

been so indoctrinated that "The Experience of becoming and being mothers has dominated their thoughts, determined their behavior and determined their position in society."²⁶ Beecher wanted to use this well-known fact to secure women a place where they could feel superior and educated. In the nursery, this could happen. Naturally men would take a positive view of this since women were acting well within their traditional sphere. The nursery was one of the places where women were subordinate to no one.

Beecher wanted her concept of domestic privacy to dispel the myth that "a housekeeper's business and cares are contracted and trivial."²⁷ Through education and indoctrination she hoped to change the middle-class women's thinking. Beecher realized that women would never be able to compete with men in the political or economic realm so she wanted women to dominate in the one place they could: the home. She saw her duty as "interpreting and shaping the collective consciousness of American women."²⁸

However, certain factors shaped her awareness of domestic privacy as well. Due to the heavy-handed authority of her father, Beecher never lost her belief in the Calvinist strain of religion. Although she tried to modify her "moral philosophy," she still used the same basic tenets of belief to affect her concept of domestic privacy. New innovations in the scientific field encouraged Beecher to reevaluate her notions of privacy to include proper ventilation and individualized sleeping space to avoid the dreadful disease of scrofula. Most importantly, Beecher's concept of domestic privacy allowed women rooms in their home in which they could be the master and ruler. In the kitchen and the nursery, women took orders from no one.

²⁶Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Private Matters: American Attitudes Toward Childbearing and Infant Nurture in the Urban North, 1800-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 1.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 220.

²⁸Sklar, 132.

The Lichtenstein Thesis: Did Slaves Develop Their Own Moral Economy?

by Gay Usher

The question of whether slaves in the American South actually developed a moral economy of their own has been answered in the affirmative by Alex Lichtenstein. According to the Lichtenstein thesis, slaves did in fact develop a moral economy separate and distinct from the morals and values of the whites.¹ I disagree and intend to refute his thesis by examining slave narratives, folklore, autobiographies, and the Works Progress Administration interviews of the 1930's. If theft had been condoned by their moral code, then the slaves could not have fully accepted Christianity and the moral code derived from it. Yet this contradicts the obvious central role played by the black church. Only by addressing these smaller questions of whether theft was a form of resistance to slavery, whether they experienced guilt, or whether they accepted the teachings of Christianity will I be able to answer the big question of whether slaves developed their own moral economy.

In Lichtenstein's article, "That Disposition to Theft, With Which They Have Been Branded: Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," he presents his own theory. He bases it on Marxist critiques of the neutralization theory of Levine and Ayers.² The neutralization theory argues that "the deviant often recognizes the moral validity of the dominant normative system even when he or she breaks its laws or codes." The person's morals are neutralized by the necessity to commit an act that goes against the society's and an individual's own morality.³ The best example of deviance among the slaves is theft. According to Lichtenstein, the slaves

¹Alex Lichtenstein, "That Disposition to Theft, With Which They Have Been Branded: Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law,"

Journal of Social History 21 (1988): 413.

²*Ibid.*, 414.

³Leverance Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977); Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (Oxford, 1984).

the slaves.

There was, however, one instance where there appeared to have been no motive for a theft. The parents of the ex-slave girl who related this story stole mutton from their master.⁸ The master, though a strict disciplinarian, still fed and clothed his slaves well. Part of the reason they stole when they were already well fed was, undoubtedly, to get back at a hard master. And so the theft could possibly have been a form of resistance. Yet it was only one account, where the theft could be construed as resistance as opposed to the numerous other accounts that support the argument for necessity as a cause of theft. There was another aspect to this same story. The parents did not tell their children that they had stolen food from their master, and they did not share the food with their children.⁹ The parents had stolen food but would not tell their children. They did not want to teach their children wrong morals and values. They knew it was wrong, thus they hid it from their children. The children obviously knew about it, as the story suggests, but they also respected their parents enough not to let on that they knew. The parents did not want to set the wrong example for their children, and the children did not want to confront their parent's shame.

