

"Goods and Chattels":  
The Economy of Slaves on Sugar Plantations  
in Jamaica and Louisiana

by

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To E. M. McDonald and the late A. G. McDonald

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## Introduction

The development of sugar plantations in the Americas during the seventeenth century changed the diet of Europeans. Previously, sugar had been relatively scarce and expensive in Europe; however, with the establishment and expansion of the sugar plantations prices declined, until, as economic historian Richard Sheridan has observed, "by the middle of the 18th century it had become a staple article of diet among large sections of European society."<sup>1</sup>

The growth of the plantation systems depended on a plentiful supply of workers. The institution of black slavery, which held millions of Africans and their American-born descendants in bondage through centuries, furnished this labor. Africans and Afro-Americans subjugated under this odious traffic in humanity bore the bitter social costs of sweetening the food and drink of Europeans.

The labor regime used to cultivate the crop exacerbated the burden of bondage in sugar slavery. According to historian Franklin Knight, who has ranked the severity of labor systems employed in raising staples on New World slave plantations, sugar slavery was the most arduous. The work expected or extracted from the slave workers on sugar estates far exceeded that of slaves on cotton, tobacco or coffee plantations.<sup>2</sup>

With sugar's profitability came the extension of its cultivation throughout the Caribbean basin, and wherever the crop was grown, a

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775 (Baltimore, 1973), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin W. Knight, Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century (Madison, Wisconsin, 1970), 64.

similar plantation system prevailed. As Knight argues,

the organization of the sugar estate followed a common pattern from Brazil, through Barbados, St. Domingue, Jamaica, Cuba, Louisiana, or any other place of the Caribbean region, regardless of the timing of the sugar culture or the prevailing metropolitan influences.

Along with the crop and the plantation system, of course, went the labor regime so destructive to the life and health of the slaves. Thus, one of the elements of organizational commonality was "that the slave on a sugar plantation fitted into a socioeconomic and political complex that was basically similar" wherever the crop was grown.<sup>3</sup>

And what was common to the life of sugar slaves throughout the Caribbean was a pattern of undernourishment, overwork, vicious punishment, poor housing and clothing, high infant mortality, ill-health, and a life-span shortened by the brutal plantation regime. These African and Afro-American workers, however, had to bear more than the burden of excessive toil and poor living conditions; as chattel slaves they suffered under the oppressive weight of bondage, the "sense of despair" felt by slaves "that was all-consuming." Black slaves were victims of a monstrous evil whereby they were deprived of their liberty, perhaps transported and sold at the behest of others, their lives' days spent in arduous toil creating wealth for the nations and individuals guilty of holding them in thrall.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Knight, Ibid., 193; The African Dimension in Latin American Societies (New York, 1974), 1.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York, 1972), 198.

Time and space separated the sugar plantation societies of Jamaica and Louisiana. Jamaica had a well-established sugar culture, and, indeed, was the world's leading producer of the commodity by 1795, when Jean Etienne de Boré first successfully granulated sugar in Louisiana; Louisiana's sugar boom under slavery came after slave emancipation in Jamaica. The temporal and spatial separation of the two societies caused the sugar plantation systems of Jamaica and Louisiana to differ somewhat: these differences are considered below. The similarities that mature sugar plantation societies shared, however, transcended these differences: the plantation systems of Jamaica and Louisiana, and the place of the protagonists, black and white, within them, conformed more readily to the commonality thesis elucidated by Knight.

In 1655, a British military expedition seized Jamaica, and Britain assumed governance of the island after nearly 160 years of somewhat desultory Spanish rule. Bryan Edwards' account of Jamaica at the time of the British conquest reveals that little of the island was under cultivation, and that a small population, consisting primarily of black slaves and Spaniards, lived in "sloth and penury." The island's principal exports had been "cacao . . . hogs-lards and hides." After 1655, Jamaica's development as a plantation society proceeded slowly, and it was not until well into the next century that it replaced

the much smaller but earlier-developed island of Barbados as Britain's leading sugar colony.<sup>5</sup>

From the mid-eighteenth century on, however, Jamaica stood pre-eminent among the British West Indian islands in sugar production and acreage under cultivation as well as in the volume of its slave trade and its slave population. Recent scholarship suggests that, notwithstanding recessions during the Seven Years War (1756-63) and the War of American Independence (1775-83), the growth of the island's sugar industry continued until the second decade of the nineteenth century, peaking in the years 1783-1815. After the elimination of St. Domingue from the world sugar economy following the outbreak in 1791 of the slave rebellion led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jamaica became the world's leading supplier of sugar. In both value and volume, the slave trade to Jamaica was greatest between 1783 and 1808 (the year Britain abolished the slave trade to its colonies) when 323,827 slaves lived on Jamaica, the island's largest-ever slave population. All these indices, therefore, suggest that the peak development of Jamaica's sugar economy under slavery came in the years 1783-1815.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies (1793, rpt. New York, 1972), I, 149-50; Sheridan, Sugar and Slavery, 487-9.

<sup>6</sup> Seymour Drescher, Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition (Pittsburgh, 1977); Noel Deerr, The History of Sugar (London, 1949), I, 158-207; Roderick A. McDonald, "Measuring the British Slave Trade to Jamaica, 1789-1808: A Comment," The Economic History Review, Second Series, XXXIII: 2 (May 1980), 253-8; Barry W. Higman, Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834 (London, 1976), 255.

Louisiana was the foremost sugar-producing state in the antebellum South. Cane sugar, climatically unsuited to cultivation in most of the North American continent, and produced only sporadically and on a small scale elsewhere along the Gulf coast, became the principal crop in southern Louisiana in the four decades before the Civil War. For over a quarter of a century after Boré's successful granulation of sugar, there was limited development in the crop's cultivation, but between 1826 and 1861, Louisiana's sugar production rose from some 100,000 hogsheads annually to over 500,000 hogsheads. The state's slave population, recorded at 69,064 persons in 1820, rose to 109,558 in 1830, and trebled to 326,726 by 1860 (not all, of course, as a consequence of the development of the sugar industry in the southern part of the state). Between 1824 and 1859, the number of sugar estates increased almost seven-fold, from 193 to 1,308. All the available indices thus point to the peak development of Louisiana's sugar economy under slavery as spanning the years 1824-61.<sup>7</sup>

For comparative methodology to yield what he terms "more meaningful generalizations about slave societies," Franklin Knight contends that "the comparative study of the slave systems of the Americas . . . should be concerned less with concurrent time spans and metropolitan institutional differences than with equivalent stages of economic and social growth." The years 1783-1815 represented the maturation of sugar plantation slave society in Jamaica, while the corresponding development

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<sup>7</sup>J. Carlyle Sitterson, Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South (Lexington, Kentucky, 1953), 28-30, 60.



in Louisiana took place in the years 1824-61. Thus the present study, a comparative analysis of slavery on sugar plantations in the two locations, with special reference to the economic activities, the "internal economy," of the slave community, focuses on these time frames since they approximate most closely "equivalent stages of economic and social growth."<sup>8</sup>

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Sugar was the most valuable world trade commodity in the eighteenth century, and the most valuable plantation crop in the Americas throughout the era of slavery, while sugar plantation slavery was the modal experience of black slaves in the New World. Of all the slave plantation staples grown, the routine of sugar cultivation exacted the most onerous labor. Despite significant differences in the techniques of sugar cultivation and production in Jamaica and Louisiana, slaves in the two plantation societies experienced similarly enervating work regimes.

Sugar cane takes from fourteen to eighteen months to reach maturity and thus frost-free tropical and sub-tropical climates, with equable temperatures year-round, abundant, well-distributed rainfall and fertile soil, provide optimal growing conditions. While Caribbean islands such as Jamaica provide the best natural growing conditions for sugar cane, Louisiana's climate, in which freezing temperatures occur

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<sup>8</sup> Knight, Slave Society, 194.

annually, made it at best a marginal sugar-growing region and necessitated adjustments in the husbandry of the crop to accommodate unfavorable weather.

In addition to the three discrete stages in the cultivation of sugar, planting, tending and harvesting, sugar plantation slaves also processed the crop. After being cut, the juices in the sugar cane fermented and soured rapidly. To prevent spoilage, the canes had to be processed within 24 to 48 hours after harvest. Thus the processing stage, conducted on the plantation, ran concurrently with the harvest, exacerbating an already punishing labor regimen.

Sugar plantations in both Jamaica and Louisiana conformed to this pattern of cultivation and processing, although the timetables differed in the two regions. The work schedules of slaves on Jamaican plantations corresponded to the full growing cycle of sugar cane (fourteen to eighteen months), whereas Louisiana's winter frosts cut short the crop's growing season, resulting in a labor routine geared to a twelve-month cycle.

The seasonality of Jamaica's rainfall determined the timing of the sugar crop's cultivation. The island's rainfall occurs principally in the latter half of the year, from June to December, and during this time slaves planted canes and tended them through the early stages of their growth. The first stage involved clearing the cane fields and preparing the ground for planting. The planting method used in Jamaica required slaves to dig holes five feet square and some six inches deep, into which short sections of seed cane, set aside from the previous harvest, were placed and covered with a layer of earth. As the

plant grew, further layers of earth and perhaps a compost fertilizer were added until the holes had been completely filled in and the field leveled. The young canes required weeding and care for the first three or four months, after which the crop could be "laid by" and left to grow to maturity, since it had grown tall enough to prevent weed infestation.

Jamaican planters had the slaves hole the canefields preparatory to planting in order to conserve topsoil. It was such a burdensome task, however, that planters often preferred to hire jobbing slaves rather than subject their estate's labor force to the exhausting work of wielding hoes to excavate holes in soil baked hard by the sun. (Appendix 4-e, Prints 1 and 4 depict slaves at work holing and planting canefields.)

Sugar cane did not have to be replanted following each harvest since the stubble left after cutting sprouted new shoots (ratoons). Ratoons yielded less sugar than canes grown from seed, but ratooning demanded less labor than planting, and thus permitted a much larger acreage to be put under crop. Depending on soil fertility, a given year's planted cane would be ratooned for up to three years. By this time, low sugar yields required that the cane roots be dug up and the cane piece replanted from seed. By ratooning some of the canes, and judiciously spacing the planting schedule throughout the latter half of the year, Jamaican sugar planters could assure an annual harvest.

Harvest occurred during the first half of the year, Jamaica's dry season. Plantation slaves usually enjoyed a brief respite from work during the Christmas period: the commencement of the harvest followed close on the heels of this holiday. Wielding long-bladed machetes,

slaves cut off each stalk of cane at ground level, lopped the top, stripped the leaves, and cut it into lengths of two to three feet. (Mature canes grew to heights of eight to ten feet.) Slaves loaded the sections of cane onto ox-drawn wagons, to be transported to the estate's sugar mill.

The crop was processed by crushing the cane in a mill (driven by water, wind or animal power) and boiling the extracted juices. A series of refining processes took place during the boiling stage to remove impurities, after which the cane juice, by now of a thick, treacly consistency, began to crystallize. At this point, the molten sugar was taken from the fire (in refining terminology, "struck"), left to cool, and then placed in hogsheads. In these barrels, a mass of sugar solidified, and the liquid residue, molasses, was drained off. Draining off molasses took about a month and was completed in the storage shed or curing house to which the hogsheads were removed. After the molasses had drained, the hogsheads were emptied. The sugar thus produced comprised top and bottom layers of low quality sugar (which went back to the boiling house for further refining) and a middle layer suitable for the final stages of processing, in which it was dried and repacked in hogsheads ready for shipment. Molasses was either sold or distilled into rum.

The processing stage not only involved complex technology and organization, but also required considerable labor. Slaves manned every stage of the process from feeding the newly cut canes through the mill to loading the hogsheads of sugar for shipment. They performed all this work in conjunction with their harvest labor in the fields.

Field slaves on Jamaican sugar estates worked in gangs. Depending upon the size of the plantation, the main gang, commonly called the great gang, was augmented by two or three lesser gangs. The great gang consisted of both male and female slaves at their peak working capacity while the weaker second, third and fourth gangs comprised youths and young adults not yet at full physical development and older slaves past their best working years.

Not all sugar plantation slaves worked in the field gangs. The employment structure of slaves accommodated the sugar estate's complex agricultural, industrial and residential organization. Domestics attended to the needs of the estates' white populations while skilled slaves worked in the various trades such as coopering, smithing, masonry, sugar-making and distilling. Slaves also staffed myriad services that did not involve field work, acting as stockmen, cooks, watchmen, hospital attendants, water-carriers, wainmen and carters.

Young children were expected to work on the plantation. Early in their lives (at the ages of five or six years) slaves were introduced to the routine of plantation labor, being organized into "pickaninny" or hogmeat gangs under the direction of elderly slave women known as driveresses. In this nascent gang system, which incorporated all the components of the adult gangs to which they would graduate, children performed such tasks as weeding and collecting fodder. Convalescent slaves and pregnant and suckling women often did lighter labor such as weeding and cleaning up around the plantation buildings.

The occupational structure of Jamaican sugar plantation labor forces usually exhibited a sex bias. Men dominated such elite

positions as drivers and head tradesmen, and various specialized occupations, such as stockmen, wainmen, watchmen and skilled sugar mill workers. Specialized roles for women in the slave labor force were more limited, comprising chiefly domestics, cooks, medical and midwifery aides, and garden and poultry tenders. Consequently women generally made up a larger proportion of the field hands, whose work was the most onerous.

Although the growth cycle of sugar cane took from a year and a quarter to a year and a half, Jamaican planters instituted a rotation of planting and ratooning that enabled the establishment of an annual cycle of labor. Planting, the late summer and fall work, fully occupied the daily schedule of the field hands. In late fall and early winter, slaves tended the crop during its early development. This work, which involved weeding, cleaning, hoe-ploughing, thinning and replanting the cane shoots, required less labor than the planting stage. Planters then could assign some of the slaves' labor to other tasks on the estate--planting various provision and minor staple crops, working on the maintenance and upkeep of the estate and its buildings, and preparing for the ensuing harvest. Harvest usually began early in the new year and lasted four or five months. Work on the sugar crop again monopolized the slaves' labor at this time.

During the planting and tending stages (called out of crop), the slaves' daily labor schedule differed significantly from the harvest (in crop) work routine. Out of crop, the slaves' plantation work spanned the hours of daylight; in crop, slaves spent their days in the field harvesting the canes, and part of each night at the works processing sugar.

Between four and five a.m., the plantation overseer sounded an alarm that signaled the commencement of the slaves' diurnal work routine. Every day except Sundays, both in and out of crop, slaves had to respond to this summons. Those who either failed to do so, or were late, had their backs lacerated by a driver's or overseer's whip.

The overseer expected the slaves to be in the field, ready for work, at dawn. Often, however, slaves had to do "before-day-jobs" around the works or stock pens. William Fitzmaurice, an experienced overseer and bookkeeper on Jamaican sugar estates, testified to a House of Commons committee that slaves, prior to going to the fields, had

various works to do which are considered as detached jobs from the field labour, such as hoeing intervals, which they can do before day, as also carrying mould to cattle pens, chopping up dung, or making mortar, or carrying white lime, or making preparations for tradesmen employed in the buildings about the works,--these are called before-day-jobs.<sup>9</sup>

At first light, slaves assembled in the fields. They brought with them their implements (a machete during harvest, a hoe out of crop) and breakfast. From dawn until mid-morning the field gangs labored, their work uninterrupted save, perhaps, for the occasional water break (young boys worked as water-carriers). A mid-morning break of half an hour permitted the slaves time to eat breakfast, which perhaps had been heated for them by field cooks, and rest. After this brief respite,

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<sup>9</sup> Testimony of William Fitzmaurice, "Minutes of the Evidence taken before a Committee of the House of Commons, being a Select Committee appointed to take the Examination of Witnesses respecting the African Slave Trade," British Sessional Papers, 1731-1800 (House of Commons), Accounts and Papers, XXXIV: 746-7, 217.



work recommenced and lasted until the mid-day dinner break. During the two-hour interval slaves had at this time, they could rest, eat and, perhaps, work for themselves tending their livestock or cultivating their kitchen gardens or provision grounds. At the end of the two hours, slaves reassembled in the fields and worked without interruption until sunset. Before returning to their houses, however, slaves often had to do certain tasks around the estate similar to the "before-day-jobs," such as trashing cattle pens and collecting grass for animal fodder. James Stephen, a leading opponent of slavery, calculated that Jamaican sugar plantation slaves worked, on average, "from 5 a.m. till 7 p.m.; deducting two and a half hours for breakfast and dinner." This eleven and a half hour day included only field work and not the before-day and after-day jobs slaves often had to do.<sup>10</sup>

Slaves usually did no plantation work on Sundays, occasionally got Saturdays off, and had a few days holiday each year. On every other day, they worked according to the routine described above.

The out of crop routine of eleven and a half hours field work, plus some two hours or more for before-day and after-day work and travel time to and from the fields, was the minimum daily work load. In crop, slaves had to work much longer hours. Throughout the duration of the harvest, slaves had to labor at night, processing the sugar crop, in addition to the regular daily hours of field work.

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<sup>10</sup> James Stephen, The Slavery of the West India Colonies Delineated (London, 1824-30), II, 150.



During the harvest months, sugar works on Jamaican estates operated around the clock, six days a week, closing down only on Sundays. Planters responded to the need for extra labor by requiring slaves to work a night shift. If a plantation had an adequate complement of slave workers, they were divided into three spells or shifts, each shift working one-third of the night. Often plantations were short-handed. When only two shifts could be adequately staffed, slaves worked half the night, each night, in addition to their day work.

Slaves on plantations operating under a two-shift system had to go straight from a day's labor cutting cane in the fields, and work five hours in the sugar mill every alternate night (five a.m. to seven p.m. in the fields, seven p.m. to midnight at the sugar works). Every other night, they worked five hours in the mill immediately prior to their day's work in the fields (midnight to five a.m. at the works, five a.m. to seven p.m. in the field). Under a three-shift system, slaves did either an early, middle or late spell of night work, working each of these shifts every third night; all, of course, in addition to their day's field work. Although plantations varied in the precise manner in which they organized harvest night work, slaves worked the same number of hours.

In Jamaica, the sugar mills closed down every Sunday (although planters often "cheated" slaves of this time off by keeping the sugar works in operation into the early hours of Sunday morning and restarting them late Sunday night instead of Monday). Slaves used the day off to recuperate from the six 18- to 20-hour days they had just worked. They also had to find time to go to their grounds in order to gather

provisions that would supplement the rations supplied them by the planter.

The brutality of slavery and the inadequacy of the goods and services furnished slaves exacerbated the onerous work regime. Jamaican planters required slaves to work these excessive hours, but failed even to provide adequate food or medical attention. Slaves exhausted and enervated by overwork and underfeeding often continued to toil only through the stimulus of the lash.

The cultivation of the sugar crop in Louisiana was a race against time. Sugar cane cannot withstand frost, which occurs annually in Louisiana. Consequently the sugar cane harvest came but nine or ten months after the date of planting (compared to the fourteen to eighteen month cycle in Jamaica). The sturdy, fast-maturing Ribbon Cane best suited this attenuated growing season. Even with this variety of the plant, however, the longer the crop stayed in the ground, the higher its sugar content. The schedule conceived by Louisiana planters, therefore, while having to accommodate an annual crop cycle, aimed at getting the sugar crop into the ground as early as possible in the year, and starting the harvest at the last conceivable moment so as to permit maximum maturity of the canes. Included in the equation determining when to start the harvest were the speed with which the crop could be cut and processed (bearing in mind that the cane had to be processed within hours of being cut) and a "guesstimate" of the date of the first killing frost.

The work routine of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves reflected the intensity of the sugar crop's cycle. Especially during the planting

and harvest seasons, slaves labored tremendously hard since the planters' goal was that the crop be sown and reaped as expeditiously as possible. Furthermore, technological advances in sugar processing, and the topography of southern Louisiana aggravated an already arduous labor schedule. By the time of Louisiana's sugar boom, mills driven by steam engines replaced those powered by water, wind or animals. These engines, however, required fuel. The swamps and forests on or near the sugar estates afforded a plentiful supply of wood, which, nevertheless, had to be felled and dragged to the sugar works. Slaves, of course, performed this labor. Because most of Louisiana's sugar estates stood on the Mississippi flood plain, they required both the construction of levees for protection against flooding, and extensive drainage systems to draw off excess water that could damage the sugar crop. Again, planters incorporated these exceedingly burdensome tasks into the plantation work routine of slaves. Technology and topography, therefore, caused the imposition of tasks different from those required of Jamaican sugar plantation slaves.

The annual work routine of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves began as early as possible in the new year (although it could be delayed by a late harvest extending into January). Immediately following their annual Christmas and New Year holidays, the slaves ploughed the fields in preparation for planting the canes. Whereas Jamaican slaves excavated holes with hand-wielded hoes into which they planted seed cane, Louisiana slaves used ploughs drawn by draft animals to open up furrows some six to eight feet apart, into which they placed lengths of seed cane that had been set aside from the previous year's crop.

Louisiana planters allowed a given cane piece to ratoon, usually for no more than two years. Since the sugar content declined with each year's ratooning, being so low by the third year as to make it unprofitable to permit another ratooned crop, the cane piece was replanted. Slaves thus planted about one-third of the estate's acreage of cane each year.

Slaves usually completed planting by the end of February, and, after the plant cane and ratoons sprouted, tended the crop through the first months of its growth. Tending the canes involved hoeing and ploughing between the rows to keep the cane piece free of grass and weeds. By late June or early July the canes had grown tall enough to withstand weeds. Slaves then ploughed and hoed ("threw up") the rows of cane in ridges to permit better drainage from the plant's roots. The sugar cane was then left to grow untended until harvest time.

Tending the crop required less work than either the planting or harvesting stages which monopolized the estate's labor. Thus, during spring and early summer, planters diverted the labor of some slaves to such tasks as growing provisions and secondary cash crops, preparing for the sugar harvest, and the many jobs necessary to the upkeep of the estate.

Through the spring and summer, planters had the slaves put in one or two crops of corn, as well as perhaps potatoes, pumpkins, sweet potatoes and other vegetables. Additionally, many planters grew peas in the cane fields. They planted this crop, after the canes had been laid by, in the strips of ground between the cane rows. Slaves harvested the crops, and cut hay for fodder, before the sugar harvest began.

Work also invariably needed to be done on the upkeep of the estate. Slaves mended roads and fences, built and repaired levees, made bricks for the construction and refurbishment of buildings on the plantation, dug and cleaned ditches, and gathered wood both for fuel and for use by the estate's coopers and masons.

After laying by the sugar crop, slaves worked full-time on the provision crops, the estate's upkeep, and a third important component of out-of-crop labor, preparation for the sugar harvest. Once the harvest began, the work of cutting canes and processing the crop continued without stopping until completed. Before its commencement, therefore, planters sought to have everything ready to see them through the harvest: sufficient wood to fuel the sugar mill, enough barrels and hogsheads to hold the crop, and adequate roads to transport the cane from field to works.

The sugar harvest usually began by mid-October. Slaves first cut and matlaid the cane that was to be set aside for the next year's seed. (Seed cane was laid out in mats and covered with a layer of earth to protect it from frost.) After matlaying the seed cane, the harvest began in earnest. So as to ensure an uninterrupted supply to the mill, slaves began cutting canes a day or two before the planter started up the sugar works. The planter hoped to run the mill without stopping until completion of the harvest. Unlike their Jamaican counterparts, slaves on Louisiana sugar estates thus worked seven days a week, day and night, in crop, although factors such as bad weather, impassable roads, and breakdowns at the mill could cause disruption of this schedule.

Because of the threat frost posed the sugar crop, harvest proceeded at a furious pace through late October, November and December. Freezing temperatures were most likely in the first couple of months of the new year, so planters tried to finish the crop by late December, at which time the slaves had their annual holidays. Often, however, harvest continued into January.

If frost came early to the cane fields, the normal harvest routine ceased and all hands worked at windrowing the crop. Slaves cut the canes, laid them in the furrows between the ridged cane rows, and covered them with cane leaves and tops. Windrowing afforded canes protection from the weather, but processing them had to proceed apace so as to prevent the canes spoiling or rotting.

Harvesting techniques resembled those employed in Jamaica. Slaves worked in gangs, cutting and stripping the canes with flat-bladed knives. Teams of slaves then loaded the crop onto carts drawn by draft animals and transported it to the sugar mill for processing.

Apart from the technological advances in sugar mill machinery, techniques of processing the crop were similar to those employed in Jamaica. The slaves on the estate performed all the labor, from feeding and stoking the mill to loading hogsheads of sugar and barrels of molasses onto the river steamers at the plantation wharf, and they did this work in addition to their harvest tasks in the field.

The gang system of labor prevailed on Louisiana sugar plantations, and, as in Jamaica, planters organized a series of gangs according to the working capacity of the slave labor force. The delegation of tasks reflected the disparity in the capabilities of the gangs. The

principal gang, made up of the strongest slaves on the estate, performed the most arduous work such as ploughing, hoeing and harvesting the cane, while the weaker gangs did less strenuous labor. For the two most burdensome tasks on the estate, ditching and wood-gathering, a sexual division of labor emerged, since usually only the men of the great gang did such work.

Slave children on Louisiana estates worked in gangs similar to the "pickaninny" gangs employed on Jamaican estates. Under the direction of a slave driveress, the children were initiated into the routine of gang labor, performing various light tasks such as cleaning-up around the sugar works and picking fodder. The work schedule of women with unweaned children accommodated their babies' feeding routine. The women either had additional time off from labor in the gangs, or worked in a "suckler's gang."

During harvest, the work regime adjusted to the demands of night work in the mill. Planters instituted a system of shifts whereby slaves had to work part of the night, every night, for the duration of the harvest.

The daily routine of Louisiana slaves resembled that of their Jamaican counterparts. Slaves worked sunup to sundown, with half-an-hour off for breakfast and a dinner break in the middle of the day that lasted one-and-a-half to two hours. Out of crop, slaves worked a five-and-a-half to six-and-a-half day week, having time off on Saturdays and Sundays. During harvest, however, the slaves had no respite from plantation work: they worked sixteen or more hours a day, seven days a week. Captain Thomas Hamilton, a traveler who commented in 1833 on the



harvest work schedule, noted that "the crop in Louisiana is never considered safe till it is in the mill, and the consequence is that when cutting once begins, the slaves are taxed beyond their strength, and are goaded to labour until nature absolutely sinks under the effort."<sup>11</sup>

Sugar slavery was arguably the most demanding of plantation systems in the Americas. The combination of agriculture and industry required in its cultivation and processing placed tremendous demands on the slave labor force. Louisiana sugar plantations earned a reputation among slaves throughout the South "as the most terrifying of all the various hells of the deep South to which blacks from the older slave economies of the tidewater states could be sold." "The cultivation of sugar in Louisiana," commented one anti-slavery traveler, "is carried on at an enormous expense of human life. Planters must buy to keep up their stock, and this supply principally comes from Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina." Mrs. Frances Milton Trollope, another committed abolitionist, claimed that "to be sent south and sold [was] the dread of all the slaves north of Louisiana." E. S. Abdy, an Englishman who traveled through the South in 1833-4, related how planters in the old South disciplined slaves by threatening to sell them "down the river to Louisiana." Slaves incorporated the Louisiana sugar region's unenviable reputation in the words of a song:

I born in Sout Calina,  
Fine country ebber seen,

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<sup>11</sup> Captain [Thomas] Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (Edinburgh and London, 1833), II, 229-30.



I guine from Sout Calina,  
 I guine to New Orlean..  
 Old boss, he discontentum--  
 He take de mare, black Fanny,  
 He buy a pedlar wagon,  
 And he boun' for Lousy-Anna.

Chorus

Old debble, Lousy-Anna,  
 Dat scarecrow for poor nigger,  
 Where de sugar-cane grow to pine-tree,  
 And de pine-tree turn to sugar.

He gone five days in Georgy,  
 Fine place for egg and ham;  
 When he get among the Ingens,  
 And he push for Alabam.  
 He look 'bout 'pon de prairie,  
 Where he hear de cotton grow;  
 But he spirit still contrary,  
 And he must fudder go.  
 He bound for Lousy-Anna.

Chorus -- Old debble, Lousy-Anna . . .

He look at Mrs. Seapy,  
 Good lady 'nough they say;

But he tink de State look sleepy,  
 And so he 'fuse to stay.  
 When once he leff Calina,  
 And on he mare, black Fanny,  
 He not take off he bridle-bit,  
 Till he get to Lousy-Anna.

Chorus -- Old debble, Lousy-Anna . . .<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the sugar boom in Jamaica, the slave population did not reproduce itself naturally. A causal analysis of this phenomenon must include the function of the slave sugar economy. The work schedule on sugar plantations, in combination with excessive punishment and inadequate rest, food, shelter and medical care proved destructive to slaves' lives.

The curse of Cain marked slave sugar cultivation in the Americas. Wherever the crop grew, slaves died. Throughout South and Central America and the Caribbean, slaves put to cultivating sugar died faster than they bore progeny. Only the slave trade, the "Black Mother," could maintain and increase the size of these slave populations.

Although no systematic study of fertility and mortality on Louisiana sugar plantations exists, the regime under sugar slavery there appears to have been similarly destructive. Abolitionist Theodore Weld

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<sup>12</sup> C. Duncan Rice, The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery (Baton Rouge, 1975), 287; Hamilton, Men and Manners, II, 229; Frances Milton Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, edited by Donald Smalley (New York, 1949), 246; E. S. Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, from April 1833, to October 1834 (London, 1835), III, 103-4.

cited statistics accumulated in 1829 by the Agricultural Society of Baton Rouge showing that, on a well-conducted sugar plantation, the death rate was two-and-a-half percent greater than the birth rate. A pro-abolitionist British traveler, Captain Thomas Hamilton, visited a Louisiana sugar estate in 1832, where he claimed that the planter gave him:

full details of the whole process of sugar cultivation, which he confessed was only carried on at an appalling sacrifice of life. At the season when the canes are cut and the boilers at work, the slaves are required to undergo incessant labour. . . . The fatigue is so great that nothing but the severest application of the lash can stimulate the human frame to endure it, and the sugar season is uniformly followed by a great increase in mortality among the slaves.

For Louisiana, the Black Mother was the interstate slave trade; the slave states of the old South were the suppliers of the men, women and children that made up the traffic.<sup>13</sup>

The United States, of course, was unique among New World slave societies in that the slave population within its borders reproduced itself naturally. Although slave imports to the United States totalled some half a million people prior to the closure of the slave trade in 1808, the slave population numbered around four million by the Civil War. Not all of the slave societies in the United States, however, had the same demographic performance. This, in part, was a function of the crop under cultivation. Sugar slavery in Louisiana was undeniably more severe and demanding (and consequently more destructive) than any of the

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<sup>13</sup> Theodore Dwight Weld, American Slavery As It Is (1839, rpt. New York, 1968), 38; Hamilton, Men and Manners, II, 229.

other slave systems in the United States save, perhaps, for rice cultivation.

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Slavery in the British Caribbean colonies formally ended on 1 August 1838, while on 6 December 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, declaring "that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Cuba and Brazil were the last bastions of slavery in the Americas. In 1870 and 1871, however, legislation initiated in these two societies aimed at gradual emancipation. On 13 May 1888 slavery was abolished in Brazil; the last slaves in the Americas were freed. Thus ended the New World's formal association with black slavery that had lasted almost four centuries.

The legacy of slavery, however, lives on. The oppression of the Afro-American descendants of slaves continues to blight the development of New World nations. Racism and discrimination, economic, social and political, encumber Afro-Americans in freedom, as chains and whips had encumbered their enslaved ancestors.

Slavery and post-slavery race relations thus have oppressed generations of Afro-Americans. Sadly, historiographical tradition has reinforced this oppression. In British Historians and the West Indies, Eric Williams attacks the scholarship that has distorted the historical record in order "to justify the indefensible and to seek support for

preconceived and outmoded prejudices." Similarly, C. L. R. James, another leading West Indian historian, claims that the dominant historiographical tradition has been the province of a "venal race of scholars, profiteering panders to national vanity." The scholarship emanating from this tradition has been instrumental in propagating consistently biased analyses, and, according to James, has "conspired to obscure the truth" about slavery and the black experience in the Americas. As a principal function of his scholarship, Williams seeks "to emancipate his [West Indian] compatriots whom the historical writings that he analyses sought to deprecate and to imprison for all time in the inferior status to which these writings sought to condemn them."<sup>14</sup>

A similar malaise has blighted the historiography of slavery in the United States. For decades after emancipation, racist doctrines permeated scholarship dealing with the peculiar institution. The writings of Ulrich B. Phillips, long the doyen of United States slavery historiography, provide the clearest example of this bias. He surely deserves a place among the "Tory historians, regius professors and sentimentalists" condemned by C. L. R. James for "represent[ing] plantation slavery as a patriarchal relation between master and slave." Phillips' view of the slave plantation as "a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization," fails to confront the terrible realities of the plantation regime, misrepresents slaves' lives and actions, and, because of the dominance

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<sup>14</sup> Eric Williams, British Historians and the West Indies (London, 1966), 12-3; C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins (1938, rpt. New York, 1963), 51.

of the historiographical tradition of which Phillips was a leader, has been instrumental in the deprecation, alluded to by Williams, both of contemporary Afro-Americans and the memory of their slave forebears.<sup>15</sup>

Phillips' work has remained influential despite the extensive scholarly inquiry into United States slavery in the half-century since its publication. Even as recently as 1975, Herbert Gutman commented on this enduring effect. "The social history of the enslaved Afro-American remains heavily shrouded by the shadow of U. B. Phillips," Gutman observes, "a shadow cast by more than that historian's narrow racial assumptions." Gutman claims that the model Phillips used to explain how slavery affected slaves and their descendants (that slave culture imitated planter culture), even if "freed from its racist assumptions, . . . still retains a powerful and wholly negative influence on the conceptualization of the Afro-American historical experience before the general emancipation."<sup>16</sup>

Other historians commenting on the historiography of slavery echo Gutman. Stanley Elkins observes of Kenneth Stampp's The Peculiar Institution that, despite its attack on Phillips, Stampp's "strategy . . . was still dictated by Phillips." Similarly, George Frederickson and Christopher Lasch claim that historians writing on slavery, despite their attitude to Phillips' findings, had accepted what he had defined

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<sup>15</sup> James, Black Jacobins, 19; Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (New York, 1918), 342-3; Williams, British Historians, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert G. Gutman, Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of 'Time on the Cross' (Urbana, Illinois, 1975), 7.

as the parameters of the debate on slave culture, had, indeed, "tried to meet him on his own ground."<sup>17</sup>

The traditions of Carlyle and Froude and of Phillips in the historiography of slavery in the British West Indies and the United States respectively have thus had lengthy and influential reigns. Only recently has a sustained challenge to their primacy emerged.

Two of the prominent harbingers of this historiographical reorientation were Eric Williams and C. L. R. James. In Capitalism and Slavery (1944), Williams directs the study of slavery towards a comparative perspective by viewing the development of the slave societies in the Americas within an emergent world capitalist system. The contribution of James lies in his analysis of the actions of slaves within plantation societies. The crux of James' argument in his masterly study The Black Jacobins (1938) is that "the ascendancy of the industrial interests were only a necessary precondition for the abolition of slavery, the root cause was not to be found in the interests of the strong but in the revolt of the weak." James depicted slaves as active, creative agents, thus challenging Phillips, who viewed slave behavior essentially as a response or reaction to stimuli emanating from the planter or his agents.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago, 1968), 21; George Frederickson and Christopher Lasch, "Resistance to Slavery," Civil War History, XIII (December 1967), 315-29.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (London, 1944); James, Black Jacobins; Ivor Oxaal, Black Intellectuals Come To Power (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), 75; Roderick A. McDonald, "The Williams Thesis: A Comment on the State of Scholarship," Caribbean Quarterly, XXV: 3 (September 1979), 63-8.



In the decades since the publication of Williams' and James' studies, and other influential work contemporaneous with them by scholars such as Aptheker, Herskovits, Hofstadter and Myrdal, the historiography of slavery has undergone tremendous developments. In 1947, Frank Tannenbaum published his seminal study Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas. Like the earlier work of Williams, Tannenbaum demonstrated the promise that comparative methodology held for the historiography of slavery. Subsequently, the scholarship of a host of historians, including influential studies by David Brion Davis, Carl Degler, Stanley Elkins, Elsa Goveia, Marvin Harris and Magnus Mörner, has established the comparative methodology in the vanguard of slavery historiography. Scholarship in slavery and other dimensions of Afro-American history, has, of course, also received stimulus and direction from various societal and intellectual developments such as the emergent ideology of the Civil Rights Movement and the reorientation in the disciplines of social history, economic history and the social sciences.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1943); Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York, 1941); Richard Hofstadter, "U. B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend," Journal of Negro History, XXIX:2 (April 1944), 109-24; Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York, 1944); Frank Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas (New York, 1947); David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca, New York, 1966); The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution (Ithaca, New York, 1975); Carl Degler, Neither Black Nor White (New York, 1971); Elkins, Slavery; Elsa V. Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven, Connecticut, 1965); "The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century," Revista de Ciencias Sociales, IV: 1 (March 1960), 75-105; Marvin Harris, Patterns of Race in the Americas (New York, 1964); Magnus Mörner, Race Mixture in the History of Latin America (Boston, 1967).



Slavery was a hemispheric phenomenon in the Americas. Throughout the New World, Western European colonizers coerced labor by enslaving Africans and Afro-Americans. The experience of black slaves varied little. For Africans transported across the Atlantic, often mere chance or temporary market conditions determined their American destination and thus the nationality of their white "masters." Slaves did not choose their slaveholders nor did they define the boundaries of the colonies where they were held in bondage. Slaves' lives as praedial laborers within a plantation system were affected little by the metropolitan affinities of the slaveholders. Yet, as the parameters within which to conduct their inquiries, historians have too readily accepted the spatial boundaries defined by the slave-holding colonizers. Consequently, the historiography of slavery, prior to the development of a comparative perspective, has tended to be atomized and parochial.

Studies of slavery encumbered by such parochialism necessarily carry a bias. This bias is introduced because the limits of a given study are defined in terms of only one of the protagonists. Thus, a study defined in terms of the spatial boundaries and the metropolitan and institutional affiliations of a set of planters, be they Catholic Luso-Brazilian, Protestant British North American, or whatever, may obscure continuities in the slavery experience that an alternative methodology will reveal.

David Brion Davis based his study of slavery in Western culture on the premise that "the problem of [black] slavery transcended national boundaries." By foregoing the delimitation of study within the narrow confines of a specific national perspective, the comparative dimension

of slavery scholarship has, according to Eugene Genovese, "introduced an invigorating freshness and a new boldness into historical work." The methodology has enabled analyses of the relationships of the protagonists, black and white, within slave societies, to the institution of slavery, thus permitting an assessment of what slaves did as slaves, and slave-holders as slave-holders.<sup>20</sup>

The development of the comparative perspective in the historiography of slavery, however, has not been devoid of methodological problems. Although poor research design, of course, detracts from the value of any historical inquiry, comparative analysis is particularly susceptible to this problem. Thus, great care must be taken in the formulation of comparative studies if the methodology is to realize its potential for affording a better view of the past. Historian Marc Bloch has written that:

in order to have historical comparison, two conditions must be fulfilled: a certain similarity or analogy between observed phenomena--that is obvious--and a certain dissimilarity between the environments in which they occur.<sup>21</sup>

When using a comparative methodology, therefore, historians must formulate their studies so that they may compare the comparable.

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<sup>20</sup> Davis, Slavery in Western Culture, vii; Laura Foner and Eugene Genovese, eds., Slavery in the New World: A Reader in Comparative History (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969), viii.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Bloch, "Toward a Comparative History of European Societies," in Frederic C. Lane and Jelle C. Riemersma, eds., Enterprise and Secular Change: Readings in Economic History (Homewood, Illinois, 1953), 496.

A comparative study of apples and oranges may indeed divulge a lot about these two entities, but, of course, can reveal little that two discrete studies would not disclose save that apples are not oranges, and vice versa.

This methodological problem has appeared in recent slavery historiography. In Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba, Herbert Klein contends that New World slave systems vary according to the institutional affiliations of the slave-holding colonizer. He claims that his findings support Tannenbaum's thesis that the slave experience differed throughout the Americas, and that the Portuguese and Spanish colonies, by virtue of their laws, religion and metropolitan influence, manifested a milder version of slavery, whereas the colonies of the North-West European nations had harsher slave systems.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the methodology of Klein's study is flawed. Klein fails either to analyze comparable slave systems, or to hold constant those variables that would necessarily distort his findings. The two slave societies in his study failed to meet the criteria Bloch claimed necessary for historical comparison; they were as different as apples and oranges! Whereas he looks at Virginia when the slave system underwent economic expansion, he confines his analysis of Cuba to the period prior to its sugar boom. During this time, Cuba was underdeveloped and underpopulated; the island's slave system was limited, static, and, in

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<sup>22</sup> Herbert Klein, Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba (Chicago, 1967).

large part, domestic and urban. Had Klein designed his research more judiciously, and compared the expanding plantation slave system of Virginia with the similar phase in the institution's development in Cuba (during the nineteenth century sugar boom), he would, as Franklin Knight has shown, have disclosed the similarities between slave plantation systems resulting from the formative compulsions of material and economic conditions. In a critique of Klein, Elsa Goveia points out that "slavery in the New World has been neither uniform nor static. For it was an economic and social institution that changed both in time and place." Goveia indicates the care with which historians should construct the research design of comparative study. "Such study," she explains, "will only yield sound results if it starts with a methodology which adequately defines whether or not the slave systems to be compared are of the same kind."<sup>23</sup>

Determining comparability is but the first step towards the formulation of an adequate research design. Since the emergence of the comparative study of black slavery, there has been considerable debate as to which phenomena provide the best indices of the structure of slave societies. In his pioneering study, Tannenbaum chose to focus specifically on the heritage of the slave-holders as the appropriate index of the character of the institution of slavery in a given New World society. Thus the important determinants of the form of slave societies were the

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<sup>23</sup> Knight, Slave Society; Goveia, "Comment on 'Anglicanism, Catholicism, and the Negro Slave,'" Comparative Studies in Society and History, VIII; 3 (April 1966), 328-30.

religion of the "masters," and the legal traditions and other metropolitan influences of the slave-holders' mother countries in Europe. Tannenbaum contends that slavery in the Ibero-American colonies was milder because the legislative tradition and dominant religion of Spain and Portugal recognized the "moral personality" of the slaves.<sup>24</sup>

Historians, however, have challenged both the applicability and the suitability of indices based on the metropolitan institutions of the slave-holders. Since, as Elsa Goveia points out, "the divorce of law and practice was . . . characteristic" of slave societies in the Americas, analyses of legal statutes and religious dogma may, indeed, tell little about the de facto organization and structure of a given society.<sup>25</sup>

Questions also arise as to whether the indices Tannenbaum chose are sufficient, in and of themselves, to an analysis of slavery. By claiming that such institutional influences determine the structure of the slave systems, Tannenbaum delineates a specific chain of causality, one which relegates the slave to the position of respondent. Africans and Afro-Americans, however, brought to the slave societies in which they lived cultures and institutional influences of their own, which contributed to shaping the structure of that society. The interaction and reciprocal influences of both slaves and non-slaves contributed to the development and structure of the slave systems of which they were constituents.

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<sup>24</sup> Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen.

<sup>25</sup> Goveia, "West Indian Slave Laws," 104.

Thus, an adequate analysis of slavery cannot be derived solely from a consideration of the slave-holder and his world. It is imperative for historians of slavery to recognize that slaves were, in anthropologist John Szwed's words, "culture bearers and creators." Historians must therefore incorporate into their analyses of slavery, what slaves believed and how they behaved.<sup>26</sup>

A methodological reorientation designed to incorporate the beliefs and behavior of slaves poses considerable challenges to the historian. Few slaves left personal records of their lives; whites were responsible for rendering most of the extant documentation on slavery. The historian cannot afford to eschew these records, although, indeed, they view slavery from the slave-holders perspective. The records must be used with care, and with an eye to the biases that they incorporate.

Recent contributions to the historiography of slavery have made good use of such materials, showing that they reveal much about the actions and activities of slaves. In his study of Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834, Barry Higman shows the wealth of information that can be gleaned from, among other sources, census materials such as the Returns of the Registration of Slaves, a triennial compilation of the slave populations in the British West Indies. Russell Menard and Allan Kulikoff, in their pioneering studies of slavery in the Chesapeake, demonstrate that, used with care and sensitivity, legal documentation such as probate records affords tremendous insight into

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<sup>26</sup> John F. Szwed, "The Politics of Afro-American Culture," in Dell Hymes, ed., Reinventing Anthropology (New York, 1973).

the structure of slave communities. Studies such as these are in the vanguard of slavery scholarship. Census data and probate records, along with other hitherto underutilized materials such as court proceedings, slave sales and church and mission records, afford rich resources for further historical inquiry, as do the government documents and parliamentary papers of European nations and their colonial dependencies.<sup>27</sup>

In analyzing how slaves acted in slavery, historians also have yet to realize fully the potential that plantation manuscripts hold. Although such records, again, were compiled by whites, they provide a detailed chronicle of the complexity of slaves' lives. The plantation system involved an intricate organization of life and work, the coordination of which necessitated sophisticated record-keeping. Planters and their delegates noted daily labor routines, kept punishment records and listed runaways. They kept registers of births and deaths, and recorded sickness among slaves. Various other accounts reveal dietary, clothing and housing patterns, as well as expenditures for slaves and payments to and by slaves. Planters' correspondence and diaries, similarly, are rich in detail concerning the activities of slaves. In sum, although these plantation manuscripts view slavery through the prism of

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<sup>27</sup> Barry W. Higman, Slave Population; Allan Kulikoff, "The Beginnings of the Afro-American Family in Maryland," in Aubrey C. Land, et al., eds., Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland (Baltimore, 1977); "The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700-1790," William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, XXXV: 2 (April 1978), 226-59; "A 'Prolifick' People: Black Population Growth in the Chesapeake Colonies," Southern Studies, XVI (1977), 391-428; Russell R. Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population, 1658 to 1730: A Demographic Profile of Blacks in Four Counties," William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, XXXII: 1 (1975), 29-54.



white eyes, they provide invaluable insight into the lives of slaves, the manner in which they organized their family and community, and the impact their actions had on the structure and organization of the plantation.

Plantation records have provided the data base for some of the most exciting developments in recent slavery historiography. Even a partial listing of such studies shows the extent to which their contribution has dominated the scholarship in recent years both in quantity and methodological orientation. The historiography of slavery in the British Caribbean has been immeasurably enriched by the work of Edward Brathwaite, Michael Craton, Richard Dunn, Stanley Engerman, Goveia, Douglas Hall, Higman, Sidney Mintz, Orlando Patterson, Richard Sheridan and others. Scholarship on slavery in Ibero-America and the rest of the non-British West Indies has benefitted from the work of Roger Bastide, Frederick Bowser, Gabriel Debien, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Neville Hall, Knight, Mintz, Mörner, Colin Palmer, Richard Price and others. The historiography of slavery in the United States, similarly, has been well-served by a scholarship that has recognized the value of plantation records, and has used them with care and discernment in disclosing the hitherto under-recognized fullness and complexity of slaves' lives. Scholars contributing to this development are, among others, Paul David, Engerman, Robert Fogel, Genovese, Gutman, Kulikoff, Lawrence Levine, Menard, Leslie Howard Owens, Richard Sutch, Peter Temin and Peter Wood.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Edward Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820 (London, 1971); Michael Craton and James Walvin, A



Scholars have, at least partially, been able to circumvent or deal with the problem of the white bias inherent in much of the extant manuscripts. Slaves left more direct evidence of their lives in bondage.

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Jamaican Estate: A History of Worthy Park (London, 1970); Craton, Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978); Richard S. Dunn, Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713 (Chapel Hill, 1972); Stanley L. Engerman, "Some Economic and Demographic Comparisons of Slavery in the United States and the British West Indies," The Economic History Review, Second Series, XXIX: 2 (May 1976), 258-75; Herbert S. Klein and Stanley Engerman, "Fertility Differentials between Slaves in the United States and the British West Indies: A Note on Lactation Practices," William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, XXXV: 2 (April 1978), 357-74; Goveia, Slave Society; "West Indian Slave Laws"; Douglas Hall, "Slaves and Slavery in the British West Indies," Social and Economic Studies, XI: 4 (1962), 305-18; "Absentee-Proprietorship in the British West Indies to about 1850," Jamaican Historical Review, IV (1964), 15-35; Higman, Slave Population; "Household Structure and Fertility on Jamaican Slave Plantations: A Nineteenth Century Example," Population Studies, XXVII (1973), 527-50; "The Slave Family and Household in the British West Indies," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, VI (1975), 261-87; Sidney Mintz, "The Jamaican Internal Marketing Pattern," Social and Economic Studies, IV: 1 (March 1955), 95-103; Mintz and Douglas Hall, "The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System," in Mintz, ed., Papers in Caribbean Anthropology (New Haven, Connecticut, 1960), Publications in Anthropology 57; Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London, 1967); Sheridan, Sugar and Slavery; The Development of the Plantations to 1750 and An Era of West Indian Prosperity (London, 1970); "'Sweet Malefactor': The Social Costs of Slavery and Sugar in Jamaica and Cuba, 1807-54," The Economic History Review, Second Series, XXIX: 2 (May 1976), 236-57; "The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century," The Economic History Review, Second Series, XVIII: 2 (August 1965), 292-311; Roger Bastide, African Civilizations in the New World, trans. Peter Green (New York, 1971); The African Religions of Brazil, trans. Helen Sebbon (Baltimore, 1978); Frederick P. Bowser, The African Slave in Colonial Peru (Stanford, 1974); Gabriel Debien, Les esclaves aux Antilles francaises (XVIIe - XVIIIe siecle) (Fort-de-France, 1974); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies (Baltimore, 1971); Neville Hall, "Slaves Use of Their 'Free' Time in the Danish Virgin Islands in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century," Journal of Caribbean History, XIII (1980), 21-43; Knight, Slave Society; The African Dimension in Latin American Societies; Mintz, Caribbean Transformations (Chicago, 1974); "Labor and Sugar in Puerto Rico and Jamaica," Comparative Studies in Society and History, I (1959), 273-81; "Slavery and the Slaves," Caribbean Studies, VIII: 4 (1969), 65-70; Mintz and Richard Price, An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective (Philadelphia, 1976); Mörner, Race Mixture; Colin

Both during and after slavery, a steady flow of slave autobiographies chronicled life under slavery through the eyes of slaves. Many of these narratives, along with various other testimony by slaves, provided support for abolitionist activities, and as such must be carefully and judiciously used by historians. Nevertheless, as John Blassingame has shown, they have tremendous potential for illuminating the slaves' past.<sup>29</sup>

The study of slavery in the United States has benefited immeasurably from the foresight of scholars who recognized the potential contribution that the recollections of ex-slaves could make. The effort to collect these reminiscences of life under slavery culminated with a government-sponsored project in the late 1930s. Ultimately, thousands of ex-slaves gave testimony about their lives; the scope covered in the

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A. Palmer, Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976); Price, comp. Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas (Baltimore, 1979); Paul A. David, Herbert Gutman, Richard Sutch, Peter Temin and Gavin Wright, Reckoning with Slavery (New York, 1976); Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery (Boston, 1974); Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, 1974); Gutman, Numbers Game: The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York, 1976); Kulikoff, "The Beginnings of the Afro-American Family;" "The Origins of Afro-American Society;" "A 'Prolifick' People;" Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York, 1977); Menard, "Maryland Slave Population;" Leslie Howard Owens, This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South (New York, 1976); Sutch, "The Breeding of Slaves for Sale and the Westward Expansion of Slavery, 1850-1860," in Engerman and Genovese, eds., Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies (Princeton, New Jersey, 1975); Peter H. Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York, 1974).

<sup>29</sup> John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community.

questions posed the slaves, and the size of the cohort interviewed, have, as scholars like Olli Alho, Paul Escott, Julius Lester, George Rawick and Norman Yetman show, permitted a much fuller understanding of slaves' lives. Even a cursory perusal of these documents illustrates the diversity of life, and the vitality and creativity of slaves that even the oppression of servitude could not stifle. George Rawick found the divergence between the activities of slaves as field laborers and their lives outside this labor regime, after work and during other time off, so striking, that he incorporated the dichotomy into the methodology of his study:

The slaves labored from sunup to sundown and sometimes beyond. This labor dominated part of their existence--but only part. Under slavery, as under any other social system, those at the bottom of the society were not totally dominated by the master class. They found ways of alleviating the worst of the system and at times of dominating their masters. They built their own community out of materials taken from the African past and the American present, with the values and memories of Africa giving meaning to the new creation. They lived and loved from sundown to sunup.<sup>30</sup>

South African writer Andre Brink may convey some of the essence of the dichotomy in the words of advice an African woman gave her son in the novel Looking On Darkness. She told him "Joseph, look, inne daytime I work my blerry arse off fo' the white people, but when it gets dark it's our turn. The Lawd give us the night to have a bit of happiness, for the days are hell." Poet LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), in

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<sup>30</sup> Olli Alho, The Religion of Slaves (Helsinki, 1976); Paul D. Escott, Slavery Remembered (Chapel Hill, 1979); Julius Lester, To Be A Slave (New York, 1968); George P. Rawick, From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community (Westport, Connecticut, 1972), 11-2; Norman Yetman, Life Under the 'Peculiar Institution' (New York, 1970).

a stanza that concludes a series of essays entitled Home, captures another dimension of the dichotomy:

The fair are  
fair, and death  
ly white.

The day will not save them  
and we own  
the night.<sup>31</sup>

Much of the activity that Rawick and the others describe went on beyond the ken of whites, and as such rarely found its way into the whites' chronicles. Historians must, therefore, not only recognize the partiality of white testimony on slavery, that it undoubtedly misses much of the family and community life of slaves "from sundown to sunup," but also discern the importance of uncovering testimony slaves left.

None of the other American societies in which slavery existed are as richly endowed with slave narrative collections as the United States, and, since few ex-slaves are alive, there is no way to fill this lacuna. Nevertheless, slave testimony is still being uncovered. The leading scholars in these efforts come largely from outside the historical profession. Their findings, however, are of great importance to historians; indeed, they indicate directions which historians cannot

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<sup>31</sup> Andre P. Brink, Looking On Darkness (New York, 1975), 38; LeRoi Jones/Imamu Amiri Baraka, Home (New York, 1966), 252.

ignore. The work of anthropologists such as Marvin Harris, Mintz, Price and Szwed has been able to disclose much concerning life under slavery by analyses of Afro-American cultures. The archaeological work of Jerome Handler and Frederick Lange in Barbados, and Barry Higman in Jamaica, has shown how much can be learned from excavating the sites of slave villages and graveyards on sugar plantations. The potential of these fields of inquiry has, as yet, not been fully realized.<sup>32</sup>

Recent historiography, thus, has made salutary progress in analyzing the slavery experience. Both its methodology and findings have challenged traditional interpretations of the "peculiar institution." The comparative technique, and the recognition of the role of slaves as a motive and creative force in determining the structure of slavery forced reorientation of the debate.

## iv

Sugar slavery justifiably earned its reputation, throughout the Americas, as the "Sweet Malefactor." To titillate the palates of white Western Europeans and North Americans, black slaves suffered and died. The use of a Hobbesian analogy in describing the lives of sugar slaves as "nasty, brutish and short," may err only in underestimating the

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<sup>32</sup> Harris, Patterns of Race; Mintz and Price, Anthropological Approach; Szwed, "Politics of Afro-American Culture"; Szwed and N. Whitten, eds., Afro-American Anthropology (New York, 1970); Jerome S. Handler and Frederick W. Lange, Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978); Higman, "A Report on Excavations at Montpelier and Roehampton," Jamaica Journal, VIII (1974), 40-5.



horrors and torment undergone by the enslaved Africans and Afro-Americans.<sup>33</sup>

There exist, throughout recorded time, few more shameful instances of man's inhumanity to man than the institution of black slavery in the Americas. Slaves, however, proved capable of transcending the brutality of the planters and their agents. Slave community life throughout the reign and dominion of King Sugar exhibited tremendous vitality; the hundreds of thousands of people who lived their entire lives and died in bondage displayed resourcefulness, endeavor, creativity, dignity and courage, the array of humanity's attributes which even as coercive a system as slavery could not stifle. The triumph of slaves over the adversity of bondage is displayed in numerous aspects of their lives: art and music, family and community development, religion, resisting and rebelling against their enslavement.

Slaves also established, within plantation communities, economic systems independent of the planters. A study of sugar slavery in Jamaica and Louisiana reveals that, throughout the two plantation societies, and, indeed, within every sugar estate, slaves developed such systems. The independence and creativity of slaves is manifest in their economic activities. An analysis of the internal economy thus offers unique insight into how slaves lived within the institution of sugar plantation slavery.

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil (1651, rpt. New York, 1962), 100; Sheridan, "Sweet Malefactor."

