the average of labourers, their wives and children, have to eat in a whole day, and that the labourer has to work on too!

When facing such tight budgets, laborers spent little on meat, but concentrated on cereal foodstuffs or (perhaps) potatoes, which Cobbett hated to see. Later in the same county, he indignantly observed:

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<sup>36</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 12; The rector and Conservative was in the Times, quoted by Frederick Law Olmsted, The Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England (1859; reprint ed., Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 243.

These poor creatures, that I behold, here pass their lives amidst flocks of sheep; but, never does a morsel of mutton enter their lips. A labouring man told me, at Binley, that he had not tasted meat since harvest; [this was written Nov. 7th] and his looks vouched for the statement.<sup>37</sup>

Cobbett's polemics constitute only a small part of the evidence describing how poor the laborers' diet was in southern England. Caleb Bawcombe, a shepherd, recalled for Hudson how the sight of deer tempted his father Isaac into poaching while living in Wiltshire (c. 1820):

For many many days he had eaten his barley bread, and on some days barley-flour dumplings, and had been content with this poor fare; but now the sight of these animals [deer] made him crave for meat with an intolerable craving, and he determined to do something to satisfy it.

Somerville encountered one man, who was better fed in prison (he had participated in the Swing Riots of 1830) than when freed to live in Hampshire. In prison he ate four times a week 14 ounces of meat. "No working man like me as can get it [good meat]. I wish I had as much meat now as I had in the hulk; and I wishes the same to every poor hard-working man in Hampshire." While visiting England, Olmsted learned of this pathetic vignette from a farmer. Illustrating how scarce fresh meat was in the laborers' diets, they gorged themselves the few times they could afford it:

They [the laborers] will hardly taste it [fresh meat] all their lives, except, it may be, once a year, at a fair, when they'll go to the cook-shops and stuff themselves with all they'll hold of it; and if you could see them, you'd say they did not know what it was or what was to be done with it--cutting it into great mouthfuls and gobbling it down without any chewing, like as a fowl does barleycorns, till it chokes him.

Edward Butt, a Sussex relieving officer and farmer, recalled for the Committee on the New Poor Law that when he was younger

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<sup>37</sup>William Cobbett, Rural Rides in the Counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Somersetshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Hertfordshire, ed. E.W. Martin (1830; reprint ed., London: MacDonald & Co., 1958), pp. 110, 254-55, 276. Since Cobbett visited areas in the economically depressed south, what he witnessed cannot safely be extrapolated to the north of England.

(before 1794) the laborers had some meat everyday with their bread when they came to eat in his father's farmhouse. But by 1837, they mainly ate bread and vegetables, especially potatoes. Unable to get milk in his area, the farmworkers also ate little meat. Somerville found one Wiltshire laborer, although saddened by his young son's death, not fully regretting it either: "We ben't sorry he be gone. I hopes he be happy in heaven. He ate a smart deal; and many a time, like all on us, went with a hungry belly." Ironically, while serving a sentence in Bermuda for poaching: "We had terrible good living . . . by as I ever had for working in England. Fresh beef three times a-week, pork and peas four times a-week." When imprisoned laborers ate better free ones, Wiltshire's dire conditions can only be imagined. Similarly, one laborer in Hampshire told Somerville: "They say meat be wonderful cheap in Reading, but what of it being cheap to we who can't buy it at no price?" Speaking more generally, Deane and Cole note an increase in England's grain growing acreage took place "at the expense of the nation's meat supply" during the French Wars. As shown by meat having disappeared from their dinner tables, many agricultural workers in southern England were beaten down to the edge of subsistence.<sup>38</sup>

#### Grains, especially Wheat, Dominate the Agricultural Workers' Diet

Perhaps best illustrating the importance of grain in Hodge's diet, consider the case of one Hampshire laborer and his family. They normally only ate bread, with some vegetables. Somerville learned the father had for breakfast just dry bread, if anything at all, before mid-day. Especially in hard times, the laborers's budgets might be 80 percent or more committed to buying bread and/or flour. Looming large in the diet of southern English agricultural workers, wheat was the dominant grain, at least in good times. Barley, rye, or oats also put their appearances,

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<sup>38</sup>W.H. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life: Impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs, new Am. ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1921), p. 81; Alexander Somerville, The Whistler at the Plough, ed. K.D.M. Snell (Manchester, England: J. Ainsworth, 1852; reprint ed., London, Merlin Press, 1989; Fairfield, NJ: Augustus Kelley, 1989), pp. 38, 75, 119, 264; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, pp. 243-44; Great Britain, Parliament, BPP, 1837, vol. xvii, Reports from the Select Committee to Inquire into the Administration of the Relief of the Poor under the Provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, part 1, second report, pp. 3, 7-8, 14-15. Below, this report may be referred to simply as "Committee on the New Poor Law"; Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, British Economic Growth 1688-1959 (1962), p. 75, quoted in Brinley Thomas, "Feeding England During the Industrial Revolution: A View from the Celtic Fringe," Agricultural History 56 (Jan. 1982): 338.

with the last being the north's dominant grain. These grains had the advantage of avoiding some of the nutritional pitfalls of corn (maize). For all his travails, Hodge in southern England did not suffer from pellagra, as many black slaves in the American South likely did for some part of the year. Since reliance on grains other than wheat in southern England was deemed a sign of poverty, laborers often resented eating bread made out of anything else. Showing barley did not always make for palatable fare, and pointing to exceptional poverty for the southern English, consider this story Hudson learned about conditions in Wiltshire (c. 1830) for those on the parish make-work detail during the winter months. Some of his most elderly informants told of how the laborers played with their food in the fields:

The men would take their dinners with them, consisting of a few barley balls or cakes, in their coat pockets, and at noon they would gather at one spot to enjoy their meal, and seat themselves on the ground in a very wide circle, the men about ten yards apart, then each one would produce his bannocks, and start throwing, aiming at some other man's face; there were hits and misses and great excitement and hilarity for twenty or thirty minutes, after which the earth and gravel adhering to the balls would be wiped off, and they would set themselves to the hard task of masticating and swallowing the heavy stuff.

Admittedly, food fights during lunch with barley balls were exceptional. For the southern English, wheat was their mainstay, with 94 percent of the population in southern and eastern England subsisting on wheat in 1801. In contrast, the northern English, despite higher incomes, had less of a taste for wheat. According to Thomas, just some 25 percent of them lived upon it, while 50 percent consumed oats, 18 percent barley, and 6 percent rye. During the 1760s, Charles Smith judged, assuming a population of around six million in England and Wales, that 3,750,000 ate wheat, 888,000 rye, 623,000 oats, and 739,000 barley. Evidently, wheat bread grew in market share until the 1790s, when over two-thirds of the population relied upon wheat. The southern English desire to cling to the wheaten loaf and to resist shifting to potatoes or other grains despite their low wages and the effects of enclosure combined, Thomas infers, to cause them possibly to eat less wheat than formerly and perhaps even less food overall. The northern English preference for oats (similar to the Scots') was made largely possible by the availability of inexpensive milk to the poor. Due to enclosures taking away most of their cows, laborers in the south could not easily do likewise, as the

Hammonds saw.<sup>39</sup> By opposing having coarser grains the mainstay of their diet, the southern English may well kept the finer "luxury grain" (wheat) in their diet only by eating less of it.

The Role of Potatoes in the Laborers' Diet, Despite Prejudices Against Them

Potatoes played an important role in the laborers' diet, especially as the nineteenth century drew on, and desperation broke down resistance against substituting them for grain. Exemplifying this contempt for potatoes, Cobbett saw them as a sign of the English sliding down to the Irish level:

I see [in Sussex] very few of "Ireland's lazy root;" and never, in this country, will the people be base enough to lie down and expire from starvation under the operation of the extreme unction! Nothing but a potatoe-eater will ever do that.

Further, rather than see the English working people reduced into living on potatoes,

he would see them all hanged, and be hanged with them, and would be satisfied to have written upon his grave, 'Here lie the remains of William Cobbett, who was hanged because he would not hold his tongue without complaining while his labouring countrymen were reduced to live upon potatoes.'<sup>40</sup>

Despite Cobbett's opposition, a man full of the prejudices of the

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<sup>39</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 119-20; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 220-21; Thomas, "Feeding England," p. 331. See also Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 51-53; E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present, no. 50 (February 1971), p. 80 (Charles Smith); Thomas, "Escaping from Constraints," p. 747; J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer (1911; reprint ed., London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1966), p. 123. However, Caird found in Lancashire by 1850, compared to 1770, that "oat-bread" had become "much superseded, even in the country districts, by wheaten bread" which now sold at a slightly lower price. English Agriculture, pp. 283-84.

<sup>40</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 110; Cobbett as cited by Somerville, Whistler p. 296. Once when on a stagecoach Somerville and his fellow passengers talked about the relative merits of the crops in Suffolk and Buckingham. After discussing what kinds they liked to eat, he asked the stagecoach's guard what type of potatoes he liked. He replied: "Give me . . . good old English fare, and good old English times, and dang your potatoes and railroads both!" Whistler, p. 50.

southern farmworker which in spirit he remained, potatoes became important in Hodge's diet. Demonstrating the decay of farm laborers' anti-potato sentiments, one Dorsetshire landowner in Dorset successfully got laborers to reclaim wasteland for him in return for planting potatoes, despite they knew next year the process would be repeated with another piece of land. In Somerset in 1845 during the Irish potato famine the blight wiped out all the potatoes. Due to the laborers' extreme dependence on them, this was a disaster because their wages averaged a mere seven shillings and six pence a week year around: "For years past their daily diet is potatoes for breakfast, dinner, and supper, and potatoes only. This year they are not living on potatoes, because they have none." In Sussex, Somerville found a laborer's wife complaining about "how it hurts the constitution of a man to work hard on potatoes, and nothing else but a bit of dry bread." This family ate four days a week normally only potatoes and dry bread. Somerville even exaggerated how important potatoes were in the diet of English laborers. When commenting on how the potato blight had wiped out the crop in the south and west of England, he said this event had gotten far less attention than the Irish disaster: "Surely the English potatoes are not to be overlooked, nor the English labourers, whose chief article of diet potatoes are. . . . How much greater must be the suffering be when to dearness of bread there is the companionship of scarcity of potatoes!" Now although potatoes loomed increasingly large in the laborers' diet, and 1845-46 was a bad year for both England and Ireland, grains still remained their staff of life generally, unlike for the Irish. Still, Cobbett's anti-potato campaign must be ranked an ultimate failure: Near the town of Farnham where Cobbett was born and buried, Somerville found "the finest specimens of this year's crop which I have seen in any part of England," having seen some excellent patches of potatoes between that place and the location of Cobbett's farm at Normandy.<sup>41</sup>

#### Did Farmworkers Prefer Coarse or Fine Food?

Against the view that the farmworkers (or slaves, by implication) prefer finer and less coarse foods, Jeffries once commented on Hodge's desires and the problems with changing what Mrs. Hodge winds up cooking:

The difficulty arises from the rough, coarse tastes of the labourer, and the fact, which it is useless to ignore, that he must have something solid, and indeed, bulky. . . . Give him the finest soup; give him pates, or even more meaty entrees, and his remark will be that it is very nice, but he wants 'summat to eat'. His teeth are large, his jaws strong, his digestive powers

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<sup>41</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 62, 249, 303, 405, 414.

such as would astonish a city man; he likes solid food, bacon, butcher's meat, cheese, or something that gives him a sense of fullness, like a mass of vegetables. This is the natural result of his training to work in the fields. . . . Let anyone go and labour daily in the field, and they will come quickly to the same opinion.

Although his rather condescending views were on target concerning food preparation, they ignore the farmworkers' desires for a less coarse grain since it may compose 80 percent or more of their diets. Certainly, some class bias is definitely coloring Jeffries' views of Hodge's real desires. Consider the implications of bread remaining the staff of life for the laborers and making up most of their daily calories. To switch from wheat to barley, or to oatmeal without milk, would tax anyone's digestive system used to the first grain when it is most of what he or she eats, not just an incidental as (wheat) bread is in many contemporary Americans' diets. Anyway, Jeffries was not discussing grain substitution at all. Unlike most aristocrats, the laborers engaged in heavy physical work needed serious bulk in their diet in order to have sufficient calories to sustain their efforts, but their food need not be unusually hard to digest or unpalatably coarse after its preparation to fulfill their needs. Indeed, according to Young, food that was too bulky might slow down the laborers eating it. As E.P. Thompson confirms: "There is a suggestion that labourers accustomed to wheaten bread actually could not work--suffered from weakness, indigestion, or nausea--if forced to change to rougher mixtures."<sup>42</sup> Although these complaints were likely partially psychosomatic, they still show the laborers preferred less-coarse grain in their diet.

Admittedly, the southern farmworkers' partiality for the white wheaten loaf was rather unwise from a modern dietician's viewpoint, as Olmsted observed: "No doubt a coarser bread would be more wholesome, but it is one of the strongest prejudices of the English peasant, that brown bread is not fit for human beings." This comment raises the issue of taking into account the laborers' definitions of "good conditions" before judging these by purely modern criteria. Snell discusses this issue at length. If Hodge placed a strong priority on eating fine white wheat bread, outsiders are presumptuous to rearrange his life for him, saying he should like what they judge to be "good for him," even though objective reasons justify the would-be imposition, i.e., the health advantages of increasing the amount of bran in

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<sup>42</sup>Richard Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters, 2 vols. (1880; reprint ed., London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), 2:71; See Arthur Young's comment in Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 122; Thompson, "Moral Economy," p. 81; see also footnote 19, p. 82.



the daily diet. The threat to the status of English laborers posed by coarser or non-wheaten bread in times of dearth was rather irrational, but it still was probably more sensible than a contemporary preference among the young for designer brand jeans or sneakers over store brands of similar quality. The "Brown Bread Act's" attempts to force laborers to consume bread made of wholemeal flour provoked riots even during the terrible 1800-1801 agricultural year. In Surrey and Sussex in southern England, the resistance to this law was especially strong; unsurprisingly, it lasted less than two months.<sup>43</sup>

#### The Monotony of the Farmworkers' Diet in the South of England

The southern English agricultural workers' diet was monotonous, like the slaves'. In the Salisbury area (1850) Caird found it largely consisted of water, bread, some potatoes, flour with a little butter, and possibly a little bacon. He reports what sounds like a prisoner's meal: "The supper very commonly consists of bread and water." In 1840s Wiltshire, Somerville found two laborers who could not afford bacon and vegetables with every dinner on eight shillings a week. Following a recent wage reduction, "they did not know how they would with seven [shillings]." In Wooburn parish, even in an apple orchard area most laborers did not earn enough to make apple pies! Years later (c. 1875), in this same general area, Jefferies still commented while noting improvement: "A basketful of apples even from the farmer's orchard [as a gift] is a treat to the children, for, though better fed than formerly, their diet is necessarily monotonous, and such fruit as may be grown in the cottage garden is, of course, sold." Near Monmouth, Olmsted ran into a laborer who, although he also had a pig and a small potato patch, "oft-times . . . could get nothing more than dry bread for his family to eat."<sup>44</sup> Thomas Smart, a Bedfordshire laborer, and his family subsisted upon garden-grown potatoes, bread, and cheese, with a little bacon occasionally, supplemented by tea and a little sugar. At times he went without meat for a month. Milk was difficult to buy from the local farmers.<sup>45</sup> The hot dinner

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<sup>43</sup>Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 243; Snell, Annals, pp. 4-14; Thompson, "Moral Economy," p. 82.

<sup>44</sup>Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 84-85; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 18, 32; Jefferies, Hodge, 1:78; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 237.

<sup>45</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, BPP, 1824, vol. VI, Select Committee on Labourers' Wages, as found in Nigel E. Agar, The Bedfordshire Farm Worker in the Nineteenth Century (n.p.: Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society) 60 (1981):66. Indicating that conditions for unskilled laborers had

laborers had around noon on Sunday Jeffries described as their "the great event" for the day. Of course, beer certainly emerged in Hodge's diet around harvest time, and often not just then. The alcoholic part of the laborers' diets provoked the rural middle and upper classes into nearly endless moralizing, at least about its abuses that caused the father's wages to be wasted in beerhouses and a lack of labor discipline. Due to the near absence of meat, this diet was arguably less satisfying than slaves', except that its bread often was purchased baker's bread. This bread, or even what the laborer's wife made at home, was a much more carefully prepared and refined product than the cornmeal the slaves often had to pound into a crude hoecake or johnnycake (cornbread). As Olmsted (c. 1851) observed while in southern England:

The main stay of the laborer's stomach is fine, white wheaten bread, of the best possible quality, such as it would be a luxury to get any where else in the world, and such as many a New England farmer never tasted, and, even if his wife were able to make it, would think an extravagance to be ordinarily upon his table.<sup>46</sup>

Admittedly, white wheat bread likely was the only luxury Hodge and his family in the south of England enjoyed. Despite this particular boon, a lack of meat still characterized the southern English agricultural laborer's diet, although not the northerner's. All in all, the slaves' "standard rations" arguably, minus the problems of eating crude corn bread and the risk of pellagra without further supplements, likely surpassed in overall satisfaction what the majority of the free agricultural laborers of England depended on because meat (and milk) fell out of their diet as enclosure advanced, making it difficult or impossible for them to keep their own cows or pigs (see pp. 40-41 below), and they often did not consume enough even of starches (potatoes and bread) in hard times.

#### The Superior Conditions of the Northern English Farmworkers

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changed little even during the First World War, the sample menus for a lower middle class household were far superior to a laborer's in Peel's Eat-Less-Meat-Book of 1917. Some agricultural laborers still ate up to fourteen pounds of bread a week during the First World War. (Unlike Germany, the diets of the English working class on the whole actually improved during World War I). Arthur Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1965; reprint ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970), pp. 123-25, 135, 193, 196-200

<sup>46</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 1:72; an example of such moralizing is in 2:80-91; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 243.

The northern English agricultural laborer clearly enjoyed superior conditions to his southern brother (or sister) during the general period of industrialization. Joseph Arch recalled why the union failed in organizing the northern farmworkers:

We could not do much in the north; about Newcastle and those northern districts the men were much better paid, and they said, 'The Union is a good thing, but we are well off and can get along without it.' The Union was strongest, and kept so, in the Midland, Eastern, and Western counties.

In northern England near Scotland, in Northumberland and Durham, the 1867-68 Commissioners found the wages were high and that the labor market favored the laborers. The institution of service still persisted in northern Northumberland in the mid to late 1860s. They were often paid in kind and received fifteen to eighteen shillings a week. Day laborers--those not under a contract for their service--received two and a half to three shillings a day. Since the laborers' cottages were dispersed, they avoided the pitfalls of the gang system since they lived on or near their employer's premises, thus eliminating long walks to work. Wages were high enough so their children rarely went to work before age fourteen except during summers, when eleven-twelve year olds took to the fields during agriculture's seasonal peak in labor requirements. In southern Northumberland, none under ten worked. Higher wages allowed northern laborers' children to receive more education than their southern counterparts, where the much smaller margin above subsistence correspondingly increased the need for them to earn their keep as soon as possible. As another sign of the North's tight labor market, routinely single women living in their parents' home often were in farm service--"bound" in "bondage"--and did all types of heavy farm work.<sup>47</sup> Excepting perhaps for housing (see p. 69), this area's agricultural workers were about as well-off as non-skilled manual laborers then could expect.

Away from these areas near Scotland, wages gradually decline until the Lincoln\Leicester area is reached, where a rather abrupt transition to southern English conditions occurs. Lincoln and Nottingham had wages of fifteen to seventeen shillings a week, but Leicester just eleven. Their diets reflected these wage differences, since in Lincoln laborers' families had meat two or three times a day, while in Leicester only the father had it, and then just once a day. Similarly, for Oxfordshire and nearby, Somerville described many laborers as "always under-fed, even if always employed." By contrast, Yorkshire's higher wages of fourteen shillings per week encouraged parents to keep their

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<sup>47</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 221-22; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. vii, xii-xiii.

children in school longer. There farm service still remained, with foremen receiving thirty pounds a year and board, a wagoner, sixteen to twenty pounds, and plowboys, ten to fourteen. Tom Mullins of Stafford remembered at age seventeen (c. 1880) he earned sixteen pounds per year and his keep. In Stafford, where during his life he moved from the southern to the northern part. (Incidentally, Caird's wage line falls at this county's southern border). Oatmeal, frequently turned into thin sour cakes shaped like disks, along with dairy products, formed the mainstay of the diet before c. 1890. "Though wages were low people managed on them and also saved a bit. Ten shillings went a lot further then than now. Bread was 3d. the quartern loaf, milk 3d. a quart, tobacco 3d. an ounce . . . beer was 2d., the best was 3d." Since service persisted in his area, an annual hiring fair took place about October tenth each year. "But I never need to hire myself out, as I always had more jobs offered than I could undertake. Pity I couldn't have spread myself a bit!"<sup>48</sup> As these descriptions illustrate, the diet of the farm laborers north of Caird's line was quite good, showing unquestionably that they were better off on average than most slaves in the United States even before considering any quality of life factors.<sup>49</sup>

#### Meat as a Luxury For Many Farmworkers

Unlike most slaves, the meat English farm laborers ate often came from what animals they personally owned and slaughtered themselves, assuming they were not sold to meet rent, clothing, or other expenses. In Wiltshire, near Cranbourne, Somerville found "all of them [the laborers] kept a pig or two; but they had to sell them to pay their rents." A Sussex farmer/relieving officer told Parliamentary Commissioners that "every labourer at that time [pre-1794] had a pig." Farmworkers in that area then got pork from feeding their own animal, not directly from the farmers they worked for. Showing a serious decline in living

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<sup>48</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xvii, xx; Somerville, Whistler, p. 128; John Burnett, ed., Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (1974; reprint ed., London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 51-52.

<sup>49</sup>Comparing slaves given rations largely regardless of work done and laborers earning wages presents some theoretical problems. Normally, slaves earned no wages, except for extra work outside normal hours, and were given a ration of food each week or month regardless of the amount of work done. But the agricultural laborers, if they had no access to a commons, an allotment, or were not under a yearly contract as a farm servant, had their standard of living virtually defined by their wages. So when examining their diets, wages stand as a partial proxy for comparison purposes when specific information on pounds of food eaten per person per week are not available for the laborers.

standards had set in, Somerville found in 1840s Dorset that often laborers were not allowed to keep a pig: "The dictum of the father of Sir John Tyrrell, in Essex, is understood and acted on in Dorset--'No labourer can be honest and feed a pig!'" Betraying a materialistic bent, Cobbett summarized well how important owning pigs was to the laborers: "The working people [near Worcester] all seem to have good large gardens, and pigs in their styes; and this last, say the feelosofers what they will about her 'antalletal enjoyments,' is the only security for happiness in a labourer's family." Of course, as part of their duties for their masters, slaves raised pigs and other animals for slaughter. But they did not own them personally, except where their masters and mistresses allowed them to, such as the task-system-dominated area of lowland Georgia and South Carolina. In England, butcher's meat (i.e., the meat of animals killed and already cut up for the buyer) was regarded as a luxury. Consequently, classes above the laborers were its main consumers.<sup>50</sup> Jefferies heaped scorn on maidservants, born of fathers still at the plow, who when at "home ha[d] been glad of bread and bacon," but after having worked for wealthy tenant farmers, "now cannot possibly survive without hot butcher's meat every day, and game and fish in their seasons."<sup>51</sup> The meat laborers ate was often what they had raised themselves, whether it was on the commons before enclosure, on allotments, or in their own gardens. Depending on the commercial market for meat was not a way to economize. Scarce until after around 1830, allotments helped laborers raise their own pigs (when so allowed). Indeed, in some areas with allotments many or most did keep pigs, in part because these produced some of the needed manure to keep their (say) fourth or half acre fertile.<sup>52</sup> But as

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<sup>50</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 32, 335-36; See also p. 120; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 8; Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 400; Phillip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," Journal of Southern History, 49 (Aug. 1983):399-420; For butcher's meat as a luxury, see Caird, English Agriculture, p. 29 and Somerville, Whistler, p. 228.

<sup>51</sup>Jefferies, Hodge, 1:97. Jefferies portrayed one old farmer who rose by practicing the utmost parsimony. But as he grew older and his teeth weaker, he started ordering butcher's meat. His equally stingy wife furiously opposed this luxury, which normally was one leg of mutton each week. His teeth could no longer take "the coarse, fat, yellowy bacon that [had] formed the staple" of his diet, "often . . . with the bristles thick upon it." Hodge, 1:55.

<sup>52</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, BPP, 1843, vol. VII, Report from Select Committee on Labouring Poor (Allotments of Land), pp. 3, 12, 14, 20, 113. This report may be referred to simply as

the enclosure movement gained strength after 1760, stripping farmworkers of grazing land, they largely lost their ability to raise their own animals until allotments slowly, partially, and haphazardly restored this ability after c. 1830.

### The Effects of Enclosure and Allotments on Hodge's Diet

Although a more general discussion enclosure and allotments' social effects appears below (pp. 279-282, 296-299), the effects of both on the diet of the farmworkers are considered here. Enclosure affected cottagers and others who mixed wage earning and subsistence agriculture using the commons by cutting out the latter, throwing them fully upon what their wages could purchase. As E.P. Thompson observes: "In village after village, enclosure destroyed the scratch-as-scratch-can subsistence economy of the poor--the cow or geese--fuel from the common, gleanings, and all the rest." Ironically, as the Parliamentary Commissioners observed in 1867-68, allotments undid this consequence of enclosure, although they came later and affected significantly fewer laborers, especially before the late nineteenth century. They allowed the laborers to grow vegetables, especially potatoes, on a quarter or half acre of land specially rented out to them. Despite his notoriety as an advocate of enclosure, agricultural improvement writer Arthur Young learned that enclosure usually oppressed the poor:

In twenty-nine cases out of thirty-one noted [by ministers making additional comments on a survey checking the effects of enclosure on grain production], the poor, in the opinion of the ministers, were sufferers by losing their cows, and other stock. . . . [In some cases] allotments were assigned them; but as they were unable to be at the expense of the enclosure, it forced them not only to sell their cows, but their houses also. This is a very hard case, though a legal one; and as instances are not wanting of a much more humane conduct, it is to be lamented that the same motives did not operate in all.

These Anglican clerics (members of a group known to be generally unfriendly to the laborers' best interests, as Cobbett and Arch made clear) made comments that indicate enclosure's role in worsening the diet of the poor in various areas following the loss of cows and other animals. One for the parish of Souldrop, Bedford observed: "The condition of the labouring poor [is] much worse now than before the enclosure, owing to the impossibility of procuring any milk for their young families." Another added, for Tingewick, Buckingham: "Milk [was] to be had at 1d. per quarter before; not to be had now at any rate." Repeatedly they

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"Committee on Allotments" below.

saw many had to sell off or otherwise lose their cows (sixteen of the thirty-one mentioned this specifically). For Passenham, Northampton, one commented: "[The poor were] deprived of their cows, and great suffers by loss of their hogs." A man of the cloth for Cranage, Chester remarked: "Poor men's cows and sheep have no place, or any being." Such deprivations helped to breed resentment one laborer expressed against almost anyone richer than himself. While attacking farmers, lords, and parsons, he additionally brought Somerville into his line of fire: "I see you ha' got a good coat on your back, and a face that don't look like an empty belly; there be no hunger looking out atween your ribs I'll swear."<sup>53</sup> Clearly, enclosure robbed meat and milk from the mouths of many farm laborers and their families, and was a major cause for eliminating animal foods from their diets as the enclosure movement gained steam after 1760 in areas with a labor surplus, such as southern rural England.

Allotments returned some of what enclosure had taken. These small pieces of land gave underemployed and unemployed farmworkers something to fall back upon financially. Because of the Swing riots of 1830-31 and the rising burden of poor rates caused by laborers applying for relief when their wages were insufficient to support them, the movement to rent out fourth- or half-acre pieces of land picked up speed as the nineteenth century passed. Intensively cultivated, small amounts of land could produce impressive amounts of food, as the 1843 Committee reported. One rood of land--usually one-fourth of an acre--could grow six months' worth of vegetables! Perhaps one-half would be planted in potatoes, with the rest being beans, peas, and other vegetables. One-eighth of an acre could grow five pounds' worth of crops--equal to ten weeks or more of wages for many laborers in southern England. In at least once case, such a tiny parcel produced eighty bushels of carrots, fourteen-fifteen bushels of other vegetables, which was double or triple what the typical farmer would have raised on the same land. A rood's worth of land could also yield a hundred bushels of potatoes. Young even published calculations suggesting that if 682,394 laborer's families each grew a half acre's worth of potatoes, then England would have required no grain imports in the disastrous 1800-1801 agricultural year. Because of the laborers' enormous desires for parcels to grow potatoes on--Cobbett's hated root--some landlords unscrupulously charged rents up to eight pounds per acre per year, which greatly exceeded what a tenant farmer would pay. Allotments could allow the farmworkers to keep animals such as

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<sup>53</sup>Thompson, Making, p. 217; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. 11; Arthur Young, General Report on Enclosures: Drawn up by Order of the Board of Agriculture (London: B. McMillan, 1808; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelly, Publishers, 1971), pp. 14, 150-52; Somerville, Whistler, p. 42.

pigs, as noted above (pp. 39-40), potentially enabling them to eat meat more regularly. One M.P. for Lincoln helped tenants by renting out small allotments to keep animals on. The 1867-68 Commission reported that in Yorkshire some laborers benefited from having "cow gates" to pasture cows in lanes nearby.<sup>54</sup> Allotments often made a major difference in the diets of English agricultural laborers fortunate enough to have them. These were unquestionably more important in their lives than the patches of land slaveowners allowed many American slaves to cultivate. Unlike for the farmworkers, masters and mistresses automatically gave to the slaves the standard rations, which was most of what they ate, excepting some in task system areas, unlike in England unless the worker was a live-in farm servant.

#### Comparing the Diets of English Paupers, Slaves, and Their Government's Army

Indicating that many southern English agricultural workers arguably had a diet worse than that of many slaves, consider this comparison between the food they received and what their respective governments gave to lowly privates in their armies. The laborers per family on parish relief received less than what one soldier in the Royal Army did, but at least some slaves received rations that compared favorably to the American army's. As Cobbett vehemently protested:

The base wretches know well, that the common foot-soldier now receives more pay per week (7s. 7d.) exclusive of clothing, firing, candle, and lodging; . . . [and] more to go down his own single throat, than the overseers and magistrates allow [in parish relief] to a working man, his wife and three children.<sup>55</sup>

As a growing population raised unemployment rates and enclosure eliminated agriculture's subsistence economy, many laborers, probably a solid majority in the south, were on parish relief for extended periods during their lives, especially during the winter.<sup>56</sup> Since arable agriculture was a highly seasonal

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<sup>54</sup>For the influence of the Swing Riots on allotments, see Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 157; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. ii-iv; Young, General Report, pp. 47, 107, 166, 348-50; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xxv.

<sup>55</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 308; see also p. 336.

<sup>56</sup>Thomas Smart, father of thirteen children with seven still living when he was forty-six years old, was asked by the Select Committee on Labourers' Wages: "Do you know any labourers with so large family as you have, who have brought them up without



business, many more laborers were out of work in winter than in summer, causing many to depend on parish relief or at various parish make-work jobs such as stonebreaking on the highways or flint gathering in the fields. The disproportion between at least some slaves and the U.S. Army's rations for privates appears smaller than the ratio between farm laborers on parish relief and average English soldiers. Olmsted cited an advertisement in the Richmond Enquirer which listed one and a quarter pounds of beef and one and three-sixteenths pounds of bread--presumably hardtack--as the daily ration, with an additional eight quarts of beans, two quarts of salt, four pounds of coffee, and eight pounds of sugar distributed out over each hundred days. In contrast, the Daily Georgian noted the rations for slaves being hired for a year to work on a canal. Each was to receive "three and a half pounds of pork or bacon, and ten quarts of gourd seed corn per week." At least some masters would beat this ration of pork: Planter Barrow Bennet gave "weakly" "4 pound & 5 pound of meat to evry thing that goes in the field--2 pound over 4 years 1 1/2 between 15 months and 4 years old--Clear good meat."<sup>57</sup> Evidently, the disproportion was greater between what the British government gave its privates and its laborers in parish relief (admittedly, those not working) and what the American government gave its soldiers and a number of slaveowners gave their slaves.

#### Better Bread Versus Little Meat?: The Slave Versus Farmworker Diet

Many bondsmen in America had arguably better diets than many farmworkers in England, at least when living south of Caird's wage line. Three pounds of pork or bacon routinely appeared in the diet of most adult slaves, while many southern English agricultural workers, once both population growth and enclosures took off, had meat generally eliminated from their diets during the period c. 1780-1840. On the other hand, the grain the slaves ate often was coarser, and (perhaps) more nutritionally suspect. Wheat bread, often made by a baker, which most southern farm workers mainly subsisted upon, was clearly a more refined and tasty product than maize crudely pounded and cooked in the forms of hoe cake and johnnycake. Reflecting how the laborers had lost meat, but had a much finer grain product compared to the slaves, J. Boucher, vicar of Epsom, observed in late 1800: "Our Poor live not only on the finest wheaten bread, but almost on bread

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assistance from the parish?" He replied: "Never one but me." (He mentioned having taken burial expenses from the parish, but nothing else earlier). BPP, 1824, vol. VI, pp. 53-56, as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 64-65, 67.

<sup>57</sup>Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, 2:240; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409.

alone."<sup>58</sup> It remains unclear who ate more vegetables. In this regard, those laborers fortunate enough to have allotments--a serious possibility only towards the end of the period being surveyed here--probably were better off than a majority of the slaves, many of whom lived almost exclusively on the "standard rations" of corn and pork. Most farmworkers were not this lucky, and the stories of privation noted above (pp. 30-32) suggest what vegetables they had were limited to potatoes. Regional variations within England complicate this picture: The minority of farmworkers fortunate enough to live in the north near where competition for labor by industry and mining pushed up their wages were certainly better off materially than most American slaves, even before considering any more ethereal quality of life criteria. As for American regional variations, the Border States such as Virginia or Kentucky may have treated their slaves better. But the difference may have been more in the form of less brutal treatment than in better food, since Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Charles Ball in Maryland and Virginia describe rations similar to the evidence encountered from elsewhere in the South. (Regional variations in the food given to slaves, however, need much more research). The differences between America, a sparsely populated, newly settled country, and England, a relatively densely populated and intensively farmed land suffering from the Malthusian effects of rapid population growth during its period of industrialization (and the mismanagement of enclosure), helps explain this supreme irony: The free farm laborers of southern England arguably had a diet worse than that of American bondsmen in Mississippi or Georgia. If those kept in slavery--the worst American human rights abuse, all things considered--may have eaten better than English rural laborers, that is deeply to the shame of England's elite--"old corruption."<sup>59</sup>

#### Clothing for Slaves

The amount of clothing slaves received is relatively well-documented, because it was a significant item of expense often bought off-plantation and then shipped and issued to the slaves instead of being made right on it. This generalization does not deny how prevalent homespun clothing was in the South, but shows

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<sup>58</sup>as cited in Thompson, "Moral Economy," p. 82.

<sup>59</sup>Edward Butt, a relief officer for Petworth union, Sussex, stated that he resigned from that position not just because of a 20l./year salary cut, but also because: "I was hurt in my feelings to see the pitiful cries of the poor; it would hurt any man to see a parcel of young children, and have no more to give, it would touch the heart of a flint-stone; I could not bear it; I did not wish to mention that [initially to the Committee]." Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 6.

planters and other masters often chose not to run truly self-sufficient plantations or farms in matters of clothing. Because low quality purchases were made, not many months passed before the slaves' "new" clothes became loose-fitting half-rags. Bennet Barrow dispensed a not-atypical clothing ration per year, at least for larger planters. In his "Rules of Highland Plantation" he stated: "I give them cloths twice a year, two--one pair shoues for winter evry third year a blanket--'single negro--two.'" His relatively frequent issue of blankets was perhaps unusual. He dutifully noted their issuance sometimes in his diary. Escaped slave Francis Henderson, from "Washington City, D. C.," recalled that his master dealt with blankets less generously--he received only one before running away at age nineteen. "In the summer we had one pair of linen trousers given us--nothing else; every fall, one pair of woollen pantaloons, one woollen jacket, and two cotton shirts." In Virginia, Olmsted learned that:

As to the clothing of the slaves on the plantations, they are said to be usually furnished by their owners or masters, every year, each with a coat and trousers, of a coarse woollen or woollen and cotton stuff (mostly made, especially for this purpose, in Providence, R. I.) for winter, trousers of cotton osnaburghs for summer, sometimes with a jacket also of the same; two pairs of strong shoes, or one pair of strong boots and one of lighter shoes for harvest; three shirts, one blanket, and one felt hat.

This optimistic description probably pertained to the more ideal masters and what slaveowners by reputation were supposed to do, or reflected the better treatment of slaves the Border States such as Virginia were known for. Later, in a conversation with an old free black man, he observed: "Well, I've been thinking, myself, the niggars did not look so well as they did in North Carolina and Virginia; they are not so well clothed, and they don't appear so bright as they do there." Additionally, Christmas gifts of certain finery could supplement the basic yearly ration of two summer suits and one winter suit, as he noted about four large adjacent plantations "situated on a tributary of the Mississippi" owned by one normally absentee planter. Slaves also could purchase clothes with earnings from working on Sundays, holidays, or late at night.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the

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<sup>60</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409. See also pp. 46-47. On p. 114 he says: "Gave women Calico dress." For blankets given, see pp. 219-20 (seventy bought); p. 377 (thirty bought); Drew, Refugee, pp. 155-156 (Henderson) Admittedly, since he was mostly a child during this period, he was not likely to be issued a blanket individually; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:105, 193, 200-210, 211; For pay for working irregular times, see Ball, Slavery

slaves normally were issued a certain amount of clothing yearly, but was it enough?

### Bad Clothing Conditions for Slaves

Evidence repeatedly points to the everyday work clothes of enslaved blacks being near rags. The semi-tropical weather of the Deep South no doubt contributed to slaveowners' complacency with ill-dressed slaves. Perhaps the reason why Olmsted had observed better dressed slaves in Virginia and North Carolina was because planters and other slaveholders knew these states had harsher climates compared to the Deep South, which encouraged them to distribute more and/or better clothes. Even so, ragged slaves were common throughout the South. Born free in North Carolina, Thomas Hedgebeth had worked for various slaveholders. He saw how badly dressed the slaves were at one place. They had no hats while having to work in the fields in summer. As he described:

They were a bad looking set--some twenty of them--starved and without clothing enough for decency. It ought to have been a disgrace to their master, to see them about his house. If a man were to go through Canada [where he was living at the time] so, they'd stop him to know what he meant by it--whether it was poverty or if he was crazy,--and they'd put a suit of clothes on him.

The slaves Olmsted saw while passing by on a train in Virginian fields were "very ragged." At one farm in Virginia, "the field-hands wore very coarse and ragged garments." A different problem appeared on the rice-island estate Kemble stayed at. The slaves issued a fair amount of thick cloth to turn into clothes. But in coastal lowland Georgia's hot climate the resulting garments were virtually intolerable during summer, even to the blacks accustomed to the climate.<sup>61</sup> Simply put, their clothes were so bad because their owners basically determined how much would be spent on them, not the slaves themselves. Their masters' self-interest naturally led to them to minimize "unnecessary clothing expenditures."

Slave children suffered most from inadequate clothing rations. Often they ended up with just a long shirt, although nakedness was not unknown. Aged freedwoman Mary Reynolds of Louisiana recalled what she wore when she was young: "In them days I weared shirts, like all the young-uns. They had collars

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in the United States, p. 44.

<sup>61</sup>Drew, Refugee, p. 278; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:40, 52; Kemble, Journal, pp. 52-53.

and come below the knees and was split up the sides. That's all we weared in hot weather." Frederick Douglass recalled his want of clothing when he was a child:

I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked--no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees.

He found the thought of owning a pair of trousers at the age of seven or eight--offered because he was being sent to Baltimore to work as a servant--"great indeed!" Aged freedman Cicero Finch of Georgia remembered how both slave boys and girls wore the same basic piece of clothing:

An' de chillun? When dey big 'nough ter put on anything, it's a shirt. Boys an' girls de same. Run roun' in dat shirt-tail. Some de gals tie belt roun' de middle, an' dat's de only diffrunts.

In an upbeat recollection presumably blurred by nostalgia, old ex-slave Kike Epps of South Carolina described a still lower standard that prevailed for children's clothing on his master's plantation: "Dis hy'ar [banyan] shu't . . . wuh made jus' lak a sack. Got hole in top fo' de haid, an' holes fo' de arms. Pull it over yo' haid, push yo' arms t'rough de side holes, an' dar yo' is!" They would wear this bag with holes "till dey mos' growed up!" Due to South Carolina's warm climate even in winter, he wore this outfit without complaint, making for a decidedly different memory from Frederick Douglass's bitter experience in Maryland's much harsher winters. Although this pattern had exceptions, generally little was spent on children's clothes because they did no field labor when young, causing the less forward-looking "entrepreneurial" slaveowners to "invest" less in their "human capital" at this point in their lives, to use desiccated cliometric terminology.<sup>62</sup>

#### Differences in Clothing Provided for Slaves with Different Positions

Just as for food, different groups of slaves received different kinds and/or amounts of clothing. Most obviously, the larger planters issued better clothes to servants than to field

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<sup>62</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 122; For exceptions, see pp. 81, 85; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 43, 44; For Finch's and Epp's recollections, see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 72, 73; Charles Ball of Maryland said that "Children not able to work in the field, were not provided with clothes at all, by their masters." Slavery in the United States, p. 44.

hands, since they had to look presentable to the big house's visitors.<sup>63</sup> They also received the cast-offs of the master's family, in the same way they enjoyed the scrapings and leftovers of the master's table. After being made a servant as a child, old freedman Henry Coleman remembered his mother told his father about one of his new needs: "That black little nigger over there, he got to git hisself some pants 'cause I's gwine to put him up over the white folks's table." His job was to swish away flies from a swing with a brush of peacock feathers over his owner's table. To wear only a shirt from that elevated position just might prove to be too revealing! Slaves with managerial duties also acquired better attire. Olmsted described the "watchman"--the top slave who served virtually as a steward and storekeeper for a large South Carolina rice planter--as being as well-dressed and as well-mannered as any (white) gentleman. One ex-slave said his father, a driver, was "de only slave dat was give de honor to wear boots."<sup>64</sup> So at the cost of living under a master's or mistress's closer supervision, drivers and domestic servants enjoyed greater material benefits such as having better food and clothing.

Many slaves saved their best clothing for going to church on Sundays or special occasions, but reserved the worst for work. Gus Feaster, a South Carolinian freedman, remembered:

Us wore the best clothes that us had [at church]. . . .  
Us kept them cleaned and ironed just like the master  
and the young masters done theirn. Then us wore a  
string tie, that the white folks done let us have, to  
church. That 'bout the onliest time that a darky was  
seed with a tie.

Solomon Northrup, held in bondage in Louisiana, recalled that on Christmas slaves dressed up the best they could:

Then, too, 'of all i' the year,' they array themselves  
in their best attire. The cotton coat has been washed

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<sup>63</sup>Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 289-90; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:52. However, exceptions occurred: While visiting one neighboring (and declining) plantation on a Georgian sea island, Kemble encountered barefoot, "half-naked negro women" who "brought in refreshments." Journal, p. 296. Similar standards likely prevailed for many rural small slaveholders in the interior regions of the South.

<sup>64</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 141-42; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:242; George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography 19 vols. (1972-: Westport), South Carolina Narratives, II (2), 36, quoted in Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 370.

clean, the stump of a tallow candle has been applied to the shoes, . . . [and, perhaps] a rimless or crownless hat . . . [was] placed jauntily upon the head.

Many women wore red ribbons in the hair or handkerchiefs over their heads then as well. Kemble saw a similar phenomenon, comparing it to poor Irish immigrants who spent (judging from her middle class standpoint) too much on clothes after coming to America:

I drove to church to-day in the wood-wagon, with Jack and Aleck, Hector being our charioteer, in a gilt guard-chain and pair of slippers to match as the Sabbath part of his attire. . . . The [male] Negroes certainly show the same strong predilection for finery with their womenkind.

Most strikingly, a free black man from North Carolina peddling tobacco in South Carolina told Olmsted how differently the slaves dressed while on the job compared to church:

Well, master, Sundays dey is mighty well clothed, dis country; 'pears like dere an't nobody looks better Sundays dan dey do. But Lord! workin' days, seems like dey haden no close dey could keep on 'um at all, master. Dey is a'mos' naked, wen deys at work, some on 'em.<sup>65</sup>

Of course, since they normally worked six days out of seven, bondsmen could not wear good clothes every work day without ruining all they had. Most lacked the necessary changes of shirts and pants to do that. Dressing badly at work compared to church or other special occasions also may have reflected their different attitudes towards the two situations. On the day they are free from work and "own their own time," they dressed to express themselves. But when they are in the fields, six days out of seven, and their time is the master's time, they avoided dressing above average or trying to impress their companions in bondage, unlike at church on Sundays. Doing so might well bring the unwanted attentions of the overseer or master against some "uppity" black.<sup>66</sup> Bondsmen and women indulged in what Kemble

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<sup>65</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 145; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 164; Kemble, Journal, p. 281; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:211. He commented while in Virginia, p. 105: "On Sundays and holidays they usually look very smart, but when at work, very ragged and slovenly."

<sup>66</sup>Charles Ball chose to stop wearing the straw hat his wife gave him while working. He feared standing out since he was the only slave on the plantation with a hat. Ball, Slavery in the

called "the passion for dress" not everyday, but only on days where the immediate coercion associated with work ceased.

#### The Factory Versus Homespun: The Master's Decision

Masters acquired clothing for their slaves in two different ways. First, they could place orders with factories in the North or in England. Second, they could make homespun right on the farm or plantation itself. Olmsted time and time again refers to the ubiquity of homespun as worn by whites in the South, including the smaller planters, which he rarely witnessed in the North. When summarizing the economic backwardness of the South, he pointed out: "How is it that while in Ohio the spinning-wheel and hand-loom are curiosities, and homespun would be a conspicuous and noticeable material of clothing, half the white population of Mississippi still dress in homespun, and at every second house the wheel and loom are found in operation?"<sup>67</sup> One of Bennet Barrow's most common diary notations describing his slaves' daily work concerned slave women spinning on rainy days which kept them (at least) busy. Slaves and others recalled the making of homespun clothing.<sup>68</sup> Here the white population's standard of living constitutes a ceiling on the black/slave population's conditions. Slaves are exceedingly unlikely to have anything routinely better than their white neighbors, outside of exceptional individuals such as the aforementioned "watchman" on one South Carolina rice plantation. Homespun was coarser cloth and required much time to produce, but had the advantage of reducing cash outlays for subsistence farmers. They gained more independence from the market, but at the cost of many extra hours of labor. Submitting to the division of labor, which small farmers accessed through the market, always presents trade-offs: They could stay independent, and either go without or put more hours of their lives into producing at home what could be bought instead, or pay for it, using cash earned from cash crops sold on an open market, knowing that a sustained price drop could ruin them.

Unfortunately for the slaves, when their masters chose to rely on the market, the clothing often specially manufactured for them was of a cheap, low-grade quality. Clothes made of "Negro

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United States, p. [1]47.

<sup>67</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:267-268.

<sup>68</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 63; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 188, 193-195; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:68-69; Joan Rezner Gundersen, "The Double Bonds of Race and Sex: Black and White Women in a Colonial Virginia Parish," Journal of Southern History, 52 (Aug. 1986):369; Bassett, The Plantation Overseer, p. 180.



cloth" were durable but rough on the skin. Even clothes made of this material may not last that long, since they often had only one or two sets of clothes to wear, besides any finery they might luckily possess. Having so few clothes made it hard to wash and clean their clothes more than once a week.<sup>69</sup> Since they often did not have another full set of clothes to change into, the daily wear and tear on what they did own was nearly ceaseless during the work week. Clearly, since the slaveowners normally chose what and how much the market produced, it was hardly a savior in providing better clothes for the slaves.

### Slaves and Shoe Shortages

Slaves also suffered from not having enough pairs of shoes or boots. The South's warm climate fortunately mitigated this shortage's negative effects, especially in the Deep South. Old freedwoman Nicey Kinney recalled that the freedmen after emancipation when going to church were "in their Sunday clothes, and they walked barefoots with their shoes acrost their shoulders to keep 'em from gitting dirty. Just 'fore they got to the church they stopped and put on their shoes . . ." This obviously implies that many slaves preferred to go barefoot at times, at least in summer. Still, Barrow knew the dog days of August could torment even his blacks' feet: "ground here verry hot to the negros feet." But when cold weather closed in, lacking adequate protection for the feet suddenly became dangerous. Once the jealous mistress of Harriet Brent Jacobs ordered her to take off her creaking new shoes. Later she was sent on a long errand during which she had to walk in the snow barefoot. After returning and going to bed, she thought might end up sick, even dead. "What was my grief on waking to find myself quite well!" As a slave child, Frederick Douglass recalled what going barefoot did to his feet in Maryland's winter: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes." Freedwoman Mary Reynolds had to wear shoes with brass studs in the toes and sides which hurt her ankles because they were too small. Despite rubbing tallow into these shoes and putting rags in them, they still left her with life-long scars. Similar to their clothing situation, slave children were even more neglected about being given proper shoes--many received none at all. One Virginia slaveowner ruefully regretted the deadly result of failing to shod one slave, telling Olmsted that: "He lost a valuable negro, once, from having neglected to provide him with shoes."<sup>70</sup> Judging from

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<sup>69</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 551.

<sup>70</sup>Bassett maintained going barefoot in warm weather was expected. Plantation Overseer, p. 271; the testimony of Reynolds and Kinney is in Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 82, 122; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 239; Brent, Incidents, pp. 17-18; Douglass,

how masters and mistresses tended to neglect supplying their bondsmen with sufficient clothing, deeming it rather optional, especially in the Deep South, the slaves were even more apt to be ill-supplied with shoes, especially since they themselves did not always wish to wear them. Slaves certainly were unlikely to have more shoes than they needed!

Just as for clothing, masters and mistresses could get their bondsmen shoes from two different basic sources. One standard approach, commonly used by the larger planters, was to order them from some company in the North or England. Brogans, basic, hard, and heavy work shoes, were not purchased while meditating on the tenderness of the slaves' feet. They were often ordered a size large, since the certainty of the fit was questionable when ordering from a distance. Barrow repeatedly recorded giving shoes to his slaves, always in October when noted. He said they were issued for winter yearly, which has its implications about the rest of the year. Alternatively, shoes could be made locally and individually by a shoemaker, perhaps by a slave craftsman owned by the planter himself.<sup>71</sup> Either way, the ration of shoes given out each year was unlikely to last until the next year's new allowance arrived while suffering under the strain of heavy field work. The bondsmen's pre-teen children were fortunate to get any shoes at all, since they rarely worked with the crops.

#### Fogel and Engerman's Optimistic Take on Slaves' Clothing Rations

Pressing forth an optimistic line on slave clothing allowances, Fogel and Engerman claim:

These [records from large plantations] indicate that a fairly standard annual issue for adult males was four shirts (of cotton), four pairs of pants (two of cotton and two of wool), and one or two pairs of shoes. Adult women were issued four dresses per year, or the material needed to make four dresses. Hats were also typically issued annually (women received headkerchiefs). Blankets were issued once every two or three years.

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Narrative, p. 43; for an exception, see Cicero Finch of Georgia in Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 72; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:104. Curiously, Olmsted found in one area of Tennessee a majority of poor whites routinely went barefoot in winter, even when the snow was four or five inches deep without thinking it was much of a problem! Cotton Kingdom, 2:128.

<sup>71</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 271; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 82, 101, 133, 213, 342, 409; for the use of local cobblers, see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 188; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 63.

They add that sometimes slaveowners issued socks, underclothes, petticoats, jackets, and coats, the latter for winter months. Likely only the most paternalistic masters indulged in such a high yearly issue. Two or three sets of clothes seem a more likely average annual ration, as Sutch argues. Barrow issued blankets every three years, but Francis Henderson's master was apparently far less generous. The exemplary planters Fogel and Engerman cite must be offset against the very neglectful ones. Ball gave his editor a horror story about his fellow slaves' lack of clothing on a large cotton plantation in South Carolina. In the work gang, none had a full set of clothes, with "not one of the others [besides himself] had on even the remains of two pieces of apparel," and many of the teenage slaves were naked. Although an abolitionist editor's bias may have distorted this story, undeniably most slaves looked on workdays terribly ragged by Northern free white standards.<sup>72</sup>

### Clothing and English Agricultural Workers

Turning to the English case, documenting conditions becomes significantly harder. Since the farmworkers normally bought clothing on their own, sources similar to that of the planters' records of clothing bought for their slaves do not exist. Furthermore, the kind of clothing the lower classes wore in England was often differed little in general appearance from the middle class's. Unlike other European societies, England had no required "peasant costume" that automatically marked off those working the land from the rest of society. But similar to many French peasants, many agricultural workers did wear smocks. Somerville once saw a crowd, of at least one thousand men, women, and children, who gathered to hear anti-corn law speeches. The men, composing two-thirds of it, mostly wore "smock-frocks or fustian coats, just as they had come from their work." This outfit's prevalence gradually declined as the nineteenth century progressed. As a youth in Warwick (c. 1840), Joseph Arch was given a smock of the coarsest cloth to wear, like other plowboys in his village. Since the sons of the local artisans sported cloth-coats (albeit made of shoddy material), they felt superior to the farmworkers' sons. The difference resulted in "regular pitched battles of smock-frock against cloth-coat." In Sussex, Cobbett saw a boy wearing a faded, patched blue smock, which made him reflect that he had worn the same when he was young himself (c. 1775). This boy also had on nailed shoes and a worn but clean shirt.<sup>73</sup> Conspicuously, by comparison, African-American

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<sup>72</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:116-17; Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 298-99; Ball, Slavery in the United States, pp. 146-[1]47; cf. Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 289, 291-92.

<sup>73</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 66-67; Somerville, Whistler, p. 382; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 31; Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 96.

slaves, the lowest of the low in their society, wore no smocks while in the fields, nor did the white farmers either.

### The Low Standards for Farmworkers, especially in Southern England

Clothing standards for agricultural workers, at least in southern England, approached the bottom of the heap even for the working class. While attacking the upper class's hypocrisy on this score, Cobbett quoted Sir John Pollen, an M.P. for Andover. Attempting to justify the corn laws as a means of helping the agricultural laborers, Pollen said the "poor devils" had "hardly a rag to cover them!" Somerville knew of one child who lent his shoes to another without any while they played together. Many of the budgets that researchers collected on the farmworkers normally had nothing devoted to purchasing clothing. After constructing a fairly reasonable, non-luxurious budget, Cobbett found that maintaining a family of five on five pounds of bread, one pound of mutton, and two of pork a day cost (c. 1825) over sixty-two pounds a year. This figure, for just food alone, was more than double what their average annual wages likely totaled, based on a nine to ten shillings a week average. Those on parish relief received still less (just seven shillings six pence per week, by Cobbett's reckoning). Of course, they ate far less meat than this in reality, ensuring their budgets came closer to balancing. With the extra harvest earnings, clothing (perhaps) could be bought for a brief period annually, since these put the agricultural workers somewhat above subsistence in much of southern England. Otherwise, they had to get them by charity or even begging. The Hampshire girls Cobbett saw in their Sunday best had received from charity a camlet gown, a white apron, and a plaid cloak each. But the upper class's generosity was unreliable, especially when by promoting enclosure and high excise taxes it had taken forcibly from the laborers much more than it ever gave back. As a result, many agricultural laborers could only afford to own one change of clothes altogether, putting them right at or below the level of many slave field hands in America.<sup>74</sup> This conclusion is hardly surprising, because of the high cost of food for large families where the father was the main or sole support, especially when his family was scraping bottom during the family life cycle. With the parents struggling to raise a large number of children, household duties heavily burdening the mother, and only one child (perhaps) able to start earning a little at age eight or nine, a virtually guaranteed family financial crisis lasting some years struck working class families until their children became teenagers and could earn their keep. Under these conditions, clothing expenses were necessarily cut to the bare bone.

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<sup>74</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 51, 306, 433; Somerville, Whistler, p. 281; Having one set of clothes is mentioned in Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 68.

Although necessary for life, clothing was often an easily postponable purchase, since the laborer's wife (almost inevitably) could somehow patch and mend what near-rags the family had for another year or more when a major crisis for the family or region struck. Encountering a laborer in northern Hampshire along the road, Somerville found he had four children and a wife to support on a mere eight shillings per week. Hovering near the bottom of the family life-cycle, having a wife unable to leave home everyday, and having one twelve-year-old earning two shillings a week, they could not think of buying new clothes: "Clothes, bless you! we never have no clothes, not new--not to speak of as clothes. We thought to have something new as bread was getting cheaper, but wages came down, and we ben't better nor afore; it take all we earn to get a bit of bread . . ." Although many laborers locally raised pigs, they saw little of them as food--they sold them to pay the rent, and maybe buy some clothing. As the trade of Poole, Dorset scraped bottom in 1843, and the surrounding countryside held in the grip of economic distress, the local people avoided coming into town to buy clothes. Similarly, when the potato blight wiped out the potatoes of southern and western England in 1845, and high bread prices came with little or no increases in wages, Somerville heard that: "The village shopkeepers and tradesmen feel it [the potato famine], and complain that the labourers are neither paying what they owe for clothes and groceries, nor are they making new purchases."<sup>75</sup> So whenever a family or general distress hit, laborers put off buying new clothes, since bread or potatoes were more immediately vital to life.

#### Homespun More Common in America than England c. 1830

A major difference between the America of 1860 and the America of a generation or two earlier Cobbett lived in (1792-1800, 1817-1819) was how commonly Northern farm families made their own homespun clothing. One time he observed "about three thousand farmers, or rather country people, at a horse-race in Long Island, and my opinion was, that there were not five hundred who were not dressed in home-spun coats." By the eve of the Civil War, this state of affairs had plainly changed. Having a farm on Staten Island, Olmsted certainly had a reasonable idea of conditions on Long Island. He commented how rare homespun was in the North, even in a more recently settled state such as Ohio (see pp. 48-49 above). Cobbett saw the decline of the home manufacture of clothing as a real privation for farm families. Correspondingly, he condemned concentrating its manufacture in the factories of the "Lords of the Loom." Noting its bad effects on keeping women employed at home, he points to the downside of the regional division of labor:

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<sup>75</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 119, 120, 413, 414.

The women and children, who ought to provide a great part of the raiment, have nothing to do. The fields must have men and boys; but, where there are men and boys there will be women and girls; and, as the Lords of the Loom have now a set of real slaves, by the means of whom they take away a great part of the employment of the country-women and girls, these must be kept by poor-rates in whatever degree they lose employment through the Lords of the Loom.

Clearly, regional specialization and the division of labor had its costs in economic displacement. Since the industrial belt in the Midlands made most of England's cloth, and the tailors of London stitched much of it together, both undermined the economic independence of agricultural workers and farmers by making much of England's clothes. In this case, strongly counter-balancing the advantages of raising the quality and lowering time spent on making clothes for rural families, the laborers' womenfolk had much less to do, causing a kind of generalized and semi-hidden underemployment. As general population growth raised the unemployment rate and the regional and sexual division of labor intensified, women were pushed out of fieldwork as the eighteenth century drew to a close and the nineteenth century opened, further impoverishing southern English agricultural workers. One farmer/relieving officer in Sussex remembered that the poor once made their own clothing (c. 1794), but that had changed by 1837.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, since America boasted a nearly empty wilderness crying out for settlement, far more work was available for everyone. Under these conditions, women need not suffer such want, in part because male wages or work brought in much more income. Hence, differing national conditions led to a paradoxical result: Olmsted saw the American South's heavy dependence on homespun clothing as a sign of its poverty/economic backwardness, but Cobbett saw its absence in England as evidence of the rural working class's increased impoverishment.

#### Special Measures Used to Buy Clothes

Illustrating the rather desperate clothing situations southern English agricultural workers endured, consider the implications of one typical self-help used to help solve it: benefit clubs. In Dorset, Caird knew of a clothing club that operated in the area around Blandford. Similar to medical clubs and friendly societies in concept, this particular one helped meet the clothing needs of rural workers and their families. The workers contributed one penny for themselves and per child per week, the employer one penny also, in equal proportion. At the end of the year, club members received clothing equal in value to

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<sup>76</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 99-100; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 14.

their accounts' totals. Despite only applying a mere bandaid over the gaping wound of low wages, this approach still encouraged laborers to exercise more self-discipline. They already had to operate carefully within low incomes to meet their most immediate needs outside food and shelter (rent). One anonymous resident rector had the program of selling "blankets, shoes, and various articles of clothing, at two-thirds of the prime cost" to laborers. After having sold them to all in his parish, he later limited sales to the sober, reliable, and church-going. In a pamphlet published during the Swing riots stating the laborer's case against the farmer and landlord's, an anonymous Christian paternalist calculated the cost for laborers of a "reasonable" set of men's clothes and shoes per year at £3 14s. 6d. and women's (much of it in cloth, not ready-to-wear) at £2 18s. 2d. Since the list for men consisted of three shirts, one pair of "trowsers," one jacket, one waistcoat, two pairs of socks, and one pair of shoes, it indicates prevailing clothing standards must have been still lower than this for southern rural districts in England. Also including other basic items such as soap and candles, these expenses "must be raised by the extra work of the labourer, by his profits in the hay and corn harvest, by the produce of his garden, by the leasings of his family, and by the earnings, if any, of his wife and children."<sup>77</sup> Simply put, the regular weekly earnings of Hodge south of Caird's wage line usually failed cover anything beyond food and perhaps rent if he was the sole support for a large family. Ironically, the anonymous Christian paternalist's clothing budget's list of items being fewer than what many larger American planters issued their slaves annually. Special measures such as a "clothing club" or

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<sup>77</sup>Caird, English Agriculture, p. 73; Anonymous, A Country Rector's Address to His Parishioners (London: Hatchard & Son; and C.J.G. & F. Rivington; and J. Swinnerton, Macclesfield, 1830), p. 19; A Plain Statement of the Case of the Labourer; for the Consideration of the Yeomen and Gentlemen of the Southern Districts of England (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot, 1830; and Winchester: Robbins and Wheeler, 1830), p. 24; reprint ed., Kenneth E. Carpenter, ed., The Rising of the Agricultural Labourers: Nine Pamphlets and Six Broad-sides 1830-1831, British Labour Struggles: Contemporary Pamphlets 1727-1850 (New York: Arno Press, New York Times Co., 1972). The latter's sample budgets, with their modicum of comfort, are found on pp. 4, 21-23. When compared to the testimony of Thomas Stuart, a Bedfordshire farm laborer, they appear realistic. This man spent fifteen shillings a year "for a pair of strong shoes to go to work in," and the sample budget said men's shoes cost thirteen shillings. He spent less on shoes for the rest of his family than the sample budget did, however, saying his whole family in one year "stands me in 2 £ for shoe bills." See the excerpt of the Select Committee on Labourers' Wages, BPP, 1824, vol. VI, in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 67.

the use of harvest earnings for a vital necessity at a low-level of purchases help demonstrate the constant struggle the southern English agricultural workers had against ending up with mere rags to wear.

#### Slave Housing: Variations around a Low Average Standard

Since their homes often were crude log cabins with dirt floors, the housing conditions of slaves were hardly ideal even for their day and age. The impulse to heap indignation against these conditions, however, must be stifled, at least to the extent the slaves lived on the frontier, where their master and mistress' "big house" often surpassed what their chattels endured by only a few steps. The housing slaves had in (say) South Carolina or Virginia in the 1800s illustrated how long settled areas treated them, but it cannot be safely extrapolated to what blacks endured when moving westward with their white owners into Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and especially Texas. Correspondingly, the slaves suffered with very crude housing when they were first taken to America en masse in the early 1700s, as slavery became widespread. But as the decades passed, at least some more paternalistic masters upgraded their slaves' dwellings, even if they remained beneath those most Northern free workers had. Hence, some antebellum defenses of slavery focused on the conditions of slaves on large plantations in long-settled regions such as lowland Georgia or South Carolina and Tidewater Virginia, where some authentic paternalism and mutual outgoing concern may have developed because (by the mid-1800s) the same white families had owned several generations of slave families. Having played with the children of slaves when young, the planter's white sons and daughters, as they became older and the master or mistress of the plantation themselves, would have long-standing personal relationships with at least some bondsmen.<sup>78</sup> These relationships simply could not exist when the earlier colonialists had imported freshly enslaved Africans directly from West Africa. Nor did this situation arise among non-hereditary slaveowners on the make on the frontier, where housing conditions were inevitably worse anyway. Hence, variations in slave housing partially correspond to how long a given area of the South had been settled, how paternalistically inclined the slaveowners were, and how long they and their ancestors had lived in one area with the same slave families over the generations.

As overwhelming evidence indicates, the slave quarters normally consisted of "houses" little better than the barns and sheds that sheltered many animals during the winter in the North or in England. One room was all many, perhaps most, slaves had, with perhaps a loft for the children to sleep in, such as where former slave Charley Williams lived in Louisiana. As freedwoman

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<sup>78</sup>cf. Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:236.



Harriet Payne commented: "Everything happened in that one room--birth, sickness, death and everything."<sup>79</sup> Slaves often lived in log cabins which allowed them to see through the chinks between the logs. Dirt floors were a standard feature.<sup>80</sup> Escaping from slavery near Washington, D.C., Henderson described wretched housing conditions: "Our houses were but log huts--the tops partly open--ground floor,--rain would come through. . . . in rains I have seen her [his old aunt] moving about from one part of the house to the other, and rolling her bedclothes about to try to keep dry,--every thing would be dirty and muddy." Booker T. Washington said that as a child he was born and had lived in "a typical log cabin, about fourteen by sixteen feet square." It had no glass windows, a dirt floor, a door that barely clung to its hinges, and numerous notable holes in the walls. Since his mother was the cook, the plantation's cooking was done in this unsanitary cabin, for both whites and blacks! Olmsted in South Carolina's high country found conditions worse than what animals in the North suffered:

The negro-cabins, here, were the smallest I had seen--I thought not more than twelve feet square, inside. . . . They were built of logs, with no windows--no opening at all, except the doorway, with a chimney of stick and mud; with no trees about the, no porches, or shades, of any kind. Except for the chimney . . . . I should have conjectured that it had been built for a powder-house, or perhaps an ice-house--never for an animal to sleep in.

Providing scant comfort to the slaves, the local poor whites' homes were "mere square pens of logs" of little better quality.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 112, 147.

<sup>80</sup>Jenny Proctor of Alabama remembered that some cracks were chinked up and some were not. Marion Johnson, once a slave in Louisiana, could count the stars through the cracks in his mother's cabin. Millie Evans of North Carolina recalled that "nice dirt floors was the style then." Showing the master was not especially neglectful for one quarters of twelve cabins, ex-slave Rose Williams regarded it as good in quality, yet still noted: "There am no floor, just the ground." Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 62, 89, 139, 161. Solomon Northrup described his cabin as being built of logs, without window or floor, with large crevices letting in the necessary light and unnecessary rain! Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 128.

<sup>81</sup>Drew, Refugee, p. 155. Kemble found similar conditions at St. Annie's, in which the bondsmen's homes failed to keep out the rain. Journal, p. 239; Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery (1901; New York: Airmount Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 15-16;

While in Virginia, Olmsted passed larger plantations that had "perhaps, a dozen rude-looking little log-cabins scattered around them [the planters' homes], for the slaves." In Louisiana he saw a creole-owned plantation where "the cabins of the negroes upon which were wretched hovels--small, without windows, and dilapidated." In the frontier conditions of Texas, he described one planter's slave quarters as being

of the worst description, though as good as local custom requires. They are but a rough inclosure of logs, ten feet square, without windows, covered by slabs of hewn wood four feet long. The great chinks are stopped with whatever has come to hand--a wad of cotton here, and a corn-shuck there.

They gave little protection against the cold. Kemble thought she had found the worst slave accommodations by far at the Hampton estate on St. Annie's in Georgia, but later discovered far worse ones nearby: "The negro huts on several of the plantations that we passed through were the most miserable habitations I ever beheld. . . . [They were] dirty, desolate, dilapidated dog-kennels." One master "provided" the worst housing of all for his slaves--none! After getting into trouble with the law in Georgia, he had moved himself and his slaves to Texas, as aged freedman Ben Simpson remembered: "We never had no quarters. When nighttime come, he locks the chain around our necks and then locks it round a tree. Boss, our bed were the ground."<sup>82</sup> These examples illustrate the general crudeness of slave housing, since it fell below what most whites in the contemporaneous North would have found tolerable, even for many living in more recently settled states such as Illinois or Wisconsin.

#### Cases of Good Slave Housing

Sometimes a higher standard of slave housing prevailed on some plantations. One particularly impressive case, pointed out as such earlier by Olmsted, was a certain rice plantation not too far from Savannah, Georgia:

Each cabin was a framed building, the walls boarded and whitewashed on the outside, lathed and plastered within, the roof shingled; forty-two feet long, twenty-one feet wide, divided into two family tenements, each twenty-one by twenty-one; each tenement divided into

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Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:207.

<sup>82</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:38, 340, 373; Kemble, Journal, p. 242; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 75.

three rooms.

The cabins all had doors that could be locked and lofts for the children to sleep in. Each room had a window with a wooden shutter to close it. Overcrowding was avoided, since only five people on average lived in each of these homes. To use English terminology, each had an "allotment" of a half-acre garden and an area that served as a combination chicken coop and sty for pregnant sows. An interviewer seeking nostalgic reminiscences from freedmen, Orland Armstrong drew attention to the good housing conditions some slaves enjoyed when visiting a plantation's ruins: "Some of the old cabins are only heaps of debris, while others are better preserved. They were built of brick, in the substantial manner of many of the fine old South Carolina plantation servant [slave] houses." A good, but somewhat lower standard than these Olmsted found on a farm in Virginia, which had

well-made and comfortable log cabins, about thirty feet long by twenty wide, and eight feet tall, with a high loft and shingle roof. Each divided in the middle, and having a brick chimney outside the wall at either end, was intended to be occupied by two families.

They even had windows with glass in the center, an unlikely sight on the frontier for anyone's dwelling, but not surprising in a long-settled country. Housing that reflected frontier conditions--"log huts" many of the slaves lived in--began to be replaced by "neat boarded cottages," reflecting a more settled life, on four large adjacent plantations by a "tributary of the Mississippi." For whites, the frontier offered a means of getting ahead financially in exchange for the privations of living in the wilderness. But for the slaves, pioneer life merely meant having to endure more work and less comfort, especially in housing, without gaining anything more than they initially had if they stayed back east toiling on some large planter's estate. Consequently, for this reason and others, slaves much more commonly lived in a house where they could count the stars through the cracks, as Marion Johnson did, "the usual comfortless log-huts" (Olmsted), not a three-room wood frame duplex.<sup>83</sup> Although some slaves enjoyed such exceptional housing conditions, these were hardly representative for most living in the South's interior, away from the lowland coastal areas of Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina, where (as Kemble's descriptions show) conditions often were hardly ideal as well.

#### How Much Better Was the Poor Whites' Housing than the Slaves'?

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<sup>83</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:52, 237-38; 2:166, 193, 195; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 57; Marion Johnson's testimony in Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 139.

The crude housing many southern whites had perhaps best serves to indicate that slave housing was not all its apologists might have claimed. Even the master's home might be unimpressive, especially when he was a small slaveholder and/or lived on the frontier. After visiting a neighboring mistress's home on a sea island of Georgia, Kemble said typical farmhouses in the North were certainly better: "To be sure, I will say, in excuse for their old mistress, her own habitation was but a very few degrees less ruinous and disgusting [than her slaves' homes]. What would one of your Yankee farmers say to such abodes?" Similarly, although noting the homes may have signs of a former splendor or elegance, she observed, using her Englishwoman's eyes to make a comparison while calling on a mistress's home in a nearby village in Georgia: "As for the residence of this princess, it was like all the planters' residences that I have seen, and such as a well-to-do English farmer would certainly not inhabit." Considering she was living in a long-settled region of the South, this condemnation is particularly noteworthy. Olmsted stayed overnight in one old settler's home in Texas. It was a room fourteen feet square, which "was open to the rafters." The sky could be seen between its shingles. He actually spent the night in a lean-to between two doors, keeping on all his clothes in the winter weather. While in Mississippi, he deliberately decided to spend a night in a poor white family's cabin seen as typical judging from all the other ones he had passed that day. Since this family had a horse and wagon, a fair amount of cotton planted, but no slaves, they likely beat the poor white average some. Measuring twenty-eight by twenty-five feet, their log house was open to the roof. It had a door on each of its four sides, a large fireplace on one side, but no windows. In northern Alabama, an area where more whites than blacks lived, most of the houses he passed were "rude log huts, of only one room, and that unwholesomely crowded. I saw in and about one of them, not more than fifteen feet square, five grown persons, and as many children." The conditions whites in the South experienced have major implications for how the slaves lived. The poor whites' standard of housing indicates the basic ceiling on what the enslaved blacks could normally expect at best. Bad housing conditions (admittedly, in part a function of a frontier environment) for many whites indicate most bondsmen likely had nothing better, and normally had something noticeably worse.<sup>84</sup>

#### Fogel and Engerman's Optimistic View of Slave Housing

Fogel and Engerman describe optimistically the average slave house. Measuring eighteen by twenty feet and being made of logs

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<sup>84</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:360, 373-74; 2:44-45 (generally), 2:4-5 (Texas), 2:105-106 (Mississippi), 2:112 (Alabama); Kemble, Journal, p. 116, 248; see also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 532-34.

or wood, it had one or two rooms. It likely had a loft for children to sleep in. The floors were "usually planked and raised off the ground." But is this description justified? They considerably exaggerate the size of the slaves' homes, since the free white rural population often lived in a home of comparable size. The travelers' accounts that mention the specific size of slave cabins rarely name a figure this high. After scrounging through various travelers' accounts, secondary sources, etc., Sutch properly maintains fifteen by fifteen feet was typical, with sixteen by eighteen "an occasionally achieved ideal size." The housing Kemble encountered at her husband's rice island estate was the best of the housing conditions on his two estates. It surpassed other places she visited or knew of locally. Nevertheless, while naming a specific size, she described appalling conditions of crowding:

These cabins consist of one room, about twelve feet by fifteen, with a couple of closets smaller and closer than the state-rooms of a ship, divided off from the main room and each other by rough wooden partitions, in which the inhabitants sleep. . . . Two families (sometimes eight and ten in number) reside in one of these huts, which are mere wooden frames pinned, as it were, to the earth by a [huge] brick chimney outside.

On the new Polk estate in Mississippi, some eighteen men, ten women, seven children, and two evidently half-grown boys, thirty-seven in all, crowded into four rough-hewn houses, built in a mere eighteen days. As Bassett describes: "The trivial character of the buildings on the plantation is shown in the fact that a few years later, 1840, all these buildings were abandoned and others built in what was considered a more healthy location." As cited above (p. 57), Olmsted saw slave houses measuring twelve by twelve in South Carolina and ten by ten in Texas. Genovese maintains, based on his sources, contrary to Fogel and Engerman's claims above, that slaveholders even into the 1850s usually did not "provide plank floors or raised homes . . . although more and more were doing so." According to Blassingame, most slave autobiographers said they lived in crude one-room cabins which had dirt floors and lots of cracks in the walls that allowed the winter weather to enter. Although admitting the existence of some with higher standards, Stampf still maintains: "The common run of slave cabins were cramped, crudely built, scantily furnished, unpainted and dirty." Those that fell beneath this "average" were "plentiful" as well.<sup>85</sup> Fogel and Engerman clearly

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<sup>85</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:116; Sutch in David, Reckoning, p. 294; Kemble, Journal, p. 30. The housing comparisons with the sea-island cotton estate and other local places are on pp. 178-79, 187, 234, 236, 242; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 262; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 525;

overstate how good the slaves' housing conditions usually were.

#### Genovese's Overly Optimistic Analysis of Slave Housing

Like Fogel and Engerman, Genovese puts an overly optimistic spin on slave housing, but here compared to the rest of the world's:

Their [the slaveholders'] satisfaction [with their slaves' housing] rested on the thought that most of the world's peasants and workers lived in dirty, dark, overcrowded dwellings and that, by comparison, their slaves lived decently. . . . During the nineteenth century such perceptive travelers as Basil Hall, Harriet Martineau, James Stirling, and Sir Charles Lyell thought the slaves at least as well housed as the English and Scottish poor, and Olmsted thought the slaves on the large plantations as well situated as the workmen of New England. . . . Even Fanny Kemble thought conditions no worse than among the European poor. . . . The laboring poor of France, England, and even the urban Northeast of the United States . . . lived in crowded hovels little better and often worse than the slave quarters.

Although his point has merit about the conditions of the southern English farm laborers, or those of the Eurasian masses, peasants and artisans, it ignores how most slaves were worse off materially than typical American free laborers. If they had not been enslaved or discriminated against, the conditions of blacks in the United States would have been better than those in most of the world because America was largely a vast wilderness full of raw natural resources awaiting exploitation by (then) modern technology. These conditions made for an intrinsically higher standard of living compared to (say) England, which suffered from the Malthusian effects of rapid population growth. Furthermore, as Sutch's reply to Fogel and Engerman over the quality of housing in the North generally demonstrates, including even New York's slums in the depression year of 1893, Genovese is too pessimistic about Northeastern urban housing standards.<sup>86</sup>

Genovese also reads too much into his citations of Olmsted and Kemble. Olmsted was not making a general point about all

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Blassingame, Slave Community, p. 254; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 294-95. Genovese's portrayal of the poor whites' housing conditions is similar to the above. Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 533-34.

<sup>86</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 526; Richard Sutch in David, et al, Reckoning, pp. 292-98.

slaves living on big plantations having housing as good as that of New England workers when he said this about a sugar plantation in Louisiana: "The negro houses were exactly like those I described on the Georgia rice plantation [quoted above, p. 58], except that they were provided with broad galleries in front. They were as neat and well-made externally as the cottages usually provided by large manufacturing companies in New England, to be rented to their workmen." Such good conditions were hardly automatic even on large plantations, as Kemble's already cited account shows. On the page Genovese cites of Kemble, she was describing sanitary conditions and rebutting the (racist) contention that the smell of blacks and their quarters was intrinsic to their race rather than being due to their poverty and ignorance of proper habits of cleanliness. She was not discussing so much the intrinsic size or construction of the house in question, but how the peculiar institution created "dirty houses, ragged clothes, and foul smells." After comparing between the smells of slaves and a "low Irishman or woman" and maintaining both resulted from "the same causes," she said:

The stench in an Irish, Scotch, Italian, or French hovel are quite as intolerable as any I ever found in our negro houses, and the filth and vermin which abound about the clothes and persons of the lower peasantry of any of those countries as abominable as the same conditions in the black population of the United States.

Although this description likely displays some class or national bias, clearly she distinguished between the cleanliness and the intrinsic quality of building construction by saying she was "exhorting them to spend labor in cleaning and making [their homes] tidy, [yet admitting she] can not promise them that they shall be repaired and made habitable for them." She also felt that the difference between the homes slave servants lived in and their master's house was much greater than that between where free white servants lived and where they worked: "In all establishments whatever, of course some disparity exists between the accommodation of the drawing-rooms and best bedrooms and the servants' kitchen and attics; but on a plantation it is no longer a matter of degree." Focusing on their lack of furnishings in particular, she said the slave servants

had neither table to feed at nor chair to sit down upon themselves; the 'boys' lay all night on the hearth by the kitchen fire, and the women upon the usual slave's bed--a frame of rough boards, strewn with a little moss of trees, with the addition of a tattered and

filthy blanket.<sup>87</sup>

After analyzing his citations of Kemble and Olmsted, Genovese clearly reconstructs too optimistically how good slave housing was relative to many free workers. As shown below, this place is hardly alone where Genovese's work draws conclusions startlingly similar to not just Fogel and Engerman's generally discredited work, but the equally discounted Slavery by Stanley Elkins as well, yet Roll, Jordan, Roll has avoided similar opprobrium and presently reigns as the leading general work of the field.

#### The Moral Hazards of Crowded, One-Room Slave Houses

Often living in one-room cabins or shacks, slave families had to undertake special measures to help preserve their children's sexual morality. In language reminiscent of the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture in England that described the hazards of promiscuously mixing the sexes of different ages together (see p. 67 below), Olmsted cites similar Victorian reasoning on sexual matters about slaves by a Presbyterian minister and professor of theology. Although rarely put so bluntly, the basic problem was figuring out how to shield the children from the sights and sounds of parental love-making and its resulting negative moral effects. Since slave families had such limited space available--one room and (perhaps) a loft to place the children being typical--these concerns were legitimate, but slaveowners usually ignored them in their general quest to reduce housing expenses. But these wretched conditions promoted the slave father and mother's inventiveness, so they found their own solutions to this problem. Some hung up clothes or quilts to create privacy, while others used scrap wood in order to subdivide a one-room home into something closer to two. A few resourceful slave parents even made special trundle beds to ensure at least some sexual privacy. According to Genovese, these measures had at least some success.<sup>88</sup> The poor housing masters and mistresses provided to their slaves clearly failed to promote the Victorian ideals of sexual purity that they generally professed.

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<sup>87</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854 with Remarks on Their Economy (New York, 1856; reprint ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 2:317. Genovese's reference to pp. 659-60 is to the 1856 edition. Also see Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:320; Kemble, Journal, pp. 24, 134-315, 234; cf. pp. 66-67.

<sup>88</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:218; Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families," Journal of Family History, 13 (1988):420; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 462-63.



## Slave Housing--Sanitation and Cleanliness

Housing quality can also be judged by its cleanliness and how much it lived up to the principles of sanitation. A relatively spacious or well-built home could still have terrible standards of cleanliness. Especially in rural areas, this aspect of housing quality more clearly burdens the occupants, not the owners. In other words, the master has no duty to enforce good housekeeping practices among his bondsmen besides setting up some basic guidelines to help them keep themselves (i.e., his property) from getting sick. In the quarters, the slaves should be cleaning up after themselves, not the master or mistress. After seeing two old slave women living without "every decency and every comfort," Kemble then visited the home some of their younger relatives. That home was "as tidy and comfortable as it could be made." Since this difference arose under the same master, it shows the slaves themselves had some level of responsibility for cleanliness. But admittedly, the intrinsic burdens of bondage, of working for their owners often six full days a week, ensured the slaves could only wring limited amounts of time during a typical work week for housecleaning anyway. Since the master class believed the ideology of "separate spheres" was inapplicable to field hands, housekeeping was inevitably neglected because both sexes were driven out into the fields to work. The depressing scene Kemble paints of the quarters on one of her husband's estates undoubtedly was found throughout the antebellum South:

Instead of the order, neatness, and ingenuity which might convert even these miserable hovels into tolerable residences, there was the careless, reckless, filthy indolence which even the brutes do not exhibit in their lairs and nests, and which seemed incapable of applying to the uses of existence the few miserable means of comfort yet within their reach. Firewood and shavings lay littered about the floors, while the half-naked children were cowering round two or three smouldering cinders. The moss with which the chinks and crannies of their ill-protecting dwellings might have been stuffed was trailing in the dirt and dust about the ground, while the back door of the huts . . . was left wide open for the fowls and ducks, which they are allowed to raise, to travel in and out, increasing the filth of the cabin by what they brought and left in every direction.

Kemble herself knew sheer ignorance and lack of education produced these appalling conditions, a cause which the master or mistress was more responsible for than the slaves. Having been born and raised in a deprived environment, the latter could not be expected to know better. After mentioning how some slaves were so dirty and smelly she disliked being attended by them at

meals, she denied that smelling bad was intrinsic to the black race, but blamed it on "ignorance of the laws of health and the habits of decent cleanliness."<sup>89</sup> An archeological discovery at Monticello suggests (but fails to prove fully) another pest slave housekeeping faced: Rodents left gnaw marks on the bones found where slaves had lived in or around, especially in the root cellar of one of their homes. True, some masters wished to improve conditions. For example, planter Bennet Barrow once inspected his slave quarters. Although finding them "generally in good order," he reproved some of his slaves as "the most careless negros I have." Another time he gave them an evening to "scoure up their Houses" and "clean up the Quarter &c." Some slaves themselves kept their homes fairly clean, at least by their own standards (not the higher ones a middle class observer such as Kemble judged by).<sup>90</sup> Although Fogel and Engerman like to think otherwise, deep concern by bondsmen or masters about cleanliness was not typical.<sup>91</sup> For good reasons most slave dwellings were neither especially neat nor orderly places.<sup>92</sup> Although the bondsmen shared the blame for their homes' unsanitary conditions with their owners, factors mostly outside the slaves' control loomed larger than their own untidiness in

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<sup>89</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 23, 24, 30-31, 213. Interestingly, Kemble's work features not only an almost complete lack of racism, but a nearly continual rebuttal against it, which was surely rare for whites living in America. Perhaps it was in part due to her being an Englishwoman, for Jacobs experienced no racism in England, unlike in the North: "During all that time [ten months in England], I never saw the slightest symptom of prejudice against color." Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, p. 190; compare pp. 180-82.

<sup>90</sup>Crader, "Slave Diet," pp. 694, 713; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 153, 190. See also Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 311; Note Harriett Payne's comments, Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 147.

<sup>91</sup>As Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:121 note: "Few matters were more frequently emphasized in the instructions to overseers than the need to insure not only the personal cleanliness of slaves but also the cleanliness of their clothes, their bedding, and their cabins." Since such instructions were likely those written by the owners of the largest and best-established plantations, naturally any paternalistic impulses on hygiene would show up disproportionately in whatever records Fogel and Engerman examined. Nevertheless, as Kemble's husband's two plantations demonstrate, even large, long-established plantations could be very ill-kept places populated with ill-washed slaves.

<sup>92</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 528.

spreading disease and dirt in the quarters, such as the failure of indifferent masters and mistresses to instruct them on the habits of cleanliness, the long workweek for both sexes that reduced the time available for housekeeping chores, and the flaws in building construction that let the elements in.

#### English Farmworkers' Housing--Quality/Size

In England, the economic dynamics of building housing for farmworkers differed sharply from America's when constructing homes for slaves. The poor law, both old and new, gave the (major) ratepayers of a parish a financial incentive to avoid erecting new cottages in their parishes, and to pull down those already extant. By reducing how many were eligible for relief, they lowered their taxes.<sup>93</sup> Ideally, the "powers that be" in a given parish wanted no more workers living in a parish than were employed year around, thus consistently keeping them off the dole. In "their" parish they strove to reduce how many could claim a settlement.<sup>94</sup> Since the poor (under the Elizabethan poor law) could have a settlement in only one parish at a time, and could claim relief only from that one parish, these laws encouraged the ratepayers to unload "their" poor onto other parishes to be cared for. In order to lower the rates, the parish elite could combine to keep out new migrants to their parish. Ratepayers, normally the gentry and (large) farmers who rented from the former, created "closed parishes" when they were few enough in number that they, by coordinating their efforts, set up a "cartel" that kept out all newcomers without a settlement in their parish.<sup>95</sup> When the ratepayers were too numerous and/or unequal in income to conspire successfully to keep out the poor without settlements in their community, an "open parish" resulted. Under the settlement laws, a new migrant to another parish could be "deported" (removed) to the parish of his origin (where he did have a settlement legally) when he became chargeable to his new parish.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, the

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<sup>93</sup>David Hoseason Morgan, Harvesters and Harvesting 1840-1900: A Study of the Rural Proletariat (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 184-85.

<sup>94</sup>Caird, English Agriculture, p. 95.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-76. See also Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxv.

<sup>96</sup>Under the settlement law of 1662, a newly arrived worker to one parish could be forcibly removed to his parish of origin/settlement if he or she was likely to become chargeable (i.e., take relief) within 40 days of arrival, at the expense of the parish of settlement. But starting in 1795, the law prohibited evicting the poor until they became actually

ratepayers of open parishes, which included the better-off artisans, professionals, and tradesmen, paid through the rates poor relief for the seasonally discharged/underemployed laborers who worked in nearby closed parishes for at least part of the year during the spring and/or summer months.<sup>97</sup> Although the deeper intricacies of the local elite's machinations to lower their taxes under the poor law (old and new) has to await further explanation below (pp. 278-79, 281-85, 287-99), the impact of the poor laws on the availability and quality of housing is considered here.

Undeniably, the English farmworkers generally endured miserable conditions in housing. The conditions they suffered were less excusable than what the slaves faced: Unlike the harsh frontier conditions many slaves and their masters suffered, England was hardly a newly settled land. Although recognizing how poor much of English rural housing was, Rule nevertheless still says: "Housing is as much a matter of existing stock as of production." On the other hand, much of England, especially in the southern arable counties, had a serious wood shortage, which increased the poor's problems in finding wood for building or even cooking. Arch contrasted his father's fortunate situation, who actually owned the home his family lived in, with conditions commonly found elsewhere in England:

In one English county after another I saw men living with their families--if living it could be called--in cottages which, if bigger, were hardly better than the sty they kept their pigs in, when they were lucky enough to have a young porker fattening on the premises.

While the farmworkers' union grew, he described their housing: "The cottage accommodation was a disgrace to civilisation; and this, not only in Somersetshire, but all over the country. As many as thirteen people would sleep all huddled up together in one small cottage bedroom." According to Somerville, in most counties "the meanest hovels are rented as high" as two pounds ten shillings per year, while in Dorset the landlords charged three and four pounds a year without any garden ground for "the worst of houses" that "the poorest of labourers" occupied. Emma Thompson in 1910 recalled how life was in Bedfordshire some 80 years earlier: "I well remember three families living in one house and two families, and only one fire place. When I was first married I had one room to live in." In a two-room house

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chargeable to the parish, and it switched the expense of removal to the parish ordering the eviction. See Deane, First Industrial Revolution, p. 153.

<sup>97</sup>Cf. Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 75-76.

(which includes the loft), she had ten children, seven surviving into adulthood. In 1797 some cottages were noted as so bad they let in the elements--a problem hardly unfamiliar to many American slaves. Examined by the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act (1838), Mark Crabtree described one typical laborer's cottage as having a dirt floor, half of a window's diamond squares of glass missing, and an outside wall which had nearly fallen down. Although observing specifically of his native area in southern Scotland, Somerville still generalized to overall British conditions when he said some new cottages were built of stone and plastered inside, "with a boarding over-head, instead of the bare roof, which is so common."<sup>98</sup> Clearly, England's farmworkers and American slaves suffered from similar housing problems.

#### Poor Housing Leads to Sexual Immorality?

Because housing space was so limited, Anglican clerics feared the poor would be (literally) de-moralized in their sexual standards of conduct. Overcrowding mounted as, among other factors, the decline of service lowering marriage ages and the tying of relief payments to being married promoted increased population growth. The pulling down of cottages to reduce poor law taxes as the first half of the nineteenth century passed added more problems, as Rule notes. One vicar, for Terrington in Norfolk, said most of his parish's cottages had two or three rooms. Often in the latter case, a lodger rented one of the three rooms, thus requiring the family to squeeze into the two remaining rooms. Some homes had only one room. The vicar focused on one case in which a father, mother, three sons, and a grown-up daughter shared a single room. He "fear[ed] that much immorality, and certainly much want of a sense of decency among the agricultural labouring classes, are owing to the nature of their homes, and the want of proper room."<sup>99</sup> In the general

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<sup>98</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 76; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 44, 127. He cited the 1867-68 Parliamentary Commission on conditions in agriculture to bolster his case. Admittedly, as a union leader, he had an incentive to exaggerate how common bad conditions were; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 172, 380; See the testimony of Emma Thompson and Mark Crabtree in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 90-91, 127; Parliamentary History, Feb. 12, 1797, as cited in the Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. iv.

<sup>99</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 78-81; The Vicar of Terrington as quoted in John Patrick, "Agricultural Gangs," History Today, March 1986, p. 24. Similar concerns also appear in Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, pp. 24-25. Caird incidently noted this problem. English Agriculture, p. 516.

neighborhood of Farnham, Surrey and Maidstone, Kent, where the hop harvesting season in September brought in hordes of temporary migrant workers, Somerville found that bad housing conditions prevailed even before the temporary workers arrived. The migrants simply worsened pre-existing crowding still further. As a result, segregating the sexes then rated as a low priority. "The undivided state of the larger families acting upon the scantiness of house room and general poverty, or high rents, often crowds them together in their sleeping apartments, so as seriously to infringe on the decencies which guard female morals." Hart, a professional gentleman of Reigate, was appalled that brothers and sisters lived in the same room until they moved out as teenagers or adults. But still worse overcrowding appeared elsewhere: Commonly in Cuckfield, Sussex, the children of both genders slept not merely in the same room, but the same bed. Clergyman W. Sankie of Farnham knew a case in which two sisters and a brother, all over fourteen, routinely slept in the same bed together. Since general housing situations approached this nadir, the laboring classes understandably never acquired "that delicacy and purity of mind which is the origin and the safeguard of chastity." Similarly, some certainly voiced similar concerns about packing American slaves into crude one bedroom shacks. But since they were generally regarded as inferior beings with stronger animalistic desires than whites, masters and mistresses in the U.S. South more easily rationalized crowded housing conditions than their English counterparts. The latter often just simply ignored the poor conditions and the agricultural workers' correspondingly degraded character. Olmsted encountered a "most intelligent and distinguished Radical" who said about them: "We are not used to regard that class in forming a judgment of national character."<sup>100</sup> Two surveys, one in 1842 and another in 1864 of 224 cottages in Durham and Northumberland, found most had just one room. Hence, while one part of the elite and middle class (justifiably) moralizes about the effects of bad, crowded housing, another determinedly ignores the need to improve such conditions altogether to save money, or to find ways to keep the poor permanently dependent on them.<sup>101</sup>

#### How the Artist's Eye Can Be Self-Deceiving When Evaluating

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<sup>100</sup>Somerville, Whistler, p. 271; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 239. Similarly, Somerville denied a certain Mr. Bennet's statement that England was "highly civilized" if he included the laborers, especially since they no longer ate and lived in the farmers' own homes. Whistler, p. 147.

<sup>101</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 81; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 239, mentions a minister who declared society intentionally and permanently should always have one part dependent on the charity of another part.

## Cottages' Quality

The physical appearance of farmworkers' cottages can be deceiving, as Rule noted, because what may appear picturesque to the eye, especially an urban dweller's, could still be unhealthy or unpleasant to live in. Arch once said that laborers' cottages with "their outside trimmings of ivy and climbing roses, were garnished without, but they were undrained and unclean within." After stopping to sketch a farmhouse he encountered near Chester, Olmsted thought the cottages nearby were "very pretty to look at." All the houses in the hamlet he was visiting were like the house he chose to draw: timber, whitewashed walls, and thatch roofs. (I do not recall him saying he had sketched any slave dwelling!) The farmer living in this house described the cottages nearby

as exceedingly uncomfortable and unhealthy--the floors, which were of clay, being generally lower than the road and the surrounding land, and often wet, and always damp, while the roofs and walls were old and leaky, and full of vermin.

The walls were made of layers of twigs and mud. Thatched roofs had the advantage of being cheaper and more picturesque than slate or tiles, and of giving more protection against the heat and cold. Their disadvantages included breeding vermin and being more apt to catch fire (it was feared). Olmsted maintained laborers' cottages usually had walls made of stone, brick and timber, or of clay mixed with straw, the last being very common. This method could make for walls of high quality, since even villas and parsonages used it.<sup>102</sup> But since the homes of laborers often were ill-maintained, they became much worse than the local elite's, even had the same quality of construction had been put into their walls and roofs, which hardly seems likely.

Again, Hodge in southern England was significantly worse off than his northern counterpart, excepting evidently Northumberland. Arch described the former's cottages above. The commissioners on conditions in agriculture in 1867-8 noted that cottages in Yorkshire were in much better shape than those in the southern counties. They were more comfortable, often had gardens attached to them or allotments, and even "cow gates" for pasturing the family's female bovine. Still, bad housing conditions still appeared in the north. After saying Dorset had the worst houses and the poorest laborers, Somerville corrected himself some--in Northumberland "the houses were worse than ever they have been in Dorsetshire"--which means they had to be truly awful! In well-off Northumberland, Caird found that some

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<sup>102</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 78; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 44; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, pp. 76, 208-10.

laborers still lived with their cows and other animals. Both even went out the same door! The cowhouse was "divided only by a slight partition wall from the single apartment which serves for kitchen, living and sleeping room, for all the inmates." Admittedly, he also discovered a newly-built village where all cottages were of two or four rooms each, having attached gardens and access to a cowhouse and pasture.<sup>103</sup> So even in an area well-known for its laborers enjoying good material conditions, the cottages were the most neglected aspect of their material well-being.

#### How Rentals and the Poor and Settlements Laws Made for Poor Quality Housing

Necessarily "freeborn Englishmen" got housing differently than American slaves. Slaveholders automatically provided it to their bondsmen, although they likely built under their owners' direction what they lived in. Except for unmarried men and women living as farm servants in housing their master (the farmer) provided them, the laborers had to rent it. (Few could hope to aspire to home ownership, Arch's family being a rare exception). As service declined, especially in the southern arable districts as the eighteenth century waned and the nineteenth opened, more and more farmworkers had to find and pay for their own housing. Helping matters none, rents rose in the period from about c. 1790 to 1837, at least in the memory of one farmer/relief officer in Sussex. Although they had a freedom slaves almost totally missed, to choose where they lived, practical factors besides financial ones constrained the laborers' free choice in housing. Because a closed parish's larger farmers and gentry had a vested self-interest in reducing how many could claim poor relief, they intentionally neglected or even tore down laborers' cottages not absolutely necessary for their operations. One witness told the Parliamentary Commissioners for the 1867-68 Report: "He [the landlord] does not care if they all tumble down." The inability of laborers to pay the rents to begin with also promoted intentional neglect, since this made renting cottages simply unprofitable. One owner of several cottages informed the Rector of Petworth, who told the Parliamentary Committee the economic dynamics involved: "If cottages brought no rent, the owners of them would not repair them, and they would by degrees take them away." Despite their likely meager carpentry skills and inferior materials, the tenants discovered they had to repair "their" dwelling, not their landlord. Other legal hurdles impeded attempts to improve laborers' cottages. In comments recorded by Somerville, Charles Baring Wall, M.P. for Guildford, Hampshire, found out that landowners really had no power over cottages held

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<sup>103</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxv; Somerville, Whistler, p. 380; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 389.



on life-holds. He had to wait until they fell in to give him the "opportunity of 'doing what he like with his own,' . . . to improve the cottages upon them."<sup>104</sup> The poor laws encouraged ratepayers to minimize the amount of poor relief paid, while the settlement laws encouraged them to drive the poor out of "their" parish so that the legal claims the poor's settlements created would burden financially some other parish. As a result, the "freeborn Englishman" often lacked the liberty to choose which parish he would settle in, because the rich of many parishes would declare him potentially (or, after 1795, when actually) chargeable to the parish, and so have him and his family removed to their parish of origin. Surprisingly, both American slaves and English agricultural workers endured restrictions on freedom of movement, for although they were far more stringent on the former, the latter also suffered more from them than is commonly realized. Clearly, the laws of England, because of those on the poor, settlements, and tenure, cost the laborers much of their freedom and created major incentives for the owners of laborers' cottages to neglect them.

#### The Problem of Cottages Being Distant from Work

Many agricultural workers endured one problem most slaves did not: long walks to work. Because of the landlords and large tenant farmers's desires to lower their taxes, many were driven out of closed parishes into open parishes, making many rent homes located uncomfortably far from the farms they worked at. The Duke of Grafton in Suffolk owned one farm where two regularly employed laborers walked four and a half miles one way from Thetford, making for, as Caird calculated, nine miles a day, fifty-four a week. In Lincolnshire, he found some farmers lent their men donkeys to ride on since walking six or seven miles one way was too exhausting! The commissioners of the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture found cottages were often built too far from where the laborers worked, even in Yorkshire where better conditions normally prevailed. These long distances laid the foundations for the infamous gang system, which mainly operated in the swampy clay soil fens districts of the Eastern Midlands and East Anglia. Under this system, a gang master gathered together groups of workers, especially children, to work on some farm a considerable distance from where they lived. If these laborers had been farm servants, living with their masters (the farmers) or in cottages on or near the farms where they

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<sup>104</sup>According to Edward Butt, before the French Revolution cottages went for 40-50s./year. Two guineas for a cottage with a garden was common. Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 8; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxv; For the cottage-owner's comments, see Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 14; Somerville, Whistler, p. 416.

worked, such measures never would have been necessary. Living so far from work was largely the fault of the poor and settlement laws creating the open and closed parish system, which heavily burdened the laborers. As Caird observed:

It is the commonest thing possible to find agricultural labourers lodged at such a distance from their regular place of employment that they have to walk an hour out in the morning, and an hour home in the evening,--from forty to fifty miles a week. . . . Two hours a day is a sixth part of a man's daily labour, and this enormous tax he is compelled to pay in labour, which is his only capital.<sup>105</sup>

So as the slaves had to endure long walks to visit family members, including husbands and wives "living 'broad," the English agricultural workers had to withstand lengthy walks to arrive at work. The subordinate class in both cases had to go a distance to do something their betters usually had close at hand.

#### The Aristocracy's Paternalism in Providing Housing, and Its Limits

As the nineteenth century passed its midpoint, a noticeable number of large landowners began to improve cottages on their lands, even though bad conditions still generally prevailed elsewhere. For some English aristocrats, paternalism actually took on some practical reality in this area. Surely knowing a good return on investment through the rent the laborers paid was a pipe dream, they still built new cottages anyway. If the laborers' wages were nine shillings or fourteen per week, they had serious trouble in being able to pay more than one shilling six pence to two shillings a week in rent. Indeed, the parish of Petworth in Sussex routinely paid at least some of its paupers' rent until the New Poor Law was passed. A semi-reasonable maximum rent was two shillings six pence to two shillings nine pence a week, although in Surrey it ranged upwards of three shillings and three shillings six pence. Laborers often struggled mightily to pay even (say) one-seventh of their income in rent. If they paid two shillings a week, their annual rent would be five pounds four shillings. If a cottage cost roughly £100 to £140 to build, depending on local building materials and supplies, the return on investment (ROI) would hover around 4.5 percent annually when ignoring all repair costs. Some let them at 2.5 percent a year, but this involves self-sacrifice. So long as farmworkers' wages were low, and what rent they could pay was equally depressed, strict profitability considerations

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<sup>105</sup>Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 161, 197, 516; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, pp. xvi, xxv, xliv.

discouraged building further cottages, over and above the poor law's own negative incentives on the construction and maintenance of cottages.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the incentives against building cottages, a number of aristocrats led the way in improving rural housing conditions. Many small tradesmen, artisans, and speculators acted differently. They built cottages in open parishes and charged excessively high rents because closed parishes denied sufficient housing for all the laborers they employed year around. As farmworkers were driven into these tradesmen's areas, they drove up the demand for (and costs of) housing. In contrast, the self-sacrificing aristocrats in this regard included the Duke of Wellington in Berkshire, who rebuilt or improved his laborers' cottages, giving each one about a quarter acre for a garden. He charged a mere one shilling a week rent for both cottage and garden. Caird regarded the Duke of Bedford's cottages as "very handsome," which had many conveniences as well as gardens attached, and let out at fairly low rents. (Some complained, however, about their rooms' small size). In 1830, according to the Steward at Woburn, the laborers on the Duke of Bedford's estates there paid just one shilling a week rent, while elsewhere others charged at least two shillings a week for two rooms, "miserable places, [with] no gardens." Lord Beverley rented one and a half acres of excellent pasture land, one and a half acres of "mowing-ground for winter food," and a house for just seven pounds per year to his laborers in high-wage Yorkshire. The Duke of Northumberland spent freely to make improvements that would help all the laborers on his huge estates. The 1867-68 Report said the Earl of Northumberland had improved or built 931 cottages for his laborers. Similarly, the village of Ford, built by the Marquis of Waterford, included houses with two or four rooms, gardens, close-by outhouses, water pipes, and use of a common cowhouse and pasture, let at just three or four pounds a year, depending on size. The Duke of Devonshire in Derbyshire built for his laborers the village of Edensor, whose cottages had pasture access and rather elaborate architecture. George Culley discovered that the landlords owned the best housing in Bedfordshire. In all but three cases, it was near or at their seats of residence. Somerville found Lord Spencer in Northampton was building impressive new dwellings for his laborers, although "the old ones . . . were equal and rather superior to the ordinary class of labourers' houses." Some cottages stood in groups of three, with the smaller one having just two or three "apartments" being placed between the larger ones. Some even had two rooms upstairs and two below. Potato gardens were placed in

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<sup>106</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xi, xv (improving cottage quality), lv (profitability problem); Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 14; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 125;

back, flower gardens in front. Here even fancy Gothic architecture greeted the passerby's eyes. A bakehouse and washing-house was provided for each four houses. They also could rent allotments at low rates.<sup>107</sup> By building better and/or providing cheaper housing, the upper class showed their rhetoric about noblesse oblige was not entirely empty.

Despite the altruistic picture reported above, Lord Egremont of Sussex revealed some of the aristocracy's other motives behind renting their cottages so cheaply yet semi-contentedly. He told the rector of Petworth, Thomas Sockett, that he got no rent for his cottages, and, to begin with, did not rent any above three pounds per year even with a good garden. He said this matter-of-factly, without grievance. He, like other landlords, did not mind getting little or nothing in rent because, under the New Poor Law, "They save it in diminution of the rate. . . . He stated, that the fact was that the poor men could not now pay the rent." So what the aristocracy may have lost from low (or zero!) rents, lower taxes more than made up for, or they considered it a downwards adjustment for the low wages their laborers earned. Furthermore, the aristocracy tended to build improved cottages only near their seats, so as (perhaps) to avoid literally looking at poverty in the face. These houses might have pretty, overly ornate facades, but have little additional comfort inside. Although exaggerating some, Somerville said, after having traveled extensively in England, that such high quality houses "are found only in some pet village near a nobleman's park, or in the park itself, and only there because they are ornamental to the rich man's residence." Although the English rural elite undeniably exploited the laborers, as the enclosure movement and the low wages the laborers received demonstrate, still at least some aristocrats sincerely made efforts at providing housing paternalistically. But their efforts must be seen in the context of the low wages and/or reduced poor rates paid after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which often meant they were handing back a slice of the loaf that they had previously grabbed from the laborers. These exertions by aristocrats at improving cottages failed to touch the lives of most farmworkers since, "the majority of [England's] rural inhabitants [still] liv[ed] in damp

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<sup>107</sup>Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 76, 98 (Duke of Wellington), 182 (Duke of Bedford), 197, 516. Somerville made similar observations about Wellington's cottages, adding that these were "the best cottages and gardens given to the poor at their rent (£3 10s. a-year) that I have seen in any part of the kingdom." Whistler, p. 131; Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 21 (Culley's observation), 69 (Duke of Bedfordshire), 301 (Lord Beverly), 389-90 (Northumberland/Waterford), 401-2 (Duke of Devonshire); Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xvi; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 371, 375-76.

and squalor," as Rule correctly observes.<sup>108</sup>

### Little Difference for Slaves and Farmworkers in the Quality of Their Housing

Probably the overall quality of housing for the average slave or farmworker was about the same. Although in both cases, large landowners may have been somewhat altruistic, since they built nice houses or cottages on some large plantations or estates, only a minority of the slaves or laborers benefited from these efforts. Dirt floors and non-glazed or broken glass windows were standard for both groups. Walls often had holes or were otherwise decrepit in both cases. Both slaves and farmworkers usually would have lacked a ceiling overhead; a gaze upwards would bring into view the rafters and beams holding up the roof. The bondsmen more likely lived in a home made nearly exclusively of wood, with (perhaps) some mud daubed in to fill the nooks and crannies or to help fireproof the chimney, compared to their contemporaneous rural field laborers in England. In England, walls made of mud/clay mixed with sticks or straw were common, thus nearly inverting the ratio of the two materials compared to America, clearly corresponding to their differing relative scarcity between the two countries. Probably a thatched roof, being cooler in summer, warmer in winter, and protecting better against the elements, was superior to what the slaves (or many poor whites) normally had in America, where stories of being able to see through the roof (or walls, for that matter) appear. In both cases, since the slaves and the laborers (normally) did not own the place they lived, they suffered from what others were willing to give them. Although the farmworkers supposedly had to pay rent, and had the freedom to move, because of the effects of the settlement laws and closed parishes, not to mention low wages and the enclosure acts helping to breed wage dependence, they often had to accept what was located near their jobs. Competition in the housing market in England was rendered even more imperfect because the governmental restrictions on labor mobility (already an intrinsically less mobile commodity than others) made workers even less able to move. Clearly, the bulk of both the bondsmen and laborers lived in rundown, decrepit housing of low quality and few amenities, even if a few fortunate souls benefited from paternalistic planters and aristocrats.

### Agricultural Workers--Sanitation/Cleanliness

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<sup>108</sup>Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, 1837, p. 14. In the second report, p. 7, for the parish of Petworth, Lord Egremont charged nearly one-third less rent for comparable housing (tenements for the poor) than the tradesmen who owned houses there; Somerville, Whistler, p. 172; Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 78.

Sanitation for the England's housing during the industrial revolution was notoriously bad. How could a reader forget Engels' portrait of Manchester's odious slums and filthy, meandering streets in The Condition of the Working Class in England? In Victorian England, the appalling death rates produced by poor sanitation practices spawned a thriving public health movement among the middle class which aimed at cleaning up the hazards resulting from the then brave new world of modern urban industrial life. It must be realized, even about such pits of despair as Liverpool's cellar dwellings, that this problem was ultimately rooted in the concentration of houses packed together in rapidly growing large cities without any changes from practices that fit much better small villages or sparsely populated rural areas. As Rule noted, the houses of the cities and towns were built of better materials, such as brick or stone, but, "It was not so much their individual deficiencies, but the collective environmental horror which they presented which shocked contemporaries." In previous centuries, the death rates of medieval cities and towns in Europe were so high they gradually devoured their inhabitants, which made their population's natural rate of increase actually negative. If people then build still larger agglomerations of buildings, but fail to change the sewage and garbage disposal systems, only public health disaster can possibly result. Although rural areas' inhabitants enjoyed better health than city dwellers, that outcome did not come from the former having superior sanitation practices. Rather, because the population density was lower, the old, traditional methods took a notably lower toll in the countryside than within England's industrial cities. Even the contrast between villages and outlying scattered houses was jarring, as Jeffries saw:

The cottages in the open fields are comparatively pleasant to visit, the sweet fresh air carries away effluvia. Those that are so curiously crowded together in the village are sinks of foul smell, and may be of worse--places where, if fever comes, it takes hold and quits not.

As Engels observed, relatively little damage might come from making a dung heap in the country, since it is more exposed to the open air. But when a similar pile builds up in a city's alley or dead end, the very same practice is much more dangerous to human health.<sup>109</sup> So although the countryside was healthier than the early industrial cities, the difference came from the concentration of large amounts of housing with barely changed

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<sup>109</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 87; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:167; Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, eds. and trans. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (New York: Macmillan Co., 1958), p. 110.

medieval sanitation measures in the latter, such as open sewers along the sides of the streets, not superior practices that systematically ensured cleanliness in the former.

Unlike the towns by the 1870s and later, many villages in England had little or no sanitary arrangements. As Joseph Arch put it: "I must not name villages [with bad sanitary arrangements]; any one who travels must observe the bad sanitary condition of the rural districts." Although in an area of England where the laborers were relatively well-paid and fed, Caird found miserable arrangements for sanitation in the village of Wark, Northumberland:

Wretched houses piled here and there without order--filth of every kind scattered about or heaped up against the walls--horses, cows, and pigs lodged under the same roof with their owners, and entering by the same door--in many cases a pig-sty beneath the only window of the dwelling.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike Olmsted's aforementioned experience (p. 68), the laborers' cottages might not be even picturesque, let alone provide sanitary conditions for their occupants.

The housekeeping of Hodge's wife may have been perfectly fine, but the area around her cottage could still stink badly. (Unlike for the slaves, a strong sexual division of labor generally prevailed among the farmworkers, except during harvest and in the north, as explained below--pp. 200-210). Jeffries explains why, by contrasting the stench emanating from the laborers' cottages to the scent of the surrounding fields:

The odour which arises from the cottages is peculiarly offensive. It is not that they are dirty inside . . . it is from outside that all the noisome exhalations taint the breeze. . . . The cleanest woman indoors thinks nothing disgusting out of doors, and hardly goes a step from her threshold to cast away indescribable filth.<sup>111</sup>

This mentality may explain why Caird found the inhabitants of Wark tolerating the conditions that he saw. The cleanliness of the farmworkers' cottages usually beat that of the slaves'

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<sup>110</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 352. But during this same general time period, Jeffries noted the increasing pressures for improving sanitary conditions in villages, which the landowners normally had to shoulder the burden of paying for. Even if they delayed making improvements, "it is impossible to avoid them altogether." Hodge, 2:113; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 390.

