

THE CHANGING INTERPRETATIONS
OF AMERICAN SLAVERY: 1865-1975

by

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B. S., Texas A & M University, 1969

A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

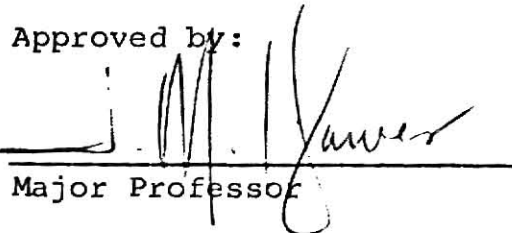
MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1975

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my profound appreciation to Drs. Joseph Hawes, Clyde Ferguson, George Kren, and Donald Nieman for their guidance and direction in the preparation of this thesis. In addition, I wish to extend a special note of praise to my loving wife, René, and my darling parents, William and Erma, without whose constant encouragement and patience this manuscript could not have been realized.

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INTRODUCTION

Few aspects of American historiography have lent themselves to such wide variety of interpretations as the institution of slavery in the ante bellum South. From the immediate post bellum period to the mid-1970's the discussion of the Old South's "peculiar institution" has continued undiminished. The vast array of scholarship directly related to the topic of slavery since 1956 confirms the notion that the institution has suffered little from a want of attention or lack of popularity. At least one major work on slavery has emerged in nearly every year since Kenneth M. Stampp published The Peculiar Institution in 1956.¹

Although the future of slavery as an institution was decided at appomattox in 1865, the study of Black slavery has had a particular fascination for American historians. From 1865 until 1975 the subject of slavery has yielded a variety of opinions and interpretations, complementary and conflicting, and it has produced one of the liveliest and most interesting debates in the historical discipline. This essay traces the development of opposing views on Southern bondage and includes an historiographical

survey of the complexities involved in differing perspectives on the institution. The study concentrates on major works reflecting the principal trends in the historiography of American slavery from the immediate post bellum period until the present.

The treatment of slavery has recently taken on a new and more urgent meaning. Because many of the recent publications on slavery are direct or indirect products of the civil rights movement, several of them tell as much about changing views on racial problems as they do about slavery on the Old South's plantations. Therefore, with the realization that racism is a nation question, this study may suggest some of the historical background of current black-white racial conflict. An investigation into the various interpretations of slavery will serve as a valid yardstick in gauging the extent to which American society has or has not changed its racial attitudes concerning Blacks. "How a person thinks about Negro slavery historically makes a great deal of difference here and now," wrote Stanley M. Elkins: "it tends to locate him morally in relation to a whole range of very immediate political, social, and philosophical issues which may in some way refer back to slavery."²

A critical analysis of the major works which have decisively influenced general trends in the study of American slavery is the major concern of this effort. However, the key emphasis is centered on the changing interpretations and fluctuation of dominant views

on slavery which reached ascendancy between 1865-1975. The chief theme that undergirds this essay contends that interpretations of Southern ante bellum slavery have fluctuated constantly over the 110 year period from 1865-1975, usually paralleling changes in the social, political, economic, and intellectual climate of the country during a particular era. Historians, being products of their own time periods, share the central concerns of their contemporaries and present day interests help shape the questions they ask of the past. Thus, the changing interpretations and analyses of the Old South's plantation regime reflect mainly the temper of the historian's individual time frame.

Nowhere is this thesis more adequately substantiated than in a bibliographical examination of the scholarship on slavery over the past century. The literature on slavery during the decades following Appomattox reflected the sectional biases of its authors. Northern authors tended to bask in the afterglow of abolitionism. Their writings, typified by Henry Wilson's conspiratorial Rise and Fall of the Slave Power (1872-79) and John A. Logan's complementary volume, The Great Conspiracy (1885), viewed slavery as a moral evil. Apologetic Confederate publications such as Edward Pollard's The Lost Cause (1866) and The Lost Cause Regained (1868), Jefferson Davis' The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (1881), and Alexander Stephens' A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States (1868-70), romanticized the South's defeat

and portrayed Black bondage as a blessing to the South as well as to the slaves.

As sectional tensions lessened in the mid-1880's, the assessment of slavery shifted as well. Constitutional histories such as Hermann E. von Holst's Constitutional History of the United States (1877-1892) and James Schouler's History of the United States Under the Constitution (1880-1913), while maintaining a moral hostility toward slavery, attempted to replace the sectional views of slavery with a conciliatory approach. James Ford Rhodes' History of the United States From the Compromise of 1850 (1892) and Albert Bushnell Hart's Slavery and Abolition (1906) were the apex of this effort. The works of a growing class of liberal Southern historians such as Woodrow Wilson's A History of the American People (1901), William E. Dodd's Statesmen of the Old South (1911), and William P. Trent's two works, William Gilmore Simms (1892) and Southern Statesmen of the Old Regime (1897), paralleled developments occurring in Northern nationalistic writing.

The appearance in 1918 of Ulrich Bonnell Phillips' apologetic treatment of plantation slavery, American Negro Slavery, revised the drift toward the nationalistic analysis of the institution of slavery established by Rhodes and others. Phillips denied charges of planter cruelty, baseness, and inhumanity, while he emphasized the best features of the plantation regime such as

its benevolence, paternalism, and its ultimate beneficial results to the planter and to the racially inferior African. Phillips' racist assessment came at the peak of racial intolerance registered against Blacks in the North and South in the early decades of the twentieth century. Widespread lynchings of Blacks, voter disfranchisement, enactments of Jim Crow legislation, the ascendancy of Booker T. Washington's accommodationist policies, the emergence of pseudo-scientific theories on race, and the failure of prevailing reform thought to include an attack on racism, led to an acceptance of Phillips' ideas on race and slavery. Phillips' primary influence can be seen in the several state histories of slavery completed between 1918-1933. V. Alton Moody's Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations (1924), Rosser H. Taylor's Slaveholding in North Carolina (1926), Charles S. Sydnor's Slavery in Mississippi (1933), and Ralph B. Flanders Plantation Slavery in Georgia (1933), all tended to follow Phillips' line of interpretation.

The ideas of cultural relativism expressed by such environmentalists as Franz Boaz, Thomas Dewey, and William I. Thomas, during the late 1920's gradually became the accepted anthropological positions on theories of race and culture. The rise of European fascism, the egalitarian spirit of the New Deal era, and the specter of democratic idealism sponsored by the victorious Allies, when combined with anthropologists theories

about race, contributed to a climate of enlightened concern for Blacks in the United States during the 1930's and 1940's. With the publication of Frederic Bancroft's Slave Trading in the Old South (1931) and Henrietta Buckmaster's Let My People Go (1933), the beginnings of a reaction to Phillips' ideas about slavery could be seen. The 1940's witnessed a further erosion of Phillips' interpretation with the appearance of Herbert Aptheker's American Negro Slave Revolts (1943), Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma (1944), and Richard Hofstadter's essay "U.B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend" (1944). Domestic and international developments of the 1950's, the infant civil rights movement, the shadow of the Cold War, and the emergence of Black African nations on the global scene, helped create an intellectual atmosphere hostile to apologetic interpretations of slavery. In 1956, Kenneth M. Stamp, in The Peculiar Institution, delivered the coup de grace to Phillips' American Negro Slavery.

The failure of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 1960's to significantly eradicate vestiges of racial prejudice served to show the degree of racism in the fabric of American society. In response to entrenched Southern and Northern resistance to integration and other political occurrences, researchers and historians began to reexamine the phenomenon of race and its implications in American history. Old debates regarding the significance of race and its relationship to slavery

were revived as demonstrated by articles published by Oscar and Mary Handlin, "The Origins of the Southern Labor System" (1950), and Carl N. Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice" (1959).

The phenomenon of color, slavery, and racial ideology found particular appeal in David Brion Davis' The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (1966), Winthrop Jordan's White Over Black (1968), George M. Frederickson's Black Image in the White Mind (1971), and William Stanton's Leopard Spots (1960). In addition, racism and racial ideology in areas outside of the South during the ante bellum period received thorough treatment in Leon Litwak's North of Slavery (1961) and Eugene Berwanger's Frontier Against Slavery (1967).

The tenacity of racial attitudes illustrated in America by urban racial violence led several historians to conclude that the slave himself represented the "key" to the meaning and understanding of the American experience. Articles by Staughton Lynd, "The Compromise of 1787" (1966), Richard Brown, "The Missouri Compromise, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism" (1966), and Robert Starobin's "The Negro: A Central Theme in American History" (1968), combined with monographs such as Robert McColley's Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (1964) and William Freehling's Prelude to Civil War (1965) to underscore the centrality of the slavery issue before 1860.

The 1960's also found historians and social scientists occupied with the controversy created by Stanley Elkins' study Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (1959), a volume reflective of the enormous burden of guilt that America directed toward Blacks. Elkins portrayed American slavery, as opposed to Latin American slavery, as a peculiarly brutal form of bondage comparable to Nazi concentration camps. The effort on the part of militant Blacks to cultivate a positive self-image of themselves ran headlong into the clownlike "Sambo" stereotype constructed by Elkins. As a result, an elaborate debate over the validity of Elkins' theses began. Supportive of Elkins' comparative analysis of New World slave regimes were Frank L. Tannenbaum's Slave and Citizen (1947), Gilberto Freyre's The Masters and the Slaves (1956), and Herbert Klein's Slavery in the Americas (1967). Taking strong issue with Elkins' arguments were Davis' The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, Eugene D. Genovese's The World The Slaveholders Made (1960), and Carl N. Degler's Neither Black Nor White (1971).

The response to Elkins' theory of slave infantilization and personality perversion gave rise to the renewed study of slave culture. Although the discussion over the presence of African survivals in slave culture had been debated earlier by Melville Herskovits in Myth of the Negro Past (1941) and E.

Franklin Frazier in History of the Negro in the United States (1949), the new emphasis on the study of slave culture was aimed principally at discrediting Elkins. Sterling Stuckey's "The Black Ethos in Slavery" (1968) and John W. Blassingame's The Slave Community (1972) found the determinants of slave behavior in an autonomous culture created by the slaves rather than in any identification with the masters' values as asserted by Elkins.

The socio-cultural study of slavery has received increased popularity recently and it has highlighted the shift from the view of slavery as uniquely cruel to a near-Phillipslike conclusion that seemed to suggest that the supposedly evil features of the plantation regime were basically unsubstantiated anti-slave propaganda which neo-abolitionist historians had continued to support. Influenced heavily by a growing sense of Black pride and consciousness in Afro-American intellectual thought, recent studies such as Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's Time On The Cross (1974) have posited that the plantation represented a testing ground for Black achievement under adversity. The appearance of Genovese's exhaustive work, Roll, Jordan, Roll (1974) illustrated that planters, far from regarding their slaves solely as property, were imbued with an overwhelming sense of paternalism. In turn, the slaves accepted the state of paternalism, often using it to their advantage in order to enable them to create an unusually large degree of "living space" on the planta-

tions. This "living space" ultimately militated against rebellion and made their lives as slaves preferable to the uncertainties of a new order born of revolt and violence.

Thus, fed by political, social, and intellectual developments, the interpretations of ante bellum Southern slavery have changed constantly from 1865 to the present. American historians have continued to demonstrate a peculiar interest in slavery, and even today there remains no clear consensus of views concerning the analysis of the institution. With the introduction of new research methods, the increased availability of previously untapped source materials, and the ever changing social and political scene, complete agreement on the interpretation of slavery appears unlikely in the near future.

CHAPTER I

SECTIONALISM VERSUS NATIONALISM

Scholarship during the first decades following the Civil War failed to treat the question of slavery apart from the larger issues of the war, Reconstruction, sectionalism, and nationalism. Slavery, after 1865, was a dead issue, having been resolved by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution; therefore, writers engaged themselves with problems of more immediate concern. While the relationship of African bondage to the coming of the Civil War was still being debated on a low key after 1865, it was not until Ulrich Bonnell Phillips published one of his most interesting works, American Negro Slavery (1919) that the institution of slavery itself was explored in detail apart from other related issues. Thus, for over half a century after the guns were silenced at Appomattox, scholars expended little effort attempting to understand and interpret black slavery as an independent institution. Most authors of the period treated African slavery under the wider rubric of general American history or as a part of the crisis of the Civil War.

Sectionally polemicized interpretations of slavery, chiefly characteristic of ante bellum writings, typified the direction of slave historiography during the immediate decades following the Civil War. Initial scholarship came to be dominated by journalists, politicians, military officials, and amateur historians whose sectional loyalties virtually destroyed any respectable claim to objectivity. The absence of a well developed class of professionally trained historians rendered the emotional impact of a fundamentally biased line of argumentation preferable to a calm objective analysis of slavery. Robbed of the urgency and sharpness of slavery as a burning issue, these authors tended to write multivolume accounts which primarily concentrated on the developing sectional crisis and the resultant military operations rather than closely examining the institution of slavery. In addition, historical judgments of slavery, at least until the mid-1880's, followed essentially the identical moral patterns of abolitionists and proslavery writers of the ante bellum period.

Henry Wilson's three-volume work, Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America (1872-79) was typical of Northern apologist writings in the 1870's and 1880's. A former abolitionist, Free Soiler, radical Republican, and Vice-President under U.S. Grant, Wilson's conception of slavery and the war was colored by his pre-war political and social biases. While Wilson went

to great lengths to sketch the armed conflict in terms of a virtuous Union triumph of good over evil, he viewed the institution of American slavery in pompous moral terms. Wilson pictured slavery as demoralizing and a complete subversion of natural rights.¹ Slavery was ill-founded because it was inimical to the advancing currents of Christian civilization.² While noting the existence of kindly slave masters, Wilson, in language descriptive of the most ardent abolitionist, fashioned the system of Southern bondage as one rooted in "violence, impatient of all restraints, whether of reason or of conscience, humanity, or religion."³ In a chilling moral indictment of the institution, Wilson suggested that slavery had infected the whole of Southern society with its deadly poison, "and that the proscription, lawlessness, and barbarism of slavery were the necessary conditions of its existence."⁴

Histories of slavery by former abolitionists like Wilson's Rise and Fall and Frederick Douglass' power autobiography, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass Written by Himself (1881) were representative of the humanitarian idealistic extremists of the North. Another style of Union sentiment was expressed in the writings of John A. Logan, former Union colonel and Vice-Presidential candidate in the election of 1884. In his massive work, The Great Conspiracy (1885), Logan supported Wilson's earlier

contention that sinister persons were at work in the South eventually revealing themselves in a small-tightly knit band of politicians conspiring to impose their will upon the nation. Unlike Wilson, Logan was less caustic in his condemnations of Southern society. In Logan's view, the people of the South were simply duped and "misled by the cunning secrecy" of the conspirators, "and without an inkling of suspicion of their fell purposes, went manfully into the field, with a courage worthy of a better cause. . . ." ⁵ Logan took a dim moral view of slavery, often referring to it as an "inherited National Curse." ⁶ Slavery, according to Logan, was the moral antithesis of freedom, the necessary ingredient of advanced civilizations. The North, while embracing "god-given Freedom," argued Logan, was endowed with a "higher-resulting civilization than that enjoyed by the slaveholding South." ⁷

If Unionist sympathizers assessed slavery strictly from a partisan and moral viewpoint, then supporters of the Southern cause were not without their own historical writers and polemicists. These individuals, usually ex-Confederates, and unskilled in modern historical techniques, but were united in their belief that history would ultimately vindicate the justice of the Southern cause. The principle objective of Southern writers and historians was to demonstrate through "accurate" history that "fanati-

cal" abolitionists and Northern aggression were basically at the root of the Civil War. Southern polemicist-historians sought to paint the institution of slavery as a positive "good" rather than a necessary "evil." To such Southern spokesmen, "evil" was to be found in the Northern determination to bring Southern reasoning into line with its own brand of ideology.

One disciple of the South's "Lost Cause" was Edward Alfred Pollard, a wartime journalist in Richmond, Virginia. In The Cause (1866) Pollard summed up the ante bellum Southern mood in romantic fashion, and glamorized the knights of the Old South as "chevaliers of olden day."⁸ Selecting a broad theme shared by the dominant Southern apologists of the period, Pollard insisted that slavery was not the cause of the war, and noted that the institution furnished "only a convenient line of distinction between the disputants."⁹ Pollard found Southern bondage to be the mildest form of slavery in the world.¹⁰ He maintained that Southern slavery "elevated the African, and was in the interest of human improvement, . . . [*it*] protected the negro in life and limb, . . . and made him altogether the most striking type in the world of cheerfulness and contentment."¹¹ Rather than slavery being regarded as an evil and an immoral institution as charged by Northern writers of the period, Pollard urged that slavery be observed in a positive role as it applied to

the particular conditions in the South. In a practical and moral sense, African servitude had established a more noble type of civilization which ultimately afforded whites the opportunities for the pursuit of individual refinement and scholarship.¹²

Easily one of the most representative works concerning the vindication of the South by a participant in the war was Jefferson Davis' two-volume account, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (1881). Davis, the former President of the Confederacy, maintained that slavery was of minimal importance in creating conditions of civil war and suggested, instead, that constitutional issues lay at the heart of the conflict. In opposing the interpretations of Unionists, Davis described the institution of slavery as mild,¹³ and strongly implied that the system was beneficial to the bondsmen. In servitude the Africans, argued Davis, "were trained in the gentle arts of peace and order and civilization; they increased from a few unprofitable savages to millions of efficient Christian laborers."¹⁴ African slavery represented a positive good because it removed virtual barbarians from "unhospitable Africa to Christian civilization whereby happiness and mutual harmony reigned."¹⁵ If John Logan viewed human enslavement as the moral antithesis of freedom, Davis understood African bondage to be the result of a moral commitment by Southerners to Christianity and civilization.

Alexander Stephens, Vice-President to Davis and author of the memoir-history A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States (1868-1870), regarded slavery as "a drop in the ocean compared with those other considerations involved in the issue of the Civil War."¹⁶ Although he attempted to evaluate the meaning of slavery essentially in economic and religious terms, Stephens also perceived the institution as containing the outlines of race relations which involved the legal subordination of Blacks to whites.¹⁷ Far from being an evil social institution as claimed by Northern abolitionists, slavery was portrayed by Stephens as a romantic and paternalistic system of intricately expressed social relations in which both had rights secured and duties imposed. "It was," Stephens wrote, "a system of reciprocal service, and mutual bond."¹⁸

In The Lost Cause Regained (1868) Edward Pollard foreshadowed Ulrich Phillips' interpretation by nearly half a century. Writing during Reconstruction when freedmen participated in the political processes in increasing numbers, Pollard agreed with Stephens that slavery had a far greater significance than its impact on morality. Pollard reasoned that the institution had been necessary as a vehicle of race control, an instrument to provide for the Black man's "proper relation to the white man."¹⁹ Slavery, ultimately, secured a barrier between the races

and established itself as an effective bulmark to race warfare.²⁰

The final two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a slight, but significant directional shift in the historiography of slavery. Numerous forces were at work weaving the varying strands of the nation's social, political, and economic growth into a unique brand of nationalism. This spirit of nationalism, coupled with the emergence and acceptance of history as a recognized academic discipline and its ultimate dominance by professionally-trained individuals had a decided impact upon the way in which historians treated slavery. Rather than remain content with making general moral assessments of slavery, historians, North and South, broadened their observation of the institution to include the denunciation of slavery on non-moral grounds.