Part I  
The Internal Economies

## Chapter 1

### The Internal Economy of Sugar Plantation Slaves in Jamaica



The slave communities on sugar plantations in Jamaica had thriving and dynamic internal economies. Slaves who in law were defined as chattels, the property of a master, had in reality property rights of their own and controlled the accumulation and disposal of earnings and possessions. These de facto rights had no legal status. Nevertheless, they existed in the two plantation societies under study, and indeed elsewhere in North America and the British Caribbean, and appear as binding as the legal recognition given the property rights (peculium) of slaves in Spanish American slave societies.

It is important to recognize that there was no protection in law for the internal economy, or any of its components such as holdings of real estate, stock, crops and manufactures, disposal of labor and accumulation of money and goods. Slaves had, for example, no legal right to the land they cultivated or to the revenue accrued from the sale of crops; no legal right to own or dispose of poultry, pigs, goats and other livestock; and no legal right to sell their labor on certain days. Legal provisions, however, were less important in structuring relations between slaves and planters than was a modus operandi which took into consideration the power of the slave community.

Although the planters monopolized the means of violence and had wide latitude over the treatment of slaves, the slaves exercised some control over their work and lives. For example, slaves could affect the productiveness of their labor by undertaking job actions such as malingering, breaking tools, work slowdowns and poisoning or maltreating livestock. Planters responded to such actions by coercing slaves' labor

through threats, punishments (primarily, though not exclusively, whipping), or the removal of recalcitrants by sale or execution. The extent and effect of such punishment should not be minimized, yet it does not fully explain slave/planter relations.

In slave societies, labor was expensive and scarce. Developing plantation societies had sufficient capital for investment and an abundance of fertile virgin land, but there was a shortage of labor. This in fact is the classic definition of H. J. Nieboer's "open resource" society: conditions which, he contended, must be present in order for slavery to exist. Thus, if planters wanted to realize the potential wealth of their estates, they needed the labor of a coerced work force.<sup>1</sup>

Slaves undoubtedly recognized the value of their labor. Working within the limits of the power relations of the plantation societies, they could extract from the planter concessions regarding their personal lives and their individual autonomy.

The internal economy of the slave community was part of the body of rights to which the slaves laid claim and which the planters acknowledged. Although statutory law did not recognize these rights, they existed de facto, the result of the process in which slaves informally negotiated conditions of life and labor. Planters transgressed these rights at their peril, for transgression could cause a decline in labor productivity. Only unusual circumstances impelled planters

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<sup>1</sup> H. J. Nieboer, Slavery as an Industrial System (The Hague, 1900), 387-91.

to such action since they were aware of the realities of labor relations and the consequences of breaking the established compact.

Jamaican planter Ezekiel Dickinson exemplified this, albeit from the perspective of an absentee. Time and again he counselled his nephew Caleb, manager of his St. Elizabeth sugar plantations, to accommodate the wishes of the slaves. He was "very desirous of . . . all our People having ev'ry reasonable indulgence" and asked "that no care or attention . . . be wanting to the Negroes," pointing out "the Gang of Negroes is the Planter's riches: the attention and care of them was one means that enabled our ancestors to settle and cultivate their Estates with such success." He insisted that all whites on the estate recognize the need for such attention to the slave labor force and contended that an overseer who was not humane to slaves was "not fit to run an Estate."<sup>2</sup>

In the years 1815 to 1816, the novelist Matthew Gregory Lewis visited his sugar estate in Jamaica which, in his absence, had been managed by an attorney. The following section of his journal clearly shows that the slaves on the plantation knew their rights and acted in concert when they were violated.

On the Sunday after my first arrival, the whole body of Eboe negroes came to me to complain of the attorney, and more particularly of one of the book-keepers. I listened to them, if not with unwearied patience, at least with subdued fortitude, for about an hour and a half; and finding some grounds for their complaint against

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<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel Dickinson to Caleb Dickinson, 19 August 1786, 28 November 1786, 10 February 1787, from Letterbook of Ezekiel Dickinson, Papers of Caleb and Ezekiel Dickinson, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.

the latter, in a few days I went down to their quarter of the village, told them that to please them I had discharged the book-keeper, named a day for examining their other grievances, and listened to them an hour more.<sup>3</sup>

The Lewis plantation slaves acted as a united labor force, aware of their power, value and rights, and not as chattels, deprived of all rights. Lewis, however, not only dealt with disputes on his own plantation, but also confronted the grievances of slaves from nearby estates. He recorded a series of such occurrences.

A large body of negroes, from a neighbouring estate, came over to Cornwall [Lewis' estate] this morning, to complain of hard treatment, in various ways, from their overseer and drivers, and requesting me to represent their injuries to their trustee here, and their proprietor in England.

I went down to the negro-houses to hear the whole body of Eboes lodge a complaint against one of the book-keepers, and appoint a day for their being heard in his presence. On my return to the house, I found two women belonging to a neighbouring estate, who came to complain of cruel treatment from their overseer, and to request me to inform their trustee how ill they had been used, and see their injuries redressed.

A young mulatto carpenter, belonging to Horace Beckford's estate of Shrewsbury, came to beg my intercession with his overseer.<sup>4</sup>

Again, the slaves exhibited by their actions an awareness of a body of rights whose abridgement they protested. Further, the slaves implied by their actions that their "owners" not only recognized these rights, but also knew that their interests were best served by preserving and protecting them.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Gregory Lewis, Journal of a West India Proprietor (London, 1834), 187-8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 115, 129-30, 144.

The internal economy was a fundamental part of the customary rights claimed by slaves. It, in its turn, was based primarily on the exercise of property rights and the use of labor time for their own personal gain.

Slaves accrued profit from property held in land, livestock and manufactures. In both Jamaica and Louisiana, slaves had de facto control of certain tracts of land on the plantation. These lands fall into two categories, gardens and grounds. The occupant had the use of the small garden area around each house in the slave village, while elsewhere on the plantation slaves received individual apportionments of more sizable areas of land from tracts specifically set aside for their use.

In Jamaica, the estate provided slaves little food. Planters gave slaves only a meager protein ration, usually salt herring, and expected the slaves to provide the rest of their food themselves from their provision grounds. This meant, however, that the slaves could work for themselves and keep the profit. They received both land and time off from regular plantation work to cultivate the crops. Many slaves raised both their subsistence needs and a surplus which they sold for gain. Planters agreed to this practice, and accepted that slaves kept the accrued profits.

Slaves controlled both the crops and the land on which they were grown. Although they lacked legal title to the land, they asserted rights to it that the planters recognized and respected. Government records contain testimony illustrating the extent of slave control. John

Blackburn, a 35-year resident of Jamaica who managed 30 sugar estates, gave evidence in 1807 before a governmental committee on the commercial state of the West Indies. Blackburn's testimony, although couched in typically inflated planter rhetoric, did indicate that slaves exercised certain control over the provision grounds:

in the infancy of a Plantation the Negro provision grounds are near their houses, which again are close to the works; that in the extension of the Plantation, it becomes necessary to cultivate in cane the Negro provision-grounds, and give them others at some farther distance, and in doing so, it is a matter of great delicacy to be done with much leisure and caution; you must give them other grounds of better quality, and well stocked with provisions fit for use, and pay them money to get their consent to make the exchange. You must particularly take care, by bribery or otherwise, to get the sanction of the head people, or your slaves would probably get discontented, and careless of their own property and of yours.

Blackburn went on to refer to "their houses, their provision grounds, their gardens and orchards, (which they consider as much their own property as their Master does his Estate)."<sup>5</sup>

Colonial Office records contain similar evidence. In the "Minutes of the proceedings of the Committee of Secrecy and Safety in the Parish of St. James" for February 1792, reference was made to a Mr. Whitaker who:

had sold a property called Windsor Castle and told his Negroes that as they were to leave the place he would pay them for their Grounds which he did at the valuation which the Negroes themselves put upon them, although that valuation amounted to several hundred Pounds more than the valuation that had been put on them by the Gentlemen who

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<sup>5</sup> Testimony of John Blackburn, Report from the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies, ordered to be printed 24 July 1807 (London, 1807), 40, 43.



had been appointed to estimate the value of the property and on whose estimation the place had just been sold. I understand that the Negroes Grounds were valued at about £280, and that Mr. Whitaker paid them for their grounds, for some stock and to compensate their inconveniences on leaving the place near £1000.<sup>6</sup>

Provision grounds on established estates in Jamaica were usually some distance from the slave village. They were therefore not readily accessible either for keeping stock requiring daily attention, or for brief working spells. Slaves kept most of their stock closer to the quarters, usually in the plots adjacent to their houses. They also used these plots as kitchen gardens, where they cultivated various crops for domestic consumption and sale and in which they may have had small orchards.

In these kitchen gardens, also called "shell-blow grounds," slaves might spend odd times during the work week, especially at midday dinner-break and at sundown. They were called "shell-blow grounds" because slaves could work there during dinner and be able to respond to the shell-blow alarm summoning them to the fields for the afternoon's labor. Descriptions of the kitchen gardens indicate that some appeared prosperous.

William Beckford saw slave houses situated in gardens containing fruit trees and in which he said there was often a hut that functioned as a store house and stock house. In addition, some gardens had enclosed pig-sties. It was his impression that "most negroes in Jamaica

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<sup>6</sup> "Minutes of the proceedings of the Committee of Secrecy and Safety in the Parish of St. James, Jamaica, February 1792," in C.O. 137/90, Correspondence, Original--Secretary of State, November 1791 to October 1792, Public Record Office, London.

have either fowls, hogs, or cattle; some have all." Hector McNeill, a staunch defender of the plantocracy, mentioned that in his travels in Jamaica he had seen slave houses encircled by kitchen gardens containing plantain groves, banana and orange trees, hog-sties and flocks of fowl. He also noted that slaves kept larger stock, presumably cattle, in the plantation pen, although fewer slaves, however, owned cattle than owned poultry and smaller livestock. The attorneys for John Foster Barham's plantations wrote to him that "each [slave] possessing stock consider[s] them as much their own Property (using their own words 'as Massa does Plantation')." <sup>7</sup>

The pens and sties Beckford and McNeill saw in the kitchen gardens probably resembled in construction a description contained in a contemporary journal. Slaves built "inclosures of pales, sticks placed near [their] houses to confine stock." Hog-sties were built with logs piled pyramidally in squares crossing at the ends and covered with boughs at the top. Slaves built these sties on the sides of hills when possible, in order to drain moisture and effluent out of them. Stock pens comprised "upright posts placed very near each other, sustaining a slight roof of stick and thatch." <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William Beckford, A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica (London, 1790), 229; Remarks upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica (London, 1788), 91; Hector McNeill, Observations on the Treatment of Negroes in the Island of Jamaica (London, [1788?]), 3-4; J. C. Grant and J. R. Webb to J. F. Barham, Westmoreland, 12 September 1813, Barham Papers, MS. Clarendon dep. c. 358. Bundle 1. Jamaica correspondence 1809-1816, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>8</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits of the Creolian and African Negroes in Jamaica," The Columbian Magazine; or Monthly Miscellany, (Kingston), 3 (September, 1797), 253.



Typical kitchen gardens would have been less well supplied than those described by Beckford and McNeill. Still, slaves usually put the land around their houses to use in raising stock and provisions which could "not only furnish [them] with sufficient food for their own consumption, but an overplus to carry to market."<sup>9</sup>

According to Rev. John Riland, a sugar planter in northern Jamaica, slaves did not always have to venture abroad to find a market for their surplus commodities. He maintained that, from the pigs and poultry raised in the kitchen gardens, "the master usually purchase[d] the provisions of his table, paying the Negroes the common price for which they would sell at the market." Various plantation records show that this was normal practice. For example, plantation accounts for 1788 of Charles Gordon's Georgia Estate included the entry, "To cash paid Mason Prince for a young Steer raised by him on the Estate £8:10:0." David Ewart, the agent on Lord Penrhyn's King's Valley Estate bought stock belonging to the plantation slaves. "I make it a practice to buy the Calves when they are a year old at a Doubloon each. . . . I think it is a fair bargain for both parties, the Negroes are satisfied with it." Early in December 1807, Ewart reported that he bought the slaves' stock, comprising "bullkins and heifers" for £140. He paid the slaves cash as "money is more acceptable to them at this Period of the Year as they wish to lay it out in little matters of finery etc. for Xmas." Ewart limited the amount of stock which each slave could have, probably

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<sup>9</sup> John Stewart, A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica (1823, rpt. New York, 1969), 267.

because they were kept in the plantation pen. He wrote to Lord Penrhyn, "I found several negroes had 4 or 5 head of Stock and I expressed a wish that each negro shall have but one meaning that they should distribute them amongst their children and relations or sell them to the Estate to which they readily agreed and several were transferred from one negro to another." The slaves apparently wanted to keep the stock, as none availed themselves of the option of selling stock to the estate. Ewart did not mention whether slaves who received the cattle paid those who had formerly owned them. It may have been that those who divested themselves of stock transferred the animals to members of their family and actually retained control over them.<sup>10</sup>

In their kitchen gardens slaves raised numerous fruits and vegetables. Fruit trees may have included coconuts, oranges, mangoes, akees and avocados. Some may have had small stands of bananas, the local staple plantain, and various indigenous vegetables such as yams, eddoes, okra and calalu. Although slaves had to be concerned initially with providing adequate food for themselves and their families, many were also able to produce a surplus which they could sell.

Slaves controlled the disposal of cash crops elsewhere within the environs of the plantation. On John and Charles Ellis's Caymanas Estate slaves apparently laid claim over all the coconut trees on the plantation. The yield from marketing the fruit of a single coconut

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<sup>10</sup> Rev. John Riland, Memoirs of a West India Planter (London, 1827), 151; 1788, Charles Gordon, Account Current with Francis Grant, Gordon of Buthlaw and Cairness Papers, 1160/6/61, University of Aberdeen Library; David Ewart to Lord Penrhyn, 26 October 1807 and 8 December 1807, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1479 and 1495, University of the West Indies.

tree was about £5:6:8 (one doubloon) per annum, so control of this abundant plant meant the possibility of substantial earnings. Slaves on the Caymanas Estate were able to exert influence in their claim to this crop. Reportedly, when some coconut trees had to be felled to make way for the construction of an overseer's house, the slaves who claimed title over them received remuneration, although the trees were not actually growing in their gardens.<sup>11</sup>

Slaves grew most of the crops they consumed and marketed in the provision grounds. Although slaves grew a variety of plants, by far the most important crop in the provision grounds was the plantain, and much of the land was laid out in walks of that staple. Slaves kept little stock at the provision grounds because they could not give the animals sufficient attention, although, according to Thomas Cooper who had spent some time in Robert Hibbert's estate, they did keep some goats there, presumably tethered or hobbled.<sup>12</sup>

The Consolidated Slave Acts of Jamaica (1792) decreed that planters "allot and appoint a sufficient quantity of land for every slave . . . and allow such slave sufficient time to work the same, in order to provide him, her, or themselves, with sufficient provisions for his, her, or their maintenance." The Act deemed "sufficient time"

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<sup>11</sup> The Jamaica Journal, 1 (November 1818), 312-318.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Cooper, Correspondence Between George Hibbert Esq. and the Rev. Thomas Cooper Relative to the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica (London, 1824), 37.

to be "one day in every fortnight, to cultivate their own provision grounds, exclusive of Sundays, except during the time of crop."<sup>13</sup>

According to John Stewart, a Jamaican planter, the amount of land adult slaves received as provision grounds was "about half an acre." Those with families got "an additional proportion of land." Provision grounds comprised the land unsuitable for sugar cultivation. In developing plantations, this was a function of distance. In their early years, plantations put the land closest to the sugar works into cane and allotted slaves provision grounds at a farther distance. As plantations developed, the allotment of provision grounds became a function not only of distance but also of quality. Mature sugar estates ultimately put into cane as much of the suitable land as possible. Slaves therefore got as their provision grounds lands unfit for sugar: the less fertile scrub and uplands. These were usually at the periphery of or even outside the estates, a considerable distance from the slave villages. William Hylton, an American who had settled in Jamaica as a sugar planter, lamented that the distance from the slaves' homes to their provision grounds led to fatigue. Another planter expressed similar misgivings, pointing out that the provision grounds were sometimes miles from the plantation. Such extensive travel and the arduous work at their grounds debilitated slaves already overworked by plantation labor. William Beckford described the process. If slaves got Saturday off, they would travel to the provision grounds, which were sometimes

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<sup>13</sup> Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies (1793, rpt. New York, 1972), II, 145, 158.

five to seven miles distant. There they would spend the day working their grounds, returning in the evening with enough provisions for themselves for the coming week and for sale at Sunday market. If the slaves only got Sunday off they would have to go first to the provision grounds and then to the market, and in so doing would have to travel considerable distances, to say nothing of the work they had to do at their grounds and at market.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Consolidated Slave Acts mandated "one day in every fortnight . . . exclusive of Sundays, except during time of crop," actual practices varied. Slaves did no plantation work on Sundays. Those capable and willing devoted this day to working in their provision grounds and at market--Sunday was market day throughout Jamaica. The number of "negro days" other than this was not as uniform, and various plantation journals reflect this disparity. The work schedule for the Rose Hall plantation, for example, lists slaves, during harvest, "taking days" in their grounds only on Sundays. Harvest lasted from January through May. For the rest of the year, slaves were "taking days" twice a week, on Sunday and either Thursday, Friday, or Saturday.<sup>15</sup>

On Braco Estate in Trelawny, overseer James Galloway's work book showed an eight-week spell of harvest labor assignments from 8

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<sup>14</sup> John Stewart, A View, 267; Letter from William Hylton, 26 June 1808, MS 670, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston; [A Jamaica Planter], Observations upon the African Slave Trade, and on the Situation of Negroes in the West Indies (London, 1788), 29; Beckford, A Descriptive Account, 152-3.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 158; Rose Hall Journal, 1817-1822, IB/26, No. 1, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

May to 26 June 1796, which listed work schedules for every day except Sundays. Nothing was recorded for the eight Sundays, so one may infer that the slaves were "taking days" then, for in the following year, throughout harvest time, the notation for each Sunday read "in their grounds." In the twelve weeks, all out of crop, between 1 October and 18 December of that year, the slaves had "negro days" on six occasions both on Saturday and Sunday, on four occasions both on Friday and Sunday, and twice only got Sunday off. Apparently, they received compensatory time out of crop for not having had their days off every other week during the harvest. There was thus established on Braco a work pattern which predated by twenty years any comparable legislation. It was not until 1816 that an act for "the better regulation and government of slaves" incorporated this principle by mandating 26 "negro days" per annum, an average of one every other week both in and out of crop. Another example shows that slaves on Braco were accustomed to the philosophy of compensatory time. Slaves who had been working in the mountains, perhaps at the pen, and had not been able to spend their usual time in the provision grounds were recompensed on their return. The work schedule for Friday 22 August 1797 recorded regular plantation work for all slaves on the plantation "except those who lost their day while in mountains [who were] in their grounds."<sup>16</sup>

It was, of course, in the planters' interest that the provision grounds be well kept and productive, because they supplied the slaves with most of their food. This partly explains why the tradition of

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<sup>16</sup> Braco Estate Journal, May 1795-November 1797, 4/2, Jamaica Archives; Geo. III, c. 25 (1816), An Act for the Subsistence, Clothing and the Better Regulation and Government of Slaves.



"negro days" was not interfered with; extant plantation records consistently show that slaves got at least one day a week off throughout the year. Many slaves, however, put these "negro days" to additional use: not only to raise enough food for their consumption, but also to produce a surplus for sale. With such compelling interests at stake, it is likely that if planters had attempted to abridge the number of "negro days," slaves would have resisted. Slaves were in a position to shape such work relations. If their traditional rights were abrogated they could sabotage the plantation's operations in various ways. To paraphrase John Blackburn's testimony quoted above, planters did not want the slaves to be discontented and careless of their own and the plantation's property.<sup>17</sup>

Earnings accumulation through the sale of surpluses produced in gardens and grounds was tremendously important in the development of the internal economies of slave communities in Jamaican sugar estates. To fully understand the dynamics of this process of accumulation, however, one must place it within the context of both plantation and island societies.

In the first place, a terribly exacting work regime, over and above the labor expected of them by the planter, confronted slaves who undertook to raise surplus provisions for market. Before dawn and in the evening, after a full day's labor, these slaves had to tend their stock, which also meant gathering fodder. They spent lunch-times ("dinner break" in plantation terminology) in their shell-blow grounds,

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<sup>17</sup> Testimony of John Blackburn, Report from the Committee, 40, 43.

thus getting little rest from their morning's exertion before returning to the fields until sunset. They spent "negro days" and Sundays in their provision grounds and at market, usually travelling considerable distances between their homes, their grounds, and the market. Therefore they faced extensive travel and a great deal of hard work. Often all of this had to be done in a single day, Sunday. At the provision grounds, the slaves had little time to tend their allotments of land. The soil was usually the most inhospitable scrub or high land in the area, less fertile and harder to work than the acreage in cane. In the brief time at their disposal, slaves had to tend their crops as best they could and harvest what they were to eat during the week ahead besides what they wanted to sell at market. Then, perhaps on the same day, they journeyed to market with their load of provisions, which they sold or bartered before returning to the plantation. One can readily see that this was a considerable undertaking, one which required both physical ability and strong commitment.

A division of labor may have evolved from this schedule because of the time constraints. Women in Jamaica have traditionally dominated the retail side of a still-flourishing market system, the characteristics of which, as Sidney Mintz points out, were formed during slavery. This may have resulted from the difficulty of tending the crop, harvesting it, and transporting enough for both home consumption and market, all in the same day. J. B. Moreton, in his study of Jamaican slavery, indicates that slaves "who lived in pairs together, as man and wife, [were] mutual helpmates to each other," and one may conjecture that the women became the market retailers in what were family



endeavors. The system would have entailed husband and wife going together to the provision grounds and quickly harvesting the produce to be sold. The wife then took it to market, spending the rest of the day selling it (retailing may have been more compatible with other women's roles such as child-rearing), while the man tended the grounds and harvested enough for the family's consumption. In any event, slaves committed tremendous energy and effort to raising and selling their crops.<sup>18</sup>

Allied to the consideration of the exacting work regime is the recognition that not all slaves could or would undertake it. Not all slaves were able to grow surplus produce, so not all slaves were involved in at least this aspect of the internal economy, and the accumulation and disposal of earnings derived from it. Those consistently excluded from profiting financially from this pursuit fall into two categories: the physically unfit and those unwilling to commit themselves to the exacting labor involved.

The unfit included the aged, the infirm and disabled, the sick, and the young. No matter how willing, they were physically unable to take part fully in marketing produce. Some were able to contribute to the effort (the superannuated and the children often looked after stock and worked in the kitchen gardens), but the extent to which they benefited was often limited to the extent of their involvement. Those who could not contribute at all fared worse. There were also slaves who,

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<sup>18</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, "The Jamaica Internal Marketing Pattern," Social and Economic Studies, 4: 1 (March 1955), 95-103; J. B. Moreton, West India Customs and Manners (London, 1793), 150.

although physically able, did not commit themselves to the effort. They were thus also deprived of whatever psychological and material benefits accrued from controlling property and commerce and garnering earnings.

Some slaves not involved with this arduous aspect of the internal economy took part in some of its other components, while others, by virtue of kinship or community ties, were incidentally involved in, and thus benefited from, the sale of provisions. For example, children and other relatives incapable of full participation in growing and marketing produce nevertheless shared in the profits gained by the active adults of the family.

Jamaican planter Gilbert Mathison contended that "every well-conditioned Negro on a plantation keeps one or more pigs, and poultry, or trafficks in tobacco, or sells his surplus provisions at market." In noting that "those less fortunate suffered from poverty," however, Mathison recognized that not everyone could profit from raising surpluses. He deplored the poverty and poor diet of the many slaves who could not even raise enough to supply themselves. This group, he noted, comprised the idle, the sick, the old and those with a large number of children: in fact, the very people least able to withstand poverty and want.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, circumstances often militated against even those slaves who, through their exertions, could expect to profit from marketing

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<sup>19</sup> Gilbert Mathison, Notices Respecting Jamaica in 1808-1809-1810 (London, 1811), 30, 39-40.

produce. Slaves invested most of their time and acreage to raising plantains, and provision grounds often were little more than extensive groves of this staple. Plantain, like its relative the banana, is the fruit of a tall and delicate tree, on which the autumnal tropical storms of the Caribbean frequently wreaked havoc. When their staple crop was wiped out in this way, slaves had to revert to their various ground provisions, especially root crops, which suffered less damage. Even this expedient could prove inadequate, however, and slaves, far from profiting from the sale of surplus provisions, were faced with starvation and in dire need of supplemental food allocations from the plantation.

The overseer on Nathaniel Phillips' Pleasant Hill Estate recorded just such an occurrence. A gale in early November of 1791 caused so much damage to the slaves' provision grounds that he was "obliged to purchase for the support of the Negroes." It was not until mid-April of the next year that he recorded "that the period is nearly arrived again when they'll be able to go to market with Plantains, as usual." It was not until mid-June of 1792, however, more than seven months after the storm, that he wrote to Phillips that the slaves were "now selling Plantains on Sundays as usual."<sup>20</sup>

Slaves on Charles Gordon Gray's St. James Parish sugar estate suffered similarly in 1812. A storm had so injured the provision grounds that many of the slaves did not have sufficient food. Gray

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<sup>20</sup> Letters from Thomas Barritt, Pleasant Hill, Jamaica, to Nathaniel Phillips, London, 2 November 1791, 10 April 1792, 13 June 1792, Nathaniel Phillips Papers, 8384, 8392, 8397, University of the West Indies, Mona.

recorded that slaves spent additional days in their provision grounds and plantain walks trying to repair the damage. These efforts met with limited success, since even three months later Gray noted, "the Negroes are complaining of Hunger as Plantain is a rarity."<sup>21</sup>

The time and energy of even the most industrious of slaves was often quickly eradicated. Horticultural practice, which relied heavily on the delicate plantain, and the fierce tropical weather, which the fall hurricane season frequently brought, could combine to devastate provision grounds. If this happened, slaves, far from accruing wealth from the sale of surpluses, could not even feed themselves. Earnings potential through the sale of surplus produce was thus based on an arduous work regime which many slaves were either unwilling or physically unable to undertake. Further, the entire economic endeavor was in constant jeopardy because of an over-reliance on the plantain.

The weekly markets held throughout the island serve as another example of the centrality of the labor of slaves to virtually every aspect of the Jamaican economy. Their exertions resulted in "the vast quantities of provisions, vegetables, and fruits" which William Sells saw "brought to Kingston market." According to Gilbert Mathison, slaves were the Kingston market's exclusive suppliers of such commodities as poultry, pigs, fruit and vegetables, a pattern repeated throughout the island. As suppliers of virtually all such fresh produce, slaves involved themselves extensively in the commerce of Jamaica.

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<sup>21</sup> Letters from Charles Gordon Gray to his father, 26 November 1812, 18 February 1813, MST 163, Institute of Jamaica.

In this case, however, unlike other aspects of the island's commerce, slaves not only created the wealth, but also accumulated it and directed its disposal.<sup>22</sup>

Growing and marketing fresh produce involved groups other than sugar plantation slaves. All slaves had rights to provision grounds and "negro days," and could engage in the internal market system. A business as extensive and lucrative as provisioning the whole island doubtless also attracted the entrepreneurial talent of members of the free black population, many of whom lived as a landed peasantry. Most slaves in Jamaica, however, worked on the plantations that raised the principal crop, sugar, and they had a correspondingly high involvement in the market system. Moreover, the extent and profitability of the system demonstrates its importance to the economic activities of these slaves.

In addition to fresh provisions, slaves bought and sold a wide range of commodities at market. These included various artifacts manufactured on the plantation, notably basketwork, pottery and woodwork. Thus slaves unable or unwilling to engage in the physically demanding labor of raising provisions, or with the skills and aptitude for craft work, could take part in the market's economic activities through various cottage industries. A broad range of slave community members engaged in this aspect of the trade. Although Bryan Edwards disparaged the quality of these goods, some of the finer articles were made by

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<sup>22</sup> William Sells, Remarks on the Condition of the Slaves in the Island of Jamaica (London, 1823), 11; Mathison, Notices, 1.

slave tradesmen who, in their spare time, turned their skill to their own profit. Incapacitated and elderly slaves who spent much of their time at the slave village also manufactured various goods for sale. Other members of the community devoted spare time during breaks from work, evenings and days off, to such activities.<sup>23</sup>

Descriptions by contemporary observers of the Sunday markets describe both the variety of goods on sale and the slaves' domination of the trade. Bryan Edwards, for example, claimed slaves raised provisions for market, and some also made "a few coarse manufactures, such as mats for beds, bark ropes of a strong and durable texture, wicker chairs and baskets, earthen jars, etc. for all which they [found] ready sale." "Sunday is their day of market," described Edwards, "and it is wonderful what numbers are then seen, hastening from all parts of the country, towards the towns and shipping places, laden with fruits and vegetables, pigs, goats, and poultry, their own property." He estimated "that upwards of 10,000 assemble every Sunday morning in the market of Kingston, where they barter their provisions, etc. for salted beef and pork, or fine linen and ornaments." Although Edwards shared a typical planter outlook in depicting slave life as an Arcadian idyll, which it certainly was not, he and others, like Gilbert Mathison, showed much consistency in their descriptions of the weekly markets, which other letters and journals corroborate. In sum, the evidence indicates that slaves controlled these markets, and therefore an important sector of

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<sup>23</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 125.

the island's internal commerce, without any real impediment.<sup>24</sup>

Slaves on their weekly sojourn to town or to market had the opportunity of spending any money they had accumulated. Although the revenue from selling goods they produced contributed to their cash holdings, they had other sources, principally gifts, theft and gambling.

Money, sometimes in significant amounts, entered the slaves' internal economy by way of gifts and incentives from planters and their agents. A few slaves on Nathaniel Phillips' plantation, for example, received an "Xmas Box" containing a small sum of money. In December 1788, out of a slave population of about 300, 21 slaves, all male, received cash gifts ranging from six shillings and eightpence to two shillings and sixpence. The following year, 54 slaves, both male and female, got from thirteen shillings and fourpence to one shilling and eightpence, the average gift being about five shillings. These Christmas presents probably went to privileged slaves: drivers, sugar boilers, distillers, tradesmen, perhaps domestics and others in positions of influence and authority. Not all planters emulated the practice followed on the Phillips' estates. James Chisholme told the overseer on his Trouthall Estate that he never gave slaves money at Christmas nor would he countenance doing so in the future. When they distributed cash, planters consistently exhibited the ulterior motive of wanting to influence in some way the behavior of slaves. While one may infer this from the case of a small minority of slaves in Phillips'

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., II, 125; Mathison, Notices, 1.



estates receiving money at Christmas, in other cases it was more readily apparent.<sup>25</sup>

Slaves received cash payments as a result of planter concern over slave fertility. The net natural decrease of the slave population greatly worried planters. Especially when the abolition of the slave trade became a possibility, and then actuality, they undertook various measures to promote circumstances in which slave women bore more children. Some planters, for example, sought to promote an increase in the number of children born by rewarding those concerned: the mothers, of course, and often the medical attendants.

In a letter to Lord Penrhyn, attorney Rowland Fearon explained the practice he employed on Penrhyn's plantations:

To encourage the Midwives to perform their duty with attention and ability, every Child she brings me one Month old, as a reward, I give her 6/8 and the Mother of the infant 3/4 to buy the stranger a Fowl to commence its little stock in life.

Penrhyn's agent on his King's Valley estate followed a similar practice:

As soon as the Month is out [i.e., when the baby is a month old], every Mother comes to me with the Child, and I give her two dollars in Money, with some other little thing for the Child--I also give the Grandee, or Midwife, two dollars--for in this Country I have observed that a good deal depends upon her attention and good will--Since I took charge of Kings Valley [2-3 months ago] I have had the pleasure of paying two in this way, and I hope I may have many more--I also give the Mother two dollars when she weans the Child.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Diaries, 1788 and 1789, Nathaniel Phillips Papers, MSS 9418, 9419; Letter from James Chisholme, Bath, to James Craggs, Vere, Jamaica, 5 December 1803, Letterbook of James Chisholme, Papers of William and James Chisholme, MS 5476, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Rowland W. Fearon, Clarendon, Jamaica to Lord Penrhyn, 26 January 1805, Penrhyn Castle Papers, MS 1361; Ewart to Penrhyn, 6 August 1807, Penrhyn Castle Papers, MS 1477.



The code of regulations Gilbert Mathison required his overseers to follow stipulated that the midwife be given ten shillings for every child she delivered that reached the age of one month. (By the age of one month, the child had survived the period of greatest risk of contracting tetanus, the principal cause of infant mortality.)<sup>27</sup>

The private papers of Jamaican planters abound in similar references to cash payments encouraging child-bearing. Ezekiel Dickinson counselled his nephew Caleb to make "it in the Interest and Wealth of breeding Women to be particularly attentive to Nursing and breeding up their children." He desired "that the Breeding Women and Midwives . . . [have] some pecuniary reward." The attorneys to John Foster Barham's sugar plantation in Westmoreland recommended "giving the Mothers something handsome," the sum suggested being "a couple of Doubloons," and a year later mentioned that "Every woman bringing up a Child, attended by the Midwife, commonly about the expiration of the Month receives 26/8 and . . . the Midwife of late receives the same sum of money."<sup>28</sup>

Planters also offered inducements of food, clothing and other gifts to women who bore children. Since the slave women probably wore and consumed these commodities on the plantation, they would have had little effect on the internal economy. In other cases, however, this was less true, as one can see from another of the policies adopted on

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<sup>27</sup> Mathison, Notices, 107-117.

<sup>28</sup> Ezekiel to Caleb Dickinson, 6 May 1786, Papers of Caleb and Ezekiel Dickinson; Grant and Webb to Barham, 11 August 1810, Webb to Barham, 14 September 1811, Barham Papers.

Barham's plantations in the vain attempt to check the net natural decrease of the slave population. The attorney wrote:

I am holding forth every Judicious encouragement to the Women in rearing their Children, and shall now adopt the plan you propose of allowing those mothers who are deserving to keep a Cow or two for the benefit of themselves and children--this can be done by my purchasing a Heifer for each instead of giving them money, this I have suggested to them with which they are very well pleased--I have also indulged them in having the Stone wall rebuilt round their Houses for the benefit of their raising hogs.<sup>29</sup>

Rewards to women who had children and to midwives who delivered them, along with Christmas gifts to some slaves, comprised the principal ways in which planters gave slaves money. Less common occurrences included rewards to slaves for learning a trade and as a means of influencing the actions of newly purchased slaves.

Ezekiel Dickinson, concerned with the high cost of hiring tradesmen, advised his nephew to reward slaves for apprenticing to a trade on the plantation. He noted "the large payments made Barton Estate for Tradesmen's Labour," and pointed to "the great advantage arising from bringing up Young Slaves under experienced tradesmen either White or Black, which I recommend to your notice by giving them a yearly consideration for their encouragement."<sup>30</sup>

Dickinson, who owned four plantations in the parish of St. Elizabeth, also proposed rewarding slaves who assisted with the process of seasoning slaves recently arrived from Africa, which he had purchased

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<sup>29</sup> Webb to Barham, 2 September 1812, Barham Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Ezekiel to Caleb Dickinson, 23 November 1784, Ezekiel and Caleb Dickinson Papers.

to supplement the plantations' labor force. The seasoning of "bozale" African slaves involved not only acclimatizing them to Jamaica's weather and disease environment, but also acquainting them with the system of slavery and, the planters hoped, reconciling them to a life of bondage. In trying to achieve this, planters meted out various punishments and rewards. Dickinson also recognized the importance of the "bozales'" peer group, the slave community present on the plantation, in influencing their behavior. From the context of the letter to his nephew, he appeared unhappy with the socialization process of previously purchased slaves. He therefore tried to influence the new "bozales'" behavior to suit his interests by sending a slave in whom he had trust to the pen in the mountains where the new slaves underwent acclimatization prior to taking residence on the sugar plantation itself. Dickinson recommended that the "trusty" be rewarded for his efforts.

The purchase you have made of ten young Men and Boys is much to my satisfaction; hope to hear they turn out well. Would it not be right to fix on the Penn at Delacross a Black Person of Character which might be the means of preventing these young men you have placed there from falling into the like errors and vices their predecessors have done; such a Person would be intituled to some reward for his fidelity.<sup>31</sup>

Similar references to rewarding and encouraging slaves indicate that it was a common practice for planters to signify their approval or appreciation by small cash gifts. Slaves could also get cash rewards from agencies outside the plantation. The Consolidated Slave Act of Jamaica (1792) mandated such a policy in cases where slaves acted

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<sup>31</sup> Ezekiel to Caleb Dickinson, 11 May 1785, Ezekiel and Caleb Dickinson Papers.

in the interests of the plantocracy. Slaves who caught runaway slaves or assisted in their capture by supplying information got a reward "not exceeding twenty shillings." Slaves who killed other "slaves in actual rebellion" received £3, and if they took the rebel slaves alive, the reward was £5 "and a blue cloth coat, with a red cross on the right shoulder."<sup>32</sup>

Slaves thus had various opportunities to involve themselves in the cash economy of the island. Off the plantation, money was an important medium of exchange at the weekly markets, and slaves who acted in accordance with the stipulations of the Consolidated Slave Acts could receive cash bounties. On the plantation, slaves received money in the form of gifts and rewards for behavior approved by the planters, and as payment or compensation for stock and provisions. Opportunities also occurred on the plantation for slaves to sell their labor. Although planters purchased and held sole title to slaves, they could not exert commensurate control. Planters could make only limited demands on the time and labor of slaves. As noted above, slaves on the Braco estate who lost their "negro days" while doing plantation work received compensatory time off. In other instances, slaves got cash payments. The accounts for Hugh Hamilton's plantations record payments "to the Negroes attending the [Indigo] Vatts on a Sunday." Slaves thus profited monetarily from the small industry of indigo-making practiced as a sideline on the sugar plantation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 149-50.

<sup>33</sup> Accounts, Hugh Hamilton and Company, settled 31 December 1784, Indigo Account, Hamilton of Pinmore Papers, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

Again it is important to note that not all slaves benefited from whatever cash economy the slave community took part in. On most sugar plantations, cash had a limited circulation and an uneven distribution among members of the slave society. On the other hand, it is unlikely that any slave plantation community had none. Plantation policy and even the legislative structure of the island incorporated the convention of cash payments to slaves, and, of course, by extension, the slaves' right to control the accumulation and disposal of such monies.

Few slaves in Jamaica left first-hand records of their experiences. Any assessments the historian makes about slave life must rely on a judicious use of the copious records left by the plantocracy. Such documentation, which includes plantation records, an extensive body of published literature, and voluminous government records, indicate the widespread incidence of theft among the slave population. Accepting for a moment the accuracy of these observations, questions arise concerning the morality of the act of stealing.

The prevailing philosophical and religious dogma of the time clearly condemned the action. This was reflected in the codes and behavior of both the slave and non-slave communities. What is clearly seen in the laws of Jamaica and the Weltanschauung of the plantocracy vis-a-vis the discountenancing of theft may be inferred from the activities of the slave community. John Stewart made reference to various uses of obeah, a fetishistic religious belief which had the capability, among other things, of preventing or revenging crimes on a person whom its powers protected. Stewart noted that an obeah fetish, placed in the gardens or grounds of slaves became "an excellent guard

or watch, scaring away the predatory runaway and midnight plunderer with more effective terror than gins and spring-guns." He also recorded its use by slaves wanting revenge for crimes perpetrated on them. Robert Renny, another Jamaican planter, substantiated Stewart. In his History of Jamaica, Renny described how slaves, if robbed by members of their community, went to the obeah men in order to discover the culprit. The aggrieved slave purchased an obi, which comprised a farrago of materials such as blood, feathers, parrots' beaks, dogs' teeth, alligators' teeth, broken bottles, grave dirt, rum and eggshells. This was then "stuck in the thatch, hung over the door of a hut, or up on the branch of a plantain tree." The obi instilled such fear in the thief that he would "tremble at the very sight of the ragged bundle, the bottle or the egg shells." Bryan Edwards also referred to obeah being used by slaves to detect a thief among their fellows.<sup>34</sup>

The preceding evidence indicates that both slave and non-slave communities condemned theft. Neither group, however, universally condemned the act. This study is not concerned with the grand larceny perpetrated by the plantocracy in, to paraphrase Eric Williams, stealing Africans to work lands they stole from the Indians in America, nor with any other of that group's felonious activities. It is concerned with the incidence of theft in the slave community, and particularly its contribution to the internal economy.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John Stewart, A View, 278-9; Robert Renny, A History of Jamaica (London, 1807), 172; Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 82.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (London, 1964), 9.

The differential application of the condemnation of theft, as perpetrated and judged by the slave community, hinged on the status of the victim. Slaves on sugar plantations lived in a bifurcated social system: the two components were slave black and free white. Simply stated, slaves condemned intra-group theft and condoned inter-group theft to the extent that it was perpetrated by members of the slave community. John Stewart, in the history he wrote of Jamaica, mentioned the duality with which slaves regarded theft: "to pilfer from their masters they consider as no crime, though to rob a fellow slave is accounted heinous."<sup>36</sup>

Intra-group theft, when slaves stole from slaves, precipitated actions on the part of the victim to locate the perpetrator. Inter-group theft, when slaves appropriated the property of the plantation, or that of the white residents, was apparently not condemned by the slave community. One should recognize, therefore, that the value-laden word theft is only appropriate in viewing the action from the perspective of the plantocracy who, of course, to a man condemned such acts. Slaves exhibited consistency in their rationalization of "stealing" from the plantation or the planter. Their common attitude argued "What I take from my master, being for my use, who am his slave, or property, he loses nothing by its transfer." This was obviously a rather glib rationale, but it exhibited a kernel of the slaves' philosophy on such acts, an extension of which encompassed a condemnation of both the

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<sup>36</sup> John Stewart, A View, 249.



person and the institution responsible for depriving them of their liberty. Such "thefts," therefore, should be viewed not only as the relocation of the various goods of a property holder, but also as resistance to the individual slave-holder and the system of slavery. The "thefts" had an additional attraction for slaves. Not only were they part of an extensive system of resistance, but they also could benefit the perpetrators by improving their diet and life style.<sup>37</sup>

To resolve the question of the frequency of theft among slaves, one must return to the planters' records. Undoubtedly slaves perpetrated both intra-group and inter-group thefts, and the indications are that the latter was widespread. The former, of course, would have been less fully documented because of the exclusion of whites from much of the community activities of slaves. Slaves had, in the form of obeah, an internal authority structure with which to regulate crime, so much of the intra-group theft was beyond the ken of whites.

Even so, there remains evidence of intra-group theft. As noted above, Edwards, Renny and John Stewart referred to intra-group theft in their descriptions of obeah. These and similar testimonies by other planter-historians indicate that the gardens and provision grounds of slaves were the most frequent targets for theft by other slaves. Trelawny planter James Stewart maintained that slaves would "steal the provisions of their neighbours at the time their own grounds yield abundance," while an anonymous article on the condition of slaves published in Quarterly Review contended that improvident slaves

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



subsisted by stealing from their "owner, neighbours, or fellow-slaves." Such theft could not be carried out with impunity. Slave grounds were on occasion protected by obeah fetishes, and often guarded by members of the slave community. William Beckford had a low opinion of the calibre of such policing. He saw invalid, crippled and superannuated slaves sent to watch the provision grounds, and disparaged their ability to perform such guard duties because he observed that some of them were not able to walk, let alone run, in the prosecution of such work. As can be seen from the following entry in the accounts of slave deaths on the Worthy Park plantation, however, some plantations were more efficiently guarded:

March 27 [1793]	Roman	shot by one of the Watchmen belonging to Tydixton Park named Watty in their Negroe grounds stealing provisions.
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The records of slave deaths on Nathaniel Phillips' Pleasant Hill Estate include:

Aug. 19 [1811]	Tom	of a chop in the head received at Winchester in the act of stealing a hog.
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Slaves raised most of this kind of stock on the estate, so it is likely that the hog Tom was stealing on the neighboring plantation of Winchester belonged to a fellow slave. The accounts of the demise of Roman and Tom suggest that the category of intra-group theft may be subdivided into inter-[slave] community and intra-[slave] community theft. Slaves, therefore, were possibly less reticent about stealing from

slaves on neighboring estates than from members of their own plantation community.<sup>38</sup>

One can imply that, if slaves had guns with which to perform guard duties, thefts from "negro grounds" comprised a widespread source of concern. Such sporadic references to these thefts, as are cited above, probably do not accurately reflect the prevalence of the crime throughout the Jamaican plantation system. The frequency with which slaves perpetrated inter-group theft, however, dwarfs the extent of their involvement in intra-group theft.

Planters constantly referred to slaves' proclivity to steal. Both James and John Stewart used precisely the same term in describing this; they maintained slaves were "addicted to theft." Robert Renny viewed slaves as "thievish," and J. B. Moreton referred to them as "born thieves." Even abolitionist Thomas Cooper asserted that slaves were "addicted to thieving," while the anonymous fictional piece Marly: or a Planter's Life in Jamaica contains the passage "whenever you see a black face you see a thief." Extant court proceedings, such as those of the "Record Book of Court of Parish of St. Ann 1787-1814 - Slave Court," bear witness to the widespread incidence of theft.

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<sup>38</sup> James Stewart, A Brief Account of the Present State of the Negroes in Jamaica (Bath, 1792), 18; Anon., "Condition of the Negroes in our Colonies," Quarterly Review, 29: 58 (1823), 489-90; Beckford, Remarks, 17; Increase and Decrease of Negroes, 1793, Worthy Park Plantation Book, 1791-1811, Worthy Park Estate Papers, 4/23-3, Jamaica Archives; Increase and Decrease of Slaves on Pleasant Hill, Nathaniel Phillips Papers, MS 9502.

Robbery, along with running away, various assaults and arson comprised the most frequently cited crimes.<sup>39</sup>

The bulk of the evidence concerning the amount of stealing perpetrated by slaves rests on the most impressionistic of the evidence left by planters: their published histories and recollections. They indicate the pervasiveness of "thefts" among slaves on the island. Indeed, judging from the consistency with which slaveholders throughout the Americas referred to the "thievery" of slaves, it seems to have been endemic to the peculiar institution of black slavery.

A different picture emerges, however, if such actions are viewed not as theft but as resistance to enslavement, and the appropriation and redistribution of illicitly accrued wealth. Slaves' clandestine stealing from the planter and plantation attacked the institution of slavery by diminishing its profitability to the slavocracy. The coerced labor of slaves created the wealth of the plantation, and the colony functioned to protect this system of forced labor. Jamaica's wealth, which accrued from slave labor, was vested in those who coerced the work, not in those who performed it. If the relationship between labor and value in slavery is viewed in this way, one must reconsider whether the reappropriation of wealth by those who created it can legitimately be termed "theft." As a tool of resistance these actions had considerable

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<sup>39</sup> James Stewart, A Brief Account, 18; John Stewart, A View, 249; Renny, A History, 166; Moreton, West India Customs, 161; Thomas Cooper, Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica (London, 1824), 17; Anon., Marly; or a Planter's Life in Jamaica (Glasgow, 1828), 36; Record Book of the Court of Parish of St. Ann - 1787-1814: - Slave Court, MS 273, Institute of Jamaica.

advantages over other methods. Stealing was a clandestine act which was relatively easily perpetrated but difficult either to prevent or detect. It thus had advantage over other forms of resistance such as assault. Also, it led not only to the diminution of the victim's wealth but to the aggrandizement of the perpetrator's. As such it performed a dual function not present in acts of resistance like arson or the poisoning of livestock.

Not all such actions fall into the category of resistance, however, nor did their proceeds all enter the internal economy. Much of the appropriation of plantation property comprised the desperate actions of deprived and hungry slaves acting from the motive of survival. A series of statements by the attorney on Georgia Estate to absentee owner Charles Gordon exemplified this. Writing to Gordon through the autumn of 1781, the attorney Francis Grant noted:

We are making a little rum from the Molasses on hand, but they will yield very little, and the Negroes, impelled by hunger, have lessened the quantity considerably by frequently breaking into the Curing house. For sometime past they have had nothing to support them of their own. . . .

I believe I shall be forced to cut canes sooner than I could wish to prevent their being destroyed by Negroes, for not only your own but your Neighbour's are making very free with them of late notwithstanding some of the best and [obscured] People belonging to you are watching them.

A month later he attributed the low sugar yield "to the Negroes stealing the Canes which it was impossible wholly to prevent." Even into the next year he asserted that the harvest was slow because "the

Canes were mostly destroyed by Negroes during the late Scarcity of Provisions."<sup>40</sup>

Whereas in the above case, a scarcity of provisions appears to have affected the entire slave community of the plantation, some slaves experienced this deprivation throughout the duration of slavery. For whatever reasons, some slaves always needed supplies they could not provide for themselves. For example, provision grounds may have failed, or some slaves may have been unable to get their grounds planted or may have been too sick to tend them. When slaves faced deficiencies, as they did to a greater or lesser extent at all times throughout the slavery period, they could revert, as did the slaves on Gordon's Georgia Estate, to appropriating supplies from the plantation.

Some planters manifested concern over the possibility of deprivation among the slave community. Gilbert Mathison, for example, in the codification of regulations for his overseer insisted that slaves who, for whatever reason, had abandoned or neglected grounds be fed "abundantly" from the plantation store. Nevertheless, there was widespread malnutrition and dietary deficiency among slaves, who, in their state of need, took supplies from the plantation without the authorization of the planter. One therefore must temper any assessment of the impact of inter-group theft on the internal economy with the recognition that not all the proceeds of these activities entered the economy.

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<sup>40</sup> Letters from Francis Grant, Georgia Estate to Charles Gordon of Cairness, near Fraserburgh, Scotland, 27 August 1781, 23 September 1781, 23 January 1782, 6/14(2), 6/15(1), 6/21, Gordon of Buthlaw and Cairness Papers.

While the proceeds of some thefts entered the internal economy, other stolen goods, particularly foodstuffs, were consumed directly by slaves to avert want and starvation.<sup>41</sup>

Appropriations of the plantation's property, however, not only helped compensate for any deficiencies suffered by slaves, but also could contribute to the growth of their internal economy. According to the fictional account of plantation life, Marly, slaves referred to the "Calibash Estate" as a metaphor for their depredations on the goods of the plantation. Slaves used calabashes as containers into which to divert quantities of the plantation's rum, sugar and other produce. The calabashes which provided the activity with its metaphorical title facilitated the storage and transportation of such commodities. To extend the metaphor, the capitalization of all the "Calibash Estate's" property occurred at the weekly markets.<sup>42</sup>

Planters were at a disadvantage in trying to deal with the unauthorized appropriation of the plantations' property. Not only were whites tremendously outnumbered by slaves, but they could look for little assistance from anyone but their own community in detecting those responsible. The slave community in general sanctioned the action of taking plantation property. Moreover anyone who performed such actions was shielded by his fellow slaves. Planters who sought information within the slave community as to the identity of a perpetrator probably returned empty handed. Plaintive comments about this abound in the planters'

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<sup>41</sup> Mathison, Notices, 107-17.

<sup>42</sup> Anon., Marly, 43.

records. For example, Charles Gordon Gray, in a letter to his father from his St. James Parish plantation, wrote that the slaves "lately broke open my Fowl House and took away 12 Fowls. I have not found out the thief." Nor, on a plantation with 171 close-mouthed slaves and a handful of whites, was it likely that he would. What is more likely is that when he stocked his larder with purchases from the market that week, he bought back his own chickens, all neatly plucked and trussed. The markets were, of course, the primary supplier of domestic provisions to everyone, black and white, slave and free, on the island.<sup>43</sup>

Planters recognized that they were at a disadvantage regarding their susceptibility to having their goods taken from them by slaves. Their principal recourse was to vigilance, preferably by fellow whites. When supervision over slaves diminished, the extent to which they seized the plantation's property rose accordingly. The possibility of just such an occurrence caused Nathaniel Phillips' overseer Thomas Barritt to bemoan the continuance of martial law at the time of the Trelawny Maroon Rebellion in 1795. Whites who would normally be overseers and bookkeepers had to perform the military duties attendant with the provisions of martial law, and therefore they were unavailable to supervise the harvest. Barritt complained, "if this Military Duty should continue during Crop, we shall be much puzzled how to take them [the canes] off, and there will be great pilfering going on, as we shall be obliged to trust much to the Negroes." Here was a clear recognition of how slaves

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Gordon Gray to father, 17 July 1810, MST 163, Institute of Jamaica.



regarded the plantation's property. It also provides the historian with an insight into the dynamics of white/slave relations and the very delicate balance of power between the two groups. Where the balance was disturbed there was a corresponding adjustment of expectations and behavior.<sup>44</sup>

Disproportionate punishments for slaves convicted of theft further illustrate the planters' ineffectiveness in controlling the activity. The plantocracy sought to institute a structure of punishments whose severity would compensate for the inadequacy of preventative measures. Slaves convicted in court for theft received punishments which incorporated hard labor in the workhouse and whipping. The records of the St. Ann Parish Slave Court show slaves receiving stipulated terms in the workhouse, from a matter of days or months up to life for theft. A specified number of lashes, for example 39 lashes each week for a given length of time, invariably accompanied these sentences. A local journal, the Columbian Magazine, recorded the proceedings from the trial of a slave named William Wynter of Hampshire Estate in St. Thomas in the Vale. He was found guilty of breaking into the estate's still-house and stealing rum, and was sentenced to two years hard labor in the workhouse with 39 lashes every three months until the expiration of his term. Colonial Office documentation of slave trials includes the sentence of 3 months in the workhouse with 25 to 39 lashes going in and 25 to 39 lashes coming out for the crime of receiving stolen coffee. Other sentences meted out included transportation off the island for

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<sup>44</sup> Barritt to Phillips, 13 November 1795, 9210, Nathaniel Phillips Papers.



stealing sheep and execution for stealing steers. In cases where slaves were transported or executed the planter received in cash the valuation the court placed on the slave.<sup>45</sup>

Court trials were atypical; more often planters dealt directly with slaves who had been caught appropriating the plantation's property. Plantation justice invariably meant that the slave was whipped, and this punishment may have been accompanied by some form of incarceration or restriction of the slave's movements. Slaves, for example, would be shackled and confined in the hot-house except for when they were taken to work in the fields each day.

A paucity of sources prevents an accurate assessment of the volume and profitability to the slave community of inter-group theft. One can imply, however, from the frequency with which it was referred to, and the almost resigned attitude planters had to the incorrigibility of slaves vis-a-vis theft, that such activities were widespread. If one accepts the ubiquity of inter-group theft, one can reasonably infer that it made a significant contribution to the cash accumulation by slaves and, by extension, to the internal economy as a whole. Drawing on the efforts of probably tens of thousands of slaves, the "Calibash Estate" was perhaps one of the most lucrative concerns on the island.

The sources similarly do not reveal which slaves took part in inter-group theft. Presumably not all slaves were prepared or

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<sup>45</sup> Record Book of the Court of the Parish of St. Ann, Institute of Jamaica; Columbian Magazine, 7 (September 1799), 126; C.O. 137/147, Trials of Slaves, 1 July 1814 to 30 June 1818, Public Record Office.

motivated to accept the risks attendant to these activities. Inter-group theft, however, did affect the lives of a much larger group of slaves than just those directly involved. It comprised a substantial source of profit which caused a corresponding impact on the internal economy of slaves. Slave communities were intimate groups who had, as is shown below, very fluid economies. Thus the gains derived from inter-group theft had an effect on those slaves who involved themselves in any of the economy's components.

A large part of the slaves' economic activities as buyers and sellers centered on the weekly market. There they disposed of the commodities they had raised, made or appropriated. It was also where they purchased various consumer goods.

The markets supplied most of Jamaica's fresh produce, primarily raised by slaves, and therefore drew purchasers from all classes on the island. Slaves retailing this produce based their transactions either on barter or cash. In their dealings with other tradespeople at market they bartered, while the medium for transactions involving persons there solely as purchasers was cash.

Although slaves provided most of the agricultural produce for market, other groups traded there. The Rev. Richard Bickell's description of Kingston market noted that there:

were Jews with shops and standings as at a fair, selling old and new clothes, trinkets, and small wares at cent. per cent. to adorn the Negro person; there were some low Frenchmen and Spaniards, and people of colour, in petty shops and with stalls; some selling their bad rum, gin, tobacco, etc.; others salt provisions, and small articles of dress; and many bartering with the Slave or purchasing his surplus provisions to retail again.

Another contemporary commentator indicated the involvement of traders other than slaves:

The Sabbath was . . . almost the only time plantation negroes had for the culture of their grounds and vending their commodities at the public markets, which are held on this day; from which irreligious and impolitic custom the lower Jews who keep shops are particularly benefitted: the negroes taking the sole opportunity of being in town to supply themselves with cloth, and foreign provision.<sup>46</sup>

The ubiquitous higglers comprised the one other group, along with the plantation slaves and white retailers, involved in the vending side of the weekly market. Slaves and free blacks made up this group, and they essentially played the role of middle men in the marketing process.