The previous conclusion leads one to wonder about the types of values that the slaves tried to teach their children regarding theft. There was a similar theme running through much of the slave folklore. That theme implied that in order to survive, the slave must take advantage of the position in which he was placed and must rely upon his own intelligence and ingenuity to outwit his master. The tales of Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit, and the wise, honest slave John made this theme apparent. Brer Rabbit, who represented the slave, was always outwitting Brer Fox, the master. Usually, Brer Rabbit was trying to steal food from his master to feed his family. The gist of the story was that he had to use his intelligence to outwit his master and not get caught. The stories about the slave John also focused on the intelligence of the slave and the ignorance of the master. He constantly used his wit to avoid getting caught. In one story, his master would not let the

⁸Ibid., 240.⁹Ibid.

committed theft, not out of necessity, but because it was, a "struggle between slaves and masters to define conflicting notions of authority, property and customary rights."⁴ As "an oppressed group or class develops an autonomous conception of their economic and social rights," the slaves, therefore, develop their own set of values and morals.⁵ This set of values was not only separate from the morals and values of the whites, its precepts ran counter to them. Thus when slaves stole, they did not feel guilt since, by their own moral code, it was not wrong. This is Lichtenstein's black moral economy.

There are several aspects to whether or not theft was a form of resistance to slavery. To the masters, it might have seemed as if it was resistance. To the slaves, however, theft was necessary for survival. Lewis Clarke, an escaped slave from Kentucky, phrased it well when he said "the masters say the slaves are a lying and thieving set; and so they are; for slavery makes a man lie and steal."⁶ It was the condition of servitude that forced the slave to steal and thus compromise his morals.

The most pressing reason for stealing was, understandably enough, an unusually violent and cruel master. Accounts of masters of this type were numerous. One involved slave children whom the mistress beat for small offenses and denied sufficient food. The children had to resort to stealing eggs and chickens from the hen-house. Said one, "many's the time I had to ask the white children for bread, and they'd slip and get us bread, and meat too."⁷ These children, especially the white children, certainly did not equate their petty thefts with the much more serious act of resisting slavery. The slave children were simply hungry and needed more food. The white children obviously did not know any better. Indeed, they probably enjoyed the excitement that went along with the stealing. Also, if theft had been a form of conscious resistance, one may ask why the instances of theft had been so much lower when the master were kind and the slaves were well fed? Theft, then, was directly proportional to the level of necessity set by

⁴Lichtenstein, *Disposition in Theft*, 415.⁵Ibid.⁶John W. Flaminge, ed., *Slave Testimony* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 153.⁷Ibid., 230.

slaves grow any food for themselves, so consequently the slaves did not get enough to eat. Therefore, John took it upon himself to steal melons for his family from his master's melon patch. One day he was caught returning from the field with some melons. When asked to explain why he had to melons and was coming from the direction of the melon patch, he simply responded that "what direction got to do wid a hones' man?"¹⁰ In another story, the harvest was bad, and the master did not supply his slaves with sufficient clothing or food. John and the other slaves were forced to steal what they could to survive.

Although the folklore seemed to condone theft, it also said when it was acceptable, which was usually in a time of necessity. The folklore also pointed out that the slaves appeared to recognize their lack of education, and the need to make up for it. Both John and Brer Rabbit managed to stay out of trouble by using their brains. The parents obviously wanted their children to develop their minds and use them to help them to survive. They tried to overcome the stereotype, which was held by many white southerners, that blacks were stupid and could not learn anything. Frederick Douglass states clearly in his autobiography, "Ignorance is a high virtue in a human chattel; and as the master studies to keep the slave ignorant, the slave is cunning enough to make the master think he succeeds."¹¹

One might wonder what feelings slaves experienced when they stole. If they did not experience some sense of guilt or shame, or even an understanding that they had committed a crime, then Lichtenstein is right. There are plenty of examples that seem to refute Lichtenstein. One of the best ones is, again, from Frederick Douglass's autobiography. "I hated everything like stealing, as such, I nevertheless did not hesitate to take food, when I was hungry, wherever I could find it."¹² In this instance, Douglass demonstrated his moral compunction against theft, however much he was forced by his circumstances to steal. Another slave pointed out expressly: "Jey (his master and mistress) taught us not to take things," but this same

¹⁰J. Mason Brewer, *American Negro Folklore* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 29.

¹¹Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Oton, and Mulligan, 1855; reprint, New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 81 (page references are to reprint edition).
¹²*Ibid.*, 189.

slave also states that "any 'Nigger' would steal when de didn't git 'nuff t'eat."¹³ The aspect of necessity promoting theft is apparent in all of the sources.