The trend toward a less polemicized and more national interpretation of slavery can be seen in the early writing of the German scholar, Hermann von Holst, viewed by many Americans in the 1870's and 1880's as an outstanding representative of the emerging school of trained historians.²¹ In his eight-volume study, Constitutional History of the United States (1877-1892), von Holst fashioned a remarkable blend of the old style polemics with a unique nationalistic approach. As to nationalism, von Holst observed that the war had been an inevitable outgrowth of good and evil, "good" being defined as freedom and nationalism, and "evil" identified as slavery and states' sovereignty. Slavery,

as a divisive force toward national unity, however, only masked von Holst's moral abhorrence of the institution. Reminiscent of the Unionist tradition, von Holst viewed slavery as a vicious and corrupt system, inconsistent with fundamental principles, and "adverse to a pure state of morals."²²

James Schouler's multivolume study, entitled History of the United States of America Under the Constitution (1880-1913), furnished an excellent example of historical scholarship in transition from amateur status to professional standing. Schouler, like many historians of the post-war generations, did not examine the system of slavery as an independent institution, but placed the major stress of his writings on constitutional and political issues from 1783-1861. A former anti-slave sympathizer who voted for Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and 1864, Schouler stressed the conventional Unionist moral denunciations of slavery and the "slavocracy." His voluminous study included a number of references to the consiratorial thesis advanced previously by Henry Wilson and John Logan.²³ Schouler branded slavery an unmitigated evil. "Slavery and Slaveholders," claimed Schouler, "went down in the dust together, and the American Constitution became, what it never had been before, a charter of universal freedom."²⁴

Schouler also found slavery wholly incompatible with the

concept of national expansion. He contended that slave labor and free labor could not live loyally and peacefully together. Schouler recognized slavery as wrong from a moral standpoint and unfortunate because it had disrupted the nation's destined march toward unity. More than anyone else, Schouler illustrated the dilemma of late nineteenth century historians. The emerging cadre of professional historians found themselves unable to detach themselves completely from the open biases and largely unsubstantiated opinions which characterized early post-war scholarship concerning slavery. Scholars of the new historical tradition, however, were developing the ability, through the application of their training in objective analysis of historical issues, to divorce themselves enough from the moral urgency of the issue to observe some of the wider implications of slavery. Schouler's Constitutional History of the United States showed how difficult it was to narrow the gulf between sectional apologies and genuine national reconciliation.

In the Civil War and Reconstruction (1903), John W. Burgess, a Tennessean and renowned for his work in Reconstruction history, castigated the South for upholding the "evil" institution of slavery. Nevertheless, Burgess reserved his primary stress for the development of a prevailing theme of nationalism. Although he viewed slavery principally from a foundation of moral abhorrence, Burgess, like Schouler and von Holst, saw

the system as an obstacle in the nation's path toward modern civilization:

This then was, in the plan of universal history, the meaning of secession: The hastening of emancipation and nationalization. The United States were lagging in the March of modern civilization. Slavery and State sovereignty were the fetters which held them back, and these fetters had to be screwed down tight in order to provoke the Nation to strike them off at one fell blow, and free itself, and assert its supremacy, forever.²⁵

Burgess' discussion of African slavery illustrated the difficulties encountered as the historiography of the institution passed from the hands of subjective amateurs to those of trained scholars experienced in the art of unattached objectivity. His ultimate conclusion was suggestive of reconcilliation in that slavery was interpreted not only as an immoral blot on the national character, but also as a menace to national unification and the mutual progress of the North and South. However, Burgess' treatment of African servitude as a moral obscenity, and his inability to remove the discussion of slavery beyond the realm of morality demonstrated the provisional consensus of the dominant intellectual mood of the late nineteenth century: with all the detachment in the world, no scholar of principle could be expected in a new and enlightened age to countenance human-chattel slavery.²⁶

James Ford Rhodes' History of the United States From The Compromise of 1850 (1892), more than any other work, epitomized the gradual shift of historical scholarship from the polemicist of an earlier period to a position of enlightened impartiality. Writing in a period characterized by sectional reconciliation, Rhodes was chiefly noted for his efforts at a balanced assessment in his analysis of the Civil War and the slavery issue. "It was an unrighteous cause which the South defended by arms," wrote Rhodes, "and at the tribunal of modern civilization, Calhoun and Davis must be held accountable for the misery which resulted from this appeal to sword."²⁷ Nevertheless, Rhodes reminded his readers that England and the "North had a hand in establishing negro slavery."²⁸ In essence, he regarded the specter of slavery as a national burden of shame to be borne by the North as well as the South. "If we suppose the Puritan to have settle Virginia and the Cavalier Massachusetts," reasoned Rhodes, "it is not inconceivable that. . .the Puritan should have fought for slavery."²⁹

For all of Rhodes' attempts at reconciliation, fairness, and objectivity, he sternly maintained that above all else, slavery involved a question of morals, and he was unyielding in his opposition to the institution. Early in his study Rhodes announced his moral indictment of slavery, frequently

referring to its "degradations"³⁰ and its "evils."³¹ In the main, Rhodes found slavery to "signify a practice utterly abhorrent."³² Eventhough Rhodes cautioned against moral judgments due to the sensitive nature of slavery, he, nevertheless, concluded that slavery was "a curse to the master and a wrong to the slave."³³

Moral revulsions against human bondage led Rhodes to a detailed investigation of the system, and he devoted an exceptionally lengthy chapter to the discussion of slavery in Southern society. Aside from occasional lapses into racism,³⁴ Rhodes' seventy-two page treatment of slavery was doubtlessly the most thorough until the publication of the works of U.B. Phillips in the early twentieth century. Rhodes attacked the system and explored the Southerners' contentions that diet, housing, and clothing, were superior to those of free white Northern laborers. Rhodes closely examined the slaves' status before Southern law, brutality, alledged master and overseer sexual exploitation of slave women, the chronic instability of the slave family, and the inevitable desire of the slave for freedom. He also evaluated the effects of bondage on the slave, master, and Southern society in general. Rhodes' study provided a relaxed and more balanced appraisal of ante bellum slavery, yet he also attacked the immorality implicit within the system of slavery itself.

Rhodes' efforts at an impartial discussion of slavery led him to conclude that the institution possessed built-in mechanisms that mellowed its harshness and mitigated against complete dehumanization. When treating miscegenation and sexual irregularities of the master class in the South, Rhodes admitted that planters released their carnal passions occasionally upon slave women who, in numerous cases, yielded "without objection. . . to the passions of their masters."³⁵ Rhodes constructed a tapestry of evidence which suggested that "slaves were sometimes whipped to death,"³⁶ but on more than one occasion he also discovered "notices of plantations on which the slaves were never whipped."³⁷ In this manner Rhodes lightened for the Southern slaveholder the vicious condemnations characteristic of an earlier period. Instead, in a genuine spirit of national, as well as intellectual, reconciliation, Rhodes concluded that "slavery is the calamity of our Southern brethern, and not their crime."³⁸

Rhodes regarded slavery as too complex and intricate to be blamed on innate imperfections in man. Instead, he singled out inanimate forces such as the development of short-staple cotton and the invention of the cotton gin as vehicles which guided the course of slavery. He, thus, portrayed the slaveholder as an innocent actor in a gigantic theatrical written and directed by unseen and inevitable forces beyond the slaveholder's control.

Slavery was retained in the border states not because of human motivations for profit, but through the demand for cotton.³⁹

To Rhodes, the slaveholder was not immoral, but all of his motives and ambitions were manipulated by the impersonal machine and the inanimate cotton fiber. Rhodes expanded his thesis and intimated that the invention of the cotton gin prevented the peaceful abolition of slavery.⁴⁰ In the final analysis, then, economic inducements rather than human incentives "were destined to prevail that would bring to naught the moral and human expectations of the wisest statesmen of the time."⁴¹

In much the same spirit of nationalism and sectional reconciliation which underscored Rhodes' work, Albert Bushnell Hart, in Slavery and Abolition (1906), reached virtually the same conclusions. Slavery was morally corrupt, therefore, the Southern cause during the war was ethically unsound. Without totally excusing the Southern slaveholder, Hart recalled that the North, having indulged enormously in the slave trade during the colonial era, was equally responsible for the growth of slavery in the South.⁴² In a further effort to lift the full burden of the guilt of slavery from the shoulder of planters, Hart contended that the demise of slavery in the North stemmed more from economic limitations than from a genuine spirit of moral indignation. The fact that the North was equally as responsible as the South for the immorality and growth of slavery

made reconcilliation much more palatable to Southern intellectuals.

Slavery and Abolition was a pioneering work in the history of the anti-slave movement. The son and grandson of former abolitionists, Hart demonstrated surprising sympathy for the slaveholders when he noted that the fact that ten percent of the slave population was free in 1830 was indeed "a tribute to the humanity of the southern people."⁴³ Searching to present the slaveholder impartially, Hart often found himself in the precarious position of excusing the excesses of the plantation regime. Physical brutality was placed in the context of nineteenth century Southern society. In this instance, brutal extremes were pardoned since cruelty to all unfortunate individuals was a symptomatic feature endemic to Southern society as a whole. Brutality to the African bondsmen was only part of an ongoing societal aspect peculiar to the South and not a deliberate attempt to erect a harsh regime.⁴⁴

Morally opposed to slavery, Hart, in a manner of balance and reconcilliation reminiscent of Ford, viewed human bondage through nationalistic lenses. Slavery "was a cast-iron and rigid system," stated Hart, "which America had outgrown."⁴⁵ In Slavery and Abolition the implication was clear: Slavery was morally inconsistent with enlightened principles of human dignity, but more importantly, it served only to retard the progress of the nation. Laying aside his moral objections to

chattel slavery, Hart, nonetheless, objected to forced bondage because, in his opinion, it represented "a deliberate refusal to go along with the rest of the world in the enjoyment of a more human spirit than that of the eighteenth century."⁴⁶

Hart typified the chief characteristic of the nationalist historian. His writings reflected both the moral denunciation of slavery and the modern nationalistic view of the impact of the institution.

If Northern scholarship found its spokesmen for balance, nationalism, and sectional reconcilliation in Rhodes and Hart, a generation of liberal Southern intellectuals was emerging as a dominant force in Southern historical circles. Developing from the ashes of the generation which spawned the likes of Davis, Stephens, and Pollard, the new breed of Southern historian appeared similar in philosophy to their counterparts in the North. These Southern liberals were well-skilled in history, reconcilliatory and nationalistic in their outlook, and willing to write off the institution their fathers had fought for as hopelessly reactionary."⁴⁷ The new Southern historians produced works that were the antithesis of Southern romanticists and apologists who, by boasting of the greatness of their fathers, managed to create the myth of the "Golden Age" of the Old South.

Previous Southern writers had encumbered their works with devotion to the idyllic Southern past, but the young liberals

during the 1880's and 1890's were optimistic concerning the future of the "New" South.⁴⁸ While maintaining a measure of respect for the traditional heroes of the Old South, the scholars of the "New" South demonstrated unconcealed satisfaction over the result of the war. The war had removed slavery and sectionalism, thus, laying the foundation for a progressive and industrial South. To the burgeoning coterie of Southern liberals, the South's destiny lay in the hope of the future rather than the worship of the past. These outspoken individuals revealed a growing conviction that the future of the "New" South lay in industrial progress rather than the rural conservatism of the plantation regime.⁴⁹ In addition, scholars such as Woodrow Wilson, William E. Dodd, William G. Brown, William P. Trent, and John Spencer Bassett, refused to write and teach within the traditional intellectual framework outline by Southern patriots of an earlier generation.

Southern liberal historians concentrated their criticisms of the Old South upon the institution of slavery, sharing views strikingly similar to Rhodes and Hart. Although Woodrow Wilson's A History of the American People (1901) and William E. Dodd's Statesmen of the Old South (1911) provide excellent illustrations of the interpretations of the new breed of Southern historians of the period, none is more representative than William P. Trent's William Gilmore Simms (1892) and Southern

Statesmen of the Old Regime (1897). Like many nationalistic oriented Southern historians, Trent shared an enlightened position regarding slavery. Human bondage carried a moral stigma, and Trent judged his forefathers in contempt of all the sacred canons of humanity for establishing and maintaining slavery. "Slavery was founded upon injustice and blindness," Trent theorized, and it "afforded constant provocation to the indulgence of lower passions."⁵⁰ In the moral denunciation of slavery, Trent and other liberals moved closer to their comrades in the North.

Reflecting the nationalistic trend occurring in Northern scholarship, Trent recognized the wider implications of slavery. Sincerely believing that the destiny of the "New" South was inextricably interwoven with the destiny of the nation as a whole, he criticized slavery because it retarded the progress of the South. In William Gilmore Simms he sternly declared that progress and slavery were "natural enemies," and that during the ante bellum period "the South had no great desire to progress except in her own way, which was, in fact, retrogressive."⁵¹ In furthering his attack on the national divisiveness of slavery, Trent concluded that "States knit together by slavery could not develop true national feeling: For that there must be a consciousness of progress, a desire to share in and further a common civilization."⁵³

Taking the position that slavery was morally unjust and that it retarded the forward progress of the South, Trent, like Rhodes, broadened his examination of slavery in an attempt to measure the impact of forced bondage on the slave as well as the master. In exploring the effect of slavery on its victims, Trent revealed that enslavement for the African was a mixed proposition at best: the plantation regime was fraught with evils, but the Black benefited by the elevation of his African status due to his contact with civilization. Trent's evaluation of slavery's impact upon the slaveholding class paralleled the findings of Rhodes, but produced more refined arguments. The institution made the master class aristocratic, conservative, arrogant, contemptuous of inferiors, and caused it to suffer from inertia of mind and body.⁵³ In the final analysis, slavery's most deleterious impact was on Southern society in general. Trent assessed slavery as a wasteful and ruinous institution that was directly responsible for the lack of literary culture and statesmanship in Southern society.⁵⁴ Only with the emancipation of the African could a new order arise Phoenix-like out of the ashes of the Old South. With the destruction of the former way of life, "a disintegrated and primitive people," wrote Trent, "have become united among themselves and with former foes, and are moving forward upon the path of progress."⁵⁵

The period from 1865-1918 witnessed a graceful shift in

the treatment of ante bellum Southern slavery. The initial generation of writers following the war represented the glowing embers of abolitionists and proslave polemics of the Old South's regime. The 1880's signalled the beginnings of a spirit of reconcilliation and ushered in a period of transition from the old-style polemics to a more nationalistic appraisal of the institution as evidenced in the studies by Schouler and von Holst. By the mid-1890's and early into the twentieth century, the institution of slavery was considered morally repugnant to Northern and liberal Southern scholars alike, and devisive to a unified nation. It was left to Ulrich Bonnell Phillips and a series of social, political, and intellectual developments during the initial two decades of the 1900's to restore the treatment of slavery to essentially an apologetic Southern view.

CHAPTER II

OF U.B. PHILLIPS AND OTHERS

If Southern liberals, such as Wilson, Dodd, and Trent, echoed an emerging nationalistic interpretation of slavery among a dominant class of Southern historians, then ambitious graduate students working under William A. Dunning at Columbia University illustrated the surfacing of a competing historical trend. At the turn of the century, Dunning established what ultimately became a center for Southern studies at Columbia University. The central thrust of the academic activities of Dunning's students, many of whom were Southern born, was directed at the study of Reconstruction in the various states of the Old Confederacy. Their writings reflected an overwhelming distaste for ante bellum slavery but evidenced a strong sense of support for the white Southerner of the Civil War and Reconstruction period. While Southern "liberals" extolled the virtues of the Old South of Thomas Jefferson, Dunning's students expressed profound compassion for the Old South of John C. Calhoun and Jefferson Davis. Their Scholarship signalled a dramatic shift from the criticisms of Old South life

by the "liberals" to a defense of nearly all its aspects.

The most outstanding of Dunning's students, Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, was especially influential in spreading among Southern intellectuals a more sympathetic attitude toward the planter regime of the ante bellum era.¹

Born in Georgia in 1877, Phillips was reared in an atmosphere of deep reverence for the ideals and standards of the Southern planter class. His extraordinary fascination with the planter aristocracy led him to dedicate one of his major works to this class.² At Columbia Phillips began applying Dunning's sympathetic views concerning Southern whites of the Reconstruction era to the planter class of the ante bellum period. Phillips traversed new ground in the study of slavery and ante bellum Southern society, and the judicious quality of his research remains unmatched, in many instances, by contemporary scholarship. His brilliant efforts at unearthing and investigating new source materials provided for the most authoritative and systematic study of the Old South up to that time.³

The appearance in 1918 of one of Phillips' best known monographs, American Negro Slavery, indicated a significant reversal from the description of slavery registered by Rhodes and Hart. American Negro Slavery was dedicated to reviving in a new form the tradition of dependency and subordination

that the plantation regime had shaped for the slave. Implicit in Phillips' basic works was an attempt to destroy once and for all the prevailing historical opinions which pictured the plantation system as a cesspool of unmitigated cruelty, baseness, and inhumanity. The bulk of Phillips' extensive research, therefore, was directed to the revision of the negative plantation stereotype while lifting the planter aristocracy to a position of unblemished purity.

The basic assumption undergirding American Negro Slavery was that of the innate racial inferiority of the Black slave. Phillips viewed Africa as a continent whose climate prohibited mental effort of "substantial character," and African Blacks had "submitted to that prohibition. . .with excellent grace."⁴ Phillips' adherence to the doctrine of racial inferiority was apparent as he lavishly referred to Blacks in such unflattering terms as "ignorant, slothful, and savage,"⁵ and "inert."⁶ This negative view of the slaves' intellectual capacities led Phillips to regard the plantation as a training institution, "a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization."⁷ Because Blacks were in an alien land and undergoing the slow process from barbarism to civilization, plantation training "was in fact just what the bulk of the negroes most needed," argued Phillips, "in order to learn industrial methods along with habits and standards of

civilized life."⁸

Phillips' assumption of the inherent racial inferiority of the slaves prevented him from considering them as serious adults. Rather, he fondly viewed the slave as childlike, humble, cheerful, and lighthearted. He noted that an "easy-going and plausible disposition" made the slavemasters surprisingly patient with their slaves.⁹ As a result, slaves and masters existed in a state of "cordial but respectful intimacy."¹⁰ Phillips' near-love for the "happy slaves" occasioned him to portray them as "submissive rather than defiant, light-hearted instead of gloomy, amiable and ingratiating instead of sullen, and whose very defects invited paternalism rather than repression."¹¹

Phillips posited that an overwhelming degree of paternalism and harmonious relations between Black and white typified the plantation regime. After a careful examination of selected plantation account books, diaries, letters, and other relevant source materials previously untapped, Phillips judged the charges of cruelty and severity of plantation slavery leveled by critics of the system to be woefully overdrawn. He depicted a romantic version of ante bellum plantation life where the slave humbly courted the master's "good will and affection," and the "master ruled by a sense of dignity, duty, and moderation."¹² Phillips held an idyllic view of Southern life where slave and white

children played together while mature young white males envied the carefree life of their Black counterpart.¹³ The plantation was embraced by a harmonious spirit of kindhearted friendship and mutual loyalty. The master-slave relationship was based not on cruelty and despotism, but "by a sense of propriety, proportion, and cooperation"¹⁴ between the paternal master and his faithful childlike slave.

In response to Rhodes and Hart, Phillips announced that "severity on the plantation was the exception, and kindness the rule."¹⁵ In regards to food, clothing, and shelter, "crude comfort" was generally the norm.¹⁶ Phillips pointed to the slaves' rapid reproduction rate as indicative of moderate physical comfort and adequate health conditions on the plantation. Phillips dismissed the contemptable charge of systematic slave breeding as being largely unsubstantiated. He maintained that for reasons of self interest and community morality, slave breeding was the exception rather than the rule.

