

THE EXCUSE OF PATERNALISM IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH: IDEOLOGY OR PRACTICE?

Josh Cole

Slavery was a major economic contributor to slaveholders in the antebellum South. Their livelihood depended on it, and slaves were exploited as much as possible in order to benefit their white masters. Abolitionists, mostly in the North, viewed the institution of slavery as a non-Christian practice that took advantage of a less fortunate group of people simply because of their skin color. They thought that the small amount of slaveholders present in the South treated their slaves inhumanely and committed atrocities that had no place in the states. Historian Eugene Genovese re-examined the master-slave relationship a few decades ago. He agreed with past historians that slavery was a cruel institution that treated the slaves unfairly. However, he believed that extreme forms of mistreatment were very minor. Genovese introduced slave-owner "paternalism," not a good, painless, or benign slavery, but a slavery in which masters took personal interest in the lives of their slaves.¹

Genovese believes that paternalism "brought white and black together and welded them into one people with genuine elements of affection and intimacy."² It was a compromise between master and slave--the master would provide for the slave as long as the slave produced for him. Genovese fails to distinguish between paternalism as an ideology and as a way of life.³ This sense of paternalism that Genovese mentions was a self-justifying ideology and, with a few exceptions, not a very visible practice in the slaveholding South. The institution of slavery was meant to fully exploit the slaves, while the ideology allowed whites to exercise their "superior" status with relatively no guilty conscience. Compromise involved the participation

Josh Cole is a graduate student from Tuscola, Illinois. He received his BA in History from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and expects to finish his MA in History at EIU in Spring 2007. This paper was written for Dr. Mark Voss-Hubbard's HIS 4940 class, Early American History, in Fall of 2005.

¹Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 111-112.

²Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 19.

³Norrece T. Jones Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), 60.

of both master and slave, and most slaves in the South did not agree to this pact. They did everything in their power to defy the master's authority due to their own brutal conditions and treatment by whites.

The ideology of paternalism meant that the masters took care of their slaves because they were personally attached to them. Genovese believes that this was especially true because slaves were given an abundant supply of food by their masters, and they retained a plentiful, if not nutritionally, balanced diet. Also, he points out that medical care on the plantations exceeded that of Southern whites, and slaves were relatively healthy under the care of their worried masters.⁴ Masters closely governed the nature of slave life on their plantations; this was a central feature to Genovese's paternalism. He states that slaves had many outside contacts with whites that extended far beyond the exploitation of labor.

During the 1930s, many ex-slaves were interviewed about their time in bondage by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). One major theme that was constantly revealed by these former slaves was the prevalence of mixed-race ancestry between master and slave. In the eyes of many slaves, these relationships between white masters and black servants were usually matters of forced sex between the powerful and the powerless. This is in direct opposition to Genovese's theory of voluntary association with whites outside of the labor circle. As one former female slave noted, "Immoral white men have, by force, injected their blood into our veins."⁵ Ex-slaves understood sexual relationships as strictly coercive with white owners and overseers being the aggressors while slave women were the victims. White masters not only included the male and female heads of the household but also their sons. Former Kentucky slave Henry Bibb even suggested "that the strongest reason why southerners stick with such tenacity to their 'peculiar institution' is because licentious white men could not carry out their wicked purposes among the defenseless colored population, as they now do, without being exposed and punished by law if slavery was abolished."⁶

Many of these former slaves recalled how some slave women actually sought sexual relationships with owners or overseers to improve their own or their families' lives and futures. Ellen Craft claimed that masters sometimes promised slave women that they would educate and emancipate the children of their union. However, Craft added that "a great majority of such men care nothing for the happiness of the women with whom they live, nor for the children of

⁴Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877*, 112-114.

⁵Fay A. Yarbrough, "Power, Perception, and Interracial Sex: Former Slaves Recall a Multiracial South," *The Journal of Southern History* 71, no. 3 (Aug., 2005), 559-560.

⁶*Ibid.*, 563.

whom they are the fathers.” Craft’s own master never educated nor freed her, as he had promised her slave mother. The possibility of better accommodations, increased food rations, and luxuries also prompted some slave women to seek out their white masters or overseers as sexual partners. Several former slaves suggested that the long-term mistresses of white men fared much better than field hands.⁷ This evidence does support Genovese’s argument that some slaves did seek out whites outside of labor. However, it is important to note the motives of these slaves for doing so. They felt that the only way to survive the system was to form “beneficial” relationships with powerful whites. They did so in order to feed, clothe, and care for themselves and their families. Keeping the master happy allowed the slaves to stay alive, while also sending a few extra provisions their way. Paternalism does not apply to these situations because the slaves felt forced to bend to the desires of their masters.