<sup>111</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 2:70.

shanties, because the laborers' wives, being at home most of the day, could sink much more their labor into housekeeping or other, associated tasks, such going to market. Unlike the slave woman out in the fields all day, Mrs. Hodge rarely could blame a time shortage for making the inside of her house dirty.

#### Slaves--Furniture and Personal Effects

What housing a subordinate class' members have obviously differs from what items they can put in it. Although good housing and owning numerous personal possessions normally positively correlate with one another, this is not guaranteed. Although comparing the household items of American slaves and English farmworkers is inevitably difficult because broad-based statistical data are mostly unavailable, it is still worthwhile to examine generally what the poorest classes of their respective societies owned as household items. Unlike food, household items form part of their owners' enduring surroundings. (Clothing has been separately considered above). Their sentimental value can disproportionately outweigh their cash value, especially when parents or other ancestors had passed them down to the current owners. They also can contribute mightily to personal comfort, such as how a chair allows someone to avoid having to sit or stand on a (sometimes wet) dirt floor.

The slaves normally could only count on having in their shacks some kind of bed. These often were made with stuffings or coverings of moss, hay, and/or corn shucks on top of a wooden frame. As a child, Frederick Douglass did not even have this. He used a stolen bag that had contained corn to help keep himself warm. Turning to a more normal case, freedwoman Millie Evans of North Carolina recalled that her family's smaller beds in daytime could be easily slid underneath the largest bed. "Our beds was stuffed with hay and straw and shucks, and, believe me, child, they sure slept good." Ex-slave Marion Johnson, once a slave in Louisiana, also thought well of the basic bedding he enjoyed: "Mammy's beds was ticks stuffed with dried grass and put on bunks built on the wall, but they did sleep so good. I can 'most smell that clean dry grass now." Solomon Northrup, less nostalgically and less comfortably, described the "bed" that his master gave him:

The softest couches in the world are not to be found in the log mansion of the slave. The one whereon I reclined year after year, was a plank twelve inches wide and ten feet long. My pillow was a stick of wood. The bedding was a coarse blanket, and not a rag or shred beside. Moss might be used, were it not that it directly breeds a swarm of fleas.

In Georgia on the rice-island plantation, Kemble saw slave women freely hazarding these risks from moss by placing it upon "a



rough board bedstead." Meanwhile, some servant boys slept on the hearth by the kitchen fire. Such rough accommodations--near Washington, D.C., escaped slave Francis Henderson similarly had "enjoyed" a "board bed" like Northrup's--could become comfortable, "being used to it." So even though Evans and Johnson recalled better bedding conditions than Henderson or Northrup, nostalgia and acclimation combined presumably caused them to overstate how well off they were. Olmsted's encounter with vermin in the bed of a fairly typical white family's home indicates what many slaves undoubtedly suffered when sleeping on anything softer than boards.<sup>112</sup>

Besides beds, slave cabins normally were sparsely furnished or equipped. Kemble saw no chairs or tables in the cabins of the servants--presumably the materially better-off slaves--who waited on her at her husband's rice-island estate, where conditions were better than the average of other nearby plantations. The slaves also often owned various ceramic objects, such as pots, cups, bowls, and plates. Their distribution on plantations reflected the slaves' and overseers' positions in Southern society as subordinate to the planters. Domestic servants predictably possessed better crockery than field hands. In his area of Louisiana, Northrup said slaves were "furnished with neither knife, nor fork, nor dish, nor kettle, nor any other thing in the shape of crockery, or furniture of any nature or description." Only by working on Sunday, their day off, could slaves earn the money to buy the utensils needed for food storage and civilized cooking. Note one reason why Rose Williams of Texas found her master's quarters pleasing: They were furnished with tables, benches, and bunks for sleeping. A mixed picture emerges, since some masters provided more than others, and the slaves themselves found ways to get or even make furnishings, including chairs, and utensils, depending on their individual initiative. For example, Mary Reynolds said the men sometimes made chairs at night. Similar to their split on slave housing, Genovese portrays the situation for furniture and utensils more optimistically (but here accurately) than Stamp's dire picture. Nevertheless, the better-off slaves acquired basic cooking utensils, furniture, and kitchen crockery often through their own efforts and resourcefulness, not necessarily because supposedly paternalistic

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<sup>112</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 121, 62 (Evans), 315 (Johnson); Douglass, Narrative, p. 43; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 128; Kemble, Journal, pp. 67, 315; Drew, Refugee, 1969, p. 109; At one fairly typical poor white's cabin, Olmsted took off his stockings initially when going to bed, but almost immediately put them back on, pulling them over his pantaloons. "The advantage of this arrangement was that, although my face, eyes, ears, neck, and hands, were immediately attacked, the vermin did not reach my legs for two or three hours." Cotton Kingdom, 2:107.

masters generously handed out these items.<sup>113</sup>

English Agricultural Workers: Home Furnishings, Utensils, and Crockery

The farmworkers' cottages were unlikely to be better equipped with furniture, utensils, or crockery than the bondsmen's quarters. While testifying before the parliamentary committee investigating the operation of the New Poor Law, Mark Crabtree's description of what furnishings the laborers had resembled reports about what slaves owned. He found one cottage, occupied by a laborer who had worked twenty years for one farmer, to have one chair, a chest, three stools, a table of two boards and a piece placed on four hedge-stakes, and two straw beds without blankets for nine people. The beds were attached to the wall on one side, and supported on two posts on the other, similar to the beds of many slaves. The home of one unemployed man presented a similar but perhaps more desperate situation because his family had pawned possessions in order to buy food. It had two chairs, a similar table built on hedge-stakes, four beds of straw with one blanket for all of them, four coverlets, and two basins. Its kitchen utensils amounted to two broken knives, one fork, one tea-kettle, two saucepans, three plates, and two broken plates. Apparently, these pathetically few possessions were all fourteen people had. Somerville's semi-apocryphal "ploughman" living in Wilton, Wiltshire, complained about having a "wretched home . . . without any comfort, almost without furniture."<sup>114</sup> For him, this grinding poverty characterized even a fairly normal year! The furnishings and utensils of the agricultural laborers could not be plentiful when so many of them already lived so close to subsistence, which their ordeal in buying clothes when paid such low wages demonstrates.

In times of crisis, such as high prices due to crop failure,

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<sup>113</sup>Kemble, Journal, pp. 66-67, 314-15; Charles E. Orser, Jr., "The Archaeological Analysis of Plantation Society: Replacing Status and Caste with Economics and Power," American Antiquity, 53 (1988) 737-38, 746-47; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, pp. 148-49. His testimony conflicts with Stamp's view that a majority of slaveowners provided frying pans and iron pots to their bondsmen. Ironically he makes this assessment just after citing Northrup in The Peculiar Institution, p. 287. Compare his treatment (pp. 287-88) with Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 530-532; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 121 (Reynolds), 161 (Williams); Blassingame, The Slave Community, p. 255.

<sup>114</sup>Minutes of Evidence Before Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, BPP, 1838, vol. XVIII, part II, as reprinted in Agar, The Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 90-91; Somerville, Whistler, p. 46.

the laborers emptied their cottages in order to fill their stomachs. In Dorset, when the port of Poole lay nearly at a standstill in 1843, in the surrounding countryside many of the laborers' cottages were nearly or literally empty. Evidently, at least the pawnbrokers were doing brisk business. Visiting the pawnbroker was also necessary to fulfill a condition for going into the workhouse: A family or elderly couple had to sell off their furnishings, because otherwise they were too "rich" to get parish relief. Knowing firsthand the severe financial stress of laborers under such stress, Somerville commented:

It has always seemed to me a grievous error to deny out-door relief to families in temporary distress, whereby they are compelled to undergo the most cruel privations, or submit to break up their little homes, sell off their furniture, . . . and become thorough, confirmed, irredeemable paupers.

Similar dilemmas still face the clientele of today's welfare state bureaucracies. The English poor law was designed only to relieve the most desperate, including those who sold off nearly everything besides the clothes on their back in order to make themselves sufficiently "desperate."<sup>115</sup> As a result, the homes of laborers may prove to be nearly empty of household items because of high food prices or long spells of unemployment. By contrast, since the slaves did not have to fend for themselves, they never suffered the calamity of selling off their furniture in the event of financial disaster, but they were denied the advantages of independence and freedom in increasing their self-respect.

#### Fuel--the Slaves' Supply Versus the Farmworkers'

The bondsmen had undeniably better fuel supplies than the farmworkers. In the United States, the problem was having too many trees, not too few. Trees had to be chopped down and the stumps removed before cultivation began. Here the slaves most clearly benefited from living in sparsely populated frontier areas, as opposed to a long-settled region where most of the trees were already cut down, such as in southeast England. Even on Kemble's husband's rice-island estate, where a priori one might think trees would be scarce, a preserve of trees and other vegetation was allowed to remain so that her husband's "people" could still easily get firewood. Perhaps best illustrating the attitude of the owners of forested land in the frontier South,

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<sup>115</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 257, 413. He described (p. 406) that in Heyshot parish, Sussex, laborers had to sell their gardens, small orchards, and houses in order to get relief. They only needed it to begin with because the local farmers resented their independence, so they refused to hire them except at harvest or some other time of high demand.

one master told Olmsted while he paid (because it was the holidays) his slaves to turn wood into charcoal, "that he had five hundred acres covered with wood, which he would be very glad to have any one burn, or clear off in any way." Masters and mistresses normally just let their slaves collect their own firewood from uncleared land on or near their property, feeling no need to supply it to them. According to Olmsted, since the slaves uncommonly liked having fires, they took extra opportunities to create them. On one Virginia plantation, the hands made "a fire--a big, blazing fire at this season, for the supply of fuel is unlimited," which they used to cook their food also.<sup>116</sup> Due to this natural resource's abundance, it cost little or nothing to use, allowing the slaveholders to grant the slaves this minor indulgence. Indeed, the slaveholders could even benefit as it helped clear the land for crops. At least in this one case, the New World's material abundance clearly benefited the slaves, since wood approached being a free good like air in America's eastern forests.<sup>117</sup>

By contrast, the agricultural workers of England often endured a truly desperate fuel situation, especially in arable areas in the southeast after enclosure. First of all, England had been chopping down its forests excessively for centuries; real shortages of wood had developed in many areas. One inn-keeper Olmsted encountered, of a village near Chester in 1850, thought America's "wood fires" were an unusual phenomenon. Indeed, growing wood shortages helped to push the English to replace charcoal with coking coal in iron making, which Abraham Darby in 1709 was the first to use successfully. A number of decades passed, however, before English ironmakers used coke extensively for smelting iron, as Deane notes.<sup>118</sup> Because of wood shortages, many agricultural laborers burned other vegetation as fuel, such as furze, turf, or peat. Compared to coal or seasoned firewood, these were inferior fuels.<sup>119</sup> The hedges which fenced

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<sup>116</sup>Kemble, Journal, pp. 47-48; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:87 (charcoal), 103 (my emphasis, Virginia), 104-5, 215 (like fires), 2:180 (collect firewood).

<sup>117</sup>The South was "where fuel has no value." Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:250. Genovese describes the sexual division of labor for fires and fuel: The men collected the firewood, while the women lit or kept the fires burning. In Africa, the sex roles are reversed; the women collect the family's firewood even to this day. Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 525.

<sup>118</sup>Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 73; Deane, First Industrial Revolution, pp. 104, 110.

<sup>119</sup>Young, General Report, pp. 158-61. Only blacksmiths used coal near where Isaac Bawcombe lived in Wiltshire in the 1840s,

off one farm from another often provided fuel, as Young knew. Farmer and former relieving officer Edward Butt recalled for the 1837 Poor Law Report that in his youth (c. 1790), laborers got fuel by paying a half guinea to get a thousand turf from a nearby commons in the Petworth, Sussex area. At that time, the farmers charged nothing to their laborers for transporting it to the latter's homes. Fuel cost much less then. In arable areas, the laborers were normally worse off, for reasons Cobbett saw: "No hedges, no ditches, no commons, no grassy lanes: a country divided into great farms; a few trees surround the great farmhouse. All the rest is bare of trees; and the wretched laborer has not a stick of wood." One plowboy of about sixteen near Abington in southern England said he had hot food only once a week, when his master let him and other boys working for him boil potatoes. Otherwise, he only ate bread and lard--cold. No fire warmed him in winter as he slept in the loft of the farmer who employed him, excepting sometimes when he stayed with local cottagers.<sup>120</sup> Hence, fuel shortages hurt the poor by chilling them in winter and by limiting how they prepared their food year around. It promoted the buying of more expensive ready-made food such as baker's bread. Furthermore, money spent on fuel was not money spent on food. In southern England, the high cost of fuel helped to lower the quality of the laborers' diets.<sup>121</sup> Shortages of wood or other materials for fuel could extract the ultimate cost: In southern Northumberland, where the laborers had lots of fuel, their death rate rose less than that of others in the harsh year of 1864.<sup>122</sup>

Shortages of wood or other vegetation provoked major conflicts between laborers and local landowners, especially after enclosure eliminated wastelands or commons that the former had

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where peat was the main fuel. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life, pp. 75-76. Somerville said the thinness of the turf in Heyshot parish made it a very poor fuel. Where it was a thick mold, "the turf is excellent fuel," but it seems he is judging this by relative English standards. Whistler, p. 405. Note also Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 234.

<sup>120</sup>Young, General Report, pp. 83, 86; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 8; Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 196; note also pp. 206, 252-53; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 62-63. This example also showed how annual service could be exploitive as labor paid by the day. This boy was paid just three shillings a week.

<sup>121</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 47; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 126-28.

<sup>122</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xiv.

used to get fuel. Landowners often imposed restrictions on gathering fuel in order to protect their game's habitat. For example, in 1825, the Earl of Pembroke ordered the villagers of Barford to take no dead wood from his forest, Grovely Wood. He had "discovered" they had no legal right to do so. Yet, as a customary right, they had taken wood from this forest for centuries. In retaliation, Grace Reed and four other women she led resisted the Earl. After defiantly gathering sticks from the Woods, they returned home. They were sentenced to jail after refusing to pay the fines imposed. But the next day, the women were freed, and Pembroke quickly declared, following further investigation, that the people of Barford had the right to remove dead wood from the forest after all. Clearly, their act of civil disobedience saved them their customary right. Elsewhere, the poor were less lucky. In Wiltshire, those living in villages next to the Fonthill and Great Ridge Woods were not allowed to gather dead wood for the same reason--protection for game animals such as pheasants and rabbits. Because the rabbits multiplied after this area was made off-limits, the forest's hazelnut trees soon died off after being stripped of their bark. This forest soon stopped supplying nuts to those who came even from long distances to gather them. In this case, having no recourse for decades afterwards, the poor lost out on both fuel and food. Hudson saw (c. 1910) its dead wood lying around as if it were an undisturbed primeval forest. The cases in which the rich gave away or sold fuel to the poor non-profitably hardly compensated for the losses inflicted by enclosure, game protection, and general deforestation. Although in America the slaves continually struggled with their masters for material advantages, an overabundance of wood ensured conflicts over it were rare or non-existent. But in England, disputes over fuel supplies were endemic. There, a child breaking a bough from a tree for any reason could be sentenced to the House of Correction, as the Hammonds noted.<sup>123</sup> Since slaveholders felt little need to protect the wild animals in areas only recently hewed from the wilderness, the slaves were usually free go hunting. In contrast, the agricultural workers constantly disobeyed their overlords' restrictions on hunting and its spillover effects on obtaining fuel supplies (see below, pp. 367-69).

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<sup>123</sup>Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 210-11; R.W. Bushaway, "'Grovely, Grovely, Grovely, and All Grovely': Custom, Crime and Conflict in the English Woodland," History Today, May 1981, p. 43; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 212-13; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 128 (charity's limits), 197 (breaking bough). Arch remembered the rector's wife handed out soup and coals in his parish when he was a child. But her charity served as a control device to help humble the poor before their "betters" and to keep them attending the Established Church. At least eventually, his mother refused to take any. Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 15, 17-18, 21-22.

## Slave Medical Care

Whether done out of financial self-interest or paternalistic altruism, slaveholders often had (white) physicians treat the slaves. Masters and mistresses usually wanted no treatable diseases or injuries to reduce or eliminate their human property's financial value. (But, as Kemble knew, their rationality could not be assumed).<sup>124</sup> Sometimes the master or overseer gave medicine or some treatment such as bleeding to his slaves. The blacks also had their own resources: many larger plantations boasted homegrown "conjurers" using herbs or spells to help cure fellow slaves of afflictions. Since slave midwives assisted other women at birth, they did not necessarily rely on doctors for deliveries. Unfortunately for the slaves and just about everyone else in Southern society excepting perhaps the physicians themselves, the crudeness and backwardness of antebellum medical science ensured it delivered at least as much harm as cure. For many sick bondsmen, the plantation's resident witch doctor's rituals and herbs arguably were more effective than the white physician's bag of tricks, which included leeches for bleedings. Despite its general ineffectiveness, even lethality, large planters such as Barrow still could pile up the doctor's bills. In a day and age when doctors charged around \$1 to \$5 per house call, Barrow spent (assuming accurately kept figures) just \$69.18 for 1838-39, but \$288.25 for 1839-40 and routinely \$300 or more annually afterwards.<sup>125</sup> The slaveholders' investment in their bondsmen encouraged high expenditures on their medical care, even when paternalism did not.

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<sup>124</sup>Most Southern slaveholders could not be mistaken for homo economicus, as Kemble knew. They were not calculating businessmen like "Manchester manufacturers or Massachusetts merchants" who would rarely sacrifice financial interests "at the instigation of rage, revenge, and hatred." In a portrait familiar to readers of Olmsted's travels, she said: "The planters of the interior of the Southern and Southwestern states, with their furious feuds and slaughterous combats, their stabbings and pistolings, their gross sensuality, brutal ignorance, and despotic cruelty, resemble the chivalry of France before the horrors of the Jacquerie . . . With such men as these, human life, even when it can be bought or sold in the market for so many dollars, is but little protected by considerations of interest from the effects of any violent passion." Kemble, Journal, pp. 301, 303. The roughneck, non-calculating culture of Southern slaveowners seriously weakens the standard apologetic for slavery, since the owner's self-interest could not be counted on to restrain how he treated his property.

<sup>125</sup>Eugene Genovese, "The Medical and Insurance Costs of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt," Journal of Negro History 45 (July 1960):152; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 48.

Masters willingly had the same doctor treat both their families and their slaves on the same visit, which shows some surprising impartiality in providing medical help. Planter Bennet Barrow noted in his diary: "Dr King practising on two of my negros--& my family &c."<sup>126</sup> This "race mixing" he took for granted despite his rigid insistence on enforcing the color line other times.<sup>127</sup> So long as they were the absolute rulers of blacks, white slaveholders readily and necessarily accepted situations that would have appalled diehard post-reconstruction segregationists. Correspondingly, Barrow (as well as the doctor himself) lightly pass over a white physician treating blacks and whites during the same visit living on the same land.

#### The General Backwardness of Antebellum Medical Care

Although slaveholders paid doctors good money to treat their slaves, positive outcomes from treatment were hardly guaranteed. Between bad treatments (e.g., bleeding and questionable "medicines") and professional incompetence, it was frequently safer not to have a doctor in the house. Barrow condemned one doctor who visited his place during a small epidemic: "number of sick ones, asked Dr Hail to see Marcus and a more undecisive man I never saw. made great many attempts to bleed him, but failed & large veins at that, Died at 11 ok." Other planters evidently placed less faith in bleeding than Barrow, at least when the overseer did it. Plowden C. J. Weston, rice planter of South Carolina, prepared a standard contract that his overseers signed which included this statement: "Bleeding is Under All Circumstances Strictly Prohibited, Except by Order of the Doctor." Counting a completed bleeding as an accomplishment and a botched one a failure, as Barrow did, accepted the premises of a backward medical "science" still practicing treatments more suited to the Dark Ages than to the nineteenth century's spirit of progress. Despite the general crudeness of antebellum medical science, it still performed some recognizably modern treatments. One day planter Barrow noted in his diary: "Number of cases of Chicken Pox, Vaccinated all my negros, Old & Young Most of them with good taking scars, but have now the appearance genuine." Regardless of what treatments the doctor gave, still patients died sometimes. Overseer George W. Bratton wrote to his

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<sup>126</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 278. Fogel and Engerman note that doctors' bills listing both the slaves and owning family's members treated on the same visit do exist. Time on the Cross, 1:120.

<sup>127</sup>For example, he condemned the repairman of his gin for talking to his blacks as if they were equals. He ran off his property the proud, well-dressed mulatto son of a nearby planter who dared to pass through his plantation's quarters. Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 186-87, 206-7.



employer, planter (and later U.S. President) James Polk, about the fate of one of his slaves: "Losa died the sixteenth of this month [November 1838] I had good atten[tion] paid to her I call in and other phisian to Loosa she died with the brest complaint."<sup>128</sup> Good intentions sometimes still brought bad results!

#### Masters Sought Ways to Reduce Medical Expenses

Undoubtedly, many masters and mistresses cut corners by calling in physicians only when their slaves were really sick or injured. After describing the Old Miss as stingy with the food rations, freedman Tines Kendricks of Georgia said she acted similarly about getting a doctor to help Mose, a young slave boy:

Aunt Hannah, she try to doctor on him and git him well, and she tell Old Miss that she think Mose bad off and ought to have the doctor. Old Miss she wouldn't git the doctor. She say Moses ain't sick much, and, bless my soul, Aunt Hannah she right. In a few days from then Mose is dead.

Jenny Proctor of Alabama remembered getting cheap medicine and a doctor's visit being a last resort:

We didn't have much looking after when we git sick. We had to take the worst stuff in the world for medicine, just so it was cheap. That old blue mass and bitter apple would keep us out all night. Sometimes he have the doctor when he thinks we going to die, 'cause he say he ain't got anyone to lose, then that calomel what that doctor would give us would pretty night kill us. Then they keeps all kinds of lead bullets and asafetida balls round our necks.<sup>129</sup>

Apologists for slavery might have claimed that the slaves automatically got medical care from their owners, unlike the North's "wage slaves" from their employers. But since slavery also gave the masters practically unlimited freedom in determining how to control their bondsmen, no guarantees existed for the provision of medical care regardless of any possible laws stating otherwise. The slaveholders cannot be given total

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<sup>128</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 198, 280. Barrow had vaccinated himself and his children against some (unnamed) disease earlier (p. 87). Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 29 (Plowden), p. 115.

<sup>129</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 71, 92-93.

freedom to make the slaves' will their will, yet easily stop those neglecting to give what supposedly gave the slaves material security (here, medical care) that replaced the uncertainties of freedom. The slaves really had neither security nor freedom because the master had practically nearly 100 percent freedom to order them about and to treat them as he wished, excepting the extreme cases where white neighbors mobilized against his excessive cruelty by their (likely low) standards.

#### Masters and Overseers as Amateur Healers for Slaves

On his or her own a slaveholder might provide medicines or even an infirmary. By administering medicines himself or herself, a slaveowner could avoid calling in a doctor to begin with, thus possibly save a dollar or two. Certainly they had financial motives for seeking medical information, since it could save the lives of their human property while simultaneously keeping the doctors away. Freedwoman Mary Reynolds of Louisiana remembered the (rather dubious) medicines her owner gave out: "Massa give sick niggers ipecac and asafetida and oil and turpentine and black fever pills." As Stamppe observes, often overseers or the masters themselves diagnosed and treated sick slaves, using doctors only as a last resort. Granted this, Fogel and Engerman sensibly infer: "Planters sought to be, and overseers were expected to be, knowledgeable about current medical procedures and about drugs and their administration." Planter Weston had his overseers pledge to refrain from using strong medicines, "such as calomel, or tartar emetic: simple remedies such as flax-seed tea, mint water, No. 6, magnesia, &c., are sufficient for most cases, and do less harm. Strong medicines should be left to the Doctor." Because overseers' low educational levels usually corresponded with a minimal knowledge of medical science, this master avoided entrusting too much of his slaves' lives and health to their medical judgment. But Kendricks' mistress dispensed medicine where he lived: "Old Miss, she generally looked after the niggers when they sick and give them the medicine. And, too, she would get the doctor iffen she think they real bad off 'cause like I said, Old Miss, she mighty stingy, and she never want to lose no nigger by them dying." This mistress knew being penny-wise may be pound-foolish. But she still hesitated to admit a slave may be really sick because they frequently shammed sickness to avoid toiling by the sweat of their faces: "Howsomever, it was hard sometime to get her to believe you sick when you tell her that you was, and she would think you just playing off from work. I have seen niggers what would be mighty near dead before Old Miss would believe them sick at all." Kemble's husband's rice-island estate had a six-room infirmary. Despite looking good on paper, in reality it was filled with weakened bodies scattered amidst an appalling spectacle of filth and rubbish, darkness and cold. This place was, supposedly, where its "patients" went to recover from sickness! Some bondswomen attempted to receive a little

warmth from a feeble fire in its enormous chimney, while "these last poor wretches lay prostrate on the floor, without bed, mattress, or pillow, buried in tattered and filthy blankets, which, huddled round them as they lay strewn about, left hardly space to move upon the floor." The "hospital" on her husband's sea island cotton estate was still worse.<sup>130</sup> Hence, between the crude medicines and primitive buildings used for medical treatment, the provision of health care by masters and mistresses for their slaves did less good than what might be claimed.

#### Black Medical Self-Help: Conjurers and Midwives

By having their own resources in the form of conjurers (i.e., shamans or witch doctors) and midwives, the slaves did not entirely depend on their owners for medical help. The black community did not just passively wait for what "ole massa" might hand out, but also looked to help themselves in health care and other needs. Like the slave preacher, the plantation conjurer served as an independent source of authority (religious, not just medical) to the slaves. Unlike drivers and domestic servants holding more prestigious positions (at least to the whites), the conjurer's activities did not fully fall under the white chain of command. Sometimes white medical science even adopted the "cures" slaves used on themselves in its own practice. According to Kemble, one physician told his white patient to bind the leaves of the poplar tree around his rheumatic knee, "saying he had learned that remedy from the negroes in Virginia, and found it a most effectual one." "Auntie Rachael," living in a cabin near Raleigh, North Carolina, gave a long list of treatments for diseases based on black folk wisdom. She had learned them from her mother, who had been a "docterin' woman." Her "cures" included giving mare's milk for whooping cough, smearing the marrow of a hog jowl on the skin lesions caused by the mumps, putting on a mud plaster and wearing little bag around the neck with a hickory nut to cure shingles, various buds and herbs for making tea to cure bad colds, and tying a charm around a child's neck to ward off disease: "A bag o' asafetida is good [as a

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<sup>130</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 122 (Reynolds), 71-72 (Kendricks); Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 315; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:120; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 29. Weston also provided a hospital for his slaves, p. 28; Kemble, Journal, pp. 32-33, 214; Stamp (p. 313) notes an ideal hospital built on James Hamilton Couper's Georgia rice plantation. Its ideal conditions, including steam heat and floors swept daily and scrubbed once a week, should not be seen as common. Kemble said that her husband's slaves were better off than many owned by other masters in their neighborhood.

charm]; er, de toe-nails of a chicken is mos' pow'ful!"<sup>131</sup>  
Although these "cures" seem positively naive and superstitious nowadays, they may have often followed better the principle of medicine that states "First, do no harm" than the white doctor's bag of tricks.

Slave midwives were valuable to their owners, not just to their sisters in bondage. Kemble noted that the "midwife of the [rice-island] estate--[was] rather an important personage both to master and slave, [for] as to her unassisted skill and science the ushering of all the young negroes into their existence of bondage is intrusted." Births attended by midwives enabled masters to reduce both medical expenses and the number of doctor's visits. The slave women benefited from having someone of their own race and sex serving them during such an intimate passage of life. Slave midwives helped rebut any contentions that black women could not assist or serve competently in some crucial position in the slave community's life. Zack Bloxham of Florida recalled his mother was a field hand, adding an evident exaggeration: "She was a midwife, too, an' treated right special on 'count of it. Dey didn' need no doctor wid Mammy dar!" Despite her very ordinary main position on the plantation, Bloxham's mother role as midwife greatly raised how much respect others, both black and white evidently, gave her. "Aunt" Florida of Georgia said her grandmother, the "sworn midwife" of the plantation, attended on both blacks and whites in her locality of "Hurricane an' Briefiel'." By helping women of both races, she again shows that whites under slavery often accepted "race mixing," but only under a social system that theoretically ensured the whites' almost complete control over most blacks. Illustrating the importance midwives potentially had, overseer John Garner blamed the death of a newborn baby slave on Matilda telling him only at the last minute she was going to have a child, which kept him from getting a midwife soon enough: "I cold not get the old woman there in time, her lying up at the same time." Of course, the "help" some midwives gave to women in labor could clearly be harmful. One "ignorant old negress" that Kemble encountered would, in cases of greatly long and difficult labor, "tie a cloth tight round the throats of the agonized women, and by drawing it till she almost suffocated them she produced violent and spasmodic struggles, which she assured me she thought materially assisted the progress of the labor."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>On the independent source of authority the conjurors had, see Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 221; Kemble, Journal, p. 63; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 64-66.

<sup>132</sup>On the value of slave midwives, see Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1980), p. 31; Kemble, Journal, pp. 28-29, 317; Armstrong, Old Massa's

Despite this caveat, slave midwives were usually vital members of the plantation community who received respect from black and white alike.

#### Medical Care for English Agricultural Workers

English farmworkers had one major advantage over the slaves in medical care, but also one major disadvantage. On the one hand, they were potentially free to go or not go to any doctor, and to accept or reject any treatment offered. However, financial limitations made a mockery of this freedom, since their poverty normally forced to rely on parish-provided medical help. On the other, the employing farmers often cared little about the fates of their (often overly plentiful) employees, since their self-interest was less directly tied to the health of their laborers than for planters owning slaves. People tend to care more for what they OWN than for what they do NOT own, although the self-interest of slaveowners only unreliably restrained their conduct, as Kemble observed (see p. 82). Quite literally, the agricultural workers were more on their own, for good or for ill. Paternalism, whether that of slaveowners or landed gentry, necessarily involves the subordinate class giving up some degree of freedom in exchange for greater security. The slaves clearly were further along the continuum that traded freedom for security than the farmworkers. Consequently, the slaves probably had more guaranteed medical care but definitely less freedom than the farmworkers. The slaves received (white) medical care whether they wanted it or not, while the agricultural workers got the freedom to fend for themselves, unless the parish paid for a doctor to attend on them when sick. If the parish did, excepting for private acts of charity, no individual farmer or landowner provided it.

In Petworth Union, Sussex, standard practice was to pay for the medical care of paupers under both the New and Old Poor Laws.<sup>133</sup> The union hired two doctors to attend the poor, both in the workhouse and without, at, respectively, ninety and one hundred pounds a year each.<sup>134</sup> Although the New Poor Law of 1834 prohibited outdoor relief to the able-bodied non-elderly, and used the workhouse as a "test" of destitution (i.e., desperation) to discourage applications for relief, it still allowed medical

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People, p. 176; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 141.

<sup>133</sup>In northeast England after about 1720 parishes routinely hired doctors to care for the parish poor. Earlier cases, such as Newcastle paying a surgeon in the 1560s, also appear. P. Rushton, "The Poor Law, the Parish, and the Community in North-East England," Northern History 25 (1989):146.

<sup>134</sup>Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, pp. 22, 50, 67.

aid to paupers not in the poorhouse. Initially, this union argued with William Hawley, an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, over whether the husband as head of the family and as a pauper was the only one legally entitled to medical relief, or whether his wife and children also were covered. The tradition of the union (including before Petworth parish became part of a union in 1835) had been to relieve medically the poor even when they failed to legally meet the definition of being a pauper. The clerk to the local board of guardians even asserted that although this was his union's standard practice, he believed it was not for other unions. The doctor, Mr. Hall, aided anyone poor who asked him for help, although strictly legally by contract he only had to help when requisitioned by the relieving officer or workhouse master.<sup>135</sup> In times of medical emergency, however, Hawley said the doctor should attend to a poor patient immediately, deeming as unnecessary the drawing up of a formal order for relief if the relieving officer was not nearby. A letter by Edwin Chadwick, the Secretary of the Poor Law Commission in London, dated August 22, 1836, declared that relieving the whole family was to be standard practice in England.<sup>136</sup> The Petworth union's board of guardians evidently operated by a more compassionate ethos than the New Poor Law required or even permitted. First, at least one of their doctors by tradition aided any poor person asking for help, not just those strictly meeting the legal definition of "pauper." Second, even before receiving Chadwick's letter, they had opted for the broader legal interpretation of helping the whole family, not just the father. Petworth Union's fairly liberal administration guaranteed the laborers a reasonable amount of medical care, but more restrictive unions elsewhere would have covered only those legally declared to be paupers, which normally meant only the able-bodied in the workhouse, and the non-able-bodied (including the elderly) without.

Extrapolating from Petworth to all of England is an obviously hazardous act. More restrictive policies operated elsewhere. Thomas Sockett, the rector for Petworth parish, described a case involving a man named Holden, living in Tillington, Midhurst parish. After asking for relief, he found that the union withheld medical aid. Free medical aid was first denied because only male heads of households were to receive it,

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<sup>135</sup>One doctor told Edward Butt, the relieving officer for Petworth parish under Gilbert's act, and briefly relieving officer for Petworth and Kirdford parishes under the New Poor Law, that he would not wait to get the relief orders from him before aiding the poor: "I shall never stop for your orders, because you may away at a distance; before I can get the order from you, a person may be dead." Ibid., second report, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., first report, pp. 51-52, 67.

not wives or children. Later, he heard that renting a house worth eight pounds a year cost him all free medical help. Although he did pay that much rent nominally, this denial ignored that half of the house was sublet to another man for three pounds eighteen shillings per year. He ultimately got no relief, except perhaps two weeks later. Showing that English medical practice's backwardness rivaled the antebellum South's, the laborer tried to help his wife like the physician had done before. After getting some leeches, he applied them as the doctor had, who "had blistered her head and put on leeches."<sup>137</sup> When medical help was this primitive and errant, the conflict between intentions and results is obvious. Assuming medical treatment was routinely this bad, the skinflint board of guardians governing Midhurst, by denying free medical "aid," helped the poor more than the relatively compassionate Petworth board!

Establishing medical clubs were another way to help laborers and others who were poor pay for medical care. Similar to the clothing club described above (p. 54), and friendly societies in general, they guaranteed benefits when the member was sick in return for paying some small amount weekly or monthly. As Thompson notes: "Small tradesmen, artisans, labourers--all sought to insure themselves against sickness, unemployment, or funeral expenses through memberships of 'box clubs' or friendly societies." According to Huggett, a typical laborer as a member might pay one shilling a month in return for potential benefits of one shilling a day for six weeks and six pence a day for another six weeks when sick and unable to work. Why were these clubs so scarce among laborers compared to the artisans, at least before c. 1815? Since class consciousness or political activism developed more slowly among the laborers than the skilled tradesmen (see below pp. ), the former naturally lagged behind the latter in organizational activities. Clearly, compared to the skilled, the unskilled were less likely to be politically concerned and more likely to possess fatalistic attitudes towards accepting conditions as they were, as Mayhew experienced in London. But consider a more immediate, practical issue: If a laborer and his family are just barely above subsistence, spending an extra shilling or two a month may be an impossible burden to bear. As Rector Sockett commented: "I think it quite a mockery to propose a medical club to a man that has not shoes to his feet." Furthermore, the local parish authorities might set their face against a club because it would make the laborers too independent. Arch remembered his local parish's parson refused to preach a sermon to help a club raise funds, although it still was organized anyway. Since rural areas contained fewer people to control and a likely even more concentrated elite possessing the great powers the central government had delegated it and a possible near monopsony over the local labor market, the

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

rural elite has relatively more power to exert against any attempts at organization by the laborers compared to their urban counterparts. Additional problems could come from within: Members, usually having only grade school educations at best, could commit fraud or mismanagement. The former ultimately destroyed the benefit society that shepherd Caleb Bawcombe had been a member of (c. 1885) for three decades. He sued its secretary for refusing to pay him because of narrow, legalistic reasons for the six weeks he had been laid up. Helped by others, he won, but the judge ordered the club to be dissolved and its money to be distributed to its members since its secretary was exposed as a cheater.<sup>138</sup> Although friendly societies were hardly a panacea because of the laborers' tight finances, they still represented a level of freedom in open collective action that American slaves could only dream about.

The laborer's right to reject a medical treatment seems unimportant, but it demonstrates the difference between a free man and a bondsman. At times it mattered, despite its theoretical nature. Arch had a running battle against the local authorities who wished to vaccinate his children over his objections. Four times He went to court, represented by just himself. Four times he won and stopped them, something which no slave could boast of. Admittedly, his reasons for opposition were dubious. He disliked the mass vaccinations at school, saying he was not going to have his "children treated as if they were cattle." He told the bench that his children were healthy. He said no hereditary diseases can be traced back for many generations in his family. He feared that their blood could be tainted by the "filthy matter . . . too often used for vaccination purposes." His reasoning was specious: The eighteenth-century's crude inoculations were still a mighty contributor to the overall death rate's decline, even before the introduction of Jenner's improved process of smallpox vaccination (1796).<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, this situation shows the farmworkers and slaves occupied sharply different legal categories, despite being as mistreated as a class by enclosure and the multitude of petty

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<sup>138</sup>Thompson, Making, pp. 241 (Mayhew), 419 ("Most were artisans,") 421. Thompson sees benefit clubs as one of the main sources of the development and expression of class consciousness and the working class's sense of organization in resisting the elite in English society; Frank E. Huggett, A Day in the Life of a Victorian Farm Worker (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972), p. 60; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 18; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 34; Hudson, A Shepherd's Life, pp. 299-304.

<sup>139</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 54-56; On the value of inoculations early on, see John Rule, The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy, 1714-1815 (New York: Longman Group, 1992), pp. 11-12.



tyrannies committed by the local gentry, large farmers, and parsons. Slaves simply could not testify in courts of law against whites at all. But if the laborers were well-informed legally (which, admittedly, they usually were not), they could wrest favorable decisions from even hostile magistrates, as Arch did. The laborers did not always have to accept what the local authorities provided for them, in medical matters or other areas of life, although the costs of insubordination could be high, while the slaves had less choice concerning what they received from their masters and mistresses, against whom disobedience usually brought much harsher, swifter punishments.

Workhouse infirmaries imposed a regime of regimentation, but likely presented decidedly more orderly and clean conditions than most infirmaries in the South that were intended for slaves. Showing its high level of control over the inmates, Petworth Union's workhouse for the elderly at Kirdford, Sussex denied them the freedom to walk anywhere without permission except for the garden/backyard area outside it.<sup>140</sup> Jeffries described one place where an elderly agricultural worker stayed that lacked the freedom and sentimental value of his own cottage, but which provided better food and care: "In the infirmary the real benefit of the workhouse reached him. The food, the little luxuries, the attention were far superior to anything he could possibly have had at home. But still it was not home."<sup>141</sup> Certainly the cleanliness of this particular workhouse beat hands down the disorderly squalor and filth that Kemble encountered in an infirmary on a plantation whose general treatment of the slaves was better than the neighboring masters' average standards. Although workhouse inmates were not treated much as individuals, their conditions surely beat the dirt floor of some "infirmary" as a place to regain health compared to staying at home.

#### Whose Medical Care Was Better?

Since the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth-century's health care was undeniably crude and primitive, the medical care slaves or agricultural workers received from their superiors remains for us today more a test of intentions than results. The fewer slaves or farmworkers that doctors bled, blistered, or gave useless patent medicines to, the better off they were. The stingy board of guardians or master who refused to pay for doctors may have helped their charges more than the seemingly compassionate authorities who paid the fees of physicians producing more pain and death than cure and life. Based on the

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<sup>140</sup>Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, pp. 8-9.

<sup>141</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 2:145. See also p. 144.

sources above, parishes and unions providing doctors for the paupers in their midst may have been given more regular care than a majority of slaves received, if for no other reason than England's higher population densities helped doctors serve more people in a given day by reducing the amount of travel between patients. But those English workers not declared official paupers at the time they fell ill likely received less help since they would either have to pay for medical expenses out of pocket or lean on the doctor's sense of altruism. Those fortunate enough to live in a parish or union that provided medical help to basically all laborers, not just the legal paupers, were probably better off than a majority of slaves. As for the bondsmen, the masters and mistresses owning them may have had more immediate self-interest in helping them when sick, just as a farmer who owns a cow calls a veterinarian when it has a disease. But self-interest only unreliably "guaranteed" slaves received medical help, since self-interest could also dictate its denial or cutting corners on its provision, such as slaveowners or overseers trying to administer medicines or treatments on their own and avoiding the calling in of doctors until the last minute. Slaves in areas where doctors were reasonably accessible may have on average received more professional medical attention than those English farmworkers on their own because they were not declared paupers legally.

Reflecting their different cultures and legal statuses, the slaves and farmworkers had different ways to get their own medical aid. The slave conjurors, being warlocks or witches as well as healers, became someone in their own community with a source of authority independent of the white establishment's. Besides the problems caused by the "magical" side of their healing arts, the conjurors' treatments probably helped no less and hurt no more their brothers and sisters in bondage than the white physicians did. The slave midwives did more good on average for their community by helping fellow slave women through the travail of birth, but they lacked the same level of power if they were not conjurors also. As shown by their limited freedom to organize medical benefit clubs, the English agricultural workers were able to engage in collective action to help meet their medical needs. But their tight family budgets were roadblocks against the sparing of a shilling or two a month, which discouraged many from joining or organizing these groups. Those engaged in collective action also took on the risk that one or more persons involved may let the whole group down by failing to do their jobs effectively, such as by committing fraud or causing bankruptcy. How these subordinate groups independently got medical care varied because of the agricultural workers' greater freedom legally allowed them to organize collectively, while the slave community, drawing on their African cultural heritage, turned to the conjurer's treatments and his perceived magical powers.

### The Overall Standard of Living: Were the Slaves or Farmworkers Better Off?

Without reliable, broad-based quantitative statistics, it is difficult to decisively prove which group of two was better off materially or the same group in different generations. Conditions that vary regionally merely add further complications, such as the differences between the Border States and Deep South for the slaves, or northern and southern England for the farmworkers. Diversity within the subordinate group cannot be dismissed, which could be caused by individual ability, the character of the specific master(s) a slave or farmworker has, and family relationships. Finally, the material standard of living only partially covers the quality of life. When making broad group generalizations, such as comparing all Southern slaves to all English agricultural workers to determine whose standard of living was higher, dogmatism should be avoided and these caveats remembered. But although this realm allows one literary source to be pitted against another, some generalizations are still possible.

For the southern English agricultural workers (who composed a solid majority of their group) and typical rural slaves, there was likely little to choose between the quality and quantity of clothing or housing. Perhaps the slaves of the Deep South of smaller planters and farmers had worse clothes, but its hotter climate ensured they had less need for them than the English did, which partially justified their owners' complacency. Apparently most in both groups probably owned only one or two changes of clothes, excluding the nicer clothes some slave servants had, or the "Sunday best" saved for church. Both often lived in one-room houses with dirt floors and non-glazed windows, having perhaps a loft for the children to sleep in. The slaves might have been better off since wood was plentiful in the New World, making construction and repairs cost less than in most of England. The English had to use other materials which nonskilled people had more trouble building with than the logs thrown together for many a frontier cabin. As for medical care, the average slave may have had better access to a physician's care than the average English farm laborer who was not legally a pauper, assuming the South's lower population densities did not sharply reduce the number of house calls made per day, and that smaller planters and farmers paid for medical help as much as large planters. Turning to diet, the slaves had much more meat and probably more food overall, but the southern English agricultural workers ate white wheat bread that was clearly less coarse than the crude corn bread many slaves ate. Ironically, the free southern rural laborers of England approached bare subsistence closer than the African-American bondsmen, thanks to enclosure, rapid population growth in a long-settled realm, and the belt-tightening of the New Poor Law (1834). Northern English agricultural workers, who composed perhaps one-third or one-fourth of all English

farmworkers, were usually significantly better off than the slaves.<sup>142</sup> Their higher wages (and superior access to allotments or other land) kept meat solidly in their diets, allowing them to pay for more clothing and better cottages. Similarly but less dramatically, the Border States' slaves enjoyed better treatment and conditions than the Deep South's. Hazarding a broad-brushed judgment, it appears the farmworker's material standard of living was no higher than slaves on average, who often were marginally better off than the southern agricultural workers considered alone, at least in diet.

#### Trickle-Down Economics with a Vengeance: How the Slaves Benefited

How could a slave labor force arguably have a marginally higher standard of living than (much of) a free one? Several unusual factors produced this result. First, even American slaves benefited some from living in a part of the world where population density was low and natural resources were abundant, especially wood and land. True, the white slaveholders expropriated most of the benefits that the slaves would have had if they had been free. This is "trickle-down economics" with a vengeance! In the South, wood for homes, heating, and cooking was nearly a free good. Masters knew slaves put to work growing corn and raising hogs in addition to the cash crop could cover most of their living expenses, leaving largely to themselves the surplus generated by the cash crop. The prudent, risk-averse planter or slaveowner made his or her slaves pursue subsistence as a collective by raising corn and hogs. Benefiting from cheap land, this strategy made many slaveowners rich, since the cash crop's receipts greatly exceeded the direct cash expenses, at least in good years. By contrast, since land was relatively scarce and expensive in England, the landlords and gentry passionately clung to it; even most farmers had little or none, let alone the farmworkers. As the industrial revolution began, England's growing population ensured competition for land ownership would intensify. Southern England's general deforestation guaranteed fuel for cooking and heating would be expensive. Hiking fuel's costs still more, its scarcity often required it to be transported considerable distances. Furthermore, the landlords and farmers used access to land as a social control/labor discipline device. They often hesitated to lease even tiny parcels of land as allotments to the agricultural workers. By making their labor force totally dependent on wages and forcing it into the labor market to survive, they wanted to

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<sup>142</sup>This crude approximation of the relative proportion of northern English farmworkers is supported by the figures for total population by county found in Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, British Economic Growth 1688-1959 Trends and Structure, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 103.

keep them from pursuing a subsistence strategy in order to control its actions better. By contrast, under their masters' direction and control, the slaves normally had to pursue subsistence, but their lack of freedom ensured they wouldn't become too independent of their owners. By owning the slaves and their produce, and keeping firm control of the distribution of food (under the gang system), the slaveholders grasped the throats of the slaves firmly even as they raised most of the food they ate. But in England, since neither the labor force nor the product of its labor was owned by the rural elite, controlling the laborers was intrinsically more difficult. The landlords and their tenants alienated the labor force from the means of production (the land through enclosures), creating a more easily controlled, wage-dependent rural proletariat since farmworkers were denied the ability to eke out a living from the local commons all or part of the year. The American slaveowner almost whimsically granted his slaves small patches of land to grow vegetables thanks to the abundance of land on the frontier, but those trying to persuade English landlords and farmers to provide allotments to farmworkers often resembled dentists trying to pull teeth from balky patients. In short, since southern England had a higher population density and lower resource base than the American South, this difference helped to ensure farmworkers likely had a lower standard of living than the slaves, particularly for food and fuel.

Theoretically, since the slaveholders owned all slaves and anything their labor produced, but the rural English elite owned neither the farmworkers nor their labor, it seems the latter should automatically be better off materially. The counter-intuitive result arises because the farmworkers had all the burdens of freedom without all of its advantages, while the bondsmen's material security in having (theoretically) guaranteed food, shelter, and clothing had some basis in fact. The landlord/farmer class in England devised a system under which the rural laborers still had to fend for themselves (excepting the parish dole and private charity), especially as service declined, but tilted the laws against their labor force. The process and outcome of enclosure demonstrated the reality of class-based legal bias above all. When dividing up the land into awards, the enclosure commissioners routinely ignored the customary rights of non-landowners to the parish commons to raise animals or obtain fuel. If they actually legally owned nothing, they received nothing. Even the recipients of a patch of land often soon sold it because their share of the expenses of building fences and the commissioners' legal costs exceeded what cash they had.<sup>143</sup> The game laws also were biased against the laborers, which not only

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<sup>143</sup>Although accepting the elite's legal categories, Young does see the problems in ignoring the poor's customary rights: General Report, pp. 12-14, 32-33, 155, 158; cf. p. 99.

outlawed them from hunting for food, but even often restricted the farmers from destroying the pests that damaged their crops, an issue returned to below (pp. 303-4, 367-69). By contrast, in America, even slaves were usually free to hunt. The poor and settlement laws combined to impede migration, helping tilt many local rural labor markets still further in the farmers and landlords' favor by discouraging competition for Hodge's labor by industry. Other ways that the law favored the upper class's material interests is dealt with in the final section dealing with methods of elite control (pp. 303-7). Clearly, the English landlord/farmer class had not set up a class-neutral system of laissez-faire. Instead, taking advantage of the laborers at almost every turn possible, they systematically tilted the law to limit the laborers' freedom to sell their labor to the highest bidder. The rural elite imposed a laissez-faire regime on the laborers only to the extent it favored their class interests, but inflicted anti-free market controls on the rural lower class, such as the settlement laws, when excessive fidelity to the principles of classical economics contradicted their own collective self-interest. For now, fuller details of how the English rural elites controlled the farmworkers have to wait until the last section. Consequently, although Hodge was no slave, his superiors definitely oppressed and exploited him, which explains how his standard of living often arguably fell beneath that of the real slaves of the American South.

### 3. THE QUALITY OF LIFE: SLAVES VERSUS AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

#### The Quality of Life and the (Material) Standard of Living Compared

The people I saw around me [in Steventon, Berkshire] were, many of them, among the poorest poor. But when I visited them in their little thatched cottages, I felt that the condition of even the meanest and most ignorant among them was vastly superior to the conditions of the most favored slaves in America. They labored hard; but they were not ordered out to toil while the stars were in the sky, and driven and slashed by an overseer . . . Their homes were very humble; but they were protected by law. No insolent patrols could come, in the dead of night, and flog them at their pleasure. The father, when he closed his cottage door, felt safe with his family around him. No master or overseer could come and take from him his wife, or his daughter. . . . The parents knew where their children were going, and could communicate with them by letters. The relations of husband and wife, parent and child, were too sacred for the richest noble in the land to violate with impunity. Much was being done to enlighten these poor people. Schools were established among them, and benevolent societies were active in efforts

to ameliorate their condition. There was no law forbidding them to learn to read and write; and if they helped each other in spelling out the Bible, they were in no danger of thirty-nine lashes, as was the case with myself and poor, pious, old uncle Fred. I repeat that the most ignorant and the most destitute of these peasants [laborers, since they were employees, and land] was a thousand fold better off than the most pampered American slave.<sup>144</sup>

Above Harriet Brent Jacobs, fugitive slave, working for her employer as a nanny while in England, expertly, eloquently, and concisely states what some quantitative historians seemingly overlook sometimes: The quality of life and the standard of living are not coextensive. The laborers undeniably had a better quality of life than most slaves. "Quality of life" captures all the aspects of life that contribute to happiness and an informed worldview. Although food, clothing, housing, medical care and other material aspects of life are captured under the heading "the quality of life," they are but a part of it. The quality of relationships with other people, such as family, friends, bosses, and agents of the state, weighs heavily in contributing towards personal happiness, as do education and religious experience. The most highly esteemed and influential slaves from the white viewpoint, such as the head driver on a large plantation, lacked the basic legal rights and protections that even the most oppressed and half-starved Wiltshire laborer possessed. Consider Kemble's description of headman Frank on her husband's rice-island estate. He had the authority to whip a fellow slave three dozen times, could give permission for slaves to leave the island, had the key to the stores, determined who would work where, and handed out the rations. He had many positive personal qualities. But he could only helplessly endure, knowing full well the ultimate futility of violence, while the white overseer took his wife as a mistress for a time and had a son by her. "Trustworthy, upright, intelligent, he may be flogged to-morrow if [the overseer] or [Kemble's husband] so please it, and sold the next day, like a cart-horse, at the will of the latter."<sup>145</sup> Since so much contributes to personal happiness besides the material basics, the standard of living cannot properly serve as a true proxy for a society's overall social well-being. In this section, the quality of life, including such aspects as education, family relationships, the position and treatment of the elderly and children, and religious activities (as developing part of an informed worldview and broader outlook on life under such highly circumscribed conditions), of English farmworkers and African-American slaves is compared, demonstrating how the former

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<sup>144</sup>Brent, Incidents, pp. 188-89.

<sup>145</sup>Kemble, Journal, pp. 44, 140-41.

were unquestionably better off.<sup>146</sup> Although the quality of life is more ephemeral and less susceptible to quantification than the material standard of living, it still is of first importance. Unlike what some economic historians seem to think, man does not live by bread alone.

### Literacy and Education for African-American Slaves

The amount of formal education that most American slaves received is summarizable in one word: none. As freedwoman Rose Williams recalled: "Massa Hawkins . . . has no books for larning. There am no education for the niggers." Masters and mistresses could easily justify this policy from their viewpoint. They feared that if their slave work force could read, 'rite, and do 'rithmetic, then it would become restless, discontent with their condition, and possibly revolt. To prevent this from happening, the law in most slave states threatened heavy penalties against anyone daring to teach slaves how to read. Today, since the leading forms of mass communication (TV, radio, and motion pictures) demand little or nothing in the way of literacy from their audiences, and since most people in the developed world are literate, which encourages them to take this for granted, the contemporary world easily forgets how total was the ignorance that darkened the minds of those unable to read in the pre-electronic media age. Besides public meetings, the printed word was nearly the only means to reach a mass of people at once in the nineteenth century. By keeping the slaves illiterate, masters and mistresses forced their bondsmen to depend mainly on rumor and hearsay passed from one person to the next as what he or she "knew." Illiteracy helped keep slaves in line by making escapes to the North even more hazardous. Even Douglass, a literate slave, did not know that Canada existed. If a bondsman neither can read a map nor already knows the geographic area he or she is planning to flee through, escape attempts become dangerous, even foolhardy. He or she could easily get lost and go in the wrong direction, especially when pausing to ask for directions from anyone with a white face was risky. Beyond the practical advantages of literacy, there is also the intrinsic excellence developed in the human mind by training it in reason, logic, and knowledge, which (certainly in the nineteenth century) came from analytical reading. Since the faculty of reason is the highest human faculty, it is a crime against the victims' humanity to have the deliberate policy of

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<sup>146</sup>The conditions of work and the resulting relationships that existed between the superior and subordinate class's individuals on the job are an important aspect of the quality of life. But since the struggles between these two groups and the methods of resistance and control are so closely tied to the quality of life aspects of work, this subject is covered in sections four and five.



not just intentionally neglecting it, nay, but prohibiting its development and full use. As Aristotle explains in the Nicomachean Ethics:

That which is proper to each thing is by nature best and more pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest.

The slaveowning class, by pursuing an intentional policy of stunting the minds of their slaves, weakened in them the faculty that makes man different from the animals, thus undermining what made them human instead of a mere "beast of burden."<sup>147</sup> Despite the English upper class harbored fears like their American counterparts', English conditions ultimately sharply differed from America's, because as the nineteenth century progressed, the government increased its efforts to educate the farmworkers.

Bondsmen repeatedly said either that they did not know how to read as slaves, learning only after they became free, or that they were the rare literate exceptions. Reuben Saunders, born and raised in Georgia, a slave set free by his master after living in Mississippi, commented: "I was never caught there with a book in my hand, or a pen. I never saw but one slave in Georgia, who could read and write, and he was brought in from another State." Questioning one slave preacher's credentials, his master's oldest son asked: "'Bird, you can't preach, you can't read. How on earth can you get a text out of the Bible when you can't even read? How'n hell can a man preach that don't know nothing?'" To defend his ministry, the slave replied that "Lord had called him to preach and He'd put the things in his mouth that he ought to say." After the young master heard Bird preach "the hairraisingest sermon you ever heard," he gave him a horse to preach anywhere nearby. Nevertheless, illiteracy was certainly no aid to this slave's ministry. A more unusual case of a slave who grew up illiterate was Williamson Pease of Tennessee. His master and mistress tried to teach him at home, but, "I would get out of the way when they tried to teach me, being small and not knowing the good of learning." Far more commonly, many a slave who wanted the ability to read was kept

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<sup>147</sup>Freedwoman Rose Williams of Texas, Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 161; Douglass, Narrative, p. 92; 1178a5-8; The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 1105; Kemble, Journal, p. 115. In this context she mentions a mentally retarded woman who is as capable at field work as other slaves without this handicap. By contrast, she noted London, a literate slave and preacher on the same plantation, must have felt deep frustration since he had a more informed outlook on life and the world.

from gaining it. W.E.B. Dubois once estimated that maybe 5% of the slaves were literate by 1860, with a disproportionately higher percentage of them living in the towns and cities than in the countryside, where controlling the slaves was easier, and in some parts of the Upper South than in the Deep South, where laws against teaching slaves to read were nonexistent or more weakly enforced.<sup>148</sup>

### Why Slaveholders Wanted Illiterate Slaves

Simply put, slaveholders wanted their bondsmen illiterate in order to control them better. A simple, tactical objection to literate slaves was that if they could read and write, they could forge passes for leaving the plantation, as Douglass once did in a failed escape attempt. But the broader, more strategic problem was that literacy would create discontent among the slaves as the veil of ignorance rose off their eyes. They would realize and feel more acutely the lost opportunities and great burdens of their servile condition. Since knowledge is power, a literate slave's greatly increased access to information also would help him or her plan escapes or revolts more effectively. Douglass explained that his mistress in Baltimore had been teaching him how to read. But suddenly, his master (Hugh Auld) terminated the lessons, warning her:

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master--to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now . . . if you teach that nigger [Douglass] how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontent and unhappy.

Ironically, through a form of reverse psychology, his master's broadside against his wife strongly motivated Douglass to learn how to read, since he realized it would open his mind. Illiteracy denied knowledge to the slaves, helping create "the white man's power to enslave the black man." Kemble found her husband's overseer had similar views:

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<sup>148</sup>Drew, Refugee, pp. 50 (Rose), 275 (Sanders); Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 50; As Douglass noted: "A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation." It was in Baltimore that he learned to read, continuing on the with aid of white children after his mistress stopped teaching him. Narrative, p. 49-50, 53-54; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 562-63.

No; he had no special complaint to bring against the lettered members of his subject community, but he spoke by anticipation. Every step they take toward intelligence and enlightenment lessens the probability of their acquiescing in their condition. Their condition is not to be changed--ergo, they had better not learn to read.

Aptly illustrating the slaveholding class's sensitivities about educating slaves into uncontrollability, a missionary once received a petition that over 350 large planters and leading citizens in South Carolina had signed. They opposed his wishes to instruct slaves only orally in religious truths:

Verbal instruction will increase the desire of the black population to learn. . . . Open the missionary sluice, and the current will swell in its gradual onward advance. We thus expect a progressive system of improvement will be introduced, or will follow from the nature and force of circumstances, which, if not checked (though it may be shrouded in sophistry and disguise), will ultimately revolutionize our civil institutions.<sup>149</sup>

Fearing a slippery slope to emancipation or rebellion began with slaves receiving any kind of (non-artisanal) education, they opposed all formal instruction. For its own purposes, the white ruling class' logic was impeccable: We must deny slaves education which increases their discontent, makes them harder to control, and leads them to revolt.<sup>150</sup>

Despite all the roadblocks against bondsmen learning to read, some still found paths to literacy. Undoubtedly, slaves learned to read from members of the class most opposed to literate bondsmen: slaveholders. The slave-owning class was neither totally united nor consistent in practice in keeping slaves illiterate. Hence, a few favorites were taught how to

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<sup>149</sup>Douglass, Narrative, pp. 49, 94, 97; Similarly, escaped slave Henry Morehead stated: "The time is now, when the colored men begin to see that it is the want of education which has kept them in bondage so long;" Drew, Refugee, p. 180; Kemble, Journal, p. 130. See also p. 9; as quoted in Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:214.

<sup>150</sup>Nat Turner, in 1831 the leader of the bloodiest American slave rebellion which erupted in Virginia, was literate, which certainly did not persuade slaveholders to encourage literacy among their human chattels. After this revolt killed some sixty whites, the white South suffered an abiding trauma that lingered into the Civil War. Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 132-34.

read, such as house servants (e.g., Douglass). In South Carolina, the grand jurors of Sumter County, greatly concerned that some masters taught their slaves how to read, warned of "consequences of the most serious and alarming nature" if this practice did not end. As a girl, Harriet Brent Jacobs learned how to read from her mistress: "While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory." Wanting all her slaves to be able to read, Mary Lee, the wife of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, cast the gift of literacy widely on her Virginia plantation. She delegated the actual teaching job to two of her children. In one rather unusual case which Olmsted records, a small Mississippi planter with twenty slaves, did not teach any of his slaves to read, but let one teach all the rest. He was thoroughly convinced that "Niggers is mighty apt at larnin', a heap more 'n white folks is," citing the case of an apparent seventeen-year-old who learned to read as well as any man he knew in a mere three months. Freedman Arnold Gragston, born and raised a slave in Kentucky, said his master, who owned ten slaves, had one special slave whose job was to teach the rest on his plantation, and others nearby, how to read, write and figure. James Sumler of Virginia got the younger white children (of his master evidently) to teach him how to read while hiding in a hayloft on Sundays.<sup>151</sup> Although such masters were not common, they still illustrate that the Southern ruling class was not as monolithic in keeping the slaves illiterate as its public declarations may indicate, since it sometimes felt that at least a few "pet" slaves were worthy of the gift of literacy.

More problematic for the white power structure (since it was uncontrolled and often not detected), some slaves taught other slaves to read. Benedict Duncan of Maryland learned from a Sunday school teacher, as did Christopher Hamilton of Missouri, but the former first learned his letters from his father. Harriet Brent Jacobs taught one old man how to read, who badly wanted to be able to read the Bible in order to serve God better. Under the cover of a Sunday school held in the home of a free black man, Frederick Douglass was teaching up to forty students how to read. Several of his students became fully literate. Jenny Proctor, freedwoman of Alabama, told what she and her fellow bondsmen did to learn to read:

None of us was 'lowed to see a book or try to learn.  
They say we git smarter than they was if we learn  
anything, but we slips around and gits hold of that

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<sup>151</sup>as quoted in Richard D. Younger, "Southern Grand Juries and Slavery," Journal of Negro History 40 (Apr. 1955):168-69; Brent, Incidents, p. 6; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 26; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:69-71; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 185; Drew, Refugee, p. 97.

Webster's old blue-back speller and we hides it till 'way in the night and then we lights a little pine torch, and studies that spelling book. We learn it too.

Furthermore, some states, such as Tennessee and Kentucky, had no laws against teaching slaves how to read. Henry Morehead, while still a slave in Louisville, Kentucky, paid his own expenses for attending a night school to learn how to read and spell. But even in this more moderate Border State, his owners objected. They brought in policemen to close the school.<sup>152</sup> Self-help measures allowed some slaves to learn how to read in defiance of the laws against it, by helping one another become literate, or finding someone else who would teach them.

Despite the slaves' own efforts at self-help and the cracks in the united facade the white ruling class presented against educating slaves to read and write, masters and mistresses usually sucessfully darkened the American slave's mind. Franklin is much too optimistic when he claims:

It is remarkable how generally the laws against the teaching of Negroes were disregarded. Planters became excited over the distribution of abolition literature in the South, but they gave little attention [?!] to preventing the training of slaves to read, which would have rendered abolition literature ineffective to a large extent.

Potentially draconian penalties threatened those teaching slaves how to read. Even death was not reckoned too harsh a penalty by the time Kemble published her journal. Earlier, heavy fines for the first two offenses, and imprisonment for the third, were Georgian law in the 1830s. Jacobs warned the old man she taught that "slaves were whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read." The formal law's punishments were one thing to fear; the dangers of the lynch mob's summary "law" quite another. Freedwoman Ellen Cragin's father asked an old white man who taught him, "Ain't you 'fraid they'll kill you if they see you?" He replied, "No, they don't know what I'm doing, and don't you tell 'em. If you do, they will kill me." When their whips could do the same job more quickly, masters need not wait on the legal system to deal with recalcitrant slaves reaching out to enlighten their minds. Ellen Betts, freedwoman of Louisiana, remembered how her master punished his slaves when they strived for literacy: "If Marse cotch a paper in you hand he sure whup you. He don't 'low no bright niggers round, he sell 'em quick. He

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<sup>152</sup>Drew, Refugee, pp. 110, 175, 180-81 (Morehead); Brent, Incidents, pp. 74-75; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 89-90; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 91.

always say, 'Book larning don't raise no good sugar cane.'" Kemble found the prior overseer of her husband's estates firmly discouraged slaves from learning to read. Despite having a literate father, Israel explained why he was not:

You know what de white man dat gobeins de estate him seem to like and favor, dat de people find out bery soon and do it; now Massa K---- [the prior overseer], him neber favor our reading, him not like it; likely as not he lick you if he find you reading; or, if you wish to teach your children, him always say, 'Pooh! teach'em to read--teach'em to work.' According to dat, we neber paid much attention to it.

Master Edwin Epps asked Northrup, already literate before he was kidnapped and sold south, whether he could read:

On being informed that I had received some instruction in those branches of education, he assured me, with emphasis, if he ever caught me with a book, or with pen and ink, he would give me a hundred lashes. . . . [He said] he bought 'niggers' to work and not to educate.

As a field hand, he found nearly impossible to get even a single sheet of paper and ink to write with, let alone have a letter mailed off plantation.<sup>153</sup> So even when a slave was lucky enough to be able to read, his master could, totally arbitrarily, effectively strip him of this ability by preventing its exercise.

#### English Farmworkers, Literacy, and Education

Although the literacy levels of the agricultural workers of England were hardly stellar, they still greatly exceeded those of Southern rural slaves. Admittedly, a very minimal definition of "literacy" is used here: the ability to read and write one's signature. Major improvement occurred as the eighteenth century ended and the nineteenth progressed. For England (and Wales) as a whole, lumping together both urban and rural averages, literacy has been estimated to be about 25 percent even in 1600, rising to roughly 55 percent in 1750, reaching around 65 percent in 1800, and then remaining on a slightly inclined plateau until about 1850. During the 1850-1900 period, England made rapid progress, as it moved towards a universal compulsory public school system, so literacy reached the 95 percent level around 1900. Since urban areas had a higher level of literacy than rural areas,

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<sup>153</sup>John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom A History of Negro Americans, 5d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), p. 145; Kemble, Journal, pp. 158, 271; Brent, Incidents, p. 74; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 50, 126; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 175.

these statistics have to be adjusted downwards to estimate the latter's rate alone. Even in 1867-68, the middle aged and elderly in Cambridgeshire only rarely could read. In 1911, Hudson encountered a 76-year-old woman in Wiltshire who said when she was young poverty prevented her from getting any schooling. Newlyweds often could not sign the register in church. An investigator for the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture found in Leicester that only one-fourth could read and write well, one-fourth could only read, one-fourth did both some, and one-fourth or more were illiterate. R.S. Schofield found that illiteracy for the 1754-1844 period ranged between 59 and 66 percent for male laborers and servants, but a higher rate inevitably prevailed among females. His figures are based upon whether they could sign their examination papers produced by investigations of their settlement status when applying for (or potentially so) relief in a particular parish. Overall illiteracy ranged from 30 percent (Dorset) to 60 percent (Bedfordshire) in 1838-39 in the counties where the Swing riots of 1830-31 occurred, with the female average consistently higher than the male average.<sup>154</sup> Since farmworkers were the lowest group on the occupational scale in the countryside, where average literacy levels were low, their high illiteracy figures come as no surprise. Rural artisans and farmers both had higher literacy rates than agricultural laborers.

The statistically-based figures cited above of average literacy are based upon the bare minimal ability of reading and writing one's signature. Reading a newspaper, magazine, or book with comprehension is quite another matter. As Hobsbawm and Rude note: "The ability to scrawl one's own name [on the marriage register at church] is no effective test of literacy." A low effective literacy rate cuts off farm laborers from knowing the activities of others elsewhere, largely limiting their mental horizons to only what they personally witnessed, which Somerville noted while in Berkshire. The laborers opposed any division of the commons, even when dividing it into petty farms would benefit them, since they knew no better way by anything they had seen or experienced personally: "In the first place, all husbandry by plough or spade, which they are accustomed to see, or have ever seen, (read of, they cannot, few of them can read,) is so different in its results from what it might be, that they very naturally believe their own eyes rather than the mere assertion

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<sup>154</sup>John R. Gillis, The Development of European Society, 1770-1870 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. 216 (chart); Hudson, A Shepherd's Life, p. 60; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, pp. xxi, xix; R.S. Schofield, "Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750-1850," Explorations in Economic History, 10 (1973): 450, cited by Snell, Annals, p. 36; Eric J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, Captain Swing (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), p. 64.

of a stranger." A "few" sounds far less than 34 to 41 percent. One way to explain the difference is that functional illiterates often can scrape by reading and writing a bare little. Semi-literacy remained a major roadblock against them learning of better ways to do things from anything written. This problem was surmountable if farmers or others more apt to be capable readers showed them how to use some new technique or way to earn a living, as Cobbett's promotion of straw-plaiting as a domestic industry shows.<sup>155</sup> The literacy rates cited above should not be taken to mean the ability to read (say) a newspaper editorial with 50% comprehension, and then be able to mentally critique it effectively.

#### A Brief Sketch of the Development of English Public Education

The development of English public education was a slow, gradual process which is only briefly summarized here. There had been many schools, church- or chapel-related, but the government did not run directly any overall system. The typical quality of these schools was questionable. Arch said his mother was nearly as important in educating him as the parson's village school that he attended for a bit less than three years (ages six to eight). That school gave him all the formal education that he received in 1830s Warwickshire. His mother read to him from the Bible and Shakespeare. As he got older, she gave him writing and arithmetic exercises to do after he finished work for the day. Shepherd Isaac Bawcombe learned how to read from a laboring lodger staying with his family who had fallen evidently from a higher position in society. Similar to Arch, Bawcombe benefited from home schooling, but unlike him, he received no formal schooling: "The village school was kept by an old woman, and though she taught the children very little it had to be paid for, and she [Bawcombe's mother] could not afford it." Schools were quite common in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire (c. 1867-68) because of the clergy's influence and even the interest of the agricultural workers themselves in educating their children. A grant of £20,000 in 1833 for building schools was the first time the central government of Britain appropriated money for schools. But only with the Reform Bill of 1867 and the Education Act of 1870 did England, as part of Britain, clearly move towards a system of universal and compulsory public education. The latter act allowed local school boards to be set up which could force students to attend up to age thirteen. School boards only needed to be created where local church-affiliated schools were inadequate.<sup>156</sup> These laws affected the whole of Britain, not just

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<sup>155</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 64; Somerville, Whistler, p. 104; Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 123-24.

<sup>156</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 9, 24-27; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 142-43; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-



English rural laborers. But what special challenges did public (government) schools and their students in the English countryside face?

The public schools for laborers and others living in rural England often bore the burdens of indifferent support from parents and their employers, limited facilities, and an early drop-out/school-leaving age. The investigators for the 1867-68 Report examined local conditions of education carefully, particularly noting what ages children tended to stop going to school and enter the work force full time. Two of the four questions they sought answers to concerned restricting child labor by age limits and about school attendance. They found a fundamental conflict within the family economy about the role of children: Since farmworkers lived so close to subsistence, their children's need to acquire an education clashed with their parents' need for them to pull their own weight financially as soon as possible. The parents' earnings, especially for those working irregularly because of rain or their own habits, were not high enough to allow for the sacrifice of a child's earnings for the longer run benefits stemming from education. Although this did gradually change, rural laborers also often had apathetic attitudes about sending their children to school. Stemming from their superior economic conditions, parents who were laborers in Northumberland and Durham cared more for educating their children. Unlike Hodge in the south, in the north he was much farther above the level of subsistence, so he (and Mrs. Hodge) could more easily afford the opportunity costs of sending children to school and foregoing their immediate earnings. In Yorkshire, because the parents had higher wages, they were more likely to leave their children in school longer. Even in these high-wage counties, the financial help from children working remained important, especially when they were part of a large family with many young children.<sup>157</sup>

#### At What Age Did Child Labor Begin and Schooling End?

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68, first report, p. xviii; David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century 1815-1914 (London: Penguin Group, 1950), p. 135; Pamela Horn, "Child Workers in the Victorian Countryside: The Case of Northamptonshire," Northamptonshire Past and Present 7 (1985-86):175.

<sup>157</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, pp. vii, x-xi, xv, xx. In 1870s Wiltshire parents had realized the value of education much more. Jeffries, Hodge, 2:67. (This work was mainly based upon his experience writing for a Wiltshire and Gloucestershire newspaper in the early 1870s).

The ages at which the farmworkers' children left school in the mid-nineteenth century to go to work seem ridiculously low by contemporary standards, but these must be seen against the backdrop of the typical laboring family's constant struggle to survive financially. Because the farmworkers' finances were so tight and because enclosure and the consolidation of small farms into large ones had cost them so much of their ability to better their conditions, even the commissioners of the 1867-68 Report conceded that it was unfair to deny farmworker parents the ability to receive wages from their children as early as possible so long as any resulting injury to the latter from going to work was preventable. Different conditions prevailed in different parts of England, since in some places seven to ten year olds went to work, while in others they waited until age thirteen. In northern Northumberland, children rarely worked before age fourteen, except during summers when eleven and twelve year olds were hired. In southern Northumberland, none under ten worked, except the children of small farmers, whose nine year olds went to work on their own farms. In Leicestershire, where lower wages prevailed, the age of children leaving school actually was falling because the increased cultivation of root crops was raising the demand for child labor to harvest or weed them. Children started work normally around eight years old, and even some six year olds joined them. The average age for quitting school had fallen from twelve or thirteen to ten. In low-wage Cambridge, some six year olds went out to work, and many more aged seven and eight did likewise. Boys left school at age nine, "never to return." But in higher-wage Yorkshire, nine was the youngest normal age for children to leave school, but so many left near that age that 74 percent attending school were under ten years old. In Northamptonshire, boys began to work at age eight, seven sometimes, and almost all were before reaching their tenth birthday. After age ten, if work was available, they often were employed all year around.<sup>158</sup> In southern English counties, such as Leicester, Northampton, and Cambridge, children routinely went to work and left school earlier than those in northern English counties, such as Northumberland, Durham, and (most of) Lincoln, which varied as a function of their parents' wages: Those farther above subsistence as they earned more could leave their children in school longer, while those closer to absolute poverty sent them out to work as soon as it was practical.

"Going to work" and "leaving school" were not necessarily simultaneous events. Since agricultural work was seasonal, children could be employed in the summer months, then put back

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<sup>158</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. ix (variations), xiii, xiv (Northumberland), xviii-xix (Leicestershire), xxii (Cambridge/Yorkshire), xxvi (Northamptonshire), xlviil-il (concession). Arch mentions both extremes in ages. Joseph Arch, pp. 247-48.

into school during fall and winter. In his or her first years of work, a child sent into the fields during one part of the year may be in the school house other times, during the winter and fall months before spring planting time arrived. Indeed, even into the 1890s, schools in Northampton made their schedules fit the seasonal demands of agriculture, not vice versa. Morgan discovered school log books with entries noting that attendance was lower than average when harvest was not yet finished or had just begun. Hence, one entry in a book kept for a school in Berkshire noted for July 22 and following days in 1878:

"Attendance smaller than usual owing to the commencement of harvest operations." Like many others, it judiciously closed its doors for several weeks during the late summer's harvest period. Mistakenly opening on September 6, 1875, it immediately shuttered its doors again for another week: "School should have been reopened today but there were so few in attendance that it was closed for another week." In 1873 an entry simply noted for July 21, 22, 23: "Attendance on these days was limited on account of Harvest." Establishing night schools for laboring children was another way to fit school around the work. One investigator for the 1867-68 Report suggested possibly that all children from five to ten years old should be legally required to go to school, and night schools should be established for ten to thirteen year olds.<sup>159</sup> Eight of Woburn Union's 16 parishes had evening schools, which had a total of 165 students out of a population of 11,682. In Bedfordshire overall, 29 of its 50 parishes had evening schools with an average attendance of 546, and 952 names on their registers.<sup>160</sup> But just because these schools existed, meeting day or night, does not mean they necessarily supplied a reasonable education. Arch saw night schools

at their best [as] mostly makeshift affairs. The boys would often attend them in the slack winter months from November to March, or they would put in their day schooling then, but the irregularity and the poor teaching did not give the ordinary lad a fair chance of

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<sup>159</sup>Horn, "Child Workers," 177-178; Morgan, Harvesters and Harvesting, pp. 64-67; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xxix.

<sup>160</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, cited by Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 19. This county was heavily agricultural, so most (c. 80 percent) of its inhabitants were farmworkers and their families. Woburn Union, confining its figures to agricultural laborers' children exclusively, overall had 839 in attendance with 1100 on the schools' registers for children under the age of 13 out of a population of 11,682 in 1861. See p. 13.

getting even a decent elementary education.<sup>161</sup>

Clearly, employers and laboring parents (as they struggled near subsistence in southern England) saw the work of the latter's children and the wages they earned during peak periods in the agricultural year as outweighing in importance their children's potential long-run intellectual development. As the government attempted to make nearly a whole generation of laborers' children truly literate for the first time, it had an uphill battle in persuading parents and employers that education was valuable when these children often ended up doing the same jobs as their parents, for whom literacy had mattered little, and when parents, usually having little education themselves, only knew its value dimly, if at all (unlike Douglass and many other literate slaves).

Ignorance Versus Skewed Knowledge: Different Models for Controlling  
a Subordinate Class

The education of masses, including the laborers, presented the English upper class with a perplexing dilemma. The two competing models of social control vis-a-vis education were both tempting. On the one hand, they could work to deny the downtrodden literacy, keep them ignorant, narrow their mental horizons, and so make them more contented in the work of drudgery that inevitably the vast majority of human beings had to endure. As Arch described this approach:

'Much knowledge of the right sort is a dangerous thing for the poor,' might have been the motto put up over the door of the village school in my day. The less book-learning the labourer's lad got stuffed into him, the better for him and the safer for those above him, was what those in authority believed and acted up to. . . . These gentry did not want him to know; they did not want him to think; they only wanted him to work. To toil with the hand was what he was born into the world for, and they took precious good care to see that he did it from his youth upwards.

Members of the elite sometimes revealed that their objectives were exactly what Arch said they were. Giddy, not only an M.P. but president of the Royal Society, rose up to speak in 1807 against educating the poor extensively:

It would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants

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<sup>161</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 248.

in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and in a few years the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them.

During the reactionary 1790s in England, local landowners even attacked the conservative Hannah More's schools in the 1790s, which strongly preached patriotism to the children and avoided teaching them how to write as they learned to read: "Of all the foolish inventions and new fangled devices to ruin this country, that of teaching the poor to read is the very worst." Obviously, American slaveholders made this choice, using the ignorance of their slaves as a control mechanism.<sup>162</sup>

On the other hand, the powers-that-be could bring the lamp of learning to the masses, but selectively control its light by placing in the curriculum concepts or ideas conducive to continuing their control and leaving in darkness those which did not. After encountering a well-dressed little girl in Hampshire, Cobbett found Lady Baring had not only given her the clothes, but had taught her to read and sing hymns. He commented, after spotting at least twelve more girls dressed similarly: "Society is in a queer state when the rich think, that they must educate the poor in order to insure their own safety: for this, at bottom, is the great motive now at work in pushing on the education scheme." Even Arch briefly alludes to this approach: "Of course he [the farmworker] might learn his catechism; that, and things similar to it, was right, proper, and suitable knowledge for such as he; he would be the more likely to stay contentedly in his place to the end of his working days."<sup>163</sup> Conspicuously, at least some American slaveholders objected to similar education, even when done only verbally, in the petition Olmsted quoted from. (See above, p. 99). The English upper class may have neglected educating the working class compared to

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<sup>162</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 25; Windham's Speeches, 3:17, cited by J.L. and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer 1760-1832: The New Civilisation new ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1928), p. 56; Gillis, Development of European Society, p. 215; One Southern overseer who visited England noted that the same arguments were used against educating the farmworkers and the slaves. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 193.

<sup>163</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 51-52; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 25.

the rest of western Europe, but, unlike Southern slaveholders, it did not strive to halt the dissemination of literacy among the masses to the extent the latter sought it.<sup>164</sup> Exceptions do arise, such as the case where local farmers pushed their laborers to take their children out of a school that had been built on someone's allotment, since they feared it would teach the value of allotments. Education was much more strongly discouraged by the practical needs of employers for labor at seasonal peaks and parents to have children work to help their families survive financially. By giving laboring parents a powerful incentive to pull their children out of school and put them into the fields as soon as possible, the rural elite's efforts to screw down wage rates through enclosure, the New Poor Law, and the settlement laws may have done more indirectly to discourage effective literacy among the laborers than any direct attempts at suppression. England simply did not have the laws against teaching reading or writing to the lower class that, in the American South, generally existed against teaching slaves. This showed the English upper class was neither united nor adamant in its objections to the laboring poor becoming literate. Presumably, the Protestant emphasis on individuals reading the Bible helped to keep anti-literacy laws from being passed, but this belief did not hinder the equally Protestant slaveholders in America from passing and enforcing such laws in most of the South. As the nineteenth century drew on, the English elite increasingly opted for the second option of social control vis-a-vis education, of bending the curriculum to teach the masses to be patriotic, industrious, obey the state and queen, etc. As the mechanization of English agriculture gradually proceeded throughout the nineteenth century, the newly invented farm machinery required increasingly literate laborers to learn its proper operation and repair, giving the upper class a good practical reason to promote literacy.<sup>165</sup> So although American slaveholders used ignorance as a major way to subdue the slaves, the English upper class increasingly opted to provide (skewed) knowledge to control refractory laborers and artisans.

#### Slaves--The Treatment of Elderly "Aunts" and "Uncles"

The treatment of the elderly serves as a useful indicator

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<sup>164</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, pp. 55-56. H.G. Wells obliquely alludes to the two options as chosen by two different nations: "The oligarchy of the crowned republic of Great Britain may have crippled and starved education, but the Hohenzollern monarchy corrupted and prostituted it." The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Mankind, ed. Raymond Postgate, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1956), 2:830.

<sup>165</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 69; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xxiii, xxxii.

for testing the realism of a culture's rhetoric about caring for the weak. Although the tradition of many cultures teaches the young to respect the old for their wisdom and knowledge, these lessons are undermined by the practical problems of the old becoming economic burdens as their health declines and fails. Filial piety towards the elderly by the young, although upheld by references to the Fifth Commandment, was not always forthcoming. Furthermore, at least in England and other nations with a Anglo-Saxon-Celtic culture, the elderly in the past, not just the present, normally did not live in the same household as their children.<sup>166</sup> They survived independently, whether by charity, odd jobs, relatives' support, poor relief, accumulated savings, or avoiding retirement until death or declining health. Hence, the aged's quality of life usefully serves as one yardstick for judging an upper class's claims of paternalism about those in the subordinate class unable to do productive work anymore.

The Southern slaveholders unhesitatingly spouted paternalistic rhetoric concerning how they cared for their workers when they were old, sick, and worn-out, but the capitalists of the north (by and large) did not.<sup>167</sup> The reality is much more mixed. Often the older slaves received enough to physically survive, but little more. Kemble found miserable conditions for retired elderly slaves on her husbands' estates, even though his plantations were reputed to treat their bondsmen above average. Two very elderly black women, having retired as actively working slaves for their master, lived in "deplorably miserable hovels, which appeared to me to be occupied by the most decrepid and infirm samples of humanity it was ever my melancholy lot to behold." On her husband's sea-island estate, she witnessed a truly pathetic old man in an infirmary die before her very eyes: "Upon this earthen floor, with nothing but its hard, damp surface beneath him [besides a little straw], no covering but a tattered shirt and trowsers, and a few sticks under this head for a pillow, lay an old man upward of seventy dying." She compared slaves' conditions when old to that of aged laborers confined to the workhouse as paupers, and said the former were little better.<sup>168</sup> This old man's case illustrates that the

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<sup>166</sup>Steven R. Smith, "Age in Old England," History Today, Mar. 1979, p. 174.

<sup>167</sup>Genovese provides a good but overly optimistic summary of how well slaveowners cared for their elderly slaves: Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 519-23. Although he carefully balances between an optimistic and pessimistic interpretation, a tilt toward a pessimistic viewpoint (like Stamp's) is more justifiable.

<sup>168</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 92, 313; cf. p. 246. While noting the pro-slavery argument that their elderly were not isolated from their family and friends as the laborers confined to the

slaveholders' altruistic rhetoric of paternalism obscured the reality of a system whose harshness at least equaled laissez-faire's on the old.

Altruism and Self-Interest Did Not Necessarily Conveniently Coincide to

Protect Elderly Slaves' Lives

Unfortunately for slaveholders, in the case of caring for older slaves, self-interest was not, by and large, conveniently allied to altruism. The slaveholder apologist's old canard that a master would seek to protect his property from harm and treat it well out of self-interest generally collapses when applied to elderly slaves doing little or no productive work. The owner rationally then should hope for the speedy deaths of his useless dependents to save on food and clothing rations. As Kemble noted: "It is sometimes clearly not the interest of the owner to prolong the life of his slaves; as in the case of inferior or superannuated laborers." Hence, it is easy to document all sorts of perfectly economically rational yet calloused behavior towards elderly slaves. Harriet Jacobs knew an old slave woman, made nearly helpless by sickness and hard labor, whose owners lacked the paternalistic sentiment to take her with them when they moved to Alabama: "The old black woman was left to be sold to any body who would give twenty dollars for her." Attempting to sell an aged slave could backfire: Walker knew one case where a slave was whipped for overstaying Christmas vacation, and because he was too old to be successfully sold in the slave markets of New Orleans and Mobile! In a case that distressed Barrow, he was told to let go of an elderly escaped slave that his slaves had captured the day before: "Uncle Bat. told my boy to turn old Demps Loose & let him go. been runaway some months, a verry Bad Example. he shall not stay in this neighbourhood."<sup>169</sup> The master of Old Demps evidently felt it cost less to let him fend for himself as a runaway than to care for him on the plantation. Since elderly slaves were net drains on their owners' account books, the latter had a self-interest in hoping none of the former lived long enough to retire on their plantations.

Did Slavery Provide More Security Against Starvation Than Laissez-Faire?

A standard condemnation of the North's general system of

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workhouse in England were, she still found old slaves were terribly neglected on her husband's estates. The workhouse infirmary that Jeffries described was certainly better than this, as mentioned above (p. 110).

<sup>169</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 303; Brent, Incidents, p. 14; Narrative of Jonathan Walker; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 262.



laissez-faire lay in its intrinsic lack of security for wage workers, including providing for retirement. As soon as an employer judged a worker as not contributing to his bottom line, such as due to diseases, crippling accidents, senility, or a depression cutting sales, he (unless of paternalistic minority) would lay off or fire one determined to be worthless to his economic self-interest. Enduring uncertainty was inevitable for members of the North's proletariat, excepting those who could fall back on the family farm. Slavery, its apologists trumpeted, was morally superior because it provided economic security for slaves in sickness or old age under a system of altruistic paternalism that was attributable to its reciprocal obligations between master and bondsman.<sup>170</sup> However, this defense of the peculiar institution always had a fundamental weakness: Since the slaveholder received so much arbitrary authority over his slaves legally, having still more de facto because of the weakness of the criminal and civil justice system in the sparsely-populated, lynch mob-prone South, promises of security were often hollow, and nearly unenforcible against any master or mistress breaking them. Frederick Douglass described his grandmother's fate when his master died, and the plantation's slaves fell into the hands of heirs who did not know them:

My grandmother, who was now very old, having outlived my old master and all his children . . . her present owners finding she was of but little value, her frame already racked with the pains of old age, and complete helplessness fast stealing over her once active limbs, they took her to the woods, built her a little hut, put up a little mud-chimney, and then made her welcome to the privilege of supporting herself there in perfect loneliness; thus virtually turning her out to die!

Quoting from a Southern newspaper, Olmsted noted a similar case of a nearly seventy-year-old slave, driven into the woods to die. The coroner's formal pronouncement on the case was, "Death from starvation and exposure, through neglect of his master."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>In his "Rules of Highland Plantation," Bennet Barrow enunciated clearly the price of retirement and guaranteed subsistence at his perceived expense, including in sickness and retirement: "If I maintain him in his old age, when he is incapable of rendering either himself or myself any service, am I not entitled to an exclusive right to his time [when younger]?" Davis, Plantation Life, p. 407. Clearly, a slave paid dearly in return for the security his master (actually, fellow slaves) provided for him in old age.

<sup>171</sup>Douglass, Narrative, p. 62; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:251. Olmsted eloquently observed that slavery stultifies the talents and abilities of its human chattels while, in practice,

Although the elderly slaves who suffered the fate of neglect or abandonment were only an unfortunate minority of those few fortunate enough even to live to a ripe old age, still these cases illustrate how unenforcible the paternalistic promises of care were, because the master had nearly unlimited power legally to demand almost anything from his slaves short of their lives. Since the Southern slaveholder's absolute and arbitrary will replaced the Northern capitalist's more constrained power over his work force's personal lives, slaves found a "paid retirement" to be deniable upon the whim of their owners, thus negating the promises of slavery as guaranteeing security.

#### Odd Jobs for Elderly Slaves

Often older slaves continued to work at least some, for better or for worse. Some still worked in the fields. Charity was one of the oldest slaves on Kemble's husband's sea-island cotton estate. She not only had to do field work, but had to walk a roundtrip of nearly four miles to and from her work area, a distance familiar to many English agricultural laborers. Composing the opposite extreme were "old and sick" slaves who persuaded their masters to let them retire; some of them suddenly became amazingly productive after Emancipation! Masters and mistresses often put their bondsmen to work at various light duties when they became too weak for regular field work. For example, old men in one frontier area sometimes did guard duty around the quarters to protect young slave children from wild animals, as Armstrong heard.<sup>172</sup> A stereotypical job for old bondswomen was to provide day care for the children of the field hands and other parents not at home during the day.<sup>173</sup> Charles Ball's grandfather, nearly eighty years old, was excused from the heavy field labor of raising tobacco, but received a half-acre patch near his cabin where he raised much of his own food.<sup>174</sup> As aged slaves did these activities, they remained useful to their owners--and perhaps felt more useful to themselves as well--by continuing to do at least some work in the autumn years of their lives.

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providing "no safety against occasional suffering for want of food among labourers, or even against their starvation any more than the competitive system" (i.e., capitalism).

<sup>172</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 247; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 522; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 63.

<sup>173</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 313; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 69; Douglass, Narrative, p. 22; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 313; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:209.

<sup>174</sup>Ball, Slavery in the United States, pp. 21-22.

Depending on the master or mistress' whim, the treatment of the elderly slaves in America varied enormously. Although some, perhaps even a narrow majority of those lucky enough to live into old age may have enjoyed their final years with old friends and family--assuming they had not been sold off earlier!--in familiar surroundings, others were condemned to death or neglect in a manner worthy of the most cutthroat, profit-seeking factory owner. Furthermore, because of sales, slaveholders moving to other areas with their slaves, estate divisions due to inheritances, and slaves being given away as gifts, an elderly slave may end up living far from many or most of his or her descendants and relatives. After his father ran away, Charles Ball found that his grandfather was his only relative still left in Maryland that he knew of when he was still a boy. The converse of this--young Charles was the only relative his grandfather had nearby, owned by another master--was evidently equally true. Helping aged slaves tests the slaveholders' altruism to the limit, since little self-interest would remain in preserving the lives of slaves no longer capable of working enough to support themselves. But as Genovese observes, the younger slaves really supported their old kinfolk, not the masters themselves.<sup>175</sup> Because relatively few slaves lived long enough to enjoy retirement, especially since infant mortality rates were high, slaveholders were less burdened than they would be under contemporary life expectancies. Proportionately fewer blacks reached old age than whites anyway (which is still holds true for contemporary American society). The 1850 census reported that the average ages at death were 21.4 for blacks and 25.5 for whites nationally, and for 1860, 3.5 percent of the slaves, but 4.4 percent of the whites, surpassed 60 years of age. The crude death rates were 1.8 percent for slaves versus 1.2 percent for whites.<sup>176</sup> Since some were self-sacrificing and

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<sup>175</sup>Ball, Slavery in the United States, p. 21; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 522-23.

<sup>176</sup>Stampp, Peculiar Institution, p. 318. By citing the highest available figure for slave life expectancy (36 years), Fogel and Engerman try to deny the force of these figures in demonstrating differential treatment for slaves and free whites. The higher black death rates result from black women having a higher fertility rate concomitant with a higher infant mortality rate, and from the South's (allegedly) less healthy climate. Time on the Cross, 1:124-25; 2:243-44. Substantially lower estimates for life expectancy for slaves are actually more common, such as Zelnick's 32 years, Farley's 27.8 for female slaves, and Elben's 32.6 for the same. They ignore the implications of higher mortality rates for black infants in demonstrating how material conditions for slaves were worse than for free whites. The idea the South's climate was epidemiologically inferior to the North's is also disputable.

others were not, slaveholders compiled a distinctly mixed record, which extinguishes any still-lingering stereotypes about all aged slaves being well taken care of.

The Senior Hodge: Cared for, or Fends for Himself?

In England, the parish normally cared for the elderly when they were not still working. Like today, they generally did not move in with their married children to be supported by them under the same roof.<sup>177</sup> Since England was a free society without slavery, relatively little incentive existed for a farmworker to fake ill health in order to retire early. After the New Poor Law (1834) tightened rules on the granting of outside relief, especially by imposing the workhouse test on the able-bodied, this incentive evaporated for the self-respecting. Many elderly people in England continued to work as long as possible. Tommy Ierat, a shepherd in Somerset, reached the age of seventy-eight before coming home one day to his wife, when he first announced his retirement thus: "I've done work." A shepherd named John worked for some sixty-five years, retiring at age eighty-five when his master did also. Caleb Bawcombe shepherded until he was almost seventy, when he joined his wife's venture in starting a small business some forty-five miles away.<sup>178</sup> Admittedly, shepherds are not representative agricultural laborers since their jobs are less physically taxing than those cultivating the soil. Furthermore, since shepherds were hired by the year, they enjoyed far greater job security and stability than most other agricultural workers. But other elderly farmworkers still could do various light tasks, thus leaving heavier tasks for the young men and women. The anonymous "Hodge" of Jeffries' account, forced into the workhouse when he could work no longer, had continued to work well past age seventy at various light tasks:

He still could and would hoe--a bowed back is not impediment, but perhaps rather an advantage, at that occupation. He could use a prong in the haymaking; he could reap a little, and do good service tying up the cut corn. There were many little jobs on the farm that

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The North-South difference in infant mortality can easily be attributed to the difference between bondage and freedom, instead of a less healthy climate. Sutch in David, Reckoning with Slavery, pp. 283-87. Conceptually, the major point Stamppp implicitly makes is still true: Of all those born, proportionately fewer black babies lived to be elderly than white ones. See Peculiar Institution, p. 319.

<sup>177</sup>Smith, "Age in Old England," p. 174; Snell, Annals, pp. 364-67.

<sup>178</sup>Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 46, 47-48, 318-19.

required experience, combined with the plodding patience of age, and these he could do better than a stronger man.<sup>179</sup>

Due to financial necessity and the lack of formal pensions for all but the most fortunate laborers, farmworkers generally worked as long as they could to avoid relying on parish relief and, especially after 1834, the high chance of commitment to the workhouse as a pauper.

Once they could no longer support themselves, the central earthly concern of most elderly farmworkers was about how the parish and/or their children would care for them. A very high percentage under the Old Poor Law (pre-1834) received parish relief in old age, according to Thomson: "It constituted . . . a formalized institution of income distribution to which the two-thirds to three-quarters of the population who were non-propertied could look with near-certain expectation of regular and prolonged assistance in old age."<sup>180</sup> Since his destiny was almost unavoidable, he lost the incentive to save and be self-disciplined as he grew older because, regardless of self-exertion, his physical strength inevitably gave out. He would have to ask for parish relief, likely resulting in committal to the dreaded workhouse after 1834. As Arch put it:

Why, even if he had managed, by the most strenuous efforts, to keep himself afloat on life's stream, he was almost bound to see his little raft of independence slowly, surely drifting on to the mudbanks of pauperism at the close of his voyage. . . . What did he care then, if at the end of his rollicking road the poorhouse door would be yawning wide to receive him? He couldn't help that, he had given up trying. He drowned the thought in his glass, and chalked up his score with a laugh, and went down a bit faster.<sup>181</sup>

However, depending on how great a fear a given laborer had of commitment to the workhouse and/or his desire to maintain self-respect by avoiding dependence on others, this scenario might not play out in his life. He (or she) might strenuously work all his might to put off the day of reckoning as long as possible. Now

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<sup>179</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, p. 143.

<sup>180</sup>David Thomson, "Welfare and the Historians," in The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure, eds. Lloyd Bonfield, R.M. Smith, and K. Wrightson (Oxford, 1986), p. 370; cited by Rushton, "The Poor Law," p. 151. See also Snell, Annals, pp. 364-67.

<sup>181</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 36.

under the Old Poor Law, the elderly received outside relief in the form of small pensions of roughly two shillings six pence a week, sometimes more. Such handouts allowed them to get by without having to move in with their children or into the workhouse. Because of this law, children over the generations grew accustomed to normally not supporting their aged parents directly, but letting the parish do it.

A fortunate few received private pensions from their employers or some other charity. For example, John, a Wiltshire shepherd who died about 1855, had worked for the same farm nearly sixty years. When his master decided to retire, he offered his aged shepherd twelve shillings a week and a rent-free cottage in the village he was moving to. Despite being a very generous offer for its day and age, John turned him down since he wanted to stay in his native village. But despite his refusal, his master still made for him a "sufficient provision." Shepherd Isaac Bawcombe benefited from a charity which "provided for six of the most deserving old men of the parish of Bishop" because a sportsman rewarded him for not allowing or committing any poaching on the land where he tended his sheep. Ironically, since he was just sixty years old and still in excellent health, he had no need to retire. The charity gave him a rent-free cottage, eight shillings per week, even some free clothes. James Foard, a guardian for Petworth union, Sussex, said Petworth parish had "a good deal" of charities, "principally for old people, who [receive] a room to live in, and a certain sum yearly." Administered totally independently of the poor laws, these charities helped those "unable to work . . . of good character."<sup>182</sup> But since charity only helped a small minority of the aged, most laborers had to depend on the aid that the poor laws dispensed to survive when old.

#### The Effects of the New Poor Law on the Elderly, Non-Working Poor

With the arrival of the New Poor Law, conditions changed. Many of the old had their pensions cut--often down to one shilling six pence or one shilling nine pence a week--or were thrown into the workhouse. Some even starved to death, slowly or quickly, after their outdoor relief was reduced or denied when they refused to live in the workhouse. As Snell notes, the parish authorities also began to force the children of aged parents to contribute towards their upkeep. They punished the recalcitrant by throwing them into jail. Farm laborer Samuel Dawson, earning just twelve shillings a week, landed in Bedford gaol for two months in 1875 because he refused to pay one shilling a week to help support his parents. But as even Snell admits, not all the aged, non-working laborers were forced to go

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<sup>182</sup>Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 46-47, 55; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 35.

into the workhouse under the New Poor Law. Instead, the percentage committed varied depending on whether the authorities tightened the screws against outdoor relief (such as in the 1830s and 1870s) or loosened them (the 1850s). Some parishes practiced more creative ways for supporting the elderly. In one area, some old men were given two acres as allotments, which kept them off the parish. But being useless for the truly crippled, this program was hardly common also.<sup>183</sup>

Interestingly, the 1837 Committee investigating the New Poor Law's effects (in its first report) repeatedly found in its chosen area of study--Petworth Union, Sussex--that the elderly did receive outdoor relief: "The aged and infirm are relieved, whenever they prefer it, at their own homes, or at the houses of relations or friends with whom they live; and by the general testimony of the witnesses their condition has been improved by an increase of pay."<sup>184</sup> Time and time again, witnesses called before the committee, even critics of the 1834 Law, admitted that the condition of the elderly was the same and/or had improved. Instead, they said laborers with large families suffered the most since they depended now only on wages, and had to make due without the old supplemental allowances paid for each child they had. As the rector of Petworth, Thomas Sockett, certainly a critic of aspects of the New Poor Law, remarked:

It has been very injurious to the deserving labouring man with a large family; but that with respect to the old people, it having been, I must say, mercifully administered in Petworth, it has not been injurious. I think the aged and infirm are as well off as they were before the New Poor Law came into operation.<sup>185</sup>

Similarly, a member of the board of guardians at Petworth and another hostile witness, James Foard stated that the New Poor Law was "very injurious to men with large families, very oppressive," but that other groups had remained unaffected by the law. "Very

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<sup>183</sup>Snell, Annals, pp. 131-33; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 257; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 220. Thomas Sockett, the rector of Petworth, Sussex, said pensions of 2s./week were normal for older people not working in Petworth parish. Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 15.

<sup>184</sup>Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, preface to minutes of evidence, p. 7. See also p. 9.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., p. 1. See also p. 15. Admittedly, he said he would have voted for the New Poor Law had he been a Member of Parliament. Ibid., second report, p. 23; first report, p. 16. But, going against Cobbett and Arch's stereotype of the uncaring, Tory-supporting establishment churchman, he harshly condemned some parts of the law that injured the poor.

few" of the old lived in the union's workhouse, and no more than had before.<sup>186</sup> When a relative could help them, they could voluntarily choose whether they went into or left the workhouse. Like what Jeffries saw, he said "they are more contented and happy" when living outside the workhouse. This option also cost the parish less!<sup>187</sup> Other witnesses made comparable comments to the committee.<sup>188</sup> Admittedly, Petworth parish/union was unusually compassionate in its administrative practices. It apparently was in some hot water for liberally interpreting a certain emergency provision of the New Poor Law that allowed outdoor relief for the able-bodied, which may have been why the committee even had interrogated its authorities to begin with. But this case still shows that the Poor Law Commission in London was not forcing the local authorities to put the elderly poor into the workhouses, at least immediately after the passage of the 1834 law. Consequently, Snell may have underestimated the amount of continuity for the care of the elderly poor before and after 1834 in areas outside of Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>189</sup>

#### How the Local Authorities Profited from the Workhouse Test

The New Poor Law's main point was to deter applicants by banning outdoor relief to the able-bodied and creating the workhouse test for destitution. The local powers-that-be of rural England did not seek full workhouses, because it cost more to maintain someone in them than at his or her own home on a

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<sup>186</sup>Ibid., p. 21. Only those with no family to care for them ended up in the workhouse. Otherwise, they lived with family members (including wives), and received pensions of two shillings a week.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., p. 31. Arch estimated the parish paid at least one shilling a week more to place an elderly person in the workhouse than to give a relief pension of two shillings a week. "As has been calculated, it costs the ratepayers from three shillings and ten pence to four shillings a week per adult." Joseph Arch, pp. 259-60.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., pp. 38, 41, 43. The assistant Poor Law Commissioner, William Henry Toovey Hawley, flatly denied that some rule prohibited the relieving of the aged and infirm at home. Ibid., p. 66. Farmer Edward Butt, having worked many years as a relieving officer for the poor under Gilbert's act for the Petworth parish, believed the elderly were better off under the new law than before. Ibid., second report, p. 4.

<sup>189</sup>"Of course, out-relief of sorts continued for some elderly people; although one should be wary of generalising arguments on 'continuity' before and after 1834 which are based on Norfolk and Suffolk." Snell, Annals, p. 131.



pension. Because only the most desperate and needy would ask for relief when it could only be had on very unpleasant terms, the workhouse test always had some justification when applied to the able-bodied. However, except perhaps as a device for detecting those faking ill-health or for encouraging the semi-able bodied to struggle on as long as possible independently, the test was unjustifiable when applied to the enfeebled elderly and others incapable of working steadily. Arch's own experience, when he cared for his own father, illustrates these issues well. Arch's wife, who had been making an important two shillings a week cleaning laundry, had to give that up to serve as a nurse to her father-in-law, which placed his family in a serious financial squeeze. The parish overseer thought Arch could get some help from the parish to care for his father. As it was, the board of guardians denied him even one shilling six pence per week, which only partially replaced his wife's earnings anyway. They said they were willing to take his father into the workhouse, and have him pay one shilling a week towards his upkeep. On the surface, their offer seems completely illogical economically because caring for Arch's father in the workhouse would probably cost three to four shillings a week. The parish quite possibly would be one shilling six pence to two shillings six pence a week worse off for committing his father to the workhouse than it would be for giving Arch a mere one shilling six pence a week relief pension to care for him, even when counting Arch's would-be one shilling a week contribution. But then, out of family pride and self-respect, Arch made the choice the workhouse test was created to encourage. He totally rejected the parish's offer to take his father in, replying, "I'd sooner rot under a hedge than he should go there!" By rejecting parish relief, he did exactly what the framers of the New Poor Law's workhouse test had counted on: Applicants would refuse to take relief when the cost of accepting it in dignity and freedom was too high. Hence, the parish ended up saving one shilling six pence per week, after having risked losing up to two shillings six pence per week had Arch placed his father in the workhouse. This case also illustrates how the New Poor Law intensified the ill-feeling between the classes in rural England. The guardians saved one shilling and six pence a week, but at the cost of making Arch resentful and angry. The ratepayers saved their quids but at the cost of sleeping less easily at night. Because of the New Poor Law, low wages, and enclosure, the rural elite knew the laborers hated them such that they could without warning torch their grain stacks, burn their barns, smash their threshing machines, and poach their game.<sup>190</sup>

#### Whose Elderly Were Better Off? The Farmworkers' or the Slaves'?

Before hazarding a summary judgment about whether old slaves

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<sup>190</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 257-60; Snell, Annals, pp. 135-37; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 153, 156.

or elderly farmworkers were better off in their twilight years, certain trade-offs and qualifications must be considered first. If the elderly farmworkers in question were workhouse inmates, who endured orderly but spartan conditions, prison-like restrictions on movement, and isolation from their children, grandchildren, and even spouses, many aged slaves were better off by comparison. The elderly slaves suffered similar restrictions on movement--the pass system--and their plantation's conditions were hardly luxurious. However, an elderly slave's chance of starving to death likely equaled a farmworker's. Laborers risked starvation after refusing to go into the workhouse and being denied a sufficient relief pension when they had no relatives nearby to help them (or other means of support), but then elderly slaves were really always in danger because of their owners' nearly absolute and arbitrary whim, since their support could suddenly vanish without warning. But IF most or all of the elderly slaves' descendants, relatives, and old friends had NOT been sold off or forced to move elsewhere when a master or mistress died or relocated far away, the quality of their human relationships when old would have been better than the agricultural laborers'. They would have died after by accompanied by familiar faces in their declining years, unlike the elderly farmworkers in workhouses, who were largely isolated from the surrounding society and who generally only associated with other workhouse inmates, assuming they were not further segregated by sex or other category. But even after the passage of the New Poor Law (1834), a significant number of elderly farmworkers still received outdoor relief because they were not deemed able-bodied. Additionally, in the period before 1834, back to 1750 and earlier, the elderly agricultural laborers normally were better off than the slaves, if they had received outdoor relief in the form of a small pension and stayed in the same cottage with the same sentimental sights and sounds they may have known for fifty years or more. The slave's level of security against starvation in old age likely differed little from that of most free workers in the United States, and fell beneath that of English farmworkers under the low-tech welfare state created by the Old Poor Law of Elizabeth (1601). The claim that the lot of slaves was preferable to the fate of agricultural workers in old age only largely rings true in the post-1834 period, and only to the extent that the elderly laborers ended up in workhouses, and the elderly slaves were not separated by sale or moving from most or all of their relatives.

#### A Slave's Childhood: Full of Fun or Full of Fear?

What quality of life did the children born into bondage have in their early years? How much work did the children of slaves do? Notoriously, the industrial revolution in England featured a heavy dependence on the labor of children (and women) in coal mines and textile mills, which because of the large numbers employed and the high intensity of work involved became

appalling. Since the masters and mistresses in the American South industriously worked at exploiting the labor of adult slaves, how did they treat slave children? Was the slave childhood full of fun and play until the early teen years, as an apologist for slavery might claim? Certainly "Uncle" Jim, cited below (p. 121), nostalgically recalled his youth. Or was it full of fear--fear of separation by sale from a mother or brother, fear of the overseer's lash landing on a father or sister, fear of a lack of food or clothing? Douglass abruptly realized his inferior status for the first time when he saw the fearful whipping that one of his aunts endured, complete with awful screaming and pleading. He hid, being afraid he would be next.<sup>191</sup> As noted above (pp. 96-102), the slaves' education was normally not just merely benignly neglected but ferociously attacked. The lives of slave children were filled, not by school, but by either play or work, since the first possibility was routinely overlooked when not totally forbidden.

Serious field labor or domestic service normally began around age twelve, which was later than what the children of many English agricultural laborers experienced. Kemble complained that "stout, hale, hearty girls and boys, of from age eight to twelve and older, are allowed to lounge about, filthy and idle" at her husband's rice island estate in Georgia. The only "work" they had was watching the infants and toddlers of the men and women in the fields. "Aunt" Sue, once owned by a Virginia master, said she really began work as a "missy-gal" (domestic servant) at age thirteen. Charles Lucas of Virginia told Drew he was "kept mostly at the quarters until age twelve or thirteen," where useful fieldwork was hardly possible. Olmsted found that the labor of younger slaves was so discounted by one planter/overseer in Virginia that they sometimes escaped his attention. He routinely failed to record them as inventory during Christmas time until age twelve or thirteen! On a large, long-established plantation not far from Savannah, Georgia, the paternalistic master did not commit slave children to regular fieldwork until age twelve, excepting some light duties such as bird scaring. In an extreme case, one master in Georgia "didn't put his boys into the field until they were 15 or 16 years old." Since this case arose in a lowland area dominated by the task system, however, the children still did work, but with their parents full time as a family unit growing crops on their own plots before reaching these ages. Illustrating the opposite extreme, although it was a fairly common age for many English farmworkers' sons to go to work, Henry Banks of Virginia told Drew he was put to work at age eight, at "ploughing, hoeing corn, and doing farm work generally." Booker T. Washington, born a slave in 1856, fared worse:

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<sup>191</sup>On child labor, see Thompson, Making, p. 349; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 24-26.

no period in my life devoted to play. From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour . . . During the period that I spent in slavery I was not large enough to be of much service, still I was occupied most of the time in cleaning the yards, carrying water to the men in the fields, or going to the mill, to which I used to take the corn, once a week, to be ground.

Pro-slavery apologist J.H. Hammond once boasted that no slave worked before age ten, most did not work until age twelve, and they did only light work for a few years after that. Genovese found Hammond to be reasonably accurate, maintaining that on average most did not work until age twelve, with some falling a few years to either side of this age. Certainly, this generalization by Fogel lacks broad support: slave children began working as early as three or four years old, nearly half worked by age seven, and almost all worked by age twelve. Since age twelve really appears to be a turning point in the lives of many slave children, Genovese's judgment is solidly based. At this age, they became a producer under labor discipline instead of a dependent largely excused from it, so the system's brutality first fully struck them under the watchful gaze of the overseer or master while working in the fields or (perhaps) big house.<sup>192</sup>

#### Pastimes for Slave Children

What did slave boys and girls do until around the age of twelve? Generally most played with abandon. In reminiscences tinged with nostalgia, aged freedman "Uncle" Jim negatively compared the higher levels of supervision children had when he was an old man to when he was young:

Dey let us play lak we want to in de ole days. We had a big yawd, an'a plantation so big we didn' know whar it begin an' whar it ended at. We run all over de place, an' jus' so we didn' break no laig, er somepun, an' git hurt, we's all right. Nobody hollerin' atter us all time. Nowadays, de white folks won't let de chillun git out dey sight. An' de cullud folks won't,

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<sup>192</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 121; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 94; Drew, Refugee, pp. 72, 105; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:131, 239; Morgan, "Ownership of Property by Slaves," pp. 402-3; Washington, Up from Slavery, p. 17; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 502, 505. Armstrong notes "adolescence" as the age for going into the fields. Old Massa's People, p. 92; See Peter Kolchin, "More Time on the Cross? An Evaluation of Robert William Fogel's Without Consent or Contract," Journal of Southern History 58 (Aug. 1992): 494.

neither. All time makin' 'em keep clean, an' wear good  
clo'es, an' stay in de house, an' not talk loud. . . .  
Pres'dent Lin'cum done sot de cullud folks free, but de  
chillun ain't got no freedom no mo'!