In an economic sense, Phillips conceded that plantation slavery contained certain disadvantages. The institution of the Old South kept money scarce, population sparse, land values low, restricted economic opportunities for both races, and fostered the neglect of natural resources. Yet he insisted that the disadvantages of the plantation regime were more than balanced by its positive features. The plantation, Phillips argued,

"kept the main body of labor controlled, mobile, and provisioned," on the one hand, while it "maintained order and a notable degree of harmony" on the other.¹⁷ The plantation as a financial venture, however, was an unprofitable enterprise at best.¹⁸ "The economic virtue of slavery," according to Phillips, "lay wholly in making labor mobile, regular, and secure."¹⁹ For the ante bellum planter, then, financial fortunes were sacrificed to the higher interests of racial control. In the final analysis, Phillips held that the "plantation was less a business than a life; it made fewer fortunes than it made men."²⁰

Although Phillips' clearly racist conclusions have been largely discredited by modern scholarship, his ideas were well received during the Progressive era in the early decades of the twentieth century. Intellectual, political, economic, and social developments in the "New" South were at work nourishing and preparing the nation for the wide acceptance of Phillips' ideas on race. The virtual elimination of Blacks from the Southern political arena, the triumph of Jim Crow legislation, and the ascendancy of the accommodationist policies of Booker T. Washington led to a ripening of Southern attitude concerning race and the ex-slaves' place in American society. In the North, Progressives gave vent to their own particular brand of

racism by restricting immigration from Mediterranean and eastern European countries. Also Progressives, North and South, began to closely associate racial purity with civic responsibility as popular journals such as McClure's published commentaries regarding governmental and business irregularities in common company with the discussion of the racial backwardness of the Black.²¹

The harmony between theories of racial purity and the various features of early twentieth century Progressivism had an enormous impact upon slave historiography. The triumph of ideas about racial inferiority laid the fundamental groundwork for the wide acceptance of an interpretation of slavery based on the premises of innate racial imperfection. The social and intellectual climate of the period gave rise to an established school of Southern historical scholarship which U.B. Phillips dominated. His commanding stature was unclipped during his lifetime, and a burgeoning school of historians sympathetic toward slavery and opposed to "radical" Reconstruction enjoyed a unique position of authority during the initial decades of the twentieth century. Phillips had clothed racism with the historical and intellectual respectability it had always sought.

The lasting impact of Phillips' publications upon American slave historiography cannot be isolated from the influence of

his painstaking methodology and research. His pioneering forays into previously unexplored sources provided him and his contemporaries with valuable historical insight. Phillips' true value as an historian, however, lies in two other critical areas: the renewal of the argument surrounding the morality of slavery, and his influence on the development of the historiography of slavery, particularly in the areas of specialized studies and state histories.

The bulk of the ideas advanced by Phillips in American Negro Slavery, and to a lesser degree in Life and Labor in the Old South (1929), were not novel. On one level Phillips' ideas were in near perfect harmony with the racism in Pollard's Lost Cause Regained and with Alexander Stephens' view of slavery as an instrument of race control in A Constitutional View of the War Between the States. On yet another level, Phillips removed the morality of slavery from the arena of unsophisticated debate by constructing a remarkably well researched intellectual defense of the Old South's system of labor and race relations. Phillips intellectualized and articulated the sympathies of the less erudite Confederate "traditionalists." He provided academic sanctions for the romantic version of slavery and the planter aristocracy while helping to lay the groundwork for the popular acceptance of his interpretation. His theory

of slavery as an element of social control found far greater approval in 1918 than did similar views during the late nineteenth century.

In the light of changed intellectual attitudes of the first several decades of the twentieth century, the element of credibility was transferred from Rhodes to Phillips. Although Southern sympathies carried the day, however, the overarching moral framework established by Union polemicists and further refined by Rhodes remained intact. The specter of morality enveloped Phillips as gigantically as it did Rhodes and Hart. Implied by Phillips was the morality of slavery based on the planters' decision to forego the financial advancements presented by the plantation in the interest of social vitality by training and controlling the uncivilized African. Although few have surpassed Phillips in scholarly eminence, even he could not free the treatment of slavery from the constraints imposed by moral considerations. The topics he selected for concentrated investigation--work, food, clothing, health, police, profitability--were topics previously covered by Rhodes.²² Phillips may well have marked a significant change in slave historiography, but he failed to alter the moral framework established by previous scholars.

The prevailing impact of Phillips' scholarship and popular ideas about race during the first three decades of the

century combined to influence the direction followed by state histories published in the wake of American Negro Slavery. In Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations (1924), V. Alton Moody pointed to the slaves' "natural tendency to give way to the impulses and passions" which caused them to commit illegal acts.²³ With minor word modification, Moody's passage closely resembled Phillips' conclusions as to slave tendencies toward crime.²⁴ Both men viewed slave rebellions as rare, but Moody noted that in Louisiana, "reports of plots created great excitement and caused immediate investigations."²⁵ Phillips also hinted that slaveholders' fears were more apparent than real, but cautioned that slave insurrections were serious enough to produce a "palpable disquiet from time to time," and that rumors were frequent enough "to maintain a fairly constant undertone of uneasiness."²⁶

Moody found in the Louisiana sugar districts the same general humaneness of slavery that characterized Phillips' views. Housing was adequate, food ample, clothing sufficient, and health was a function of "well-ordered hospitals" which the slaves reported to "immediately" if ill.²⁷ Slave marriages were frequent even if there were no supporting legal provisions for the practice. Conspicuous in Moody's study was the failure to treat the separation of slave families and the extensive

sexual irregularities between white and black plantation populations. According to Moody, miscegenation "was frowned upon" and the leading "planters were against it."²⁸ Like Phillips' broader study, Moody discovered slavery in Louisiana to be fundamentally unprofitable. Because of pestilence and constant climatic disasters, the planter in the Louisiana sugar producing areas "struggled on, men of ability, handling great sums of money, managing great interests, ever hoping for Fortune's smile but ever on the verge of ruin."²⁹

While Moody's work mirrored Phillips' sympathy for the ideals of the Louisiana planter class, Rosser Howard Taylor's Slaveholding North Carolina (1926) detailed a similar development of the economic importance of slavery in a different agricultural area. After examining the economic profitability of North Carolina tobacco plantations, Taylor concluded that "in North Carolina slaveholding was not generally profitable."³⁰ Taylor made occasional references to American Negro Slavery and other Phillips publications. Furthermore, Taylor's conclusions were similar to those of Phillips since he found slave housing liveable, the plantation food "coarse, but ample," and clothing adequate, because of planter self-interest.³¹ Taylor discovered the business and social requirements of the North Carolina tobacco plantations to be interwoven to such an extent that fi-

nancial objectives became obscured. Taylor's studies revealed that during periods of extended economic difficulties tobacco planters sold land and slaves only as a last resort. This entrepreneurial nonsense resulted in, according to Taylor, a self-defeating effort to "continue to live in a style befitting of a planter."³²

While Moody and Taylor adopted Phillips' main thoughts and ideas, further evidence of Phillips conclusions were reflected in Charles Sackett Sydnor's Slavery in Mississippi and Ralph Betts Flanders' Plantation Slavery in Georgia, both published in 1933. In an exhaustive investigation into the mechanics of slavery in Mississippi, Sydnor found that slaves silenced critics of the institution by their "cheerfulness."³³ Sydnor maintained that physical conditions for slaves were satisfactory and that planters took care to provide proper medical treatment to unhealthy bondsmen.³⁴ He also claimed that slaves accused of felonies were given jury trials and generally received fair treatment by the courts.³⁵ The average slave did not perform an unreasonable amount of work in a day. Severe punishment was rare and the masters' treatment of chattel property usually depended on their character and attitude, and both these tended to be determined by the economic interests of their class. Slaveowners gave considerably less attention to the religious and moral training of their property than to

their slaves' physical well being.

In general, Sydnor remained in the Phillips tradition, however, he also demonstrated a measure of independence from the Phillips model. Sydnor did not consider the plantation as an unprofitable venture, but he did not construe it as a boon to the planters' economic fortunes either. He saw the plantations as economically marginal at best, and observed that "considering the price of slaves, it was impossible for a planter to make large profits."³⁶ He agreed with Phillips concerning the slaves' utter state of "backwardness." Where Phillips attributed this to a function of innate racial qualities, Sydnor, taking advantage of the newly fashioned ideas of culture and race developed by Franz Boaz, Thomas Dewey, and William I. Thomas, theorized that cultural deprivation inherent in the plantation operated to keep Blacks "in a low stage of civilization for generation after generation."³⁷ Sydnor also remained less convinced than Phillips in the alleged harmony which existed between master and slave. Rather than accept the idyllic version presented in American Negro Slavery, Sydnor admitted the system's pathetic evils. Nowhere was this more conclusively illustrated than in his discussion of fugitive slaves whose very existence represented "the evil side of slavery."³⁸

Even with sporadic forays into the seamy areas of slavery,

Sydnor held firm to his belief in the essential mildness of the system in Mississippi. Sydnor concluded that except for the constant threat of being sold and separated from his family, "being a slave was not for the average negro a dreadful lot."³⁹ Physical conditions on Mississippi plantations, according to Sydnor, were such that the chief difference between a slave and a free agricultural worker lay outside the realm of orders, allotments, punishments, surveillance, and restrictions. How distasteful life was under these conditions," reasoned Sydnor, "depended on two . . . variables: the character of the master and the desire for freedom in the hearts of the slaves."⁴⁰

In Plantation Slavery in Georgia, Ralph Betts Flanders' view of plantation organization closely paralleled Sydnor's work on Mississippi and Phillips' more comprehensive volumes. According to Flanders, the majority of the slaves on Georgia plantations lived in a state of "ease" and "idleness."⁴¹ Housing consisted of "neat frame buildings," food was coarse, but abundant, and clothing constituted an enormous plantation expenditure. Health conditions were good enough to warrant the conclusion that slavery, on this issue alone, was "beneficial" to the slave.⁴² Georgia planters displayed a paternalistic interest in the religious and moral welfare of their slaves, and insofar as possible, humanitarian influences governed the sale of "human chattel."⁴³

Flanders, however, discovered far more cruelty and violence in the system. He found abundant evidence which suggested that slaves were cruelly treated on occasion, and he noted that "many died as a result of harsh or inhuman treatment."⁴⁴ Flanders also took issue with Phillips on the subject of economic profitability. According to Flanders, the thrift, industry, and ambition of the individual planter determined slavery's profitability rather than inherent racial qualities of the work force or the inanimate forces of nature. Flanders criticized Georgia slaveholders whose "plantation account books suggests a lack of effort on the part of planters to operate their establishment upon a business-like basis."⁴⁵ This discovery led Flanders to a judgment reminiscent of Phillips. "To many Georgia planters," wrote Flanders, "ownership of slaves was regarded as a mark of dignity, a fundamental support of the social order, and not an instrument of economic advancement."⁴⁶

Flanders, more than Sydnor, viewed the plantation as a labor system inextricable tied to the race issue. Emancipation would have meant disruption of the established social order and a destruction of capital. In the final analysis, Flanders saw the Georgia plantation, as did Phillips, as a means of social control. "As a training school for the untutored savage," declared Flanders, "it served to a large degree as a civilizing agency."⁴⁷

Even as the significance of Phillips' historical scholarship dispersed itself throughout varying channels of academic thought during the first third of the twentieth century, the growth and acceptance of psychology and the social sciences had begun to undermine Phillips' earlier assumptions on race. The environmentalism of Franz Boas, Thomas Dewey, and William I. Thomas during the late 1920's had come to be the accepted avant-gard position on race and culture. Cultural relativism as expressed by the environmentalists emphasized culture and surroundings as opposed to race as determinants of the individuals intellectual capabilities.

Undoubtably, the widespread approval by the intellectual community of the new doctrines regarding race forced Phillips to reassess the position taken in American Negro Slavery with regard to the mental dexterity of the plantation slave. Proof that Phillips was bringing his earlier views on race into line with modern research was revealed by the publication of his most renowned work, Life and Labor in the Old South (1929). Concerning the slaves' racial inferiority to whites, the tone throughout the volume was noticeably subdued when compared with American Negro Slavery, for it made only occasional outright statements on race.⁴⁸ In Life and Labor in the Old South Phillips stressed cultural inferiority instead of inherent qualities of racial inferiority. He continued to de-

scribe the great body of plantation Blacks as "notoriously primitive" and "uncouth," but in the end, he declared that they were merely "Negroes of the time."⁴⁹ Thus, at least by 1929, Phillips' emphasis on the racial inferiority of the slave had deviated to the encumbrances of a primitive African background. Phillips' own shift in racial ideas served as part of a growing body of scholarship which eventually culminated in a rejection of his main assumption on Black slavery during the next three decades.

CHAPTER III

REVISION AND KENNETH STAMPP

The second third of the twentieth century witnessed a gradual shift in the historical interpretations of American slavery. During this period neo-abolitionists writers, such as Kenneth Stampp, rejected U. B. Phillip's apologetic version of slavery which had dominated the decade of the 1920's and much of the 1930's. The growth of scholarly reaction to the ideas advanced by the Phillips school was in direct response to political developments on the international and national scene during the years 1931-1956. The rise of fascism, particularly the racist ideology of Nazism, the egalitarian spirit of the liberal New Deal era, and the democratic idealism fostered by the victorious Allies contributed to a climate of greater concern for Blacks in the United States during the decade preceeding and following the outbreak of World War II. Moreover, the civil rights movement, the shadow of the Cold War, and the emergence of Black African nations on the international scene assisted a creating an intellectual at-

mosphere hostile to the pronounced opinions of racist apologists for slavery.

A sustained effort to modify the views of Phillips did not materialize until the late 1930's and 1940's, but Frederic Bancroft's Slave Trading in the Old South (1931) challenged the prevailing views on slavery and focused examination on a specialized area, the domestic slave trade, and aspect which had received only scant attention in Phillips' American Negro Slavery. Because of its narrowness of scope, Bancroft's study lacked the breadth of view and organization of material of Phillips' work. Nevertheless, Slave Trading in the Old South becomes vitally important as a corrective and supplement to American Negro Slavery.

Before Bancroft, little was known of the domestic slave trade, of its precise extent, of the channels used, of cities which were chief depots, of the type of men who controlled it and the social position they held, of its cruelties, and its profits. In discussing these detailed aspects of the slave trade, Bancroft directed his research toward examining three vital questions neglected or ignored by Phillips: Were slaves bred especially for market? Was the slave trade cruel? What was the extent of the trade?

While Phillips dismissed slave breeding as a step-child

of abolitionists' imagination and with "no shred of evidence to support its claims."¹ Bancroft held that "the largest percentage of profit came. . .not from slave labor on the regular crop but from the rearing of slaves when their value was rapidly augmenting."² Bancroft argued that the system of regulated breeding encouraged early marriages and informal matings. He also asserted that Virginians earned a profit of over ten million dollars on the sale of 281,142 slaves between 1830-1860.³ Bancroft went on to reveal that slaves "were seldom reared expressly for the market,"⁴ however, the specter of raising slaves for sale "was rarely lost sight of."⁵ Moreover, most planters considered slave rearing of prime importance.⁶ In suggesting that upper South states bred slaves for their market value, Bancroft stopped just short of accusing any individual slaveholder of deliberately doing so.

Contrary to the Phillips interpretation, Bancroft concluded that slavery was "essentially ruthless in general and inhuman in some of its main features."⁷ Conceding that deliberate sadism by traders was an expressive vice, Bancroft explored the more salient aspects of the trade, such as the deplorable conditions of the jails, slave pens, and trading facilities.⁸ In the same manner, he attempted to measure the psychological effects of bad treatment on the slave--the ultimate victim of the commercial trading process.⁹

In addition, Bancroft determined the most cruel feature of slavery to be the destruction of the slave families. Phillips devoted only passing attention to family division and resolved that children were "hardly ever sold separately."¹⁰ Bancroft, on the other hand, discovered numerous advertisements which indicated a willingness to sell children apart from their mothers along with a propensity on the part of slaveholder to separate slave spouses. His investigations led him to conclude that "the selling singly of young children private and public was frequent and notorious."¹¹

In much the same manner in which Phillips lauded planter integrity, Bancroft exposed the contradictory shortcomings of Southern slaveholding morality. Planter sexual irregularities, a subject largely ignored by Phillips, were revealed by the fact, according to Bancroft, that "shapely and prepossessing mulattresses" were like to be bought for sexual purposes in addition to their labor.¹² Although Phillips sought to demonstrate slaveholder kindness by citing various accounts of slaves being manumitted in wills, Bancroft questioned planter intentions by alleging that they were sometimes more concerned with the final good name of the tester than the welfare of the slave.¹³

In seeking to revise portions of Phillips' American Negro Slavery, Bancroft analyzed the extent of the slave trade in the South. Phillips treated slavery as a mode of social con-

trol, an approach which minimized its evils and made the most of its advantages. Bancroft, conversely, viewed slavery not as a social system, but as an economically profitable enterprise with tentacles deeply-rooted in the social, political, and economic fabric of the South. Slave trading in the Old South was important economically because from 1859-1860 it involved transactions valued at over \$150,000.¹⁴ Slavery was, according to Bancroft, "absolutely necessary to the continuance of the most highly prized property and to the economic, social, and political conditions dependent on it."¹⁵

In the same year as Bancroft's work was published, Henrietta Buckmaster authored a powerful and emotionally-charged historical account of the growth and development of the Underground Railroad. Let My People Go contained and provided an underlying moral conviction for the revisionist era: Moral virtues of people whatever the forces ranged against them, will triumph through the heroism called forth by the struggle of right against wrong. The moral tone of Buckmaster's stirring narrative, and to a lesser degree Bancroft's work, was ironically reminiscent of the polemics of Henry Wilson and John Logan in the nineteenth century. Bancroft divulged a moral contempt of slavery when he found it "beyond belief when thought of as existing until after the middle of the nineteenth century in

the republic that considered itself to be the sole personification and the last hope of liberty enlightening the world."¹⁵ Buckmaster, in an obvious attempt to stir deeper emotions, revived the conspiratorial allegations of "slavocracy," "slave Power," and the notion of Southern dominance of the national government.¹⁷

Buckmaster devoted the bulk of Let My People Go to a detailed description of the activities of the Underground Railroad and the dramatic, and oftentimes, tragic episodes of its many conductors. Moreover, the prologue contained an account of slavery at sharp variance with the convention pictured provided by the followers of Phillips. Buckmaster rejected the classic themes of planter paternalism, kindness, and slave docility and argued that "American slavery was a reign of violence, emotional as well as physical."¹⁹ In place of the tranquil and harmonious personal relations suggested by Phillips, Buckmaster detected a torrid struggle for freedom by a once powerful African race against a cruel and inhuman slaveholder class that sought to utilize every available legal and extra-legal apparatus in order to maintain Black subservience and white supremacy.

Slave Trading in the Old South and Let My People Go represented an attempt to alter the view of slavery advanced by

Phillips' American Negro Slavery. The two works suggested that future historical studies of the institution would result in a serious challenge to the prevailing interpretation.

In American Negro Slave Revolts (1943), Herbert Aptheker, a well-known Marxist historian, attempted to put to rest the assumption that black slaves were "for the most part. . .by racial qualities submissive rather than defiant."²⁰ Like Bancroft and Buckmaster, Aptheker did not issue a flat challenge to the pieties of the Phillips school; instead, he tried to modify only minor portions of American Negro Slavery.