Most masters handpicked their mistresses, and no “plain” black woman could throw herself at the sexual mercy of her master if he did not desire her. These women had little power to refuse the sexual advances of their superiors. Anthony Christopher’s family avoided punishment and received better treatment because of his sister Deenie’s relationship with the master, Mr. Patton. Deenie understood that her family faced negative repercussions if she denied the master sexual access to her body, and consequently, she decided not to refuse him. After all, Southern white men owned slave women as property, and the law permitted them great latitude in the treatment of their human property.⁸

Slave men were forced to endure this humiliation of knowing that their masters and overseers could demand sexual access to their partners and wives. They often stood by helplessly while their female partners and daughters endured the unwanted attention of white men. If male black slaves did attempt to interfere with the master’s advances on slave women, they could be severely punished. Some masters even castrated their black rivals for coveted black women.⁹ Slave wives often did have two competing intimate relationships – with husbands and with masters. The ultimate authority in these relationships rested solely with the white masters and overseers.¹⁰ If a black male slave got in the way between the master and concubine, the white master could simply separate the couple through sale. White men were not going to allow inferior black males keep them from

⁷Ibid., 564-565.

⁸Ibid., 560-562.

⁹Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 83.

¹⁰Fay A. Yarbrough, “Power, Perception, and Interracial Sex: Former Slaves Recall a Multiracial South,” 565-569.

exercising their sexual urges, even if it meant severing family ties. The master’s own personal ambitions mattered more than those of any of his chattel.

Wives of slave masters also practiced miscegenation with blacks. By choosing a slave lover, an elite white woman could coerce the silence of her sexual partner because she could threaten him with an accusation of rape should he refuse her advances or reveal their relationship. Black male slaves accused of this crime were swiftly and severely punished, often resulting in death. Sexual codes of the time assumed that the concept of rape did not apply to men, especially not black men, because all men “welcomed” the sexual advances of women due to their instinctual, masculine nature. This standard failed to recognize white women as sexual aggressors.¹¹ This hardly represents a paternalist relationship between female master and slave. The female master, knowing that she could sexually exploit a black male slave, demanded affection from her black victims unless they wanted to suffer the consequences by refusing her. Once again, the slave had no choice but to give into her demands so that he would not lose his family or life.

Harriet Jacobs is an example of the sexual domination that white slave owners attempted to exercise over their black female slaves. Jacobs was a Louisianan slave owned by Dr. Flint. At the tender age of eleven, and while being forty years her senior, Flint began to sexually harass her. Jacobs viewed Dr. Flint as any other white slave owner – he considered women of no value, unless they continually increased his stock. When Harriet grew into adulthood, she began to engage in a relationship with a black carpenter from another plantation.¹² Flint discovered her relationship with this man and disallowed her from marrying him or even seeing him again. She would end up becoming pregnant and delivered a baby boy, and Flint flew into a rage over this. He threatened to sell her child if she did not consent to his future sexual demands. Flint also threatened to shoot the carpenter and made plans to build a cottage on the outskirts of town to incorporate Harriet as his “permanent” concubine.¹³ Harriet estimated that he already had eleven slave mistresses prior to her, and he sent them away with their babies when his lechery turned elsewhere.

His lewd lust became a lifelong obsession to bend her to his will and to force her to submit voluntarily to his sexual demands. She refused to become his “cottage concubine” and managed to escape from his clutches when he handed her over to his son. Harriet did

¹¹Ibid., 572-574.

¹²Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Washington Square Press, New York, 2003), 37-40.

¹³Ibid., 97.

believe that humane slaveholders existed, but they were “like angel’s visits – few and far between.”¹⁴ She did not feel comfortable in a sexual relationship with her master, but he insisted that she persist in one unless she wanted to see harm come to her and her loved ones. Genovese states that for the masters, paternalism meant reciprocal duties within which the master had a duty to provide for his people and treat them with humanity. Also, it was the slave’s duty to work properly and to do as they were told. Whites thought that slaves had an obligation to be grateful.¹⁵ Dr. Flint took this idea and reworked it to his liking. He wanted Harriet to perform sexual labors for him, while completely giving into his power and being thankful for it at the same time. Her refusal caused her to be separated from her family. There was no understanding or common ground between Dr. Flint and Harriet.