The geographical location of a plantation did not make much difference in the occurrence of theft. A slave from Texas commented that "d'niggers 'roun' dere never git 'nuf t' eat so dey kep' stealin' stuff all d' time."¹⁴ The story was the same for a slave from a Mississippi plantation. "Mama used to slip back at night an' bring us things an de white folks never knowed it."¹⁵ If there had not been an obvious need, why would the slaves risk stealing? When they were caught, the punishments could be as severe in this world as they presumably would be in the next.

Some slaves' morals and values were neutralized by the necessity for food. But not all slaves experienced this. One slave, whose pig had been stolen from him by his master, had just cause to steal the pig back, but "my mother had taught me not to steal, and I never could bring my mind to fulfill my resolution (to steal the pig back)."¹⁶ As a final example of a slave morality against theft there was a magazine interview of an ex-slave in the late 1800's. The interviewer asked the slave if "colored people stole from each other?" The slave answered "not so far as I know. I admit that they steal from their masters." The interviewer following this same line of questioning, asked "if their master has chickens and pigs will they steal them?" The slave simply answered "the majority of them will not, but there are always some bad ones who will steal."¹⁷ This demonstrated again the understanding and acceptance of the dominant moral code that stealing was bad.

Where did these slave's morals and values that are so apparent in these sources come from? Many of their values were grounded in their religion, Christianity. To a large extent, necessity aside, the slaves tended to be

¹³*Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁴Bhessingame, *Slave Testimony*, 652.
¹⁵Sarah Aahley, interview by F. W. Dibble, Bernice Grey, Jefferson Beaumont (Greenwood Press, 10 June 1937), *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 2, vol. 2, part 1, George Rawick, ed., 89.

¹⁶Rose Hobman, interview by Vera Burts (Greenwood Press) *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 1, vol. B, part 3, George Rawick, ed., 1057.

¹⁷Bhessingame, *Slave Testimony*, 652.

better Christians than their masters. Just as the circumstances of slavery forced slaves to neutralize the dominant moral code in order to survive, so too, the economic circumstances, or benefits, of slavery enticed white southerners to neutralize their religious beliefs in order to maintain the institution of slavery. One can wonder just which was the worse rationalization, that of petty theft, or that of the subjugation of an entire race of people. Though both the blacks and the whites practiced the same religion, the whites compromised their beliefs as slavery grew and a schism grew between the black and white religions. The white religion began to accept slavery: "All the Methodists, even the preachers, are slave holders and think nothing of it."¹⁸ This schism in the religion of blacks and whites in the South caused a lot of disillusionment among the blacks over the hypocrisy that arose in their master's religion. This hypocrisy further becomes evident when one asks from whom did the slaves learn to steal. It was not unusual for masters to order their slaves to steal from neighboring plantations. Henry Bibb, an escaped slave, wrote in a letter to his former master that "you compelled me to cheat, lie, and steal from your neighbors."¹⁹ The initial compromise led to numerous other compromises, until there was very little substance left in the white religion. How could a true Christian condone slavery, let alone the crimes that accompanied such an institution? These contradictions in religion led some slaves, such as Frederick Douglass, to give up their religion later in life. However, it also encouraged some slaves, such as Henry Bibb, to hold their religious beliefs all the more and to pass them on to their children and even other adults. Bibb even wrote a series of letters to his former master in which he sermonized, pointing out to him the wickedness of his ways. He did this because he felt "bound as a Christian" to make his former master aware of the peril that his soul was in.²⁰

Another question arises: how did the slaves come by their religion in the first place? Many slave owners felt it was their Christian duty to convert their slaves. Usually these masters were the same ones who took good care

¹⁸Ibid., 218.

¹⁹Ibid., 53.

²⁰Ibid., 52.

of their slaves and treated them well. As one mistress said of her slaves, "they must rest and go to church" on Sunday.²¹ Jack, a slave in Mississippi "attended church with the white people," and with permission he was able to hear a sermon by a black preacher.²² Locality played a minor role in religion. In Texas, a slave, named Lewis Jones, said, "on Sunday, regular, weuns have de chu'ch an' Tom, he preach."²³ Another Texan related her Sunday church experiences, adding that she witnessed the ordination of a black preacher by a white preacher. Her remembrance of the prayer the white preacher used to ordain the black man showed the extent of her excitement over the event.²⁴ It is apparent from this evidence that in some cases religious instruction of the slaves was not only tolerated, but encouraged as well.