Frequently using classical Marxist phraseology, Aptheker catalogued the unrest that permeated the institution of slavery during the ante bellum period. In all, he isolated over 250 "revolts" and conspiracies which proceeded "beyond personal freedom."²¹ In a conclusion that remains highly controversial even to modern scholarship, Aptheker suggested that the evidence "points to the conclusion that discontent and rebelliousness were not only exceedingly common, but, indeed, characteristic of American Negro slaves."²³

Aptheker acceptance of rumors of servile insurrections as constituting established fact hampered American Negro Slave Revolts and the devotion to ideas of class struggle forced Aptheker to view the battle between Black slave and white master

as part of a larger class struggle involving the oppressed poor whites pitted against the dominant ruling classes within Southern society. His Marxist analysis of slavery moved him to regard slavery and racism as by-products only of capitalistic exploitation rather than the result of some complex system of sexual, economics, and psychological variables that they represent. In the end, his writings, sprinkled liberally with the conspiratorial-insinuating concept of "slavocracy," approximated the moral indignation of the earlier polemicists. Aptheker's neo-abolitionist position, like that of Buckmaster, led him to remark that Black resistance typified the "never-long interrupted drama of the organized struggle of an enslaved people to throw off their yoke."²⁴

American Negro Slave Revolts was the culmination of much scholarship during the late 1930's and early 1940's which emphasized the great degree of resistance by slaves to their bondage. This period witnessed a great interest in slave rebellions that began with Harvey Wish's "American Slave Insurrections Before 1861" (1937),²⁵ and a second article, "Slave Disloyalty Under the Confederacy" (1938),²⁶ which detailed the numerous devices slaves used to subvert the Confederate war effort. Aptheker's "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States" (1939) revealed the existence of various

camps of runaway slaves in the ante bellum South.²⁷ In 1942, Raymond and Alice Bauer's article, "Day to Day Resistance to slavery," noted that slaves employed alternative methods of protest other than violence to register their dissatisfaction with their condition.²⁸ In 1943, Kenneth M. Porter published "Three Fighters For Freedom," which described the heroics of Felix Cuff, John Caesar, and Louis Pacheco.²⁹ Porter followed, in the same year, with an article entitled "Florida Slaves and Free Negroes in the Seminole War, 1835-1842," which described the key roles that Black runaways played in assisting the Seminole Indians in fighting off federal forces.³⁰

By 1944 the balance of credibility between the Phillips analysis and the small band of revisionists had begun to veer in the direction of the latter, partly because of two publications that year, one by a renowned Swedish sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, and the other by a highly respected American historian, Richard Hofstadter. Myrdal's two-volume detailed assessment of the Black question, An American Dilemma (1944) reflected the state which the debate on slavery had reached, while Hofstadter's critique of the apologist's tradition, "U.B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend," represented the first direct challenge to the sanctities of the arguments advanced by Phillips.

After an exhaustive and objective study of numerous as-

pects of black life, Myrdal concluded that there existed a painful "dilemma" between professed high ideals of the American Creed" and the actual behavior and attitudes of white Americans toward Blacks.³¹ Myrdal suggested that the "Negro Problem" should be viewed primarily as a moral issue because the nation early laid down as the moral basis for its existence the principles of equality and liberty.³² An American Dilemma was, therefore, heavily balanced on the side of comprehensive morality, and it struck forcefully with fact and interpretation. At a time of momentous redefinition and changes, Myrdal argued that Americans were "free to choose whether the Negro shall remain her liability or become her opportunity."³³ To Myrdal, the choice was a moral decision, and it was fateful not only for America, but for all mankind. Either the American creed must prevail and the world sustain its hope in democracy, or the American deed must prevail and the faith in human goodness be destroyed. The question, reasoned Myrdal, was a moral dilemma "in the heart of the American."³⁴

Although Myrdal's study dealt more with the social results of slavery than with its more pertinent historical realities, it remains vitally important because it helped to revive the moral factor in the discussion of the Black in the present and the past. After the publication of An American Dilemma some historians began to visualize the Black problem in terms

of historical morality. This reduction of the meaning of slavery to the level of a modern moral judgment was consistent with previous trends of interpretations.

The most brazen attack leveled by the revisionists during the 1940's came from Richard Hofstadter. In a small sixteen page article entitled "U.B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend" (1944), Hofstadter issued an overt challenge to the conclusions advanced by Phillips in American Negro Slavery and Life and Labor in the Old South. Hofstadter asserted that Phillips himself was biased and his sampling techniques were subject to suspicion. While Hofstadter lauded the thoroughness of Phillips' studies, he maintained that they were distorted because of inadequate sampling procedures. The procedures did not accurately reflect life on the average size Southern plantation, because Phillips had elected to use data which only represented an aristocratic elite planter class which "were not at all representative of the common slaveholding unit."³⁵ According to Hofstadter, the narrowness of Phillips' samples, ten per cent of all slaves and one per cent of all slaveholders, led to an incorrect analysis.³⁶

Because Phillips was a native Georgian, Hofstadter argued that his conception of the Negro was characteristically Southern. Hofstadter charged that Phillips' version of slavery

had "been moderately described. . .as 'friendly,'"³⁷ and that his view of Southern history "always appeared in a haze of romance."³⁸ By the same token, Phillips' personal biases led him to portray the slave "as singularly contended and docile serio-comic creature,"³⁹ and the master-slave relationship as one of unmatched paternal beauty. Hofstadter further added that Phillips' failure to treat the important subject of miscegenation represented "striking testimony to Phillips' great powers of intellectual resistance."⁴⁰ Hofstadter concluded with an appeal for future study of the institution to be undertaken by unbiased scholars willing to utilize the social sciences as constructive research aids.⁴¹

The 1950's continued to yield the same wave of revision which typified the two previous decades of scholarship concerning slavery. The most notable critic who sought to alter Phillips' classic exposition of the slave regime was Kenneth M. Stamp. In an article that foreshadowed latter research, Stamp's "The Historian and Southern Negro Slavery" (1952), delivered a plea for racial objectivity on the part of historians studying Black slavery. Noting that Phillips paraded his racial biases unashamedly, Stamp called upon his colleagues to ignore unscientific assumptions of Black inferiority which had characterized earlier studies on slavery. Backed by the findings

of social psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and sociologists, Stamp charged that "no historian of the institution can be taken seriously any longer unless he begins with the knowledge that there is no valid evidence that the Negro race is innately inferior to the white."⁴²

Accompanied by social and political developments and the flowering of new intellectual trends, the mid-1950's witnessed the floodtide of revisionist reaction to the opinions of Phillips and his followers. Accepted anthropological explanations of race became more closely associated with culture and environment than genetics, thereby, making it possible that Blacks "could be regarded as full members of the human family."⁴³ The Black image was upgraded in the United States in order to counter Soviet Cold War propaganda, and later as an effort to court the Black African nations just emerging from European colonialism. The 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, which terminated almost two decades of litigation in behalf of public school integration, undoubtedly created a favorable climate for the rejection of Phillips' ideas. The civil rights movement, beginning under Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration and popularized by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King-led Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, brought public opinion to bear on the legitimacy of traditional versions of Blacks in and out

of slavery. The activities of civil rights organizations had begun to erect a curtain of moral immediacy around their crusade, thus, reflecting the direction that modern historical scholarship would take.

The social and political activities of the 1950's spelled the doom of the Phillips-based analysis of Black slavery. Historians of Southern slavery found themselves no longer able to relinquish a "moral" responsibility to eradicate the specter of the "rightness" of slavery in the face of rapidly developing political events. Stanley M. Elkins convincingly explained the direct relationship between the historian and moral positions on prevailing problems. "How a person thinks about Negro slavery historically makes a great deal of difference here and now;" declared Elkins, "it tends to locate him morally in relation to a whole range of very immediate political, social, and philosophical issues which in some way refer back to slavery."⁴⁴

The Peculiar Institution (1956), by Kenneth M. Stampp, capped almost three decades of revisionist scholarship. The exhaustive volume, argued Stanley Elkins, represented "the culmination and quintessence of the entire anti-Phillips reaction in historical writing."⁴⁵ The social, political, and moral atmosphere had demanded a thorough reassessment of the ideas extended by the apologists, and Stampp's work proved to be the coup de grace of the Phillips interpretation. Early revision-

ists of the Bancroft-Buckmaster-Aptheker mold fashioned sporadic forays against the firmly established Phillips tradition which, subsequently, yielded only minor alterations and variations. However, the neo-abolitionist flavor of The Peculiar Institution resulted in the near-total devastation of the Phillips school of interpretation.

Stampp's most significant contribution to slave historiography was his success in reversing Phillips' moral position. Phillips viewed slavery as a positive good for slave and slaveholder. Stampp, on the other hand, regarded slavery as a violation of human dignity and a ruthless system of degradation and human exploitation. Slavery was an outrageous form of human abuse, and Stampp repeatedly referred to the institution as the "Old South's greatest affliction."⁴⁶ Slavery was an affliction because it represented a tragic dilemma between profit and convenience for Southern slaveholders from which they could not escape until they ceased to be slaveholders. "When, at last, they lost the profits and conveniences of slavery," argued Stampp, "they won the chance to live in peace with themselves and with their age. It was not a bad exchange."⁴⁷

Stampp attacked Phillips' scholarship as audaciously as he did his moral position. The Peculiar Institution differed with American Negro Slavery on almost all the major points of

discussion, particularly the concept of 'Black innate inferiority. Stamppp quickly disassembled theories of alleged Black intellectual inequality, thereby, destroying the sacred assumptions which held together the racist principles of Phillips' time-honored theories. With the aid of advanced social science techniques and the conclusions extended in Myrdal's studies, Stamppp placed a final rest to the academic doctrines of racial inferiority, citing research that conclusively revealed that variations in intellectual capacities and personalities are ascribed to an individual phenomenon rather than to racial traits.⁴⁸ In a manner characteristic of mid-twentieth century American liberalism, Stamppp reasoned that "slaves were merely ordinary human beings, that innately Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins."⁴⁹

After the destruction of the concept of innate racial inferiority of the slave which constituted the heart of Phillips' best works, the remaining tenants of American Negro Slavery and Life and Labor in the Old South crumbled rapidly before Stamppps' scholarly onslaught. In place of the docile, submissive, and contented bondsman, Stamppp substituted the warrior-slave whose subtle expressions of love for freedom caused him to "wage ceaseless and open warfare against his bondage,"⁵⁰ and in the final analysis, according to Stamppp,

the Black slave "longed for liberty and resisted bondage much as any people could have done under the circumstances."⁵¹

Using data collected from a more representative sample of ante bellum Southern plantations, Stamppp asserted that slaves were overworked, poorly housed, fed, and cared for as indicated by their high mortality rate. In addition, Stamppp demonstrated the versatility of slaves and slavery by pointing out the varied occupations that engaged slave labor. Phillips had maintained that for racial reasons, slaves were incapable of but the most simple agricultural labor and could not be successful utilized outside the plantation regime. Also, where Phillips found few instances of cruelty, Stamppp discovered much brutality, although he stopped short of making sweeping generalizations concerning typical slaveholder behavior. Phillips sought to illustrate the general humaneness of slavery by noting the elaborate legal devices erected by planters to protect the slave. Stamppp, however, reasoned that the mere existence of such sophisticated "black codes" was suggestive of planter excesses. In the same manner, Stamppp disclosed that slaves were chattel property first and few restrictions were placed upon the owner's right to purchase, use, or dispose of such property.

While Phillips found it comfortable to deny slave breeding, ignore family division, and dismiss miscegenation, Stamppp met the issues head on. Avoiding the appearance of direct ac-

cusations, Stamppp admitted that there may not have been systematic efforts at slave breeding; nevertheless, "numerous shreds of evidence exist which indicate that slaves were reared with an eye to their marketability--that the domestic slave trade was not 'purely casual.'"⁵² Of family disunion, Stamppp contended that no state forbade masters to separate husband and wife, although some states, notably Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama, placed slight age restrictions on the sale of children from their mothers.⁵³ "In the chief exporting states," added Stamppp, "owners could separate children of any age from their mothers."⁵⁴ Concerning miscegenation, Stamppp revealed that "the failure of the color barrier to prevent miscegenation in in the Old South is hardly surprising, for this has always been the case when two races have intermingled."⁵⁵ Also detected by Stamppp was the fact that not all interracial sexual relations were casual, that many white men took Black wives, and to a lesser extent, white women left their spouses for Black men. In the end, the chief victims of the unrewarding process of miscegenation "were the colored females who were directly involved in it."⁵⁶

In methodical fashion Stamppp destroyed the portion of Phillips' argument which rested on the unprofitability of slavery: That because plantation farming was basically unprofitable, the plantation existed as a method of social and race

control rather than as an instrument of economic gain. Stamppp found little support to indicate that planters "held their human property chiefly. . .to help the South solve its 'race problem' "57 Allowing for the interpretation that the institution was "part of a social pattern made venerable by long tradition," Stamppp concluded that, "discounting myths, there is ample evidence that the average slaveholder earned a reasonably satisfactory return upon his investment in slaves."58 When the profitability of slavery was weighed against the dignity of men, Stamppp insisted that economic interests made Southern society cling to the "peculiar institution" in a world which had outgrown and repudiated it.

The benevolent and paternalistic master that Phillips wrote of so fondly turned out to be, according to Stamppp, a condescending planter whose relationship with his slaves approximated the type of paternalism which existed between a "fine lady" and her "lapdog."59 The much written about benevolence which allegedly typified the planter's relations with his slaves applied only to an elite class of domestic slaves. "Rarely did he [master] have more than a casual acquaintanceship with the mass of common field-hands,"60 and only a minority of the slaves lived in holding so small that the master had constant close association with them.61 Stamppp reminded his

readers that, at best, the paternal relationship was between master and a "fawning dependent." Slavery, by its very nature, could never be a relationship between equals.⁶²

Stampp, in a final moment of moral frustration, declared that with freedom "the Negro in literal truth, lost nothing but his chains."⁶³ The truth of Stampp's prophetic statement forms the basis for a future discussion on the ever changing interpretations of American slavery.

CHAPTER IV

PROFITABLE TO WHOM?

While historians of American slavery have generally become engaged in the moral debate over slavery, certain specific aspects of the Old South's "peculiar institution" have generated similar controversy. The "perennial" controversy over the profitability of slavery has continued to receive fresh treatment from historians and econometricians--historians who use computer-assisted data in their research. New insights into the profitability of slavery have resulted from the application of modern economic theories and techniques. In addition, the question of "Profitability to Whom?" has further confused the issue. "To argue that slavery did or did not retard the economic development of the South," reasoned Hugh Aitken, "is obviously not the same as arguing over whether it was or was not profitable to slave owners."¹ Moreover, the introduction of technology, through the use of high-speed computers and the application of analytical methodology to the study of slavery's profitability, has also produced interesting results.

"The debate over slavery's profitability has raged undiminished," according Harold Woodman, "and except for greater subtlety of method and sophistication of presentation, often rests today on substantially the same ground that it did a hundred years ago."²

Erudite nineteenth century defenders of slavery, such as J. D. B. De Bow, Albert T. Bledsoe, Thomas R. Dew, and George Fitzhugh, regarded the institution as a social and humanitarian blessing as well as an economic viable system. Their abolitionist counterparts, Hinton Rowan Helper, John E. Cairnes, Cassius Clay, and Daniel Reaves Goodloe, assailed the institution for contributing to the South's chronic economic backwardness. Early twentieth century scholarship, characterized by the writings of U. B. Phillips, stressed slavery's unprofitability and blamed the lack of Southern economic development on the inherent deficiencies of the slaves. While the plantation performed socio-economic functions--that of routinizing, organizing, and training "savage" labor³--it had baneful effects upon the Southern economy as a whole. The plantation system exhausted the soil, froze capital in land and labor, kept labor immobile, limited the opportunities of whites and slaves, drained off surplus investment capital, and retarded urbanization, industrialization, diversification, and technological advancements.

Phillips envisioned the planter of the Old South as a tragic victim "trapped by the irreversibility of history into a social system which no longer made economic sense but which could not be gotten rid of."⁴ State studies published in the decade of the 1920's and 1930's, notably those of Taylor in North Carolina, Flanders in Georgia, Sydnor in Mississippi, and Moody in Louisiana, supported Phillips' view.⁵

In an article, "The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion," published in 1929, Charles Ramsdell explained that planters were beset by an irresistible tendency toward the overproduction of cotton. High cotton yield combined with consistent low prices would have eventually made slavery unprofitable, thus, earmarked for ultimate extinction. In a similar fashion, soil and climate imposed "natural limits" to the geographical extension of slave agriculture, and those natural limits had been reached by 1860. Western expansion was precluded because of the limitations associated with soil and climate, and this made slaveholding a cumbersome and expensive system.⁶ The South, because it maintained an unprofitable system of agriculture and could not expand, was heading for economic self-strangulation.

In the 1930's critics of Phillips and Ramsdell struck crucial blows at the traditional view of slavery's profitability. Lewis C. Gray, in his History of Agriculture In The South-

ern United States to 1860 (1933), concluded that slavery was a highly profitable form of business enterprise as compared to wage labor. He argued that slavery was inefficient in manufacturing enterprises, but that the slaves were considerably more skillful, responsible, and performed more efficiently than free wage labor in agriculture. Furthermore, slaveowners had merely to supply subsistence commodities to their laborers to keep them functioning while free wage laborers could not be employed as inexpensively.⁷ Gray found slavery remuneratively rewarding in the richest and most favorably situated lands. Because slavery was profitable, virtually all available excess capital went into the expansion of staple production based on slave labor and was, therefore, unavailable for industrial growth and trade. "Hence, we have the near-paradox of an economic institution competitively effective under certain conditions," explained Lewis, "but essentially regressive in its influence on the socio-economic evolution of the section where it prevailed."⁸

Robert R. Russel, in "The Effects of Slavery Upon Non-Slaveholders" (1938), denied that slavery was responsible for the South's economic quagmire, while Thomas P. Govan's article, "Was Slavery Profitable?" (1942) discovered needed adjustments in planter bookkeeping methods which served to alter traditional-

ists' claims of the institution's unprofitability. In The Peculiar Institution (1956), Kenneth Stampp demonstrated slavery to be economically advantageous to the planter because slave labor was cheap, exploitable, and it harbored hidden sources of profit, such as goods produced on the plantation, the sale of excess slaves, the natural increase of slaves, and the appreciation of land values because of improvements. When these factors were added to the sale of the staple crop, plantation slavery became a highly successful venture. In the final analysis, "the average slaveholder," concluded Stampp, "earned a reasonably satisfactory return upon his investment in slaves."⁹

Revision took a new twist with the publication of an important article in 1957 by Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South." Conrad and Meyer's conclusions were less than original in the sense that previous authors had detailed similar results. However, the authors took the debate out of the framework of traditional historical research methodology and, instead, attempted "to measure the profitability of Southern slave operations in terms of modern capital theory."¹⁰ Their general purpose was to view the argument over slavery's questionable profitability apart from the realm of accounting and bookkeeping and measure profitability according to economic theory.¹¹ The profitability of slavery, then, became a problem of economic theory,

which could not be assessed through traditional historical methods.

Conrad and Meyer used new techniques of quantitative data analysis--generally grouped under the label "econometrics"-- to reach their conclusions. Through the use of elaborate formulas, annual returns, interest rates, costs of capital investments, "best guesses" on data concerning the longevity of the slaves' life, and the production of "intermediate goods," slave breeding, the authors decided that "slavery was apparently about as remunerative as alternative employments to which slave capital might have been put."¹² Not only did the planter receive an investment return commensurate with alternative economic ventures of the period, according to Conrad and Meyer, but slavery was also an "economically viable institution in all areas of the South" because of regional specialization.¹³

In a double-barrelled assault, the authors insisted that the institution of slavery was profitable to the planter as a business enterprise and that the system, when viewed in the broader range of effects on Southern economy as a whole, did not hamper economic growth. Capital amassed by planters was not earmarked for industrialization and diversification principally because it was profitably used in crop production. Industrialism lagged in the South because "the South did not

really own the system but merely operated it."¹⁴ "The economic problems of the South," charged Conrad and Meyer, "were the product of an agricultural community and not a result of the existence of slavery."¹⁵

The major thrust of Conrad and Meyer's arguments, even after repeated attacks by scholars who carefully checked their results by alternative methods and reexamined the quality of their data,¹⁶ has remained intact: Slave labor in the antebellum South was profitable. Nevertheless, analysis of the economic significance of slavery shifted toward researchers who alluded to slavery's profitability but questioned the system's effect on Southern economic development. If viewed in strictly individual economic terms, as did Conrad and Meyer, profitability could well be determined. But analysis of the economic development of a large region over a half century was a task infinitely more complex and required more careful and intricate considerations than the estimation of a rate of return on capital.

Interestingly enough, however, the shift of emphasis from profitability to overall economic development brought a revival of the traditional themes formerly advanced by Phillips. The absorption of capital by investment in slaves, the rigidity and inherent inefficiency of the slave labor force, and the inhibiting effect of slavery on the growth of industrialization

and urbanization were issues which, again, demanded more satisfactory treatment than they had received before the publication of Eugene D. Genovese's The Political Economy of Slavery in 1965.