Freedwoman Louise Dugas similarly recalled that she and other slave children played around the sugar refinery on her master's sugar plantation: "Us chillun eat dat sugar 'twill our stummicks so sweet dey hurt! Go off an' play while, 'twill de feelin' leave, den eat some mo'!" Frederick Douglass, clearly not someone inclined towards nostalgic recollections of slavery, remembered his boyhood (up to age seven or eight) favorably about how much time he had to play, if not for food and clothing. "I was not old enough to work in the field, and there being little else than field work to do, I had a great deal of leisure time." He only needed to do a few light tasks like driving up the cows in the evening, cleaning the front yard, etc. While visiting an old-time lowland plantation near Savannah, Olmsted witnessed a surely common scene on large plantations throughout the South. Some twenty-seven slave children, mostly babies and toddlers with some eight or ten year olds tending the youngest ones, played on the steps or in the yard before the veranda of the big house. "Some of these, with two or three bigger ones, were singing and dancing about a fire that the had made on the ground. They were not at all disturbed or interrupted in their amusement by the presence of their owner and myself."<sup>193</sup> The consciousness of being a bondsman, as someone almost certainly doomed to a lifelong drudgery in the fields with small chances for advancement or intellectual enlightenment, simply was not fully grasped by young slaves. The traditional defense mechanisms of a subordinate class in wearing a mask before one's superiors, the guarding of every word spoken when "on stage" before the master or some other superior white, had only partially penetrated the consciousness of these young children playing before their owner in front of "the big house." A child develops these mechanisms only over time as parents teaches them about them, an issue which is returned to below (pp. 329-330). The children abruptly had to become more calculating with their words after being thrust into a productive role through fieldwork, domestic service, etc., round about age twelve, in order to avoid whippings or other punishments.

Slave children could play with the white master's children with little consciousness of racial differences until about six years of age or older. Harriet Jacobs remembered a scene where a white child played with her slave half-sister: "When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight." She did so, knowing what was

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<sup>193</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 78-79; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 43-44; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:239.

likely in store for "her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood" when grown-up, which was due to her beauty. Olmsted witnessed in Virginia on a train

[a] white girl, probably [the] daughter [of the white woman seated behind her], and a bright and very pretty mulatto girl. They [including an older black maid] all talked and laughed together; and the girls munched confectionary out of the same paper, with a familiarity and closeness of intimacy that would have been noticed with astonishment, if not with manifest displeasure, in almost any chance company at the North.<sup>194</sup>

Slave children played various formal games with one another and with the whites, such as marbles, hide-and-peek, hide-the-switch, horseshoe pitching, jump rope, and different versions of handball and stickball. They also played games representing their condition of bondage, such as auctioning one another off and whipping each other with switches. "Uncle" Smith Moore of Alabama reminisced about playing with the white boys when young, even riding colts and steer together. Kemble was greatly disturbed that Sally, her still very young daughter, would learn the wrong lessons from romping with slave playmates:

I was observing her to-day among her swarthy worshipers, for they follow her as such, and saw, with dismay, the universal eagerness with which they sprang to obey her little gestures of command. She said something about a swing, and in less than five minutes head man Frank had erected it for her, and a dozen young slaves were ready to swing little 'missis.' --, think of learning to rule despotically your fellow-creatures before the first lesson of self-government has been well spelt over!

Such deference, given to the master and mistress' offspring, soon inculcated the habit of command--or lording it over others--into their minds. A white child had to be seven to eleven years old before this habit seriously sank in, which is when the spark of reason ("concrete operations") first comes into life. Correspondingly, as the young slave passed age six, his parents taught him increasingly about the need to guard his words, especially as he may see such scenes as the overseer or master

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<sup>194</sup>Brent, Incidents, pp. 28-29; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:39. This incident illustrates again how whites, with blacks in bondage, willingly engaged in "race mixing" that would have appalled post-reconstruction segregationists. "When the negro is definitely a slave, it would seem that the alleged natural antipathy of the white race to associate with him is lost." (1:40).

overruling his parents' authority, or even whipping them, thus making obvious the need to protect them and his fellow slaves in general from the whites' punishments.<sup>195</sup>

#### Plantation Day Care: How Slave Childhood Was Different

The central role of what amounted to institutionalized day care on the plantations was perhaps the biggest difference between the childhood of a slave and his white counterparts, in England or America. Since masters drove both the mothers as well as fathers into the fields to work, older brothers and sisters while under the eye of one or more old women who had retired from field labor largely cared for the youngest children left behind. For much of the day, since older children (not necessarily of the same family) watched younger ones, the children were left on their own. The old women did not care for the young children so much as watch the older children do so, as Genovese notes: "By and large, the children raised each other." Kemble saw on all the plantations she visited and lived on that children under the age of twelve cared for all babies in arms. Eight or nine year olds got the job of carrying nursing babies to their mothers in the field, and then back to the quarters, watching them during the hours their mothers (and fathers) worked elsewhere. As Kemble observed, "The only supervision exercised over either babies or 'baby-minders' was that of the old woman left in charge of the Infirmary, where she made her abode all day long." Obviously, the adults exercised little control over the children, except when they committed some major offense, since this aged bondswoman probably had her hands full just watching over the infirmary's patients. Needless to say, since these children fundamentally needed adult supervision themselves, having eight year olds watch over young babies (who were not necessarily their siblings) made for day care of dubious quality. Freedwoman Ellen Betts of Louisiana remembered caring for children when she was still a child herself:

Some them babies so fat and big I had to tote the feet while 'nother gal tote the head. I was such a little one, 'bout seven or eight year old. The big folks leave some toddy for colic and crying and such, and I done drink the toddy and let the children have the milk. I don't know no better. Lawsy me, it a wonder I ain't the biggest drunker in this here country, counting all the toddy I done put in my young belly!<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 505-6 (games played), 510-11 (mask training); Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 69; Kemble, Journal, 57-58; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 378;

<sup>196</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 508; Kemble, Journal, 312-13. Note p. 31 also, where no adult was in sight supervising the

This woman admitted she was not the best babysitter when she herself was young. She surely provided poorer care than the babies' mothers or fathers would have; she certainly made for a worse role model for the babies under her supervision than nearly any adult present on the plantation would have. Almost inevitably parents have more self-interest and concern for their offspring than eight-year-old children who frequently were not even relatives of the babies in question. Such crude day care, made up of children watching babies under the loose supervision of one or more old women, resulted in less disciplined, more ignorant children than would have been the case had the slave women not been driven into the fields for a full workday, thus demonstrating that largely dissolving the sexual division of labor weakened the black family under slavery.

### Is All Work Bad for Children?

Is all work bad for children, slave and otherwise? Although child labor has gained much notoriety from the textile industry in England during the industrial revolution because of the intensity and length of the work day that the children endured, could not something more casual, especially when part of the family economy under the parents' direct supervision, be in fact valuable to children in building discipline and training them for their future roles in society? Looking at the institution of slavery through the eyes of a middle class Englishwoman, Kemble saw the idleness of the children as a problem, not an asset, since it increased the women's work load:

Every able-bodied woman is made the most of in being driven afield as long as, under all and any circumstances, she is able to wield a hoe; but on the other hand, stout, hale, hearty girls and boys, of from eight to twelve and older, are allowed to lounge about, filthy and idle, with no pretense of an occupation but what they call 'tend baby.'

This task actively took little of their day, since it mainly involved carrying the babies needing to be nursed to their mothers in the fields and back. Besides this, the older children basically left them to kick, roll, and rest about in or near their cabins, activities they often joined in themselves. If Kemble is believed, the slave children on her husband's estates were less creative in their pastimes than others elsewhere! If the lives of young slaves were empty of education, work, or training for an occupation, filling them instead with aimless leisure time was of "questionable benefit"--even though the

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babies or the baby-minders in a cabin; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 126.



children enjoyed it!--when taking a broader view.<sup>197</sup>

Being communally cared for, slave children were correspondingly fed communally as well, in a remarkably crude, animal-like manner. Throughout the South adults on plantations fed them as if they were pigs. Typically, one or more old women, having charge of the slave children's day care, placed food in a trough, and called the children to eat. After scrambling to show up first, they quickly dug in. Equipped only with their bare hands or perhaps a piece of wood, they gobbled down as much as they could grab in order to get the most. Frederick Douglass described the feedings he experienced when young on his master's Maryland plantation:

We [children] were not regularly allowanced. Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called mush. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush; some with oyster-shells, others with pieces of shingle, some with naked hands, and none with spoons. He that ate fastest got most; he that was strongest secured the best place; and few left the trough satisfied.

"Uncle" Abner in Arkansas, in a memory saturated with the nostalgia of a care-free childhood (or deference to the white interviewer), remembered a similar procedure:

Granny put a big trough on de po'ch, an' pile de food in. Lawsy! No food taste so good since! Cawn bread an' yams, an' hunks o' meat. Milk ter drink in de tin cups. Eat yo' stummick full, fight wid de res' o' de chillun erwhile, an' roll over on de flo' ter sleep!

It seems that, because of how he was raised, he still did not realize even as an old man how degrading trough feedings were. The crude communal feeding of slave children, to the extent it was done, obliterated the slave family's role in providing for their children directly. These feedings must have told slave children early in life that they were different from whites because no white child was fed out of a trough, as Genovese

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<sup>197</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 66, 121, 122, 312. She rebukes a Times [of London?] correspondent who noted on the estate he visited that "all the children below the age of twelve were unemployed." Olmsted had a similar perspective: "Until the negro is big enough for his labour to be plainly profitable to his master, he has no training to application or method, but only to idleness and carelessness." Cotton Kingdom, 1:131

notes.<sup>198</sup> The master and mistress, by feeding slaves this way, often treated them like the cows, pigs, and horses in their barns and sties, as their most valuable livestock, not as fellow human beings, not withstanding any possible contrary propaganda.

#### The Slave Childhood: Good, Bad, or Indifferent?

It is rather rash to make a summary judgment of the quality of life for millions of slave children. But generalizations, with the attendant qualifications and exclusions, are necessary so the past can be viewed more clearly than the jumbling confusion caused by listing a hundred or a thousand concrete particulars which most people soon forget. The childhood of slaves featured little work until the immediate pre-teen years, little or no education, and an abundance of play time. The plantation system minimized the role of parents in raising their children by obliterating the sexual division of labor in fieldwork, leaving the children largely to their own devices under the daily but loose supervision of one or more elderly "grannies" for much of the day. Communally feeding the children like animals was merely a product of the crude day care system established on the plantation. This system left the children unusually ignorant even for an uneducated class of people, since younger children had much less knowledge and fewer lessons from experience to pass on, and simply couldn't care as much or as well as the babies' mothers and fathers did. This childhood of idleness and ignorance made the transition to regular fieldwork all the more jarring, as the masters and mistresses, who may have earlier indulged their pickaninnies, thrust them out into the fields under the threat of the lash. As Olmsted observed: "The only whipping of slaves I have seen in Virginia, has been of these wild, lazy children, as they are being broke in to work. They cannot be depended upon a minute, out of sight."<sup>199</sup> The individual relationships a child has with his or her parents is the main determinate of the quality of a person's childhood. For the broader issue of the negative effects slavery had on inter-family relationships because of the master's or mistress' interfering in them for work discipline purposes, see below (pp. 167-176). Nevertheless, because of a lack of parental/adult supervision, the slave childhood may have been often enjoyable, at least until the reality of low caste status came fully crashing in mentally and emotionally somewhere between ages six and twelve (or when regular work began), but it made for unusually ill-disciplined, ignorant youngsters whose parents largely squeezed their civilizing function into Sundays or between when they worked and slept.

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<sup>198</sup>Douglass, Narrative, 44; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 56; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 507.

<sup>199</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:131.

### Hodge's Childhood: More Work, but More Worthwhile?

When comparing the lives of children of English agricultural workers and African-American slaves, two key differences stand out. First, the farmworkers' children had lives filled with more work, since their age of going to work was lower, as well as more formal education, especially as the nineteenth century drew on, compared to the slaves' offspring. These two activities inevitably cut back on the amount of playtime they had before around the age of twelve. Second, the farmworkers remained almost unaffected by the quality of life issues associated with how slavery subverted the slaves' parental authority and weakened family life because the master or mistress imposed work discipline by manipulating the family members' loyalties to one another by threatening sales or by whippings. Farmers could threaten to fire and blacklist their laborers, but since mostly only men made up the work force, especially in the south and outside the peak harvest and haymaking seasons, they simply lacked the power to interfere within the laborers' families to the same degree. Hodge's sons and daughters encountered far less fear and thus wore a thinner mask than the stereotypical "Sambo's" children. Due to the sexual division of labor and, increasingly, mass education, the children of farm laborers were also normally much better supervised during the day than young slaves. The ill-effects of the primitive day care, such as that found on Southern plantations, hardly existed in rural England, because Mrs. Hodge normally was found at home, especially in the south. As male unemployment rates rose towards the end of the eighteenth century on into the early nineteenth, women and children were pushed out of the agricultural labor market and into the home.<sup>200</sup> Although the children of farmworkers had less pleasure from playtime compared to the young slaves, their childhood likely was more worthwhile to the extent they received some formal education, some practical work experience (if the hours were not excessive, etc.), and were around adults more, including their parents, whose knowledge and experience in life made them much better role models than the eight year olds "minding baby" in the American South.

As demonstrated earlier in the section dealing with education (pp. 105-107), the children of agricultural laborers

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<sup>200</sup>Snell, Annals, 40, 45-46, 49-66, 309, 348-50. One of the questionnaires which parishes filled out as part of the inquiries into the Old Poor Law, BPP, 1834, vol. xxx, reported this process at work clearly. Selattyn, Shropshire reported: "Women and Children are not now so much employed as formerly, because labouring men are so plentiful, and their labour so cheap." Hugh Cunningham, "The Employment and Unemployment of Children in England c. 1680-1851," Past and Present, no. 126 (Feb. 1990), 135.

went to work normally a number of years before the children of slaves did, excepting in northern England where higher parental wages prevailed than in the south. Boys commonly began work at eight or nine years old in much of England. Caleb Bawcombe regularly began to help his father with the flock at age nine. But in relatively high-waged areas, children often only began to work regularly at age twelve, thirteen, or even fourteen. Since generally their first years at work were highly irregular and especially tied to seasonal labor demands, the age at which children first entered the labor force did not mean full time, year-around work began for them then. In Northamptonshire, country boys eight to ten years old worked for an estimated ten to twelve weeks a year at least for two shillings a week, which is hardly full-time employment. The authors of the 1867-68 Report found that work for children under age ten was "precarious, occasional, and fluctuating," but soon afterwards became increasingly regular, especially for boys. Working for the first time when he was nine, Arch said he scared crows for twelve months straight for several farmers. So he either had an unusual experience or he included the slack periods in between stints. Bird scaring was common, if seasonally irregular, work in Northampton for the youngest boys (seven or eight years old), giving them ten weeks of work (spring), three (summer), and three more (winter). In northern Northumberland, children rarely worked before age fourteen, except during summers, when eleven and twelve year olds did also. The normal July-November seasonal peak for agriculture provided much more work for children than than at other times. The Fens stood out as an exception, since there children worked with the winter turnip crop. This area was notorious for the gang system, which helped "to force children into premature employment." Yorkshire, without this system, had seasonal work for boys begin at age twelve.<sup>201</sup> These ages for going to work (excepting Arch's) likely reflect some tightening of the labor market in the late 1860s in agricultural areas, (a key ingredient in the brief successes of Arch's National Agricultural Labourers' Union in the early 1870s), which makes projecting them backwards more than two or three decades hazardous.

#### Just How Common Was Child Labor, Especially in the Countryside?

Earlier on, from the early eighteenth century until the 1840s, many contemporaries considered child unemployment and underemployment to be a problem, which puts in context Kemble's complaints about idle young slaves lounging about on her

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<sup>201</sup>Hudson, Shepherd's Life, 67; Horn, "Child Workers," 173; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, ix (generally), xiii (Northumberland), xxvi (Northampton), xvii (Fens), xx (Yorkshire); Arch, Joseph Arch, 29.

husbands' estates while the women were overworked.<sup>202</sup> Agriculture presented further problems for employing children, for unlike mining or cotton spinning, domestic industry or factories, their small size and strength unambiguously worked against them. H.H. Vaughn noted in 1843 that, unlike climbing chimneys or running carts of coal in mines with low ceilings, smallness was no advantage: "In most out-door work weight and strength are an advantage." They could not easily be employed full time. R.H. Greg, in a 1837 defense of the factory system that saw industry as the savior of idle children, even exaggeratedly claimed: "Boys are of little use, girls of still less, in agricultural countries, before the age of 18." Now this view plainly overstates the case. The infamous masters of the gang system found gathering children (and women) into groups to weed or harvest root crops a perfectly workable solution to the Fens's labor shortage. This area's farmers found the hiring of plowboys (ages eight to eleven), and children to weed (seven to eleven for boys, seven to thirteen for girls) financially wise. In Leicester, due to more land and root crops coming into cultivation, farmers employed children down to even six years old. Vaughn's claim still has its germ of truth, for children (like women) were in the "last hired, first fired" category; farmers normally viewed them as "a cheap and amenable labour force which could be used flexibly as the seasons dictated."<sup>203</sup> But as many local labor markets tightened in the 1860s into the early 1870s, they were increasingly hired even in the long-depressed agricultural counties of the south of England. Somewhat earlier, the 1851 census found very few five to nine year olds (2.0 percent of boys, 1.4 percent of girls) were employed, and still many ten to fourteen were not employed (36.6

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<sup>202</sup>Cunningham, "Employment of Children," strikingly covers this subject in depth, noting that many saw industry and mining as a solution to the problem of idle children burdening their parents. He concludes on p. 150: "It is usual to think of the school rescuing the working child from the factory; it is more plausible to think of it removing the idle child from the street. In 1871 when the number in the census 'at home' was still high, the Registrar-General suggested that school was the proper place for these 'unemployed children'." Also note Mary B. Rose, "Social Policy and Business; Parish Apprenticeship and the Early Factory System 1750-1834," Business History 12 (Oct. 1989):6-7; the statements by Defoe and Pitt in Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, 144. Thompson's critique of child labor, alluded to above (p. 119), when placed amidst such evidence for child unemployment, largely applies to those children employed in the factory and mining districts, where the labor intensity and length of the workday were undeniably extremely demanding.

<sup>203</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xvii, xviii; Horn, "Child Workers," 174.

percent for boys, 19.9 percent for girls). True, it seems these figures may not accurately capture much of the part-time or seasonal work children engaged in.<sup>204</sup> Still, they warn against extrapolating back the ages given for children going to work in the 1867-68 Report to periods of higher adult male unemployment in agricultural areas in the south of England, where industry generally was a weak competitor for labor.<sup>205</sup>

Traditionally, one important transitional point in the lives of laborers' children was when they were first hired into farm service under a yearly contract with a farmer who boarded them at his expense at his house. This career stage began generally around the age of fourteen; a later shift in status to day laborers developed after they married. Women went into service, not just men, especially in the more pastoral counties in the southwest as (especially) dairymaids. Fundamentally, "farm servant" was synonymous with being unmarried, and "day laborer" with being married. Service's chief benefit was to increase the young worker's economic security. No threat of applying for parish relief in the slack winter months hung over those so employed, especially in arable areas with their greater the seasonal peaks and dips in the demand for labor compared to pastoral areas. This practice imposed greater stability on the young, encouraging them to save for a delayed marriage, especially because the monetary wages normally were paid in one lump sum near the end of the service period. The farm servant also received a settlement in the parish he lived in, allowing him to apply for parish relief there, after a year's completed service. The experience of service followed by marriage and day labor gradually declined as the eighteenth century closed and the nineteenth opened in much of southern England, especially the southeastern grain-growing, arable region. What caused this decline? As population growth caused higher unemployment, farmers gained an incentive to hire labor only by the month, week, or even day. The poor laws' settlement provisions, which discouraged the yearly hirings that later gave farm servants the

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<sup>204</sup>Sonya O. Rose raises a similar point in connection with the household economy functioning in domestic industry, not agriculture. When children are working for their parents directly and not for an employer for wages, those gathering data for a census are more apt to overlook them. See Rose, "Proto-Industry, Women's Work and the Household Economy in the Transition to Industrial Capitalism," Journal of Family History 13 (1988):188.

<sup>205</sup>Cunningham, "Employment of Children," 140-47. Even the 1867-68 Report found, at least in the Thames Valley area, only relatively few employed under the age of ten and that only one eleventh under age eight were employed. Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xxix.

right to apply for relief in the parish of hire, were another factor. Then enclosure in combination with the poor laws in the south promoted population growth: Both encouraged early marriages since single people had trouble getting any relief, and discouraged saving, since the wages earned by now exclusively wage-dependent laborers were enough only for a bare subsistence. Farm service, as a key transition point of childhood into adulthood in the world of work, gradually became a relic of the past as the eighteenth century closed and the nineteenth century opened, except for northern areas and in certain occupations such as shepherd, where steady, year-around work was necessary. Increasingly, men and women (when employed at all) spent their whole careers as day laborers, without the farm servant stage in their work lives.<sup>206</sup>

### The Parental Push for Child Labor

Parents had a strong financial incentive to put their children to work as soon as possible, excepting when schooling was a serious option. Some resisted this course, perhaps remembering their own more-carefree childhood.<sup>207</sup> Working class parents typically faced the problem that during the family life cycle their income was at its lowest point when the number of young mouths needing to be filled was at its highest then when the children and their mother could do little work outside the home. When a family had (say) five children ages one, three, five, seven, and ten, the mother (granted the traditional sexual division of labor) had to watch the children and could not easily work at jobs outside the home. Children at these ages normally could not be put to work, except maybe the oldest. In agricultural districts without any domestic industry, often finding work for young children and their mothers was hard, even though their earnings were vitally necessary to put the family above the barest of subsistence levels. The New Poor Law fell hardest on families at this nadir point in their lives, because it eliminated the Speenhamland system's per child allowances paid by the parish. In areas of high unemployment, the natural tendency in England's patriarchal society was to minimize the unemployment rate for men at the cost of pushing women and children largely out of the labor market, excepting the peak summer months, which included harvest. Cobbett lamented the concentration of weaving and spinning in the north, which undermined the old domestic industries in the south, including weaving and spinning cloth just for household use, thus leaving women and children, especially girls, out of work (see above, pp.

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<sup>206</sup>Snell develops this theme at great length in Annals. Note especially pp. 67-103, 210-219, 322-327. See also Cunningham, "Employment of Children," 123, 148.

<sup>207</sup>Cunningham, "Employment of Children," 120.

53-54). As the sexual and regional divisions of labor increased in intensity, they helped to accentuate the natural burdens of the family life cycle for southern England's agricultural workers, excepting the few places where some domestic industry persisted. Because American slaves were guaranteed support in food and day care (at least in theory), they rarely had to face independently the pressures of the family life cycle, unlike English farmworkers. But the bondsmen's guaranteed support and security came at the cost of independence and freedom, since the financial constraints on childbearing were largely eliminated by necessarily being their masters' property. Hence, while the children of Hodge had to endure the tightening pressures of family life cycle when their parents had many offspring, which the children of slaves avoided, the farmworkers had much more independence and freedom of action, which slaves never enjoyed because of their unfree status.

The investigators working for the 1867-68 Report were acutely aware that they should avoid recommending an age limit on children working that would greatly burden the poor. They knew the parents' earnings, especially when even many men experienced irregular employment, were not enough for them to easily sacrifice the earnings of their children for higher considerations such as education. As Arch noted: "Children were employed till the law compelled them to be sent to school, and when the father was able to earn so little who can wonder at it? Boys, as soon as they were big enough, would be sent out into the fields, just as I was." In Cambridgeshire, low wages encouraged parents to put their children to work as early as possible. If a husband earned twelve shillings per week, ten shillings six pence went towards flour for bread, so children had to work in order for the family to survive. In Northampton, the loss of earnings by those aged eight to ten would only constitute some twenty shillings a year to the parents, but these were much higher elsewhere (four pounds seven shillings a year in Lincoln and Nottingham). In the Thames valley area (and surely elsewhere!), parents under high financial pressure naturally tended to neglect their children's education.<sup>208</sup> Ironically, the children of small freeholders in the Humber/Fens area had less education than did the hired laborers'. This curious result stemmed from the small farmers putting their children to work on their farm as soon as possible.<sup>209</sup> Because so many families lived

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<sup>208</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xi (recommend age), xxi (Cambridge), xxvi (Northampton), xxxi (Thames); Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 247.

<sup>209</sup>This evidence, but coming from the English side, backs Genovese's claim: "The southern slaveholders knew, too, that their slave children fared closer to the style of their own pampered children than to that of the children of



so close to bare subsistence, parents had to make their children work early in life, thus prioritizing the immediate earnings needed for financial survival over longterm improvement resulting from their children's education.

#### Day Care an Uncommon Experience

Due to the high unemployment rates for men and especially women in many agricultural areas, and the introduction of the scythe in arable districts, which required great strength to use, laborers' children rarely experienced any kind of day care. The sexual division of labor combined with high unemployment in southern England ensured children received plenty of adult supervision. Even when harvest came, and virtually everyone was put to work (at least as the mid-nineteenth-century mark is passed) in agricultural parishes, children might still directly assist their parents in harvest. The family often worked as a unit, with the husband using a bagging hook to cut down the stalks of wheat, the wife following closely behind, gathering and tying them together, with one or more children pulling and preparing the ties for their mother to use. Many times, after negotiating with the farmer for a given piece work rate, a number of families entered a field at once, each working on its one or two allotted acres. A family of farmworkers also worked together to raise food when given an allotment, since the children and mother would tend the plot during the day while the father was away working for some farmer. The rest of the family could hoe, weed, plant, and pick food from the plot themselves, giving them additional (self)employment and badly-needed food. Some children even used wheelbarrows to gather manure from the public roads for their family's plot! Then, in the evenings or early mornings, or otherwise when not working for others, the father would work on the family's allotment also. In this situation, the productive unit was the family. Clearly, a child's experience while working for his or her father or mother typically differs sharply from the impersonal supervision exercised by a farmer or one of his carters. It's unlikely that farmers treated even long-term farm servants or apprentices to husbandry nearly as well as their fathers and mothers would. Normally, day care made no appearance in the lives of laborers' children, at least when both the parents were alive. But one older child may end up watching younger brothers and sisters in areas where the women also worked in the fields routinely, such as southern Northumberland. Jeffries idyllically describes how the parents would lock out of

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nonslaveholders, who had to help their parents by doing rough work at early ages." Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 504. Again, Kemble and others raise an important point: Was keeping a child in idleness without an education better than putting them to work under their parents' eyes (as opposed to a textile mill owner owner's impersonal supervision and high intensity work regime)?

the cottage their older child, who then watched her younger brother or sister play out in the beautiful spring countryside. Day care--or paid baby-sitting--might make its appearance in an area such as Yorkshire, where the women also did field work regularly. Here, this practice's consequences produced various complaints: The women kept their cottages less tidily, they neglected their families, they gave opiates to their children, and they paid "an old woman" daily so much to care or them!<sup>210</sup> (Talk about shades of nearby industrial Manchester!) The English agricultural workers' family still was much more apt to be an active, productive economic unit than the black slaves' family (excepting some in lowland task system areas) because the latter was much more subordinated to the productive process than the former as masters mostly eliminated the sexual division of labor and created a greater average division of the family unit spatially during the workday by separating mothers and their children more commonly than the farmers in England did with the laborers.

#### Young Hodge at Play

Although the life of young Hodge was more filled with work and especially education than a young slave's, the former still had time to play. Getting themselves thoroughly dirty, younger pre-school children might romp about outside their parents' cottage in the fields or perhaps in a nearby farmyard carefully out of sight of the adults. Maybe the oldest sister would watch her younger siblings play around the ditches and hedges, gathering flowers or even acorns which the farmers would pay for. The habit of the parents, if both were gone, was to lock their children outside. Less innocently, two boys in the village of Ridgley that Somerville described were keen at raiding nests, following clearly in their poaching fathers' footsteps. Caleb Bawcombe managed to combine with play routinely while watching his father's flock. He and his brother were playing "on the turf with nine morris-men and the shepherd's puzzle," when their mother suddenly appeared one time. While engaged in crow-scaring, Arch sometimes mischievously looked for trouble by bird-nesting, trespassing, etc., in more idle moments. He favorably compared the outdoors environment he enjoyed to what children in the mines endured: "And I had the trees to look at and climb, hedgerow flowers to pluck, and streams to wade in." Although his mother's home schooling competed against play, he did not mind this regime. As a teenager, working as a stable boy for what were good wages for his age and county, he continued to study, seeing how limited the opportunities for amusement in his village

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<sup>210</sup>See Morgan, Harvesters, pp. 23-27, 98; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 211, 222, 225, 226, 227; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xiv (Northumberland), xxiv (Yorkshire); Jeffries, Hodge, 2:73-74.

were:

The village lad had two kinds of recreation open to him. He could take his choice between lounging and boozing in the public house, or playing bowls in the bowling alley. That was all. There were no cricket or football clubs, no Forester's meetings.<sup>211</sup>

The first option led into the wasteful, profligate way of life the middle classes, local farmers, and gentry routinely condemned, which he did not find tempting. Children, as always, will find some way to play, but on balance the farmworkers' offspring had more work, more schooling, and less playtime than the slave's children.

#### The Relative Quality of Life for the Children of Slaves and Laborers

Excepting how masters could subvert parental authority by whippings, sales, etc., and the fear inspired by the same, slaves until about age twelve typically had a more carefree childhood than agricultural workers. Although young farmworkers worked rather irregularly before age twelve or more, they still did more work at younger ages than most young slaves. Furthermore, especially as the nineteenth century advanced, education increasingly became a reality for the offspring of laborers, which meant the school often filled days without work, at least outside agriculture's summer/harvest seasonal peaks. So while young slaves had more playtime, the children of laborers were much more likely to gain some education, as limited or crude as it may have been, and to receive what arguably was useful work experience. Unlike the contemporary United States, where society is wealthy enough to guarantee thirteen years of school to its entire population, the pressures of bare subsistence in the farmworkers' world often made child labor necessary for a family to survive independently as an economic unit. Slave children also were much more likely to experience day care, at least on the plantations, where the "baby minders" were still young children themselves, often unrelated to their young charges. By contrast, young Hodge enjoyed--a perhaps problematic term here--much more adult supervision, since women had largely been driven out of the agricultural labor force outside of seasonal peaks by the time the nineteenth century began, limiting them to a more strictly defined homemaking role. The high adult male unemployment rates, at least in southern England, indirectly ensured their children received more supervision from their

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<sup>211</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 2:65-67, 73-74. Somerville portrayed laborers' children as picking flowers also. Whistler, pp. 281-82; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, p. 68; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 27, 28, 33-34.

parents, whose greater experience in life made them better role models. Day care was rare, at least in the south, although an older sister (likely) may have watched younger siblings. While school increasingly did split up the laborers' family during the day, as in contemporary society, they still had adult care and attention. At least at harvest, the laborers' family also sometimes did function as a unit, instead of being separated during the day, unlike for the bondsmen. So outside of the kind of frightening experiences Douglass tells, the slave's childhood likely was more enjoyable to about age twelve on average, but the farmworker's youth likely was more worthwhile, benefiting from the advantages of more education, more family and adult direction and care, and (arguably, if not especially intense or long in hours) useful work experience.

### Religion--A Source for Enlightenment, Social Unity, and Social Conflict

To the skeptically inclined, the juxtaposition of religion and the quality of life initially may appear peculiar, but consider the reasons for relating the two. Religion, especially for those peoples who are illiterate or semi-literate, is the main source of an integrated view of existence, by bringing a man's or woman's mind above the routine material cares of life. It attempts to explain the unknown, since the (ostensible) purpose of revelation is to bring humanity knowledge that is necessary to live the right kind of life in the here-and-now, but which is unobtainable by reason, philosophy, or science, or cannot be with the same degree of certainty. It is the main source of morality and behavioral restraint above the level of fear of authority or what the neighbors think. As long as the Thrasymachuses of the world would define justice, and morality in general, as "nothing else than the advantage of the stronger," religion's specific precepts and commandments will serve as the main restraining force on people's actions since philosophy is generally perceived as having failed to provide a satisfactory natural law theory as the foundation of right and wrong.<sup>212</sup> Religion also supplies a purpose for an individual's decisions about values in this life through asserting they affect his fate in the afterlife. It elevates the concerns of believers above those which also preoccupy animals to eternal verities which have to be reckoned with, granted the truth of the religion in question.

Organized religion, although first and foremost it concerns man's relationship with God (or the gods), also brings people

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<sup>212</sup>Plato, Republic, 338c; The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters, Bollingen Series LXXI, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. of Republic, Paul Shorey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 588.

together in order to worship the divine, through rituals, assemblies, pageants, processions, etc. Here religion becomes contested terrain between a society's elite and subordinate classes, since nominally all humans have to be concerned about what the supernatural powers-that-be desire of them. Both the rich and poor are destined for the same fate--the grave. Religion can serve instrumental purposes for this present life as well, which the elite may twist to serve their own purposes. When it comes to an upper class imposing hegemony and a subordinate class resisting it, religion is often a central battle ground. The powerholding class in society can bend religion into a system of social control to benefit itself even as the subordinate class may manipulate the same religion to justify its resistance, despite a mutually shared faith may bring the two sides together into the same social settings to serve the same God or gods. Religion can serve simultaneously as a site of social unity and as a setting for social conflict since it provides people with a collective activity outside of work, as well as a means of raising their minds above the purely material to take a broader, more philosophical view of life. It reminds its adherents that something other than self-interest should guide their actions in life.<sup>213</sup>

Christianity, being the religion shared by both the English farmworkers and converted African-American slaves, contains elements of use to both sides in their power struggle, even as it serves as a means of unifying each side in a common concern about God's purpose for their lives. Christianity emphasizes the need to obey authority, of obeying the powers that be as ordained of God (Rom. 13:1-7), of rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's (Matt. 22:21), and to keep the command of the king (Eccl. 8:2). It tells slaves to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5-6; Col. 3:22), and not to steal from them (Titus 2:9-10). On the other hand, the state is not the ultimate authority for Christians. It presented a theoretical threat to the totalitarians of this past century who wanted the whole heart, mind, and soul of all the citizens of whatever nation they ruled over. Thus, after the Sanhedrin told them to stop preaching about Christ and the resurrection, Peter and the other apostles defiantly replied (Acts 5:29): "We must obey God rather than men." Similarly, during the previous run-in with the Sanhedrin, Peter and John proclaimed (Acts 4:19): "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge." Christianity, even as it tells those of a subordinate class to obey their superiors in this world, it humbles the elite philosophically by saying all persons are equal in His sight (Gal. 3:28): "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

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<sup>213</sup>cf. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 161-68. Of course, this analysis assumes the elite and masses of the same society mostly share the same religion.

slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." "For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave" (I Cor. 7:22). It condemns giving a rich man precedence in the assembly of believers (James 2:1-4). It states the rich are not favored in God's sight, at least if they are covetous of their property or oppress the poor (James 5:1-6; Matt. 19:21-26; Amos 4:1-3; Isa. 3:14-15; Eze. 18:12-13; 22:29). Furthermore, and perhaps most ominously for slaveholders, Jehovah is portrayed as the freer of the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 6:5-7, 20:2). Hence, the Bible presents material susceptible to manipulation by an elite bent on exploiting a subordinate class and for a subordinate class to condemn and--if it denies that Christianity teaches pacifism--resist the powerful. Although it makes for poor hermeneutics and bad systematic theology, each side is apt to use the parts of the raw material of revelation that favors its cause, while conveniently ignoring that which does not.

#### Slave Religion--The Slaveholders' Options on Christianizing the Slaves

Because Christianity contains teachings that an elite may not always find to its liking, it can become divided over whether inculcating Biblical precepts to a subordinate class is in its material self-interest. Of course, the elite's strongly religiously motivated members will evangelize heedless of any negative consequences to their position in this life,<sup>214</sup> but normally altruistic idealism cannot be counted on to predominate in the upper class. The elite faces here the same problem it does with disseminating or denying education to the masses. A society's rulers have to choose between two models of social control: skewed knowledge or ignorance (see above, pp. 107-9). Christianity presents a similar problem theoretically, for those, like Napoleon, who approach religion as an instrument for controlling other people's behavior. On the one hand, after noting all the useful statements about obedience not just to God, but to secular authorities in the Bible, slaveholders could see converting their slaves as advancing their self-interest, over and above any otherworldly benefits. A Machiavellian analysis could conclude teaching them Christianity was valuable. Having been written in an ancient world full of slaves, yet not condemning slavery as an institution, the Bible (usefully) tells slaves to obey their masters. After all, Rome was full of slaves, many ancient Christians were slaves, and some Christians

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<sup>214</sup>Joseph, Hugh, and Jonathan Bryan, all of a wealthy colonial planter family in South Carolina, were such idealists. See Alan Gallay, "The Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism: George Whitefield, the Bryan Family, and the Great Awakening in the South," Journal of Southern History 53 (Aug. 1987): 383-88.

even had slaves (e.g., Philemon) Harriet Jacobs, although overstating the impetus of Turner's rebellion in promoting evangelism among the slaves, expressed this option forcefully: "After the alarm caused by Nat Turner's insurrection had subsided, the slaveholders came to the conclusion that it would be well to give the slaves enough of religious instruction to keep them from murdering their masters."<sup>215</sup> On the other hand, the Bible contains many statements about the duties of the rich and powerful towards the poor and weak which an oppressed class could forge into useful ideological weapons for hammering their superiors with. The Old Testament's description of God using Moses to free the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt surely resonated with American slaves. The New Testament's proclamations about being free in Christ (re: II Cor. 3:17-18; Luke 4:17-21) or all being equal in God's sight (Col. 3:11) were potentially troublesome to slaveholders.<sup>216</sup> Then, pragmatically speaking, large numbers of slaves gathered together for religious assemblies may prove hard to control.

American slaveholders' mainstream response eventually made a compromise between the two models: They evangelized their slaves, but presented a perverted Protestant Christianity which overbearingly emphasized the need to obey while purposely neglecting those parts of the Christian message that might be, well, ah, dangerous. Conveniently cast aside was the Reformation's message that each man must be able to read and interpret the Bible himself as God's Spirit directed him. Evangelization based on selective exegesis was easily carried out, with whatever not serving the slaveowners' interests edited out, for since they kept their slave population largely illiterate and bookless, the bondsmen were mostly incapable of checking on their masters and mistresses' teachings by opening and reading the Bible for themselves.<sup>217</sup>

#### The Earlier Practice of Not Evangelizing the Slaves

Earlier in Southern slavery's history, the other model--of leaving their slaves in heathenish ignorance--slaveholders had considered, even practiced. Some still advocated this approach

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<sup>215</sup>Brent, Incidents, p. 69.

<sup>216</sup>See Winthrop D. Jordan, The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 91-92.

<sup>217</sup>Kemble mentions the two models. Journal, pp. 71-72, 131. Freedwoman Jenny Proctor of Alabama for a while believed she had no afterlife based upon what one white preached to blacks on her plantation because "we didn't have no way finding out different. We didn't see no Bibles." Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 91.

in the 1830s, such as a former long-time overseer turned planter himself that Kemble's husband had employed. Conversions of Africans when they first arrived in the New World have been argued to be exceedingly rare; even their children's religious status was normally ignored. While visiting South Carolina, evangelist George Whitefield, one of the foremost leaders of the Great Awakening, pointedly condemned the American South for treating its slaves like animals. He urged their Christianization and improved conditions for them. The Great Awakening led slaveholders to abandon the previous policy of neglecting to convert their slaves. As Gallay observes: "Most planters feared their bondpeople would move from religious training to religious rights and perhaps on to civil or to political rights." They feared emancipations would follow conversions: "The few slaves who were permitted religious instruction were required to make a formal statement in which they denied any expectation that baptism would lead to freedom." When the legal status of slaves in early colonial Virginia was still unclear, before the General Assembly passed a law in 1667 that specifically denied that baptizing slaves would liberate them, some gained freedom for this reason. The Great Awakening changed such attitudes significantly, because the spirit of revivalism wants everyone saved now. The itinerate preachers found persuading both lost black and white sheep to repent equally fine works. So from the 1740s on much greater efforts were made to convert the slaves to Christianity, as slaveholders gradually abandoned the policy of leaving slaves pagan to preserve distinctions between whites and Africans which had helped justify the enslavement of the black man.<sup>218</sup>

#### The Gospel of Obedience Distorts the Christianity Given to the Slaves

As the slaves came into the churches, the slaveholding class labored mightily to ensure the slaves learned the message of obedience. Clergymen throughout the South had to teach this distorted "Gospel" or else risk losing the slaveholders' support for evangelizing their slaves.<sup>219</sup> One pamphlet on the subject of evangelizing the slaves that Kemble found evidently strongly

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<sup>218</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 131; Gallay, "Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism," 380-81. See also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 185; Paul C. Palmer, "Servant into Slave: The Evolution of the Legal Status of the Negro Laborer in Colonial Virginia," South Atlantic Quarterly 65 (summer 1966):360-61; Jordan, White Man's Burden, pp. 89, 97, 98.

<sup>219</sup>Note the local clergy's timidity with the one-time overseer of Kemble's husband's estates, who opposed church gatherings off or even on the plantations he managed. Kemble, Journal, pp. 267-68.



stressed teaching the lesson of obedience. The bondsmen's newfound religion was not to be allowed to escalate the difficulties of imposing work discipline on them. Slaves repeatedly complained about how often white preachers told them to obey their owners from the pulpit. Lucretia Alexander, once a slave in both Mississippi and Arkansas, summarized a typical sermon:

The preach came and preached to them in their quarters. He'd just say, 'Serve your masters. Don't steal your master's turkey. Don't steal your master's chickens. Don't steal your master's hogs. Don't steal your master's meat. Do whatsoever your master tells you to do.' Same old thing all the time.

Another slave woman refused to go to church, so she got locked up in her master's seedhouse. She complained:

No, I don't want to hear that same old sermon: 'Stay out of your missus' and master's henhouse. Don't steal your missus' and master's chickens. Stay out of your missus' and master's smokehouse. Don't steal your missus' and master's hams.' I don't steal nothing. Don't need to tell me not to.

Using Ephesians 6:5 as his text, Jacobs heard Anglican clergyman Pike teach what must have been a stereotypical message telling slaves to obey their masters and to fear God if they slacked off at work, lied, stole, or otherwise injured their masters' interests. Evidently, his lesson for a slave audience remained largely unchanged from week to week: "I went to the next Sabbath evening, and heard pretty much a repetition of the last discourse." Some black preachers gave similar messages, because either white supervision restricted their choice of material or they "sold out" to the whites. Masters and mistresses in the South clearly wanted a clipped form of Christianity to serve as an ideological underpinning to slavery through emphasizing the message of obedience although the slaves resisted it.<sup>220</sup>

By making Christianity carry out their instrumental purposes, the slaveholders brought a bent, distorted gospel to the slaves. The Christian message lost much of its authenticity when masters and mistresses harnessed it for imposing work discipline on their bondsmen. Freedman Charley Williams of Louisiana said he largely missed the core of its teachings because what he heard was so twisted:

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<sup>220</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 91; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 25-26; Brent, Incidents, pp. 70-71; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 225-27; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 84-89; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 207-9.

Course I loves my Lord Jesus same as anybody, but you see I never hear much about Him until I was grown, and it seem like you got to hear about religion when you little to soak it up and put much by it. Nobody could read the Bible when I was a boy . . . We had meetings sometimes, but the nigger preacher just talk about being a good nigger and "doing to please the Master," and I always thought he meant to please Old Master, and I always wanted to do that anyways.

This black preacher may have taught what pleased those wielding nearly absolute power over him. But his probable inability to read the Bible also handicapped him from bringing the full Christian message to his flock. For he could not teach what he did not know, and if he had not heard the message of equality in God's sight, he could not easily teach it knowledgeably to others, assuming he had enough bravery to do so. Lunsford Lane, a North Carolina freedman turned abolitionist speaker in the North, said he had heard certain New Testament texts about slaves obeying their masters routinely recited in sermons intended for audiences held in bondage. While observing these sermons telling the slaves to obey had "much that was excellent" mixed into them, the message of obedience still strongly remained present. Sometimes their propaganda paid off: A number found theft declined and discipline improved as slaves "got religion."<sup>221</sup> At least for this life, the slaves benefited less clearly. They were told to obey without hearing much the corresponding message about their masters' obligations to them or about master and slave having equality in Christ. This mangled form of Christianity also made the true experience of conversion more difficult. While many, perhaps most slaves may have received the general evangelical Protestant Christian message of "repent and accept Christ as Savior to gain eternal life," a minor point of the Christian religion--slaves must obey their masters--was artificially exalted into the pride of place to suit the slaveholders' interests. The time and effort spent teaching this point caused other, more important doctrines to be left gathering dust, either partly or completely pushed aside. Being an artificial construction that served the ruling class's instrumental purposes, the Christianity that the white masters and mistresses and the preachers under their influence bequeathed to their slaves often lacked an essential authenticity and integrity.

#### The Slaves Add to the Religion Given Them by their Masters and

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<sup>221</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 118; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 14-15 (Lunsford Lane); Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 158-59; Robert Starobin, "Disciplining Industrial Slaves in the Old South," Journal of Negro History, 53 (April 1968): 113.

## Mistresses

The slaves clearly received a watered-down faith from their masters and mistresses, one which was transparently bent towards serving their obvious material interests. The slaves filled the vacuum in their religious lives by drawing upon their own cultural heritage from Africa. The Catholic Christianity of the Indians in Latin America was influenced by their ancestors' pre-Columbian religious practices; likewise, the Protestant Christianity of the slaves took on traditions and a character partly derived from the traditional animist religions of Africa, thus producing an analogous syncretistic combine.<sup>222</sup> But because the slaves were a minority even in their region, and further imports of slaves directly from Africa had been cut off since 1808 (excepting those smuggled in), the Africanisms found in African-American religious beliefs were proportionately much fewer than those showing up in the Caribbean or Brazil.<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, such influences showed up in the United States. The beliefs of Charles Ball's African-born grandfather were full of Africanisms. His rather eccentric religious beliefs certainly look to be Islamic, perhaps in a Sufi-influenced version because formal doctrine was de-emphasized. A detectable strain of Deism seems to appear here also, which may point to the abolitionist editor's own beliefs influencing his interpretation of what he heard Ball say about his grandfather. His case was exceptional, because he expressed these beliefs without combining them with the faith of the slaveholders. The testimony of freedman William Adams of Texas exemplifies the much more usual syncretism, in which the Christian belief in casting out demons subsumes a voodoo-like belief in hexes and preventing them. When a child he

hear[d] them [his mother and other adults] talk about what happens to folks 'cause a spell was put on them. The old folks in them days knows more about the signs that the Lord uses to reveal His laws than the folks of today. It am also true of the colored folks in Africa,

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<sup>222</sup>Of course, Catholicism itself (especially) is a syncretistic combine of the Roman Empire's religions, Jewish beliefs, and doctrines specifically originating from Jesus of Nazareth and Paul. Easter and Christmas were substituted for the Passover and Day of Atonement, Sunday for Saturday, the saints and Mary replaced the gods of the pantheon concerning each having specific control of various natural processes affecting humanity, etc.

<sup>223</sup>For Brazil, note Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 180. In some areas where organized Voodoo emerged, such as southern Louisiana, the African side of the combine was fully dominant, or even all that was present. Blassingame, Slave Community, 41; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 217, 220.

they native land. Some of the folks laughs at their beliefs and says it am superstition, but it am knowing how the Lord reveals His laws.

Adams's case demonstrates how the slave conjurors' practices and powers coexisted with Christian beliefs within the same individuals. These conjurors' gave the slaves an independent source of religious authority from what white preachers or their masters and mistresses believed. Berry and Blassingame see the frenzied yelling, "the ring shout, the call-and-response pattern of sermons, prayers and songs, the unrestrained joy, and [the] predilection for total immersion" as derived from African rituals and customs.<sup>224</sup> The slaves combined beliefs from their own African religious tradition with the twisted Protestant faith of their owners to help explain or mentally cope with slavery's privations.<sup>225</sup>

#### No Surprise: The Slaves' Lack of Religion Freedom

Turning from the content of the slaves' beliefs to how much freedom they had to practice them, often slaveholders and overseers restricted or even simply prohibited the slaves from expressing their faith.<sup>226</sup> All the stories about the slaves' receiving punishment for expressing their religious beliefs shows the master class was less interested in the souls of their bondsmen and more concerned about keeping control than their propaganda proclaimed. Planter Barrow, never one much for sending his slaves off plantation, once reluctantly let them leave for religious reasons: "gave the negros permission to go

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<sup>224</sup>Ball, Slavery in the United States, 21-24; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 36-38; Mary F. Berry and John W. Blassingame, "Africa, Slavery, & the Roots of Contemporary Black Culture," Massachusetts Review, autumn 1977, 515. They overstate their case because the poor whites at services, especially revival meetings, had an emotional interpretation of religion as well, coming from the Protestant belief in being "born again." The emotional services held by Methodists and others among the English working class shows American whites need not have copied the blacks in this regard. Note Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 376-77; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:265-71; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 239-40.

<sup>225</sup>Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 371, 374-76; William C. Suttles, Jr., "African Religious Survivals as Factors in American Slave Revolts," Journal of Negro History 56 (April 1971):96-100, 102; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 182-83.

<sup>226</sup>Olmsted maintained that the generality of preaching in the South to the slaves had been overstated, that many masters still discouraged it. Cotton Kingdom, 2:213-14.

over to Robt. H. Barrows to preaching, . . . being near & leaving home but seldom, granted them permission."<sup>227</sup> Barrow's slaves also might have had meetings without his permission. As a slave in Virginia, William Troy had been at many illicit meetings of his church. Despite their precautions, such as holding gatherings at night, patrols sometimes did break them up. David West, from Virginia, reported a similar experience: Patrollers whipped those caught at or after night services. Eli Johnson was threatened with no less than 500 lashes for leading prayer meetings on Saturday nights. An eloquent plea before his master and mistress allowed him to evade punishment. Note how his request, which contains an apparent allusion to Ps. 22:17, implicitly appealed to an Authority above his owner's:

In the name of God why is it, that I can't after working hard all the week, have a meeting on Saturday evening? I am sent for to receive five hundred lashes for trying to serve God. I'll suffer the flesh to be dragged off my bones, until my bones stare my enemy in the face, for the sake of my blessed Redeemer.

Slaveholders opposed unsupervised meetings, held at suspicious hours, watched by no whites, because their slaves might be castigating them behind their backs--or planning something worse. At least, they thought, their slaves should be resting for work the next day if the meeting was otherwise innocuous. Even at meetings which slaveholders allowed, patrollers (or other white observers, such as the master or overseer) stood present. Indeed, throughout the South that was legally required. Mrs. Colman Freeman was born free, but witnessed patrollers whipping slaves who attended such meetings without passes when they did not escape first by running into a nearby river! "Uncle" Bob of South Carolina had a master who broke up meetings by using his whip. The slaves' solution? They went to a outlying cabin, turned up-side-down a washing kettle propped up off the floor by boards, and used it to muffle the sound of singing and praying as they gathered around it!<sup>228</sup> Clearly, the master class had little interest in giving their bondsmen the freedom to meet for services, especially from those they or their representatives were absent.

But slaveholders restricted other religious activities by

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<sup>227</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, 198. One overseer kept the slaves in his care from going to a nearby church because it would join together slaves from different plantations. This left them with services just once a month. Kemble, Journal, 220.

<sup>228</sup>Drew, Refugee, 89 (West), 331 (Freeman), 353-54 (Troy) 383-84 (Johnson); Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 231; Cf. Cato of Alabama's testimony in Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 86.

their slaves besides meetings. In an exchange reminiscent of Peter's with the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19), one slave named Adam replied to the overseer threatening him with a hundred lashes when he was about to be baptized: "I have but two masters to serve, my earthly and my heavenly master, and I can mind nobody else." The Christian doctrine that obedience is owed to God above all earthly powers' contrary commands here definitely bears fruit! Kemble knew her husband's overseer whipped one man for allowing his wife to be baptized. Illustrating how much the slaveholders denied their own Protestant heritage when attacking their slaves' right to read, Jacobs noted: "There are thousands, who, like good uncle Fred [she was illegally teaching him how to read], are thirsting for the water of life; but the law forbids it, and the churches withhold it. They send the Bible to heathen abroad, and neglect the heathen at home."<sup>229</sup> For after the slaves received knowledge of Christianity, what they decided to do with its content inevitably did not always please their owners, who frequently ended up restricting how their human chattels expressed their newfound faith.

#### The Slaves Try to Unbend a Bent Christianity

Although the slaveholders upheld Christianity at least nominally, they knew the full free exercise of religion by their bondsmen could threaten their material interests. They wanted the benefits of teaching the slaves to obey by using their religion's tenets, but without the drawbacks. Unfortunately for their propaganda purposes, since Christianity was a "package deal," they could not go picking and choosing which doctrines they wished the slaves to hear when the latter had strong motives to seek those being withheld. Mary Reynolds of Louisiana never went to church when she was a slave. Prayer meetings had to be quietly conducted because her owner's black driver threatened his fellow slaves with whippings when he heard them. Even under such restrictions, she still heard the Christian doctrine that all people are equal in God's sight, albeit in a somewhat mangled form: "But some the old niggers tell us we got to [still] pray to God [so] that He don't think different of the blacks and the whites." Some whites really did try to deny this truth, by saying the slaves were not even human! One white preached this to the slaves, as freedwoman Jenny Proctor of Alabama remembered:

Now I takes my text, which is, Nigger obey your master and your mistress, 'cause what you git from them here in this world am all you ever going to git, 'cause you just like the hogs and the other animals--when you dies you ain't no more, after you been throwed in that hole.

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<sup>229</sup>Drew, Refugee, 332; Kemble, Journal, 167-68; Brent, Incidents, 75.

Attempts to shield the slaves from the implications of objectionable doctrines by teaching them a bastardized Christianity were inevitably doomed to failure. Once the genie is out of the bottle, stuffing him back in is impossible.<sup>230</sup> The slaves could use Christian teachings their masters disliked hearing, such as by demanding recognition that they were brothers in Christ (i.e., fellow human beings). The master class's attempts at religious censorship inevitably partially failed, undermined by literate slaves, idealistic whites, etc. When masters and mistresses revealed that a Higher Authority stood above their own, they made a righteous defiance available to the bondsmen which was based upon the very religion that their owners taught them, something which had potentially dangerous repercussions.

Despite the hazards, most masters and mistresses pressed forward with the project of evangelizing their slaves, especially in the generation or two before the Civil War (1800-60). They often consented to having their slaves join them at services, which demonstrates once again whites accepted a certain degree of integration under slavery, so long as they kept the blacks in utter subjection. This principle was perfectly illustrated by the slaves' receiving communion last, after the whites had, at an integrated service. Freedwoman Nicey Kinney of Georgia saw her master and mistress as "sure believ[ing] in the church and in living for God." They all together routinely attended on different weeks three different churches. Mistress Sallie Chaney made sure her slaves did no work on Sunday, and that they went to church services, which were held on her Arkansas plantation. Bennet Barrow thought a planter neighbor of his "verry foolish in relation to religion among his negroes," evidently because he was always trying to convert them and so forth. The Bryans of colonial South Carolina were totally determined to preach to and teach to their slaves and those on neighboring plantations in large emotional meetings. As a result, a committee of the colonial legislature condemned the Bryans' activities and a grand jury indicted them. Jonathan Bryan even wanted to build a "negro school"! Olmsted noted that Bishop Polk of Louisiana worked strenuously not just to convert all 400 of his slaves, but he performed their marriages and baptisms by the standard rites.<sup>231</sup> At least some masters and mistresses saw converting their slaves to Christianity as a religious duty, without always having the

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<sup>230</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 91, 121; Kemble uses a similar analogy. Journal, 90.

<sup>231</sup>Kemble, Journal, 73 (segregated communion), 150 (a largely segregated church); Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 81 (Kinney), 147 (Chaney). See also 62, 143, 145-46; Davis, Plantation Life, 184; Gallay, "Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism," 386-87; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:213.

ulterior instrumental purpose of using their faith as an ideology that taught obedience, since they went beyond the bare minimums required.

### Slave Preachers: Their Role and Power

The white elites always eyed suspiciously the slave preachers, who made up for a general lack of education through lung power and sheer emotionalism when conducting meetings. They had about the highest position a slave in the eyes of fellow slaves could attain without gaining it based on his master's property or authority.<sup>232</sup> Masters had good reasons for their mistrust. The preachers could start an outright revolt, like Nat Turner. Failing to do something that deadly and spectacular, they might serve as public questioners of the slaveholder regime.<sup>233</sup> They could reveal and expound doctrines of Christianity the masters would prefer to be swept to some corner or under the rug. They could become an alternative source of power on the plantation, like the conjurers in their own sphere, because God was seen as authorizing their role. Because of the Protestant teaching of the priesthood of all believers, which allowed even poor, illiterate whites to preach, slaveholders knew that totally eliminating the slave preachers was not a realistic possibility granted the religious milieu they moved in. The general policy became more one of regulation than elimination, although their owners could censor them or sell them off. Barrow rued the day he let his slaves preach, writing he would opt for simple elimination: "Gave negros permission to preach shall never do it again too much rascallity carried on."<sup>234</sup> Despite policies like Barrow's, slave preachers often led emotional services, full of singing, moving, and shouting in a call and response pattern. Since they were normally under suspicion and/or direct white supervision, excepting illicit night gatherings, they frequently had to preach "authorized" sermons about obeying their masters and stealing none of their property, or at least neutral ones not obviously susceptible to interpretations that readily undermined the slaveholders' regime ideologically. Some apparently even "sold out" completely for material benefits and respect from the white authorities, as Blassingame maintains, or they even honestly believed slaves had

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<sup>232</sup>Even a capable and conscientious white pastor could also get awesome respect from his black flock: Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:226.

<sup>233</sup>Olmsted described the effects of having a respected position on their character. Cotton Kingdom, 1:260.

<sup>234</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, 91.



to obey their owners.<sup>235</sup> Still, despite the compromises they often had to engage in, the slave preachers, as a group, were the most threatening among the slaves to the planter and master class's project of achieving hegemony over their human chattels, followed by the conjurers.

Although American slaves generally failed to develop a religious millennialist tradition like subjugated peoples elsewhere, African-American slave religion could still, under unusual circumstances, subvert work discipline on the plantations. For example, the proclamations of the whites' own millennialist movement spilled over, affecting the slaves' own beliefs. William Miller, a Baptist layman turned preacher, predicted the world would end in 1843, later emending that prophecy to 1844, based upon his interpretation of Daniel 7:25's "2,300 evenings and mornings." Bennet Barrow, never much of a church-goer, complained that one-fourth of the white population "are run crazy on the subject of Miller prophosey, that the world would come to an End some time this year." But for him, the real problems began when Miller's predictions began to terrify his slaves. He noted, in his diary entry for April 11, 1843: "Negros are much frighed [frightened] the thoughts of the world coming to an end any day." Some kind of trouble, although it remains unspecified, must have inspired him to later sermonize against such a belief: "Gave my negros a Lecture 'to day' upon the folly of their belief that the world would End to day, & their superstitious belief in Dreams &c." As the prophesied Judgment Day passed without happenstance, the slaves evidently fell back into their normal routines. A more dramatic showdown erupted on Kemble's husband's rice-island estate years earlier, when a black prophetess named Sinda predicted a soon-to-come Judgment Day. Her fellow slaves became so frightened that they stopped all work in a virtual strike. The overseer found no combination of argument, criticisms, or flogging got them to work before the predicted day would come. He patiently waited it out, warning her before the rest that she would be "severely punished" if her prediction was false.

Her day of judgment came indeed, and a severe one it proved, for Mr. K---- [the overseer] had her tremendously flogged . . . the spirit of false prophecy was mercilessly scourged out of her, and the faith of her people of course reverted from her to the omnipotent lash again.<sup>236</sup>

The unanimous passive rebellion here made this a remarkable

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<sup>235</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, 130-37.

<sup>236</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, 283-85. Note 286 also; Kemble, Journal, 84.

incident, for it briefly placed the lone white overseer in a nearly helpless situation while avoiding the terrible "kill or be killed" violence that normally characterized slave revolts. But since the slaves were told, "Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. 14:13), they passively awaited the outcome of a false prophecy. They just fell back into their old ways of relating to the white overseer when it all came to nought. Since their "strike" relied on direct supernatural deliverance, unlike millennialist movements where a dynamic prophet incites the masses into taking things into their own hands, when the expected prophesied event did not take place, they had no practical alternative but to return to their old patterns of submission to white authority, since they were not following Franklin's not-always-Biblical dictum that the Lord helps those who help themselves.

### Did Slaveholders Achieve Religious and Ideological Hegemony Over Their Slaves?

Were the slaveholders and planters successful in establishing an ideological hegemony over the slaves through religious teaching? This question will have to be returned to below in order to analyze it more than is possible here. Now Genovese makes hegemony the cornerstone of historical interpretation in Roll, Jordan, Roll. He borrowed this framework from Gramsci, who developed it to explain why the workers in advanced industrialized countries had failed to overthrow their capitalist elites despite the absence of continuous and massive coercion. Genovese fits religion's role in creating hegemony into his overall framework of paternalism, which created a system of reciprocal obligations between the masters and the enslaved, allowing the latter sometimes to reproach and restrict the former's actions by asserting they had (customary) rights in return for an (outward) acceptance of their enslaved condition. They focused on improving their conditions from "within the system" rather than by unrealistically seeking liberation from it. In religious matters, it is necessary to account for why African-American slaves mostly lacked a violent, millennial faith that sought to revolt and turn the world up-side down compared to (say) Caribbean slaves influenced by Voodoo. The bloody revolt in Virginia led by Nat Turner, a literate slave preacher, merely rises up as the great exception to the American experience. Genovese attributes the difference to the non-millennial faith of black preachers and their congregations. This happened for four basic reasons. First, they accepted the practical realities of being out-numbered, out-gunned, and out-organized by the whites and their governmental/social order. Second, because African religion had a strong this-world emphasis that denied an ultimate end-time ultimate consummation, the slaves tended to infuse such a sensibility into their form of Christianity. Third, the preachers pointed to God Himself as the deliverer through someone He would call like Moses rather than a charismatic political

black preacher-prophet among themselves. Lincoln, i.e., the leader of the (Northern) white establishment politically, ultimately filled this role when liberation finally came. Fourth, millennial movements developed in cases in which the underclass and superiors both had a fully developed civilization and culture. But an equality of cultural integrity and heritage did not exist in the South between whites and blacks. Illiterate African-American slaves, through the brutal shock of being torn from their homeland, dumped into a subordinate condition under the rule of a majority alien European culture, cut off from substantial continuing contact with their old culture, joined by a mixture of fellow slaves descended from different tribes who spoke different languages (assuming these had not been already forgotten by those born into slavery), had to accept substantial assimilation to the dominant culture even to be able to communicate and work with one another, let alone their white owners.<sup>237</sup> Importantly, in a brilliant but overreaching counter-attack, James Anderson takes Genovese to task for maintaining the slaves had basically accepted ideologically their condition of slavery, as part of his onslaught against the view the slaveholders had successfully established hegemony over their bondsmen. Anderson observes that Genovese discounts alternative sources of authority for the slaves, such as the conjurors or skilled artisans among them. Resistance to hegemony is composed only of a formal counter-ideology, "organized effort, and political ingenuity." Summarizing his opponent's views, Anderson writes: "Resistance rests upon sound and conscious mental activity; in other words, it is political brilliance."<sup>238</sup> But a subordinate class need not have a highly developed counter-ideology in order to reject the superordinate class's ideology. Genovese, according to Anderson, fails to document that most slaves really accepted the evil social system into which they were born. Running away to the North still manifested black opposition to slavery; large, collective, armed revolts need not erupt routinely to prove the slaves rejected slavery as a good way of life. Anderson's polemic clearly calls into question how successfully the slaveholders achieved hegemony over the slaves through a paternalistic ethos.

How can the conflict about the reality of hegemony over the slaves, religious and otherwise, be disentangled? This dispute depends on how someone defines "resistance" and where--what social sites--that resistance appeared. If the only "resistance" that counts is composed of large, organized campaigns formed around a coherent counter-ideology, then American slaves obviously never achieved this level of political activity. But

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<sup>237</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 88-93, 271-79.

<sup>238</sup>James D. Anderson, "Aunt Jemima in Dialectics: Genovese on Slave Culture," Journal of Negro History 61 (Jan. 1976):113.

successful hegemonic incorporation becomes hard to prove after it is realized that resistance occurs in different ways at different social sites. Subordinates can act one way before the dominant class, and another among themselves alone, alternatively putting on and dropping off a mask that conceals their true beliefs. James Scott uses the terms "onstage" to refer to social situations in which the dominant class or group interacts with their subordinates. By contrast, when both are "offstage," and the dominant and the subordinate classes part company, each side can speak more freely about the other than when together, especially the latter. The record of writings, conversations, speeches, etc., produced when both interacted together is the "public transcript"; what each group produced when out of the other's presence is its "hidden transcript." Genovese's concept of hegemony suffers a limited understanding of the public transcript's limitations for proving what the slaves really believed: What the slaves said may not be what they really did believe, since the elite largely controls the public transcript. The ruling class's coercive power, real or imagined, intimidates the subordinate's class's willingness to speak out, thus constantly muddying the accuracy of the public transcript's record of the latter's real beliefs. The slaves could have used the ideology of paternalism, and even some of the religious doctrines of Christianity, to restrain their owner's actions as instrumentally as some masters used Christianity to teach their slaves to obey them. But when off by themselves, at a social site of their own choosing, such as a late-night church service in the woods, their slave preachers may have preached of a day when all blacks would be free. Maybe they even proclaimed a classic millennial upside-down world where the bondsmen were the rulers and the masters the slaves. (Of course, the beliefs expressed at illicit activities are almost unknown, because little documentation about them exists, which is the usual nature of the hidden transcript).<sup>239</sup> If there were such social sites, like a plantation's quarters at night, largely or completely beyond the ability of the slaveholders to destroy or watch, then the slaves may have developed a crude counter-ideology that would sustain their spirits to resist their owners' continuous oppression. While a lack of documentation makes the hidden transcript mostly irretrievable, especially for a mostly illiterate group as utterly subjugated as the slaves, occasional peeks at it are possible, such as through the slave narrative

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<sup>239</sup>What one slave preacher said when he got so excited during services that his mask slipped may hint at what was preached at such gatherings. Forgetting that a white man was watching him, he prayed: "Free indeed, free from death, free from hell, free from work, free from white folks, free from everything." Henry Clay Bruce, The New Man. Twenty-nine Years a Slave. Twenty-nine Years a Free Man (York, PA, 1895), 73, cited by Blassingame, Slave Community, 135-37.

collection. The hidden transcript also increasingly slips into the public transcript as the chaos of the Civil War's last two years totally undermines the entire social system of slavery in the South, and the level of fear slaves have about speaking out plummets. Scott's conception of a hidden transcript generated by a subordinate group offstage likely inflicts a mortal wound on Genovese's theory of hegemony generally, including its implications for the slaves' religious beliefs specifically.<sup>240</sup>

The religion of the slaves--largely a mixture of very basic Christian doctrine and some African practices and rituals--served a number of valuable purposes to the bondsmen. It offered them hope for the future afterlife and helped comfort them during the trials of the present life, because their faith told them the oppression that they suffered under would not last forever. By providing them with social gatherings, which (allegedly) served transcendent purposes, it helped weld local slave communities together. It provided an offstage social site (at least when illicitly used) where the trials of being a slave were openly discussed with others suffering the same condition. It bestowed on them an independent source of authority above the master's that they could appeal to--the Christian God's--and also from the slave preachers, who they saw as His representatives on earth. Despite masters and mistresses selectively taught slaves a religion supposedly shorn of subversive tendencies, it still handed them another ideological resource to criticize their owners' failures. It also encouraged them to practice what they supposedly believed morally. Although the slaves normally could not count on them, there were some limits to slaveholder hypocrisy. Christian teaching sometimes could restrain slaveholders, such as when one white man rebuked a slaveowner who had beaten his slave (tied to a tree) with a cat-o'-nine tails for a long time:

Old Deacon Sears stand it as long as he can and then he

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<sup>240</sup>James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), passim. Scott rejects the concept of hegemony altogether, whether it be the strong version in which the masses gain false consciousness from the elite's propaganda and then really believe in the ideology of the superstructure, or the weak version, wherein the elite settles for the masses simply becoming resigned and passive about their plight. His rejection is too complete, at least for advanced industrial countries with a history of free elections and free speech. In such nations, the masses may really come to accept some of the elite's ideology as being in their self-interest--such as property rights and (in America) the Horatio Alger myth. (How else could Rush Limbaugh, and right-wing talk radio in general, get such high ratings?) Still, Scott has dealt a mighty blow against Gramscian theorizing.

step up and grab Old Master's arm and say, "Time to stop, Brother! I'm speaking in the name of Jesus!" Old Master quit then, but he still powerful mad.<sup>241</sup>

In this case, in which one white restrained another, the slave received only some comfort. But in other instances the slaves received much more, such as those of Eli Johnson and Adam, in which the slaves themselves made implicit appeals to a Higher Power above their masters and/or overseers, and their superiors responded to their pleas. Because slaveowners sharply reduced or eliminated the slaves' outlets for personal expression that were normally available to free people, such as in business and social clubs, the slaves poured additional passion into their religion. This was one of the few venues where the bondsmen had a degree of cultural and social autonomy which many masters (at least by the mid-nineteenth century) willingly tolerated, or even actively promoted. In the field of religion, from both the conjurers with their African-derived beliefs and the slave preachers with their syncretistic faith, the slaves received a source of authority besides that of the slaveholders, which was a development that helped them mentally, emotionally, even spiritually, to survive the oppression of bondage.

#### English Agricultural Workers and Christianity

While religion played a central role in the social lives of the slaves (when their masters permitted it), it mattered less to the English farmworkers. The slaves often were largely prohibited from any other organized group activities besides church services on a regular basis, outside of the holiday-related parties masters might hold during the Christmas season in late December. They poured their passion into what was permitted them, above and beyond the Africanisms expressed in highly emotional church services. In contrast, the farmworkers had other social outlets, such as benefit clubs, friendly societies, even the pub, which decreased the emphasis placed on church services when they lacked a strong religious motivation. Since they were not as oppressed as the slaves by the legal system, they could engage in more activities largely or completely organized by themselves, including (after Parliament repealed the Combination Acts) even unions for some in the 1860s and 1870s.

#### Reasons for the Established Church's Unpopularity with the Laborers

Why many farmworkers lacked faith (as expressed by church attendance) in organized religion can also be explained politically. The Anglican church and its parsons personified the establishment in England, and its interests in keeping the

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<sup>241</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 96.

laborers in line. They increasingly saw the Established Church as a tool of the gentry and farmers for controlling them. The message of obedience to the secular authorities as the powers-that-be which are ordained of God once again resonates, though perhaps less often than in American slave states.<sup>242</sup> John Wesley, although the founder of Methodism, himself died a good Anglican. Upholding Toryism in politics, he repeatedly taught this doctrine.<sup>243</sup> Emphasizing the next life as the cure for the present life's material inequalities appears in English preaching, as does the implicitly subversive teaching that all persons are equal in God's sight.<sup>244</sup> The farmers themselves resented the burdens of the tithing system that supported the church. Then the laborers, fairly or not, saw the tithes as yet another reason for their low wages.<sup>245</sup> The farmers frequently used the burden of tithe-paying to justify cutting or not raising wages, thus helping mobilize the laborers' resentment to serve their own agenda on occasion, such as in some areas during the Swing riots.<sup>246</sup> The charity which the parsons and their wives dispensed came not freely, but at the cost of the laborers' having to obey clerical demands. Since in many parishes pluralists held the livings, another problem arose. Supposedly attending to more than one parish, they often didn't appear in "their" parishes for months or years on end. So if they did not care enough to live in a given laborer's parish, why should he or she care about going to church to listen to some ill-paid curate preach?<sup>247</sup> Parsons and other Establishment churchmen gave sermons sometimes as loaded as white preachers gave to slaves concerning the laborers' God-ordained need to obey the secular authorities over them. Having recalled scenes where at least 500 "boys and

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<sup>242</sup>Thompson, Making, 351; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, 215.

<sup>243</sup>Thompson, Making, 41. Similarly, note the message of patience and submission taught by the Conference of Methodist Ministers, in an address adopted in 1819 almost 30 years after Wesley's death: Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, 280-81.

<sup>244</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, 223-24, 329.

<sup>245</sup>For the farmers' resentment against the tithes, see Cobbett, Rural Rides, 191.

<sup>246</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, 109, 118, 130, 152, 158-59, 231-33.

<sup>247</sup>Cobbett blasts the Established Church for such abuses, where the parsons take their tithes for a given parish, but totally neglect to serve it, failing even to maintain a rectory or (in one Wiltshire case) a church in it. Cobbett, Rural Rides, 365-66, 400-403.

men" would have left similar churches in the past, Cobbett commented on why he saw very few laborers leave a church at Goudhurst:

Here I have another to add to the many things that convinced me that the labouring classes have, in great part, ceased to go to church; that their way to thinking and feeling with regard to both church and clergy are totally changed; and that there is now very little moral hold which the latter possess.<sup>248</sup>

Hence, in many areas where the farmworkers especially resented the establishment (the power axis of gentry/farmers/parsons), Dissent and Non-conformity gained popularity, thus filling Methodist chapels while emptying Anglican churches.

The Church's unpopularity with many laborers had many identifiable roots. One source was simply the unequal treatment they received at church services with the well-off, who were supposedly their equals before God and brothers in Christ. Cobbett--unrealistically--extolled the glories of making everyone in the medieval past stand or kneel for the entire church service because then: "There was no distinction; no high place and no low place; all were upon a level before God at any rate." He noted the favoritism shown to the rich at church by how and where they sat: "Some were not stuck into pews lined with green or red cloth, while others were crammed into corners to stand erect, or sit on the floor." In these situations, the laborers were necessarily treated with contempt by their alleged betters through social discrimination in an alleged "house of God." Arch mentioned similarly that, at the local Anglican services in Barford, Warwickshire, the laborers and others in poverty had "lowly places" where they had to "sit meekly and never dare to mingle with their betters in the social scale." Curtains were put up to shield the wealthier folks from the gaze of Hodge nearby. The parson's wife threw her weight around by ordering the laborers and their wives one day to sit on opposite sides of the aisle. Worst of all, as a mere seven year old eyeing through a keyhole what happened when his father took communion, Arch noticed the squire took it first, followed by the farmers, the tradesmen and artisans, and last and least in the local social hierarchy, the laborers:

Then, the very last of all, went the poor agricultural labourers in their smock frocks. They walked up by themselves; nobody else knelt with them; it was if they were unclean . . . I wanted to know [asking his mother] why my father was not as good in the eyes of God as the squire, and why the poor should be forced to

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<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 170. Note also 178.



come up last of all to the table of the Lord.<sup>249</sup>

Similarly, American slaves received communion last in mixed congregations. At services conducted like this, James 2:1-4 was an unlikely text for the day!

#### How the Local Elite Can Use Charity to Control the Poor

At least when they were not absentee pluralists, the local clergy sometimes provided aid to local laborers. The rector of St. Giles, Wiltshire, at the seat of Lord Shaftsbury, gained great praise from his extensive charitable works. But his good deeds, as Somerville observed, wrought some bad results: the loss of habits of independence and the inclination of charity's recipients to feel that they must have it and "were not previously as well provided for as they should be." In short, even non-government handouts still tend to breed dependency and discontent. Arch mentioned that his local parson and his wife served up soup and gave out coals to local laborers. Their charitable acts were little to their credit, however, because they used them to control the laborers receiving them. By threatening to withdraw these gifts for any laborers or their wives who disrespected or disobeyed them, they routinely received acts of obeisance from the otherwise reluctantly compliant. For example, the laborers' wives at church had to curtsy to the parson's wife. In one instance, when she suddenly ordered the hair of all the girl students in her parish "cut round like a basin, more like prison girls than anything else," Arch's mother battled this decree and won, but at a certain cost: "From that time my parents never received a farthing's-worth of charity in the way of soup, coals, or the like, which were given regularly, and as a matter of course, from the rectory to nearly every poor person in the village." As an adult, Arch successfully fought a similar crusade for his nine-year-old daughter. She wished to wear a hair net decorated with some white beads to school, which the parson's wife tried to stop because: "We don't allow poor people's children to wear hair-nets with beads." Obliquely extracting acts of deference by threatening to withdraw charity paled by comparison with the parson's (and farmers') direct threats to cut off aid from those daring to attend with some Dissenters who preached in a local back lane's old barn. Having already lost all access to handouts, Arch's mother without hesitation attended there--but the threats may have kept other laborers from doing likewise.<sup>250</sup> These incidents illustrate how charity can be a tool of social control wielded by the elite against the poor. Although a potential donor does not use

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<sup>249</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, 176; Arch, Joseph Arch, 16-17, 19-20.

<sup>250</sup>Somerville, Whistler, 34; Arch, Joseph Arch, 7-8, 15, 17-18, 21-22, 50-52, 53-54.

physical force by denying someone a handout, those directly owning the means of production produce a powerful incentive for obedience by threatening to withdraw aid from those largely or completely without productive private property. The subordinate class then may have little choice (besides migration) except to comply with the strings attached to such costly "gifts." By these machinations with charity, the Church gained the bodies of some people at weekly services but often lost their hearts.

The tithes were the leading reason for the Church's unpopularity among the farmer and laborer alike. Two types of tithes existed generally, the great or rectorial tithe, and the small or vicarial tithe. The first entitled its owner (for it could be and was sold to non-clergymen) to one-tenth of the produce of the soil and forests, such as one-tenth of the wheat or hay grown in the parish. The second was given only to the highest resident clergyman, which may be the rector, the vicar, etc. Strongly sympathizing with the rioters, an anonymous pamphlet published during the Swing riots described how the tithes reduced "Swing" from a small farmer to a laborer whose services the parish auctioned off to another farmer at three shillings a week. "Swing" replied to the equally fictional parson who came to collect one-tenth of his crop when he was really entitled to two-thirds less because of two prior fallow years: "Why surely . . . your reverence will not rob my poor little children, by taking two-tenths more than you have a right to?" The pamphlet may be fictional, but the resentment expressed was real, and captured the flavor of much popular opinion in the countryside. These views were shared by the semi-literate laborer who wrote to the Rector of Freshwater (Isle of Wight) after some small act of arson had been committed against him: "For the last 20 year wee have been in a Starving Condition to maintain your D[---] Pride . . . As for you my Ould frend you dident hapen to be hear, if that you had been rosted I fear, and if it had a been so how the farmers would lagh to see the ould Pasen [Parson] rosted at last."<sup>251</sup> Clearly the Church, by latching onto the state's power to gain it mammon, lost itself many hearts and minds because it forced people to support a particular organized religion that personified the local establishment. Had the Church adopted the early nineteenth-century American model of volunteerism, under which people only support and attend "the church of their choice," it would have held its parishioners much better than it did.

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<sup>251</sup>On the two types of tithes, see J.W. Anscomb, "Parliamentary Enclosure in Northamptonshire Processes and Procedures," Northamptonshire Past and Present, 7(1988-89): 413; The Life and History of Swing the Kent Rick-Burner (London: R. Carlile, 1830), 17, in Carpenter, Rising of the Agricultural Labourers; "Swing" letter, quoted by E.P. Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, 233.

## The Laborers' Turn to Nonconformity and Its Mixed Results

Like other occupational groups in England, as the laborers' support for the Church waned, that for Methodism and other Nonconformist groups waxed. Depending on what its examiners emphasize, Methodism's effects on the laborers' (and other workers') willingness and ability to resist their superiors results in rather wildly disparate interpretations in the historiography. Undeniably, a peculiar correlation existed between annual peaks in radical activity (and/or its aftermath) and Methodist conversions in areas noted for working class unrest.<sup>252</sup> On the one hand, E.P. Thompson sees this movement as producing cathartic effects on working class emotions by draining away energy, money, and time from the radical reformers in the early nineteenth century. By emphasizing discipline at work, such as through punctuality and steady attendance, Methodism has been called a tool of factory owners that served their requirements for work discipline over and above its general message that advocated submission to the state.<sup>253</sup> On the other hand, by teaching its members practical ways to organize themselves (such as through the handling of money) into larger, more orderly groups and giving them (sometimes) managing and even preaching roles in the local chapels, Methodism helped lay some of the foundation for unionization of the work force. In the Established Church, the laborers came just to listen; in the Chapels, they came to participate. They had a real hand in administration, in trying to convert others, arguing doctrine, etc.<sup>254</sup> Joseph Arch personifies effects like these. He was a Nonconformist and even an occasional lay preacher before founding the first national farmworkers union.<sup>255</sup> George Loveless, one of the martyrs in the infamous Tolpuddle case was not only a Methodist, but had a "small theological library."<sup>256</sup> Despite Wesley's personal conservatism and the mainline Methodist ministry's, these cases show that Christianity's message of the equality of all persons in God's sight naturally did not stay

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<sup>252</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, 288-91; J.A. Hargreaves, "Methodism and Luddism in Yorkshire, 1812-1813," Northern History 26 (1990): 161.

<sup>253</sup>Thompson, Making, 354-65; Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, 284-86.

<sup>254</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, 270-71.

<sup>255</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, 47-48, 50.

<sup>256</sup>Thompson, Making, 41; Rule, Labouring Classes, 310-11. The Tolpuddle case involved six farmworkers from Dorset who were sentenced in 1834 to be transported for seven years merely for administering oaths despite forming a union itself was legal.

corked up, in some workers and laborers' minds, in some bottle labeled "spiritual only," but it flowed out as they also applied it to the affairs of this world. Then a few who thought this way turned the incidental training in organization that Methodism gave to the working class back against their employers (including the farmers) through unions and friendly societies (which sometimes served as fronts for unions).<sup>257</sup>

#### Christianity: An Instigator of Laborers' Resistance?

Joseph Arch's own life provides excellent examples of how Christianity's teachings could be turned against the elite nominally upholding them. At a meeting gathering together union delegates from all over England, while they sang a stirring pro-union hymn, he thought: "Joseph Arch, you have not lived in vain, and of a surety the Lord God of Hosts is with us this day." In his version of Christianity, God clearly supported his efforts to unionize the farmworkers. Later, sounding like an Old Testament prophet, in a long speech given to his fellow laborers, he thundered:

I have heard that, in various parts of the country, the farmers have threatened to pinch their labourers this winter, and to reduce their wages to ten shillings a week. . . . Will that stop foreign competition? No! and God will avenge the oppressor. I believe that the succession of bad harvests are a visitation of the Almighty upon the farmers for their treatment of their labourers, and upon a luxurious and dissipated aristocracy. I believe in a God of Providence, and as sure as the sun rises and sets, He will avenge Himself on the oppressor. The farmer must not be too confident.

He employed similar Old Testament allusions when recalling how and where he led the founding of the agricultural laborers' union in 1872:

I know that it was the hand of the Lord of Hosts which led me that day; that the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth raised me up to do this particular thing; that in the counsel of His wisdom He singled me out, and . . . sent me forth as a messenger of the Lord God of Battles. . . . Only through warfare could we attain to freedom and peace and prosperity; only through the storm and stress of battle could we reach the haven where we would be. I was but a humble instrument in the Lord's hands, and now my work is over, my warfare

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<sup>257</sup>Thompson, Making, 42.

is accomplished.<sup>258</sup>

Plainly invoking a religious sanction, even calling, for his work as a union leader, he condemned his enemies in the elite with language reminiscent of Ezekiel's or Jeremiah's. The bent Christianity which the elite emphasized--which taught obedience to the state and its sundry representatives--Arch upends here. The subversive side of Christianity--the part emphasizing the rich should not oppress the poor, and that spiritual salvation is harder for them than for the poor--Arch wielded against the farmers and aristocracy. As a general procedure, the subordinate class can condemn the elite by using the latter's own ideology whenever they are hypocrites or fail to live up to the paternalistic Christian model they supposedly uphold. The elite naturally finds it harder to parry the poor's points when couched in the elite's own ideology. (Whether or not the poor really believe in the elite's ideology (i.e., "false consciousness") is another issue). Hence, Christianity, in certain hands, can become a fountainhead of resistance and action rather than a source of passivity and resignation in the affairs of this life. Being a package deal, and a double-edged sword, Christianity's upper class promulgators could not always count on evangelization producing "useful" results.

#### Similarities in Southern White American and English Lower-Class Religion

The laborers enlisting in Methodism or another Nonconformist sect ultimately desired greater meaning out of their lives than the material world could provide, because of its oppression and disappointments. This religion told them they could achieve happiness without wealth by changing their outlook on life. But then what made its message any different from Anglicanism's? The evangelical nonconformists stressed the need for a personal conversion event called becoming "born again," i.e., a highly emotional, even ecstatic, experience of oneness with God stemming from accepting Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah and Savior for their sins through His sacrifice. Since this experience does not come willy-nilly, but takes a high level of personal conviction and emotional upset over one's past life, Methodist preachers notoriously fomented emotional church services in order to help produce it. Cobbett looked down upon them with contempt for the evident irrationality and disorder involved, singling out the congregational singing as the only positive feature:

His hands [the Methodist minister's] were clenched together and held up, his face turned up and back so as to be nearly parallel with the ceiling, and he was bawling away, with his "do thou," and "mayest thou,"

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<sup>258</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, 114, 313, 402.

and "may we," enough to stun one. Noisy, however, as he was, he was unable to fix the attention of a parcel of girls in the gallery, whose eyes were all over the place, while his eyes were so devoutly shut up. After a deal of this rigmarole called prayer, came the preachy, as the negroes call it; and a preachy it really was. Such a mixture of whining cant and of foppish affectation I scarcely ever heard in my life. . . . After as neat a dish of nonsense and of impertinences as one could wish to have served up, came the distinction between the ungodly and the sinner. . . . Monstrous it is to think that the Clergy of the Church really encourage these roving fanatics.<sup>259</sup>

Now compare Cobbett's contemptuous description of a Methodist service in Kent, England, to Olmsted's more objective but still somewhat skeptical observations of a spiritual meeting in the American South, held mostly for the whites, although the blacks present outnumbered them. The similarities show that lower-class Southern whites did not mainly derive an emotional style of religion from the slaves. In the American situation, a greater level of chaos prevailed: While the minister strived to win souls in a rather rude building, people kept coming and leaving, children crawled in the aisles (one even got into the pulpit a few times), and some dogs accompanied their masters. The preaching style was a twin of the Methodist service's that Cobbett witnessed:

The preliminary devotional exercises--a Scripture reading, singing, and painfully irreverential and meaningless harangues nominally addressed to the Deity, but really to the audience--being concluded, the sermon was commenced by reading a text, with which, however, it had, so far as I could discover, no further association. Without often being violent in his manner, the speaker nearly all the time cried aloud at the utmost stretch of his voice, as if calling to some one a long distance off; as his discourse was extemporaneous, however, he sometimes returned with curious effect to his natural conversational tone; and as he was gifted with a strong imagination, and possess of a good deal of dramatic power, he kept the attention of the people very well.

Tumult accompanied the altar call as crying and groaning men and women stepped forward to kneel before the "howling preacher," who cried "aloud, with a mournful, distressed, beseeching shriek, as if he were himself suffering torture." The blacks watching it all, confidently awaiting their turn later with the same

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<sup>259</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, 177-78. Compare 171-72.

preacher, generally had "a self-satisfied smile upon their faces; and I have no doubt they felt that they could do it with a good deal more energy and abandon, if they were called upon." Although the African heritage of the slaves predisposed them towards energetic, emotional religious exercises, the parallels between the American and English cases demonstrate the poorer whites in the South or in England's industrial areas were likewise inclined towards a religion requiring their active participation. All three groups had a desire for an expressive faith that required their input and energy, whether it be through emotional church services, an active personal sense of having become converted as an adult, or getting involved in the organization of believers that supported the ministers. (After all, any religion downplaying emotion and/or rituals in favor of reason is a poor candidate for popularity with people of little or no education a priori). The blacks, drawing upon their own heritage, simply took advantage of the opening lower-class evangelical religion gave for expressing their emotions. They built upon it, adding ceremonies, such as the call-and-response singing and preaching, and the ring shout/dance, or simply did more energetically what the whites did. The emotionalism of Methodist services in England, among a people whose national temperament was traditionally described as including a "stiff upper lip," fatally undermines W.E.B. Dubois' claim that Southern whites merely had a "plain copy" of slave worship services.<sup>260</sup> The blacks' example may have encouraged some lower-class whites to express their emotions at religious services more strongly than their white Methodist kinsmen in industrial England's working class did, but their basic pattern of worship would have remained the same even if no slaves had been brought to the New World.

Somehow Seeking Participation in and Control of One's Destiny:  
The Consolations of Faith?

Both slaves and laborers turned to evangelical Christianity to provide them with the meaning of life. They sought something that placed their own destiny in their own hands, as against living in a material world with often oppressive masters and employers and nearly zero social mobility. Through a faith where "he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman," where the eternal state was far more important than the present life, "a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away," at least some became more content in this life, seeing the trials of this life as preparation for the next. The truly ancient Stoic advice that one can control and change one's attitude or thinking when one cannot change one's material or physical environment bears fruit here. They also sought

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<sup>260</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:265-71; W.E.B. Dubois, cited by Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 239.

meaning through active participation in something, in some organization controlled at least partially by themselves, where people like themselves had some significant input. The slave preacher (or conjuror!) had almost the only influential social role a bondsman could have that was not directly derived from his master's power and ownership of property. The driver, the "mammy," even the skilled artisan, received positions based on their willingness to serve obediently their master or mistress. But on religious matters the slaves themselves frequently received a chance to organize a social group and its activities generally to their own liking, even though watchful whites carefully screened the ideological content emanating from the pulpit. Similarly, the laborers adopting Nonconformity, even when under the banner of mainline Methodism, took part in chapels where they determined their activities and influenced their organization much more than in the churches. Some, such as Arch, even received a chance to preach since formal qualifications (i.e., a seminary degree from university training) were not considered always essential. Now, it can be argued that slaves or laborers who adopted these beliefs drained energy from resistance movements that could have challenged the elite's hold on them. Nevertheless, the laborer embracing Nonconformity, or the slave participating in an illicit late-night meeting, figuratively voted "no confidence" about their masters' religion as they presented it to their subordinate class. Although modern-day skeptics may dismiss them as passive in effect, such decisions of faith still subverted the elite's ideological hegemony. In a material world fraught with bondage, oppression, and hopelessness, they sought some means to assert they had ultimate control over their own destinies, and to participate in something that shaped their lives, instead of feeling their masters and natural events solely determined their fates. For these oppressed men and women, the consolations of faith for them were neither unimportant nor futile in their ultimate effects, bringing as it did meaning to lives otherwise vain and useless, largely consumed by the burdens their elites imposed.

#### The Slave Family: How Well Did It Survive Slavery?

One of the most endlessly contentious issues in the historiography of African-American slavery concerns how badly it damaged the black family as an institution. Contemporary politics always lurks in this debate's background, and not just merely the civil rights movement, race riots, affirmative action, and abolition of Jim Crow. More specifically, the 1965 Moynihan report, which blamed the poverty of the inner cities on the black family's weaknesses going back to the time before emancipation, became a target of not just politicians or civil rights leaders, but historians. Moynihan maintains that the black community's disproportionately high number of female-headed, single-parent families, combined with absentee fathers, created in the ghettos a system of matriarchy by default, leading to increased crime and



poverty from ill-raised children. At the time, his report created a storm of controversy, but rising concerns about the effects of increased white illegitimacy (and divorce) rates since then have combined with general political rhetoric nowadays about "family values" to vindicate mostly Moynihan's thesis in the culture at large in more recent decades, even though it only partially explains the genesis of poverty among American blacks.

Now, what does it mean to say the family is a "strong" or "damaged" institution, black and otherwise? Here, "a strong family" shall be defined as a stable traditional nuclear family of a husband, a wife, and their children, that avoids events such as divorce, illegitimacy, and death which either prevent its formation or break it up afterwards by separating its members, especially before the children become self-supporting adults. The purpose of the family in this context is to raise successfully well-adjusted, well-socialized children who will be able to make reasonable decisions and support themselves without burdening society by committing crimes, living off the dole for extended periods, or committing various other social pathologies. The black family under slavery endured additional events broke it up above and beyond those present among free people. Since slave marriages in the American South had no legal standing, masters and mistresses had the power to separate the husband or wife by sale from his or her mate. They also could take slave children from both or either of their parents in order to display them on the auction block. Since slaveholders normally (excepting in a state or two) held their bondsmen as chattels, personal moveable property, they could take them wherever they wished when relocating to another farm or plantation. So if one master owned the wife, and another the husband, the one moving away had no legal obligations to purchase the spouse left behind. Slaves also were disposed of as gifts, divided among heirs of an estate, rented for greater or lesser periods, or sold to meet the debts of bankrupt slaveowners. All these events often caused the separation of husbands and wives, of mothers, fathers, and children. Slaveholders frequently had no wish to maintain the marriage or parental bonds of their slaves since the goal of maximizing profits may require them to treat their human chattels as totally interchangeable units of labor. Consequently, the black family under slavery suffered additional constant assaults upon its stability besides what free people already endured, such as divorce, illegitimacy, and death. While the extra assaults never "destroyed" the black family as an institution, for numerous slaves fortunately avoided such disasters, or resourcefully patched new relationships together after their owners obliterated the old ones (if perhaps illicitly from the viewpoint of strict Biblical sexual morality), they still contributed to a sense of rootlessness, alienation, and greater inability to commit to stable relationships among many bondsmen. Because the slave family unit suffered additional strains imposed artificially by outsiders, this section devotes far more space to

American slaves than to English farmworkers, for the latter's conditions were "normal," at least relative to a free society (meaning, one without serfdom or legal bondage) conforming to western European norms.

Importantly, the African-American slave family differed from those elsewhere in the Americas because of the nearly balanced male/female sex ratio in the United States, especially after the colonial period. Monogamy soon became the norm for the black American slave family, just as for whites, even though some curious exceptions occasionally appeared where masters did not care how many "wives" their male slaves took since their marriages had no legal standing anyway.<sup>261</sup> The closing of the legal international slave trade for America after 1807 motivated masters and mistresses to maintain an even gender ratio among their bondsmen because they wanted to promote family arrangements that would keep up the birth rate. A disproportionately male slave population, as was the case south of the border, could not be expected to reproduce itself. The masters found an even sex ratio promoted their interests, and also the black family's stability--but such happy coincidences of slaveholder-slave self-interests in this realm proved to be few and far between.

The key difference between the quality of family life for the agricultural workers and slaves revolves around how their differences in legal status enabled slaveowners to subordinate the family unit of their slaves to the needs of agricultural production in ways almost impossible to do with English farmworkers, a theme returned to again below (pp. 167-176, 189-190). Slaveholders routinely manipulated or took advantage of the relationships between the members of slave families to serve their instrumental purposes in increasing output and profits. Master Jones could always threaten a defiant (married) "Sambo" with, in so many words, "If you don't shape up, I'll sell your wife [or you] South." In the English case, while a farmer could fire and work to blacklist a rebellious laborer, or (mostly post-1832) wave the sword of Damocles of the dreaded workhouse over a recalcitrant farmworker's head if put out of work, he simply neither could threaten to dissolve the laborer's family as the ultimate sanction for violating work discipline nor manipulate the family's relationships to his own ulterior ends to anywhere near the same degree. Slaveholders could routinely whip their slaves, and most did, but no farmer could dare expect to get away with whipping adult farmworkers. The astute but ruthless

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<sup>261</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, 149-50. The earlier colonial period saw more of an imbalance until near its end. Note the figures for King William Parish, Virginia in Gundersen, "Double Bonds of Race and Sex," 354-56. For cases of polygamy being tolerated, see Kemble, Journal, 207, 226. Also note Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 169.

slaveowner or overseer could take advantage of the relationships within the black family to maximize the effects of imposing submission by the lash. One particularly cruel overseer in Alabama "sometimes, to cramp down the mind of the husband, . . . would compel him to assist in the punishment of his wife."<sup>262</sup> Miscegenation also undermined the quality of black family relationships. But here, the master, his sons, or his overseer sought sexual gratification instead of profit. The slaves' quality of life fell way beneath the agricultural workers' as a result of how their different legal statuses allowed slaveholders to subordinate totally human relationships within the slave family, such as husband and wife, mother and daughter, brother and sister, to weaken or to destroy them in order to serve work processes performed for someone else's ends of monetary or even sexual gain. The slaveowners' ultimate crime against the black family was to treat it as a means to serve their own ends of increased profit outside the confines of Scriptural law, instead of letting this institution's relationships serve its members' ends of personal happiness and character growth.

#### The Family Bonds of Slaves Made Conditional upon the Stability of Slaveholders

In a number of ways, slaves had their family bonds solely conditionally upon the continued life and financial success of their (individual) owners. If a master (or perhaps mistress) went bankrupt or died, slave family bonds were dissolved to serve the interests of creditors or heirs. As Gundersen notes: "The value of slaves as property meant that black family stability was tied to the life cycle of their owners." The heirs split up the children of Harriet Brent Jacobs' grandmother. Her uncle Benjamin, "the youngest one, was sold, in order that each heir might have an equal portion of dollars and cents."<sup>263</sup> Frederick Douglass himself experienced the terrible anxiety and excitement of a large estate's division. All its slaves dreaded being turned over into the hands of a particularly cruel son of the recently deceased master. Douglass fortunately avoided that particular disaster. But the whole process of division, seemingly totally capricious at times to its victims, illustrated how the slaves' family and social lives meant little or nothing to the whites who, having total control over the slaves' destinies, settled the estate:

Our fate for life was now to be decided. We had not more voice in that decision than the brutes [farm animals] among whom we were ranked. A single word from

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<sup>262</sup>Drew, Refugee, 141.

<sup>263</sup>Gundersen, "Double Bonds of Race and Sex," 370; Brent, Incidents, 4.

the white men was enough--against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties--to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings.<sup>264</sup>

When financial trouble struck white slaveholders, slaves knew what was likely to follow, as "Uncle" Shade, once a slave in Georgia, commented: "Dey knowed all de white folkses troubles. Knowed when white man got ter raise money it mean you gwine see de spec'lator's buggy drivin' up, an' somebody gwine be sold!" Because his kind master went bankrupt, John Little was sold away from his family at public auction to a virtually inhuman one living ten miles away in the same county of North Carolina. His mother strived to get neighbors to buy him, but they refused, believing the slave traders would pay more. One man in Louisiana told Olmsted about men he knew as a child and had gone to school with who eventually fell on hard times, which came generally from their own fiscal irresponsibility and prodigal lifestyles. Another told him about one largely wiped out by the weather: "Had two bad crops. Finally the sheriff took about half his niggers." Since the master of Charles Ball died with heavy debts, some of his slaves were sold to different masters, including Ball's brothers and sisters: "Our new master took us away, and I never saw my mother, nor any of my brothers and sisters afterwards." Under these conditions, the preservation of relationships within slave families depended not only on the master's kindness, but also upon his continued life and financial success. Slave families were vulnerable to division from any upsets that disturbed the whites owning them.<sup>265</sup>

Living amidst a nation settling a wilderness, slave families were split up for another reason: The whites frequently moved while carving out new farms and plantations on the frontier or elsewhere in the South. Since the wilderness seemed limitless, the white settlers found it profitable to exhaust the soil's fertility and then move on for another spot to exploit. As a result, the American white population was much more mobile than the laborers who were scraping out a living near some village in

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<sup>264</sup>Douglass, Narrative, 60; for a more optimistic spin on estate divisions, note Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 125-27; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:232. Herbert G. Gutman decisively shatters their optimism in Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 132-36.

<sup>265</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 258; Drew, Refugee, 198; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:154; Ball, Slavery in the United States, 16. See also 77-78; Note Bobby Frank Jones, "A Cultural Middle Passage," in Herbert Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, 133-34.

southern England--a reality full of ominous implications for slave family stability. Different slaveholders often owned different members of the same slave families. The practice of one master owning the husband, and another the wife and children, was especially common. Family divisions routinely took place without the sound of an auctioneer's gavel simply by one planter moving his slaves to some new, more fertile piece of land in another state or county. When visiting Texas, Olmsted noted that after the land was sold separately from the slaves, "the whole body of slaves move away, leaving frequently wives and children on neighbouring plantations. Such a cause of separation must be exceedingly common among the restless, almost nomadic, small proprietors of the South." After carefully examining 65 slave narratives, Davis finds the relocation of owners was the second most common reason for slaves to move, accounting for some 46 relocations out of 350, following rentals at 103 moves. In five of the sixty-five cases, slaves accompanied their masters when moving long distances westward. Constituting an extreme case, the master of Henry Bruce moved nine times in less than ten years. Fogel and Engerman claim that 84 percent of all interregional movement of slaves resulted from masters relocating. But after examining the statistical basis for this number, Gutman and Sutch demolished it. After committing a arithmetic error in division, Fogel and Engerman casually accepted Calderhead's assumption that 50 percent of the slaves migrating in Maryland were sold outside the state, leaving 50 percent to have moved with their masters. As Gutman and Sutch observe: "But even when the error is corrected, the result is still a totally baseless number produced by a faulty procedure." So even when no sale took place, white slaveholder relocations still routinely destroyed slave families by separating their members.<sup>266</sup>

#### The Routine Destruction of Family Relationships under Slavery

During sales, slaveholders often ignored the family "bonds" of the human beings they owned. Such stories are legion. Freedwoman Joanna Draper's story shows that masters knew selling a slave woman away from her children was despised, but her owner still did it anyway: "He sold her (my husband's mammy) off and lied and said she was a young girl and didn't have no husband, 'cause the man what bought her said he didn't want to buy no

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<sup>266</sup>F.N. Boney, "Thomas Stevens, Antebellum Georgian," South Atlantic Quarterly 72 (spring 1973): 238-39; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:3; Jack E. Davis, "Changing Places: Slave Movement in the South," Historian 55 (summer 1993): 661-63. In passing, he notes Tadman's estimate that no more than 30 percent of interregional slave migration came from slaves accompanying moving owners; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:48; Sutch and Gutman in David, Reckoning, 100-105.

woman and take her away from a family." R.S. Sorrick, sold as a slave himself at the age of one, told Drew that he knew of one-month-old babies being sold away from their mothers! Dan Josiah Lockhart was sold at age five, "and when I first saw my mother to know her, I had a wife and child." "Uncle" Shade, born in Georgia, saw his seven brothers and sisters sold off to various different owners. Some of his brothers and sisters were resold twice as one trader sold to another, a process that scattered them over two or three states. He told Armstrong: "Did we ever find de chillun whut de spec'lators tuk? Naw suh. You know how 'tis. When de fambly once scattered, it's hard to get togedder ergain!" After one slave trader purchased and planned to take far away all seven of one mother's children via the auction block, the woman cried in agony: "Gone! All gone! Why don't God kill me?" Sales affected others besides mothers and their children. Without warning, Charles Ball's owner sold him away from his wife and children. He was not even allowed to see them again before leaving. His parents' marriage had ended similarly, when a Georgia trader took his mother away from Maryland, leaving his father behind. One slave woman auctioned off in Richmond, Virginia had been forced to separate from her husband two days earlier. While she had seven children, only three were sold with her. Why can similar stories about slave sales destroying family relationships can be recited seemingly endlessly? As Gutman and Sutch observe, as indicated by New Orleans sales invoices which number in the thousands, most sales of individuals reflect the destruction either of marriage or parental-child bonds: "The predominance in the New Orleans sales of single individuals, far from being evidence of the security of the slave family, is evidence that slave sales typically broke up slave families, since, as Bancroft knew, nearly every slave belonged to a family."<sup>267</sup>

Conscious of the family relationships of their bondsmen, at least some masters and mistresses tried to preserve them by attaching conditions to sales or restricting who could buy them. Under an ideal system of slaveholder paternalism, family bonds should only be broken under "necessity." Unfortunately, as shown above, "necessity" proved to be of common occurrence because of unpredictable events disrupting the lives of white slaveowners. For example, Mrs. Polk wanted to trade a family of slaves on her estate in Mississippi to avoid having to move them away from family and friends. This effort failed, although it was still

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<sup>267</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 102; Drew, Refugee, 45, 121; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 258-60; Brent, Incidents, 14; Ball, Slavery in the United States, 16, 35-36; Chambers's Journal, Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:375-77. One or more of these seven children may have died earlier, long before this sale took place; Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, 132.

hoped an exchange would occur later.<sup>268</sup> Despite being often ignored, an anti-selling ethos did show up in slaveholder culture. Planter Captain Wayne Bedford was told, when he was twelve years old by his dying father, "to grow up, keep the plantation going, keep the slave families intact and above all take care of his mother."<sup>269</sup> One bill collector, after showing up at planter Barrow's door, "offered him a family of negros."<sup>270</sup> Louisiana codified a bit of this paternalistic ethos by prohibiting the selling of children of age 10 or lower away from their mothers (fathers were irrelevant) unless they were orphans.<sup>271</sup> According to Sweig, this law, passed in 1829, caused the number of single children ten years or less being sold to fall from 13.5 percent before April 1, 1829 to just 3.7 percent afterwards, based on incoming coastwise shipping manifests. Apparently responding to public criticism (or their own consciences), one major slave trading firm in New Orleans, Franklin and Armfield, chose to deal mainly in slave families after 1834.<sup>272</sup> But such moves were mere baby steps. If the

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<sup>268</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, 197. Note that even with an intact nuclear slave family being relocated to their new master because of inheritance, she was still told that they seemed to be in distress over separating from friends and other family members.

<sup>269</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 316-17.

<sup>270</sup>my emphasis, Davis, Plantation Life, 184.

<sup>271</sup>Judith Kelleher Schafer, "New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements," Journal of Southern History 47 (Feb. 1981):36.

<sup>272</sup>Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, "The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 21 (winter 1991):454-55. The source of this figure was the certificates of good character which Louisiana briefly required for all slave sales. Fogel and Engerman maintain only 9.3 percent of slaves sold were children under thirteen in Time on the Cross based on sales invoices. A later sampling of theirs using these certificates of good character of children ten years old and less produced a figure of 11.1 percent. See Freudenberger and Pritchett, *Ibid.*, p. 453; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:49-50. Gutman and Sutch demolish Fogel and Engerman's calculations that indicated most young slaves sold were orphans in David, Reckoning, 130-131. Pritchett and Freudenberger's data also refute their claim that this Louisiana law was seldom enforced. See Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:53-54. Significantly, Schafer found twenty-eight ads listing children separately under eleven, of whom only six were said to be orphans, in New Orleans newspapers for 1850.

slaveholders really had taken seriously the slaves' family ties, they would have passed laws totally prohibiting the involuntary separation (for any cause) of husbands and wives, and of children from their parents when under the age of (say) eighteen. The general lack of such laws in the American South (outside of this Louisiana statute and any like it) proves most slaveholders valued flexibility in the labor market much more than the preservation of their slaves' family relationships, any paternalistic pro-slavery propaganda to the contrary notwithstanding.

#### Fogel and Engerman's Mistakenly Low Figures on Marriage Breakup

Notoriously, Fogel and Engerman maintain relatively few slave marriages were broken up, based on a questionable reading of the New Orleans slave sale records. They said 84 percent of all sales of those over age 14 involved unmarried individuals, that 6 percent were sold with their mates, and widows and voluntary separations made up at least 25 percent of the rest (i.e., about 5 percent overall). Therefore, by a six-to-one (84 percent to 16 percent) ratio, single women were sold more commonly than married. Based on their fallacious figure (critiqued above) that sales caused only 16 percent of all interregional slave movement (even Calderhead's guess was 50 percent), they conclude: "It is probable that about 2 percent of the marriages of slaves involved in the westward trek were destroyed by the process of migration."<sup>273</sup> Their calculations rest upon some very questionable assumptions, which Sutch and Gutman examine at length. Most importantly, the New Orleans invoices rarely say anything about marital status, excepting the cases where married couples or families were disposed of as a unit. Using a sample limited to women aged twenty to twenty-four, Fogel and Engerman assume that broken marriages only happened when married women were sold with one or more children, but without a husband. Their assumptions overlook childless married couples, those whose children had all died, and all cases in which traders intentionally sold the (normally older) children apart from their parents. Slave traders in the frontier southwest had strong motives for selling slave mothers and fathers separately from their children because the newly opened plantations in that region only wanted hands able to work productively right away. Using probate records, Fogel and Engerman maintain only about half (53 percent) of slave women aged 20-24 (from which they extrapolate to the whole population of slave women) had children. This calculation's plausibility melts before Kemble's observations about the universality of 16-year-old mothers and 30-year-old grandmothers on her husband's

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"New Orleans Slavery," 36-37.

<sup>273</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:49; 2:51-52.



Georgian estates.<sup>274</sup> Ironically, their own statements show married slave women (i.e., the 16 percent figure) were frequently separated from their mates by the auction block: If 6 percent were sold with their husbands and 25 percent were widows (an assumed figure--only 5.18 percent in the general population were), then sales did separate nearly 70 percent (100% - 25% - 6% = 69%) of all married couples sold in New Orleans. Here quantitative history supplies an excellent example of the GIGO principle at work: If certain false or questionable hypotheses are initially assumed, number crunching afterwards will not magically change them into "facts." Above all, Fogel and Engerman implicitly equate a broken slave family with a broken slave marriage, which blithely ignores how selling off children away from their parents also breaks family ties.<sup>275</sup> Far more reliable broad-based quantitative data produce a much higher percentage of masters tearing up slave marriages. Based upon ex-slaves registering their marriages with the Freedman's Bureau, Blassingame derives a figure of 32.4 percent (out of a sample of 2888) while Gutman obtains 22.7 percent (from a sample of 8700).<sup>276</sup> Undeniably, a high percentage of slave families suffered forcible separations because the slaveholders' labor market valued individuals' work potentials as interchangeable units of labor far more than their family relationships.

#### How the Slaves' Fears about Family Breakup Could Make for Continual Anxiety

Like the sword of Damocles, a constant dread of sudden disaster hanged over the heads of slave family members. Without warning, at a slaveowner's whim or turn of fate, he or she could

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<sup>274</sup>Kemble, Journal, 58; cf the mention of fourteen-, sixteen-, and eighteen-year-olds in Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:80. Very few of these children were illegitimate: Only three unmarried mothers were on the rice island estate Kemble stayed at. Journal, 134-35. Fogel and Engerman used probate records to establish a high average age for slave mothers at the first birth of a child. But they commit so many fallacies with the data (including equating oldest surviving child with a first birth at the time of probate), any re-examination of the evidence totally controverts their claims. See Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:138-39; Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, 136-46; Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, 140-52.

<sup>275</sup>For the general discussion about this issue, note Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:48-53; Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, 112-33; Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, 108-23.

<sup>276</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, 341, 361; Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, 128-29.

destroy their family relationships through sale, moving, death, etc. This fear could transform itself into an all-consuming anxiety when a given bondsman had a personal make-up so inclined. Sarah Jackson had a good master, who even offered her and her children freedom. She took it because of a quite literal worry about the morrow: "I had served all my days, and did not feel safe at night: not knowing whom I might belong to in the morning. It is a great heaviness on a person's mind to be a slave. . . . I did not know how long before it would be my own fate. . . . I am better here [Canada] than I was at home,--I feel light,--the dread is gone." William Johnson explained why he fled bondage: "The fear of being sold South had more influence in inducing me to leave than any other thing. Master used to say, that if we didn't suit him, he would put us in his pocket quick--meaning he would sell us." Although Johnson was apparently a single man, having no marriage to lose through sale, this general fear gnawed away even on him. George Johnson of Virginia shared a similar anxiety, for the recalcitrant were more apt to be sold than whipped where he lived: "The slaves were always afraid of being sold South." Harriet Tubman constantly worried herself: "Then [after she grew older] I was not happy or contented: every time I saw a white man I was afraid of being carried away. I had two sisters carried away in a chain-gang,--one of them left two children. We were always uneasy."<sup>277</sup> Once safely on the free soil of Canada, all these former slaves lost their nagging fears of being sold away from all they knew in this world, and likely being dumped elsewhere merely as some slaveholder's factor of production.

#### The Process of Being Bought and Sold as Itself Dehumanizing

The fear of being sold was one burden of slavery--quite another was the dehumanizing process of sale itself. Here a buyer and seller likened your value to barnyard animals', and weighed it in the balances of the cash nexus. You changed hands as if you were a piece of merchandise, with no end of your own choice but to serve the buyer's purposes in life. The physical inspection process, during which you as a slave had to strip your clothes off in order to help the prying eyes of unknown strangers inspect your body's various orifices, exemplified the intrinsic assault that sale constituted on your dignity. Katie Rowe of Arkansas once described how her master sold his slaves:

He had a big stump where he made the niggers stand

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<sup>277</sup>Drew, Refugee, 29 (William Johnson), 30 (Tubman), 52 (George Johnson), 179 (Jackson). Since the WPA narratives are heavily weighted towards those who were only children while in bondage, they might not often mention this kind of fear, which is the province of adults.

while they was being sold, and the men and boys had to strip off to the waist to show they muscle and iffen they had any scars or hurt places, but [ah!--the privileges of Victorian womanhood!-EVS] the women and gals didn't have to strip to the waist. The white men come up and look in the slave's mouth just like he was a mule or a hoss.