In cases where slaves either did not want to make the trip to market or did not intend to spend market day retailing their produce themselves, they reverted to trading with higglers. This group journeyed throughout the island buying up produce, manufactures and appropriated goods which they in turn would sell at market on Sundays. Their margin of profit, of course, was the difference between what the plantation slave would accept in order to be rid of the work of transporting and selling the goods himself, and the higher price which the goods would fetch when retailed at market. Higglers also bought up produce on Sundays when the slaves arrived with it in town. This indicates the willingness of slaves to give up some margin of profit in order to put their time in town to other uses.

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<sup>46</sup> Rev. Richard Bickell, The West Indies As They Are (London, 1825), 66; Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (August 1797), 168.

Higglers, in their transactions with plantation slaves, dealt in either barter or cash. It was an occupation which involved members of the non-plantation slave population and also probably some members of the free black and free colored populations. A contemporary description of their activities, albeit a somewhat jaundiced one, shows clearly the scope of their activities.

#### HIGGLERS

In the towns there is a species of occupation very agreeable to the indolent and desultory disposition of the negroes. They are sent abroad by their owners, to work out as it is called, for which liberty they are obliged to pay a certain rate per week or month. . . . Turned loose on the community, they are guilty of every kind of fraud and forestalling, to make up their respective allotments. They are the receivers and venders of stolen goods and occasionally thieves themselves; the most honest part of their employment being to monopolize roots, greens, fruit, and other edibles, which they purchase from the country negroes, and retail at exorbitant prices.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the dealings between plantation slaves and others trading at market involved barter, although there was some cash used. Slaves also dealt with those wishing only to purchase goods. In such instances, with no exchange of commodities, cash was the trading medium. The purchasers in these instances included planters or their representatives, buying for their own table or supplementing their imported provisions, ship chandlers, army quartermasters and townspeople. Kingston was a large city by the late eighteenth century, and a number of other ports and administrative boroughs on the island had sizable urban populations. Markets were held within the environs of every town

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<sup>47</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 2 (April 1797), 702.

of any size on the island each week. They were an integral part of Jamaica's food supply, well patronized by town dwellers who bought what they needed with ready money. This was the principal route by which cash entered the internal economy of plantation slaves.

Planter historian Edward Long, whose History of Jamaica was published in 1774, estimated that slaves held a significant share of the coin in circulation in the island at that time. His calculations reveal that slaves held approximately twenty percent of Jamaica's circulating coin, and this comprised about sixteen percent of all coin then on the island. (See Table 1-1.)<sup>48</sup>

Long does not reveal the source of his data, and himself acknowledged the speculative nature of the calculations. Nevertheless, they were part of an extensive and informed consideration of the economy of the island which, in the absence of any other data, at least offers a general indication of the relationship of the cash component of the slaves' internal economy to the economy of the island in general. One must bear in mind that the figure of £10,437:10:0 incorporated the cash holdings of all 170,000 slaves on the island, not just the approximately 105,000 who worked on sugar plantations.<sup>49</sup>

Long bemoaned the shortage and debasement of Jamaica's coin, and exhibited some concern over the decreasing amount of the small currency units which slaves traded in. For example, he condemned the

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Long, The History of Jamaica (1774, rpt. New York, 1972), I, 537.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., I, 496.

Table 1-1  
Coin in Circulation in Jamaica, 1776

Quantity of coin in present circulation in Jamaica	£	s	d
The Negro slaves possess, chiefly in small silver, about	10,437	10	0
The rest of the inhabitants	<u>39,562</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>
	50,000	0	0
And there rests inert or uncirculat- ing, in the chancery chest, treasury, and private hoards about	<u>15,000</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	65,000	0	0

Source: Edward Long, The History of Jamaica (1774, rpt., New York, 1972), I, 537.

intra-Caribbean trade in mules, horses and cattle. Jamaica's role was as a purchaser, and this had dire consequences for the island's currency supply:

This trade drains away much of the old hammered silver, and the milled ryals, and indeed renders them so scarce, that it is to be feared, the want of them must some time or other prove very distressful to the Negroes, who would fall into a miserable state if ever the island should be deprived of small silver.<sup>50</sup>

Long's analysis contained two solutions which he contended would facilitate the trade carried on by slaves:

It has been proposed to obtain a small silver milled coin from Britain, appropriated to the circulation within the island; that is to say, such a quantity of it as might enable the housekeepers and Negroes to carry on their marketing for butcher's meat, poultry, hogs, fish, corn, eggs, plantains, and the like.

The solution Long preferred involved putting copper coins of small denomination into circulation. These, he argued, would:

supply to a great extent, the necessities of the internal commerce; whilst, at the same time, they would establish a measure for the lowest kinds of barter, or traffic, that can be carried on by the Negroes, and poorer housekeepers, who are put to great difficulty and loss, by having no other than a silver currency, of too high value for their ordinary occasions. The inhabitants would grow more thrifty than at present they are: for they [are] accustomed to handle none other but a silver coin, the lowest denomination whereof is equal to fivepence sterling.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the shortage of currency, slaves suffered loss through the debasement of the silver coinage in circulation. Long

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., I, 549.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., I, 562, 571.



referred to the "notorious clippers" who trimmed off part of the coin's silver. They then exchanged the coin at face value rather than the value by weight which had been lessened to the extent that it had been clipped. Slaves no doubt were part of the group of "notorious clippers," but Long indicated that they were also victims of currency debasement. He accused white traders of profiting from the trade by accepting debased coins at an assessed part of their face value and then returning them into circulation in the market at the face value. According to Long, slaves lost out at both ends of this deal. "Debased currency circulate[d] chiefly in the retail branch of internal commerce; in which its passage from one person to another [was] so rapid, that its imperfections escape[d] notice." This, he said, mainly affected slaves:

for they have their dealings chiefly with the retail shopkeepers, who are a sort of middle-men between them and the merchant importers; these shopkeepers, who, for the major part are Jews, look with great circumspection on the coin they receive, knowing, that if it is too much depreciated, it will not pass on the merchant; whenever therefore they take diminished money from the Negroes, it is with design to profit upon them; and this is usually managed, by giving but a trifling value of their goods for it; and then, by watching for opportunities to change it for heavy money; and, as the light money reverts into circulation, and can have no outlet by trade, so it continues to run current so long as any heavy money can be picked up; when this is exhausted, the shopkeepers begin to cry down the light and counterfeit coins; the Negroes are unable to carry on their traffic; and a general confusion ensues.

One would suspect that the trading and financial acumen of slaves regularly dealing at market was more refined than Long indicated. Whether or not he was accurate in his assessment of such victimization of slaves, his analysis does reaffirm the extensive involvement of slaves in Jamaica's cash economy.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., I, 573.

Retailing the goods they brought was only one of the activities slaves engaged in at the weekly market. Invariably they were also there as consumers bent on purchasing various commodities. Furthermore, consistent with the traditions of many other peasant and rural peoples, market day had important social implications for slaves.

Slaves as consumers executed their transactions either by barter or with cash. Their purchases included clothing and accessories, food, alcohol and tobacco and housewares. Slaves, who already monopolized the raising of domestic provisions, were interested primarily in purchasing imported provisions at market. Mathison included in a list of slave purchases, commodities such as salt pork and beef, cod, meat, rice, flour and bread. Bryan Edwards also mentioned that slaves purchased salt beef and pork.<sup>53</sup>

The part of this study devoted to clothing shows the extent to which slaves furnished their own garments. The planter supplied only work clothes, while the slaves provided themselves with clothes to wear outside working hours. They bought at market the finery, jewelry and accessories, with which they adorned themselves on holidays or Sundays.

Many slaves enjoyed smoking and spent some of the money they accrued from marketing provisions to the purchase of tobacco and pipes. A contemporary commentator observed that "Negroes of both sexes regale themselves with smoaking tobacco." Both men and women smoked pipes

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<sup>53</sup> Mathison, Notices, 1; Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 125.

which often had leather caps, covering the bowl and fastened to the stem, in order to prevent tobacco and embers falling out.<sup>54</sup>

At market, slaves had the opportunity to buy various housewares and personal items. Included among such purchases were the manufactures other slaves had taken to market--bowls, furniture, bed mats, baskets and the like--as well as imported manufactures like jewelry, pocket knives and other metal ware.<sup>55</sup>

Plantation slaves also apparently bought a lot of alcohol. At market there emerged two consumption practices. Slaves bought alcohol to take back to the plantation for consumption during the week. They perhaps transported it in receptacles similar to those described in The Columbian Magazine in 1797.

The most common utensil is a calabash bottle, stopt with the stem on which the Indian corn grows. A cane is sometimes used for this purpose, to fit it for which they clear it of the membranes at the joints and cork the upper end: a large cane will hold a considerable quantity, and serves the double purpose of a bottle and a walking stick.<sup>56</sup>

Slaves also consumed alcohol when socializing at market. As many studies document, the consumption of alcohol is often central to the

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<sup>54</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (July 1797), 108-9.

<sup>55</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 125; Sells, Remarks, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (July 1797), 109.

market day activities of rural communities; Jamaican slaves proved no exception to this practice.<sup>57</sup>

Weekly markets were the locus of Jamaican slaves' principal social activities off the plantation. On their weekly sojourns to town, slaves got clear of the regulatory plantation authority, putting distance between them and the white overseers and book-keepers. The markets were bustling, crowded affairs, which afforded slaves anonymity and a broader scope for autonomous activities than they had, day-in, day-out, laboring in a gang under the eye and whip of overseer, book-keeper and driver. The factors of distance and anonymity served to loosen, both physically and psychologically, the bonds of servitude. Slaves reflected in their actions at market the latitude conferred by these circumstances.

The diurnal plantation regulations functioned not only to inhibit the autonomy of slaves but also to limit inter-plantation contact. Slaves' nocturnal activities in part compensated for this, and planters repeatedly complained of the night ramblings of slaves going from plantation to plantation to visit friends and relatives. Other than night ramblings and holiday visits, however, slaves from

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<sup>57</sup> Included in the extensive body of anthropological work on this topic are, Paul Bohannon and George Dalton, eds., Markets in Africa (Evansville, 1962); Thomas F. De Voe, The Market Book (1862, rpt. New York, 1970); Enrique Mayer, Sidney W. Mintz, and G. William Skinner, Los campesinos y el mercado (Lima, Peru, 1974); and Robert H. T. Smith, ed., Market-Place Trade--Periodic Markets, Hawkers, and Traders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Vancouver, 1978). Scottish literature, of course, provides the example of Tam O'Shanter:

Frae November till October

Ae market-day [he] was nae sober

Robert Burns, The Complete Works of Robert Burns (Boston, 1863), 172.

different plantations had limited opportunities for contact with each other. The weekly markets offered the chance to remedy this. Thus, going to market not only allowed the slaves to get away from the location of their daily grind and from the eye of their daily oppressor, but brought them in closer contact with their fellows. The laxity of regulation and surveillance at market permitted them to indulge, with little impediment, in whatever activities they chose.

The first indication of how slaves regarded their visits to market comes from the way in which they prepared for them. Going to market was an occasion for some to dress up in their Sunday best: clothes which they had acquired by their own efforts. They therefore not only put the plantation behind them, but also divested themselves of the identifiable accoutrements of slavery, plantation garb. Gilbert Mathison, for example, stated that many of the slaves who went to market were "dressed in finery." Others, who either had no finery, or were unwilling to wear it for the working and walking entailed in going from plantation to provision grounds to market and back, wore work clothes. (Appendix 1-a comprises a contemporary print of a Jamaican slave woman on her way to Sunday market.)<sup>58</sup>

The activities of slaves at market differed little from the market day experiences of many other rural populations in Europe, North America and elsewhere. The early part of the day they spent in carrying out their tasks as purveyors and purchasers. This was a time of great activity and bustle. Mathison recollected the noisiness as slaves

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<sup>58</sup> Mathison, Notices, 3.

and others indulged in loud and extended bargaining over their transactions. As the commercial activity of the market diminished in the later part of the day, social activities took over. Having completed all their transactions slaves took time to visit with friends and perhaps spend some of the money they had made earlier in the day on food and drink. Rum shops ministered to the needs of the slaves:

Many houses are kept for their [the slaves'] entertainment, where they have a meal of coarse bread, salted fish and butter, and a bowl of new rum and water for one ryal, which is about five pence sterling.<sup>59</sup>

The extent to which the planters and others condemned the drinking and socializing probably reflected its popularity with slaves. Rev. R. Bickell complained that very often slaves spent the money accumulated from selling provisions on "new destructive rum, which intoxicate[d] them, and drown[ed] for a short time, the reflection that they [were] despised and burthened slaves." He noted that "the drunkenness of some with the imprecations and obscenities of others put one in mind of a pandemonium." Dr. John Williamson, who practiced on the Earl of Harewood's St. Thomas in the Vale estate, mentioned that market day was "concluded by scenes of excess and brutal debauchery," while another contemporary observer noted that, after slaves had disposed of their goods at market, they frequently went to "regale and debauch" themselves before going back to the plantation. Edward Long also complained of the

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<sup>59</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (July 1797), 108.

latter part of the Sunday "being uselessly dissipated in idleness and lounging, or (what is worse) in riot, drunkenness, and wickedness."<sup>60</sup>

Post-market festivities also allowed slaves to indulge in the pastime of gambling where they had the opportunity of adding to their day's gains (and also, of course, of losing their shirt). The author of an anonymous article which appeared in a Kingston journal in 1797 claimed that male slaves were addicted to gambling and that many gambling houses in Kingston accommodated their habit. As gaming houses were illegal in Jamaica precautions had to be taken by proprietors, but apparently few were discovered or suppressed. In other cases, in order to prevent discovery, slaves retired to secluded open air venues to gamble--Kingston burial ground was one such place. The article's author contended that slaves played a number of gambling games, including not only cards and dice, but also some of their own devising. In these games slaves apparently bet sums of money against stolen goods.<sup>61</sup>

Clearly, there was a wide range of social activities in which slaves indulged after market. No doubt the Rev. R. Bickell accurately perceived that slaves imbibed spiritous liquors as a way of drowning their sorrows and putting the day-by-day realities of slavery behind

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<sup>60</sup> Bickell, West Indies, 66; Anon., Negro Slavery; or a View of Some of the More Prominent Features of that State of Society as it Exists in the United States of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies especially in Jamaica (London, 1823), 57; Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (August 1797), 170-1; Long, History, II, 492.

<sup>61</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (August 1797), 168-9.



them momentarily. In addition, the rum shops offered an opportunity for conversation and camaraderie in an atmosphere less readily found on the plantation.<sup>62</sup>

Whites viewed slaves' activities on market-day with distaste and, in times of unrest on the island, with alarm. They recognized that large congregations of slaves over whom there was little surveillance potentially threatened the security of the island and the safety of the white minority. One such instance of this came as a consequence of the Haitian Revolution in the early 1790s. News of this slave rebellion caused Jamaican planters to reconsider the security of the island. They were especially unhappy about the fact that virtually all of the male slaves regularly attending market carried cutlasses or machetes. Since these work tools were also potentially offensive weapons, the whites decided to deal with the problem on the next market day. They were thwarted, however, because the slaves came to market that day without their cutlasses. This further discomfited the whites not only because it showed slaves were reluctant to be disarmed, but also because of the rapid dissemination throughout the slave population of the information that whites planned to take steps against cutlass-bearing slaves.<sup>63</sup>

The weekly market, therefore, gave slaves opportunities to indulge in a panoply of social activities deprived them on the plantation. Many of these social activities, however, depended on the

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<sup>62</sup> Bickell, West Indies, 66.

<sup>63</sup> C.O. 137/90, Correspondence, Public Record Office.

slaves' financial competence; that is, depended on the success of their trading activities earlier in the day. For example, grog cost money and it took money to gamble. The contact which slaves had with non-slave groups at the market provided the inflow of ready cash into their internal economy. This in turn depended on the control slaves had over domestic provisions and manufactures. As Edward Long pointed out:

In this island they [the slaves] have the greatest part of the small silver circulating among them, which they gain by sale of their hogs, poultry, fish, corn, fruits, and other commodities, at the markets in town and country.

The market was therefore a crucial component in the slaves' internal economy. Those who had readiest access to it and the greatest amount of commodities to offer stood to profit most. Many, however, found themselves excluded from this trade and thereby economically disadvantaged.<sup>64</sup>

Some slaves could compensate for their lack of mobility or lack of access to markets by trading the provisions they raised and the goods they appropriated to higglers. Others were unable even to profit in this way. All slaves who lived on plantations, however, were part of slave communities which had internal economies and economic activities in which cash was invariably one of the exchange media. The internal economy within plantation slave communities affected more slaves than those involved in the market activities on a Sunday. If the Sunday markets were the source of much of the revenue which fuelled the internal economy, the plantation community was the base of much of its activity.

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<sup>64</sup> Long, History, II, 411.

Bryan Edwards maintained that slave-owners never interfered with any wealth accumulated by slaves at market or elsewhere. He insisted that those who had property or capital could dispose of it in any manner they thought fit. Through bartering, buying and selling at market, slaves converted much of their earnings and resources into consumer goods. Some of the profit accrued at market, however, returned with the slaves to the plantation in the form of cash. Slaves either spent this money at a subsequent market or on the plantation, or saved it.<sup>65</sup>

Jamaican slaves based their plantation economies, in part, on cash. Most of the money injected into this system had been brought back by slaves from market. This meant that slaves other than those involved in the market dimension of the internal economy shared in a cash economy. By providing various services and commodities on the plantation, slaves could be part of the plantation economy and its cash component, although not directly involved in the weekly markets which were the source of much of this revenue.

The capture and sale of rats on the plantation, for example, provided income. Rats infested the cane fields and caused extensive damage to the sugar crop. Planters either employed slaves as rat-catchers or offered a bounty for those caught. The bounty on some plantations comprised "a quantity of rum, proportioned to the number taken, which is known by the number of tails." The rest of the rat's body was also a marketable commodity. The consumption by slaves of rat's meat was apparently a widespread dietary practice. It caused

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<sup>65</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 125.

one commentator to claim that the bounty for catching rats was unnecessary as "the animals themselves are sufficient inducement for taking them, as they [the slaves] eat them with as much satisfaction as we [planters] should some species of game. On the plantation that provided the setting for the novel Marly, the slave delegated the responsibility for catching rats in turn sold them to other slaves on the plantation for food. Slaves, incidentally, nicknamed rats "Sir Charles Price" after a leading Jamaican planter. Plantation records contain few references to rat catching and selling activities, and it is therefore difficult to determine their extent. If, however, slaves controlled the sale of the twenty rats a day which one slave on Charles Gordon Gray's St. James Parish estate reportedly caught, it obviously had the potential of being quite a lucrative endeavor.<sup>66</sup>

When slaves attended community celebrations and festivities, they purchased food and drink from those who had prepared it. J. B. Moreton's description of West India Customs and Manners indicates that, on these occasions, such fare as "strong liquors" and various dishes of swine, poultry, salt beef, pork, herrings, vegetables and roasted rats were divided into calabashes and sold at a bit and a half bit per serving.<sup>67</sup>

Slaves unable or unwilling to raise their own crops could find work in the grounds of other slaves. An anonymous article on the

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<sup>66</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (July 1797), 107; Anon., Marly, 46; Charles Gordon Gray to father, 16 August 1810, MST 163, Institute of Jamaica.

<sup>67</sup> Moreton, West India Customs, 155-6.

condition of slaves, published in the Quarterly Review in 1823, contended that slaves who were "too improvident to cultivate their provisions" sometimes worked in the provision grounds of others and in return received "a small allowance for their present wants." It may be, therefore, that those unable to or unwilling to invest their time extensively in raising their own provisions were part-time beneficiaries of the provision ground/market system. They probably were not involved in the marketing aspect, and had no control over the grounds or the crop, but exchanged their labor for a share of the proceeds.<sup>68</sup>

The practice of obeah involved the transference of money. The value which the rare and obscure components of the amulets, fetishes and charms had was compounded by the magical qualities vested in them by the obeah practitioner. In his post-Emancipation study of obeah in the West Indies, Hesketh Bell mentioned, "the most valuable of the sorcerer's stock, namely, seven bones belonging to a rattlesnake's tail--these I have known sell for five dollars each, so highly valued are they as amulets or charms." He went on to comment on "how profitable was the trade of Obeah-man." Similar practices of buying charms and fetishes must have been carried out by slaves on sugar plantations seventy or one hundred years earlier.<sup>69</sup>

Various reports relevant to slave deaths offer the historian further evidence of the vitality of the internal economy. Both Edwards

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<sup>68</sup> Anon., "Condition of the Negroes," Quarterly Review, 29: 58 (1823), 489-90.

<sup>69</sup> Hesketh J. Bell, Obeah; Witchcraft in the West Indies (1889, rpt. New York, 1970), 16.

and Long maintained that slaves made bequests of capital and property on their deaths. Edwards claimed, "they are permitted . . . to dispose at their deaths of what little property they possess: and even to bequeath their grounds or gardens to such of their fellow-slaves as they think proper." Long contended that:

the black grandfather, or father, directs in what manner his money, his hogs, his poultry, furniture, cloaths, and other effects and acquisitions, shall descend, or be disposed of, after his decease. He nominates a sort of trustees, or executors, from the nearest of kin, who distribute them among the legatees, according to the will of the testator, without any molestation or interruption, most often without the inquiry, of their master; though some of these Negroes have been known to possess from 50£ to 200£ at their death; and few among them, that are at all industrious and frugal, lay up less than 20£ or 30£. For in this island they have the greatest part of the small silver circulating among them, which they gain by sale of their hogs, poultry, fish, corn, fruits, and other commodities, at the markets in town and country.<sup>70</sup>

Some indication can be derived from burial ceremonies that slaves incurred financial debts. John Stewart's View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica offers evidence of this:

Previous to the interment of the corpse it is sometimes pretended that it is endowed with the gift of speech; and the friends and relatives alternately place their ears to the lid of the coffin, to hear what the deceased has to say. This generally consists of complaints and upbraidings for various injuries,--treachery, ingratitude, injustice, slander, and, in particular, the non-payment of debts due to the deceased. This last complaint is sometimes shown by the deceased in a more cogent way than by mere words; for on coming opposite the door of the negro debtor, the coffin makes a full stop, and no persuasion nor strength can induce the deceased to go forward peaceably to his grave till the money is paid; so that the unhappy debtor has no

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<sup>70</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 125; Long, History, II, 410-1.



alternative but to comply with this demand, or have his creditor palmed upon him, as a lodger, for some time.<sup>71</sup>

The internal economies of sugar plantation slaves were characteristically fluid. Edward Long pointed to the fluidity of the market system in referring to the rapid circulation of small currency "in the retail branch of internal commerce." Slaves were less likely to accumulate significant savings than they were to spend, within a short space of time, what they had earned. Some slaves saved enough money to purchase their freedom, but typically these were not plantation slaves; or, if they were, they held positions of privilege on the plantation: tradesmen, domestics and the like. The involvement of most plantation slaves in the internal economy was at a much smaller scale. Agricultural activities epitomized the small-holding pattern: a variety of staples suitable for consumption and sale, and a few head of small stock. Income derived from these sources may have been supplemented by cottage industries, gifts and bequests, "thefts" and appropriation, working for remuneration on days off, and sale of goods and services. Slaves spent most of the money derived from these activities more or less as it was earned, on clothing, food, furniture, tobacco and other consumer items. What was not spent at market purchased various goods and services on the plantation. Historian Orlando Patterson contends that "very few [Jamaican] slaves managed to save anything." There was little opportunity to accumulate savings, and Long correctly indicated the atypicality of

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<sup>71</sup> John Stewart, A View, 275-6.



slaves who left £50 to £200 on their deaths. He was also overly sanguine in asserting the typicality of bequests of £20 to £30.<sup>72</sup>

The system of slavery permitted few slaves to prosper and forced many into abject poverty. Largely through the assertion and mobilization of their own power, however, many members of the slave population of Jamaica's sugar plantations took part in an economy of exceptional vitality and diversity. Unimpeded by either the planters or the untenability of their position in law, slaves averred their right to accumulate and dispose of cash, and laid claim over property and the disposal of their labor. In so doing, despite their de jure status as chattels, they involved themselves in a multiplicity of autonomous actions and choices such as management, retail and purchasing decisions.

Slaves' economic activities entailed much hardship and sacrifice and promised few opportunities for prosperity. Nevertheless, Jamaican sugar plantation slaves established and developed an internal economy, the vitality of which stands as testimony both to the courage and endeavor of individual slaves and to the strength and vigor of the slave community.

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<sup>72</sup> Long, History, I, 573; II, 410-1; Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London, 1967), 229.

## Appendix 1-a

## West Indian Slave Woman Going To Sunday Market

A contemporary print of a West Indian slave woman on her way to Sunday market. Among the wares she is carrying are sugar cane, pine-apples, poultry, a calabash and a bottle. Note also the elaborate clothing and accessories worn by the woman and the person with whom she is talking.

Source: Reproduced in Susanne Everett, The Slaves (New York, 1978), 81.

## Appendix 1-a (continued)



## Chapter 2

### The Internal Economy of Sugar Plantation Slaves in Louisiana

Slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations engaged in a wide range of economic activities. The internal economy on Louisiana estates, in which slaves accumulated and disposed of money and property, showed the same vitality as that developed by Jamaican slaves. In both plantation societies the internal economy was central to slave family and community life.

Louisiana law offered no protection to slaves involved in the internal economy. The legal status of slaves defined them as chattels, the property of another person. The laws of Louisiana, like the laws of Jamaica, conferred on planters extensive rights and powers over slaves.

The modus vivendi established on Louisiana sugar estates, however, did not come solely from the exercise of the planters' power. Slaves also had power that derived from their ability to affect productivity. Thus slaves, whose labor created the wealth of the sugar plantations, could influence profitability by withholding their labor or working less efficiently. Although they risked punishment at the hands of the planters, slaves engaged in job actions such as running away, malingering, working slowly, feigning sickness, being unresponsive to orders or responsibility, and sabotaging crops, tools and livestock. As John Blassingame points out, slaves knew their value as workers to the plantation and "parlayed it into better treatment." They used their power to shape aspects of plantation life such as the quality of housing, clothing and food, and conditions of work. They also sought protection for their economic activities and secured

customary rights that permitted the extensive development of the internal economy.<sup>1</sup>

Like their Jamaican counterparts, Louisiana slaves controlled the use of some land on and around the plantation, where they raised livestock and grew crops for their personal consumption and sale. Although the crops differed, slaves in both societies held and cultivated the land similarly.

In slave villages, on Louisiana estates, gardens surrounded the houses so that occupants could, if they wished, raise a kitchen garden and keep some livestock. Travelers often commented on these gardens. T. B. Thorpe's 1853 description of slave villages on Louisiana sugar plantations included the observation that:

in the rear of each cottage, surrounded by a rude fence, you find a garden in more or less order, according to the industrious habits of the proprietor. In all you notice that the 'chicken-house' seems to be in excellent condition.

In his Diary North and South, London Times correspondent William Howard Russell's description of a Louisiana sugar plantation slave village included mention of "the ground round the huts . . . amidst which pigs and poultry were recreating." He added that "the negroes rear domestic birds of all kinds." On another plantation Russell noted that "behind each hut are rude poultry hutches, which, with geese, turkeys and a few pigs form the perquisites of the slaves. . . ." A former slave, Elizabeth Ross Hite, confirmed the traveler's accounts, recalling

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<sup>1</sup> John Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York, 1972), 213.

"we had a garden right in front of our quarter. We planted ev'rything in it. Had watermelon, mushmelon, and a flower garden." Similarly, ex-slave Catherine Cornelius remembered the "garden patch, wid mustard greens, cabbage, chickens too."<sup>2</sup>

Louisiana slaves put their kitchen gardens to diverse uses, raising a variety of fruits and vegetables, and small livestock, especially poultry and hogs. The close proximity of these gardens to the slave village meant that slaves could work them at odd times through the week, as for example, during the midday break and in the evenings. Moreover, old slaves, who did little plantation work and spent most of their time in the quarters, labored in the kitchen gardens. One ex-slave recalled that her grandmother did not go to work in the fields, but "would tend to the lil patch of corn, raise chickens, and do all the work around the house."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> T. B. Thorpe, "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 7 (November 1853), 753; William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South (London 1863), 371, 396; Interview conducted under the auspices of the Slave Narrative Collection Project, Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration. Interviewee--Elizabeth Ross Hite: Interviewer--Robert McKinney: Date--ca. 1940, Louisiana Writers' Project File, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Interview conducted under the auspices of a Slave Narrative Collection Project organized by Dillard University using only black interviewers. This project developed alongside the Federal Writers' Project program. Interviewee--Catherine Cornelius: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--ca. 1939, Archives and Manuscripts Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewee--Melinda [last name unknown]: Interviewer--Arguedas: Date--ca. 1940: F.W.P. Interviews, Federal Writers' Project Files, Melrose Collection, Archives Division, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches, Louisiana.



Besides their kitchen gardens, slaves had more extensive allotments of land elsewhere on the plantation. There they generally cultivated a cash crop, most commonly corn. While some of the crops raised in the kitchen garden were destined to be eaten at the slaves' table, this was less true of the crops in the "negro grounds," which they raised primarily for market. In addition to corn, slaves grew other market staples such as pumpkins, potatoes and hay. Usually located on the periphery of the plantation, beyond the land in sugar, the "negro grounds" were less accessible than the kitchen gardens. On Houmas Estate, an Ascension Parish sugar plantation belonging to John Burnside, it was "on the borders of the forest" that the slaves "plant[ed] corn for their own use."<sup>4</sup>

Since they were less accessible, the "negro grounds" could not be worked in the same way as the kitchen gardens, that is, during spare time and at the end of the day. Slaves needed time both to work in the grounds and to travel to and from them. Only on weekends, when slaves often did no work for the plantation, did they have time to tend these more distant grounds. The exception to this rule was during sugar harvest, when, in an attempt to gather the crop as swiftly as possible to avoid the dangers of frost, slaves worked every day of the week. In return, slaves sometimes received compensation for this debilitating work in the form of days off at the end of harvest equal to the number of Sundays worked. The 1849 plantation journal for Elu Landry's estate, for example, recorded that, after completion of the

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<sup>4</sup> Russell, My Diary, 399.

sugar harvest on 20 November, slaves had the following three days off (21 to 23 November) for working on Sundays during the harvest. Such systems of compensatory time off were common throughout the sugar region of Louisiana, and replicated practices found on Jamaican sugar estates.<sup>5</sup>

Out of harvest, slaves could, if they wished, spend Sundays at work in their grounds. On some plantations, moreover, slaves had time off other than on Sundays. William Howard Russell claimed that on a sugar plantation he visited the slaves had "from noon on Saturday till dawn on Monday morning to do as they please." On other plantations, however, slaves did regular plantation work for six days and some light work for part of the Sunday. Ex-slave Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that "de Sunday wurk was light. Dey would only pull shucks of corn." Sunday work usually entailed the performance of a specific task, which after completion the slaves could devote the remainder of the day to their own activities. Entries in the plantation journal for Samuel McCutcheon's Ormond Estate in St. Charles Parish recorded that on Sunday, 5 August 1838, the slaves were at work shelling corn and gathering fodder till 10:00 a.m.; on 23 September, the men were branding oxen and the women making hay until noon; and a month later, on 28 October, the slaves shelled corn until 8:00 a.m. On each occasion, when they completed the task, the slaves had the rest of the day off. Ex-slave Catherine Cornelius recalled a similar system in operation on Dr. William Lyle's Smithfield Plantation in West Baton Rouge Parish.

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<sup>5</sup> Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry (Elu) Estate, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

On this estate, however, the task work system applied to Saturdays, while slaves invariably had Sunday off except during harvest: "dat [Saturday] was de day fo' ourselves," Cornelius explained. "We all had certain tasks to do. If we finished dem ahead of time, de rest of de day was ours."<sup>6</sup>

Slaves could also devote time out of the annual holiday periods to work for themselves. Holidays usually came at Christmas and New Year (although these could be delayed by a late harvest), and perhaps at the end of planting, when the crop was laid-by in mid-summer, and immediately prior to the commencement of harvest. The holiday before the beginning of the sugar harvest was particularly important to slaves, for it permitted them to harvest their crops before they were expected to labor full-time cutting and grinding cane. Slaves on Isaac Erwin's Shady Grove Plantation had two days' holiday (28 and 29 September 1849) before the sugar harvest commenced on 1 October. They devoted the days to "dig[g]ing their Potatoes & Pinders." Similarly, on Valcour Aime's St. James Parish plantation, on the day preceding the commencement of the 1851 sugar harvest, the slaves had a "free day to dig their potatoes." When such free time was not available for harvesting crops, the work had to be done on slaves' regularly scheduled days off.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Russell, My Diary, 399; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Plantation Diary, Volume I, 1838-1840, McCutcheon (Samuel) Papers, Archives, LSU; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Erwin (Isaac) Diary, Archives, LSU; Plantation Diary of Valcour Aime, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

Slaves engaged in a variety of money-making activities besides raising crops and livestock for sale. Technological developments in the sugar industry permitted Louisiana slaves an opportunity to earn money that the Jamaican slaves did not have. Mechanization of the grinding and milling of sugar allowed Louisiana sugar planters a higher yield and made possible larger harvests than the water-, wind-, or animal-powered mills used in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Jamaica. The machines used in Louisiana, however, required a source of power. Almost without exception, locally-gathered wood provided the fuel. Experiments with burning imported coal or canes that had already had the juice extracted (called trash or bagasse) usually proved unsuccessful because of the expense of coal and the slow technological development of the bagasse-burner.<sup>8</sup>

Louisiana planters, therefore, faced the problem of getting enough wood to fuel their sugar mills, and, although wood-gathering became part of the regular plantation labor schedule, this source proved insufficient for their needs. Planters were always in the market for wood, and thus afforded slaves the opportunity to engage in a very lucrative endeavor. Slaves collected wood on their days off in the summertime and early fall prior to the beginning of the sugar harvest. This schedule permitted the slaves to tend and weed their

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<sup>8</sup> In October 1858, for example, William Palfrey's "Bagasse burner proved a failure." Plantation Diary, 1842-1859, 1867 (Volume 17), Palfrey (William T. and George D.) Account Books, Archives, LSU; In 1842, 225 barrels of "Pittsburg Coal" costing \$90.00 were purchased for the Gay family's sugar estate. Box 11, Folder 81, Gay (Edward J. and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU.

crops in spring. By summer these crops had grown high enough to be laid-by and left until harvest. With their crops laid-by, slaves could devote their attention to gathering wood.

Wood-collecting was onerous, unpleasant work. The wood had to be taken from swamp and bayou areas abutting the river-front plantations. Slaves, therefore, either worked from a flat-boat or had to stand for long periods in the water. The wood they cut was floated or boated out. Invariably, only men did this work, which, although arduous, was remunerative. In 1849, slaves who cut wood on Lewis Stirling's plantations received six bits (seventy-five cents) per cord, while three years before, slaves on the Uncle Sam Estate in St. James Parish got fifty cents a cord. The price paid on the Uncle Sam plantation remained constant through the rest of the antebellum period, for there is a journal entry for 25 October 1859: "Paye aux negres pour 2018 Cordes Bois--\$1009.25," and in the fall of 1861, 61 slaves cut 1598 cords of wood and received \$799.00. In 1861, the most wood cut by one slave was eighty cords and the least was three cords. Most slaves cut between fifteen and forty cords. There were, incidentally, some 130 slaves on the plantation at that time. The Gay Estate in Iberville Parish also paid slaves fifty cents a cord for any wood they cut, as did Colonel W. W. Pugh on his Woodlawn Plantation in the years 1848-55, while throughout the 1850s George Lanaux paid sixty cents a cord to slaves on his Bellevue Estate.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Box 7, Folder 39, Stirling (Lewis and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Box 1, Uncle Sam Plantation Papers, Archives, LSU; Joseph K. Menn, The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana--1860 (New Orleans, 1964), 353-4; Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36), Gay Papers; Journal 1851-1860 (Volume 14), Lanaux (George and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU.

During harvest, sugar mills consumed huge quantities of wood. In 1853, for example, slaves on the Stirling family's plantation harvested 306 acres of cane, which yielded 533 hogsheads of sugar, 953 barrels of molasses, and 59 barrels of cistern sugar. In processing this crop, the sugar house burned 1,350 cords of wood. The following year, the crop of 500 hogsheads of sugar, 833 barrels of molasses, and 22,242 pounds of cistern sugar required 1,125 cords of wood. William T. Palfrey's sugar mill was much less efficient than that of the Stirling plantation. Palfrey ran out of wood during the 1857 harvest after the mill "used at least 1800 cords of wood" to make around 440 hogsheads of sugar. At this stage, eleven arpents of cane still had to be ground. In the following year, after the "Bagasse burner proved a failure," he used 1,520 cords of wood to make 385 hogsheads of sugar but still had 130 arpents to grind. He again ran out of wood, and had to buy an additional  $253\frac{1}{2}$  cords at \$4.00 a cord from his son in order to complete the harvest.<sup>10</sup>

Since it took from two to four cords of wood to make one hogshhead of sugar, huge amounts of wood were required to process Louisiana's sugar crop whose annual total twice topped 400,000 hogsheads in the decade preceding the outbreak of the Civil War. Time given over to wood-collecting in the regular plantation labor schedule could not supply all that was required. Contracting for wood off the plantation, as William Palfrey found out in 1858, was an expensive proposition. The efforts of slaves working in their own time gathering wood thus

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<sup>10</sup> Plantation Diary 1851-1863, Stirling Papers; Plantation Diary 1842-1859, 1867 (Volume 17) W. T. & G. D. Palfrey Papers.

proved the most effective and efficient means for planters to supplement their fuel supply. It also gave slaves the opportunity to earn substantial amounts of money.<sup>11</sup>

The price planters paid slaves for wood (fifty or sixty cents per cord) was considerably below the market price. Although slaves always had a ready market on the plantation for the wood they cut they could not sell it off the estate because planters had sole purchasing rights. In addition to a cash payment per cord, however, slaves received other perquisites in the form of tools and equipment. Although working for themselves, slaves used the plantation's axes and saws, and also had access to the estate's flat-boats, work animals and tackle necessary to bring the wood out of the swamp and back to the mill. It is also probable that where slaves got special issues of clothing, such as boots, for cutting wood as part of the plantation work, they used them for their private wood-gathering. Furthermore, of course, slaves did this work on land owned by planters, and felled trees over which, in law, the planters had title.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of relative profitability and price-exploitation, a great many slaves throughout the Louisiana sugar region cut wood for their own profit. Few extant plantation records fail to mention slaves working for themselves, collecting wood for sale to the estate.

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<sup>11</sup> "Statements of the Sugar and Rice Crops Made in Louisiana," by L. Bouchereau, (New Orleans, 1871) in Box 1, Folder 1, UU-211, #555, Pharr Family Papers, Archives, LSU.

<sup>12</sup> Plantation Diary 1842-1859, 1867, W. T. & G. D. Palfrey Papers.



Woodcutting comprised one of the more lucrative of the slaves' economic endeavors, and made a significant contribution to the internal economy.

Wood was just one of many goods and services for which planters paid slaves. If they desired, slaves could devote as much of their free time to filling such needs as they cared. In return, of course, they received cash.

Planters usually would pay slaves to dig ditches. A good and well-maintained irrigation system was vital to the sugar estates because of the topography of that region of Louisiana and its proximity to the Mississippi River. As with wood-cutting, the amount of ditching done as part of the regular plantation labor schedule proved insufficient to the estates' needs, and planters often reverted to hiring ditchers, either gangs of jobbing slaves, or wage laborers. Many planters, alternatively or additionally, were willing to pay slaves on the plantation for any ditching they chose to do on the weekends or on holidays.

The amount paid slaves for this work varied according to the type of ditches they dug. On Duncan Kenner's plantation, slaves got \$3.00 per acre for digging a six-foot ditch, while the payment for shallower ditches of one to two feet in depth was from fifty cents to \$1.00 per acre. The records of W. W. Pugh's Woodlawn Plantation show that digging 344 yards of "cross-ditching" earned slaves \$5.50.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Diary 1847 (Volume 1), Kenner (Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36), Gay Papers; Cashbook for Negroes 1848-55 (Volume 6), Col. W. W. Pugh Papers, Archives, LSU.

Wood-cutting and ditching were, perhaps, the most arduous tasks slaves did for the plantation. There were, however, a multitude of other jobs they could do. Louisiana plantation records include lists of work done by slaves in their spare time, for which they received cash. On W. W. Pugh's estate, slaves who made shingles got \$3.00 per thousand, staves paid \$5.00 per thousand, pickets \$1.25 per hundred, and boards 2½ cents per four-foot board. Pugh bought shuck collars for 37½ cents each and hogsheads for 75 cents each. Hauling wood paid 75 cents a day since it was light work that entailed driving a cart. Slaves who wanted to do regular work for the plantation on Sundays or holidays got from \$1.00 to \$1.25. (This, incidentally, matched the cost of hiring jobbing slaves.)<sup>14</sup>

Slaves on the Gay family's sugar estate in Iberville Parish also got paid for a variety of jobs on the estate that they did in their time off from plantation work: sugar-potting, making hogsheads and barrels at \$1.00 each, fixing and firing kettles, collecting fodder for 1 cent per bundle, making iron hoops, mending shoes at 12½ cents a pair, counting hoop-poles for 50 cents a day, and serving as watchmen at \$1.00 a month. Skilled slaves were able to make money during sugar harvest. In the mid-1840s the sugar-maker received \$30.00 for his services at harvest, while his deputy got \$15.00; the chief engineer and the kettle-setter each got \$10.00. The firemen, kettle-tenders

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<sup>14</sup> Cashbook for Negroes 1848-55 (Volume 6), W. W. Pugh Papers; Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36), Gay Papers.

and the second engineer got \$5.00 for the work they did during the harvest season.<sup>15</sup>

On Benjamin Tureaud's estate, slaves received remuneration for such work as making bricks, hogsheads, shuck-collars and baskets, while on the Wilton Plantation in St. James Parish, estate accounts note cash paid to slaves for ditching, "levying," and making rails and handbarrows. Such extensive documentation attests that throughout the Louisiana sugar region, plantation slaves had numerous opportunities to earn money by doing work for the estate.<sup>16</sup>

Since a number of the jobs listed above could only be performed by tradesmen, they represented an opportunity for slaves skilled as coopers, waggoners, blacksmiths and the like to use their training for their own profit. Large-scale projects performed by skilled slaves were potentially quite lucrative. One set of slave accounts on the Gay family's plantation record that a slave named Thornton got \$20.00 for making a cart.<sup>17</sup>

On some estates, the slave tradesmen's plantation labor involved a piece-work system in which each worker had to produce a specific quantity of items. This system, which was employed on John

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<sup>15</sup> Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5); Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36); "Memorandum relative to payments to negroes Dec. 1844," Box 11, Folder 81, Gay Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Ledger 1858-1872, Tureaud (Benjamin) Papers, Archives, LSU; S-124 (9) #2668, Bruce, Seddon and Wilkins Plantation Records, Archives, LSU.

<sup>17</sup> Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36), Gay Papers.

Randolph's Nottoway Plantation on the Bayou Goula, afforded the coopers an opportunity to make money for themselves by exceeding the number of barrels the planter required them to produce. In December 1857, Cooper Henry received payment of \$19.50 for making 26 barrels and 13 hogsheads above his required quota. His fellow-tradesmen Cooper William and Cooper Jack got \$16.00 and \$8.00 for their extra production of 22 barrels and 10 hogsheads, and 10 barrels and 6 hogsheads respectively. Although the plantation records give no indication, it may have been that the coopers worked for themselves during the regular plantation labor schedule after having completed their set tasks. There is no mention of what would have happened had a cooper not fulfilled the required quota.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, most slaves were not skilled, and thus were unable to benefit, at least directly, from the sorts of paying jobs available to the tradesmen. Further, many of the tasks that did not require specific skills required great physical stamina. Wood-cutting and ditching are two examples. Other than the few jobs which required neither of these prerequisites, such as counting hoop-poles and collecting fodder, slaves had few opportunities to work for the plantation in any capacity other than making themselves available for whatever day-work the planter delegated. Such work presumably would take into consideration the abilities of the individual slaves since it was purely a voluntary effort on the part of the slaves. If the work did not suit them, they would not do it. Many slaves chose not

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<sup>18</sup> Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-1863, John H. Randolph Papers, Archives, LSU.

to do such task work for the plantation, preferring a more independent labor system centered on their small-holding agricultural activities, while others combined working for themselves with working for the plantation.

Slaves who worked for themselves concentrated on raising crops and livestock, hunting and fishing, and collecting and drying a very marketable crop that grew in profusion in that part of Louisiana, Spanish moss. Although slaves grew a number of cash crops, the principal one was corn: poultry and pigs comprised most of their livestock. Slaves found a market on the plantation for much of the crops and livestock they raised, although they occasionally had other outlets such as river traders and markets in nearby towns. Slaves consigned their dried moss, and barrels of molasses, to major entrepôts on the Mississippi, chiefly St. Louis, New Orleans and Natchez.

Spanish moss (tillandsia usneoides) is a plant indigenous to the sugar region of Louisiana. The grayish-green moss, whose hair-like strands festoon trees, is well-known to anyone who has been in that region. Before the advent of man-made fibers, Spanish moss was one of the principal commodities used for stuffing in furnishing and upholstery. The moss was much in demand, for it was relatively scarce, since, despite its abundance in Louisiana and other parts of the southern United States, it grew nowhere else on the North American continent. There was a demand for as much Spanish moss as could be gathered, and slaves in Louisiana were excellently placed to take advantage of it.

Hunton Love, who for the first twenty years of his life had been a slave on John Viguerie's sugar plantation on the Bayou Lafourche, recalled that:

Once I heard some men talkin' an' one sed, "You think money grows on trees," an' the other one say, "Hit do, git down that moss an' convert it into money," an' I got to thinkin' an' sho' 'nuff, it do grow on trees.

This anecdote, taken from a more extensive testimony on slave life given by Love in the late 1930s, indicates the importance of the collection and sale of moss to the economic activities of slaves in Louisiana.<sup>19</sup>

The records of various plantations mention that slaves exploited the market for moss. On Robert Ruffin Barrow's sugar plantations on the Bayou Lafourche, slaves set aside Sundays for collecting and processing their moss crop, and the accounts of Magnolia Plantation, a relatively small sugar estate with a slave population of between forty and fifty, recorded payments to slaves for moss.<sup>20</sup>

The records of the Gay family's sugar estate in Iberville Parish contain much more extensive documentation of moss-gathering,

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<sup>19</sup> Interviewee--Hunton Love: Interviewer--unknown: Date--ca. 1940: FWP Interviews, Louisiana State Library.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from J. L. Rogers (Overseer), Caillou Grove, to Robert Ruffin Barrow, Residence, 29 October 1853, Box 2, Folder 1850s-20; Residence Journal of R. R. Barrow, 1 January 1857-13 June 1858, (copied from original manuscript in Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina), Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Department of Archives, Tulane University, New Orleans; Book of Accounts of the Magnolia Plantation 1829-1853, Louisiana State Museum.

including the collection and marketing pattern, and payment schedules. In the mid-1840s, the plantation was being run by Colonel Andrew Hynes and Joseph B. Craighead, while Edward Gay lived in St. Louis and acted as agent for the estate's produce. In 1844, Gay wrote to Hynes and Craighead suggesting that the slaves pick moss and send it to St. Louis where he could guarantee it would sell for a good price. Thereafter, moss was an integral part of the internal economy of the slave community on the Gay Estate. Within a few months, the first shipment of dried moss sold in St. Louis at two cents a pound. Twenty-two slaves, two of whom were women, sent in all 9,705 pounds of moss and received a total of \$162.03 (\$196.10 less \$34.07 freight and commission). Individual payments ranged from the \$26.55 Jacob Young received for 1,490 pounds of moss, to \$4.30 paid Thornton for one bale weighing 260 pounds.<sup>21</sup>

Up until the Civil War, slaves continued to send their bales of moss to St. Louis for sale. The price per pound dropped from two cents to 1¼ cents in 1849-51 but returned to two cents a pound in 1852, after which it remained constant through 1861. The moss was shipped to Gay's agency in St. Louis on steamers bound up the Mississippi. Each year, several shipments were made, on average four or five per annum. When the moss had been sold, Gay sent a receipt of the transaction to Hynes, listing the name of the slave, the number

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<sup>21</sup> Letter from Edward Gay, St. Louis, to Hynes and Craighead, Iberville, 6 April 1844; "Account 1844, Memorandum, Sale of moss for the negroes," Box 11, Folder 81, Gay Papers.



of bales, the poundage, price, expenses and net proceeds. Hynes then reimbursed the slaves.<sup>22</sup>

A record book documenting moss-gathering and sale on the Gay plantation in the years 1849-61 shows the extent of the slave community's involvement. These data, transcribed in Appendix 2-a, show that, in the thirteen-year period, 160 slaves, 41 of whom were women, sold moss. The number engaged in collecting and drying it was probably larger than this, for some of the shipments were sent jointly by a husband and wife, and they had probably been assisted in these early processes by their children and other family members. Since the total number of slaves, including children, on the estate in 1850 was 224 and in 1860 stood at 240, it would appear that a majority of adult slaves on the plantation took part in this money-making venture. A summation of the total shipments for the period shows that at least \$4,000 entered the internal economy, that is an average of some \$300 a year.<sup>23</sup>

Picking moss from the trees was a relatively easy task that required little other than some agility and application. With the assistance of a long staff the non-parasitic plant could readily be detached from a tree's trunk and limbs. After it had been dried in the sun, the moss was bound in bales weighing 250-350 pounds, and was ready for shipment. The slaves on the Barrow plantation used the

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<sup>22</sup> Moss Record Book 1849-1861 (Volume 35); Boxes 11-13, Folders 81-96, Gay Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Moss Record Book 1849-1861 (Volume 35); Estate Record Book 1848-1855 (Volume 34), Gay Papers; Menn, Large Slaveholders, 244-5.

estate's oxen to transport the bales to the riverside wharf, where they were loaded into the first available steamer. There is no indication that the slaves paid for the use of the oxen, and it is likely that this aspect of transporting the bales was a perquisite. Slaves did, however, have to pay for the cartage aboard ship, and the agent's sales commission. This amounted to from 75 cents to \$1.25 a bale in total. When the receipts arrived at the plantation, slaves were reimbursed for the total net proceeds of their moss, usually around \$4.00 to \$5.00 a bale. The planter made no deductions from this sum although the moss had been picked on his land, and the bales had been hauled to riverside by his draft animals. Planters did not interfere with the rights of slaves to collect and sell moss, and to be sole beneficiaries of the subsequent profits.<sup>24</sup>

Slaves picked moss during time off from plantation work. They rarely devoted their days off, however, to a single economic endeavor. Slaves who worked for themselves invariably developed an extensive and integrated system of economic activities. Slaves, for example, may have worked a bit for the plantation doing the occasional day or half-day's work. As well as moss-picking, they perhaps spent time collecting fodder to sell to the plantation, tending their crops of corn, potatoes and pumpkins, and raising some small livestock.

Poultry and hogs, the livestock most commonly raised by slaves, found their principal market on the plantation, although river traders

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<sup>24</sup> Residence Journal of R. R. Barrow, 1857-1858, Barrow Papers; Boxes 11-13, Folders 81-96, Gay Papers.

and town markets sometimes provided alternative retail outlets. Few travelers failed to comment on the proclivity of slaves to keep poultry. Descriptions of slave villages on Louisiana sugar plantations invariably mention the chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese ranging through the quarters.<sup>25</sup>

Raising poultry was ideally suited to the economy of the slave community. Fowl needed little attention and provided a dual income as slaves marketed both eggs and the birds themselves. Except, perhaps, for the initial expense of buying fledglings, raising poultry required only a small capital outlay while providing a steady income, particularly since birds and eggs were so readily marketed.

The prices paid by planters varied little throughout the period of the sugar boom. Chickens sold at anywhere from 10 cents to 25 cents each and the price of eggs was from 12½ cents to 15 cents a dozen. On W. W. Pugh's Woodlawn Plantation in Assumption Parish, muscovy ducks sold for 37½ cents each in the early 1850s.<sup>26</sup>

Ellen McCollam, who, with her husband Andrew, owned a small sugar plantation in Assumption Parish, recorded in her diary in August 1847:

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<sup>25</sup> Thorpe, "Sugar and the Sugar Region," 753; Russell, My Diary, 373.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Thomas Haley (Overseer), Grande Cote, to Mrs. Mary Weeks, New Iberia, 11 April 1841, Box 9, Folder 29, Weeks (David and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Notebook 1853-1857 (Volume 9), The Weeks Hall Memorial Collection, Weeks (David and Family) Collection, Archives, LSU; Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5), Gay Papers; Ledger 1851-1856 (Volume 18), Lanaux Papers; Cashbook for Negroes 1848-55 (Volume 6), W. W. Pugh Papers.

I bought all their chickens in the Quarters From Little Jack 5 for 2 bits, 5 for 4 bits and 4 hens one dollar, Molly 3 hens 6 bits 1 pullet 20 cents, Barrel 1 hen 2 bits 3 little chickens 15 cents-- Big Isaac 2 hens 4 bits 1 chicken 5 cents little Isaac 9 young chickens 10 cents a piece and one rooster 11 cents Mary one pullet 20.

A little over a year later she "bought of little Isaac 5 hens 2 roosters [and] a little chicken [for] \$1.00."<sup>27</sup>

Judging from the scene which William Howard Russell witnessed, slaves in their dealings with planters over the sale of poultry showed a trading acumen consistent with their position as independent retailers. When visiting John Burnside's Houmas Plantation in Ascension Parish, he recorded that:

An avenue of trees runs down the centre of the negro street, and behind each hut are rude poultry hutches, which, with the geese and turkeys and a few pigs, form the perquisites of the slaves, and the sole source from which they derive their acquaintance with currency. Their terms are strictly cash. An old negro brought up some ducks to Mr. Burnside and offered the lot of six for three dollars. "Very well, Louis; if you come tomorrow, I'll pay you." "No massa, me want de money now." "But won't you give me credit, Louis? Don't you think I'll pay the three dollars?" "Oh, pay some day, massa, sure enough. Massa good to pay de tree dollar; but this nigger want money now to buy food and things for him leetle family. They will trust massa at Donaldsonville, but they won't trust this nigger." I was told that a thrifty negro will sometimes make ten or twelve pounds a year from his corn and poultry.<sup>28</sup>

This fascinating exchange between the slave Louis and the planter John Burnside shows the slave as a retailer with a knowledge both of the value of his commodity and the terms of the transaction. Louis showed

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<sup>27</sup> Diary and Plantation Record of Ellen E. McCollam, McCollam (Andrew and Ellen E.) Papers, Archives, LSU.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, My Diary, 396.

his bargaining acumen, and he was prepared to contradict the planter in the course of the negotiations. The money he accrued from the sale was earmarked for purchases for himself and his family. Although he found a market for his goods on the plantation, apparently he planned to spend his cash off the estate in the nearby town of Donaldsonville, where, by virtue of his understanding of the terms demanded by the merchants there, he had presumably traded before. Burnside would have had no influence in determining how Louis spent his money.

Slaves marketed their other livestock on the plantation. On the Gay family's estate in 1845, for example, the selling price for a breeding sow stood at \$3.00. The plantation on which they lived provided slaves with the principal market for their crops and livestock. Slaves, however, could bypass the plantation completely by selling their commodities either at the markets in nearby towns, or to the river traders who plied the waterways in this region.<sup>29</sup>

In their own grounds, slaves practiced a somewhat diversified system of agriculture, raising a number of different cash crops. Some land may have been given over to pumpkins, which the planters bought for one to two cents each. On Benjamin Tureaud's estate, a slave named Big Mathilda received \$10.00 for the 700 pumpkins she sold to the plantation in 1858, while slave accounts for the Gay plantation show that, in 1844, seven of the 74 slaves recompensed by the plantation for goods and services derived part of their earnings from the sale of pumpkins

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<sup>29</sup> Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5), Gay Papers.

at two cents a piece. In the previous year, the plantation's record book includes an entry for "Pumpkins 4000 bought of our Negroes...\$80."<sup>30</sup>

Slaves may also have put some of their land in potatoes, while hay was another crop that found a ready market on the plantation. An additional advantage to raising a crop of hay, of course, was the small amount of labor required. About the same proportion of slaves on the Gay family's plantation as had raised pumpkins in 1844 sold hay to the estate. The retail price in that year stood at \$3.00 a load, while a year before, the total crop of hay made by the slaves on the Gay estate was 3,000 pounds for which they received \$30.00, or one cent per pound.<sup>31</sup>

Another commodity sold by slaves was molasses. On Duncan Kenner's Ashland plantation, the overseer, W. C. Wade, recorded, in January 1852, "sold the negroes molasses," while slaves on the Gay plantation regularly shipped molasses for sale in St. Louis where it fetched \$8.00 to \$12.00 a barrel through the 1840s. The net returns to slaves for molasses sold in St. Louis on 29 April 1845 listed Ned Teagle receiving \$11.80 for the barrel of molasses he sent, while Martin and Big Maria were paid \$11.18 and \$10.00 respectively for their shipments of one barrel each. In the next two months, nine slaves sent a total of 6½ barrels of molasses to St. Louis where it sold for a comparable price. The largest shipment

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<sup>30</sup> Ledger 1858-1872, Tureaud Papers; Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5), Gay Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Plantation Diary of Valcour Aime, Louisiana State Museum; Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5), Gay Papers.

of molasses recorded at this time was the 19½ barrels sent to St. Louis on board the Highlander. This shipment, sold by W. H. Belcher on 8 January 1847, netted the fifteen slaves involved a total of \$148.89. The plantation records indicate, however, that throughout the late 1840s, shipments of molasses regularly accompanied the bales of moss slaves sent north to St. Louis by steamer. The records do not reveal whether slaves grew cane in their grounds and processed it in the estate's mill, or whether they received molasses in payment for services rendered the plantation. The latter explanation perhaps is the more likely since slaves did not sell any of the other cane products--sugar or cistern sugar.<sup>32</sup>

All of the above crops were minor in comparison with the raising of corn. The growing and retailing of corn was possibly the most lucrative dimension of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves' internal economies, and the one which involved the largest proportion of the slave population. Extant plantation records abound with references to slaves growing corn in their grounds, and selling it, primarily to the plantation, but oftentimes elsewhere.