Genovese describes slavery as a paternalist system that saved blacks from extermination. He states that “it gave the masters an interest in the preservation of the blacks and created a bond of human sympathy that led to an interest in their happiness as well.”¹⁶ He fails to mention that the masters were only interested in the preservation of “superior blacks” or mulattoes. Miscegenation between the white master and mulatto slave was a common trend in the antebellum South, and Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb of Georgia favored this superior race as the result of their mixture of white and black blood. He blamed miscegenation on the “natural lewdness” of blacks but found the problem mitigated because race mixture was beneficial to slavery. Light-skinned mistresses served as regular partners to Southern whites, and quadroon balls were held in New Orleans where gentlemen arranged liaisons with beautiful black slave women. In an auction of “nigger wenches,” slave traders presented their sexual victims as warranted virgins, excellent concubines and valuable for the manufacture of light colored slaves. Slave masters preferred mulattoes to darker blacks and provided them with better opportunities in slavery and in freedom.¹⁷

Proprietors generally preferred mulattoes as house servants and plantation tradesmen and gave them more opportunities to acquire skills for these occupations than they gave darker slaves. Masters chose mulattoes for household chores because, it was alleged, the “mixed race” was more susceptible to improvement and could handle tasks requiring higher capabilities. More often than darker

¹⁴Ibid., 63.

¹⁵Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 144.

¹⁶Ibid., 85.

¹⁷Robert Brent Toplin, “Between Black and White: Attitudes Toward Southern Mulattoes, 1830-1861,” *The Journal of Southern History* 45, no. 2 (May, 1979), 188-192.

skinned bondsmen, mulattoes were provided some education, enjoyed good food, clothing, and shelter, and had opportunities to move around both inside and outside of the plantation. Sometimes they had just as much authority as plantation managers. Mulattoes were major beneficiaries of manumission. Masters usually granted them this freedom because they did not want their own children to grow up in bondage. Due to all of these advantages that mulattoes enjoyed, they considered themselves superior to other slaves. This feeling of superiority allowed mulattoes to associate with their masters on a more personal level.¹⁸

However, slaveholder opinion remained divided about the mulattoes’ potential role in a crisis. Some viewed their feelings of superiority and independence as a dangerous sign, while others believed that it would make them loyal and trusted friends of the white man. The latter believed that the failure of Denmark Vesey’s conspiracy of 1822 showed the truth of this expectation because mulatto servants reported to their masters the plans for revolt before they could be put into action.¹⁹ Mulattoes and masters seemed to be more capable of paternal bonds because the masters treated mulattoes like human beings rather than heathen barbarians. This relationship also shows that masters did favor a certain sect of slaves over another; The sect that more closely resembled themselves rather than the “unknown” purebloods. Therefore, paternalism was an ideology that justified the better treatment of one people over another, although both peoples were “black.”

Slavery was a ruthless system of controls designed with deliberate intent to employ any form of degradation considered helpful in exploiting slave labor for profit. As evidenced by the master-mulatto relationship, castes were maintained among slaves and espionage was rewarded to divide slaves against slaves to support white control.²⁰ However, slaves struggled fiercely against this growing power of the master class and their determination to reduce black people to labor and little more. They created new economies and societies that tried to protect themselves from the harshest aspects of the slave regime and provide a measure of independence to counter the trauma of enslavement. This trauma was a result of the

¹⁸Ibid., 189-191.

¹⁹Ibid., 192-196.

²⁰W.M. Brewer, Book review of Kenneth M. Stampp’s *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, *The Journal of Negro History* 42, No. 2 (Apr., 1957), 142-143.

atrocities of slave life: towering rates of mortality, endless work, and the omnipresent violence of white masters and overseers.²¹

The vision of the natural inferiority of peoples of African descent became a mainstay of the defense of slavery and certain proof that the proper and most humane place for black people was under the watchful supervision of a white master.²² The paternalistic compromise, as Genovese described it, implied a basic agreement between master and slave. Slaves thought that they were entitled to sufficient autonomy within slavery to fashion their own lives and that masters would respect this arrangement because slaves would hold them to it.²³ The problem with this theory is that slaves were not able to resist or rebel against white oppressors, who always worked to constrain slave autonomy. Slaves had no one to appeal to except the masters or overseers, and masters would not be told by their slaves how to manage their chattel.