During one slave auction in Richmond, Virginia, one witness described a potential purchaser, tagged by him "Wide-awake," conducting a physical inspection of the "merchandise" after having stared at "it":

Moved by a sudden impulse, Wide-awake left his seat, and rounding the back of my chair, began to grasp at the man's arms [who was accompanied by a boy], as if to feel their muscular capacity. He then examined his hands and fingers; and, last of all, told him to open his mouth and show his teeth, which he did in a submissive manner.

This same witness later saw a black man told to strip behind a screen, where a dozen "gentlemen" rigorously examined his entire body, with "every tooth in his head . . . scrupulously looked at." As dreadful as the process of being sold was, the real pain came afterwards, from enduring separation from your loved ones, which for Douglass meant the friends he wanted to run away with before their scheme was exposed.<sup>278</sup>

#### How Slavery Undermined the Families of Slaves

The fear and indignities of sale or other ways separation from friends and relatives took place were but a subset of the damage slavery inflicted upon the enslaved black family. Slavery subverted the bondsmen's families by having the master organize his plantation or farm's work force as a collective serving his ends, having functions of life that normally would have been done by members of a family that he owned instead being done by others or by himself. The more activities others on the plantation performed for the family as part of their regular, non-household work, the weaker it became as a functioning unit because the plantation's organization for work supplanted roles that otherwise would have been performed within it. The master's work organization replaced whatever family economy the slaves would have developed, excepting those in task system areas who raised crops on patches of land in their free time off work. As noted above, old women and young children took care of the young babies of the mothers (and fathers) working in the fields. Clearly, the

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<sup>278</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 106; Chambers's Journal, Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:374, 377; Douglass, Narrative, 97.

ever-so-practical masters denied to apply the Victorian idealization of the sex roles as expressed through the separate spheres to their adult female slaves, who went out into the fields with their men instead of caring for their children as homemakers during the day. Some large plantations replaced the cooking done by the slave families individually with communal kitchens, raising greatly the regimentation level of meal times. On the rice-island estate Kemble's husband owned, each one of the four settlements on the plantation had a "cook's shop," where "the daily allowance of rice and corn grits of the people is boiled and distributed to them by an old woman, whose special business this is." While here the bondsmen evidently still prepared food separately, perhaps by warming it up again for lunch, the basic cooking processes were still done communally. The more that the master did or had done for his bondsmen by them as part of their assigned job duties outside of their families, and the more he subordinated their preferences for a stronger sexual division of labor by driving both the women and men into the fields, the weaker as a functioning unit the slave family became.<sup>279</sup>

#### How Slavery Weakened the Father's Role

The father's role clearly sustained the worst damage from the slave family's subordination to the overall work organization, a point which was inflamed by the controversy surrounding the Moynihan report in the 1960s. The causes for this are many, but a major reason was certainly the light weight masters placed on the father-child bond compared to the mother-child tie. Rarely, if ever, was a father sold with his children without the mother's presence, but sales of mothers together with just their children were relatively common. The masters, undoubtedly influenced by their own patriarchal outlook on life, tended to see the men first as workers, and fathers second, but judged women's role as mothers as equaling or exceeding their importance as workers. Slave mothers added to their owner's wealth as she gave birth, but a slaveholder often rated the father's role, especially when another master owned him, as scarcely exceeding a stud's or sperm donor's. Partly because the slaves often chose to "marry abroad," that is, to choose a wife or husband owned by another slaveholder, the father's role was lessened. This practice was enormously common--by one count, two-thirds of nuclear slave families had multiple owners, including cases in which the master owning the children differed

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<sup>279</sup>Kemble, Journal, 18. Note also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 495; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 287. After emancipation, the forced equality in field work soon disappeared, for the freedmen and freedwomen preferred and adopted the sexual division of labor that the whites had. See Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief," 422.

from the one owning one of the parents. The husband, especially if he lived a considerable distance away, or his master was rather stingy with passes, often was a mere "weekend father" to his children. In this context, the length of the slaves' workday and the exhausting burdens of heavy field labor looms large, which surely would discourage long walks to a nearby plantation where the husband's wife was. "Uncle Abram," a slave Northrup knew while enslaved in Louisiana, had a wife who lived seven miles away. He had permission to visit her once every two weeks on weekends. As "he was growing old, as has been said, and truth to say, [he] had latterly well nigh forgotten her." Since the master had such great power over his slaves, including control over their food supply, and the adults of both sexes worked in the fields or in the master's home, the slave father consequently lost the role of provider to his wife and children. Since she was with the children all weeknights, the slave mother did most of the daily housework that was crammed in between sleeping and days in the fields (or owner's house). By feeding, dressing, and caring for her children much more, she maintained a much firmer family bond with them than the off-plantation father did. Her "quantity time" swamped any supposed "quality time" the father may have had with his children on weekends. Kemble's depressingly pessimistic analysis of slave fatherhood had a solid basis: "The father, having neither authority, power, responsibility, or charge in his children, is of course, as among brutes, the least attached to his offspring." Although Blassingame and especially Genovese emphasize that the slave "man of the house" sometimes helped his family through hunting, fishing, etc., the white master nevertheless had fundamentally undermined the importance of the slave father's position by subordinating his workers' family roles to their roles in the plantation's or farm's work process.<sup>280</sup>

The slaveowner's total dominance weakened the slave father's role in other ways as well. The biggest, potentially most damaging threat to the man's role in the slave family came from his inability to stop physical punishments or sexual advances by masters who did either. Indeed, a major motive for "marrying abroad" was a husband's desire to avoid seeing his wife be whipped or letting her see him be whipped. As Moses Grandy explained: "No colored man wishes to live at home where his wife lives for he has to endure the continued misery of seeing her flogged and abused, without daring to say a word in her defense."

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<sup>280</sup>On the damaged father's role, see Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 344-46. The two-thirds figure is based on a 1866 military census of ex-slaves who lived in Princess Anne County, Virginia, where the blacks questioned stated who owned them in 1863. Gutman, Slavery and the Number Games, 105; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 169; Kemble, Journal, 60; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 486-89; Blassingame, Slave Community, 179.

Harriet Jacobs was happy her lover, a free black carpenter, was not a slave, but even with his superior legal status he still had "no power to protect me from my master. It would have made him miserable to witness the insults I should have been subjected to." She encouraged him to move to the North, since she knew her master would not let her marry him anyway. True, sexually exploiting a slave woman could be hazardous to the health of the exploiter. Sometimes they paid with their lives since some bondsmen would kill them. Jacobs herself was happy when they had the boldness to "utter such sentiments [of opposition] to their masters. O, that there were more of them!" On the other hand, as a result of the dehumanizing, de-masculinizing effects of slavery, Jacobs lamented: "Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters."<sup>281</sup> Despite the assaults on slave manhood and fatherhood, the passionate battles many husbands and wives fought against forced separations show that many had marriage and family relationships approaching normality. An enslaved man faced terrible impediments in fulfilling his position in nurturing his children and living in understanding with his wife, a role hard enough to make men to fulfill in contemporary free society. That some did is a testimony to the power of the human spirit under oppression, while those who failed suffered under burdens no American bears today.

Where the fathers failed, the mothers frequently picked up the slack. Slavery did strengthen the mother's role in the slave family at the expense of the father's, i.e., "matriarchy" did develop to some degree. The mother's unusually strong role had two major sources. First, by imposing field labor on both sexes, slaveholders basically eliminated the sexual division of labor by creating a kind of forced equality. Second, the practice of having a wife or husband "living abroad" produced a sense of independence in the women because their men simply were not often physically present for much of the day or week.<sup>282</sup> The slave wife on her own would care for her children, cook, work, etc. without

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<sup>281</sup>Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, 16, quoted in Peter Kolchin, Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Cambridge: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1987), 211. Cf. Kemble, Journal, 175; Brent, Incidents, 41-43; Blassingame, Slave Community, 172.

<sup>282</sup>This practice also increased the men's feeling of independence because they received the freedom to walk to another plantation using a standard or monthly pass. Bennet Barrow opposed allowing off-plantation marriages in part because: "3d-- it creates a feeling of independance, from being, of right, out of the control of the masters for a time." Davis, Plantation Life, 408.

her husband around except on weekends (or perhaps weeknights) after he had used a pass to go visit her. The men themselves effectively took on the mentality that their master's place was a barracks, while "home" was where their wives lived. Because they were not the providers, and did not own or control property which made their wives dependent on them and what they earned, they intrinsically had less control over their wives compared to free men, as White notes. Planter Barrow strongly opposed letting slaves marry off plantation. Giving a number of reasons against the practice, he in part enumerated: "2d Wherever their wives live, there they consider their homes, consequently they are indifferent to the interest of the plantation to which they actually belong." And because "marrying abroad" was so routine, the "weekend father/husband" role was ubiquitous in the slave community. As noted above, two-thirds of slave nuclear families by one quantitative study had members owned by multiple masters; "marrying abroad" was surely a major reason for the divided ownership. Since such a slave family's stability was surely conditional to what could happen to two masters, not just one, this arrangement increased the likelihood of forced separations if one master or the other should move, die, go bankrupt, etc. One reason Barrow attacked "marrying abroad" was to avoid involuntary separations. Hence, the practice of "marrying abroad," of seeing the grass as greener on the other side of the fence when choosing a mate, caused a sense of rootlessness in the men, requiring by default the women to take on additional responsibilities at home and work which made them more independent of their husbands.<sup>283</sup>

#### Factors Which Encouraged Slaves to Treat Marriage Bonds Casually

No slave state recognized marriages between slaves. Legally the slaveholders' regime no more concerned itself about an enslaved man and woman living together than about two barnyard animals copulating. Because these ceremonies had no legitimacy, the master had the authority to perform slave weddings; he often joined slave couples together. Some weddings were relatively elaborate, such as those for some favored domestic servants, and still more had a minister perform them.<sup>284</sup> But since the normal

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<sup>283</sup>Deborah G. White, "Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South," Journal of Family History, Fall 1983, 255; Davis, Plantation Life, 408, 409; On the frequency of marrying abroad, see Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, 103-4 and Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:81; On seeing the "grass is greener elsewhere," see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 155. The bondsmen also had good reasons for their custom, but it had its intrinsic costs, including increased involuntary separations.

<sup>284</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 147; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 166-68.

slave wedding was performed very casually, this very lack of gravity to the ceremony induced many to take their vows correspondingly lightly. In one case, after the master gave his permission, and he said to bring the slave woman to the big house, the couple exchanged their vows thus:

'Nat, will you take Matilda fo' yo' wife?' 'Yes suh,' Pappy say. 'Matilda, you take Nat fo' yo' husban?'' 'Yes, Massa,' she say. 'Den consider yo'self man an' wife!' he say. An' de names went in de book, whar us-all lil' nigger went down later on.'

Another master routinely used a white preacher to marry his slaves, but a neighboring white master, recalled freedwoman Millie Evans of North Carolina, joined together his slaves himself. "He would say to the man: 'Do you want this woman?' and to the girl, 'Do you want this boy?'" After having the couple jump the broom, he'd say, "That's your wife" to the groom. Olmsted found some dispensed with any ceremony at all, after their owner gave them permission. The former long-time overseer that Kemble's husband had employed took the marriage bonds of the slaves very casually in practice. If he heard anything about disagreement between a slave husband and wife, he would make them switch partners in order to curb the marital wrangles.<sup>285</sup> These practices illustrate how the surrounding white society actively destroyed slave marriages even when no sales or relocations took place, since the couples were not forced or even allowed to work out their problems to help ensure stability in the quarters. Since the masters knew slave marriages were not legally binding, they often failed to take them seriously themselves, which then encouraged their slaves also to take their vows casually, even when many did not.

#### How Slavery Encouraged a Casual Approach to Family Relationships

A lack of commitment to family relationships often afflicted bondsmen, as amply documented below. This tendency in part came from the alienation the system of slavery produced among them, in which many felt more or less rootless and untied to a particular place or set of fellow humans.<sup>286</sup> Alienation could serve as a defensive mechanism for emotional and psychological protection against loss a priori. Alienation could also be produced among the slaves after they personally experienced being uprooted and transported from all they had known to some distant plantation

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<sup>285</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 166; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 65; Mary Reynolds of Louisiana disliked a similar casual wedding she had (124). Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:81; Kemble, Journal, 167.

<sup>286</sup>Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 342-43.



where their ability to raise and pick cotton was all that mattered. Hence, a feeling of separation or withdrawal from a position, place, or object of previous sentimental attachment could be either a preemptive measure or the eventual consequence of being forcibly separated from family members and friends. Unlike white families in the larger society, the slave family received no benefit from any legal protections and relatively little from positive societal pressures on its members to preserve their relationships with one another.<sup>287</sup> Overseer Ephraim Beanland, who was about to move James Polk's slaves down to Mississippi to open a new plantation, tried to buy the wife of a slave that a neighboring master owned, but without success: "I went yesterday and ofered Carter \$475 for Seasers wife and she is not willinge to go with you [Polk] so I tell Seaser that she dose not care any thinge for him and he sayes that is a fact."<sup>288</sup> The white master's wish to move his slaves was hardly the only problem here, for he authorized his overseer to offer some cold hard cash to preserve the slave marriage in question. For whatever reason, Caesar's wife used Polk's move as a convenient way to divorce her husband. A casual approach to sexual relationships did appear in the quarters. One slaveholder told Olmsted that the slaves would spend a few weeks "trying each other" before choosing settling down with a particular mate.<sup>289</sup> One frustrated master found his slaves avoided quarrels and stole little, but he could not "break up immorality . . . Habits of amalgamation, I cannot stop." The wife of a white pastor for a black congregation in Montgomery, Alabama, incredulously discovered that many took their marriages very lightly. They wanted divorces for apparently trivial cases of disagreement or incompatibility. One man sought to get rid of his wife for wanting to spend all he made on clothes, while one woman visited the pastor's home to make this request: "I came to ask, please ma'am, if I might have another husband."<sup>290</sup> The two whites here condemned the sexual promiscuity and casual relationships these actions manifested. But because the white community fundamentally had taken the blacks' family relationships rather offhandedly itself, it had little reason to expect anything better. It denied their slaves' relationships legal recognition by authorizing the willy-nilly separations that masters for any whimsical reason at their command could impose on slave couples. It's wrong to expect all the black community to respect their

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<sup>287</sup>See Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief," 418.

<sup>288</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, 84.

<sup>289</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:81.

<sup>290</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:225-27. The latter two cases may be of free blacks instead of slaves; the context does not make it completely clear.

marriage relationships as sacred when their white owners clearly denied they were by their own actions.

Even the parental-offspring relationship was often treated casually. Although the passion expressed by many slave mothers as their children were separated by the auction block from them for the rest of their lives is truly notorious, others dealt with their offspring quite impersonally. The father-child bond was much weaker than the mother-child tie, for reasons like those given above. Kemble found one baby of a slave family had just been "mercifully removed [from] the life of degradation and misery" to which its birth had doomed it. The father, mother, and nurse who also was its grandmother, all seemed apathetic and indifferent to its death, either from, Kemble inferred, the

frequent repetition of similar losses, or an instinctive consciousness that death was indeed better than life for such children as theirs . . . The mother merely repeated over and over again, 'I've lost a many; they all goes so;' and the father, without word or comment, went out to his enforced labor.

The root of the high infant mortality rates may have been a semi-intentional carelessness, over and beyond the bad treatment and material conditions, such as minimal maternity leaves, that many slave mothers endured. Barrow negatively cited Luce for "Neglect of child. Its foot burnt." This case was hardly unique. Edie, on Kemble's husband's estate, lost all seven of her children. On Polk's plantation, Evy's babies never lived long after their births. Why did Barrow's slave Maria neglect to tell him earlier about her baby's sick condition before it died? Why did "Candis" say her child was just a little sick when, after checking, "Old Judy" found it lay dying, "'pulseless.'" And Matilda chose not to tell the overseer she was pregnant until a few minutes before her baby's birth. The child died the next day, evidently because the midwife could not arrive to help soon enough. Although a skeptic of a sometimes weak mother-child tie could always attribute all these deaths to simple bad luck, disease, bad treatment, and poverty, a theme of almost willful neglect still seems to lurk in their background. Consider Bassett's speculations about Evy's string of infant deaths:

But we may judge that a controlling cause was her inefficiency in taking care of them. Perhaps she did not feel much interest in their health. They were not hers, but her Master's. Why should she be interested in taking care of master's negroes? Here was mother love at a low ebb. . . . Fortunately not all slave

women were indifferent on this point.<sup>291</sup>

Although this analysis cannot be decisively proven without direct access to the slave women's own thoughts, sometimes it should still be seen as a serious possibility. The sense of alienation many slave mothers likely felt from life itself may have made them careless about continuing it in others when existence was a continuous, burdensome round of drudgery organized to serve mainly someone else's ends in life.

Children also sometimes felt a weak emotional tie to their parents, as freedwoman Linley Hadley's story demonstrates: "My papa went on off when freedom come. They was so happy they had no sense. Mama never seen him no more. I didn't either. Mama didn't care so much about him. He was her mate give to her. I didn't worry 'bout him nor nobody then." True, since her owner arranged (or helped to arrange) her parents' marriage, the husband-wife relationship was correspondingly weak, so they used the arrival of freedom as a convenient moment to get divorced. Nevertheless, the daughter felt no emotional loss about her father's permanent departure. Frederick Douglass felt no particular ties to the plantation he had lived on before going to Baltimore. He knew no father, who was a white man, his mother was dead, and he rarely saw his grandmother. Although he lived with two sisters and one brother, "the early separation of us from our mother had well nigh blotted the fact of our relationship from our memories." He felt no homesickness when moving away:

The ties that ordinarily bind children to their homes were all suspended in my case. I found no severe trial in my departure. My home was charmless; it was not home to me; on parting from it, I could not feel that I was leaving any thing I could have enjoyed by staying.<sup>292</sup>

Douglass's case exemplifies the sense of alienation, detachment, and rootlessness that slavery inflicted on many bondsmen. Consider the inevitable reactions of slaves, after having developed close relationships with their spouses or children, who were then suddenly sold away from all they knew as home and family. They frequently had to finish out their lives on a distant plantation among (initially) strangers under the lash of some brutal overseer or owner who saw slaves as workers above

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<sup>291</sup>On the difference of slave parents, see Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 346; Kemble, Journal, 95, 174; Davis, Plantation Life, 201, 269, 432; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, 141, 264-65.

<sup>292</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 228; Douglass, Narrative, 44-45.

all, not as fathers, husbands, or sons, mothers, wives, or daughters. Certainly the slaves felt little sense of loyalty to the larger white community, i.e., America as a whole, because of the bad treatment and conditions they endured, not to mention how some education was necessary for the creation of nationalism to begin with. A detached, uncommitted outlook on life, developed as a protective psychological mechanism, perhaps affected a majority of slaves, certainly likely a significant minority, which has ominous implications for the looseness of their family bonds.

#### Other Ways Slavery Destroyed Family Relationships

Slavery damaged the slaves' family relationships in other ways, even among those seriously committed their families. Slaves planning to run away faced the cruel dilemma of choosing between freedom and family. As noted below, the slaves' desire to preserve family relationships was a major deterrent against running away. One woman in Virginia, caught between conflicting orders her master and her foreman gave about getting ice for the former while she was sick, "took to the woods" and was not seen again. She left behind a young nursing infant who soon died, despite another woman took care of it. Escaping after being very badly treated, Christopher Nichols, a Virginian slave, knew liberty had a high price for him: "I left a wife and three children, and three grandchildren,--I never expect to see them again in this world--never." One slave woman in Alabama had six children by six different men, spectacularly illustrating how slavery could undermine family stability. Three of her husbands were sold, another died, and "two others failed to making any lasting attachments." Hence, one of those children, "Aunt" Olivia, had no memories of her father, and commented: "On count o' de husban's changin' so freqump, we all raise up widout any reg'lar Pappy."<sup>293</sup> Perhaps for one of these reasons--sale or divorce--was why Jenny Proctor of Alabama remembered nothing about her father. Joanna Draper of Mississippi had been rented out to some place about a hundred miles distant from her original master's place after being sold. Around the age of twelve, she was freed, leaving her on her own from then on. Here the indifference, the rootlessness, the alienation, are all obvious in her statement about why she did not go back to her parents: "I don't know why I never did try to git back up around

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<sup>293</sup>Drew, Refugee, 71-72 (Nichols); Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 172. True, she put an optimistic (perhaps nostalgic) spin on the situation: "But we got 'long jus' fine!" Nevertheless, today it is known that on average the uncertainty stemming from family instability produces far more children with major psychological problems than stable family environments do. A case of a Kentucky slave woman having seven children by seven different men appears in Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 346.

Hazlehurst and hunt up my pappy and mammy, but I reckon I was just ignorant and didn't know how to go about it. Anyways, I never did see them no more." William Harrison, once a Virginian slave, had been sold away from his parents when he was about eight years old. After serving in the Union Army, he did go to look for his parents, but couldn't find them. He had heard that his mother had been sold from Selma, Alabama, to Birmingham. While searching for her, he stayed one night with a family in Birmingham. Years later, he found out from his brother who he had met while in the army that he had accidentally stayed with his mother! Although possibly the product of an overactive imagination, the ultimate Oedipal nightmare of how slavery scrambled family relationships concerned a man who married his own mother by accident after full emancipation came.<sup>294</sup> This grab bag of cases illustrates how slavery could mangle slave family relationships, through a melange of sales, leasing, distant, failed childhood memories, and a lack of commitment to family obligations. In other cases, a thirst for freedom robbed them of their family relationships when they chose the former above the latter. Slavery in the Southern states and the general westward movement towards the frontier combined together to form a vast engine for confusing, destroying, and weakening many slaves' family lives.

#### How the Master Could Routinely Interfere in Slave Family Relationships

The master or mistress's steady intervention in slave family life helped produce instability in its relationships besides the damage inflicted when they dissolved the family itself by sale, moving, etc. Slaveowners might choose to punish a husband and/or wife for fighting, arguing, or committing adultery. The master, instead of the parents, might punish a slave child for some petty infraction. Since the master loomed above the slaves as a paterfamilias, a father of fathers, some (likely among the domestic servants, not field hands) might have turned to a kind master, and asked him to solve family problems which, had they been free, they would have worked out on their own. Striking at the slave family's deepest foundations, miscegenation was another way a master could interfere with it. The master (and/or his sons)--rarely was it ever a mistress--would sexually exploit the women under his (or their) authority, and have children by them. The master (or overseer) here thrust himself between the slave woman and her man in order to satisfy his own sexual appetites.<sup>295</sup> Forced to stand aside, the black husband usually had to tolerate this intruder into his marriage bed, although some bravely

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<sup>294</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 55, 89, 102, 156.

<sup>295</sup>Clarence L. Mohr, "Slavery in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1773-1865," Phylon, 32 (Spring 1972): 11.

retaliated in a self-sacrificial defiance, surely knowing the dangers involved.<sup>296</sup> If the woman was unmarried, her offspring were necessarily illegitimate, and normally lacked a father figure and role model to give them direction in life, assuming they were not sold outright to appease the mistress's jealousy. Harriet Jacobs's daughter, whose father was a prominent white man, later becoming a congressman in Washington, D.C., lived with him as a domestic servant and slave. He showed no love towards her despite being affectionate to his white daughter by his wife.<sup>297</sup> Work discipline issues here spill into the slaves' personal lives, because the master would regulate and control the off-work lives of his slaves far more than a typical employer would regulate the lives of his employees, excepting live-in helpers such as domestic and farm servants. Since the master claimed the bondsmen themselves as his property, controlling them when they were not working was also part and parcel of his responsibilities over his "troublesome property." Since the slaves normally lived upon the master's land in "company housing," this further increased his power over them, with the important variation that the employees were "company owned" as well! Thus masters and mistresses also weakened slave family ties by their constant daily interference when doing things for the slaves that free blacks would have done on their own or through the (mostly) former's sexual misconduct and its inevitably unpleasant consequences.

#### Master-Arranged Marriages

Forced arranged marriages were another way a master or mistress could interfere in their slaves' family lives. The slaveholders normally let romantic love between the men and women they owned take care of their desires for their "negro property" to multiply, be fruitful, and replenish the American wilderness. Nevertheless, slaveowners had the power to impose, not just to destroy, marriages. Charley Nicholls's master in Arkansas said he was going to choose a good woman for him. When he suggested he might help him in the selection process, his owner laughed and said: "Charles, nobody yo' age got any sense, white or cullud!" After the master presented him with "de house-gal," Anna, the choice impressed him. The grin on her face then showed the feeling was mutual. They went on to have no less than twenty-four children together. (One has to wonder whether the master knew his domestic servant had her eye on Nicholls already!) But master-arranged marriages were unlikely sources of soul mates. Consider now the surely far more common and less happy outcomes of such matches as illustrated by Rose Williams's case. Her master told her to live with Rufus, a big bully of a man, when

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<sup>296</sup>Note Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 359-60.

<sup>297</sup>Brent, Incidents, 35, 105, 193.

she was about sixteen years old and still in virginal ignorance. During the first night, she threw him out of bed and banged him over the head with a poker. She had another run-in with him the next night, when she threatened him with the poker again: "Git 'way from me, nigger, 'fore I bust your brains out and stomp on them." Afterwards, her master offered her two choices: Either accept a whipping at the stake or live with Rufus in order to have children for him. Out of the fear of the whip and appreciation from his buying her with her parents the year before, she yielded. William Grose, formerly a slave in Virginia, was sold away from his wife, a free woman. His new master sent for a woman, who after coming in, was unceremoniously assigned to him: "That is your wife . . . Cynthia is your wife, and [to his brother sold with him] Ellen is John's." When doing such things, masters treated their human chattels like animal stock, implicitly acting as if the slaves treated the most physically intimate relationship possible between two people as a purely animal function. Which specific individual was assigned to another mattered little; producing children who increased their owner's net worth mattered much. In Rose Williams' case, her master pointed out he had paid big money for her, so he wanted her to have children. Her mistress said since both Williams and Rufus were "portly," the master wanted them to "bring forth portly children." What about quality of character and compatibility in personality when men and women choose mates? Well, those characteristics take a back seat to the slaves' duties to serve as profitable breeding stock for their owners. As it has been observed, unlike the case for traditional societies where arranged marriages remain the norm to this day, those imposed on the slaves were done not in the interests of the families (or the parents of the children) being joined together, but to benefit some third party, the slaveholder. Master-arranged marriages inevitably raised the levels of alienation within the slave family unit and increased the "voluntary" separation rate among bondsmen since the unifying bond was forced, as Linley Hadley's comments above illustrate. Although the slaves did not have to endure imposed marriages often, they certainly were yet another factor that contributed to slave family instability that the slaveowners inflicted.<sup>298</sup>

#### Just How Common Was Miscegenation?

How common was miscegenation? It constituted a major, blatant, and direct subversion of the bondsmen's marriages by their masters. Fogel and Engerman argue that the miscegenation

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<sup>298</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 164; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 161-62; Drew, Refugee, 84. While exaggerating the frequency of arranged marriages, Franklin makes insightful comments on their negative consequences. From Slavery to Freedom, 148.

rate was around 1-2 percent per generation. Surprisingly enough, unlike most of their innovative claims, this assertion can survive the scrutiny of their critics. Gutman and Sutch's rebuttal, which proposes a transmission rate in the 4-8 percent range per generation, builds upon an earlier, higher estimate of the percentage of white genes in the African-American population of .31 by Glass and Li. A later, improved estimate by Roberts brought it down to about .20 by substituting data from West African populations (i.e., from Africans of the same ethnic stock as most American blacks) for those Glass and Li took mostly from elsewhere in Africa. The newer estimate assumes ten generations passed, with a gene flow rate of .02 to .025 per generation. Glass later maintained the upper and lower bounds were .0241 and .0336 for the gene flow per generation, down from his and Li's earlier estimate of .0358. In light of Glass's and Roberts's revised figures, and Reed's three fairly similar estimates for total white genes in the black population (which are  $.273 \pm 0.037$ ,  $.220 \pm 0.009$ , and  $.200 \pm 0.044$ ), Gutman and Sutch's higher transmission estimates are unsustainable. Additionally, Fogel and Engerman are conservative when they assume 30-year generations, since shorter generational lengths (c. 25 years) are plausible when using Gutman's own averages of slave mothers' ages at their first birth, their husbands' ages, and average slave life expectancies.<sup>299</sup> If more generations passed during the same period of time, each generation needs a lower percentage of white male fathers to reach recent total figures for a given percentage of white genes existing in the black gene pool. On the other hand, Fogel and Engerman apparently look back too far (to 1620) for an appropriate date for white gene transmission to begin. Gutman and Sutch suggest 1710 or 1720, while Glass and Li prefer 1675 or 1700. These two variables largely cancel each other out (length of generation and starting point) for the pre-1900 period. Sutch and Gutman assert that Reed as well as Glass and Li excluded mulattos, but the latter's methodology contradicts

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<sup>299</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:133, 2:110; Bentley Glass and C.C. Li, "The Dynamics of Racial Intermixture--an Analysis Based on the American Negro," American Journal of Human Genetics 5 (Mar. 1953): 10; D.F. Roberts, "The Dynamics of Racial Intermixture in the American Negro--Some Anthropological Considerations," American Journal of Human Genetics 7 (Dec. 1955): 361-62, 366; Bentley Glass, "On the Unlikelihood of Significant Admixture of Genes from the North American Indians in the Present Composition of the Negroes of the United States," American Journal of Human Genetics 7 (Dec. 1955): 371; T. Edward Reed, "Caucasian Genes in American Negroes," in Laura Newell Morris, ed., Human Populations, Genetic Variation, and Evolution (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1971), 427-48; Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, 146, 154; Sutch in David, Reckoning, 283-84.



their claim.<sup>300</sup> As Glass and Li note: "Since the hybrid individuals between Whites and Negroes are in the United States regarded socially as Negroes, any interbreeding between the two populations will result chiefly in a 'one-way' gene flow from the White to the Negro population." Glass later made similar statements, making a point of repeatedly downgrading the reliability of studies that excluded light-skinned blacks. Precisely for the same reason, Reed even excludes two studies from New York City based upon only dark-skinned blacks. He kept the Evans and Bullock county results from the South, which reveal a low level of white gene transmission (.106 total; transmission rate estimated to be .02 by Fogel and Engerman). In contrast, the figures for Northern cities are significantly higher, such as Detroit (.26 total, with a rate of .052). Strongly bolstering Fogel and Engerman's low transmission rate estimates is the extreme case of the Gullah sea island blacks of Georgia. They basically had only contact with white masters, overseers, and their families before the Civil War, and relatively little contact with whites since, so their level of white genes will serve as an excellent indication of how much fundamentally involuntary miscegenation occurred. Their total of white genes is a mere 3.66 percent; the corresponding transmission rate per generation is .006.<sup>301</sup> Fogel and Engerman clearly can defend the upper bound (i.e., the 2 percent figure) of their 1-2 percent transmission rate by generation, contrary to what their critics have charged.

Despite the Pressures, Slaves Still Maintained Some Form of Family Life

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<sup>300</sup>Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, 151. Gutman and Sutch argue the Evans and Bullock county results are biased downwards because they say mulattoes were excluded from them and because proportionately more mulattoes migrated north or to Southern cities than blacks. But Fogel and Engerman maintain that southern urban areas even in 1850-1860 had a disproportionately high percentage of mulattoes when their movements were still (largely) regulated by slaveholders. Time on the Cross, 2:113. Clearly, more miscegenation happened in urban areas than in rural, since the bondswomen in cities had far more contact with whites and were less tightly supervised than on plantations and farms. After discussing the reliability of the 1860 Census reports' figure that about 13 percent of black Americans had white ancestry, Genovese maintains most miscegenation took place in cities. Roll, Jordan, Roll, 414-15.

<sup>301</sup>Glass and Li, "Dynamics of Racial Intermixture," 8; Glass, "Unlikelihood of Genes from North American Indians," 371, 372, 375, 377; Reed, "Caucasian Genes in American Negroes," 436; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:111, 112.

Despite all the damage slaveholders inflicted on slave families, surely the average bondsman was passionate about at least some of his or her relationships, even when a disturbingly high number took one or more of the basic bonds of the nuclear family (parent-child or husband-wife) lightly. Furthermore, the slaves had strong motives for concealing what they really believed from all whites, especially their owners and overseers; the bondsmen could keep whites in the dark about the real strength of these ties. For example, according to overseer John Garner, the "Boy charls," who had arrived last spring, "run away some fore weeks agow witheout any cause whatever." But was this literally true? Even the overseer knew better: "I think he has gown back to tennessee where his wife is." That was a long trip from where Polk's Mississippi plantation lay. After visiting his brother's plantation in Mississippi, William Polk found one slave mother strongly worried about her sick daughter's health: "Her mother (LucY) says from her complaints of her breast, she fears she [the daughter] is going in the manner in which Alston, Hamp and Charity did, though it may be only the fears of a mother occasioned by sollicitude for her welfare." And the child could return deep love to his or her parent. As a boy, Warren McKinney was a slave in South Carolina, where he fought back against the whipping of his mother by his master: "When I was little, Mr. Strauter whipped my ma. It hurt me bad as it did her. I hated him. She was crying. I chunked him with rocks. He run after me, but he didn't catch me." Although constituting only three minor pinpricks of evidence, these incidents still testify how passionately the bondsmen could uphold their family relationships. But even in McKinney's case, the rootlessness and the alienation that slavery caused still may have reached into his family: "When the war come on, my papa went to build forts. He quit Ma and took another woman."<sup>302</sup> Although free people do make similar decisions, the slave family still underwent stresses and strains that free families did not. Unsurprisingly, a number cracked under the pressures, and became indifferent to one or more important nuclear family relationships. Much more remarkably, many did not despite the damage wrought by "living abroad," miscegenation, sales and relocations inducing separations, non-legally recognized marriages, the performance of functions for the slave family by others that it would have done for itself if free, and the subordination of the slave family to the process of imposing work discipline. Consider by contrast how casually and indifferently many today in America take their family relationships, parental and conjugal, while having advantages unimaginable to the bondsmen; when considering the centrifugal pressures they encountered, the oppressed and mostly illiterate slaves held some form of family life together

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<sup>302</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, 107, 129; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 241.

remarkably well.<sup>303</sup>

### The Key Issues Involved in Examining the Quality of Farmworker Family Life

The state of the family life of the English farmworkers now needs some close examination. Here the flood tide of controversy greatly ebbs. The overall level of stability of the farmworkers' family life institutionally produces little grist for the mills of contemporary English politics. As Snell notes in passing, "family break-up [is] a subject of great interest because of the rising modern divorce rate, but one on which there has been little historical discussion in Britain."<sup>304</sup> By contrast, the slave family's instability, when debated by American historians, carries not just the freight of our mutual obsession with race, but the burden of controversies in the larger society over welfare reform, "family values," inner-city crime, etc. The stability of the laborer's family correspondingly receives much less attention below, in part because it did not suffer the peculiar distortions that resulted from the basically unlimited authority of slaveholders over their slaves, who really had no "private life" shielded from their owners' eyes. The fundamental norms of then-contemporary lower class and peasant family life in western Europe, such as the prevalence of the nuclear family household and the rarity of divorce, apply to the English case.

But one key theoretical consideration needs exploration first which has important implications for the quality of family life for both English farmworkers and African-American slaves: Were family relationships in the lower and working classes in the

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<sup>303</sup>When describing the greater number of roles a slave could play in Latin America compared to the United States, Stanley E. Elkins wrongly declares: "He [the Latin American/Caribbean slave] could be a husband and father (for the American slaves these roles had virtually no meaning)." Conspicuously, Elkins's summary judgment overlooks the slave woman and her roles as wife and mother, which (following the insights of Gilder in Men and Marriage) are much more durable and less socially constructed than the man's roles as husband and father. By apparently taking the universal "he" of his sentence too narrowly and literally, he accidentally eliminated half of all American slaves' experience with family life! Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 136. The imbalanced sex ratios in which men outnumbered women on many Caribbean and Latin American plantations undermine his argument as well.

<sup>304</sup>Snell, Annals, 359-60.

past much more motivated by practical material self-interest than at present? Marriages in peasant villages were typically mostly based upon the practical self-interest of the older adults of the families being joined together, such as the inheritance of land and dowries. Does the reality that romantic love weighed little in the balances of peasant marriage contracts mean the husband and wife involved mainly saw themselves as traders merely trying to get the most out of the other? Did the privations of pre-industrial life, with its concept of limited resources that needed careful conservation and rationing as expressed by limiting how many could marry and when they could do so numbers and timing of those marrying, increase the selfishness of people's relationships? Did they see the dependents of the family, such as young children and old people incapable of fieldwork, as at best unpleasant burdens to bear, and at worst parties to be permanently disposed of as quickly as possible? Or, despite the privations of life, did married people in the lower classes living close to the subsistence level have fundamentally affectionate, caring relationships with one another? Did the increasing sexual division of labor produced by men working away from home more as industrialization advanced, which increasingly confined women to domestic duties after the spread of Victorian ideals about the separate spheres, raise the level of alienation within families instead of lowering it? On the quality of the pre-industrial masses' family life, Eugen Weber and John Gillis, who paint a pessimistic picture, face off against K.D.M. Snell, who upholds an optimistic view.<sup>305</sup>

The "Weber/Gillis" Thesis Summarized: Was British Family Life the Norm?

Weber deals exclusively with the case of the French peasantry, while Gillis's work has a broader focus, and deals mostly with western European nations' conditions as part of a political and social history of late eighteenth century and nineteenth century Europe. Weber and Gillis depend on sources left by middle class observers seeing the cruelty or callousness that frequently accompanied peasant (or other, lower class) family life. No direct access to the minds of the peasants themselves is now possible, except perhaps through proverbs or the filter of official documents. The latter are always problematical because the poor often had a strong self-interest to shade or conceal the truth from their superiors in rural

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<sup>305</sup>Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976), 167-91; Gillis, Development of European Society, 3-12, 31-32; Snell, Annals, 9-14, 369-73, 399-410. Also note, as implicitly siding with Weber and Gillis, George Huppert, After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 2-7, 117-27.

society. Since lower-class people lived so close to subsistence levels, the productive adults developed habits and mores in family life intended to reduce the number of dependents, young or old. The constant struggle to survive drained affection out of marriage and parental relationships. It was no formula for marital bliss when forming marriages in peasant village societies that the financial benefits (such as the inheritance of land) that the families involved would gain greatly exceeded in importance the man and woman's levels of romantic attraction and personal compatibility.

Because of the crude transportation available, villages, having only limited local resources to offer their inhabitants, had to aim for self-sufficiency. As a result, men and women could not marry until their mid to late twenties in order to cut down on the number of children born that would need support. In turn, which is due to a high infant mortality rate and low life expectancies of forty years or less, a family needed to have so many children born to produce the desired one male heir. To get even a 60 percent chance of achieving this goal, four births were necessary. Because of the struggle to feed them, families with more than a few children farmed them out to relatives, patrons, and masters through apprenticeship and domestic service from young ages, eight and up. Adults saw children mainly as mouths to feed when young. Clearly earmarking the expendability of children, adults who perceived newly arrived children mostly as burdens had the motive for resorting to infanticide. As Gillis summarized: "Mothers regarded their hungry infants as little beasts, insatiably aggressive and destructive. 'All children are naturally greedy and gluttonous,' one seventeenth-century doctor concluded." When the children grew older, they would see the old, meaning their parents in particular, as obstacles to self-fulfillment because they could not marry themselves until their parents died or resigned active management of the land (or other property, such as artisanal tools and animal stock). Delayed marriage and involuntary lifelong celibacy were common as a result, unlike in most non-Western European societies. As parents aged, the tables could be turned on them; their children then may have desired quick and early deaths for them. For example, middle class observers heard peasants calculatngly discussing their parents: "He is not good for anything anymore; he is costing us money; when will he be finished?" More generally, peasant sayings such as the following circulated: "We inherit from the old man, but our old man is a sheer loss!" and "Oh! it's nothing, it's an old man."<sup>306</sup> The elderly might be driven from one house to another among resentful children, becoming subject to conditions leading to a slow--or quick--parricide or matricide. Grimness and estrangement born

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<sup>306</sup>Gillis, Development of European Society, 5, 7; Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen, 175.

out of material self-interest may have characterized the family life of the western European lower classes, a product ultimately of the constrictive ratio of cultivatable land to human food, which encouraged especially the productive in peasant society to resent their dependents.

Since above English agricultural workers and American slaves are compared, the presumably poor family life of French peasants could be deemed irrelevant. After all, Snell is dealing with the English case, while Weber is not. To buttress his optimistic picture of the laborers and artisans' family life, Snell cites letters English emigrants sent to America, Canada, or Australia that expressed strong family sentiments. Letter after letter, he observes, contain language like this extract's:

Dear wife and my dear children this comes with my kind love to you hoping to find you all well as its leaves me at present thanks be to God for it dear wife . . . dear wife give my kind love to my mother and my brothers and sisters and i hope they will send me word how thay all be . . . from your loving husband antill death.

The rural workers' autobiographies which mention the positive quality of their marriages, such as those by Somerville or Arch, also support Snell's viewpoint.<sup>307</sup> How can the data from Weber, Gillis, and Snell be reconciled, besides trying to duck the implications of Weber's data by saying it concerns Frenchmen and not Englishmen?

#### The Limits to Snell's Rebuttal Against Seeing Lower Class Family Life as Harsh

Snell's mistake resembles Fogel and Engerman's when they implicitly equate slave marriages being broken up by sale with slave family breakup. The main tension that Weber and Gillis observe emerges between the productive adults owning some type of property, rented or owned, and their dependents, whether they are children or aged parents. The resentment characterizing family relations stems from the productive being forced to support the nonproductive because of their family relationships. Additional bitterness results from adult children who are unable to marry until they have come into the possession of their parents' property when the latter die or retire. In reply, parents complain that their adult children are disobedient and ungrateful. (To Weber, the generation gap is nothing new!) Furthermore, the French peasantry and English farmworkers dealt with marriage differently. English laborers rarely (if ever) had arranged marriages because they normally had no property (or

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<sup>307</sup>Snell, Annals, 10, 370.

position based on it) worthy of notice by parents or heirs. But French peasants often did have property interests requiring protection, so parents serving family interests often carefully chose mates, or otherwise limited the number of possible choices, for their children in order to avoid such problems as divided inheritances. For this reason, their marriages would be less happy than the English laborers', if all other things were equal, because a love match is more likely to avoid marital discord, at least when the couple kept physical attraction from blinding them from considering personal compatibility and character. Huppert puts well the potential cost of arranged marriages to the wife's happiness:

The secret torments experienced by girls pushed into marriage against their inclination rarely stand recorded in official documents, even though their plight was clearly one of the most common dilemmas of the times and subject of innumerable popular plays, stories, and songs.

Knowing disinheritance was the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, reluctant bridegrooms faced a less severe version of the same problem. So when Snell maintains working class marriages were (generally) good, this is not identical to all family relationships, because Gillis and Weber focus on the tensions of the parent-child bond. Since Snell also leans upon letters written from countries where resources seemed limitless, where a great and mostly empty wilderness ached to be filled (e.g., America, Canada, Australia), Gillis's theme of the limited good constricting and burdening everyone in a biologically-determined circle of life is inoperative. Men in these countries with so much land, work, and high wages available compared to England worry little by comparison about earning the minimal amount to support wives or children. The wives themselves could find lots of paid work or useful labor in raising food available as well, lessening or eliminating the need for their husbands to support them. Since wizened parents are poor candidates for emigration to distant foreign countries' frontier regions, the need to financially support them is rendered a non-issue, beyond possible remittances via the mail. A scarcity of resources provokes the family clashes that Gillis, Weber, and (implicitly) Huppert discuss, but this problem is an unlikely concern for a man writing home from some sparsely populated frontier region to his wife, children, or parents. Finally, as Snell himself admits, such letters may reflect the adage that absence makes the heart grow fonder.<sup>308</sup> So although the disharmony levels of peasant marriages on the Continent arguably surpassed that of the farmworkers, Snell's evidence does not refute Gillis and Weber's

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<sup>308</sup>Snell, Annals, 11, 370; Huppert, After the Black Death, 118.

grim interpretation of family relationships between the productive and dependents, old or young.

When dealing with elderly agricultural laborers and the poor law, Snell himself notes that their family relationships could be badly strained when parish authorities forced adult children to support their elderly parents, as noted above: "The pressure on relatives to pay (and this extended beyond children, even, informally, to neighbours) placed a heavy strain on the family, and must frequently have raised ill-feeling between spouses and animosity against the elderly."<sup>309</sup> The agricultural workers frequently felt this burden was an unfair imposition because over the generations they had come to assume that the (Old) Poor Law would make others care for their aged parents. By contrast, the French peasantry was totally unaffected by any poor law. They had long been accustomed to making private arrangements dealing with their aged parents--which obviously failed to reduce much the level of resentment it generated. One witness, rather shocked, described the peasants' attitude toward their parents: "[The family members are] harsh on the dying as they are hard on themselves. [They] are not embarrassed to say in his hearing that he is dying and will kick the bucket anytime. His wife and his children mutter bitter words about wasted time. He is a burden and he feels it."<sup>310</sup> The French historian Bonnemere described the attitudes from others that an old man in 1850s rural France endured:

[He] carries the wretchedness of his last days with him from cottage to cottage, unwelcome, ill received, a stranger in his children's house. At last he dies . . . but it well for him to make haste, for greed is there, and greed nerves the arm of hidden parricide.<sup>311</sup>

Snell ironically records family relationships strained for similar reasons when the English parish authorities intervened:

It was reported that: 'Many sons contribute to support of aged parents only when forced by law'; that children might move away from the area 'to evade claim'; that 'Quarrels frequently arise between children as regards giving the help'; or that the 'aged prefer a pittance from the parish (regarded as their due) to compulsory maintenance by children; compulsion makes such aid very

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<sup>309</sup>Snell, Annals, 367.

<sup>310</sup>Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen, 175.

<sup>311</sup>Gillis, Development of European Society, 4.



bitter'.<sup>312</sup>

The attitude reflected in the last clause was due to how the Poor Law, Old or New, made somebody else pay for the aged's upkeep. The ratepayers were forced to support the nonproductive, unlike in countries without a poor law, such as France, Ireland, or Scotland. Because the New Poor Law tightened the screws on relief's availability, adult children were increasingly forced to support their aged parents, thus making the quality of family life of the English laborers suffer from the same problems the French peasantry had long faced, who supported their elderly directly without any third parties in-between.

#### How Not Being Independent and Self-Sufficient Could Improve Family Life

Conspicuously, the slave family in the American South avoided internal family conflicts about supporting their elderly. Because the slave family was not financially self-sufficient, but was subordinated to the slaveholders' interests in production, these conflicts were eliminated. Bondsmen did not undergo the pressures of the family poverty life cycle, which were concomitant with the burdens of freedom and independence. All the slaves, children and elderly included, ate from a common pot, so to speak, since none (typically) had to support themselves directly. Since the master and mistress stood between the productive adults on one side and the children and retired old slaves on the other as the protectors and supporters of all their human chattels' interests and needs, the slaves' resentments mostly focused on their owners and overseers, not against the unproductive in their midst. After all, by its very nature, slavery discouraged self-motivated hard work by every slave since the amount of work done usually had little effect on how much anyone owned or earned, thus placing a premium on everyone being as lazy as the lash allowed. Upholding themselves as the supporters of the slaves' children and elderly, the slaveholders, because they owned the land, labor, animals, and crops, became the intermediaries between the productive and nonproductive slaves. The slaves perceived any shortages of food, shelter, and clothing as the stingy master or overseer's fault; correspondingly, they saw none among their own families as a financial drain. Since the slave family lacked the burdens of freedom, its members did not have to depend on each another as much, because the plantation's work process organized and did for its slaves so much of what free families had to do on their own. Overall slave family instability remained much higher than free families' despite this reduction in inter-generational disharmony, which was a curious byproduct of the master's making all his slaves economically dependent on him, because the

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<sup>312</sup>Snell, Annals, 367.

peculiar institution still produced powerful centrifugal forces that forcibly broke up slave families for the reasons described above. The privations that result from the outer world's hostility and indifference can drive families to stay together; the ease that comes from other institutions performing functions for the family that it could do independently, such as child care and cooking, can encourage families to drift apart.

The Weber-Gillis thesis has its own implications for the slave family, despite its origins in analyzing general European conditions: If lower-class family life in Europe was "nasty, brutish, and short," could have it been the same among the slaves? A number of differences obviously arise here, including cultural traditions derived from Africa (e.g., an emphasis on the extended family), and how the system of slavery itself directly attacked the slave family in the name of the profits that slaveholders derived from labor mobility and flexibility when dividing its members up. The conflicts between the enslaved and masters trumped any among slave family members themselves whenever any financial or material motivations arose, since masters controlled how much any of their slaves received, outside of theft and some outside earnings for off-hours work. Dubois's extremely pessimistic portrayal of slave family life varies sharply from Gillis and Weber's descriptions of lower class European family life, despite all believe a low quality of family relations prevailed. Depicting the depths to which the slave family could plummet, Dubois here exaggerated the plight of average field hands on plantations without resident masters: "The homes of the field hands were filthy hovels where they slept. There was no family life, no meals, no marriages, no decency, only an endless round of toil and a wild debauch at Christmas time." Since the master or mistress could countermand any of the slave father's desires, he lacked authority in the home, making him easily sink "to a position of male guest in the house, without respect or responsibility." The slave mother was also absent, but for different reasons: She was a full-time field hand or domestic servant who lacked time to care for her children well. When she was sexually used by the master, his sons, or the overseer, her husband still could not protect her. She could be suddenly and arbitrarily separated by his or her master from him. Given these dismal realities, Dubois summed up the slave family's condition: "Such a family was not an organism at best; and, in its worst aspect, it was a fortuitous agglomeration of atoms."<sup>313</sup>

Despite some similarities, different causes produced clearly

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W.E.B. Dubois, The Negro American Family, ed. W.E. Burghardt, Atlanta University Publications, no. 13 (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1908), 47, 49, cited by Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:201-2.

different effects between what Dubois describes and what Gillis's, Weber's, or Huppert's depict for the family units they portray. In the case of the African-American slaves, the master's power to divide slave families in order to promote his self-interest and to subordinate them to profit-producing work processes produces sharply different stresses from what laborers or peasants endured. In contrast, in having to struggle to maintain some degree of financial solvency and independence above the margin of subsistence, peasants often resented the burdens imposed by nonproductive family members such as the elderly or young children. The kinds of alienation the two groups were apt to suffer from varied as well. The slaves were prone to sense a rootlessness characterized by the feeling that they belonged to no place or set of people, besides to their masters and mistresses. But the French peasants' sense of anomie likely had opposite causes: Many felt constricted in and too tied down by major, life-changing decisions, such as marriage, in their local villages. They had to deal with and support family members that they had little desire to help. Although because masters and mistresses largely determined their slaves' occupation and place of residence, slaves suffered from this kind of alienation as well, but within their families, different factors operated. Most slaves had far more freedom to choose a mate than French peasants did, with their arranged marriages or highly limited choices within their native villages. Hence, although Gillis and Weber's thesis plausibly points to lower class Europeans having a low quality of family life, their theory cannot be easily transferred to American slaves because they faced very different societal pressures.

#### The Limits to Applying the Gillis-Weber Thesis to the English Case

So then, what are the implications of the Gillis-Weber thesis for the quality of the English laborers' family life? It only partially fits because the laborers had more freedom to choose who they married, often like the slaves. Their families routinely lacked the financial interests that, among French peasants, encouraged arranged marriages or narrowed dramatically the pool of potential spouses. As wage earners or dependents on parish relief during the Speenhamland era of family allowances, they had no need to wait until their parents died to marry. To the extent proletarianization spread because of domestic industry's development or subsistence farming's decline, this process had the advantage of freeing adult children to marry before their parents died or retired so the family farm or business could be turned over to them. Furthermore, enclosure and the poor law both tended to lower the laborers' average marriage age because they largely removed the laborers' need to build up a nest egg of savings while working as (unmarried) farm

servants before becoming (married) day laborers.<sup>314</sup> The pressures of families having to survive independently, excepting any charity or parish relief, still promoted among them uncompassionate responses towards dependent elderly parents or young children. In a lament made to Somerville, note the torn feelings one Wiltshire man felt over the death of his son:

We had another boy, but he died two weeks aback; as fine a boy as you could wish to see he wur, and as much thought on by his mother and I; but we ben't sorry he be gone. I hopes he be happy in heaven. He ate a smart deal; and many a time, like all on us, went with a hungry belly. Ah! we may love our children never so much, but they be better gone; one hungry belly makes a difference where there ben't enough to eat.<sup>315</sup>

Although feeling sadness over his son's death, this father also felt relieved by the removal of the burden of buying food for his son when his family scraped so close at the margins of subsistence. The father earned only eight shillings a week to support what before was a family of five. Slaves would have no such mixed feelings over a child's death, because they had no need to support directly that child in a financially separate, self-supporting family. Instead, all their children were communally cared for under the (nominal) slaveholder's aegis as part of the plantation's (or farm's) functions. Slaves felt no financial burden from having a large family because they were all automatically fed part of the plantation's standard rations and their offspring received crude day care while the adults worked in the fields. Few slaves worried about the pressures that the family poverty life cycle describes because they did not support their offspring directly. But the factors Weber and Gillis spotlight that lowered the quality of family life for French peasants (and others) did affect the English farmworkers, but to a lesser extent, because although they did attempt to independently support themselves, their marriage relationships likely were better, being more based on love matches or personal compatibility, because their families lacked serious property interests.

#### Some Evidence Bearing on the Quality of Farmworkers' Family Life

It is easy to show that this or that laborer's family apparently had strong ties. Their resistance against being split up when placed in a workhouse, either by sex when all were placed in one, or when just part of a family might go in, could summon

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<sup>314</sup>Snell, Annals, 53-54n., 210-17; Somerville, Whistler, 385; Rule, Vital Century, 23-25.

<sup>315</sup>Somerville, Whistler, 38.

all the passions of the human spirit, much like the archetypal slave auction scene. Having been ordered to enter the workhouse with his wife, one aged laborer compared it to sundering what God had placed together "that we may live apart and meet death in our old age each alone," in order merely to deter others from applying for relief. In one terribly tearful scene, one Wiltshire laborer told his family they were just about out of food, so to get any bread one of his children (all of them being under age ten) would have to go into the workhouse. Two begged not to be sent. Their mother said any of them would have their hearts broken if they went. The oldest girl said, "Oh, don't send me, I be willing to eat less bread not to go, and Billy says he be the same; father, we will not cry for bread when we be hungry no more, so be's us ben't sent to the union." Seeing their determination to stay together at such a high cost, the father could only hug and kiss them.<sup>316</sup> The strength of the laborers' family relationships can also be demonstrated less dramatically. Arch's wife desired plaintively that he stay and work around their home more, instead of tramping about to earn much better wages far away. In this or that aged couple, as Hudson noted, when the wife or husband dies, the other soon follows her or him to the graveyard. Laborers' wives were said to dislike cottages with a second story because they could not watch their children or an old relative as well, which implies not all elderly relatives were ill-cared for.<sup>317</sup> The laborers' family life hardly can be characterized as being only grim and devoid of affection.

Nevertheless, the laborers' family life also had a dark side. The sexually-segregated male culture of the pub and beerhouse, including the drinking bouts, wasted wages, and idleness that so irked middle class critics, was hardly conducive to making happy households. True, it is easy to exaggerate how common these problems were. The role of the aristocracy, gentry, and farmers in creating the laborers' economically hopeless position in their post-enclosure, high under- and unemployment rural world could also be mistakenly overlooked. But still the ultimately self-chosen ill-effects of the tavern on marital and filial relations are undeniable. Then in some cases, husbands abandoned their wives and children to be supported by the parish. Snell found 289 cases of family desertion out of 4,961 settlement examinations, which occurred when the local parish authorities considered ordering a removal or when they investigated a relief applicant's parish of settlement. Five percent of the examinations made under the Old Poor Law (in the 1700-1834

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<sup>316</sup>Somerville, Whistler, 354, 395-396. Compare Arch, Joseph Arch, 35; Snell, Annals, 352.

<sup>317</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, 47; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, 55, 57-58, 62-63; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, 58.

period) revealed cases of desertion. They almost always featured the husband as the one guilty of abandoning his family, often while serving as a soldier or member of the militia. The number of abandonments rose to 10.5 percent of those examined under the New Poor Law (1835-1880). This increase is likely the product of a change in the applicant pool: Instead of showing more family break-ups occurred overall, the new law deterred all but the most desperate from applying for relief. Middle-aged women with two or three children to support and no husband to assist them were more apt to be at their last extremity, and were less likely to let the post-1834 regime deter them from applying for relief, than intact families that included a husband temporarily out of work. While illegitimacy was something of a problem (Tess Durbeyfield had her real-life counterparts), it was neither common nor as problematic since (unlike contemporary inner-city America) normally the father and mother did marry after their child's birth. Indeed, the working and lower classes deemed the ability of a woman to become pregnant before marriage to be a positive sign, as proof of her fertility. (Of course, the men seldom blamed themselves when such proof was lacking!) One woman expressed her mate's attitude thus: "My husband acted on the old saying about here, 'No child, no wife', and I had one afore I was married." Cohabitation before marriage was not rare. Although the practice produced some instability in laborers' families, because the men might abandon the women they impregnated, others in their village pressured such men to do the honorable thing in a dishonorable situation. The English agricultural workers' behavior here was typical for western Europe.<sup>318</sup> The New Poor Law's bastardy enactment attempted to discourage this custom, which seemed to have some effect at least in Petworth Union: The number of illegitimate births fell from nineteen to ten from 1834 to 1836.<sup>319</sup> The masculine beerhouse culture, the modest number of desertions, and the hazards of bearing children before marriage clearly betray that the English laborer's family did have problems. But only possibly excepting the first listed did these problems differ much from what elsewhere prevailed in much of Europe. The stability of laborers' families definitely far exceeded that of American slaves. Nevertheless, this evidence

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<sup>318</sup>Despite Jeffries obviously stereotypes Hodge, his account about "The Low 'Public'" contains enough subtleties to show it should be taken seriously. Hodge, 2:80-92; Snell, Annals, 359-63; Snell, Annals, 354, especially footnote 97; Gillis, Development of European Society, 6.

<sup>319</sup>Snell, Annals, 354; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, 50, 53-54. However, in some rather confusing, seemingly contradictory testimony, Arthur Daintrey, a member of this union's board of guardians, said the New Poor Law discouraged the marriage of already pregnant women because obtaining an order of affiliation under it cost so much.

helps support the Gillis-Weber thesis concerning how low the levels of affection could plunge for workers' family life, even though the English laborers' case here appears to be better overall than the French peasantry's.

#### Why the Slave Family Was Fundamentally Worse Off than the Laborer Family

Despite the English farmworker's family had its share of instability and its own version of resentments between the productive and nonproductive, its relationships were still in much better repair than the slave family's. The slaveholders created the difference, by prioritizing their needs for a flexible labor supply while pursuing profit over the quality of their slaves' family relationships. Englishmen and Englishwomen simply never had to endure family breakup as a direct sanction by their employers or as an immediate result of the death or bankruptcy of some farmer for which they worked. They did face, of course, the same challenges to staying committed to their family relationships that free people everywhere had. True, the parish authorities (i.e., the local government) interfered some through apprenticing children in cases of "parental irresponsibility."<sup>320</sup> The local "powers-that-be" also could split up the families of the unemployed who applied for "indoor" relief under the New Poor Law before they entered the workhouse. But these acts of intervention hardly approached what slaveholders could do privately without the approval of others. Masters and mistresses routinely, if not always, treated slave family relationships cavalierly. The lack of legal recognition of slave marriages then encouraged the bondsmen to treat their family ties lightly as well. Laborers never had to suffer the pain of involuntary permanent separation of a son or daughter, brother or sister, mother or father, aunt or uncle, etc., from them because of an employing farmer or landlord's arbitrary whims. Certain whole problems that could rent apart a enslaved black family in the American South the laborers never had to experience, such as sexual assaults by their employers and landlords for which they had no legal recourse against, which was miscegenation's core problem. Arranged marriages (i.e., those masters forced on their subordinates), although uncommon among the slaves, were non-existent among laborers. The laborers never had to deal with the major issues that generally weakened slave family life, such as "living abroad" being a routine way of life causing literal distance within many slave families, the father's role as provider being made largely superfluous because the slaveholders provided automatic rations for their slaves, the mother's role being undermined by fundamentally involuntary work in the fields requiring the use of crude master-provided day care, and the youngest children being raised largely in the daytime by somewhat

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<sup>320</sup>Snell, Annals, 356.

older children and not their parents under the guidance of one or more old women on the plantations.<sup>321</sup> Now the family economy among the laborers was gravely weakened towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth as enclosure generally wiped out their direct access to the means of production. But among the slaves this institution hardly existed outside the task system areas, since husbands and wives rarely worked with each other to support directly their family independently. So despite the problems in English laborers' family life, which increased during the rise of enclosure and the decline of service (which had promoted the accumulation of savings), which both encouraged the irresponsible, beerhouse culture among the men in areas without allotments, the slaves' fared far worse because the slaveholders could, in order to serve their own material interests, directly intervene and break up the slave family into scattered individuals.

#### Why the Laborers Had a Higher Overall Quality of Life Than the Slaves

Although arguably African-American slaves had a material standard of living equal or greater than English laborers' in various areas, the former's quality of life was much lower. Now Olmsted would have denied this conclusion. Having traveled and made inquiries into the conditions of the lower and working classes in Britain, Germany, France, and Belgium, as well as America, Olmsted has a viewpoint that cannot be casually dismissed (my emphasis): "And as respects higher things than the necessities of life--in their [the European lower classes'] intellectual, moral, and social condition, with some exceptions on large farms and large estates in England, bad as is that of the mass of European labourers, the man is a brute or a devil who, with my information, would prefer that of the American slave."<sup>322</sup> But when judging by the quality of life criteria used above, even considering the low place Hodge sank to in many parts of Southern England, even when on these large farms and estates, he still was undeniably better off than the slaves in many ways, as Harriet Jacobs believed. In particular, their family relationships were not constantly disrupted and destroyed by their superiors' pursuit of profit. They had freedoms and rights under the law which no slave had, such as the ability to testify in court against their social superiors. Since they had superior

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<sup>321</sup>Since the slaves themselves chose to emulate the traditional sexual division of labor after emancipation, this implicitly was how they judged their own situation. To apply Snell's point about the quality of their own lives to produce results that historians employing contemporary values may find disagreeable. Snell, Annals, 9-14.

<sup>322</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:242-43.



access to gaining the ability to read, write, and do basic arithmetic, the farmworkers' low intellectual level still surpassed the slaves'. Excepting in a few liberal states such as Kentucky, nobody could legally teach a slave how to read. By contrast, especially as the nineteenth century passed, the English government made major efforts to try to educate all the laborers, even though the standards were often low and slack. And earlier on, a number of independent and church-affiliated schools operated in the countryside, thus giving the laborers a much higher rate of literacy even in the late eighteenth century than rural slaves had. Although the English elite sometimes eyed very suspiciously the idea of educating the masses, they never took harsh, punitive legal measures against promoting literacy among their subordinate class, unlike the Southern slaveholders.

### The Problems of Comparing the Slaves' and Laborers' Quality of Religious

#### Experience

Comparisons between the laborers and slaves about the quality of their religious experience are difficult because of some of the extraneous factors involved. Undeniably, the laborers had more freedom to practice the faith of their choice. At least, they did not endure the punitive measures some slaveholders turned against their slaves, such as completely barring them from leaving their plantation (or farm) to attend some religious service, or whippings for daring to practice this or that ceremony of the Christian religion. Of course, some laborers paid a price for choosing Nonconformity, such being denied charity by the local parson or blacklisting by local farmers affiliated with the Established Church. But even then, if the laborer was truly determined to worship God in a manner dictated by his conscience, he still had the (costly) option of moving from his home parish--a freedom the slaves lacked. The growth of Methodism and other Nonconformist sects in England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries demonstrated that the pressures the Established Church could exert through the local gentry, farmers, and clergy were too weak to always prevent members of the lower and working class from defecting from its fold even in rural areas. But clearly religion played a proportionately greater role in the slaves' lives than in the laborers' since the latter had more organized social outlets into civil society than the former, such as the pub, benefit clubs, friendly societies, even perhaps a union. Many laborers were indifferent to religious concerns, but religious apathy rarely characterized the slaves generally, even though the Christianity they practiced was rather questionable.<sup>323</sup> The social side of the slaves' religious practices probably often totally swamped the self-denying and doctrinal side of their nominal convictions.

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<sup>323</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 1:165-67.

How much did such activities as shouting for the Lord, ring dances, and even much call-and-response singing really attempt to honor and worship God? How much were they simply an emotional release while participating in an interesting social activity? One antebellum white minister said slaves lacked a sense of repentance from sin or faith in Christ. While claiming to have all sorts of visions or dreams from the Lord, they were very superstitious and ignorant of Christianity's most basic tenets.<sup>324</sup> Not helping matters any, their owners systematically harnessed Christianity for their own work discipline and social control objectives by over-emphasizing the Bible's call of obedience to secular authorities while routinely and conveniently overlooking their Christian obligations to the slaves. Although Hodge likely was little better informed doctrinally than many bondsmen, even the Established Church's Christianity was less badly bent to serve the governing class's goals than what the slaves received. Nonconformity sometimes also provided a useful corrective on this point to the Established Church's biases. The laborers also had more freedom to participate actively in the organizational side of their faith (such as in the collection of money and the arranging of meetings) when part of a Nonconformist group, a freedom the slaves largely lacked even when they had their own black preachers and could meet separately from whites. And when one of their own stood in the pulpit, often white observer(s) watched, forcing him to self-censor his preaching in a way which Nonconformist ministers or even the Church's clergy (from their rich benefactors) avoided. Those slaves who were free to practice some kind of religion may have gotten more socially from it and have a sense of participation in it than average laborers, who often either were indifferent and stayed home or attended services of the Church and mostly just listened. But, especially when they could read the Bible, the laborers in a Nonconformist sect likely had a much more informed and freely practiced faith than most slaves had. The laborers in these groups developed more organizational skills, which had practical effects when putting together friendly societies and unions to resist systemically the powerful in their society. Hence, because of Hodge's greater religious freedom, he had may have gotten more out of his religious convictions at least when part of a Nonconformist group than the stereotypical (and seeming) "Sambo," who endured proportionately more ruling class distortions in the religion he received and more censorship and restrictions on his own religious activities, but who likely got more emotionally and socially from meetings (when composed mostly of his own group) than the laborers attending the Established Church.

#### How Elderly Slaves Could Have Been Better Off Than Elderly Farmworkers

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<sup>324</sup>See Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:223-24.

Turning to the subject of the quality of life for the elderly, the slaves as a group might have been better off than the laborers, granted certain limitations and qualifications. To the extent elderly laborers landed in the workhouse under the New Poor Law (post-1834), separating them from friends and family in their sunset years through confinement, and to the degree to which elderly slaves lived out their last years among their own relatives and friends from earlier years, then arguably the slaves were better off. After all, both groups suffered similar limitations on their freedom, since the inmates of workhouses were confined to their premises, and elderly slaves on their plantations or farms had to stay when lacking passes, like their younger counterparts. However, the Old Poor Law's treatment of elderly laborers, and even sometimes under the New (such as in Petworth Union as shown above), through their being granted small pensions as outdoor relief, would have had more favorable conditions than slaves of the same age. The elderly slaves also faced a likely greater risk of abandonment or neglect by their masters and mistresses, notwithstanding any paternalistic propaganda to the contrary, than the English laborers did under the Old Poor Law at least. By giving slaveowners virtually unlimited authority to deal with their "troublesome property" as they felt fit, especially in practice in sparsely populated, semi-frontier areas where the law was weak and the mob was strong, the alleged guarantees of security slavery promised for retired slaves were unenforceable. To the extent the elderly slaves had been separated earlier in life from children, siblings, spouses, and/or friends meant that retired slaves may be still be surrounded by strangers or mere acquaintances even when their own master had not sold off (or moved) the aged themselves earlier in life. So granted the foregoing exclusions and exceptions, the aged farmworker was normally treated better than the elderly slave, except during a certain period (c. 1835 to 1865) when arguably the average older slave's conditions surpassed the average workhouse-confined elderly laborer's.

#### How the Slaves' More Carefree Childhood Was Not Necessarily a Better One

As for the treatment of children, the differences between the slaves and the agricultural workers might be small, depending on what values someone chooses when visualizing the proper goals of childhood and the correct organization of family life. Before the 1850s or so, because of the frequently high unemployment rates even for adult male laborers that helped drive women out of the farm labor force in southern England, the offspring of laborers may have stayed home except during such peak seasons as planting and/or harvest. But at least towards the middle of the nineteenth century (from the 1850s especially), the laborers's children likely went to work earlier than slaves's offspring. This generalization would hold at least in southern England where low wages prevailed and/or where the gang system operated in

combination with the cultivation of root crops that children (and women) could easily weed and dig up. Hodge may have gone to work at age eight in such areas, while the young slave might not be in the fields until age twelve on average. On the other hand, the laborers' offspring had a much greater access to education, and benefited much more from direct adult supervision, especially by their parents, compared to the slaves's children. The quality of daycare young slave children gave to the toddlers and babies assigned to them for much of the day under the supervision of one or more old women on plantations rarely could equal what guidance came from the passion and effort that a mother (or father) could muster for their own flesh and blood. Laborers' offspring also often gained a few years of basic elementary education, at least as the nineteenth century progressed and the government became more serious about trying to educate all English children. Even on the subject of work itself, certain young slaves may not have benefited from getting (say) four more years of playtime than laborers' children. The likely low labor intensity of the tasks farmers assigned children, such as birdscaring for some weeks part of the year, hardly equaled (say) a young cotton piecer's grueling, full-time, year-around schedule of seventy hours a week while running around so many spindles in a textile mill. Kemble's criticism of young slaves lounging and rolling about the ground while their mothers worked in the fields should not be automatically dismissed as mere reactionary middle class commentary. (Of course, as a mother herself, she would naturally identify with the burdens the slave mothers' bore unaided by their children). Since these young slaves may not legally get an education when not in the fields, they have to spend their childhoods largely unproductively. At least when young Hodge was put to work, such as during harvest together with his family, he helped to support himself, and maybe even others in his family with an income that his parents sorely needed. When considering a child's obligation to support himself or others in his family when his parents cannot carry the full load alone (such as during the low point of the family poverty cycle), it becomes harder still to condemn such relatively casual child labor. So although young slaves may have had a more carefree childhood ages eight to twelve than young farmworkers (assuming the high unemployment rates of much of the period under study in the South did not keep them out of the workforce until they were older), the latter were more likely than the former to benefit from an education, have more parental supervision, and help himself or his family more through performing productive wage work.

The heaviest and most obvious weight against the slaves' quality of life came from their family relationships being conditional on their owners' whims and emotional states, and remaining provisional upon the soundness of their owners' health and financial conditions. Furthermore, plantation slaves especially had functions normally done by families individually instead collectively done by others as part of the work

organization, such as weekday daytime child care and (sometimes) food preparation. The casual way slaveowners treated the bondsmen's family relationships, legally and in practice, by example also encouraged the slaves themselves to treat their own family ties lightly. Their attempts to evade some of the most humiliating aspects of the slaveholders' system of work discipline through "living abroad" had its own costs by increasing the possibilities of involuntary separation through having multiple owners and by removing the father from his children's lives for much of the day or week. By contrast, the English laborer's family would have approximated standard free European norms since its intra-relationships were not made a secondary priority to the individual members' role as factors of production. True, to some degree a farmer could manipulate the family ties of his laborers for his own purposes. He could require the children of a family to work for him, by threatening he would fire their father otherwise. But he simply could not threaten to dissolve the laborer's family as punishment for failing to follow his wishes. He could try to blacklist the laborer, and attempt to inflict the dilemma of migration or possible starvation on a laborer (if his fellow farmers locally held up a common front), which was the ultimate penalty he could bring to bear. While an employer could threaten recalcitrant laborers with the workhouse (which could split up families), this punishment was only available to the extent the laborers felt compelled to apply for aid under the New Poor Law. As free men, they could still migrate (i.e., "run away"). And the divisions inflicted by the workhouse were much rarer, involved much shorter distances, and were much more temporary than what the slaves typically endured. Although the Weber-Gillis thesis, even when mitigated to fit English conditions, indicates the laborers' family life was not exactly idyllic, still the slaves' conditions were much worse because their family relationships were expendable when they interfered with their owners' pursuit of profit.

A comparison of the quality of life for the slaves and farmworkers reveals that the slaves undeniably endured much worse conditions than the farmworkers, unlike the much smaller differences in their standards of living. The slaveholders' casual and calloused treatment of slave family bonds, as shown by splitting up husbands and wives, mothers, fathers, and children, through wills, gifts, sales, and migration, by itself proves this clearly. Even when the evidence is more controverted, such as how slaves aged eight to twelve generally worked less than their English counterparts (at least in the post-1850 period as the labor market tightened) and elderly slaves possibly were treated better in retirement than old workhouse-confined laborers, requires a number of added conditions and qualifications for the slaves' quality of life to be deemed more desirable than the laborers'. In a number of ways young Hodge was arguably better off, by benefiting from more parental and adult supervision

during weekdays, gaining some barebones education, and having even to work itself. He may have needed, for example, to help support himself and/or others in his family, and farm work for children was nowhere as intense and burdensome as what many in the mills suffered. As for comparative religious experience, the laborers had more freedom to practice their beliefs without coercion; those in Nonconformist sects furthermore benefited from participating in a faith that built their organizational and mental skills. But the slaves often poured much more emotional energy into church activities because they had fewer social outlets than the many agricultural workers who indifferently stayed at home or passively attended the Established Church's services. The slaves allowed to go to meetings which let them freely express their customs and rituals without being restrained by a major white presence may have gotten more out of services at least socially than laborers in the last two categories. So although some individual points could be disputed, the slaves still were definitely worse off than the agricultural laborers in their quality of life.

#### The Hazards of Historical Analysis that Uses the Values of Those in the Past

The quality of life analysis made above clearly takes certain assumptions for granted. What values should a historian use when judging someone's quality of life? Snell maintains that it is more sensible to evaluate by the poor's own standards rather than using the historians', especially those who emphasize real wage increases and nutritional intake, who implicitly believe man is merely homo economicus. Elsewhere he observes the hazards of applying the historian's own values in contradiction or ignorance of the lower class's values in the past: "For example, the implications for the quality of life of family break-up (if it became more prevalent) should depend on an assessment of the attitudes and control the poor themselves had over this--rather than a historian's view on the sanctity or dispensability of married life."<sup>325</sup> Although valuable, this approach has its limits. Consider the freed slaves after emancipation who chose to emulate the whites' sexual division of labor and so largely ended heavy field work by adult black females. Presumably historians employing contemporary feminist constructs could not necessarily evaluate positively what the freedmen and freedwomen did after freedom came. Snell's approach would forestall any historians from critically analyzing some past lower class' values.<sup>326</sup> Obviously, here again the old morass

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<sup>325</sup>Snell, Annals, 9-10, 13-14, 369 (quote).

<sup>326</sup>Interestingly, Snell's approach turns the Whig interpretation of history on its head. What is now privileged are the values of a majority of average people in the past, instead

over the objectivity and absoluteness of any moral code or set of values confronts historians, with Snell's views ultimately tending towards a kind of cultural relativism vis-a-vis the values of some past lower class rather than those of some obscure tribe anthropologists have discovered in the jungles of New Guinea or the Amazon. Obviously, it is rather futile and beyond the scope of this work to settle completely such a broad philosophical question here. Plainly however, nobody should automatically accept as moral whatever any group of people do by tradition presently or in the past, otherwise (say) legalized segregation, slavery, infanticide, suttee, foot binding, or female genital mutilation could no longer be condemned. To the extent historians may believe in some given moral absolute or imperative values (such as, say, a prohibition of genocide or the equality of the sexes to various degrees), they ought to use their own (objectively-based) values when examining the conditions or quality of life of some past lower class group as well. Above, most of the values implicitly used to judge and compare the quality of life of the slaves and laborers are assumed to be fundamentally universal such that most contemporary Westerners would agree (ideally) with what the laborers and slaves themselves did value. Those values include stability in family relationships, freedom of association with others without coercive separations by third parties mainly motivated by profit, a sense of altruism towards the elderly and young, freedom of conscience and practice in religious activities, and the avoidance of what encourages a sense of rootlessness, alienation, and anomie among people. Other values implicitly used above are more controversial, such as those involved in evaluating how beneficial or harmful was the (often) casual, intermittent labor of children ages eight to twelve as opposed to giving them mere idle free time with nothing else such as education to fill it to them and their families. Regardless of what values historians use to make quality of life and standard of living comparisons, or whether they believe values are absolute or relative to some culture or group, their identity should be made explicit, as Snell does in his work. They should not implicitly be smuggled in, as those inclined to a purely material view of mankind's needs (e.g., caloric intake and real wage changes) often do. For man does not live by bread alone.

Undeniably, the comparisons made above inevitably fall into some kind of reductionism because so many variations from what could be called "average" happened in the past real worlds of the slaves and laborers. Changes also continually occurred, which increase the difficulties of generally describing conditions in any long time period. For example, the material standard of

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of emphasizing the (relatively few) originators and developers of present-day values in various movements or individuals in the past.

living as well as the quality of life for the slaves generally improved in the period being surveyed (1750-1865) as housing for more settled areas improved and harsher punishments such as branding died away. By contrast, it steadily grew worse for southern English agricultural workers because of enclosure, the decline of service, rising under- and unemployment, and the New Poor Law's harshness from 1750 until about 1850. After the mid-century point, the laborers' conditions began to improve as a result of the spread of allotments and the tightening of local labor markets that made the (brief) successes of Arch's union possible in the early 1870s. Although drawing such lines is inevitably hazardous, quite possibly the rising average standard of living for slaves approached and surpassed that of the (southern) farmworkers during the period of the French Wars due to the fiscal burdens of those wars and the step-up in enclosures towards their end. Changes and variations in this general picture must be kept in mind, such as the regional differences that gave the northern English farmworkers a higher quality of life and (especially) standard of living than their southern counterparts, and granted the slaves of the Border States better treatment than those of the Deep South. Although generalizations and evaluations about what was typical and atypical are the heart and soul of social history, historians should always be wary of committing overkills in grinding out reductionist conclusions concerning "the average whatever" in the past while forgetting the rich diversity of historical phenomena. Occasional bows toward at least recognizing regional variations, as done above, helps to avoid this pitfall. Hence, while we need a focus on what is "average" and "typical" to avoid getting lost in a maze of disparate concretes and isolated details, we also must seek some balance to avoid reductionism that so eagerly pursues "the average" that all else is sacrificed in that hunt.

#### 4. THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

##### The Sexual Division of Labor: African-American Slaves

It must always be remembered that white masters and mistresses determined the sexual division of labor among American slaves, not the latter themselves. Driven into the fields along with their men, black women during their (generally) dawn-to-dusk workdays had their children cared for by a primitive day care system. Slaveholders imposed this system in order to increase the labor participation rate of their human capital in tasks that directly increased agricultural production and profits. Inevitably, their choice decreased the slaves' level of household labor that provided real, if economically unmeasurable and rather intangible, comforts. After all, how could an economist doing Keynesian national income accounting (or anyone else) properly quantify the positive social effects of better cooked and prepared meals, better mended clothing, or (especially) the clear benefits of having mothers spend more time with their own young



children? Since these matters did not directly improve the bottom-line figures of slaveholders' account books, they chose to reduce how much housework slave women did. Because generally fieldwork was deemed unacceptable for white women, including even indentured servants, to do regularly, but to drive black slave women into the fields was par for the course, this practice may have had a racist motivation also.<sup>327</sup> The colony of Virginia recognized slave women's direct role in agricultural production by counting them when figuring the tithe, but it excluded the white women. As Gundersen concludes: "Black women were considered a basic part of the agricultural labor force in a way that white women were not."<sup>328</sup> So slaveowners forcibly imposed a weakened form of the sexual division of labor upon their bondsmen, which had the curious consequence of creating a crude approximation of sexual equality, especially among the field hands.

#### Kemble on a Stricter Sexual Division of Labor's Advantages

Throughout the South, slaveowners expected black women to work in the fields. When noting that men and women had to perform the same size of task assignments before the current overseer arrived to manage her husband's estates, Kemble sarcastically commented: "This was a noble admission of female equality, was it not?" She approved of his reduction in the amount of work allotted to the women as compared to the men, but she still disliked mothers with five or ten children having to do as much work as women with none. Kemble felt having to do both housework as well as regular field labor was an aching burden. Although blaming the "filthy, wretched" condition of the children and "negligent, ignorant, wretched" mothers upon slavery in general, she maintained a sharper sexual division of labor would be necessary to change their plight:

It is hopeless to attempt to reform their habits or improve their condition while the women are condemned to field labor; nor is it possible to overestimate the bad moral effect of the system as regards the women entailing this enforced separation from their children, and neglect of all the cares and duties of mother, nurse, and even housewife, which are all merged in the mere physical toil of a human hoeing machine.

Then she explains the case of Ned, the engineer/mechanic who tended to the engines in the rice-island plantation's steam mill for shelling rice. His wife's health had largely been ruined by

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<sup>327</sup>At least, by c. 1700 this seemed to be the case in Virginia. Kolchin, Unfree Labor, 32; 454-55, n. 27.

<sup>328</sup>Gundersen, "Double Bonds of Race and Sex," 367.

a combination of heavy field work and child bearing. As a result, she now spent most of her time in the estate's miserable "hospital." What this woman endured Kemble compared to the lifestyle and standard of living that a Northern artisan's wife had. Such a free man would earn enough so his wife would only have to do housework. If his wife became an invalid, he likely would be able to hire or get some outside help for her.<sup>329</sup> Kemble clearly believed both freedom and a sharper division of labor between the sexes would have benefited the slave women.

Kemble's attitudes on a woman's role in the world of work require some closer examination. Although she was an actress by profession and certainly not personally strict practitioner of the Victorian ideology of the separate spheres herself, then-contemporary middle class sensibilities on the subject still strongly influenced her. She also had at this writing two very young children of her own; the burden of caring for them would have encouraged her to want her husband's financial support. She surely projected her own personal situation onto the slave mothers who had far more children than she had, yet also had to work long days for very little return outside the home. She found the thoughts of having to do the same herself simply appalling. After all, the jobs most of these slave women had hardly promoted what today might be called "self-actualization," even if they had been paid wages for them. Most people would find becoming a "human hoeing machine" to be intrinsically unappealing. She, as a middle class woman, could benefit from the positive side of the separate spheres, at least while being burdened with young children and not practicing her profession. Dill notes that middle class women who placed a premium on family stability could benefit from it--which women with young children are especially apt to find worth the trade-offs required:

Notwithstanding the personal constraints placed on women's development, the notion of separate spheres promoted the growth and stability of family life among the white middle class and became the basis for the working-class men's efforts to achieve a family wage, so that they could keep their wives at home. Also, women gained a distinct sphere of authority and expertise that yielded them special recognition.<sup>330</sup>

Besides the reality that female field hand slaves "enjoyed" a basic sexual equality that resulted from a system of coercion and exploitation, Kemble's own personal situation as a mother caring for young children likely inspired her to take an insistent stand against having women work long hours while their older pre-teen

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<sup>329</sup>Kemble, Journal, 28, 121, 122, 151-52 (Ned).

<sup>330</sup>Dill, "Our Mother's Grief," 418.

children lounged about in idleness.

### Jobs Female Slaves Had

Slave women routinely performed tasks in the field that white women either never did, or only did when their husbands were dead or absent for a long time. Olmsted witnessed a scene where slave women spread manure from baskets carried on their heads, with one filling her apron with it before moving it. The ability of some slave women who plowed using double teams particularly impressed him. Although he "watched with some interest for any indication that their sex unfitted them for the occupation," he found "they twitched their ploughs around on the head-land, jerk[ed] their reins, and yell[ed] to their mules, with apparent ease, energy, and rapidity." Mrs. Ellis, a slave who escaped from Delaware, testified: "I did a great deal of heavy out-door work,--such as driving team, hauling manure, etc." Northrup described four "large and stout" lumberwomen who were "excellent choppers" and "were equal to any man" at piling logs. In his area of Louisiana, women would "plough, drag, drive team, clear wild lands, work on the highway, and so forth." Furthermore, "some planters, owning large cotton and sugar plantations, have none other than the labor of slave women." Although the tendency was to have women hoe and men plow, "the exceptions to [this] rule were so numerous as to make a mockery of it." So slave women often did heavy work like the men, even if proportionately fewer did such tasks or as much of them when they were pregnant or soon after giving birth.<sup>331</sup>

To get a more specific picture of which jobs slaveowners assigned to men, women, or both, Barrow's diary repays analysis. Since he owned and managed a large plantation, his operations featured more specialization than small farms with just a handful of slaves would have. In order to keep some slaves busy on days when it rained or other conditions idled them, he had the women spin cotton. This was one of his most common diary notations besides mentions about the weather, certain specific field operations, and notes concerning his crops' conditions.<sup>332</sup> In an occupation that (earlier) in the eighteenth-century America symbolized femininity (i.e., "spinsters,") Barrow chose never to place men at work at it, suffering them to be sometimes idle

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<sup>331</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:216-17, 201-2; Drew, Refugee, 44; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 116-17; White, "Female Slaves," 250, 251. Fogel and Engerman maintain that "plow gangs were confined almost exclusively to men, and predominantly to young men," but this is unduly dogmatic. Time on the Cross, 1:141.

<sup>332</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, 77, 78, 79, 80, 86, 121, 125, 141, 234, 243, 247, 252, 304, 305, 310, 315, 344.

instead of (in the name of filling his wallet) making the men also do it.<sup>333</sup> On one day of very heavy rain, May 5, 1845, he wrote with obvious annoyance: "Women spinning--Men doing nothing."<sup>334</sup> He also gave women tasks that were unfeminine by early Victorian standards besides what they did in regular field work by hoeing or picking cotton. He made them haul hay, build fences, roll logs, clear land, even work on the dam.<sup>335</sup> At some of these tasks men helped or did at other times, such as when all hands rolled logs or a "few men" assisted the women. Besides regular field work, the men's odd jobs included working on the roads, getting timber, chopping and sawing wood, repairing chimneys, getting rails, and pressing cotton into bales to prepare it for shipment.<sup>336</sup> The scattered tasks Barrow assigned to slaves of both genders included making fences, clearing land (although this tended to be a male task), and "trashing cotton," which involved removing extraneous matter out of picked cotton.<sup>337</sup> The "sucklers," meaning nursing mothers formed into a gang for various odd jobs, performed such light tasks as planting peas, trashing cotton, replanting corn, and spinning cotton.<sup>338</sup> Although for regular tasks such as hoeing or picking cotton Barrow assigned both sexes to them, he definitely still drew some lines between men and women for various odd jobs.

Since enslaved men and women often did similar jobs, how did this tendency affect their marriage relationships? As noted above, the institution of slavery seriously weakened the husband's role. Unlike men in the surrounding free society characterized by patriarchal practices, the slave husband had little ability to control his wife through owning some part of the means of production or through being the main wage worker in his family, placing his wife in an economically-dependent position. His wife worked directly for her master or mistress, receiving a certain standard ration for herself and her children regardless of whether or not her husband lived on the same

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<sup>333</sup>Spinning as a symbol of femininity is discussed in Norton, Liberty's Daughters, 15, 18-20.

<sup>334</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, 355; similar expressions are found on 99 and 188.

<sup>335</sup>Ibid., 86, 142, 223, 252, 256, 317, 344.

<sup>336</sup>Ibid., 77, 78, 93, 105, 121, 154, 222, 300, 304.

<sup>337</sup>Ibid., 80, 82, 105, 211, 212, 222, 223, 234, 243, 246, 252, 256, 305, 310, 315, 317. The disproportion of men trashing cotton compared to women stems largely from Barrow's tendency to have the women spin on rainy days, but the men trash cotton.

<sup>338</sup>Ibid., 80, 93, 192, 317.

plantation or farm as she did. She received the same ration for herself regardless of whether she was unmarried, divorced, or widowed. Financial necessity and the burdens of pregnancy and bearing children simply were not important factors in driving slave women into the arms of their husbands, keeping them together as marital "glue." A relatively equal sexual division of labor caused men to treat their wives more like equals, as a coworker in life under ideal circumstances. Even after he and his wife had escaped slavery, John Little took for granted the heavy labor his wife did besides him in Canada: "My wife worked right along with me: I did not realize it then, for we were raised slaves, the women accustomed to work, and undoubtedly the same spirit comes with us here." So together they chopped trees, logged trunks, and cleared the land generally in Ontario's wilderness. His wife gained self-respect from her abilities in doing such work: "I got to be quite hardy--quite used to water and bush-whacking; so that by the time I got to Canada, I could handle an axe, or hoe, or any thing. I felt proud to be able to do it--to help get cleared up, so that we could have a home, and plenty to live on." Clearly, even after the Littles gained freedom, the habits gained from slavery's weak sexual division of labor promoted equality within their relationship. This freed couple's comments support White's speculation: "Since neither slave men nor women had access to, or control over, the products of their labor, parity in the field may have encouraged equalitarianism in the slave quarters."<sup>339</sup>

#### Exceptions to the Slaves' Weak Division of Labor

The picture drawn above of a weak sexual division of labor among American slaves drawn above needs some important qualifications. Although the field hands and domestic servants had fairly equal numbers of men and women among both, the ranks of drivers and artisans were almost exclusively filled by men.<sup>340</sup> Slave women also did most of their own housework, in part because of "marrying abroad." This widespread practice put the husband and wife on different farms or plantations because they had different owners. The husband ended up often ended up treating where he worked during the day or week as a virtual barracks, not as his true home. "Home" was where he visited his wife and children at night or on weekends. As a result, while their husbands were gone, the full burden of cooking, cleaning, washing, and feeding children by absolute necessity fell on their wives. Even when present, he may have done little housework--a

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<sup>339</sup>Drew, Refugee, 217-18, 233; White, "Female Slaves," 251.

<sup>340</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:141. Note the general descriptions of these two groups--"the men between" and "men of skill" (my emphasis)--in Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 365-98.

phenomenon familiar to many contemporary women enduring their own "second shift" of housework. Because of their long work days, slave mothers often gave little attention to housework or child rearing. Booker T. Washington recalled that his mother normally had little time to help her children during the day: "She snatched a few moments for our care in the early morning before her work began, and at night after the day's work was done." Also because of the burdens of pregnancy, the recovery process after delivery, and the need to nurse their children, slave women may, for some short given period, have been given different, lighter tasks or even excluded from work altogether. Planter Barrow's gang of "sucklers" reflected this practice. On Kemble's husband's rice-island estate, a number of the slave women petitioned to have the time they could avoid hoeing the fields after birth increased from three weeks to four. Mary, one of these slaves, mentioned Kemble's babies and her "carefully tended, delicately nursed, and tenderly watched confinement and convalescence" while entreating her to have less exhausting labor assigned to them the month after giving birth. Although evidently their petitions for increased maternity leave went nowhere, they still demonstrate the practice's reality. Inevitably it placed women in a different labor role from their husbands at least briefly. Of course, as White and Johnson note, not all masters lessened the burdens of pregnant women. Some women did gain positions of prestige, in jobs largely or exclusively limited to their gender, such as midwife, skilled seamstress, cook, and/or "mammy" in domestic service.<sup>341</sup> So although the sexual division of labor was generally weak among the slaves because most were field hands or (unspecialized) domestic servants, a much sharper specialization characterized the higher echelon jobs, and the special female burdens arising from reproduction caused at least some temporary distinctions to appear among average slaves.

#### Plantation Day Care Revisited

Rudimental day care and, sometimes, communal cooking socialized functions on plantations that slave families otherwise would have done individually. As a result, their owners boosted the labor force participation rate from a free average of about one-third to about two-thirds through (especially) forcing women

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<sup>341</sup>Washington, Up from Slavery, 17; Blassingame, Slave Community, 180-81; Kemble, Journal, 182-83. See also 79. Kemble, for her part, could scarcely keep herself composed during the latter's request, having been struck at the sentimental center of her life; White, "Female Slaves," 251-53; Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?," Journal of Southern History 47 (Nov. 1981): 512-14; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 353-61.

and older children into the fields.<sup>342</sup> By having one or more old women look after the children who really took care of the babies and toddlers during work hours, the master class greatly narrowed the differences between the work of women and men.<sup>343</sup> These children carried the babies to their mothers to nurse them, when they did not get them on their own.<sup>344</sup> Olmsted knew one fairly enlightened master in Louisiana who gave nursing mothers two hours with their babies at noon, and let them get off work one hour earlier in the evening. These mothers carried a heavy load in toiling all day then getting their children afterwards. Once a slave on a cotton sea-island estate, freedman Benjamin De Leslie described the burden this way of life imposed on his mother: "Us chillun [were] lef' wid er granny. Mammy'd come in at dark, bare feet wet wid de sweat whut run down all day. . . . Reckon folks terday don' know much 'bout wu'k."<sup>345</sup> Masters greatly increased the hours of field work (or domestic service) and correspondingly reduced the amount of leisure time, education, and housework their female slaves would have had if they had been free. As a result, they got more work and thus agricultural production from the average slave through greatly weakening the sexual division of labor. But shipping out more cotton bales (or barrels of molasses) came at the cost of undermining the slave family's stability by reducing the importance of the father's role and by assigning childrearing to somewhat older children themselves in a communal setting, as discussed previously.

Force and exploitation were the foundation for the degraded equality of the sexes that generally prevailed under slavery. As Davis wrote: "The unbridled cruelty of this leveling process whereby the black woman was forced into equality with the black man requires further explanation. She shared in the deformed equality of equal oppression." After freedom came, black families soon adopted generally the whites' sexual division of labor.<sup>346</sup> Some today might criticize their choices, but at least

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<sup>342</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:206-207. For communal cooking, note Bassett, Plantation Overseer, 31.

<sup>343</sup>For examples of this system, see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 23, 68-69; Douglass, Narrative, 22; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:239; Boney, "Blue Lizard," 354; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 147.

<sup>344</sup>Kemble, Journal, 31; Drew, Refugee, 141.

<sup>345</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:318; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 212.

<sup>346</sup>Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Massachusetts Review, winter-spring

whites were not coercing them to choose otherwise. Certain non-quantifiable aspects of the quality of life for these families improved through such a decision, which allowed for more housework of a higher quality, parental supervision of children, and additional time for children or even adults to get an education. Fundamental decisions affecting the quality of life such as the sexual division of labor should be decided by those personally affected, not outsiders using force to bring about particular results for their own economic benefit.

#### The Sexual Division of Labor: English Agricultural Workers

A major difference between the sexual division of labor between American slaves and English farmworkers was the transformation of the latter's during the time period being surveyed (c. 1750-1875). By contrast, since driving women into the fields was well established even in colonial times, here little changed during the nineteenth century for the bondsmen. In the English case from the late eighteenth century on into the nineteenth, as male unemployment rose as due to enclosure and population growth, farm laboring women generally were pushed out of the labor force, at least in the southeastern arable areas of England. The parish of Selattyn in Shropshire returned a questionnaire for the 1834 Poor Law Report stating: "Women and Children are not now so much employed as formerly, because labouring men are so plentiful, and their labour so cheap." The parish authorities, facing a major problem in finding work even for married men, ranked employing women much lower since they could always be (conveniently) seen as homemakers primarily, having a built-in job ready made to keep them busy and out of trouble. By contrast, unemployed and underemployed men were considered much more dangerous and troublesome. They idled their time away in beerhouses and pubs, got drunk, had fights, and went poaching for game to feed their families. Their role in society when without wage work to do was much more anomalous and purposeless than that of women, whose ability to bear children to continue the species gave them more in-built meaning to their lives. Their inborn aggressive tendencies, since they led easily to various crimes, were made to order for increasing the petty sessions' docket size. So beyond any of the standard prejudices against women having certain jobs--attitudes which were significantly weaker in the late eighteenth century than in the Victorian period anyway as Snell explains--the local parish powers-that-be had their reasons for prioritizing the employment of men.<sup>347</sup>

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1972, 88-89; Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief," 422; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 451, 501.

<sup>347</sup>On the subject of women being pushed out of the labor force, see Rab Houston and K.D.M. Snell, "Historiographical



Women's Work in Arable Areas at Harvest Time Increased Later in the Century

From the 1850s on, the number of women employed full time or for long periods in field labor apparently increased in arable areas during harvest or other seasonal peaks in the yearly agricultural cycle. They were hired more then because as the size of England's harvests grew, mechanization had not kept apace to help much in bringing the crops in.<sup>348</sup> As many local labor markets tightened in the third quarter of the nineteenth century onwards as a general rural depopulation through migration occurred, women increasingly reentered the fields during harvest. Often their work was subsumed as part of the family economy, when the whole family, husband, wife, and children, harvested grain together under a piece-work agreement with a local farmer. Even the ancient practice of gleaning, which women and children had always dominated, continued long into the nineteenth century.<sup>349</sup> Snell and Morgan's differences in outlook on women's participation in the labor force lie in the former's emphasis on the 1700-1850 period and on the south where women had become increasingly scarce in the fields, while the latter deals with 1840-1900, and deals with England more generally.<sup>350</sup>

The 1867 Report on Women and Children in Agriculture reflects the changes Morgan brings to light. The Report paints a diverse picture of how much women were employed in field work. In some areas, none worked in the field, for others, they

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Review: Proto-Industrialization? Cottage Industry, Social Change, and Industrial Revolution," Historical Journal, 27 (June 1984):487; Snell, Annals, 21, 40-66, 156-58; 1834 Report, as quoted in Cunningham, "Employment and Unemployment of Children," 135. For a general analysis of men's nature relative to women's and its influence on their sex roles, see George Gilder, Men and Marriage.

<sup>348</sup>An evident exception to this generalization concerned largely pastoral areas such as Dorset, where by the late nineteenth century (c. 1885), women did field work only uncommonly. Snell, Annals, 392-394. However, Jeffries' account of women field workers in Wiltshire, another heavily pastoral county in southwestern England, points in another direction. Jeffries, Hodge, 2:61-62.

<sup>349</sup>Morgan, Harvesters and Harvesting, 11, 15, 20, 21, 24, 26, 52, 93, 102, 109-10, 115, 152.

<sup>350</sup>Even though Snell's subtitle mentions 1660-1900, his work only sparsely covers the last half of the nineteenth century, especially when discounting his discussion of the inaccuracies in Thomas Hardy's portrayal of English rural life.

appeared sometimes, while in some places, they routinely worked.<sup>351</sup> Women customarily labored in the fields where competition for workers was strong, such as the industrial north. In northern Northumberland, women, normally unmarried adults, were "bound" in what was called "bondage" (i.e., under contract). These women did heavy farm work for local farmers while still living at their parents' homes. One sample farm in this area had eight men, eight women, and three "lads" as the "regular staff." In southern Northumberland, married women often worked, earning one pound a week.<sup>352</sup> As Patrick noted, the gang system's perceived moral scandals and exploitation in the Fens largely sparked the writing of the 1867-68 Report. Under this system, gang masters employed women and children in groups to (especially) plant, weed, and harvest root crops because not enough laborers lived near by. Rounding up groups of ten to forty women and children from a nearby village, the gang masters led them to relatively distant farms to work. In the Humber-Wold area, the wives of steadily employed male laborers avoided field work, but the wives irregularly-employed "catch work" laborers and their children worked in order to make up for lost ground financially. Here women and children commonly harvested potatoes. In Yorkshire, farmers made tacit agreements with male laborers that, as a condition of employment, their wives and children also had to be placed in their service. These agreements failed to guarantee them steady employment, but they meant this "auxiliary labor" was not allowed to go shopping around for higher wages elsewhere nearby during the peak harvest and/or haymaking seasons. In the south, female workers were still scarce, at least as year-around laborers. Northampton reported only 190 female laborers out of a group of 8,975. Jeffries, who mainly based his perceptions of English agriculture on what he saw in 1870s Wiltshire, maintained that female field work had declined, especially for the winter months, even if a number still worked in the summer and spring.<sup>353</sup> Clearly, many women still did field work in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, especially in northern England and during seasonal

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<sup>351</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. x.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid., pp. xiii, xiv; Agar, "Bedfordshire Farm Worker," 15, citing Culley's investigation for this report. Conspicuously, the sample Bedfordshire farm employed fourteen men and eight boys, but no women, while the Northumberland one did, befitting the difference in the sexual division of labor between the north and south broadly speaking, at least for arable districts.

<sup>353</sup>Patrick, "Agricultural Gangs," 22-26; Report on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xvi, xxii (Humber-Wold) xxvi (Northampton); Jeffries, Hodge, 2:61-62.

peaks.

### The Female Dominance of Dairy Work Declines

Women had long dominated dairy work. Because of the demand for dairymaids, female laboring employment and their wages had fallen little in pastoral areas in the southwest of England during the 1780-1840 period, as Snell notes.<sup>354</sup> Skilled, experienced dairymaids and the farmers' wives who supervised the maids and/or took on their work themselves brought in a cash income that helped pay the rent. A dairy farm's mistress might supervise two to twenty maids, with each maid tending ten cows in turn, working from before dawn into the late evening. They also had a significant amount of independence from direct male supervision since their menfolk often knew little about the process of making cheese from milk. Indeed, a small farmer with the misfortune of having only sons and no daughters might be forced into raising livestock and abandoning dairying! But then, in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, men interested in improving methods and thus profitability invaded this female preserve. They saw dairywomen as archconservatives unconcerned with innovation and progress in their craft. Male managers and cheese factors, wishing to serve the market more efficiently by applying a scientific approach to dairying in general and cheesemaking in particular, gradually began to shed light on what had been largely a female mystery. As a result, women here increasingly lost control of their old domain. Many farmers' wives, such as one Jeffries describes, abandoned this line of work when alternatives presented themselves, because it required long hours and much hard work. Interestingly enough, the move by farmers' wives into the parlors and housework strictly considered happened before the Victorian ideology about the separate spheres held sway. Machinery assisted in this transition, which allowed farmers to use fewer dairymaids overall, and less skilled personnel to supervise the tasks involved. Hence, a largely female sanctuary within the agricultural work force fell increasingly under direct male domination in the nineteenth century, even though dairymaids were still hired as live-in farm servants by larger farmers when their own wives' and daughters' labor was insufficient, assuming their female family members had not abandoned dairying themselves.<sup>355</sup>

### How the Separate Spheres' View on Sex Roles Influenced the 1867-68 Report

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<sup>355</sup>Snell, Annals, 40-45, 158; Deborah Valenze, "The Art of Women and the Business of Men: Women's Work and the Dairy Industry c. 1740-1840," Past & Present, no. 130 (Feb. 1991), 142-69; Jeffries, Hodge and his Masters, 1:85.

In the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture, the potential negative effects of field labor on women's roles as wives and mothers is a major issue. Many involved with preparing the Report saw the world of work for women and proper sex roles through the lens of the separate spheres. One of the four main questions the Report investigated concerned whether or not women should work and its possible damage to their morals or their performance of domestic duties. The Commissioners even considered the policy proposal of making the employment of girls under the age of sixteen illegal. In Yorkshire, a special school was created to train girls in household duties such as laundering, cooking, and washing. It was said to be good for drawing the tastes of young girls "away from the license of field work" to domestic service and "future duties in life." Female field labor was said often to cause women laborers to keep their cottages less tidily and to neglect their families. They also, it was said, gave opiates to their children at home to quiet them [shades of Engels' depiction of Manchester!], and even hired "an old woman" to care for them. A working wife's messy cottage was even blamed for helping drive her husband to the local public house and into its noxious influences. By contrast, single women held in "bondage" (i.e., under contract) in northern Northumberland received a much more positive portrayal. Their heavy field labor was simply noted not to be harmful morally, meaning, injurious to performing what was deemed the proper sex roles when they married later. From Nottingham and Lincolnshire came a similar report about female field work's non-effects on their roles as wives and mothers. The moral problem seen here concerned the women and older girls corrupting the younger ones--presumably through bawdy talk and so forth--which meant the solution was age, not sexual, segregation. The rector of Stilton charged that gang work made girls "rude, rough and lawless," thus making them unfit for "domestic duties and [which] consequently disqualifie[d] them for their future position of wives and mothers." Others lodged similar complaints, adding that field work developed a "love for unhealthy liberty" in these girls, who said they liked its freedom compared to domestic service's. With different counties of England being investigated for the negative effects field work had on the sex roles of women who performed it, the Report's consideration of whether and how much to restrict the employment of girls depended not merely on the generic issue of how much child labor exploited children and kept them out of school, but also on its perception of the specific negative effects on girls' future roles as wives and mothers.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>356</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. vii, x (generally), xxiv (Yorkshire), xiii (Northumberland), xviii (Nottingham/Lincolnshire); See Stilton in Patrick, "Agricultural Gangs," 25. Caird found in Norfolk condemnations of female field work similar to the 1867-68 Report's: "They contend that it [regular field work for women] has a most

## Why Did Laboring Women Increasingly Fall Out of the Field Work Force?

Did women themselves initiate the changes in the sexual division of labor? Or did middle class mores on the subject of femininity seep down to the laborers, whether from men or women, such as through laborers' daughters being hired as domestic servants? The desires of many farmers and/or their wives to move upscale relate to this issue. Many pursued middle class cultural attainments, and sought to separate themselves more clearly from the laborers both in status and in physical proximity, such as by exchanging live-in servants for day laborers. Somerville noted through his travels and conversations that he had that:

The farm-houses and farmers' families are much finer than twenty, and thirty, and forty years ago; so much more refined, with richer furniture, and "accomplished" manners, that the unmarried labourers are no longer permitted to live within the farm-house, nor eat at the farmer's table, nor step within the farmer's door.

Cobbett complained about farmers putting on gentlemanly airs and having (in a particular case) "worst of all . . . a parlour! Aye, and a carpet and bell-pull too!" To the extent women believed in expressing their femininity by learning French, playing the piano, reading literature, etc., in farmhouse parlors, and by abandoning dirty, backbreaking work to hired men, the ideas behind the attempts of farmers' wives to embourgeoisify themselves trickled down to the laborers through the domestic servants they hired. On this general theme, Jeffries asks:

Has not some of the old stubborn spirit of earnest work and careful prudence gone with the advent of the piano and the oil painting? While wearing the dress of a lady, the wife cannot tuck up her sleeves and see to the butter, or even feed the poultry, which are down at the pen across 'a nasty dirty field.'<sup>357</sup>

After the servants got married themselves, they often tried to emulate some of what their former master and mistress did, to the

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demoralising effect, causing women thus employed to lose all feeling of self-respect, rendering them bad housewives when married, and unfit, from want of experience, to exercise that strict economy in expenditure, and to provide those small fireside comforts which are so necessary in a labourer's wife." English Agriculture, 175-76.

<sup>357</sup>Somerville, Whistler, 147, cf. 42; Cobbett, Rural Rides, 219-220; See also Snell, Annals, 67-71; Jeffries, Hodge, 2:97, 100-108.

extent their pocketbooks may have allowed. Simply put, did women begin to withdraw themselves from field work before the ideology of the separate spheres held strong sway, or were Victorian middle class ideas about the sex roles the main cause for the change? Which drove the changes in sex roles more at this time, the superstructure of society or the forces and relations of production?

As described both below and above, the rising male unemployment rate in many local rural labor markets in the south of England in the late eighteenth century was a major reason for women leaving the fields. This development took place before the middle class sensibilities of the Victorian era had a chance to operate on the laborers or even many of the farmers. The Victorian period merely saw this change completed, which had begun due to economic rationalization in southeastern arable districts. As Snell plausibly argues:

But insofar as they [moral sentiments antagonistic to women working] cannot readily be dated from before 1800, at the very earliest, their significance seems heavily undercut by the evidence that the major sexual division of labour began at least fifty years before such 'middle-class' attitudes towards the roles of women can have had influence.<sup>358</sup>

The dairywomen of Cheshire, unwilling to give up their work, rejected the ideas of J. Chalmers Morton (c. 1870) on the subject. They denied their work was "drudgery," saying that the quality that could come from home-made cheese was worth their continued efforts as against his advocacy of applying factory methods. Their declining control over the dairy industry was obviously not their notion. On the other hand, the ideas of a woman's "proper place" may have encouraged at least some women to withdraw from the labor force and be relegated increasingly to doing housework or domestic service only. The 1867 Report on Employment in Agriculture found in Lincolnshire and Nottingham that the girls were less inclined to do field work themselves. In these two counties, above age twelve or thirteen, they were not found in the fields in some areas. On the other hand, although Jeffries believed that the number of women field workers

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<sup>358</sup>Snell, Annals, 51-57, 66. Although left unstated, presumably the economic rationalization Snell mentions involved the increasing use of scythes in place of sickles for the harvesting of grain. But the substitution of one for the other was hardly an overnight process, since various methods of harvesting grain were sometimes employed side-by-side. The slow pace of technological progress still allowed some women to do harvesting work even late in the nineteenth century. Morgan, Harvesters and Harvesting, 17-20, 25-29, 97-98, 115.

had greatly declined (in the general area of Wiltshire in the 1870s), still "there does not appear to be any repugnance on their part to field-work."<sup>359</sup> The weight of the evidence points towards late eighteenth/early nineteenth century changes inspired by the economics of enclosure, poor relief, and population growth in pushing women out of the labor force because of a rising male unemployment rate instead of women actively accepting the Victorian idea of femininity and voluntarily withdrawing themselves from the paid labor force, or passively going along with their husbands' or employers' ideas that women ideally should be supported by their husbands and mainly do housework.

#### Allotments Partially Restore the Family Economy

The spread of allotments during the nineteenth century, in a small way, brought or kept women in the agricultural labor force. Enclosure and many families' heavy dependence on the father's wages for support had largely destroyed in southern arable areas the family economy. But it was partially restored through husbands, wives, and children all working on their small plots of land as a family, though not necessarily all at the same time of the day. Perhaps the father tended the plot on Sundays or some day he was off from work; the mother and her children might till it during spare time on regular weekdays, not just Sundays. Sometimes even three generations of a family worked together. Often women and children, who would have been idle otherwise, cultivated the plots, while the men worked full time for farmers. But in Bedfordshire even late in the century (1893), the women did not work on the allotments because they had been used to earning significantly more money through such domestic industries as straw-plaiting and lace-making. Since these industries had largely collapsed by then, the women clearly had failed to adjust fully to the new conditions.<sup>360</sup> More importantly, the family economy had persisted because family members harvested grain together, as mentioned above, as different members took on different tasks. Nevertheless, allotments played a role in keeping women in the agricultural work force, albeit not for wages.

#### Quality of Life Issues and the Sexual Division of Labor

Towards the end of Annals of the Labouring Poor, Snell explores the downside of the increased sexual division of labor

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<sup>359</sup>Valenze, "Women's Work and the Dairy Industry," 168; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xviii; Jeffries, Hodge, 2:62.

<sup>360</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, 18, 107; William Bear's report, 1893 Royal Commission on Labour, BPP, 1893-94, XXXV, as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, 31.

and the decline of the family economy in favor of centralized production in factories and workshops. With the father taken from home to work elsewhere, and the mother confined increasingly to non-wage-paid housework and childrearing, the home became less important economically. Increasingly, the family became "a unit of primary socialisation and recreative convenience." His analysis of Thomas Hardy's novels focuses on how a sharp sexual division of labor creates emotional distance between a husband and wife, thus causing them to share no work together, but only pleasures. As a result, a couple fail to learn well each other's real character. Although the upper and middle classes largely had had a distinct sexual division of labor for centuries, this relationship now spread among the working and laboring classes, in such occupations as artisans, farmworkers, and unskilled city workers, during the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>361</sup>

Snell's analysis about the pitfalls of a sharp division of labor in undermining the working class family's cohesion strongly differs from others saying a weak division of labor produced the family ills prevailing among the American slaves. The legacy of slavery in this regard decades later became especially controversial because of the Moynihan report's discussion of the social problems caused by matriarchy and illegitimacy in the 1960's black family. In particular, enslavement sometimes nearly reduced slave father to a mere stud, because of the way the master stood between the slaves and the means of production as the slave's provider, instead of slave families independently and directly supporting themselves. Through the practice of "marrying abroad," the slave husband and wife deliberately chose to work apart from one another in order to avoid (especially) the terrible scenes where one had to watch or even help to inflict a whipping or punishment on the other. Since the slave husband often came to visit his wife just on weekends, this arrangement was an extreme case of married couples coming together only to share pleasures in life, and not the work that supported them and their children. The slaveholders did destroy the family economy among the slaves, excepting those in task system areas who assiduously tended their animals and plots of land, since the family members did not work together as an economic unit of production. But in addition, slave families did not even directly support themselves because the slaveowners issued standard rations to all the human chattels on their plantations

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<sup>361</sup>Snell, Annals, 408; see also 304, 309, 369-73, 399-410. Of course, centralized work places did have their practical advantages for home life, as George M. Trevelyan comments: "The working class home often became more comfortable, quiet and sanitary by casing to be a miniature factory." English Social History (New York and London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1942), 487, as cited by Robert Hessen in Ayn Rand, Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal (New York: The New American Library, 1967), 116.



and farms. Even if the husband and wife did live on the same plantation, they were often separated during the day by working in different gangs segregated by sex and/or cultivating function (such as plowing versus hoeing). Furthermore, unlike a couple or family working together in domestic industry in their own home, they could not set their own work hours or have flexibility in taking breaks that would allow them to freely interact together. Of course, some of the differences between what Snell sees among the English farmworkers or artisans and others observe in the slave family come from the special features of slavery that made the master's authority the ultimate and controlling force in the slaves' physical lives, not the sexual division of labor itself. Nevertheless, while Snell argues that a sharp sexual division of labor produces alienation between the sexes because the husband and wife do not spend enough "quantity time" during work hours with one another, others have blamed a weak sexual division of labor in part for weakening the slave family because the father's role is made largely superfluous relative to the mother's.