It is a well known fact that a large number of slave owners tried to deprive their slaves of religion. It is also well known that they were not always very successful. It was not unusual for the slaves from one plantation or even from several neighboring plantations to get together on Saturday nights and have prayer meetings. Ruben Laird, a slave from Mississippi, recalls "there were no churches or schools for the slaves. The only form of worship...was prayer meetings."²⁵ Stearlin Armwine, a slave in Texas, likewise remembers; "the only church service I know anything about was when the slave would get together once in a while at night and have a prayer meetin and sing."²⁶ The influence of religion on the slaves was obviously fairly strong, or else they would not have out of their way (risking punishment) to hold prayer meetings. If religion had been this strong, then the morals and values of Christianity must have been internalized by the slaves.

²¹Ibid., 231.

²²Jack Jones, interview by unknown (Greenwood Press) *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 1, vol. 8, part 3, George Rawick, ed., 1212.

²³Lewis Jones, interview by Sheldon F. Gauthier (Greenwood Press, 1937) *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 2, vol. 6, part 5, George Rawick, ed., 2111.

²⁴Will Adams, interview by Alex Hampton (Greenwood Press, 6 June 1937) *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 2, vol. 2, part 1, George Rawick, ed., 12-13.

²⁵Ruben Laird, interview by unknown (Greenwood Press, 9 April 1936) *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 1, vol. 8, part 3, George Rawick, ed., 1298.

²⁶Stearlin Armwine, interview by Aline Stibley (Greenwood Press, 1 May 1936) *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 2, vol. 2, part 1, George Rawick, ed., 84.

Even slave superstitions, passed from generation to generation, contained some Christian influences. "If you are drowning....and cross your hands, you will come to the surface and float."²⁷ Another one is to "make the sign of the cross over your bread so that you will always have some, over your fire so it will always burn," and so-on.²⁸ For such religious concepts to have integrated themselves into slave superstitions, the degree to which slaves internalized their religious beliefs must have been very great. Lichtenstein's thesis is too broad to be generally accurate. Applied to a specific place and time it might prove valid. As it is formulated, it cannot be applied to the entire South. In fact, slaves in the American South clasp the Christian moral code of their masters to their bosoms and made it their own. Possibly, the slaves were better Christians than were their masters. Christianity and slavery did not mix. The slaves understood that. But the whites chose to ignore it and compromised their faith. Considering the strength of their faith, they must have internalized the morals and values that accompany Christianity. Even Frederick Douglass, who eventually lost his faith, retained the values and morals that he had gained from it. With all of this evidence, one can hardly say that the slaves rejected the morals and values of white society in order to create their own moral economy in an effort to resist their condition. In a few instances, this may have happened. But it certainly did not happen everywhere. Thefts of necessity far outnumbered thefts as a means of resistance.

²⁷Elisingame, *Slave Testimony*, 301.
²⁸Ibid.

The Popular and Intellectual Response to Industrialism: Exploring the Urban Jungle with Upton Sinclair

by Mark G. Schmeltzer

It would hardly be a worthwhile endeavor to prove that Upton Sinclair, in his now legendary muckraking exposé, *The Jungle*, sought to publicize more than merely the need to reform the meat-packing industry. Even professional reviewers at the time of the novel's publication recognized that Sinclair had "a deeper cause to serve."¹ Now famous too, is Sinclair's reaction to his book's repercussions when he quipped, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."² It would be equally redundant to indict the author's description of his protagonist's conversion to Socialism as a "manifesto" which was intended to promote "the doctrine of Socialism."³ However, Upton Sinclair must be viewed as more than a tract writer for American Marxists. The popularity of *The Jungle* proved to be a necessary mechanism in the self-correcting machine of Democratic Capitalism. It earned this recognition by confirming the violence done to this nation's democratic sensibilities by runaway industrial growth. And it did so at the same moment in our history when the public was struggling to come to terms with the new reality. Scarcely had the verdict of time begun to gestate when an observer at *The Times* (of London) concluded that *The Jungle* "will be recognized far and wide for what it is--a most important sociological document; and the practical effect of it should be great."⁴

The biographers of Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle*'s critics may vary slightly in their judgments of the author's political intent. However, the more significant question in evaluating the novel is its broad social and historical implications.

¹Review of *The Jungle*, by Upton Sinclair, *The Literary Supplement of the Times of London*, 1 June 1906, 201.

²Leon Harris, *Upton Sinclair: American Rebel* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1975), 71.

³*The Literary Supplement of the Times of London*, 1 June 1906, 201.

⁴Ibid.