From the mainstream masters' perspective, slaves were property that had no control over their own possessions because all of their things actually belonged to their white masters. Family formation and child rearing were business matters to be handled by whites. Masters and slave mothers usually argued over how to care for the children in these families. At Rosswood plantation near Natchez, Mississippi, the owner, Dr. Walter Wade, who fancied himself an expert on the care of newborns, always blamed mothers when children died of starvation (the mother failed to provide sufficient milk) or suffocation (the careless mother rolled over the child asleep at her side). Former slave Fannie Nicholson related how her cousin's child was treated by the master, recalling "One day my cousin's marster didn' want to feed her chile, and when de chile kep' on asking for food, her marster beat her and tied her up in de attic and de chile died. 'Cause of disawful thing my cousin went crazy."²⁴

Slaveholders, such as South Carolinian politician James Henry Hammond, viewed these deaths as "the deliberate design of heaven to prevent me from accumulating wealth and to keep down that pride

²¹Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 215-217.

²²*Ibid.*, 363-365.

²³Christopher Morris, "The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered," *The Journal of American History* 85, No. 3 (Dec., 1998), 982-983.

²⁴Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds. *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980), 217.

which might in such an event fill my heart."²⁵ White attitudes similar to these did cause the blood to boil in some blacks, and these individuals defied white authority as much as they could without being killed. The endless cycle of work with no freedom in sight was too much to bear for these rebels.

Many planters were psychotically possessive in regards to their human property in this slave economy.²⁶ Paternalism not only spared these planters from having to justify an oppressive system of force, intimidation, and ceaseless struggle, but it cast all responsibility for that reality elsewhere. They wanted slaves to look at them as all-knowing, all merciful, and all-powerful, and they bombarded slaves with words and deeds telling them that they sprang from savages and could be nothing but slaves. They treated the slaves inhumanely, and almost all slaves concealed a burning indignation against their enslavement and the illegitimacy of those whose authority was rooted in it.²⁷ They did not cooperate with each other in order to provide protection, rather they looked to defy each other by any means possible. Genovese recognizes that this system of exploitation encouraged kindness and affection for mulattoes while also encouraging cruelty and hatred for purebloods.²⁸

Paternalism was a way of life that, in the words of Genovese, "necessarily involves harshness and may even involve cruelty so long as it is within the context of a strong sense of duty and responsibility toward those in dependent status." Herbert Gutman thinks that Genovese has utilized little evidence to prove "that the typical slave viewed himself or herself as bound in an 'organic' relationship" in which they depended on their masters for support. He concludes that Genovese has not shown how slaves either benefited from the ideology of paternalism or acceded to these "mutual obligations" that were necessary for the unpractical system to operate.²⁹ Paternalism was an ideal system in which slaves were to be treated fairly and as human beings, and the way that the majority of masters treated their slaves does not reflect this mindset.

Masters exerted their superiority over their slaves through physical and psychological means. They whipped slaves for various and often-insignificant reasons, branded them to reaffirm their

²⁵Christopher Morris, "The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered," 990-994.

²⁶Norrece T. Jones Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina*, 45.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 19-28.

²⁸Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 4-5.

²⁹John and Judith Modell, Book review of Herbert G. Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, *Signs* 4, No. 2 (Winter, 1978), 380-381.

domination over them, and sometimes had their ears cut off if they disobeyed direct orders. Slaveholders also constantly looked for ways to trim the costs of feeding their slaves and threatened to sell them if they did not produce enough for their masters. As mentioned earlier, the slave family was not only at the base of masters' most effective control mechanism, but it was also the source of their most persistent aggravation of the runaway. Owners also awarded slaves sporadic holidays so that they could effectively pacify and control the slaves for a little longer.³⁰