#### The Division of Labor: Blessing or Curse?

Snell's critique of the Victorian sexual division of labor is a subset of attacks made (such as by Marx) against the alienation that centralized factory production created through the specialization of jobs and the impersonal cash nexus between employer and employee. Thompson's discussion of the concept of time and work, and the switch over from a task-orientation to a time-orientation, is really an attack on the division of labor:

Mature industrial societies of all varieties are marked by time-thrift and by a clear demarcation between "work" and "life". . . . But if the purposive notation of time-use becomes less compulsive, then men might have to re-learn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life.

The "clear demarcation" appears because one goes to a separate workplace from home, works there for so many hours, and then returns home to "enjoy life," i.e., leisure time with one's family which is largely under one's own control. The division of labor, which originally was part of the foundation for early civilization's development, presents a basic trade-off to society as a whole: Workers benefit from the increased productivity and shorter workdays an intricate division of labor yields, but may suffer mind-stultifying, narrow tasks tending machinery or pushing paperwork in a bureaucracy, thus causing increased alienation. Of course, much of the manual labor in artisans' workshops or the fields was hardly exciting or self-fulfilling either! As M. Dorothy George comments: "It seems unlikely that

the average weaver, toiling hour after hour throwing the shuttle backwards and forwards on work which was monotonous and exhausting, had the reactions which would satisfy a modern enthusiast for peasant arts."<sup>362</sup> (Some people also may personally prefer work to be at a different location from home: It allows them to escape from it!) To send the father of the family out to work, to earn or to seek to earn the "family wage" English labor unionists desired, while exclusively relegating the mother to housework and child care during his absence, increased productivity, but also weakened the feelings of affection or family ties between the couple in question. To have their children go to school (or daycare) further broke up the family economy, for they gained knowledge and possibly alien values that neither the mother nor father agreed with, while spending many hours out of either parent's care. Snell and Thompson properly see the problems with an increased division of labor, whether sexual or among those at a central place of production such as a factory, but its advantages need consideration also. Eventually, at least, increased specialization led to higher productivity, higher wages, and shorter hours. The workweek has fallen from (say) 75 hours to 40 over a period of 150 years while real wages have sharply risen. Today most people in Western nations enjoy a high standard of living so far above the subsistence level that even their lowest stratum are more overweight than those of the middle or upper classes above them. Would these people voluntarily give up such great material advantages for the perceived improvements in family relationships (or allegedly less work place alienation) that would be brought by a return to subsistence farming, literal cottage industries, and mass education's abolition? Although many do have the financial resources to buy land and engage in individual experiments of simplifying their lives in a Thoreauian manner, few choose to do it. (Not everyone could choose this option. Because subsistence farming and domestic industry have such a low productivity, probably about 80 percent of the Western world's present population would become superfluous, and--ahem--require elimination). Snell's analysis also takes for granted the high quality of the lower classes' family relationships in western Europe in the pre-industrial past, a claim which Weber and Gillis seriously question. So although an increased division of labor has its drawbacks, its benefits must be added to the balances

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<sup>362</sup>Marx's views on alienation are described by Fritz Pappenheim, The Alienation of Modern Man: An Interpretation Based on Marx and Tonnies (New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1959), 84-97; E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," Past and Present, no. 38 (Dec. 1967), 93, 95; M. Dorothy George, England in Transition: Life and Work in the Eighteenth Century (London: Penguin, 1953) 139, as cited by Robert Hessen in Ayn Rand, Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal (New York: The New American Library, 1967), 116-17.

before idealizing the advantages of domestic industry and subsistence farming for family and marriage relationships.

The issue of the sharpening sexual division of labor during industrialization needs some examination in this context. Even the likes of Dill could see its benefits, at least for middle class women whose time and energies were freed for charitable, religious, and political activities. Kemble obviously concurred. Viewing American slavery from the vantage point of a Victorian middle class Englishwoman, she found simply intolerable the thought of enduring daily some ten or more hours of field work on top of caring for young children and housework. Of course, the separate spheres' chief drawback as an organizing principle for society stemmed from its theoretically pigeonholing narrowly the talents of half of the human race into a specific set of tasks (housework, child care, etc.) when their individual abilities and talents often could have been more fully developed outside the home in various careers. By placing serious limits on individual women's choices in life, especially for those who could not or would not marry, this ideology constrained their personal autonomy by social custom, private discrimination, and laws against entry into specific professions and jobs. But for those women more attuned to the life of a homemaker, the separate spheres presented some advantages, since they (theoretically) forced men to be more stable in their work habits and protective of their wives. For these reasons, many saw the principal problem with the slave family's relationships as the man's lack of a real function besides siring offspring, thus enabling him to be more irresponsible about his duties towards his wife and children. The slave father's dereliction of duty directly resulted from the slaveholder's furnishing automatically rations of food, clothing, and shelter to an enslaved wife and children without any real regard for his (or her) level of work effort. Nowadays, contemporary Western society has been dissolving the separate spheres since its (semi-)capitalist economy tends towards labor shortage during booms and war, thus encouraging women to work outside the home. Women then farm out many of the child care and housework responsibilities to others (assuming they do not come home to face the infamous "second shift" while their husbands lounge about, doing almost nothing).<sup>363</sup> This change means contemporary society has sharply moved away from the Victorian model on sex roles, and towards those once found on Southern plantations. Excepting mainly those presently dependent on governmental transfer payments, because each family still has to support itself directly by its own efforts, the negative effects from more androgenous sex roles on the quality of family

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<sup>363</sup>For example, note poetic lament concerning housework piled on top of field work by the (fictional) early eighteenth century rural laboring wife "Mary Collier" in Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 79.

life today are much lower they were on the slaves, although the results from having less "quantity time" together still remain. After all, to have both men and women working outside the home does not solve the problem Snell describes, unless they happen to work together for the same employer or in a family business as a partnership.

#### Who Was Better Off Depends on the Values One Has

Clearly the plantation slave and mid-Victorian laborer pitched their camps at spots near the opposite extremes of the division of labor's general continuum. The best position for societal well-being lies somewhere in the middle between these two extremes. Enough differentiation between the sexes should remain for people to benefit from the complementary roles possible and to give individuals through society some basic guidance to their identity, which reduces the amount of confusion, alienation, and anomie they may feel otherwise. But enough similarity (or social tolerance for similarity) should exist to allow individual men and women to make freely their own choices based on individual talents and interests. The slaves themselves simply had no ability to make such choices before emancipation. But soon after freedom came, they chose to emulate the free white society's division of labor as influenced by the ideology of the separate spheres. Using Snell's basic approach, under which the poor's judgment of what values matter to them most trumps what (say) a modern-day professional economist thinks they should have valued, this outcome shows they evaluated negatively the sexual division of labor imposed on them by their owners. Although not as artificially imposed, English female laborers were increasingly pushed out of the labor force in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As applied to the farmworkers, the Victorian model of the separate spheres takes on the feel of a male make-work program. The local parishes conveniently could just assumed women would find something to do at home, while seeking some way to keep men out of the beerhouses and hunting (re: poaching) grounds. But illustrating how different its values are, contemporary Western society has freely chosen a sexual division of labor that resembles a Southern plantation's more than Victorian England's. To determine which model provides a higher quality of life depends in turn upon hotly contested values and how intrinsically different is the biological (and psychological) nature of men and women. The Sears-EEOC case illustrates how old-fashioned patriarchalists can use to their own advantage the in-house debates between "equality" and "difference" feminists.<sup>364</sup> To the

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<sup>364</sup>A valiant attempt to square this particular circle appears in Joan Wallach Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 167-77. For the view that traditional gender roles are not only based on biological

extent outsiders force a way of life upon some group--here, masters imposing a certain sexual division of labor among American slaves--its quality of life is lower than where it was freely chosen. Otherwise, as this terrain is so controversial presently, each person after examining the evidence--historical, scientific, and anthropological--naturally ends up choosing, based on his or her values, the model or mid-point between the two extremes that would supposedly make for the best society. Who was better off between the slaves and farmworkers concerning the sexual division of labor depends on what values historians and others apply when judging a people's past way of life.

#### 5. CONTROLLING SUBORDINATE CLASSES--HOW IT WAS DONE

##### The Central Reality of Work and the Elite's Needs for Controlling Its Workers

Today and in the past, the central reality of most adults' lives is the set of tasks and activities that make up the means by which they earn a living. Especially in the pre-industrial and early industrial past, people back then compared to today in the developed world lived shorter lives, worked more hours daily and weekly, and worked more years before retiring, assuming that was even possible before they died. In the case of the African-American slaves and English agricultural workers, their daily tasks were fairly similar although they normally tended different crops. Both groups benefited from any and all the reputed intrinsic advantages of doing farm work instead of factory or shop work, such as from laboring in fresh air outside at tasks that were meaningful and understandable in the context of the overall production process. This section does not deal with the specific techniques or tasks of the slaves or farmworkers in fields or homes, but with "management's" attempts to control them. After covering two basic aspects of working conditions, concerning the number of work hours and days off from the job, how the elites controlled their subordinate classes is described below. The former needed the labor power of the latter, but (usually) wanted it on the best possible terms, compensating it as little as possible without sparking revolts, strikes, or uprisings that would be expensive to quell. How the slaves and farmworkers resisted their respective dominant classes may be occasionally touched upon in this section, but that is mainly dealt with in the next.

The methods of controlling the slaves and laborers inevitably differed. Since the latter were legally free, they could quit and move elsewhere (excepting the settlement laws' restrictions). But since the slaves were not, corporal

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differences, but that society needs to maintain them to avoid "sexual suicide," see George Gilder, Men and Marriage.

punishment was often necessarily employed to compel labor, with additional aid to work discipline provided by the fear of the auction block. The English elite used more indirect, collective legal measures such as enclosure and the poor laws to extract labor power from the farmworkers. Since individual masters and mistresses owned and controlled the slaves both on and the job and off, managing them tended to be correspondingly more direct and individualized, as illustrated by the pass system, after the slave codes had set the basic legal framework in place. The English rural elites, in contrast, had counted on a tilted free market to bring them labor. They rigged the law of supply and demand for labor to favor themselves, such as by using enclosure and the settlement laws to ensure a ready supply of laborers for the peak summer season in arable agriculture. The laborers then semi-freely chose to work for this or that individual local farmer or landowner. But slavery required a stricter system of control, since the bondsmen had no freedom to choose to work for different masters or mistresses legally, but had to work for those that owned or rented them. (Some slaves were permitted to "moonlight" for pay on Sundays, but compensation for that practice existed by permission, not by right). Since slaves had little or no intrinsic self-interest to work for their "employers," their owners had to use much more coercion to keep them in line compared to what their English equals exerted on the farmworkers. Because the slaves were their property, slaveholders had far more legal right to inflict pain and to damage the bodies of their "troublesome property." They also had the legal power to interfere in and control their human chattels' off-work lives. The reality of paternalism is examined below, since both elites used this social order's ideology to justify their ascendancy, through proclaiming the existence of a mutual reciprocal system of altruism underlay their rule over the subordinate classes. It is decidedly dubious that these elites established ideological hegemony over the laborers and slaves through paternalism or some other means. Since both these work forces mainly or completely worked for others, and not directly for themselves as in subsistence agriculture (or artisans in their own shops), the elite's machinations for controlling them clearly suffused their work lives.

#### Dawn to Dusk: Work Hours for Slaves

First of all, two of the conditions of work itself should be examined before analyzing the elite's attempts to enforce compliance. How long did the slaves work each day? Their time at work tended to fill all available daylight hours. Slaves rarely slept past dawn, although more paternalistic masters deviated from this standard. Their lifestyle sharply differed from that for many poor whites around them. The latter had relatively leisurely days since they could get by through hunting, fishing, and/or some subsistence agriculture. Most slaves got up at the crack of dawn or earlier. The overseer's or

master's bell or horn aroused them and warned them that they had little time left in the quarters before their presence was required in the fields. John Warren told Drew he had to get up at four o'clock on the Mississippi plantation he lived at. He had just fifteen minutes to eat breakfast in the field before work began. Similarly, Dick Smith, once a slave in Louisiana, told Armstrong he got up at four o'clock in summer, five o'clock in winter, when the latter was two hours before sunrise. Freedman Tines Kendricks of Georgia remembered how the mean old mistress would be up "'Way 'fore day . . . hollering loud enough for to be heard two miles, 'rousing the niggers out for to git in the field ever 'fore light." Freedwoman Jenny Proctor recalled that her mother as a cook had a three o'clock rising time. Olmsted's experience confirmed these accounts about the slaves getting up early. Once he had to feed his own horse at a place he stayed in Louisiana, since all the slaves had left before daybreak. Another time, he found the slaves already at work after he awoke at four o'clock following an awful night's sleep during which insects repeatedly attacked him in a small planter's house in Mississippi.<sup>365</sup> Bondsmen clearly routinely started field labor at dawn if not earlier.

#### Using Force to Get the Slaves into the Fields in the Morning

Since the slaves did not directly benefit from work, but normally got fed and clothed the same regardless of their productivity levels, masters and overseers had to enforce strictly the starting time for work. They often inflicted whippings on the dawdling. As Douglass recalled, although the bondsmen might have been doing housework or cooking late the night before, they had better hear the horn in the morning at dawn. Otherwise, the consequences were often dire: "If they are not awakened by the sense of hearing, they are by the sense of feeling; no age nor sex finds any favor." The overseer, with the Dickensian name of Mr. Severe, stood armed, ready and waiting with a "large hickory stick and heavy cowskin," for anyone not immediately heading off for the fields after morning reveille. Naturally, the overseer or hands-on master arose when his slaves did, as freedman "Old Man Ned" of North Carolina recalled about his owner. Having dispensed with overseers, Bennet Barrow by 1845 had turned over daily operations to his black driver. One day he decided to get up with his slaves at daybreak, which produced (to him) impressive results: "Began at day Light

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<sup>365</sup>On hours of work generally, see Stamp, Peculiar Institution, 73-79; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 60-61; One sugar plantation owner disliked the poor whites living nearby because their lives of relative ease tended to demoralize his bondsmen. Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:331, 2:37, 88 (work hours); Drew, Refugee, 183; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 87; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 70, 89.

Overseering--Coffee at day Light out 'till 12--negroes worked harder to day than they have done in at Least 5 years." On the other hand, when his slaves got up late one day, he partially blamed himself: "Hands made a Bad beginning this morning got out Late Ploughs &c. Began overseering in Earnest, neglect my business all the year perswaded it injured my health--negros very much out of Geer." But this kind of mistake was uncommon, as the slave narratives bear witness. One sign of a harsh master was that he made his slaves get up very early daily in order to maximize the work effort extracted from them. Escaped slave Henry Banks described how one of his Virginian masters dealt with slaves who rose up slower than the sun in the morning: "Let daybreak catch me in the house, instead of currying the horses, that was as good for a flogging as any thing else." Henry Gowens suffered under a cruel overseer in Alabama. After receiving "a first-rate English watch to keep his time and blow the horn by," he ordered the slaves to eat nothing before twelve noon. After blowing the horn two hours before daybreak, he said he expected everyone up and at work one hour later at the second horn blowing. He threatened: "If I find any of you lagging back after the last horn blows, I shall whip you up to the spot where the work is to be done." J.W. Terrill, once a slave in Texas, remembered that the overseer awoke the hands at three o'clock. If they got up late, he tied them to a tree at night with nothing to eat, and later gave them thirty-nine lashes from a long, wide belt. The testimony of Aaron Sidles, who for years traveled up and down the Mississippi as a steamboat's steward, shows how generally force was used near daybreak on the slaves. The first thing in the morning he heard were the bells rung to awaken the slaves on farms or plantations on either side of the river. "The next thing, before it was light enough to see, I heard the crack of the overseer's whip, and the cries of the slaves, 'Oh! pray, Mas'r! Oh! pray, Mas'r!' Every morning I heard it from both sides of the river."<sup>366</sup> Clearly, masters and overseers had to apply or threaten to apply a lot of physical force to get the slaves on task around or before sunrise, unlike the English landowners and farmers, who relied mainly on the laborers prodding themselves to get to work on time in the morning since they could be fired or have their pay docked for being late.

The most extreme semi-standard hours slaves had to endure was during grinding season on sugar plantations. Slaves here may have been worked to death literally. Having been a slave in Alabama, Cato felt he had been well treated, but knew that:

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<sup>366</sup>Douglass, Narrative, 29; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 353. Concerning overseers, note Bassett, Plantation Overseer, 12; Davis, Plantation Life, 329, 354; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 166; Drew, Refugee, 50 (Banks), 97 (Gowens), 190 (Sidles). Cf. Sidle's testimony with Isaac Griffin's on 199 and John C--n's on 192 from their travels on the Mississippi.



"Some [of] the niggers hated syrup-making time, 'cause when they had to work till midnight making syrup, it's four o'clock up, just the same. Sunup to sundown was for field niggers." Olmsted found a Louisiana sugar planter whose slaves worked the two- to three-month grinding season around the clock. They worked in relays, each on for eighteen hours and off six, which kept three-fourths of them constantly at work. In contrast to Cato's testimony, the slaves on this plantation actually evidently liked grinding season, since a garrulous house slave's comments corroborated the master's testimony. Olmsted questioned carefully at length this slave without his appearing guarded or defensive. These long hours were made more tolerable by giving them lots of food and coffee and by encouraging them, "as much as possible, to make a kind of frolic of it." Despite this attempt to paint a human face on obvious exploitation, Olmsted still observed: "No farm, and in no factory, or mine, even when double wages are paid for night-work, did I ever hear of men or women working regularly eighteen hours a day. If ever done, it is only when some accident makes it especially desirable for a few days." Despite (some?) sugar planters tried to make these schedules bearable, somehow even enjoyable, they still could well have extracted a deadly toll. One group of Louisiana sugar planters admitted that working slaves to death and replacing them every seven years was more profitable than driving them less hard, and "maintain[ing] them in diminished efficiency for an indefinite length of time."<sup>367</sup> Extreme conditions taxed the bondsmen's health, even when they could be persuaded to tolerate or enjoy long hours which lasted for only two or three months and only after the preceding slack period had given them extra rest.

#### Finishing Work for the Day--Some Variations

The end of the slaves' workday varied much more than its start. The task system areas, mainly in the lowland coastal regions of Georgia and South Carolina, allowed the slaves to finish working for their master for the day as soon as they completed their set assignment ("task"). This may explain why the slaves were done by three thirty in the afternoon on Kemble's husband's cotton sea-island estate. On his rice-island estate, the workday was longer and the labor more physically draining. Here the bondsmen worked from daybreak to six in the evening, but they had time off for lunch at noon. But more typically, slaves worked until sunset. Mr. Freeland, a straightforward average master of Maryland, worked his slaves hard, but Douglass thanked him for doing so only between sunrise and sunset. George Johnson of Virginia worked from sunrise "and quit work between sundown and dark." "Aunt" Tilda of Mississippi told Armstrong that she worked from "de daylight to noontime" and after lunch, "wu'k[ed]

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<sup>367</sup> Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, 86; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:327-328, 337-338, 2:46-47, 239; Kemble, Journal, 303.

till de sun go down an' de overseer whoop: 'All in! Day's done!' an' back to de cabins ergain." However, many slaves worked far longer hours. Olmsted knew two plantations in Mississippi that roused up their bondsmen at three thirty in the morning, and they frequently worked until nine at night. Appalled that her children were still enslaved, Mary Younger knew they still labored late at night despite starting work before daylight. William Brown, once a Virginian slave, had worked sometimes as late as ten at night in some seasons. Because the slaves would feed his horse at the place he spent the night at, Olmsted found they generally worked until nightfall after already appeared in the fields when he first looked out early in the morning. On a plantation near Natchez, since the hands worked until nine thirty in the evening after getting up at about five in the morning during summer, the hoe gang members worked about sixteen hours in a day. The plow gang worked less because their break was about two hours long versus (perhaps) a half hour for the hoe gang. On one plantation in Virginia, however, they only worked eleven hours a day because of a two-hour break at noon, which corresponded to the better treatment for which Border Slave States were known. Although undeniable variations in what hours slaves worked appeared among different plantations and farms, Sutch and Ransom have calculated quantitatively that the average slave (male, female, and child) worked approximately 16-22 percent more than the average free laborer, North and South. This figure was based on a comparison of how many hours slaves worked in 1860 with those of the freedmen in 1870. Genovese, as well as Fogel and Engerman, are too optimistic when saying free workers, especially when wives and children are included, normally worked as many and/or more hours than the slaves.<sup>368</sup>

#### Hours of Work--Agricultural Workers

When they were employed, the English agricultural laborers and slaves often worked remarkably similar hours. In both cases, the dawn-to-dusk nature of agricultural work during planting, growing, and harvesting season drove their daily schedules. Carters, foggers (cow feeders), and milkers had to tend to their animals seven days a week, arriving early in the morning and later in the afternoon or evening to feed them. Shepherds accompanying flocks in the fields were effectively "on call" for twenty-four hours a day because they had to watch over the flock

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<sup>368</sup>Kemble, Journal, 52, 65, 255, 260, 315; Douglass, Narrative, 88; Drew, Refugee, 52 (Johnson), 260 (Younger), 280 (Brown); Armstrong, Old Massa's People, 210; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:103 (Virginia), 2:100 (Mississippi), 2:179-80 (near Natchez); David and Temin in David, Reckoning, 211-12. These figures also are based upon the number of days worked per year, not just the hours per day that was worked. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 61; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:208.

at night, especially during lambing season. Their job was task-oriented, not time-oriented, so they may be working when others laborers slept and relaxing while others worked. As Jeffries noted about shepherds: "His sheep rule his life, and he has little to do with the artificial divisions of time." During harvest season the laborers' hours grew long and late. But in winter, especially in arable areas, even when they were not underemployed or unemployed, they worked short hours: They would leave the fields by five o'clock at nightfall.<sup>369</sup> Since their employers had to pay them for each hour or day they worked, the laborers remained on the job only as needed, excepting farm servants under a one-year (or less) contract. In contrast, since masters and mistresses had to feed, clothe, and otherwise meet the needs of their bondsmen regardless of their output, they had a continual incentive to work their human chattels as many hours as possible. Every moment a farmworker slacked off cost his or her employer also, but only for a mutually agreed upon set period, such as a day, week, or month. When a slaveholder purchased a slave, he had bought all at once all of that slave's potential labor for a lifetime: So, arguably, time was a-wasting every moment that slave was idle, except for meeting the minimum physical requirements of sleep, meal periods, etc. Although on paper the slaves and farmworkers seem to work daily about as many hours because of agricultural labor's intrinsic diurnal nature, the former often worked fewer many hours overall in a given year than the latter, which was attributable to winter (and general) unemployment.

#### Were Workdays Shorter for the Farmworkers than the Slaves?

The agricultural workers at times worked dawn to dusk like the slaves. As a young man in a mowing gang during harvest, Arch worked from five in the morning to seven at night. Batchelor in 1808 noted how the hours during harvest grew longer, "extend[ing] . . . from sunrise to sunset, or when carrying the corn, as long as the day-light permits." Somerville encountered three Wiltshire carters, who all got up at four in the morning to attend to their horses. Two of them arrived home for dinner at seven o'clock, and the other left the stable at about half past seven. But normal hours were shorter than these. Some laborers signed an allotment agreement that prohibited them from tending their plots of land between six in the morning and evening without first asking their master's (farmer's) permission. During these hours they presumably worked elsewhere when

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<sup>369</sup>Thomas Batchelor, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Bedford (London, 1808), found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, 11; Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 60; Jeffries, Hodge, 2:57-63, 130, 132. He noted that wages were higher in summer than in winter, which corresponds to the number of hours worked daily.

employed. In confirmation of this surmise, Batchelor described a Bedfordshire farmworker's typical hours: "Day-labourers are expected to work as long as the light is sufficient in the winter: and from six o'clock in the morning till six at night, in summer. Of this nearly an hour and a half are consumed in meals."<sup>370</sup> For the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture, Culley reported for northeastern Buckingham and Bedfordshire that the hours of work were normally six in the morning to six in the evening in summer, and from dawn to dusk in winter, with one and a half or two hours off for meals. In most of Buckingham, the hours of work were six to five, with one and a half hours off.<sup>371</sup> Basing it upon the responses of Oxfordshire farmers to a survey, Andrew Doyle published in 1881 a list of typical working hours for laborers. Many worked from seven to five, six to six, or nine hours altogether, excepting harvest or haymaking seasons. Some worked eight hours or less in total.<sup>372</sup> As the nineteenth century passed its mid-point on into the late 1860s, many laborers increasingly wanted a more carefully defined workday, in place of the loose concept of working dawn to dusk. This desire reflects a transition from task-orientation to time-orientation, which the farmworkers used advantageously when bargaining with employers. After having defined the workday more strictly, the laborers could then receive overtime pay if they exceeded normal hours during harvest or some other peak period.

The figures mentioned above show the laborers often stopped work earlier than many slaves in non-task system areas, at least those Olmsted had seen in the Deep South. Interestingly enough, the difference in latitude made "dawn to dusk" vary between England and the subtropical South. The farther north one goes, the shorter the daylight periods are in winter and the longer in summer. One agricultural worker who worked twelve hours a day in summer, told Sommerville that he worked "as long as I have light to see in winter." Since dusk approached by about four thirty, and nearly full darkness arrived by five, for about three months laborers averaged only about eight and a half hours of work per

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<sup>370</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, 37-38; Batchelor as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, 12, 13; Somerville, Whistler, 32; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, 112. The slaves normally had less time than this for meals. One of Douglass's chief complaints against Covey, to whom his master had rented him, and with which he later fought, was that he routinely cut their meal times too short. Narrative, 88.

<sup>371</sup>As in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, 19

<sup>372</sup>Doyle's list as in Morgan, Harvesters, 107-8. Cf. Doyle's figures with Bear for the Royal Commission on Labour in 1893 for Bedfordshire. Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, 30.

day.<sup>373</sup> Excepting harvest and haymaking, the agricultural workers' workday did not expand to fill all available daylight hours during the summer. The slaves then normally worked past six in the evening. England's colder climate and shorter growing season also limited the amount of agricultural work possible for the laborers compared to the slaves.<sup>374</sup> For example, wheat harvesting in England normally was finished by late September, but the process of picking, cleaning, and packing cotton might begin in late August and continue into December. Even with the addition of hand threshing, which was increasingly superseded during the nineteenth century despite the intimidating retrogression provoked by the Swing riots, seasonal patterns affected grain harvesting in English arable areas more than the American South's stereotypical corn/cotton/hog agriculture. The laborers were considered to work only eight or nine hours because one and a half or more hours for meals being factored in. Many slaves lacked this benefit have during their workday, who may have had one fairly short break of (perhaps) one half hour or more to eat near noon, though some had up to two hours off.<sup>375</sup> Certainly, the laborers' one and a half hour's worth of breaks seemed to be much more widespread than the slaves having a similar period off. These reasons point to the average Southern slave having a relatively longer workday than the average farmworker on a year-around basis, when excluding work on allotments and gardens.<sup>376</sup>

#### The Length of the Workweek and Days Off--Slaves

Since the owner of slaves possessed all their future time in their lives, and at his discretion determined how much of it was to be taken up in work, he always had an incentive to make slaves

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<sup>373</sup>Somerville, Whistler, 37; Jeffries, Hodge, 2:62; Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, 30.

<sup>374</sup>Cf. this with the discussion of Northern versus Southern agriculture's relative efficiency in David, Reckoning, 209-11.

<sup>375</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 65; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:103; 2:100, 179; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 56, 87, 210; Benjamin Drew, Refugee, pp. 97, 128. In a number of these cases the exact length of the break is not given, but where it is stated or implied, often it was for a half hour or less, when it was not two hours instead!

<sup>376</sup>Some laborers got off at five or six, and then worked on their allotments from six fifteen or six thirty to the end of the evening, but this was not done in winter. Others worked on them early in the morning at four or five, before going in to work for a local farmer or landowner. Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 1-2, 15.

work as many days as possible. Especially in country of largely unsettled wilderness which positively ached for human labor to transform it into productive farmland from a profit-seeking viewpoint, the slaveholders normally had no end of tasks for their bondsmen to perform. Under these circumstances, that so many slaves had Sundays off and sometimes part or all of Saturdays in the antebellum South may be a little surprising. Here slaveholders' paternalism did bear some practical fruit, since many believed Sundays were reserved for church attendance and rest from work, and applied this to their slaves. Other days off included the Christmas-New Year holiday season and (much more rarely) other holidays such as the Fourth of July. The weather and the growing season played a role in giving days off. A rainy day often canceled all field work for all or part of the day. Sometimes, due to the state of the growing crops and the effectiveness of the hoeing that killed the weeds, there was little work to do on some summer days. So besides the "official" days off such as Sundays or Christmas, some slaves got other days off as well.

#### Slaves Normally Did Not Work on Sundays

Normally slaves got Sundays off. Perhaps the number of slaves who received all or part of Saturday off was somewhat greater than the number of those who were forced to work on Sundays routinely. On the one hand, there are the cases where the slaves got the whole weekend off. Freedwoman Mom Hester Hunter remembered that: "My old missus was a dear old soul, and she would see to it that all her niggers wash and iron and cook on Saturday 'cause she never allow no work gwine on round where she was when Sunday come, be that she know 'bout it." Giles Smith, once a slave in Alabama, recalled: "Us always have Saturday afternoon and Sunday off." "Aunt" Florida, born a slave on one of Jefferson Davis' plantations in Mississippi, said that all day Saturday was given to the slaves as a day off, as well as Sunday. His Hurricane and Brierfield plantations were the only ones she knew of where the master gave off this much time each week to the slaves. Joseph Sanford, a one-time Kentucky slave, told Drew the overseer his master hired gave his slaves half of Saturdays off. His owner disliked this practice, but had to tolerate it for the time being since he had agreed to give the overseer a free hand in management. On the other hand, cases of slaves involuntarily laboring on Sundays occur, showing the supposedly paternalistic Southern slaveholders were often as profit-motivated as any Northern industrialist or merchant. These cases were not limited to sugar plantations in grinding season, Northrup maintained, but was commonly imposed during the height of the cotton picking season. Isaac Williams, once a slave in Virginia, planned to run away but was handcuffed by his master before he ran away. When this occurred, he told him: "I have done all I could for you, night and day, even carting wood on Sunday morning,--and this is what I get for it." John Holmes

knew of one master with two or three farms who did not give Sundays off. He forced his slaves to move from one farm to another on Sundays to be ready for work Mondays. John Warren, once a slave in Tennessee and Mississippi, was happy he did not "have now to drive a wagon Sundays to haul cotton bales."<sup>377</sup>

In colonial South Carolina, slaves often had to work on Sunday, either directly for their master, or necessarily on plots for the food they ate. Gallay has maintained that due to the rise of paternalism promoted by Whitefield and the Great Awakening in the late 1730s and 1740s, and with the first really widespread and serious attempts to convert the slaves to Christianity, they increasingly received Sundays off in order to attend church. Certainly, by the time of the last generation before the Civil War, Sundays off from forced labor had become standard in the South, as abundant testimony demonstrates.<sup>378</sup> However, slaves working voluntarily for pay on Sundays was fairly common, as well as those who tended their plots of land to raise food for themselves or for sale.<sup>379</sup> Such labor was not necessarily "voluntary" in that the standard rations of food or clothing did not generally cover necessary household items, as Northrup described:

[A slave] is furnished with neither knife, nor fork, nor dish, nor kettle, nor any other thing in the shape of crockery, or furniture of any nature or description. . . . To ask the master for a knife, or skillet, or any small convenience of the kind, would be answered with a kick, or laughed at as a joke. Whatever necessary article of this nature is found in a cabin has been purchased with Sunday money. However injurious to the morals, it is certainly a blessing to the physical condition of the slave, to be permitted to break the Sabbath. Otherwise, there would be no way to provide himself with any utensils, which seem to be indispensable to him who is compelled to be his own

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<sup>377</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 151, 170; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 42; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 149; Drew, Refugee, pp. 59 (Williams), 163 (Holmes), 186 (Warren), 360 (Sanford).

<sup>378</sup>Gallay, "Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism," pp. 380, 393; For slaves receiving Sunday off, see Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 147; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 188, 407; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:71-72; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 79, 168; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, p. 107.

<sup>379</sup>Drew, Refugee, p. 360; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 79.

cook.<sup>380</sup>

By not giving their bondsmen necessary household items, masters and mistresses could drive them to work for them on Sundays for pay since the "standard rations" were not enough to really get by. So while Sunday (or late night) paid labor could be called "voluntary," in that the slaves were not whipped for not showing up, they often virtually had to do it in order to prepare food, sit, and sleep in their cabins at a level higher than animals in lairs or nests. Although fully forced Sunday labor was uncommon for slaves in the American South in the thirty years before the Civil War, slaveholders had lowered the compensation given for most of the time slaves worked so much in their favor that when the slaves came to them "voluntarily" to work for necessities they would have been able to buy had they not been slaves, paying slaves for Sunday work still manifested a distorted "free market" for labor.

#### Holidays the Slaves Did Not Work on

While sometimes slaves received other holidays off, such as the Fourth of July, almost universal was the custom of giving slaves some part of the Christmas to New Year's season off from work.<sup>381</sup> The bondsmen might be given presents, money, or a fancy dinner by their master or mistress at this time. Planter Barrow gave his slaves \$500 in 1839 and \$700 in 1840 at Christmas time. In 1841 he gave them a number of articles he had bought for them in New Orleans. However, in 1842 due to a poor economy, he gave them lots of food and drink during this season, but no money or manufactured items. The length of this break varied greatly. Barrow gave his slaves 12 days off during the 1840-1841 holiday season, while other masters were often much more stingy. Jenny Proctor described how on her master's estate in Alabama Christmas lasted as long as the tree that burned in the master's fireplace. Taking advantage of this custom, the slaves spent the whole year looking for, and then had burned, the biggest sweet-gum tree they could find, in order to make the holiday season last longer. When they could not find one, and had to use oak, they only had three days off on average. The master also had his way of retaliating against his slaves taking advantage of this custom: "Old Master he sure pile on them pine knots, gitting that Christmas over so we could git back to work." Douglass and the slaves that he knew received six days off, basically all the time between Christmas and New Year's Day. Harriet Jacobs said the

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<sup>380</sup>Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, pp. 148-49.

<sup>381</sup>For examples of slaves being given other holidays off, see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 134-35; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 143-44; Sudie Duncan Sides, "Slave Weddings and Religion," History Today, 24 (Feb. 1974):84.



slaves who were to be rented were hired on New Year's Day, and reported to work the next day. They then worked until Christmas Eve, and had the next seven days in December off before beginning the cycle anew if they were hired out again. So while the custom of allowing the slaves to celebrate Christmas was virtually universal in the South, the length of the time they had off during this already seasonally slow period of the agricultural calendar varied considerably upon the individual slaveholder in question--Northrup mentions three, four, five, and six days.<sup>382</sup>

#### Unplanned Days Off Due to Weather or the State of the Crops

Slaves received also received days off because of natural events related to the weather and the state of growing crops.<sup>383</sup> Even the Christmas break took advantage of this, since most plantations had little regular work to do outside of those growing sugar. By late December, normally the harvesting was complete and the crop processed and packed for shipment. Masters and mistresses could easily give their bondsmen a week off then. Another event that caused slaves to have unscheduled days off, at least from field work, were rainy days. Based upon Bennet Barrow's diary it becomes obvious that his slaves were routinely pulled from tending the crops on rainy days, and put to work (if female) at spinning often, while the men (at least sometimes) got away with doing little or nothing, as noted above (p. 199).<sup>384</sup> Then when the crops had already been well-tended during the summer, and simply needed some time to grow before further work was necessary, Barrow gave his slaves days off. For August 1, 1838, he commented: "Hoeing old above--4 sick--verry little work to do." In 1840, after on Friday, May 15, his "hoe hands [had] verry light work," he gave his "negros [a] Holliday after 10 ok" on the next day, a Saturday. On June 11 of this same year, he noted: "Pleasant morning, Hoe hands waiting for work for 6 days past, worked piece of new ground cotten fourth time 'scraped'" On June 15, 1841, he said that he "shall stop hoes to night 'till it rains." In an entry for June 8, 1838, he commented: "This time last year was out of work owing to the dry spring." For June 8, 9 and 10 of 1837, he wrote: "No work in the field. . . . stoped work untill it rains . . . gave the hands to day." The last of these three days was a Saturday. On Saturday, May 21,

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<sup>382</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 139, 218, 247, 248, 279. See also p. 51; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 92; Douglass, Narrative, p. 83; Brent, Incidents, p. 13; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 163.

<sup>383</sup>Cf. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 567-69.

<sup>384</sup>For example, see Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 272, 301-302, 349, 352. Cold weather also could have similar effects: *Ibid.*, p. 321.

1842, with his slaves having "finished hoeing corn by one oclock" his "negros [had a] holliday since." Evidently, when not much work needed to be done on the crops, he tended to give them part or all of Saturday off, such as the half day he gave off for May 23, 1840 or the whole day for Saturday, May 29, 1841. After noting his "crop [was] in fine order" a couple days earlier, he gave his slaves Saturday, June 16, 1838 off. For Saturday, June 23, 1838, he wrote: "Intended giving all hands to day--but found 30 acres not half worked." Similarly, Kemble observed that the hands got done by a rather early three thirty in the afternoon, on a sea island plantation that grew cotton like Barrow's, and commented: "The chief labor in the cotton-fields, however, is both earlier and later in the season. At present they have little to do but let the crop grow."<sup>385</sup> Hence, the slaves may have gotten all or part of Saturday off or received shorter days than sunrise to sunset in summer when the crops did not need much further cultivating to kill the weeds.

Despite the incentives for their owners to maximize the amount of work extracted from their bondsmen, they clearly did not necessarily drive them to the limits of endurance. No doubt, this result in part was due to how the death rate of slaves would have increased as their masters and mistresses drove them for longer hours. If slaveowners were ideal homo economicus profit-maximizers, they would make their slaves work as many hours as they could, so long as profits produced by the incremental work did not exceed the costs of sicknesses and deaths caused by the additional hours of labor imposed. As it was, certain social institutions, such as the church's teachings about ceasing from work on Sundays and having slaves attend services on that day, always tended to restrain the bulk of masters and mistresses from probing the limits of their human chattels' endurance. A degree of practical paternalism, perhaps as much driven by self-interest as personal religious conviction, was responsible for this. While slaves such as Douglass saw much religious hypocrisy in the South about their treatment, Gallay still has argued that Christianity, in the form of the revivals of the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, was the principal source of the paternalistic ethic in dealing with the slaves, which was often expressed by practices like having Sundays off. The days off for Christmas, New Year's, etc. also fell into this category. Natural events, such as bad weather or having to wait for the crops to grow further, also placed a damper on slaveholders seeking the make their slaves work as much as they could. So although the slaves worked very long hours, especially in newly settled regions in the Deep South, the surrounding white society had certain practices from their social institutions and also experienced natural phenomena that restrained them from driving

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<sup>385</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 118, 119, 120, 124, 195, 196, 198, 232, 233, 258; Kemble, Journal, p. 274.

their slaves to the maximum extent possible even with the built-in financial incentive involved.

### The Days of Work for Agricultural Workers

Most English agricultural workers suffered from the opposite problem the slaves did: They had too many days off, not too few. Farmworkers, at least most of those in southern England, suffered from chronic underemployment and unemployment throughout most of the period examined here, especially from about 1780 to 1850. They needed more work, not less. American slaves suffered the opposite problem of working too much, especially in the Deep South away from the long-settled Atlantic Seaboard where paternalism and a lack of a strong profit-making drive characterized proportionately more slaveholders. Had the English laborers been able to eke out a living off the local commons, or using an allotment, they would have suffered much less from unemployment. As it was, with the enclosure movement being so strong in the 1790-1820 period, and allotments only seriously and more commonly becoming available only after (say) 1850, agricultural workers became almost exclusively dependent on wages, and especially those of the male head of household. Unlike many poor whites in the American South, who through hunting, fishing, and some casual agriculture, could meet their most basic needs generally without much routine, methodical labor, this back-up option disappeared for most English farmworkers by the end of the French Wars. Furthermore, with the decline of service for the unmarried in Southern England, especially in arable areas in the southeast, young farmworkers had to endure the strong seasonal variations that characterize arable agriculture as much as their day laboring elders. Dependence on parish relief for the entire winter season was a common fate in these areas. The financial incentives of the farmers or directly-employing landowners were the opposite of the slaveholders' in this regard: Since the former only paid their workers when they worked, they had an incentive to minimize the amount of work they did in order to minimize their wage bills. In contrast, since the slaveholders by purchasing slaves had bought theoretically all of their future work potentials, and had to feed and clothe them regardless of how much they worked, their incentive was to make them work as much as possible. For the English farmer relying on day laborers, wages were a totally variable cost, so long as he hired no farm servants for a fixed period and ignored the rates going up as the number of poor increased, but for the slaveowner, the costs of slave ownership were mostly fixed, between the initial purchase price and the automatic rations the slaves were entitled to. The farmers, taking advantage of the reserve army of the unemployed, tended to employ laborers only as they needed them, even on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis, fomenting insecurity among the farmworkers as a whole. Somerville encountered in 1845 an apt analogy one Wiltshire farmer used to explain how he treated his men:

On inquiry [concerning a speaker at an anti-corn law meeting using the term "pitting potatoes"] I found this to refer to a farmer who had said that he did with his labourers as he did with his potatoes: he did not keep all the potatoes out for use every day; and he did not, like some farmers, try to find work for the men all the year round. When he did not need them he put them in the workhouse until they were needed.<sup>386</sup>

Any discussion of the number of days farmworkers labored has to be considered against a grim backdrop of the decline of service, the enclosure movement, chronic underemployment, seasonal unemployment in arable areas, make-work activities, and the common experience of taking parish relief, including stays in the workhouse.

#### Those Laborers Who Had to Work Sundays, and Those Who Did Not

As noted above, the laborers who tended animals necessarily faced seven-day workweeks, such as carters and shepherds (p. 218). While they had to work everyday, these laborers did benefit from having regular work year around, which was why those living in pastoral areas suffered from less seasonal unemployment than those in arable areas, since the needs of livestock for food and other care were daily affairs. Caleb Bawcombe told Hudson why shepherds had to work everyday:

Some did say to me that they couldn't abide shepherding because of the Sunday work. But I always said, Someone must do it; they must have food in winter and water in summer, and must be looked after, and it can't be worse for me to do it.

For regularly employed field laborers, Saturday work was expected, but none for Sundays. They did not like working extra hours of overtime past the customary quitting time on Saturdays. Jeffries describes the situation of one Farmer George who, while leading a crew haymaking, made an unpopular decision late on Saturday that required extra overtime work from his men.

The men grumble when they hear [his decision]; perhaps a year ago they would have openly mutinied, and refused to work beyond the usual hour. But, though wages are still high, the labourers feel that they are not so much the masters as they were--they grumble, but obey.

Jeffries elsewhere notes that half days on Saturdays were more often observed in an urban setting than a rural one. In the

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<sup>386</sup>Somerville, Whistler, p. 385.

country, those tending the animals did not get off much sooner than they would have otherwise, nor were a half day and a full day very different during winter months. Bear noted in 1893 that the number of men working on Sundays on a Bedfordshire farm was one-fourth to one-half of those normally employed, with one-third being rarely exceeded. The number of hours worked by them on this day was four to six, changing with the job and season of the year. As always, those tending animals are the busiest on a Sunday: "Cowmen, who have to milk twice a day, are occupied longest on Sunday, taking all seasons of the year into account." Farm servants did no necessary work on Sundays, performing only such tasks as caring for the animals. Strikingly, even during harvest time, field workers often did not work Sundays. Arch noted that his union's branch secretaries had to try to catch field laborers when they came home briefly on weekends during harvest time: "In hay and in harvest time the men would often be away from their homes for five, six, and seven weeks, coming back late on the Saturday night, and leaving again either late on Sunday night or early on Monday morning."<sup>387</sup> Clearly, the laborers whose services were not absolutely necessary on Sundays were not expected to work that day, such as field workers during most (or all!) of the year, but those tending animals had to be present everyday for at least a few hours, including Sundays.

Many laborers still may have worked on Sundays, like slaves who had the day off nominally. Instead of working for someone else, they worked for themselves on their allotments, if they had one. During winter, they did not work on their allotments because nothing grew on them then. But for the rest of the year laborers worked on them during days they had off when not employed. One man who let out allotments placed in the terms of the lease a number of restrictions, one of which prohibited Sunday work. Jeffries portrays Hodge as merely strolling down to his allotment to see how the crops were coming on Sundays, but not actually working on it.<sup>388</sup> Obviously, in a number of cases without such restrictions, Sunday work by a farmworker or his family on their allotment must have been common. The laborer then did not have Sundays off any more than the slaves who worked

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<sup>387</sup>For how pastoral areas were different from arable in seasonal unemployment, note Snell, Annals, pp. 40-49; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, p. 327. Note also p. 329; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:81, 2:71; Bear, Royal Commission on Labour, 1893, as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 30-31; M.C.F. Morris, The British Workman: Past and Present (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 121. The chapter this statement appears in was said to characterize the years 1840-1860; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 281.

<sup>388</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 1-2, 112; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:71-72; cf. 2:165.

the same day to get the money to buy basic kitchen utensils or necessary clothing.

Seasonal and Other Changes in the Workweek, and Their Effects on Unemployment

Like the slaves, farmworkers lost days of work to due to rain or the weather in general. Robert Long, who farmed 280 acres in Bedfordshire, found in early July in 1866 that all the rain kept him from getting on with the hay. Only as the weather permitted could they work with the turnips on one part of the farm. He had his teams do "odd jobs carting out dung and carting in gravel to the yards, and also to the New Close ruts that have been made larger lately since the weather has been so showery." Although a banal event, especially in the English climate, rainfall could significantly affect a farmworker's family budget. The Commission on Employment in Agriculture noted that the nominal wage rates per week exceeded what the laborers were paid in actuality often because a number had irregular work habits or lost days due to the rain. The seasonal fluctuations due to winter, especially in arable areas, sharply affected how much labor was needed. Even in Durham in northern England, once the potatoes were gathered, work ceased until spring. Some of the desperation fueling the Swing riots was, according to Hudson, because "it was customary, especially on the small farms, to get rid of the men after the harvest [such as in October or November] and leave them to exist the best way they could during the bitter winter months." Other days were lost because of a chronic surplus of laborers seeking employment in many areas in southern England. The "ploughman" Somerville set up to debate a guardian and others said in Wilton, Wiltshire one third of the population was normally without work, another third had it only three days a week, and only one third was employed continuously year around. In a problem found elsewhere in England as well, there was in the Humber-Wold area in 1867-68 one group was composed of steadily employed men, while another were irregularly employed "catch work" laborers, who had no fixed employer. The latter's wives and children worked in gangs in order to keep up financially. Interestingly, in strong contrast to how many slaves might fake illness to get a day off since they lost little by doing so, the laborers' loss of some days due to sickness was seen as one more factor that affected their earnings negatively.<sup>389</sup> Even with the poor rates hiked due to layoffs of laborers, at least in "open" parishes where the extra laborers lived in the same parish as the ratepayers, employers often judged it financially expedient to lay off many laborers in the winter months just to hire them back

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<sup>389</sup>Diary, as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 107; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xi (rain), xv (Durham), xvi (Humber-Wold), xxix (sickness); Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 219-20; Somerville, Whistler, p. 45.

in spring. Unlike the case for slaves, whose masters had an incentive to make them work as much as possible because the substantially fixed costs of maintaining a slave were largely the same whether they worked zero hours or seventy, the farmers and landowners of England had an incentive to have laborers work as little as possible above what was judged profitable and/or necessary for maintaining agricultural production. The difference between the two work forces came from who bore the costs of idleness, creating very incentives for these two elites when dealing with their respective work forces. In England, the laborers lost financially, not their employers, while for the slaveowners, every idle day lost of compulsory labor cost them, not their slaves, who had to be fed regardless of the weather.

The slaves clearly worked more hours per day and per week than the agricultural workers normally. The farmworkers did not necessarily benefit from this difference, for much of it was due to underemployment and unemployment. Unlike the slaves, who were at least theoretically guaranteed a certain amount of food and clothing regardless of how much they worked, since the agricultural workers were attempting to independently support their families, a lack of work could have dire effects on their financial and even physical conditions. Furthermore, the frustration and unease caused by chronic underemployment and unemployment eroded away the laborers' feelings of independence, especially as they so often had to resort to parish relief in winter time in arable areas. Modern microeconomic theory, which sees the number of hours filled by work as a purely negative activity that is willingly traded off for additional hours of leisure in a labor supply curve, overlooks how a person's identity, especially for men in Victorian society, largely consisted of what job or occupation they had. When they lacked work, especially for periods of months on end, this chewed away at their self-respect, and encouraged non-productive activities such as idling away hours in pubs and various crimes (at least from the upper class's viewpoint) such as poaching. In the case of the slaves, they almost never had a problem in being supplied enough work, especially in a frontier wilderness area that characterized so much of the South even in 1860. Their problem was the exact opposite: Their masters and mistresses were apt to work them for too many hours, sometimes to the limits of endurance and past. The situation of the slaves and farmworkers varied because their respective elites' profit motives manifested themselves in different ways. With the decline of service, the employers of farmworkers minimized their costs by employing them as little as possible since they had to pay them each time they worked. For the slaves, their owners had purchased in advance all their potential work efforts, so to maximize profits they would have them work as much as possible. Of course, this summary ignores how paternalism in one form or another might restrain farmers from hiring laborers on a day-by-day basis only, and slaveholders from making their slaves work sixteen hour days

six or seven days a week. Nevertheless, both groups of workers were oppressed by their respective ruling classes, but one group was controlled through a lack of work, while the other was controlled by having too much imposed on it.

#### How "Voluntarily" Did Slaves Work? The Necessity of Coercion and Supervision

"Slavery" defines a relationship that involves the will of the owner of a slave having fundamentally total de jure control over another human being's life. The will of the master or mistress theoretically should become identical to the will of the slave. The slave is to give up all self-interest that conflicts with the will of his or her owner. He or she treats the slave's life not as an end in itself, but as a means to the slaveholder's own ends in life. In point of fact, this goal was never practically attained, because the human spirit or human nature does not naturally submit completely to someone else, especially when the self-interest of the subordinated person normally directly conflicts with following the commands of the master. The slave wants to work as little as possible, yet receive not only the standard rations, but steal some more on the sly from the master's stores. The slave naturally desires to be free from the absolutely binding will of his master, yet legally is tied to him for life or until sale. He naturally resents how his life's fate is determined by his master, with no court of appeal against his decisions, except perhaps in rare, extreme cases of mistreatment. The amount of self-interest that binds most slaves to their owners is small, excepting those who may have "sold out" and benefit from working to enforce the master's rules, such as drivers, or those who by having long-standing, multi-generational personal and intimate contact with the white family that owned them and by enjoying better physical comforts sometimes came to identify with "their white folks," such as certain domestic servants like mammies or valets. Continual struggle characterized the relationships between the field hands and many domestic servants on the one hand, and the slaveholders and their hired lackeys, the overseers, on the other. Kemble once listened to her husband's overseer who was "complaining of the sham sicknesses of the slaves, and detailing the most disgusting struggle which is going on the whole time, on the one hand to inflict, and on the other to evade oppression and injustice." Slavery was a "state of perpetual war," consisting normally of low-intensity "day-to-day resistance," punctuated by occasional revolts, pitched battles, and executions.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>390</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 50. From the slave's viewpoint, Allen Parker said nearly the same thing, as cited by Blassingame, Slave Community, p. 317; Note Redpath's phrase in Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 2. "Day-to-day resistance" is described in Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 97-109. Note that the revolts and



The central objective of masters and mistresses was to maximize their slaves' work effort with a minimal investment in time, money, and force to extract it. While paternalistic masters and mistresses may have denied the typical profit maximizing goal that they said characterized the Northern merchant or industrialist, still most slaveholders pursued similar goals, outside of some who had lived on the same land and had owned the same families of blacks for generations along the Eastern Seaboard, often upon soil of largely exhausted fertility. Slaveholders confronted a major problem in pursuing this objective: The measures undertaken that made their black work forces more easily controlled often simultaneously injured damaged their capability to work as effectively or productively. They wished to keep their slaves from taking care of themselves, yet not destroy their ability to carry out their daily toil.<sup>391</sup> As Barrow commented in his "Rules of Highland Plantation":

You must provide for him Your self and by that means creat in him a habit of perfect dependence on you--allow it ounce to be understood by a negro that he is to provide for himself, and you that moment give him an undeniable claim on you for a portion of his time to make this provision, and should you from necessity, or any other cause, encroach upon his time--disappointment and discontent are seriously felt.<sup>392</sup>

An obvious example of the practical costs in keeping slaves in line was from denying them an education in most parts of the South. Keeping a subordinate class ignorant makes it much easier to control, yet also hampers its ability to labor as effectively for the dominant class. One good practical reason for keeping the slaves illiterate was to prevent them from forging passes that allowed them to leave their home plantations for destinations elsewhere, including northward.<sup>393</sup> True, because the slaves normally engaged in field work or domestic service that required neither literacy nor numeracy, this policy's costs to

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pitched battles were much less common in North American slavery than in the Caribbean and Latin America.

<sup>391</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:60-61.

<sup>392</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 407. This comment attacks the system prevailing in Caribbean slavery, where the slaves had to work so many days on their masters' estates, and then spend so many days working on their own gardens to raise food for themselves, like medieval serfs. In some cases the task system in mainland North America came close to this.

<sup>393</sup>Note the testimony of James Smith of Virginia in Drew, Refugee, p. 351.

the elite was largely limited to the artisans whose minds were darkened by it. But the costs were there, and the Southern elite by and large judged these perfectly acceptable. Their objective was not to develop the full human potential of their personal chattels by improving their minds and abilities, but to extract labor services from them in order to raise profitable cash crops. The slaves' own ends in life were largely irrelevant, except as theirs interfered with the plans and desires of their owners in their lives. The masters of the slaves channeled and stunted the development of the slaves abilities and talents in order to fulfill the their own ends in life, as part of the process of imposing social control and labor discipline.

### Why the Whip Had to Be Used to Impose Work Discipline on the Slaves

To meet the purposes of imposing work discipline, the slaveowners had a number of tools at their command. The most obvious, as well as the most used and abused, was coercion through corporal punishment. Although some few masters and mistresses were able to dispense with it, by and large the whip stood out as the emblem of authority for the slaveowner as well as the overseer.<sup>394</sup> Time and time again, slave narratives describe the savage beatings that slaveholders or overseers inflicted on the blacks under their authority. Beatings were inflicted for malingering at work, running away, mistakes made from inexperience or incompetence while on the job, and for about any imaginable petty and not-so-petty offense that came before the generally passionate, rough-hewn, easily-provoked slaveholders and overseers of the South.<sup>395</sup> Olmsted once had the rare experience of being a Northerner who witnessed a full-blown thrashing of a shirking young slave woman. He questioned the overseer who had so passionlessly inflicted this beating on her

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<sup>394</sup>Stampp, Peculiar Institution, p. 174. For cases of slaves not whipped, or not whipped as adults, or masters who rarely whipped their slaves, note Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 66, 143; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 68; Drew, Refugee, p. 282; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:70. While such cases show that masters who never whipped their adult slaves were not complete oddities, they certainly constituted a mighty small minority of those who owned slaves in the South, as Genovese observed, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 64.

<sup>395</sup>For a sample of the available evidence on this point, see Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down, pp. 9, 43, 85, 160, 164; Kemble, Journal, pp. 175, 200; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 180; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 109, 127, 133, 134; Brent, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, p. 197; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 71-72; Drew, Refugee, pp. 42, 49, 51, 54, 68, 74-75, 132, 138, 210, 227, 257, 382; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:280.

whether it was necessary. He replied:

If I hadn't [whipped her], she would have done the same thing again to-morrow, and half the people on the plantation would have followed her example. Oh, you've no idea how lazy these niggers are; you Northern people don't know anything about it. They'd never do any work at all if they were not afraid of being whipped.<sup>396</sup>

Clearly, this overseer, who was regarded as one above average in ability, believed in the utter necessity of using (or threatening to use) physical force to get the slaves he supervised to work. Unlike the case for free wage workers, where denying them work and the corresponding wage payments would eventually starve them out, the slaveholder automatically supplies what the slave needs for survival (and normally little above that), so he has little natural desire to work out of personal self-interest or from the desire to feed his family. In place of the driving force of self-interest or serving their family, and from the manifest inability for most slaves to fundamentally change their position in life from being a personal chattel owned by another, the external motivation supplied by the whip had to generally replace internal self-motivation.

#### How Commonly Were the Slaves Whipped? The Time on the Cross Controversy

How often were slaves whipped? Fogel and Engerman, using Bennet Barrow's diary, maintained:

His plantation numbered about 200 slaves, of whom about 120 were in the labor force. The record shows that over the course of two years a total of 160 whippings were administered, an average of 0.7 whippings per hand per year. About half the hands were not whipped at all during the period.

Their calculations were not based on the main text of the diary, but on an appendix in the published version assembled by the editor, Edwin Davis. It lists "misconduct and punishments" for 1840-41. A problem with the text as presented here is that for many diary entries an "X" is placed next to the name of the slave whipped by Barrow, but he, characteristically, was not fully consistent at doing this. Strictly counting just the "X"'s, one comes up with 156 whippings that were so marked in his diary. It appears this was mostly what Fogel and Engerman counted. In rebuttals them on this point, Gutman and Sutch maintained 175 whippings were administered against the slaves on Barrow's plantation, which must include whippings that were not marked by

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<sup>396</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:207.

an "X" in the diary's appendix. About 155 names get listed in the appendix with an offense or a blank space (the equivalent of ditto marks?) next to them, but no tell-tale "X." In two cases, a whipping was noted in the entry besides the name, yet no "X" was placed by the slave's name, with one of these mentioning how the six slaves listed immediately above, also without "X"s by their names, were whipped for being late in reporting to work in the morning. In another case, the main entry for the diary mentions how a group of five slaves were whipped for killing a hog in the field, but the appendix has no "X"s by their names. Once, when two carters and four house slaves were whipped, the main entry notes this, but no "X"s appear by the slaves' names in the appendix. Twice Alfred (the driver) was whipped during this time, but his name never appears in the appendix as one who was punished. The whipping for one slave woman was unlisted in the appendix. She was whipped for an incident that involved Barrow's cook. After she complained about the injustice of being whipped because the cook really was at fault, Barrow allowed her to give the cook "a good drubing" in compensation!<sup>397</sup> Evidently, by counting these additional 22 whippings and adding it to the 156 ones that do have "X"s by their names (one of these cases having one "X" to stand for two slaves being whipped), Gutman and Sutch came up with (though the math and the exact way they arrived at their count is not clear) their 175 figure. Note that if all the names with offenses or blank spaces but no "X"s are also counted along with the ones which do have "X"s, one suddenly comes up with Barrow having administered some 330 whippings in about 23 months, a wildly different figure, but one which seems plausible from the listing of offenses in the appendix even when no punishment (i.e., an "X") is signified besides the names listed. Clearly, Fogel and Engerman underestimated the number of whippings that occurred on Highland plantation with their 160 figure, although even Gutman and Sutch's correction may still be too low.

Fogel and Engerman's calculation uses a figure of 120 active field workers in Barrow's labor force, which is a much bigger problem than their underestimate of the number of whippings. This figure is way too high for the number he had during the time the diary's appendix covers (mostly 1840-41). For example, for his entry of August 12, 1842, he said he averaged sixty-five hands during one day of cotton picking, which was the time of year when virtually every man, woman, and child that could work was mobilized for field labor. On September 11, 1842 he had seventy-two pickers at work, which included a number of children.

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<sup>397</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:145; For their general analysis of the Barrow diary and whipping frequency, see Sutch and Gutman in David, Reckoning, pp. 57-69; Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, pp. 17-34; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 181, 191, 192, 205, 239, 437, 439.

For November 3, 1838, he had forty-two pickers in the field, and on September 10, 1842, he had sixty-nine pickers, including eleven children. Evidently, the figure of 120 hands is deduced from Barrow's will and estate inventory, which was probated in 1854, but by then he had far more slaves than in 1840-41. They also used a base of two years instead of twenty-three months which (with the exception of the final entry) is all the appendix covers. As a result, Fogel and Engerman's figure of 0.7 whippings per hand per year seriously underestimates the number of whippings inflicted. Gutman and Sutch calculate 1.19 whippings per hand per year, a 69 percent higher figure. Furthermore, Barrow used other punishments which are not included in this count, such as overtime work, imprisonment, chaining, shooting, head raking, even humiliation by having men wear women's clothes or placing one slave wearing a red flannel cap on a scaffold in the quarters. (This list includes punishments inflicted outside the period the appendix covers). Since their calculations here are plainly incorrect, Kolchin lets Fogel and Engerman off too easily when summarizing this historiographical dispute, allowing the intellectual fog coming from controversy obscure Gutman and Sutch's clear refutation of them.<sup>398</sup>

Now a broader question needs to be asked about Fogel and Engerman's conclusions about the relative rarity of whippings on Highland plantation. Instead of asking how often an individual slave was whipped per year, Gutman and Sutch ask how often did Barrow's bondsmen see someone among their number whipped. After all, the purpose of punishing one slave is not just to deter that one individual slave from shirking, running away, etc. in the future, but all the rest as well. Much like the overseer Olmsted talked to, who said if he did not whip the slave woman he saw avoiding work, half the plantation the next day would do likewise (above, p. 232), Barrow counted on the deterrence value of punishment by example. Gutman calculated that a flogging occurred every 4.56 days on Barrow's plantation on average.<sup>399</sup> This result means Barrow continually induced fear by wielding the whip, which his slaves had to consider when thinking of breaking his rules since the worst regularly happened to others they knew, on an average of three times every two weeks.

#### The Deterrence Value of Occasional Killings

A more drastic punishment existed, although its cost were very high, and by inflicting it on some individual it could only change the behavior of other slaves: death. Sometimes the slave

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<sup>398</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 268, 272, 421, 422; 392-406 (will); Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 62-63; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, p. 123.

<sup>399</sup>Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, p. 19.

was killed by a master or overseer, sometimes by a lynch mob, sometimes by the judicial system after receiving the full measure of due process that a slave (and his or her financially self-interested owner) could expect. Regardless of source, they all combined to remind the bondsmen that a fate worse than corporal punishment awaited those who committed the worst crimes. Furthermore, unpredictably, for petty offenses, a master in the heat of passion or in the throws of insanity could also inflict it. In some cases slaves were killed or executed by burning them alive. One slave in Tennessee who killed his master was executed thus, with many a fellow slave witness of his dreadful end:

He was roasted, at a slow fire, on the spot of the murder, in the presence of many thousand slaves, driven to the ground from all the adjoining counties, and when, at length, his life went out, the fire was intensified until his body was in ashes, which were scattered to the winds and trampled under foot. Then 'magistrates and clergymen' addressed appropriate warnings to the assembled subjects.

This extreme case, stoutly justified in the local press, was not unique, as Olmsted indicated in a footnote that one judge had gathered evidence of slave burnings "every year in the last twenty" (c. 1840-60). Barrow strongly approved of the burning alive of two runaways who killed two white men and raped two white women. A "great many [were brought] to witness it & several hundred negros &c. Burning was even too good for them." Executions by burning were also "authorized" by lynch mob, such as the hardly singular case of a Alabama justice of the peace who, being intimidated by a crowd of seventy or eighty men, allowed them to vote to burn alive the slave who killed a white man.<sup>400</sup>

Being whipped or shot to death by one's owner was a much more likely fate than being burned at the stake. While clearly uncommon, it occurred enough that slaves knew it could happen to them, especially when so much arbitrary and absolute power had been committed into the hands of their owners. Since the slaveholders by regional character were passionate, emotional men who placed perceived points of honor above cold-blooded financial calculations, the slaves had something more to fear. Sometimes, they killed in arguable cases of self-defense: "One day he [a slave named Joe] turn on Marse Jim with a fence rail, and Marse

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<sup>400</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:349, 354; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 262; including other such atrocities is Ball, Slavery in the United States, pp. vi-viii; Alan D. Watson, "Impulse Toward Independence: Resistance and Rebellion among North Carolina Slaves, 1750-1775," Journal of Negro History 63 (Fall 1978):327. Also note Kemble, Journal, p. 304.

Jim had to pull his gun and kill him." Much more likely, a slave was killed for violating some rule or otherwise violating his or her owner's expectations. Mary Younger told Drew she knew of a mistress who lived nearby who whipped no less than three of her slave women to death. Younger also helped one badly whipped man by greasing his back--who still soon died. One slave girl was hanged by her master and mistress for revealing to Union soldiers where they had buried the family's silver, money, and jewelry after they had left. Douglass described several cases of slaves being killed--nay, murdered--by their owners without punishment, such as one for trespassing on another master's property and another for being slow to assist with a crying baby because she had fallen asleep.<sup>401</sup>

The Danger of Corporal Punishment Backfiring, Requiring "Massive Retaliation"

One especially dangerous flash point was when a slave challenged his master's authority by refusing some (lesser) punishment. Then, his owner just might up the ante and kill him. The reasoning was that if one slave could get away with refusing to obey his master, then others would soon follow suit, and the whole system of involuntary labor would collapse. Austin Gore, an overseer in Maryland Douglass served under, shot a slave to death who had been whipped some by him, but had briefly escaped to the temporary sanctuary of a nearby creek before being permanently dispatched by a musket. He explained to Colonel Lloyd, the slave's owner, why he killed him:

His reply was, (as well as I can remember,) that Demby had become unmanageable. He was setting a dangerous example to the other slaves,--one which, if suffered to pass without some such demonstration on his part, would finally lead to the total subversion of all rule and order upon the plantation. He argued that if one slave refused to be corrected, and escaped with his life, the other slaves would soon copy the example; the result of which would be, the freedom of the slaves, and the enslavement of the whites.

Singling out Demby as an example was evidently effective, because a "thrill of horror flashed through every soul upon the plantation" excepting the overseer himself when the deed was done. Mother Anne Clark described how her father suffered a similar fate for refusing a whipping:

He never had a licking in his life. . . . one day the master says, "Si, you got to have a whopping," and my

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<sup>401</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 41 (Master Jim), 211 (Union); Drew, Refugee, p. 259; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 41-42.

poppa says, "I never had a whopping and you can't whop me." And the master says, "But I can kill you," and he shot my papa down.<sup>402</sup>

The policy of sacrificing some slaves' lives to frighten the rest into submission was time and again judged a cost-effective tactic by slaveholders. Freedman Cato of Alabama described this approach to discipline thus:

When they [the slaves] was real 'corrigible, the white folks said they was like mad dogs and didn't mind to kill them so much as killing a sheep. They'd take 'em to the graveyard and shoot 'em down and bury 'em face downward, with their shoes on. I never seed it done, but they made some the niggers go for a lesson to them that they could git the same.

The well-attended hanging of a slave woman who set her master's barn afire and killed thirteen horses and mules was evidently such an exercise. While these acts of terrorism were rare, they did not have to be common to usefully promote social control and work discipline from the slaveholders' viewpoint. Similarly, the calculation that "only" 127 blacks out of 6 million (0.003 percent) were lynched in 1889 implicitly greatly understates the deterrent effects that the mere known existence of this practice had in keeping the black man in line. Just hearing about the death of a slave at the hands of his master was enough to keep many in line, and when push did come to shove, a master's threats to kill a recalcitrant slave often were enough to get him to fall into line, since the worst possible result was known to happen in these situations. So when Mary Grayson's mother saw her master waving a shotgun from his buggy, loudly threatening her to "git them children together and git up to my house before I beat you and all of them to death!," they knew "he acted like he was going to shoot sure enough, so well all ran to Mammy and started for Mr. Mose's house as fast as we could trot."<sup>403</sup> In these cases, the deterrent value of prior terrorism, exercised on a few individuals sacrificed for the greater good (?) of maintaining the overall system paid off, whether done by masters individually, a lynch mob, or the court system, making the mere threat of using deadly force enough to make most slaves fall into line.

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<sup>402</sup>Douglass, Narrative, p. 40; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 55.

<sup>403</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 67 (arson), 86 (Cato), 132 (Grayson); Gutman uses this lynching statistic this way. Slavery and the Numbers Game, p. 19.



## How Even Good Masters Could Suddenly Kill a Slave in the Heat of Passion

Southern masters professing paternalism might have denied pursuing this policy, or at least would have disavowed killing slaves except for major crimes such as murder. Barrow, who clearly was quick to punish his own slaves, condemned a neighboring planter named A.G. Howell for (it was said) castrating three slaves, and killing others, including leaving some in the stocks until they were dead. He also judged him for ironing up one slave boy up his leg and thigh, creating a nearly solid scab in the process, after which he chained him around the neck. Concerning another man who whipped a black to death, Barrow wrote: "Man tried for Whipping a negro to Death. trial will continue till to morrow--deserves death--Cleared!" Masters such as Barrow did not believe in killing slaves except for major offenses. Nevertheless, the mere fact a number of masters were not so paternalistic--or predictable when losing their temper--meant death always remained a possible penalty for bondsmen with all but the kindest masters. After all, Barrow himself, who condemned Howell's cruelty, one time was mad enough to write that he "would give 'freely' \$100 to get a shot" at one runaway slave who he had actually shot at and hit four years before. At that time, Barrow said he would shoot him if he ran away, soon following through with his threat after making it.<sup>404</sup> Hence, even a fairly typical large planter such as Barrow, who was neither especially cruel nor kind, could kill one of his own slaves under the right circumstances, an outcome his slaves undoubtedly weighed when calculating whether and when they should disobey him.

## Miscellaneous Punishments that Masters Inflicted on Slaves

Masters and mistresses had a multitude of alternative punishments besides whipping and outright killing to keep their work forces in line. One approach was to stake slaves in chains, and let them suffer under the hot sun. Another was to set up stocks, and place the slave's head and hands through the boards, perhaps for weeks at the time for a serious offense such as trying to run away to the North. One slave woman for refusing to work was for a whole year made to sit on a log daily where the ants bit her. Planter Barrow, as noted above (p. 234), was particularly inventive in some of his punishments for his slaves, which included making male slaves dress in women's clothing. During Christmas one year he exhibited a recently captured runaway slave on a scaffold while sporting a red flannel cap. Another time he made a slave "wear a sheet topped with red-feathered flannel ear muffs." Less creatively, he imposed overtime on slaves who had worked badly and imposed a general

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<sup>404</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 148, 174, 202, 211, 239, 359.

ducking in water. One slaveowner's particularly disgusting but ingenious penalty consisted of making a slave eat the worms that he had missed taking off tobacco leaves.<sup>405</sup> Imprisonment also was an option, both private and public. Planter Barrow had a jail of his own for recalcitrant slaves, such as one who pretended to be sick, one cotton picker who tried to pass off a ten pound rock as cotton, and others who ran away. Many a slave who committed some major crime or had run away and had been caught ended up in some local jail until his owner picked him up--or sold him. Douglass experienced this fate after his conspiracy with others to escape failed, and he was briefly in jail before his master picked him up. Others that Drew interviewed ended up in jail because of failed escape attempts or, once, in connection to a successful one.<sup>406</sup> So in addition to the obvious expedients of whipping and sometimes killing slaves who did not obey, a multitude of other punishments existed, including sale.<sup>407</sup>

#### Examples of Corporal Punishment Backfiring

Whenever a slaveholder inflicted corporal punishment on a slave, an element of risk lurked because it could backfire. The slave might resist the whipping, or could run away in retaliation, which raised the costs of routinely using the whip unpredictably, since a master or mistress could not fully know in advance what would happen. Barrow experienced a number of times a backlash against punishments he meted out. After Tom Beauf picked badly, so Barrow whipped him, leaving a few cuts on his back. The next day in the evening he left the field, and he had "not seen him since." After whipping him for not picking enough cotton the day before, Dennis ran away the next day. Barrow once wanted to weigh G. Jerry's basket at dinner time (noon). He

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<sup>405</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 92, 164, 226; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 50, 91, 112, 154, 175; John Thompson, The Life of John Thompson, A Fugitive Slave (Worcester, MA: 1856), p. 18, cited by Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 172.

<sup>406</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 165, 166, 175, 269; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 97-99; Drew, Refugee, pp. 63-64, 206, 379.

<sup>407</sup>Selling recalcitrant slaves was another punishment slaveholders inflicted, perhaps the most effective one in their arsenal, because it manipulated slave family ties for the purposes of imposing labor discipline, a point already covered above (p. 159). As Genovese noted: "The masters understood the strength of the marital and family ties among their slaves well enough to see in them a powerful means of social control. . . . No threat carried such force as a threat to sell the children, except the threat to separate husband and wife. . . . Masters and overseers . . . shaped disciplinary procedures to take full account of family relationships." Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 452.

evaded handing it over, and got whipped for it. This act "offended his Lordship & he put out." Another time, he told Dennis--the troublemaking slaves in Barrow's diary tend to be the same ones all the time--that he intended to whip him, evidently for not picking enough cotton, and he ran away. Barrow commented, after sending another after him: "I had rather a negro would do any thing Else than runaway." Besides running away, trying to punish a slave had another possible result: The slave could fight back, possibly even killing the slaveowner or his overseer. Aunt Nicey Pugh of Alabama said that: "There was a white woman who was kilt by a nigger boy 'cause she beat him for sicking a dog on a fine milch cow." John Little, who had been a slave in Virginia and North Carolina, described to Drew once how he felt. His character and past history of resistance indicates his meditations were no mere idle thoughts:

I sometimes felt such a spirit of vengeance, that I seriously meditated setting the house on fire at night, and killing all as they came out. I overcame the evil, and never got at it--but a little more punishment would have done it. I had been so bruised and wounded and beset, that I was out of patience. . . . On that night when I was threatened with the paddle again, I was fully determined to kill, even if I were to be hanged and, if it pleased God, sent to hell: I could bear no more.

Slaves also could retaliate by a production slowdown, after being forced to work more hours than they wished.<sup>408</sup> While corporal punishment may have been cheaper in application normally than imprisonment, as Fogel and Engerman note, when it backfired this was not true, when the expenses of lost labor time and pursuing a runaway piled up, or when the overseer or master were injured or even killed for trying to whip a slave who refused to consent to the punishment.<sup>409</sup>

#### Did Slaveowners Successfully Implant a Protestant Work Ethic in the Slaves?

Fogel and Engerman remarkably claim that not only had the master class sought to imbue the slaves with the Protestant work ethic, but often succeeded in accomplishing that goal:

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<sup>408</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 130, 135, 163, 165; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 152; Drew, Refugee, p. 220; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 101.

<sup>409</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:146-47. Barrow knew of one incident where a driver was killed for trying to whip a slave. Davis, Plantation Life, p. 156.

[Planters] wanted devoted, hard-working, responsible slaves who identified their fortunes with the fortunes of their masters. Planters sought to imbue slaves with a "Protestant" work ethic and to transform that ethic from a state of mind into a high level of production. . . . The logic of [Stamp's] position made it difficult to acknowledge that ordinary slaves could be diligent workers, imbued like their masters with a Protestant ethic.<sup>410</sup>

Their claim's fundamental problem is a lack of evidence from the slave's own viewpoint that he or she was so motivated, and identified with the slaveholder's own interests so closely. While some house servants, who had been owned by multiple generations of the same white family on the same plantation may have come to closely identify with their owners' interests, this assuredly generally was not the case with most field hands. The master's self-interest in trying to maximize work and minimize expenses in maintaining them was too diametrically opposed to the slave's self-interest in working as little as possible and increasing what food, clothing, etc. he got from his owner.<sup>411</sup> Fogel and Engerman exaggerate the extent to which most slaveholders had worked out an elaborate system of positive incentives to give slaves a reason to work beyond negative sanctions such as whipping.<sup>412</sup> Instead of seeing whipping and other manifestations of physical force as a supplement to incentives coming from wages for overtime work, Christmas bonuses, promotions, and manumissions, these positive incentives should be seen as largely superfluous additions to a slaveholder regime characterized by violence, force, and physical punishment.

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<sup>410</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:147, 231.

<sup>411</sup>Barrow appealed to his slaves' self-interest through his "Rules of Highland Plantation." Commenting on what might happen if they were scattered about due to being allowed to go wherever they wished after work was done: "Who can tell the moment when a plantation might be threatened with destruction from fire--could the flames be arrested if the negroes are scattered throughout the neighborhood, seeking their amusement. Are these not duties of great importance, and in which every negro himself is deeply interested . . . Wherever their wives live, there they consider their homes, consequently they are indifferent to the interest of the plantation to which they actually belong." When considering such chronic runaways as G. Jerry and Dennis, or such defiant slave women as Patience and Big Lucy, this appeal to identify with their master's interests apparently did not penetrate the quarters very deeply. Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 406, 408.

<sup>412</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:147-53.

Proof that slaves were mainly kept in line by force and the threat of it comes from how work discipline so often collapsed and many slaves fled from their masters when armies of a power hostile to slaveholders' interests were nearby, whether it was the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, or--especially--the Civil War. If the slaves had had so many positive incentives to work for their masters, masses of field hands would not have fled from their plantations as the Union army moved southward, and others would have been so defiant or uncooperative while they remained.<sup>413</sup> The slaveholder's use of force on his labor force, and protection against rebellion or mass non-compliance with his orders, ultimately relied on others in society backing him up with force when he was challenged, since the slaves on plantations and farms often greatly outnumbered their owners. The disorganization caused by war served as an opportunity for the subordinate class--here, the slaves--to publicly express their true feelings and beliefs by word and deed since some nearby army hostile to the dominant class provided potential protection against their superiors' ability to use coercion against subordinates who were supposed to always obey them. Because the private thoughts and oral expressions of the bulk of the slaves are irretrievably lost as part of what Scott calls the hidden transcript, normally we cannot know what thoughts motivated them. However, the various slave narratives composed

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<sup>413</sup>Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down, p. 124, 133, 198, 215; Kemble, Journal, pp. 210, 274, 335; May, "John A. Quitman and His Slaves," p. 569; Wallace Brown, "Negroes and the American Revolution," History Today, 14 (Aug. 1964):557-58; Clarence L. Mohr, "Bibliographical Essay Southern Blacks in the Civil War: A century of Historiography," Journal of Negro History 59 (April 1974):183-88, 193-95; Frank A. Cassell, "Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812," Journal of Negro History 57 (April 1972):144-55; William F. Messner, "Black Violence and White Response: Louisiana, 1862," Journal of Southern History, 41 (Feb. 1975):19-36; Jeffrey R. Young, "Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867: Paternalism amidst 'a Good Supply of Disease and Pain,'" Journal of Southern History 59 (Nov. 1993):702-3; Sylvia R. Frey, "The British and the Black: A New Perspective," Historian 38 (Feb. 1976):226-38; John Cimprich, "Slave Behavior during the Federal Occupation of Tennessee, 1862-1865," Historian 44 (May 1982):335-46; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, pp. 87, 92, 119, 216-18. Genovese, due to his overarching model of paternalism as the hegemonic ideology of the master class being really accepted in a modified form by the slaves to suit their own purposes, underestimates how disruptive war was in maintaining labor discipline. Resistance to slavery need not have been manifested by violent revolts, but by masses of slaves running away, a lower risk strategy which still often obtained the desired goal. Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 143-45, 148-49.

by a small minority of slaves (often with the help of abolitionist whites) give valuable insights into how the slaves did look at the system of oppression they suffered under.<sup>414</sup> The protecting presence of armies hostile to the dominant class in the South allowed the bondsmen to "speak truth to power." They could publicly express their beliefs about those over them in authority, and defy that class by running away or refusing to obey this or that order issued by their owners.<sup>415</sup> In this extreme situation, during the Civil War, with the old regime, being clearly and fundamentally challenged, indeed, in its death throes--the true beliefs of the slaves came out into the open and into the public transcript. Then, it stood revealed many did not accept their master's paternalistic ideology in reality, but had earlier professed it and used it tacitly against their masters when they were far more powerless against the dominant class' ability to coerce them. Fogel and Engerman's claims that the slaves had to some greater or lesser degree internalized the Protestant work ethic is fatally undermined not just by a lack of positive evidence, such as citations from the slave narratives, but by the quasi-freedmen who fled to areas where the Union army was present, or who stayed on their masters' plantations, but increasingly disobeyed them or requested wages for routine work.

#### The Slaves' Sense of Work Discipline Like that of Other Pre-Industrial People

Fogel and Engerman's claims about the slaves being inculcated with the Protestant work ethic is closely tied to the issue of how much the slaves had a time-orientation as opposed to a task-orientation in their work habits, and how punctual they were getting to work in the morning, and methodical in working once there. Their work habits were a subset of those of pre-industrial peasant peoples everywhere, including Europe, where hard work in irregular spasms was valued, but consistently punctual and regular daily labor was not. The type and amount of work necessary was tied to the seasonal and diurnal rhythms of

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<sup>414</sup>Actually, we know the slaves' "hidden transcript" better than the agricultural workers', because there are far more slave narratives and autobiographies than diaries and autobiographies by farmworkers.

<sup>415</sup>For example, although the Union army evidently was still far away, the war's disorganizing effects questioned the slaveholder regime's legitimacy, making the slaves more restive and free to speak, still existed in this case. After his grown son had paraded around in a Confederate officer's uniform, one North Carolinian master shot and killed a slave for defiantly saying, after mumbling it first: "I say, 'Look at that goddam soldier. He fighting to keep us niggers from being free.'" Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 194-95.

planting, tending, and harvesting crops. English artisans, having "Saint Monday" off, often started the workweek with little or no work, but worked furiously long hours towards its end, collapsing into exhaustion late on Saturday, just to repeat the cycle again next week. This irregular cycle illustrates how workers may work hard, but not especially regularly. The pre-industrial peasant mentality was also characterized by not working once a customary level of subsistence had been reached, and even while any money remained in the pocket. Defoe described cynically such a worker this way:

There is nothing more frequent than for an Englishman to work till he has got his pockets full of money, and then go and be idle or perhaps drunk till this is all gone. . . . Ask him in his cups what he intends, he'll tell you honestly, he'll drink as long as it lasts and then go to work for more.<sup>416</sup>

A hike in wages paid per hour backfires on the employers of people who think this way because they work proportionately fewer hours, as per the backwards bending labor supply curve.

In the particular case of the enslaved blacks, they were brought into a labor system in America which, for all their masters and mistresses' efforts to make them work regularly, was still largely regulated by the seasonal agricultural work cycle. Turning the slaves into methodical clock-punchers was simply not fully practical or necessary because agricultural work is highly irregular even in subtropical areas such as the American South. A factory work regime in its classical form is strictly time-oriented and not tied to daylight or seasonal rhythms. Admittedly, the sugar planters, having around-the-clock slave labor in their sugar refineries, approached this model, but even then it was done during a grinding season, not year around. Field work on their plantations was still dominated by seasonal rhythms. Furthermore, the whites themselves in the South who were supposed to be inculcating this Protestant work ethic into the slaves, hardly exemplified it themselves, whether planter or poor white. After all, one of the key differences between a Yankee businessman and a paternalistic planter, pro-slavery apologists stated, was that the former was much more methodical and regular in pursuing wealth than the latter, who knew when relaxing was good in itself. James Sumler saw the implicit hypocrisy on this score among whites, which encouraged him to escape from slavery in Virginia: "After I got to years of maturity, and saw the white people sitting in the shade [presumably his master's family in particular], while I worked in

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<sup>416</sup>As quoted in Gillis, Development of European Society, p. 41.

the sun, I thought I would like to be my own man."<sup>417</sup> As for the poor whites, much like the English cottagers who eked out a living on the end of their village's commons before enclosure wiped out that way of life, they often scraped by through hunting, fishing, some casual subsistence farming, perhaps supplemented by some wage labor in order to get cash for goods that had to be purchased. Olmsted routinely found throughout the South that large planters when asked about the local poor whites always felt them to have a bad influence on their slaves because

the contrast between the habits of the former--most of the time idle, and when working, working only for their own benefit and without a master--constantly offered suggestions and temptations to the slaves to neglect their duty, to run away and live a vagabond life, as these poor whites were seen to.

Genovese's excellent discussion of the slaves and their work ethic, which draws upon Thompson's insights on work discipline being imposed on the English working class, clearly demonstrates the shallowness of Fogel and Engerman's claim that planters often succeeded in inculcating the Protestant work ethic into their slaves, especially when they lacked it to a significant degree themselves to begin with, and had to use force so often to keep their bondsmen working.<sup>418</sup>

#### Genovese's Paternalism: How Successful Were Planters in Imposing Hegemony?

Another ideological control device the slaveholders used to control the slaves needs discussion here besides Fogel and Engerman's Protestant work ethic. The foundation of Genovese's work Roll, Jordan, Roll concerns the slaves accepting their masters' ideology of paternalism with its reciprocal duties between the enslavers and the enslaved, as per Gramsci's notions of hegemony. Even if the slaves often changed and adapted this ideology to favor their own purposes in life, turning what privileges their masters and mistresses granted them customarily into rights, they still accepted the overall system of paternalism, if not always slavery itself. Genovese maintains:

But despite their [the slave preachers'] will and

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<sup>417</sup>Drew, Refugee, p. 98. Cf. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 297, 309.

<sup>418</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:356; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 285-324. See also Gutman and Sutch and David and Temin in David, Reckoning, pp. 55-57, 69-74, 89-93, 204-7; Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, pp. 8, 14-18, 25-31, 39-42, 85, 165, 171-73.



considerable ability, they could not lead their people over to the attack against the paternalist ideology itself. . . . The range from abject acceptance of slavery through insistence on a decent return to outright defiance should not obscure the underlying thread. Some accepted slavery in fear of freedom; others in awareness of superior force; others only because they were held down by the manifestation of that force. Almost all, however, with lesser or greater intensity, fell into a paternalistic pattern of thought, and almost all redefined that pattern into a doctrine of self-protection.<sup>419</sup>

Genovese' view raises the issue of whether most slaves developed "false consciousness," i.e., really accepted the ideology of their masters and made it their own as well.

#### Scott Versus Hegemony

Scott's analysis casts serious doubt upon this score. In contrast to Genovese's analysis, is it not possible that the slaves could have merely proclaimed publicly their devotion to what their masters believed in order to obtain some practical advantage, while privately denying it? They could appeal to their masters and mistresses on the basis of the latter's views of ruling for the good of the slaves in order to obtain (say) better rations, less punishment, and so forth. The ideology of the dominant class can be used by the subordinate class to condemn the former when they fall hypocritically short of its ideals, yet still allow them to appear in conformity with their superiors' beliefs. Often the weak have some practical self-interest in creating an appearance of hegemony by their superiors, and will go through the motions of publicly appearing to accept their values, while among their own kind alone, they will deny them. Merely noting the rituals of deference, such as slaves not talking back to an overseer ordering to do something in a particular case, but looking downwards and shuffling away, does not mean those so engaged have accepted their masters' ideological "hegemony in the sense of active consent." For example, consider the implications of what Douglass experienced initially with his Baltimore mistress. She had not dealt with a slave under her control before, and so was not aware of the rituals of deference slaves were supposed to manifest towards her:

I could not approach her as I was accustomed to approach other white ladies. My early instruction was all out of place. The crouching servility, usually so acceptable a quality in a slave, did not answer when

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<sup>419</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 6, 143-44.

manifested toward her. Her favor was not gained by it; she seemed to be disturbed by it. She did not deem it impudent or unmannerly for a slave to look her in the face.<sup>420</sup>

Now, when Douglass performed these rituals of deference with his masters, was he really accepting his role as a slave for life? Inwardly, he obviously was not, whether in the recesses of his mind or in his conversations with other slaves when no master or mistress was present (part of the "hidden transcript"), such as those he conspired with to escape to the North.

Speaking more generally, slave religion served, at least on some level, as the main source of at least a semi-coherent counter-ideology for many slaves when they had meetings among themselves alone. It was said that Gabriel and Martin Prossner in Virginia at religious services regularly harnessed the Old Testament story about God freeing the children of Israel through Moses to gain recruits for their conspiracy: "The Israelites were glowingly portrayed as a type of successful resistance to tyranny; and it was argued, that now, as then, God would stretch forth his arm to save, and would strengthen a hundred to overthrow a thousand." Similarly, at Vesey's planned rebellion in South Carolina, which appeared to be centered on the membership of the African Church of Charleston, one alleged conspirator said that he "read to us from the Bible, how the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage." Somewhat differently, but still using a religious base for his counter-ideology, was the charismatic Nat Turner, whose visions as a prophet led him to start a rebellion. The most crucial of these visions, in May 1828, had God telling him that

the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the Yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first.

These examples indicate how slaves could use the Bible's religion to reply against their masters' official religious ideology of patience, humility, and obedience. But these proclamations remained behind the scenes, when whites were not watching. Officially, the slave preachers had little choice but to teach what their masters wanted them to when whites were present, but this changed when they were by themselves, as freedman Anderson Edwards of Texas recalled:

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<sup>420</sup>Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, pp. xii, 11, 17-18, 24, 66, 70-71, 87, 93-95, 105-6; Douglass, Narrative, p. 48.

When I starts preaching I couldn't read or write and had to preach what Master told me, and he say tell them niggers iffen they obeys the master they goes to Heaven; but I knowed there's something better for them, but daren't tell them 'cept on the sly. That I done lots. I tells 'em iffen they keeps praying, the Lord will set 'em free.<sup>421</sup>

It is necessary to be wary of accepting the slaves' proclamations of loyalty and gratefulness at face value, for the heart may not be agreeing with what the tongue feels compelled to say.

Obviously, the problem here is the lack of documentation concerning what most slaves really thought as they went through such rituals of deference, and professed their undying love for their master, and so forth. Now sometimes light can be shed on the hidden transcript, which reveals how the oppressed analyzed their condition when among themselves alone, through the slave narratives (such as Douglass's). Sometimes it erupts into the public transcript (which the dominant class largely writes, disseminates, and controls) through occasional outbursts, etc. Still, determining what most slaves really thought inevitably comes down to fortuitously impressionistic literary evidence. Unfortunately for historians, there were no Gallup polls using statistical samples of slaves to record what they believed about their masters, mistresses, overseers, and slavery itself. Little of what was said in the slave quarters when no master or overseer was within earshot has come down to us. Almost entirely, the preserved records are composed of the public transcript. Still, there is reason to believe that the slaves always sensed that they were oppressed and exploited, judging from their dull, plodding work habits, their theft of food and other items, and the number who ran away at least temporarily. They saw practically what freedom meant, from how their master's family lived, and from neighboring poor whites, so it was not something they had to completely imagine on their own. Of course, enough cases exist of slaves appearing truly sad at the passing of a good master, not running away when the Yankee army passes through, or other human intimacies between white and black that likely indicate many slaves really did accept some sense of reciprocal duties (or rights) between them and their masters, especially in the case of domestic servants, as Genovese observes. Although Genovese is fully cognizant that much slave behavior, at least on the job, was or could have been deceitful,

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<sup>421</sup>As quoted in Vincent Harding, "Religion and Resistance among Antebellum Negroes, 1800-1860," in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, eds., The Making of Black America, vol. 1: The Origins of Black Americans; 2 vols. Studies in American Negro Life (New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 182, 185, 187-88; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 26.

intentionally incompetent, or "putting on old massa," the dangerous implications of duplicity for his application of Gramsci's model of hegemony to American slavery were not seriously considered.<sup>422</sup>

Were the Slaveholders Really Believers in Paternalism?: The Implications of Jacksonian Democracy and Commercial Capitalism in the American South

Genovese's thesis that the master class successfully implanted their hegemonic ideology of paternalism in the slaves' minds also depends on whether the slaveholders themselves really believed in it. Could have the typical masters of the South been just as motivated by profit as the money-grubbing Yankee merchants and industrialists that pro-slavery apologists portrayed while defending a paternalistic "peculiar institution"? The roughneck crew portrayed in Olmsted's description of the frontier interior planters, alluded to above, with their passions and desires to make money off "cotton and negroes," is a world apart from the long-settled paternalistic great planters of lowland South Carolina or those attempting to sustain their pride while eking out a living with a few slaves on soil of declining fertility in Tidewater Virginia. Once a book-peddler on board a steamboat in Louisiana attempted to sell a "Bible Defence of Slavery," which clearly had a paternalistic overtone to it judging from the frontispiece he displayed. He thrust the book into the hands of a would-be purchaser, and was yelled at with the following:

Now you go to hell! I've told you three times I didn't want your book. If you bring it here again I'll throw it overboard. I own niggers; and I calculate to own more of 'em, if I can get 'em, but I don't want any damn'd preachin' about it.

Was such a man, part of the striving, roughneck, quick-tempered, gun- and knife-packing crowd Olmsted described, really motivated by the love of his slaves to embrace the paternalistic "peculiar institution"? Or, did he judge this was the best way for him to make money? He did not even try to keep up the pretense it was the former. Similarly, one relatively poor white who lived in northern Alabama, a miner who also kept a small farm, told Olmsted:

The richer a man is . . . and the more niggers he's got, the poorer he seems to live. If you want to fare well in this country [as a lodger] you stop to poor folks' housen; they try to enjoy what they've got,

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<sup>422</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 91, 119, 292-93, 295, 306, 308, 335, 342-61 (sharing intimacies).

while they ken, but these yer big planters they don' care for nothing but to save.<sup>423</sup>

This account may reflect class prejudice, of poor white against rich planter. Still, it undermines the idea the slaveowners seriously lived the profit-devaluing paternalism that pro-slavery ideologues such as Fitzhugh spoke in their names. Or, if they did not live it, how much did they merely believe in it, since a certain level of hypocrisy is inevitable among those who uphold any ideology due to human moral weakness?

While the older, long-settled regions of Tidewater Virginia and lowland South Carolina had large planters by the mid-nineteenth century whose families had owned slaves over several generations, most of the rest of the South was still at best a semi-settled wilderness heavily affected by the frontier mentality.<sup>424</sup> Boney describes one typical smaller planter named Thomas Stevens, who although he at one time owned thirty-one slaves, never could mobilize more than five or six prime adult male field hands in the field at once. Having started out as a miller, carpenter, and distiller, he raised livestock as well as crops on his farm. As described in a slave narrative by one John Brown, he was a hard driver of his slaves, of his sons, of himself, and expressed both rage and occasional brutality against his slaves while pursuing increased production on his farm. To Boney, "planter" in his thinking should involve someone who owns 50 or 100 slaves, not just 20, because: "The designation of planter carries strong connotations of elitism and aristocracy which distort the basic reality of the antebellum South." In contradiction to Genovese or Beard, he views the South's whites as dominated by a capitalistic, bourgeois ethic, characterized by ambition, striving, and profit-making. "No matter how many slaves most planters accumulated, they tended to remain bourgeois businessmen, fundamentally middle-class agriculturists in hot pursuit of the fast buck. . . . The great majority of Southern whites were thoroughly bourgeois, optimistically pursuing profit by hard work and sharp bargaining." The individualistic mentality of these men seeking upward social mobility by their own efforts is very different from that of European, especially Continental, aristocrats who stereotypically eschewed commercial ventures and active participation in the management of their land. The planters of the South had a much more commercial

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<sup>423</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:346, 2:117.

<sup>424</sup>Olmsted noted that the South's dominant crop was grown on 5,000,000 acres out of over 500,000,000 acres, leaving much of the rest to wilderness. Cotton Kingdom, 1:24. See also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 43-44, for how the frontier mentality affected the South's legal system by encouraging extra-legal violence.

mentality than their supposed European counterparts, and a number were, according to Degler, "actively engaged in railroading, banking, ginning, and manufacturing of all kinds." Conforming to this description, May describes John Quitman, a major Mississippi planter and politician, as "immersed in land speculations, banking activities, Mississippi railroad development, the Natchez Steam Packet Company, and southern commercial conventions." He served as an officer for a number of corporations.<sup>425</sup> Degler even suggests, in an argument reminiscent of Fogel and Engerman's, that if the slaveholders earned a rate of profit comparable to that of bourgeois Northerners that they "must have been working as hard at making profits . . . unless one assumes it was all accidental."<sup>426</sup> The character of the utterly pragmatic, temperamental, roughneck smaller planters and slaveholders Olmsted encountered time and time again on his travels, whose conversations were dominated by slaves, cotton, and other "shop talk," strongly support Fogel and Engerman's revisionist view of

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<sup>425</sup>Boney, "Thomas Stevens," 232-33; Carl N. Degler, "The Foundations of Southern Distinctiveness," Southern Review 13 (spring 1977):230; May, "John A. Quitman and His Slaves," p. 564. Both Degler and May cite the work of Morton Rothstein, and May cites William Scarborough, to support their views.

<sup>426</sup>Degler, "Foundations of Southern Distinctiveness," p. 233. See Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, vol. 1, pp. 67-73. For a reply, note David and Temin in David, Reckoning with Slavery, pp. 39-43. Their argument does have force, because (in a perfectly efficient market) the relatively few marginal purchasers of slaves who were purely motivated by profit-making considerations would be enough to bring the rate of return to equilibrium with other profit-making activities in commerce or industry. However, how much could the "tail" of a few profit-motivated planters wag the theoretical "dog" of purely non-economically motivated slaveholders in reality, especially since the market for slaves (in particular) was not exactly fully efficient? Their point loses force because the mere existence of profits presupposes someone desires them, just as the existence of wages presupposes laborers' self-interest in earning them. Furthermore, even in their example of the budget-constrained "Cavalier fop" who has no profit-making motive concerning his slaves, self-interest is still present, even if more weakly, because within his limited resources "on average he would hold more slaves were slaves cheap (vis-a-vis other things) than he would were slaves relatively dear" (p. 41). They ignore how the further off this market would go from the general rate of return in the economy as a whole, proportionately increasing amounts of capital would "bleed" from the slave-owning sector. Profit-seeking entrepreneurs will shift capital from one sector to another as the rates of return between different sectors grow increasingly wider.

a capitalistic, profit-seeking slaveholding class.

Counter-Attacks Against Portraying Slaveholders as Bourgeois Individualists

Several lines of attack have been launched against characterizing southern slaveholders as striving individualists seeking profit and upward mobility through their own efforts as part of a larger system of capitalistic commercial agriculture. Arguing against Oakes, Gallay notes that the great planters dominated the South politically and ideologically. By Stamp's calculations based on the Census, the elite composed of those owning over a hundred slaves constituted less than three thousand families in the South out of a population of some 1,516,000 free families. Even for small slaveholders, there remained "the hierarchical structure of the plantation with its dependent relationships."<sup>427</sup> This leads us to the question of the nature of paternalism, and how compatible it is with a capitalist mode of production. Stamp as well as Fogel and Engerman note that paternalism can be quite compatible with enlightened self-interest or profit-making in some cases, as the success of traditionally paternalistic companies such as IBM (although its "no layoffs" policy is dead nowadays) and Eastman Kodak.<sup>428</sup> Paternalism as a social system is not just about the duties of the subordinate and dominant classes to each other, but it gives the dominant the right to punish and control their subordinates for their own good, just as a father punishes his children for their own good.<sup>429</sup> That such punishment also serves the interests of the dominant class--well, that is just incidental. Or is it? As Anderson noted in his review of Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll,

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<sup>427</sup>Gallay, "Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism," p. 371; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 30-31. Gallay maintains this ruling elite owned over half of the slaves. Stamp calculates that only one-fourth of all the slaves belonged to those who owned less than ten, that somewhat more than half lived in units of twenty, and one-fourth lived in units of over fifty. If we accept Boney's definition of a "planter," which evidently tilts towards those who really could delegate the management of their plantations to others so they could pursue women, wild game, and card playing, then a strong majority of slaves were not owned by such planters.

<sup>428</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:73; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 163-64.

<sup>429</sup>For example, as an illustration of this ethos, we find in the New Testament (Hebrews 12: 6-7): "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

the masters' ideology allowed them to turn the slaves into dependent children, permitting them to whip and otherwise punish the slaves continually:

In [Genovese's] attempt to bind the master and slave in an intimate relationship, he failed to understand that the masters, in their own minds, denied the slaves the quality of gratitude in order to commit brutality without regret or responsibility. George Fitzhugh needed to say that Africans had less self-control and that the 'master occupies toward [his slaves] the place of parent or guardian.' But historians need not accept this as genuine fatherly concern.<sup>430</sup>

Anderson's point leads us to a spectacularly unsurprising conclusion: The ideology of the upper class tends to be self-serving and self-justifying, at least when they are confident in the exercise of their power. Normally, when a businessman proclaims his belief in paternalism, such as Carnegie, who simultaneously proclaimed both philanthropy and Social Darwinism, or the businessman who declared during a strike that the best interests of the workers would be served by the Christian businessmen of America, historians eye it very suspiciously. Should not a similar level of skepticism be directed against Southern slaveholders' proclamations of the same beliefs? After all, as Degler observed, many were no more than a generation removed from personally wielding the hoe, ax, or plow themselves, which gives precious little time for an aristocratic ethos to develop from the nouveau riche milieu out of which sprang frontier success stories. Boney raises the issue of whether they deceived themselves or just others: "Whether they fooled themselves into believing otherwise [that they did not have a profit-seeking bourgeois outlook, but were aristocratic paternalists] or only misled later generations is another question entirely." The close personal ties and human intimacies that make up a truly practiced system of paternalism would occur mostly only with domestic servants, drivers, some artisans, and perhaps a few field hands a master or mistress may have played with as a child. For example, Olmsted noted how "two or three well-dressed negro servants" greeted some of the white passengers on a ship on the James River in Virginia with enthusiasm, even kisses. One fat mulatto woman shouted loudly and pathetically, "Oh, Massa George, is you come back!" to a "long-haired sophomore." By contrast, the same level of feeling was not felt by the field hands present: "Field negroes, standing by, looked on with their usual besotted expression, and neither offered nor received greetings." Stamp cites cases of masters distraught over the deaths of a personal attendant and a gardener, but who did not seem especially disturbed emotionally by the deaths of

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<sup>430</sup>Anderson, "Aunt Jemima in Dialectics," pp. 112-13.



field hands. The case of James Hammond is particularly striking. While he was sincerely distressed over the death of his gardener, he was emotionally (though not financially) indifferent to the deaths of two field hands: "Neither a serious loss. One valuable mule has also died."<sup>431</sup> For these reasons, in a view clearly different from Genovese's, Stamppp is largely correct when broadbrushing this summary statement: "Plantation paternalism, then, was in most cases a kind of leisure-class family indulgence of its domestics."<sup>432</sup> For the most part, many masters and mistresses--Barrow being an excellent case in point--probably looked at the mass of their slaves often as "Theory X" management might deal with the members of an uncooperative labor union, as employees who need constant supervision, prodding, verbal abuse, and punishments to get anything done, without any great emotional attachment to most of the individuals involved, making it easy to replace any of them. Hence, if most of the elite or middling slaveholders were striving, individualistic, profit-seeking capitalists, who often honored paternalistic ideology as mere platitudes at best, largely reserving its practice to domestic servants, then the hegemonic function of paternalism in keeping the bulk of the slaves in line is gravely weakened, for the dominant class cannot pass down to its subordinate class what it does not believe itself.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>431</sup>Degler, "Foundations of Southern Distinctiveness," 231; Boney, "Thomas Stevens, Antebellum Georgian," 233; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:142; Stamppp, Peculiar Institution, p. 325.

<sup>432</sup>Stamppp, Peculiar Institution, p. 326. Genovese implicitly rebuts this argument. Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 10. He maintains that slaveholders often knew all their slaves by name, as well as their individual personalities. However, this is not enough for close emotional bonds to form. Many high school teachers, facing 120-150 different students in the course of a day, may soon know all their individual names and many individuals' personal quirks and talents. Nevertheless, the serious emotional bonds that come from the intimacy of sharing what is on each other's minds are likely limited to a relative few out of this group.

<sup>433</sup>Degler noted that Fitzhugh's brand of true conservatism, who repudiated the liberal tradition of Adam Smith and John Locke, constituted only a small minority viewpoint among whites. These views could not be sold to the poor white voters who personified "Jacksonian Democracy" in the South. While Calhoun, a much more influential figure than Fitzhugh, repudiated natural rights and defended slavery, he still remained in the liberal tradition by comparison. He did not look at political and social institutions as organic wholes as Burke did, but something changeable based upon reason, as illustrated by his proposal for a concurrent majority in approving legislation. Degler suggests that white Southerners, by emphasizing the racial component of

## Ignorance as a Control Device Revisited

As observed earlier in the section dealing with education (pp. 107-9), an elite can control its subordinate class by inculcating knowledge that legitimizes its authority and favors its continued control. Promoting the ideology of paternalism or the implantation of the Protestant work ethic among the slaves can be seen as a subset of this approach, although for them very little of this occurred through formal education and book learning. The other option employs ignorance as a control device for keeping a lower class in subjection. Southern slaveholders applied this method to their bondsmen in many ways. By keeping slaves in ignorance of geography, local or continental, it made successful escapes to the North or Canada much more unlikely. It is hard to escape to someplace not known to exist, or, if known, when how to get there remains unknown. Even Douglass, a literate slave, did not know of Canada's existence, and nothing in America past New York northwards, which still was not fundamentally safe due to the (old) fugitive slave return law. So he thought, when conspiring with a group of fellow slaves to escape: "We could see no spot, this side of the ocean, where we could be free." Similarly, John Hunter, who escaped from slavery in Maryland, commented: "A great many slaves know nothing of Canada,--they don't know that there is such a country." Freedman Arnold Gragston, was a slave in Mason County, Kentucky, right near the Ohio River. Before he assisted the Underground Railroad in helping slaves escape by rowing them across that river, he labored under some seemingly astonishing misconceptions about an area so close to himself: "[I] didn't know a thing about the other side. I had heard a lot about it from other slaves, but I thought it was just about like Mason County, with slaves and masters, overseers and rawhides." These stories indicate the slaves generally knew little originating from abolitionists and other Northerners propagandizing against slavery, with what was known being badly diluted and distorted by the "whispering lane" effect. Because it was nearly impossible for slaves to get this information otherwise, Ball made a special effort to memorize the names of towns, villages, rivers, and where ferries were located on them as he was taken from Maryland to Georgia to enable him to find his way back one day.<sup>434</sup>

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American slavery more than it was elsewhere, allowed them to read the blacks out of society and political life as being innately inferior. This heavy dose of racism allowed them to have an individualistic, liberal capitalism with a republican government based upon universal white manhood suffrage among themselves while keeping blacks in chains. Degler, "Foundations of Southern Distinctiveness," 234-39.

<sup>434</sup>Douglass, Narrative, p. 92; Drew, Refugee, p. 115; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 186; Ball, Slavery in the United States,

Ignorance also helped keep slaves in bondage or in fear of acting on their freedom after emancipation came. Texas freedman Anderson Edwards and his fellow slaves did not know for a year after freedom had been proclaimed that in fact they were free. Their master had kept them in the dark until some Union soldier paid a visit and ransacked the plantation. One freedman was forced to work after emancipation for his master four years, until he stole a horse to get away, another for three years until his mistress freed him after his master was hanged, and one did not know she was free until she ran away and a black man told her she was free. The federal government wisely sent agents to fan the Southern countryside to investigate whether the freedmen were being paid and telling them they were free, because it could not trust the former masters to tell their slaves that they were no longer slaves. During the war, Georgian newspapers went to considerable trouble to spread scare stories about the treatment of ex-slaves in the North or in the Union army to discourage runaways, counting on the masters to tell these tales to their bondsmen, which evidently had some effect.<sup>435</sup> Clearly, "knowledge is power" for an oppressed class in a very practical sense because it becomes much harder for an elite to tightly control a subordinate group that knows substantially as much as its rulers, such as due to widespread public education.<sup>436</sup>

#### How Masters Would Manipulate the Slaves' Family Ties in Order to Control Them

Another control device, already described above (p. 159) in the section dealing with the family life of the slaves, was for masters and mistresses to manipulate the family relationships of the bondsmen for labor discipline purposes. The Southern Baptist minister Holland Nimmons McTyeire stated in his essay "Duties of Christian Masters" that slaveholders should build up the family unit among the slaves for reasons that also benefited their self-interest:

Local as well [as] family associations, thus cast about him, are strong yet pleasing cords binding him to his master. His welfare is so involved in the order of

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pp. 48-49.

<sup>435</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 76, 102-3, 233, 249. See also Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 319; Clarence L. Mohr, "Before Sherman: Georgia Blacks and the Union War Effort, 1861-1864," Journal of Southern History 45 (Aug. 1979):332.

<sup>436</sup>Some of the other effects of using ignorance to control the slaves was dealt with in the section on education (pp. 107-9) and the quality of life (p. 97) above, so they need not be repeated here.

things, that he would not for any consideration have it disturbed. He is made happier and safer, put beyond discontent, or the temptation to rebellion and abduction; for he gains nothing in comparison with what he loses.<sup>437</sup>

Family ties also had the practical effect of discouraging slaves from running away, since they did not want to leave wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, etc. behind in the South if they fled alone. And if they fled in a group, they became easier to track down and catch. One Georgian overseer was not at all afraid that abolitionists would successfully tempt a slave to escape he was sending to the North with his family because: "I take care, when my wife goes North with the children, to send Lucy with her; her children are down here, and I defy all the Abolitionists in creation to get her to stay North."<sup>438</sup> Jacobs, if she had not been a mother, would have found it much easier to flee to the North, but she felt compelled to try to have her children freed as well: "I could have made my escape alone; but it was more for my helpless children than for myself that I longed for freedom. Though the boon would have been precious to me, above all price, I would not have taken it at the expense of leaving them in slavery."<sup>439</sup> Douglass made a similar point, but because his family life had been very weak, he latched onto the importance of friends, such as those in his own life, as discouraging slaves from running away: "It is my opinion that thousands would escape from slavery, who now remain, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends."<sup>440</sup> Always one of the most powerful ways family ties could be used against the bondsmen was for a slaveholder to threaten to sell them or some other family member as the ultimate punishment for disobedience. Colonial Georgian William Simpson noted that a slave he sold wrote "to his wife frequently, and appears by his letters to be in great distress for want of her." He had sold him for being disobedient, but now said he was considering buying him back to rejoin husband and wife.<sup>441</sup> But in most cases family members separated by sale were unlikely ever to see each other again, unless it was a local one. Using the family ties of their slaves to control them, through discouraging

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<sup>437</sup>as quoted in Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, p. 101.

<sup>438</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 298.

<sup>439</sup>Brent, Incidents, pp. 91-92.

<sup>440</sup>Douglass, Narrative, p. 110.

<sup>441</sup>Joyce E. Chaplin, "Slavery and the Principle of Humanity: A Modern Idea in the Early Lower South," Journal of Social History, winter 1990, p. 309.

escapes or using the threat of sale, the slaveholding elite used against them some of the very aspects of their character that proved their humanity, and that they were not animals, to the whites.