Both slaves and planters benefited from retailing the corn crop within the confines of the plantation. By selling corn to the plantation, slaves did not have to go to the expense and effort of shipping and marketing their crop, while the planters, by buying from the slaves, were also saved the various fees attendant to purchasing through an

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<sup>32</sup> Ashland Plantation Record Book, Archives, LSU; Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5); Box 12, Folder 86; "Sales of Moss & Molasses belonging to the Negroes," Box 13, Folder 100; Box 12, Folder 93; Box 13, Folder 96, Gay Papers.



agent. The planters, of course, wanted to purchase the crop since corn meal, along with meat, comprised the rations they supplied the slaves on their plantations. The planters may, in some cases, have limited slaves' movement off the plantation to gain priority in purchasing the corn crop. In other cases, however, planters even put the estate's transportation at the disposal of slaves who went off the plantation to market their crop. For example, Elu Landry's plantation diary recorded that, on 7 October 1849, Landry "gave [the slaves] permission & pass to sell their corn in the neighborhood--lent them teams for that purpose." In another instance, slaves on the estate of Mr. Ventress, a Bayou Goula sugar planter, sold their 1859 crop of 1,011 barrels of corn to J. H. Randolph of Nottoway Estate and received a cash payment of \$758.00 (75 cents a barrel). Selling corn off the plantation, however, remained the exception. As a rule, the crop was sold for cash to the planter on the estate on which the slaves lived.<sup>33</sup>

On the plantation, the purchase price of corn ranged from 37½ cents to 75 cents a barrel. Slaves on George Lanaux' Bellevue Estate received 75 cents a barrel for the corn they harvested in 1851 and 1852, while twenty slaves on William T. Palfrey's Ricohoc Estate got 75 cents (6 bits) a barrel for the 275 barrels they sold to the plantation in 1861. Through the 1830s slaves on Lewis Stirling's Wakefield and Solitude Estates sold their corn at 62½ cents (5 bits) a barrel, with the exception of 1831. A successful 1830 crop realized \$189.56½

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<sup>33</sup> Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry Papers; Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, Randolph Papers.

for the 306 barrels of corn grown by 37 slaves on the Solitude Estate, but the 1831 crop yielded only 109½ barrels for the 22 slaves involved, and sold for only 31½ cents per barrel. A note appended to the account explained the drop in price. It stated, "I allow but 2½ bits a barrel for Corn this year because there was a great deal of rotten corn amongst it." In subsequent harvests, however, the price rose again to five bits. In 1838, for example, 49 slaves on the two Stirling estates sold a total of 621 barrels of corn at this price, realizing \$388.13. Through the 1850s, corn sold for 50 cents a barrel on John Randolph's Nottoway Estate, and slaves regularly harvested a crop totalling 200 to 300 barrels. Slaves on the Gay family's plantation received 50 cents a barrel for their corn in 1844, while a year before they had sold their crop of 900 bushels for \$375.00, or 41½ cents per bushel. By 1857-59 the price slaves received for their corn on Lewis Stirling's Wakefield Estate stood at 50 cents a barrel: they harvested 384½ barrels, 322½ barrels and 456 barrels respectively in these years. This tariff represented a 12½ cents a barrel increase from the price paid the previous year (1856). The reason for the price fluctuation is unexplained, although it may have resulted from the instability of the regional corn market.<sup>34</sup>

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Journal 1851-1860 (Volume 14), Lanaux Papers; Plantation Diary 1860-1868, 1895 (Volume 18), W. T. & G. D. Palfrey Papers; Ration Book 1828, 1830-38 (H-13), Stirling Papers; Plantation Book 1853-63, Journal 6, Randolph Papers; Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5); Estate Record Book 1842-1847 (Volume 12), Gay Papers; "Negroes Corn for 1857," Box 9, Folder 54; "Negroe's Corn Sept. 18, 1858," Box 9, Folder 56; "Negroes corn 1859," Box 9, Folder 57; "Negroes Corn [1856]," Box 8, Folder 52; "List of the Negro Corn [1852]," Box 7, Folder 44, Stirling Papers.

The prices slaves received for their corn on the plantation were somewhat below the commodity's market price in New Orleans where, from 1847 through 1860, the cost per barrel fluctuated between 45 cents and \$1.40. Shipping, handling and commission charges could account for the price differential; the plantation price would thus reflect the equivalent of a local market price. The large fluctuation in the price of corn on the New Orleans market in this fourteen-year period (reproduced in Table 2-1) was in part a consequence of the lack of an organized retail market for the crop. Corn was grown throughout the sugar region, and most growers sought to be self-sufficient while giving little thought to retailing their surplus as a cash crop. As Sam Bowers Hilliard points out, the retail trade in corn was a local enterprise in which prices could fluctuate significantly as a result of a bad harvest creating strong local demands. Additionally, since the level of transactions on the New Orleans market was small, prices fluctuated widely from year to year. Moreover, the undeveloped market probably accounted for part of the variance in the cost per barrel paid slaves on the plantation.<sup>35</sup>

Slaves managed to obtain protection for their crops in case of loss or damage. In 1859, Lewis Stirling's Wakefield Estate accounts record that twelve slaves "lost all their corn" (a total of 47 barrels). They were, however, recompensed by the planter at the full price of 50

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<sup>35</sup> De Bow's Review, IV (November 1847), 393; VI (December 1848), 436; VII (November 1849), 420; IX (October 1850), 456; XI (November 1851), 496; XIII (November 1852), 512; XV (November 1853), 528; XVII (November 1854), 530; XIX (October 1855), 458; XXI (October 1856), 368; XXIII (October 1857), 365; XXV (October 1858), 469; XXVII (October 1859), 477; XXIX (October 1860), 521; Sam Bowers Hilliard, Hog Meat and Hoecake (Carbondale, Ill., 1972), 155.

Table 2-1

Average Price Per Barrel of Corn Sold in  
New Orleans in Year Ending 31 August

1847	\$1.10
1848	.60
1849	.45
1850	.90
1851	.90
1852	.70
1853	.75
1854	.90
1855	\$1.40
1856	.80
1857	\$1.25
1858	.50
1859	\$1.00
1860	\$1.00

Source: De Bow's Review, IV (November 1847), 393; VI (December 1848), 436; VII (November 1849), 420; IX (October 1850), 456; XI (November 1851), 496; XIII (November 1852), 512; XV (November 1853), 528; XVII (November 1854), 530; XIX (October 1855), 458; XXI (October 1856), 368; XXIII (October 1857), 365; XXV (October 1858), 469; XXVII (October 1859), 477; XXIX (October 1860), 521.

cents a barrel. In a similar instance two years previously, six slaves had "lost their corn by the hogs," but nevertheless received payment of \$22.00. Unfortunately the records reveal no indication of the precise reason why or on what grounds planters indemnified slaves for lost or damaged crops. The existence of such arrangements, however, shows the importance to the plantations of the private agricultural endeavors of slaves and the extent to which planters would go to assure slaves' continued involvement.<sup>36</sup>

Slaves used their time off, particularly on weekends, to cultivate their corn crops. At spring planting and fall harvesting slaves had to devote the greatest amount of their free time to these crops. Sometimes, particularly during harvest, slaves secured additional time off from the regular plantation schedule in order either to take in their crop or market it. On Duncan Kenner's Ashland Plantation, slaves, on Sunday, 10 October 1852, "gathered their corn, made a large crop." Two days later, on the Tuesday, "all but a few hands went to Donaldsonville," a nearby town, presumably to market their crop, or, if they had sold it to the plantation, to spend their earnings. The next day, the sugar harvest began. From this time (13 October) until the journal ended on 31 December 1852 slaves worked at sugar harvest every day, including Sundays and Christmas. The sugar harvest was still in progress when the journal ended.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Negroes Corn for 1857," Box 9, Folder 54; "Negroes corn 1859," Box 9, Folder 57, Stirling Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Ashland Plantation Record Book.

Christmas was a time when some slaves could expect to receive cash payments in the form of a holiday bonus. Such was the case on John Randolph's Nottoway Estate. Through the early 1850s, regular entries in the plantation books recorded the amounts of money paid for the "Negroes' Christmas." (See Table 2-2.) The slave population on Nottoway was, at this time, around 150 in total. The records do not show precisely how or to whom the Christmas money was distributed.<sup>38</sup>

Extant plantation manuscripts contain numerous references to cash paid slaves without mention of the reason for the payments. In the Stirling family's sugar plantation records, for example, there is a "Memorandum of Money Paid or Given to the Negroes in 1854." This list, reproduced as Appendix 2-b, shows that 95 slaves, 50 women and 45 men, got cash payments ranging from \$15 to 10 cents; one slave on the list, George Austin, apparently received no money. The total amount paid was \$314.55. While some of the payments may have been gifts, it is likely that most of them recompensed slaves for goods and services. Some of the larger payments went to two people, and these slaves undoubtedly were partners in some money-making venture, for example, wood-cutting. A like list, probably dating from the following year, (the manuscript of which is reproduced as Appendix 2-c) shows that 78 slaves received a total of \$258.50. Similarly, in the early 1840s, there were a number of cash payments, for which no explanation was recorded, to slaves on the Gay family's plantation--from 24 September to 28 December 1840 the

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<sup>38</sup> Journal--Plantation Book 1847-1852 (Volume 5); Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, Randolph Papers.

Table 2-2

"Christmas Money" Paid Slaves on  
John H. Randolph's Nottoway Estate

25 December 1850	"Paid Negroes Christmas"	\$150.00
27 December 1851	"Paid Negroes Christmas"	\$175.00
25 December 1852	"Paid Negroes Christmas"	\$200.00
9 January 1854	"Paid Negroes for Christmas money"	\$300.00
25 December 1854	"To Cash Paid negroes for corn & Extra Money"	\$500.00
21 December 1855	"To Negroes as Christmas money"	\$188.00
25 December 1856	"Paid out to the Negroes about"	\$200.00

Source: Journal -- Plantation Book 1847-1852 (Volume 5), and Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, John H. Randolph Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



planter paid slaves some \$600.00, while one year later, between December 1841 and January 1842, 34 men received a total of some \$200.00, the individual payments ranging from \$1.00 to \$20.00. The time at which these payments were made indicates that they were either for some of the slaves' crops or for work performed during harvest.<sup>39</sup>

Hunting and fishing provided slaves with another source of revenue. Game and fish abounded in southern Louisiana, and provided sugar plantation slaves with the opportunity to supplement their diet and possibly earn some income. Ex-slave Martha Stuart recalled that slaves would "go rabbit huntin', or if dey felt lak fishin', dey'd go." She said that slaves would sometimes borrow guns from the planter to go hunting. This was often unnecessary "cause dey had dogs to catch rabbits and possums and coons; but ef dey wanted to hunt birds or patridge or sumptin dey used de marster's gun and gived 'im half of whut dey kilt." Another former slave, Elizabeth Ross Hite, recalled that her father, a slave on Pierre Landreaux' Trinity sugar estate, went hunting at night: "mah father caught possum. . . . He went out at night trapping, but de drivers didn't know it. No sir, he wasn't allowed to go out at night but would steal out." Former sugar plantation slave West Chapman provided a colorful description of "possum hunting" in his recollections of life as a slave:

We sure did eat 'possums, an' we had fun gettin' dem. We always took a dog an' it run de 'possum up a tree--a small tree so the critter

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<sup>39</sup> Box 8, Folder 49; Box 8, Folder 51, Stirling Papers; Estate Record Book 1831-1945 (Volume 8); Cashbook/Daybook 1837-1843 (Volume 18), Gay Papers.

could wrop his tail 'round it--he would stay dere till Gabriel blow his trumpet, if we didn't cut dat tree down. We jes' pull him off den we clean and wash him good and wropped him in hot embers, pair-broiled him, an' den roasted him alongside sweet pertaters. You could dry him too by smoking him like a ham.

As well as providing variety to the pork and corn diet supplied slaves by the planter, slaves may have sold or bartered some of their catch either to fellow-slaves, traders or planters.<sup>40</sup>

Some slaves received money for catching runaways. The estate accounts of Magnolia Plantation for 1829 include the payment of \$2.00 to one of the slaves on the plantation for stopping a fugitive slave. Similarly, John Randolph entered in his journal for 1850, "Paid Gus for catching Ben -- \$3.00." Both these men were slaves on Randolph's plantation. Eight years later Randolph paid "To Cropper's [an Iberville Parish sugar planter] Negro Man for Catching Runaway -- \$25.00."<sup>41</sup>

Within the confines of the plantation, slaves who were willing and able had a wide range of opportunities to provide goods or services for which they received cash remuneration. Money earned in these ways may have been supplemented by holiday gifts from the planter. The home plantation, however, was not the only source of revenue. As indicated above, some slaves were involved in marketing produce both in the neighborhood of the plantation and at major entrepots on the Mississippi River.

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<sup>40</sup> Interviewee--Martha Stuart: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.,: Date--ca. 1938: Dillard Project, Archives, UNO; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Interviewee--West Chapman: Interviewer--Dillon: Date--ca. 1940: F. W. P. Interviews, Natchitoches.

<sup>41</sup> Book of Accounts of the Magnolia Plantation 1829-1853, Louisiana State Museum; Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, Randolph Papers.

While transactions in such entrepôts as St. Louis, Natchez and New Orleans involved retail agents, transactions in the general locale of the home plantation could take a number of forms. In the instances cited above, the slaves on the Ventress estate apparently contracted with J. H. Randolph for the sale, at 75 cents a barrel, of their sizable corn crop of 1,011 barrels. On the other hand, slaves on Elu Landry's plantation borrowed the estate's draft animals and wagons to sell their crops throughout the neighborhood.<sup>42</sup>

Slaves had still other options for marketing their crops and goods. Those who lived near towns could avail themselves, as did their Jamaican counterparts, of the village markets. Rev. P. M. Goodwyn, who was at the time living on his brother-in-law Edward Gay's sugar plantation in Iberville Parish, indicated the prevalence of this marketing practice in the portion of a letter, entitled "Sabbath scenes and reflections," that he wrote on Sunday, 26 August 1860:

I see going to and from the place of trade--wagons & carts, loaded and empty--servants walking and riding, carrying baskets--bundles--packages etc.--and I ask, why all this?--Can it be possible that there is a necessity for it?--If so, then it is excusable,--and, vice versa,--Has the Master gone, or is he going to the house of God today?--How will he--how ought he to feel--as the thought comes up while he is attempting to worship--"My Servant, or Servants, have a permit from me,--and now, while I am here, they are trading and trafficking in the stores of the town [probably Plaquemine].<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, Randolph Papers; Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry Papers.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Rev. P. M. Goodwyn, St. Louis Place, to Edward Gay, 27 August 1860, Box 29, Folder 255, Gay Papers.

Despite Rev. Goodwyn's Christian disdain over the violation of the sanctity of the Sabbath, Sunday was obviously a very important trading day for slaves able to journey to nearby towns. The importance of these markets for the internal economy of slaves rested not only in their function as an outlet for the various goods the slaves raised and produced, but also provided them the opportunity to spend their earnings. The slave, Louis, who, as mentioned above, sold his ducks to John Burnside, owner of Houmas Estate, was obviously well acquainted with the retail outlets in the nearby town of Donaldsonville. He insisted on a cash payment for the poultry as he intended spending the money in the town's stores where "they will trust massa [with credit] . . . but they won't trust [him]." <sup>44</sup>

The market-day activities of Louisiana sugar slaves were not confined to retailing and purchasing goods. As with their Jamaican counterparts, some Louisiana slaves apparently used this day to shake off the routine and restrictions of the plantation. For going to market, slaves may have donned their best clothing, the "strangely cut [and] wonderfully made" Sunday clothes that William Howard Russell observed they had. In conformity with a prevalent market-day practice, Louisiana slaves apparently spent some of their earnings on alcohol. A letter from P. E. Jennings, the Mayor of Plaquemine, to Edward Gay stated that "Several Negroes were lately caught in this town drunk and gambling on Sunday in the day time in the house of a Free Negro woman." These

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<sup>44</sup> Russell, My Diary, 396.

illicit "shebeens" were, no doubt, a feature of market towns throughout the Louisiana sugar region.<sup>45</sup>

Even when the Sabbatarian scruples of either slave or planter militated against Sunday trading, slaves could still find a retail outlet for their goods in town markets. An instance, cited in the plantation records of the Weeks' family's Grande Cote Island sugar estate, provides evidence of this. A letter, written by William Weeks, mentioned that a slave named "Amos has heard of the flat boats [trading vessels] being in New Town & has asked my permission to spend a portion of his crop on them--In consideration of his faithful services on all occasions, and his really conscientious scruples about trading on Sunday, I have concluded to let him go tomorrow." The letter was written on Sunday, 31 January 1853. Amos, therefore, had the Monday off, a working day on the plantation, to go to town to trade on his own behalf. The letter also implies, of course, that other slaves on the estate did trade on Sundays.<sup>46</sup>

Slaves, of course, were not the only people benefiting from the marketing of their products in town. The townspeople and other residents of the area, including perhaps the planters themselves, could purchase the fresh produce raised by the slaves. These purchasers, in turn, provided the slaves with cash which may have been reinvested in the local economy, since slaves bought goods from the towns' merchants.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 373; Letter from P. E. Jennings, Mayor of Plaquemine, to Edward Gay, 25 August 1858, Box 25, Folder 221, Gay Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from W. F. Weeks, Grande Cote, to Mary C. Moore, 31 January 1853, Box 31, Folder 82, Weeks Papers.

Compared with the Jamaican experience, a smaller percentage of Louisiana sugar slaves had the opportunity of marketing in towns. This was principally a function of distance. Jamaica is a relatively small island (a little over 4,000 square miles). The land suitable for raising sugar during slavery was, of course, considerably less than this. Consequently, the distances from all but the most remote of Jamaican sugar plantations were not great enough to prevent slaves from walking to the nearest town or cross-roads market, trading, and returning to the plantation within the space of a day. This was not the case in Louisiana, the 23 parish sugar region of which encompassed some 14,000 square miles. The Louisiana sugar region not only was much larger than the entire island of Jamaica, but it also had fewer towns, relative to its size, than had Jamaica. A much greater proportion of the Louisiana slave population, therefore, did not have recourse to markets outside the plantation they lived on, where they could buy and sell commodities.

In Louisiana, the plantation became the market. The town market as a retail and purchasing outlet was replaced, in large part, by a system which, as far as the slaves were concerned, was carried on within the plantation itself. Typically, this took the form of planter as purchaser of goods and services, or intermediary with an external agent, as in the sale of Spanish moss. The planter also performed an intermediary role in many of the expenditures made by slaves; that is, slaves made their purchases through the planter, the cost being debited from personal accounts the planter administered. Even in the cases where this planter/plantation-centered marketing pattern existed, however,

slaves also had the opportunity of marketing outside of it. The most important dimension of this was the trade slaves carried on with itinerant peddlers.

Travelling salesmen plied the highways and waterways of the Louisiana sugar region trading with plantation slaves. Frances Doby, who as a child was a slave on Lucius Dupre's St. Landry Parish sugar plantation, recollected that "some time de banana wagon come or de dago man sellin pom cake. We run to de wagon to buy wid de picayons."<sup>47</sup> Ex-slave Martha Stuart recalled the salesmen who "come thru the country," while another former slave, Catherine Cornelius, remembered trading done with "de ped'lers on de riber." A Canadian, William Kingsford, who travelled in the southern United States in the mid-1850s, gave an excellent description of river traders in his reminiscences. From the deck of a steamer heading to New Orleans from Natchez, Kingsford observed:

the small vessels which, owned by pedlars, pass from plantation to plantation, trading with the negroes principally, taking in exchange the articles which they raise, or, when the latter are sold to the boats, offering to their owners the only temptations on which their money can be spent. These vessels are generally unwieldy and ill-built, got up cheaply, for they are intended but for one trip. As a rule, they are constructed on the Ohio, passing down that river to Cairo, when they turn into the Mississippi, proceeding to New Orleans, where they are broken up and sold for lumber. Now and then you come upon one of them, moving sluggishly down stream, or moored

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<sup>47</sup> Picayon or Picayune was a term used in Louisiana to refer to small denomination coins. The word comes from picayune, a Spanish half-real piece formerly current in Louisiana.



inshore, where the owner is dispensing his luxuries, in the shape of ribbons, tobacco, gaudy calicoes, and questionable whiskey.<sup>48</sup>

Of the two types of merchants, highway and river traders, the latter had more extensive contact with plantation slaves. Inadequate roads often made travel by land difficult, while Louisiana sugar plantations all had direct access to navigable waterways. The bayous and rivers of southern Louisiana, therefore, facilitated a widespread and vigorous trading network involving river traders who were, for the most part, white, and sugar plantation slaves. Moreover, river traders were not subject to as many controls as their counterparts on land. River traders could move in and out of areas quietly and quickly and thus trade clandestinely in illicit goods; highway traders were more likely to be constrained to trade in ways approved by planters.

Access to a trading network outside the control of planters was extremely important to slaves. This network allowed for more than an alternate market; it provided slaves the opportunity to sell goods the planter would not buy, and to buy goods the planter would not sell or order. The principal commodity that slaves could rarely buy through the planter was alcohol. They could obtain liquor from river traders, who in turn were on the market for a variety of commodities, including stolen goods which, of course, could rarely find a place in the transactions between slaves and planters. Whereas in Jamaica, slaves used

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<sup>48</sup> Interviewee--Frances Doby: Interviewers--Arguedas-McKinney: Date--1938: F. W. P. Interviews, Natchitoches; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; [William Kingsford], Impressions of the West and South during a Six Weeks' Holiday (Toronto, 1858), 47-8.

weekly markets and higglers for trading considered illicit by planters, in Louisiana, slaves who did not have access to town markets traded with river peddlers.

The independence that this external trading network conferred on slaves may have been attractive to them. Planters had no influence over either the form of the trade or the goods being dealt in. Indeed, often the river trade was carried out in direct opposition to the dictates of the planter. Slaves, thus, divested themselves of the constraints of the plantation and engaged in an independent economic system in which they made marketing decisions without the impediments that plantation regulations could dictate.

The trade between sugar plantation slaves and white river traders comprised an inter-racial marketing nexus at odds with the rules and values of the planters. The interests of the river traders lay in encouraging and protecting actions, performed by enslaved Afro-Americans, that their fellow-Caucasian slave-holders outlawed. Further, the river traders supplied slaves with goods that planters had, by law, prohibited. (Throughout the period under study, there were laws banning the sale of alcohol to slaves, unless approved by the slaveowner, under penalty of fine and imprisonment).<sup>49</sup>

A letter written by sugar planter Maunsell White of Deer Range Estate in Plaquemines Parish clearly shows the disparity of interests between planter and river trader, and the identity of interests between

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<sup>49</sup> U. B. Phillips, compiler, The Revised Statutes of Louisiana (New Orleans, 1856), 48-65.

slave and river trader. Writing to fellow-planter George Lanaux, owner of the nearby Bellevue Estate, White related how some of his slaves:

were caught stealing molasses to sell to a Boat or "Capota" & were watched until they were found on Board the Boat, where they had hid themselves & were secreted by the owner; a man who called himself "Block," a German & another who called himself "Bill." On searching the Boat, an other negro was also found, who said he belonged to the Boat as did also the Men who owned it; but we soon found on arresting the whole of them, that the Boy confessed or said he belonged to you [Lanaux], & when I questioned him again this morning said He had been gone away from you for 4 months;\* the whole of which time he said he spent in the City [presumably New Orleans] at work. Thirty five Dollars and 50/100 were found on his Person, & a Silver Watch. . . .

\*he afterwards said it was only 2½ months.<sup>50</sup>

In this case, the river trader harbored a runaway, and concealed from the planter slaves who had stolen goods from the plantation on which they lived. Although there is no record of what happened to Block and Bill, they probably met with stern justice at the hands of the planters. White merely refers to conferring with Lanaux "in regards to the prosecution of the offending parties."<sup>51</sup>

Transactions in stolen goods between slaves and peddlers were, according to Frederick Law Olmsted, prevalent throughout the South. There was a higher incidence of such trading in the Louisiana sugar region because the sugar estates had navigable waterways. This meant that the peddlers could more easily transport and conceal themselves. This necessarily clandestine activity was invariably carried on under

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<sup>50</sup> Letter from Maunsell White, Deer Range to G. Lanneau, 15 April 1859, Box 3, Folder 1, Lanaux Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

the cover of darkness. Olmsted observed that "the traders . . . moor at night on the shore, adjoining the negro-quarters. and float away whenever they have obtained any booty, with very small chance of detection."

Unless caught in the act, traders could readily dispose of any "evidence," in the form of stolen property, by dumping it over the side of the boat.<sup>52</sup>

River peddlers probably had few criteria regarding what they were willing to purchase. The character of the trade militated against bulky consignments, the loading of which would require time and therefore increase the likelihood of detection. Except for such logistical problems, however, the peddlers would have had little to consider other than whether they could make a profit in disposing of the goods. In sum, river peddlers were willing to purchase a wide variety of goods from the slaves; few of the planters' possessions or the plantations' moveables would have been safe from the depredations of those involved in the trade.

A large part of this trade probably involved the plantations' produce, molasses and sugar, and, perhaps, some of the minor crops like corn; slaves would also have found a market for small livestock. The trade, however, encompassed a wider variety of commodities. The image of the plantations' "moveables" gives an idea of the variety of articles that slaves and river peddlers dealt in. It appears that anything that was moveable and could be moved expeditiously could find its way to the river peddler. Olmsted provides a couple of examples. One planter had

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<sup>52</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (New York, 1856), 674.

"a large brass cock and some pipe . . . stolen from his sugar-works." The planter "had ascertained that one of his negroes had taken it and sold it on board one of these boats for seventy-five cents, and had immediately spent the money, chiefly for whisky, on the same boat." It cost the planter \$30.00 to replace the machinery. Another sugar planter informed Olmsted "that he had lately caught one of his own negroes going towards one of the 'chicken thieves,' (so the traders' boats are called) with a piece of machinery, that he had unscrewed from his sugar works, which was worth eighty dollars, and which very likely might have been sold for a drink."<sup>53</sup>

Of course, not all the goods traded or sold to the river traders by slaves were stolen. Slaves found a market on the river for their own produce, livestock and manufactures, preferring to trade them on the river because they had the opportunity to deal for commodities, such as alcohol, which the planter had proscribed. Further, it could be posited that slaves preferred to deal with river traders because it took a greater portion of their economic activities outside the realm and influence of planter and plantation.

The internal economies of sugar plantation slaves in Jamaica and Louisiana shared the vitally important characteristic of a trading nexus outside the confines of the plantation. Whereas Jamaican slaves had recourse to the higglers who criss-crossed the island and weekly markets, Louisiana slaves had access to market towns, or, if too distant from

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 675.

markets, the opportunity, in the words of ex-slave Catherine Cornelius, "to git down tuh de ped'lers on de riber at nite tuh buy stuff."<sup>54</sup>

Another shared characteristic of the internal economies of sugar plantation slaves in Jamaica and Louisiana was the integral role that theft played. Theft was as prevalent in Louisiana as it was in Jamaica. Every available index (slave narratives, plantation records, newspapers and journals, travellers' accounts and government documents) indicates the widespread incidence of theft on Louisiana plantations. As was true in Jamaica, many sugar plantation slaves in Louisiana were not bound by any value-system that proscribed their appropriating property of the planter or plantation. Indeed, anything belonging to the planter that was either consumable or marketable and was readily transported was potentially prey to the depredations of members of the slave community.

Plantation records reveal the prevalence of slave theft, and give a profile of the most popular targets. It is nigh impossible to find such records of any detail in which there is no mention of thefts perpetrated on the estate. Most thefts involved the plantations' produce and livestock. As mentioned above, slaves on Maunsell White's Deer Range sugar plantation stole molasses to sell to river traders, and William Weeks reported from the Weeks family's Grande Cote Island estate on "Simon that prince of runaways & troublesome negroes . . . [whose] last offence was to go into the sugar house & steal a portion of the little sugar I [William Weeks] had kept for home use."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from William F. Weeks to Mary C. Moore, 20 June 1860, Box 36, Folder 180, Weeks Papers.



Whereas depredations on the estates' produce may have been somewhat curtailed by its being kept in locked buildings, livestock ranged free and was easy prey to slaves. Time and again reports of such thefts occur in plantation records. The diary of Joseph Mather, superintendent of Judge Morgan's Aurora Plantation, recorded the "theft of chickens," and Ellen McCollam, in a diary entry dated 15 August 1847, noted that she had "had 8 hens stowlen out of the yard since the first of March." The threat of having his livestock stolen prompted Maunsell White to urge his overseer to make a picket pen "in order to save our hogs, pigs & sheep from all sorts of 'Varmints' two-legged as well as four." Similarly, planter J. E. Craighead complained that "the negroes steal our sheep as we have no safe place to keep them." One can judge the extent to which stealing livestock was viewed as a characteristic of slaves by a claim incorporated in the lines of a Louisiana song:

Negue pas capab marche san mais dans poche,  
 Ce pou vole poule --  
 Negro cannot walk without corn in his pocket,  
 It is to steal chickens -- 56

Slaves, however, did not confine themselves to stealing produce and livestock; other plantation moveables fell victim to theft. On at least two occasions planter Andrew McCollam and his wife Ellen lost items from their laundry. One time they had "8 shirts stolen out of the wash,"

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Mather Diary 1852-1859, Archives, LSU; Diary and Plantation Record of Ellen E. McCollam, McCollam Papers; Letter from Maunsell White to James P. Bracewell, 10 August 1859, Maunsell White Letterbook, Archives, LSU; Letter from J. E. Craighead, Plaquemine to John B. Craighead, Nashville, 11 September 1847, Box 14, Folder 102, Gay Papers; Lyle Saxon, compiler, Gumbo Ya-Ya (Boston, 1945), 430.



and a year later "had a pair of sheets table cloth stolen out of the garden." Elu Landry had to send "to M. Broussand's ----- [obscured] shop to get a skiff traded off to him by the Boy Samuel without any leave of me," and a visitor to Colonel Andrew Hynes' sugar plantation had a trunk, which was full of clothing, stolen when his luggage was being loaded onto the steamer.<sup>57</sup>

It is impossible to compile an exhaustive list of thefts and articles stolen; a large part of plantation theft must have gone unrecorded and undetected. Nevertheless, the activity can be profiled. Slaves apparently stole frequently from a wide range of targets. For the most part, the articles stolen were either readily disposed of or hard to track down. Livestock could be quickly slaughtered, butchered and cooked; stolen poultry could be added to the flock already kept by slaves and would have been indistinguishable from the rest; stolen cloth and clothing could easily be made up or altered; and the river traders provided a discreet and relatively safe outlet for goods that were readily transportable.

Slaves could not carry out these thefts with impunity; not all their depredations went undetected. The somewhat patchy evidence left in plantation records exhibits a consistent pattern as regards those whom planters deemed guilty of stealing--they were predominantly men. This

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<sup>57</sup> Diary and Plantation Record of Ellen McCollam, McCollam Papers; Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry Papers; Letter from Nicholas Phipps, Donaldsonville, to Colonel Andrew Hynes, February 1847, Box 13, Folder 97, Gay Papers.

pattern holds for both Jamaica and Louisiana; only very rarely are women mentioned as having been caught or punished for stealing from the plantation. It does not necessarily follow, of course, that the frequency with which male slaves were caught and punished for theft indicates the extent of their involvement. Women may have been craftier or involved themselves in lower-risk thefts, or men may have assumed culpability if detection became likely. It is also possible that slaves divided their responsibilities when appropriating the plantations' property. Men may have assumed the role of actually making off with the goods while women had the responsibility for rendering the stolen property difficult to detect--slaughtering and cooking livestock, sewing-up or altering clothing, and so forth. Men were therefore involved in the aspects that held a greater likelihood of detection, the actual appropriating of the goods, and the marketing of them to a third party either on the river or at market. Consequently they ran a higher risk of being caught.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The following plantation records cite instances in which specific slaves were deemed guilty of theft: in each case the culprit was male. In none of the plantation records consulted for this study are women cited as felons. Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry Papers; Ashland Plantation Record Book; Diary and Plantation Record Book of Ellen E. McCollam, McCollam Papers; Letter from William F. Weeks to Mary C. Moore, 20 June 1860, Box 36, Folder 180, Weeks Papers; Letter from John Palfrey, Plantation, Attakapas, to William T. Palfrey, Franklin, Louisiana, 16 July 1833, Box 2, Folder 9, W. T. & G. D. Palfrey Papers; Letter from Maunsell White to George Lanneau, 15 April 1859, Lanaux Papers; Letter from A. J. Robinson, Chaseland Plantation, to Charles L. Mathews, Bayou Sara, 21 September 1856, Box 2, Folder 16, Mathews (Charles L. and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Letter from Captain John De Hart, Orange Grove Plantation, Indian Bend, St. Mary, to Sarah Evans, Pinckneyville, Mississippi, 6 October 1832, Box 4, Folder 27, Evans (Nathaniel and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU.

Joseph Mather, a Louisiana plantation supervisor, confronted the problem of having his chickens stolen by holding all the slaves on the estate responsible. He made all the slaves labor on a Sunday, the traditional day off, as punishment for poor work and the "theft of chickens." Either Mather thought that punishing all the slaves would encourage them, as a community, to control those who were wont to steal, or, indeed, he viewed as culpable an integrated network within the slave community that involved in the theft more than the person who actually made off with the chickens.<sup>59</sup>

There are many problems with trying to assess the impact of theft on the internal economy of the slave community. It is nigh impossible to calculate the volume of the activity or its profitability. Similarly, the paucity of data prevents an assessment of what proportion of the slave community involved themselves in stealing from the plantation. Presumably not all slaves were equally willing to assume the risks attendant to these acts, nor did they all have the necessary physical abilities.

As in Jamaica, much of the stolen property went to supplementing inadequate diets. F. D. Richardson, a sugar planter in Jeanerette, Louisiana, alluded to this in a letter written to a fellow-planter. He mentioned slaves "committing depredations in the way of robberies," and claimed that "the whole matter is no doubt attributable to the high price of pork--for many planters will not buy at the present rates & depend upon a little beef and other things as a substitute." Martha Stuart,

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Mather Diary 1852-1859.

formerly a plantation slave in the Louisiana sugar region, recalled that "ma Marster had a brother, they called him Charles Haynes, and he was mean and he didn't feed his people . . . he didn't give 'em nuthin; 'twas the funniest thing tho; his niggers was all fat and fine cause dey'd go out and kill hogs;--dey'd steal dem from de boss."<sup>60</sup>

In some cases, slaves could have eaten the food and livestock they raised, rather than steal from the plantation, and, as a consequence, the thefts contributed to their internal economy in that they freed their own goods for sale. Undoubtedly, however, this was not the case with all thefts of food. Just as in Jamaica, the diet of Louisiana slaves was prey to the caprices of planters, seasons and markets. Stealing food to fill their bellies and the bellies of their families was often the only alternative to undernourishment and starvation. Theft, by slaves, of clothing and other necessities of life stemmed from motives similar to those that led slaves to steal food--stolen cloth, for example, could supplement an inadequate clothing ration.

Runaways often subsisted on food stolen from plantations. When a slave named Anderson ran away from John Palfrey's sugar plantation he ate green corn and "a quantity of peaches which he purloin'd from Mr. Seraphim Indius' plantation." Ex-sugar plantation slave Albert Patterson recalled that "if a nigger hide in de woods, he'd come in at night,

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from F. D. Richardson, Jeanerette, Iberia, to Moses Liddell, 18 July 1852, Safe 12, Folder 3, Liddell (Moses, St. John R., and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Interview with Martha Stuart, loc. cit.

an' to get a meal. They bore a little hole in the floor an' they break into de meat house, too."<sup>61</sup>

Not all goods stolen from the plantation by slaves were consumed directly by the perpetrator. In addition to improving slaves' diet, clothing and lodgings directly, goods stolen by slaves were traded for other commodities or for cash, and as such comprised an important part of the slaves' internal economy. Slaves had external outlets for stolen goods either at market or with itinerant traders. Supplemental to these markets, slaves also probably dealt in stolen goods with slaves on their own and nearby plantations, and also, perhaps, with free blacks and poor whites in the neighborhood.

In dealing with plantation theft, the historian is, of course, confronted with the problems inherent in analyzing phenomena of the past that went virtually undocumented. Just as it is difficult to assess the extent of this clandestine activity, precisely which portion of the slave population took part in it, and whose property was targeted, whose immune, so it is virtually impossible to determine its impact on the larger structure of the slaves' internal economy.

What evidence does exist indicates, however, that plantation theft did play a role in the solvency of the internal economy and should be viewed as part of an integrated economic system. Theft often involved a separate marketing system; stolen goods required a special trade outlet, and this outlet was able, in turn, to supply commodities unobtainable through other channels.

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<sup>61</sup> Letter from John Palfrey, Plantation, Attakapas, to William T. Palfrey, Franklin, 16 July 1833, Box 2, Folder 9, W. T. & G. D. Palfrey Papers; Interviewee--Albert Patterson: Interviewer--Maud Wallace: Date--1940: F. W. P. Interviews, Louisiana State Library.

The patterns of theft replicated those of Jamaican sugar slavery. Slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations apparently subscribed, as did Jamaican slaves, to a bifurcated order vis-a-vis theft. A typology of this order involved the slave community sanctioning thefts perpetrated on an outside agency by one of its members, and condemning thefts perpetrated on their own community by any of its constituents (or, indeed, anyone else). Again as in Jamaica, Louisiana slaves may not have considered the property of slaves in communities other than their own exempt as a target of thefts by them. The presence of locks and lock-fast places in the slaves' houses, explained in detail in Chapter 3, indicates that slaves sought to secure the possessions they kept in their houses.<sup>62</sup>

Obviously, a number of motives impelled slaves to steal: hunger, despair, disgruntlement, hatred, a sense of injustice, revenge and avarice. Kenneth Stampp's explanation of why slaves stole ascribes, as a major cause, slaves' discontent with their standard of living. Theft, he contended, provided them an opportunity not only to enrich their diets, but also, by trading for other wares, to accumulate "coveted commodities" and "worldly goods."<sup>63</sup>

The data used in this study do not permit an accurate assessment of the relative importance of various motives in explaining plantation

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<sup>62</sup> For patterns of theft on Jamaican sugar plantations, see Chapter 1. The presence of locks in the houses of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves is analyzed in Chapter 3.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South (New York, 1956), 127.



theft. Many slaves, for example, received inadequate food and clothing and sought to alleviate their suffering through taking what they needed. Other slaves used theft as a vehicle of resistance, a means of attacking slavery and its profitability. The incidence of thefts and the manner in which slaves perpetrated them, however, suggests that slaves also viewed theft, at least in part, as a rational and legitimate dimension of their internal economy, a means by which they could augment their resources.

The internal economy of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves was extremely diffuse and diversified. On and off the plantation, with and without the sanction of the planter, slaves had numerous opportunities to pursue activities which could net them financial or material gains. Recalling the cash economy of the slave community on Dr. William Lyle's sugar plantation, ex-slave Catherine Cornelius maintained "we got money several ways."<sup>64</sup>

The amount of money within the internal economy fluctuated. The potential for earning money varied from season to season and year to year, while individual slaves on a given plantation and slave communities on different plantations did not have equal earning capacities.

A large proportion of the capital entered the Louisiana slaves' economy in fall or early winter. Slaves gathered and usually sold their cash crops prior to the beginning of the sugar harvest (late September to early October), and wood-collecting continued up to the commencement of the harvest. In both cases, slaves usually received payment either

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.



just before or just after the sugar harvest, or else at Christmas. Other opportunities occurred for slaves to earn money during the harvest and processing of the sugar crop--attending the sugar kettles and serving as firemen, sugar-makers and engineers. Stealing from the sugar house also was seasonal as it had to be carried out between the time the crop was processed and its shipment off the estate. Furthermore, any gifts that slaves received from planters were usually distributed at Christmas-time or at the end of harvest. A contemporary commentator, T. B. Thorpe, portrayed Christmastime as:

the season when the planter . . . makes presents of calico of flaming colors to the women and children, and a coat of extra fineness to patriarchal "boys" of sixty-five and seventy. It is the time when negroes square their accounts with each other, and get "master" and "mistress" to pay up for innumerable eggs and chickens which they have frome [sic] time to time, since the last settling day, furnished the "big house." In short, it is a kind of jubilee, when the "poor African" as he is termed in poetry, has a pocket full of silver, [and] a body covered with gay toggery.<sup>65</sup>

This seasonal bias sometimes resulted in the sudden injection of large sums of money into the internal economy of a given slave community. Valcour Aime, a St. James Parish sugar planter, for example, paid \$1300.00 to slaves on his plantation for their 1848 corn crop, and on 25 October 1859, slaves on the Uncle Sam sugar estate received \$1083.25 for cutting wood and making barrels and bricks. The following year, slaves on Uncle Sam earned \$506.00 for wood, bricks and barrels, and the year after, the total paid was \$843.00. In these years, as in 1859,

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<sup>65</sup> T. B. Thorpe, "Christmas in the South," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 26 December 1857, 62.

slaves were all paid at the same time. Similar payment schedules, involving sums from a few dollars to hundreds of dollars, occur regularly in plantation records.<sup>66</sup>

Not all of the inflow of cash occurred in late fall and early winter. Poultry provided year-round earnings, as did theft from the plantation, day labor, moss-collecting and other money-making ventures not affected by seasonal changes.

The uninterrupted labor schedule during the sugar harvest in Louisiana, when slaves worked seven days a week spending the daylight hours cutting the cane and nights working in the sugar mill processing the crop, meant that slaves had little, if any, free time to devote to their own economic interests. Similarly in Jamaica, the sugar harvest labor schedule had slaves working Monday through Saturday for upwards of fifteen to eighteen hours a day, at night in the mill, in daytime cutting cane in the fields. Jamaican slaves had only Sundays off during harvest, and in this brief respite from the gruelling work regime, had not only to try to recoup their strength, but also get out to their provision grounds and gather food to see them through another week. Louisiana planters assumed greater responsibility than their Jamaican counterparts for feeding slaves. Consequently, it was less important, from purely dietary considerations, that slaves have time off each week to gather foodstuffs. Additionally, the sugar harvest in Louisiana was invariably a race against the weather, since cane suffers severe damage if exposed to frost. In order to maximize the sugar yield, planters

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<sup>66</sup> Plantation Diary of Valcour Aime 1847-1852; Boxes 1 and 2, Uncle Sam Papers.

sought to complete the sugar harvest before the first frost, but did not wish to start cutting until the last possible moment in order to permit the cane to grow and increase in sugar content. The decision to begin harvesting involved delicate judgment, part of the equation being how quickly the crop could be taken off--the quicker, of course, the better. This resulted in a labor schedule in which slaves worked seven days a week.

During harvest, therefore, slaves in both Louisiana and Jamaica worked tremendously hard. The long hours that night work in the sugar mill involved exacerbated the severity of their labor. The demands placed on them by this harvest work schedule sharply curtailed any free time they had to work for themselves. Slaves devoted most of the time they had off during harvest to the basic necessities of survival--food and rest. Apart from the slaves who got paid for their services during harvest (such as kettle-men, firemen, sugar-makers and engineers) and those able to "appropriate" some of the sugar and molasses they made, slaves had little opportunity to do much to advance their economic position. Additionally, slaves would have had few opportunities at this time to spend any money they already had.

The internal economy of slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations, therefore, had a curious profile. Potential and realized earnings fluctuated considerably since the onerous demands of the labor regime of sugar slavery, particularly at harvest, overlaid the seasonal fluctuations traditional to rural populations whose source of income derived from growing and marketing crops. Earnings potential also fluctuated

from year to year since the cash crops that comprised an important dimension of the slaves' economy were subject to the vagaries of the weather. Poor growing years diminished the profitability of the slaves' crops.

The opportunity, capability and proclivity of slaves to engage in money-making ventures varied from individual to individual on a single sugar estate, and from plantation to plantation throughout the Louisiana sugar region. Variations in the amount of free time enjoyed by slaves on different estates obviously affected the extent to which they could work for themselves, while the types and quantities of products planters were willing to purchase affected profitability, as did the availability of alternate markets.

Much of the work done for the plantation, for example, coopering and smithing, favored skilled slaves, while only slaves with strong physical constitutions could expect to make much money cutting wood and digging ditches. Neither the small-holding agriculture slaves engaged in, nor the few other paying chores they could do on the plantation, required trade skills or such strength and stamina. Nevertheless, even these activities favored certain slaves.

The system whereby goods and cash entered the slaves' internal economy consistently discriminated against certain members of the community, since all the money-making ventures it incorporated required physical effort on the part of slaves. Hence, slaves either too old, too young, too sick, or incapacitated in some other way, were excluded from most, if not all, of the activities that contributed to the profitability of the economy. Although the structure of family in the

slave community compensated in part for these inequities, nevertheless, some slaves patently did less well within the internal economy.

Work slaves did for themselves had to be integrated into the punishing labor schedule of sugar plantation slavery. Not all slaves could endure, or were willing to assume, the attendant physical and psychological strains. Further, the oppression of bondage was responsible for the indifference or unwillingness of slaves to spend the little time they had off from plantation work in the exacting labor schedule required of working on their own. The despondency, hopelessness and, in John Blassingame's words, "sense of despair among many of the slaves that was all consuming," militated against their committing themselves extensively, or even nominally, to working for themselves.<sup>67</sup>

For a number of reasons, therefore, considerable disparities existed in the earnings of slaves even within the same plantation. The money accumulated by individual slaves on Benjamin Tureaud's estate for 1858-59 ranged from \$170.00 to \$1.00. Some slaves, including 22 of the 30 women listed in the ledger, earned no money, although, since a few of these received goods on credit, presumably there was the expectation that they would earn some in the future. Similarly, cash earned by slaves on the Gay family's plantation in 1844 ranged from \$82.00 to \$1.00 with, again, some slaves getting credit: slaves earned a total of \$900.12 (including \$32.00 in credit) in this year. Moss accounts for the Gay Plantation in 1849-61 show that individual slaves gathered totals of from one to forty-eight bales in the period. The

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<sup>67</sup>Blassingame, The Slave Community, 197.

twenty-three slaves paid for cutting wood on the Stirling family's sugar estate in 1849 received sums of from \$10.50 to \$1.12 as their share of the total of \$103.48 paid, while a "Memorandum of Money Paid or Given to the Negroes in 1854," taken from the same records, lists payments of from \$15.25 to 10 cents in the total of \$314.55 paid the fifty women and forty-five men named.<sup>68</sup>

Plantation records, however, contain only a partial reckoning of slaves' earnings. The records are incomplete, often only containing the payments for certain commodities or work performed. Additionally, they do not incorporate profits derived from transactions in markets other than on the plantation. Undoubtedly, any other earnings would also have been unevenly distributed, but not necessarily to the benefit of the same groups of slaves. Slaves who derived the greatest profit from dealings with river traders or through stealing from the plantation, for example, may not have been the slaves who made the most money in transactions with the planter.

The incompleteness of data on the internal economy, especially those dealing with dimensions external to the plantation, prevents a full assessment of the economy's volume and distribution. Not all slaves participated in the internal economy equally, and some may not have had any direct participation. As with Jamaica, however, one can reasonably posit that an internal economy was integral to the community life of slaves on every sugar plantation in Louisiana.

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<sup>68</sup> Ledger 1858-1872, Tureaud Papers; Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5); Moss Record Book 1849-1861 (Volume 35), Gay Papers; "List of Wood Cut by Slaves and Payment Made," Box 7, Folder 39; Box 8, Folder 49, Stirling Papers.

Participation in an internal economy offered slaves a number of benefits, some material, others less tangible. Slaves who worked for themselves and accumulated money and property were not only in a position to purchase such goods as would make up for what was deficient or omitted in the supplies given by planters, but also could derive satisfaction from the manner in which they organized the economic system.

Slaves were responsible for the structure of the internal economy. They chose the manner and extent of their involvement, making the attendant decisions about marketing, agronomy, working and so forth. Slaves thus decided which crops to grow and how to raise them; how they distributed their time between their small-holding agricultural pursuits and work for which the planters paid them; when to sell, what to buy: the types of decisions not normally associated with the lives of a people, enslaved in perpetuity, whose very being was defined by law in terms of an "owner" or "master."

One must, of course, recognize the important proviso that the slaves' internal economy operated within the constraints of the structure of the "peculiar institution," and primarily within the confines of the plantation on which the participants lived. Planters imposed various limitations on the economic activities of slaves, such as claiming sole purchasing rights over certain commodities, proscribing the purchase by slaves of some goods, and restricting movement on and off the plantation. Further, the internal economy had to accommodate the sugar plantation's onerous labor regime, again dictated by planters. Slaves' economic activities, therefore, comprised one, often very limited, facet of plantation life.



The importance of the internal economy to slaves and to an understanding of slave life lies, however, not only in its volume and extent, but also in the variance between the dynamics of the internal economy and the dynamics of servitude. Slaves qua slaves, at least in their working role as field hands in the omnipresent gang system, operated within a structure of social and labor relations that deprived them of personal rights, autonomous actions, decision-making roles concerning planting, harvesting and marketing, and self-motivated work regimes. Slaves as operatives within the internal economy, however, necessarily assumed the responsibilities of determining the manner in which they would structure their efforts. For example, they controlled "their" land and the manner of its cultivation, and decided on how to market produce and dispose of the accumulated profits.

The plantation journal of Mavis Grove Estate in Plaquemines Parish provides a further telling example of the disparity between slaves' lives as slaves, and their activities within the internal economy. The journal records that on Sunday, 13 September 1857, "Boys not cutting wood today, resting from the fatigues of last night's frolic." Normally, slaves on Mavis Grove spent Sundays cutting wood for sale to the planter, but forbore doing so on the day following a dance. These slaves, evidently, adhered to a work ethic, in relation to their internal economy, in which labor patterns interrelated with various social considerations. This fusion of work and social habits clearly is not the labor system of slaves as members of a field gang, nor does it reflect an external labor system in which slaves had to work to avoid starving. It demonstrates that slaves working within their

internal economy held the responsibility for determining how to order their time and labor, and shows the amalgam of priorities they considered.<sup>69</sup>

A comparison of the labor system of slaves in their internal economy with ideal types of slave labor and free small-holding agrarian labor further demonstrates the disparity between slaves' lives as slaves, and their personal economic activities. Slave field hands in the gang system invariably used in cultivating sugar had virtually no say in how their efforts were to be organized. Planters decided what and where work was to be done (planting, hoeing, cleaning, laying-by, cutting); what to plant and when and where to plant it; when to harvest; and how to process and market. Field hands acted within this system as functionaries, charged to work at a specific pace on a preassigned task that they themselves had no part in determining. On the other hand, free small-holding agrarian labor, perhaps best represented as a landed peasantry, had the responsibility of deciding how to organize their work, such as planting, harvesting and marketing. Clearly the structure of the slaves' internal economy resembled more closely the latter ideal type, that of a landed peasantry; it differs significantly from the ideal typical slave labor system which their efforts for the planter, sunup to sundown, six days a week, more closely approximated.

This process of the internal economy may have proved cathartic to slaves. The dimensions of independence, responsibility and decision-making inherent in the system could have been, in themselves, rewarding.

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<sup>69</sup> Journal of Mavis Grove Plantation 1856, Louisiana State Museum.

Involvement in the internal economy undoubtedly had potentially deleterious effects such as physical stress, and the diminution of time one could spend in other pursuits such as resting or being with one's family. Nevertheless, slaves could derive satisfactions from working for themselves, pacing their own work, taking responsibility for the organization of their efforts, controlling the disposal of, and profiting directly from, the fruits of their labor.

As well as deriving satisfaction from the process of the internal economy, slaves, of course, accrued material benefits in the form of goods they bought with their accumulated earnings. An analysis of what slaves bought permits an explanation of why slaves worked and operated an internal economy. Given that working for themselves afforded slaves some gratification, their motivation for involvement in the internal economy undoubtedly rested largely with its end-product, the purchasing power that permitted the acquisition of goods.

An examination of purchasing patterns permits an assessment of how slaves viewed their earnings and the function of their economic system. Slaves bought some goods to compensate for inadequate supplies from the plantation, their purchases serving to avert real distress. In other cases, however, slaves bought items that they considered reflected an improvement in their status.

Within the plantation system, slaves had few opportunities for any form of social mobility. Scope for advancement in the planter-structured hierarchy of drivers, tradesmen and head people was limited and not necessarily sought by all slaves. Manumission was unlikely for

ordinary field hands since they could seldom accumulate the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of dollars necessary to buy their freedom, and it was as unlikely that the planters would gratuitously manumit them. The coercive nature of sugar slavery, however, did not deprive those in servitude of purpose.

Recent scholarship on slavery in the Americas has made salutary progress in documenting the vitality of slave community life in such dimensions as family, culture and religion. The structure of the internal economy provides further evidence. Both the extensive involvement in the internal economy and the purpose reflected in their purchases testify to the vigor of the slave community. Purchasing patterns disclose how slaves defined themselves, what priorities they placed in terms of the acquisition of "coveted commodities," and how these priorities translate into slaves' aspirations and their perceptions of "betterment." Given what slaves purchased, there can be little doubt as to their desire to use their earnings for self-improvement--to eat and dress better, to live in more comfortable homes, to care, in these and other ways, both for themselves and for members of their families. Although their earnings were often small and their purchases equally modest, they do reflect the independent actions of slaves as consumers, and as such offer a unique insight into the way they dealt with their lives in bondage.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Blassingame, The Slave Community; Leslie Howard Owens, This Species of Property (New York, 1976); Mechal Sobel, Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith (Westport, Conn., 1979); Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York, 1978); Olli Alho, The Religion of Slaves

Louisiana slaves' purchases fell principally into six categories: food and drink; pipes and tobacco; clothing and other personal items; housewares; implements; and livestock. Although the categories are few, each contains a wide variety of items. Plantation records provide the most complete classification of slaves' purchases; they do not, however, incorporate all that slaves bought. Prior to analyzing slaves' buying habits, as manifested in plantation manuscripts, it is important to assess to what extent these records distort the overall spending patterns of slaves.

One indication that slaves did not buy solely through the planter comes from the very accounts which itemize what they did purchase through this agency. As well as the goods slaves bought through the "slave accounts" kept by the planters, they usually withdrew some of their earnings in cash. Once slaves withdrew money, it played no further role in the dealings between them and the planters, save for occasionally when slaves would deposit, into their account, cash they may have withdrawn earlier. Slaves, however, normally spent this cash elsewhere.

When slaves sold their produce off the plantation--to river and highway traders, at town markets, or in the neighborhood of the estate--they availed themselves of the opportunity to spend some of their

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(Helsinki, 1976); Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness (New York, 1977); Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom (New York, 1976); Peter Wood, Black Majority (New York, 1974); Gerald W. Mullin, Flight and Rebellion (London, 1972); Edward Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820 (London, 1971); Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London, 1967); Michael Craton, Searching for the Invisible Man (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).

earnings where they had transacted their sales. These agencies also offered slaves the opportunity to spend cash they had withdrawn from their accounts on the plantation.