Slaves felt the wrath of their owners because the owners were unhappy, intoxicated, or just in the mood to abuse their property. These acts of brutality became much easier once the masters ceased to identify or empathize with blacks and began to regard them as "subhuman beings." This subhuman status of black slaves allowed slaveholders to resort to curtailment or the complete denial of food allotments as punishment for "unproductive" slaves. Masters also pierced their slaves with forks, burned them with tar, skinned them with knives, and killed them outright with pistols and whips. Many more graphic accounts of slave brutality are available to us through slave accounts. In his memoirs, Horace Muse illustrated the thoughtless sadistic master class, claiming, "I 'member a marser in Ashland, Virginia what backed one o' his slaves in a barn an' shot an' stabbed him to death 'cause he said de slaves was 'jarrin' at him."³¹

An unidentified former slave in Georgia said that his master "had a barrel with nails shove in it that he would put in when he couldn't think of nothin' else mean enough to do. He would put you in this barrel and roll it down a hill. When you got out you would be in a bad fix, be he didn't care. Sometimes he rolled the barrel in the river and drowned his slaves."³² Punishments such as this hammered black slaves with the reality that they were a despised race, oppressed for their skin color. They dealt with the world on those terms, thus further underlining the gap between master and slave. Rejected by white society, blacks rejected white judgments in turn and developed their own moral system and mental world in opposition to the master's.³³

Solomon Northup recorded his terrible experiences after his servitude. Tibbeats, an overseer, was constantly abusing him for menial offenses. He even attempted to split open Solomon's head with a

³⁰Norrece T. Jones Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina*, 45-68.

³¹Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, 216.

³²Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*, 39-40.

³³*Ibid.*, 97-98.

hatchet and then axe because he falsely accused him of ruining a crop, which Solomon claimed he did not do. Solomon's future owner, master Epps, treated his slaves far worse. His chief delight was in dancing with his "niggers," or lashing them around the yard with his long and heavy whip, simply for the pleasure of hearing them screech and scream as the great welts were planted on their backs.³⁴ Recalling these pitiful festivities, Solomon recorded being "bent with excessive toil – actually suffering for a little refreshing rest, and feeling rather as if we could cast ourselves upon the earth and weep, many a night in the house of Edwin Epps have his unhappy slaves been made to dance and laugh."³⁵

Epps did not care one bit that his slaves were made to suffer under his ownership, and no one knew this any better than Solomon. He claims his master "could have stood unmoved and seen the tongues of his poor slaves torn out by the roots – he could have seen them burned to ashes over a slow fire, or gnawed to death by dogs, if it only brought him profit. Such a hard, cruel, unjust man is Edwin Epps."³⁶ Obviously, Northup did not encounter any notions of paternalism from his various masters. He constantly lived in fear for his own life and viewed whites as evil human beings bent on greed and power.

Charles Ball lived forty years in Maryland, South Carolina, and Georgia as a slave under various masters. One of his masters tied him with a clothesline to a mill post and left him there overnight. The cord was bound so tightly around his wrists, that before morning the blood had burst out under his fingernails.³⁷ Under another master, Charles was falsely accused of murdering a white woman. The master brought a doctor onto the plantation to examine Charles. The doctor assorted his instruments, felt Charles' pulse, and told him that it would not do to skin him since he was so full of blood. Instead, the doctor thought it was necessary to bleed Charles in the arms, as to reduce the quantity of blood before taking his skin off. He then bound a string around Charles' right arm, and opened a vein near the middle of the arm.³⁸ He bled until he lost consciousness, but he was not skinned after all.

Charles recalled other incidents that he witnessed as a slave. One slave was whipped until he crumpled to the ground. A heavy

³⁴Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1968), 111-122.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 139.

³⁷Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States. A narrative of the life and adventures of Charles Ball, a black man, who lived forty years in Maryland, South Carolina, and Georgia, as a slave...* (J.T. Shryock, Pittsburgh, 1854), 93.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 193-195.

block of wood was chained to one foot, which he had to drag after him at his daily labor for more than three months. This slave escaped to the woods by cutting the irons from his ankle, but he was caught about a week later. He was whipped again and had an iron collar placed on him, which extended from one shoulder over his head to the other, with the bells fastened to the top of the arch.³⁹ One master was murdered by one of his own slaves, a black woman, whose husband he had sold to a man who was going to New Orleans. The woman accomplished her task by sneaking into the master's chamber through the window, and then cutting his throat with a carving knife. Two murder convicts were hung together, and another slave who attempted to conceal the murder of his master received five hundred lashes. This slave was tied to a tree and whipped until blood flowed down in small puddles at the base of the tree. Charles saw flakes of flesh as long as his fingernails fall out of the gashes in the slave's back.⁴⁰ Charles' experiences with masters also suggest that paternalism was simply an ideology that did not reach fruition in the antebellum South.