Positive Incentives Only a Supplementary Method for Controlling the Bondsmen

Using positive incentives was another way for masters and mistresses to deal with their slaves, such as rewards for working hard. While the stick inevitably looms much larger than the carrot in slaveholders' dealings with their slaves, as argued above against Fogel and Engerman (pp. 233-35, 240-44), positive incentives did exist, and played a supplementary role in controlling and disciplining the slaves. One standard way to get extra work from the slaves was to pay them for overtime hours, such as for work on Sundays and late nights. Although a master or mistress could compel the slaves to work these hours, the negative repercussions (work slowdowns, the neighbors' criticisms, etc.) were such that they usually paid them for the extra work. When done with their tasks for the day, several boys worked willingly for Kemble to clear paths on her husband's estate for pay within twenty-four hours of her making the offer. Similarly, some carpenters there made a boat they sold for sixty dollars to a neighboring planter built in their spare time. Patrick Snead, born a slave in Savannah, Georgia, worked as a cooper making barrels. His task was to make eighteen a week, but since he "could make more than twice as many . . . [he] began to have money." John Clopton, once a slave in Virginia, worked nights to earn the money to buy a hat and some clothes because his master supplied him with no hat and few clothes. Olmsted found one farmer in Louisiana who paid slaves fifty or seventy-five cents a day to work for him Sundays. Another Mississippi planter's blacks earned money for extras such as tobacco by working Saturdays and Sundays, with one clearing fifty dollars in a year by making boards with axes. Paid work did have its problems for slaves, because they could be more easily cheated by their employer, who could refuse to pay them, and then they had no legal redress. One slave in Mississippi was not paid three dollars for a number of Sundays he had worked for one white farmer. John Quitman's slaves received pay for chopping wood on Sundays. His brother-in-law Henry Turner complained that the slaves were "very troublesome in the way of asking for their dues when not paid" for chickens they had raised on the Monmouth plantation in Mississippi.<sup>442</sup> As noted above earlier (pp. 222-223), while the slaves willingly did extra work (i.e., without the compulsion of the whip), it was not totally voluntary because

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<sup>442</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 25, 258. Note also pp. 40, 177, 279-80; Drew, Refugee, pp. 101, 161; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:39, 103, 181; May, "John Quitman and His Slaves," pp. 556-57.

the masters did not give them enough to allow them to get by at all comfortably without the extra work's earnings. After all, if Clopton's master gave him the necessary food, but hardly any clothes, when he chooses to work Sundays to buy clothes, this work was not truly voluntary. The master's arbitrary power in reducing the sustenance provided to his slaves forced them to work overtime "voluntarily" for real necessities. A slave who did a bad job in overtime work did not face the whip, but the penalty of going shirtless, hatless, knifeless, panless, etc., was harsh enough.

Slaveholders also had less formal incentives than pay for overtime work. Freedwoman Mary Reynolds remembered that her master in Louisiana at Christmas time gave a suit of clothes to the cotton picker who had picked the most. Henry Laurens and his overseer wished to give an incentive to his most dutiful slaves and get others to imitate their example. Instead of giving them the standard "white plains" for clothes, they were given blue cloth and metal buttons for their clothes. Barrow bought for his slaves Atean and Dave Bartley a suit of clothes for each one time in August because of their "fine conduct picking cotten &c." More generally, slaves worked perhaps because it was an intrinsically understandable part of the production process, unlike the work of many industrial workers monotonously engaged in making or assembling the parts of machines. Some self-interest did exist, because they generally grew the corn and raised the hogs they were fed with. Some were industrious because they felt they had a stake in successfully completing work, as Blassingame noted: "Many slaves developed this feeling because the planters promised them money, gifts, dinners, and dances if they labored faithfully."<sup>443</sup> Others worked on their own time on some patch of land their owner allowed them to cultivate, growing crops they could eat or sell to raise cash, in a manner remarkably similar to the allotments of English agricultural workers. One master found it easier to control his slaves by threatening deductions from the revenue produced by them on the patches of land they worked. The privilege to raise crops on their own time became particularly important in the task system areas, where some slaves developed major holdings of animals through their families' voluntary work once the involuntary task for their masters were finished, in a manner reminiscent of medieval serfdom, where peasants worked on their lord's land so many days per week, and on their own so many days per week.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>443</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 123; Chaplin, "Slavery and the Principle of Humanity," 309; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 157; Blassingame, Slave Community, p. 292. See also Orser, "Archaeological Analysis of Plantation Society," 742.

<sup>444</sup>For examples of this practice, see Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 158; Kemble, Journal, p. 47; Davis, Plantation Life, p.

Hence, while slaveholders did offer slaves positive incentives, these should not be seen as motivating work more than negative "incentives" such as the whip, executions, and the threat of sale. The very nature of slavery eliminated positive incentives as the fundamental motivator for the enslaved because, usually, "No effort of your own can make you free, but no absence of effort shall starve you."<sup>445</sup>

One of Fogel and Engerman's mistakes concerning the pervasiveness of incentives for slaves was to equate gifts given to slaves at Christmas time with an incentive system. They cite Barrow's year end bonuses, claiming: "The amounts received by particular slaves were proportional to their performance." The diary does not support this claim, because Barrow did not say which slaves received how much from the overall amounts given to all the slaves listed in his diary. These cash gifts appear to be gifts unrelated to work performance, which means then they could not have had motivating effects. For example, Barrow wrote for December 24, 1838: "Hands went to Town payed them last night \$500." Similarly, for December 24, 1841 we find: "verry cold, Gave the negros money last night \$700. all went to Town to day." During one year, 1842, due to financial hardship, he dispensed with monetary gifts altogether, explaining why he did so: "Gave the negros as much of Evry thing to eat & drink during the Hollidays as they Wanted times so hard no able to give any thing more." When someone "gives" someone something, it is not an incentive in any direct sense, because it is not tied to personal productivity. Sides portrays the mistress distributing Christmas gifts largely regardless of merit: "[She] distributed the gifts to the slaves, trying to treat them all equally, though allowing herself to give an extra present 'where some notable conduct warranted it.'" Some plantations also distributed the winter rations of clothes, blankets, and shoes this time of the year, which were not gifts, but what the slaves were automatically entitled to, regardless of work effort. Barrow's Christmas time gifts for slaves were likely no more "incentives" for his slaves than any given to his own children.<sup>446</sup>

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253; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 187, 203, 210; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:238, 251; 2:180, 195-96, 238-39; Alex Lichtenstein, "'That Disposition to Theft, With Which They Have Been Branded,': Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," Journal of Social History 21 (spring 1988):424-26; Morgan, "Ownership of Property by Slaves," pp. 399-420; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 164-66.

<sup>445</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 280.

<sup>446</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:148; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 139, 218, 279; Sides, "Slave Weddings and Religion," 83. For more on this issue, see Gutman, Slavery and

Fogel and Engerman emphasize the incentive effects of rewarding slaves better jobs who served their masters and mistresses well:

Slaves had the opportunity to rise within the social and economic hierarchy that existed under bondage. Field hands could become artisans or drivers. . . . Climbing the economic ladder brought not only social status, and sometimes more freedom; it also had significant payoffs in better housing, better clothing, and cash bonuses.

Although referring to The Jamaica Planter's Guide, they cite no direct evidence that American slaveowners operated this way. Their indirect evidence came from interpreting a skewed age distribution found in a heavily sugar-growing parish they surveyed, which was biased towards older men among the artisans. They said this meant older men were rewarded with better jobs due to serving their masters better when younger. Problematically for them, this age distribution could also be explained by a declining demand for trained slaves towards the late antebellum period, perhaps due to European immigration to urban areas in the South.<sup>447</sup>

One major problem confronts the claim the slaves desired to climb up an occupational pyramid for better jobs and material conditions: The slaves with the better jobs, such as drivers and domestic servants, were often seen as stooges serving their master's interests and enforcers of his rules by the ordinary field hands in the quarters. A job that gave a slave high prestige in the eyes of the master often had correspondingly low status in the eyes of the bulk of the slaves, at least if the slaves in the high positions were seen as generally identifying with and consistently serving their master's interests without giving others any slack.<sup>448</sup> A number of slaves clearly felt the

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the Numbers Game, pp. 44-47.

<sup>447</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:149, 150, 2:117-118, 262; Gutman and Sutch in David, Reckoning with Slavery, pp. 74-86. They also explain here how Fogel and Engerman's inflated figures on the percentage of black drivers and overseers (supervisors of drivers) were inaccurate.

<sup>448</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 258-60, 316; Orser, "Archaeological Analysis of Plantation Society," pp. 740-41. For the general unpopularity of the drivers with other slaves, note Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 85, 90, 91, 94, 120, 121; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 217-18. The ex-slaves interviewed in the FWP narratives may have emphasized the brutality of the drivers due to fearing saying negative things



trade-offs involved were worth it, because to demote (or threaten to) a domestic servant to field work was an effective control device precisely because he did wish to keep the job he already had.<sup>449</sup> It does make sense that the more reliable, loyal, intelligent, and/or diligent slaves would end up as drivers, artisans, or domestic servants, such as Atean, who ended up a foreman on Barrow's plantation. Still, the high level of capriciousness in promotion decisions easily undermined the incentive effects involved, especially if these slaves picked up the opprobrium of their fellows as they rose. While artisans and drivers did have better conditions than ordinary field hands, Fogel and Engerman fail to link "specified performance standards" and "the strength of the existing inducements--material and other" to those wishing "to escape the lot of the ordinary field hand," ignoring how an occupational hierarchy's mere existence does not guarantee merit, as opposed to nepotism or chance, is the main way of assigning positions within it.<sup>450</sup>

### The Brutal Overseer as a Historical Reality

One very basic decision a master had to make about organizing his plantation's operations concerned whether he hired an overseer or performed his own supervision, leaning upon black drivers more. If he hired an overseer, then the problem was the master did not necessarily like "paid management's" motives when managing his slaves. Since an overseer did not own the slaves he managed, he was more apt to mistreat them, especially when given

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about their past white master and/or overseer to white interviewers that gathered their reminiscences. William L. Van Deburg, "Slave Drivers and Slave Narratives: A New Look at the 'Dehumanized Elite,'" Historian 39 (Aug. 1977):728-30. However, in at least two of the narratives found in Botkin cited above, the slaves were willing to say negative things about their masters as well, thus blunting Van Deburg's point.

<sup>449</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 153; Brent, Incidents, p. 41. However, if the slave was a valuable artisan, punishing him this way normally cost too much. Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 184.

<sup>450</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 272, 359, 419, 421; David and Temin in David, Reckoning, pp. 45-46; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 370-71, 393. The nearest any master might have come to Fogel and Engerman's model of long-run incentives was the large plantation of Zephaniah Kingsley in Florida. It featured a three-tiered hierarchy: freedmen, the drivers who were next in line to be freed, and the mass of slaves, which included a flow of continual newcomers from Africa. See J.P. White, "Christmas at the Plantation," North American Review 278 (Nov./Dec. 1993):5-6.

the high turnover rate endemic to this profession, which made him still less likely to care about the individual bondsmen he supervised. In order to make a large crop, he was apt to drive the slaves too hard. One English traveler from Mississippi wrote to the London Daily News in 1857 that:

[The overseer's] professional reputation depends in a great measure upon the number of bales or hogsheads he is able to produce, and neither his education nor his habits are such as to render it likely that he would allow any consideration for the negroes to stand in the way of his advancing it. . . . His skill consists in knowing exactly how hard they may be driven without incapacitating them for future exertion.<sup>451</sup>

Overseers have a well-deserved reputation for brutality.<sup>452</sup> Generally overseers in the South were emotional, uneducated men possessing a violence-prone frontier mentality, often deficient in the "people skills" required to manage slaves successfully. Since keeping slaves in line was a continual struggle, and the use of raw force and punishment was frequently necessary because they had little incentive to work, these realities soon hardened most overseers who were not harsh to begin with. As the case Olmsted witnessed, in which one overseer unemotionally inflicted a brutal beating on a shirking slave (cited above, p. 232), the very nature of the system, with its minimal incentives for the slaves to work outside of avoiding physical punishment, made banal cruelty necessary for its continued functioning.

The overseer on a large plantation could be corrupted by his position of nearly unlimited power, especially if the master was not physical present. One antebellum South Carolina newspaper suggested that: "[Overseers] who combine the most intelligence, industry, and character, are allured into the service of those

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<sup>451</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:189.

<sup>452</sup>Gathering "horror stories" of harsh overseers is easy, and little exists to rebut the overall impression they give. Unlike the case concerning good versus bad masters, where even among the slaves a more divided opinion exists, testimony about overseers is nearly always negative. See Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down, pp. 36, 104, 106; Kemble, Journal, p. 180, 223-24; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 154; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 112, 145-47; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 38-40; Drew, Refugee, p. 29, 183; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, pp. 170-71; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 139. One striking exception to this generally dismal picture was the overseer from Pennsylvania who protected Northrup from a master about to hang him with the aid of two other overseers for whipping him. See Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, pp. 77, 83-85.

who place all power in their hands, and are ultimately spoiled."<sup>453</sup> Even such a man as Barrow, who never hesitated to apply the whip when he felt it necessary, complained about the brutality of his own overseer, as well as their general class, from a slaveholders' viewpoint:

More Whipping to do this Fall than all together in three years owing to my D mean Overseer--never will have another unless I should be compelled to leave . . . I hope the time will come When every Overseer in the country will be compelled to addopt some other mode of making a living--they are a perfect nuisance cause dissatisfaction among the negros--being more possessed of more brutal feelings--I make better crops than those Who Employ them.<sup>454</sup>

As a result, he stopped hiring overseers, and relied on black drivers for the immediate supervision of his slaves. As will be seen below (pp. 341-42), the slaves could exploit the weaknesses and tensions in the master-overseer relationship for their own ends of evading work.

#### The Task Versus Gang Systems: Different Approaches to Work Discipline

Choosing between the task and gang systems was another fundamental management decision for a farm or plantation. While the gang system was much more widespread, as the task system was largely limited to lowland Georgia and South Carolina, still a number of slaveholders experimented or found compromises between the two systems. Both should be discussed because of the trade-offs between the two from the viewpoint of the slaveholders and the bondsmen. The task system consisted of giving individual slaves a particular set quota of work in the field, and when they were done, they had the rest of the day off to do largely as they pleased. The gang system consisted of supervising slaves in a group while they worked, driving them through the field to do particular jobs, with no particular limit on the length of the work day other than the rising and setting of the sun. The task system benefited the stronger slaves who could be done earlier in the day, but the full onus of individual responsibility fell on them for any careless or shoddy work done in order to finish early or for any other reason. The gang system tended to benefit the weaker hands, since the number of hours they would have worked at a particular task would have been the same under either system. It allowed slaves as a group to evade responsibility for

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<sup>453</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:189.

<sup>454</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 99, 154. He also complains about overseers on pp. 89, 90, 232.

bad work, because an overseer or master found it harder to discover which individual slave(s) did bad work. As Young noted: "Whereas slaves toiling in gangs could surreptitiously work at less than full speed, the task laborer was accountable if the assigned work was not completed by the end of the day." The enslaved blacks generally appeared to enjoy work in groups over individual labor in isolation, which may have given them a preference for the gang system, excepting for its intrinsic disadvantage of suffering under much more surveillance and intense regulation from the white overseer, master, or driver. The principal advantage of the task system from the master's viewpoint was that it reduced the amount of immediate supervision required from drivers, overseers, himself, etc. Freedman Mose Jordan recalled for Armstrong this advantage from the slave's view:

'When you git dat done, you can go fishin'!' Massa say. An' dat was de bes' way ter wu'k. De overseer lay off de task. Dis many rows fo' de boys an' gal, dat many fo' de big bucks an' women' folks. 'Git dat done, an' you kin quit,' he say. Den de folks wu'ked ter git it don. Dat better'n whippin' em!

The driver or overseer would set the task at the beginning of the day, and then periodically check during the day to see whether the tasks assigned were completed, and how well the work had been done.<sup>455</sup>

#### The Infrapolitics of Task (Quota) Setting

The task system made for continual struggles between the slaves and their owners over the size of the tasks imposed. The masters tried to "up" the tasks set, while the slaves leaned on custom--suddenly transmuted into a "right"--to keep the tasks the same size. Olmsted noted that: "In nearly all ordinary work, custom has settled the extent of the task, and it is difficult to increase it." In this situation, despite all the legalisms about the will of the master being absolute and the slave having to always obey and make himself a mere extension of his owner's will, a degree of "negotiation" occurred between the two sides. The masters who raised the daily task by too much risked "a general stampede to the 'swamp'--a danger the slave can always hold before his master's cupidity." The slaves could employ what amounted to a strike against their owners. This was a rare case of the slaves collectively organizing to resist their owners without using violence. The task system was so entrenched in

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<sup>455</sup>Young, "Ideology and Death," 697; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 213; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 321-23; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 54-56; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:236-37; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, pp. 79, 347.

this area--"Eastern Georgia and South Carolina"--that any master who denied this "proscriptive right" would "suffer in his reputation" and "experience much annoyance from the obstinate 'rascality' of his negroes." The infrapolitics--"day-to-day resistance"--of the task system involved battles over quota setting which are quite similar to those between management and labor in modern industry, especially in the mid-twentieth century socialist economies of Eastern Europe. When masters see slaves getting done at noon, one o'clock, two o'clock, long before sundown, they would want to "up" the norms imposed. Harry Porter, a one-time field hand, recalled that if his fellow bondsmen on his plantation "got through early or half an hour before sundown . . . [their master] would give them more the next day." Sometimes lowland masters imposed day work, and attempted to keep the slaves working steadily all day long. But this backfired, with the slaves often doing less work than they would have under the task system.<sup>456</sup> The task system had the great advantage of attempting to harness the slaves' self-interest (and their sense of task-orientation in their work) on behalf of their master, since the sooner they finished, the sooner they could work on their own plots of land and raise food for themselves or crops to sell.

Consider this good example of a struggle between slaves and "management" over the size of the tasks imposed. One group of pregnant slave women pleaded to Kemble to ask the master to lower the size of tasks required of them. She really did not want to do this, especially when they said he had refused their request already, but she weakened before their emotional cries for relief.<sup>457</sup> The slaves here exploited potential differences in the white elite that ruled over them--in this case, pitting the mistress against the master--a issue returned to below (pp. 268-69). Because the slaveowners had at their disposal the ability to inflict overwhelming physical force on their workers, an option not available to modern-day management, by using threats they could raise the quotas set for their bondsmen. One planter in Virginia, after firing his incompetent overseer, found that slaves were only expected to chop a cord of firewood a day, which he found ridiculously low. He told one slave to cut two, who replied that was too hard, that he "Nebber heard o' nobody's cuttin' more'n a cord o'wood in a day, roun' hear. No nigger couldn' do it." This master replied: "Well, old man, you have

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<sup>456</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:247-48; Cf. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 621; Morgan, "Ownership of Property by Slaves," pp. 400-401. Notice how organizing work by task appealed to the slaves' sense of time and work (task-orientation), while trying to get them to work methodically by the clock was a failure (time-orientation).

<sup>457</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 135.

two cords of wood cut to-night, or to-morrow morning you will have two hundred lashes--that's all there is about it. So, look sharp!" From that point on, he got two cords of wood from each slave given that job, although his neighbors still got only one. He also made each slave maul two hundred rails a day, when his neighbors were stuck with one hundred per day. While down in lowland South Carolina or Georgia, Olmsted found the slaves around there were assigned only to do one cord of wood per day, and a hundred rails mauled, which indicates they had successfully hoodwinked "management" generally.<sup>458</sup> On paper, the slaves seem legally helpless against the force their owners could bring to bear to compel work from them. But the generally low quotas of work prevailing in many cases demonstrate masters and overseers did not use all the force possible at their disposal. Since the Southern white work ethic (in terms of time-oriented punctual consistency) was not especially strong, the slaves through continual foot-dragging successfully tricked their owners into accepting a level of work performance half or less than that free labor was expected to accomplish.

#### The Gang System's Advantages

The gang system had the advantage that when the greater level of supervision involved--not to mention violence applied--was done intelligently, the slaves accomplished more than under the task system. The overseer and master had a number of tricks to speed up work without direct use of the lash. Barrow found by organizing a race he could get his slaves to pick more:

hands all running a race--"picking Cotten"--Hands  
avreaged higher to day than I ever had them to do. 191  
1/2 by dinner [noon] . . . never had or heard of such  
picking as my hands picked yesterday Clean Cotten in  
the morning--usual Cotten in the evening--averaged 364  
1/2. highest 622. lowest 225--42 pickers. 15311 lbs.

Another tactic was to try to have the slaves sing songs with a fast pace that sped up work, that fit the task at hand, or at least made the day's work go by more pleasantly. Thinking more strategically, they also tried to prohibit sadder, depressing songs since they might make them less happy in their condition of lifelong bondage.<sup>459</sup> Illustrating how the task system could allow

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<sup>458</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:136, 247-48.

<sup>459</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 136; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 240; Blake Allmendinger, "Acting and Slavery: Representations of Work in the Writings of Fanny Kemble," Mississippi Quarterly 41 (fall 1988):512; Starobin, "Disciplining Industrial Slaves," 112; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 126-

widespread malingering when the quotas were set too low by custom, consider freedman Mose Jordan's memory of the cotton picker's task (quota) for his plantation for one day: 150 pounds. This case confirms the planter who told Olmsted that the average slave did an amount of work only half or less than that of free labor, when considering what Barrow was able to get out of his slaves, at least on unusually good days. One time, on September 10, 1842, his sixty-nine pickers, which included eleven children, averaged 305 pounds, one gathering 520, setting a kind of record, Barrow thought. Many of the first-year pickers, presumably children, were able to pick 120-145 pounds that day.<sup>460</sup> A quota of 150 pounds, being obviously lower than what a full day's labor by an experienced, healthy, and persistent adult could perform, demonstrated that the slaves on Jordan's plantation successfully kept the tasks set at a fairly low level, perhaps benefiting from unusually paternalistic or incompetent management. The gang system had the advantage (from the master's viewpoint) of being able to drive the slaves while working, which on good days made them more productive than the task system, for when slaves cultivated crops on their own time after finishing their daily task, this did not directly help the master financially.

When choosing between the task and gang systems, the white slaveholders faced a fundamental trade-off. The task system, by allowing slaves to grow their own crops in the extra time they had left over after their daily tasks were done, gave the slaves more freedom for trading and increased involvement in the economy, but it reduced the costs of supervision and force being applied while raising crops. The gang system allowed slaveowners to greatly narrow the slaves' cultivating and trading activities, significantly restricting the illicit liquor/stolen goods trade slaves carried on with neighboring poor whites. It also reduced the amount of free time they had to lounge about and maybe get into trouble. But this system cost more in requiring continual surveillance and applying violent force to keep them working. Notoriously, "when an overlooker's back is turned, the most of them [slaves] will slight their work or be idle altogether."<sup>461</sup> Masters and mistresses also controlled the slaves more because they were almost exclusively dependent on the standard rations doled out to them, of both food and clothing, instead of having the ability to buy or raise their own. Another trade-off was that to increase individual responsibility tended to reduce group

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<sup>460</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 213; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 421.

<sup>461</sup>Debow's Review 18 (March 1855):339, quoted by Kolchin, Unfree Labor, p. 79.

responsibility, and vice versa. The task system increased individual responsibility, but at the cost of allowing slaves as a group to have serious though surreptitious influence on the size of the work quotas imposed on them, through a process of implicit "negotiation." The gang system decreased individual responsibility, for it was harder to know who had done a given bit of shoddy work, but increased the ability of the master to control the group as a whole, potentially rebounding to his benefit when done intelligently without an excessive use of violence.

### The Patrol/Pass System

The pass/patroller system was another important part of the slaveholders' means of control over their slaves. Nominally all slaves not on their owner's (or renter's) property had to have a pass giving them permission to be elsewhere, especially in rural areas. Any white person, including those not knowing them personally, could ask them to produce a pass. During certain hours, especially at night, any slave could be punished by patrollers if he was up and around off his master's property. The patrollers were normally poor whites who were hired (or effectively conscripted slaveholders) to roam about checking whether slaves were obeying the pass and curfew restrictions. Those without valid passes could be whipped on the spot. While this system tended to only be slackly observed when white fears of slave rebellion were low or in areas with few slaves, patrollers were the main force in rural areas with police powers that dealt with slaves.

The slave patrols deservedly picked up a reputation for inflicting brutal punishments. They were often composed of poor whites seeking to prove their superiority over blacks whose living conditions (or ability to read) were little different from their own. Freedwoman Manda Walker of South Carolina described how one patrol beat her father. His pass had expired because the creek between his master's place and his wife's had overflowed, making it difficult to cross on a mule. After commenting, "The time done out, nigger," the patrol proceeded to brutally whip him in front of his wife and children until his wife's master told them to stop. This burst of legalism shows the patrol was merely seeking an excuse to whip a black man, since nature did present a legitimate obstacle against this man getting home on time. Jacobs said the office of constable where she lived was considered a degradation to any white wealthy enough to buy a slave, but one poor white was happy to have it because: "The office enabled its possessor to exercise authority. If he found any slave out after nine o'clock, he could whip him as much as he liked; and that was a privilege to be coveted." While Jacobs likely exaggerated concerning how much the constable was allowed to whip legally, the law was often ignored in Alabama, as former slave Philip Younger described:



In Alabama, the patrols go out in companies at about dark, and ride nearly all night. If they meet a colored man without a pass, it is thirty-nine lashes; but they don't stop for the law, and if they tie a man up, he is very well off if he gets only two hundred. If there is a party assembled at the quarters, they rush in half drunk, and thrash round with their sticks, perhaps before they look at a pass,--all must be whipped unless they rush out.

He also described one patrol which whipped a free black woman married to a barber since "she was in a little better standing than the patrol was." These stories illustrate the patrols' general brutality, which was surely motivated in part by the desire of the poor whites to confirm their superiority over what they would call "uppity niggers," for sometimes people will affirm all the more strongly their differences from some despised group of "others" when those differences are all the more minimal.<sup>462</sup>

The requirement for slaves to have passes when off-plantation was an essential control device for slaveholders. By regulating their movements, it reduced the risk of slaves gathering to plot revolts and also made it easier to spot and catch runaways. After receiving a request from one slave to visit a family member on another plantation who had just been sold off, Kemble commented:

There seems generally a great objection to the visit of slaves from neighboring plantations, and, I have no doubt, not without sufficient reason. The more I see of this frightful and perilous social system, the more I feel that those who live in the midst of it must make their whole existence one constant precaution against danger of some sort or other.

But how strictly masters adhered to these regulations varied wildly, depending on their whims and the whites' state of concern over slave rebellion. Some masters were not only strict in granting passes, but also tried to keep their slaves on their plantation or farm as much as possible, such as Barrow:

I never give a negro a Pass to go from home without he first states particularly where he wishes to go, and assigns a cause for his desiring to be absent. if he offers a good reason, I never refuse, but otherwise, I

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<sup>462</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 168-69; Brent, Incidents, p. 123; Drew, Refugee, pp. 249-50. For more on the patrol system, see Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 617-19; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 214-15.

never grant him a Pass, and feel satisfied that no practice is more prejudicial to the community, and to the negros themselves, than that of giving them general Pass'es.

He opposed letting slaves go wherever they want after finishing work, as obviously at least some masters he knew did, because if they routinely stayed on their own plantation, getting used to the friends and family they had there, pure habit would reduce the burdens imposed by restricting their movements. This plan evidently did not work for the master of Jenny Proctor of Alabama, who appears to have been as strict as Barrow:

The only way any slaves on our farm ever goes anywhere was when the boss sends him to carry some news to another plantation or when we slips off way in the night. Sometimes after all the work was done a bunch would have it made up to slip out down to the creek and dance. We sure have fun when we do that, most times on Saturday night.<sup>463</sup>

Barrow's wish to create a "closed system" where the slaves could be content by a forcibly imposed habit ignores the human mind's ability to imagine other possibilities, such as from the freedom of movement of slaves on neighboring plantations, watching the whites come and go themselves, or resentment and "negative psychology" encouraging rule violations.

#### The Slaveowners Who Liberally Granted Passes or Dispensed with Them Altogether

Some masters were very loose in granting passes, or even dispensed with them altogether. Freedman Calvin Hays of Mississippi had a master, a prominent judge and slaveowner, who told his bondsmen this:

'Yo' don' need no pass! If dey [the patrollers] lay de han' on ye, tell 'em who yo' is, an' lemme know if dey whip ye!' So you'd be goin' 'long, jus' tendin' yo' business, drivin' er wagon inter town er to de cotton press, an' pattyroller ride up. 'Who you, nigger' he say. 'One de Mays' people!' you say. 'Go on, den!'<sup>464</sup>

The more trusted slaves who personally attended on the master's family might also gain an exception from the pass system, or be

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<sup>463</sup>Kemble, Journal, p. 259; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 407-08; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 92.

<sup>464</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 150-51. Freedman Tony Washington tells of a similar practice, *ibid.*, p. 32.

given very general passes. Cato needed no pass, unlike his fellow slaves on an Alabama plantation, being the houseboy and nephew of the master: "I had a cap with a sign on it: 'Don't bother this nigger, or there will be hell to pay.'" Alfred Robinson, the body servant of one Colonel Reed of Kentucky, being instantly recognizable locally, needed no pass: "'I'se Alfred, de Cunnel's valet!' I'd tell de folks. Dat got me by widout er pass." One patrol complained to a slaveowner about the very general pass he gave a slave who nursed him when he was sick: "'Why, dis pass would let dat nigger go to Europe!'" Steering a more middle ground, South Carolina rice planter C.J. Weston required every slave who left to have tickets for passes, but granted them liberally, in a manner Barrow would have sharply objected to: "No one is to be absent from the place without a ticket, which is always to be given to such as ask it, and have behaved well."<sup>465</sup> While theoretically very strict controls existed on the slaves' movements, even the masters were not always terribly keen on enforcing them strictly, let alone what the slaves themselves could get away with without their owners' permission.

#### How the Divisions among the White Slaveholders Benefited the Enslaved

Divisions among slaveholders, their families, overseers, and neighbors often combined to restrain--or, sometimes, accentuate--how harshly the bondsmen were treated. In a number of cases, the slaves took advantage of the whites' discord, pitting one white person with authority against another, often benefiting from the resulting clash. Concern over what their neighbors thought helped restrain how harsh masters and mistresses were against their slaves--a classic argument of pro-slavery polemics that, nevertheless, was rooted in some reality. Jacobs was thankful that she lived in a small town, because having neighbors close by restrained Mr. Flint, her owner:

Bad as are the laws and customs in a slaveholding community, the doctor, as a professional man, deemed it prudent to keep up some outward show of decency. . . . The application of the lash [which her master had avoided inflicting on her] might have led to remarks that would have exposed him in the eyes of his children and grandchildren. How often did I rejoice that I lived in a town where all the inhabitants knew each other. If I had been on a remote plantation, or lost among the multitude of a crowded city, I should not be a living woman at this day.

However, neighborhood gossip could also work the other way. It

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<sup>465</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 86 (Cato), 113 (Robinson) 146 (Europe); Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 25.

imposed not just a floor on harsh treatment, but a ceiling on good treatment. As Philip Younger, a slave in Alabama for over half his life, described:

Once in a while a man is kind, as kindness is out there, and then he is hated by all the other masters. They say, "his niggers spoil our niggers." These servants are not allowed on the other plantations at all,--if caught there, they will put as much on them as they can bear.

Some slaves in Georgia violated the law by selling corn, cotton, and other crops without their owners' permission. This practice was frowned upon not just because stolen crops might be sold, as Mohr stated, but "because it caused 'dissatisfaction' among slaves who were not allowed such liberties." Genovese noted one planter who said it was futile to enforce discipline on your plantation when a neighboring planter does not, because, as another explained, the bondsmen easily spot the differences and become displeased. When the masters did not maintain a common front and equalize how they treated their human chattels, the slaves' murmurings and complaints due to comparing differences between different local "administrations" made controlling them harder. But since the slaveowners had a common self-interest against their slaves' demands, their community standards of treatment were not going to be especially high. Olmsted wondered whether the striving ruffian individualists he encountered on one steamboat in the South would have their passions "much restrained by the fear of losing the respect of their neighbours." Because the master's will over his own slave was legally paramount, the neighbors' complaints about the cruelty of some master or mistress in their midst was mostly limited to the force of moral suasion. After Christopher Nichols, once a slave in Virginia, had been horribly whipped for trying to run away, all the whites who saw him the next day working in the mill "said it was a shame to use anybody in that way."<sup>466</sup> He did not count on these criticisms to restrain his master in the future, so he soon ran away again, this time successfully. Despite these caveats, much as a child will complain to his parents that the kid next door was allowed to do such-and-so, so why cannot he, the slaves, being similarly powerless, could make similar comparisons, and by complaining at least sometimes get better treatment from their owners.

#### How Mistresses and Other Family Members Often Restrained Ill-Treatment

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<sup>466</sup>Brent, Incidents, pp. 28, 33-34; Drew, Refugee, pp. 70 (Nichols), 249 (Younger); Mohr, "Slavery in Oglethorpe County," 8; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 41; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:356;

The mistress often could influence the master or overseer to treat the slaves better. Consider how one slaveboy mistakenly thought his master told him to "eat it" when in fact he said "heat it," when referring to some cold, leftover "hopping John," which was cowpeas, boiled with pork or bacon, sometimes with rice added. The master was going to whip him, but did not when his wife demurred: "Oh, no, he is young and didn't understand." In one white slaveowning family in South Carolina, because the wife had owned a number of slaves when she married her husband, she treated her slaves markedly better than those of her husband. She "would't allow no slashing round 'bout where she was," and pushed her slaves to keep their quarters more tidy. One time, as her husband was about to whip one of her slaves, she said, "John C., you let my nigger alone," and was obeyed. Another mistress was mercilessly whipped for treating her husband's slaves well by unchaining them and cooking them a meal one time.<sup>467</sup> More stories about mistresses being more kind than their husbands, such as by attempting to dissuade them from selling a slave off, could be given.<sup>468</sup> Admittedly, the mistresses sometimes were worse than their husbands. Harriett Robinson, once a slave in Texas, remembered how her mistress ("Miss Julia") routinely beat her during the Civil War, while her master did not touch her. One day, when she told her brother to whip her, the master came home after hunting, and blasted their treatment of her: "You infernal sons of bitches, don't you know there is three hundred Yankees camped out here, and iffen they knowed you'd whipped this nigger the way you done, they'd kill all us. Iffen they find it out, I'll kill all you all." This master's opposition to his wife's harsh treatment was probably motivated purely by pragmatism, for evidently he had done nothing to stop all the earlier beatings. In the case Tines Kendricks of Georgia described, the mistress was plainly meaner than her husband, being stingy, and awaking her slaves loudly before dawn. She "cuss and rare worse'n a man."<sup>469</sup> So while "the fairer sex" was more commonly a restraining force on its husbands' (or fathers') treatment of their slaves, certainly sometimes the mistresses were crueller than their husbands.

Younger family members sometimes restrained the punishments meted out on a slave. Ball said the white daughters of the

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<sup>467</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 50, 76, 148.

<sup>468</sup>Ball, Slavery in the United States, pp. 57-58; Kemble, Journal, pp. 102-3, 135, 170; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 31, 32, 81; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 82-83. Also note the implications of Jacobs saying she could look for no protection from her young mistress against Mr. Flint in Brent, Incidents, p. 18.

<sup>469</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 70-71, 194.

master and mistress would make a particular slave their own, and the white sons had their favorites as well. As a result, the young mistresses looked out for the interests not only of the slave girl, but her family as well, while the young masters "have many disputes with the overseer if he abuses them [their favorites]." In another case, Mary Reynolds was sold because her master "didn't want Miss Dora [his daughter] to play with no nigger young-un." But because the young mistress was so emotionally attached to Mary, and became severely and deathly depressed because of her absence, a doctor was called on to see what was wrong. After the doctor recommended buying Mary back in order to save the master's daughter's life, her father did so, even though buying her back cost much more than what he got when initially selling her. In another case, one young master (as an adult) got his father to stop beating a captured runaway over the head with a club that made the latter bleed terribly.<sup>470</sup> The children of the master when in residence constituted another of the informal checks on the barbarity of the system. Thus, when the white children had grown up playing with slave children, the attachments formed in the childhood years formed one of the main foundations for a truly practiced paternalism, at least towards these "old favorites."<sup>471</sup>

#### The Central Reality of Violence as the Main Tool to Control the Slaves

The slave population of the South was mainly controlled by violent coercion and the threat of it by the white ruling class with aid from poor whites. The slaves were not primarily kept in line by the successful implantation of the ruling class' ideology, whether it be the Protestant work ethic, in Fogel and Engerman's version, or the reciprocal duties/rights of paternalism between the rulers and the ruled, in Genovese's version. Genovese's model is only true if he could prove the slaves really accepted the ideological framework of the system which held them in bondage, as opposed to giving it just lip service publicly before their owners, and denying it among themselves. Successful indoctrination may have occurred among many of the drivers and house servants of large planters, especially in long-settled regions among the Atlantic Seaboard, but probably did not get very far otherwise. Furthermore, the ruling class itself may not have believed in paternalism so much as a striving, individualistic commercial capitalism and Jacksonian Democracy, which treated whites as political equals

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<sup>470</sup>Ball, Slavery in the United States, p. 58; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 119; Drew, Refugee, p. 69. However, later, after he had been chained to a tree, he punished by making him fall on his back.

<sup>471</sup>Cf. to Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 515-19.

(vis-a-vis the vote), but excluded blacks on purely racial grounds. Such positive incentives for the slaves as better food and clothing, better jobs, etc. for extra work and/or unusual loyalty to their masters and mistresses were merely supplements to measures that inflicted continual violence. For while sheer habit may have kept many slaves in the fields much of the time, the slaveholders always had to whip recalcitrant bondsmen as examples to intimidate the rest. Judging from Barrow's experience with his slaves, a majority of them became "recalcitrant" enough to be worthy of the lash at one time or another. Three out of four of Barrow's cotton pickers were whipped at least during the appendix's 1840-41 period. Of the 50 out of 65 who were whipped, they felt the lash no less than 130 times in that same period.<sup>472</sup> Corporal punishment had to take the place of internal motivation when a slave's will had to be forced to be the same as his or her owner's.

Occasional sacrificial executions, combined with those slaves killed on the job by masters or overseers, further struck dread among those enslaved, even though barbarisms such as burning at the stake never totally eliminated the worst slave crimes, let alone routine acts of resistance like pilfering and malingering. Both Genovese's concept of paternalism and Fogel and Engerman's view of the Protestant work ethic being accepted by the slaves suffer from discounting the fundamental reality of violence and force as the main tools for controlling them. As Anderson noted when critiquing Genovese:

It is stated that paternalism can encourage violence, but there is no history of violence as a means of repression in the Old South that is interwoven into the book. . . . Violence is dealt with in terms of how often the whip cracked [shades of Fogel and Engerman!] or how often police patrols tracked down slaves rather than with than the intensity and nature of the violence employed. More importantly, the whole question of violence is shoved into the background.

Since slavery involves a fundamentally involuntary, unchosen relationship between its work force and "management," it had to rely on force much more than capitalist employers do. The latter rarely need to openly resort to it except when their property is attacked, blocked, or occupied by strikers. Dissatisfied workers in a free labor market have the right to move and look for another job, which constitutes its biggest "safety valve" for workers' frustrations, even though it is an individualistic and (often) burdensome choice for them to make. In contrast, Reuter maintained that

the principle that controlled the allocation of

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<sup>472</sup>Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game, p. 26.

plantation work was naked power. Mean work went to slaves, other work to the owners. The duties of the Negroes were determined in the same way as those of the livestock. Those who resisted were beaten and whipped. As valuable property, less frequently were they hanged or shot.<sup>473</sup>

Labor discipline collapsed throughout the South whenever a hostile army was nearby, especially during the Civil War, proving that the slaves were mainly controlled by the use of violence or constant threats of it. The hordes of field hands which fled many Southern farms and plantations, and the much greater resistance those which remained behind put up against their owners whenever the Yankee army was nearby, proves slavery's base was not positive incentives and the slaves' accepting a Protestant work ethic or a paternalistic ethos of reciprocal duties/rights that kept them in line. If ideological factors or positive material incentives were what mainly kept the slaves in line, then the presence of a hostile army to the interests of slaveowners should not have had much effect on the slaves obeying them or running away. Hostile armies stripped away slaveowners' ability to use armed force to put down major revolts (or the threat of them) and it interfered in the judicial/police system of capturing and returning escaped slaves who were in "occupied territory." Slaves in these areas could often escape vigilantes and lynch mobs that unofficially meted out "justice," or found these forces mobilized much less often against them because of the implicit threat the occupying army posed. Especially in the Union army's case, the master class faced the danger the local commanders or troops may be affected by anti-slavery sentiment. They could set out to make as much trouble as possible, such as by destroying or pillaging the planters' property or subvert slaveowners' attempts to control their slaves. Largely only with the house servants generally, and the slaves of unusually kind masters, where the paternalistic ideology was likely seriously practiced by the masters and really actually accepted by the slaves, especially in long settled areas, did the presence of a hostile army have lesser effects in subverting work discipline, because then a stronger voluntary component existed in the slave/master relationship.

#### The High Levels of Violence between the Slaves and Masters Compared to England

As for the enslaved, because they have no free choice, this lead to much greater violence on both sides when revolts did

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<sup>473</sup>Anderson, "Aunt Jemima in Dialectics," 111; As summarized in Richard S. Sterne and Jean Loftin Rothseiden, "Master-Slave Clashes as Forerunners of Patterns in Modern American Urban Eruptions," Phylon 30 (fall 1969):254.



occur, both in the numbers of whites killed by the slaves, and in the ensuing judicial and vigilante killings that followed. The slaves' desperation was greater, their goals much higher than the farmworkers' during the Swing Riots, and the American whites' frontier/vigilante ethos ensured massive retaliation when "putting the black man back in his place." An "all or nothing" mentality characterized the slave revolts, for they knew the system must be totally overthrown in order to achieve their goals when resorting to violence. Otherwise, sooner or later, the white militia and (if necessary) regular army would catch up with them, and kill them en masse in pitched battle. During the Turner rebellion in Virginia in 1831, the rebel slaves eventually totalled about seventy, and killed fifty-five whites, among whom "neither age nor sex was to be spared." They left behind, as Blassingame described, "a trail of ransacked plantations, decapitated bodies and battered heads across Southampton," all in a mere forty-eight hours of time. More than forty blacks were executed or murdered (by lynch mobs, etc.) in the aftermath of this revolt. After the 1811 revolt in New Orleans, sixteen black leaders had their heads cut off and placed on stakes along the Mississippi, twenty more slaves were hanged, and perhaps one hundred more were killed by "roving bands of militia and vigilante groups." After the exposure of the Vesey plot in South Carolina in 1822, which had killed no whites, some twenty-two blacks were executed. Their bodies were allowed to dangle for hours. Its court stopped after executing thirty-five in all, having had dozens more scheduled for death, explaining that "the terror of example we thought would be sufficiently operative by the number of criminals sentenced to death [already]." Sterne and Rothseiden maintain that with whites so ready to resort to violence, especially with extra-legal lynchings and riots, along with the routine whippings and other punishments necessary to keep the slaves in line on plantations, the blacks readily learned from (especially Southern) American culture to use physical force as a tool during conflicts.<sup>474</sup>

#### Both Sides Committed Far Less Violence during the Swing Riots in England

Unlike the major American slave revolts, one has to look long and hard to find anyone actually killed in the mob violence that broke out during the Swing riots in 1830-31. In the ensuing trials relatively few farmworkers were finally executed compared. The Swing Riots were much more widespread in time and space than any American slave revolt, with some twenty counties affected, reaching a peak in the November and December of 1830. Despite all the verbal threats made to life, limb, and property, machines

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<sup>474</sup>Stampp, Peculiar Institution, p. 133; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 219-20; Anderson, "Aunt Jemima in Dialectics," 111-12; Sterne and Rothseiden, "Master-Slave Clashes," 250-60.

smashed, ricks burned, and dangerous weapons rioters branished, Hobsbawm and Rude noted:

In fact, no single life was lost in the whole course of the riots among the farmers, landlords, overseers, parsons or the guardians of law and order . . . However, as we have seen even these methods [rick-burning, beating up overseers of the poor, etc.] were used in moderation, and at the height of the mass movement, hardly at all. More than this: the limits of violence were known and not overstepped. Property was its legitimate object, life was not.

Another noted: "They got about their task of riot politely, dressed according to many eyewitnesses' accounts in their best clothes, seldom using threatening language." With great difficulty a case can be located where someone was actually killed during the Swing riots: One Wiltshire farmer shot and killed a rioter just after he participated in a mob that smashed up some threshing machines. Demonstrating the contrast with Turner's merciless band, Lady Cavan was able to challenge the rioters' sense of propriety by saying, "Seeing you are my neighbours and armed, yet, as I am an unprotected woman, I am sure you will do no harm." The gathered laborers quickly denied they meant any harm, and did none. When the English authorities, after initially showing some sense of mercy and/or restraint on the local level, implemented a policy of repression, only 19 were actually executed, although 252 were sentenced to death. Out of some 1,976 cases, 800 were acquitted, with 644 being jailed and 505 being sentenced to transportation, with 482 actually arriving in Australia and Tasmania. While these figures still sound high, it has to be remembered the Swing riots involved far more laborers over a much larger geographic territory compared to the Turner or New Orleans slave revolts. Admittedly, the death sentences meted out greatly exceeded the severity of the crimes committed. But then, in America, thirty-five slaves were executed in South Carolina just for (allegedly) participating in Vesey's abortive conspiracy to revolt, in which no whites or others were injured or killed, and no property was damaged.<sup>475</sup> Furthermore, there were no lynch mobs or vigilante activities that punished or killed laborers involved in the Swing riots, while in the aftermath of both the Turner and New Orleans revolts these were quite active. England's agricultural working class, even when rioting, showed a much greater restraint in using

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<sup>475</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 212, 287 (quote), 253-58 (policies of repression), 308-9 (punishment statistics); "A very English rising," Times Literary Supplement, Sept. 11, 1969, as cited in Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 360; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 233-34; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 279 (Cavan), 254, 266 (policies of repression).

violence than the slaves, and in turn the English ruling class inflicted much less punishment on the average rioter, compared to Southern American whites' standards of punishing slaves involved in slave revolts, actual or abortive, by the legal process or the lynch mob.

#### The Lower Goals and Greater Divisions among Local Elites in the English Case

The farmworkers' goals were almost pathetically lower than the slaves', at least as proclaimed, even when the cloak of anonymity could be used, such as through the threatening "Swing" letters. Many sought just somewhat higher wages and (at the instigation or passive acceptance of the farmers in some areas) the end of the tithe and lower rents, and the destruction of the machines that robbed them of work. None announced any desire for the land of the gentry and aristocracy to divide among themselves.<sup>476</sup> Not even the goal of gaining allotments or reversing enclosure was stated by most rioters, which implies the basic acceptance of their condition of proletarianization, at least for their main means of support. Sometimes the gathered crowds of laborers did "levy" (i.e. extort) immediate cash payments or beer from various farmers and landowners. Occasionally the political agenda of the radical reformers such as Cobbett showed up in the demands of the laborers, such as a complaint against sinecures, and others against taxes, but these certainly were not the main demands of the laborers. Resentment against specific officials or places involved in the parish relief system was displayed, such as in the destruction of the Selborne and Headley workhouses in Hampshire.<sup>477</sup> Consider the demands of one crowd of 150 that gathered in Ringmer, Sussex, which threw forward a letter stating their grievances to Lord Gage when he sought the leader of the group to come forward to state their demands. Although the writer had the advantage of anonymity in stating his group's goals, all that was demanded was a fairly substantial wage increase (in order to avoid dependence on parish relief) and the dismissal of the permanent overseers of the poor, singling one out in particular, who were less sympathetic to their claims for relief. The vestry proceeded to grant these demands after discussion, and with cheers the

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<sup>476</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 184; Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 360.

<sup>477</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 66, 102-5; Hammond and Hammond, Village Laborer, pp. 246-49, 258-59; See also, although fictionalized and opposed to the rioters' demands, Machine-Breaking and the Changes Occasioned by It in the Village of Turvey Down: A Tale of the Times (Oxford, England: W. Baxter, 1830), pp. 26-30, as found in Carpenter, Rising of the Agricultural Workers.

assembled crowd dispersed.<sup>478</sup> A significant factor in the riots, especially on the local level as the disturbances occurred, was that many farmers and even some landowners, especially on the county level, sympathized with the laborers' demands.<sup>479</sup> A number of the farmers in East Anglia even seized upon the situation to use the laborers' collected numbers to exert pressure against landowners to lower rents and clergymen their tithes in order to, they said, raise their men's wages.<sup>480</sup> Would-be similar actions by Southern poor whites--to instigate and collude with the slaves in a rebellion--are unimaginable. Slaveholders and poor whites remained united as classes against the blacks during all the slave revolts and panics that happened in the antebellum South. The English farmers' sense of personal danger from the open unrest of their workers was far less than what slaveowners and their small farmer and poor white allies felt during the actuality of a slave revolt, where the mentality on both sides was kill or be killed. Despite the evident oppression of the laborers, they were much more restrained in their dealings with local farmers and landowners during the Swing Riots, and vice versa, than the slaves were with their owners and allies among the non-slaveholding whites--and the lynch mob mentality was entirely absent among the English.<sup>481</sup>

#### The Routine Police State Measures in the South

American slaveowners routinely employed a number of very coercive safety measures and precautions in order to protect themselves against their human chattels. Slavery involves far more exertion of control, surveillance, and violence on a steady basis than is the case in a capitalist society where labor is free to quit and change jobs, and move elsewhere. The Southern whites were much more paranoid than the English rural elite, both for objective reasons and because of racist ones, and feared the slaves might attack them violently back in retaliation for the ill-treatment they had received. Olmsted described how the standard security measures in major Southern cities approached

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<sup>478</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 250-52; compare the similar demands made and granted in Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 105, 117-18.

<sup>479</sup>Concerning the counties' rulers willingness to make concessions, note Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 16-17.

<sup>480</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 104, 109-10, 118, 124-25, 130, 152, 158-60, 231-33.

<sup>481</sup>The remarkable restraint and order of English crowds during food riots also confirms this characterization. See Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd," 99, 108-20; Hammond and Hammond, Village Laborer, pp. 116-18.

those associated with martial law:

But go the bottom of this security and dependence [between slave servants and masters], and you comes to police machinery such as you never find in towns under free government: citadels, sentries, passports, grape-shotted cannon, and daily public whippings for accidental infractions of police ceremonies. I happened myself to see more direct expression of tyranny in a single day and night at Charleston, than at Naples [under Bomba] in a week; and I found that more than half the inhabitants of this town were subject to arrest, imprisonment, and barbarous punishment, if found in the streets without a passport after the evening 'gun-fire.'

He went on to explain how a twelve-year-old girl, in a district where slaves outnumbered free fifty to one, stopped an old slave along the road, and angrily ordered him back to his plantation under the threat of having him whipped when he hesitated to return. Then

she instantly resumed the manner of a lovely child with me, no more apprehending that she had acted unbecomingly, than that her character had been influenced by the slave's submission to her caprice of supremacy; no more conscious that she had increased the security of her life by strengthening the habit of the slave to the master race, than is the sleeping seaman that he tightens his clutch of the rigging as the ship meets each new billow.<sup>482</sup>

The pass and patrol system had controls that were far tighter than anything dreamed up under the settlement laws and parish authorities in England, as damaging as the latter were to the English farmworkers' freedoms of movement and of contract. The level of compulsion and surveillance involved in the gang system was far higher than anything under which the English laborers suffered, including under their own gang system, because corporal punishment could not be inflicted on adult laborers. While the task system appreciably reduced the amount of compulsion and watchfulness masters maintained, it was not common outside lowland Georgia and South Carolina, so it must not be taken as the norm. Compulsion was the name of the game, and incentives for working extra hours, Sundays, and holidays were just mere supplements to a system of control characterized by violence.

Coercion, Not Incentives or Ideology, as the Basic Means of Enforcing Slavery

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<sup>482</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:350-51.

While the slaves found ways to take advantage of divisions between masters, mistresses, their children, and overseers, as well as between poor whites and planters (such as in the illicit liquor/stolen goods trade), the fact remains when any slightly serious challenge to the overall system of slavery occurred, all the whites would unite against the blacks, enslaved and otherwise. Small advantages gained by resistance while the overall system maintained in place did not disturb its characteristically fantastic levels of violence and coercion. While many stories may be told about huge masses of slaves routinely working when hardly any whites were around besides an overseer, or the owning white family, the fact remains the slaves, at least certainly their leaders, knew that revolt would result in a bloodbath, composed mostly of their own blood once the militia or regular army caught up with them. The routine whippings, sales, imprisonments, executions, etc. indicated that the whites meant business, and that they were (at least publicly) undivided and fully confident in maintaining their social system. Unlike other ruling classes which have been overthrown, who became divided and lost their nerve and belief in the justice of their social order, the South's became more dogmatic and bellicose in defending itself in the three decades before the Civil War. Habit, combined with routinely punishing enough slaves as examples to restrain the rest, sufficed to keep them in line in most cases concerning any frontal attacks on the system that oppressed them. As for how the slaves could and did quietly subvert the system, oftentimes trying to get as many material advantages as they could, that is discussed below (pp. 325-353). The effects of the Union army's presence demonstrated that most slaves were not obedient because they were turned into childish, docile "Sambos" in personality, or due to notions of paternalism or the Protestant work ethic swimming around in their heads. Now some exceptions did exist--such as among many drivers, domestic servants, and even the field hands of the kindest masters where the duties of the ruling class were not mere words, where the slaves actually did come to identify with their white family and its interests, sometimes in a quasi-client/patron relationship, especially in long-settled areas. Nevertheless, the overall system of slavery was maintained by a continual application of violence, coercion, and surveillance, and any other measures, such as pay for overtime work, better jobs for more loyal or harder-working slaves, the inculcation of paternalistic ideology, etc. were mere supplements, not its core.

#### Basic Differences between the American and English Elites' Methods of Control

Because the English farmworkers were legally free, the English aristocracy and gentry, as well as their allies among the tenant farmers, had to take a considerably different approach to maintaining social control and imposing work discipline on their work force than American slaveholders when dealing with their

slaves. One key difference was that local government loomed much larger in the lives of the English farmworkers than it did in the lives of the slaves, whose master or mistress had the total power to discipline them except for serious offenses such as murder. England, having long been settled, had much stronger local administrative machinery in place, even if its actual ability to deploy force in times of emergency was surprisingly low. Compared to Southern frontier America and its vigilante/lynch mob spirit, a much stronger respect for the law as a means of settling inter-personal disputes existed, even if duels among aristocrats remained a standing exception to this rule until well into the nineteenth century.

#### The Freedom of Action Local Government Officials Had in England

In England, controlling unruly or troublesome agricultural workers on a routine basis while not at work was a job largely left to the magistrates and justices of the peace. Conveniently enough for local rural elites, these normally were squires, parsons, landowners, or various others in the local rural ruling class who possessed a vested economic interest in disciplining the lower classes. For unlike ancien regime France, with its central control and appointment of local officials and gendarmes, only intensified after the Revolution, England's rural officialdom normally had its roots in the immediately surrounding countryside where they held office. French intendants and their subdelegates were directly responsible to the king and his royal council, often served in alien areas, and were removable at will. By contrast, local English officials simply could not be easily disciplined or removed by the king, parliament, or the home office. Only with an address to the king from both Houses of Parliament could they be removed. As a result, English government in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was much more decentralized than France's, and local magistrates provided a check on the central government's powers such that the local landowners often could insulate themselves from London's effective authority. But this system correspondingly created hundreds, nay, thousands, of petty oligarchies, wherein squires, parsons, and landowners served as magistrates locally, often ruling on cases that indirectly or directly affected their own interests. Generally they could pretty much do as they wished, bending laws and setting precedents that served their own interests, largely only restrained by any sense of paternalism or gentlemanliness they possessed. Justices of the peace also had taken on many administrative responsibilities over the centuries, and had much authority, directly or indirectly, over the maintenance of parish roads, the settlement law's enforcement, and the setting of the poor rates. Since so much of the laborers' lives and fates were wound up in the poor and settlement laws, power fell into the hands of the local vestries under the Old Poor Law and boards of guardians under the New, giving local government great direct influence on the laborers'

lives. The corresponding institutions in the American South had much less influence on the slaves because so much effective de facto judicial power had been delegated to the slaveholders through their ability to use corporal punishment. English rural elites used the local administrative machinery at the parish and county levels, whether through courts or the bodies that oversaw paupers and gave out relief, to mainly to control the laborers, not so much any personal power that came from being supervisors or employers.<sup>483</sup>

Because the laborers were legally free men and women, employers, as employers, had much less control over the laborers when they were off work than the slaveowners had over their personal chattels. Work discipline issues spilled over much less into the off-work personal lives of the agricultural workers than for the slaves. Except in some cases under the poor laws for families declared paupers, it was impossible to destroy or split up a laborer's family in order to force compliance with his or her betters. The laborers, at least theoretically, had the freedom to quit and go anywhere in England they wished--although, as we will see, the settlement laws put a considerable crimp on this. As a result, English rural elites had to use considerably more indirect measures of control than the Southern slaveholders had, who could, on the spot have recalcitrant slaves whipped, imprisoned, or sold, only rarely facing any official appeal or interference against their actions concerning their enslaved blacks.

#### The Basic Strategy for Controlling the Farmworkers Better

Since the landowners as well as the farmers had increasingly accepted a commercial system of agriculture (paternalistic rhetoric notwithstanding), and raised crops for sale and not generally for immediate subsistence, they would not attack the free market on principle to restrict the freedoms of the laborers, at least by the late eighteenth century. Their approach instead was to rig the labor market on terms that favored them, making the laborers semi-freely then choose to work for this or that local farmer or landowner in some given parish. They used enclosure to try to force laborers into a complete dependence on wages through destroying the semi-independent, "scratch as scratch can" subsistence economy that eked out a living off the parish commons. By using the settlement laws that forced laborers to stay in their own parishes when they became chargeable to the poor laws (or worse, before 1795, when the

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<sup>483</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, trans. Stuart Gilbert (1856; New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1955), pp. 32-72; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 12-17; Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, pp. 60-80, 269; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 164.



local parish believed they may become chargeable), they created semi-captive pools of laborers. But this could be expensive, because the poor rates had to be jacked up to pay for all these people on relief. Parishes with one or a very few dominant landowners could manipulate the poor laws by driving out all laborers who might become chargeable to the parish, such as during the long winter slack season in arable areas. These parishes became "closed," because laborers could not easily gain settlements or live in them without long-term contracts. Landowners would keep only the laborers they needed year around in these parishes, and relegate the "reserve army of unemployed" to nearby "open" villages or small towns, which was drawn upon during seasonal peaks such as harvest and haymaking. This practice also had the advantage of allowing them to dispense with farm servants, who gained settlements when given one-year contracts in the parish they worked in, and who likely became semi-idle in winter anyway. Parishes to which extra laborers were driven had the misfortune of becoming "open" because those who owned (or rented) the land were too large or diverse a group to act in a monopsonic fashion. Ratepayers (the occupiers of the land) in these parishes had to pay much higher poor rates (which amounted to real estate taxes) as a result than the landlords or farmers in closed parishes. With the passage of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, landowners found another way to avoid having to pay relief to all but the most desperate. The New Poor Law banned outdoor relief to the able-bodied, and deterred applicants for relief by the workhouse test by even those possessing local settlements. So the English rural elites, by skillfully wielding enclosure, the settlement laws, and the poor laws, could lower their wage bills and poor rates by saturating the local labor markets with labor only as they needed it, allowing them to dispense with farm servants, while attempting to avoid paying for its "upkeep" during seasonal lows in the agricultural year through foisting "surplus workers" upon open parishes and through making small landowners (or tenants) pay higher poor rates than they otherwise would have and by finding ways to deter laborers from applying for parish relief. Let us consider each part of this program piece by piece.

#### Enclosure as a Method of Social Control and "Class Robbery"

Although public-spirited motives could always be cited to justify enclosure, it still remained a form of class aggression, of landowners against cottagers and laborers, in Thompson's words "class robbery," since it clearly served the material interests of the former group as against the latter.<sup>484</sup> Landowners received

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<sup>484</sup>Thompson, Making, pp. 216-17. The purpose of this brief summary on enclosure is not to debate the overall merits of enclosure, such as the trade-off between increased production and high social costs like increased unemployment, loss of rights to

a large, proportional increase in their property, since they had formal legal title to their rights in land. By contrast, the poor's customary rights to the use of the village common were not legally recognized. As a result, they normally got little or nothing from the commissioners hired to assess, apportion, and award the lands that had been the village commons. Usually they not only received nothing, but lost access to the commons, which now was split up among pre-existing landowners. The Earl of Lincoln admitted that nineteen of twenty private enclosure bills ignored the rights of the poor. Even when their rights were recognized and were awarded a small piece of land, it often had to be sold. In Buckingham, within two or three years of enclosure 50 percent of the landowners sold their land, as opposed to the normal rate of 20 percent selling per decade.<sup>485</sup> Perhaps they could not pay the legal costs all landowners had to bear for parliamentary enclosure to take place. Sometimes they could not pay to build fences on their small strip of land, which cost proportionately more for small parcels than large, so they had to sell it. One calculation found it cost four pounds an acre to enclose twenty acres, but two acres cost thirteen pounds each. As a clergyman for Parndon, Essex noted, after an enclosure that took place in 1795: "Their little allotments all sold; could not enclose." Since the purchasers were the normally better-off landowners or farmers to begin with, this land was likely permanently alienated from the poor as a class. These general effects were reported by one veteran of twenty enclosure commissions thus, as summarized by another:

Numbers in the practice of feeding the commons cannot prove their right, and many, indeed most who have allotments, have not more than one acre, which being insufficient for the man's cow, both cow and land are usually sold to opulent farmers. That the right sold before the enclosure would produce much less than the allotment after it, but the money is dissipated, doing them no good when they cannot vest it in stock.

Another commissioner said that in most of the enclosures he had known, "the poor man's allotment and cow are sold, five times in six before the award is signed."<sup>486</sup> The sellers of these small strips of land received from enclosure a few pounds that was

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common, etc.

<sup>485</sup>Young, General Report, pp. 12-13, 16; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. 48, 52, 54; Anscomb, "Parliamentary Enclosure in Northamptonshire," pp. 415-416; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 93, 97-98; Rule, Vital Century, pp. 86-87.

<sup>486</sup>Young, General Report, pp. 155, 158, 169-70; cf. p. 81.

likely swallowed up by basic living expenses like food--food often once gained by grazing their animals on the commons in the past, an option now terminated by enclosure. Enclosure clearly was a redistribution of property from the poor to the rich, which is only obscured because the poor's customary rights to the commons were not generally legally recognized--and, even when they were, the resulting allotments awarded often did them little permanent good.

Enclosure: Direct Access to the Means of Production and Food Both Lost

As noted above, meat largely fell out of the farmworkers' diets during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (pp. 30-33, 37, 39-41). In many areas enclosure helped cause their diet to deteriorate, because the poor before it could own a cow, sheep, or pig, and graze it on the commons. After enclosure, they had to sell their cows (especially) since the only pasture they could use had now disappeared behind the fences of their richer neighbors and/or converted to arable use. The poor now had to pay hard cash earned from wage work for milk, butter, and meat that before they had gained independently from working for others by the generally minimal effort of having one or more of their animals graze on the local commons. As Somerville noted: "Each enclosure bill excluded the poor man from the common, and, upon the whole, it may be as well for them to live the mean life of breeders of geese, rather than be turned out to labour for wages less than the price of food." But more was lost than just additional income in the form of animal foods. They also lost their direct access to the means of production whenever enclosure struck their parish or village. With the destruction of the semi-subsistence economy of the poor based on the commons, which had kept many out of the labor market for much of the year, the now thoroughly proletarianized laborers were thrown upon exclusively depending on working for others to gain a living--or upon handouts of others, whether the charity of the rich or the dole of the parish. Excellently summarizing this process, one clergyman in 1795 said enclosure and the stripping of cottages of attached land reduced the laboring poor "from a comfortable state of independence to a precarious state as mere hirelings, who when out of work, come immediately upon the parish."<sup>487</sup> Some even saw destroying the economic independence of the poor as a good policy since it imposed stricter labor discipline upon them. As one advocate of large farms claimed:

[The benefit the poor gain from the commons] is an essential injury to them, by being made a plea for their idleness; for, some few excepted, if you offer

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<sup>487</sup>Somerville, Whistler, p. 32; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xlvi

them work, they will tell you, they must go to look up their sheep, cut furzes, get their cow out of the pound, or perhaps, say they must take their horse to be shod, that he may carry them to a horse-race or cricket-match . . . if by converting the little farmers into a body of men who must work for others, more labour is produced, it is an advantage which the nation should wish for: the compulsion will be that of honest industry to provide for a family.<sup>488</sup>

Opposing an unsuccessful 1845 bill that encouraged allotments, one M.P. said laborers should be "solely" dependent on wages for a living. So the farmworkers lost more than food when enclosure came, but any remaining economic independence as well from their social superiors, whether as employers or as dispensers of charity or parish relief, unless a permanent system of allotments was put into place.<sup>489</sup>

But even for the rich, the blessings of enclosure were by no means unmixed. Under the poor law, ratepayers--who were not necessarily exactly "rich"--had to support unemployed laborers. When enclosure cut off the poor from the commons for cutting fuel, grazing animals, or raising vegetables, those out of work turned to the parish much more quickly than they otherwise would have if they could have maintained a state of semi-subsistence, semi-independence. When completely proletarianized laborers ran out of cash earned from wages, they and their families were fundamentally helpless, and had to look to others for aid. Enclosure commonly caused rate hikes in many parishes in order to support the now greatly multiplied numbers of paupers, especially in arable areas because seasonal unemployment was high in winter. One gentleman told Somerville in 1844 that he expected half the laboring population of his parish in Sussex to seek relief at the workhouse in winter. Speaking generally, the rush to enclosure during the French Wars and their immediate aftermath correlated with a rapid increase in the amount of poor relief granted from the 1790s until the 1815-20 post-war period. It peaked then at

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<sup>488</sup>J. Arbuthnot, An Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions and the Size of Farms (1773), as quoted in Snell, Annals, p. 173. Cf. the clergyman for Naseing, Essex's comment that enclosure locally had "a worthless crew changed to industrious labourers." Young, General Report, p. 156; see also pp. 391-92. Those living near large commons were considered "irregular in their habits" and "were often the most distressed and needy of the surrounding population." Commission on the Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. lii.

<sup>489</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 35-37; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 99-101; Rule, Vital Century, pp. 88-90.

3.2 percent of national income and twelve shillings ten pence per person. Snell powerfully demonstrates this relationship more specifically by regressing the amounts of per capita poor relief paid with the ten counties most affected by parliamentary enclosure, where over 35 percent of their land was enclosed. The correlation determination (r) was an astonishing .911, which meant "as much as 83 per cent of the variation [ $r^2$ ] in poor relief in these counties can be explained by the percentage of land enclosed." Even in those fourteen counties where 17 to 35 percent of the land was enclosed a correlation coefficient (r) of .755 was produced, with the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) coming to over 57 percent. The history of specific parishes proves these correlations were not coincidental. Sir Paul found an average increase in the rates of over 250 percent in the nine parishes he listed. In the extreme case of Lidlington, they went from one shilling to four shillings six pence in the pound, in Chattris, from two shillings to four shillings six pence, and Hethersett, five shillings to ten.<sup>490</sup> Thus, enclosure could actually damage landowners, for increasing their control of the laborers by stripping them of their former state of semi-independence using the commons caused local tax hikes.

#### Open and Close Parishes: One Dumps Laborers onto the Other

One parish, by dumping its laborers off on other parishes as much as walking distances and the legalities of the settlement laws allowed, lowered its poor rates. Creating a "close parish" in which ideally only the minimal number of laborers required year around gained settlements therein became a standard objective for many in the rural elite. Landlords would work to pull down cottages deemed unnecessary, and farmers would avoid hiring live-in farm servants on one-year contracts to keep from giving them settlements in the parish they worked in. As clergyman John Cox of Essex testified: "People began to see that by hiring by the year they created settlements in their parishes, and they did not do it long." A number were taken to hiring servants for fifty-one weeks or a few days short of a year. Ann Peece was dismissed a few days short of a year because "it would not be safe for the parish for her to continue there."<sup>491</sup> All laborers who became chargeable as paupers would be shipped out to their parish of settlement, if it was elsewhere. The laws of settlement before 1795 were a very powerful tool, because if parish authorities simply thought someone was "likely" to become

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<sup>490</sup>Thompson, Making, p. 221; Somerville, Whistler, p. 407; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 76; Snell, Annals, pp. 195-97. Note that Yorkshire was broken up into three different "counties" for these comparisons; Young, General Report, p. 157.

<sup>491</sup>As quoted in Snell, Annals, pp. 70, 77; compare Hammonds, Village Labourer, pp. 115-16.

chargeable, he could be removed to his place of settlement under the 1662 Settlement Act. Prior to the 1795 act, certificates also had to be granted by the original parish of an immigrant to another parish in order to allow him or her to leave legally, which helped clarify the immigrant's place of settlement. If the receiving parish demanded a certificate, and it was not granted, it could immediately remove (i.e., "deport") the immigrant back to his or her place of origin. Relegated to some other nearby "open parish," were all the "catch work" laborers needed only during seasonal peaks such as harvest, haymaking, and spring planting. Here ratepayers suffered from the misfortune of not being able to operate as a tight cartel to keep laborers from gaining settlements, so they had to provide relief for laborers often employed elsewhere for at least part of the year. Those not employing farm labor were forced to subsidize those who did, who failed either to pay a living wage (as under the Speenhamland/family supplement system) or to employ them year around.<sup>492</sup>

Even some time before the French Wars, Young encountered one man, Charles Turner, who by bringing in more laborers instead of pushing them out, acted "diametrically opposite to the vulgar ideas impressed by those efforts of barbarism, the poor laws of this kingdom: Instead of quarrelling with other parishes to see who should be troubled with the fewest poor, he endeavors by all means to increase that number in his." The effort to push out laborers intensified after the effects of enclosure, population growth, and the decline of service manifested themselves as the nineteenth century began. Sometimes extreme measures were employed to push laborers off onto other parishes. After the French Wars, estates for eight to ten miles around Norwich were systematically cleansed of laborers, while cottages were pulled down faster than they were built in some areas of Devon and Somerset. (As described above about laborers' housing (pp. 65, 69-71), the settlement laws were a major reason for the poor quality of rural housing and crowding, such as the poor quality

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<sup>492</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 34, 182-83; Snell, Annals, pp. 17-19, 72-73, 78-80, 334-36; Norma Landau, "The Regulation of Immigration, Economic Structures and Definitions of the Poor in Eighteen-Century England," Historical Journal 33 (Sept. 1990):541-72; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 108-16. There is an ominous similarity between the pre-1795 certificate system and the pass system imposed on slaves, the main differences being the latter was proportionately much less often enforced, especially in urban areas, that it was tied to giving aid to the poor, not a restriction on movement for the sake of control alone, that a local unit of government, not a master/employer/owner granted it, and the difficulties imposed in instantly spotting violators because of a lack of racial differences between the laborers and those who enforced it.

cottages that tradesmen charged exploitive rents for in the open villages). Separating laborers' parish of work and of residence sometimes imposed walks of five, ten, preposterously even twelve miles in some cases around Norwich. This problem laid the foundation for the infamous gang system, as the authors of the 1867-68 Report knew, where gang masters would gather groups of men, women, and/or children from (normally) open villages to work on distant farms. Originally, the settlement laws existed to protect a given parish's resources (its commons, etc.) for its own poor first of all as against newcomers who might overtax them if permitted to come in without restrictions. But in the hands of the landlords and large farmers they became a tool of oppression for driving down the poor rates. The Hammonds powerfully and succinctly described Hodge's predicament thus: "The destruction of the commons had deprived him [the laborer] of any career within his own village; the Settlement Laws barred his escape out of it."<sup>493</sup>

### The Decline of Service

The decline of service was another development farmworkers normally strongly opposed since it injured themselves as a class. From their viewpoint, it guaranteed them food and a place to stay when still young and unmarried for an entire year. It also encouraged the accumulation of savings before marriage because the cash part of their wage was paid as a lump sum at the end of their contract. Now as the accumulated effects of enclosure, population growth, and the near universalization of parish relief under (especially) the Speenhamland system piled up in the early nineteenth century this changed. But traditionally, starting as young teenagers, a man or woman working in husbandry would be a farm servant for so many years, and live on the farmer's premises. At annual hiring fairs, they (likely) would switch employers, and live for another year with another farmer. After getting married, they became day laborers hired by the day, week, or month, who lived in their own cottages. But in one way this system's decline did benefit the laborers: It reduced the amount of control and surveillance their superiors exercised over them.

Now, when did service collapse? Regionally, this system persisted in northern England into the mid and late nineteenth centuries, and in some parts of the southwest, but in southern England it had largely disappeared by c. 1840, especially in arable areas in the southeast. It had begun to change in the

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<sup>493</sup> Arthur Young, A Six Months Tour Through the North of England 2d ed., 4 vols. (London: W. Trahan, W. Nicol, 1771), 2:129; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xvi, xvii, xxv, xxvi; Morgan, Harvesters, p. 192, footnote 14; Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 79-80; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 108.

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and many in husbandry became laborers without having passed through the farm servant stage first. Snell's figures, based on quantifying 1,272 settlement law examinations for southeastern counties, found that while in the 1760s about 45 percent of farm servants continued with the same employer for two years, it fell to about 25 percent by the 1790s for a group of southeastern counties. For some counties, such as Hertford, Buckingham, Berks, Essex, and Oxford, this practice ceased completely by 1820, and for Surrey, Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire, by 1810. While a gradual decline in the number of annual hirings can be seen from c. 1780, the main collapse dated from c. 1810, with a rapid increase in shorter hiring periods occurring, and a corresponding decrease in fifty-two week hirings, by 1840. Fifty-one week hirings, which are obvious contrivances to avoid giving farmworkers settlements, for this same area rose from nearly nil in 1810 to nearly 20 percent by 1830. But down into the 1820s and 1830s, a large number of regular annual hirings still occurred. In the north, service remained a feature of many agricultural workers' careers, as the 1867-68 Commission on Employment in Agriculture found. In north Northumberland, service included the female "bondage" system. This varied from standard service because the woman still lived at her parents' home, not her employer's. Yorkshire itself still had a strong system of statute hirings, in contrast to it "dying out in many localities" elsewhere in England. Chadwick hoped the New Poor Law, which abolished outdoor relief for the able-bodied, would operate "both on the feelings and interests of the employers of labour as an inducement to resort to the ancient and excellent practice of hiring labourers for the year certain."<sup>494</sup> This hope remained unsatisfied, for it would be hard to bring back this system as dead as it was by 1834 in southern England, unless the causes of its decline strongly reversed themselves.<sup>495</sup>

#### Why Service Declined

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<sup>494</sup>Snell, Annals, pp. 74-76, 84; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xii-xiii, xx, xxiv; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 47

<sup>495</sup>J.C.D. Clark says enclosure "may even have tended to increase the numbers of living-in servants, for the effect of more efficient agriculture was to increase, not reduce the demand for labor." This assumes not only that the given enclosure did not replace arable land with permanent pasture, but generally discounts how enclosure increased unemployment by driving more workers into local labor markets, especially in winter, since they could no longer eke out a living off the local commons. English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 68.



So why did service decline? Contemporaries did repeatedly blame the rising social pretensions of farmers and their wives caused them to not want laborers living under the same roof with them. The aspirations of farmers to gentility, especially those with a large amount of land, was discussed above (pp. 207-8), emphasizing the female side, when dealing with the sexual division of labor. One farmer went bankrupt due to overspending by him and his wife, and inattention to his farm, whom Arch had worked for as a child. He used this case to condemn the general class of non-working farmers:

Why do not these farmers, with their wives and families, draw in, and turn to, and live according to their means, instead of being above their trade? Let the farmer give up his hunter, let his wife doff her silken gowns, her furbelows and fal-lals, let his daughters drop their tinkling accomplishments, and let them give their time, their attention, and their money to the farm, as it is their clear and bounden duty to do.

These pretensions not only manifested themselves by extravagant living and neglect of business, but also by casting out farm servants to live elsewhere. One conversation Somerville had with a Wiltshire laborer reveals well the laborers' resentment against the farmers on this score. After maintaining that while the lords, squires, parsons, and farmers were all bad, the latter were the worst, and that Somerville himself was one of them, he said:

You ha'a daughter, playing on the piano on a Saturday night to drown the noise of them brutes of labouring men what come to get their wages through a hole in the wall; what cannot be allowed to set foot within a farmer's house now-a-days; what must be paid through an opening in the partition, lest they defile the house of a master what gets rich as they get poor.<sup>496</sup>

Due to the high agricultural prices during the French Wars that increased farmers' incomes, and the effects of enclosure in reducing social mobility upwards from the cottagers' ranks and impoverishing many laborers, the differences between the haves and have-nots grew during this period. The perceptions of contemporaries about the "embourgeoisement" of the larger farmers as a class had a basis in fact, and this had implications for the discontinuation of service.

Factors of an directly economic nature were prominent in the

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<sup>496</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 30-31; Somerville, Whistler, p. 42; cf. p. 147 cited above (p. 208).

decline of service. Originally, farmers desired it because they wanted to have a fully secure "lock" on a certain number of laborers' services year around to ensure their ability to meet the peak seasonal demands of the agricultural year, even if it meant having to maintain the farm servants through the slack winter season in a semi-idle state in (especially) arable areas. But because of population increases in many rural districts starting from the 1740s, and correspondingly rising unemployment, farmers no longer needed a guaranteed minimal number of contract laborers. Furthermore, enclosure itself helped eliminate the need for farmers to tie up labor in long-term contracts because laborers were no longer apt to refuse short term offers of employment in order to attend to some aspect of scraping a living off the parish commons instead. The parish's "reserve army of unemployed" was so large farmers could hire them for the exact number of days or weeks needed, and dismiss them at will, on a daily basis. No threat existed of a real labor shortage year around, except (though not always even then) at harvest time, so farmers lost any incentive to "lock in" a minimal number of laborers. Another reason for farmers switching over to day laborers from farm servants were higher agricultural prices relative to the supply of money, such as during the French Wars. When food was cheap, but money relatively scarce, it was financially wise to board and feed farm servants on the farmers' own premises to minimize wage payments. But when the shoe was on the other foot, paying the laborers and making them shift for themselves in cottages of their own became the more profitable course of action. As Cobbett put it:

Why do not farmers now feed and lodge their work-people, as they did formerly? Because they cannot keep them upon so little as they give them in wages. . . . [A] number of people, boarded in the same house, and at the same table, can, with as good food, be boarded much cheaper than those persons divided into twos, threes, or fours, can be boarded. . . . therefore, if the farmer now shuts his pantry against his labourers, and pays them wholly in money, is it not clear, that he does it because he thereby gives them a living cheaper to him; that is to say, a worse living than formerly?

As mentioned above (p. 282), service also declined because settlements were conferred upon farm servants hired for a year until 1834, when the New Poor Law abolished this. But the provision of parish relief discouraged hiring for even shorter terms of service because the rates were paid by all property holders or occupiers in a parish, which included those employing no workers at all. They could lay them off, even for a day because of rainy weather as Chadwick complained, and force others to subsidize the continued maintenance of their laborers at the semi-starvation levels of pre-1834 outdoor poor relief. In short, farmers found many solid financial reasons to end boarding

their laborers over and above any social pretensions for doing so.<sup>497</sup>

### How Poor Relief Itself Promoted Population Growth

The Poor Laws, at least under the Speenhamland system of family allowances before 1834, promoted a rising birthrate, constituting another factor that helped hold Hodge in poverty. The population growth of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not just an autonomous and exogenous phenomenon that helped to transform rural class relations. Parish relief encouraged early marriages, and discouraged accumulating savings, because married men and women with families received priority in getting work and aid through their parish, while single men and women were largely allowed to shift for themselves, or were given particularly unpleasant make-work jobs. Philip Hunt, a Bedfordshire magistrate, testified in 1824 that: "What is the course which a labourer takes to increase his income or wages, when he marries and has a family? He applies to the overseer of the parish for assistance; and that assistance in general is doled out in so limited a way, that very few labourers marry voluntarily." G.O. Fenwick, the Vicar of Kempston, Bedfordshire, complained in a questionnaire returned to the committee that drew up the 1834 Poor Law Report: "The poor laws, as at present administered, act as a bounty upon marriage." Clergyman Hugh Wade Gery, of Eaton Socon, Bedfordshire, while testifying in 1837, attributed the recent increase in population in parishes "in some measure upon the persons marrying earlier now, without having provided for a family, which they were in the habit of doing formerly, now depending upon parochial relief." The old delayed marriage pattern of patiently accumulating savings as farm servants boarding with farmers until they could marry (say) in their mid to late twenties increasingly disappeared along with service, itself undermined by rising unemployment. Parish relief's inducements to early marriage created a vicious circle that helped confine the laborers to poverty. The increasing population of rural England since the 1740s had already increasingly flooded many local parish labor markets with potential workers, and this just added to the problem. The decline of service and enclosure combined to increase the numbers of those dependent on parish relief, especially during the winter months in arable areas by driving up seasonal unemployment, helping to universalize its influences on the farmworkers as a class. Especially under the Speenhamland and roundsmen systems of having wages supplemented by the parish, allowing farmers to avoid directly paying living wages to their

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<sup>497</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 219-20; Chadwick's letter as reproduced in Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 46; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 44-46; Snell, Annals, pp. 69-97, 216.

laborers, they received an incentive to marry early and have many children similar to American slaves: Just as slaves were guaranteed so much food by their masters and mistresses regardless of work effort and were (often) rewarded one way or another for having children, the local parishes guaranteed so much aid per family member regardless of how good a worker the farm laborer (male head of household) was. Under such conditions, the laborer and his family largely ceased needing to independently sustain themselves as an economic unit, and lost any incentives to save or limit family size, because parish officials increasingly became a "master" who automatically took care of them, albeit increasingly at semi-starvation levels. Firing laborers for bad work performance lost much of its sting as a labor discipline tool when so many received so much aid directly from the parish to begin with, and were totally dependent on the dole for much of the year anyway. With so much mass unemployment, so many used to being idle, and so much aid given by the parish, much of shame for being fired had disappeared--especially when the farmers and landowners were so often deeply resented to begin with--as did many of the economic consequences for being jobless, including when one had a large family increasing further in size. Hence, parish relief itself was a factor, combined with the decline of service and enclosure, in increasing population growth.<sup>498</sup>

#### Assorted Methods that Deterred Applicants for Relief

Rural elites increasingly saw how unsustainable the patch-work Speenhamland system was when facing an ever-growing army of applicants for relief and their falling levels of individual productivity. They started looking for more ways to deter applicants from applying. Imposing shame on recipients by some visible degradation, such as making them wear a badge with a "P" in blue on their shoulder on the right sleeve, was common in the northeast of England in the eighteenth century. Laborers also were publicly humiliated by such practices as harnessing paupers to carts with bells around their necks and holding auctions for their labor like those for slaves. Another approach was to create "make work" jobs as an alternative to pure relief spending. Since many of these jobs were not especially pleasant, and could serve as an outdoor test of destitution, many had one more reason to avoid applying for relief any earlier than they had to. Although working on the roads and breaking stones theoretically was hard, oppressive work, often as actually done

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<sup>498</sup>Thompson, Making, p. 221; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, pp. 53-54, second report, p. 18; Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 52, 64, 73; see also p. 76; Somerville, Whistler, p. 385; Snell, Annals, pp. 210-18, 348-52; Rule, Vital Century, pp. 23-24; Hammonds, Village Labourer, p. 167.

by the pauperized laborers these jobs were covers for idleness. Other jobs, such as oakum-picking, had deterrent effects as well. After citing Assistant Commissioner Hawley's report that noted this job "had the effect of driving many from the workhouse and deterring others from approaching it," Walter asked him, "Are you not aware that oakum-picking is considered a disgraceful and degrading employment in consequence of that employment being given in prisons?" Although Hawley denied this, the implications of Walter's question were clear.<sup>499</sup>

#### Why "Make-Work" Jobs Failed to Deter Applicants and Undermined Work Discipline

Make-work jobs often backfired on those who offered them, if they wished to accomplish much useful by them. Similar to the reputation built up around those hired by the WPA under the New Deal to rake leaves, many laborers with these jobs performed little real work because the assigned tasks were perceived as unimportant whether performed or not, by the employers as well as the employed.<sup>500</sup> As Thomas Batchelor noted, in the questionnaire he returned to the 1834 Poor Law Commissioners for the parish of Lidlington, Bedfordshire:

[The laborers' productivity was] diminishing very much, in consequence of the evil example of paying many persons on the roads for doing scarcely any thing; and the reason why they are permitted to have wages almost without work is, because the farmers have no interest in the permanent improvements of the roads, or even the lands, while the laws permit the public, or the landowners, to receive nearly all the profits of work, which they refuse to pay for, or encourage by allowances.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>499</sup>Rushton, "The Poor Law in North-East England," 147; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 76; Anonymous, The Life and History of Swing; reprint ed., Carpenter, Rising of the Agricultural Labourers, pp. 18-19, 24; Hammonds, Village Labourer, p. 241; Peter Dunkley, "'The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: A Case Study," Historical Journal 17 (June 1974):337-338; Report on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 71.

<sup>500</sup>For a contemporary analysis of this phenomenon, see George Gilder, Wealth and Poverty (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 143-44, 154, 156-61.

<sup>501</sup>as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 74. Even when something was accomplished, a lack of incentive for further employment could exist when one ends up overwhelmed with a surplus inventory of gravel. One area in Yorkshire employed so many at stone-breaking that they piled up enough stones to last

The laborers on the roads and in the parish gravel pits were notorious slackers, which undermined efforts to impose work discipline on them. Paying them by the day without reference to how much work they had done did not help matters any. Though commenting obviously polemically, Assistant Commissioner Hawley wrote one "almost magical change" brought about by the New Poor Law was that "the lazy groups of paupers, who heretofore infested the highways or thronged the gravel pits, have totally disappeared."<sup>502</sup> Guardian Ralph Carr of Gateshead, Durham, complained in 1847 about the transfer of applicants for parish relief to the "surveyor of highways; that he employed them at little more than half the wages of the county; that they dawdled away the time in a gang; that they mended the roads very badly, and displaced a great deal of valuable free labour, and were themselves very much demoralized." James Beard, the Rector of Canfield, Bedfordshire, after making an offer to send some families to places with work, and the men who responded asked about what kind of beer was made there, felt: "I desired them to return to their places of idleness, viz. the gravel pits."<sup>503</sup> Make work-jobs simply were poor deterrents to relief applicants if in fact the jobs were not difficult.

The New Poor Law: Detering Applicants for Relief by Using the Workhouse Test

The capstone of efforts to deter applicants and tighten work discipline was the New Poor Law, which abolished outdoor relief for the able-bodied (and often for the not-so-able-bodied) and imposed the workhouse test. The workhouse test was hardly original with the New Poor Law, because even in the 1750s the regulations for Corbridge and Berwick in northeastern England applied this in principle, the Berwick rule being nearly identical.<sup>504</sup> The rural elites of England allowed the fear of the

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over eight to ten years after only three or four months. Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 29.

<sup>502</sup>A.F. Cirket, "The 1830 Riots in Bedfordshire--Background and Events," Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 57 (1978):107; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 66; Committee on Poor Law Amendment Act, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 72; cf. testimony by farmer Thomas William Overman of Bedfordshire in 1838, Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 92.

<sup>503</sup>Quoted by Dunkley, "The 'Hungry Forties,'" 340; letter to E. Chadwick, 1836, as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 131; see also pp. 78-79.

<sup>504</sup>Rushton, "The Poor Law," pp. 147-148. On the early advocacy and application of this test, see David Eastwood, "Debate: The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus," Past &

workhouse and its bad conditions to surge among their parishes' laborers in order to reduce the rates. Indeed, deterrence had to be the name of the game, because it could cost as much as three times more to keep one person in a workhouse rather than give them outdoor relief, a point dealt with above concerning Arch's dealings with the local board of guardians about giving his father a pension (pp. 117-18). They confined the inmates by prohibiting them from leaving the grounds of the building, which was like a contemporary minimum security prison.<sup>505</sup> Somerville recorded how one old man by the name of Adam lamented the conditions he had to face: "Oh, master, what terrible things some of them as have been in and out again tell of that union house. They are put to their work and to their victuals like soldiers to drill." In this area, the guardians did not allow even elderly couples to live together, which particularly angered and saddened him: "To 'sunder we whom God did join together, that we may live apart and meet death in our old age each alone, to deter, for they say that is it, to deter other poor creatures from coming on the parish." In this case, the parish authorities began to exercise a power theoretically limited to slaveholders: They manipulated family relationships and the threat of their dissolution in order to compel desired behavior--here, not coming to the parish. The laborers faced the dilemma of actively preserving their marriages and families and suffering total destitution, even starvation, or going into the workhouse to stay alive, and suffering the break-up of their most treasured earthly relationships. Assistant Commissioner Hawley defended separating the sexes in the workhouses because of "the impossibility of conducting the government of the workhouses where the sexes were not separated."<sup>506</sup> Sometimes children, perhaps a few out of a

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Present, no. 127 (May 1990), p. 191.

<sup>505</sup>Peter Mandler, "Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus," p. 192, footnote 27; For more on the workhouse/prison analogy, see James Turner's exchanges with James Fielden, M.P., in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 92-94. Admittedly, while the authors of the 1834 Poor Law Report wanted the inmates of the workhouses continually confined, local exceptions existed, such as in Peterborough union, Northampton. Its guardians voted to allow the infirm and aged to walk outside for four hours daily in certain areas. Anthony Brundage, "The English Poor Law of 1834 and the Cohesion of Agricultural Society," Agricultural History 48 (July 1974):416.

<sup>506</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 353-54; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 70. Interestingly, he noted if elderly couples "wished to live together, the Commissioners have, in some cases relaxed the rule." The Northampton guardians in 1837 received such permission, for they had partitioned off a room for elderly couples who wished to sleep together. Brundage,

large family, would be separated from their parents when they applied for relief, as Arch remembered: "I know for a fact that, when some of the men had a large number of children and were unable to keep them, the parish authorities used to take several of them away and put them in the workhouse."<sup>507</sup> Even when the elderly couples were not split up, many still were put away from their children by being committed to a union workhouse at some distance from their home parish.<sup>508</sup> The laborers' fears about living in workhouses were also justified in other ways, since they were conducive to spreading disease and under its one roof mixed able-bodied men and women in one nearly indescribable menagerie.<sup>509</sup> Making the workhouse diet less desirable was another tactic, although it was problematic when the diet of so many southern English agricultural workers was so minimal already.<sup>510</sup> All in all, the name of the game was to deter applicants and thus save money by making conditions inside the workhouses as undesirable and miserable as possible so that only the most and truly desperate would apply, which served to create an enormous amount of resentment by the laborers as a class against the English rural elite.<sup>511</sup>

#### Falling Productivity: One More Consequence of the Old Poor Law

Besides trying to lower their taxes, landowners and farmers had another major reason to accept the workhouse test, which was to reimpose work discipline upon the laborers. Under the Speenhamland and roundsmen systems, because laborers and/or their families were granted so much aid regardless of work effort directly from the parish, and not in the form of wages, labor

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"English Poor Law," 416.

<sup>507</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 35; cf. the debate over taking in part of a family in Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, pp. 16, 32.

<sup>508</sup>For more on this general theme, see Snell, Annals, pp. 133-35. Engels mentions that pauperized families were divided within a workhouse. Condition, pp. 324-25.

<sup>509</sup>See Crabbe's poem in Hammonds, Village Labourer, p. 144.

<sup>510</sup>Somerville's fictitious dialog, based on solid facts, said the workhouse made "the diet as low as will possibly sustain life" in order to deter applicants. Whistler, p. 47.

<sup>511</sup>For more on the deliberately bad conditions in workhouses and their deterrent purposes, see Engels, Condition, pp. 324, 326-29; Dunkley, "The 'Hungry Forties,'" 335-37; Snell, Annals, pp. 127, 132-37; Eastwood, "Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus," 190-92



productivity began to decline. After all, if half of what a laborer earns is given to him by the parish automatically, the foundational labor discipline tool of a capitalist economy, getting sacked, loses its bite, especially when so many were fully dependent on parish relief in winter anyway. Compared to American slaves, whose food was mostly provided by some master while lacking any direct tie to work performed, the laborers under this system were halfway there in having their incentives as wage workers to work removed. As the Webbs once observed, when discussing the allowance system: "The labourers, secure of subsistence, progressively lowered the quantity and quality of their effort." Unfortunately for the rural elites, unlike slaveholders, they could not resort to corporal punishment to compel work from semi-idle adult laborers, which meant the latter's level of productivity had potentially an even lower floor than that of the slaves, to whom the lash could be applied. Under the roundsmen system, a man who found work for himself was just as well paid as a roundsman if he had a large family, because although he only received half the wages of the former, the parish made up the difference. As Churchwarden T.M. Overman noted in a questionnaire returned for Maulden, Bedfordshire to the 1834 Poor Law Commission: "The labourer, when he found that the parish was to make up his money, became indifferent about the quantity he did." He felt that overall labor productivity was falling, that twelve men now did what used to be the work of nine eighteen years earlier, and

as long as the magistrates keep up that system of ordering the overseers to make up men's money, the evil will keep increasing; it takes away that nice feeling that the family is maintained by himself, which must be restored, or property will be of little value soon.<sup>512</sup>

Young noted that it was demoralizing to be necessarily dependent on handouts from the parish to begin with, and when acquiring property such as a cottage [i.e. social mobility] was a near impossibility. The laborers' desires to work were deadened by knowing that many of the jobs they did receive under the roundsmen system were rather trivial and unnecessary, and the low pay they received was no help either. Clergyman Gery, a magistrate the poor would apply for relief through, knew the roundsmen system well, described its negative effects on productivity when testifying in 1817: "A very bad effect it has had upon them in very much diminishing their industry: those persons who are sent round go late and return early, and do not exert themselves in working." He regarded those required to go from farmer to farmer looking for work by the parish as "perhaps

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<sup>512</sup>Morgan, Harvesters, p. 192, n. 10; Overman as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 75; see also Gery on p. 52.

the worst workmen."<sup>513</sup> Labor productivity also was lowered by the bad habits of non-industriousness gained from "make-work" programs, because "the indolence acquired by loitering on the roads, etc. makes a larger number now necessary" to do essential farmwork than used to be. Southern laborers had a poor reputation for working well compared to northern ones, according to complaints by northern manufacturers. One of them as well as Assistant Poor Law Commissioner E. Carleton Tufnell said pauperism and the bad effects of poor relief undermined their work ethic. In 1832-33, twelve English counties reported that 50 to 76 percent of their parishes had declining labor productivity, which, not coincidentally, were the ones which the Swing Riots afflicted generally or at least partially. Thus, between the pincers of falling labor productivity and rising rates, the landowners and farmers became increasingly unified about doing something to cut the rates, and reimpose labor discipline.<sup>514</sup>

#### The Workhouse Test as a Tool for Increasing Labor Productivity

By imposing the workhouse test and eliminating outdoor relief for the able-bodied, after having enclosed the commons and eliminated service, the rural elites found a way to reimpose labor discipline, following the laxness induced by the Speenhamland, roundsmen, and ticket systems as well as parish make-work jobs. By eliminating the latter systems and outdoor relief generally, suddenly when a laborer was fired, and no farmer or actively engaged landowner would hire him, he faced the basic alternatives of either going into the dreaded workhouse, migrating, or complete destitution and even starvation. The laborers greatly resented the landowners and farmers as a class for this imposition, as Snell notes, but it generally succeeded in its aims. Chadwick stated the theory thus:

As soon as the labourer is aware that the only form in which he can receive parochial relief is as an inmate of the workhouse, together with his family, subject to the restrictive discipline of that establishment, he will gradually, if not immediately, be supplied with

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<sup>513</sup>Arthur Young, An Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Maintenance and Support of the Poor (Bury St. Edmunds, 1801), cited by Snell, Annals, p. 214, footnote 144; Hugh Wade Gery, testifying before Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Poor Laws, BPP, 1818, vol. V as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 50; see also Cirket, "1830 Riots in Bedfordshire," 75-76.

<sup>514</sup>Batchelor for Lidlington, Commission on Poor Law, BPP, 1834 as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 74; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 56; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 51.

motives of a totally opposite character, and forethought and increased industry will take the place of extravagance and indulgence.

John Napper, the chairman of the Petworth, Sussex board of guardians, confirmed the reality of this theory when asked whether the laborers were better workers for their employers and whether their personal habits and character had improved:

They are more attentive in their places, and they are anxious to get places. . . . They are more respectful to their employers. Before the union took place, they did not care whether they employed them or not, because, if they were not employed, they went to the parish and got work; now they have no chance; if a man leaves a farmer, the waywarden will not set him to work without an order from a certain number of farmers who recommend him, and they would not give that recommendation, if a man got out of work for his own fault.

Thomas Sockett, the Rector of Petworth, believed the single men were more provident and well-behaved as the result of the New Poor Law, despite being a sharp critic of some aspects of it. In Northamptonshire, even an unfinished workhouse was "already the terror of many" and made "the idlers . . . more obedient."<sup>515</sup> The workhouse test clearly served as an excellent tool to reimpose labor discipline after the slackness of the Old Poor Law's outdoor systems of parish relief, although this change surely also reflects a thickening of the laborers' "mask" before their superiors, since the negative consequences of disobeying or annoying them had risen.

#### The Workhouse Test Was a Tool for Lowering Wages Also

The fear induced by the "bastilles" of the English countryside also helped the rural ruling class to ratchet down wages. After all, if a laborer refused some farmer's offer of employment at a low wage, and nobody locally was offering anything higher, then he (or she, if the head of household) was forced to enter the workhouse, unless he left the parish for work elsewhere. The working class generally dreaded committal to workhouses as much as prison, a fear their superiors took advantage of. Proof that wages were lowered on a large scale is shown by Snell's use of Bowley's statistics on agricultural wages, where for southern England generally they fell from an average of eleven shillings two pence per week to eight shillings nine pence a week, a 21 percent drop from 1833 to 1850. More

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<sup>515</sup>Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1838, first report, pp. 7, 38, 46; Brundage, "English Poor Law," 412.

clearly, proof of an immediate drop was found in that wages had fallen to nine shillings nine pence per week by 1837, a drop of 13.4 percent from already low levels. Furthermore, these figures exclude the drop in family income caused by eliminating family allowances, etc. under the New Poor Law, which made their losses still greater. Since the wages of farmworkers in the South already bordered on subsistence levels, the rural elite's program to increase work effort from their laborers often dangerously backfired: The workers became so ill-fed, they simply could not work as well. Guardian James Foard of Petworth, Sussex said some were better able to work under the old system, because: "I consider that those who have large families cannot now get that sustenance which they ought to have to do a day's work." Caird noted the farmers of Wiltshire made a false economy by paying their laborers "a lower rate of wages than is necessary for the performance of a fair day's work." While speaking specifically of Berkshire, Somerville applied his comments generally to southern conditions by stating: "We have those people always under-fed, even if always employed."<sup>516</sup> Under such circumstances, which increased poaching and other crimes by those laborers intent on avoiding half-starvation, the farmers and landlords had succeeded all too well in lowering wages and imposing labor discipline--at least when the laborers were under their gaze during daylight hours.

#### Allotments as a Social Control Device

Having grasped the throats of the laborers perhaps a little too securely through proletarianizing and subordinating the laborers through enclosure, the workhouse test, and the decline in service, some among the English rural elites began to reconsider their program of totally cutting off the laborers' direct access to the means of production. Leasing allotments to the laborers was the main solution the enlightened among the elite proposed to partially reverse total wage dependency. Due to enclosure, "until the allotment system was revived the English labourer was severed from all connexion with the land."<sup>517</sup> Their advocates pushed them as a means to lower the rates and reform the moral character of the laborers possessing them. Laborers having them committed fewer crimes such as poaching and petty thievery, and had less time to be idle and less interest in

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<sup>516</sup>Snell, Annals, pp. 128-31. These are money wages only, but Snell maintains prices were similar for 1833 and 1837, and that for 1850 prices were only "marginally lower;" Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 24; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 85; Somerville, Whistler, p. 128.

<sup>517</sup>Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xl.

visiting the beerhouses because they spent more of their "leisure time" (i.e., time off from wage work) cultivating them. In Hadlow parish, Kent, allotments led to a fall in crime from thirty-five offenses to a mere one from 1835 to 1837.<sup>518</sup> One witness who had let out allotments for years described how attaching conditions to them made controlling the laborers easier: "One of the rules is, that he shall not be dismissed if he does not commit crime, and they value that amazingly." One thief suddenly became very repentant when threatened with the loss of his patch of land. Designed to tame the lawless habits of certain villages in west Buckinghamshire, one rule stated all those convicted of any offense lost their allotments. Similarly, although he was dealing with miners in a rural setting in the mid-eighteenth century, William Danby of Swinton gave his workers small farms out of uncultivated moor land. He said allotments increased sobriety and industry, and reduced riot, idleness, insolence, and time in pubs without him using violence to control them at his coal mine. He told Arthur Young his motives, a classic expression of paternalism, in which social control measures aid upper class objectives while simultaneously improving the lower class's quality of life:

"If," said he, "I can give these fellows a better notion of a local property and happiness, I shall gain a power over them, which I can easily turn to their good, and the benefit of their families, as well as to my own convenience."

Although Danby was dealing with eighteenth-century miners, remarkably similar stories about farmworkers given allotments are found in the Report on Allotments of Land (1843), illustrating the deep desire of almost anyone working on the land to have some part of the earth that could be called "one's own." Furthermore, by giving them a stake in society, even so small as one as a half- or quarter-acre leased "at will," the laborers' desires to strike back at their social superiors were reduced. One parson in Wiltshire noted how the mob--presumably a reference to the Swing Riots--got almost no support in his parish because then their own land was at risk. In Bedfordshire, larger estates offered them at the time of the Swing Riots to quell unrest. Allotments also increased respect for property rights among the laborers generally. Since, as Golding, an agent for the Bedfordshire estate of the Dynevor family stated, "the men would suffer anything rather than forfeit their allotment," the rural elites sometimes used powerful this positive incentive--the carrot of allotments--in place of the stick of workhouse tests

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<sup>518</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. v; see also pp. iv, 6, 22, 40, 49, 84, 110, 137; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-1868, pp. xxxi, xxiv.

and enclosures.<sup>519</sup>

#### Allotments Help Reduce Increases in Rates Caused by Enclosure

Allotments had the advantage of lowering the price tag of enclosure for the rich, because it had led directly to hikes in the local poor rates. Since arable agriculture--especially--is a highly seasonal business, the winter inevitably created much unemployment among the laborers. They lacked any other means of earning a living or getting food, since they had to sell all their cows and could not cultivate any gardens on the commons, so they had to come to the parish to relief to get by in winter, causing the rates to rise. The generally pro-enclosure General Report strongly advocated providing allotments for the pasturing of cows to laborers because the tax "burden which has of late years proceeded with so rapid an increase, as to threaten very heavy evils to the landed interest." One investigator hired by the Board of Agriculture found when visiting a district in Rutland and Lincoln that even in years of scarcity those cottagers who had cows--some 753 owning 1195 cows--did not ask for parish relief. He found those parishes where the poor had few or no cows (or cottages of their own, by implication) that the rates were the highest, at five shillings eleven pence in the pound. One family in Mayfield, Sussex, having been chargeable to the parish even when food prices were low, after being given a cow suddenly ceased being a burden, even prices were high. Those who had built their own cottages on the commons or otherwise owned them outright also avoided being a burden to ratepayers in some areas. Similar stories of allotments allowing many laborers to avoid applying for relief suffused the 1843 Report. One area, after it gave out allotments, found afterwards almost no one had applied for relief. In another, it not only reduced applications for relief, but one witness felt allotments lowered population growth in his parish compared adjacent parishes without them. If laborers did have them, they could avoid applying for relief when they were sick as well.<sup>520</sup> The steward of landowner Thomas Dodge Cooper of Toddington, Bedfordshire was encouraged by how the allotments let by his estate allowed the laborers to go home quietly in the evenings, "doubtless, with the pleasing anticipation of their labour eventually making them independent of the Parish, as their Fathers, or rather Grandfathers had been formerly." These stories indicate, so long as the poor law could not be abolished outright as some middle class critics had

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<sup>519</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 12, 24, 40, 84; Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 7, 22; Young, Six Months Tour, 2:261-64.

<sup>520</sup>Young, General Report, pp. 14-15, 164-66; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 11, 15, 17, 22; see also pp. v, 12, 32, 113; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 342-43.

desired in 1834, the rural elites' own financial interests in reducing the rates seemed to be allied to leasing allotments to the poor. Nevertheless, the English elite's desire to breed dependency among the laborers to increase their power and control at the expense of greater income, which was elsewhere manifested by landlords' use of insecurity in tenure to control their tenant farmers' votes, and by the scarcity of allotments nationally, especially before the 1830 Swing riots, remained the leitmotif of rural class relations.<sup>521</sup>

#### Why the Rural Elite Still Sometimes Opposed Allotments

In a number of cases, farmers and/or landowners opposed providing allotments to laborers, even from a narrow conception of financial self-interest in reducing the rates, or only changed their opposition after having seen the advantages due to others who persisted in providing them despite their criticism. From the rural elite's standpoint, the problem with allotments was that they partially reversed what enclosure and the decline of service had wrought: total wage dependency, as (reluctantly) supplemented by parish relief and private charity. This overriding goal must be either abandoned, or at least attenuated, when allotments are introduced, because they provide the laborers with some direct access to the means of production, instead of working for somebody else who owned or leased it, who paid them only for the tasks they performed while on it. One lawyer and landowner in Essex leased allotments while facing the opposition of neighboring farmers. While one reason given was because the laborers would scour the roads for manure to place on their allotments, he felt they were opposed also because it made the laborers too independent of them. In one case in Yorkshire when unusually large allotments were given, of one acre to two and a half, the farmers were very unhappy because the laborers excessively cultivated their plots, and so withdrew much more from the local labor market. In St. Giles, Wiltshire, the farmers refused to regularly employ any man who had an allotment. Somerville said this was because the farmers wanted the laborers instantly available at all times: "He calls the men when he choose in the morning, keeps them to any hour at night, detains them always late, but especially at those seasons of the year, spring and harvest, when the allotments would most require their attention." Farmers were still complaining against allotments

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<sup>521</sup>Cirket, "1830 Riots in Bedfordshire," 109-10; Hammonds, Village Labourer, pp. 156-57; Committee on Allotments, 1843, BPP, p. iii. For an example of how at-will tenancies or insecure tenure could intimidate farmers when public voting was done, see Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 59-60; cf. Somerville, Whistler, p. 129. As for allotments still not being especially extensive even mid-century, see Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxxii.

late in the century. Indeed, allotment advocates sometimes said the pieces of land should be kept deliberately small so that the laborers stayed in the local labor market, looking upon their patch of land as a supplement to family finances, not its main support. When once one badly managed farm was split up into allotments, these were kept very small--about one-fourth of an acre each--to keep the recipients from becoming small farmers who avoided wage work, and from wasting time from going to town to market what they raised. In a number of cases, while the farmers and landowners had initially been opposed to granting allotments in their local parishes, after someone among their number stuck out their neck to get the ball rolling, they found a number of advantages to the system, and so changed their minds.<sup>522</sup>

#### Miscellaneous Ways Allotments Were Used to Benefit the Rural Elite

Since providing allotments so strongly clashed with the rural ruling class's overall approach for controlling the laborers by proletarianizing them, the system largely only made headway based how it reduced rates, curbed the amount of crime, and appealed to the paternalistic ethos of some landowners. Even when patches of land had been leased to the laborers, landowners strived to ensure they could not get any more land and become petty farmers. Arch criticized this policy in his 1886 maiden speech in parliament:

If I have energy, tact, and skill, by which I could cultivate my acre or two, and buy my cow into the bargain, I do not see any just reason why my energies should be crippled and my forces held back, and why I should be content as an agricultural labourer with a rood of ground and my nose to the grindstone all the days of my life.

Destroying the old social mobility among the laborers that a village commons provided seemed part of the landowners and farmers' agenda (though perhaps not intentionally), because when Hodge farmed his own land he was not available to cultivate someone else's. In many cases though certainly not all, the laborers were also charged a higher per acre cost for their allotments than farmers with land of similar quality. Arch knew of many cases of this, commenting generally that: "Now five shillings for twenty perches equals two pounds per acre, and yet a farmer on the other side of the hedge will get his for twenty-five shillings." Interestingly, he implicitly conceded the landlords found it was more costly to administer many small

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<sup>522</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 2, 16, 39, 47, 106, 108; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 33-34; Morgan, Harvesters, pp. 139-40, 148.



tenancies than two or three big ones, as he went on: "If the landlord can afford to let allotmentland at twenty-five shillings per acre to the farmer, he can surely let the labourer have it at, say, thirty shillings."<sup>523</sup> In many cases landlords charged what the market would bear over and above the extra administrative costs and risks, knowing the laborers were desperate enough for the land in question. One witness for the 1843 Commission knew of cases where laborers were hurt by being charged a very high rack rent of up to eight pounds per acre due to the high demand. Jeffries knew of this practice, though in a less extreme form, since "the cottagers could pay a rent for an acre which, in the aggregate, was three times that given by the ordinary farmer." Even the highly praised and philanthropic clergyman of St. Giles, Wiltshire, Mr. Moore, charged twelve shillings per half-acre, while the farmers were charged four or five shillings less. The laborers also suffered from having little security of tenure for their plots of land, like many farmers. Arch said his father had his allotment changed four times during his lifetime, because after the laborers had improved a particularly poor piece of land up to good condition, the field was then let to a farmer. The laborers with allotments suffered in a somewhat more extreme form all the problems Caird, Arch, and Somerville repeatedly describe concerning the ill-effects caused by the insecurity of land tenure for farmers on English agriculture. When one landowner withdrew allotments in Sharpenhoe, Bedfordshire in order to punish those who joined Arch's union in the 1870s, his act illustrated the political/economic power his class had when tenure was withdrawable at whim.<sup>524</sup> So while allotments undeniably were a boon to the laborers, the good they did was attenuated by the firm desire of the farmers and landowners to keep the farmworkers in the local labor market by deliberately keeping the pieces of land let so small they had to remain a supplement to the farmworkers' income, often charging them a disproportionately high rent for the privilege, and by making their use of it conditional upon continued good behavior as judged by their social superiors.

#### Another Positive Mode of Creating Work Discipline: Piecework

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<sup>523</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 344-45, 360. Actually the administrative costs and the loss of rent may not have been much greater, other than agents spending more time while collecting from more people, because laborers with allotments reliably paid their rent in at least some cases. In one case, the landlord had lost only one-quarter of 1 percent of rent charged. See Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 17, 112, 119.

<sup>524</sup>Commission on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 47; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:152; Somerville, Whistler, p. 33; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 344; Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 7.

The positive incentive of piecework also was used to create work discipline among the laborers, similar to how the task system and pay for working non-normal hours helped control the slaves. Since the laborers possessed the pre-industrial mentality of task-orientation, offering piecework was a wise policy, especially when some clearly objective task had to be completed, such as bringing in the harvest in arable areas. The farmers (or employing landowners) also applied some elementary psychology, although it also cost them more financially. Arthur Young explained it thus, but very similar language appeared some seventy years later in the report by the Committee on Allotments:

You will find that the prices of the piece-work are, in general, out of proportion to the daily prices; they are so much higher [by one-fourth over work paid by the day in his estimate]: and this is the case, not with any particular county or place, but universally. No labourers will take work by the piece, without a certainty of earning more than the common pay, in return for working so much harder for themselves than they do for their masters.<sup>525</sup>

The source of the time-orientation that E.P. Thompson saw that opposed "life" and "work" comes from the directly division of labor, in which one person works for another as an employee, and is not some merely abstract notion imposed on people to get them to show up on time regularly:

Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must use the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduce to money is dominant.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>525</sup>my emphasis, Young, A Six Weeks Tour Through the Southern Counties of England and Wales, 2d ed. (London: W. Strahan, W. Nicoll, etc., 1769), pp. 324-325; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 47.

<sup>526</sup>Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, Industrial Capitalism," 60-61, 90-97. Curiously, when he waxes philosophical on the nature of task-orientation towards the end of this article, he largely forgets this crucial insight. Necessarily, if it is the division of labor that creates time discipline through having the managers and the managed in a central workplace--the essence of the factory system--then who owns the means of production, whether it be the state or private individuals, becomes irrelevant to the switch over from task-orientation to time-orientation, as the Soviet experience in the 1930s demonstrates.

Granted the general existence of a task-orientation among the laborers, excepting possibly those influenced by Methodism, the insightful employer could harness this frame of mind that would increase or speed up work done on his time by assigning and paying for piecework. Just as the American slaves in task areas would finish their assigned duties more quickly because whatever time was leftover was theirs, and not their masters', piecework produced a similar mentality in English laborers, which encouraged them to work harder because what they were paid was directly tied to what they did. Note though the size of the piecework premium Young saw must have declined, at least for southern England. James Turner, sent to investigate conditions of the laborers in Ampthill Union, Bedfordshire for the 1838 report on the poor law, said those paid piecework only made one shilling more per week, if that. His testimony describes one typical manipulation of management's when setting quotas: "It is so contrived, when the farmer gives the work to his men, he contrives so that he shall earn a shilling a week more [nine shillings instead of eight shillings], but they do a shilling more work for it."<sup>527</sup> So while the farmers seemed to be giving something with these incentives to the laborers, that was not necessarily the case, since the profit motive helped inform them where to set the amount paid per unit of the task accomplished.