Genovese paid deference to a portion of Conrad and Meyer's argument which suggested that, as a business enterprise to the planter, slavery was remunerative. However, Genovese leveled a serious charge at the econometricians in regards to their allegations that slavery did not inhibit Southern economic growth. Conrad and Meyer confessed that their studies were designed to analyze plantation slavery only "from a strict economic point of view;" nevertheless, Genovese charged that slavery was inherently more than an economic system. He argued that slavery "gave the South a social system and a civilization with a distinct class structure, political community, economy, ideology, and set of psychological patterns and, as a result, the South increasingly grew away from the rest of the nation and from the rapidly developing sections of the world."¹⁷ Slavery could not be understood within the narrow framework of economics and profitability because it was infinitely more complex. Slavery was necessarily an economic system, but it was concurrently a social system, "the foundations of which rose a powerful and remarkable social class; a class constituting only a tiny portion of the white population and yet so powerful

and remarkable as to try to build a new, or rather to rebuild an old, civilization."¹⁸ The fatal weakness, according to Genovese, was that the entire civilization of this social system of the Old South's rested on the inefficient and inadequate economy.

In a conclusion that brought him dangerously close to Phillips, Genovese suggested that the slave economy of the Old South was stagnant because of the slave. For reasons too lengthy to detail here, the slaves worked below their capacity,¹⁹ and this resulted, accordingly to Genovese, in low productivity. The slaves needed constant supervision, reasoned Genovese, because they yielded their labor grudgingly. They labored slovenly and refused to adapt to advances in technology, thereby, preventing "the growth of industrialism and urbanization."²⁰ Personal initiative in the slave became counterproductive as evidenced by their careless use of farm implements and their brutal treatment of animals. Southern agriculture, concluded Genovese, adjusted to its labor force. By the same token, Southern agriculture discouraged innovation, slaves being unwilling to cope with existing technology; it basically ignored crop rotation in the absence of a burgeoning livestock industry; and it concentrated on the cultivation of a few cash staples, because it was cheaper to import food from the West. As a result of this inefficient labor system, the South witnessed a

steady decline in the fertility of the soil.²¹

The Old South's economic woes, suggested Genovese, could find no solution which did not entail the ultimate emancipation of its slaves and the eventual destruction of the aristocratic, semi-feudal plantation society of the dominant planter class. Needed agricultural reforms could be financed only through the sale of slave property. Successful industrialization required urban markets, a requirement incompatible with a plantation economy. In conclusion, "a general reformation of Southern agriculture," argued Genovese, "could not take place while slavery was retained."²² Genovese saw the South as trapped in a quasi-colonial situation. The South provided a market large enough to be attractive to established outside industries, but not large enough "to sustain domestic industry on a scale adequate to compete with outsiders who could draw upon wider markets."²³ The industry that did exist in the South catered to the luxury demands of the planter class, to the crude textile and hardware requirements of slaves and the rural poor, and to Northern demands for semi-agricultural exports.

Faced with soil exhaustion at home and with an inability to initiate meaningful agricultural reforms without destroying slavery, planters sought to expand into the West, Cuba, and Central America. Slavery could be profitably used, according to the author, in the mining of minerals and the production of

hemp in the western states,²⁴ but the Republican party foiled this move, thus, preparing the stage for rebellion. With one bold stroke the planters sought to remove the political restrictions that were slowly destroying their way of life. "The defense of slavery, to them," argued Genovese, "meant the defense of their honor, and dignity, which they saw as the essence of life."²⁵

Genovese insisted that the profitability of slavery could not be confined to economic terms alone. To understand both the profitability of slavery and Southern economic growth, the motives of the dominant planter class had to be considered. To the Southern slaveholder, slavery was a social and political way of life which involved the interplay of sociological and psychological forces far greater than the strict economic limitations discussed by previous historians. Slavery was inimical to Southern economic development and it retarded urbanization, industrialization, diversification, and technology. That it was not economically rewarding mattered less to the planter class of the Old South than did its maintenance as a bulwark of an aristocratic, semi-feudal, class dominance.

Genovese's theoretical argument which viewed the planter as a "precapitalist" aristocrat more concerned with the maintenance of class, power, and moral values than with sheer profits

was powerful, although not altogether persuasive. It was flatly challenged in 1974 by a much publicized study, Time On The Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery. The two authors, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, labeled themselves "Cliometricians"--scholars who use computer-assisted mathematics to analyze historical problems. Utilizing elaborate techniques to interpret masses of economic data, Time On The Cross resulted in socio-cultural implications far greater than its impact on Southern economic history.

Fogel and Engerman suggested that slavery was a profitable business for slaveholders--so profitable, in fact, that it was fundamental to the economic growth of the ante bellum South. Slavery did not retard economic advancement, rather, it served to enhance Southern economic development. Southern agricultural efficiency outdistanced that of the North by a stunning thirty-five per cent in 1860,²⁶ and slave labor was considerably more efficient than Northern wage labor.²⁷ While Genovese categorized the slaves' labor as "carelessness and wastefulness,"²⁸ Fogel and Engerman credited heightened Southern agricultural efficiency to the "special quality of plantation managerial posts which were manned by slaves themselves, their "superior management," their internalization of a Protestant work ethic, and their intensity of effort which matched that of a modern assembly line, contributed to "the economic

success of the plantation."³⁰ Fogel and Engerman suggested that slavery was efficient and profitable not solely due to the slaves' efforts, but also because of the "earnestness with which they [slaveholders] approached their tasks."³¹ Far from parading as noncommercial aristocrats interested only in elegant living, as implied by Genovese, Fogel and Engerman saw the planters as a "highly self-conscious class of entrepreneurs. . .steeped in the scientific agricultural literature of the day. . .[who] debate[d] the full range of problems that they encountered in plantation management."³² Planters, according to the authors, operated their plantations as "large, scientifically managed business enterprises," and with the assistance of black overseers and driver, planters "were the first group to engage in large scale, scientific personnel management."³³

Fogel and Engerman argued that the image of the South "as a colonial dependency" and as "a land of poverty" was false. "Far from being poverty-stricken," wrote the authors, "the South was quite rich by the standards of the antebellum era."³⁴ According to Fogel and Engerman, a country as advanced as Italy did not achieve the Southern level of per capita income until the eve of World War II.³⁵ Table and graphs revealed that far from stagnating, per capita income was actually growing thirty per cent more rapidly in the South than the

North.³⁶ Neither could the cliometricians accept the argument that the unequal income distribution of the South made its markets too small to support a large scale modern manufacturing industry, or that it consequently reduced the rate of investment in physical capital by reducing savings. Believing this argument to be overstated, Fogel and Engerman insisted that income savings in the South were "probably" higher than they would have been with a less skewed income distribution.³⁷ Their general conclusion was that the institution of slavery was unquestionably profitable to the planter and indispensable to the financial growth of the Old South's economic well being.

As a creditable piece of scholarship, Time On The Cross will probably not withstand the rigid test of academic assaults. Currently other cliometricians have begun to criticize its conclusions and methodology. Fogel and Engerman do, however, demonstrate the potential of econometrics as a methodology if carefully applied. In the main, Time On The Cross, rather than solving the question of profitability by adding clarity to the debate, served only to further confuse the issue. Presently, the discussion of slave profitability and Southern economic retardation and growth remains where it was over one hundred years ago--an historical "perennial."

CHAPTER V

OF RACE AND SLAVERY

The failure of the civil rights movement during the 1960's to moderate racial prejudice demonstrated to Americans that racism was far too complex to be eradicated by national and local legislation. The inability of Congressional action or the hopeless appeals of protest organizations to fundamentally alter the lives of most Black Americans served to show how deeply entrenched racism was in the fabric of American society. Partly in response to these political trends, researchers have reexamined the phenomenon of color and its implications in American history. Their results have indicated a deeper awareness of the development of racial attitudes and their impact on slavery and American history. The historical issue of the origins of American racial attitudes has become a productive and responsive field of inquiry.

Writing in the 1950's, an historiographical period better known for its adherence to consensus than division, Oscar and Mary Handlin denied any connection, no matter how casual, between the origins of the institution of slavery and the form-

ulation of American racial attitudes toward Blacks. In fact, they maintained that the "status" of the slave rather than the "race" of the bondsman was the determining factor in colonial racial perceptions. In "The Origins of the Southern Labor System," the Handlins sought to explain the beginnings of racial attitudes. They insisted that "racism was not there from the start. . . .It emerged rather from the adjustment to American conditions of traditional European institutions."¹ Black slaves originally shared the identical status as white servants. After the 1660's, the need to attract white labor induced American colonists to make living conditions more favorable for the European indentured servant than those of the African imports. During the process, the status of Blacks deteriorated into a position of involuntary servitude. With the development of a large scale plantation economy in the 1690's and the importation of increasing numbers of African laborers, the economic necessity of forced labor became a crucial issue for the colonists. While lower class white European immigrants made their way into a higher social class leaving their social origins behind, the color of the African remained a distinction and stamped him with a badge of inferiority and slavery. "Color then emerged as the token of slave status;" argued the authors, "the trace of color became the trace of slavery."²

Carl N. Degler joined the debate in the late 1950's, an

era characterized by the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, Southern resistance to school integration at Little Rock, Arkansas, and the glacial slowness of the region's acceptance of the Brown decision which had been handed down by the United States Supreme Court in 1954. In a powerful article, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice" (1959), Degler implied that rabid Southern resistance to racial integration could be explained only by the theory that racism was inextricably ingrained in the American character. The roots of racism could be found in America's earliest history. In fact, Degler asserted that racial prejudice antedated the actual institution of slavery itself. He rejected the Handlin's argument that slavery arose from a peculiar economic situation of the late seventeenth century.

Degler viewed colonial slavery as "clearly. . .the consequence of the general social discrimination against him [the slave]." ³ "The status of the Negro in the American colonies was worked out within the framework of discrimination," declared Degler, "that from the outset. . .the Negro was treated as an inferior to the white men, servant and free."⁴ Degler's research revealed instances of prejudice early in the 1640's in Virginia. This provided clear evidence, at least to Degler, that long before slavery or Black labor became important to

the Southern economy, a special and inferior status had been worked out for the Black in the English colonies.⁵ "It would seem, then, that instead of slavery being the root of the discrimination visited upon the Negro in America," argued Degler, "slavery was itself molded by the early colonial discrimination against the outlander."⁶

David Brion Davis' The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (1966) explored the phenomenon of color, racial ideology, and the status of slaves in other slave societies. He discovered a continuity of attitudes regarding the slaves' position in society including Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre--all of which alluded to the natural inferiority of the slave.⁷ Classical Stoics challenged the concept of the innate inequality of the slaves' status and early Christian thinkers stressed the inward freedom of the slaves' soul which minimized his external condition. In addition, early Christian thinkers emphasized the equality of mens' spiritual souls, regardless of physical condition, before God.

Nevertheless, Davis did not extend his thesis so far as to admit that preconditioned racial prejudice created conditions that demanded slavery. In fact, he was inclined to suggest the opposing views. Davis viewed slavery in America as "a pro-

duct of innumerable decisions of self-interests made by traders and princes in Europe and Africa,"⁸ rather than the result of racism. Europeans had been enslaved in the ancient and medieval worlds without firm regard to race. More importantly, "in no ancient society," claimed Davis, "was the distinction between slave and freemen so sharply drawn as in America."⁹

Davis observed an identifiable correlation, however oversimplified, between economic profit and social attitudes. That slavery gave rise to racism seemed plausible; "when profits from the slave trade were reputed to run as high as three hundred per cent," reasoned Davis, "it was relatively easy to associate the system with the beneficent order of the universe."¹⁰ Thus, colonists may have been initially prejudiced, however, economic incentives compelled them eventually to rationalize their practice with the protective garb of racism.

The issues of ideology and American racial attitudes received exhaustive treatment with the publication of Winthrop Jordan's White Over Black (1968). In intricate detail, Jordan traced the anguished sense of animosity among English-speaking people toward Blacks from the Elizabethan era through the War of 1812. Jordan sought to answer a simple question: What were the attitudes of white men toward Blacks during the first two centuries of European and African settlement in what became the United States of America?¹¹ In psycho-analytical fashion,

Jordan traced the attitudinal development of Englishmen toward Blacks from their first contacts with Africans in the middle of the sixteenth century through the introduction of Black bondsmen in America from the colonial period down through the first generation following the formation of the Constitution. What Jordan found was a white aversion and fear of Blacks and a projection of white unacknowledged lust and aggressions upon the African descendants. Paranoid whites viewed the Black as a mirror of their own apparent avarice, fear, and sexual aggressions. "It is scarcely surprising," wrote Jordan, "that Englishmen should have used peoples overseas as social mirrors and that they were especially inclined to discover attributes in savages which they found first but could not speak of in themselves."¹²

While Degler argued that colonists in North America were preconditioned toward racial prejudice, he admitted that he was perplexed as to where and when this attitudinal phenomenon originated. White Over Black located the beginnings of English racial beliefs and stressed the persistence of racist ideology in early American history. At the initial contact with Black Africans, Elizabethan Englishmen immediately associated them and their native land with heathenism, savagery, bestiality, lusty sexuality, libidinous men, and a foreboding specter of

devilish blackness. Jordan insisted that Englishmen, in light of attitudes which emerged during their first two centuries in America, did not leave in the Old World all the initial impressions gathered of Blacks before they became slaves.¹³ In fact, "from the beginning," insisted Jordan, "Englishmen tended to set Negroes over against themselves."¹⁴

If Jordan demonstrated that colonists were racially prejudiced during the initial settlement of North America, he did not imply that their prejudices necessarily led to the enslavement of the African. Jordan eventually dismissed the antiquated debate enjoined by the Handlins and Degler. He noted that "outright enslavement and. . .other forms of debasement appeared at about the same time," and "the coincidence suggests a mutual relationship between slavery and unfavorable assessment, with no cause for either which did not cause the other as well. Slavery and prejudice may have been equally cause and effect, continuously reacting upon each other, "dynamically joining hands to hustle him [the slave] down the road to complete degradation."¹⁶

Continuing the discussion of the extent of racist ideology in American slavery, George M. Fredrickson's Black Image in the White Mind (1971) surveyed the "relationship of racial doctrines and images to general social and intellectual developments"¹⁷ when formalized racism was in an "embryonic stage"

in the early 1800's until it had reached a peak of power and influence on the eve of World War I, "just before it began to be seriously challenged by the new liberal environmentalism of the twentieth century."¹⁸ While the chronological limits of Black Image in the White Mind transcended slavery, Fredrickson's book complimented those by Davis and Jordan. Central to Fredrickson's study was the notion that intellectualized racist theory during the nineteenth century emerged for the first time as a central current in Western thought. Conceding that racism, as a rationalized pseudoscientific theory implying the innate and permanent inferiority of non-whites had roots in the biological thinking of the eighteenth century, Fredrickson insisted that it did not exert great influence until well into the nineteenth century.²⁰

By distinguishing between "racial prejudice" and "racism," Fredrickson sought to detail the development of American racial ideology. He defined racial prejudice as "brutal race preference" while he viewed racism as a "rationalized ideology grounded in what were thought to be the facts of nature."²¹ He traced the impact of the unscientific racial ideas of Hinton Rowan Helper and George Fitzhugh, the ideas and significance of "polygenesis" and Herrenvolk, the paternalism of the New South, the effect of Darwinism, and the cultural growth of racist attitudes

toward Blacks as having their origins in the institutionalization of slavery based on race during the seventeenth century. However, "racism did not come to full ideological consciousness," noted Fredrickson, "until called forth by nineteenth developments and given shape and consistency by contemporary trends in scientific and social thought."²²

William R. Stanton's Leopard Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859 (1960) illustrated the intensity of the special brand of American racism. The racialist argument development during the ante bellum period--the position that the various races of man were not varieties of one species--was not necessarily an ad hoc argument forged for the special purpose of providing a presumably scientific foundation for the defense of slavery. Stanton charged that the argument for multiplicity of species evolved not in response to a defense of slavery but as part of the most advanced scientific theory of the day. The polygenesis theory was voiced by learned capable men such as George R. Glidden, Louis Agassiz, and E.G. Squier.

Stanton contended that the "American School" of anthropology, which so rapidly advanced the cause of polygenesis, unintentionally offered support to the proslavery argument. Because of its fundamental commitment to religion, the South rejected the support of diversity of origins. The Bible spoke

of the commonality of human origins. In rejecting the scientific explanation of the diversity of races, "the South," wrote Stanton, "turned its back on the only intellectually respectable defense of slavery it could have taken up."²³ With the deliberate repudiation of the ideas of polygenesis, the South spared the American School "the reproach before history of having effectually furthered the cause of slavery."²⁴ Implicit in Stanton, however, was the notion that American racism evolved from a predisposition on the part of whites to regard the status of Blacks as one of innate inferiority. Although proslavery elements were slow to seize upon the opportunity to justify the institution's existence by scientific arguments, the appearance of the American School did little to alter the fundamentally racist attitudes which Americans, both North and South, held.

The racial ideology and attitudes of people in geographical areas outside the South during the ante bellum period has received fresh treatment. Eugene Berwanger's Frontier Against Slavery (1967) revealed that "prejudice against Negroes was a factor in the development of antislavery feelings in the ante-bellum United States."²⁵ Berwanger contended that the populace in the West, to a large measure, emigrated from settlements in the Old Northwest where state legislatures, "overwhelmed by the fear of being inundated by manumitted slaves or free Negroes

from the South, were enacting laws to deprive the Negro immigrants of any semblance of citizenship, to exclude them from the states, and to encourage them to colonize in Africa."²⁶

Social and political thought patterns in the Ohio Valley shaped the ideas which pioneers brought to the West; some were altered to fit the special needs of the new environment while others were discarded for reasons of impracticability. Nevertheless, "prejudice against the free Negro," theorized Berwanger, "found special acceptance" in the states on the western frontier.²⁷

Berwanger emphasized that westerners were willing to see slavery contained in order to eventually extinguish it, however, their primary concern was not slavery's abolition, but its expansion. Moreover, he attempted to show that although a sizeable "segment of the western population considered slavery morally repulsive," not all opposition to slavery was based on moral, economic, or social reasons. Berwanger confessed that "from the beginnings of their settlement the western free states and territories enacted stringent restrictions against free Negroes."²⁹ Discrimination against Blacks in the Middle West reached its peak between 1846 and 1860 during the height of the slavery extension controversy, according to the author. Berwanger concluded that arguments over slavery's expansion made midwesterners more aware of the presence of free Blacks, increased their racial antipathy, and produced additional legal

measures to restrict the race.³⁰ Western fear and antipathy toward Blacks led to the support of colonization schemes as a vehicle to reduce the Black population "and prevent miscegenation."³¹

Berwanger revealed that "in territorial Kansas a large group of settlers was more anti-Negro than antislavery,"³² and that race prejudice was reflected by Congressmen and Senators from the Middle West. People in the western free states took elaborate precautions to confine the Black to the South through the initiation of security measures and exclusion laws. Fear of racial equality, economic competition, miscegenation, political predominance, and the generally accepted view of innate inequality of Blacks forced "westerners to refuse to accept them," added Berwanger, "as equals on a political or social level."³³ Indeed, political leaders from the Middle West made it abundantly clear that they had no intentions of uplifting the Black or equalizing his place in society.