J.S. Lame was a slave in the South as well, and his reflections on the institution mirror that of Northup and Ball. His master starved his slaves and punished them most severely for crimes both real and imaginary. Genovese's paternalism maintains that slaves ate more than most other laborers. He acknowledges that starvation did occur with the slaves but was infrequent.⁴¹ One imaginary crime involved a few missing chickens at the master's home, which was attributed to the theft of one of his slaves. The slave "lied" about the theft, and the master proceeded to place one end of a rope around his neck. He then fastened the other end to his carriage and dragged him along the roads surrounding the plantation. Lame "needed no works of fiction to illustrate the evils of slavery." They were seen in the social, civil, spiritual, and mental degradation of the blacks, and in its corresponding influence on the whites.⁴²

Edmund Covington was a Mississippi slaveholder who represented these evils of slavery. He minimized expenditures on food and health care and increased work loads of female and child laborers to the point of exhaustion. Slave families that lived on his land lost nearly ninety percent of all children born on the plantation, a

³⁹Ibid., 280-282.

⁴⁰Ibid., 312-326.

⁴¹Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 62.

⁴²J. S. Lame, *Maryland slavery and Maryland chivalry: Containing the letters of "Junius," originally published in Zion's Herald: together with a brief history of the circumstances that prompted the publication of those letters. Also a short account of the persecution suffered by the author at the hands of Southern slaveholders* (Collins printer), Philadelphia, 1858), 10-13.

horrendously high rate of child mortality even for a coastal rice plantation in Mississippi.⁴³ He simply replaced dead slaves with new property in order to maintain high levels of production. Slavery was a purely economic matter to him, and if killing a few dozen slaves meant saving a few dollars, he would gladly accept this fate.

Jermain Wesley Loguen attributed the cruelties of his white masters to evil temptations instead of their natural wickedness. His masters and their mistresses were made beasts of as a result of the whiskey from their distilleries. They were endurable while sober for the most part because the slaves knew how to perceive them and how they could and could not act around them. Loguen's master and mistress were always intoxicated though, and the slaves sensed that they were never safe in the presence of their white superiors. They became very short-tempered, intolerant, and physically violent toward their chattel. Loguen thus viewed slaveholders as licentious and intemperate, or in "kindred evils." Their "sensuous spirits looked downward to the earth, where they held their human chattels only as instruments of their pleasures, and never upwards to the heavens."⁴⁴ The white superiors treated the slaves as wild animals because they felt that they had the right to do so, and the spirits enabled the masters to exercise this power without blame. Loguen believed that the only way to live through a life of servitude under a white master was to resort to "trickery," or pretending to be content with his bondage.⁴⁵

The concerned efforts of Southerners to hide these less attractive features of their slave society caused an almost total censorship of information in local publications about the more hideous aspects of slavery.⁴⁶ This makes Genovese's argument for the practice of paternalism that much more doubtful, simply because there are so few sources besides slave narratives to rely upon for accurate details of slavery. He argues that sinister treatment by cruel masters was in the minority, but we simply do not know to what extent this cruelty was practiced. The narratives that are available to us though make clear that slaves were not "pitiful infants but angry men and women who had to endure unfavorable conditions that were not in their power to

⁴³Christopher Morris, "The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered," 982.

⁴⁴Jermain Wesley Loguen, *The Rev. J.W. Loguen, as a slave and as a freeman: A narrative of real life* (Syracuse, J.G.K. Truair & Co. (printers), 1859), 102-104.

⁴⁵Ibid., 253.