Farmers could get laborers to work harder for them, but only by paying more for it--a labor management principle very opposed to the "cheap labor" philosophy that dominated rural elites in southern England, who willingly ratcheted wages to or even below subsistence levels.<sup>528</sup> Jeffries noted that hedging and ditching were hard work when done right, and that such work was normally paid by the piece, which was no mere coincidence. Arch quit one job that involved digging a six-foot-deep drain because he was being paid only one shilling six pence per day. He wanted to be paid two shillings six pence a day, because someone with the much easier task of "forking 'twitch'" on the same farm was earning as much as him. Besides for unusually difficult tasks, farmers also were apt to resort to piecework during labor shortages. Young said giving piecework to laborers normally hired at day wages in order to enclose wastelands in sparsely populated areas was nearly the same as paying higher wages. During harvest, when labor shortages were characteristic also, farmers found that this was one time of the year when wages were seriously bargained over, often with groups of laborers banding together temporarily to work for them, as Morgan described. Laborer Mark Rushton,

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<sup>527</sup>Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 88.

<sup>528</sup>Such policies backfired then, as they do today, for the basic reason Caird saw: "No labour is more unprofitable than that which is underpaid." English Agriculture, p. 73.

born near the Essex/Suffolk border, remembered that: "We were allus hired by the week, except at harvest. Then it was piece-wukk." On Sir Robert Peel's estate in Staffordshire, when wheat was reaped, it was usually done by task work, "on account of the rate paid for it, from the scarcity of labour in harvest," the cost of labor per acre harvested was high. Late in the nineteenth century, Bear in Bedfordshire found that piecework was available normally only for hoeing and hedging, sometimes at harvest, and with a little mowing, in part because in areas with much permanent pasture made it harder to pay laborers by the piece. He noted the one way piecework could backfire on those offering it, where the infamous backward-bending labor supply curve phenomenon takes hold: "Several employers informed me that the men did not care to take piece-work, or to exert themselves to earn much at it if they did take it; also that after doing enough to come to 2s a day a man would often leave off to work on his allotment."<sup>529</sup> So while piecework could get the laborers to work harder by paying them proportionately more for their increased efforts, farmers offered it because of the premium involved only when some type of labor shortage threatened, whether seasonal (harvest) or geographical (sparse population). Otherwise, paying by the day or week was the name of the game, except in those places (and times) when farm servants were employed.

Closely related to the decisions to pay by the day or by the piece concerned the laborers' relationship to time. Assigning task work made more sense for people with a pre-industrial mentality who have a relatively weak sense of methodical, punctual work habits, but prefer to work hard in bursts followed by a slack period which is again repeated the next week. In agriculture, much of the work was inevitably task-oriented, such as getting in harvest or making hay, because of the objective necessity of completing the task in question, unlike monotonously adding repeatedly one more widget on one more gadget on a seemingly endless assembly line in modern industry, where having a time-orientation makes more sense. One motive behind the enclosure movement was the desire to impose work discipline on the laborers. Those eking out a living off the commons had a sense of time the elite criticized as wasteful and resistant to doing wage labor: "In sauntering after his cattle, he acquires a habit of indolence. Quarter, half, and occasionally whole days are imperceptibly lost. Day labour becomes disgusting." Other agricultural improvers complained laborers lost time to seasonal

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<sup>529</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 2:60; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 340; Young, General Report, p. 105; Morgan, Harvesters, pp. 110-14; see also pp. 53, 95, 98, 106-7 for more on piecework's extensive use during harvest; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 248; Royal Commission on Labour, 1893, as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 32.

fairs and weekly market days when no village shop existed nearby. Like the poor whites in the South who lived largely by hunting, fishing, and doing some subsistence agriculture, this lifestyle is much more casual than the tight discipline a slave lived under, driven into the fields six days a week for twelve or more hours a day. Laborer scraping together a living off the commons, supplemented by some casual wage labor for things they need to buy with cash, live a more relaxed lifestyle compared to the regular wage earner or farm servant, who work more hours. The hours seem still longer due to working for someone else, not for themselves in tasks they did to directly support themselves. Hence, one of the purposes for imposing enclosure was not just to more efficiently use the commons (the public-spirited motive) or for the rural elite to make a land grab (the more likely, self-interested motive), but also to place more work discipline on the laborers by fully destroying the subsistence economy and forcing them to work for local farmers or employing landowners.<sup>530</sup> Ironically this backfired on the elite, because enclosure lead to greater dependence on parish relief, especially in arable areas in winter, and the Speenhamland and roundsman systems did much more to undermine work discipline than enclosure did to improve it before the passage of the New Poor Law.

#### The Legal System and Its Influence on the Laborers

As mentioned above (pp. 276-77), the legal system had a much greater direct impact on the lives of English farmworkers than on American slaves. This was because the farmworkers were still legally free men and women, despite the privations and oppression they suffered under. Instead of summarily punishing some farmworker who had committed some offense against them, the landowner, parson, or large farmer could not directly retaliate in their roles as landowners, etc., because the state had a fundamentally effective legal monopoly on the use of force, despite such exceptions as the upper class's duels. While this monopoly theoretically also existed in America, the violent heritage of the frontier and the lynch mob made it much less of a reality, over and above the need of slaveowners to be able to immediately punish their slaves to maintain effective control over them. Under slavery, the state through the slave codes delegated much of its legal powers to use violence to private individuals so long as they were dealing with their human chattels. Inevitably, the habit of using force outside of the legal process spilled over into encounters with others who were not slaves, especially on the unpoliced frontier or other sparsely populated areas. In England, the rule of law was more of a reality--at least so it seemed--as against the American penchant for employing personal violence.

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<sup>530</sup>Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, Industrial Capitalism," 76-79.

The Justice of the Peace/County Court System Necessarily Expressed Class Bias

Compared to the upper and middle classes, the rule of law was often not much of a reality for the working class. Due to the system of justices of the peace, the local landholders, sometimes parsons, as magistrates could rule on cases that indirectly or even directly affected their personal self-interest as against any laborer brought before them. Considered in his role as a landholder alone, squire Smith could not do anything against farmworker Jones other than have him fired and blacklisted. But in his role as a judge he could sit on cases in the petty sessions (or even the quarter sessions, where the justices of the peace sat as a group to rule on more serious cases and administer many county level affairs) involving this same farmworker, and contrive to bend the law to convict him or have him sentenced to the maximum possible punishment. Even if the squire was not actually the judge, his social connections to the magistrates could serve to help ruin anyone of low social standing brought before the local petty sessions (where, depending on the gravity of the cases, a quorum of one or two justices had to be present to hear them). Arch described hypothetically how this worked using himself to illustrate a fairly common situation:

Suppose I am had up before the magistrates on some slight charge not in any way connected with game, and I see sitting on the bench in close proximity a certain squire, on whose property I had once happened to knock over a hare or a little rabbit. If that squire recognised me, as he would be sure to do, he would tell the magistrates, and they would be very likely to inflict on me the heaviest penalty in their power. The case taken on its own merits might have been trivial; but I should have to bear the whole rush of the law, because the magistrates were friends of this squire who had a bitter feeling against me.

When certain types of cases could be tried by single justices out of sessions, the abuses escalated since they were concealed from direct public scrutiny. For example, in 1822 the Duke of Buckingham once tried and convicted a farmer (not just a mere laborer) for coursing on his property, with the witnesses being his own gamekeepers. In one case held before a quarter session in which a laborer stole a ten-foot plank, the leading justice had the supreme satisfaction of pronouncing a sentence of transportation for fourteen years--because it was from him that the plank had been stolen! Jeffries once described Petty Sessions as "apart from the criminal business, . . . practically

an informal weekly Parliament of local landowners."<sup>531</sup> Actually it remained such a parliament when trying criminals, with elite prejudices manifesting themselves on poaching and other subjects. Additionally, the fear of the French Revolution spreading to England encouraged the use of the law by the upper class as a clear tool of reactionary repression for a period of roughly twenty-five or thirty years (c. 1793-1820), regardless of the merits of the law as written. William Pitt illustrated this when he whitewashed the conviction of the reformer Muir (sentenced to fourteen years transportation for sedition) by the notorious Braxfield, who had packed the jury to gain the desired result. He said that "the judges would have been highly culpable if, vested as they were with discretionary powers, they had not employed them for the present suppression of doctrines so dangerous to the country."<sup>532</sup> So for a substantial part of the period this work deals with, the bias of the courts against the laborers (and other members of the working class) would have been worse than for times before and after.

#### The Biases of the Courts Against the Laborers Should Not Be Exaggerated

Despite the general situation described above, the bias of the county courts of England should not be oversold. The middle strata in England--the farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, etc.--staffed many of the local positions such as juryman and constable, pressed many of the charges that set the court system's machinery in motion, and could use the law for their own purposes (which, admittedly, were not necessarily favorable to the laborers!). As Styles noted: "Indeed even the labouring poor were able to engage, to a more limited extent, in some of these uses of the criminal law." Illustrating this general point, Jeffries described a case in which a shopkeeper sued a laborer for not paying eight shillings for goods bought on credit. With a number of more important cases waiting to be heard, the county court judge patiently went over two dirty, semi-legible, chaotically organized ledgers to finally determine that the laborer's wife was trying to cheat the shopkeeper's wife out of the eight shillings by showing the same receipt for two different debts. "The petty village shopkeeper and the humble cottager obtain as full or fuller attention than the well-to-do

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<sup>531</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 164; see also pp. 153-54; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 14; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 229-30; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:141. Since in this work he is generally sympathetic to the rural elite, this description gains weight.

<sup>532</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, p. 62. For more on this general theme, see Thompson, Making, pp. 107-77, 219, 222; Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, pp. 80, 94.

Plaintiffs and Defendants who can bring barristers from London." Relative to the legal system, many fundamental differences existed between the way Hodge was treated on the one hand, and Sambo on the other. Hodge, as lowly as he was, still was fully a person under the law, and could witness, sue, and bring criminal charges against his social superiors at least theoretically, while the black man's testimony was ruled automatically inadmissible against whites, whether rich or poor. But, although the farmworker could sue his superiors, his case could be dismissed due to class bias, such as the case mentioned above of the master who successfully sued a laborer who quit before his week's contract was up, but was unsuccessfully sued in turn by another laborer for his week's wages who was dismissed before his week was up--before the same judge! Another risk of taking legal actions against one's social superiors or their direct dependents was retaliation by social or economic means outside of the legal system, resulting in "a black mark against his [the laborer's] name for ever after."<sup>533</sup>

#### Ignorance of the Law as a Control Device

Ignorance of the law served as a control device against the laborers, just as it did in much else. Arch described one policeman's error when he told him that placing a snare for rabbits on his garden could make him criminally liable. When the Commission on Game denied this, he commented: "If the policeman was wrong, how were we to know? The labourer has mostly to learn his law by bitter experience." Instead, the distinct impression the laborer receives is that if he molests the game in any way, even to protect the crops on his allotment, "He feels as if 'Notice to quit' is being shaken like a rod over his back all the time, when it's a question of game."<sup>534</sup> The local powers-that-be surely were not going out of their way to correct such misimpressions, since it was not in their self-interest to do so. Even if a laborer had been aggrieved by someone in authority, he might not know of any legal recourse. One night Arch's brother went to get the week's groceries. He was unjustifiably searched by a policeman who suspected him as a poacher. He did not know, nor did Arch he until testifying to Parliament on the game laws, that the constable could have been "county-courted" for undue search. But such a law does no good for those ignorant of its very existence: "How were we to know that we had a legal remedy for such treatment as this? We were ignorant of the law, we feared the law, and I think we had good reason to, considering

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<sup>533</sup>John Styles, "Crime in 18th-Century England," History Today 38 (Mar. 1988):41; Jeffries, Hodge, 2:13-17; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 152.

<sup>534</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-68.



the way it was often administered."<sup>535</sup> But this bias in the application of justice due to ignorance of the law is not directly the fault of the system itself, but results from differential educational opportunities, access to paid legal advice, etc. Even though Arch felt generally too much partiality and class feeling existed among the magistrates, he still admitted some were not biased:

I believe Lord Leigh and some others that sat upon our bench always did justice; those we knew, we said among ourselves, "Oh, if I was to be brought before the bench I should prefer so-and-so, and so-and-so, to try us. Justice would be done; even if the day went against us, we should be sure it was the fault of the law and not of the way in which it was administered."

He mentioned how one policeman near Coventry would never bring poaching cases when one gentleman was acting judge unless he had very clear evidence. But when that man was absent, "he brought up several cases where there was only slight suspicion, he got convictions. 'We picked our customers in the magistrates,' he said."<sup>536</sup> So while an undeniable amount of bias existed in how the law was administered in rural courts, this should not be exaggerated.

#### Examples of How the Contents of the Law Could Be Against the Laborers

A more important source of bias against the laborers concerned the actual contents of the law itself, not the ill results due to the prejudices of the judges applying it. As mentioned above (pp. 279-80), the customary rights of the poor to the village commons was usually ignored, while the formal title to land of the neighborhood's landholders was recognized. The commissioners involved in enclosure applied the law often fairly impartially among those who held legal title, but used it to often virtually assault the parish poor, whose customary rights were not recognized, or if they were, received allotments which the expenses of enclosure itself normally forced them to sell. The game laws displayed similar bias, which are covered below (pp. 367-70) with the laborers' resistance against the rural elite. Laws that at least theoretically inflicted draconian punishments for relatively minor crimes were similarly biased because their violators normally are members of the working class. Laws that potentially inflict capital punishment for

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<sup>535</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 151-152. For the ignorance of the law among the Swing Rioters, see Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 276.

<sup>536</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 152-53.

sheep stealing, machine-breaking, rick-firing, or taking half a crown are not apt to affect many of the high and mighty. The same goes for those laws that made an entire crowd, judged to be a mob by possibly just one other person, liable to the death penalty if one or more among it robbed or wounded someone else.<sup>537</sup> True, rather notoriously, the English law of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was festooned with death penalties that were normally not actually carried out even when handed down at sentencing, but were downgraded to transportation and imprisonment, or simply pardoned.<sup>538</sup> Still, they contained a deterrent value from what potentially could happen to a laborer when suddenly hauled before the magistrates for some offense. As the Hammonds noted, because the laws were so broadly drawn and so many had violated them, during the special assizes held at Winchester after the Swing Riots: "Most of the agricultural population of Hampshire had made itself liable to the death penalty, if the authorities cared to draw the noose."<sup>539</sup> The class bias in the laws themselves is shown by how the laborer's violation of a contract to work for a given period were subject to criminal penalties such as imprisonment, while the employer's breaches of a labor contract were subject to only civil penalties such as fines or the restitution for unpaid labor.<sup>540</sup> Another problem for the laborers dragged into court was that certain legal procedures were heavily weighted against those of little or no education or training in public speaking and unused to dealing with the law or their social superiors in the fully intimidating formal atmosphere of a high court. Under the law extant when the Swing Riots occurred, a counsel for the defense of someone charged with a felony could not speak to the court for the accused. Instead, he had to present his defense himself, which was something rather frightening to do in the social setting he was suddenly thrust into after having sat in a dingy jail cell for so many weeks or months.<sup>541</sup> Even such a protection as trial by jury was commonly inoperative for laborers, for the law often permitted one magistrate alone to send them to prison.<sup>542</sup> Clearly, the actual contents of the law often posed a greater

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<sup>537</sup>For some of these specific laws and cases, see Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 227-30; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 272-75.

<sup>538</sup>For example, see the Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 200-202.

<sup>539</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>540</sup>Morgan, Harvesters, pp. 124-26.

<sup>541</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 198-200.

<sup>542</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, p. 63.

threat to the labourers than how and whether it was administered in a biased manner. Since the upper and middle classes were its main writers, the law naturally and automatically overlooked the interests of the laborers, such as in enclosure, or was intentionally written with the perspective to seeking to deter, control, or punish them, such as permitting death penalties for trivial offenses only the poor were apt to commit.

#### The Important Differences between Controlling the Laborers and Slaves at Work

Turning from the legal system's effects on the laborers to how they were controlled while on the job, major differences existed between the treatment of the English farmworkers and American slaves, which had an important influence on their overall quality of life. Most significantly, the farmworkers did not suffer from corporal punishment (at least as adults) while on the job, and were able to change employers when their contract of service (if any) had ended, advantages the slaves totally lacked. Neither the large estate's steward nor the bailiff, to whom a gentleman farmer would delegate direct supervision, were exactly beloved figures among the laborers themselves, much like contemporary bosses. But they still lacked the terrible general reputation for brutality and violence that characterizes Southern overseers or drivers--even though Cobbett thought little of bailiffs, especially from Scotland. The laborers' general animosity focused on the farmers who employed them and did much of the supervision. The standard complaints of someone like Arch, the head of a union of farmworkers, the son of a laborer, who had necessarily an antagonistic relationship with farmers as a group (although he felt a ultimate unity of interests linked the laborers and farmers together) focused around low wages, not hiring enough (to prevent unemployment), and wanting to keep the laborers in the same place in society. But the leading grievance of slaves, besides the lack of freedom itself, concerned whippings and other acts of corporal punishment, followed by inadequate food rations, demonstrating the slaves inevitably suffered from far more personal humiliation while on the job than the farmworkers. Arch's union may have wanted to raise the respect given to workers in husbandry from society as a whole, but the level of personal disrespect shown to laborers by the farmers was no where near what the slaves suffered, especially since the factor of race was absent. Consider the scale of disproportion between the typical treatment meted out by someone like Southern planter Bennet Barrow, a disciplinarian but opposed to cruelty for its own sake, who nevertheless administered dozens of beatings and other acts of corporal punishment a year, and a particularly bad master described to Hudson by a very old and retired laborer named Joan. At the age of ten in 1830s Wiltshire, she and her younger brother, age seven, had to go to work because her father had broken his leg while plowing. She ended up working for a "very hard master and overseer" described

thus by Hudson:

He was known in all the neighbourhood as "Devil Turner," and even at that time, when farmers had their men under their heel as it were, he was noted for his savage tyrannical disposition; also for a curious sardonic humour, which displayed itself in the forms of punishment he inflicted on the workmen who had the ill-luck to offend him. The man had to take with punishment, however painful or disgraceful, without a murmur, or go and starve.

Now after given a description like this, one wonders then what the specific punishments, etc. consisted of, and what these two mere children were in for. What was the single worst experience of Joan's brother at the hands of "Devil Turner"? He was punished by "standing motionless for longer hours at a time on a chair placed out in the yard, full in sight of the windows of the house, so that he could be seen by the inmates; the hardest, the cruellest task that could be imposed on him would come as a relief after this."<sup>543</sup> While this was hardly kind nor exactly contemporary enlightened labor management theory, such a tale pales sharply before the page after page of beatings and harsh masters described in (say) Drew's collection of slave narratives, The Refugee. Especially when considering that laboring children sometimes did suffer corporal punishment, this was hardly the worst imaginable case of abuse on the job. Likely, the humiliations inflicted by "Devil Turner" were congruent to, but probably surpassed, those inflicted on subordinates by particularly ill-humored managers in contemporary business and industry. These admittedly are emotionally painful and distressful to experience, but are small potatoes to what the social equals of Bennet Barrow regularly and banally perpetrated on their slaves, or through their overseers, as routine measures to enforce work discipline and general social control.

#### Ideological Hegemony, Paternalism, Class Consciousness, and Farmworkers

When examining the effectiveness of ideological control over the farmworkers by the English rural elites, a potential problem arises which is almost the opposite of that about paternalism and American slaveholders. In the case of slaveowners, they billed themselves--or allowed themselves to be billed in pro-slavery polemics--as laid-back gentlemen to whom questions of personal honor and looking out for the interests of their "black children"

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<sup>543</sup>On Scottish bailiffs, see Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 211-12; For Arch's ideas on the relationship between the laborers and farmers, see Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 35-37, 128-30, 175-76, 314; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 216-17.

were higher priorities than profit-making. The question then becomes whether in fact they were in the main, as maintained above (pp. 247-52), outside of the hereditary planters of Tidewater Virginia and lowland Georgia and South Carolina, striving individualists out to raise their rank in society by making fast bucks by owning slaves in commercial agriculture. Concerning the English elite, a common viewpoint of the eighteenth century was that the aristocratic ethos had been overtaken by bourgeois individualism and a growing industrial capitalism. In the wake of J.C.D. Clark's self-proclaimed "revisionist tract," English Society 1688-1832, such views have become simply unsustainable, at least for the period prior to the French Revolution.<sup>544</sup> The burden of Clark's work, in which the political ideals of paternalism (which he calls "patriarchalism"), is to demonstrate that English society was an ancien regime, fundamentally dominated by the ideals of gentlemen and the Christian doctrine of obedience to the powers-that-be of the aristocracy, gentry, and the clergy of the Anglican Church up until the transition period of 1828-32, when the Corporation and Test Acts were repealed and the Reform Bill was passed. Clark does successfully prove the elite's political ideology was not dominated by Lockiean contractarianism, but by patriarchal ideals of natural submission based on the model of the family, at least until c. 1795. But then the issue becomes how much of this sank down into the lower classes-- especially, for our purposes here, the farmworkers. Unlike the case for the American slaveholders, who likely, in the main, did not seriously believe in the paternalistic ideals of reciprocal duties between the enslavers and the enslaved and all its concomitant ideological baggage of being a gentleman; the typical squire, noble, clergyman, even large farmer, of England did most likely believe in paternalistic ideals, at least up until the time of the French Wars.

#### Did Some in the Elite Begin to Repudiate Paternalistic, Communal Values?

Did the English landed elite's ideology begin to change away from the patriarchal, gentlemanly ethos at the end of the eighteenth century? Clark would deny this, but its truth has serious implications for their success at hegemony. Early in the nineteenth century, Mandler maintains, a major section of the landed elite began to be heavily influenced by Malthusianism and Classical economics, which were cast in a Christian form by such men as J.B. Sumner, and propagated in a somewhat more

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<sup>544</sup>I believe that while Clark's thesis is perfectly sustainable for most of the eighteenth century, its full credibility is seriously undermined after c. 1795 by the aftereffects of the French Revolution and the wars with France, including the growth of artisanal radicalism.

intellectually sophisticated manner by Chalmers and Copleston. The best proof he cites for this was the general lack of resistance among the gentry and aristocracy against the New Poor Law, which had centralizing and rationalizing aspects that undermined their individual discretion in dealing with the poor. No longer could a single magistrate order relief to be given to a laborer's family. Now, it had to be approved by the union's board of guardians. The establishment of the Poor Law Commission in Somerset House to help administer the New Poor Law was another step towards the kind of centralism typical of France, but not England. Why was landed opposition generally so feeble against this weakening of their local powers of control? Part of this resulted from how the landed interests still could thoroughly control the local boards of guardians. The squires or their tenant farmers often served on them, and these boards had general practical autonomy from Somerset House.<sup>545</sup> But additionally, as Mandler convincingly argues, due to the penetration of these ideas "turning the ground," cast often in a Christian individualistic form to make them more palatable, made it much easier for the landed elite to reconcile themselves to the New Poor Law, if they had not been thoroughly converted earlier. Most of the assistant commissioners who gathered the information for the 1834 Poor Law Report and helped to implement it were landed gentlemen. Such men as Thomas Frankland Lewis, the leading Commissioner after 1834 and the putative author of the 1817 report, and William Sturges Bourne, the chairman over the 1817 committee and a commissioner in 1832-34, were rural landowners. For these reasons, the imposition of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act cannot be seen as the alien imposition of bourgeois believers in individualistic laissez-faire capitalism, but was largely the direct creation of the rural elite itself.<sup>546</sup>

#### How the Rural Elite Tried to Have Paternalism and Capitalism Simultaneously

So then, what are the implications of a substantial number of the rural elite (though probably not a majority) beginning to accept bourgeois individualism as an ideology? Before the French Wars (1793-1815), seeing English society as composed of orders instead of classes makes sense since only the upper most stratum could be called "class conscious," i.e., as cognizant of its own interests and its differences as a group from the rest of society. But due to the strains in the rural social fabric caused by war, continued population growth, the decline of service, enclosure, the Speenhamland and roundsmen systems, and finally the New Poor Law of 1834, the laborers gradually developed a sense of grievance against their rulers, whether

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<sup>545</sup>Brundage, "English Poor Law," 406-7, 416-17.

<sup>546</sup>Mandler, "Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus," 194-201.

squire, parson, or farmer, out of which their sense of class consciousness developed. The Swing Riots by themselves, because of their spontaneous, rather spasmodic nature, and their rather minimal demands, cannot be seen as proof that the laborers collectively had rejected the traditional, paternalistic model of deference and reciprocal duties. Swing instead should be seen as a desperate protest by laborers demanding that the rural elite live up to its customary obligations to the poor. As Evans maintained: "The riots were in part a protest against the decline of paternalism." But they were a sign that "business as usual" could not continue, especially in the matters of parish relief, mass pauperization, and rising poor rates. The fear they induced among the rural elite directly led to the passage of the New Poor Law with its ban on outdoor relief for the able-bodied and the workhouse test. This law's underlying values--individualistic, capitalistic ones--symbolized the practical repudiation of the rural elite's paternalism and its obligations to the poor. As Hobsbawm and Rude commented: "The New Poor Law of 1834 knocked the last nails into the coffin of their ancient belief that social inequality could be combined with the recognition of human rights." But, crucially, the landed elite still demanded the rituals and appearances of submission and deference from the laborers, yet by increasingly embracing the values implicit in commercial agriculture under capitalism, they increasingly also abandoned their duties to the poor. The laborers enormously resented this rent in the implicit social contract, virtually all of whom, especially if they lived long enough or lived in arable areas, would depend or had depended on parish relief. The first stormy meetings when the boards of guardians under the New Law went over the lists of those already taking relief, determining who should be stuck off, and the attacks on workhouses, averted and actual, are enough to illustrate how opposed the masses in many rural areas were to the new order. Hobsbawm and Rude summarize well the results of the English rural elite trying to square the circle of commercial capitalism and gentlemanly paternalism:

[The laborers] paid for the failure of British rural society to combine tradition and capitalism, for they got the benefits and hopes of neither. Stretched on the rack between the pauperisation of a caricatured market economy and the social oppression of those who grew rich from it, they lacked even the only real resource of the British labouring poor, the capacity to constitute themselves as class and to fight collectively as such.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Evans, Forging of the Modern State, p. 146; as cited in Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 360; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 17, 52; see also p. 47; On the opposition of the poor, see Snell, Annals, pp. 133-37; Brundage, "English Poor Law," 408-

The New Poor Law's passage and implementation symbolized how the rural elite decided to alleviate this contradiction in their society by leaning more strongly to the side of individualism, yet, by leaving the settlement laws in place with little change other than abolishing a year of service as a head of settlement, they were still trying to rig the labor market in their favor.

### Paternalism Vs. Capitalism: The Trade-Offs between Freedom and Security

From the subordinate class's viewpoint, what are the advantages and disadvantages of paternalism? Under this social system, a subordinate class theoretically made the bargain of choosing to obey an upper class in exchange for its provision of physical safety and general well-being. The subordinate class thus trades freedom for greater security, whether economic or against criminals. With the waning of feudalism, the part of the bargain concerning physical safety and protection against criminals or invaders largely, if not completely, drops from view. Concerning the contract between classes (though "orders" may be a less anachronistic term) the upper class would maintain its provision for the poor was a privilege, but inevitably the lower class made that provided by custom a right, making it hazardous for the upper class to change the terms of the deal. In a complaint similar to that made by American masters about their slaves' actions when they did not defer rightly to them out of appreciation, Chadwick noted that: "No gratitude is ever created (for relief received as a right) towards a numerous body, invested with a corporate character and official functions."<sup>548</sup> Since the poor had turned the custom--one based on law, of course, but that does not eliminate its conditional character since the upper class theoretically can always change laws--into a right, the desire of some to abolish the poor law outright and end all parish relief in the early 1830s was deemed impractical because the elite feared a social revolt. The laborers accepted the crust of bread provided by the local parish at a high price, especially under the settlement laws' restrictions, because they lost much of their freedom to change employers and migrate to where better jobs, or any jobs, were available.

Service as an institution also reflects the trade-off between freedom and security under paternalism, since it gave the farm servants involved more security--a guaranteed job, food to eat, and a place to stay for an entire year--at the cost of having more freedom to pursue shorter-term jobs that were more financially rewarding in their given time span, such as being a migrant harvester in season. Jeffries noted the latter

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<sup>548</sup>Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, p. 48.



advantage, maintaining that by his time of writing young farmworkers preferred the latter option: "[The young laborer] is rarely hired by the year--he prefers to be free, so that when harvest comes he may go where wages change to be highest. He is an independent person, and full of youth [and] strength." Those in service were also burdened by being at the beck and call of his or her master potentially all waking hours, or at least for all the customary tasks done by farm servants in their particular locality. Since the risk-taking entrepreneurial attitude of pursuing economic opportunity wherever it knocks is generally weaker among the poor, and the desire for economic security greater, they normally resented the failure of their social superiors to take them or their teenage children into their homes to work in husbandry. The family of origin was burdened with its children for a longer period in their teenage years--but this also arguably strengthened the family as a unit.<sup>549</sup> The decline of service made it not only harder to gain a settlement, but increased the social segregation between farmworkers and the farmers and landowners. Instead of living and eating together under one roof, the farmworkers now lived increasingly separately in their own cottages even when unmarried. Its decline undeniably made class relations worse, as illustrated by the lack of farm servants involved in the "Bread or Blood" riots of East Anglia or Swing itself.

#### How the Waning of Paternalism Made the Laborers' Class Consciousness Possible

The waning of vertical relationships (client-patron) and the growth of horizontal, intra-class ones made the development of class consciousness possible, as Snell and Engels both noted. Making large numbers of the laborers live on their own in their own cottages, often gathering them into large open villages, combined with the effects of declining migration to urban areas or even other nearby rural parishes in the south in the early nineteenth century, reduced the influence, control, and supervision of the dominant class, because paternalism is most effective on a face-to-face basis. Subordinates find it much easier (especially when illiterate, etc.) to identify with the interests of an upper class when somebody physically present around them embodies and represents it, as Newby has stated. A drop in control might not be for the good of the child or teenager who would have been taken into service, as Arch noted: "He earned money enough to be independent of his mother, and ten chances to one he would get into all sorts of mischief, and there was no one to control him. His master did not care, as a rule, what he did out of work time." This lament illustrates the essence of paternalism: the controls of the superior are for the good of the subordinate, even when the latter does not know it or

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<sup>549</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 2:61; Snell, Annals, p. 260.

appreciate it. Consider the behavior of one squire's domestic servants, which describes well the annoyances that come with constant surveillance, even when he had a kindly disposition: "He [the squire] was the meanest [meaning, "stingiest"] master they [the coachman and footman] had ever known; yet they could not say that he paid less wages, or that they were ill-fed--it was this meddling, peddling interference they resented." The relationship of the farm servant and farmer was significantly closer, for better and for worse, than that of mere employer and mere employee, only brought together by the cash nexus in an impersonal labor market.<sup>550</sup> Hence, even from the farmworkers' viewpoint, some advantages came with the decline of service, since it increased their freedom and reduced the direct supervision and control of their employers, allowing for the development of stronger horizontal relationships and ideas of self-interest as a collective in their subordinate group, but at the cost of greater economic insecurity, more unemployment, and worse living conditions.

#### The Power of Gifts to Control, and When They Do Not

When the upper class makes gifts to the subordinate class which it cannot pay back, the power of paternalism is manifest. As noted above (pp. 151-52) when dealing with how the parson's charity in Arch's parish of birth was a powerful control device for helping to keep the laborers in line, the ability of one person to put others in his debt increases his control over them, even when they are not legally obligated to pay anything back. This reason no doubt helped motivate one witness to the Committee on Allotments to say he did not want to create an arrangement in which the laborer thinks it his right to have an allotment, instead of a kind arrangement, due to passing a Parliamentary Act. But apparently freely given gifts come at a price. The Duke of Wellington voluntarily supported one widow near his estate, even providing her with a cottage. When Somerville came to visit the Duke's park in Hampshire, he wanted to go in, but she was initially hesitant to allow him in while the Duke was present in the park because "she could not do anything, on any account, to give his Grace offence." Hudson despised the "servility, hypocrisy, and parasitism" that grew up around a dominant squire in a village, judging it better to suffer poverty without gifts of "the customary blankets and sack of coals to old women" in order to gain "greater manliness and self-dependence when the people are left to work out their own destiny." But

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<sup>550</sup>Snell, Annals, pp. 67-69, 101-103, 321-322. While dealing with an urban, industrial context, Engels made the same point. Condition, p. 138; Howard Newby, "The Deferential Dialectic," Comparative Studies in Society and History 17 (April 1975):155-57; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 249; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:135; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 38.

when the gift becomes something automatically supplied by law through a governmental entity, the social effects of the "gifts" radically change. By the mere passage of a law providing something to someone, they are prone to thinking over time that they were entitled to it as a right--even though the law can be changed just as quickly to take it away from them, showing it was an arbitrary creation. For this reason, ruling class members fought a losing war when they maintained that the allowance system of supplementing wages through the parish was an "indulgence" to the poor, in particular to the deserving poor, not an "entitlement" for everyone.<sup>551</sup> Because they still had a deep-seated desire to stand on their own two feet economically, and not depend on handouts, the laborers came to resent what they nevertheless maintained was a right. "The parish money is now chucked to us like as to a dog," said one Sussex laborer in the 1834 Poor Law Report, which was full of (from the elite's viewpoint) insolent, churlish complaints by paupers concerning their right to relief. Since the ratepayers themselves resented paying the increasing poor rates, and found all sorts of ways to deter applicants for relief even before the passage of the New Poor Law, the laborers naturally felt this negative attitude themselves, and wished to reply in kind. Gifts given by paternalists in the upper class clearly lose much of their ability to positively influence the behavior of the subordinate class when they are perceived as a right, which is especially apt to happen when guaranteed by law for long periods, as was the case for the Tudor Poor Law.<sup>552</sup>

The Failure of Paternalism as an Ideological Control Device from C. 1795

From the upper class's viewpoint, the bottom-line consideration about paternalism was its success as a social control device, especially through ideological hegemony, because the latter would give the social order legitimacy through eliding "is" and "ought" together. While this program was reasonably successful (so far as the thoughts of average people in history are discernable) up until about 1795 in England, it began to seriously fail in the first decades of the nineteenth century, in which a somewhat inchoate sense of resentment and desperation began to sweep over the farmworkers in southern England due to the effects of enclosure, population growth, the decline of service, mass pauperization coming from rising unemployment, and

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<sup>551</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 25; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 121-22; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 293-94; Eastwood, "Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus," 192.

<sup>552</sup>Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 226-27; Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 69; Newby, "The Deferential Dialectic," 161-63.

skyrocketing increases in their dependence on parish relief, not just in bad years such as 1800-1801 or 1795-1796, but routinely as a matter of course. Their increasing loss of economic independence, defined both as loss of direct access to the means of production (through enclosure) and through the inability of laborers' wages to support their families without supplements from the parish through such means as the Speenhamland and roundsmen systems, created a sense that the past had been better than the present. The Swing riots, the "Bread or Blood" riots of East Anglia, the traditional food riots that occurred especially in bad years--all these reflected desires for a paternalistic economy in which the upper class really did care about the material needs of the poor and for just prices and just wages, since the crowd's public demands were not revolutionary, but generally highly limited and incremental, even when they had the cover of anonymity to make demands, with little use of outright violence. However, these protests still signaled that the laborers' minds were beginning to cease to identify with individuals with power among the rural elite, as the emptying pews of the Church of England to swell the ranks of Dissent and the indifferent help illustrate.<sup>553</sup> But a lag of about a generation between the growing rejection of paternalism and the embracing of class consciousness in the period c. 1795-1840 occurred because, as Obelkevitch observed:

While the objective conditions of their lives were those of a working class, subjectively they were reluctant to abandon traditional values, and preserved a communal outlook in a class society. If being determines consciousness, it does not do so instantaneously. The decisive period of change came late for the labourers, in the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century.<sup>554</sup>

The Swing Riots of 1830-31 should be seen primarily as demands by the rural lower class that the elite practice its traditional obligations to the poor, rather than a decisive rejection of paternalism.

#### The Laborers' Growing Class Consciousness, C. 1834 to 1850

Rural social relations were damaged especially by the 1834

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<sup>553</sup>From 1770 to 1851, Nonconformity rose from having just a half million out of seven million in England, to slightly over half of the church-going population in 1851, with over half the population not attending church at all. Clark, English Society, p. 89.

<sup>554</sup>James Obelkevitch, Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875, as quoted in Clark, English Society, p. 68.

Poor Law and earlier attempts to tighten the screws on relief such as by inflicting humiliating acts on the paupers, like harnessing them to parish carts. Resentment against workhouses was shown by the Swing Riots earlier themselves, where two were pulled down at Selborne and Headley, Hampshire, and by the general resistance against building them later, especially in northern England. One witness told in 1853 a Parliamentary Committee that: "My firm persuasion is, that these workhouses [in Suffolk] might have been pulled down or nearly destroyed, if we had not had the assistance of the police." The attitudes beneath these attacks were illustrated by one laborer who said his Union was "the greatest curse that ever happened to the poor man," while one fire engine operator heard during a fire, "Unless something be absolutely done about these unions, the fires will go on."<sup>555</sup> The rural England Somerville toured in the 1840s was full of sullen and resentful laborers. Should a threshing mill be built, "the ferocious population of the neighbourhood will burn down barns, corn-ricks, and all," even though the Oxfordshire farmer in this case already employed 50 percent more laborers per acre than any of his neighbors and had greatly improved the land. Another farmer, in Buckingham, if he did the same, feared similar results, and then he could never rest "on his pillow, himself nor family, in peace." While traveling in England, he found, when raising the possibility of enclosing any commons of size to laborers nearby: "in all cases they reply with a bitterness expressive of no milder belief than that they think me an agent of some one about to rob them, about to invade their little privileges, and despoil them of an independence which, even if not worth a penny, they would still cherish." One Wiltshire laborer he encountered on the road, already quoted above (p. 286) for his especial resentment against the farmers, plainly thought in class terms. Merely upon the sight of Somerville appearing relatively well off, he condemned him without knowing who he was:

"Ah! you be a precious lot o'hard screws on a poor man, the whole lot of you." "Which lot? You seem to include me, and yet you don't know who or what I am?" "Don't I though? I see you ha' got a good coat on your back, and a face that don't look like an empty belly; there be no hunger looking out atween your ribs I'll swear. You either be a farmer or somebody else that lives on somebody else."<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>555</sup>Snell, Annals, p. 136. Confirming Snell's viewpoint, although in an urban, artisanal context, was the leading grievance of Chartist orators--the New Poor Law. Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 390; also see Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century, p. 71.

<sup>556</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 42, 101-2, 140, 153.

As shown by these conditions of social unrest plainly just underneath the surface, class consciousness developed among the laborers due to the accumulated grievances they had against the rural elite, showing paternalism's failure to ideologically hold their minds, even if the outward signs of deference may largely still have held.<sup>557</sup>

#### When the Laborers as a Class In Itself Began to Act For Itself

The decisive step to full class consciousness among the farmworkers had to wait until the time of the formation of farmworkers' unions, beginning in the 1860s, culminating in Arch's Agricultural Labourers' Union of the 1870s, especially to the extent it involved the farmworkers seeing their fortunes linked to urban artisans, miners, domestic outworkers, or industrial workers, i.e., the working class as a whole. To appropriate some of Marx's language, it was only then the rural laborers as a class in itself really began acting for itself, with leaders raised from its own ranks such as Arch who articulated its interests.<sup>558</sup> It is one thing to have a lot of sullen laborers who are resentful of farmers, parsons, squires, and aristocrats, who increasingly realize at some level they are getting the shaft as group from some other group in society, which was the general condition of the laborers between c. 1795 and 1870 suffering under the pressures of enclosure, the decline of service, the mass pauperization of the Old Poor Law and the workhouse tests of the New. It is quite another for this group to rise up, organize itself at least some formally, and make demands of its rulers on a widespread scale, which it was to do through farmworkers' unions in the 1860s and 1870s. Much of the baggage of paternalism had to be dropped, which was a gradual process from the mid-1790s until the passage of the New Poor Law, which showed the ruling class had largely abandoned those ideals itself. The laborers' class consciousness grew rapidly as they began to discard paternalism as an ideological construct

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<sup>557</sup>Newby notes that the outward signs of deference, such as bowing, saluting, etc., are not without meaning, because they allow the superordinate to maintain his social distance (avoid "fraternizing" and excessive identification with by the subordinate) while routinely engaging in the close-knit face-to-face interaction by which traditional authority is exercised. Since hegemony is fundamentally based upon the thinking of the subordinate class in question, using a strictly behavioral definition of deference has little bearing on the question of the elite's success in getting the subordinate class to believe in its ideology. As a result, a mask can conceal a considerable amount of class consciousness. Newby, "Deferential Dialectic," 142-43, 158-60.

<sup>558</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 385.

themselves after their social superiors many did the same. The creeping realization came over the bulk of laborers that little positive could be generally expected from the rural elite of aristocrats, squires, parsons, and large farmers as a group to help them out of their plight, even if scattered exceptions existed, such as the great aristocrats who worked at improving the cottages on their estates, mentioned above (pp. 71-73) in the section on the standard of living, or those who gave allotments early on, such as the Earl of Winchilsea. At this stage, paternalism increasingly became mere empty rhetoric without much reality of outgoing concern for the lower classes backing it up.<sup>559</sup> One witness proclaimed to the Committee on Allotments in 1843 that "there are no better disposed persons in the world towards the poor than the landed proprietors of England," while another in a letter extract said that providing garden allotments was "a most important one [matter], most especially to the landowners, who must naturally have the welfare of the laboring classes much at heart."<sup>560</sup> In the countryside Somerville toured in southern England, these proclamations would have rang especially hallow, as "faith without works." Even though Arch himself made repeated statements about the farmers and laborers'

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<sup>559</sup>Clark insists that the essence of patriarchalism--his preferred term for the same concept--is hierarchy and divinely appointed, inherent authority based on the model of the family being applied analogously to the state. It is not "fatherly care as a gloss on collectivism, or the degree of kindness we might fancy we can measure in social relations." But for this doctrine to have legitimacy to the lower class, it must involve more than mere obedience and subjection to the upper class. Paternalism is not just mere "dictatorship" or "tyranny," but involves a system of unequal rights and duties in which the upper class is favored because supposedly it looks out for the interests of all of society, including the lower class, not just its own. While Clark rightly points out, in a reply to E.P. Thompson, that "a model which relies on 'emotional cosiness' or justice-as-fairness is likely to be applicable to no period," historians (if the documentation is available) can still crudely gauge how much of a reality this aspect of the paternalistic model has. The New Poor Law of 1834, combined with such generally earlier moves as enclosure, the decline of service, and the tightening of the screws on relief under the Old Poor Law, were decisive signs that the upper class was rewriting the social contract, and turning away from paternalism in practice. The growing acceptance in the early nineteenth century of Malthusianism and Classical economics among the rural elite--something which Clark would contest--may not have reduced the hypocrisy level greatly, depending on how often paternalistic rhetoric was resorted to simultaneously, or by the same individuals. See Clark, English Society, pp. 74-75.

<sup>560</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. 113, 137.

interests being fundamentally one, which displayed some remnants of the old paternalistic ideology (much like Cobbett, whose Toryism never totally died), his autobiography is saturated with a sense of class consciousness. This class perspective was the basis for the initial successes of his union in organizing workers, even if its membership never compared anything near a majority of all farmworkers in England. The mere existence of class consciousness demonstrates the eventual failure of the rural elite to maintain ideological hegemony by the end of the period with which this work is mostly concerned (1875).<sup>561</sup>

#### A Comparison of Respective Elite Control Strategies: Slaveowners and Squires

The goals of slaveowners and the English rural elite were fundamentally the same: to gain labor services from a subordinate class at least cost to itself in money and surveillance time. Now some truly practiced paternalism can be found in both cases, in which there was some sacrifice of profit or advantage to the subservient group by some masters or English landowners. Nevertheless, with human nature being what it is, self-interest inevitably prevails as the leading upper class objective, although this may manifest itself by seeking prestige or power instead of profits. Both elite classes proclaimed (or allowed to be proclaimed in its name) a communitarian paternalism as its ideology, although this was particularly shallow or unlikely among the smaller, recently-established American planters in interior regions of the South, and had even worn thin among many in the English rural elite in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Both elites faced a fundamental contradiction between the values of capitalistic commercial agriculture and paternalism, where the elite was to provide protection and security in return for the obedience of the subordinate class as part of the implicit social contract. Since the market in capitalism rules over the ruling classes, and its economic power and variableness can neither be controlled nor denied in the long run, the slaves and laborers were made promises by their rulers that could not be kept. Hence, we find the slaveholders selling off slaves and dividing families in times of bankruptcy and economic distress, while the English elite found that the Old Poor Law was simply economically incompatible in the long run with enclosure, the decline of service, and high levels of labor productivity, and so eventually terminated it with the New Poor Law's workhouses. The individualistic, self-seeking behavior associated with commercial agriculture under capitalism tended to swamp the communal values proclaimed by paternalism in the case of both elites. In many

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<sup>561</sup>On the rising of the laborers' political consciousness and the farmworkers' unions, note the incidental discussion by G.E. Mingay in Hartwell, The Long Debate on Poverty, pp. 43, 45.



individual cases the elite's members were not always especially happy about this contradiction's results. William Ford, Northrup's exceptionally kind master, nevertheless sold eighteen slaves when facing bankruptcy due to being security for his brother. The rector of Petworth parish, attacked aspects of the New Poor Law, yet admitted had he been a member of Parliament, he still would have voted for it even if amending it had been impossible.<sup>562</sup> Having embraced commercial capitalism, the slaveholders and gentry faced the raw fact that it was not especially compatible with paternalistic obligations to their respective subordinate classes, which often opened a yawning gap between ideology and performance from the latter's viewpoint, one which in the English rural elite's case became wider during the period surveyed here (c. 1750-1875).

While both elites exercised traditional, face-to-face authority with members of their subordinate classes, the English rural ruling class tended to do this more through the agency of the state as a magistrate, while the southern slaveholders, with the assistance of overseers, exercised their authority as a master on the work site. The latter also sometimes resorted to extra-legal means, such as participating in mobs with poor whites, an option barred to English gentlemen dealing with social inferiors. The English landowners were more concerned with general social control through the parish and county as governmental entities, leaving to the farmers and their bailiffs most of the immediate supervisory tasks of imposing work discipline on the work site. But American slaveholders, especially if they lacked overseers, were deeply involved in imposing day-by-day work discipline on the slaves and other supervisory functions. Since they owned the slaves, and owned the piece of property they worked on, their ability to control the slaves off working hours was much greater than that of English landholders and farmers relative to the laborers, who often went home to some open village some distance away from the work site.<sup>563</sup> Both the Southern United States and England had

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<sup>562</sup>Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 75; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 16; second report, p. 23.

<sup>563</sup>Of course, those laborers who lived in close parishes with tied cottages, i.e., farmer- or landlord-provided ("company") housing generally had better housing, but were subject to significantly more control. If they were fired, they lost their jobs and homes just as instantly. "Mr. Trethewy, agent to Lady Cowper [in Bedfordshire, where the farmers had full control over the cottages and who lived in them on her estates said] . . . he has never known any evil result to the labourer from his being brought more under the control of the farmer." Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 21.

strong traditions of landowners staying in residence on their landed property for at least for part of the year, so their personal involvement in managing their estates, especially the slaveholders', was particularly high compared to (say) that of French nobles and landholders, gathered into residence in Paris, various provincial cities, or (before 1789) Versailles. A major difference between the two elites was that the American slaveholders were much more likely to use personal violence, such as by corporal punishment or outright killings, including by extra-legal means, to impose their wills on the slaves. Since the state under the slave codes delegated so much power to masters and mistresses to use force against their slaves at their own discretion, this naturally tended to spill over into helping other slaveholders control their slaves extra-legally. The practical weakness of the state in sparsely populated, recently settled frontier regions, where the police as a professional institution were simply non-existent, and whites, rich and poor, were quick to use violence to settle disputes among themselves, was another reason for them to resort to "judge lynch" during panics about slave revolts or for punishing slaves who attacked their owner individually. In the English case, since the rural elites had considerably less fear of the laborers' revolting, especially before the 1830-31 Swing Riots, correspondingly far fewer "police state" measures were necessary to control the behavior and movements of the legally free laborers, such as through the pass/patrol system. As the nineteenth century drew on, especially after the Swing riots and the imposition of the New Poor Law, this began to change, and the gentry and aristocracy largely came to see the advantages of having rural police on the model of London's "bobbies" or France's gendarmes. Nevertheless, the amount of violence employed and blood drawn routinely by the English rural elite was far less than that by American slaveholders, as their respective treatments of the Swing rioters and the Turner revolters demonstrates, whether legally or (especially) extra-legally.

Being employing capitalists, albeit in agriculture, the English rural elite had the advantage of being able to use much more in the way of positive incentives than the American slaveholders could possibly hope to, even under the task system. The motive for the laborers to work was wages, while that for the slaves inevitably came down to the lash or the fear of it, when the threat to dissolve the recalcitrant bondsman's family was not used. The laborers had to support their families independently, while the slaves, being provided automatically with sustenance regardless of work performance, had far less of a positive, internal motive to work. This difference did narrow considerably towards the end of the Old Poor law, under the Speenhamland and roundsmen systems, because the parish promised to support directly much of a laborer and his or her family's needs through allowances, regardless of any given laborer's work effort. But, as labor productivity began to fall and the poor rates had

enormously risen by the 1830s from the 1770s, the English elite reimposed the full power of firing employees by the passage of the New Poor Law and the workhouse test for the able-bodied.<sup>564</sup> The power of the chief weapon of work discipline under capitalism, dismissing employees for poor performance with the consequent loss of wages to support themselves, had been restored by the fear of the workhouse, but this tool was simply unavailable to slaveholders by the very nature of the system they had created. Slaveholders could sell recalcitrant slaves, but this was a much more troublesome process than firing an employee, and the mere fact these slaves were being marked as undesirable lowered their sale value, injuring the net worth of their owners. Slaveholders necessarily had to use much more physical force, such as by corporal punishment and occasional killings pour encourager les autres by example, to get their slaves to work than English farmers, who by dismissing their laborers amidst an overstocked parish labor market to face the workhouse, migration, or possible starvation, did not need to employ high levels of violence on the job to create an incentive to them to work. The fundamental difference here lay in how the laborers, as employees paid only as they performed a certain task, had a natural incentive to work, while the slaves, being provided automatically with the necessities of life such as food, shelter, and clothing, had to be compelled to work by their owners. Incentives necessarily remained supplemental in the case of controlling the slaves, such as pay for Sundays and late nights, while these in the form of wages remained the dominating motivator for the farmworkers, who received nothing to sustain themselves if they did not work, except in cases where the Old Poor Law provided them straight relief requiring no work. So even when the laborers were not paid by piecework, there still remained positive incentives to work for their farmer or employing landlord by the mere fact of them being paid for what they did.

These two elites did eventually end up taking different approaches to using knowledge to control their subordinate classes. As discussed above (pp. 107-9) in the section dealing with education, elites can control using sheer ignorance their subordinate class, or they can use skewed knowledge. The slaveholders, without question, used ignorance to control their bondsmen, as shown by their legal war against slaves gaining

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<sup>564</sup>Admittedly, the poor rates had fallen nearly one-third from the 1815-20 period to 1830-35, bearing witness to the rural elite's success in tightening the screws in the last years of the Old Poor Law. Mulhall estimated the pence paid per inhabitant in England under it fell from 152 to 114 during this time, and as a percent of the national income, 3.25 to 1.75. Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 51. The fall in productivity combined with the fears induced by the Swing Riots may have been as important reasons for the passage of the New Poor Law as high poor rates.

literacy. While this model did tempt a number of English landholders, in the end they opted to provide education by the state to the laborers. Anyway, they had allowed on a piecemeal basis some laborers to be taught in schools runs by the clergy or other independent schoolmasters. Since the laborers were legally free, and England's Protestant culture placed a premium on learning the Bible, it was difficult to deny them literacy. Besides the content of the curriculum, the school could also teach punctuality and a sense of disciplined time, such as how the Methodist Sunday Schools in York made the first rule for the children to remember was to arrive "a few minutes before half-past nine o'clock."<sup>565</sup> While the antebellum South was about as Protestant as England, the dangers of rebellion, forged passes, and general discontent coming from greater intellectual awareness were judged so great that the southern elite willingly junked a key tenet of Protestantism to keep their subordinate class in line. Since the slave's freedom of religion was legally totally dispensable at the choice of his or her owner to begin with, their elite's desire for self-preservation trumped their faith.

How much success did these two elites have at ideological hegemony with their respective subordinate classes? Much of this has to remain unknowable, because the thoughts of average people often were only fortuitously preserved in the documentation now available to us today. Most of what little the subordinate classes in question did say that was preserved is in the public transcript, which the dominant class largely shapes and controls. The social sites where the subordinate class spoke freely among themselves, out of the earshot of their masters or employers, rarely produced any records available today, although the slave narratives and workers' autobiographies are the closest exception to this rule. Another distortion exists when judging how successful these two elites were at hegemony: Because the slaves were under a much more restrictive regime, their mask was typically thicker than that of English laborers. It is hard to imagine, for example, a white slaveholder being subjected to the verbal abuse Hawley experienced while traveling the roads from semi-employed paupers working along them. The slaveholder insulted by slaves would, especially with Southern whites possessing such an overdeveloped sense of defending personal honor against insults, likely alight from his carriage and perform a public whipping on the spot, as Barrow did once, or otherwise report the offense to the slave's master to deal with, with likely similar results.<sup>566</sup> The risks to a slave for speaking out was considerably higher than that for a laborer, a point which is dealt with in the section on resistance below: The one

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<sup>565</sup>Cited by Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, Industrial Capitalism," 84.

<sup>566</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 235.

could be whipped, sold away from his family, possibly even killed, while the laborer might face loss of job, blacklisting, and self-imposed exile to find more work, perhaps prison in some cases for sedition. Another clouding issue Scott describes was the subordinate class's manipulations of the ruling class's ideology, such as the former instrumentally proclaiming its loyalty to the latter's ideals to get something out of them, while privately denying these ideas among themselves (cf. "rebels in the name of the tsar.")

#### How Much Success Did These Two Elites Have at Hegemony?

Granted the above disclaimer, what are the indications for these two elites' success at hegemony? In the English case, judging especially from the demands typical of food rioters in time of dearth and the Swing Rioters' minimalistic demands, the paternalistic model appeared to be largely accepted by the laborers at least prior to the French Wars, and at least in part for some time afterwards. The crowds appeared to demand its practical implementation by the elite, not a radical overturning of society in the name of egalitarianism with equal rights and equal property for all. Even with the cloak of anonymity protecting the authors of Swing letters, etc., the English crowds and rioters did not demand the land of the gentry and aristocracy. It took the piling up of offenses over one or two generations, such as enclosure, the decline of service, mass pauperization, underemployment, and unemployment under the Old Poor Law, and (especially) the workhouse tests of the New, before the laborers realized as a class the rural elites as a class were not governing in their interests, and saw the gap grow between paternalistic rhetoric and practical actions that helped them. Contributing to this change was the repudiation of communal paternalistic values of a substantial part of the rural elite in favor of individualism and capitalism under the sway of Malthusianism and Classical economics. As the laborers came to realize over time their social superiors had repudiated paternalism largely practically and even some ideologically, symbolized by the New Poor Law of 1834 and its implementation, full class consciousness began to appear, which was outwardly shown by unionism developing among the farmworkers, especially by the successes of Arch's union in the 1870s. The failure of the elite's hegemonic objectives is demonstrated by the extent class consciousness exists among the subordinate class, which had become plain in the mid-nineteenth century English countryside.

In the case of the slaves, two available historiographical models for hegemony exist.<sup>567</sup> One is Fogel and Engerman's concept

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<sup>567</sup>Arguably, a third exists, Elkins' "Sambo" hypothesis, but it differs considerably from these two. His analysis uses social psychology and maintains the pressures of slavery bent the

that bourgeois individualistic slaveholders successfully inculcated bondsmen with the Protestant work ethic. The second, and more persuasive, is Genovese's model of paternalism, of reciprocal duties between the enslavers and the enslaved. Both models, but especially Fogel and Engerman's, are undermined by the centrality of violence and force being used to control the slaves. If Barrow's slaves really did have and practice the Protestant work ethic, why did he have to whip them so often? Why did masters and mistresses almost universally complain about the shamming and deceitful behavior of their human chattels? But Fogel and Engerman's model still has the advantage of identifying the ideology of the typical slaveholder much more accurately than Genovese's. Genovese faces the problem of proving that the bulk of slaveholders, especially the planters of the interior areas of the South away from the Atlantic Seaboard and New Orleans, really had the values of communal paternalism instead of self-seeking, individualistic capitalism. If the elite does not hold certain values, or only holds them very shallowly, as mere rhetoric to deceive the underlings, its ability to inculcate them into latter is either completely destroyed or seriously limited. It is hard to successfully teach values which one does not believe, or live, oneself. While Genovese is aware how the slaves did manipulate their masters and mistresses' ideology for their own purposes, by turning customs into rights, the implications of Scott's model are ominous for his analysis, because the slaves had to wear thicker masks than laborers did because of the importance of violent coercion as a discipline tool under slavery. Because of the much greater brutality of the system, whether through corporal punishment on the job, executions carried out by the judicial system, or hangings by a white mob, or the devastation wrought by manipulating and destroying family bonds in the name of labor discipline and/or profit, it is much harder to believe the slaves would accept the implicit social contract bargain their ruling class had made with them, compared to that between the farmworkers and the English rural elite.

Imagining a young, teenaged English farm servant thinking it is a good deal to have guaranteed food, shelter, and a job for one year in exchange for being at the beck and call of his master, the farmer, much of the waking day, is fairly easy. Believing Sambo would find being permanently bound by an accident of birth to this or that white master, who may whip him mercilessly, or sell his wife, his mother, his children, etc. away from him for any reason, was a good bargain is much less plausible. He could easily see from how his white family, his overseer, the poor whites nearby, and/or free blacks lived, the advantages of liberty as opposed to slavery. The masses of slaves who fled whenever an army hostile to the Southern white

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personality of the slaves, not so much their ideology, as is discussed in the next section (pp. 333-336).

elite's interests was nearby during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars are good evidence for this. Doubtless, the paternalistic ideology did make some actual converts among drivers and the domestic servants especially, as well as among the slaves who had been owned by great planters over a period of generations in long settled regions along the Atlantic Seaboard, but it is unlikely it was really accepted in the main by most slaves other than tactically to get something out of the whites and beyond outward behavioral signs of deference, such as not looking the master in the face. Part of the essence of paternalism is for the subordinate class to identify its interests with its master's in a personal way, while the superior maintains social distance to avoid losing respect of the subordinate through "fraternization." It is much easier to imagine English laborers identifying with their farmer or squire, at least before c. 1795, than the typical slave with his master because of the endemic violence and family divisions many masters had to inflict to maintain order or financial solvency, while the English elite avoided employing anywhere as much force, and mostly only manipulated family bonds to the extent a laborer applied for parish relief from a system tied to the workhouse test. In short, communal paternalism becomes a more plausible possibility for the masses to accept ideologically the more the elite respects the privileges/rights of the subordinate class to be protected from criminals and economic insecurity. For the slaves, the costs of their masters and overseers' particular brand of paternalism under slavery was far higher than that required by English farmer of the English farmworker in service, or even the squire and parson in general deference. Although Scott's objections about the masses manipulating the elite's ideology theoretically apply to both the English laborer and American slave's cases equally, there is reason to believe the paternalistic ideology made much greater inroads among the laborers than the slaves in the period prior to the French Wars, and then the English rural elite lost what hegemony they had due to their actions, causing class consciousness to develop in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century.

## 6. ON RESISTANCE BY A SUBORDINATE CLASS

### The Infrapolitics of Daily Life

For any subordinate class, day-to-day resistance, not spectacular revolts or rebellions, dominate their lives. The small victories and defeats of infrapolitics coming from the ongoing struggle between the subordinate class and the dominant class often have a significant bearing on the level of comfort the former has, and so cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. Whether someone, a slave or farmworker, has a stomach full or empty on a given night, based upon the successful or unsuccessful theft of food or poaching of game, is a matter of particular importance to him or her. Such daily struggles often do not

receive the journalistic and historiographical ink that spectacular revolts and riots do, but often have more direct bearing on the lives of the subordinate class in question. Indeed, enough little guerrilla attacks on the prerogatives of the dominant class may end up undermining some principal aspect of the way they exploit the subordinate class if the elite does not work to continually enforce it. For example, to the extent poaching (in the case of the English farmworkers) or pilfering from the master's stock (more an American slave issue) becomes so banal and routine from so many violations of the dominant class's laws, then those laws increasingly cease to exist as practical realities. Laws can be destroyed by the death of a thousand cuts due to the subordinate class's exertion of continual pressure, as it probes for weaknesses in the dominant class's strength and will to enforce its prerogatives, unless the latter pushes back just as steadily through surveillance and force. Since the dominant class, at least when unified and not threatened by foreign invaders, normally can win any direct frontal attacks on its prerogatives by the subordinate class, the latter tends to resort to circuitous, covert tactics to gain its ends anyway. In the case of American slaves in particular compared to their Latin American and Caribbean brethren, significant revolts were rare events, especially in the period this work analyzes. Besides the complicated case of the Seminole War, actual insurrection only occurred twice between 1750 and 1865: Turner's in 1831 and that near New Orleans in 1811. The abortive conspiracies of Gabriel Prosser (Virginia, 1800) and Denmark Vesey (South Carolina, 1822) receive lots of attention, but never got off the ground. Similarly, although the Swing Riots of 1830-31 were impressive in their national scope, the English farmworkers simply did not regularly take to making frontal assaults en masse against the rural elite. Because of these considerations, this section emphasizes the day-to-day resistance ("infrapolitics") of the slaves and farmworkers to their respective elites, not the spectacular revolts or riots that made ruling classes quiver in their boots for some short periods of time, but which largely came to nought in the end.<sup>568</sup>

#### Analytical Problems with "Day-to-Day Resistance" (Infrapolitics)

After listing some acts typical of it, Genovese rather skeptically views day-to-day resistance thus:

Stealing, lying, dissembling, shirking, murder, infanticide, suicide, arson--qualify at best as prepolitical and at worst as apolitical. . . . [It] generally implied accommodation and made no sense except on the assumption of an accepted status quo the

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<sup>568</sup>For some of Scott's relevant points on this matter, see Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, pp. 190, 193-94.



norms of which, as perceived or defined by the slaves, had been violated.

While he admits that seemingly innocuous activities, such as a black preacher's sermon on love and dignity, could serve as groundwork for political action by strengthening the cohesion of the subordinate class against their masters, he denies such activities are directly "political." Fogel and Engerman are similarly skeptical, while using rather different premises. They argue, against Stampf in particular, that characterizing the slaves' behavior as consisting of stealing, lying, dissembling, shirking, etc., effectively concedes the traditional stereotypes of blacks under slavery. The difference merely was it gave these acts a non-racist, non-genetic interpretation, maintaining resistance against their owners caused them:

[Herskovits and Bauer and Bauer] had merely argued that laziness and irresponsibility were really forms of resistance to slavery. Stampf gave this resistance a moral twist. In effect, he attributed to slaves the morality of abolitionists. In doing so he not only gave to those engaged in resistance a political consciousness that Douglass did not find among his fellow bondsmen . . . he simultaneously cast a stain on those who strove to improve themselves within the system. Stampf's second path also led him to concede the truth of Phillips's description of the behavior of blacks, but to argue that it was the system rather than race which was to blame.

Strikingly, they argue that such low intensity types of resistance should be compared to how often these acts were done by free workers, over and above the problems of determining actual motivation and frequency for them.<sup>569</sup> So Fogel and Engerman and Genovese all share skepticism about day-to-day resistance. But Fogel and Engerman's disavowals are much stronger because they believe the slaves were imbued with the Protestant work ethic. Although these arguments are made in the context of American black slavery, the same theoretical arguments could be applied to English farmworkers as well, with poaching added to the list of typical acts of resistance, and a lesser emphasis on shirking and theft.

#### The Continuum of Resistance from Infrapolitics to Organized Insurrection

Against the implied theory of resistance held by Fogel and Engerman and (to a lesser extent) Genovese, the struggle

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<sup>569</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 598; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:210, 225.

manifested in daily infrapolitics is part of a continuum of resistance which includes revolts, riots, rebellions, strikes, etc. are part of. To focus on the spectacular acts of resistance misses a large part of how a subordinate class opposes the dominant class's demands, especially when the former knows suicidal most frontal attacks against the latter are. Resisting within a particular social system's bounds, often quietly, anonymously, and covertly, does not mean those so involved accept its overall legitimacy or their position as an oppressed group. Instead, this may be the only practical way many members of a subordinate group can strike back at the dominant group, or to simply meet some physical needs the ruling class's laws or customs would prevent. Since the members of a subordinate class may use tactically the ideology of the dominant group to accomplish some immediate goal, records of them spouting elite ideology do not prove they really accept these ideas when offstage, away from the presence of the members of the dominant class. While involving some double-mindedness and dissembling, that hardly proves it did not happen, since the greater the degree of oppression, the thicker the mask subordinate class's members wear, and the more lies it tells to protect itself from the heavier extractions of the dominant class. Genovese's great theme concerning the hegemonic effects of paternalism as an ideology on the slaves, even as they tailored it to suit their own interests, necessarily denies this possibility at some level, even granting his point that greater political awareness--organized class consciousness--is much more clearly manifested by the acts of the minority who attempted to runaway or fight head on against their masters.<sup>570</sup>

Since the mentality of typical illiterate slaves or farmworkers was generally rather limited due to a lack of education, it is harder for them to imagine themselves abstractly as part of very large group of thousands or millions who need to organize as a group to resist collectively the demands of another group. Instead, they saw themselves and the relatively small number of family members, friends, and members of their group they personally knew as being oppressed by their master or masters in some small local area in very specific ways, such as by a lack of food, whippings, lack of freedom of movement, etc. They knew the concretes through personal and local examples of and about their overall class, but the abstractions largely escaped them, which placed abstract, systematic political consciousness largely beyond them, even as they were surely conscious of generally getting the shaft from some master or farmer when receiving stunted rations, whippings, low wages, long

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<sup>570</sup>"The slaves' response to paternalism and their imaginative creation of a partially autonomous religion provided a record of simultaneous accommodation and resistance to slavery." Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 597, 598.

hours, etc. Day-to-day resistance among the slaves, seen in this light, becomes an act performed not against slavery as a social system--even though if asked offstage most slaves likely would have said they wanted to be free--as much as striking back against a particular master or trying to get some more food to survive more easily. To gain some practical advantage within a system of oppression does not mean the oppressed do not object to their overall state of subordination, especially when knowing open, frontal attacks were both futile and self-destructive. However, even granting this point of Scott's does not mean that the members of a subordinate class have a fully developed counter-ideology and political program for opposing the elite's demands, which means Genovese's perspective must be taken seriously. Anderson, although deeply critical of what was drawn from this viewpoint, stated Genovese's position thus: "Resistance, in his terms, presupposes the formation of ideology, organized effort, and political ingenuity. Resistance rests upon sound and conscious mental activity; in other words, it is political brilliance."<sup>571</sup> In the case of American slaves, a fully developed class consciousness (one which was acted upon broadly in an organized manner) never came to exist in the South, at least in part because of the greater restrictions placed upon them and the greater watchfulness of their ruling class, while with the farmworkers "political brilliance" nationally came ultimately only in the 1870s with the formation of Arch's union.

#### The Need for a Subordinate Class to Wear a Mask to Conceal Their Knowledge

The basic means by which the slaves (or members of any other subordinate class) resist their masters concerns denying superiors information that would aid their attempts to keep them in line. Wearing a mask accomplishes this end, in which the slave played a certain role and acted a certain way when onstage before his masters, but acted differently when just among members of his own group, or someone else perceived as being friendly. Subordinates present a common front against their masters by following a code of silence, thus purchasing common protection by doing so, as Georgia planter Charles C. Jones observed:

The Negroes are scrupulous on one point; they make common cause, as servants, in concealing their faults from their owners. Inquiry elicits no information; no one feels at liberty to disclose the transgressor; all are profoundly ignorant; the matter assumes the sacredness of a "professional secret": for they remember that they may hereafter require the same concealment of their own transgressions from their fellow servants, and if they tell upon them now, they

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<sup>571</sup>Anderson, "Aunt Jemima in Dialectics," 113.

may have the like favor returned the[n].

Once the Confederate troops in Rutledge's Mounted Rifles encountered slaves who gave them very friendly greetings. Later on, after the servant of one master and Confederate officer said not to trust them, he went back again, this time dressed as a Federal officer. He now found the slaves volunteered to aid the Union war effort: "Massa, you come for ketch rebels?" and "We show you whey you can ketch thirty tonight." They showed or pointed out to him the Rebel Camp, and added: "We kin ketch officer for you whenever you want'em." Masters and mistresses themselves knew their slaves dissembled in their presence, but found it hard to stop. Mary Boykin Chesnut sensed the ambition of Dick, the butler, who she had taught how to read when young, and who presently would not look her in the face as the South's fortunes plunged downwards in the summer of 1863:

He is the first Negro that I have felt a change in. They go about in their black masks, not a ripple or an emotion showing; and yet on all other subjects except the War they are the most excitable of all the races. Now Dick might make a very respectable Egyptian Sphynx, so inscrutably silent is he.<sup>572</sup>

Dissembling seriously restricted the slaveholders' attempts to control their human chattels, for individual slaves often withheld information in order to protect themselves as a group.

#### Early Training in Mask Wearing

Where and how was this behavior learned? Young slaves learned early on from their parents that they could not go around saying whatever first popped into their minds about some situation on their plantation or farm.<sup>573</sup> Clearly a general dread and mistrust of whites developed among slaves, since the whites were the ones who could punish them, or turn them in when running away.<sup>574</sup> David West, as a slave, was cheated out of a half bushel of grain out of a barrel's worth by a rich slaveholder. He had to consent to the unfair deal, because "he knew I would not dare

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<sup>572</sup>Jones, Religious Instruction, pp. 130-131, as cited in Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 316; Chesnut, Diary from Dixie, pp. 269, 292-93. See also p. 433. Incidentally, and ironically, this officer's servant likely constitutes a striking case of successful hegemonic indoctrination.

<sup>573</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 510-11; Scott, Domination, p. 24.

<sup>574</sup>Brent, Incidents, pp. 162, 173; Drew, Refugee, pp. 86, 134.

say any thing about it,--the law was such that he could have me whipped, if I were to contradict him." When young, slaves learned the consequences of speaking their minds could easily be disastrous, even when they were definitely right. As ex-slave Lee Guidon of South Carolina recalled: "They didn't want the slaves talking 'bout things. One time I got ruffed up, and say I saw going to freedom . . . My ma put her hand over my mouth like this and say, 'You don't know anything 'bout what you saying, boy.'" When his father and other men made a break for freedom as a group, and the master went on the warpath, freedwoman Mary Grayson was told by her mother: "If any of you young-uns say anything about any strange men coming to our place I'll break your necks!" Harriet Brent Jacobs' son had secretly found out she was hidden away in the house he lived in, but never told anyone about it: "Such prudence may seem extraordinary in a boy of twelve years, but slaves, being surrounded by mysteries, deceptions, and dangers, early learn to be suspicious and watchful, and prematurely cautious and cunning." When Kemble praised London's character, noting he had thoroughly refused to reveal how he had learned to read, she complimented him by saying "besides his other good qualities, he appears to have that most unusual one of all in an uneducated person--discretion."<sup>575</sup> Having come from a life of freedom in a free society, this statement shows she did not realize that slaves learned such habits early in life as survival strategies for enduring a system of oppression. The members of a subordinate class, especially one as tightly controlled as American slaves, naturally learn how to wear a mask and to develop "discretion," excepting for those slaves, mainly among the drivers and house servants, who throw in their lot with their masters and mistresses, and become spies for them.

#### The Costs of Being Open and Removing the Mask

When the mask did come off for some reason, perhaps because of an emotional explosion, dire consequences could result. Barrow narrates one case where a servant was whipped, although only twice lightly, because, according to his mother-in-law, "the girl forget herself [when being "saucey" one time] thought she was talking to negros A fine Compliment indeed." This domestic servant got off fairly lightly for her apparent carelessness. Enough experience with the high costs of freely and clearly expressing some of the thoughts contained in the hidden transcript were a sufficient reminder to wary. Freedwoman Annie Hawkins, once a slave in Georgia and Texas, had endured a particularly harsh master. When he died, she and her sister laughed, because "we was glad he was dead." Their mistress then whipped them with a broomstick, but the emotional release coming

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<sup>575</sup>Drew, Refugee, p. 90; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 66, 132-33; Brent, Incidents, p. 159; Kemble, Journal, p. 134.

from venting one's feelings and beliefs openly "didn't make us sorry though." Similarly, ex-slave Fannie Moore's mother was whipped with a cowhide for declaring (in part): "I's saved. . . . I ain't gwine-a grieve no more. No matter how much you all done beat me and my children, the Lord will show me the way. And some day we never be slaves." Despite being punished, she still went back to the fields singing. Barrow whipped two slaves for lying to him. He said one of them, Margaret, he had never known her to do this before. Southern whites, even the mistresses and masters who were daily attended upon by black slaves, simply did not know their minds as well as they thought they did, since the slaves wished to avoid being punished. The slaves' masks systematically kept them in the dark, although more insightful ones among them, such as Chesnut, knew very well they routinely concealed many of their thoughts from their owners. Olmsted, after asking whether the slaves discussed freedom among themselves and whether it was done frequently, was told by one Louisiana slave that that was indeed the case: "Yes, sir. Dey--dat is, dey say dey wish it was so; dat's all dey talk, master--dat's all sir."<sup>576</sup> Evidently, since Olmsted was neither a slaveholder nor a Southerner, this slave had let his mask down, calculating negative consequences were unlikely. For while a subordinate class has to wear a mask, the psychological pressure to reveal something in the hidden transcript creates continual temptations, because it always wants to speak "truth to power," but for prudential reasons its members normally refrain from doing so, or often do so anonymously or in deniable and semi-vague forms.

#### The Subordinate Class's Compulsions to Lie

Lying was routine aspect of wearing a mask for slaves, for telling the truth could become very costly for them in the here and now, even as their Christian beliefs told them its potential costs in the hereafter. One traveler challenged a slaveholder that he would catch a certain slave in a lie before he left, although the slaveholder said this slave, named John, never lied. He got the slave to open up a covered dish by telling him not to uncover it, after placing a mouse under it. It jumped away after he uncovered it, but he denied he had lifted the cover. Its disappearance proved John would lie, so the traveler commented, "See there, John been lying to you all the time, you just ain't knowed it." The comment by the slave telling this story is particularly telling: "And I reckon he right, 'cause us had to lie." Because the costs of the master's or overseer's hand coming down on them could be so high, slaves routinely lied in order to protect themselves. After a young slave who attended on

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<sup>576</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 200, 363, 433-34; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 164-65, 190; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:340; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 90-91

her denied desiring freedom, Kemble said he did so because "he comprehended immediately that his expressing even the desire to be free might be construed by me into an offense, and sought, by eager protestations of his delighted acquiescence in slavery, to conceal his soul's natural yearning, lest I should resent it." For such reasons, her husband maintained that "it was impossible to believe a single word any of these people said."<sup>577</sup>

While such acts are understandable under the conditions of oppression they suffered under, maintaining double-mindedness on telling the truth always extracted a cost, for situational ethics that favor one's group or class as against another undermines the close calculations necessary in an economy and community based on economic credibility. This habit inflicted long run damage on the freedmen after emancipation and as old habits (understandable in the world of Reconstruction and the KKK) lingered. Employers in a capitalist economy need accurate information to successfully make profits, and naturally dislike hiring or dealing with those whose unwillingness to tell the truth in uncomfortable situations undermines the corporation's or company's profitability or ability to survive. Unquestionably, the roots of this practice lay in traditional African cultural custom, as European travelers and anthropologists discovered through cases where those telling lies had nothing to gain from deceiving another. It was regarded as a discourtesy to tell something to another person that he or she did not wish to hear, seeing human comfort as more important than telling what was strictly true--the motive behind many a "white lie" told today. As Genovese noted, after citing the case of a slave who felt he had "lied on himself" by saying nice things to a new relative of the white family:

[Those ethically torn] were struggling toward a morality necessary to function in a modern economy and society. To the extent that the exigencies of survival suffocated their impulses, they dealt crippling blows to the long-run prospects for the black community, while protecting it against its oppressors.

Condemning the slaves for their elastic morality remains difficult, as Kemble knew. After catching her cook Abraham in a lie about some missing mutton and getting repeated denials even though the truth was obvious, she commented: "Dirt and lying are the natural tendencies of humanity, which are especially fostered by slavery. Slaves may be infinitely wrong, and yet it is very

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<sup>577</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 3; Kemble, Journal, p. 49; see also pp. 120, 263 and Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:105 for similar declarations.

hard to blame them."<sup>578</sup>

### Why the Rituals of Deference Still Had Meaning

The behaviors and rituals of deference were another component of the mask the slaves wore before their masters in particular, and whites in general. As described above (pp. 316-17), these rituals are not without meaning even when the role-player rejects the ideology of the social system he or she is subordinated under and does not respect a particular member of the elite in actuality. The balancing act of paternalism involves getting the subordinate to be socially close enough to identify with the elite member and his interests, while simultaneously maintaining social distance between the two that can be lost by the daily close intimate contact--the "familiarity that breeds contempt." The physical acts of bowing, averting the eyes downward, touching the forelock, etc. allow the elite to maintain a type of "ceremonial purity" that "sanitizes" the "pollution" that comes from having close relationships with the subordinate class that might, without these rituals, lead to "uppity" servants and field hands.

Throughout the American South the slaves routinely ridiculously exaggerated these rituals to doubly demonstrate their apparent submission to their masters and mistresses. Kemble, who frequently was treated by large groups of slaves congregating around her to beg, petition, and plead almost as if she was the Messiah while staying at her husband's estates, knew full well how the slaves' desperation to secure her favor worked them up into pathetic scenes. Being an actress by trade, she could easily see how the slaves were playing a role before her.<sup>579</sup> When on a walk with her husband, one slave coming towards them

halted, and caused us to halt straight in the middle of the path, when, bending himself down till his hands almost touched the ground, he exclaimed to [her husband], "Massa ----, your most obedient;" and then, with a kick and flourish altogether indescribable, he drew to the side of the path to let us pass, which we did perfectly shouting with laughter . . . so sudden, grotesque, uncouth, and yet dexterous a gambado never came into the brain or out of the limbs of any thing but a "nigger."

On the streets of Richmond, Virginia, Olmsted witnessed the

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<sup>578</sup>See the discussion in Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 609-12; Kemble, Journal, p. 283.

<sup>579</sup>Kemble, Journal, pp. 53, 55, 135, 139, 309; Allmendinger, "Acting and Slavery," 510-13.



blacks were often well dressed, which made him comment:

There was no indication of their belonging to a subject race, except that they invariably gave the way to the white people they met. Once, when two of them engaged in conversation and looking at each other, had not noticed his approach, I saw a Virginian gentleman lift his walking-stick and push a woman aside with it. . . . their manner to white people is invariably either sullen, jocose, or fawning.<sup>580</sup>

Olmsted personally experienced how these rituals of deference could create social distance undesirably. Once, when introduced to a respected black preacher and slave driver, he shook his hand, and said he was happy meeting him. "He seemed to take this for a joke, and laughed heartily." After Olmsted's friend made a slightly humorous comment, the preacher initially answered with some scriptural phrase, "but before he could say three words, began to laugh again, and reeled off like a drunken man--entirely overcome with merriment." After a further exchange, clearly not intended as a joke, where he staggered off laughing hard, Olmsted commented that he had really desired "to treat him respectfully, wishing to draw him into conversation; but he had got the impression that it was intended to make fun of him, and generously assuming a merry humour, I found it impossible to get a serious reply." This incident illustrates how a subordinate's acts of deference could serve as a mask, which might not seem at all to constitute "resistance," yet still protect him or her. The rituals of deference helped the slaves conceal their true thoughts from their masters and mistresses while simultaneously assuring their owners of their submissiveness. This slave preacher succeeded in evading a conversation that he thought judged threatening, while doing so in a way not seeming at all defiant. The social distance these rituals created also benefited to the slaves as a subordinate class, since after going through the required physical acts to put off their owners, being sufficiently appeased, may avoid further inquiries into their state of mind. They also could secure a hearing about a grievance from their master, when they acted highly submissively first.<sup>581</sup> In a world dominated by unpredictably passionate whites in which the wrong look, comment, or gesture could lead to a whipping or even death, the slaves did what had to be done to survive, suffering much indignity in the process.

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<sup>580</sup>Kemble, Journal, pp. 163-64; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:47. While he noted how one black man strongly protested against three whites who shoved and hit him out into the middle of the street, this defiance was exceptional.

<sup>581</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:260-61; Ball, Slavery in the United States, p. 58.

## Elkins's "Sambo" Hypothesis and Its Problems

It is impossible to ignore Stanley Elkins's "Sambo hypothesis" and the torrent of historiographical ink unleashed in response to it, when considering the mask slaves wore. His thesis can be briefly stated thus: "Sambo," meaning slaves conforming to the stereotypical behaviors of being childlike, loyal but undependable, given to laziness, lies, and theft as well as silly talk full of exaggeration, really and commonly existed on American plantations. Since genetic factors cannot explain this stereotype, and Latin American slaveholders did not see their slaves in a similar manner, there must be something different about slavery in the United States that caused "Sambos" to exist. Due to a lack of powerful competing institutions such as the church and the crown that in Latin America held the planters' financial interests as entrepreneurs in check, American commercial capitalism created a "closed system" that cut off the slaves from contact with free society through (in particular) a legal system's slave codes that basically denied the humanity of the slaves and made emancipation relatively hard to obtain. The Nazi concentration camps during World War Two were a closed system that produced infantile behavior remarkably like that of "Sambo," with the inmates coming to personally identify with the SS guards due to the absolute power they wielded over them. A similar process is said to have occurred on American plantations, where young slaves would come to identify with the white master as the chief "significant other" in their lives, as a father figure to all his "black children." As a result, little serious resistance and hatred towards the white master and mistress existed. What brought Elkins' work such attention was its ingenious harnessing of psychological theory, in particular Sullivan's theory about the development of a sense of self based upon the expectations of certain powerful others (such as parents) in someone's life, to shed light on a historical controversy: Were the slaves as U.B. Phillips portrayed--lazy, lying, undependable, childlike "Sambos"--or as Stamp's "white men with black skin," continually full of schemes to resist their owners? Elkins' work, like Fogel and Engerman's Time on the Cross, has been subject to withering scrutiny from many angles. It problems will be only briefly surveyed here.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>582</sup>The best overview of this controversy is: Ann J. Lane, ed., The Debate Over Slavery: Stanley Elkins and His Critics (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971). A blistering critique of Elkins, although its target is often only clear to those familiar with this controversy, is in Blassingame, Slave Community. A excellent and reasonably brief critique of the Elkins thesis is: Kenneth M. Stamp, "Rebels and Sambos: The Search for the Negro's Personality in Slavery," Journal of Southern History 37 (Aug. 1971):367-92. Hugh Tulloch notes that the Elkins thesis was "daring, cogently argued and satisfying

The controversy over Elkins' thesis arises in connection to whether the slaves really were "Sambos" in personality, or did they role-play "Sambo," putting on a mask when onstage before the whites. Elkins's leading mistake comes from making a fairly close analogy between concentration camps and plantations. The main purpose for one was to kill people while the other was to exploit people, most of whom had to stay alive in order to profitably raise cash crops. While slaveholders did hold immense power over their black subjects, their purposes in using it were very different from the SS guards', whose basic objective was to kill off prisoners by methods both quick and slow. Personality-bending, "brain-washing" effects only take effect in extreme cases where the dominant group is not just out to control the subordinates to profitably exploit them, but are bent in a night-and-day task to extinguish any possible crevice in which the subordinates could carve out their own social sites away from the surveillance of their superiors or any other kind of freedom. Only in cases such as the Chinese P.O.W. camps Americans were kept during the Korean War or hostages held by terrorists for a long period ("the Stockholm syndrome") does the subordinate class begin to be "brainwashed" into "loving master" and accept uncritically wholesale the ideology of the dominant group. In total institutions such as asylums and prisons for common criminals, personality bending does not occur--situations much more analogous to slavery. Slaveholders were not out to destroy every vestige of freedom of the slaves as such, which would impractically consume enormous effort in surveillance time and money, but to obtain the sufficient ("optimum") amount of submission necessary to profitably raise crops. As Fogel and Engerman noted: "'Perfect submission' was the rhetorical position of the master class, not its practical objective."<sup>583</sup>

The flaw in Elkins' use of Sullivan's theory about significant others lay in failing to see the other roles slaves play in their daily lives beyond the one played before the white master and overseer. They had significant others in their lives besides the whites exercising authority over them. In the course of a day or week, a slave might be principally acting as a husband or wife, a mother or father, an aunt or uncle, a daughter or son, a brother or sister, a friend, a worker, a buyer and seller, etc. By seeing how poor whites and/or free blacks lived, perhaps in some cases working with them side by side, or even how

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complete, but had the single disadvantage of being wrong, and every study thereafter has contributed to the slow accumulation of counter-evidence and implicit rebuttal." "But the Cat Himself Knows: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South--A Historiographical Survey," History Today 30 (May 1980):58.

<sup>583</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:232; Scott, Domination, pp. 83-85.

their white master's and/or overseer's family lived, they knew practically how free people lived, as Davis observed. The social space given in particular by family life, and the quarters generally, prevented any over-identification with the white master, over and above the social distance produced by the rituals of deference. Clearly, "alternative forces for moral and psychological orientation" did exist for the slaves, allowing for the development of conscious accommodation and an autonomous personality beneath the front slaves put up before their owner. The Elkins thesis's biggest hurdle lay in denying slaves used their mask of deference to accomplish their goals against the elite. If "Sambo" was a mask put on to deceive the master, such as by feigning stupidity or clumsiness they could evade working or answering probing questions, it just as easily came off when among just those of their own social group, and not be who they really were. As one insightful planter wrote in 1837:

The most general defect in the character of the Negro, is hypocrisy; and this hypocrisy frequently makes him pretend to more ignorance than he possesses; and if the master treats him as a fool, he will be sure to act the fool's part. This is a very convenient trait, as it frequently serves as an apology for awkwardness and neglect of duty.

The level of violence slaveholders routinely employed demonstrates that "Sambo" was a mask, certainly not the general reality, for American slaves. Also, as Lewis observed:

To view compliance as a convenient mechanism employed by several generations would necessarily destroy [Elkins'] assumption of the slave's internalization of the "Sambo" role. Consequently, the possibility that conformity and compliance might be extorted without significant personality distortion is not considered. If the "Sambo" role were internalized then the use of force would not have been as prevalent as the literature reveals.

The slaveholding elite did not always see their slaves as Sambos, and indeed had to be selectively inattentive to real slaves' behavior and misinterpreting what they did observe to propagate this stereotype. Blassingame sees the persistent plague of conspiracy and revolt panics that periodically swept through the white community as showing that it saw slaves also as deceitful Nats, concealing bloodthirsty desires for revenge behind a compliant obedient exterior. Ultimately, Elkins' more extreme version of hegemony, in which not just the beliefs but the personality of the slaves are shaped and molded by their masters in the latter's desired image, hits the same rocks Genovese's model of slaves' accepting and adapting paternalism and Fogel and Engerman's view of slaves becoming imbued with the Protestant

work ethic do, with its failure merely being easier to prove. The semi-autonomy that slaves achieved individually through role-playing a mask and collectively through their culture (especially in their religion) refutes any overarching thesis of successful hegemonic incorporation on a mass scale.<sup>584</sup>

#### An Act of Routine Resistance: Stealing

One of the biggest management headaches masters and mistresses faced was theft of their property by some of the rest of it. Slaves stole above all food--corn, pork, hogs, chickens, fruit, even pumpkins--all were fair game. Money, household possessions, even cotton were also "appropriated."<sup>585</sup> Once Barrow complained: "My negroes or some others are determined we shall not have any Chickens." Field hands faced greater temptations to steal than house servants, because the latter generally benefited from the white family's leftovers. The slaveholders' general response to their slaves stealing was predictable. They watched to detect and prevent thievery, and punished those caught. Barrow whipped a number of slaves who stole from him, including field hands for hogs that turned up missing and house servants who broke into his storeroom. One day he stopped three--probably not his own--from going to town to sell cornmeal. He set up a nightly patrol to catch chicken thieves, and had standing orders for a night watch of "two or more men. they are answerable of all trespasses committed during their watch, unless they produce the offender. or give immediate alarm." He also prohibited his slaves from selling anything "without my express permission" partly because they "would be tempted to commit robberies to obtain things to sell."<sup>586</sup> Prohibiting slaves from selling goods was a measure designed to undermine the illicit traffic through which poor whites would encourage slaves to steal hogs, corn,

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<sup>584</sup>Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role," 85; Elkins, Slavery, p. 133, n. 106; Farmer's Register 5 (May 1837):32, as cited in Stamp, "Rebels and Sambos," 391; Mary Agnes Lewis, "Notes: Slavery and Personality: A Further Comment," American Quarterly 21 (spring 1967):118; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 223-26; William W. Nichols, "Slave Narratives: Dismissed Evidence in the Writing of Southern History," Phylon 32 (winter 1971):404-9. For someone insightfully drawing attention to the similarities to Genovese's and Elkins's theses, see Richard H. King, "Review Essay: Marxism and the Slave South," American Quarterly 29 (spring 1977):126.

<sup>585</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 6, 25-26, 46, 49; Douglass, Narrative, p. 33; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 211; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 124-27.

<sup>586</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 75, 106, 192, 239, 346, 359, 406, 409, 410.

cotton, or other agricultural produce to exchange for liquor or money. This black market was a major problem for planters and farmers throughout the South.<sup>587</sup> Ex-slaves Joseph Sanford and John Warren confirmed these practices, the former describing how a cowhide was applied on him for taking some salt from his Virginian master's house, while the latter said "the white folks down south [he was a slave in Mississippi] don't seem to sleep much, nights. . . . They listen and peep to see if any thing has been stolen, and to find if any thing is going on."<sup>588</sup>

Some masters tried giving adequate rations and using religious teaching (an attempt at hegemony once again) to restrain thefts, but these general pro-active measures were not especially successful. Davis maintained that the Barrow plantation's slaves were well-fed, but his claim that they did not steal that often is undermined by the incidents recorded in Barrow's own diary. Despite all the prevention measures, theft remained a major problem. Russell commented, while visiting a friend's plantation near Natchez: "Large plantations are not suited to the rearing of hogs; for it is found almost impossible to prevent the negroes from stealing and roasting the pigs." Overseers on one large Deep South plantation told Olmsted, offhandedly "as a matter of course," that their slaves stole corn to feed the chickens and hogs they kept on their own. One slaveholder insisted on taking and locking up Olmsted's blankets and saddlebags for security, even following them to their place of safety, explaining: "Some of our own people in the house might come to them. Such things have happened here, and you never can trust any of them." Molly, a domestic servant, explained to Chesnut in a remarkably matter-of-fact tone how the white neighbors nearby had lost all their food. Her revelation illustrates how the hidden transcript was breaking out into the open as the South's fortunes were plainly on the ropes in early 1864: "Niggers stole it. Nobody else could be that mean but their own niggers. You needn't look scared, missis. Why should we take em in de bulk? We takes em as we wants em."<sup>589</sup> In the incessant war of wits between slaves trying to steal and masters trying to prevent them from doing so, each side won its share of battles.

#### Various Motives for Theft

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<sup>587</sup>Lichtenstein, "'That Predisposition to Theft,'" 424-32; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:196; Drew, Refugee, p. 157.

<sup>588</sup>Drew, Refugee, pp. 187, 359.

<sup>589</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 32; Lichtenstein, "'That Predisposition to Theft,'" pp. 422-23; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:37, 177, 195-96; Chesnut, Diary from Dixie, p. 348.

Why did the bondsmen steal? Sometimes they stole because the slaveholder was so stingy in his rations that the slaves felt compelled to steal to live, while another motive was due to a lack of variety in the slave diet, a problem noted above (pp. 21-22). The pressures of perceived necessity made for an elastic slave conscience, similar to its approach to lying. As Thomas Jefferson noted, a man with no little experience dealing with slaves:

That disposition to theft, with which they have been branded, must be ascribed to their situation, and not to any depravity of the moral sense. The man in whose favour no laws of property exist, probably feels himself less bound to respect those made in favour of others.

But the slaves justified their behavior on another, deeper line of logic. Their culture saw theft as simple justice, of the laborer taking what was due him or her, as Olmsted found that slaveholders themselves knew:

It is told me as a singular fact, that everywhere on the plantations, the agrarian notion has become a fixed point of the negro system of ethics: that the result of labour belongs of right to the labourer, and on this ground, even the religious feel justified in using "massa's" property for their own temporal benefit. This they term "taking" and it is never admitted to be a reproach to a man among them that he is charged with it, though "stealing," or taking from another than their master, and particularly from one another, is so.

The slaves, by dubbing theft as "taking," rejected their owners' morality, saying it did not apply to their specific situation. As Kemble noted: "It is very natural these people should steal a little of our meat from us occasionally, who steal almost all their bread from them habitually."<sup>590</sup>

#### The Intrinsic Costs of Double-Standards in Morality

Justifying stealing had intrinsic costs, for evidently some, at least, did not just stop at their master's stores. A Liberty County, Georgia missionary once complained that masters punished their slaves for thefts committed against them, but not for those committed against other slaves.

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<sup>590</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:106. For an example of a slave feeling perfectly justified in successfully hoodwinking his owner's into giving him his unpaid wages before running away, and Jacobs' somewhat reluctant endorsement, see Incidents, p. 198; Kemble, Journal, p. 277.

Hence, in some places, thieves thrive and honest men suffer, until it becomes a practice to 'keep if you can what is your own, and get all you can besides that is your neighbour's.['] Things come to such a pass, that the saying of the negroes is literally true, 'The people live upon one another.'

The slaveowners' harnessed universal Christian morality to stop their bondsmen from stealing while not, in a significant number of cases, feeding them enough. Their class interest was patently obvious. But repudiating this rule had spillover costs since some slaves, at least, chose to ignore the lines drawn even in their own culture about "taking" and "stealing," although this cost is not necessarily seen by others who have analyzed this issue. The intrinsic costs were a deeper problem, since some slaves experienced mixed feelings about "taking," similar to those about lying. As Genovese noted: "But the slaves' resistance inevitably weakened their self-respect and their ability to forge a collective discipline appropriate to the long-term demands of their national liberation." The life of accommodation, deception, and theft were seemingly necessary, even successful adaptations to conditions of slavery, but were poor preparations for a life of freedom, where the bad habits learned from the institution of bondage did not go away overnight, proved maladaptive as residual thefts continued against white employers after freedom came. Willie Lee "Rose forcibly argued in 1964 [that] learning accommodation was not healthy once freedom came." As Paquette concluded:

Slave theft or shirking, for example, may challenge discrete elements of a larger moral code but given mutual dependency, also may entail drawbacks for the slaves' construction of a coherent and more just alternative order. . . . To succeed, oppressed peoples, unlike some social historians, can ill afford to misconstrue license as moral economy.<sup>591</sup>

#### Evading Work by Claiming Sickness

The main battleground between masters and slaves concerned work. The slaves, being unpaid for regular work, had almost every incentive to slack off. They were kept in the field and steadily working by the watchfulness of the overseer, driver,

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<sup>591</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:219; Lichtenstein, "'That Disposition to Theft,'" 413-439; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 608-9; In "The Old Allegiance," summarized by Laurence Shore, "The Poverty of Tragedy in Historical Writing on Southern Slavery," South Atlantic Quarterly 85 (spring 1986):152; Robert L. Paquette, "Social History Update: Slave Resistance and Social History," Journal of Social History 24 (spring 1991):684.



and/or master, and the threat and application of physical force. Despite the pressures brought against them, slaves resourcefully found many a way to shirk while at work, or to avoid showing up at it to begin with. Notoriously, slaves faked sickness, disease, or injury to escape work. One of Barrow's slaves was particularly inventive--he avoided work for months by pretending to be blind. After a doctor examined him and said nothing was wrong, Barrow gave him twenty-five lashes, and ordered him to show up for work, after which he absconded. One female slave evaded work for over two years by supposedly being in the process of dying from phthisis [tuberculosis]. It turned out she had become in that time a capable milliner and dressmaker, kept busy by local black ladies! These situations presented the master class with a major dilemma. The slave could be really sick, and ordering a him to work threatened his health. One overseer lamented how, thinking a slave worth \$800 was shamming by claiming sickness, he ordered him to work. The slave turned up dead two days later. His policy now, like his new employer's, was to generally give slaves the benefit of the doubt--a policy inevitably congenial to them. On the other hand, the slave could be perfectly healthy, yet by using colorful language and pitiful cries and moans, try to get out of work for a day or more. The slaveholder thus remained always somewhat in the dark, yet suspecting at least some of his or her slaves sometimes were faking it. Barrow's diary notes fairly often that so many slaves were sick and so many pretending, but (evidently) receiving the day off. He complained of two female slaves being terrible shirks for being laid up twice a month. He tested and rejected the claim of one slave thus, which backfired against him: "Ginny Jerry . . . has been shirkin for some time came to me Friday morning sick--suspecting him Examined him found nothing the matter complaining of pains &c. told him to go & work it off--he has concluded to woods it off." Olmsted summarized the problems Southern slaveholders faced, showing once again the real power of the mask slaves wore before their masters in subverting labor discipline:

It is said to be nearly as difficult to form a satisfactory diagnosis of negroes' disorders as it is of infants', because their imagination of symptoms is so vivid, and because not the smallest reliance is to be placed on their accounts of what they have felt or done.

One letter writer, who was from Virginia but had lived in New York, estimated nothing less than one-sixth of the labor-days a slave normally could have worked was lost to illness, real or imagined. The slave divers who worked along North Carolina's shoreline illustrate well the remarkable difference between free labor and slave labor about whether and how much sickness was faked. They dived to place gunpowder in submerged tree stumps that snagged large sweeping nets that caught fish. They were

paid a quarter to a half dollar a day above the one dollar their owners received, and rewarded with whisky as well for working. "His divers very frequently had intermittent fevers, but would very rarely let this keep them out of their boats. Even in the midst of a severe 'shake,' they would generally insist that they were 'well enough to dive.'"<sup>592</sup> Suddenly, the moment serious incentives were offered, lazy, shirking, "sick" slaves became healthy and hardworking! So long as slaves had little self-interest in whether and how much work they did, their interest in "putting on old massa" about how sick they were in order to lie in bed all day easily trumped any intrinsic desires to work.

#### Work: Slowdowns and Carelessness

When the slaves found they could not avoid work altogether, the next line of defense was to do it slowly and/or carelessly, attempting to deceive the overseer and master about how much they could do. Slaves often worked only so long as they were being watched, and the moment the master turned his back, they would slack off. In South Carolina, Olmsted witnessed a particularly naked example of "eye service":

The overseer rode about among them, on a horse, carrying in his hand a raw-hide whip, constantly directing and encouraging them; but . . . as often as he visited one end of the line of operations, the hands at the other end would discontinue their labour, until he turned to ride towards them again.

Sometimes Barrow was impressed with the work of his slaves, such as on certain record cotton-picking days, but other times he saw his slaves or those of other planters as terrible slackers. While visiting a relative's property, he commented: "Never saw negroes hoe as slow as they do on Robt. H. B place." After whipping eight or ten slaves one day for not picking enough cotton, he noted that low weights did not necessarily make for higher quality: "Those that pick least weights generally most trash." A number of times he whipped slaves for slackness at work, illustrating coercion placed a floor on productivity, but did little towards achieving any kind of excellence.<sup>593</sup> The fundamental problem slaveholders faced concerning their bondsmen

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<sup>592</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:118-121, 149, 153, 238; 2:198-200, 380-81; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 90, 123, 132, 148, 157, 214, 231, 244, 311, 329; see also Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 72; Kemble, Journal, p. 50.

<sup>593</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:208; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 135, 160, 219, 232, 244. For further documentation, see the prior section dealing with slaveholders' control strategies (pp. 231-35).

was, in the words of a Virginian capitalist and slaveholder who had experience with them both in the factory and on the farm:

They will not labour at all except to avoid punishment, and they will never do more than just enough to save themselves from being punished, and no amount of punishment will prevent their working carelessly and indifferently. It always seems on the plantation as if they took pains to break all the tools and spoil all the cattle that they possibly can, even when they know they'll be directly punished for it. . . . They only want to support life: they will not work for anything more.

When offered incentives, the ability of the most slothful to instantly turn to work can be little short of miraculous. One slave, who could have earned \$150/year if he hired his own time made a mere \$18 one year while costing in medical bills some \$45. The executor of the estate who owned him offered him his freedom if he would earn \$400 (Olmsted believed). He soon earned the sum, and was granted his freedom. This story demonstrates how, contrary to what this Virginian capitalist and slaveholder thought, the slaves' slackness was due to slavery, and not due to any genetic factors. Having robbed the slave of the product of his labor and correspondingly any interest in working well, the slaveowner had to use the poor substitute of external compulsion and violence to replace his human chattel's internal motivation. The slave's own sense of justice revolted against a system that enriched his owner, and left him with the proverbial crust of bread largely regardless of work performance. That slaveowners found it so frustrating to deal with those whose self-interest by the system they had devised was so totally opposed to their own is only natural and inevitable--but fully self-inflicted!<sup>594</sup>

#### The Strategy of Playing the White Folks Off Against Each Other

By using the strategy of pitting one white against another, slaves sought to gain some advantage out of the ensuing conflict. The most obvious fault line among the whites was between the master and the overseer, since the two normally were of different social classes, with the master naturally tending to hold his overseer in contempt, or at least as less respectable than himself. The slaves were perfectly capable of trying to drive a wedge between the two, attempting to have the overseer fired or made more constrained in his actions. Illustrating this strategy of slave resistance, consider this case history: Two slaves, Ben and Jim, ran away from Polk's plantation to A.O. Harris, his

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<sup>594</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:99-100; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 277, 280, 282; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 305.

brother-in-law. They accused the overseer, Ephraim Beanland, of whipping one of them especially severely, and said he did not encourage them at all, but was full of curses, in a letter Harris wrote to Polk. Ben refused to return, so Harris rented him out to a local ironworks for the time being. Another brother-in-law, Dr. Silas Caldwell, passed along similarly uncomplimentary news about the overseer after arriving at the plantation, although he expressed some skepticism: "I think he lacks stability. I think he has got along badly with the negroes. The negroes say he likes his liquor, but let that rest as negro news. If it is the fact it will appear." Beanland struck back, arguing that if these two slaves were allowed to runaway against his authority, then others were sure to follow. In a letter to Polk, he objected to Ben being rented out instead of brought back to the plantation: "I do not think that he [Ben] ought to be befriended in any such an maner now if I corect any of the others they ar shore to leave me thinking that if they can get back to[o] that will do." Beanland wrote a letter to James Walker, yet another of Polk's brother-in-laws. He complained about being caught between the demands of Harris and Caldwell on the one hand, and the need to discipline the slaves on the other:

I do not like in the first plase I must please Calwell and Mr. Haris as it apeares and then if I donte please every negro on the place they rin away rite strate and then if I do not make a crop my imploier of corse will not like it and I would like to now how I can please them all and make a crop two.

In another letter to Polk, he described how other slaves were running away because of how Ben's not being returned allowed other slaves to flout his authority: "If ben is not brought back mister haris had beter take the rest of them until I get ben I now that they will run away untill I get ben." Beanland's ability to discipline his slaves was being surely undermined by Polk's in-laws siding with the slaves and listening to their negative testimony about him. Since he could not punish Ben after he ran away because of Harris's interference in particular, his power to punish one slave as an example to the rest to intimidate was being effectively nullified. In the end, Polk sustained his overseer, not his slaves or his in-laws, and had Ben returned. Soon afterwards, Beanland reported how all the slaves who had runaway were back and how "all apear[ed] satisfied." Nevertheless, this overseer plainly had a close brush with losing his job due to the power of slave witnesses to swing other whites--here, three of Polk's brother-in-laws--onto their side. Outside a Southern courtroom, the subordinate class's testimony was by no means without avail, especially when

masters had reasons to distrust their overseers.<sup>595</sup>

### Manipulating White Authority for the Slaves' Own Purposes

Slaves sometimes manipulated white authority by using it to get back at some other slave who had injured them somehow. Suddenly, the slave turns into an informant, in order to secure his own purposes, not so much to curry favor with the overseer or master. Freedman Mason of Mississippi described why he and another slave were whipped by patrollers while pursuing women on the next-door plantation without passes: "Me an' my cousin was projecting' eroun' doin' a little courtin' wid two gals on de jinin' plantation. Didn' have no pass. Boys over dar got awful jealous. Slip an' tell de overseer one night. He call de pattyrollers!" Similarly, another freedman described how, if a woman was offended by a man pursuing her from another plantation who she did not know, "an' she git mad an' call de overseer, yo' better duck down de fiel' right quick, caise you gwine git whipped." A somewhat different example of this phenomenon was by how one old slave woman ordered others to shoo away turkeys whose gobblings were making it difficult for Olmsted to get directions from her: "If some of you niggers don't shew them turkeys, I'll have you all whipped as soon as your mass John comes home." At this point, her command was performed.<sup>596</sup> She threatened to bring down white authority on other slaves, not for her own self-chosen objectives, but merely have something done to aid her in talking to Olmsted. This incident still shows how slaves could collectively use white authority to accomplish their own ends, by turning informant (or threatening to) for their masters.

### How Pleadings and Petitions Could Restrain Masters and Mistresses

The complaints and pleadings of slaves had the ability to reach the hearts or minds of their owners, even though they could theoretically totally ignore their petitions from their position of nearly absolute authority. Because the slaveholders often wished to have a positive relationship with their bondsmen, at least those they had close dealings with, such as domestic servants, they frequently were willing to change their decisions. Sometimes by referring to values in the masters' own religion or code of paternalism, the slaves could restrain them, which constitutes a classic case of the subordinate class manipulating the ideology of the dominant class to protect their own interests. For example, one mistress suddenly ended a long

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<sup>595</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 52-66. See also Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 195; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, pp. 276-77, 295; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 16-21, 357-58, 381-82.

<sup>596</sup>Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 152-53; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:71.

whipping after the slave said, "Old Miss, if I were you and you were me, I wouldn't beat you this way." Some slaves successfully persuaded their masters to buy them or sell them in order to keep their families together. One freedman recalled how one slave, when his wife was being moved away with the master, successfully pleaded to be sold to the same master his wife belonged so they would stay together thus: "'Sell me, Marster! Sell me!' he say over an' over. So ter stop his pleadin', Marster sold him an' las' I seen o' him he was wavin' his arms an' singin', goin' off behin' dat wagon!" While such cases were not normal, the slaves themselves, despite being the legally powerless personal chattels of their owners, still had the ability to encourage slaveholders to sell or buy them as it was deemed in their interests. Stamppp noted that a few slaves even had success at persuading their owners to free them in their wills. Barrow's slaves successfully persuaded him to extend the Christmas holiday from Friday, January 2, 1846 until the following Monday because, as he saw it, there was "not much to do."<sup>597</sup> Illustrating the truth behind the proposition to "Ask, and it shall be given to you," slaveowners condescended to grant some requests by their bondsmen, despite no legal compulsions were involved. Persistent pleading and petitioning could and did bring useful results to the de jure powerless at least upon occasion.

#### The General Problem of Slaves Running Away

Slaves running away constituted a serious form of resistance to the slaveholders' continued control over their work force. By this act a slave openly repudiated the master/slave relationship, at least in cases where he or she was trying to escape permanently. In cases in which the bondsman hanged around the general locality of home, running away lacked this clear meaning, but may have been simply a means to temporarily duck punishment or get an illicit vacation away from working. These cases were trying enough. But when the slave did get far, the hassle and expenses to masters and mistresses in catching their human chattels, punishing them, and getting them to work again could be enormous. In order to capture and return one slave named Jack who had run away as far as Arkansas from Tennessee, Polk faced a bill from the slave catcher of some \$126 by his overseer's calculations for his expenses alone, while in one letter he said it "cost verry near \$200." The slave catcher wanted \$140 for his expenses alone, but Dr. Caldwell objected, offering to pay \$100. These figures easily equal or exceed the annual rental for hiring a prime field hand--the aforementioned Ben (pp. 342-43) was temporarily rented to an ironworks for \$100/year. And these

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<sup>597</sup> Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 165; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 126, 173-74; Davis, "Changing Places," 657, 672-75; Stamppp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 95-96; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 381.

figures ignore the lost revenue coming from opportunity costs--the loss caused by the slave not working for his or her owners, over and above the expenses of capture. Runaways also presented a major danger, as occurred in Beanland's case temporarily, because if they were not caught and punished their example would encourage other slaves to imitate them. David Gavin, a small slaveholder in South Carolina complained in his diary in 1857 when Remus ran away: "This is the 2<sup>d</sup> or 3<sup>d</sup> time he has ranaway, and lost together nearly a years work, I cannot afford to keep him at this rate, he will spoil the rest of my people by his bad example." It is no wonder that Barrow lamented, as cited above (p. 239), that he would rather have a slave do anything than run away.<sup>598</sup>

Why did slaves run away? Sometimes, where reaching the North was a practical goal, such as in Douglass's case and a number of others living in the Border States, it was a calculated bid to gain freedom and permanently dissolve the bonds of bondage. Escaped slave Mrs. Isaac Riley, who had lived most of her life in Perry county, Missouri, which is along the border of Illinois, had experienced excellent treatment--she had a good master, and had never known or seen overseers, patrols, family separations, or the use of the paddle and lash in her area. But with her husband desiring freedom in Canada, and after a relative of her master told her she might be treated much worse if her master should die, she fled. "I used often to think that I would like to be as free as the white people were. I often told them, when they made me angry, that they had no more business with me, than I had with them."<sup>599</sup> In other cases, because of a threatened sale or because of a desire to be reunited with family members after they or the runaway(s) had been sold themselves, they left. Mary Grayson, once a slave in what was then Indian Territory, recalled her mother ran away and hid in a clay pit after being sold to a slave trader. It was late in the night before they found her again. John Little, nine months after marriage, was suddenly sold. After resting for two weeks at his new master's place, he ran away, and was thrown in prison--with another slave there "under the same circumstances . . . going to see his wife, as a man has a right to do." Trying to avoid punishment was another reason slaves fled from their masters. Here the masters faced a major dilemma: On the one hand, if they cracked down, and (say) whipped shirking slaves for their slackness, they could

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<sup>598</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 57-61; Gavin diary as cited in Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 114-15.

<sup>599</sup>Drew, Refugee, pp. 299-300. Unquestionably, the mild treatment characteristic of her area was due to the extreme closeness of the Illinois border across the Mississippi. Slaveholders in such areas were encouraged to treat their slaves well to avoid the expenses of recapturing them in the North.

run away or fight back. But, if they let some offense(s) slide, others could imitate the rules violator, and soon all their slaves could be defying them. Barrow repeatedly faced this problem, and sometimes slaves ran away to avoid punishment or in response after it was inflicted. After whipping eight or ten slaves for not picking enough cotton, he wrote the next day: "Dennis ran off yesterday--& after I had Whiped him." In another case, his slave Ginney Jerry was one of a group of eight or ten whipped and ducked for stealing some of his hogs, and "Mr. Ginney Jerry next morning Felt insulted at his treatment & put out, would give 'freely' \$100 to get a shot at him."<sup>600</sup> Harriett Robinson, once a slave in Texas, told a story about her step-father that illustrated a particularly nasty Catch-22 masters had when punishing runaway slaves and getting them in the fields again. After absconding for another reason, he returned, the master had him whipped 300 times--and then he ran off again!<sup>601</sup> This slaveowner surely knew if he did not punish this slave, others might imitate his example, but when he did so, the slave ran away in retaliation once again, which put him that much further behind in putting this man back to work. Because of the threat of it backfiring, the moment a master punished a slave was dangerous, because the chances for him resisting him was at its highest came when the lash was applied or in its immediate wake--such as by running away or fighting. So slaves ran away to seek freedom, pure and simple, to rejoin relatives, or as a way to retaliate against or evade punishment.

#### Temporary and Local Flight

Slaves had several different possible objectives when fleeing their owners. Most commonly, they fled only temporarily and stayed in their local area, remaining around friends and relatives who might secretly feed or otherwise help them when the master or mistress was not in sight. Because the master controlled the slave's food supply, the runaway might find foraging and sleeping in the woods uncomfortable or impossible. When he briefly fled Covey's farm once, Douglass did not go far, because the master controlled his food supply: "I spent the day mostly in the woods, having the alternative before me,--to go home and whipped to death, or stay in the woods and be starved to death." James H. Hammond's Silver Bluff plantation in South Carolina had fifty-three slaves escape between 1831 and 1853, but none permanently gained their freedom. Two-thirds were caught,

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<sup>600</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 130; Drew, Refugee, pp. 206-7; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 135, 359; see also p. 163; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:200; and Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 154 for more on how inflicting punishment could backfire against slaveholders.