What slaves bought at alternative markets, however, probably was very similar to what they bought through the planter, with one notable exception--alcohol. Markets outside the plantation were usually the only source from which slaves could obtain this commodity: planters only infrequently supplied slaves with liquor (they occasionally distributed it on holidays, like Christmas) and rarely would allow slaves to buy it through the plantation accounts (although Martha Stuart recalled that, on the plantation where she was a slave, "you had whiskey. . . . Our boss didn't care how much you want--send to town to git it--and git it cheap den, 20 cents a gallon, and twas whiskey.").<sup>71</sup>

Except for alcohol, and perhaps some money spent on gambling, such as was referred to by the Mayor of Plaquemine township in his complaint about slaves being "drunk and gambling" in that town on Sundays, slaves' expenditures off the plantation went to buy commodities similar to those purchased through the planter. The river traders William Kingsford saw sold "ribbons, tobacco, [and] gaudy calicoes" as well as whiskey, while V. Alton Moody claimed that these traders sold both whiskey and "cheap finery." Ex-slave Catherine Cornelius recalled

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<sup>71</sup> Slaves on the Gay Family's Estate, for example, were occasionally given whiskey. On 28 December 1846 "whiskey for Negroes dinner" cost \$1.50, and on 25 December 1850 "Whiskey for Negroes" cost \$2.50. The planter paid for these items. Estate Record Book 1842-1847 (Volume 12); Estate Record Book 1848-1855 (Volume 34), Gay Papers; Interview with Martha Stuart, loc. cit.



that, on the plantation where she lived, the planter, Dr. William Lyle, "wouldn't gib us combs en brushes, but we got some from pedlin."

Slaves could also obtain these goods, except for the whiskey, along with many others, through their plantation accounts.<sup>72</sup>

Within the six general categories mentioned above, slaves could choose from a wide range of goods, as a tabulation of items shows. Slaves bought such foodstuffs as flour, molasses, meat, coffee, herring, mackerel, ham, beans, pork, rice, biscuits, potatoes, apples and bottles of cordial. Louisiana slaves made widespread use of tobacco, chewing it and smoking it in pipes they bought for that purpose. They also bought a tremendous variety of cloth and clothing, all of which went to provide them with the "best clothing" they wore when not at work on the plantation. Among more elaborate purchases were "Elegant Bonnets," a "fine Summer Coat," a "Fine Russian Hat," "Chambray," white and colored shirts, roundabouts [short jackets] and waistcoats, black shoes, a fur hat, white "cambrice" and silk dresses, gloves, an oiled-cloth winter coat, oiled-cloth and "log cabin" pantaloons. More usually, however, slaves purchased plainer wares: lengths of calico, check, plain and striped cotton, linen, cottonade, "domestic," blue drilling and thread, as well as simpler made-up clothing like dresses, hose, shirts, pants, hats, shoes and boots, kerchiefs, suspenders and shawls. (For a much more detailed analysis of slaves' clothing purchases, see

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from P. E. Jennings, Mayor of Plaquemine to Edward J. Gay, 25 August 1858, Box 25, Folder 221, Gay Papers; Kingsford, Impressions, 47-8; V. Alton Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations (New Orleans, 1924), 68; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.



Chapter 4.) As well as clothes, slaves bought such personal items as pocket knives, combs, fiddles and umbrellas. Patrick, a slave "Engineer and Overseer" on the Gay family's plantation, paid \$15.00 for a watch, while on W. W. Pugh's Woodlawn Estate, one slave spent \$3.00 to get his watch mended. Slaves bought just as diverse a range of housewares. Their purchases included blankets, baskets, tin cups and buckets, cutlery, soap, sheets of tin, locks, mosquito bars, bed spreads, "furniture," coffee pots, tallow and spermacetti candles, portable ovens, copper kettles, chairs, bowls and pots. (Chapter 3 contains a fuller description of the housewares slaves bought.)<sup>73</sup>

Some of the purchases made by slaves represented a capital investment in their economic activities. Slaves bought various implements and gear: shovels, saddles, bridles and bits, wire, twine, fishing hooks and line, "mud boots" and mitts. They also invested in such livestock as pigs and shoats, and poultry, but the records do not reveal whether these purchases were for home consumption or if the slaves intended raising and breeding the animals for sale at a later time. None of the plantation records consulted for this study list purchases of seed. It is possible either that those slaves who had had a crop the previous year sold part of what they kept back for the next year's seed to those who had not raised anything the year before, or, perhaps, slaves got seed from the planters' stock as a perquisite.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Appendices 2-d to 2-k contain itemizations of slaves' expenditures.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendices 2-d to 2-k.

Obviously, not every slave, nor, indeed, every slave community bought such a wide range of goods as are listed above. The foregoing tabulation derives from the records of purchases made by hundreds of slaves on some twenty Louisiana sugar plantations in the years from 1834 up to the beginning of the Civil War. This extensive listing, however, better serves to distinguish slave purchasing trends throughout the Louisiana sugar region during the period of the sugar boom: these trends are not as readily discernible in an analysis of one plantation in a given year.

The pattern that emerges suggests that over time slaves' buying practices underwent little change. Throughout the period covered slaves placed high priority on a rather limited number of commodities, specifically flour, cloth and tobacco. Other goods given primacy included shoes and various items of made-up clothing.

This general pattern held not only through time but also from plantation to plantation throughout the sugar region. When slaves had only limited purchasing power, they tended to invest principally in these few staple commodities, whereas slaves with larger earnings invariably only purchased other goods in addition to the staples rather than in place of them.

Rations distributed by planters could, in specific cases, alter slaves' buying habits; slaves obviously did not have to buy goods if they were given them at the expense of the planter. On the Gay family's plantation, for example, slaves got tobacco as a regular part of their

rations. Hence, an extensive itemization of purchases on that estate reveals that no slave spent any money on that commodity.<sup>75</sup>

The buying habits of slaves show that, in the first instance, they wanted to improve their diet, furnish themselves with better clothing, to be worn when not at work on the sugar crop, and enjoy tobacco. To these commodities, one should also probably add alcohol, which, although it could not be purchased through the plantation accounts and therefore went undocumented, many slaves seem to have esteemed. Doubtless, some of the cash slaves withdrew from their accounts went to purchase liquor from river traders, illicit "shebeens" and grog-shops, or, perhaps, "moonshiners" either on or off the plantation. Slaves considered the purchase of the more elaborate personal wares, housewares and other items, of secondary import, since they financed investment in such goods with money left over after they had bought the staple commodities.

Various plantation accounts provide evidence of this pattern. A ledger (reproduced as Appendix 2-d) listing slave earnings and expenditures on one of Benjamin Tureaud's sugar plantations, for example, shows, that of the 93 men who bought goods through the plantation, 76 (82%) spent part of their earnings on tobacco, 77 (83%) bought shoes, and 70 (75%) bought either meat or flour. In addition, the majority of the slaves (51 out of the 93--55%) bought some cloth or clothing other than shoes. Conversely, a minority of slaves bought such items

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<sup>75</sup> See Appendices 2-e and 2-g; Letter P. O. Daigre (Overseer) to Edward J. Gay, 15 August 1858, Box 25, Folder 221, Gay Papers.

as mosquito bars, locks, buckets and sheet-tin. The records of the Weeks family's Grande Cote Island sugar plantation provide substantiating evidence of slaves' buying practices. The principal commodities slaves bought with money earned from the sale of eggs and chickens were striped cotton, handkerchiefs, tobacco, flour and coffee. Records of other Louisiana sugar plantations evince a similar purchasing pattern. Clearly, most slaves used their plantation accounts primarily to buy these staples: food, clothing and tobacco.<sup>76</sup>

The 1844 slave accounts of the Gay family's plantation (reproduced as Appendix 2-e) show no purchases of tobacco, since slaves received a tobacco ration from the planter. They do, however, show that slaves placed similar emphasis on buying cloth and foodstuffs. The records of the Gay and Tureaud Estates (Appendices 2-d and 2-e) also show the extent to which slaves withdrew cash from their accounts. Virtually all slaves on both plantations withdrew at least part of their earnings in cash; a sizable number of slaves on the Gay Plantation bought nothing at all through the planter, since they withdrew, in cash, every penny they earned. How slaves spent this money, of course, cannot be assessed accurately, but perhaps some slaves, while they used their plantation accounts to buy staple goods, were more inclined to buy "luxury" goods, such as housewares and personal items, off the plantation where they could exercise greater personal control over selecting from a range of goods, rather than abdicating this to an intermediary, the planter.

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<sup>76</sup> Notebook 1853-1857 (Volume 9), Weeks Collection.

Both the Tureaud and Gay records show slaves putting cash into their plantation accounts. They do not, however, document where this money came from. Some of the cash may have been the unspent balance of sums previously withdrawn from accounts. It is also possible that slaves used their plantation accounts as depositories for earnings made other than through the planter. Thus, slaves who made money selling goods on the river or elsewhere off the plantation banked their earnings in their plantation accounts. Similarly, any money accrued from intracommunity transactions, such as T. B. Thorpe alluded to (" . . . the time when negroes square their accounts with each other . . ."), could be deposited with the planter. Given the extent to which slaves withdrew and deposited cash, the plantation slave communities were obviously familiar with the medium of hard currency, albeit in small denominations, and thus acquainted with the structure, not only of a barter or trade system, but also of a cash economy.<sup>77</sup>

Some slaves also were conversant with the operation of a credit economy. The 1844 plantation accounts for the Gay Plantation (Appendix 2-e), for example, show that nine slaves received a total of \$32.00 in credit. Six of the slaves used their credit to obtain flour and coffee, two withdrew theirs in cash, while one slave, Elias, spent part of his \$4.00 of credit on a "Fine Russian Hat bt. in N. Orleans" that cost him \$3.00. The other dollar went to pay off a previous balance he owed on clothes. Similarly, on the Tureaud Estate, slaves named Nash and David Big got flour, meat, handkerchiefs, check cloth, shoes

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<sup>77</sup> T. B. Thorpe, "Christmas," 62.

and tobacco on credit, while another slave, Charles Yellow, who had earned only \$2.00 cutting wood, bought tobacco, flour, shoes, hose, meat, handkerchiefs, cotton cloth and a hat. Since the bill for these goods came to \$15.50, the planter apparently extended credit to Charles Yellow for the balance of \$13.50. (See Appendix 2-d.)

Few slave women accumulated earnings and transacted business in accounts registered under their own names. On the Tureaud Estate (Appendix 2-d), for example, 98 men had accounts and all transacted business in 1858-59, whereas of the 30 women listed in the ledger, only 8 accumulated any earnings for which they received goods and cash; the other 22 had neither debits nor credits. Similarly the Gay Plantation records (Appendix 2-e) show very few women had accounts, either in comparison to the number of men (6 women and 70 men), or in comparison to the total number of women living on the estate (some 70 adults).

Other records evince a similar pattern. The 1851 accounts of slaves on John Randolph's Nottoway Plantation (reproduced as Appendix 2-f), for example, show that only eight women (as compared to 47 men) received such items as boots, shoes and flour. Of these eight, only two had their own accounts. Three of the other six apparently were not charged for their shoes, since the journal entry reads "Gave Dicey, L Anny, Silla, a pair of shoes," and no cost was entered. The three other women each had the purchase amounts deducted from the accounts of a male slave. Two of these women, Mahala and Susan, each received a pair of shoes at the cost of \$1.00, for which the accounts of George and Gus, respectively, were debited \$1.00, while in the other case,

the journal records "Long William got 1 pr. Shoes (for Leana) -- \$1.00." An 1864 "List of Negroes" shows that George and Mahala were husband and wife, and one may assume that Gus and Susan, and Long William and Leana were also married, or perhaps closely related, although it is also possible that they had some sort of non-kin working or contractual relationship.<sup>78</sup>

That few women held accounts on plantations, of course, does not reflect their lack of involvement in the system, nor suggest that they accrued fewer benefits from it. As in the case of George and Mahala on the Randolph estate, wives made purchases through accounts that were in the name of their husbands. The accounts of slaves on the Gay Plantation provide further examples of this. In 1840-41, William Sanders had his account debited to pay for a "White Cambrice dress for wife." In 1839 Little Moses' account paid for shoes for his wife, Charity, while five years later, Ned Davis was charged for "Coffee by your wife." The accounts of slaves on the Gay Plantation for the late 1850s (reproduced as Appendix 2-g) record not only account-holders withdrawing cash from their accounts, but also wives and daughters making withdrawals. A slave named Willis bought children's shoes from his account on the Tureaud estate, while Kenawa Moses, a slave on the Gay Estate, paid for "meat for [his] children" from the money he earned. Other slaves on the Gay Estate charged for goods and cash to family members included Harry Cooper, who bought shoes for his wife and his daughter Tulip, and Alfred Cooper, who paid for calico for his

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<sup>78</sup> Ledger 1862-1865 (Volume 3), Randolph Papers.



daughter Louisiana, and two "Elegant Bonnets" costing \$2.00 each, presumably for his wife Dedo and his daughter.<sup>79</sup>

The systems of debiting and the purchasing patterns revealed in the various ledgers indicate that the slave accounts served the family of the account-holder. This family orientation is clearly shown where purchases were made for wives and children. Even where the records make no mention of kin-relationship, however, as in the debit of \$12.50 from the account of Woodson, a slave on W. W. Pugh's estate, for a "Silk Dress for Rachel," and in the "cash [paid] to Aunt Julia" from Patrick's account on the Gay Plantation, it seems most likely that the men and women were kin.<sup>80</sup>

Records of the Gay family's Iberville Parish sugar estate provide evidence of the family structure of account-holding. A comparison of the 1844 slave accounts on the plantation with other slave lists compiled at around the same time, for the purpose of recording rations distributions and work schedules, shows the familial relationships of the account-holders. Seventy-six people earned money and held accounts, 70 of whom were men. Of these 70 male account-holders, 37 were heads of households, 6 were sons in male-headed households, and 3 were sons in female-headed households, while 18 were single males without family affiliation. The status of the remaining 6 males is less clear: 1 of them may have been a male head of household and 1 a son in a male-headed

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<sup>79</sup> See Appendices 2-d to 2-g; Memorandum Book 1840-1841 (Volume 28); Estate Record Book 1831-1845 (Volume 8), Gay Papers.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendices 2-e and 2-j.

household, while two appear to have been single males, and the other two cannot be traced elsewhere in the records. Of the six women holding accounts, two were heads of households, one was a daughter in a female-headed household, and one a single female. The two other women held joint accounts; Clarissa with her husband Toney (Toney also held an account with another slave, Ned Teagle, who was a son in a female-headed household), and Anna with William, neither of whom can be traced elsewhere in the plantation records. (This analysis is reproduced schematically in Table 2-3, with notations on specific individuals in Appendix 2-e.)<sup>81</sup>

Many of the slaves recorded as single and without family affiliation had families who drew on their accounts. A slave named Kenawa Moses, for example, who was recorded as single, paid from his account for "meat for [his] children." Slaves on the Gay Plantation worked either on the Front or Back Place, and rations and labor were allocated according to whether they were on one place or the other. Slaves from both these parts of the plantation lived together, however, so it may be that a number of those recorded as single males in the various slave lists, in fact lived with their family, but worked on a different part of the estate and thus were listed separately. Alternatively, some of the single male slaves may have had families in nearby plantations, or, as was possible in the case of Kenawa Moses, lived apart from their families, the members of which continued to contribute to and draw from the accounts.

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<sup>81</sup> Estate Record Book 1831-1845 (Volume 8); Cashbook/Daybook 1837-1843 (Volume 18), Gay Papers.

Table 2-3

Family Relationships of Slaves holding Accounts  
on the Gay Estate, 1844

Male Account-Holders

Head of Household	37
Son in a Male-Headed Household	6
Son in a Female-Headed Household	3
Single Male	18
Head of Household (?)	1
Son in Male-Headed Household (?)	1
Single Male (?)	2
Unknown	2

Female Account-Holders

Head of Household	2
Daughter in a Female-Headed Household	1
Single Female	1

Joint Male/Female Account-Holders

Husband and Wife	1 couple
Unknown	1 couple

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 5, Daybook 1843-1847; Volume 8, Estate Record Book 1831-1845; Volume 18, Cashbook/Daybook 1837-1843, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The accounts held by sons in either male- or female-headed households suggests a "coming of age" pattern. Young adults may have been listed individually, for example, when they assumed sole responsibility for a specific money-making endeavor.

Records of other plantations, though less complete, suggest a similar structure of account-holding, male heads of households comprising the largest group under whom accounts were listed. An itemization of goods purchased indicates that the whole family of the account-holder had recourse to the account. Some of the goods purchased went to named persons, other than the account-holders, who were usually members of account-holders' families. Other purchases, although debited to the account-holders, obviously were not solely for their benefit.

The staple foodstuffs slaves bought--meat and barrels of flour--benefited the whole family, while the lengths of cloth bought through the accounts were probably sewn up by the women of the family to provide garments for the whole family. Similarly, the housewares purchased obviously benefited the household: such goods as candles, furniture, cutlery and other tableware, coffee pots, blankets, locks, mosquito bars, soap and cooking utensils.<sup>82</sup>

The system whereby slaves accumulated earnings developed around the family, the various members of which employed themselves in an integrated work structure. The pattern of expenditures further reflects the family orientation of the internal economy since plantation accounts, although recorded under the names of the heads of households, clearly

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<sup>82</sup> See Appendices 2-d to 2-k.

served the family as a whole. Appendices 2-h, 2-i, 2-j and 2-k provide supportive documentation. The purchases listed in these appendices, which slaves on Wilton Plantation, George Lanaux' Bellevue Plantation, W. W. Pugh's Woodlawn Plantation and Alexis Ferry's estate made, encompass a range of commodities, both household and personal wares, that undoubtedly went to improve the lives and comfort not only of the slaves who were debited for the goods, but also of members of their families.

Expenditures indicate what commodities slaves gave priority, and, therefore, permit an assessment both of the shortcomings of planters' supplies, and the slaves' perception of betterment. These purchases show the choices slaves made as consumers, the "bundle of preferences" they selected to spend their often limited cash earnings on. What Louisiana slaves bought indicates that they directed much of their concern with improvement to home and family, a principle around which many of the economic activities of Jamaican slaves also revolved.

Although the internal economy was often conducted at a very modest level, it not only developed throughout the two plantation societies, but also, indeed, within every sugar estate. Many sugar plantation slaves sacrificed a portion of what little free time they had to working for themselves, earning money for their own and their families' benefit.

## Appendix 2-a

Bales of Moss sent by Slaves on the Gay Estate  
for Sale in St. Louis--[349-6]

[illegible]

## Appendix 2-a (continued)

[illegible]



## Appendix 2-a (continued)

[illegible]

## Appendix 2-a (continued)

	'49	'50	'51	'52	'53	'54	'55	'56	'57	'58	'59	'60	'61
Patrick		1	5		3	8	6	15			1		
Alfred		1	1			1	4	3		1	3	2	
Tom		1	1				1						
Bill Chase		1				1	1	5	1	1	2	1	
Lucy		1		1				1					
Josiah			1		1								
Peter Purnell			1										
Emily			1								1		
Charity Moses			1										
Little Austin			3										
Jim Tunley			1	2									
Jim Thornton			3			3		1					
Davy Thornton			1		2								
Penelope & Ritter			1		1								
Horace			1			2	4	5			1	1	1
Ned Dickerson			1		1	2	1	4		4	1	4	
Henderson			1			2	2	1				3	
Julia			1										
Bill Dock			1		1	1	2	4		2	2	1	
Geo. Tunley			1										
Levin				1	1		1						
Sugar Charles					1								

## Appendix 2-a (continued)

	'49	'50	'51	'52	'53	'54	'55	'56	'57	'58	'59	'60	'61
Tom Yellow					1	1							
Henna					1	1							
Clarissa					1	2		1					
Woodson					1	2	2	4		1		2	
Toby					1	1	1	2				2	1
Sam Satin					1		1	2			1	2	
Bill Thornton						2	1						
John Garner						1	2	1		2	2	2	1
Moses						6	4	5	1	1	7	5	
Jacob Lenox						2	2	1				1	
Sophy						1							
Dick & Andrew						2							
Jim Shallowhorn						2	1	2			1		
Margaret						2							
Rainey						2							
Ann						1							
Harry Tunley						2		2		1	1	1	1
London						2	2					1	
Little Austin						1	3	2		1	1	1	
Abram							1						
Caroline							1						
Ambrose							1	1					

## Appendix 2-a (continued)

[illegible]

## Appendix 2-a (continued)

	'49	'50	'51	'52	'53	'54	'55	'56	'57	'58	'59	'60	'61
Providence											3	5	1
Elizabeth W											1	1	
Ben Tate												3	
Overton												1	
Perry's George												1	
Tamar & Louisa												1	
Eliza Moses												3	
Harry												2	
Sally Ann												1	
Silas												1	
Mary Jackson												1	
George Archy												1	1
Mary Naylor												1	
Lewis												3	
Nancy												1	
Enoch												1	
Sidney												1	
New Jerry												1	
Henry Scipio													1
H Fanny													1

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 35, Moss Record Book 1849-1861, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-b

"Memorandum of Money Paid or Given to the Negroes in  
1854." Lewis Stirling and Family Estate

Wesley	\$ 6.35	Clarinda	\$4.00	Lewis	\$2.00	Catrine	\$4.75
Allen	11.00	Ellen	4.00	Baptiste	2.00	Maretta	2.50
Jack White & Wash.	15.25	Liddy	4.75	Robert	1.50	Sarah	2.00
Adam & Jack D.	11.35	Nanny	4.00	Wiley	2.00	Lucy	1.50
Sam Brown	6.10	Cecile	4.00	Luke	.50	Liddy	1.00
Long George	6.65	Marinda	3.00	Edmund	.40	Affy	2.50
Ervin	6.60	L.Charlotte	4.00	Primus	.30	Fanny	2.00
Alfred	15.00	Frozene	4.00	L. Joe	.30	O.Charlotte	2.00
William	8.85	Maria	3.75	Sampson	.30	Margaret	2.50
Isaac	4.00	Rose	4.00	Stephen	.10	Amy	.30
George Austin		Eliza	4.00	Henry	.10	Ann	.30
Sam Jackson	5.00	Eveline	4.00	Old Joe	1.50	L. Margaret	.30
Levin	3.00	Jane	4.00	Tompo	2.00	Judy	.30
Julius	3.00	Celia	4.00	Wilson	5.00	Harriet	.30
Primus	3.00	Francoise	4.00	Spencer	3.00	Caty	1.50
Sambo	3.00	Nelly	4.00	Anderson	3.00	Sophia	2.50
Joseph	4.75	Clara	4.00	Joe J.	4.00	H. Louisa	2.00
Little George	4.35	Isabell	4.00			Suckey	2.00
Old Barrica	4.00	Delila	4.00			Hannah	2.00
Harry	4.00	Serella	4.00			Nannette	2.00
Bartlett	2.50	Esther	3.00			Josaphene	.50
Nelson	5.70	Phoebe	3.50			Kitty	.50
Lige	4.00	Rosabell	3.00			O.Lindu	1.50

## Appendix 2-b (continued)

Monday	4.00	Harriet	4.00		
Joe Clay	2.00	Louisa	2.50		
L. Barrica	2.35	Henrietta	2.50		
L. Leven	2.00	Lindu	4.00		
	\$147.80		\$102.00	\$28.00	\$36.75

Source: Stirling (Lewis & Family) Papers, Folder 49, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



## Appendix 2-c

Reproduction of a manuscript recording "Money paid the Negroes" on Lewis Stirling and family's estate 1855[?]. A total of \$258.50 was paid.

Source: Stirling (Lewis and Family) Papers, Box 8, Folder 51, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-c (continued)

Melton	13.50		
Lindsey & Wesley	75.00		Sophy - 1.50
Lidney	6.50	15.00	Cecilia - 1.50
Allen	3.50	14.75	Fanny 2.50
Anderson L.	3.50	7.75	Calif. 1.50
Loane	1.50	11.50	Frances 1.50
Cross	3.50		Martha 2.50
M. J. King	13.00		Beulah 2.50
Long	7.00		Vera 2.50
Lydia	4.00	7.50	Mary 1.00
Sam B. King	9.50	6.75	Shirley 1.00
Sam J.	6.00	1.25	Barthel 0.00
Jack White	5.75	5.00	Harriet 1.00
Lumbe	6.50		Mary 1.50
Washington	6.50		Nelly 1.50
Adams	7.00		Mary Ann 1.50
Julius	4.25		Harriet 1.50
Drum & L. George	4.25		Harriet 1.50
Lindson	4.00		Charlotte 1.50
L. Lewis	2.00	1.00	Lydia 1.00
William	6.75	2.00	Leah 1.50
Joseph	3.50	2.00	Eliza 1.50
Spencer	3.00	1.50	Lois 1.00
Patience	3.00	1.50	Eliza 1.00
Louisa	2.50	1.50	Harriet 1.00
Low. J. C. Low	2.00	1.50	Belia 1.00
Nanny O. Linder	2.00	2.50	Esther 1.00
Monkley	17.00	1.50	Phoebe 1.00
Liddy	164.75	1.50	Lack D. 1.50
Blindes	42.75	1.50	Liza 1.00
Proctor	234.00	1.25	Shirley 1.50
	12.50	2.25	
	64.75		

## Appendix 2-d

Earnings and Expenditures of Slaves  
on Benjamin Tureaud's Sugar Estate--1858-59

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Aaron Butcher	\$170.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Cotton Cloth, Shoes, got cash
Abraham	16.00	Wood & Corn	Flour, Tobacco, Shoes, got cash
Adam	64.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Handkerchiefs, Meat, got cash
Alex	12.00	"paid by him"	Tobacco, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Sheet-Tin, Meat, a Lock
Aleck Evans	26.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, a Lock, Hogsheads, got cash
Albert	13.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, got cash
Alfred	105.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Meat, Hose, Cotton & Check Cloth, got cash
Ben Russel	24.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, got cash
Bill Busley	45.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Handkerchiefs, Meat, Cotton Cloth, got cash
Bazil	44.00	Corn	Tobacco, Flour, got cash
Bill Polley	14.00	Wood	got cash
Bill Siddon	160.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Hose, got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Billy Buck	\$ 3.00	Wood	Tobacco, Shoes, Hat, got cash
Bob Stuart	54.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, got cash
Brower	14.00	Wood	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Hose, Handker- chiefs, Thread, Calico Cloth, Shirt, Pants, got cash
Charles Anderson	36.00	Corn & Hogsheads	Tobacco, Handker- chiefs, Meat, got cash
Charles Johnson	15.00	Wood	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, got cash
Charles Pennington	19.00	"Cash recd. from him"	Tobacco, Handker- chiefs, Cotton Cloth, got cash
Charles Yellow	2.00	Wood	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Hose, Meat, Handkerchiefs, Cot- ton Cloth, Hat [Total Cost-\$15.50]
Carlos	19.00	Wood	Handkerchiefs, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Pants, got cash
Chasteen Smith	24.00	Wood & Corn	Shoes, Meat, got cash
Cooper	28.00	Wood	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Thread, Check Cloth, got cash
Curry	23.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Handkerchiefs, got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Daniel	\$ 7.00	"Cash recd."	Shoes, got cash
David Big			Tobacco, Shoes, Meat [on credit]
David Ingram	26.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, got cash
David little	32.00	Hogsheads	Tobacco, Shoes, Cot- ton Cloth, got cash
David Rock	75.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, got cash
David Smith	56.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, Cotton Cloth, got cash
Dick Sawyer	14.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, got cash
Ely	13.00	Wood	Pants, Handker- chiefs, got cash
Frank	18.00	Wood, Corn, & Bricks	Shoes, Flour, got cash
Felix	1.00	Wood	got cash
George Johnson	17.00	Wood & Corn	Shoes, Meat, a Lock, got cash
George Little	38.00	Corn	Tobacco, Flour, got cash
Grimage	35.00	Wood & Hogsheads	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, Meat, Cotton & Calico Cloth, got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Gustus	\$ 49.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, Meat, got cash
Hampton Turner	49.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Handkerchiefs, Meat, got cash
Harrison	22.00	Wood	Shoes, Handkerchiefs, got cash
Henry Camphor	28.00	Wood & Corn	Meat, got cash
Henry Hite	12.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, got cash
Henry Davis	85.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Flour, got cash
Henson	14.00	Wood	Tobacco, got cash
Horace	9.00	"Cash recd. from him"	Tobacco, Shoes, got cash
Isaac Big	4.00	"Cash recd. from him"	Tobacco, Meat, Shoes, Bucket
Isaac Fabre	12.00	Wood & Corn	got cash
James Anderson	47.00	Wood & Corn	Shoes, got cash
James Siddon	17.00	Wood	Tobacco, Cotton Cloth, Shoes, Hat, got cash
James Thomas	36.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Cot- ton Cloth, Flour, Hose, Mosquito Bar, got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Jack Locket	\$ 25.00	Wood	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, Meat, Cotton, Check, & Calico Cloth, got cash
Jesse Big	110.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Meat, Shirt, Mosquito Bar, got cash
Jesse Little	53.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Handkerchiefs, Wire, Twine, a Lock, Hose, got cash
John Brannum	7.00	Wood	Flour, Shoes, Hand- kerchiefs, got cash
John Johnson	28.00	Wood & "Cash recd. from him"	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Meat, got cash
Jonas	36.00	Wood & Hogsheads	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Meat, got cash
Lewis Benjo	22.00	Wood	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, got cash
Lewis McCargo	43.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, got cash
Liedge	10.00	Corn	Flour, got cash
Lunkey	21.00	Wood & Corn	Shoes, Tobacco, Cotton Cloth, got cash
Madison	26.00	Wood & Corn	Flour, Shoes, Meat, Handkerchiefs, Tobacco, got cash



## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Martin	\$ 12.00	Wood	Cotton Cloth, Shoes, got cash
Mitchell	146.00	Wood, Corn, & "Cash recd."	Tobacco, Meat, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, Hose, Shirt, got cash
Moses	10.00	"Cash recd. from him"	Tobacco, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, got cash
Moses Jones	23.00	Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Handkerchiefs, got cash
Nash			Flour, Meat, Check Cloth, Handker- chiefs [on credit]
Nat Johnson	13.00	Wood	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, got cash
Nat Russel	28.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, Meat, Mosquito Bar, got cash
Nathan Black "Defunct 1859"	15.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, got cash
Nathan Morris	44.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Meat, Hose, got cash
Nathan Yellow "Defunct 1859"	33.00	Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Meat, Handkerchiefs, Shoes, Hose, Check Cloth, got cash
Ned	94.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Rice, got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Nick	\$ 68.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Handkerchiefs, Cotton Cloth, Hose, Calico Cloth, got cash
Oliver	35.00	Corn	got cash
Peter Little	15.00	Wood & Corn	Flour, got cash
Peter Bladen	7.00	Wood	got cash
Peter Preston	22.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Meat, a Lock, got cash
Perry Reed	36.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Meat, Dress, Thread, got cash
Perry Walley	62.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Mosquito Bar, got cash
Philip	3.00	Wood & "Cash Recd."	Tobacco, Shoes, Hat
Richard	1.00	"Cash Recd."	Tobacco
Rodolphe	15.00	Wood & "Cash Recd."	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Flour, got cash
Ruffin	3.00	Baskets	Shoes, got cash
Sam Cook	81.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, Hand- kerchiefs, Cottonade, Linen, & Check Cloth, got cash
Sampson	20.00	Wood & "Cash Recd."	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Dress, got cash

## Appendix 2-c (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
Simon	\$ 13.00	Wood & Corn	got cash
Snowden	34.00	Wood, Corn, & Shuck Collars	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Handkerchiefs, Hose, Cotton & Check Cloth, got cash
Spencer	63.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, got cash
Stephen	14.00	Wood & Hogsheads	Tobacco, Shoes, Meat, Handkerchiefs, Hose, got cash
Tom Big	25.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Meat, got cash
Tom Brown	32.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, got cash
Tom Chizem	10.00	Wood	Shoes, got cash
Tom Scott	98.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Cotton Cloth, Meat, got cash
Thomas	8.00	Hogsheads	Shoes, got cash
Washington Bright	12.00	Corn	Tobacco, Shoes, Calico & Check Cloth, Thread, Mosquito Bar, got cash
Washington McGuinis	27.00	Wood	Tobacco, Shoes, Flour, Cotton, Cottonade, Calico & Check Cloth, a Lock, Hose, Dress, got cash
Willis	68.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, Child's Shoes, Meat, Shirt, got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u> (about)	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
William Bill	\$ 10.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Meat, Handkerchiefs, got cash
Yolle	69.00	Wood & Corn	Tobacco, Flour, Shoes, got cash

Of the 30 women listed in the ledger, 22 had nothing recorded in their accounts--neither debits nor credits. Listed below are the statements of the remaining 8 women.

Anna Old	\$ 28.00	56 days work for the planta- tion	got cash
Catherine Old	1.00	Wood	Hat
Elsy	18.00	35 days work for the plan- tation	Shoes, Flour, Meat, Cotton, Calico, & Check Cloth, Dress, got cash
Harriet	5.00	"Cash paid by her"	Tobacco, Flour, Meat, Shoes, Calico & Check Cloth
Mathilda Big	10.00	700 Pumpkins	got cash
Phoeby	19.00	Corn	got cash
Sarah Dom	22.00	44 days work for the plan- tation	got cash
Winny Big	24.00	48 days work for the plan- tation	got cash

## Appendix 2-d (continued)

## Prices Slaves Paid for the Commodities They Purchased

Tobacco	.30 per pound
Flour	\$4.60 per barrel
Shoes	1.45 per pair 1.30 per pair 1.10 per pair .55 per pair (children's)
Sheets of Tin	.30 per sheet
Locks	.60 each
Meat	1.05 per 16 pounds
Hose	.15 per pair
Check Cloth	1.05 per 7 yards
Cotton Cloth	1.00 per 7 yards
Handkerchiefs	.20 each
Pants	2.00 per pair
Calico Cloth	.50 per 5 yards
Mosquito Bar	.80 each
Thread	.10
Blue Buckets	.30 each
Wire	.25 per pound
Twine	.37½ per pound
Cottonade	.30 per yard

Source: Tureaud (Benjamin) Papers, Ledger 1858-1872, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-e

Earnings and Expenditures of Slaves on the  
Gay Family's Sugar Estate with Notations  
on Their Family Relationships--1844.

## FRONT PLACE

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u>	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
z Jacob Lenox	\$ 38.80	Pumpkins, Fod- der, Corn, Ser- vices as Sugar Maker	Flour, Herring, got cash
z Armstead	8.00	Fodder, Corn	Flour, got cash
z Moses, Driver	2.00	Corn	got cash
z Jim Pipkin	3.50	Fodder, Corn	got cash
z Wm. Sanders	23.25	Corn, Services as 2nd Sugar Maker	Flour, Umbrella, Man's Saddle, got cash
z Henry Holbrook	9.00	Fodder, Corn	got cash
y Big Washington	21.00	Corn	got cash
y Sam'l Brown	11.50	Pumpkins, Fod- der, Corn	Bedspread, got cash
x Scipio	12.25	Fodder, Corn	Flour, got cash
z Tom Bell	19.50	Pumpkins, Corn	Flour, Herring, Goose, Coffee, got cash
y Little Ben	1.00	Moss	got cash
z Joe Sims & z Henderson	20.50	Corn	got cash
z Harry Tunley	20.00	Molasses Bar- rels, Corn	Flour, Bucket, Mackerel, Domestic Cloth, got cash

## Appendix 2-e (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u>	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
x(?) Yellow Daniel	\$ 13.62½	Corn	Coffee, got cash
y Ram George	7.50	Corn	got cash
y(?) Toney	1.00	Fodder, Corn	got cash
y Bob Ross	12.00	Fodder Corn	Flour, got cash
z Jim Banks	4.00	Corn	Domestic Cloth, got cash
z Lawrence	11.00	Corn	Flour, got cash
z Pollard	5.00	Corn	Flour, got cash
y Charles Carroll	1.87½	Fodder	got cash
z Bill Garner	7.00	Corn, Fodder, Services as Engineer	Flour, Calico Cloth, got cash
z Jim Tunley	4.25	Molasses Bar- rels, half- day's work for the plantation, iron hoops	Brown Linen & Cottonade Cloth, got cash
z Little Moses	9.00	Corn, Moss, Fodder	Flour, got cash
y Isaac Bell	2.50	Corn	got cash
x Alcade	2.75	Corn	got cash
x Jerry	2.80	Corn	Flour, Calico Cloth, got cash
v Aunt Milly	4.00	Cash paid by her	Flour
z(?) Augustus Josiah	6.00	Credit	Flour
w Lee	4.00	Credit	"Fine Summer Coat," got cash



## Appendix 2-e (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u>	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
z Alfred Cooper	\$ 53.40 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	Molasses Barrels	Calico Cloth for Louisiana [daughter], Furniture, Calico & Cotton Cloth, Flour, Buckets (3), Coffee Pots (2), "Elegant Bonnets" (2 @ \$2.00 each), Sets of Knives & Forks (2 @ \$1.25 each), got cash
z London	4.50	Corn	Coffee, got cash
y Elias	4.00	Credit	"Fine Russian Hat bt. in N. Orleans," (\$3.00), Money Due on Clothes
x Little London	4.00	Credit	Flour
z Nathan	4.00	Credit	Flour
x Alex <sup>r</sup> .	4.00	Credit	Flour
x Yellow Davy	4.00	Credit	Flour
z Josiah	4.00	Credit	Flour, Coffee
q Little David	2.00	Corn	got cash
BACK PLACE			
z Patrick	82.00	Pumpkins, Fodder, Corn	Bedspread, Mackerel, Cash to Aunt Julia, got cash
z Hercules	10.30	Corn, Fodder, 5 Months Watching	Flour, got cash
z Absolem	15.50	Corn, Fodder	Bedspread, Mackerel, got cash

## Appendix 2-e (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u>	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
z Davy Stump	\$ 25.80	Corn, Fodder, Molasses sold for Meat	Flour, Coffee, Ham, got cash
z Martin	29.87	Corn, Fodder, Molasses sold for Meat	Flour, got cash
z Edmund & z Sam Henderson	27.65	Corn, Fodder, Molasses sold for Meat	Flour, Herring, got cash
v Polly Sanders	23.90	Pumpkins, Fodder, Corn	Flour, Coffee, got cash
z Big Austin & y Jacob	31.15	Pumpkins, Fodder, Corn, Hay	Flour, Bedspread, got cash
z John White	5.50	Fodder, Corn, Hay	Coffee, got cash
z Perry & y(?) Washington	25.50	Fodder, Corn	got cash
z Alfred	1.00	Credit	got cash
y Little Austin & z Alfred	18.50	Corn, Fodder	Flour, got cash
u Clarissa & u Toney	3.80	Hay	White Cotton Cloth, got cash, "to Clarissa - \$ lent for Emily wedding"
w Ned Teagle & z Toney	24.25	Corn, Molasses sold for Meat	Flour, Coffee, got cash
z Henry Bias	5.50	Fodder, Hay, Molasses sold for Meat	got cash
y Clem	20.00	Moss, Services setting Kettles	Coffee, got cash

## Appendix 2-e (continued)

<u>Name of Slave</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u>	<u>How Earned</u>	<u>How Spent</u>
y Bill Chase	\$ 9.50	Fodder, Corn	got cash
z Ned Davis	14.00	Corn, Fodder	Flour, Coffee, got cash
z Joe Engineer	15.00	Services as Engineer	Flour, got cash
y Cook Dick	5.00	Services	Coffee, Flour
y Simpson	26.50	Fodder, Pumpkins, Corn	Calico Cloth, got cash
y Kenawa Moses	8.10	Molasses sold for Meat	Domestic Cloth, Meat, got cash, "meat for your children"
z Bill Moss	5.00	Corn, Hay, Fodder	got cash
y Little Washington	12.00	Hay, Molasses sold for Meat	got cash
y Big Ben	11.80	Corn, Fodder, Eggs	got cash
t Adeline	2.00	Hay	got cash
w Mack	2.00	Hay	got cash
q William & q Anna	2.00	Hay	got cash
r Long-Susan-----	<del>3.00</del>	<del>Gern</del>	<del>got cash</del> [sic]
y Yellow Toney	1.00	Credit	got cash
y John White	18.50	unrecorded	unrecorded
"Additional to z Hercules, z J Lenox & others say"	45.00	unrecorded	unrecorded
Total Paid	<u>\$900.12</u>		

## Appendix 2-e (continued)

Prices Paid Slaves for Goods and Services  
Listed Under "How Earned"

Pumpkins	.02 each
Fodder	.01 per bundle
Corn	.50 per barrel
Services as Sugar Maker	\$30.00
Services as 2nd Sugar Maker	\$15.00
Molasses Barrels	\$ 1.00 each
Services Setting Kettles	\$10.00
Half-day's (e.g. Sunday work counting hoop-poles)	.25
Moss	\$ 3.00-6.00 per bale
5 months Watching	5.00
Hay	2.00 per load
Molasses (sold for meat)	\$ 8.00-11.50 per barrel
Services as Fireman	\$ 5.00
Services as Engineer	\$10.00 & 5.00
Eggs	.12½ per dozen
Iron Hoops	1.25

## Appendix 2-e (continued)

## Prices Slaves Paid for Goods Listed Under "How Spent"

Flour	\$ 5.00 per barrel	Coffee Pots	.75 each
Herring	1.00 per box	Domestic Cloth	.10 per yard
Umbrella	1.00 each	Calico	.10 per yard
Man's Saddle	10.00 each	Brown Linen Cloth	.25 per yard
Bedspread	1.50 each	Cottonade Cloth	.25 per yard
Goose	.50 each	White Cotton	.10 per yard
Bucket	.25 each	"Fine Summer Coat"	3.00 each
Mackerel	7.00 per $\frac{1}{2}$ -barrel	"Elegant Bonnets"	2.00 each
Meat	.04 per pound	Knives & Forks	1.25 per set
Ham	.05 per pound	"Fine Russian Hat bt. in N. Orleans"	3.00

## Key to Notations on Family Relationships of Account-Holders

z	Male Head of Household
y	Single Male
x	Son in a Male-Headed Household
w	Son in a Female-Headed Household
v	Female Head of Household
u	Husband and Wife -- Joint Account
t	Daughter in a Female-Headed Household
r	Single Female
q	Unknown

Note: If the symbol (?) follows a notation, it denotes that the family relationship of the person is somewhat uncertain because of the incompleteness of data.

## Appendix 2-e (continued)

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 5, Daybook 1843-1847,  
Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton  
Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-f

Slave Accounts ("Account with the Negroes for 1851")  
on John Randolph's Nottoway Estate--1851

1851

January	L. Alfred	1 pair Boots	\$2.00
	Moses	-do-	2.00
	Coley	-do-	2.00
	Caeser	-do-	2.00
	Long William	-do	2.00
	Bob	-do-	2.00
	Bill Billaps	-do-	2.00
	L. George	-do-	2.00
	Stephen	-do-	2.00
	Cooper William	-do-	2.00
	Anthony	-do-	2.00
	Ben	-do-	2.00
	Peter M	-do-	2.00
	Lee	-do-	2.00
	Minny	-do-	2.00
	Jacko	-do-	2.00
	Washington	-do-	2.00
February	Frank	-do-	2.00
	Henry Green	-do-	2.00
	L Rosetta	1 pair Shoes	1.00
March 2nd	Frank	1 pound Tobacco	.25



## Appendix 2-f (continued)

March 2nd (cont.)	Long William	1 Molasses Barrel	\$1.25
	Nick	2 Molasses Barrels	2.50
May 3	H. Green	1 Barrel Flour	4.00
	Moses	-do-	4.00
	L. William	-do-	4.00
	Lennon	-do-	4.00
	Lee	-do-	4.00
	Bob	-do-	4.00
	Billy R	-do-	4.00
	Gus	-do-	4.00
	L. Alfred	-do-	4.00
	Minny	-do-	4.00
	B. Alfred	-do-	4.00
	Frank	-do-	4.00
	Sampson	-do-	4.00
	Henry Cris	-do-	4.00
	Reuben	-do-	4.00
	L. George	-do-	4.00
	B. Peter	-do-	4.00
	John	-do-	4.00
	Taswell	-do-	4.00
	Coley	-do-	4.00
	Henry Cooper	-do-	4.00
	William Cooper	-do-	4.00

## Appendix 2-f (continued)

May 3 (cont.)	Old Bill	1 Barrel Flour	\$4.00
			paid \$3.00
	Anthony	-do-	4.00
	Bill Billaps	-do-	4.00
	Jack	-do-	4.00
	Harry	-do-	4.00
	George Carpt <sup>r</sup>	-do-	4.00
	Ceaser	-do-	4.00
	Green	-do-	4.00
May 18	Tom	1 pair Russets	1.00
	Toby	-do-	1.00
June 1	Big Peter	1 plug Tobacco	.25
	Frank	-do-	.25
August 2	Moses	1 pair Shoes	1.00
	Caeser	1 plug Tobacco	.25
	Bob	-do-	.25
August 10	Mahala	1 pair Shoes	1.00
			chd. to George
	Susan	-do-	1.00
			chd. to Gus
	Green	-do-	1.00
August 17	Big Peter	1 plug Tobacco	.25
	Frank	-do-	.25
	Bill Billaps	1 pair Boots	2.00

## Appendix 2-f (continued)

August 7	Washington	1 plug Tobacco	\$ .25
	<del>William-Geoper</del>	<del>-----do-----</del>	<del>Paid-----</del> .25 [sic]
	Alfred BlkSmith	-do-	.25
	Little Alfred	-do-	.25
	Gorgo (little)	1 plug Tobacco	.25
	Reuben	-do-	.25
	Big Alfred	1 pair Shoes	1.00
	Anthony	-do-	1.00
	Sampson	-do-	1.00
	Lee	-do-	1.00
	Nick	-do-	1.00
	Lennon	-do-	1.00
	Taswell	-do-	1.00
	Dice	-do-	1.00
	Yellow Jack	-do-	1.00
	Toby	-do-	1.00
	Noel	-do-	1.00
	Little Henry	-do-	1.00
	Henry Green	-do-	1.00
	Jacko	-do-	1.00
September 20	Coley	-do-	1.00
	Tom Woodruff	-do-	1.00
October 5	Long William	1 pair Boots	2.00
	Long William	1 pair Shoes (for Leana)	1.00

## Appendix 2-f (continued)

	Washington	1 pair Boots	\$2.00
	Bob	1 plug Tobacco	.25
	Henry Green	-do-	.25
	Long William	1 Tin Bucket	.18
	Little George	1 pair Shoes	1.00
October 26	Frank	1 plug Tobacco	.25
	Washington	-do-	.25
	L. Alfred	-do-	.25
	Lee	-do-	.25
	Fort	1 Tin Bucket	.18 3/4
November 18	William (Cooper)	1 plug Tobacco	.25
December 17	"Gave Dicey, L Anny, Silla, a pair of shoes."		

Source: John H. Randolph Papers, Volume 5, Journal--Plantation Book 1847-1852, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-g

Earnings and Expenditures of Slaves on the  
Gay Family's Estate in the late 1850s

Payments Made to Slaves for:

Ironing Carts	Holiday Work (75 cents to \$1.00 per day)
Firing Kettles	Ditching (50 cents to \$1.00 per acre)
Fireman	Slabs of Wood (25 cents per cord)
Sugar Potting on Holiday	Making a Cart (Thornton paid \$20.00)
Moss	Fixing Kettles
Hay	Making Hogsheads
Woodcutting (50 cents per cord)	

Expenditures by Slaves:

Coffee	Flour	Fish	Shovels
Shoes	Mitts	Boots	Socks
Mackerel	Calico Cloth	Cotton Cloth	Beans
Linen Cloth	Pork	Check Cloth	Dresses
Cottonade Cloth	Flannel Cloth	Pants	Saddle
Knives	Shawls	Domestic Cloth	Gloves
& Cash to Selves, Wives, Daughters			

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 36, Plantation Record Book 1849-1860, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-h

Commodities Bought by Slaves on Bruce, Seddon and  
Wilkins' Wilton Estate with Money Made Cutting Wood--1848

Shoes	Tobacco	Soap	Knives
Combs	Hats	Blankets	Baskets
Pipes	Suspenders	Tin Cups	Hooks
Line	Cotton Cloth	Calico Cloth	Checked Cloth
& Cash Withdrawn			

Source: Bruce, Seddon, and Wilkins Plantation Records, Wilton Plantation  
Daily Journal 1853, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana  
State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-i

## Earnings and Expenditures of Slaves on George Lanaux'

Bellevue Estate--1851-54

Payments Made to Slaves for:

Corn	75 cents per barrel	Chickens	25 cents each
Wood	60 cents per cord	Sunday Work	30-60 cents per day
Eggs	15 cents per dozen	Holiday Work	60 cents per day

Expenditures by Slaves. In addition to withdrawing cash, slaves bought:

Flour	\$5.00 per barrel	Rice	\$7.00 per barrel
Knives	.25 each	Spoons	.50 per dozen
Sheet-Tin	.35	Tobacco	
Boots	3.50 per pair	Locks	.75 each
Fiddles	2.00 each	Portable Oven	.85 each
Biscuits	3.15 per barrel	Flannel Dresses	1.25 each
Potatoes	2.10 per barrel	Copper Kettles	.40 each
"Mouchoirs de tête" (Kerchiefs)			.15 each
Oiled Cloth Winter Coats			2.50 each
Oiled Pantaloon			1.10 per pair
"1 paire Brodequins" (Laced Boots)			1.15 per pair
Denim Pantaloon			1.10 per pair
"Log Cabin" Pantaloon			1.25 per pair

## Appendix 2- (continued)

"1 piece collette 30 yds."	\$ .12½ per yard
"1 serrure francais de 6 pces" (6-piece French Lock)	1.00 each

Source: George Lanaux and Family Papers, Volume 14, Journal 1851-1860, Volume 18, Ledger, 1851-1856, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



## Appendix 2-j

Earnings and Expenditures of Slaves on  
W. W. Pugh's Woodlawn Estate--1848-55

Payments Made to Slaves for:

Wood	.50 per cord	Shingles	\$4.50 per 1,500
Pickets	\$1.25 per 100	Staves	\$4.50 per 900
Sunday/Holiday Work	\$1.00 to \$1.25 per day	Shuck Collars	.37½ each
Hauling Wood	.75 per day	Cross-ditching	\$5.50 per 344 yards
Muscovy Ducks	.37½ each	Boards	.02½ per 4 foot board
Chickens	.20-.25 each	Burning Kiln Bricks	\$12.00
Making Hogsheads during Holidays	.75 each	Ditching	

Expenditures by Slaves. In addition to account-holders and others (presumably family members) withdrawing cash, slaves bought:

Flour	Bottles of Cordial
Shoes	Boots
Tobacco	Blankets \$4.00 per pair
Apples \$2.25 per barrel	Small Shoats .75 each
"Silk Dress for Rachel"	\$12.50 (debited to a slave named Woodson)
"Mending Watch"	\$ 3.00

Source: Colonel W. W. Pugh Papers, Volume 6, Cashbook for Negroes 1848-55, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 2-k

Commodities Bought by Slaves on Alexis Ferry's Sugar Estate  
with Money Made Cutting Wood--1848

Tobacco	Flour
Cottonade Pantaloons	Handkerchiefs
Shoes	Plates
Dresses	Meats
Hats	Cottonade Cloth
Chairs	
"Bolle Lustre" (glazed bowl)	
"Bolle Doré" (gilt bowl)	
"Bolle Jaune" (yellow bowl)	
"Gobelets" (cups)	
"Secousse de Tasse" (saucers ?)	
"Contenit" (containers ?)	
"Robe Bontenit" (fine dress ?)	
"Tignons" (head scarf, turban)	
"Pot Jaune" (yellow pot)	
"Aunes Coutes" (expensive lengths of cloth ?)	
"Aunes Jingus" (lengths of thin [ginguet] cloth ?)	
"Aunes Con Teint" (lengths of dyed cloth ?)	
"Bleuecroisée" (blue twill ?)	
"Fublonis" ( ? )	
"Colletes" ( ? )	

Source: Alexis Ferry Journals, Volume 1, 1842-1865, 1877, Department of Archives, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

## Part II

### Goods of Chattels

## Chapter 3

### The Housing of Slaves on Sugar Plantations in Jamaica and Louisiana

The status of bondage severely limited the actions of sugar plantation slaves in Jamaica and Louisiana. Planters exercised extensive control over the lives of the men, women and children enslaved on their estates, while slaves who traveled off the plantation were subject to a body of law that strictly regulated their actions.

Sugar plantation slaves often journeyed off the estate. In both Jamaica and Louisiana, slaves attended town markets where they bought and sold various commodities. They also, on occasion, left the estate when engaged in plantation work and when making social visits to other estates. When slaves left the plantation, the control of their movements and actions became the responsibility of the larger society. Official and semi-official groups like patrollers and militia, with the unofficial assistance of members of the free white community, exercised, often rigorously, the pass laws, curfews and other regulatory slave codes.

The control of slaves on the plantation, however, was less closely related to the formal structure of law. Planters, for example, could contravene, with virtual impunity, laws that limited punishments and mandated conditions of work and diet. In the less formal system of slave/planter relations that prevailed within the confines of the sugar estates, slaves also secured concessions from the planters, and recognition of customary rights which, of course, had no formal legal standing. The establishment and operation of the internal economy was central to the rights secured by slaves.

The stability and security of the internal economy derived from the modus vivendi established between slaves and planters on

the plantation. Notwithstanding that slaves conducted some dimensions of the internal economy off the plantation, they based the operation of their economic activities on the plantation. In the slave houses, gardens and grounds, which were the focus of family and community life, slaves had the opportunity to establish and develop their internal economies.

## i

Throughout the island of Jamaica, sugar plantation slaves lived in houses of similar construction. Typically, Jamaican slave houses were made of wattles or wattle-and-daub. To build and repair their houses, slaves used materials that were readily available in the surrounding countryside. At times, planters purchased lumber and other necessities, particularly for finishings and repairs or when the plantation was located too far from woodlands, mountains or other sources of supply. The construction techniques slaves used were of African derivation.

After clearing the land, houses were lined out and framed. Forked posts provided the middle and end supports, while shorter posts framed the house and served as floor joists. Frequently, slaves burned the part of the post that was to be sunk below ground-level, giving the wood a protective coat to retard rot. A ridge-pole placed along the notches of the main supports and wall plates either notched or nailed into place on the shorter posts of the external frame completed the skeleton of the house. Rafters, connected in pairs by wooden pins,

straddled the ridge-pole, and withes (heliotropium fruticosum) bound laths to the rafters.

The walls, which at this point comprised only the horizontal members of wall plates and cross beams, were then wattled. Vertical sticks between every two horizontal wall plates, and others attached to each side of every post, provided a lattice into which wattles (either small round sticks or sturdy slivers stripped from larger timbers) were then woven by being bent around the perpendiculars, each wattle bending either in or out opposite to its neighbors.

Slaves often daubed the wattles with clay or mud combined with vegetable fiber, such as plantain leaves, which acted as a binding agent. Daubing filled the cracks between the wattles, and when smoothed onto both inner and outer walls, provided a plaster-like finish which hardened when dry.

Slaves usually thatched their houses with any of a variety of available plants, the best of which were the mountain cabbage palm (roystonea oleracea) and other thatch palms. These thatches were so durable they reputedly lasted for more than thirty years. The leaves of the thatch palms, which are long, narrow and monocotyledonous were plaited together. To render the roof watertight, slaves put several layers of these plaits on the roof laths and tied them there with withes. When they could not get thatch palm, slaves used inferior substitutes such as sugar cane leaves, grass and other species of palm.

They constructed the door of the house by joining a few plain boards together and hinged it with leather straps or wooden pivots.

Windows were similarly shuttered. In nearly every case, slaves left the floors of their houses uncovered, and the earth, in the course of time, dried and hardened. (See Appendix 3-a.)<sup>1</sup>

The size of the houses, though partly dependent on the number of occupants, was fairly uniform, as was the internal layout. The "shell" commonly measured between fifteen and twenty-four feet in length, ten and fifteen in width and, according to Jamaican planter-historian Bryan Edwards, was "barely sufficient to admit the owner to walk in upright." The house usually contained two rooms or two rooms and a central hall. The hall, or if there was none, one of the rooms, contained an unvented fire around which slaves could sit and talk, smoke and perhaps cook. The other room or rooms were used for sleeping.<sup>2</sup>

Construction of the cabins varied. William Beckford observed that occasionally one of the rooms in the cabin had wooden flooring. He also said that sometimes one room had a louvred window which operated on the principle of a venetian blind. It is likely, however, that few slave houses displayed these features. Roofs were sometimes shingled, and on rare occasions may have been slated. Lord Penrhyn, for example, sent slates from his quarry in North Wales to be used for roofing the boiling house on one of his Jamaican sugar plantations,

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<sup>1</sup> Description of construction techniques based on Anon., "Characteristic Traits of the Creolian and African Negroes in Jamaica," The Columbian Magazine; or Monthly Miscellany (Kingston), 3 (September, 1797), 249-252.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies (1793, rpt. New York, 1972), II, 126.



as a precaution against fire, and perhaps the slaves on the estate used some for roofing their houses.<sup>3</sup>

Slave houses sometimes differed in size and construction according to the number and status of the occupants. Slave houses in Jamaica were primarily family dwellings and varied in size according to the size of the family. Housing for head slaves, including drivers and tradesmen, was often better than that of field hands, if not in size, then in finishing and appointments.

Primary responsibility for building the slave houses rested with the future occupants, the slaves themselves, who relied on construction materials gathered locally. This affected significantly the quality of housing, architectural design, division of labor, residential patterns and slave autonomy.