⁴⁶Norrece T. Jones Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina*, 74-88.

change. They retained their self-respect and sense of justice and hated the master for his cruelty toward them.”⁴⁷

Many slaves resisted the authority of their masters through violent and nonviolent means. Genovese mentions this resistance, but he focuses more on the occasional, organized slave rebellions rather than the everyday acts of resistance. Feigned illnesses were widespread, and this allowed the slaves to get out of work for a day if they were able to successfully fool the overseers. Others stole from their masters as often as possible simply to resist complete control. Arthur Greene shifted the blame of stealing from the slave to the master class, claiming “White folks certainly taught niggers to steal. If dey had give ‘em nough to eat dey wouldn’ have no cause to steal.”⁴⁸ Slaves also participated in work slowdowns on a large scale in an attempt to hinder the master’s economic gains. A small percentage of bondsmen helped fugitive slaves escape and sneak across the countryside. Arson and poisonings were more lethal objections to the master’s authority. These acts were mostly committed by domestic servants since they personally prepared the master’s family’s meals. These frequent acts of resistance helped spread a sense of moral and spiritual autonomy among the slaves – something that paternalism failed to do because it was not practiced by many Southern slaveholders.

The most fractious and courageous bondsmen were removed from the slave quarters by sales and voluntary departures, and this greatly depleted the human resources for antebellum rebellions. The fear of betrayals by other slaves also played a very influential role in minimizing revolutionary activity. The infrequency of mass rebellion allowed slaveholders to hold firmly onto their ideology of paternalism. However, masters only behaved paternally toward their “perfect” black slaves. These were slaves who produced greatly for their masters and peaceably lived their lives in servitude. Patriarchs thought nothing of destroying kinship ties when “forced” to sell those who had breached the “contract.” They were more concerned with the loss of valuable laborers than with the dissolution of any paternal bonds when a chattel died.⁴⁹ This reinforces the suggestion that paternalism was more of an ideology than an actual practice in the antebellum South.

Disdain of masters as a whole often inspired a complete distrust of whites in general. Slaves instructed their youngest offspring to

⁴⁷Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*, 179-180.

⁴⁸Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds, *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, 124.

⁴⁹Norrece T. Jones Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina*, 190-206.

view masters as evil and powerful adversaries with whom they should have as little contact with as possible. Some masters were liked more than others, but slaves rarely allowed any kindness or humoring to blur the reality that the principal objective and motive of planters was to enrich their own pockets and their power at the complete and utter expense of slave labor. The grapevine and personal observation taught the slaves that all planters, however “different,” were potential sadists capable of unleashing barbaric rage whenever they chose to do so.⁵⁰ Former slave Robert Ellet shared in this disgust of the white race, especially the master Class, recalling “The overseers was white and of the lowest grade. The slave always hated them.”⁵¹

Some slaves did want to use “friendly” whites to secure pardons or milder punishments for stealing. Genovese says that such appeals by servants “strengthened the doctrine of paternalism among the whites as well as among themselves.” This type of situation is as close to paternalism as slavery represented. Slaves considered bondage an evil that would cause the damnation of anyone who advocated or supported it. Bondsmen knew that the possibility of freedom depended on their correct behavior and that only faithful and “deserving” slaves would be rewarded, therefore the prospect of liberation became an effective mechanism of control in itself. The small minority of pureblooded slaves who consummated paternalistic bonds came about exclusively from the top of the domestic hierarchy: mammies, butlers, and lady servants. These slaves knew it was in their best interests to wear masks of loyalty and docility so that they could live favorably above the standards of field hands and other outdoor manual laborers.⁵²

Genovese asserts that paternalism demanded protection for blacks “in a strange and hostile white world.”⁵³ The problem is that blacks were not offered this protection at all because they were the everyday victims of white cruelty and exploitation. Genovese believes that paternalism insisted upon “mutual obligations – duties, responsibilities, and ultimately even rights – which implicitly recognized the slave’s humanity.”⁵⁴ Slaves had little to no rights under their white masters, and their superiors viewed them as property to be controlled in every aspect of their lives. There was not much compromise or affection between master or slave either, and the two groups could not have been more socially fragmented from each

⁵⁰Ibid., 52-76.

⁵¹Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, 85.

⁵²Norrece T. Jones Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina*, 150-164.

⁵³Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 142.

⁵⁴Ibid., 5.

other. Paternalism was simply an ideal that allowed slaveholders to justify the exploitation of blacks in bondage. Genovese's description of the ideal is accurate in a few different areas. However, I have not been able to find many existing examples of it in the slave narratives. Paternalism was not the reason that slaves and masters coexisted; the slaves had no legal identities, few social connections, and relatively no organized resistance movements due to the support of slavery in the South. They had no means to end their oppression to the "superior" white race; they were forced to live in bondage or to die resisting it.