<sup>601</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 180.



while one-third came in on their own, after a temporary absence that averaged forty-nine days. The manager of a very large plantation in the Deep South told Olmsted that the runaways hid in the swamp, and came into the cabins at night to get food. "They seldom remain away more than a fortnight, and when they come in they are whipped." Sometimes, even when a slave had been gone a long time, they still had not gone far. Barrow's slave Ginney Jerry had run away, and was caught six months and three days after absconding--right in Barrow's neighborhood. Before capture, John Little spent two years running in the woods near his old master's place where his mother lived, after leaving his new master's place about ten miles away. Sometimes slaves fled to other local slaveholders for temporary sanctuary against an enraged master or overseer threatening punishment for some reason. The former might then intercede for the slave, if they believed the slaves in question, and ask for lighter or no punishment to be inflicted. Northrup did this once, by fleeing to his old kind master, William Ford, after fighting with his present cruel master, John Tibault, who sought to kill him with a hatchet and an axe. Ford even got the latter to sell Northrup, after criticizing Tibault for his shameful treatment of him in threatening slaves with such weapons, saying if this kind of treatment became common other slaves would be made discontent and start running away.<sup>602</sup> The desires to stay close to family and friends who could still help them, and be in a familiar area where they knew their surroundings, were other good reasons why many slaves did not go far when they ran away.

#### "Negotiating" a Return

Local runaways demonstrated they had some bargaining power with their owners. Because of the expense and time it might take to capture slaves forcibly and bring them in, masters did have some self-interest in being able to get them to return on their own. Freedman Cato of Alabama remembered that if a runaway came in on his own, he was punished considerably less than if his owner ran him down with the dogs in a search party. Another master sent out a runaway's brother to threaten him with the dogs if he did not come in, because he knew exactly where the runaway was in an attempt conceal his scent. Sure enough, he came in--but the dogs were still unleashed against him anyway and tore him up badly, after being told he did not have to move with his master if he beat them to a big black-gum tree. This was a bad deal, to say the least! Another master, after fighting with a slave named Isaac Williams who then ran away, offered him a deal:

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<sup>602</sup>Stampp, Peculiar Institution, p. 115; Douglass, Narrative, p. 80; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, p. 288; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:200; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 288; Drew, Refugee, pp. 204-5; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, pp. 97-101, 106-11; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 655-56.

If he came in, he would not whip him. He lived up to this deal--but then would whip his wife, telling her to make "Isaac a good boy"! Sometimes they would agree to return in exchange for a reduced amount of punishment, or none at all, using other slaves as their intermediaries. The master who owned Williams later on used him to relay a message through a runaway's sister to tell him he would not whip him if he came in on his own. But after the slave came in, he broke his promise, and whipped him anyway. One Alabama master faithfully followed a similar deal, and after conveying a message through other slaves, his runaways returned after being told they would not be whipped if they came back on their own. After spending a summer in the woods, John Holmes returned, because his master told all the neighbors that he would not be whipped if he came in. And what was his owner's motive for displaying leniency?: "I was a great hand to work and made a great deal of money for our folks." In some cases, the initiative came from the other side, and one slave might negotiate with the master for the runaway's return. This strategy was particularly risky since the collaborator or even the whole slave force might be punished for such an act.<sup>603</sup> Negotiations between the legally almost all-powerful master and his human chattels after running away show the de facto realities of slave management were very different from the theory found in the slave codes or pro-slavery polemics. Even an individual slave, upon occasion, had some bargaining power with his master, depending on the latter's disposition and willingness to pursue him at all costs.

#### How Runaways Could Resist Capture

Even when a slave was being pursued by a party of white men and their dogs, slaves still had ways to avoid or resist capture. William Street, once a slave in Tennessee, was pursued by two white men and their three bloodhounds. He, being well armed with a pistol, knife, and big stick, shot one of the dogs dead. His owner decided to hand him over to the slave catcher because he had killed a bloodhound who he would not sell for \$500, commenting: "He was worth more than him, d--n him." Still more spectacular was one slave in Louisiana who, upon capture and being placed in a boat, grabbed and attacked one of his two captors with a hatchet, seriously wounding him, then threw them both overboard. Later, these same two slave catchers, after getting some dogs, cornered him near the edge of the Mississippi river on a large raft. Armed with a pistol and club, he knocked the dogs into the water, threatened death to his pursuers, and had to be shot at three times before he went down. Defiantly choosing to drown rather than be captured, he sank into the water

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<sup>603</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 85, 95; Drew, Refugee, pp. 56-58, 140, 164; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 18; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 654.

still waving his club. This "bondsmen" certainly demonstrated he would rather be dead than enslaved! Slaves also presented serious potential problems while on the run, because they could attack whites or their property. In Mississippi, Olmsted's roommate awoke him by trying to barricade his room, explaining, "You don't know . . . there may be runaways around," before pulling out two loaded pistols to check their caps! Planter Barrow himself lost a cow and nearly a hog to runaways owned by one of his relatives. Slaves also could seek aid from other slaves or free blacks who would hide them in their homes. This was always risky, because informers lurked among the black population, always willing to sell out a fellow black for the white man's money and esteem. In a case that demonstrates the adage that truth can be stranger than fiction, Harriet Jacobs was hidden for seven years in a crawl space above the shed added to her mother's house in order to evade her master's sexual advances. Another slavewoman, after hitting her mistress and being threatened with the stocks and the lash, was able to live in a nearby cave secretly for seven years until the time freedom came. Her husband fixed up the cave to have a stove, beds, tables, and a ceiling of wood. She even gave birth to three children, who then lived there as well. Her husband routinely brought food to her. She and her children were effectively maroons, staying in the slave states while beyond the control of their owners. Some escaped slaves were less lucky, and were turned in by other blacks. John Little's hiding location was betrayed by a free born black man for a mere ten dollars offered by some poor whites, after his master offered a reward of fifty dollars for his capture, dead or alive. Barrow once had his slave Dennis pretend to be a runaway in order to capture one owned by another planter. For such reasons, runaways were hesitant to trust anyone else they encountered, whites above all, but blacks as well. Even after capture, runaways could still cause problems for their owners. Barrow confessed that he placed too much reliance on one captured runaway to tell where other runaways were: "Caught one woman this morning & very foolish endeavored to make her direct us to the Camp & fooled the day off to no purpose, Brought her to my house tried the cold water on her Ladyship [i.e., ducked her]."<sup>604</sup> The difficulties that slaveholders faced in recapturing local runaways show that although they may not have gained permanent freedom in most cases except perhaps as maroons, they still were a major headache for them and other whites. These acts of resistance may have been often individual and rather unthinking, and not organized and collective, but still they kept the white regime busy hunting for escapees and taming those they captured, demonstrating to them

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<sup>604</sup>Drew, Refugee, pp. 288-89; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:161-62 (see also 2:21-22); Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 215, 217, 227, 341; Brent, Incidents, pp. 117, 151, 210; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 179-80; Drew, Refugee, p. 145.

that many slaves were hardly content in bondage. Local runaways were significant because they were much more numerous than those who permanently escaped to the North or (in some cases) Mexico, and presented the white regime with notable economic losses and labor discipline problems, and encouraged them to restrain the harshness of their treatment of their bondsmen in order to discourage further flights.<sup>605</sup>

#### Maroons: Settlements of Escaped Slaves

Some American slaves fled to uninhabited areas distant from where white settlers were, and set up their own settlements to farm the land, although this was never as common an option for slaves in the United States as in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America. Maroon slave settlements in the South never grew to the size and strength of some of those elsewhere in the Americas, but they could still pose significant problems for masters trying to hang onto their human property. They provided runaways a place of refuge, such as where Polk's slave Jack fled to in Arkansas, where no law officer could easily take any of them back without a large armed force backing him up. Upon occasion, they also launched raids against plantations and farms nearby and attempted to free still more slaves, sometimes killing the masters in the process. From 1705 to 1769 Virginia legalized the killing of any "outlying slaves" without getting the colony's legal permission first, and explicitly authorized their castration as well. North Carolina had a similar process of outlawing particularly destructive runaways which encouraged slave catchers to kill them, especially when their owners offered rewards that paid more for them dead than alive because the colony would reimburse their losses.<sup>606</sup> During the Seminole War maroons played their largest role in the history of American slavery. While exaggerating, Major General Thomas Sidney Jesup, the leader of American troops during the most critical stage of the Seminole War, was still onto an essential truth when he said in late 1836: "This . . . is a negro, not an Indian war." Although the Seminole War was nominally a struggle between Indians and whites, it was more a conflict between the slaves the Indians had bought and runaways who fought along side the Indians against the United States Army. During this war at times possibly 250 to 400 or 500 blacks fought for the Indian cause in some actions, making this one of America's most notable instances of organized slave resistance against the white regime. Its main cause, since the Seminoles

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<sup>605</sup>Kolchin, Unfree Labor, p. 293.

<sup>606</sup>Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 79; William S. Willis, "Divide and Rule: Red, White, and Black in the Southeast," Journal of Negro History 48 (July 1963):163-65; Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role," 91; Palmer, "Servant into Slave," 367; Watson, "Impulse Toward Independence," 323.

did not live in the main path for white settlers heading west, was the white slaveholders' opposition to their slaves running away to live among the Seminole. These escapees made those remaining behind especially discontent because they lived a more relaxed lifestyle than those in plantation agriculture. Most of the blacks living among the Indians were slaves in name only even when purchased by them, and most lived prosperously in their own villages, whom they only burdened by demanding some tribute from them at harvest and butchering times. In 1841, as the war was winding down, the War Department effectively decided to allow many of the blacks to go west with the Seminoles despite many were the legally claimable property of white Americans. Justifying this policy, Lieutenant Colonel W.J. Worth said that "if . . . the swamps of Florida become . . . the resort of runaways, their intelligence, so superior to the Indian, might impose upon the general government a contest quadruplicate in time and treasure than now being waged." Ending this war and clearing out Florida presently of all blacks not controlled by whites and most of the Seminoles themselves in order to prevent future runaways was deemed a good trade-off in exchange for allowing most of those blacks already among the Seminole to go free. Maroon settlements were vulnerable to the advancing frontier and determined armed white parties clearing them out. The vast Dismal Swamp in Virginia and North Carolina largely ceased to be a refuge for permanent runaways by the time Olmsted wrote in the 1850s.<sup>607</sup> So while maroon runaway slaves played a part in the overall picture of resistance against the slaveholding elite, they caused far fewer problems in the United States than in Brazil and other Latin American and Caribbean areas, where governments sometimes waged full-scale wars with large maroon settlements, and even negotiated treaties that recognized their autonomy.<sup>608</sup>

#### The Most Successful Runaways

The most successful, as well as the most unlikely, runaways were those who secured permanent freedom in Canada, Mexico, or the North, assuming they were not recaptured in the latter and hauled back into bondage.<sup>609</sup> Flight to free territory was

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<sup>607</sup>Kenneth Wiggins Porter, "Negroes and the Seminole War, 1835-1842," Journal of Southern History 30 (Nov. 1964):427-50; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:155. The story had been different earlier: see Watson, "Impulse Toward Independence," 322.

<sup>608</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 590-91. Palmares, a huge maroon colony, had upwards of 20,000 blacks, and waged wars with the Dutch and Portuguese for over a half century.

<sup>609</sup>Mexico was the favored destination of Texan slaves seeking permanent freedom. Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:372; 2:7-8, 20,

generally only a practical option for slaves living in the Border States, or those so light complexioned they could pass for being white, and so could flee greater distances without suspicion or detection.<sup>610</sup> The exact numbers of those successfully escaping permanently are humanly unknowable, as quantifying any illegal and necessarily secret activity is, but some basic parameters and estimates are available. A lower limit on the number arriving in Canada is given by the estimate of 30,000 blacks who were living in Upper Canada made by the First Report of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada in 1852. While most of the adult blacks included in this estimate were likely successful fugitives, not many of the children counted could have been, because they mainly were single men between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five who normally fled by themselves or sometimes with one other slave.<sup>611</sup> Another estimate of those permanently escaping is about a thousand a year in the 1850s, with the number falling from 1,011 in 1850 to 803 in 1860 according to census reports. Judge Lumpkin of the State Supreme Court of Georgia claimed in 1855 60,000 slaves totaled up all those lost to the North. Mississippi Governor Quitman once declared 100,000 slaves had fled the South during the years 1810 to 1850. This round number, doubtlessly declared rhetorically, is much higher than the census

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91-92, 153.

<sup>610</sup>Barrow had one slave, "nearly white" who ran away from him and another planter in 1835 who successfully reached Canada all the way from Louisiana. In 1841 he wrote, and asked for the funds to return to slavery in Louisiana. This certainly seems a trick, because of the positive portrayal of conditions in Canada found in Drew, not mentioning how most slaves definitely preferred freedom over bondage when given an opportunity for it. Davis, Plantation Life, p. 231; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 92-94.

<sup>611</sup>Drew, Refugee, p. v; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, pp. 288-90. Kolchin cites quantitative studies of classified ads about runaway slaves. One study found 76.6 percent of the fugitives found in the classified ads of the South Carolina Gazette were male, and 88.3 percent of those listed in the Virginia Gazette during a sixty-seven year period in the eighteenth century. Daniel Meader, using eighteenth-century South Carolina newspapers, found 2,001 runaways listed in 1,806 notices, averaging out to 1.11 fugitive per escape. Michael John's study of group flights based on Charleston newspapers between 1799 and 1830 found 70 percent of them consisted of two people only. This evidence undermines Drew's statement that "many of the children" included in this population of 30,000 could have been refugees from slavery, especially when the logistics of flight favored solitary strong unburdened individual adults who could more easily hide, evade, and escape from pursuers.

data of Northern blacks who said they were born in the South. Nevertheless, in his study on the Underground Railroad, William Siebert believes this figure is reasonably accurate, maintaining that 40,000 slaves escaped through Ohio alone. However, these figures constitute only a small proportion of the slaves who lived and died in bondage in the antebellum South over the decades before 1861. In 1860, the South had almost four million slaves, and about a quarter million free blacks.<sup>612</sup> When considering the low average life expectancies and the turnover of generations even in the fifty years before the Civil War, only a very small percentage of those born in bondage escaped it by illegal means. For most masters, especially those in the Deep South, successful runaways (and the Underground Railroad's aid to them) were largely irritants and theoretical hazards as opposed to serious practical threats, outside of cases where during war armies hostile to their interests roamed nearby.

As discussed above (p. 174), family connections always served as a major restraint on escape attempts, as one owner of two plantations in Mississippi commented, although he knew this was hardly fail-safe:

Only way [to restrain runaways] is, to have young ones there [Texas] and keep their mothers here [Mississippi], eh? Negroes have such attachments, you know. Don't you think that would fix 'em, eh? No? No, I suppose not. If they got mad at anything, they'd forget their mothers, eh?

Despite these ties, many bondsmen still willingly ran away because the desire for freedom beat so strongly in their hearts, although those who left wives, husbands, or children behind suffered mixed feelings on their choice. These refugees from slavery also indirectly aided those who remained behind, by helping restrain the ill conduct and harsh treatment of calculating masters and mistresses in the Border States because the chances of successful escapes from these areas were much higher than from the Deep South. Making the bondsmen more content in their chains generally reduced their willingness to flee, since family separations caused by sales and punishment frequently provoked runaway attempts. Hence, the effects of their decisions, even if normally made on their own, had positive collective effects upon their fellow black brothers and sisters left behind in chains.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>612</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 648, 652; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, p. 287; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 194; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 30-31.

<sup>613</sup>Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:153; Kolchin draws a sharp contrast between the individualistic choices of runaway slaves

### "Strikes" Conducted by Groups of Slaves Running Away

One underrated but significant type of collective protest by slaves were virtual "strikes," in which they withdrew their labor from their owners in an organized manner by running away temporarily in large groups. While uncommon, these protests occurred enough in some areas to present problems for slaveholders who imposed a particularly harsh overseer over them or demanded too much work from them. One Florida overseer, after trying "pushing them up a Little" found his work force retaliated by suddenly deserting him. A small Louisiana planter had a similar experience, with all but two of his slaves disappearing in protest against how much work he imposed. John Holmes described how, when the overseer and mistress's son were going to whip everyone for not helping the former when he fought with a slave woman, all the young able men besides one fled into the woods after a domestic servant tipped off those in the quarters of their white family's plans. "They sent off the overseer to get us home." While the overseer did come back to stick out the year, he chose not to whip any of the men because they might run away. More generally, as described above (p. 261-62) about the infrapolitics of quota setting in task system areas, if the master increased the imposed daily work excessively he risked "a general stampede to the 'swamp.'" One respected Deep South overseer told Olmsted when he first arrived, many of the slaves ran away often, but after getting used to his ways said they liked him better than all the prior ones. Still, he occasionally had problems with groups running away, which he dealt with thus: "If many of them went off, or if they stayed out long, he would make the rest of the force work Sundays, or deprive them of some of their usual privileges until the runaways returned. The negroes on the plantation could always bring them in if they chose to do so" because if they stopped feeding them, they had to come in. Ex-slave Annie Coley recalled a much more confrontational "strike" which yielded success also. After one cruel overseer beat a woman and made her miscarry late in her pregnancy in the field, all the slave women attacked him and threatened to burn him on a brush pile. After their men told them to let him go, the master said he was going to whip all the women for their act. But he soon changed his mind: "All de womens hid in the woods dat evenin' [to avoid the whipping], en Boss never say no more about it. He sent the over seer away en never did hev no more overseers." One Georgia overseer over a small plantation, after whipping some of its slaves, complained that six of them ran off--"every man but Jack." He suspected they were hiding out in the woods until they could meet their owner or his uncle, which illustrates once again the principle that the slaves sought redress of their grievances by playing

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with the collective flight of families and villages among Russian serfs. Unfree Labor, pp. 283-85, 288-90.



upon the divisions among the whites who ruled them.<sup>614</sup> These "strikes" often seemed to actually wrest some concessions from the slaveholders or overseers affected, or at least they avoided inspiring harsh crack-downs. It amounts to a type of temporary and local running away done en masse, since the slaves disappeared into the swamps or woods, and did not hang around in the quarters or some other place where they could be easily located and whipped for their recalcitrance. Perhaps due to this lack of direct confrontation, in contrast to the picket lines of modern unions when on strike, and because it often took advantage of the overseer/slaveholder fault line, masters at least sometimes granted concessions to their "striking" bondsmen, thinking that the protests by such a large group at once proved they had legitimate complaints.

#### Small Scale Open Confrontations and Violence

Small scale show-downs between slaves and masters and their overseers in which one or more slaves fought their owners and supervisors, or attempted to hit or kill them, were another form of resistance. These struggles and crimes do not constitute organized resistance, in the sense of a slave rebellion, but still created worries and fears among the white regime's members, because their own lives could suddenly and unexpectedly be at risk when (say) seeking apply the lash to some slave who refused to be whipped. Similar to what provoked many runaways, the flash point of resistance often was a slave refusing to be punished by his owner, and latter insisting on doing it anyway in order to maintain his authority and prove he would enforce discipline on other slaves as well. The classic incident here, but he was hardly alone, was Frederick Douglass's struggle with Edward Covey, to whom his master had rented him out for breaking. Covey tried to whip him for having run away, but after losing to Douglass, he never tried to whip him again. Afterwards, so long as he remained a slave, "I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me." One master, insistent on applying the lash to a slave who refused to be whipped, found one tactic to be useful, as escaped slave Mrs. James Seward from Maryland described: "My master could not manage to whip my sister when she was strong. He waited until she was confined, and the second week after her confinement he said, 'Now I can handle you, now that you are weak.'" This attempt to whip still backfired, because she ran away, and got sick after running through water.

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<sup>614</sup>Stampf, Peculiar Institution, p. 113; Drew, Refugee, pp. 167-68; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:249, 2:207-8; The testimony of Annie Coley, cited by Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?," Journal of Southern History 47 (Nov. 1981):514; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 18-19.

Francis Henderson, who worked on a plantation in Washington, D.C., fought his master and his son when they tried to whip him. After throwing the latter against the side of the barn, he ran into the woods. "From this time I was not punished. I think my master became afraid of me; when he punished the children, I would go and stand by, and look at him,--he was afraid, and would stop." John Holmes was an especially recalcitrant slave, and always refused to be whipped, causing showdowns and fights, getting shot one time and nearly shot another, whenever his owners or overseers sought to punish him. On his plantation, there were two other men and one woman who refused to be whipped besides him. The overseer got into a vicious fight with the slavewoman, who after hitting her with a stick for not working fast enough, struck back with a rake, and exchanged blows and wrestled on the ground. With the aid of the mistress's son and son-in-law, they whipped her terribly, but it backfired: "She behaved worse afterwards." One morning, Holmes was late getting into the field. After his overseer said, "I'll make all the hands catch you, and I'll whip you," he replied: "There ain't a man the sun shines upon, that shall whip me." By his account, his boast was achieved. One slave struck the man who had hired him from his master, and after the stakes for whipping him spread-eagle were pounded into the ground, his brother said to him, "Charles, before I'd be whipped for that Frenchman, I'd cut my throat." He did this, beat off five men who followed him into the river, and after coming out of the water, was not whipped--and his throat healed in a few weeks.<sup>615</sup> Such spectacular incidents when whippings were opposed were hardly usual, as were slaves who refused to be whipped, but they presented enough danger that overseers and masters in some areas were taken to carrying loaded pistols and/or knives when confrontation did come. Because of the bad example these slaves set for others from the masters' viewpoint in preserving labor discipline, their defiance constituted a challenge to the maintenance of order, which either required employing extreme measures whenever they would be confronted, as with the slavewoman Holmes knew, or else they would turn a blind eye to their refusals to be whipped, calculating, like Covey, further showdowns were not worth the risks involved.

The lives of masters, mistresses, and overseers could be at risk in confrontations with slaves. Some of the ways slaves disposed of overseers permanently included being whacked in the head with a hoe, getting hit by the stick and then having his hands and feet chopped off with an ax, and being whipped and thrown off a cliff. In each of these cases, it was because the overseer had whipped a slave before some kind of retaliation ensued.

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<sup>615</sup>Douglass, Narrative, p. 83; Drew, Refugee, pp. 42, 158-59, 163-70, 255-56.

Chesnut described how her cousin, one old mistress named Betsey Witherspoon, was murdered by her house slaves. Why? Because they had acted so insolently to their owner because she did not try disciplining them at all seriously, her son said he would whip them. In order to prevent the threatened punishment, they murdered her in bed, and stole some linen, a nightgown, and gold coins. In another case Chesnut described, yet another mistress was murdered by her slaves, then hanged to look like she had committed suicide. Another slave murdered her mistress and her two young children--for which she was soon lynched. Slaves could be much more subtle about how they murdered their masters. House slaves who prepared the white family's food preferred poisoning. In North Carolina between 1755 and 1770, the colony had fifty-nine claims for slaves being executed. Nearly 25 percent of these were for murder or attempted murder of whites. As a result, while they did not threaten the regime's overall stability, these crimes struck fear in masters and (evidently) especially mistresses. Chesnut once wrote:

Hitherto I have never thought of being afraid of Negroes. I had never injured any of them; why should they want to hurt me? . . . Somehow today I feel that the ground is cut away from under my feet. Why should they treat me any better than they had done Cousin Betsey Witherspoon?

Kemble wrote she knew that Southern white men often denied living under a continual sense of danger, but "every Southern [white] woman to whom I have spoken on the subject has admitted to me that they live in terror of their slaves." For these reasons the domestic servants were not be allowed to sleep in the same house as their master generally--a precaution Mrs. Witherspoon certainly was not observing. Yet, Chesnut also observed that "nobody is afraid of their own Negroes," and she said she would feel perfectly safe on the plantation "even if there were no white person in twenty miles."<sup>616</sup>

#### "Nats" or "Sambos"?--Selective Perception by the Master Class

Masters and mistresses possessed a rather contradictory mind-set about their own slaves. Their selective perception caused self-deception. They imputed towards and/or focused upon different characteristics in the slaves depending upon on their mood and their slaves' immediate acts. When the slaves had on their masks, when playing "Sambo the fool" to trick their owners, or sullenly went about their work after having challenged white

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<sup>616</sup>Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 175-76; Chesnut, Diary from Dixie, pp. 139-40, 145-48, 151-52; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:13; Watson, "Impulse Toward Independence," 320; Kemble, Journal, pp. 295, 313-14.

authority and losing, masters could be confident about their relationships with their human property. But when the occasional murder, conspiracy panic, or (much more rarely) actual revolt transpired, and the black man had demonstrated his danger to the whites, then he became a "Nat" instead--a slave who had been well-treated like those in Chesnut's family, but who suddenly turned and murdered his master in bed in cold blood, with another slave finishing the grisly job. Blassingame interprets the Southern slaveholders' mentality thus: "The more fear whites had of Nat, the more firmly they tried to believe in Sambo in order to escape paranoia." This psychological portrait is likely overdrawn, because enough slaveholders and overseers had dealt with enough ordinarily recalcitrant slaves "shuffling" while in the fields, who sought and employed almost every possible trick in the book to evade work, let alone actual open rebelliousness upon occasion (or had heard about such). As a result, the pure "Sambo" stereotype was never really believed in by most whites in their hidden transcript, even as it was featured strongly in pro-slavery propaganda of the public transcript. Although small scale frontal assaults on white slaveholders and overseers were not common, and were not a fundamental threat to the regime because of their generally individualistic, even anarchic nature, they occurred enough to keep most of them on their toes with procedures reminiscent of a police state, at least in areas where slaves heavily outnumbered the whites. Slaveholders knew punishment could suddenly backfire possibly, over and above the rather rare cases in which some of them were killed deliberately after conscious calculation by their bondsmen.<sup>617</sup>

#### The Rarity of Slave Revolts in the United States Compared to Elsewhere

Slave revolts--organized insurrection against the white regime by slaves en masse--in the Southern United States in the period 1750-1865 were very rare, for all the attention they received by contemporaries and historians since. During this time, only in two cases did groups of slaves actually began to use violent force against their owners: one near New Orleans in 1811 and Turner's rebellion in 1831. The New Orleans revolt in St. John the Baptist and St. Charles parishes featured somewhere between three hundred and five hundred slaves armed with plenty of pikes, axes, and hoes, but few firearms. They organized themselves in companies commanded by officers as they marched on New Orleans, and succeeded in burning a few plantations and killing two whites. Later they were dispersed by regular troops and militia under Wade Hampton, with sixty-six slaves being

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<sup>617</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, p. 233; For more on slaves killing or attacking their owners and their supervisors, see: Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 361-63; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 152; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 130-32.

killed in open battle, and afterwards the executions of sixteen leaders followed. Although much more obscure than Turner's revolt, it holds pride of place as America's largest slave revolt. Turner's band of rebels never numbered more than sixty or seventy, but they managed to kill far more whites before being quelled, as described above (p. 272). Even these revolts were minor affairs compared to the size and frequency of those in the history of Latin American and Caribbean slavery. For example, in what is now Guyana, there were at least eighteen revolts over and above maroon wars and abortive uprisings in the period 1731 until the abolition of slavery. In 1823, one of these revolts involved between 10,000 and 20,000 slaves on 50 plantations. Another in the part then called Berbice in 1763 involved about 2000 bondsmen, who succeeded in killing about 200 of the colony's 350 whites. In Jamaica, the average revolt featured about 400 participants, with one in 1760 having 1000. During the decade 1730-40, a major revolt occurred almost every year. Bahia in Brazil during the period 1807-1835 featured at least six major revolts. For a period of three years Manoel Francisco dos Anjos Ferreira held the entire province of Maranhao with the aid of his followers in the Balaiada in Brazil. By comparison, Turner's rebellion was a mere passing vapor. And all these ultimate failures overlook the greatest and most successful revolt of all, that of Saint-Domingue beginning in 1791.<sup>618</sup> By comparison, the history of slavery in the United States singularly lacks such drama--befitting the emphasis on daily infrapolitics when discussing slave resistance above.

#### The Factors Militating Against Slave Revolts in the United States

The reasons for Southern slaves' relative quiescence to their Caribbean and Latin American brothers and sisters resulted from a multitude of factors, all of which favored revolt in the latter areas compared to the United States. The difference in the number of revolts was not due to some inherent docility of North American slaves, but because just about objective factor nameable weighing the balance of forces between the white regime and the slaves was tilted towards more towards former in the United States compared to Latin American and Caribbean conditions. The slave population outside of the United States was much more likely to heavily outnumber the whites and be proportionately more African than native-born (creole), especially as the nineteenth century drew along and the legal foreign slave trade closed in 1808, and to have a skewed sex ratio in which men outnumbered women, especially on the large plantations. Even as early as the American Revolution, only one-fifth of American slaves were African-born, while as late as 1800, one-fourth of the people in Martinique, Barbados, and

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<sup>618</sup>Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 588-93; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 214-21; Elkins, Slavery, pp. 136-37.

Jamaica were Africans who had arrived in the preceding decade. Males made up 60 percent to 70 percent of the slaves in Latin America. In Jamaica, blacks outnumbered whites ten to one, and the slave to white ratio was eleven to one in Haiti, twenty to one in Surinam, and seven to one in the West Indies generally, while in the South a 0.5 ratio prevailed regionally. The African-born, having experienced their own enslavement and loss of freedom, and having a stronger ethos of collective organization, were naturally more restless than the creoles born in America, who tended to protest in an individualistic manner more and were habituated to the rigors of bondage from birth. The African slaves also had a non-Christian religious tradition, as developed into Vodun in the Caribbean, which formed ideological foundations for revolt, and due to language and other cultural differences, less influenced by the master class' attempts at ideological hegemony. Their continual importation infused African cultural practices among both earlier arrivals and the creoles themselves. Assimilation was a plausible objective for Southern whites when dealing with slaves, at least after the closing of the foreign slave trade. This objective was rather absurd where the whites were a small elite among masses of blacks and mulattos. In such places as Jamaica, Haiti, and Guyana, they had to segregate themselves from the blacks to preserve their cultural identity. Due to having a nearly even sex ratio, the men among American slaves experienced much more of the intrinsically taming and settling aspects of marriage and family life, unlike the restless "bachelor herds" of large Caribbean and Latin American plantations, where many of the men could never hope to marry. The slaves in the United States were often held in relatively small units, three-quarters in groups of fifty or less, and almost half were owned in groups of twenty or less. There were 2.1 slaves per white member of a slaveholding family, with 72 percent holding less than ten and nearly 50 percent of slaveowners less than five bondsmen. By contrast, a collective consciousness flourished much more among those on the much larger groups customarily held in Latin America and the Caribbean, which averaged one hundred to two hundred, where the master's and mistress' personal presence and influence was much less likely to be felt face-to-face by the ordinary field hand. As in capitalist industry, a real paternalism is much more likely to flourish in smaller units of production than in larger ones, where the owner really comes to know his workers--or slaves--as the case may be. The master also was less likely to be physically present as well--absenteeism flourished in much of Latin American and Caribbean slavery, where one estimate had 90 percent of the owners of Jamaican slaves were absentees. But in the United States, resident masters were an important restraining force on the discretion granted to overseers in punishing the

slaves under their authority.<sup>619</sup>

Other factors militated against the slaves rebelling in an organized fashion. The white regime in the United States was far more unified and militarily efficient than that of the ruling classes in many Latin American colonies such as Brazil and Saint Domingue, and could count upon the automatic support of a fierce, well-armed poor white majority wherever the slaves grew dangerous. The Caribbean elites, in particular, faced a much greater likelihood of invasion from without as well. Nothing like the maroon colony of Palmares developed within the confines of the United States, nor were the whites reduced to making treaties with such entities, nor did any rebels ever hold out long against the military power the whites commanded. By contrast, in Cuba, it took two months to push out seven hundred slaves out of a mountain stronghold, and in colonial Mexico, their army once took months to reach where slaves had revolted--and still failed to defeat them. While undeniably inferior to the North's or England's, the South's development of a superior transportation and communications network, such as through railroads, steamboats, and the telegraph, gave the white regime advantages over its slaves no other slaveholding elite had possessed by the eve of the Civil War, making large maroon colonies and sustained revolts practically impossible. Southern slaves, especially those outside task system areas, had relatively little experience in raising their own food and selling it to others, while elsewhere in the Americas, since the slaveholders made the slaves grow their own food, there were much greater opportunities for black entrepreneurship and initiative taking. These commercial activities broadened the mind, helpful when planning revolts and in encouraging them to begin with, since more "practical freedom" existed outside the master's and overseer's daily supervision and control, giving them a taste for more. Because free whites were more numerous than the slaves in the South, the slaves could be easily excluded from bearing arms in wartime to repel foreign invaders and from most consequential commercial activities. But in Jamaica and Saint-Domingue, the mulattos and slaves actually controlled much of the commerce, while the continual warfare in Latin America and the Caribbean caused slaveholders to arm their slaves for military purposes, and sometimes grant them freedom in return for doing so. In America, keeping the slaves totally economically dependent by providing them most or all their food and prohibiting them selling or growing anything themselves was a much more practical objective, and one many masters pursued to one degree or another outside task system areas. American slaves did not gain any of

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<sup>619</sup>Kolchin, Unfree Labor, pp. 51, 53, 57, 234-35, 237; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 590-91; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 214-15; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, pp. 21, 23; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 30-31.

the military experience that could be employed in revolts. Positive incentives also did play a role in discouraging revolt, since the material conditions of Southern slaves, such as in food provided and hours worked, was certainly better than those which prevailed in most other places in the Americas. Better treatment was one of the reasons (besides having fewer deaths due to tropical disease) why the slave labor force in the United States was the only one which experienced natural increase through births exceeding deaths. While Brazil received about 37 percent and North America about a mere 6 percent of all slave imports to the New World during the period 1500-1825, both wound up with a very similar number of blacks in 1825. Finally, the slaves were more stratified by economic function and status due to the greater division of labor on the large plantations in the Caribbean and Latin America, and because there was much less of a free white artisanal class to turn to perform certain trades and functions. This occupational hierarchy encouraged more development of capable leadership compared to the United States above the masses of the field hands and domestic servants that made up most slaves throughout the Americas. Thus, each one of the factors concerning the likelihood of slave revolt listed above which influenced the relative balance of forces favored the continued control of the white regime in America and prevented organized rebellion and/or encouraged passivity among the bondsmen compared to the rest of the New World.<sup>620</sup>

#### Many Slaves Knew How Much the Deck Was Stacked Against Successful Revolt

American slaves did not develop any kind of revolutionary ethos due to the paucity of actual armed insurrections among them, and the ease with which the white elite was able to crush the very few that did occur, something which Aptheker maintained but fellow Marxist Genovese has denied.<sup>621</sup> For those literate slaves who rose above the masses of field hands, perhaps as preachers, drivers, artisans, or the domestic servants of large planters, who could analyze their society more intellectually,

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<sup>620</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 214-15; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 214-15; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, pp. 26, 28, 242; Elkins, Slavery, pp. 136-37; Kolchin, Slavery, pp. 236, 253-54, 343-52, 363-65.

<sup>621</sup>Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, Columbia University Studies in the Social Sciences, no. 501 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 587-88, 596-97. Tulloch noted that while Aptheker wrote in terms of 250 slave revolts in the South, "most of them, it turned out, document[ed] White fears and rumours rather than actual physical outbreaks of rebellion." "But the Cat Himself Knows," 57-58.



they easily saw how strong and powerful the white regime was and how the balance of forces were tilted overwhelmingly against successful insurrection. Frontal attacks en masse were simply hopeless, especially as the slaveholding elite readily employed savage repression against those who did participate in the few revolts that did occur, such as near New Orleans and under Turner, or those that nearly did, like Prosser's and (evidently) Vesey's. Slaveholders sometimes tolerated the occasional individual slave who refused to be whipped, but normally otherwise did his or her work. Entertaining violence by slaves in organized groups was quite another matter, and was brutally crushed, as the violent nature of the white regime as compared to England's rural elite was shown above (pp. 271-74). Furthermore, those seriously planning revolts faced the problem of informers among their own ranks, which destroyed both Prosser's and Vesey's conspiracies, resulting in the costs of repression without any white blood being drawn or property destroyed. Olmsted noted casually, while describing Prosser's conspiracy: "Having been betrayed by a traitor, as insurgent slaves almost always are, they were met, on their approach, by a large body of well-armed militia, hastily called out by the Governor." For these reasons, American slaves were apt to put that much more effort into daily infrapolitics, because "deliverance from below," such as occurred in Haiti under Toussaint Louverture, was simply impossibly utopian. Perhaps for these reasons, especially with the more informed, literate slaves seeing freedom arriving "from above," through the Union Army without them having to take any dangerous risks, and escape opportunities massively multiplied, the South suffered no significant slave revolts during the Civil War despite the draining of young men from the countryside to serve in the Confederate Army and the growing disorganization of its economy and communications/transportation network while suffering invasion and blockade. When Mr. Chesnut discussed offering freedom in exchange for fighting for the South, his headmen were interested. "Now [December 1864] they say coolly that they don't want freedom if they have to fight for it. That means they are pretty sure of having it anyway."<sup>622</sup> Unlike those who fought for the North, this theoretical offer involved fighting for the cause of those who held them in bondage, so they may have lied about their loyalty to the South's cause even as they could (now) safely admit to their desire for freedom. Nevertheless, this story points to a obvious risk avoidance strategy--why fight for freedom when likely within a year's time the Union army's bayonets will deliver it to your door? When the white regime was much stronger, before the war, the realization that open revolt more likely led to death instead of liberty was a fundamental

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<sup>622</sup>My emphasis, Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:42. See also Marion D.deB. Kilson, "Towards Freedom: An Analysis of Slave Revolts in the United States," Phylon 25 (summer 1964):187; Chesnut, Diary from Dixie, p. 456.

reason for why American slaves appeared more passive than their Latin American and Caribbean counterparts.

Why Then, If Revolts Were So Rare, Were the Whites So Paranoid?

Granted the lack of slave revolts in the years 1750-1865, then why were the slaveholders so paranoid? Why did so many insurrection panics shake through the South? Aptheker's history of slave revolts actually is a record much more of white fears of slave conspiracies, a number of which were likely the product of "strong grievances on one side and deep fears on another," than any actual preparations for revolt above, perhaps, idle threats and gossip. Wade has even questioned the existence of Vesey's famous conspiracy:

No elaborate network had been established in the countryside; no cache of arms lay hidden about the city; no date for an uprising had been set; no underground apparatus, carefully organized and secretly maintained, awaited a signal to fire Charleston and murder the whites.<sup>623</sup>

Aptheker's record of conspiracies suffers from uncritically analyzing his sources. Those described for the post-1835 period almost invariably were said to have originated in the mind of a white man, such as an Northern abolitionist or a Southern fellow traveler, not from a black.<sup>624</sup> The panic that led to "lynch law" proceedings in three counties in Mississippi in 1835 was not an exception to this rule. Supposedly, John A. Murrell's gang of some one thousand desperados was planning a vast insurrection to take place on Christmas Day, 1835 in order to facilitate their plans of plundering the countryside. Although convicted and thrown into prison for stealing slaves some months before that date, a pamphlet about his supposed plans about slave rebellion circulated, and in the July of 1835 a white mob in Livingston county hanged slaves. Some of them had pointed to two white men in their confessions--who were soon summarily executed in turn. John Cotton, one of these whites, "confessed," saying he was part of a plot for all the slaves in the South to revolt, from Maryland to Louisiana, desiring to destroy the white population of the South. The absurdity of this tale is evident, yet within a few weeks twelve white men (with five hanged) and a much larger number of slaves had fallen victim to drumhead legal proceedings

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<sup>623</sup>Richard C. Wade, "The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration," Journal of Southern History 30 (May 1964):150.

<sup>624</sup>Elkins, Slavery, pp. 218-22; Stamp, "Rebels and Sambos," 369-70.

and were punished.<sup>625</sup> Employing a sociological approach, Morris maintains the ultimate cause of this scare, and by extension those in other parts of the South, was due to a lack of community organization and contact among the whites on a routine basis in some local town that would administer the county, which caused them to suspect and accuse whites they did not know well of being the ringleaders.<sup>626</sup> However, there were deeper reasons for these witch hunts periodically sweeping parts of the South, over and above any objective need for vigilance. An elite, when it purportedly believes its labor force is contented, at least in its propaganda in the public transcript, is apt to blame discontent on outsiders, on subversives, inflaming the minds of its subordinate class to become discontent and to rise against their masters. (Similar rumors were present during the Swing Riots in England, during which gentlemen or foreigners were blamed for setting fires, etc.) This strategy serves to unite "us" versus the relatively unknown "other" or "them"--serving to help quell any publicly expressed doubts Southern whites might have about the regime themselves. The panicky paranoia that surfaced upon occasion also demonstrated that deep down the slaveholders did not believe their own propaganda about how contented Sambo supposedly was, but knew he had good reasons not to be happy between his crude, coarse rations and the overseer's lash, understanding the slaves' very humanity meant they likely desired freedom secretly as much as any white did.<sup>627</sup>

#### Resistance to Slavery in the United States Is Dominated by Infrapolitics

The story of resistance under slavery in the United States is mainly one of day-to-day resistance--of evaded work, stolen food, and protective lies, rather than one of revolts, open defiance, and organized, collective efforts. This was not because American plantations were populated with Sambos instead of Nats due to the effects of a closed system producing bent

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<sup>625</sup>Edwin A. Miles, "The Mississippi Slave Insurrection Scare of 1835," Journal of Negro History 42 (Jan. 1957):49-56.

<sup>626</sup>Christopher Morris, "An Event in Community Organization: The Mississippi Slave Insurrection Scare of 1835," Journal of Social History 22 (fall 1988):93-111.

<sup>627</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 198, 200, 215-217; For more on these panics, and the overkills and continual suspicions of the whites, see Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 230-38; Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 136-39; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 218; Donnie D. Bellamy, "Slavery in Microcosm: Onslow County, North Carolina," Journal of Negro History 62 (Oct. 1977):346-47; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 595-97.

personalities (Elkins) nor, in the older historiography, upon some innately rooted dispositions in character (U.B. Phillips's American Negro Slavery). Part of this lay in the inevitable reality that the infrapolitics of struggle between a dominant and a subordinate class largely make up most both groups' mutual dealings, outside of rare, revolutionary moments, because of the former's strength compared to the latter. Routinely the weak use covert, circuitous means of accomplishing their aims, because the costs of open defiance normally are very high. However, American slaves, even more than their Latin American and Caribbean brethren, placed their efforts into day-to-day resistance because the objective strength of the white regime in the United States was so great, open and organized defiance was even more suicidal than normal for this subordinate class. Due to the ethic of the easy use of personal violence coming from living in relatively unsettled, unpoliced, frontier areas under a naturally suspicious white regime whose public mores emphasized defending one's honor and thus was correspondingly hypersensitive about personal slights and offenses, and the lack of any substantive de jure legal rights much above the right not be murdered by one's master, the slaves lacked the ability to organize in a collective manner that was not violent itself in nature. Although some resistance occurred that mimicked the withdrawal of labor by striking unions, by masses of slaves running away in protest against particularly abusive overseers or overly demanding work schedules, the suspicions of the whites and their refusal (as demonstrated by the legal theory of the slave codes) to recognize them as having any legal rights to freedom of association or to the product of their labor ensured that collective protests almost inevitably had to turn to violence. The slaves, working within the system, could not change the regime by any open and sustained collective activity, such as the English farmworkers' unions constituted. The only way to change slavery at all as a social system was to totally overthrow it at once--which led directly to the desperate use of violence whenever the slaves did rise against their owners throughout the Americas. The policies of the white regime left the slaves the alternatives of open violence, which was especially suicidal in the American case, or surreptitious infrapolitics, through wearing masks before their masters, venting their frustrations in generally unsurveyed social sites, and covert, loose, informal organizing in the quarters that aimed at making extracting work out of them a maximally frustrating process for their owners and supervisors. That American slaves lacked an extensive history of revolts and large scale maroon colonies has little to do with any virtues or defects in character or personality, but was due to the objective strength of the white regime over them.

#### Resident Slaveholders Supervising Small Units of Production Smother Resistance

Another reason for the lack of collective resistance by

Southern slaves against their masters and mistresses lay in the smothering effects of their small units of production and close, personal supervision by resident slaveholders, as Kolchin has observed. The practical effects of paternalism, although that ideology likely was not accepted by the bulk of masters or slaves in actuality, still bore useful fruits from the white regime's viewpoint due to the resident nature of the master class and their ability to routinely interfere in the lives of their human chattels. Simply put, the larger the size of the unit of production and the farther away the owner lives away from it, the harder it is for him to survey, control, and punish those under him, regardless of the slave code's legalities about the will of the bondsman being made one with the master's. The amount of "practical," de facto freedom of the subordinates increases correspondingly with the lessening of the master's power. To manage most American plantations, no large, complicated administrative apparatus of managers supervising other managers intervening between the owner and the average slave was necessary--if the master did not personally supervise his slaves at work, normally all he needed was one overseer to manage them. By knowing not just his domestic servants, but many or all his field hands personally, especially in those cases of large hereditary slaveowners in long settled areas, he could interfere in their family and off-work, "private" lives much more than was the case for those generally absentee Caribbean planters who often ruled over much larger bodies of slaves. Furthermore, he often strived to make his bondsmen as economically dependent on him as possible, by providing food and clothing directly to his bondsmen, sometimes even having food cooked communally. For American slaves, outside of task system areas, the patches of land they cultivated were normally supplements to income at best, when their owners did not forbid them altogether. The slaves of the Caribbean were much more likely to raise all their own food themselves on plots of land assigned to them, so their masters could escape the hassles of providing food for such large numbers of bondsmen. All the close personal attention American slaves received, regardless of how much actual paternalism was being practiced through it, helped to prevent the development of autonomous collective organizations among them. Their "practical freedom" was much less than that of typical Russian serfs or Caribbean bondsmen, who had much more economic independence and freedom of action. A lack of experience with independent action had deadening effects on collective resistance, as shown by the different responses of those born enslaved and those who survived the Middle Passage. Creoles were particularly apt to engage in individualistic modes of protest, such as by running away alone, while the Africans held in slavery in eighteenth-century Virginia, used to much more collaborative effort before being enslaved by the whites, were more apt to engage in collective protests by running off in groups and establishing maroon colonies on the frontier. The effects of slavery on the bondsmen in the United States, under the tight, personal supervision of

their owners on relatively small units of production, who sought to make them almost exclusively economically dependent on the standard rations, which heavily undermined the autonomy of their culture, turned their slaves towards individualistic modes of protest whose covert yet defiant nature was not especially clear to their owners by deliberate intention. While the resident nature of the masters and mistresses in America benefited the bondsmen by raising the standard of living and lowering the brutalities of the system through restraining overseers (i.e., paid management), it increased the social costs of bondage to the bondsmen by allowing their owners to interfere much more in their personal and family lives and limiting the development of an autonomous culture and ethos of collective protest, especially with the closure of the African slave trade and the high natural rate of population growth among the creole slaves. As Kolchin noted, benign neglect might have benefited the slaves much more than a paternalism that caused the masters to continuously meddle in their bondsmen's lives, in which they were treated as permanent children requiring constant protection, direction, correction, and punishment.<sup>628</sup>

#### Resisting Enslavement Is Not the Same as Resisting Slavery as a Social System

With day-to-day resistance looming so large in the lives of American slaves and the historiography of the subject, this leads us to a major objection against its significance. Since free workers in contemporary society also engage in shirking, vandalism, lies to evade work, theft from the work place, etc., how do we know whether when slaves engaged in the same behaviors they were really resisting slavery as a social system? Kolchin uses the example of absenteeism doubling among American autoworkers between 1965 and 1972. Was this proof of them increasingly resisting capitalism, disliking the specific policies of the auto companies, or just alienation from boring, repetitive jobs?<sup>629</sup> It is difficult peering into the minds of subject classes in the past because we lack general access to their minds and the hidden transcript they produced, as discussed above (pp. 246-47). While the masses can prove they are ideological and political through collective, open efforts to resist the dominant class, i.e., that they are "class conscious," such collective efforts were rare among American bondsmen. Citing the thoughts of the unusually resourceful, oppressed, and/or lucky slaves who escaped into freedom and lived to write or tell their own stories in narratives is problematic because

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<sup>628</sup>Kolchin, Unfree Labor, pp. 59-61, 98-102, 132-35, 156, 235-39, 289, 348-49.

<sup>629</sup>Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 2:210; Kolchin, Unfree Labor, pp. 242-43.

these men and women were plainly extraordinary, and from their contact with northern abolitionists, whose ideology may have helped form the framework of their analysis of slavery as a social system, even when they did not serve as editors or transcribers for the narratives they published. One is largely left with rather cryptic, covert activities such as stealing and lying, which are correspondingly hard to interpret politically, even as they are plainly troublesome to the dominant class. It makes more sense to see the bondsmen, especially those who were illiterate and profoundly ignorant of the rest of the world outside of what they had personally experienced, as resisting not slavery as a social system, but their enslavement personally, as Paquette has suggested. Conceiving of freedom from one's one harsh master, and seek the redress of particular, concrete grievances is one thing. But it takes a wide leap conceptually for an uneducated, illiterate mind think in universals, and see the whole system throughout the South as needing to be overturned. Since concept of "freedom," as in the absence of physical coercion from others, is a Western concept, unknown to almost all non-Western people prior to contact with Eurocentric cultures, the development of an ideology of freedom that did not involve social control and connectedness to family, kin, and friends (the African antonym for "slavery") was hardly an automatic development natural to the human mind. With the enormous power of the white regime in America necessarily preventing most open, organized, collective struggles that could be easily labeled "political," the creole slaves themselves inclined towards individualistic modes of protest, and much of the subordinate class' infrapolitics being equivocal to interpretation, even by design of the perpetrators, it becomes quite difficult to prove American slaves were as class conscious as the farmworkers who joined Arch's union in the 1870s. Furthermore, many types of day-to-day resistance can serve at least inadvertently as props for the overall system. For example, maroonage unintentionally served as a safety valve propping up the planters' rule in Antigua. As this valve closed because most of its available land fell under cultivation, pressures building under forced accommodation helped create a great conspiracy in 1736.<sup>630</sup>

Normally infrapolitics should seen as a desire to gain concrete, particular advantages against specific masters (i.e., filling a half-empty belly with stolen food) than as politically-motivated acts supported by a well thought out ideology, unless

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<sup>630</sup>Paquette, "Social History Update," 682-684; King, "Marxism and the Slave South," 127, discussing Genovese. He notes the escaped slaves in some maroon colonies "sanctioned forms of dependency including slavery," which demonstrates they were not rebelling against the idea of slavery in itself necessarily by choosing to run away to join these groups to begin with.

the hidden transcript hints at something greater, due to the difficulties of illiterate, uneducated minds being able to conceive of and think about universal concepts. The concept of "resistance" should not be trivialized through extending the concept of infrapolitics into the daily activities all people, free or slave, engage in in order to live.<sup>631</sup> While no doubt slaves as a whole were conscious of getting the shaft from their superiors to one extent or another, they never reached the level of autonomous self-organization and collective effort of being a class acting for itself, clearly conceptualizing their position as a group relative to their masters'. Nevertheless, it should always be remembered in reply to Elkins, Genovese, and Fogel and Engerman, that the lack of collective effort by American bondsmen was much more a function of white power and restrictions on the bondsmen's education and practical freedom of action, especially through being resident masters on small units of production, than anything intrinsic to the personality of "Sambo" himself or to the successful indoctrination of him with the ideology of paternalism or the Protestant work ethic.

#### Hodge: The Predominance of Daily Infrapolitics over Outright Riots

Having discussed much of the general theory of resistance by a subordinate class against a dominant class when dealing with African-American slaves above (note especially pp. 325-329), this section dealing with English agricultural workers is more brief. The role of day-to-day resistance through various crimes is paramount here as well, since major riots in the English countryside were not especially common, even considering those over the price of food in periods of high prices. The research of Dale Edward Williams found that most market towns experienced no more than one food riot in the course of a century.<sup>632</sup> And while the Swing riots of 1830-31 and the earlier "Bread or Blood" riots of East Anglia were fairly spectacular, the former being far more extensive than any slave revolt in the United States, such events were hardly frequent. After the ultimate failure and repression following "Swing," the countryside was not marked by major, organized protests by the laborers again until the 1860s-1870s farmworkers' unions. Chartism was something that mostly bypassed the farmworkers, being primarily an urban phenomenon

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<sup>631</sup>"Not all people have survived enslavement; hence her [the slave woman's] survival-oriented [which included domestic labor such as cooking, sewing, washing, raising children, and cleaning house] activities were themselves a form of resistance." Wright, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role," 86-87.

<sup>632</sup>Dale Edward Williams, "Morals, markets and the English crowd in 1766," Past and Present, no. 104 (August 1984), pp. 69-70, as noted in Harrison, Crowds and History, p. 13.



dominated by artisans and factory workers, with the miners playing an important supplementary role. The English countryside Somerville toured was full of dissatisfied laborers and general unrest which had its effects on the rural elite, but no major organized collective protests. English laborers mainly resisted through infrapolitics, since for any subordinate class, direct frontal assaults are dangerous and risky. But the laborers could engage in more open opposition compared to slaves in the South, because they had far more legal rights and were regarded fundamentally as part of the society they lived in, not outside of it, which lay the foundations for the unions' successes in the 1870s.

### Social Crime--The Infrapolitics of Poaching

The laborers principally struggled against their masters through committing what the latter regarded crimes, but not the laborers themselves. The most important of these was poaching, in contrast to the supremacy of theft among American slaves, although that crime was hardly unknown among the laborers either. The game laws were a constant source of class friction, because they outlawed any hunting by anyone the landowners did not specifically give permission to, even when the animals wandered away from their preserves. The law gave the landlords permanent property in wild animals, allowing them to punish those who killed "their" game. The old feudal right of chase was operative up into 1834. Landowners possessing it could hunt even on others' land as well. Since the farmers normally leased their land, they also were negatively affected by the game laws. Tenant farmers could not legally kill any animals feeding off the crops of the land they cultivated unless they received their landlord's permission first, which he was often loathe to grant. Routinely they were not compensated by their lord--the Earl of Abingdon in Oxford being an exception--by having their rents reduced in compensation. The game laws mainly oppressed the laborers by denying them a way to get food, especially meat, as would have existed had they lived in the United States even as black slaves. Some suffered like the farmers because their allotments were damaged or ruined from game eating crops raised upon them, a problem Somerville once encountered in Sussex. Further petty tyrannies were inflicted by restrictions placed on where laborers could walk freely without being questioned by the police or gamekeepers. Gathering wood in forests was banned for a similar reason. When a laborer was convicted of poaching, he was apt to be blacklisted by the local rural elite, and denied a job after even one conviction, as Arch noted: "The man is looked on as a poaching vagabond by all the employing class round about. . . . I have gone with them from one end of the village to the

other, farmer after farmer, but nobody would give them a job."<sup>633</sup> The laborers, when members of poaching gangs, routinely got into virtual pitched battles with the local squires' or lord's gamekeepers, some on either side being wounded, arrested, even sometimes killed, as Somerville and Hudson both described. Ironically, these gangs were the consequence of the heavy penalties meted out to violators of the 1770 and (especially) 1800 and 1803 laws. Poachers gathered into large groups because gamekeepers did not like trying to stop them then, and they became more likely to fight than allow themselves to be captured, because the penalties were so harsh against poaching.<sup>634</sup>

#### The Laborers' Counter-Ideology Against the Elite's Game Laws

The farmworkers rejected the upper class values that underlay the game laws. They maintained they could kill wild animals and birds because they were not owned by anyone in particular, especially when they had run off their lord's preserves and lands. In reply to the 1816 Act that inflicted transportation for seven years upon those who carried a net for poaching into a forest or park, a manifesto was published in a Bath newspaper by some evident poachers: "The Lord of all men sent these animals for the peasants as well as for the prince." Arch felt the laborer who killed the incidental rabbit or hare that crossed his path was not in the wrong, whether it was because he was half-starving, had merely inadequate wages, just liked the taste of its meat, or was trying to get compensation for it eating breakfast on his allotment:

The plain truth is, we labourers do not believe hares and rabbits belong to any individual, not any more than thrushes and blackbirds do. . . . Has the hare or the rabbit a brand on him for purposes of identification? If I found a stray loaf on the road it would be mine, and so with a rabbit or hare.<sup>635</sup>

But there were limits on the moral permissibility of poaching for

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<sup>633</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 141, 404; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 150-52, 158-59, 162; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 212-13.

<sup>634</sup>Somerville, Whistler, pp. 38-39, 272-79; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 79-80, 84-90. See also Emsley, "Crime in 19th-Century Britain," 44; Robert Long's diary as found in Agar, Befordshire Farm Worker, p. 111; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 186, 191; Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 159-60, 435-36.

<sup>635</sup>cited by Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 187; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 159-161; cf. Bawcombe's attitude in Hudson, Shepherd's Life, p. 81 and Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 438-440.

at least some laborers. Both Arch and shepherd Bawcombe drew an implied distinction between those who incidently poached while having a regular job, and those without regular jobs, (in Bawcombe's version) the beer house idlers who were members of poaching gangs.<sup>636</sup>

Poaching became undoubtedly the most common crime that the laborers committed against their superiors as a part of day-to-day resistance. Since they generally did not live on their employers' property at night, especially as service declined in the nineteenth century, it was considerably harder for them to steal from the farmers' or squire's stocks and larders than for the slaves from their masters. English jails and prisons were full of laborers convicted for poaching offenses, with some getting hanged. Cobbett in 1823 maintained one-third of those in English jails were there for violations of the game laws, which required them to be enlarged, and that their number exceeded all those in prison for any reason in France. Cobbett did exaggerate, though not by too much--between 1827 and 1830, one-seventh of all criminal convictions were under the game laws, for a total of 8502 offenses. In Bedford jail in the January of 1829, of the ninety-six prisoners yet to be tried, eighteen were poachers who had used arms against gamekeepers. Consider this indication of how common this offense was. Isaac Bawcombe was rewarded of a pension due to the influence of one elderly gentleman. This man routinely found excellent hunting on the one spot of hilly land where Bawcombe's flock regularly fed, which was the only explanation his gamekeeper had for his unusual success there as opposed to other hilly areas on his lands. Bawcombe had been the exception to the rule, for not only did he not poach himself, but tried to stop others from doing so. This gentleman hunter's relative lack of success elsewhere pointed to how common poaching was even on his own land, without him even really knowing it!<sup>637</sup>

#### The Role of Theft, More Generally Defined, in English Rural Infrapolitics

While the upper class also regarded killing wild animals as stealing their property, we need to consider theft by laborers more broadly. No doubt the limits of what was considered to be "fair game" for the laborers to "take" from their employers were much narrower than those the slaves accepted. Arch maintained while he would work with someone who poached a rabbit, he would

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<sup>636</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 155; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 80, 94.

<sup>637</sup>Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 160, 440-41; Hammond and Hammond, Village Laborer, pp. 188, 190; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, p. 54.

not with someone who had taken a chicken: "But let a man who had stolen a hen off a roost be ever such a good workman, I should have nothing to do with him; I should keep clear of him and avoid his company . . . If I saw any man steal six-pennyworth from an employer of mine, I should at once report the man."<sup>638</sup> Still, the English rural elite battled against farmworkers stealing their property. One reason initially given for opposing allotments was that the laborers would use the cover given by growing their own crops to help conceal what was stolen from their employers. Jeffries, examining archetypes among the laborers from a middle class perspective, described one as the boy who starts by pilfering from his employer, cumulating with a stolen whip, and finally gets thrashed by the carter as punishment. His stereotype ignores the real reason why many laborers stole from their employers or others, especially in times of dearth and/or relatively low wages--hunger. Some old people witnessed to Hudson, including one lady of ninety-four years, that sheep stealing was a common crime, despite the draconian penalties threatened: "The men were strangely indifferent and did not seem to care whether they were hanged or not." She pointed out some grandchildren of a man hanged for sheep stealing at Salisbury. Arch remembered when he was around nine years old in 1835 how desperate so many of the laborers were. Many stole turnips, potatoes, and other produce they could get their hands on, and it was no exaggeration to say every other man was a poacher in his parish. Much like Kemble on slaves stealing food to live, Arch reluctantly felt such behavior acceptable, although he believed the laws of the land should be obeyed as much as possible: "How can I blame these men because they would not sit still, and let the life be starved out of them and theirs? They would not; so they risked their liberty, the next dearest thing they had . . . in their endeavours to obtain food." Somerville noted in questionnaires returned to the Anti-corn Law League from English areas that when work was plentiful, crimes were rare, but when work was scarce, poaching and sheep-stealing were common.<sup>639</sup>

#### The Correlation Between Poverty and Theft

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<sup>638</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 163-64. Comparing this attitude to Frederick Douglass' on "taking" is especially instructive. However ironic for the line Arch drew here, around Kirdford in Sussex after the New Poor Law went into operation, all of the "fowls" of one farmer and most of his neighbor had been stolen, and pilfering generally had increased. Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 10.

<sup>639</sup>Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 2; Jeffries, Hodge, 2:88; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 221-22, 224-27; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 14; Somerville, Whistler, p. 95. See also pp. 273, 407-8.

Turning to evidence more quantitative in nature, statistical series exist which, based on the numbers of indictments in various years, appear to indicate a strong correlation between dearth and numbers of thefts committed in peacetime. This relationship breaks down during wars, evidently because the army would absorb large numbers of young men apt to commit crime, especially when many magistrates would offer offenders the opportunity to avoid prosecution if they would join the army. Although Innes and Styles are rather skeptical of the correlation between crime and poverty due to how prosecutors could change their behavior over time in those they try to convict, they acknowledged King's series on Essex even had a wartime correlation between its bad years (1740-41, 1772, 1800-01) and increased crime. While, as always, correlation cannot prove causation, literary evidence, such as that of Hudson and Arch above, illuminates plausibly the interrelationships involved, so it is not mere guesswork to see bad years with high prices leading to increased petty thefts by the laboring poor. When the number of poachers committed to the Gaol of Bury St. Edmunds goes from five, four, and two in the years 1810-12 to seventy-five, sixty, sixty-one, and seventy-one in 1822-25, demobilization and local labor markets flooded by ex-soldiers and sailors seeking work were not the only reasons why. These had largely been adjusted to in the 1815-20 period right after the French Wars ended, so we should look for other causes. Orridge, the governor of this jail, maintained most of the poachers committed their acts out of distress, not the love of sport.<sup>640</sup> Even when such statistics are treated with some care they still point to the truth of the viewpoint of Arch and Hudson's informants: Poaching and stealing increased at times when the poor were worse off.<sup>641</sup>

#### Hodge's Thinner Mask

Like Sambo, Hodge wore a mask as well in order to conceal his thoughts from his superiors, but his mask never needed to be as thick. Because the costs of insubordination proportionately were not as high (i.e., no corporal punishment for adult farm workers, no sales splitting families), and because he underwent

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<sup>640</sup>Joanna Innes and John Styles, "The Crime Wave: Recent Writing on Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century England," Journal of British Studies 25 (Oct. 1986):389-95; Styles, "Crime in 18th-Century England," 38-39; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 189.

<sup>641</sup>For more on this cause of crime, see Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 32; Mark Baker, "Aspects of the Life of the Wiltshire Agricultural Labourer, c. 1850," Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine 74/75 (1981):64. Somerville, Whistler, pp. 139-40 ties crimes to the insecurity of work coming from at-will tenancies and the lack of annual hirings.

less routine surveillance by his superiors, unless he was a live-in farm servant, Hodge had more freedom to maneuver. Hodge also had more legal rights, although exercising them was potentially hazardous or easily blocked unless he knew the law well. Nevertheless, farmworkers still learned to hold their tongues. Arch noted many laborers in the presence of their superiors in formal social settings of the latter's choosing were intimidated, and simply lacked social ease to talk freely even if no penalty was involved in saying what they thought, which caused them to be seen as stupid or slow. But the more articulate laborers did not speak out either because they "had learned the trade of mouth-shutting and teeth-locking as soon as they could talk, and before they knew what bird-scaring was. A man with the weight of many masters on him learns how to be dumb, and deaf, and blind, at a very early hour in the morning."<sup>642</sup> Both of these factors, of social intimidation and the willing concealment of thoughts, led to the development of the classic stereotype of Hodge as a slow-moving, slow-thinking brute who spoke few words. In interviews, one journalist for the Morning Chronicle complained in 1849 that the farmworker typically looked upon the (better educated social superior) suspiciously, feeling oppressed as long as the interview lasted, acting timid and withdrawn. Holdenby saw laborers putting up a "mysterious barrier of 'Ay, ay', 'may be', 'likely enough', with which the labourer hedges himself in." These all are signs of the mask going up, and so his social superiors did not see the "real Hodge" as much as they may have thought. So they then thought him stupider and less articulate than he was in fact, although the more insightful saw he was concealing much from them.<sup>643</sup> The attitudes of the laborers' employers, who saw them as useless outside their ability to work, helped create this mask, as Arch noted: "Work was all they wanted from him; he was to work and hold his tongue, year in and year out, early and late."<sup>644</sup>

Accompanying the mask Hodge wore was a certain amount of lying. He had to do less of it than the slaves because he was

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<sup>642</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 147.

<sup>643</sup>as quoted in Snell, Annals, pp. 6-7. The town dwellers, rich or middle class, knew little better the mind of the farmworkers. See Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, p. 12. Interestingly, the stereotypes of Sambo and Hodge diverge in several key aspects, although they are inevitably self-serving creations of the dominant class in both societies. Sambo is seen as a perpetual child, as being fun-loving and energetic but irresponsible, while Hodge is seen as slow in gait and talk, as noncommunicative and monosyllabic, but, nevertheless, as an adult, as more steady in his habits, despite his pub frequenting.

<sup>644</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 11.

not under surveillance as much as them, and telling the truth did not have as drastic a penalty for him generally. But in a mitigated form, the same phenomenon still manifested itself. Hudson noted that due to the nature of the game laws, which constituted one of the worst continuing oppression they experienced, even honest laborers were "obliged to practise a certain amount of deception." He knew one shepherd who lied by denying to his employing farmer that his dog ever hunted for hares, when in fact he did. Since the shepherd refuses to believe killing a hare is robbing anyone, "if he is obliged to tell a lie to save himself from the consequences he does not consider that it is a lie." Hodge's mask also could simply be a refusal to volunteer information, a way to conceal his financial affairs from prying outsiders. In one parish, after initial suspicion of its offer to let allotments had abated, the laborers hesitated to say these kept them off relief, because they feared their rents would be hiked, etc. Behind the gestures of deference, a non-deferent mind could well lurk, such as one old woman who bowed a deep curtsy to her squire, yet referred to him very familiarly out of earshot. His gamekeeper complained to others about his wages, his lack of perquisites, his lack of fees in shooting season except when the place was let for the season to another--but went to the squire hat in hand. As Jeffries described: "They hardly dared open their mouths when they saw him, and yet spoke of him afterwards as if he sat with them at bacon and cabbage time." In Stotfold parish, Bedford, right after the Swing Riots mob locally had been dispersed, according to the parish's rector, at least some laborers were suddenly "'touching their hats' to their masters--who never did so in their lives before."<sup>645</sup> As noted above, such rituals of deference are not without meaning even when the performer is not very sincere about them, because they help the elite maintain a necessary social distance that otherwise would be lost or lessened by routine face-to-face interactions. In the case of the laborers of Stotfold parish, they may have suddenly begun following certain rituals of deference to clearly signal they had accepted defeat and their subordinate position after the village rioted and their ringleaders were arrested. Some of the concessions that had been made to the laborers locally may have encouraged these gestures, such as exemption from taxes and the dismissal of the assistant overseer, even as the vestry did not concede their demands for a wage hike. Although Hodge's mind was often concealed by a mask, the level of distortions about him are significantly lower than that about African-American slaves, due in part to the lack of operative racism between the classes, but also because the mask was indeed thinner and his more open complaints, ensuring the avoidance of perverse misreadings of his

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<sup>645</sup>Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 94-96; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, p. 10; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:131, 134; Cirket, "1830 Riots in Bedfordshire," 96.

personality similar to Elkins's about the slaves.

How Farmworkers Could "Run Away"--Resistance Through Migration and Emigration

Another form of resistance, analogous to the slaves' running away, was to migrate to another part of England or to emigrate abroad in search of better jobs, opportunities, and treatment. Moving was not an act necessarily intended to affront the local rural elite, because sometimes they were happy to encourage it when faced with paying high rates year around. Lord Egremont in Sussex paid a number of emigrants' expenses, of about ten pounds per adult and five per child, and Petworth parish paid at least five per adult and three pounds and ten shillings per child, which came to 107 emigrants over five years (1832-36) who left for Canada. The rector of Petworth, while perhaps ignoring the effects of the New Poor Law excessively, attributed nearly all the drop in relief expenses in his parish in recent years to emigration. Other times emigration met with opposition, but either way it still had the function of limiting local employers' bargaining power with their laborers in the long run. Migration introduces into the picture the competition of other employers for labor, which limits what the local parish farmers can do in lowering wages or otherwise mistreating their laborers. Those dealt with badly enough long enough compared to known conditions elsewhere are apt to "vote with their feet" and leave. As mentioned above (pp. 28-29), the principal reason for the northern laborers' superior conditions and treatment was due to the nearby presence of industrial and mining employment which drove up the price of labor (wages) due to its relative scarcity. While in England, Olmsted found cases on the Salisbury plain of very large farms in which it appeared one farmer employed an entire village. Using such monopsonic power, analogous to the stereotypical "one company town," these farmers paid rock-bottom wages of six or seven shillings a week.<sup>646</sup>

Under these conditions, only two main solutions presented themselves: (1) flee the "one-farmer village," or (2) organize, and so form a union with theoretically equal power in the labor market. Many eventually chose the first option, and simply left, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century. As for the other . . . while Arch's union gained strength, Warwickshire's County Chamber of Agriculture met to consider the laborers' demands, a group of about thirty tenant farmers and several major landowners. They desired a settlement soon because if the union's demand for sixteen shillings per week was not granted, the men could get twenty-three or twenty-seven by going north by

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<sup>646</sup>Committee on the New Poor Law , BPP, 1837, first report, p. 4; for a case of opposition, see Morgan, Harvesters, p. 123; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 273.



train: "Owing to migration and the state of the general labour market, wages are still going up." During one strike, Arch noted some locked-out laborers accepted offers from "Gentlemen" seeking workers for cotton mills and railways, and emigration agents "were prowling around, picking and choosing the most likely, and tempting them across the sea." Although Arch had initially opposed emigration, he later changed his mind. He committed considerable personal time and union money to supporting those who wished migrate within England or leave it altogether. He visited Canada to investigate conditions for laborers there.<sup>647</sup> Arch saw that by pitting different employers against one another and encouraging laborers to move, higher wages could be gained for members of his union, even if they changed occupations, and went into another industry. These actions aided even those left behind since migration reduced the number of glutted local labor markets in southern England which had empowered employers when pushing down wages.

#### The Reluctance of Laborers to Move and Other Obstacles to Migration

Although laborers considering migration and emigration faced nowhere near the same number of legal and practical hurdles American slaves did when it came to running away, major impediments still existed. Always the settlement and poor laws lurked in the background, as already described extensively above (pp. 69-70, 278-79, 282-84). They created cages for the local poor, making them afraid to move away and lose their right to receive parish relief, not to mention removable from where they migrated to when becoming chargeable. Another problem was why many slaves did not want to permanently run away to the North or elsewhere: breaking ties with family and friends. While the laborers did not risk the actual dissolution of their family by leaving, like the slaves, they would lose all or most contact with friends and family left behind. Arch noticed on his travels working that most of the laborers he encountered routinely complained about their lot in life, but they made no effort to better themselves, not budging "an inch from the place and position in which they found themselves. The fact was, very few of them could write a letter, so the majority were afraid to go from home, because they would not be able to communicate with their friends."<sup>648</sup> In a study of Brenchley, Kent Wojciechowska found the laborers were the least mobile of all the occupational groups she studied in the 1851-1871 period besides farmers. For the laborers, 32.1 percent persisted from 1851 to 1861 and 33.2 percent from 1861 to 1871. The corresponding percentages for farmers were 35.4 percent and 30.9 percent, for tradesman and

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<sup>647</sup> Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 96, 106, 108, 174-220.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

craftsmen, 31.9 percent and 23.9 percent, professionals, 22.2 percent and 6.1 percent, domestics, 9.2 percent and 7.9 percent, and those in commerce, 14.7 percent and 8.3 percent. These differences confirmed contemporaries' generalizations about farmworkers' relative immobility compared to others, especially when they normally did not move as far afield when they did leave. The movement that did occur was concentrated among the unattached--young single men and women, or widows and widowers--demonstrating how family ties restrained it. Obviously then, the fall of the laborers' average marriage ages during the early nineteenth century was no aid to finding better jobs elsewhere. Laborers perhaps ended up in an adjacent parish or in the same county, unlike the professionals, who were often not born in this parish and were more likely to leave it for a place far away. The Poor Law Commissioners found even when they offered to finance laborers willing to move elsewhere in England, few signed up, and many of those who did eventually returned.<sup>649</sup> Another factor behind the laborers' lack of willingness to leave was when the farmer who steadily employed them was stable, which Wojciechowska's data demonstrates as a class they were, and did not move, neither did his laborers.<sup>650</sup> Those in tied cottages--the "company housing" of the employing farmer--were inevitably less mobile, as were the children of laborers in such houses, because farmers sometimes threatened to evict elderly parents if their children did not work for them.<sup>651</sup> Despite all the disincentives to leave, enough farmworkers did around the time of the French Wars to make up a major part of those working as spinners in the Bolton area. Workers there arrived from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, showing migration started also from rural areas far away, not just from local ones.<sup>652</sup> Being an individualistic response to bad conditions, migration for the laborers had the advantage of avoiding direct confrontations with the rural elite. But this solution failed to solve the main problem facing English farmworkers: Except when seasonal or local labor shortages exist, groups of unorganized laborers simply lack the marketing power to effectively bargain for wages with a few oligopolistic or one monopsonic farmer as the main parish employer(s), because it is much easier to play "divide and conquer" with a large group than a small, making them compete against one another.

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<sup>649</sup>Bogusia Wojciechowska, "Brenchley: A Study of Migratory Movements in a Mid-Nineteenth Century Rural Parish," Local Population Studies, no. 41 (autumn 1988), pp. 32-35.

<sup>650</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 1:122.

<sup>651</sup>Snell, Annals, pp. 338-39.

<sup>652</sup>Factory Commission, Supplementary Report, 1834, part i, p. 169, as cited in the Hammond and Hammond, Town Labourer, p. 12.

### The Tamer Confrontations Between Hodge and His Masters

Like the slaves, sometimes laborers confronted their employers or the local landowners in an unorganized, small-scale manner. These conflicts, like the Swing Riots compared to the slave revolts, featured far less violence than those between slaves and their owners and overseers, mainly because the absence of corporal punishment for adult laborers eliminated the main provocation for violent retaliation. It is singularly difficult to find any stories of laborers killing or physically attacking a bailiff, a steward, a farmer, or a landowner, while similar stories about the slaves' attacking their superiors abound. A number of incidents illustrate that Hodge's mask was thinner than Sambo's, and that he undertook fewer deferential rituals and made more open complaints. Jeffries described the case of a laborer interrupting an argument about the value of a mechanical reaper between a farmer, his wife, both in a gig, and his son, who worked as bailiff. The reaper complained, "Measter . . . cam't you send us out some better tackle than this yer stuff?," and poured some ale out onto the stubble with a grimace of total disgust. The farmer, by no means a small and poor one, merely sharply replied, "It be the same as I drink myself," and drove off. Robert Long, who farmed 280 acres in Bedfordshire, complained in his diary about the shortage of laborers and independence of his men during harvest--two factors which are no mere coincidence. He had boasted to others he had had the same men all year, even during harvest, but now he lost all confidence in them because they were taking advantage of the seasonal and local labor shortage to break one of his rules: "I always threaten to discharge a man who fetches beer from a public house, but in Harvest time when the corn wants cutting (and they know it) it cannot be carried out."<sup>653</sup> The background to these incidents was harvest, which was one time of the year farmworkers had some economic power, and so the farmers were not so apt to fire laborers for complaining or breaking rules. These cases illustrate a certain straightforwardness not encountered with American slaves often, excepting those few who were defiant when the lash was going to be applied, or from pampered house servants. The difference resulted not from any of Hodge's intrinsic virtues compared to Sambo's, but because the risks and costs of defiance were lower for the laborers--especially during harvest! Changing employers and finding work was easy then. Hence, the farmer engaged in haymaking (discussed above, p. 227) heard the grumbling of his laborers, but they did not walk off the job when he suddenly imposed overtime on them, because the local employment situation had recently deteriorated. The members of a subordinate class obviously are much more likely to openly complain when the ability of the dominant class to punish

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<sup>653</sup>Jeffries, Hodge, 1:66; as found in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 107-8.

is for some reason restricted. And when the social system allows the subordinate class' members to express more complaints openly based on the hidden transcript's content, the more continual but gradual emotional release involved makes violence less likely to occur compared to when some subject population, having worn a thick mask almost continually, suddenly and finally finds some way to vent its feelings against the dominant class.<sup>654</sup> Hodge's lower propensity to violence than Sambo is partially based on this difference, besides the others attached to the frontier ethic and how the exaggerated gentlemanly ethic of protecting one's personal honor against insults through dueling and other acts of violence was found among the Southern white male population generally, not just its uppermost elite.

#### Food Riots as a Method of Resistance

Immortalized by Thompson's article on the subject, the food riot was yet another means by which the laboring class protested against high food prices in an organized manner, invoking the moral economy of the landed elite's own paternalistic ideology. These riots always remained remarkable for the English crowd's general refusal to attack personally the bakers, millers, shopkeepers, farmers, middlemen, etc. that were seen as its opponents. And this was despite the strong ill-effects prices hikes for bread or other basic foodstuffs caused when so many were so close to subsistence as it was. The rioting crowds employed the medieval "just price" model, in which they set a price (which the seller would judge too low from prevailing market conditions). Then they would offer to pay for the food, and would only seize it without any compensation when the seller still resisted. One wagon loaded with wheat and flour was intercepted by a group of women, who threw the bags over the side. When told he could sell it at forty shillings a sack, or that they would take it all without payment if he refused, the driver (a farmer) soon capitulated: "If that must be the price, it must be the price." In one report, the sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1766 noted the crowd visited one farmhouse. They politely said they could thresh the grain and pay five shillings per bushel for it, an offer the farmer accepted. Later on, in the main markets, they visited all who sold food, setting their own prices: "They returned in general the produce [i.e., the money] to the proprietors or in their absence left the money for them; and behaved with great regularity and decency where they were not opposed, with outrage and violence where they was: but pilfered very little." In other cases, such as at Drayton, Oxford in 1766, the Isle of Ely, 1795, and Handborough, Oxford, 1795, the food rioters even "conscripted" a constable or magistrate to superintend their forced sales at relatively low prices to legitimize their actions. Especially in these cases,

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<sup>654</sup>Compare Scott, Domination, pp. 213-19.

the crowd's attitude was that if their superiors did not enforce the laws from the Elizabethan and early Stuart period that allowed magistrates to force sales and set low prices and which prohibited many of the standard activities of middlemen, they would force them to do so! The key difference between the paternalistic model and the crowd's was it had the power and right to initiate itself proceedings to enforce it, rather than passively waiting for their betters to altruistically do so. While the laborers themselves were not necessarily the leaders or initiators of these riots--Thompson lists two cases of gangs involved in construction work starting riots later joined by farmworkers--they still constituted a major means of rural protest.<sup>655</sup>

This kind of organized action was simply unknown among American slaves, whose struggles against their owners featured different forms of "direct action." Excepting those few "hiring their own time," the slaves did not have to support their own families independently and were automatically furnished with some given allowance of food from their masters. They never had to take action against those involved in marketing, especially when Southern slaveholders generally aimed at producing the food, such as corn and pork, required for their slaves' subsistence right on the plantation. The English lower orders often got away with these riots, even when troops and convictions followed in a number of cases, because many of the magistrates were somewhat sympathetic. It is unimaginable slaves could escape without punishment committing similar acts, which was because they were fundamentally regarded as "outside" their society and legal system, while English rural workers were included, but in a subordinate position. The laborers had not only the freedom to organize impromptu protests and crowd actions inconceivable to slaves, but an ability to avoid much of the punishment that should have followed. Helping them in their cause was how the local rural elite in times of crisis was often somewhat divided, giving an opening to the local protesting crowd. The farmers and gentry, at least in the eighteenth century, were often unsupportive of the middleman's and shopkeeper's commercial ethos, especially when they wished to head off a riot by taking various proactive measures. Sometimes at these moments some paternalistically-oriented magistrates encouraged prosecutions against at least the minor players in the local market place to demonstrate they cared to the plebes. Such divisions did not exist among Southern whites, poor or rich, when facing restive black slaves, making it much more difficult for this subordinate

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<sup>655</sup>Thompson, "Moral Economy of the English Crowd," 76-136. See also Harrison, Crowds and History, pp. 12-13; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 116-18, 173-74. By extrapolating from the unusual restlessness of Cornish miners, Rule mistakenly sees food riots as common. Labouring Classes, pp. 348-53.

class to take advantage of divisions among the elite to accomplish its own objectives. The food riot as a means of protest again illustrates the much lower level of violence in English society compared to the Southern United States. According to the research of Stevenson, apparently no English crowds during food riots killed anyone deliberately from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth. The violence involved normally targeted property, not people, and was often threatened without actually being performed, such as those farmers in Cornwall intimidated by crowds bearing ropes along with contracts forcing hoarded grain to be sold at low prices, or by anonymous letters sent to those in authority or those possessing grain before any action was taken.<sup>656</sup>

### The Swing Riots Generally Considered

The riots that hold pride of place in the history of the farmworkers' struggle with the rural elite were the Swing riots of 1830-1831, with the bulk of incidents occurring in the November and December of 1830. The laborers during it generally sought above all to destroy threshing machines that would rob them of winter employment in arable areas, and also to condemn low wages and how the Old Poor Law was administered. While the rioters used rather varied modes of protest, with some common in some counties and others rare or non-existent elsewhere, a general pattern can still be outlined. First normally came semi-literate, threatening letters to those in authority along with acts of arson. Used as a protest tool, arson had the advantage of being carried out surreptitiously. After Swing was over, it was to present problems for years to come in some areas. Then second crowds formed, whose members often forced others to join with them. They approached those in authority to intimidate them into granting their demands for higher wages and "levied" upon them an immediate handout in money or perhaps beer. The crowds then generally destroyed the local farmers' threshing machines. In East Anglia, the riots took a somewhat different form, because (as described above, pp. 150, 274) the farmers took advantage of the laborers' unrest to attack the parsons' tithes and landlords' rents. The riots affected a broad swath of England, generally developing most strongly in low-wage arable counties, while higher wage, pastoral ones were much less affected, with the counties south of Caird's wage line being the most riot-prone. Hobsbawm and Rude found some 386 threshing machines and 26 other pieces of agricultural machinery were destroyed over a period of about one year (August 1830-September 1831). Some 314 cases of arson were recorded in the same period. The size of the mobs involved ranged up to 2,000 who rioted against police at Ringwood, the 1,000 who destroyed Headley's poor-house, another

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<sup>656</sup>See Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 351-53.

1,000 who gathered at Chichester to meet the justices and large farmers to demand a wage increase, and 700-800 gathered for incidents in Micheldever. One hundred to 300 were common elsewhere in other actions. The riots and related arsons were fairly general in Berkshire, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire, with important hot spots in Norfolk and Huntingdon. The area for about twenty-five miles outside London was mostly unaffected, perhaps due to the minimal arable area nearby compared to pasture and the effects of the metropolis in providing alternative employment and raising wages. Much of East Anglia outside Norfolk, Dorset, Buckingham, Bedford, and Cambridge, with a fair amount of the adjoining Midland counties, were only partially affected, despite laborers in many of these areas experienced conditions as bad as those which did riot generally. The 1,976 rioters sentenced or acquitted were the tip of the iceberg of those guilty, and were more likely the leaders and others who committed particularly noxious offenses or those unlucky enough to be easily recognized and caught. The broad national scope of this uprising compared to any slave revolt in the United States is obvious, as well as its relative bloodlessness, as discussed above (pp. 271-74), in which the rioters actually killed no one, and the elite carried out only 19 executions, although the number of transportations inflicted was indeed high (481 actually sailed out of 505 sentenced).<sup>657</sup>

#### How Laborers Did Benefit Some from the Swing Riots

The Swing Riots, despite the repression that soon followed, did secure the farmworkers at least some temporary benefits. For some years afterwards, farmers were intimidated against using the machines that took away the late fall/winter work of threshing from the laborers--ironically, a task which they normally strongly disliked intrinsically. Part of this was because the economic benefits for small farmers of machine threshing were marginal to begin with when so many parishes had large labor surpluses anyway. A temporary wage increase did occur in some areas. More significant were its effects on broader national questions. The unrest among the laborers helped undermine the landed elite's confidence in itself and its standing in the eyes of the middle class, thus aiding in the passage of the Reform bill of 1832. The immediate repression by the Special Commission was enough to place the laborers back into a sullen acceptance of

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<sup>657</sup>On the Swing Riots generally, see Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, passim, but especially pp. 170, 173-75, 195-203, 212, 262, 357-58; Hammonds, Village Labourer, pp. 239-326; Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 357-63; E.P. Thompson, Making, pp. 226-29; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 195-201, 203, 207, 229-35; Cirket, "1830 Riots in Bedfordshire," 75-112; Barbara Kerr, Bound to the Soil: A social History of Dorset 1750-1918 (London: John Baker, 1968), pp. 100-115; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 261-65.

their position, in contrast to the significant number of local magistrates who initially deal with them leniently. But the rural elite, increasingly affected by the ideology of classical economics and Malthusianism itself, now saw the practical need to do something about the Old Poor Law's defects, especially under the Speenhamland system of family allowances. With middle class ideologues in full support, it responded to the Swing Riots in the long run through the New Poor Law of 1834. By tightening the screws of work discipline and using the workhouse as an engine to deter applicants, they created a better way to control the laborers in the future. While some reported the laborers' attitudes improved after the passage of the New Poor Law, this was surely due to their masks thickening. They now felt more of a need to keep their jobs because the fear of being committed to the workhouse. When the Poor Law Commission concluded that "the moral conduct of the labouring classes is said to be improved, and a better feeling to exist between them and their masters," the authors were being deceived and deceiving themselves by the outward show the farmworkers presented to those with power in rural areas.<sup>658</sup> So the Swing Riots had considerable influence on the course of English national politics, more than even Turner's rebellion did in the United States. But in contrast to the history of artisans in English urban areas, the farmworkers were much more quiescent, figuring little in the history of Chartism. While the Swing riots were quite spectacular compared to any American slave revolt in the numbers engaged and size of restive areas during the two-month period in which they were most intense, still the farmworkers mounted no more further major efforts at organized resistance until the unions formed in the 1860s and (especially) early 1870s, making them as a group about as tranquil in this regard as American slaves during much of the nineteenth century.

#### The Relative Weakness of the Farmworkers' Unions Compared to Others in England

Compared to the urban skilled trades, unionism among the farmworkers was much weaker, especially early in the century. The Tolpuddle case, in which six Dorset laborers were sentenced for transportation for seven years 1834 because they took oaths

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<sup>658</sup>On laborers' distaste for threshing, see Hudson, Shepherd's Life, p. 207. On the connection between Swing and Reform, and the effects on wages and machine threshing, see Thompson, Making, p. 228; Dyke, "Cobbett and the Radical Rural Platform," p. 199; for a more cautious analysis of the political connections, and for the marginal economic benefits of machine threshing, see Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 296-99, 359-65; on mask thickening, see Report from Select Committee on Poor Law Amendment Act, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 10; see also first report, pp. 38, 49.



when forming a union, constituted an early and interesting anomaly. It united trade unionists across England in protest against the incredibly arbitrary and unjust legal proceedings of magistrate James Frampton. The Tolpuddle unionists had organized to fight a cut in wages from an already paltry seven shillings a week to six. Since they had not yet struck, withdrawn any labor, or issued any demands, they could only be heavily punished by citing a law designed to deal oath-taking as part of the government's attempts to put down sedition in the wake of the naval mutinies of 1797. Although these farmworkers had no such intent, they were still convicted and transported, only returning in 1838 after having their sentences remitted in 1836 because of massive and continuing protests by urban unionists.<sup>659</sup> The Tolpuddle martyrs case had great symbolism to the cause of unionists across England, illustrating how all their members potentially were at risk in the hands of arbitrary magistrates. Besides Tolpuddle, farmworker unions showed some signs of life in the 1830s. One union in the Kent/Sussex border area in 1835 used a friendly society as its cover--an old trick--because of the legal dangers involved, especially in the squire/magistrate-dominated countryside even after the combination laws had been repealed. Nevertheless, the practical effects of unions among farmworkers remained trivial until the 1860s and early 1870s. The Hammonds suggested the paucity of organized resistance among the laborers compared to urban workers was due to the softening effects of the natural rural setting they lived in, and because possible leaders were continually eliminated by the imprisoning and transporting of poachers, "tossed to the other side of the world."<sup>660</sup> Furthermore, a delayed response occurred to changes in the organic bonds of the village community, where many of the laborers had lived in or fairly close nearby for many generations. A generation elapsed after the dissipations of the traditional vertical relationships of client-patron in the countryside through the decline of service, enclosure, and the tightening of relief under the poor laws before the laborers fully realized their plight and devised effective solutions to it. Then they sought to develop effective horizontal relationships of unity within their class, such as by organizing unions to resist the dominant class, when individualistic solutions such as migration were rejected. The countryside Somerville toured was plainly restive, as illustrated by the elite's fear of arson and machine-destruction. But it took time for the slowly changing mores of a largely illiterate or semi-literate subordinate class of unskilled workers to begin effectively act their growing class consciousness because of the

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<sup>659</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 310-12.

<sup>660</sup>See the research of Jones and Lowerson cited in Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 362; Hammonds, Village Labourer, pp. 237-38.

rural elite's power and the high rate of unemployment, which made unionization difficult. Hobsbawm and Rude note it took time for the ideas of continuing, permanent organization to take hold of the minds of people in the rural hinterlands away from its origins among urban artisans. Through the growth of such organizations as friendly societies including such national organizations as the Foresters and Oddfellows and the nonconformist sects (both discussed above, pp. 54-55, 89-90, 153-57), rural laborers increasingly did learn how to organize practically in ways which the slaves never had a chance to because they had much less freedom.<sup>661</sup>

### The Organization of the Agricultural Labourers' Union in 1872

Paramount in the history of farmworker unionism was the creation of the Agricultural Labourers' Union (ALU) in 1872. Beginning locally in Warwickshire under the leadership of Joseph Arch after being asked by three other men to speak in favor of organizing a union, it was born the evening of February seventh at Wellesbourne. When he arrived, he found nearly two thousand laborers in attendance, and after a speech that lasted about one hour, two or three hundred signed up. Although Arch paints a very dismal picture of the condition of the laborer at that moment--"Their poverty had fallen to starvation point, and was past all bearing"--this is questionable considering the broader picture. It is no coincidence that Arch's union began near the peak of the business cycle (1872) just before the depression of 1873 was to sweep over Europe and America, leading eventually to the straightened conditions of English agriculture for much of this decade and thereafter. Jones' research points to a turning point in agricultural unemployment in the 1840s, leading to increasing labor shortages in the 1850s and 1860s. In a classic case of a revolution resulting from rising expectations, Arch's union began during a pause in the upward trend of the standard of living. While conditions were hardly wonderful for the farmworkers, even when compared to the rest of the English proletariat, they still were likely better in the 1870s than they were in the 1830s. Neither was Southern Warwickshire by any means the area with the worst conditions in southern England, as Caird's tables indicate.<sup>662</sup> Arch's personal perception of the situation compared to the recent past among the same people was

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<sup>661</sup>Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 292-96. Among the leaders of the Agricultural Labourers' Union that began in 1872, most were local Methodist preachers such as Arch sometimes was himself, while none were trained for service as Anglicans. Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>662</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 67-73; Jones is cited in Wojciechowska, "Brenchley," p. 30; Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 512, 514.

likely somewhat exaggerated, unless locally southern Warwickshire was experiencing unusual problems.

By the end of May in 1872, this union had nearly 50,000 members. In the April of 1875, it had 58,650 members in 38 districts with 1,368 branches, with total income of £21,000 in 1874 and £23,130 in 1875. Over £6,000 was spent on migration and emigration purposes, helping nearly 2,000 men go to Australia and New Zealand, 500 to what was Queensland, and almost 4,000 to Canada. In 1874, £7,500 was spent on relief during strikes and lockouts, and £21,400 in 1875. Due to the impact of the 1870s depression, these numbers turned downwards. In 1881, there were some 25,000 members scattered over 22 counties. After flickering upwards in 1890-91, the union collapsed mid-decade. Rather ironically, Arch attributed his union's demise to the laborers' thinking after gaining the vote and access to the land they no longer needed the union despite it had been a significant factor in getting them the vote to begin with! Arch's union was not the only one among the farmworkers. Started nearly a year earlier in 1871 in Herefordshire, another had quickly spread over six counties and had organized about 30,000 laborers. Curiously enough, the rector in the village it began in--Leintwardine--had backed it. Opposing strikes from its beginning, this other union emphasized migration and emigration as the solution to Hodge's problems. Its activities still caused wages to increase two shillings a week in Herefordshire and also some in Wiltshire and Dorset in particular. Arch's union had had its successes as well--it pushed wages in Bedfordshire up one shilling in 1874, to a nineteenth-century peak. Its major struggles included a lockout in East Anglia, where it attempted to support those staying out for the union by asking for help from urban workers and others. Much of its power disappeared after 1875, as the force of the agricultural depression hit, and the farmers again often had a local reserve army of the unemployed to draw upon, and could use falling agricultural prices to justify cutting wages. Splitting after a conference in Birmingham in 1875, the ALU spawned the National Farm Workers Union. Headed by Matthew Vincent, the editor of the Labourers Union Chronicle, the union newspaper, it emphasized land reform. Arch's group had emphasized raising wages instead. The Agricultural Labourers' Union was rent by major internal struggles, especially in the late 1880s over the sick fund which eventually virtually bankrupted it. Although unions only represented a small percentage of all farmworkers, they had influence beyond those organized. Farmers would have to pay union wages to non-unionized laborers when unionized laborers worked for them, otherwise they might go join the union. Other kinds of spillover effects existed, even when no union locally backed the demands. Robert Long complained in his diary in 1867, even before these unions were organized, about how one laborer of his, dissatisfied with his wages, demanded a one shilling per week pay hike, because of recent strikes in the adjacent county of Berkshire.

He refused to grant it: "Was [this increase] likely when my neighbours are paying the same as myself?"<sup>663</sup> So even in the practical realm of gaining higher wages or preventing further decline, the farmworkers' unions had weight considerably beyond their numbers. As Rule noted about trade unionism generally, it had influence beyond those formally declared members through affecting the mores of the workplace in favor of the workers:

For thousands more workers than can be counted in membership statistics, a collective labour experience and response was central even if amounting, on most occasions, to no more than a tacit insistence that the customs and norms of the workplace be regarded, and was only episodically dramatic.<sup>664</sup>

### Comparing Two Subordinate Classes' Methods of Resistance

The English farmworkers' highest order achievement was the creation of unions, with their permanent organization of members in a movement to resist the demands of the dominant class. Due to how the laborers still had some minimal rights and were considered part of their society, albeit an oppressed, subordinate part, these allowed them to achieve levels of organized resistance that were forever denied to African-American slaves, whose very humanity was only reluctantly conceded by the Southern legal system. The structure of English society allowed them some ability to gain their ends within the system, without having to totally overthrow it, as illustrated by the (male) farmworkers eventually gaining the vote in 1884, something which the broad majority of African-Americans in the South, besides the hiatus of Reconstruction, were denied until the 1960s. The covert "weapons of the weak" of daily infrapolitics are the main tools used by a subordinate class when it has no formal means of gaining redress for its grievances openly and legally. American slaves inevitably had to lean upon covert and semi-covert day-to-day resistance more than the laborers because they had no open means of legally resisting their masters, while the English laborers did eventually gain and use such rights, despite all the obstacles placed in their way. The English laborers' advantage in possessing rights compared to the slaves is illustrated by incidents in which Arch was harassed for holding assemblies of laborers. In one instance, demonstrating well the adage that knowledge is power, Arch dumbfounded farmers opposed to his gathering, after a policeman told him he could not hold a meeting on the village green of Pillinghurst, Sussex, by replying that

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<sup>663</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. xiii, 110-111, 235, 253-54, 275, 281, 288-89, 333, 376, 380-86, 390-91, 401; for the 1875 split, see Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 8-10, (Long), p. 109.

<sup>664</sup>Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 20.

"any Englishman can stand on any public ground, and deliver a speech in favour of a petition to the House of Commons? I have a petition here for the House of Commons, and you must not touch me." Similarly, his union won a test case after deliberately holding a meeting in an area where three local leaders of laborers were charged for supposedly blocking the Queen's highway in the same spot. Actually, since the primitive Methodists had held meetings there, this all was plainly a pretense for finding some legal means to obstruct the union's efforts. This act of civil disobedience paid off--his union won after showing they were not blocking any travelers, since enough space existed around the crowd to allow them to pass around. Or, consider the implications of the Anti-Corn Law meeting held in Upavon in the summer of 1845, featuring a laborer as speaker, which had at least a thousand people attending it, mostly laborers and their families. Although the speaker, David Keele, had been fired for being at such a meeting before, he had found work again.<sup>665</sup> Here the laborers, although legally voteless, were actively participating in the broader political questions of their nation--a level of political participation unimaginable for American slaves. The American equivalent would be a thousand slaves gathering to hear one of their number speak out against free trade before the Civil War--the equivalent heresy on this issue to Southern slaveholders. Impossible! Slaves had no right to freedom of assembly at all, which inevitably destroyed any possible peaceful, organized attempts for the redress of their grievances against their dominant class. All their organized efforts had to be covert, and since their social system allowed no place for open complaints against their rulers, it inevitably turned these efforts towards violence, because open, organized, non-violent protest held no promises of success for them. While the rights Hodge had were often ignored or denied by his rulers, he still was able to use them to carve out breathing space that protected open organized vehicles for resisting the rural elite in time, while Sambo had no such rights legally to begin with, causing open organized resistance to be necessarily violent, because his social system prohibited any formal permanent structures by the subordinate class to resist the dominant class.

Both the farmworkers and slaves suffered from the oppression of their dominant class, and both groups gained a reputation for being relatively quiescent, compared to (say) Russian or French peasants or English and French urban artisans. Both took to the use of day-to-day resistance, through such acts as theft, lying, and (for the English farmworkers) poaching, as the dominant means of resistance during most of the period surveyed (1750-1875). Since frontal attacks on the prerogatives of the dominant class were dangerous, both groups were turned to covert, circular means

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<sup>665</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 134-37, 233-34; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 381-382.

of gaining their ends. The American slave ended up depending on such means proportionately more, and sporting a thicker mask generally, because the likely punishments for resistance were much more drastic and violent, and their dominant class held proportionately more power over them, such as through its ability to split up slave families as a tool of labor discipline. While the English ruling class was willing to draw blood upon occasion, as Peterloo and the repressive measures following the Swing Riots demonstrate, it was much less than that which followed the two major American slave revolts (in the period 1750-1865) or even mere conspiracies such as Vesey's. Correspondingly, the level of violence employed by the slaves was much higher than that used by English farmworkers, because corporal punishment inflicted by masters, mistresses, and overseers sometimes spawned a violent backlash effect when some slaves could take it no more, or refused whippings on principle. The build-up of emotional pressure was higher among the slaves due to the thicker mask they had to wear, in avoiding (say) open insulting comments about their owners more continuously, causing a stronger, more likely violent, venting of feelings when they were released. The stories of overseers and masters getting physically attacked, even killed, by slaves on the job are many--anecdotes about the farmworkers doing likewise are hard to even find. Nat Turner's vision of "blood flow[ing] in streams" contrasts sharply with Arch's counsel to a crowd of laborers numbering in the hundreds, with the county's policemen watching, to avoid violence, riot, and incendiarism, to "act as law-abiding citizens, not as red-handed revolutionaries."<sup>666</sup> The reasons for this difference was not due to any of the intrinsic virtues or vices of Hodge as opposed to Sambo, but due to the fundamentally differing legal statuses they held in their respective societies, the level of violence routinely employed by their respective dominant classes, and the resultant inability for one of these societies to tolerate any open organized dissent by its subordinate class, while in the other this was grudgingly granted.

The farmworkers resisting also benefited from the English rural elite's relatively greater divisions compared to Southern slaveholders. The farmers, since they generally rented the land they tilled, were not necessarily at one with the local establishment of parson and squire, seeing tithes and rents as drains upon their profits. They took advantage of the Swing Riots in East Anglia in order to reduce both, as was described above (pp. 150, 274). Even among the gentry and clergy themselves, no perfect unity of class interest existed, for some really did take paternalistic ideology seriously to one degree or another, at least in times of dearth, even as others, as the nineteenth century advanced, accepted the middle class ideologies

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<sup>666</sup>Blassingame, Slave Community, p. 219; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 74-75.

of Malthusianism and Classical economics. Some local magistrates during the Swing riots temporalized, seeing the justice of the laborers' complaints to one degree or another, such as those of Tunstead and Happing, Norfolk. They recommended to the "owners and occupiers of the Land" to discontinue the use of threshing machines and to raise the laborers' wages, saying "no severe measures will be necessary" if these demands of the laborers were granted.<sup>667</sup> Although Arch and Cobbett accurately and repeatedly described the reactionary tendencies and positions of the Anglican clergy, an ideological divide existed among them that surely did not exist among the clergy of the American South over slavery by the 1850s. Consider how the rector of Leintwardine favored a farmworkers' union that began in his village, the rector of Petworth strongly condemned aspects of the New Poor Law, as mentioned above, or the Bishop of Manchester, Dr. Fraser, spoke in favor of Arch's union.<sup>668</sup> The natural teleology of extending the franchise starting with the Reform Bill of 1832 helped box in the English elite into granting something that was not really in their best interests. The premises that underlay that bill were gradually extended to the rest of the potential adult electorate in the century that followed. By contrast, not only were the slaveholders united as a class in their desires to keep their bondsmen in bondage, but the poor whites could be counted upon to put the black man in his place should he ever revolt or threaten to. The laborers' greater successes at resistance, especially in an organized form, resulted not only from the more open nature of their social and political system, but also from the greater divisions among the English rural elite compared to the slaveholders in the Southern United States in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

The resistance of the laborers also had more positive benefits and fewer long-run ill effects upon them than that of the slaves. Due to the greater power of the slaveholding regime and its individual masters and mistresses having been delegated the authority to use physical violence against them, the slaves wore thicker masks than the laborers. Correspondingly, the slaves employed more day-to-day resistance that had higher costs to it to themselves than the laborers had to, such as through

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<sup>667</sup>See the "Public Notice" reproduced in Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, pp. 156. Thompson, Making, p. 226 ignores this response by a number of local magistrates when he wrote the riots were "met with the same sense of outrage as a rising of the 'blacks'." Even when later London unleashed a wave of repression, the blood drawn was much less than that surrounding any major American slave revolt or conspiracy, especially when the relative size of the Swing Riots to these are taken into account.

<sup>668</sup>Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 222, 224-25.

lies, shirking, and thefts. The overhang from such bad habits did not disappear overnight after (semi-)freedom came, helping stunt their economic progress during Reconstruction and afterwards. The laborers, before the time their "freedom" came (arguably with the vote in 1884), did not live under as harsh a regime, and had, even outside the unions and various riots, more freedom of speech against their betters, as Assistant Poor Law Commissioner Hawley had experienced first hand while traveling the roads of rural England. While the laborers also suffered some of the effects stemming from the duplicity of mask-wearing, these were much more mild, and had the countervailing effects of unionization towards the end of the surveyed period. The thinner the mask, the fewer the ill-effects that came from the day-to-day resistance that accompanied it, which placed the laborers in a more advantageous position for economic competition compared to the slaves, over and above the problems caused by continuing racism of American society long after the Civil War. In short, because the English rural elite gave their subordinate class more rights, the laborers were able to resist them much more openly and continuously than the slaves were able to, lessening the intrinsic ill-effects that came from many methods of infrapolitics that employed lying, stealing, and shirking.

#### 7. CONCLUSIONS: THE BALANCE BETWEEN "RESISTANCE" AND "DAMAGE"?

##### Resistance and the Subordinate Class's Quality of Life

For those inclined to glorify any subordinate class's resistance and sufferings, a standard conundrum lurks, ready to bite the unwary. Consider the dilemma facing socialist discourse that Dwight MacDonald observed. On the one hand, if one emphasizes the sufferings of the oppressed working class and the damage inflicted on them by the capitalist regime, then its victims must have been brutalized and deeply damaged psychologically. On the other hand, if one emphasizes how powerfully and stalwartly the workers stood up to their capitalist masters, it implies conditions must not have been so bad after all.<sup>669</sup> The worse the oppressions suffered by a subordinate class are said to be, the less plausibly any effective resistance occurred, and the more likely its members were infantilized or otherwise damaged as effective human beings. The mere act of resistance in itself implies the existence of resources, material or legal, to do so, and the more effectively it is done, the more the resources or breathing space the dominant class allowed it, whether by default or intention. The school that emphasizes oppression holds to the "damage" or "victim" thesis, which Elkins's work, with its concentration camp

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<sup>669</sup>See the summary in Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 480.



analogy, exemplifies in the historiography of African-American slavery. The "resistance" school extremities are reached by Angela Davis's journal article, with its "Rah-Rah-Rah!" present-minded spirit, but it is hardly alone. Shore suggests the need to scrap the endless assault on Elkins's work--which he justly labels a "historiographical disaster, seminal only in the sense that a caricature generates other caricatures"--that turns the ordinary, the survivors, and the time-servers, and just about everyone else in the subordinate class into heroes for engaging in routine daily activities that got them by in life. One needs to cultivate more a sense of tragedy, despair, defeat, and isolation about the struggles that enslaved Americans--or, I may add, oppressed English farmworkers--without falling into the trap of believing all or most were totally brutalized by their experience, nor that all or most were heroes (like Frederick Douglass or John Little). When John Lindsey, once a slave himself, portrays them due to slavery as having "their faces scarred and wrinkled, and almost deprived of intelligence in some cases,--their manliness crushed out; stooping, awkward in gait,--kept in entire ignorance," one should not automatically reject this unflattering description.<sup>670</sup> But neither should one then go to the opposite extreme, and maintain all or the great majority were this way. Selective perception is simply deadly, since it blocks a balanced picture of this institution, or of the conditions of English laborers, split between major north and south variations in their standard of living. What becomes evident above, despite the (southern) English farmworkers had arguably a lower standard of living than most American slaves, is that their superior legal status allowed them a higher quality of life, including a greater ability to resist their masters, and suffered less from the inevitable kick-backs coming from forced accommodation and morally troublesome day-to-day resistance strategies. The successes of the English agricultural workers in forming long-standing organizations, such as benefit clubs, and (later) unions, dedicated to promoting solidarity among themselves and (for the latter in particular) resistance against their masters, while American slaves lacked these entirely, were a function of the English rural elite giving their subordinate class much more breathing space in their legal system than Southern slaveholders gave to theirs. The differences had nothing to do with any intrinsic character flaws of slaves, but rather the farmworkers gained greater organizational skills over the decades through participating in Nonconformist sects, benefit clubs, friendly societies, even unions, which their elite (often reluctantly) allowed them to have, but the American slaveholders totally forbade their slaves from developing (except perhaps in the religious sphere some). The English farmworkers had a superior quality of life, since they could engage in more

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<sup>670</sup>Shore, "Poverty of Tragedy," 147-48, 155, 157, 159-60, 162-63; Drew, Refugee, p. 78.

resistance, do it more openly, and suffer from fewer kick-backs from the routine tactics a subordinate class uses in infrapolitics.<sup>671</sup>

### Slavery is on a Continuum of Social Systems of Subordination

More importantly, this work attempts to portray much of what occurred to these two subordinate classes as hardly unique, even though some important differences remained between the two due to different legal statuses and the results coming from the laborers' families attempted to independently sustain themselves as an economic unit, while almost no slaves did that. In both cases, the elites in question could not do as they please, even when one of them, American slaveholders, had nearly absolute power over their subordinate class. It is necessary to avoid over-emphasizing the effectiveness the elite may have over the minds of their subjects--a mistake Fogel and Engerman, Elkins, and Genovese all commit to one degree or another, through whatever variation of hegemony they applied to analyze American slavery. Clark, in his English Society, may commit a similar error, but since that work intentionally focuses on the beliefs and acts of the elite, dealing with the subordinate classes only incidentally, convicting him on this score cannot be easily done based on that work alone. Barrow had the self-deceit to maintain that: "A plantation might be considered as a piece of machinery, to operate successfully, all of its parts should be uniform and exact, and the impelling force regular and steady; and the master, if he pretended at all to attend to his business, should be their impelling force."<sup>672</sup> However, in the real world, especially when the numbers of slaves so heavily outnumbered him and his family, his personal chattels' own ideas about how the plantation should be run inevitably had much influence over its practical functioning, even as he freely applied the lash and other punishments. The same went for the English elite when they faced restive laborers in their midst, especially that small but powerful minority organized as part of a union: They simply could not always have their way, regardless of their ability to create enclosures, raise food prices, lower wages, change laws governing relief, employ new technology in agriculture, and ending service, without being constrained by the fears of riots or arsons breaking out against them.

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<sup>671</sup>W.E.B. Dubois regarded the slaves' necessary "defence of deception and flattery" as causing "a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence," that living a "double life, with double thoughts, double duties" involved a "peculiar wrench of the soul." Souls of Black Folk, as cited in Shore, "Poverty of Tragedy," 161.

<sup>672</sup>Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409.

The above work has avoided seeing race as some kind of ultimate reality for the American system of slavery, even as racism was necessary for its practical functioning. Slaveholders felt uncomfortable with especially light-skinned slaves, who could pass as whites or nearly so. This was not only because they could escape more easily, but also because the similarity in skin-color made them reflect on the humanity and likeness to themselves of those they held in bondage. William Pease, born a slave, had blue eyes and passed for white among strangers. Three or four trading houses in slaves refused to buy him because he "was too white for them." One slaveholder (not his master) told him while on board a ship: "You're as white as my daughter there . . . all you've got to do when we get to a landing is take your clothes and walk." He was able to escape from Arkansas without being questioned once. He fled because his master was going to whip him, not for any specific offense, but because "niggers always should be whipped some, no matter how good they are, else they'll forget that they are niggers."<sup>673</sup> Even in this case, Pease's condition of bondage trumped his light skin color, even as it allowed him to easily escape, since he could be whipped as much by his owner as the darkest-complexioned slave. The comparison made generally above places American slavery on a continuum with other systems of social subordination, not seeing it as unique in its effects on those oppressed, through comparing it with English laborers. Correspondingly, "black labor" and "slave labor" have intentionally not been equated above, partly because 11 percent of all blacks in the South were free, but also because the blacks' condition of bondage effected their treatment more than any other factor. Even as it channeled the expression of racism by a particular means, this particular social system had many, many negative effects on the slaves over and above any directly resulting from racism. Oppression is oppression, whether done for reasons of race, profit, or power lust. American Slavery actually may have provided a higher standard of living than most southern English laborers enjoyed, but a much lower overall quality of life, because of how it provided inferior quality human relationships between family members (by the dominant group breaking the subordinate class's families up for profit-seeking reasons) and also between workers and "management," generally considered, due to the slave master's ability to use corporal punishment and confiscate the total product of the slave's labor for his own benefit.

A comparative historical analysis can bring insights to the surface that otherwise would be missed, such as the above has done, so long as the comparison does not involve two fruits as different as apples and oranges. Elkins's overriding mistake was to create a comparison between an system of subordination designed to systematically exterminate and destroy its

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<sup>673</sup>Drew, Refugee, pp. 123, 128-130.

subordinate class with another that had to keep it in existence to profitably raise crops in commercial agriculture. By comparing two groups at nearly the same time in nations with fairly similar cultures and technological levels, Elkins' pitfall is avoided, while new insights are brought to the fore. New insights will continue to come, breaking out of the rigid categories of "victimization" and "Sambo-bashing" by others continuing to follow David Davis's prediction: "I think it is not improbable that future studies of slavery will be less concerned with race as the ultimate reality, especially as we more accurately locate slavery on a spectrum of labor systems."<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>674</sup>Davis, "Slavery and the Post-World War II Historians," 9.

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