From time to time, planters participated in various phases of house building. At the most limited level, they supplied certain building materials, most importantly nails and less commonly lumber and shingles. For example, on James Chisholme's Trouthall Estate, after each field slave had lined out a house and erected the basic frame, the overseer gave him one hundred nails and promised him \$3 for finishing the house. At the next level, planters made the estate's slaves and free tradesmen available to assist with construction. The

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<sup>3</sup> William Beckford, A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica (London, 1790), I, 229; Letter from Rowland Fearon, Clarendon, Jamaica to Lord Penrhyn, 26 January 1805, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1361, West India Reference Library, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.

maximum involvement, of course, was when the planter supplied housing for the slaves.<sup>4</sup>

Planters assisted with house building, particularly if building materials were not available in the surrounding countryside. Some planters also rendered assistance out of concern for the health and welfare of the slave labor force, a concern stimulated both by humanitarian feelings and a desire to protect a significant capital investment.

Some planters responded to the high mortality rate of newly-imported African slaves during the "seasoning period" by assuring the slaves of the basic necessities of life from the outset of their residence in Jamaica. To this end, they provided provision grounds ready-planted for the newcomers and arranged for shelter in any of three ways. The newcomers could be boarded out with members of the existing slave community until they could build for themselves, or have built for them, their own houses. This boarding-out procedure, referred to by Bryan Edwards, was the one used on Nathaniel Phillips' sugar plantations in St. Thomas in the East. Otherwise, temporary housing could provide an interim solution, as happened on Lord Penrhyn's plantations, where the newly-purchased slaves were given "tight temporary Huts, until a leisure opportunity offer[ed] of erecting Houses for them." Incidentally, while living in these huts, the newcomers performed the assigned task of "preparing wood for their houses." A third

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from William Anderson, Trouthall Estate to James Chisholme, 9 March 1811, Chisholme Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland.

alternative was for the planter to have housing built before purchasing any more slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Planters also concerned themselves with the housing of the resident slave population on their estates, a practice which intensified in the last decades of slavery in Jamaica, particularly after the closure of the slave trade. With the external source of slaves closed, planters tried to improve the treatment of those on the island with a view to maintaining the labor force by natural increase. Thus they instituted various practices, loosely grouped under the heading of "amelioration." Planters believed improved housing would lead to an increase in the number of live births and a decrease in the infant mortality rate. Better housing, they felt, would promote better health. Planters tried to improve the quality of slave quarters by making the houses more weatherproof and building them in safer and healthier locations. They offered assistance primarily by supplying materials and the skilled help of the estate's tradesmen. Sometimes they also provided assistance when the slave houses suffered weather damage.

In many ways, however, the involvement of the planter in house construction was peripheral. The slave community exercised some autonomy, especially concerning where and how the houses were to be built. The decisions of slaves on these matters offer important insights into the structure and values of their community.

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<sup>5</sup> Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, II, 119; Letter from Thomas Barritt, Pleasant Hill, St. Thomas in the East Parish, Jamaica, to Nathaniel Phillips, 4 July 1793, Nathaniel Phillips Papers, 8419, West India Reference Library, UWI; Fearon to Penrhyn, 6 February 1806, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1415.

Family structure principally determined residence patterns. Husbands, wives and their children, if residing on the same plantation, lived together in the same house as a family unit. Unmarried slaves either lived with their families or, if of a marriageable age, alone or with other single persons of the same sex. The latter arrangement operated when African slaves, whose marriage and family relationships had been broken, were purchased to supplement a plantation's labor force. After just such a purchase, the attorney in charge of Nathaniel Phillips' plantations informed Phillips that he would "get a house or two made for the Men." Another arrangement, one used for the female slaves purchased for Phillips' estates, was to board the new slaves out with established residents. This process seems to have been, on occasion, less of a boarding-out arrangement than an adoptive one. African slaves were adopted as family members, particularly if there was some common heritage with slaves already living on the plantation; for example, if they were from the same part of Africa, were from the same African nation, or were transported across the Atlantic on the same vessel. Phillips' attorney said of the slaves he had purchased, that "most of the old people here such as Winsor, Ben, Frank etc., are of the same country. . . . The old people are glad to see them, and have taken them in their houses."<sup>6</sup>

Housing patterns reflected both nuclear and extended family structures. While houses were essentially one-family units, their

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<sup>6</sup> Barritt to Phillips, 4 July 1793, Phillips Papers, 8419.

spatial location could reflect an extended family network. For example, a number of slave houses on the Hope Estate just outside of Kingston, all belonging to members of the same family, were built close to each other and surrounded by a fence. All the slaves living in this family compound used a common gateway. Such family enclaves resulted from the slaves' prerogative to build their houses where they saw fit since the planter designated only the general areas of slave housing and left the precise location to the discretion of the slaves.<sup>7</sup>

There was generally little regularity in the spatial layout of houses in the slave villages on Jamaican plantations, unlike in Louisiana, where the typical settlement consisted of orderly rows of houses, with streets running down the middle. Where this formal order existed in Jamaica, as, for example, on Roehampton Estate in St. James Parish, the planter had assumed greater responsibility for the construction of houses. The usual Jamaican pattern was for houses to cluster throughout a general area along with the slaves' fruit trees, vegetable gardens and stock pens for chickens, hogs and goats. Irregular spacing of houses impeded surveillance and domination. In Louisiana, where planters determined the settlement pattern of slave housing, the chief consideration for spacing houses regularly and having the overseer's house overlook the slave village was to allow surveillance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Jamaica Journal (Kingston), I (November 1818), 15-25.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 3-b, a contemporary print of Roehampton Estate, St. James Parish, Jamaica, shows slave houses regularly spaced in rows. Appendix 3-c shows the irregular clustering of slave houses on Old Montpelier Estate, St. James Parish, Jamaica.

Although slaves used local materials to build their houses, construction techniques derived from African practices. An anonymous contributor to a Kingston journal noted that "the groundwork of all Negro habitations in Jamaica was as in Sierra Leone, the Negro huts of Africa." The illustration of Jamaican slave housing that comprises Appendix 3-a clearly shows the African influence in the shape and structure of the walls and roofs, and the techniques of wattling, daubing and thatching.<sup>9</sup>

Another contemporary commentator, J. B. Moreton, observed that when the future occupants were a family, a division of labor emerged in the construction process in which the husband assumed responsibility for providing shelter; "those who live in pairs together, as man and wife, are mutual helpmates to each other, the men build the huts, and assist to work in their grounds." Another example of this occurred on James Chisholme's Trouthall Estate. A letter to Chisholme from the attorney in charge of his estate mentioned one of the slave tradesmen and his wife, and "a fine House the Carpenter had made her."<sup>10</sup>

There was considerable inquiry, and much disagreement, about the quality of slave housing. During the movements for abolition and emancipation, legislative debates on the condition of slaves in the West Indian colonies revealed starkly contrasting views about housing. William Fitzmaurice, formerly a bookkeeper and overseer in Jamaica,

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<sup>9</sup> The Jamaica Journal, I (1818) in Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London, 1967), 54.

<sup>10</sup> J. B. Moreton, Manners and Customs in the West India Islands (London, 1790), 150; Letter, Anderson to Chisholme, 6 September 1800, Chisholme Papers.



gave evidence on slave housing to a House of Commons Select Committee on the Slave Trade and testified that "the greater part of them are open, and exposed to the weather--their houses are made of wattle, without being plaistered--they lie at night on a board on the ground close to the fire, and after the fire goes out they suffer by cold and damp." Robert Renny supported this testimony in his History of Jamaica. He described slaves as living in wretched habitations which were barely sufficient to keep the weather out. Much the same picture was given by Dr. John Quier, the resident physician on the Worthy Park Estate. In his testimony to the Jamaica House of Assembly Committee on the Slave Trade, Quier blamed the inadequacy of lodgings, their smokiness, dampness and cold, for causing respiratory ailments among slaves.<sup>11</sup>

Other contemporary sources offer a conflicting view of the quality of slave housing. Hector McNeill's defence of slavery and the slave trade included a description which showed the houses of slaves to be a comfortable and commodious arrangement of apartments, with ample furniture, utensils and apparel. A description of the slave village on Hope Estate compared the quality of its clean and neat houses to English cottages, while Dr. John Williamson's experiences during

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<sup>11</sup> Testimony of William Fitzmaurice, Minutes of the Evidence taken before a Committee of the House of Commons being a Select Committee appointed to take the Examination of Witnesses respecting the African Slave Trade, British Sessional Papers (1731-1800), House of Commons, Accounts and Papers, XXXIV:745 (1790-1), 206; Robert Renny, A History of Jamaica (London, 1807), 178; Testimony of John Quier, Two Reports (one presented the 16th of October, the other on the 12th of November, 1788) from the Committee of the Honourable House of Assembly of Jamaica . . . on the Subject of the Slave Trade, and the Treatment of Negroes (London, 1789), 31.

his residence in Jamaica from 1798 to 1812, left him with the impression that slaves "in their own houses . . . have their snug warm fire-side, and little air admitted to it." One must bear in mind that these conflicting descriptions were offered by parties on either side of the slavery debate.<sup>12</sup>

In as extensive a system as sugar slavery in Jamaica, it is likely that all of the foregoing testimony could be substantiated, if not in general, then at least in specific cases. The case of a slave carpenter building a fine house, cited by the attorney on Trouthall Estate, can be combined with Rev. Thomas Cooper's observation that some of the slave houses were built on a superior style, to show that the condition of slave housing was not uniformly bad. There is no doubt that a properly-constructed wattle-and-daub house could give perfectly adequate shelter and lodging in the tropical Jamaican climate, and some must have done so. The weight of testimony, however, indicates the general inadequacy of slave housing on Jamaican sugar plantations.<sup>13</sup>

Although most slave quarters were poor, an elite group of slaves often had better housing. Bryan Edwards, for example, stated that "tradesmen and domestics are in general vastly better lodged and provided. Many of these have larger houses with boarded floors."

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<sup>12</sup> Hector McNeill, Observations on the Treatment of Negroes in the Island of Jamaica (London, 1788?), 2-3; The Jamaica Journal, I (1818), 15-25; John Williamson, Medical and Miscellaneous Observations relative to the West India Islands (Edinburgh, 1817), 147.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson to Chisholme, 6 September 1800, Chisholme Papers; Thomas Cooper, Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica (London, 1824), 22-3.



According to another Jamaican sugar planter, Gilbert Mathison, slaves in a position to accumulate earnings used their money to keep their houses in good repair; those less fortunate suffered. Where the planter assumed responsibility for constructing houses, slaves in positions of authority and privilege received lodgings superior in either size or appointments.<sup>14</sup>

The vast body of the slave population was denied the advantages accorded the drivers, tradesmen and other elite slave groups. Field slaves had neither the construction skills necessary to build and repair houses nor were they able to accumulate wealth as readily. Similarly, their subordinate position in the labor hierarchy denied them the favors of the planter. Thus, a quite different picture of housing conditions of ordinary slaves emerges.

One may assess the standard of housing by referring to appraisals of the buildings' value. John Blackburn, an estate manager, testifying before the House of Commons Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies in 1807, commented that "their houses are in great measure, of their own building, and may be worth twenty, twenty-five or thirty pounds each." Only the best slave housing would have been valued as highly. A more accurate assessment of the value of most slave housing can be derived from the inventory of Nathaniel Phillips' Pleasant Hill Estate taken in May 1784. The total valuation of "Negro Houses" for a slave population totalling 315 slaves was

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 127; Gilbert Mathison, Notices Respecting Jamaica in 1808--1809--1810 (London, 1811), 39-40.

£400. The inventory does not include the number of "Negro Houses." Slaves on this plantation, however, lived for the most part in single-family dwellings that probably averaged four or five occupants each. By way of comparison, the inventory evaluated these 315 slaves at £22,160, the total valuation of the plantation was £73,693, and a framed "Hot House" (hospital) built on a stone wall and with a shingled roof alone was valued at £200.<sup>15</sup>

In his description of West Indian sugar plantations, Dr. Collins pointed out that for the great majority of slaves, those who labored in the fields, "the erection, or repair of their houses, becomes a very heavy task, when it is to be effected alone as is the case on most estates, and, of course, the business advances slowly, and is imperfectly done." He further attested to the inadequacy of "the generality of negro houses," although he conceded that "but a few [were] much more solidly and artificially constructed by the sensible negroes on most estates." Indeed, "house" may be too grand a word to describe the structures in which most slaves lived. The words "hut" and "shed," which the Rev. Thomas Cooper used, may be more suitable to describe the crude constructions.<sup>16</sup>

Such rude housing was unable to protect its inhabitants from the vagaries of Jamaica's climate, which is both tropical and maritime.

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<sup>15</sup> Testimony of John Blackburn, Report from the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies, ordered to be printed 24 July 1807 (London, 1807), 43; Inventory and Valuation of Pleasant Hill Estate, 24 May 1784, Phillips Papers, 11524.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Collins, Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves in the Sugar Colonies (1811, rpt. New York, 1971), 117; Cooper, Facts Illustrative, 22-3.

Whereas Jamaica's latitude affords an absence of excessively cold weather, it is a rather small, mountainous island where both wind and rain occur to a greater extent than in a continental tropical climate. If there was no daub or plaster, both wind and rain penetrated the chinks between the wattles. Prolonged rains drenched inadequate thatching and caused damp to rise from bare floors. A tacit recognition of the shortcomings of slave housing, especially in wet weather, can be seen in the actions of Nathaniel Phillips' estate manager when dealing with an outbreak of measles on Pleasant Hill plantation. He reported that "the late wet weather is much against Measels Negroes, who are required to be kept warm, we have got the overseers house nearly filled with them." Although the manager took this measure, in part, because of quarantine considerations, he also recognized that the slaves' own housing was not suitable for keeping them dry and warm. In a letter to Phillips he explained that he had a policy of supplying all measles victims with dry accommodation and warm clothing.<sup>17</sup>

More severe weather often damaged slave housing. For example, a storm that hit Lord Penrhyn's sugar estates in 1815 caused widespread destruction of slave houses. The storm was not of sufficient force, however, to harm any of the other buildings on the estate, which had been more substantially constructed by expert workmen. Similarly, Nathaniel Phillips' Pleasant Hill and Phillipsfield estates suffered storm damage on 2 November 1800. The storm injured crops, but, as the manager reported, "few Buildings were hurt Excepting the Negroe Houses."

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<sup>17</sup> Barritt to Phillips, 25 April 1795 and 27 May 1795, Phillips Papers, 9203 and 9205.

Reports of weather damage to slave housing were so frequent in the records of planters and their agents in Jamaica that it seems to have been almost an annual phenomenon, occurring with the onset of the hurricane season towards the end of the year. The damage, however, was often due more to the fragility of the houses than the severity of the weather. When really severe weather brought significant damage to the sturdier buildings on the plantation, for example, the sugar works and the white people's housing, it devastated the slave quarters.<sup>18</sup>

Prolonged rains posed another threat to the slaves' housing. Slave quarters, often situated by water-courses, could be inundated if these streams burst their banks when swollen by heavy rains. This occurred on one of Lord Penrhyn's plantations when "a small Rivulet that is contiguous to the Negroe Houses . . . rose also to a great highth which has done some injury to the Negroe Houses and swept away some of the Negroes Cloaths, Hogs and a little poultry."<sup>19</sup>

Fire posed a threat to which slave housing was particularly susceptible. Dr. Collins, in his Practical Rules, detailed preventive measures that indicated the prevalence of this destructive force. He went so far as to say that "fire . . . seldom fails to do more or less mischief on every plantation, once in two or three years, sometimes scarcely leaving the vestige of a house." The chief causes of

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<sup>18</sup> Letter from J. Shand, Spanishtown to G. H. D. Pennant, 6 November 1815, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1542; Barritt to Phillips, 26 November 1800, Phillips Papers, 11615.

<sup>19</sup> Fearon to Penrhyn, 6 June 1806, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1424.

frequent fires were combustible building materials, the closeness of the slaves' houses to each other and the presence of naked flames.<sup>20</sup>

Wattled, thatched houses, constructed on a skeleton of wood, were both easily ignited and quick to burn. Almost invariably the fire spread, consuming nearby houses. A May 1813 report in the Jamaica Magazine reported the destruction of 45 slave houses on the Holland Estate: field cooks apparently had failed to properly extinguish a fire in the cook-room after preparing the field hands' breakfast. In another instance, seven slave houses on Duckenfield Hall Estate burned during very dry weather in April 1797. James Chisholme was aware of this potential hazard and urged the manager on his Trouthall sugar plantation to make sure, as a precaution against fire, that slaves did not build their houses too closely together. The threat of fire was ever present because, as William Beckford intimated, slaves kept fires burning constantly in their cabins. Crude torches fashioned by slaves to provide light for their dwellings increased the menace.<sup>21</sup>

A further threat of fire came from slaves' frequent recourse to arson as a means of resistance. One of the most prevalent forms of covert resistance by slaves was setting fire to the cane fields. In dry weather, flames could race through the tinder-like canes wreaking destruction. Intensive land use meant that the cane fields abutted

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<sup>20</sup> Collins, Practical Rules, 121.

<sup>21</sup> The Jamaica Magazine (Kingston), III (May 1813), 349; Barritt to Phillips, 6 April 1797, Phillips Papers, 11580; Chisholme to Anderson, 6 August 1810, Chisholme Papers; William Beckford, A Descriptive Account, I, 229; The Columbian Magazine, 3 (September, 1797), 252-3.

plantation buildings so that burning canes also threatened the sugar-works and houses. Cane fires also threatened neighboring plantations downwind. For example, on Pleasant Hill Estate, in St. Thomas in the East Parish, during a dry spell in May 1796, the estate manager reported "cases of fire breaking out among Negroe Houses, do. Grounds or Cane Pieces.--last night this Estate was very near being burnt down, by some evil minded, or Runaway people, setting fire to Stoakes Hall Canes [an adjoining plantation]." <sup>22</sup>

Although slave housing on Jamaican sugar plantations seemed particularly susceptible to damage and destruction, the responsibilities for repair and reconstruction rested primarily on the shoulders of the occupants. This resulted in continual deterioration in housing quality in that buildings, poorly constructed initially, were repaired by men and women who probably lacked all three essentials for performing good and efficient work: time, skill and materials. <sup>23</sup>

Some plantations, however, had a policy where the planter assisted slaves when their houses were damaged or dilapidated. For example, as the attorney on Duckenfield Hall Estate, in St. Thomas in the East Parish, explained in a letter to the plantation's absentee owner Jacob Franks:

. . . it is always generally usual after crop time, to give the assistance of the estates carpenters to do such jobs at the negroe houses & is much a matter of course, that I thought you were well aware of it, & therefore did not particularly specify it, in my

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<sup>22</sup> Barritt to Phillips, 20 May 1796, Phillips Papers, 11573.

<sup>23</sup> Collins, Practical Rules, 116-7.



letters to you. Now as to expence, permit me to assure you, that absolutely no positive expence was the estate put to, but in the few nails, used in the repairs & construction of the houses, & the few feet of common white pine boards, used in repairing old doors & windows, & when necessary, making new ones, & not only was the expence of both very trifling indeed, in effect, but surely it seems not a moment to be put in competition, with the great satisfaction it was, and is, to the negroes, to have their cottages, (& they are nothing else), weathertight & comfortable, exclusive of the benefit, which their health may accrue from those circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

When a storm devastated the slave village on his Pleasant Hill Estate in July 1784, Nathaniel Phillips instructed his overseers to encourage the slaves to repair the damages "by assisting them in rebuilding their houses." On the same plantation in May and June 1793, severe rains damaged slaves' houses and again the estate manager assisted in their repair. A storm that struck G. H. D. Pennant's Denbigh Estate in October 1815 wrecked slave houses, "but," the overseer reported, "the carpenters [were] assisting in repairing them." The same storm also hit Pennant's Kupius Estate, where the overseer reported that "a number of the negro houses are entirely blown down." He therefore "allowed the negroes some time to repair their houses."<sup>25</sup>

When a stream burst its banks on one of Lord Penrhyn's sugar plantations inundating slave housing, the estate's manager wrote Penrhyn that "the Houses must be repaired for the present, but they must be

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<sup>24</sup> Letter from John Kelly, Green Castle, Jamaica, to Jacob Franks, Islesworth, near London, 10 December 1809, Records relating to Duckenfield Hall Plantation, Jamaica, Acc. 775, 928/5, West India Reference Library, UWI.

<sup>25</sup> Phillips to Barritt and Robert Logan, 24 October 1784, Phillips Papers, Letter Book from June 1778, 11484; Barritt to Phillips, 5 June 1793, Phillips Papers, 8419; Extracts from overseers' letters, 25 and 26 October 1815, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1541.

removed to prevent the like from happening again." On William Dickinson's Appleton Estate in St. Elizabeth Parish, sickness among the slaves prompted the manager to remove their houses to a healthier location. Planters probably gave slaves assistance, either in materials, labor, or time-off, to shift their settlements.<sup>26</sup>

Most slave houses were sparsely furnished. Although Hector McNeill in 1788 saw slave houses with what he called a "propriety" of furniture and utensils, published accounts by Bryan Edwards and John Stewart indicated that the furnishings of slave houses were lacking in both quality and quantity, mentioning only the presence of a table and chairs or stools and a few items of crockery, calabashes and containers. Nor did Edwards or Dr. Collins believe slaves needed much in the way of furniture. Edwards, Stewart and Collins agreed in their descriptions of the one other important piece of furniture in slaves' houses, the bed, a wooden frame or board on which were spread a mat and a blanket. While privileged slaves may have had beds and other furnishings of better quality, Collins mentioned that some of the slave population may not have had any of even the most simple furniture. The paucity of data prevents a precise assessment of how slave houses were furnished. Nevertheless, many sugar plantation slaves, especially field-hands, probably fell within the "deprived" category.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fearon to Penrhyn, 6 June 1806, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1424; Letter from William Dickinson, Upper Harley Street, London, to Thomas J. Salmon, Jamaica, 24 May 1788, Dickinson Family Papers, West India Reference Library, UWI.

<sup>27</sup> Hector McNeill, Observations, 4; Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 126; John Stewart, A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica (1823, rpt. New York, 1969) 266-7; Collins, Practical Rules, 120-1.



Slaves had to provide their own household furnishing, for little was supplied them at the plantation's expense. Slaves could, for example, furnish their houses by purchasing the necessary articles. Planter Gilbert Mathison, in his Notices Respecting Jamaica indicated that "well-conditioned Negroes" on sugar plantations raised small livestock and grew surplus produce in their provision grounds which they then sold at market. They used the accumulated remunerations to keep their houses in good repair and to buy various furnishings for them. Cash income would have been necessary to provide the books and prints which William Sells claimed adorned some of the slaves' houses he entered.<sup>28</sup>

Slaves made most of their furnishings, however, from materials they gathered in the surrounding countryside. Thus, to outfit their homes, slaves needed skills, time and the inclination to spend it making furniture. An article in a Kingston journal, The Columbian Magazine, described chairs made by slaves that were "bottomed with flags and rushes." Making these required both basketry and carpentry skills. Slaves who made sleeping mats also had to be skilled in basket-weaving, for the mats were made of "plantain leaf ribs stripped of dry foliage placed close together and confin[ed] . . . so by strips of the bark of trees." Slaves needed woodworking skill not only to construct tables and benches, but also to make the beds described as "cabbins or

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<sup>28</sup> Mathison, Notices, 39; William Sells, Remarks on the Condition of Slaves in the Island of Jamaica (London, 1823), 36.

platforms, (frequently made of cleft cabbage-stems), supported by rails placed on four short posts fixed in the earth."<sup>29</sup>

Slaves had one other piece of bedding, blanketing; this was one of the few household items planters sometimes provided. Even in this case, however, all slaves did not receive equal treatment. Testimony presented to the House of Commons in 1789 mentioned blanketing as one item included in the annual clothing allowance to slaves--"All receive a piece of woollen cloth or blanketing." Three yards of such material was apparently the usual distribution, with drivers and head tradesmen getting a double ration. Rev. Thomas Cooper claimed, however, that many slaves did not receive even this meager covering. He noted that "they lie on boards, or on a door covered with a mat of their own making, and sometimes a blanket for covering, but they have not all blankets. A woman with children has a blanket, and also the aged men; but many men have none." Further House of Commons testimony offered an explanation for this difference. Whereas women got a blanket at the expense of the plantation, men were given a "Welch blanket or Woollen Jacket." Thus the distribution of woollen cloth to male slaves was presumably expected to function both as an outer garment and bedclothes. This would cause the cloth to wear out more rapidly and may explain Cooper's observations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," The Columbian Magazine, 3 (September, 1797), 251.

<sup>30</sup> British Sessional Papers (1731-1800), House of Commons, Accounts and Papers, XXVI:646A, Pt. 3 (1789), p. 6; List of Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny, 10 June 1797 and 6 June 1799, Harmony Hall Estate Papers, 7/7-1, 7/56-1, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica; Cooper, Facts Illustrative, 23; British Sessional Papers (1731-1800), House of Commons, Accounts and Papers, XXVI:646A, Pt. 3 (1789), p. 5.

The more demanding projects of erecting and repairing houses required techniques which few other than tradesmen possessed. Slaves needed less sophisticated skills to make simpler pieces of furniture, and, therefore, more members of the slave population would have possessed them. Slaves, however, needed time and the motivation to devote it to these enterprises as well as skills.

In his Practical Rules, Dr. Collins drew a stark picture of the lot of field slaves. He contended that "with negroes, half whose time is devoted to the service of others, the little which is not given to sleep, must necessarily be employed in obtaining or cooking their food, which exhausts almost the whole of their short remissions from labour." The punishing labor regime of sugar slavery greatly limited the free time available to those suffering under it, and enervated both their spirits and their strength. Any incentive or inclination towards the manufacture of furnishings and home improvement was tempered by the overwhelming fatigue slaves suffered, by their need to provide themselves with sustenance, by the inadequacies of their shelter, and by the despondency of bondage. How bare must have been the homes of generations and thousands of slaves who lived and died on the sugar plantations of Jamaica. The evidence of J-- M--, formerly a bookkeeper on Bushy Park Estate in St. Dorothy Parish, evoked this bleak scene. He referred to the indifferent huts, frequently devoid of furniture, which were the slaves' living quarters.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Collins, Practical Rules, 116; Anon., Negro Slavery; or a view of some of the more important features of that state of society as it exists in the United States of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies, especially Jamaica (London), 1823), 67.

Individual slave houses were usually surrounded by a small plot of ground which could be used as a kitchen garden. This area may have been fenced off, and occasionally, as on Hope Estate, there were family compounds, comprising a number of houses and their gardens, which were fenced-off from the rest of the village. Gardens sometimes contained a partitioned section for small livestock, principally poultry and hogs. William Beckford noted that often a hut stood in back of the house and functioned as a buttery, storehouse, stockhouse and enclosed pigsty. Despite his use of the word "often" such outbuildings may have been less common than he implied. Similarly, as was true of other improvements in housing, privileged slaves were more likely to have these outbuildings on their plots than were ordinary field hands.<sup>32</sup>

Slaves, by conscientiously working their kitchen gardens and raising small livestock, could both supplement their diet, and, by selling the surplus at market, acquire some money. The fertile soil and tropical climate of Jamaica permitted even small patches of ground to yield an abundance of fruits and vegetables. Contemporary reports frequently described slave villages with many fruit trees, coconut palms and vegetable plots. If slaves, for whatever reason, did not work these gardens, however, the fecundity of the soil quickly turned them into ruinate patches. References to "showplace" examples of slave housing and gardens, as in the Jamaica Journal of 1813, should not be permitted to conceal, if not their atypicality, then certainly that

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<sup>32</sup> The Jamaica Journal, I (1818), 15-25; Beckford, A Descriptive Account, I, 229.

they were but one side of the coin. This exaggeratedly idyllic view, which described the slave houses nestled like English cottages among trees bearing coconuts, cashews, oranges, shaddocks, forbidden fruit, mangoes, avocados, akees, neesberries and other fruits, standing in fenced gardens that contained poultry and pigs, vegetables and pine-apples, must be tempered with the dismal, and probably more widespread, picture of squalid hovels surrounded by overgrown weed-infested patches of ground.<sup>33</sup>

Close to the cabin, either adjacent to it, or leaning against it, was the kitchen area. Despite the presence of a fire inside the dwelling itself, slaves usually did their cooking outside, either in the open air, or in a lean-to structure built abutting the house, which sheltered the fire and surrounding area. Slaves were responsible for this area; they built the shelter, provided the necessary utensils and constructed a suitable fireplace.

Other than the implements necessary for the cultivation of the sugar crops, plantation owners gave the slaves few tools. They did, however, sometimes issue slaves cooking utensils. Slaves regularly received a cane knife that they used primarily as a work tool, but also in their kitchens. The fictional account of plantation life and society in Jamaica, Marly, refers to the supply of a clasp-knife to each slave as part of the annual allowance. James Stewart's account of slavery in Jamaica noted that planters provided slaves with an iron pot and a

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<sup>33</sup> The Jamaica Journal, I (1818), 15-25, 312-8.

knife for cooking victuals. The knives planters supplied the slaves were work tools that slaves took home for their own use.<sup>34</sup>

Other than knives, iron pots were the kitchen utensil most frequently supplied at the planters' expense. A list of articles provided the slaves on Harmony Hall Estate in Trelawny Parish in February 1798, showed that a few received pots. Of the twenty-two men on the list, three received pots; of the twenty-one women, one received a pot; none of the sixteen boys or six girls got a pot; and the only other one issued at this time went to a cook. While clothing was issued the slaves annually on this plantation, pots were issued less frequently, perhaps only when the previous one broke. The Harmony Hall list does not indicate the reason for supplying the pots, so it could also conceivably have been some reward or incentive payment. The "Negro Accounts" on Hugh Hamilton's Pemberton Valley Estate itemized the purchase of ten iron pots at 3/9d each. The same set of accounts mentioned that "New Negroes" were supplied with "calabashes" at the expense of the plantation. Other than the above examples, and a passing reference by Robert Renny in his History of Jamaica to the fact that newly-purchased slaves received a small wooden spoon immediately after they had been sold at dock-side, slaves received little else from the planter for culinary purposes.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Anon., Marly; or a Planter's Life in Jamaica (Glasgow, 1828), 64; James Stewart, A Brief Account of the Present State of the Negroes in Jamaica (Bath, 1792), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Served with Cloath, etc., 22nd February 1798, Harmony Hall Estate Papers, 7/56-1; Negro Account, Accounts of Hugh Hamilton and Company, settled December 31st, 1784, Hamilton of Pinmore Papers, B1755, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Scotland; Renny, History of Jamaica, 176.



Except for what the slaves purchased using their own resources, they depended primarily on country materials to make their kitchenware. The principal raw materials they found were clay and gourds. They used clay to make earthenware pots, urns and bowls, and they cut gourds or calabashes to form containers, plates, dippers and spoons. John Stewart indicated that slaves carved wood to make mortars and pestels for grinding corn, bowls and other such articles.<sup>36</sup>

Some slaves had skills to fashion clay into glazed, convex-bottomed pots called yabbas,<sup>37</sup> which they sold or bartered at the weekly markets for provisions or other manufactures. Pots made by less-skilled slaves for their own use were similar, though probably cruder in design and construction. Fashioning gourds or calabashes was much easier. Calabashes with one end cut off, and a stick pushed through the side, served as water cups, and slaves made spoons by cutting calabashes from one end to the other. The quality of such utensils no doubt ranged from the most crudely-fashioned gourd or coconut-shell dipper to pieces of earthenware of artistic construction and design. In this realm slaves had

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<sup>36</sup> John Stewart, A View, 266-7.

<sup>37</sup> Yabbas, whose name may derive from the West African Igbo word *gbà* meaning calabash or pot, were made by slaves following traditional African principles. Slaves cast these vessels by montage, that is, by adding successive rings of clay, and either fired them over an open fire or just left them to dry. Examples of yabbas made during slavery, and now housed in the Jamaica Archaeological Society, show a strong influence of Asante pottery design. (See illustration in Appendix 3-d.) Beatrice F. and William E. Welmers, Igbo: A Learner's Dictionary (Los Angeles, 1968); Michel Leris and Jacqueline Delange, African Art (London, 1968), 448.

considerable autonomy and could transcend, through their own talents, both the deprivation of supplies and a white-created infrastructure of privilege. For other slaves, the planters' failure to supply these goods exacerbated the sordidness and destitution of their lives in bondage.<sup>38</sup>

Sugar plantation slaves in Jamaica probably cooked their meals similar to the following 1797 Columbian Magazine description:

The trivet for supporting the vessel in which he [the slave] prepares his food, consists of three large stones: when he cannot get so many old gun or pistol barrels, broken augers or bill handles to drive into the earth, racks, spits and dripping pans when requisite are soon collected. Two forked sticks placed in the earth at a due distance from each other, are substitutes for the first; or a longer and slender one serves for the second. The last is compounded of half a cylinder taken from the stem of a plantain tree, and placed before the fire under the meat, with one end depressed to convey the gravy into a calabash placed to receive it.

Because their diet contained little meat, slaves would have used the spit less frequently than the trivet. They occasionally constructed crude ovens by scooping a hollow in a cutbank and placing hot coals in it.<sup>39</sup>

Slaves stored food and water in their houses in gourds and earthenware jars, some of which were suspended from the ceiling to prevent rats from getting to the grain or fish. As an additional precaution against pests, they built a device from "an half cylinder of bark with the round side uppermost, the rope to which their food [was] appended passing thro' this up to the ridge pole."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," The Columbian Magazine, 3 (September, 1797), 251-2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



Although planters and their delegates sometimes concerned themselves with slaves' housing, generally they neglected it. This neglect was a two-edged sword. It meant, for slaves, miserable conditions of life in which their inadequate housing caused discomfort and could even threaten their health and lives.

Planter neglect, however, permitted slaves considerable liberty within their quarters. From this freedom developed the peculiar status of the slave's house as the focus and base for activities, inherently inimical to the institution of slavery, and largely independent of the plantation system and those who controlled it. A clear illustration of this was the consistent reaction by whites to any threat or rumor of slave rebellion: to search slave quarters. As Lord Balcarres reported to the Duke of Portland in August 1795, the outbreak of the Maroon Rebellion prompted the militia to search all the slave huts on the island for concealed arms. Another report mentioned that in this search "for all and every kind of Arms, we do not hear of any other sort being found but Cutlasses, which Negroes have in common for trimming Plantain trees etc. in their Provision grounds." Rumors of a Christmas rebellion at the time of the abolition of the slave trade again led the island government to order a strict guard and a search of slave houses for arms. Since slaves' houses were beyond the ordinary purview of whites, the white population of the island moved against slave quarters during times of trouble. It was in their houses that slaves could hide weapons, secure from everyday discovery. After all, for a slave, the possession of arms was a capital offence. Yet except during emergencies or on government orders, searches

were cursory. While slaves had no legal rights to privacy in their homes, and some planters ordered their overseers and bookkeepers to visit the slave houses regularly, the sequestration of the quarters was generally maintained as a consequence both of the attitude of the slaves, and the antipathy, acquiescence, laziness and unconcern of whites.<sup>41</sup>

Slaves developed a territorial and proprietary attitude to their houses and gardens. Testimony in the 1807 House of Commons Report from the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies included a Jamaican sugar estate manager's reference to the slaves' "houses, their provision grounds, their gardens and orchards, (which they consider as much their own property as their Master does his Estate)." To secure their property, slaves used home-made wooden locks, keys and bolts. While these protected slaves' property against theft, they also served to affirm their ownership and dominion. Similarly, in Louisiana, lists of purchases by slaves show they spent some of their financial resources on locks. Clearly, the possession and use of locks by slaves is antithetical to the whole notion of slave subjugation. Nevertheless, their widespread use indicates a degree of slave autonomy. Slaves were and viewed themselves as property-holders, with the ability to protect and defend their possessions and territory. Slaves invested their houses with the

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<sup>41</sup> Lord Balcarres to the Duke of Portland, 3 August 1795, Hardwicke Papers, Volume DLXVIII, Add. 35916, British Library, London, England; Barritt to Phillips, 15 August 1795, Phillips Papers, 9207; Letter from David Ewart, Westmoreland, Jamaica to Lord Penrhyn, 8 and 10 December 1808, Penrhyn Castle Papers, 1495.

hallmarks of ownership, and these were normally, though tacitly, recognized by the planters and their agents.<sup>42</sup>

The slaves' sense of territoriality was revealed in the way they used their own land. In the garden near the house, slaves buried their kin, sometimes erecting a grave-marker on the spot. J. B. Moreton, in his description of slavery, indicated that families sometimes even interred deceased relatives under their beds within the house itself. Testimony by John Blackburn, a Jamaica sugar plantation manager, to the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies in 1807, reflected the slaves' perception of their house and home being hallowed and sacrosanct because of this custom. Blackburn testified that "every [slave] house has a garden round it, of a quarter or half an acre or more; they are attached to the spot, and they are attached to the graves of their forefathers." Burial patterns similar to those adopted by slaves in Jamaica existed in various West African societies.<sup>43</sup>

The extremely powerful and pervasive religious practices of obeah provide another example of the effects of the property and ownership status of the slave grounds and houses. In his history of Jamaica, planter John Stewart observed that obeah charms, when placed in the

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<sup>42</sup> Testimony of John Blackburn, Report from the Committee, 40; Anon., "Characteristic Traits," The Columbian Magazine, 3 (September, 1797), 251; Lanaux (George and Family) Papers, 1830-(1850-1880)-1915, Volume 18, Ledger 1851-1856, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

<sup>43</sup> Moreton, Manners, 162; Testimony of John Blackburn, Report from the Committee, 43; for West African burial customs see J. Olumide Lucas, The Religion of the Yorubas (Lagos, 1948), 225; and for a more general treatment, Edward G. Parrinder, West African Religions (London, 1949).

slaves' gardens or grounds, protected them from plunder and theft. A charm, he wrote, "loses its power, however, when put to protect the gardens and plantain walks of the Buckras." The system of obeah, therefore, made a distinction that affirmed a bifurcated structure of property and ownership: slave black and free white.<sup>44</sup>

On less esoteric levels than the sepulchral and religious, the attitudes and actions of slaves illustrated the importance of the sanctuary house and grounds embodied. Although in part a result of their dislike of the estate's hospital or "hot house," slaves preferred to remain, when sick, in their own houses, and, according to William Beckford, the "better kind of negroes" were allowed to do so. As has been noted above, slaves invested time, effort and money in their houses. The house was the repository for slaves' possessions, no matter how meager: their "best clothes," and artifacts of utility and comfort. "The underparts of eaves [which] project to shelter walls from rain afford[ed slaves] places to bestow sticks, pipes, whips, hunting and fishing spears, cutlasses etc."<sup>45</sup>

The slave quarters were the seat of various social activities. Family and friends gathered around the fires in the kitchen and inside the house, or, weather permitting, in the "yard" outside. Planters complained that runaways skulked around and were fed in the slave village. Superannuated slaves were left to their own devices there.

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<sup>44</sup> John Stewart, A View, 278-9.

<sup>45</sup> Beckford, A Descriptive Account, II, 18; Anon., "Characteristic Traits," The Columbian Magazine, 3 (September, 1797), 251.

Slave houses and grounds were the most important source of self-determined action and decision-making, and the nucleus of slave community and family development, where a form of independence was asserted by the slaves, and conceded by the whites, despite its fundamental dissonance with the basic premises of slavery.

## ii

A comparison of slave housing on sugar plantations in Jamaica and Louisiana reveals significant differences. They differed in such physical aspects as construction materials and site placement as well as in the degree of control exercised by slaves and planters.

Typically, slave houses in Louisiana were built of wood or brick. Wood houses were simple frame structures, clapboards nailed to a wooden skeleton. There were two principal types of wooden framed houses, double and single cabins. Double cabins accommodated two slave families or households. The cabin was partitioned down the middle, and each apartment had its own front entry. These cabins often had a built-in front roof overhang, and the gables faced sideways. Each half of the house was again divided into two rooms, front and back. A chimney stood in the middle of the house, thus serving both households, their fireplaces being built into the central partition. Single cabins had a front-facing door, side-facing gables, and were divided into a front and back room, with the fireplace and chimney in one of the side walls. (See illustrations in Appendices 3-e & 3-f.)

Brick houses, though generally constructed on the same design plan, occasionally varied dramatically from it. A notable example was the row of four two-story brick houses on the Woodland Plantation in Plaquemines Parish. This design, most unusual for Louisiana, permitted four separate households to be lodged in one building. A central chimney served the fireplace in each of the four sections. These structures (see illustration in Appendix 3-g) are still standing, and two of them were still occupied in 1965.<sup>46</sup>

Some Louisiana planters built slave quarters that differed from the general pattern of wood or brick houses. On the McCollam Plantation in Assumption Parish, for example, brick pillars provided the skeleton to which the weatherboards were secured, and on the Weeks family's plantation at Grande Cote Island, the overseer recorded that he had built log cabins, adding parenthetically that they were the best that could be made under the circumstances.<sup>47</sup>

The roofs of the houses invariably were of shingle nailed to wooden rafters and battens. Raised wooden floors, wooden-shuttered windows and, occasionally, a porch, completed the single story dwellings, usually without any loft space. Sometimes double cabins were built with a fireplace at each end of the building. There were, therefore, two end chimneys rather than the more usual central chimney.

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<sup>46</sup> William Darrell Overdyke, Louisiana Plantation Homes (New York, 1965), 204.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from John Merriman, Grande Cote, Louisiana, to Mrs. Mary Weeks, New Iberia, Louisiana, 5 July 1840, Weeks (David and Family) Papers, Box 8, Folder 28, Archives, LSU.

The decision of whether to build slave dwellings of wood or brick depended on several considerations: convenience, durability, cost and philosophical preference. Basically, materials at hand were used. Many of the plantations along the Mississippi, its tributaries and other southern Louisiana waterways had either a sawmill, a brickworks, or both. Failing that, there assuredly were such works near at hand and readily accessible by river. River driftwood and the abundant stocks waiting to be felled in the swamps at the rear of the riverfront plantations assured a plentiful supply of lumber. Clay for brick-making needed only to be dug. The overseer on the Weeks family's plantation built log cabins because the estate lay in what was, at that time, a frontier area of southern Louisiana, Grande Cote Island. Logs were plentiful but he did not have ready access to either of the improved materials, board or brick.

Despite the greater durability of brick, a material which in all likelihood the planter had used to build his own house, he seemed to prefer wood for building slave houses. Wood, which was readily available, utilized construction skills more common among plantation tradesmen. Moreover, an 1845 address on the topic of construction materials indicated that planters believed that brick houses were damp and caused illness and debility among slaves. This circumstance reportedly led planters to use wood in building slave quarters although they used brick in their own more elaborate dwellings.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> P. A. Rost, Sugar, Its Culture and Manufacture, Discourse before the Agricultural and Mechanics Association of Louisiana, May 12, 1845 (Hahnville, La., 1876).



The size of the cabins was fairly uniform. On the Craighead Plantation in Iberville Parish, double cabins were constructed which measured thirty-two feet by sixteen feet, while in West Feliciana Parish, one of the Butler estates had cabins which measured thirty-two-and-a-half feet by sixteen feet. Single cabins measured anywhere from sixteen to twenty feet by sixteen feet. Solon Robinson, a noted agriculturalist from Indiana, described a less usual construction design. While travelling in the South in 1849, he visited Trufant and White's Myrtle Grove sugar plantation in Plaquemines Parish, and reported that "the negro houses [were] built of brick, with elevated floors, 32 feet square, divided into four rooms, with chimney in the centre." Other slave houses built of brick, such as those on the Evan Hall Plantation, conformed to the regular rectangular pattern. (See illustrations in Appendix 3-h.)<sup>49</sup>

The cabins generally had front and back rooms of different sizes. The front room was usually the larger of the two, although in the slave houses on the Laurel Valley Estate near Thibodeaux, the back room was the larger. The fireplace was in the large room, which served a variety of needs as kitchen, parlor, sitting-room, dining-room and bedroom. Slaves reserved the smaller room primarily for sleeping. In double

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<sup>49</sup> Letter from J. E. Craighead, Plaquemine, to John B. Craighead, Nashville, 11 September 1847, Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Box 14, Folder 102, Archives, LSU; The Cottage, in National Register of Historic Places, Louisiana Preservation and Cultural Commission, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Baton Rouge; Herbert Anthony Kellar, ed., Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturalist: Selected Writings (Indianapolis, 1936), II, 181; Henry McCall, History of Evan Hall Plantation, manuscript, 1899, Department of Archives, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; see photographs reproduced in Appendix 3-h.



cabins, of course, both partitioned sections were similarly divided, and were thus a mirror-image of each other.<sup>50</sup>

The slave houses in Louisiana, which were set in a small plot of ground that could be cultivated as a kitchen garden by the occupants, differed from Jamaican slave quarters since they invariably stood regularly spaced in straight lines on either side of a dirt road. On larger estates, such as the Uncle Sam Plantation in St. James Parish where there were more than two rows of houses, the houses retained their regularity of spacing and their access to a road running in front. (Spacing of slave houses on Madewood and Uncle Sam plantations is shown in plans of the estates included as Appendices 3-i and 3-j.)<sup>51</sup>

Although the quarters were often distant from the great house, the overseers always lived near them. The overseers' houses, usually of similar design to the slave houses though larger and more elaborate, stood so that they commanded a view of the slave village. Standing on a promontory, or else at right angles to the rows of slave houses, the overseers' houses looked down the dirt road between the cabins.<sup>52</sup>

The purely physical aspects of the wood or brick slave housing on Louisiana sugar plantations differed markedly from the wattle-and-daub slave housing common on Jamaican sugar estates. Further evidence

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<sup>50</sup> Laurel Valley Plantation, in National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>51</sup> Madewood Plantation, in National Register of Historic Places; Uncle Sam Plantation, Historic American Buildings Survey, LA. 74, Archives Department, LSU.

<sup>52</sup> Uncle Sam Plantation, Historic American Buildings Survey.

of these differences appears when one looks at the delegation or assumption of responsibility for construction and repair. In Jamaica, of course, most of this responsibility devolved on the slaves; in Louisiana, it rested principally with the planter.

The best evidence of this obligation is seen in contractual arrangements between planters. A contract between John Randolph of Notoway plantation in Iberville Parish and C. A. Thornton of Wilkinson County in Mississippi, for example, stipulated that Randolph supply land on his estate for sugar cultivation and a mill to process the sugar. Thornton promised, in exchange for one-third of the proceeds, to provide a slave-labor force of approximately twenty-five hands, to pay one-third of the plantation expenses, and to erect six slave cabins and a hospital. A similar contract between Mary C. Moore and her husband John Moore stated:

John Moore furnishes, the use of his plantation situate in the Parish of St. Mary below Franklin also the labor of his Slaves named on the schedule herewith, estimated equivalent to twenty-two working hands, and puts in the moveables, described on the Schedule at the value there Stated

Mrs. Mary C. Moore furnishes the labor of her Slaves named on the Schedule estimated equivalent to Fifteen working hands and puts in the moveables described on the Schedule at the value there Stated--She is to have Cabins made for the use of her Slaves at her individual cost, which will belong to her and may be removed at the expiration of the Partnership.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Contract between J. H. Randolph, Iberville Parish, Louisiana, and C. A. Thornton, Wilkinson County, Mississippi, 1 January 1846, John H. Randolph Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, Archives Department, LSU, Contract between Mary C. Moore and John Moore, 23 January 1847, Weeks Papers, Box 14, Folder 40.

Either the estate's labor pool or an outside contractor, who may have been assisted by the estate's skilled and unskilled labor, did the actual construction. On the McCollam Plantation in Assumption Parish, two white tradesmen were hired to erect slave cabins, and likewise William Palfrey contracted Mr. Addison Pumphrey to build slave cabins on his plantation in St. Mary Parish. J. E. Craighead recorded, in a letter to his father, the financial obligation he had assumed for the construction of slave houses, noting "I have paid \$34 each for 5 double cabins framed 32x16 \$170 For 13 single cabins framed lumber & all put up at \$20 each \$260." Although not mentioned in the letter, undoubtedly he contracted the building of these cabins to an outside agent. By comparison, the contract between Palfrey and Pumphrey, undertaken in 1857, ten years after Craighead's transaction, required two cabins to be built at the cost of \$25 each.<sup>54</sup>

Responsibility and control over the construction of slave housing remained in the hands of the planters even when slaves performed the labor. When the estate's tradesmen and other slaves did the work, it was as part of the plantation's daily labor schedule under the direction and supervision of the planter and overseer. The residence journal of Robert Ruffin Barrow's sugar plantation in Lafourche Parish indicated that throughout the early months of the year, when the field hands planted

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<sup>54</sup> McCollam (Andrew and Ellen E.) Papers, Diary and Plantation Record of Ellen E. McCollam, Vol. II, 1847-1851, (entries for 10 and 25 August 1847), Archives Department, LSU, entry for 9 March 1857, Plantation Diary 1842-1859, 1867 (Volume 17), Palfrey (William T. and George D.) Account Books, Department of Archives, LSU; J. E. to John B. Craighead, 11 September 1847, Gay Papers, Box 14, Folder 102.

cane, the estate's carpenters mended old cabins and framed new ones. Elizabeth Ross Hite, formerly a slave on Pierre Landreaux' Trinity Plantation in Assumption, provided substantiating testimony. She recalled that "de houses was like little doll houses made by de carpenters on de farm."<sup>55</sup>

While planters sometimes contracted out for construction of new houses, repairs to the existing ones were always left to the estate's tradesmen. Sugar planter Mary Weeks' overseer told her, "I have renewed all the cabbins since I have been here and put good shingle ruffs on them." Joseph Mather, superintendent of Judge Morgan's Aurora Plantation in St. James Parish, employed some of the hands in shingling slave cabins in June 1855. As noted above, the carpenters on the Barrow plantation were employed for repair as well as for construction.<sup>56</sup>

Because of their involvement with the construction of slave housing, Louisiana planters bore much more direct responsibility for the quality and condition of slave quarters than did Jamaican planters. The construction practices employed on Louisiana sugar plantations, if undertaken with suitable care and consideration, could have provided adequate,

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<sup>55</sup> Entry for 2 February 1857, Residence Journal of R. R. Barrow, 1 January 1857 to 13 June 1858, (copied from original manuscript in Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina), Archives Department, Tulane; Interview conducted ca. 1940 under the auspices of the Slave Narrative Collection Project, Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration--Interviewee--Elizabeth Ross Hite: Interviewer--Robert McKinney: Date--ca. 1940, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge.

<sup>56</sup> Merriman to Mary Weeks, 5 July 1840, Box 8, Folder 28, Weeks Papers; entry for 16 June 1855, Joseph Mather Diary, 1852-1859, Archives Department, LSU; entry for 2 February 1857, Residence Journal of R. R. Barrow, Archives Department, Tulane.

though unostentatious, housing. On the other hand, the general pattern of construction produced houses built cheaply with materials which lacked durability, on a simple, somewhat flimsy design. In order for such rude and unsubstantial housing to shelter its occupants adequately, there had to be continuing repair and refurbishment, else the rapid deterioration which the houses were bound to suffer would accelerate. The widespread inadequacy of slave housing on Jamaican sugar plantations was a consequence of the planters' virtual abdication of responsibility for their construction and maintenance, while the quality of Louisiana slave dwellings varied according to the extent to which Louisiana planters acted on their much greater responsibility for the upkeep of the housing.

On the whole, the houses on Louisiana sugar plantations were of better quality than those on Jamaican estates. Skilled tradesmen constructed and repaired them using finished materials in their work. The crude huts erected by Jamaican field slaves probably provided less adequate shelter than the slave housing on Louisiana estates built by craftsmen skilled in construction, using the proper materials, in time allotted specifically for the task. In comparing slave housing in Jamaica and Louisiana, however, one must consider other factors.

Louisiana and Jamaica differ, of course, in topography and climate, and these elements influenced the adequacy of shelter. Housing that provided shelter in the frost-free climate of Jamaica, where winter temperatures average in the low 70s (fahrenheit), would be inadequate in Louisiana, where snow and freezing temperatures occur occasionally through the winter months.

It is doubtful whether, in general, the wood or brick houses of Louisiana slaves functioned any better in their environment than did the wattle-and-daub houses in Jamaica. The testimony of an ex-slave offers some evidence. Catherine Cornelius, born a slave on Dr. William Lyle's sugar plantation in West Baton Rouge Parish, recalled that the house in which she lived as a slave was "ver cold in de winter." Further evidence of the inadequacy of slave houses can be seen in a letter from John Palfrey, of Forlorn Hope Plantation in the Attakapas District, to his son William T. Palfrey. Palfrey bemoaned the shortage of hands on his plantation during the 1836 harvest. Nevertheless, he outlined a plan to plant a large crop the following year. While he was projecting this extensive commitment of his labor force, which coincided with the severest weather of the year, he noted "my negro cabins are to be completed, the present ones affording scarcely a shelter." Palfrey recognized the need to build houses, but had permitted the task to be put off until the existing housing had deteriorated extensively, and at a time when slaves most needed shelter and protection from the elements--during winter, and when slaves worked hardest--the grinding season.<sup>57</sup>

As was true also in Jamaica, the frailty of slave housing in Louisiana not only subjected the occupants to dampness, cold and draughts,

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<sup>57</sup> Interview conducted under the auspices of a Slave Narrative Collection Project organized by Dillard University using only black interviewers. This project developed alongside the Federal Writers' Project program. Interviewee--Catherine Cornelius: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--ca. 1939, Archives and Manuscripts Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans; Letter from J. Palfrey, Forlorn Hope Plantation, Attakapas District, to William T. Palfrey, Franklin, 5 December 1836, Palfrey (William T.) Papers, 1834-1865, Archives Department, LSU.



and consequently debilitated them, but also meant that the houses could not withstand rough weather. For example, in August 1831, on the Wakefield Plantation in West Feliciana, strong winds blew the roofs off most of the slave cabins. Although other buildings were located near the quarters, only the slave houses suffered damage, probably as a result of their flimsiness in comparison with the rest of the plantation's buildings and works.<sup>58</sup>

Some plantations did provide well-built housing. In such an extensive plantation system, the quality of housing undoubtedly ran the gamut from excellent through adequate to miserable. After visiting a Louisiana sugar plantation, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote that the slave houses were "neat and well-made." Nevertheless, it seems likely that such superiority in Louisiana sugar plantations' slave houses in comparison with those in Jamaica did little more than compensate for the harsher climate they had to face.<sup>59</sup>

"One family to a Cabin," was how Catherine Cornelius remembered the housing pattern on the Lyle Plantation. As in Jamaica, slaves on Louisiana estates normally lived in families. If slaves had no established marriage or family connections, they lived alone or in households made up of members of the same sex.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Entry for 28 August 1831, Plantation Diary, July 24, 1830 to October 1, 1831, 1833 (Box 12, No. 24), Stirling (Lewis and Family) Papers, Archives Department, LSU.

<sup>59</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (New York, 1856), 659.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.

Plantation records provide evidence of the importance of family in determining the occupancy of slave housing. The household structure on the Gay Plantation in Iberville Parish in 1856 comprised 167 slaves living in 49 separate household groups occupying the apartments in 25 double cabins, with one apartment vacant. Table 3-1 shows the composition of the 49 households, 44 of which were family units, the other five apartments being occupied only by men.

The two single-occupant dwellings housed slaves named Bill Chase and Jim Banks. Four years previously, the harvest work schedule recorded that both Bill Chase and Jim Banks were field hands, so it seems unlikely that they were living alone because they held a privileged position in the labor force. More likely they were widowers whose families were no longer staying with them. This tentative thesis derives from two slave-lists recorded in 1842. At that time Jim Banks was fifty years old and living with his wife Amy Gilchrist, who was the same age, and another person named Susan, for whom no age was recorded, but who may have been their daughter. In 1842, Bill Chase, who was then thirty-three years old, apparently lived on his own. In his case, it is also possible that he had a wife and family living on another plantation. (See Appendix 3-k for the complete 1856 Housing List with notes on family structure.)<sup>61</sup>

The 49 slave dwellings on the Gay Plantation each measured approximately sixteen feet square, and thus provided the occupants limited living space. While Bill Chase and Jim Banks, living on their own, and

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<sup>61</sup> Plantation Record Book, 1849-1860, Gay Papers, Archives Department, LSU.



Table 3-1

Household Composition of the Slave Village  
on the Gay Plantation, Iberville Parish,  
Louisiana in 1856

<u>Household Composition</u>	<u>Number of such units in the slave village</u>	<u>Number of Slaves</u>
Husband, wife and five children	1	7
Husband, wife and four children	2	12
Husband, wife and three children	4	20
Husband, wife and two children	14	56
Husband, wife and one child	6	18
Husband and wife	10	20
Father and two children	2	6
Mother and two children	1	3
Mother and one child	3	6
Mother, child and grandchild	1	3
Ten male slaves*	1	10
Two male slaves	2	4
One male slave	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
	49	167

\* A notation next to this entry stated that the apartment was a "House for old men and young men without homes."