In North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (1961), Leon Litwak viewed racism during the antebellum era as a national problem. "Discrimination against the Negro and a firmly held belief in the superiority of the white race were not restricted to any one section," explained Litwak, "but shared by an overwhelming majority of white Americans in both North and South."³⁴ Popular pressures forced political

parties, Democrats, Whigs, and Republicans, along with social and economic insititutions, "to embrace the doctrine of white supremacy," wrote Litwak, and "sanction the social and economic repression of the Negro population."³⁵

Litwak argued that because of the absence of a firm federal policy on the position and status of the free Black in the North, "the future of the Negro was left to the states and to the dominant race."³⁶ North of Slavery portrayed the society of the the Northern states as overtly racist and pointed toward several forms of racial discrimination such as residential restrictions, exclusion from certain public accommodations, and confinement to menial employment.³⁷

While the northern Black faced a multitude of legal, economic, social, and political restrictions before 1860, Litwak was quick to note that his condition was not necessarily the same as his brother in the South. The northern Black "spoke out freely against his condition; he organized, agitated, penned editorials and pamphlets and petitioned state and federal bodies to improve his position," however fruitless the results.³⁸

Racism had so thoroughly pervaded northern attitudes that it manifested itself in the abolitionist crusade. While neither Litwak nor Berwanger could determine the intensity of northern racial attitudes, both acknowledged that the Mason-Dixon Line did little to "dramatize essential differences in the attitudes

toward the Negro."³⁹

The research yielded by historians who have studied the development of American racial attitudes has, inadvertently, given rise to an interesting trend in the historiography of slavery. Disappointed with the snail-like pace of integration and the surfacing of latent racism in Northern-based urban communities, a small but vocal group of historians has come to regard slavery not as an anomaly, "but as central to American society from the beginning."⁴⁰ Young scholars such as Staughton Lynd, Robert McColley, Richard Brown, and Robert Starobin have linked the institution of slavery closely to the development of American history. They contend that long periods of American history were shaped by the problem of slavery and freedom. Relating slavery directly to the formation of basic political institutions, such as the Constitution and the emergence of the party system, these men view late eighteenth century and nineteenth century American politics as largely determined by issues concerning Blacks.⁴¹ Authors of this persuasion attempt to prove that trade and industrialization were dependent upon the growth of slavery, and territorial and economic expansion were a direct by-product of slavery and racism.⁴² In essence, "the most recent scholarship," suggested Robert Starobin, "begins to view the Negro as a key to the meaning of the American experience."⁴³

Staughton Lynd's interesting article, "The Compromise of 1787" (1966) explored the motives for Southern representatives' acceptance of the Northwest Ordinance and the impact of the Ordinance on the work of the Constitutional Convention. Lynd revealed that Southern delegates reasoned that "even without slavery" the Northwest "was expected to support Southern policies in Congress;"⁴⁴ the Ordinance may have been construed by Southerners as a tacit endorsement of slavery; and the negotiations that led to the Ordinance appear to have involved an agreement to speed the admission of new states from the Northwest by lowering the population required for admission, thus, favoring Southern interests since these settlers were expected to support Southern interests. Lynd theorized that "the Ordinance could well have seemed a Southern victory to the Southern majority."⁴⁵ Also, the Northwest Ordinance, the fugitive slave provisions, the postponement of the abolition of the African slave trade, and the "three-fifths" clause caused Lynd to remark that "the evidence suggests that the motives which moved men in making the Ordinance and Constitution were essentially the same."⁴⁶ The drafters at Philadelphia were troubled about slavery as were the legislators in New York, and Southerners who sought to guarantee slave property and make possible a stronger Southern voice in Congress saw Northwest settlement as a means to increased political strength. In this

way, slavery was an independent force in shaping and ratification of the Constitution.

Robert McColley, in Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (1964), concentrated on the early years of the growth of the United States. He concluded that his primary intention was to illustrate "a full portrayal of the powerful and varied influence of slavery on the life, thought, and politics of Jeffersonian Virginians."⁴⁷ The drift of McColley's argument was that Jeffersonian Virginia gave rise to a powerful and elite slaveholding class that nurtured and protected the institution of slavery. He persuasively demonstrated that slavery was not moribund before the cotton boom of the early nineteenth century nor did there exist, among this class of slavemasters, a humanitarian desire for slave emancipation. McColley argued that "Jefferson was not ahead, but rather far behind such public advocates of emancipation" as John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin.⁴⁸ Indeed, "Jefferson," insisted McColley, "went as far in attacking and eliminating slavery as an elected representative of Virginia could go," and was pledged to slavery in private and public life. Regarding Jefferson's liberalism as a myth, McColley suggested that Jefferson's Virginia transmitted "along with the axioms of democratic republican, the model theory of American racism."⁵⁰ McColley also argued

that Virginians dominated the federal government under Jefferson and used this influence to secure the protection and expansion of their institution. "The Virginia dynasty, led by Thomas Jefferson and securely in control of the national government after 1800," charged McColley, "exerted its power" toward "guaranteeing the security of slavery in the vast Louisiana territory and promoting the greatest and easiest possible access to foreign markets for the rising planters of the deep Southwest."⁵¹

Richard H. Brown's article, "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," (1966) tested the era of Jacksonian democracy against the thesis of slavery's centrality. From the inauguration of Washington until the Civil War the South was in the saddle of national politics, and to Brown, "this is the central fact in American political history to 1860."⁵² Andrew Jackson's chief agent of Southern Power, Martin Van Buren, insisted Brown, "was a Northern man with Southern principles."⁵³ Slavery was the "one single compelling idea which virtually united all Southerners, and which governed their participation in national affairs."⁵⁴ The question of slavery was "too critical, too sensitive, too perilous for all Southern society," argued Brown, "to be dealt with by those not directly affected. Slavery must remain a Southern question."⁵⁵

Brown charged that slave power "underlay the Constitution

and its creation of a government of limited powers, without which Southern participation would have been unthinkable."⁵⁶ In order to provide security for slavery, Jefferson and Madison attempted to construct a party designed to protect the Constitution against change through interpretation. The Republican party became national and lost its identity while Van Buren guided Jackson's victory with a party predicted on a strict construction of the Constitution in order to protect the sanctity of slavery. Jackson vetoed the Maysville Road bill and thwarted efforts to recharter the Bank of The United States in an attempt to illustrate the strict interpretationist bent of his administration. The security of Southern slaveholding interests, indeed, underlay political developments from 1790-1860.

William F. Freehling's Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Crises in South Carolina, 1816-1836 (1965) also underscored the centrality of the slave issue during the Jacksonian era. Freehling minimized the economic reasons for South Carolina's actions in 1829, although he did not completely rule out "pecuniary embarrassments" as a plausible factor in nullification. Rather, Freehling attempted "to show that the nullification impulse was to a crucial extent a revealing expression of South Carolina's morbid sensitivity to the beginnings of the anti-slave campaign."⁵⁷ Freehling admitted that the essential purpose of the book was to demonstrate that the central occurrence in the

broadier transition of South Carolina from the enthusiastic nationalism of 1816 to the extreme sectionalism of 1836 was rooted in the central importance of the slavery issue.

Freehling discovered that "low country rice and luxury cotton planters, although overwhelmingly in favor of nullification, remained somewhat prosperous in the twenties and thirties,"⁵⁸ suggesting that economic motives for nullification were remote. Freehling argued that South Carolina's frenzied response to the relatively underdeveloped attack by abolitionists in the 1820's masked that state's tremendous sense of guilt and fear regarding the institution of Black slavery. Thus, "the sight of a slave listening to a Fourth of July oration," insisted Freehling, "chilled the bravest southerner,"⁶⁰ and South Carolinians were "always more apprehensive about slave revolts than any other region of the Old South."⁶¹ Denmark Vesey's conspiracy pointed out the need for South Carolinians "to check abolitionist propaganda and to stop congressional slavery debate."⁶²

The guilt of the slaveowners, the uneasiness over Vesey's conspiracy, and the Turner revolt in Virginia burdened the conscience of the tidewater gentry and they responded "hysterically to a harmless attack" by abolitionists.⁶³ Fear of servile insurrection initiated by abolitionist propaganda encouraged nullifiers "to fight the abolitionists indirectly by contending against the tariff."⁶⁴ South Carolinians, obsessed with what

they regarded as signs of a growing antislavery movement could only wage a preventive crusade against the abolitionists by attacking the protectionists' use of broad constriction.⁶⁵ Nullifiers considered protective tariffs as onerous economic burdens but also as an integral part of a sectional exploitation which would lead to slave revolts, colonization schemes, and ultimately the abolition of slavery. Tangentially, the nullification impulse was a result of the economic distress in South Carolina, but more specifically it was "an expression of the anxiety surrounding the discussion of slavery in South Carolina," explained Freehling, "in the years immediately before the anti-slavery crusade became part of the national political scene."⁶⁶

In 1968, Robert Starobin authored a powerful article, "The Negro: A Central Theme in American History," (1968) which stressed slavery's central importance to the national experience prior to the Civil War. Starobin provided a bibliographical review of the recent literature produced by the belief in the centrality of the slavery issue to the growth of the nation at least until 1860. He argued that traditionalist historians minimized the presence of slaves while revisionists alluded only to the Blacks' conservative contributions. In addition, Starobin contended that Black historiography appeared headed in the direction of the "neo-revisionists," the advocates of the centrality of the Black to the history of America.⁶⁷ Starobin concluded

that "Slavery was an integral institution in American political and economic life at least as early as the 1780's "while slavery and the position of the Negro seemed to determine important political decisions and party formations from the framing of the Constitution until the Civil War."⁶⁸ In short, "the Negro," predicted Starobin, "is becoming recognized as a key to American history and one of its most distinctive themes."⁶⁹

CHAPTER VI

ELKINS AND HIS CRITICS

Prior to the publication of Stanley M. Elkins' influential study, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (1959), historians of American slavery had usually begun with a basic moral judgment of the institution. The subjection of slavery to moral value considerations formed the basis for differing trends which gained ascendancy at one time or another from 1865 until the present. The appearance of Elkins' book in 1959, however, was the first work which dismissed moral apologies and indictments of slavery in an effort to raise striking new viewpoints in order to analyze ante bellum Southern slavery. Elkins viewed the "old debate" over the rightness and wrongness of slavery as having reached a stalemate and that little more could be presented in support of either side. Thus, the goals for historians of American slavery in Elkins' opinion, would henceforth be the exploration of new "lines" of arguments and inquiry.¹

In his attempt to shift scholarship from moral assessments to an examination of the slave himself, Elkins ignored elaborate discussions concerning the treatments of slaves and other external

factors, and concentrated on the psychological effects the institution wrought on the personality of the slaves. Elkins' basic conclusion held that elements characteristic of the "closed" nature of North American slavery--the demand for subservience to a single authority--operated in such a fashion as to alter fundamentally the slaves' personality from that based on a distinctive warlike heritage to that of a shuffling "Sambo" image.²

"Sambo," according to Elkins, was "docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing."³ In essence, Elkins claimed that features unique to the plantation system in North America gave rise to a "childlike" slave character whose "relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment," and "it was indeed this childlike quality that was the very key to his being."⁴

The "Sambo" personality developed, according to Elkins, because only in the United States was there an absence of institutional barriers, such as the Roman Catholic church and Roman civil law to ameliorate a harsh system. Unlike developments in the Iberian slave colonies, North America and English slavery demonstrated a lack of institutional protection for slaves while taking on all the chief dynamics of "unopposed capitalism." The liberal, Protestant, secularized, capitalistic culture of the United States was devoid of the restraints engendered by

the conservative, Catholic, paternalistic, quasi-medieval societies of the Spanish and Portuguese cultures, and this gave license to the indiscriminate use of planter "absolute power." The only defense American slaves possessed in response to planter authority was the internalization of the role of the happy infant-- "the good humor of an everlasting childhood."⁵

In a far-reaching attempt to illustrate the deleterious effects of a "closed" system accompanied by absolute power, Elkins constructed a rough analogy between the Southern plantation and the Nazi concentration camp operations. His conclusions suggested that Southern slaves displayed similiar effects of infantilism to those experienced by white camp inmates. The Black slaves, as was the case with the white prison camp survivors, did not resist absolute authority which was proven by the relative absence of bloody slave revolts which so typified Latin American and Caribbean slavery. The slaves' and inmates' conception of themselves as children and not rebels made resistance "quite unthinkable."⁶ In the end, the feature common to the plantation and the concentration camps--closeness--combined with the aspect of absolute authority, and led to a total dependence upon the oppressive agency and the eventual perversion of the slave's and inmate's personalities.

Ultimately, Elkins unveiled his own brand of neo-abolitionism. Even though he assailed the moral inclinations of previous

historians, the moral implication of his own work escaped only the most careless reader. Explicit in Slavery was the assumption that slavery was harsh and brutal. The magnitude of the planters' brutality and absolute authority surpassed even Stamp's strong indictments, and slavery could be compared favorably only to Nazi concentration camps. The "closedness" of the English and American regimes were of such harshness that they significantly altered the personality of their slaves and turned them into a race of "clowns," individuals totally emasculated and reduced to childlike dependency. In reality, Elkins had become entrapped in a web spun by his own contradictions. Refusing to make a moral assessment of the institution of slavery, Elkins opted, instead, for a position which gave the appearance of neutrality, but one which would not betray his own moral judgments. In the final analysis, Slavery was fraught with nearly the same moral overtones that shrouded The Peculiar Institution.

Slavery fulfilled its pledge to generate new avenues of inquiry. However, Elkins' supporters and critics were more successful in anticipating and exploiting the new drift of scholarship than was Elkins himself. His belief in the fundamental differences in New World slave regimes has led to the publication of several excellent studies in comparative slave institutions, both verifying and attacking his position. Elkins' controversial analysis of the psychological impact of the institution of slavery

upon the personality of the slave brought forth numerous essays and studies both substantiating and rejecting part or all of his major conclusions. In fact, the decades of the 1960's and 1970's have witnessed so many publications concerned with Elkins' theses on slave infantilization and comparative slave regimes that Elkins' supporters have found it necessary to devote an anthology defending and further examining his basic views.⁷

The importance of the impact of Elkins' study must also be measured in the light of political and intellectual trends during the 1960's. Concern with invalidating or supporting Elkins' thesis was tied closely to the developing new image of the Black initiated by the civil rights struggle and the Black liberation movement. Elkins' focus on the impact of slavery upon the personality of the Blacks boldly introduced psychological models into historical analysis, and by implication related the slave background to a variety of current problems.⁸ The image of a docile, submissive, and contented "Sambo" slave unwilling to demonstrate the manly attribute of the love of liberty was wholly repugnant to the gallant portrait painted by modern Black militants dedicated to relentless struggle, even violence, in the attainment of their expressed goals. The Black search for a proud heritage and a viable identity created an interest in the mechanisms of the slave personality and the responses of slaves to their conditions. Critics of the Elkins

approach, notably John Blassingame, Sterling Stucky, Robert Fogel, Stanley Engerman, and Eugene D. Genovese would later seize upon these prevailing social, cultural, and intellectual trends in order to issue scathing rebuttals against Elkins.

Slavery's loyal defenders and most ardent critics gathered at the forensic waterhole created by Elkins. His insistence upon the extent of institutional developments, such as the church and the legal code as dominant factors in the growth of differing New World slave regimes, provided a point of contention. However, it was Elkins' emphasis upon comparative analysis of slave systems that formed the basis for new and exciting major ideological battles that have recently invaded the academic scene.

In an effort to revive the comparative approach into the study of slavery, Elkins relied heavily upon a seminal essay by Frank L. Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen, published in 1947. Tannenbaum argued that slavery was far milder in feudal Catholic cultures than in capitalistic Anglo-Saxon Protestant societies because the basic humanity, the "moral personality" of the slave managed to be preserved. Customs and institutions, namely the Catholic church and an elaborate pre-existing Roman civil code, unknown to English-speaking slave colonies, assisted in protecting the slave. "The Negro under this system," insisted

Tannenbaum, "had both juridical and moral personality, even while he was in bondage."⁹ This "element of human personality," according to Tannenbaum, "was not lost in the transition to slavery from Africa to the Spanish or Portuguese dominions."¹⁰ In conclusions, Tannenbaum believed that the critical difference between race relations in the United States and in Latin America lay in the manner in which institutions interposed themselves between slave and slaveholder.

Tannenbaum's essay remained largely ignored until popularized by Elkins, as were certain works by the Brazilian scholar, Gilberto Freyre, whose book, The Masters and the Slaves, received miniscule recognition when published in 1956. On occasion, Freyre described Brazilian slavery in much the identical manner as Ulrich B. Phillips portrayed Southern ante bellum slavery in the United States. Relations between master and slave were humanized and paternal, especially between master and female slave. Slaves, while subjected to certain disabilities and sometimes cruelly treated, frequently came to play an emotionally significant role in the intimate lives of white owners. A high rate of miscegenation was one of the hall marks of the empathy between the races. Freyre implied that the sexual link, absent in Anglo-Saxon Protestant societies, formed the basis for fluid racial relations. "The friction here [Brazil]," wrote Freyre, "was smoothed by the lubricating oil of a deep-going miscegena-

tion."¹¹

With the growing trend among historians toward comparative studies, Tannenbaum and Freyre were reexamined for possible answers to delicate problems posed by Elkins. In a small and poorly edited book, Herbert S. Klein attempted to test the thesis developed by Tannenbaum and Elkins. In Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba (1967), Klein studied the cases of Cuba and Virginia to determine "the social and economic dynamics of the New World slave systems."¹² By exploring the two slave societies, Klein hoped to explain how and why the two regimes differed so markedly. In Cuba, central authorities maintained strong control, but in Virginia local government flourished; in Cuba "the development of the slave codes, by the very nature of the sources from which they came, forms a continuum of legal history from Justinian to the nineteenth century,"¹³ while in Virginia, slaves barely had any legal personality; in Cuba slaves were baptized, wed, and accepted into the church, but in Virginia they were denied religious equality; in Cuba slaves were diversified and manumission was common, while in Virginia, with its one-crop plantation economy, slave tasks were limited and degraded, and manumission was rare; in Cuba the freedmen could find a place in the social system regardless of their skin complexion, but in Virginia freedmen were

terrorized, persecuted, and ostracized.

Klein's general conclusions substantiated those previously advanced by Tannenbaum and Elkins. He concluded that on the eve of freedom, Cuba and Virginia met the historical challenge in very different ways. In Cuba, a continuing process of integration led to the substantial assimilation of its former slaves into the society at large, while in Virginia the period following Reconstruction witnessed an erosion of the initial economic and social gains made by ex-slaves. As a result of a combination of causes "two sharply different slave regimes" emerged."¹⁴ On the whole, Klein's examination added to the Tannenbaum-Elkins contention only by testing its validity in a specific case. While the general conclusions of Klein's concerning Cuban and Virginian society were not provocative and his understanding of the Virginia slave regime, at times, seemed strained, Slavery in the Americas was solid evidence of the emerging tendency of scholars toward the study of comparative slave history.

In an erudite treatment of the evolution of beliefs and social patterns of ancient Old World slave civilizations to the modern New World institution, David Brion Davis' The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (1966) delivered the first major stunning blow to the comparative theories of Tannenbaum, Elkins, and Klein. Rather than emphasize institutional dis-

tinctions between Iberian societies and English-American slave regimes in the New World, Davis stressed the vast continuity between ancient and modern slave systems. "Although American slavery was shaped into a distinctive pattern," argued Davis, "few of its basic features were unique to the New World."¹⁵

Davis saw a direct influence of chattle servitude in Europe on the South's institution. He noted the largely disregarded fact that "true slavery persisted as a viable institution around the edges of Medieval Europe--in Spain, in the vast Moslem world, in the Byzantine Empire, in Kievan Russia--and that from the thirteenth century to the late fifteenth century an internal slave trade flourished in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean."¹⁶ This Old World development, thereby, provided the historical link from the supposed end of European slavery in the Middle Ages to the New World in the sixteenth century.

Stressing continuity rather than diversity in slave cultures, Davis rejected the Tannenbaum-Elkins contention of British-America's uniqueness. Davis insisted that the contrast between the feudal, patriarchial, Catholic cultures of Latin America, which granted the slave at least a minimal claim to humanity, and the competitive capitalistic culture of Protestant North America, which treated the slave as simply an object of commerce, was all too often based on Iberian and English slave regimes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this impor-

tant period, conditions in the Spanish and Portuguese systems had ameliorated. "It is perhaps significant that accounts of Latin American slavery often pictured the relaxed life on sugar plantations after their decline in economic importance," noted Davis, "and ignore conditions that prevailed during the Brazilian sugar boom of the seventeenth century, the mining boom of the early eighteenth century, and the coffee boom of the nineteenth century."¹⁷ In addition, Davis held that historians, such as Tannenbaum, Elkins, and Freyre, confused the protection provided for the slave by legal codes with actual conditions in Latin America, and disregarded the likelihood that these internal restraints were largely ignored by the slaveowners and proved virtually unenforceable. Davis argued that differences in Latin American and North American slavery were due to "regional or temporal differences within the countries themselves,"¹⁸ and to "the range of variations that occur in any slave society,"²⁰ rather than to national and cultural institutions.