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 36, Plantation Record Book, 1849-1860, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

the fifteen households made up of two persons each, must have had relatively uncrowded quarters, the same cannot be said for the ten male slaves who lived in the same cabin, and who thus each had approximately twenty-five-and-a-half square feet of shelter (a little over six feet by four feet). Ceceil George, who had been a slave on a Louisiana sugar plantation attested to these crowded conditions. She commented that "all de houses [were] packed wid people."<sup>62</sup>

On some plantations planters promoted a hygienic regime in the quarters by instituting a policy that called for the slave houses to be regularly whitewashed, inside and out. Catherine Cornelius recalled that on the Lyle estate "de cabins was white." Painting often coincided with a general clean-up around and under the cabins. Cleaning the quarters, a spring or summertime chore, removed trash, refuse and also probably human excrement, which had accumulated in the vicinity of the cabins.<sup>63</sup>

Some plantations provided the slaves with latrines. For example, on R. R. Barrow's estate the 1857 Residence Journal recorded that, on one day in November, "Jerry and 3 hands [were] building negro privies over ditch." Slaves, however, were not normally provided with privies. The usual practice in Louisiana, which also prevailed in Jamaica, was called, in the patois of the island, to "go a bush." Both systems were unsanitary and likely to harm the slaves' health: the use of primitive privies could spread disease through seepage contaminating drinking

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<sup>62</sup> Interviewee--Ceceil George: Interviewer--Maude Wallace: Date--1940, F. W. P. Interviews, Louisiana State Library.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.

water, and "going a bush" led to accumulation of excrement around the quarters. Annual clean-ups, even when carried out, were inadequate to deal with the potential health risk that such indiscriminate waste disposal systems posed.<sup>64</sup>

On estates where planters mandated clean-ups and whitewashing, slaves did the chores as part of the regular work schedule. The tasks may have been delegated to some of the weaker hands, or done as Sunday light work. On Charles Oxley's Roseland Plantation in St. Charles Parish, the latter alternative was adopted: the 1847 Plantation Diary recorded that slaves cleaned their quarters on Sunday, 8 August. There is no indication of how they disposed of the refuse, nor of whether they used collected excrement as night soil. It is unlikely, however, that infrequent clean-up operations were able to prevent dysentery, bowel complaints, worms and related maladies that afflicted the occupants of these insanitary quarters.<sup>65</sup>

Louisiana slaves themselves bore much of the burden for keeping their quarters clean. A number of factors, however, hindered them from doing the task adequately. They had little time or resources to devote to this work because of the prodigious labor demands imposed on them, especially during planting and harvest. Nor did they have the medical knowledge of hygiene with which to structure their habits of toilet and housework.

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<sup>64</sup> Entry for 17 November 1857, Residence Journal of R. R. Barrow, Archives Department, Tulane.

<sup>65</sup> Entry for 8 August 1847, 1847 Plantation Diary of Charles Oxley, Roseland Plantation, St. Charles, Kenner Family Papers, Archives Department, LSU.

Such perfunctory precautions on plantations as annual clean-ups and whitewashing failed to compensate for the deficiencies in the slaves' efforts in maintaining a healthy residential environment. An 1850 Medical Report illustrated the hazard; it blamed the "old and decayed houses" of a Catahoula Parish plantation for the outbreak of whooping cough which killed thirteen slave children. Although not itself a sugar estate, the plantation lay near the sugar region, and neighboring sugar estates probably experienced similar hazards.<sup>66</sup>

Often only a serious and immediate health threat moved planters to improve the hygiene of the slaves' houses. Yet, even then, they did little more than clean-up in and around the houses, and whitewash them inside and out. When cholera appeared on Elu Landry's estate, he evacuated half of the slave village, sent the slaves to live in the sugar house, and set some of them to whitewashing the quarters with lime. Rachel O'Connor, whose plantation was in the Bayou Sara sugar region, wrote to her brother David Weeks at his sugar plantation in the Attakapas District, that "almost everyone talks of white washing there [sic] Houses, negro cabins, and all, on account of the Cholera being near, as it is recommended among many other preventatives now in circulation." She intimated that she would do it to her buildings.<sup>67</sup>

From the foregoing descriptions a picture of the bare structure of slaves' houses emerges: small wood or brick buildings, the

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew R. Kilpatrick, "Report on the Medical Topography, Meteorology and Diseases of Trinity, Louisiana, and Its Vicinity during the Year 1850," in Erasmus Darwin Fenner, ed., Southern Medical Reports (New York, 1851), II, 178.

<sup>67</sup> Entries for 11 and 12 July 1849, Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry (Elu) Estate, Archives Department, LSU, Letter from Rachel O'Connor to David Weeks (no date), Box 30, 1-2, Weeks Papers.

exterior facade unembellished, save perhaps for a coat of whitewash. The interior, divested of occupants and their belongings, evinced a similar rudeness: plain board or brick walls; uncovered rafters, battens and shingles above, bare floorboards below; heating provided by a single fireplace, light and air by wooden-shuttered windows devoid of glass, and a simple wooden door. The occupants of these unpretentious dwellings furnished and decorated them, sometimes with the assistance of the planter.

Each cabin contained only the bare furnishings, beds, table and chairs, which the plantation's carpenters built at the expense of the estate. Slaves slept on wooden box-type beds. Louisa Martin, formerly a slave on Richard Pugh's Madewood Plantation on the Bayou Lafourche in Assumption Parish, recalled that slaves "had nothin but old sawmill beds--wooden beds, chinch [bed-bug] harbors." Catherine Cornelius "'member[ed] de man what mak em [the beds] he wuz a slave carpenter--his name was Dave Parker--he wuz a good carpenter." Slaves usually slept on mattresses stuffed with straw or Spanish moss. These mattresses must have aggravated the chinch problem alluded to by Louisa Martin, although it was the recollection of Elizabeth Hite, who had been a slave on Pierre Landreaux' Trinity Plantation, that slaves "slept on wooden beds wid fresh moss mattress. Our bed was kep' clean. Much cleaner den de beds of today [ca. 1940]. Dey was scrubbed ev'ry Saturday. Dere wasn't a chince on one of 'em."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Interviewee--Louisa Martin: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--1938: Dillard Project, Archives Department, UNO; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.

A variant of this style of bed was the rope bed, which had a wooden frame with lengths of rope strung across it, much in the fashion of modern spring-beds. A straw or moss pallet provided a simpler alternative. Although Catherine Cornelius maintained that "dere were enough beds alright," Louisa Martin claimed there were "sometimes four and five in one bed, chillun, you know," and Carlyle Stewart, formerly a slave on Octavo de la Houssaye's plantation on the Bayou Teche near Jeanerette, remembered that "he got in . . . bed with maw and her five chellin."<sup>69</sup>

The other furnishings slaves had were simple and homemade. In Louisa Martin's cabin, they "didn't have nuthin but ole boxes, saw-mill timber . . . dey had a table an about four chairs," while Catherine Cornelius remembered a "home made cupboard, chairs, benches, table--slave carpenter made all ub em." Slaves received other furnishings and utensils at the expense of the plantation. Ellen McCollam of Ellendale Plantation, Terrebonne Parish, recorded in her diary that in February 1845, she "received by the Steamboat . . . a Doz Buckets for negros." In October of the following year, she had one of the women field hands, Cinthy, temporarily working at sewing-up mattresses that she distributed to the slaves.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interview with Louisa Martin, loc. cit; Interviewee--Carlyle Stewart: Interviewer--Flossie McElwee: Date--1940, F. W. P. Interviews, Louisiana State Library.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Louisa Martin, loc. cit; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit; Entries for 4 February 1845 and 6 October 1846, Diary of Ellen McCollam, McCollam Papers.

Tin buckets and other metalware were among the items most frequently provided the slaves. Many plantation records and accounts illustrate this. On Samuel McCutcheon's Ormond Plantation in St. Charles Parish, for example, slaves got ovens, pots, spiders and tin kettles, while on Richard Pugh's Leighton Plantation in Lafourche Parish, slaves received tin buckets. The contract, mentioned previously, between J. H. Randolph and C. A. Thornton in which Thornton pledged to furnish supplies and homes to slaves in return for a share of the sugar crop grown on Randolph's estate, also stipulated that Thornton had to give these slaves meat, clothes, tools and utensils. The precise nature of the utensils was not set down, but they probably included buckets and other metal artifacts. Slaves on William Minor's Waterloo Plantation, on the Mississippi in Ascension Parish, received such a distribution in January 1859. In his Plantation Diary, Minor recorded that a number of items were issued the slaves, including gallon and gallon-and-a-half pots, skillets, spiders, bowls and spoons.<sup>71</sup>

William Minor's list mentioned one item other than metalware which was distributed for household use: bed-ticking. Unlike Ellen McCollam's diary, there was no mention of whether the ticking was made up into mattresses beforehand, but since slaves also received needles and thread at this time, they may have had to do the

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<sup>71</sup> A list of shoes and utensils distributed slaves, McCutcheon (Samuel) Papers, 5 Vital Register, 1836-1862, U-158, #1087, Archives Department, LSU; Folder 4, Pugh (Richard L.) Papers, Archives Department, LSU; Contract between J. H. Randolph and C. A. Thornton, 1 January 1846, Randolph Papers; entries, 13-15 January 1857, Diary, 1857 (7), Minor (William J. and Family) Papers, Archives Department, LSU.



stitching-up themselves on their own time. Slaves received drapery goods other than bed-ticking at the planter's expense. Blankets were regularly distributed, as mentioned in the Plantation Ledger of John Randolph of Nottoway, which also recorded attempts to cope with the prevalent insect problem by giving out mosquito netting. The clothing assessment for the Weeks family's sugar plantation at Grande Cote Isle included fifty mosquito bars comprising twelve yards of material each, while another clothing list for the same plantation recorded that there was an annual issue of both double and single mosquito bars in 1859, 1860 and 1861. William Palfrey's Plantation Diary shows that in July 1844 eight married couples and two single men received mosquito bars, one was also given to "Kizzy for her children." "To furnish . . . musquitoe bars for her slaves" was a contractual obligation of Mary Moore when she entered into the partnership with her husband John, establishing a sugar plantation. As mentioned previously, she also had the responsibility of building houses for the slaves she brought to the partnership.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the most extensive documentation of utensils and furnishings supplied to slaves can be found in the records of the Gay Family, who cultivated sugar in Iberville Parish. Much of the equipment mentioned above was regularly supplied the slaves on this plantation: buckets, skillets, pots and mosquito bars. The records also

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<sup>72</sup> Entries for 13-15 January, 1857 Diary, Minor Papers, entry for 6 October 1846, Diary of Ellen McCollam, McCollam Papers, Volume 8, Ledger 1862-1865, Randolph Papers; Folder 260, Volume 10, Notebook, 1859-1877, Weeks Papers; Volume 17, Plantation Diary 1842-1859, 1867, Palfrey Papers; Contract Between Mary C. Moore and John Moore, 23 January 1847, Weeks Papers.



showed, however, a variety of other supplies. The Estate Record Book for 1825 to 1839 listed nineteen slaves, each of whom received one set of knives, forks, plates, cups and saucers, while another twenty-nine slaves received only plates. In 1843, "12 little boys received barlow knives," and lists of clothing and supplies given the slaves from 1849 to 1859 showed that knives were a regular part of this distribution. Various other items distributed to the slaves at the expense of the plantation were cups, sifters, coffee pots, coffee mills, cotton cards and "tin buckets . . . each containing one cup."<sup>73</sup>

Bedding was allocated the slaves by family on the Gay Estate. In January 1840, 52 bed-ticks were issued, mostly to women identified as "wives of" named male slaves. Single men also received bed-ticks, which were recorded under their name.<sup>74</sup>

Planters also distributed blankets, indispensable in keeping off the chill and damp of Louisiana winters. On the Gay Plantation, through the 1850s, slaves received blankets every three years at the end of the grinding season (December or January). The standard allocation was one blanket per adult, with a smaller ratio for children. For example, Nathan and Maria, a childless couple, received two blankets, while Jacob Lenox and his wife Little Jinny, who had four children living with them, received only four blankets. (See Appendix 3-1 for the blanket distribution on the Gay Plantation.) On John Randolph's

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<sup>73</sup> Volume 7, Estate Record Book, 1825-1839; Volume 8, Estate Record Book, 1831-1845; Volume 36, Plantation Record Book, 1849-1860, Gay Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Volume 8, Estate Record Book, 1831-1845, Gay Papers.

Nottoway Plantation there was a similar ration. Each family, according to its size, was issued from one to two-and-a-half pairs of blankets, childless couples received one pair and single people each half a pair--a single blanket. Slaves on Lewis Stirling's Solitude and Wakefield Plantations in West Feliciana Parish had a comparable issue of blankets in January 1833. During a brief holiday before the commencement of harvest in October 1849, Isaac Erwin, owner of Shady Grove Plantation on the Bayou Grosse Tete in Iberville Parish, "gave out negro cloths and 1 blanket a piece. gave two pare pantaloons a coat and 1 shirt to Men. 1 Frock and two slips to women and 1 blanket a piece." He did not mention providing blankets for children. Different allocation systems, where each slave--man, woman and child--received a blanket, prevailed on the Stirling family's Wakefield Estate in the 1850s. (See Appendices 3-m and 3-n.) The lists differ slightly, in that the one for 1857 records separately the distribution to mothers of blankets for their infant children.<sup>75</sup>

Such a niggardly blanket-issue, one per slave triennially, could only aggravate the hardships wrought by inferior housing and adverse weather. Blankets apparently could wear out in less than two years. In a letter of July 1840 from the Weeks Family's plantation on Grande Cote, the overseer, John Merriman, wrote that "there is some Blankets here Shall I give them to the most kneedy or is it your

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<sup>75</sup> Volume 8, Estate Record Book, 1831-1845, Gay Papers; Volume 8, Ledger, 1862-1865, Randolph Papers; Ration Book, 1828, 1830-38, (H-13), Stirling Papers; Entry for 29 September 1849, Isaac Erwin Diary, Erwin (Isaac) Diary, Archives Department, LSU; Folders 48 and 54, Stirling Papers.

intention to furnish Blankets to go round, it has or will be two years this fall since there has been any given out." Planters expected the slaves' blankets to last three years; at least in this case, however, they wore out within two years. William Weeks, in a letter to his mother in December 1853, related his satisfaction concerning the lot of the slaves on the Grande Cote Island plantation: "I have given out the blankets," he wrote, "they have all plenty of covering & good warm clothes and are as comfortable as most negroes, and a great deal more so than many." His chastening final comment indicates a recognized differential in treatment and quality of life throughout the slave populations on Louisiana sugar plantations. One wonders whether the slaves, of whose comfort William Weeks was so sure directly after they received blankets, suffered want before they received their next blankets three years hence.<sup>76</sup>

Families and households, not individuals, comprised the basis of the plantation distribution system. This affirmed and reinforced the slave family structure, and was apparent not only in housing and furnishings, but also in the distribution of food and clothing.

Extant documents describing the supply of furnishings and utensils to slaves at the expense of the plantation are incomplete. It is neither possible to assess fully whether they were distributed frequently enough to prevent shortages, nor whether or why there were disproportionate allotments among the slave population. No reason

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<sup>76</sup> Merriman to Mary Weeks, 12 July 1840, Weeks Papers, Box 8, Folder 28; William F. Weeks to Mary C. Moore, 29 December 1853, Weeks Papers, Box 22, Folder 92.

is given, for example, for issuing 29 slaves on the Gay Plantation a plate each, when at the same time 19 other slaves each received a knife, fork, plate, cup and saucer.<sup>77</sup>

Some allocations rewarded slaves or served as an incentive payment; child-bearing women were so rewarded. As in Jamaica, planters attempted to promote a high birth rate among the slave population on their estates, and so adopted incentive policies. On William Minor's Southdown Plantation in January 1857, nine "Sucklers . . . g[o]t one cradle blanket" each, and three got two. Such elite groups as tradesmen and drivers not only benefited from additional food and clothing allowances, but also received preferential allocations of furnishings and utensils. Planters did not provide equally for all slaves on their estates, and from estate to estate the planters' conception or exercise of his responsibility for equipping slaves, at his expense, varied.<sup>78</sup>

Slaves could compensate for deficiencies by buying needed items for themselves, if they were financially able. Some plantation owners kept the books of the slaves' accounts, recording their income and expenditures, and listing the items they purchased and sold. Moreover, the planters often acted as middlemen, supplying the slaves with items which they had ordered and deducting the cost from the accounts. These account books provide an index of items which slaves bought because of the failure of the plantation to supply them.

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<sup>77</sup> Volume 7, Estate Record Book, 1825-1839, Gay Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Rachel O'Connor to A. T. Conrad, 12 April 1835, Box 6, Folder 22, Weeks Papers; 1857 Diary (7), Minor Papers, entry for 3 January 1857.

Often slaves had to purchase their own tableware. Catherine Cornelius recalled that the tin dishes, knives and forks were not supplied on the Lyle Plantation, but were bought by the slaves themselves. Apparently slaves there were not issued any tableware, because, aside from having to buy the dishes and cutlery, they made their own wooden trays and gourd cups. On the Wilton Plantation, near Convent in St. James Parish, slaves spent money they earned cutting wood on such items as knives, blankets, baskets and tin cups. On John Randolph's plantation in October 1851, Long William was debited 18 cents from his account for a tin bucket, and three weeks later, a slave named Fort purchased a tin bucket at the cost of 18 3/4 cents.<sup>79</sup>

The daybook of John Erwin's Iberville Parish sugar plantation itemized the income and expenditures of some 75 slaves, all but 6 of whom were men. Their purchases of utensils and furnishings included bedspreads at \$1.50 each, buckets at 25 cents apiece, coffee pots at 75 cents each and knives and forks at \$1.25 per set. There is also a notation that "Alfred Cooper bought . . . furniture," although the kind and cost was unspecified. Among items purchased by slaves on the same plantation three years previously were tallow and spermacetti candles and knives. The same structure of earnings and expenditures continued on this plantation until the Civil War.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit, Daily Journal, 1848, Bruce, Seddon and Wilkins Plantation Records, Archives Department, LSU, Volume 5, Journal--Plantation Book, 1847-1852, Randolph Papers.

<sup>80</sup> Volume 5, Daybook, 1843-1847, Gay Papers.

St. James Parish planter Alexis Ferry's journal itemized slave expenditures more elaborately. Twenty-nine male slaves received, in exchange for money earned cutting wood, a variety of items such as glazed, gilt and yellow bowls, cups and mugs, chairs and yellow pots. The list, compiled by a French-speaking overseer whose strong point apparently was not literacy, contained words of dubious etymology. Items to which they referred may be containers ("contentit") and saucers ("secousse de tasse"). Slave purchases thus reflected the inadequacy of planter-supplied essentials of domestic life: cooking and eating utensils, furniture and bedding.

Two other sets of accounts not only show the inadequacy of plantation supplies, but also permit assessment both of the structure of slave life on sugar plantations and of the dynamics of the internal economic system. George Lanaux' Plantation Journal for his Bellevue Estate in Plaquemines Parish showed that in 1851 slaves purchased, among other things, knives at 25 cents each, spoons at 50 cents per dozen, and tinware--probably sheets of tin ("ferblanc")--at 35 cents per item, with money accumulated by cutting wood and raising corn. In the next four years, they bought portable ovens ("four de campagne") at 85 cents each, kettles ("chaudiere") at 40 cents each, and locks.<sup>81</sup>

The purchase of locks, of course, is particularly interesting because, as in the Jamaican experience, the legal status of slaves as

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<sup>81</sup> Volume 1, Journal, 1842-1865, Alexis Ferry Journals, Archives Department, Tulane; Volume 18, Ledger, 1851-1856 (Bellevue), Lanaux (George and Family) Papers, Archives Department, LSU.

chattels without property rights cannot be reconciled with the ownership and property rights asserted by locks. Slaves recognized their de facto status as owners and property-holders in their own right, and this was also recognized and normally not transgressed by whites on the estates, although it had no de jure basis. Frederick Law Olmsted, visiting a Georgia rice plantation, saw in many of the slave houses "closets with locks and keys," and noted that when the slaves were absent from their houses they "locked their outer doors, taking the keys with them." Louisiana slaves probably took similar precautions, for locks of various types were purchased on the Lanaux Plantation: ordinary locks at 75 cents, and complex six-piece ones ("serrure francais de 6 pces") at \$1.00 each. Slaves on Benjamin Tureaud's Brule, Houmas and Bagatelle plantations in the parishes of Ascension and St. James also purchased locks at 60 cents apiece, as well as such items as buckets at 35 cents each, wire at 25 cents, twine at 37 1/2 cents per pound, tin at 30 cents per sheet and mosquito bars for 80 cents each.<sup>82</sup>

In purchasing furniture and utensils, slaves principally bought the necessities of domestic life: the most functional of furnishings, kitchenware and tableware. As in the purchase of gilt and glazed bowls by slaves on Alexis Ferry's plantation, there were, however, instances where slaves equipped their homes more elaborately. As a rule, the acquisition of any "luxury" items by slaves was made through an economic

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<sup>82</sup> Olmsted, A Journey, 422; Volume 18, Ledger, 1851-1856 (Bellevue), Lanaux Papers; Ledger, 1858-1872 (48), Tureaud (Benjamin) Papers, Archives Department, LSU.



subsystem essentially outside the province of the planter. The marketing systems outlined above, where orders were placed through the planter, were supplemented by transactions with travelling traders and at markets.

Slaves could acquire many necessities and furnishings from peddlers and merchants. Travelling salesmen plied the highways and waterways of the Louisiana sugar region, trading and selling various wares to plantation slaves. Martha Stuart, who had been a slave on a Black Creek plantation, recalled that in their houses slaves had "pictures on the wall," and would either "send off and buy 'em," or else acquire them from "picture men [who] come thru the country." The other source for household goods was markets held in towns throughout the sugar region.<sup>83</sup>

It was, of course, possible for slaves to make most of the household goods they lacked. Ex-slave Catherine Cornelius recalled that the wooden trays and gourd cups they used were made by the slaves themselves. Both Martha Stuart and Catherine Cornelius remembered they had wooden tubs in which they bathed, and that they were made "by de men, em sawed off barrels."<sup>84</sup>

A good example of economic differences among slaves is found in the means by which they lit their homes. Slaves who could afford them bought candles because they were not normally part of the rations distributed by the planter. Consequently, in the words of Louisa

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<sup>83</sup> Interviewee--Martha Stuart: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--unknown (ca. 1938): Dillard Project, Archives Department, UNO. A description of slaves going to Sunday market in Plaquemine is contained in a letter from Rev. P. M. Goodwyn to Edward Gay, 27 August 1860, Box 29, Folder 255, Gay Papers. The letter is printed in full on p. 145.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interview with Martha Stuart, loc. cit.



Martin, the only slaves who had "candles [were] jus dem what was able." She continued that "us po folks didn't know what candles was." Her cabin was lit by "a old tin pan wid piece of rag and grease." Similarly, Carlyle Stewart's family could not afford to buy candles, but his mother made their own from beef tallow, and Catherine Cornelius recalled "de women slave ma[d]e candles--ma[d]e de wicks on de spinnin wheels." Martha Stuart also recalled slave women made candles. When supplies of furniture and utensils by the planter proved deficient, slaves had either to purchase the articles at their own expense, to fabricate a more or less effective substitute, or to do without.<sup>85</sup>

This system, of course, heavily favored those with skills, positions of privilege, superior physical abilities and mental aptitude. The houses of slaves thus no doubt ran the gamut from rather handsomely-equipped homes to the sort of dwellings found by Frederick Law Olmsted in northern Louisiana. "Several of them," Olmsted reported, "were very destitute of furniture--nothing being perceptible but two very dirty beds, and a few rude stools." The tragedy of such squalor was exacerbated in that those most likely to suffer by it were those least able to endure it--the old and the young, the infirm and the disconsolate.<sup>86</sup>

Slave cooks prepared some meals, especially breakfast, in a communal kitchen. On some plantations, they prepared other meals for single slaves, the old, the indolent, orphans and others in want.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Louisa Martin, loc. cit.; Interview with Carlyle Stewart, loc. cit.; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interview with Martha Stuart, loc. cit.

<sup>86</sup> Olmsted, A Journey, 629-30.

Families, however, usually cooked at least the main meal of the day, the evening meal, in their own homes. Although Catherine Cornelius mentioned that some of the slave cabins had "mebbe a kitchen in de back," it was more usual for cooking to be done in the larger of the two rooms in the cabin, the one containing the fireplace. Both Louise Downs, formerly a slave on Dr. Louis Perkins' sugar plantation in East Baton Rouge Parish, and Louisa Martin, remembered the big back logs burning in the fireplaces, in which the slave women prepared food for their families in pots, kettles, spiders (three-legged skillets suitable for placing over an open fire) and ovens. Slaves perhaps ate at a table set with the cutlery and crockery they had acquired.<sup>87</sup>

Slaves supplemented their diet with food they grew in kitchen gardens close to their cabins: they rarely received more than a limited ration of pork and corn at the planters' expense. Within the confines of their small kitchen plot, which was often fenced, slaves also kept their livestock and poultry, and in their gardens, slaves grew a variety of crops for their table.<sup>88</sup>

The labors of superannuated slaves, along with the work of others during the evenings, lunch breaks and weekends could yield rich rewards from the fertile alluvial soil of the Mississippi floodplain. Certain factors, of course, militated against slaves pursuing

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interviewee-- Louise Emily Downs: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--1938: Dillard Project, Archives Department, UNO; Interview with Louisa Martin, loc. cit.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Volume 8, 1848-1865, Volume 9, 1853-1858, and Volume 10, 1856-1858, Memorandum Books, De Clouet (Alexandre E.) Papers, Archives Department, LSU. They include lists of rations distributed to slave families.

this activity zealously, in much the same way as they inhibited repairing and refurbishing houses and furniture building. The onerous work schedule, especially during the sugar harvest when night work was demanded of slaves, meant that they had neither the time nor the physical or mental resources to labor stenuously in their gardens. Even the aged slaves were pressed into service during harvest time. Labor demands differed from plantation to plantation, and influenced whether slaves were conscientious in tending their gardens. Whereas the kitchen garden made it possible for slaves to supplement the frequently meager rations distributed by the plantation, labor demands restricted the time and energy available.

Slaves' domestic animals, both the "quarter dogs" which traveler Thomas Bangs Thorpe found in "extraordinary numbers," and cats, roamed the houses and gardens. Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that "de quarters had cat holes fo' cats to com in an' out."<sup>89</sup>

Small livestock and pet animals could be found in all slave villages and, apparently, in or around most slave houses. Many slaves, however, were not able to cultivate their kitchen gardens effectively. As in other aspects of slave domestic life, the quality of gardens varied, from well-tended plots to neglected ones, from productive to ruinate land. This disparity reflects the consistent discrimination against those slaves who bore the heaviest burden of bondage, those subjected to the most arduous labor, the weak, the aging and the sick.

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 7 (November 1853), 746-67, Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.

Even within one slave plantation society, even on a single plantation, the quality of slaves' housing differed greatly. Houses were well- or ill-constructed, furnished to a greater or lesser extent, and repaired with varying frequency and effectiveness. Throughout the Louisiana sugar region, however, slave housing displayed a basic similarity. Planter control over certain areas created a general internal consistency throughout Louisiana, which differed in fundamental ways from the Jamaican experience: construction patterns and materials, spacing and responsibility for building and repair are, perhaps, the most important. Nonetheless, in both societies there emerged a similar pattern of consistency that derived from the relationship between the slaves and their homes.

In both societies slaves assumed extensive control over their houses. Despite amorphous questions concerning property rights, for most practical purposes the slaves largely determined life and living patterns in the quarters and behaved as property owners. The privacy of slaves' homes was generally inviolate, and they affirmed this by securing them against intruders and incursions. Even though estates in both societies had house-search policies, they do not appear to have been widely used save in emergencies.<sup>90</sup>

As in Jamaica, slaves in Louisiana acted in ways that showed they held their houses in special regard. Although slaves on Louisiana

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<sup>90</sup> Balcarres to Portland, 3 August 1795, Hardwicke Papers, British Library; Ewart to Penrhyn, 8 and 10 December 1808, Penrhyn Castle Papers; some Louisiana planters would have had house-search policies similar to those mentioned in Kenneth Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York, 1968), 149.

sugar plantations did not endow their homes with the overt religious and sepulchral importance Jamaican slaves did, on the secular level there was considerable similarity between the two societies. The houses were the locus of peculiarly slave-centered activities on both family and community levels. These activities lay outside the province of the planter and the plantation system. Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that "de slaves had a gud time in dere quarters. Dey played guitar, danced fo de light went out. Dey put skin over a barrel fo a drum. Dey talked er bout de master's business in dere quarters too. . . . Dey married . . . an had big affairs in dere quarters." Catherine Cornelius related how the whites respected the privacy of slave community activities--"de people in de big house did n't come down to our cabins fo' our celebrations--dey come down sometimes, but not on no special days." She also remembered that the slaves "dance[d], jigged . . . [on] Satiday nite--in de slave cabins."<sup>91</sup>

Whites had little control over these activities, and even those they tried to proscribe were nevertheless carried on clandestinely within the confines of the quarters. For example, slaves who had run away from the plantation and were hiding out in nearby woods or swamps would return to the quarters at night to visit with relatives and be fed. Although their presence was rarely betrayed, planters frequently sought to discover such activities. Ellen McCollam, in a diary notation for April 1847, mentioned that "Ester [was] whipped for not telling

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.

that she heard Kit (who had run away) talking in the yard." Their quarters, therefore, provided slaves with the security to engage not only in private slave-centered activities, but also in activities that challenged the very fabric of the institution of slavery.<sup>92</sup>

### iii

There are two levels on which the historian can compare slave housing on the sugar plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana. The first of these, the planter-centered variant, showed many differences: construction patterns, materials, spacing and responsibility for building and repair, for example. Climate and geography were important differentials dictating the type of shelter necessary and the availability of materials. Demographic considerations were also important, because after the closure of the slave trade to Jamaica in 1808, planters on the island assumed some of the responsibilities for housing that their Louisiana counterparts adopted in the later post-slave trade era of the sugar boom. The high rate of absentee ownership among Jamaican planters may have exacerbated the plight of Jamaican slaves. Their domestic comfort could have received shorter shrift from an attorney or overseer interested in short-term profits to placate a British-based estate owner, whereas in Louisiana slaves lived and worked on a plantation that was an integral part of an independent nation-state, not a colony, under a planter whose life, heritage and interests were rooted,

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<sup>92</sup> Entry for 20 April 1847, Diary of Ellen McCollam, McCollam Papers.

not in a mother-country thousands of miles distant, but in the land worked for sugar.

The second level of comparison, the slave-centered variant, is, however, marked by continuity. In both Louisiana and Jamaica, slaves assumed extensive responsibility for their houses, and there emerged a pattern of dominion, territoriality, independence and property rights. Houses and villages provided the focus for a wide range of activities, all of which conformed to a basic pattern of autonomous action, despite their fundamental antagonism to the nature of slavery, such as the assumption and protection of property rights, family and community development and subversive acts. Although these activities had no legal sanction, they were prevalent in slave societies on the sugar plantations of both Jamaica and Louisiana. They represented the creative and active development of people in bondage who were thus able, in part, to circumvent the institution of slavery, and structure it to their own designs. The development of the slave-centered variant in housing clearly shows the limits of power even in as coercive an institution as slavery. In "real" terms, as opposed to theoretical "ideal-type" structures, there can be no monopoly of power. The power of slaves in the politics of housing-control shows clearly what was a subtle thread running through the fabric of slavery.

## Appendix 3-a

Print 1: Thatched wattle-and-daub housing in Jamaica ca. 1860. The house in the background on the left-hand side shows a partially daubed wattle house. The wattles are the dark horizontal lines, and the light-colored areas partially covering them are daub.

Print 2: Detail showing thatching, wattling and daubing.

Source: Adolphe Duperly, Picturesque Jamaica (Kingston, Jamaica, [189-]), 67.



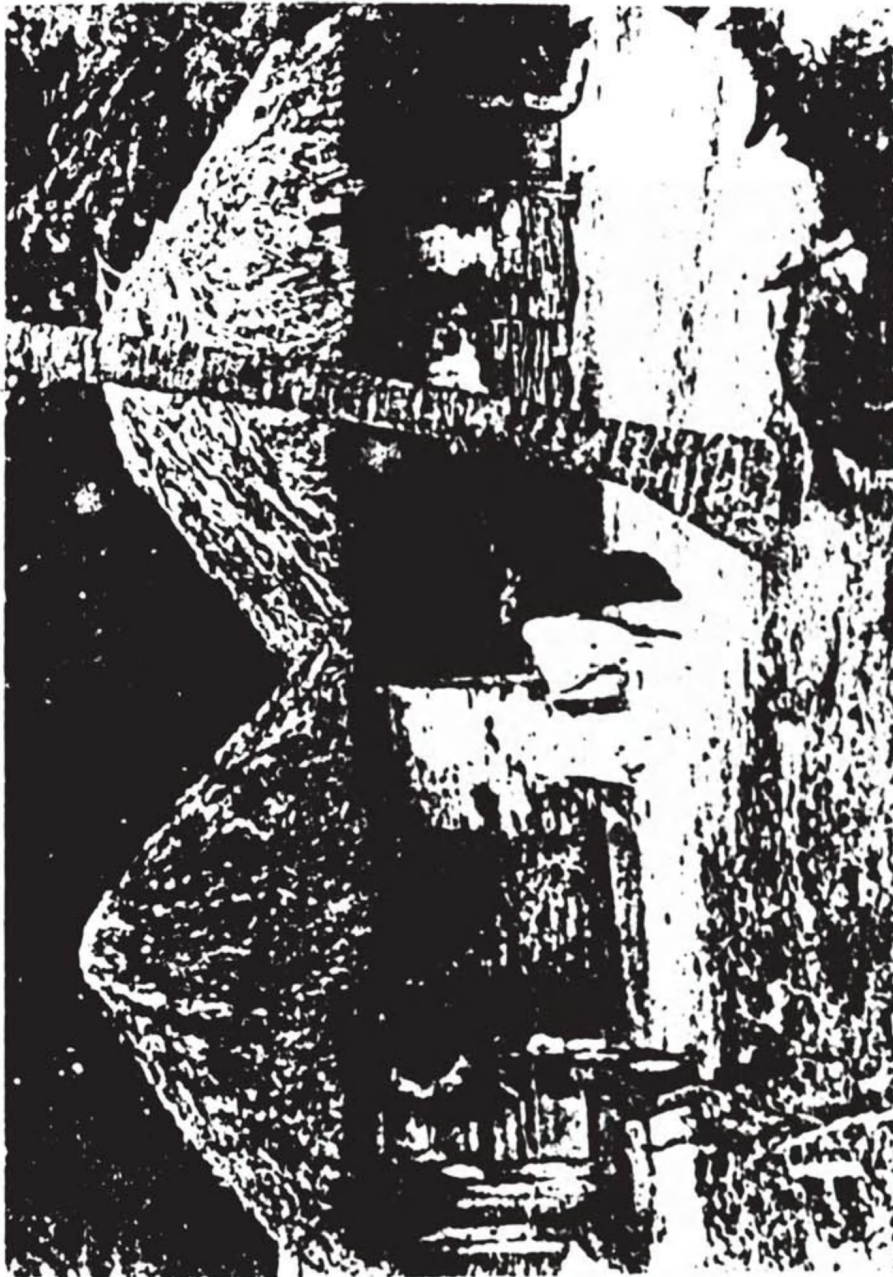
Appendix 3-a (continued)

Print 1



Appendix 3-a (continued)

Print 2



## Appendix 3-b

A contemporary print of Roehampton Estate showing slave houses (at the right-hand side of the picture) regularly spaced in orderly rows.

Source: Frontispiece to Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (Kingston, 1973).

## Appendix 3-b (continued)



VIEW OF ROEHAMPTON ESTATE, JAMAICA: FROM AN OLD PRINT

## Appendix 3-c

A contemporary print of Old Montpelier Estate, St. James, Jamaica, showing slave houses irregularly clustered in the woods behind the sugar mill (on right-hand side of print).

Source: Michael Craton, Searching for the Invisible Man (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 4-5.



## Appendix 3-c (continued)



## Appendix 3-d

Jamaican yabbas, made during slavery, which show Asante influence in construction and design. Housed in the Archaeological Museum, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

Source: Archaeological Museum, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

## Appendix 3-d (continued)





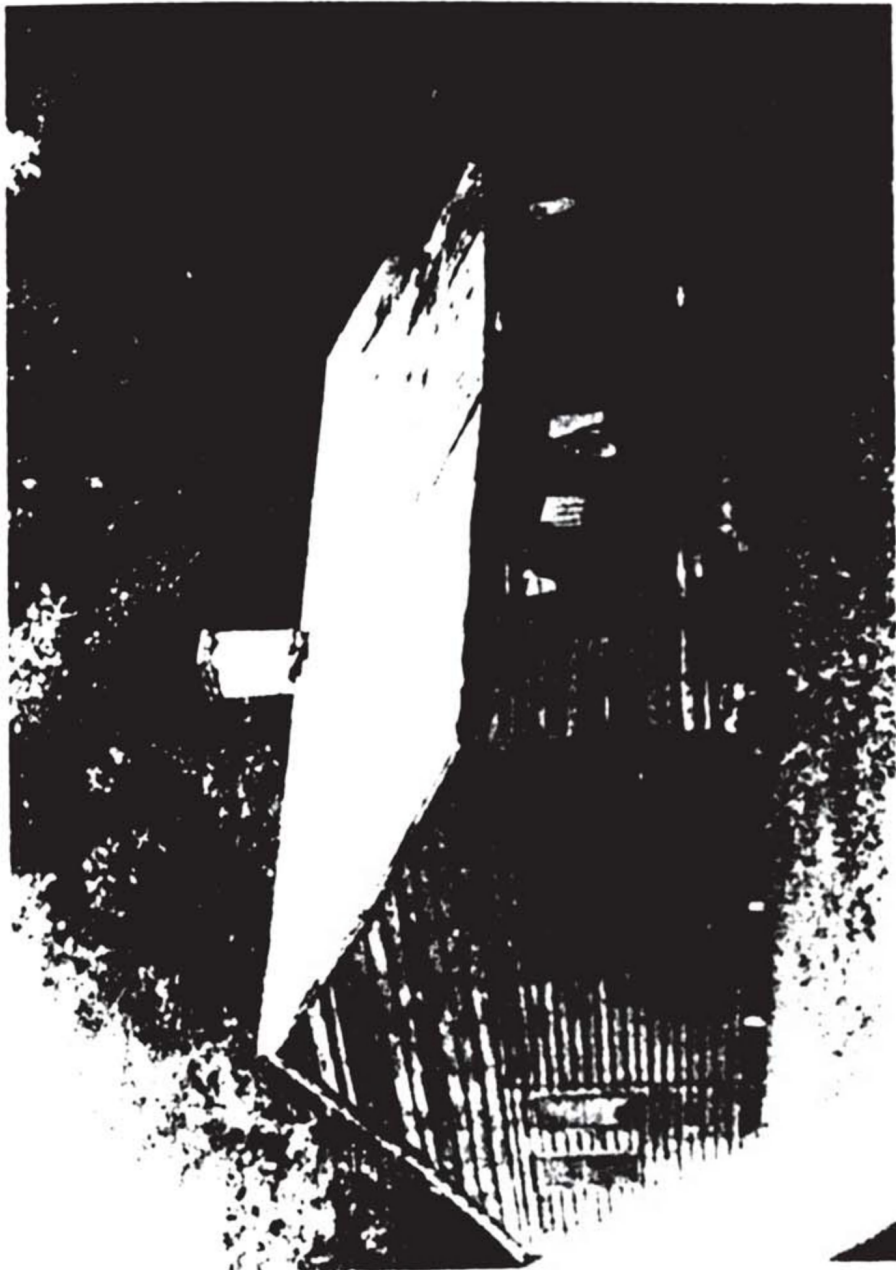
## Appendix 3-e

Photographs taken in 1978 of houses located on what were, during slavery, the Gay Plantation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana (print 1) and the Pugh family's Madewood Plantation in Assumption Parish, Louisiana (print 2). The houses, which were reputedly built in the nineteenth century, both show the "creole" construction designs similar to those used in building slave houses. The house in print 1 is one of the last that remain standing of the rows of houses pictured in Appendix 3-f.

Source: Photographs taken by, and in the possession of, R. A. McDonald.

Appendix 3-e (continued)

Print 1



Appendix 3-e (continued)

Print 2



## Appendix 3-f

A photograph, taken ca. 1906, of rows of double cabins located on what was the Gay Plantation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana. The construction date is not known, but the building pattern and regular spacing are similar to those found in slave villages on Louisiana sugar plantations. A few of these buildings are still standing and occupied.

Source: National Register of Historic Places, Louisiana Historical Preservation and Cultural Commission, Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 3-f (continued)



## Appendix 3-g

Two-story brick slave houses (an unusual design for the Louisiana sugar region) located on the Woodland Plantation in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana.

Source: William Darrell Overdyke, Louisiana Plantation Homes (New York, 1965), 204.

## Appendix 3-c (continued)



## Appendix 3-h

Rectangular brick slave houses (double cabins) built ca. 1850 on the Evan Hall sugar plantation in Assumption Parish, Louisiana.

Source: Photographs taken in 1978 by, and in the possession of, R. A. McDonald.



Appendix 3-h (continued)

Print 1



Appendix 3-h (continued)

Print 2

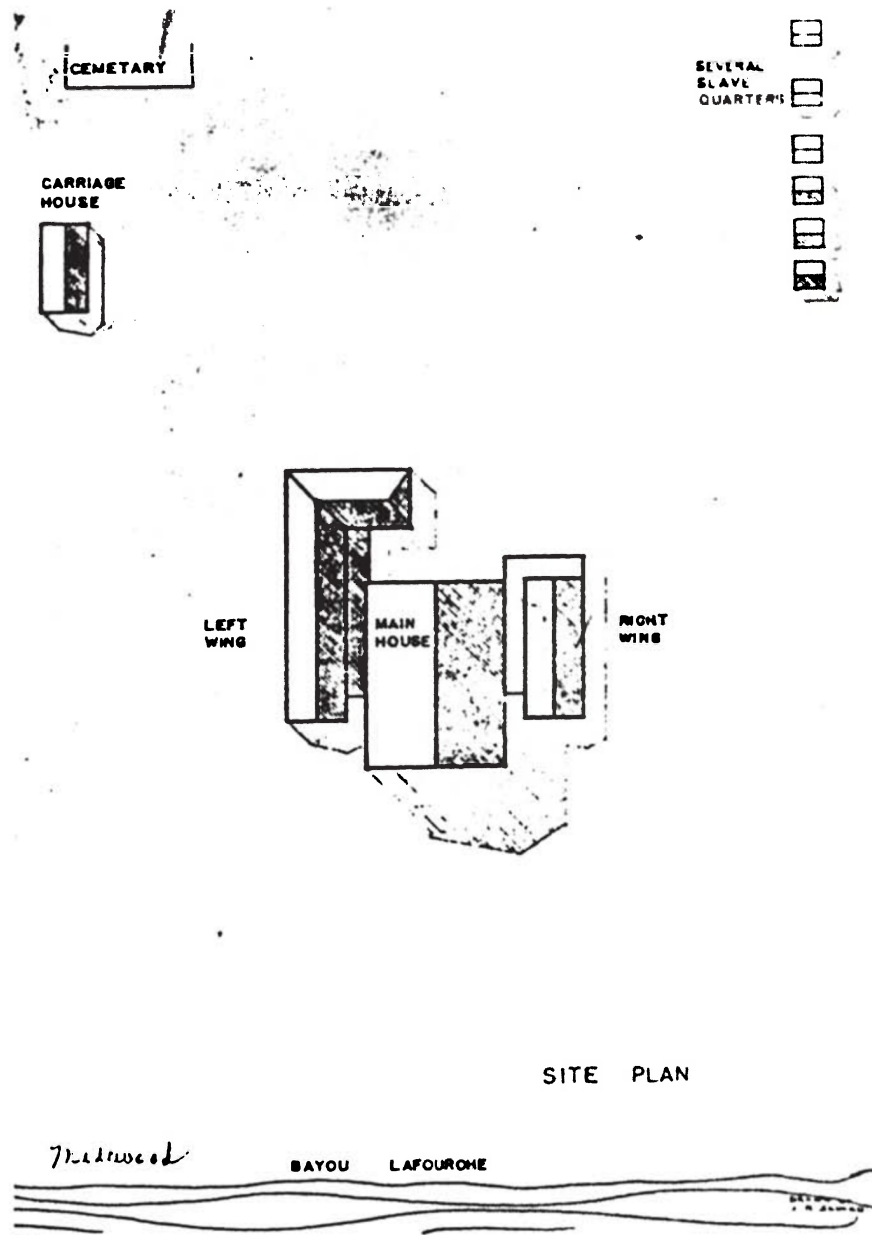


## Appendix 3-i

Plan of the Pugh family's Madewood Plantation on the Bayou Lafourche, in Assumption Parish, Louisiana, showing (in the top right-hand corner) regularly-spaced double slave cabins.

Source: National Register of Historic Places, Louisiana Historical Preservation and Cultural Commission, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 3- (continued)



## Appendix 3-j

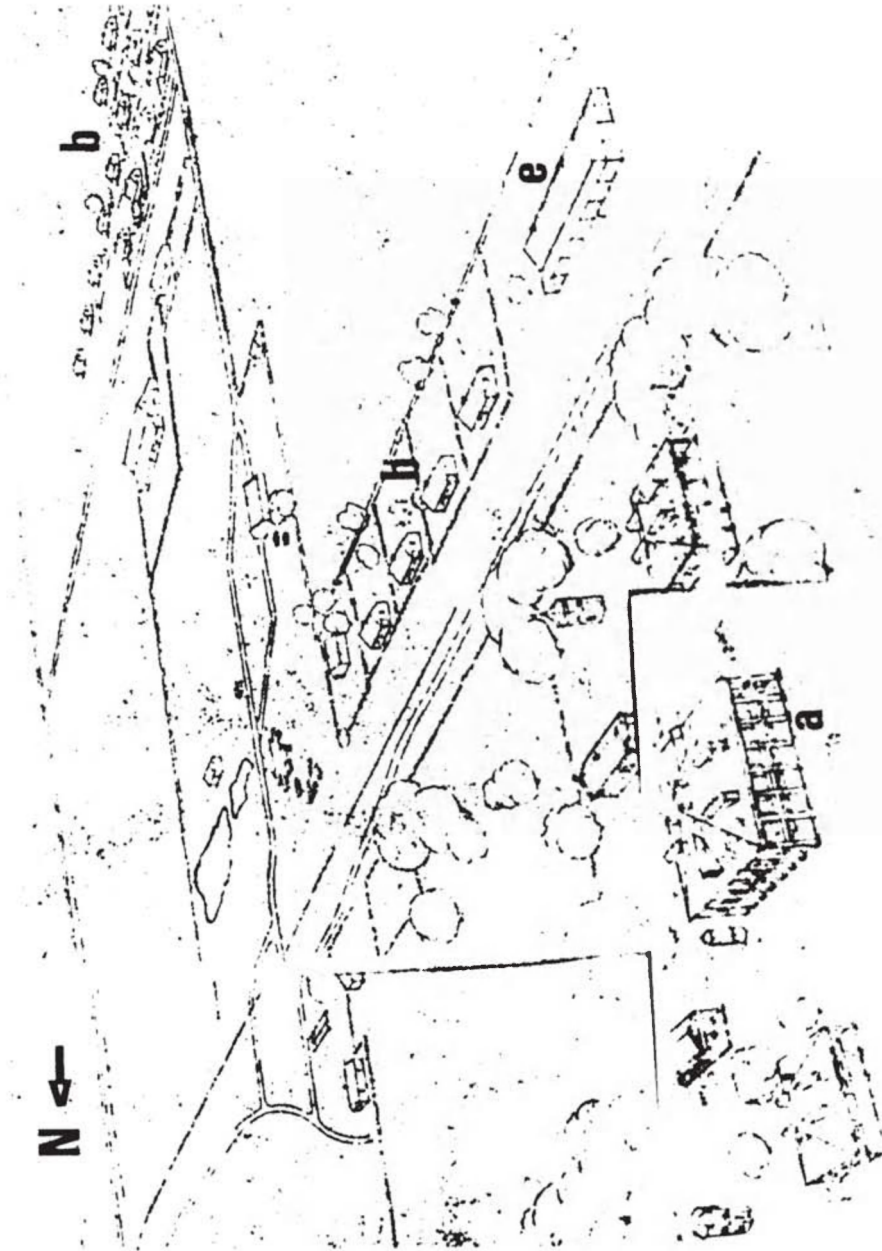
Plan of the Uncle Sam Plantation in St. James Parish, Louisiana, showing regularly-spaced double slave cabins, and their proximity to the slave hospital and the planter's house.

## Key

- a: planter's house
- b: slave houses-double cabins
- e: slave hospital

Source: Historic American Buildings Survey, LA. 74, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 3- (continued)



Appendix 3-k

"List of Houses Needed for Accommodation of Negroes--1856."

Gay Plantation, Iberville Parish, Louisiana.

No.

- 1 App [Absalom] & family consisting of Eliza, Leah, App [Absalom Jr.] [husband, wife and two children]
- 2 Dick & Milly [husband and wife]
- 3 Levin & Anica [husband and wife]
- 4 Ned Davis, Sally, Armas [husband, wife and one child]
- 5 Big Austin, Lizzy, Wm [husband, wife and one child]
- 6 Little Austin, Phoebe, Patsy [husband, wife and one child]
- 7 Alfred, Cynthia, Abram, Hacket, Philis, Com [husband, wife and four children]
- 8 Charles, Lizzy, Penelope, Andrew [husband, wife and two children]
- 9 Levi, Adeline, Gracy, Henry [husband, wife, and two children]
- 10 Drummer John, Ailsy, Frank [sic - died 1854] [husband and wife]
- 11 Black Augustus, Mary Bidy [husband and wife]
- 12 Yellow Augustus, Horace, Margaret [father and two children]
- 13 Jerry, Viney, Lucy, Alfred [husband, wife and two children]
- 14 Woodson, Comfort, Adam [husband, wife and one child]
- 15 Geo. Green, Maria, Anna, Henderson [husband, wife and two children]
- 16 Caroline Lenox, Anna [mother and one daughter]
- 17 Joe Bell, Betsy [husband and wife]



## Appendix 3-k (continued)

- 18 Scipio, Becky, Henry [husband, wife and one child]
- 19 Jim Thornton, Betty, Violet, John [husband, wife and two chil-  
dren]
- 20 Bill Chase
- 21 Bill Garner, Henna, Sally Ann, John [husband, wife and two chil-  
dren]
- 22 Bill Moss, Susan, Harriet, Lavinia, Priscy [husband, wife and  
three children]
- 23 Ben, Emily, Horace, Hamilton, Eady, Lizzy [husband, wife and  
four children]
- 24 Thornton, Melissa, Bill Thornton, Enoch [husband, wife and two  
children]
- 25 Jim Shallowhorn, Patsey, Rachel, Becky [husband, wife and two  
children]
- 26 Harry Tunley, Lucy, Fanny, Biddy, Henry, Charles, Polly [husband,  
wife and five children]
- 27 Sugar Charles, Nancy [husband and wife]
- 28 Simpson, Caroline, Sally Ann [husband, wife and one child]
- 29 Moses, Charity, Easter, Perry [husband, wife and two children]
- 30 House for old men & young men without homes Joe Penny, Jim Babe,  
Peter, Sam Henderson, Ceazar Naylor, Daniel, Ferdinand, Armas,  
Sam Satin, Jim Tunley
- 31 Ceazar, Nancy [husband and wife]

## Appendix 3-k (continued)

- 32 Tom Bell, Charity, Sophy, George [husband, wife and two children]  
33 Maria, Mack, Charlotte [mother, son and granddaughter]  
34 Bill Dock, Louisa, Matilda, Henna, Lavinia [husband, wife and  
three children]  
35 Tom, Eliza [husband and wife]  
36 Julian, Edmund [two males]  
37 Peyton, Rachel, Ellen, Josiah [husband, wife and two children]  
38 Ned Dickinson, Rinda, Gracy, Polly Ann [husband, wife and two  
children]  
39 Perry, George, Laura [father and two children]  
40 Henry Hynes, Mary, Joe, Sally Ann [husband, wife and two children]  
41 Jake Lennox, Jenny, Henna, Jake, Aleck [husband, wife and three  
children]  
42 Henderson, Patsy, Harry, Jim, Lucy [husband, wife and three chil-  
dren]  
43 Jim Banks  
44 Elias, Rainy [two males]  
45 Joe Hynes, Tulip [husband and wife]  
46 John Gibson, Ritta [husband and wife]  
47 Maria (Nathan), Victor [mother and child--Maria was the wife of  
Nathan, Nathan died in 1854]  
48 Mary Jackson, Foxall, Toby [mother and two children]  
49 Viney, Rinda [mother and daughter]

## Appendix 3-k (continued)

25 Double houses of which we have 18

Bill Garners house's left 1

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 36, Plantation Record Book 1849-1860, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 3-1

## Gay Plantation, Iberville Parish, Louisiana

"Blankets Delivered January 14, 1840."

Moses, Beckey	2
Rachel Shallowhorn, 5 Children, Wm Sanders, Scipio & Daniel	5
Phoebe & 3 children	2
Big London, Elsey & 5 children, Little London & Major	4
Jim Tunley, Amy Brice & one child	2
Harry, Lucy & 3 children	3
Julia Ann, Alcade	2
Jacob Lenox, Little Jinny & 4 children	4
Caroline	1
Suckey Holbrook, Henry Holbrook	2
Little Charity, Little Moses & 4 children	4
Aunt Milly (1), Linda (1)	2
Dutch Betsey	1
Sue	1
Mary & 1 child	1
Frankey	1
Alfred, Dido & 4 children	4
Isaac, Anica	2
Bill Garner, Henna & 2 children	3
Tom Bell, Charity, 3 children, Joe Bell	4
Sophia (1), Joe (1)	2

## Appendix 3-1 (continued)

Beckey	1
Aunt Violet, Davy	2
Henderson, Patsy	2
Amstead & Viney	2
Mary Mouse	1
Charlotte & children	2
Lucy & children	2
Lawrence, Suckey Elias & 2 children	3
Jim Banks, Amy Gilchrist	2
Jim Pipkins, Aunt Sally	2
Saml. Todd, Minta	2
Peter Purnell, Nancy, Mary Ann, Maria	4
Pollard, Charlotte	2
Lewis Bell, Polly (2), Mahala Ann & Oliver (1)	3
Lewis & Davy	1
Aunt Phillis, Coon Charles	2
Lee	1
Nathan, Maria	2
Louisa	1
Miller Billy	1
Elias	1
Hukey	1
Saml. Jenkins	1
Isaac Blacksmith	1

## Appendix 3-1 (continued)

Drummer John	1
Ennells	1
Ben Gray	1
Toney	1
Saml. Jones	1
Aunt Marjery, Rachel	2
Esther, Joe	2
Leaven King (1), Jacob (1), Elsey & Jane (1), Comfort (1)	4
Suckey Sigh, Rachel & 2 children, Josiah, Augustin	5
Cooper Peter	1
Yellow Augustin	1
Sugar Charles	1
Ceasar Naylor	1
Isaac Ball (1), Cromwell (1)	2
Alex	1
Rob Ross	1
Long Susan	1
Jerry	1
Yellow Daniel	1
Little Polly & 4 children	3
Tamer	1
Big Washington	1
Granny Jinny	1
Ram George	1

## Appendix 3-1 (continued)

Patrick, Charity, Martha, Mary, Caroline	5
Thornton, Melissa, Jane, Jim	4
Maria, Mark	2
Aunt Julia	1
Ned, Polly	2
Ann, Harriet	2
Rainey, Davy Stump	2
Polly, Emily	2
Clarissa, Toney	2
Cook Dick	1
Emily	1
Penny, Martin, Harriet, Joe, Jackson	5
Aunt Gray, Adeline	2
Minerva, Henry Bias	2
Aunt Prissa, Susan, Bill Moss	3
Aunt Aggy, Ned & 4 children	3
Rachel Butter, Edmond	2
Fanny Beard, John White	2
Jane, Joe	2
Ellen & 3 children	2
Eliza, App	2
Maria Henderson, Sam Henderson	2
Bill Chase	1
Hercules	1



## Appendix 3-1 (continued)

Kenawa Moses	1
Big Ben	1
Austin, Washington, Alfred, Simpson, Doc William, Pale	6
Cynthia	1

Note: Numbers in parentheses alongside the names of slaves denote that blankets were issued individually, although the persons named were bracketed together

Source: Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Volume 8, Estate Record Book, 1831-1845, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

## Appendix 3-III

"Blankets given out to the Negroes October 8, 1854,"

Stirling Family's Wakefield Plantation,

West Feliciana Parish.