Eugene D. Genovese, in The World The Slaveholders Made (1969) supported Davis' theory of the continuity of slave developmental patterns from Europe to the New World. Genovese maintained that a comparative study of the complex development of slavery and serfdom in their various forms in Europe, the West Indies, North and South America, could not be understood in terms of isolated nations and colonies. Slavery anywhere

could only be comprehended in light of the institutional growth of Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean Islands, and the United States. Genovese demonstrated the importance of treating different New World societies as a series of colonial cultures located "within the process of world-wide capitalistic development itself."²⁰

Genovese's fundamental thesis was that previous ventures into comparative slavery had yielded important social, political, and racial insights, but the efforts of historians, such as Elkins, and Davis, had ignored the vital dimensions of class structure and the outlook of the slaveowners. "Race relations," insisted Genovese, "did not determine the patterns of slavery in the New World; the patterns of slavery. . . manifested in particular forms of class rule, determined race relations."²¹ Slavery in the New World was considered "less a matter of race than of class and that Africans could not have been so treated unless the groundwork had been laid by the treatment of the white lower classes."²²

Linking the slaveholding class in the New World to the dominant capitalistic classes in Europe was Genovese's key point. Wholly within a consistent, rational, Marxist analysis, Genovese illustrated that slaveholders in the Caribbean colonies belonged to the same class of dominant bourgeoisie as that in the emerg-

ing capitalistic nations of England, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark. These planters belonged to a world wide class of entrepreneurs whose motives and aspirations differed little. Spanish America witnessed the development of a seigneurial society of which slavery was but one of several forms of independent labor. With emancipation "the ruling class was not seriously undermined;" contended Genovese, "all that happened was the conversion of one form of dependent labor into other forms."²³ In the United States the planter clung to a "bourgeois world-view" which ideologically indentified him with the rapid extension of world capitalism.²⁵ The colonization of the New World re-created archaic regimes, both seigneurial and bourgeois, typified by the patriarchial plantation. Within this internal archaic development continued a powerful process of world capitalistic expansion. This practice absorbed the independent internal process within itself and distorted it in decisive ways. "The great revolt of the slaveholders of the Old South represented a dramatic reactionary movement," reasoned Genovese, "to reverse the fundamental thrust of world history."²⁵

Of the several authors who have engaged in comparative research, Carl N. Degler has written probably the most interesting monograph, Neither Black Nor White (1971). Less concerned with the internal mechanisms of the actual institution of slavery

than with the development of different patterns of race relations in the United States and Brazil after emancipation, Degler attempted to explain the ultimate ramifications of Black servitude. In lieu of his announced conclusions, he offered his book as a research study to "help Americans understand the possibilities for as well as the difficulties of developing an egalitarian biracial society in place of one of white supremacy."²⁶

Neither Black Nor White took firm issue with the Tannenbaum-Elkins thesis--that Iberian institutions of the Catholic church and Roman civil law favored a basic humanity toward the slave in Latin America, therefore, making the transition from slave to freedman a process of relative fluidity. Acknowledging the phenomenon of fluid race relations in Brazil, Degler viewed the imbalanced black-white population ratio as the main determinant of Brazil's racial order. "It is evident that differences in the practices of slavery in Brazil and the United States," argued Degler, "can be quite adequately accounted for by the accidents of geography, demography, and economy and the underlying differences in attitudes toward Negroes rather than by the differences in the laws and practices of church and state regarding slavery."²⁷

Degler's primary explanation for Brazil's enlightened position on race relations appeared in the "escape hatch" concept.²⁸

The fact that a large class of free mulattoes in Brazil stood waiting as a community for freed slaves to join at the lower end of the economic scale after emancipation, "helps to explain why relations between the races in Brazil have been less rigid and less prone to hostility than in the United States."²⁹

Mulattoes were categorized as Blacks in the United States because Blacks were considered a minority, thus, easily controlled. Miscegenation was rampant in Brazil because of the lack of white females, while slaveholders in the United States rarely found such conditions. In the end, demography, closely supported by Iberian cultural factors, such as democracy and the lack of an English-based "work ethic," proved to be the basic difference in a smoothly functioning racial social order like Brazil and a disruptive color conscious society such as the United States.

Critics of Elkins' position concerning infantilization and the ultimate perversion of the slaves' personality have found their most effective arguments rooted in the examination of slave culture. Recent studies have revealed that an autonomous culture fashioned by the slaves themselves mitigated against a total identification with their owners, a feature Elkins believed inherent in a "closed" slave system. Through the judicious use of heretofore questionable evidence--slave narrative and autobiographies--the socio-cultural line of in-

vestigation has unearthed a wealth of information on the psychological and personality behavior of the slave.

Recently, the study of slave institutions and cultural behavior has been aimed primarily at discrediting Elkins' most outstanding conclusions. Elkins, however, derived the basis for some of his controversial arguments from the earlier works and debates between the two leading authorities on Black culture, Melville J. Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier.

Anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits, in Myth Of The Negro Past (1941), examined the economic and social structure, religious beliefs, and artistic achievements of West Africa in an effort to challenge effectively many misconceptions of African history. Herskovits revealed a surprising degree of West African continuity in Black American social and religious practices which implied that the culture of Blacks in the United States was strongly influenced by African carryovers. Unfortunately, Herskovits' conclusions ran headlong into the finding of Black historian-sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, whose History of the Negro In the United States (1949) suggested that the harshness and dehumanizing aspects of the slave trade dissolved most cultural ties between slaves and their former homeland. The slave culture was influenced strictly by the American environment. During the 1950's Frazier's argument prevailed because of the

nation's growing emphasis on integration, a process which, if successful, minimizes cultural and social differences between races. With the heavy concentration in the late 1960's on the rediscovery of the Black African heritage and Black awareness, Herskovits has, at least for the time being, regained a marked degree of credibility and ascendancy.

Elkins, inadvertently, built on Frazier's concept of cultural discontinuity. Portraying slavery as a closed, totalitarian institution analogous to a Nazi concentration camp, Elkins implied that it completely devastated Black culture and created a "Sambo" personality totally dependent on the master for role models and cultural values. Sterling Stuckey, in an article published in 1968, "Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery," insisted that slaves were able to fashion an autonomous culture and community with its own life style and set of values, an ethos, "which prevented them from being imprisoned altogether by the definitions which the larger society sought to impose."³⁰ This ethos was an amalgam of Africanisms and New World elements which helped the slaves feel their way along the course of American slavery, "enabling them to endure."³¹ Like Elkins, Stuckey made use of new evidence, particularly folklore, slave songs, and spirituals, which indicated that many slaves were quite aware of exploitation and oppression and were hardly

content with their lot. Slave religion best illustrates this point in that it had a dual nature: masters attempted to use Christianity to inculcate obedience, but many slaves identified with Biblical heroes who challenged slavery in ancient times.

One of the most persuasive replies to Elkins came in 1972 with John W. Blassingame's The Slave Community. Attempting to revolutionize the study of slavery by viewing the institution from the eyes of the slave rather than the master, Blassingame attacked Elkins for dealing with plantation stereotypes, the planters' projections, desires, and biases, rather than actual slave behavior, such as the slaves' inner life, thoughts, actions, self-concepts, and personalities. Like Stuckey, Blassingame resorted to such unconventional sources as slave biographies "in an effort to delineate more clearly the slave's view of bondage and to discover new insights into the working of the system."³² By utilizing sources from the slaves' personal records, travelers accounts, and planter testimonies, Blassingame's three-dimensional picture of plantation slavery revealed the complexity of the institution and the deep interaction between master and slave.

In contrast to Elkins, Blassingame uncovered several different slave personality types and insisted that slaves played a variety of roles and, therefore, exhibited "sham" characteristics, traits non-reflective of the slaves' self conception,

designed rather to distort the master's perception of the slave.³³ Thus, personality imagery perceived by the planter gave rise to the conflicting stereotypes of Nat and Sambo. Because planters feared Nat, the rebel, so thoroughly, "the more firmly they tried to believe in Sambo in order to escape paranoia."³⁴ In effect, what had formerly been passed off as distinct slave personality traits, had for the most part, been images and stereotypes developed in the psyche of the slaveowners' consciences in an attempt to rationalize particular situations. Blassingame strongly hinted that Elkins incorrectly based his study on one stereotype desired by planters rather than actual slave behavior. In actuality, "there was a great variety of personality types in the quarters," insisted Blassingame, and "even in the publicly held stereotypes, slave behavior ran the whole gamut from abject docility to open rebellion."³⁵ In the long run, the predominance of the Sambo and Nat stereotypes explained a great deal more about the white man's character than about the behavior of most slaves.³⁶

Blassingame met the issue of slave infantilization, docility, and submissiveness head on. The African retained enough manhood to rebel because "the Southern plantation was not a rationally organized institution designed to crush every manifestation of individual will or for systematic extermination."³⁷ Admitting that food, clothing, and shelter were often inadequate,

Blassingame concluded that, "whatever the impact of slavery on their [slaves] behavior and attitudes, it did not force them to concentrate all their psychic energy on survival."³⁸ In a rebuttal to the adherents of Frazier's theories, Blassingame contended that American born slaves retained a remarkable degree of their West African culture, such as religious practices, dances, and superstitions. Confessing that American slave culture was, at best, adulterated by contact with American environment, he maintained that the slave was able to retain many African cultural elements and emotional contacts with his motherland. This contact, however tenuous, enabled the slave to link European and African forms to create a distinctive culture.³⁹

It was a distinctive culture developed by the slaves in their quarters which militated against internalization of unflattering stereotypes. "Antebellum black slaves created several unique cultural forms," argued Blassingame, "which lightened their burden of oppression, promoted group solidarity, provided ways for verbalizing aggression, sustaining hope, building self-esteem, and often represented areas of life largely free from the control of whites."⁴⁰

The slaves' quarters represented his social environment, a place where cultural elements--an emotional religion, folk songs and tales, dances, and superstitions--established his

ethical roles and "fostered cooperation, mutual assistance, and black solidarity."⁴¹ The "perpetual motion and constant singing"⁴² characteristic of the slaves' religious faith helped them conquer their fear of the master, thus, highlighting an area of life beyond the immediate control of whites. A psychological defense against total dependence on and submission to the master was developed by the slaves' belief in an array of superstitions. The fact that the master was "a puny man" compared to the supernatural prevented the slaves' total identification with the ideals of their masters.⁴³ The unrestrained exhibitions of dancing gave vent to the "expression of the slaves' inner feelings," while it also provided an "escape" from the slaveholders' European-based cultural restrictions.⁴⁴ Tales, representing the distillation of folk wisdom and the projection of the slaves' personal experiences, dreams, and hopes, preserved an additional region of life free of white surveillance. In the same fashion, slave songs, secular and spiritual, delineated the slaves' world view, and ultimately secured an emotional area of personal autonomy for the bondsmen.

Blassingame claimed that the slaves' work experience defined his secondary environment, the situation in which the slave would most often enter into contact with whites. The secondary environment "was far less important in determining his

personality than his primary environment."⁴⁵ As a result of the slave's concern with his social environment, a strong sense of group solidarity and identity was developed apart from the masters' frame of reference. The slave's culture bolstered his self-esteem and served as his defense against personal degradation.⁴⁶ Because of the slave's adherence to his own cultural norms, "he could preserve some personal autonomy, and resist infantilization, total identification with the slaveholder, and internalization of unflattering stereotypes calling for abject servility."⁴⁷

The refutation of Elkins carried Blassingame into a reinterpretation of the slave family. His efforts also led him to revise portions of Stamp's The Peculiar Institution concerning the instability of the slave family, the casual attitudes of slaves toward marriage and sex, the lack of deep and enduring affection between slave spouses, and the general indifference of slave parents regarding their children.⁴⁸ In a double-barrelled attack on Elkins and certain aspects of Stamp, Blassingame found the slave family one of the most important survival mechanisms for the bondsman because inherent in its organization were the familiar variables of love, companionship, sexual gratification, cooperation, self-esteem, and understanding.⁴⁹ In essence, the slave family was a complex organic network of physical and emotional interactions and not the simple reckless abandon implied by

Stampp. Furthermore, "however frequently the family was broken, it was primarily responsible for the slave's ability to survive on the plantation without becoming totally dependent on and submissive to his master."⁵⁰

In the effort to illustrate the strength and cohesiveness of the slave family under adversity, Blassingame had to minimize, to a measureable extent, the "absolute power" and cruelty of the planter. Slaveholders aided in promoting morality in the slave quarters, according to Blassingame, if only for reasons of self interest and communal pressures.⁵¹ Also, white churches, however hypocritically, sometimes helped to foster slave morality by "excommunicating adulterers and preaching homilies on fidelity."⁵² Blassingame sought to prove family longevity by revealing that masters deliberately dissolved only 32.4 per cent of the slave unions.⁵³ "In other words, in spite of their callous attitudes," argued Blassingame, "masters did not separate a majority of slave couples."⁵⁴ Therefore, the slave family, although frequently broken, endured as a viable social organization and provided a refuge from the rigors of slavery.

In spite of white sexual exploitation of slave females, frequent dissolution, loose morality in the quarters, and the inability of the slave male to protect his female from the planter's lash and sexual aggressions, the slave male found other avenues open in his efforts to gain status in his family.

The slave father was able to supplement the family diet with food obtained by hunting and fishing, and through cultivation of small plots of land provided by the master. The slave made furniture and worked on holidays to buy commodities and luxury items for his family. In the quarters, the slave community, the male established a pattern of love and affection for his family and in times of stress, he "drew on the love and sympathy of its members to raise his spirits."⁵⁵

Blassingame's book The Slave Community, denoted a changing tone in the interpretation of slavery. The white racial guilt, so evident in Stamp's portrayal of the slave regime as a harsh, degrading, and brutal form of bondage, dominated scholarship on the subject in the 1950's. One of the developments which followed on the heels of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's was an intellectual rejection of integration as a primary goal, thereby, giving rise to a growing sense of Black pride and Black nationalism. This changing racial emphasis significantly affected the interpretation of American slavery. Black scholars, supported by contemporary militants, have refused to accept the view that slaves were infantile "victims of a system of slavery so repressive that it undermined their sense of family, their desire for achievement, their propensity for industry, their independence of judgement, and their capacity for self-reliance."⁵⁶

Thus, Blassingame, Stuckey, and other critics represent a reassessment of Elkins based on a revision of plantation life popularized by nineteenth century abolitionists and modern revisionist historians.

CHAPTER SEVEN

POST-REVISION AND "NEW PERSPECTIVES?"

If current social trends, such as the militant emphasis on Black pride and consciousness, cultural nationalism, and the relaxation of pressure toward integration goals, influenced Blassingame's The Slave Community, then they will undoubtedly play a key role in the new direction of the treatment of slavery in the decade of the 1970's. The attempt on the part of modern Black intellectuals to construct a positive self-image, in and out of slavery, has led to repeated rejections of Elkins' "Sambo" stereotype. The effort of recent scholars to present Blacks in more representative roles has succeeded in placing historians of American slavery in an intellectual dilemma: if the true history of slavery is the record of Black achievement rather than abject docility, then the slave regime, as described by revisionist historians, could not possibly have been so cruel, inhumane, and exploitive as to destroy all the vestiges of slave humanity and sensibilities. Thus, recent literature has been directed toward revising the worst features of slavery developed

by neo-abolitionist scholars, such as Kenneth Stampp, who insisted that the institution was so repressive as to undermine its victims' sense of humanity. In a reassessment of revisionist interpretations, recent writers have discovered the slave experience to be the foundations of Black cultural, psychological, family, and moral resources.

Perhaps the most controversial, recent contribution to slave historiography is Time On The Cross, discussed in part in chapter four. Presented as an economic examination of the institution of slavery, the study is fraught with cultural implications and reveals as much about the sociology of slavery as it does about Southern economy. Relying heavily upon quantification as a primary methodology for an economic reinterpretation of American slavery, Time On The Cross is an excellent example of the manner in which current scholarship has placed less emphasis on the debilitating aspects of the institution while stressing the achievements of Blacks under the regime.

The major conclusions advanced by the authors of Time On The Cross included various corrections to the traditional interpretations of slavery and its economic relationship to the ante bellum Southern economy. In general, Fogel and Engerman argued that slavery was a rational and efficient system, that it was not moribund on the eve of the Civil War, and that planters were

optimistic concerning the future of the institution. The typical slaves were more industrious than Southern free white labor; urban slavery was compatible with an industrial regime; planters encouraged and promoted stable slave families; the slaves' material conditions compared favorably to those of free industrial workers; the average slave recovered about ninety per cent of the income his labor produced; and the Southern economy witnessed dramatic growth during the ante bellum period.

The economic conclusions reached by Fogel and Engerman, while presented in a previous section, cannot be totally separated from their socio-cultural implications. The authors insisted that slave labor, far from being incompetent and inferior, was highly efficient, in part, because of refined techniques of specialization, incentives, and punishment. In addition, the superior efficiency of the plantation system was to be credited, above all, to the collective discipline and ingenuity of the slave himself. In a curious effort to demonstrate the level of achievement of the bondsmen while at the same time attempting to silence the critics of slave labor, Fogel and Engerman maintained that above average efficiency of the plantation was due to "ordinary slaves" who were "diligent workers, imbued like their masters with a Protestant ethic."¹ The slave, in short, was assumed to possess a vested interest in the slave

system, whereby, he could "strive to develop and improve themselves in the only way that was open to them."²

Fogel and Engerman contended that the highly efficient and achievement-oriented slave was standing evidence of the fallacies inherent in the arguments of the inferiority of slave labor posited by earlier critics, like Rhodes, Phillips, J. E. Cairnes, Stamp, and Elkins. Rhodes and Phillips attributed the incompetence of slave to racial factors, Cairnes viewed the phenomenon as sociological in origin, Elkins credited it to psychological conditions, while Stamp claimed that inferiority was merely "day-to-day resistance" in disguise.³ Fogel and Engerman suggested that slaves internalized the Protestant work ethic, although they presented painfully little evidence to support this particular claim. Continuing with this line of reasoning, Fogel and Engerman claimed that slaves took advantage of numerous avenues of advancement open to them, noting that most large plantation employed Black overseers rather than white.⁴ Also, additional numbers of slaves were utilized in specialized capacities, such as artisans, domestics, and industrial workers. The true Black heroes throughout slavery, concluded Fogel and Engerman, were the bondsmen, who through their own initiative, diligence, and industry, managed to climb the economic ladder of Southern ante bellum society, in contrast to the failure-

prone "Black rebels whose greatest achievements were such proficiency at stealing, shirking responsibilities, and feigning illness."⁵

Preoccupation with the slave's superior work habits led the authors to minimize the severity of slavery as an institution. In order to account for "the superior quality of Black labor,"⁶ Fogel and Engerman claimed that good treatment and better than average material conditions were responsible for the slave's performance. The slaves' diet "exceeded modern (1964) recommended daily levels of the chief nutrient."⁷ Slave housing compared favorably with that of free workers during the ante bellum period.⁸ The low illness rate supported the contention that slaves were healthy and well cared for.⁹ The most visible contradiction which haunted these arguments was the authors' admission that while the slave enjoyed better living conditions than free farm workers in the South, the life expectancy of the slave was 12 percent below the average white American.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Fogel and Engerman maintained that this ratio compared favorably with European urban industrial workers at the time.

In a careless attempt to illustrate the ultimate strength of the slave family, Fogel and Engerman maintained that its stability was a direct result of planter Victorian morality

spiced with good business practices. In an effort to encourage a unified nuclear slave family, the planter abstained from sexually exploiting the females, insisted upon a modicum of morality in the quarters, and refused to yield to the temptations of slave-breeding. That planters did not indulge in sexual irregularities with slave females was evidenced according to the authors, by the surprisingly low percentage of mulattoes, the relative mature age of slave females at the time of childbirth, and the preference of slaveholders for white sexual partners. Fogel and Engerman further maintain that wealthy planters possibly discreetly maintained mistresses in town rather than resort to the slave quarters for sexual gratification, thereby, upsetting the labor discipline. In addition, the authors insisted that the slave family was not undermined by widespread promiscuity because slaves led "prudish" sex lives.

Fogel and Engerman's theories seem to rest on faulty methodology and unreliable evidence. The degree of slave efficiency, they claimed, is dubious simply because of the instrument they adopted to calculate efficiency--the geometric index of total factor productivity--remains highly suspect and subject to variable interpretations.¹¹ Little evidence is provided to support the theory that slaves internalized their masters' Protestant work ethic qualities. The slave, in actuality, gave

his labor very grudgingly: testimony in surviving slave narratives and autobiographies, tend to suggest that slaves labored no longer or harder than was necessary.

The weakest portion of Time On The Cross, however can be found, in the evidence the authors used to discredit accusations of sexual exploitation. The ratio of mulatto phenotypes, 10.4 per cent, to the remainder of the slave population is an indication of the existence rather than the extent of miscegenation and sexual irregularities. Contradicting the authors' argument of female sexual abstinence before marriage is the fact that slave women began having children as soon as physically possible giving birth to their first child, on the average, at age 18.5 instead of the 22.5 figure cited by Fogel and Engerman.¹² While some planters were wealthy and could afford to support a mistress "in town," most slaveholders could not, a fact that suggests slave women became prime targets for the uninhibited sexual advances of masters. That few Black females were listed as prostitutes in Nashville (thus, proving that slave owners preferred white sex partners) revealed as much about Black morality as it did about planter sex preference.

Out of the vortex of a growing sense of contemporary Black pride and Black nationalism which initiated monographs, such as The Slave Community and Time On The Cross, Eugene D.

Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll (1974) has rejected the emasculated Sambo for the "protonational conscious" slave fueled by his own collective solidarity. In Roll, Jordan, Roll, Genovese sees behavior under slavery as a "demonstration of the beauty and power of the human spirit under conditions of extreme oppression."¹³ Genovese's massive volume, thus, is a book revealing how Blacks lived and thought under slavery. Corresponding with the author's efforts at accuracy and diligence is an underlying theme of slave nationalism. Due to the exigencies created by the slave experience in America, it is Genovese's opinion that the origins of Black culture and Black national consciousness could be found in slave life.

Elaborating on a theme outlined in an earlier work, Genovese claimed that a unique, self-conscious planter elite was able to rule the South because it infused the entire white population with an ideology protective of its own class interests. Slavery was a way of viewing life for the ante bellum slaveholders, and it became part of the world that they made. Central to Genovese's work was the Gramscian idea of "hegemony," the ability of a particular class to contain certain antagonisms on a terrain where its legitimacy is not dangerously questioned.¹⁴ This hegemony created "an historically unique kind of paternalistic society unequalled by other New World slave societies."¹⁵

The understanding of paternalism was of central importance to Genovese because it was accepted by both slave and master, eventhough both participants held a radically different interpretation of it. Paternalism, according to Genovese, "afforded a fragile bridge across the intolerable contradictions inherent in a society based on racism, slavery, and class exploitation that had to depend on the willing reproduction and productivity of its victims."¹⁶ Genovese viewed paternalism as a system which allowed each participant to feel that it predominated. While paternalism helped the master define the involuntary labor of the slave as a legitimate return for protection and direction, the slaves won a "moral" victory because paternalism forced the masters to view them as "acquiescent human beings." The masters unwittingly tended to merge the concepts of slavery and paternalism into a single idea, mistakenly viewing the slaves' internalization of the acceptance of paternalism as a tacit acceptance of slavery. The slaves, however, "proved much more astute in separating the two; they acted consciously and unconsciously to transform paternalism into a doctrine of protection of their own rights, a doctrine that represented the negation of the idea of slavery itself."¹⁷

Genovese explored the master class in perhaps what was the best section of the volume. The Old South, linked by paternalistic

bonds, however misunderstood by master and slave, established a pre-modern society influenced as much by the slave as by the slaveholders. Courts were generally fair to slaves because ultimately they recognized the slaves' humanity. The laws the slaveholders established were infinitely more harsh in print than they were in practice. "Duty" and "burden" were essential elements of the master's self-image, and the paternalistic attitude they directed toward their slaves was also extended to their immediate family. The slaveholders viewed themselves as "authoritarian fathers who presided over an extended and subservient family, white and black."¹⁸ Indeed, this special sense of family, argued Genovese, shaped Southern culture in that it "brought white and black together and welded them into one people with genuine elements of affection and intimacy."¹⁹

In the slaves' world, the acceptance of paternalism was merely a move to generate as much "living space" as possible within the institution. Accommodation was not a preference, but a realistic adjustment to a given world. The practical question facing the slave was not whether slavery itself was a proper relationship but how to survive it with the greatest degree of self determination.²⁰ Paternalism was, however, at best an uneven agreement which slaves entered into out of necessity. Nevertheless, individual Blacks defined paternalism differently and ultimately turned it into a weapon against the master class.

Their acceptance of paternalism allowed them to perceive that they had rights which the slaveholders could impugn "only by committing a specific act of injustice."²¹ In actuality, Genovese theorized that the slaves had only accepted the limited protection of the masters' benevolence without acknowledging the reality of power over them. This genuine misunderstanding of the masters' idea of paternalism indicated that the bondsmen had achieved a measure of psychological and cultural autonomy.

The masters, on the other hand, were "tough, proud, and arrogant; liberal-spirited in all that did not touch their honor; gracious and courteous; generous and kind; quick to anger and extraordinarily cruel; attentive to duty and careless of any time and effort that did not control their direct interests."²² They required the appearance of affection from their slaves for the sake of their own self-image which was needed to justify the slave regime and to "curb their own tendencies toward cruelty."²³ Rather than resist, the slave acquiesced in "what would not be avoided," believing that a harsh and unjust order preferable to insecurities of no order at all.

The internalization of the masters' "aristocratic ethos" and values of courtesy was but additional assurance of the genuine depth and strength of the paternal bonds forged by master and slave. With the invasion of the Union armies came the slaveholders' "moment of truth." The shocking exodus of their

bondsmen to the freedom of the Union lines "constituted the essence of ingratitude, of unfaithfulness, of disloyalty, of treason."²⁴ That many ex-slaves, 80 per cent, according to Genovese, remained on the plantation after emancipation did not offset the shock of the behavior of those who did not. To the slaveholders, the flight of their slaves represented a betrayal of the trust and dependence of their "unique kind of paternalist society."²⁵

Ultimately, Genovese found the paternalistic agreement between slave and master to have been counterproductive to the former. In response to critics such as Elkins, who contended that slavery was so brutal as to reduce the bondsmen to complete child-like dependence on the slaveholders, Genovese insisted that slaves were not totally emasculated or dehumanized. The slave, argued Genovese, "found ways to develop and assert their manhood and womanhood despite the dangerous compromises forced on them." However, the legacy of paternalism kept the slaves and their posterity from a full appreciation of individual strength. The catastrophic results of the intersection of paternalism and racism for the slaves was that it "transformed elements of personal dependency into a sense of collective weakness."²⁷ To Genovese, it was not that the slaves did not act like men, rather, "it was that they could not grasp their collective strength as a people and act like political men."²⁸

Genovese's discussion of slave religion provided one of his most astute observations into the life of the slave. The bondsmen used religion as a form of resistance against dehumanization, and they "seized the opportunity to turn even white preaching into a weapon of their own."²⁹ Dismissing the argument over the continuity of West African religious survivals as being untenable in "stark form," Genovese charged that a significant thrust in Black culture "emanated from the African tradidtion."³⁰ The complex mixture of African folk elements and Euro-Christian concepts provided an autonomous religion for Blacks while it inadvertently functioned as a defense against the psychological assaults of slavery and racial oppression. Folk elements in the slaves' hybrid religion, such as magic, eventually strengthened the bondsmens' community in its collective and individual aspects as it functioned to provide some defense against "natural disasters and forces beyond their control."³¹

Black religion mitigated against submission and docility. When slaves in the New World made Christianity their own, "they transformed it into a religion of resistance, not often of revolutionary defiance, but of a spiritual resistance that accepted the limits of the politically possible."³² By adjusting spiritual religion to fit their needs of reality, the slave solved the plexing problem of how to achieve spiritual freedom, retain

faith in earthly deliverance, instill a spirit of pride and love in each other, and make peace with a political reality within which revolutionary solutions no longer had much prospect.³³

Using a multitude of slave narratives, records, and testimonies, Genovese explored the lives of the slaves in the Big House. He discovered that intimate bonds of affection existed between master and servant. In the reciprocal dependency of slavery in the masters' homes, emotional attachments crossed racial lines and "the intimacy of shared secrets lives brought the Black and white women of the Big House together in a relationship of mutual dependence, while "many mistresses and some masters became imprisoned by their dependency, and the slaves knew as much."³⁴

This relationship of dependency and paternalism reached tragic proportions for the slave as exemplified by the elusive Black "Mammy," a resourceful and responsible woman of power and influence who absorbed the paternalist ethos and accepted her place in a system of reciprocal obligations defined from above. Her tragedy, which was shared by countless other Blacks lay not in her abandonment of her own people, "but in her inability to offer her individual power and beauty of Black people on terms they could accept without themselves sliding further into a system of paternalistic dependency."³⁵ Genovese revealed that house servants and field slaves did not constitute separate and mutually

hostile camps and their social distance appears to have been overdrawn. "Variety of circumstances...bound them together, "and marriages between the two classes usually occurred without notice on all except a few plantations."³⁶ The house slaves' most important function was that they emerged as "integration-ists," people of both worlds who transmitted folk culture to the whites and who imparted a large measure of Euro-American Christianity to the quarters.

The pressures on the slave family "took a terrible toll,"³⁷ but Genovese insisted, much like Fogel and Engerman, that "slaves created impressive norms of family life, including as much of a nuclear family norm as conditions permitted, and that they entered the postwar social system with a remarkable stable base."³⁸ He described the slaves as having an "earthly" attitude toward sex, but at the same time they "adhered to definite if flexible standards of sexual morality."³⁹ The allegations of slave promiscuity and rampant adultery were only semi-convincingly disproven by the author, but he stood on somewhat firmer ground in his assessment of the strength of the Black male who has become the victim of scholars and researchers wishing to read post bellum history backward. "For all the deformities introduced by slavery, they (slave women) knew that many of their men were strong and dependable."⁴⁰

According to the author, sexual violations by the master

class have been greatly exaggerated. Although "miscegenation poisoned Southern race relations. . . through the psychological devastation it wrought upon white society and black,"⁴¹ slaves were able to set limits on sexual exploitation. Also, suicides appeared rarely among old slaves because of the prevailing high degree of physical and emotional security. Furthermore, housing was at best "tight cabins,"⁴² but they served to strengthen the sense of family. Food seemed to be equal to the situation, but clothing "provided little or no assurance against the brief bitter cold snaps."⁴³ The ability of slaves to laugh at themselves and their conditions allowed them to "assert their rights as men and women to the fullness of the Lord's earth."⁴⁴

Unlike Herbert Aptheker, Genovese found little evidence to support a revolutionary folk tradition among Southern ante bellum slaves. Indeed, with so many forces arrayed against a successful frontal attack upon the regime in the American South, Genovese wondered why the rebel even tried at all. Rather than make the most of the few suicidal efforts of Prosser, Vesey, and Turner, the author drew away from viewing slave resistance in overt insurrectionary terms while opting to examine it in the light of the deeper cultural and organic social relationships inherent in the slaveholders' hegemony.

The behaviorial response of the slaves to paternalism and their imaginative creation of a partially autonomous community

life in the interstices of the system "sapped their will to revolt,"⁴⁵ according to Genovese. The slaves had created a world of their own within the oppressors' world which had made conditions worth living in while it simultaneously discouraged overt resistance. The slaves accommodated the system, thereby, making accommodation a weapon in itself. Accommodation became a way of "accepting what could not be helped without falling prey to the dehumanization, emasculation, and self-hatred."⁴⁶ Accommodation to paternalism enabled the slave to assert rights which by their very nature set limits to the surrender of self, but actually constituted an implicit rejection of slavery.⁴⁷ The "day-to-day" resistance posited by Stamp, although it "contributed more to the slaves' struggle for survival than did many bolder acts,"⁴⁸ was at best "prepolitical" and generally implied an acceptance and accommodation of the status quo. Genovese contended that the slaves' "collective" form of resistance, the substitution of their own definition of paternalism which refused the surrender of will that constituted the ideological foundation of the masters' paternalism, ultimately proved more valuable than a few ill-fated individual frontal assaults on the regime. But in terms designed to salve the soul of Black militants, Genovese claimed that the "rebels did their best, and weak as their effort was, it was a great deal better than nothing."⁴⁹

In what is probably the best book on slavery since Stamp's The Peculiar Institution (1956), Genovese still remained unconvincing in his efforts to demonstrate a proto-national consciousness among ante bellum slaves. This was undoubtedly the weakest portion of the exhaustive volume. Conclusions and data, in critical instances, seemed stretched and contradictory. Collective slave behavior normally always appeared to be the better course for the bondsmen, but house servants, drivers, mechanics, free Blacks, and Mammies, were intellectually chastized for not capitalizing upon their "individual power and beauty" as a vehicle to fight oppression.

In Genovese's view of the slave community, or nation, his Marxism became evident. There was a noticeable absence of class division among slaves on the plantation. House slaves and field slaves demonstrated remarkably close association; slaves showed a high degree of solidarity; they frequently stole from the master, but rarely from each other; their kindness and courtesy toward one another, and their efforts at sexual abstinence proved to be the rule rather than the exception. However, Genovese's overall conclusion was un-Marxian: It was religion, Marx's "opiate of the proletariat," that emerged as the coherent force which expressed a proto-national consciousness. Without religion, slavery "might have been condemned to the level of a pathetic

nihilism."⁵⁰ With it, the slaves were able to assert manhood and womanhood in their everyday lives and were able to struggle for collective forms of resistance in place of individual outbursts.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

Since 1865, views on Afro-American slavery have run almost full circle. The sectional polemics of the earliest authors developed into a more balanced and reconciliatory assessment of the system of slavery by nationalistic-oriented second generation historians, North and South. U. B. Phillips, capturing the ideological mood of the nation at the turn of the century, made racism the key to his view of the plantation and stressed the benign paternalism of the masters. Revisionists, fueled by an enlightened concern for Blacks in the 1940's and 1950's, exposed the brutality and cruelty of the institution and its resultant effect on the slave. The complexities involved in analyzing slavery became evident as scholars attempted to examine the system in light of prevailing racial attitudes during the 1960's. The refinement of new techniques applied to questions of slavery's ultimate profitability showed the constant state of flux historians have reached in that "perennial" area of investigation. Finally, the emerging view in the mid-1970's of slavery as a not-so-harsh system refocuses on the ideas originally

developed by U. B. Phillips.

Time On The Cross and Roll, Jordan, Roll illustrate the present state of scholarship about Southern ante bellum slavery. The tone of the two studies represent another changing interpretation of the institution of human bondage. Neither defending slavery nor extenuating its barbarism, Time On The Cross and Roll, Jordan, Roll attempt, once again, to demonstrate that the plantation regime, as it developed in the American South, was not unusually cruel, exploitive, or harsh. The fact that slaves were able to construct a distinct, cohesive, and autonomous culture that left a legacy of achievement and an unusual record of accomplishment illustrates the incompatibility of slavery with abject brutality and absolute power.

While it is still much too early to make definitive predictions concerning the course of American slave historiography, the current patterns of analysis set in motion by the socio-cultural examination of slave life suggest that the institution of African bondage in the ante bellum South has been targeted for another round of reinterpretation. At this writing there appears little agreement among historians about most aspects of slavery. The present drift toward a reevaluation of Phillip's benevolent version of the plantation further complicates the understanding of the slave regime.

Due to the phenomenal interest implicit in the subject of slavery and the constant changes in the political, social, and intellectual climate characteristic of the United States, it is unlikely that there will ever be a complete consensus among historians on a general analysis of the Old South's "peculiar institution." New research methodology combined with additional source material repeatedly direct ambitious scholars toward new perspectives and syntheses of slavery. And the record of scholarship from 1865-1975 shows that the interpretation of slavery has been ever changing.

FOOTNOTES

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THE CHANGING INTERPRETATIONS
OF AMERICAN SLAVERY: 1865-1975

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1975

ABSTRACT

A study of some of the interpretations of slavery in the Old South provides important insights into the writing of American history. This analysis of the scholarship concerning Black slavery is an attempt to understand how historians have treated the institution of bondage and places the major writers in their respective historical contexts.

I have examined the major literature on slavery published between 1865-1975. Most of the authors who wrote about slavery during the first quarter century following Appomattox were amateur historians who had personally participated in the war. Their assessments of slavery remained obviously biased and followed a sectional pattern. In the late 1880's, however, "nationalist" writers, fueled by a strong desire for sectional reconciliation, supplanted these partisan amateurs.

The turn of the century witnessed the rise in popularity of the works of Ulrich Bonnell Phillips on Southern slavery. Phillips' ideas and assumptions of racial inferiority dominated the study of slavery from 1918 until 1956 and influenced the writings of scores of authors of American slavery. The widest acceptance of his views occurred during the initial quarter of the twentieth century, a time when race was emerging as a vital

issue in the social and intellectual fabric of the nation. During the decade of the 1930's and 1940's Phillips' ideas on race and slavery received heavy criticism from revisionist scholars. Historians such as Frederic Bancroft, Henrietta Buckmaster, Herbert Aptheker, and Richard Hofstadter, writing in the background of New Deal egalitarianism and a popular reaction to the rise of European fascism, triggered a wave of revision which culminated with the works of Kenneth M. Stamp in the mid-1950's.

During the late 1950's and through the 1960's, several historians, notably David B. Davis, Winthrop Jordan, Leon Litwak, and Carl Degler, reexamined the phenomena of race and slavery. Their findings emphasized how deeply racism was embedded in the American experience. The investigations of these authors into such subjects as the European roots of racism, the plight of the pre-Civil War "free" Black, and other subjects, coinciding as they did with the intense opposition of many Americans to the moderate goals of the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, further underscored the enduring strength of racism in America.

In *Slavery*, published in 1959, Stanley Elkins broadened the scope of the study of the institution of slavery by attempting to remove it from the realm of morality. This widening of the formerly narrow horizons of slave historiography made it possible for other scholars to observe the system from differ-

ing viewpoints. Thus, Eugene D. Genovese studied the regime from a Marxist perspective while Herbert Klein compared slavery in the United States to specific Latin American forms. In addition, the refinement of computer technology ushered in a "cliometric revolution" and a resurgence of the study of slavery's profitability during the late 1950's and into the 1960's and 1970's.

The early and mid-1970's has seen a shift in the historiography on slavery to a socio-cultural appraisal of the institution in an extended effort to refute Elkins' unflattering "Sambo" concept. Historians such as Genovese in Roll, Jordan, Roll (1974), and John Blassingame in The Slave Community (1972), portray the Old South's institution as less brutal than previously posited by neo-abolitionist scholars.

American historians have differed in their interpretations of slavery because they have lived at different times and because they have used varied historical perspectives and methodologies. Their motives have ranged from self justification to moral indignation and a claim for scientific objectivity. It appears likely that as American culture continues to change, the interpretations of the "peculiar institution" of the Old South will also keep changing.