	<u>In Family</u>	<u>Blankets</u>
Long George	11	11
Wilson	10	10
Lindu's House	5	5
Henrietta	9	9
Hannah	4	4
O Joe	2	2
Sambo	6	6
Suckey	2	2
Chaney	8	8
Tompo	1	1
Yanco, Jack, Fanswoise & Child	4	4
Liddy, Charlotte & Child	4	4
Bartlet	2	2
Harry, Wife & Chis	3	3
Nelson	9	9
Affy	2	2
Sam Jackson	1	1
Sophy	3	3
Dilily	7	7
Barica	4	4

## Appendix 3-π (continued)

Sam Brown	5	5
Ervin	11	11
Ginny & Monday	2	2
Levin l Maretta 5	6	6
George Austin	1	1
Adam	6	6
Allen	4	4
Ellen	4	4
Isaac	1	1
Anderson	5	5
Washington	4	4
Alfred	4	4
Julius	1	1
Cecile	1	1
Spencer	2	2
Catrine	1	1

Source: Stirling (Lewis and Family) Papers, Folder 48, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Appendix 3-n

"Blankets given out December 25, 1857."

Stirling Family's Wakefield Plantation, West Feliciana Parish.

2 to Eveline	for Sidney & Ervin
1 to Lindu	for Rosallie
2 to Charlotte	for Mary & Celia
1 to Cecile	for Virgil
2 to Phoebe	for Bartlet & Julius
2 to Frozine	for York & Patterson
1 to Sarah	for Ned
1 to Isabel	for Charles
1 to Clarinda	for Georgiana
1 to Affey	for Hannah
1 to Henrietta	for Albert
1 to Margaret	for Thomas
1 to Maretta	for Leven
1 to Maria	for Judy
1 to Rose	for Cinthia
1 to Lucy	for Allen
1 to Harriet	for Martin
1 to Easter	for Richard

Note: This list is followed by a distribution of Blankets for the remainder of the slaves on the plantation which is similar to the 1854 list reproduced in Appendix 3-m.

Source: Stirling (Lewis and Family) Papers, Folder 54, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

## Chapter 4

### The Clothing of Slaves on Sugar Plantations in Jamaica and Louisiana

Under Jamaica and Louisiana law, slaveholders bore the expense of slave clothing. The 1792 Consolidated Slave Act of Jamaica required:

that every master, owner, or possessor of slaves, shall, once in every year, provide and give to each slave they shall be possessed of, proper and sufficient clothing, to be approved of by the justices and vestry of the parish where such master, owner, or possessor of such slaves resides.

The early territorial legislatures of Louisiana also sought to ensure that slaves received adequate clothing. If slaves did not get land where they could grow market crops and provide themselves with clothes out of the accrued profits, slaveowners, by law, had to give them two sets of clothing each year, a summer and a winter issue. The Louisiana legislatures, however, soon gave up trying to specify what these outfits should comprise. Although both societies attempted to legislate for "adequate" slave clothing, the statutes characteristically lacked both definition and enforcibility.<sup>1</sup>

As a general rule, planters in Jamaica gave slaves annually either a suit of ready-made clothes, or adequate lengths of material. In Louisiana, slaves generally received two suits of clothing a year, either made-up or the equivalent in material: one of lightweight cloth suitable for summer wear, and the other a heavier winter issue.

Marked disparities in the clothing of sugar plantation slaves in these societies resulted from differences in both the clothing

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies (1793, rpt. New York, 1972), II, 148, Joe Gray Taylor, Negro Slavery in Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1963), 106.

planters supplied slaves and the apparel slaves themselves purchased. The clothing distribution varied from estate to estate and often even on the same plantation where, for example, privileged slaves like drivers and tradesmen received bonuses beyond the regular issue given field hands. Moreover, sugar plantation slaves in Jamaica and Louisiana had clothes other than those supplied them by the planter. Slaves obtained these garments, which they never wore at work on the plantation, through their own efforts, by purchasing them with money they had earned, trading for them, or even stealing them. No matter how limited the independent economic activities in a given slave community, the acquisition of clothing was always a significant part of the pattern of slave expenditures. This aspect of slave clothing, therefore, permits a fuller understanding of the extent and complexity of the internal economy of sugar plantation slaves in the two societies.

## i

Slaves on Jamaican plantations commonly wore work clothes of osnaburg cloth. This coarse, hard-wearing linen fabric (named for its town of origin, Osnabrück) served for slaves' work clothes throughout the Caribbean. Other textiles issued Jamaican slaves included baize, kersey, penistone flannel and other coarse woollens, fustian (a cotton/flax mixture), linsey-woolsey (a wool/flax mixture) and various cottons. Customarily, Jamaican planters purchased the cloth or clothing for the slaves, and bore the entire expense. Besides the main items of clothing (trousers, jackets, frocks, coats and shirts), the planter also supplied

various accessories, for example, hats, caps and kerchiefs. Since Jamaican planters did not supply field hands with shoes, most slaves worked barefoot.

Jamaican slaves usually received an annual issue of lengths of cloth, which they themselves sewed into garments, using needles and thread that were also supplied them. On Peeke Fuller's Thetford Plantation in the Parish of St. John, the standard allotment for adult slaves in the clothing distribution of 1800 was a cap, seven yards of osnaburg and three-and-a-half yards of baize. Adolescent girls and boys received a cap, five yards of osnaburg and two-and-a-half yards of baize, while younger children were allotted two yards of osnaburg and a yard-and-a-half of baize. Apart from a few minor variations, the only consistent divergence from this allocation pattern was that drivers and head tradesmen received an additional one to five yards of osnaburg.<sup>2</sup>

The annual allowance of clothing for slaves on Hinton East's Somerset Plantation for 1793 showed a similar structure, but a much more complex breakdown of allocations. Not only did privileged slaves receive extra allowances and children less than the adult ration, but also distinctions existed among and within the various work gangs, because of the differing capabilities of individual slaves. Slaves in the first or great gang received a larger allowance than those in the weaker and less productive second gang, who in turn received more than slaves working in the still weaker third gang. Superannuated slaves, watchmen and

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<sup>2</sup> Thetford Plantation Book 1798-1799, 4-23/9, Worthy Park Estate, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.



others with lower working capacities received a reduced allowance. (See Appendix 4-a for a full breakdown.) Another distribution variant, contained in the 1799 clothing list for Harmony Hall Estate (reproduced in Appendix 4-b), not only shows quantity differentials determined by age and occupation, but also by sex, with men receiving a larger allowance than women. Michael Craton's compilation of the clothing issued slaves on Worthy Park Estate in 1793 (reproduced as Appendix 4-c) evinces a similar distribution pattern, one that was common throughout the island, where slaves in the various gangs and trades received differing amounts and types of clothing.<sup>3</sup>

Through the early years of the nineteenth century, especially after the closure of the slave trade, however, the amount of material furnished Jamaican slaves increased. Table 4-1, a comparison of the quantities given the slaves on Harmony Hall Estate in 1799 with the annual distributions on that estate for 1811 and 1813, clearly shows this. The 1811 ration was significantly larger than that of 1799, while the subsequent year showed the same general distribution, but slightly increased quantities. The coincidence of increased clothing allocations with the agitation against, and ultimate abolition of, the slave trade indicates that this development was one of the ameliorative measures which planters hoped would cause the slave population to

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<sup>3</sup> Journal of Somerset Plantation, MS 229, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica; List of Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny, 6 June 1799, Gifts and Deposits, 7/7-1, Jamaica Archives; Michael Craton, Searching for the Invisible Man (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 176-9.

Table 4-1  
Cloth Rations Issued Slaves on  
Harmony Hall Estate, 1799, 1811, 1813.

<u>1799</u>	Osnaburg (yards)	Baize (yards)	Hats
Men	6	3	1
Women	6	2 1/2	1
Boys	3	2	-
Girls	6	-	1
 <u>1811</u>			
Men	8	5	1
Women	7	6	1
Children	5	3	1
 <u>1813</u>			
Men (24 men got)	8	5 1/2	1
(16 men got)	7	5	1
Women	7	6 1/2	1
Children	6	4	1

Source: List of Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny, 6 June 1799, Gifts and Deposits, 7/7-1, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica; Account Book--Harmony Hall Estate, MS 1652, Volume 1, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica.

increase naturally. This would obviate the need for supplemental imports of slaves from Africa.<sup>4</sup>

Although the combination of osnaburg linen and baize woollen comprised the usual issue to slaves, planters substituted a variety of other materials. There were three different causes for divergence from the osnaburg/baize norm: market pressures, or the predilections of either slaves or planters.

An important market influence was the emergent British cotton industry, which was challenging the dominance of European-manufactured linens, such as osnaburg. International conflicts, especially the blockades of Europe during the Napoleonic Wars, contributed to shifts in market and product, again adversely affecting the trade in osnaburg.<sup>5</sup>

Slaves took it on themselves to voice their opinions on the cloth they received, indicating their preferences and dissatisfactions. Absentee sugar planter Nathaniel Phillips, in an October 1789 letter written to the overseer of his Jamaican sugar estate, revealed how slaves expressed their opinion: "Agreeable to my promise to my black friends, I have sent them Blue Cottons, and also some striped do. for the Women." A letter from overseer Barritt to Phillips in April 1793 related that the slaves "have not been well pleased with their Oznabrig, Hats & thread this year," and seven years later the issue recurred, when slaves complained that the osnaburg and thread were both of poor

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<sup>4</sup> List of Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny, 6 June 1799, Gifts and Deposits, 7/7-1, Jamaica Archives; Account Book--Harmony Hall Estate, MS 1652, Volume 1, Institute of Jamaica.

<sup>5</sup> Grace Lovat Fraser, Textiles By Britain (London, 1948), 64-75.

quality. The chief problems seemed to have been the coarseness and openness of the weave of the cloth. The slaves on Phillips' plantations also found fault with the heavier material given them. Barritt wrote to Phillips in May 1791: "I had [the slaves] served the 22nd Inst with their Blanket Clothing, when the women in general mentioned that they wished you would send them out Blue Blanks. to their coats, instead of the linsey woolsey, as it lasts much longer."<sup>6</sup>

Aesthetic considerations were also apparently important to slaves, since in October 1791, Phillips wrote apologetically that "The Striped Woollens were shipped for the Women before I understood that they preferred the Blue." In trying to resolve the problem, he observed "You will find by the Invoices that I have sent an additional quantity of Blue Cotton (& some Gray (for a trial) [sic] in all 550 yards--so that you may keep that quantity of the Striped for the year following." Either Phillips confused the cloths, or else he expected slaves to choose the color they preferred even though it was in a different material.<sup>7</sup>

In clothing the slaves, Jamaican planters probably considered cost first. Only a small expenditure, however, was required to supply

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Nathaniel Phillips, London, to Thomas Barritt (Overseer), Jamaica, 20 October 1789, Letter-Book from June 1778, MS 11484; Letter from Thomas Barritt, Pleasant Hill, to Nathaniel Phillips, 10 April 1793, MS 8413; Barritt to Phillips, 25 May 1791, MS 8374, Nathaniel Phillips Papers, West India Reference Library, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips to Barritt, 12 October 1791, Letter-Book from June 1778, MS 11484, Phillips Papers.

a slave with the quantities of material which comprised the normal allocation. Charles Gordon, in calculating various expenses on his Georgia Estate, estimated that providing a slave with "cloathing and feeding [cost] £10" annually. The "Negro Accounts" of Hugh Hamilton's estate showed the purchase, in July 1784, of 447 yards of osnaburg at the cost of £14:13:5½. By December 1787 the price of osnaburg had risen to 10½d per yard, 428 yards being bought at the cost of £18:14:6. At this time Hamilton also purchased three pounds of osnaburg thread at 3/9d per pound, and "5 Dozn. Negroe Hats" at £1:2:6 per dozen (1/10½d each). The price of osnaburg continued to rise, and in 1789 the Duckenfield Hall Estate accounts record that the cost of osnaburg was 1/3d per yard. Cost was not the only factor; planters showed concern over whether or not the cloth could adequately protect the slaves, and prove durable.<sup>8</sup>

Occasionally in Jamaica slaves were issued ready-made clothing as either the whole or a part of their issue. Normally, however, only "special status" slaves received made-up apparel. Sick slaves often received made-up clothing, as did slaves in positions of authority and privilege. Child-bearing women also received clothes, either for themselves or for their infants, as an incentive to raise a large family, while other slaves were allocated clothes as a bonus payment. James

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Charles Gordon to Francis Grant, 19 May 1787, 1160/6/86, Manuscripts by or concerning the families of Gordon of Buthlaw and Cairness, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland; "Negro Account," 1784; "Negro Account," 1787, B1755, Hamilton of Pinmore Papers, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Scotland; Acc. 775, 943/6, Records relating to Duckenfield Hall Plantation, Jamaica, West India Reference Library, UWI.

Chisholme, for example, sent word to his resident overseer James Craggs that he was shipping eight bedgowns for slave women with young children, twelve check shirts for children of one month old, and an old coat, waistcoat and breeches of his which were to be given to "the most deserving negro." Four years later, his concern for stimulating the growth of slave families prompted Chisholme to extend incentive payments to the nurses since he sent a trunk containing "72 yards of printed cotton for the breeding women . . . several parcels marked for the Children's Nurses," and a sizable quantity of his old clothes which were to be given to deserving slaves at the overseer's discretion.<sup>9</sup>

A report on the condition of pregnant women on one of Lord Penrhyn's sugar estates, submitted by the resident agent, shows both the solicitous attitude taken towards "breeding" on some plantations, and the widespread inadequacy of infant clothing elsewhere. The agent, David Ewart, reported to Penrhyn, that:

I have always, My Lord, given great encouragement to Breeding, without reference to the late measures of the abolition, and I hold out several little rewards to the Women, which few others do--Your Lordship will observe a dozen suits of Baby Linen written for in the List of Supplies, after their arrival every Child will have one given to it--The Mothers can hardly be expected to have those things, particularly the poorer sort of Negro Women, and the old Sheets, Table Cloths etc of many Estates do not afford a sufficient supply--Osnaburghs are too coarse for such infants.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from James Chisholme, Bath, to James Craggs, Vere, Jamaica, 10 December 1793; Chisholme to Craggs, 3 December 1797, Letterbook of James Chisholme, MS 5476, Papers of William and James Chisholme, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from David Ewart, Westmoreland, to Lord Penrhyn, 6 August 1807, MS 1477, Penrhyn Castle Papers, West India Reference Library, UWI.

Sugar planter Gilbert Mathison was equally solicitous. He drew up a formal "Code of Regulations" for the overseer on his estate, which was issued on 1 January 1810. One provision stipulated that each woman who delivered a child was to receive a calico or linen frock for herself, plus two of the same for her child when it reached the age of one month (the threat of infant mortality, especially from tetanus, had, by this time, lessened). On other plantations, women who had just borne children received additional lengths of cloth, sometimes of superior material. On the Hope Estate, near Kingston, as on James Chisholme's estate, mothers of young children received lengths of calico and printed cotton.<sup>11</sup>

Concern for sick slaves impelled planters to distribute ready-made clothing. The Duckenfield Hall Estate accounts show a payment of 6/8d being made for a "Frock for sick negro named Tryal." Jacob Israel Bernal, the proprietor of Richmond New Works sugar plantation in St. Ann Parish, spent £1:2:6 in October and November 1792, furnishing a sick male slave with "a warm Jacket," "a check shirt" and "a pair of shoes." The policy on Nathaniel Phillips' plantations was to supply all measles victims with dry housing and warm clothing.<sup>12</sup>

Supplemental clothing allocations for slaves in positions of authority or privilege were made by giving clothes as well as extra

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<sup>11</sup> Gilbert Mathison, Notices Respecting Jamaica in 1808-1809-1810 (London, 1811), 107-17; The Jamaica Journal, I (November 1818), 15-25; Chisholme to Craggs, 3 December 1797, Chisholme Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Acc. 775, 945/9 (1791), Duckenfield Hall Papers; MS 1073, Accounts of Jacob Israel Bernal, Esq., proprietor of Richmond New Works, Sugar Plantation, St. Ann Parish, Middlesex, 1792, Institute of Jamaica; Barritt to Phillips, 27 May 1795, MS 9205, Phillips Papers.



lengths of cloth. In the 1798 clothing distribution on Harmony Hall Estate, the driver, Spize, received an additional five yards of osnaburg beyond the standard ration of seven and "A Jacket & Pantaloons." According to the anonymous author of the novel Marly; or a Planter's Life in Jamaica, head slaves received a woollen jacket as well as the regular osnaburg and baize issue.<sup>13</sup>

James Stewart in his Brief Account of the Present State of the Negroes in Jamaica noted that some planters, when distributing clothes, made special provision for "indolent" slaves. The annual clothing allowance, distributed at Christmas, was equivalent to two suits of osnaburg and one suit of Kendal cotton. Stewart claimed that "the intelligent [slaves] receive their quantum of cloth which they make up at leisure after any fashion they please." He contended, however, that planters had to give made-up clothing to other slaves, and made the undoubtedly exaggerated claim that "it [was] often necessary to cloath the indolent and careless, five or six times during the year." Stewart's observations certainly do not agree with those of Robert Renny who observed that the clothing given to slaves by the planters was coarse and scanty, "it being in many instances, two years, before new osnaburg frocks [were] allotted to them."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Harmony Hall Papers, Gifts and Deposits, 7/56-1, Jamaica Archives; Anon., Marly; or a Planter's Life in Jamaica (Glasgow, 1828), 64.

<sup>14</sup> James Stewart, A Brief Account of the Present State of the Negroes in Jamaica (Bath, 1792), 12; Robert Renny, An History of Jamaica (London, 1807), 179.



Sometimes a broader section of the plantation community received ready-made clothing, either as a regular or supplemental allocation. James Chisholme wrote to his overseer that he was sending a slave domestic, a maid, to his Trouthall Estate "to make new Negro clothes." Similarly, the 1798 clothing distribution list for Harmony Hall Estate (reproduced as Appendix 4-d) showed that a number of slaves received clothing already made-up, and not lengths of cloth. Interestingly, this list showed that only women received needles. Possibly, couples were given cloth, the wives receiving needles to sew clothing for herself and her spouse, while planters gave the single slaves ready-to-wear garments. Nathaniel Phillips, for a reason that is not revealed in the letter, intended to give the slaves on his plantation gifts of clothing, since his overseer, Thomas Barritt, wrote:

I have been consulting Old Betty and some others of the good people to know what present from Young Massa & Missus will be most pleasing to them, and they seem to hint that a shirt of cotton check to the Males, and a coat of Do. to the females with a Handkerchief each would make them say Thankey grandee to both.<sup>15</sup>

Newly-purchased African slaves constituted another group that usually received made-up clothing. On arrival in Jamaica, these slaves would, at most, be clothed in a loin cloth or shift. Planters supplied them with clothes immediately after purchase, or on reaching the plantation. One contemporary source mentions that when the slaves were

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<sup>15</sup> Chisholme to Craggs, 10 December 1793, Letterbook of James Chisholme, Chisholme Papers; "Served with Cloath etc 2nd February 1798," Gifts and Deposits, 7/56-1, Harmony Hall Papers, Jamaica Archives; Barritt to Phillips, 5 June 1799, MS 11603, Phillips Papers.

taken on shore, they were immediately clothed, men in osnaburg trousers and frocks and woollen caps, women in osnaburg shifts and coats and checkered kerchiefs. Bryan Edwards corroborated this practice noting that African slaves, after purchase, were clothed in osnaburg, and given hats or kerchiefs and knives. Worthy Park Plantation records mention that a female slave, Cuba, received "12 yds Oz [osnaburg] to make 4 Pair Truses [trousers] for the New Negroes--Falmouth, Homer, Samson, Philip." Apparently these slaves did not receive the full clothing allotment until their arrival at the plantation.<sup>16</sup>

Clothing rations slaves received often proved inadequate. Not all planters felt obliged to provide adequate clothing and there were few sanctions which could be brought to bear on them. As sentiment grew among planters in favor of amelioration, the clothing supplies apparently improved somewhat. "Of clothing," Bryan Edwards observed in 1793, "the allowance of the master is not always so liberal as might be wished, but much more so of late years than formerly." Similarly, John Stewart claimed that, after the closure of the slave trade, planters treated slaves better, and one of the measures taken was improving the clothing ration. Despite such sentiments, and legal provisions mandating adequate clothing supplies notwithstanding, many planters failed to supply slaves with "proper and sufficient clothing."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits of the Creolian and African Negroes in this Island," The Columbian Magazine; or Monthly Miscellany, 2 (April 1797), 700-1; Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 118; Plantation Book: Worthy Park 1783-1787, 4/23-1, Worthy Park Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, II, 127, 148; John Stewart, A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica (1823, rpt. New York, 1969), 230-1.

Inadequate apparel may not have been too detrimental to the health of most slaves. Jamaica's benign climate meant that slaves, even though insufficiently clothed, were not likely to suffer unduly from exposure. The ragged clothing slaves wore was sufficient garb for most of the year. Moreover, lightly-clad slaves may have been healthier than the planters, who, in conformity with their perceived status and rank, felt obliged to overdress in formal attire more suited to Britain's cool, temperate climate. Light or scanty clothing was cooler and more comfortable, less apt to become damp with perspiration, and easily washed and dried. Shoes and more adequate clothing, however, would have helped prevent the cuts, bruises and insect bites that slaves suffered a great deal from, especially when working in the fields.

Jamaica's dependency on imports from Europe influenced the adequacy of slaves' clothing rations. Sea routes often were temporarily severed, especially during periods of warfare between European nations when adversaries preyed on each others' shipping. On these occasions, local stocks of provisions were likely to be overtaxed or exhausted, as one overseer reported in a letter to his employer in England. He bemoaned the fact that the outward-bound fleet had to put back after fifty days at sea, noting "we are in great want of W Hoops, Oil, Grease, Copper Nails, Candles, and the Negro Cloathing, all of which articles, wth. many others, sells here at three times the price that they formerly cost."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Barritt to Phillips, 15 April 1796, MS 11571, Phillips Papers.

Dry goods in Kingston were consistently more expensive than those bought in the United Kingdom and shipped directly to the estate; planters invariably preferred the latter. Circumstances, however, sometimes forced the planter to buy in Kingston. "If there is not a sufficient quantity of warm Cloathing shipt to supply the aged People on the Estate and Breeding Women," Ezekiel Dickinson wrote to his nephew who ran one of his estates, adding parenthetically, "(who I am very desirous shall have all reasonable indulgence particularly such as may be descendants from those who were resident on my late Patriot Colonel Gomersals time) I desire you will purchase what further may be wanted in Kingston."<sup>19</sup>

Other plantation records evinced a similar concern about slaves' clothing. Overseer Thomas Barritt assured Nathaniel Phillips that "every attention is paid to their Houses, Clothing & feeding," while Phillips' expressed his "earnest wish to have adopted every reasonable plan to make [the slaves] comfortable and happy." A few years later Barritt wrote to Phillips blaming slaves' attitudes, and not the inadequacy of their clothing, for sickness among them: "I believe oweing to the North winds prevailing at this time of year, many of them are troubled with Colds and fevers and it is impossible to make any of them put on their warm clothing." When floods on one of the Penrhyn plantations swept away some of the slaves' houses, along with some of their

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from Ezekiel Dickinson, Bowden House, Wiltshire, to Caleb Dickinson, 28 November 1786, Letterbook of Ezekiel Dickinson, Papers of Caleb and Ezekiel Dickinson, West India Reference Library, UWI.

clothes and other possessions, Penrhyn's agent reported that he was "obliged . . . to help them out by replacing their little losses."<sup>20</sup>

Needless to say, not all planters or their delegates shared the solicitude shown by Phillips and Penrhyn's agent. Nor was Jamaica's climate so equable that clothing did not matter at all. During the autumn and spring rains, and in winter nights, especially on the higher elevations, temperatures could be cool and the atmosphere damp. At such times, all slaves, but especially the weak, the elderly, the young and the sick, were adversely affected by their inadequate clothing. While some plantations made special accommodation for these groups, on others, "scanty" clothing undoubtedly caused sickness and death. William Beckford lamented the lot of slaves working as watchmen (traditionally an occupation for the elderly), especially on plantations and pens at higher elevations. He noted that cold winds were particularly hard on them, for they were obliged to be on hill summits all night "without raiment perhaps, and without food."<sup>21</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, privileged slaves often received a supply of clothing which was both ample and of superior quality. Evidence for this can be found both in plantation records

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<sup>20</sup> Barritt to Phillips, 8 September 1790, MS 8363; Phillips to Barritt, 1 November 1790, Letter-Book from June 1778, MS 11484; Barritt to Phillips, 20 November 1793, MS 8424, Phillips Papers; Letter from Rowland William Fearon (Attorney), Clarendon, Jamaica, to Lord Penrhyn, 6 June 1806, MS 1424, Penrhyn Papers.

<sup>21</sup> William Beckford, A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica (London, 1790), I, 198-9.

and in the visual testimony of various artists who painted scenes of plantation life. Appendix 4-e comprises a series of contemporary prints, all of which show drivers wearing a much more elaborate outfit than the field hands. Items of clothing such as frock coats, shoes, collar and cravat, and glazed hats, along with the omnipresent whip or swagger stick, all distinguished the driver in his position of privilege. One should, however, be wary of the idealization or stylization which may have been made of the subjects of these prints, as even the field hands seem to be overdressed for the arduous tasks of hoeing, loading and cutting they are performing. For example, in Print 4, all of them seem to be wearing their full annual issue of clothing.

Clothing was used as an instrument by which Jamaican planters sought to control the slaves on their plantations. The manner in which planters clothed newly-purchased African slaves clearly manifested this, as did the system of differential clothing allocations on the plantation.

Slaves arriving from Africa underwent a rite of passage immediately following their sale to the planter. The key elements of this ritual were twofold; the assertion of power dominance by virtue of ownership, and an acculturation process designed to restructure identity. A slave's ownership was legally established by purchase. Planters asserted control and power dominance concomitant with ownership by branding slaves and limiting their movements and activities. Slaves could be separated from relatives and companions, shackled and forced to walk or be transported to a destination of the planters'



choosing: the sugar plantation where they would probably spend the rest of their lives in bondage. These actions were legitimized and justified both by the immediate sanction, the ubiquitous whip, and by the formal legal structure of the society.

Clothing was one of the most important instruments planters used to establish the second element of the rite of passage, the acculturation process designed to restructure the identity of slaves. Slaves arriving in Jamaica were either naked or clad in a loin cloth, but immediately were clothed in garb foreign to all their previous experience. The style, cut and material of the clothing derived from the heritage of the slave-holding Europeans, but at the same time cut in a manner that immediately identified the wearer's status. The men wore trousers and a loose shirt-like frock or smock covering their upper body, while the women wore a full-length shift and a half-to three-quarter-length coat. Headgear consisted of woollen caps, glazed or felt hats and kerchiefs. Men wore hats or caps; women usually wore kerchiefs. Children were scantily clothed, both sexes wearing only simple one-piece shifts, if, indeed, they wore anything at all. Although the material and style were European, however, the osnaburg trousers, frocks, shifts and coats were the clothing of slaves and slaves alone.

On the plantation different clothing allocations further served the planters' desire to control the slave population. Drivers and other privileged slaves received clothes which not only placed them apart from ordinary field hands, but also brought them closer to the whites, since, as the prints in Appendix 4-e show, their clothes more closely resembled those of the planters. Planters created a hierarchy

of privilege that was affirmed by tangible, visible rewards such as better housing and food, as well as power and influence. Clothing, of course, was one of the most visible perquisites.

Since the clothing given the elite slaves more closely resembled that of the planter, one can see the continuance of the europeanization (or in the case of Jamaica, anglicization) of the slaves which was started with the rite of passage at the dockside sale. Anglicization was embedded in the privileges sought by some members of the slave community. Drivers, liaising between slaves and planters, adopted attitudes of dress, manners and speech that more closely approximated white attitudes than did those of field hands. In an allusion to this process, Edward Brathwaite uses the evocative image of "snow . . . falling on the canefields." Clearly the quality and style of clothing issued to drivers and other elite slaves forms a vital link in this process.<sup>22</sup>

The pervasive influence of clothing as an instrument of domination can be seen in the way it affected a sphere of activity which in itself was essentially outside the sway of the planters. Jamaican slaves spent a large part of any revenue they accumulated purchasing clothing for Sunday and holiday wear.

Slaves often invested in ready-made clothing. Thus, they bought clothing, either made locally or in Europe, that followed European styles. If slaves bought material, they made it up to resemble, even to the point of caricature, the current European fashions which

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820 (London, 1971), 300.



both slave and slave-owner at least aspired to wear. John Stewart concluded his description of the clothing of slaves with these observations:

Neither sex wear shoes in common, these being reserved for particular occasions, such as dances, etc., when all who can afford it appear in very gay apparel--the men in broad-cloth coats, fancy waistcoats, and nankeen or jean trowsers, and the women in white or fancy muslin gowns, beaver or silk hats, and a variety of expensive jewellery. . . . All of them who can afford to buy a finer dress, seldom appear, excepting when at work, in the coarse habitments given them by their masters.

Some years earlier, James Stewart commented on the finery which the slaves "sport[ed] on holidays or extraordinary occasions." Female slaves wore fine linen, cambric and muslin, and were bejewelled with costly ornaments, while the dress of the men comprised cocked hats, waistcoats, breeches and "preposterous ruffles and coats." A similar pattern, to which plantation slaves probably aspired although few would have attained, was manifested by urban slave artisans and described in a contemporary journal:

Mechanics are generally able from their own labour to buy good cloathing: Broadcloth coats, linen waistcoats and breeches, a smart cocked hat, with a gold or silver loop, button and band, are common with them in the holidays; to which they sometimes add shoes and stockings. They frequently have their cloaths made in the newest English fashion and sometimes exceed it fantastically.<sup>23</sup>

John Stewart, in his description of the demeanor of slaves when dressed for holidays, observed:

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<sup>23</sup> John Stewart, A View, 269; James Stewart, A Brief Account, 10-1; Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (June 1797), 7.

On these occasions the slaves appear an altered race of beings. They show themselves off to the greatest advantage, by fine clothes and a profusion of trinkets; they affect a more polished behaviour and mode of speech; they address the whites with greater familiarity, they come into their masters' houses, and drink with them; the distance between them appears to be annihilated for the moment.<sup>24</sup>

The process of cultural interchange affected all of Jamaica's inhabitants, black and white, slave and free. It is not within the province of this study to assess the extent of African and Creole influences on the European population, or of African and European influences on the Creole population, but, as is documented elsewhere, these processes did occur.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the element of emulation or adoption of various modes of European dress by slaves, the complete effect was not European. Indications of this can be found initially in the same records which show most clearly the European influence in the "best" clothing of slaves. The Columbian Magazine reported that "they frequently have their cloaths made in the newest European fashion and sometimes exceed it fantastically." James Stewart mentioned "the preposterous ruffles and coats," while John Stewart noted that the slaves wore "fine clothes and a profusion of trinkets" (my emphasis).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Stewart, A View, 270-1.

<sup>25</sup> Brathwaite, Creole Society, passim. The word "Creole" is used to describe that which is born in, or native to, the particular region.

<sup>26</sup> Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (June 1797), 7; James Stewart, A Brief Account, 11; John Stewart, A View, 271. Slave finery was described most fully in records and histories written by planters. The descriptions thus incorporate certain biases. As well as stressing the benignity of slavery, planters, as a result of

The clothing of slaves displayed three influences, African, Creole and European. Some of the clothing slaves bought had been imported, ready-made, from Europe, and they wore it unmodified. Creole clothing incorporated adaptations of other styles, which struck James Stewart as being "preposterous" parodies or caricatures. Creolization was further evidenced in the ways in which items of clothing were worn together, despite what would, in European or African eyes, be seen as an incongruity or clashing of styles.

Some items, particularly accessories, were of African derivation and worn in African ways. Perhaps the most common item of clothing of African descent was the turban worn by the women. As can be seen in the prints in Appendix 4-e women wore turbans as part of their work dress, and the contemporary prints portraying slaves at their leisure (reproduced as Appendix 4-f) show that this item of dress was also part of their finery. Edward Long refers to the predilection of slave women for turbans which they wore "at all times," and Michael Scott's description of women dressed in finery during a holiday celebration included reference to "their nice showy, well put on toques, or Madras handkerchiefs, all of the same pattern, tied round their heads, fresh out of the fold." The kerchiefs used by women for their turbans were usually part of the regular clothing issue given by the planter.<sup>27</sup>

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their conviction of the cultural supremacy of whites, probably over-emphasized the extent to which slaves imitated and mimicked the clothing and other standards of the planter class.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Long, The History of Jamaica (1774, rpt. New York, 1972), II, 412-3; Michael Scott, Tom Cringle's Log (1838, rpt. London, 1915), 245.

Slaves wore jewels and ornaments as an integral part of their best clothing. John Stewart noted "the profusion of trinkets" worn on festive occasions, and William Beckford commented on the slaves' liking for beads, coral, glass and chains which were worn on the neck and wrists. Jewelry was, of course, worn as an accessory in European fashions. The styles worn by slave women, however, although partly incorporating European styles, were also of African derivation, as is shown in this contemporary description:

Besides the usual European ornaments of ear-rings and necklaces, the women have at different times used as beads, the seeds of Jobs-tears, liquorice, and lilac; the vertebrae of the shark; and lately red sealing wax, which in appearance nearly resembles coral. Sometimes they sportively affix to the lip of the ear, a pindal or ground nut, open at one end; at other times they thrust through the hole bored for the ear-ring, the round yellow flower of opopinax.

African heritages also appeared in the adornments, the "party-coloured beads tied around their loins," which Scott saw slave children wearing, and can be inferred from the "profusion of beads and corals, and gold ornaments of all description" with which Matthew Lewis saw slave women bedecked at the commencement of a festival on his plantation.<sup>28</sup>

Many slaves on Jamaican sugar plantations, however, did not wear much other than the planter's issue. Those unable or unwilling to garner sufficient funds or trading goods, in particular had little opportunity to supplement the scanty garb supplied them by the planter with better apparel, the cloth and cut of which immediately distinguished

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<sup>28</sup> John Stewart, A View, 271; Beckford, A Descriptive Account, II, 386; Anon., "Characteristic Traits," Columbian Magazine, 3 (July 1797), 109; Scott, Tom Cringle, 141; Matthew Gregory Lewis, Journal of a West India Proprietor (London, 1834), 74.

it from the coarse plantation wear. All slaves did not benefit equally from the internal economy. As a consequence, although some could acquire various fineries, the "wardrobe" of others contained little except the meager plantation ration that would deteriorate into rags before the next issue.

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As in Jamaica, slaves in Louisiana spent a considerable portion of any revenue they accumulated on the purchase of clothing. Whether or not they purchased made-up items, the styles of the slaves' "best" clothing conformed to the general dictates of fashion in the region. The syncretic influences, so important in determining the styles of such clothing in Jamaica, were less apparent in Louisiana. Like other facets of slavery in the United States, the process of creolization of clothing styles was further advanced and was reflected in the homogenization of fashions throughout society. Nevertheless, evidence of an exaggerated "creole" style of clothing is found in William Howard Russell's My Diary North and South, where he noted that the slaves' Sunday clothes were "strangely cut" and "wonderfully made."<sup>29</sup>

The extent and nature of clothing purchases by slaves show that it was essentially an autonomous activity of great importance to both slave societies. Although opportunities to accrue wealth were severely limited, slaves invariably spent part of any income they had to

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<sup>29</sup> William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South (London, 1863), 373.

purchase clothes. Moreover, some slaves managed to buy clothing of high quality cut in the most elegant styles.

The records of the Gay family's sugar plantation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, offer many examples of slaves purchasing apparel. Among the items purchased by slaves in 1844 were a "Fine Summer Coat" bought at the cost of \$3.00 by a field hand named Lee, and a "Fine Russian Hat bt. in N. Orleans" for \$3.00 by another field hand, Elias. Alfred Cooper bought two "Elegant Bonnets" at \$2.00 each, presumably for his wife Dido and his sixteen-year old daughter Louisiana. Three years earlier, the account of William Sanders, another slave, was debited by an unrecorded amount for a fur hat, black shoes and a calico dress for his wife, while Patrick bought a pair of boots and a watch costing \$15.00 to \$20.00, Hercules paid \$10.00 for a roundabout jacket of blue or black cloth, a dark-colored umbrella and a waistcoat, Ned Davis made a similar purchase of a fur hat, a roundabout and an umbrella, and Samuel Todd bought a white "cambrice" dress for his wife. Similar purchasing patterns continued on the Gay Estate up until the Civil War.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout extant Louisiana sugar plantation records, the purchases of similar luxury apparel recur. For example, in 1848, slaves on Alexis Ferry's plantation bought, among other things, expensive lengths of cloth ("aunes coutes") and a fine dress ("robe bontenit"). On George Lanaux' Bellevue Estate in the early 1850s, slaves paid \$2.50

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<sup>30</sup> Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5); Memorandum Book 1840-41 (Volume 28), Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



each for oiled-cloth winter coats, and \$1.25 a pair for "log cabin" trousers, among other items, while a cash-book for W. W. Pugh's Wood-lawn Plantation in Assumption Parish lists a slave named Woodson being charged \$12.50 for a silk dress for Rachel.<sup>31</sup>

The recollections of slaves further attest to such purchases. Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that her mother raised corn, sold it at fifty cents per barrel, and "bought good clothes wid de money, nothing but silk dresses." Although Mrs. Ross Hite's mother undoubtedly bought more than silk dresses, the frequency of similar references to the fine clothing slaves bought to wear on days off, throughout the slave narratives, indicates that the purchase of such items was not unusual.<sup>32</sup>

More typically, however, slaves spent their earnings on plainer and less expensive clothing, a practice widespread among sugar plantation slaves in Louisiana. On one of Benjamin Tureaud's estates, slaves spent some of the money they earned by selling corn and cutting wood on such diverse items as shoes, hats, hose, shirts, pants, dresses and handkerchiefs, as well as a variety of cloths such as cottonade, check, cotton and calico. In the 1858-59 ledger are the names of 98 male slaves, all but two of whom accumulated money over the period, the sums

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<sup>31</sup> Volume 1, #331, 1842-1865, 1877, Alexis Ferry Journals, Department of Archives, Tulane University, New Orleans; Ledger 1851-1856 (Volume 18), Lanaux (George and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Cashbook for Negroes 1848-55 (Volume 6), Colonel W. W. Pugh Papers, Archives, LSU.

<sup>32</sup> Interview conducted under the auspices of the Slave Narrative Collection Project organized by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. Interviewee--Elizabeth Ross Hite: Interviewer--Robert McKinney: Date--ca. 1940, Louisiana Writers' Project File, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge.

ranging from \$1.00 to \$170.00. Well over half of them, including the two non-earners who received goods on credit, spent part of their earnings on clothing. Only eight of the thirty women in the ledger earned any money, and of them, only three spent any of it on cloth or clothing. The other five withdrew their earnings in cash. Virtually all the 106 slaves who earned money during this time withdrew at least part of their earnings in cash, and probably some of this went towards the purchase of clothing off the plantation.<sup>33</sup>

The Gay Plantation slave accounts for 1844 itemized clothing purchases other than luxury items. In a slave community that two years previously numbered 267 persons, 86 of whom were males over the age of sixteen years, 77 slaves (71 men and 6 women) earned \$900.12, out of which they purchased, among other items, cloth and clothing. Again, virtually all the slaves withdrew part of their earnings in cash. Apart from a few luxury items of ready-made clothing, slaves mainly bought lengths of cloth: calico, domestic, white cotton, brown linen and cottonade. Thus, in this year, almost every slave family on the Gay Plantation earned money, or received credit, which, in turn, they partly invested in clothing for holiday and Sunday wear.<sup>34</sup>

The best clothes of slaves conformed to contemporary styles and fashions. The description of a slave wedding that took place on Howard Bond's Crescent Place sugar plantation near Houma in Terrebonne Parish, recorded in the diary of Bond's wife, Priscilla "Mittie" Munnikhuysen

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<sup>33</sup> Ledger 1858-1872 (48), Tureaud (Benjamin) Papers, Archives, LSU.

<sup>34</sup> Daybook 1843-1847 (Volume 5), Gay Papers.



Bond, exemplifies this. The scene described is atypical, probably depicting the nuptials of two favored slaves, perhaps domestics. Nevertheless, it gives a good portrait of the dress of the participants:

Had a wedding here tonight, two of the servants got married. . . . The bride looked quite nice dressed in white, I made her turbin of white swiss-pink tarlton [tarlaton] & oranges blossoms. . . . I wonder what the "Yankees" would think of it if they had seen how happy they were dressed in their ball dresses. The groom had a suit of black, white gloves, & a tall beaver. The bride dressed in white swiss, pink trimmings & white gloves. The bride's-made & groom's-man dressed to correspond.

The presence of an ornate turban in the bride's ensemble can be accounted for because they "were the most popular head-dresses of women [in the United States] during the first half of the nineteenth-century" rather than laid to the syncretic influence of an African-derived clothing heritage peculiar to the slave population. The rest of the clothing described was very much à la mode.<sup>35</sup>

Although ex-slave Elizabeth Ross Hite's recollection of the fine clothing worn by slaves at weddings closely matched Bond's description, she also indicated that such elaborate ceremonies were atypical. "Sometimes de slaves would have marriages lak de people do today wid all de same trimmings. De veil, gown an ev'rything," Hite recalled. "Dey married fo de preacher an had big af'fairs in dere quarters. Den some-time dey would go to do master to git his permission an blessings." She added, however, "Shucks som of dem darkies didn't care er bout

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<sup>35</sup> Diary 1857-1869, Bond (Priscilla "Mittie" Munnikhuysen) Papers, Archives, LSU; Elizabeth McClellan, History of American Costume 1607-1870 (1904, rpt. New York, 1969), 638.

master, preacher or nobody dey just went an got married." The ceremonial garb donned for religious occasions, like funerals, baptisms and marriages, and the best clothing worn to go to town or market, or when visiting friends and relations on holidays, conformed to the current fashion trends in the United States. (For a contemporary print depicting the best clothing of sugar plantation slaves in Louisiana, see Appendix 4-g.)<sup>36</sup>

Since the purchase of best clothing was an autonomous activity, the decisions concerning the extent and direction of investment rested with the slaves. Former slave Martha Stuart maintained that slaves could buy "any kind er dress [they] wanted to get." Elizabeth Ross Hite noted that some plantation owners were averse to such practices, which were, nevertheless, carried on clandestinely. She recalled that "we sold old clothes to darkies who had mean masters. Dey had to hide 'em though."<sup>37</sup>

The principal considerations determining the extent of slave purchases were the predilections of the slaves, and the amount of money they had. As Martha Stuart observed, slaves could have as "many [dresses] as [they] wanted, many as [they] could buy." The final proviso

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Interview conducted under the auspices of a Slave Narrative Collection Project organized by Dillard University using only black interviewers. This project developed alongside the Federal Writers' program. Interviewee--Martha Stuart: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr., Date--ca. 1938, Archives and Manuscripts Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.

is, of course, the important one. Not all slaves had the financial wherewithal to buy such clothing, nor had they the opportunities to accumulate the necessary money. Thus, while Martha Stuart related that "de overseer used to tell us, you darkies . . . got better clothes den ma wife and chillun's got," other slaves in the Louisiana sugar region wore only what was distributed to them at the expense of the plantation.<sup>38</sup>

Slaves sometimes received special "Sunday" clothing in the form of gifts from the planter. Ellen McCollam mentioned that she "gave out to the negro women each a new dress and handkerchief as a Christmas present," in addition to the regular distribution of work clothes. Similarly, "on Christmas master would give his slaves presents," Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled. "Dey would be clothes most of de time." Another time when superior clothing may have been given to slaves was on the occasion of a wedding. Ex-slave Louisa Martin recalled that slaves, "w'en dey wante to git married dey'd go to de white folks and dey'd give em fine clothes to wear." This was true of at least part of the bride's ensemble in the slave wedding on Howard Bond's plantation, described above.<sup>39</sup>

As in Jamaica, Louisiana planters customarily purchased the slaves' work clothes and bore the entire cost. The materials Louisiana

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Martha Stuart, loc. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Diary and Plantation Record of Ellen E. McCollam, Volume II, 1847-1851, McCollam (Andrew and Ellen E.) Papers, Archives, LSU; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Interviewee--Louisa Martin: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--1938: Dillard Project, Archives, UNO; Diary 1857-1869, Bond Papers, Archives, LSU.

planters most commonly bought were woollens and various cottons such as denim, calico, cottonade, "lowell" and a twill called "jane" or "jean." Less frequently Louisiana planters distributed osnaburg, fustian and linsey-woolsey. Although Julia Woodrich, who had been a slave on a Louisiana sugar plantation, recalled that "the missus wove the cloth," this was not typical: planters usually bought commercially-woven cloth.<sup>40</sup>

The clothing issue to slaves in both Jamaica and Louisiana included accessories like hats and kerchiefs in addition to the main items: trousers, skirts, frocks and coats. An important difference between the clothing rations was that slaves on Louisiana plantations received shoes and sometimes socks, while Jamaican slaves worked barefoot.

As a general rule, slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations received larger clothing allocations than Jamaican slaves. Moreover, distribution was more frequent, usually twice a year, as compared to the annual distribution most common in Jamaica. Such differences in slave clothing in the two societies, however, probably only reflected the climatic disparity between the regions; it is doubtful whether Louisiana slaves were better equipped, since they needed protection from a harsher climate than that of Jamaica.

Of the two issues each year, one was designed to be worn during the warm Louisiana summer, the other to combat the cold and damp winter

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<sup>40</sup> Interviewee--Julia Woodrich: Interviewer--Flossie McElwee: Date--1940: FWP Interviews, Louisiana State Library.

months with their frost and snow, which were unknown in Jamaica. The Louisiana slaves received their lighter-weight summer clothing in spring or early summer and their heavier issue in the fall or early winter.

The clothing issued to Louisiana slaves for summer wear was usually cotton. A man received a pair of pants and a shirt, a woman, a dress and a chemise. If slaves did not get ready-made apparel, equivalent lengths of cotton material were given to them, and they were expected to make their own clothes. Headgear, usually kerchiefs for women and straw hats for men, was also included in this distribution. From the records of John Moore's Magill Plantation, one can estimate the quantities of material necessary to furnish such clothing. A letter to Moore from his overseer, William Lourd, includes the amount of cloth needed for the spring issue:

I give a list of clothing for a suit a piece, 31 grown women--6 small girls, which will take 241 yds for frocks & for chemise 105 yds, close calculation. 35 men will take for pantaloons 105 yds, nine small boys, will take 18 yds--making 123 yds for pantaloons, and the same quantity of stuff for shirting.

Adult female slaves, therefore, each received seven yards for a frock and three yards for a chemise, adult male slaves, each three yards for a shirt and three for a pair of pants. Young girls, by which Lourd meant early adolescents, each received four yards for a frock and two yards for a chemise, while their male counterparts were each given two yards for making a shirt, and another two for a pair of pants. Younger children on this plantation were given clothing less frequently.

Lourd stated that "the children can do without clothes till fall as I gave them all a suit a piece last fall."<sup>41</sup>

Other sugar estates exhibited similar distribution patterns. On John Randolph's Nottoway Plantation, summer clothing, usually issued in mid-March, comprised pants and a shirt for each man, and a dress, or a dress and a chemise for a woman, all of which were ready-made. Equivalent lengths of cloth were given the slaves on David Magill's plantation, although there different types of cotton were to be used for the various articles of clothing: the men received twilled cotton for making pants, women denim for their dresses, and both were given plain cotton for shirts and chemises respectively.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the sugar region, the distribution patterns for summer clothing displayed considerable uniformity. The usual practice, mentioned in many plantation journals, was to issue slaves all their summer clothing at one time, that is, on a given day in spring or early summer. Similarly, planters gave the slaves most of their heavier winter issue on a single day late in the year.

It was, however, more common for slaves to receive supplemental winter allocations of clothing than was true with the summer issue. On John Randolph's plantation, for example, slaves received their winter clothing, comprising a shirt, two pairs of pants and a pair of

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<sup>41</sup> Letter from William Lourd (Overseer), Magill Plantation, to John Moore, 20 February 1862, Box 38, Folder 185, Weeks Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Ledger 1862-1865 (Volume 8), John H. Randolph Papers, Archives, LSU; Cashbook 1856-1859 (Volume 12), Estate of D. W. Magill, Box 58, Weeks Papers.



shoes for each man, and a dress, chemise and a pair of shoes for each woman, usually in mid-October. Various ledger entries, however, indicate that, as the winter progressed, other items were distributed such as "extra shoes," "josies" (short jackets) given to the women in January and February, and "woollen jackets and socks" given out in November. More over, some planters chose to give lengths of cloth which the slaves themselves made up. (See Table 4-2 for the standard winter clothing issue on the Weeks family's Grande Cote Island plantation.)<sup>43</sup>

Various types of woollen cloths served the slaves as winter wear. On the Weeks plantation, slaves received kersey, a coarse, ribbed woollen material, which, in 1857, cost 27 cents per yard. The standard adult issue of kersey for both men and women in that year was seven yards apiece. Philip Hicky, on his Hope Estate, used linsey-woolsey, a coarse linen and wool or cotton and wool mix, for slaves' heavier clothing, and Elizabeth Ross Hite, an ex-slave, recalled the "thick yarn clothes" which slaves on Pierre Landreaux' Trinity Plantation wore in winter. Rachel O'Connor, a slave-holder in the Bayou Sara sugar region, referred to the blanket cloth she used for slaves' heavy clothing, while the records of numerous other plantations merely cite "woollen cloths" in describing the winter issue.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ledger 1862-1865 (Volume 3), Randolph Papers; "Clothing Assessments for Grande Cote," Box 42, Folder 260, Weeks Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Ally Meade to Mary C. Moore, 2 October 1857; Cashbook 1856-1859 (Volume 12), Weeks Papers; Letter from Philip Hicky, Hope Estate, to Morris Morgan, 12 July 1859, Hicky (Philip and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Letter from Rachel O'Connor to David Weeks, 20 November 1833, Box 4, Folder 17, Weeks Papers.

Table 4-2

Standard Winter Clothing Issue for Each Slave  
on Grande Cote Island Estate

	Shirting (cotton)	Woollens	Shoes
Men	3 yards	6 yards	1 pair
Women	6 yards	6 yards	1 pair
Boys (adolescents)	2½ yards	5 yards	1 pair
Girls (adolescents)	5 yards	6 yards	1 pair
*Small Children	2 yards	-	-

\*Small children received 2 yards of cotton shirting each in both fall and spring.

Source: "Clothing Assessments for Grande Cote," Box 42, Folder 260, Weeks (David and Family) Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



With the exception of children, all slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations received shoes as part of their regular clothing allowance. These were either purchased ready-made, or made on the plantation. In either case, they were crudely constructed, especially if fabricated on the estate. Charles Gayarre's account of life on a Louisiana sugar plantation included reference to the crude cobbling techniques used to make shoes. Slaves, he noted:

protected their feet with what they called quantiers made in this way. The negro would plant his foot on an ox-hide that had undergone a certain preparatory process to soften it. Armed with a flat and keen blade, another negro would cut the hide according to the size and shape of the foot, leaving enought margin to overlap the top of it up to the ankle. Holes were bored into it, and with strips of the same leather this rustic shoe was laced tight to the foot. It was rough and unsightly, but wholesome, like the French sabot or wooden shoe. The foot, in a woollen sock, or even bare, when encased in a quantier stuffed with rags or hay, was kept remarkably warm and dry.<sup>45</sup>

Catherine Cornelius recalled that on the plantation on which she was a slave the male slaves made the work shoes "wid beef hide." Other than that the shoes were "heavy," she mentioned neither their quality, nor the skill with which they were fabricated, so it may be that they were of similar construction to those described by Gayarre. There were, however, other instances, in which tradesman, apparently skilled in the craft of shoe-making, were employed to supply a plantation. Ex-slave Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that, on Pierre Landreaux' sugar estate, "dere was a big brick house fo' de shoemaker shop. De

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Gayarre, "A Louisiana Plantation of the Old Regime," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXXIV (March 1887), 610-1.

shoemaker was cullored. He was free. His name was Beverly. He tanned de hides an' did ev'rything. Even teached de darkies, dat is, de young ones." Alternatively, some planters hired skilled slaves from outside the plantation to cobble slave shoes, as when "Mr Billards negro man Edmund came to make shoes" for the slaves on William Palfrey's plantation.<sup>46</sup>

Many planters, however, chose to buy commercially made "negro shoes" for the slaves. These were also of crude construction, and the "ponderous ill-made" footwear seen by William Howard Russell was, as likely as not, of this type. For example, it is unlikely that the contract Nashville, Tennessee penitentiary had with the Gay plantation in 1840 for making shoes at fifty cents a pair furnished the slaves with well-crafted footwear. Although the retail price for "negro shoes" was somewhat higher if purchased through the usual commercial outlets (\$1.00 to \$1.25 per pair in the 1840s and 1850s), the quality probably did not differ markedly.<sup>47</sup>

The shoes issued to field hands were often described as "russett brogans," a term indicating not only the coarse construction, but also the condition and color of the leather, which had retained its brown

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Plantation Diary 1860-1868, 1895 (Volume 18), William T. and George D. Palfrey Account Books, Archives, LSU.

<sup>47</sup> Russell, My Diary, 380; Box 6, Folder 51, Gay Papers; "W. Emerson's a/c for Boots & Shoes for Southdown & Waterloo for 1849," Diary 4 - 1850, Minor (William J. and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Journal--Plantation Book 1847-1852 (Volume 5), Randolph Papers; Box 5, Folder 25, Stirling (Lewis and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU.

hue through tanning. On a number of larger plantations, however, better quality black shoes were purchased for domestic house slaves. For example, included in the distribution for 1854 of "negro shoes" on the Sitrling family's plantation were "House Servants Black Shoes" of various sizes, and ex-slave Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that "de master brought his house people shoes from France. Dey had to look gud, caise de master had plenty of company."<sup>48</sup>

While domestics and slaves at work in the fields wore shoes, hands employed in two of the more arduous tasks on the plantation, ditching and wood-cutting, sometimes received boots. Both the wood-cutting, done in the swamps abutting the plantations, and ditching meant that the slaves spent extended periods standing in water. Consequently, some plantation owners chose to give boots to slaves so employed, as, for example, on the Gay family's plantation where some of the male slaves got "ditching boots."<sup>49</sup>

Slaves received shoes once or twice a year. Practices varied from plantation to plantation, and, on the same estate, slaves' sex and age could influence the frequency of issue. When planters issued only one pair of shoes a year, they usually comprised part of the fall clothing ration. Elu Landry, for example, gave the slaves their shoes in October 1848 and November 1849, while on the Stirling family's plantation in 1859-61, the shoe issue fell regularly in October.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Negroe Shoes given out in 1854," Box 8, Folder 43, Stirling Papers; Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Estate Record Book 1831-1845 (Volume 8), Gay Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Plantation Diary and Ledger, Landry (Elu) Estate, Archives, LSU; "List of Negroes Coats & Shoes," Box 10, Folder 59, Stirling Papers.

A different system prevailed on the Gay family's estate. In 1849-53, slave men of working age received two pairs of shoes each year, usually in February and October, while some slave women received only one pair and others two. There is no discernible pattern indicating why some women received two pairs and some one, but since the ledger listed what each individual slave received, the allocation may have been based on demonstrable need. Alternatively, some of the women may have been doing light work, perhaps because they were pregnant or suckling, and consequently did not receive the ration accorded field hands. Need seems to have been the determining criterion on John Randolph's plantation, a ledger of which lists, without further explanation, "Extra shoes given out."<sup>51</sup>

Not all slaves received the full allotment of footwear. On the Gay plantation, for example, superannuated and adolescent slaves received shoes less frequently than working adults. The records do not reveal whether this was a specific policy, or if these groups wore out their shoes less quickly. Young children usually went without shoes. Carlyle Stewart, who, as a child, had been a slave on Octave de la Houssaye's sugar estate, recollected that as children "we didn't have no shoes." The clothing allocation of slaves on the Weeks family's sugar estate supports Stewart's testimony, since it shows that small children received no shoes. (See Table 4-2.)<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36), Gay Papers; Ledger 1862-1865 (Volume 8), Randolph Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Plantation Record Book 1849-1860 (Volume 36), Gay Papers; Interviewee--Carlyle Stewart: Interviewer--Flossie McElwee: Date--1940, F.W.P. Interviews, Louisiana State Library; "Clothing Assessments for Grande Cote," Box 42, Folder 260, Weeks Papers.

Other exceptions to the annual/semi-annual shoe distribution pattern occur, for example, in the ledger recording shoes given out on the Gay family's estate for 1859 and 1860. On numerous occasions throughout these years slaves, numbering anywhere from 1 to 45, received shoes, presumably when they needed them; similarly, Maunsell White claimed that he gave the slaves on his Deer Range Plantation "2 pr. & sometimes 3 pair in the course of the year depending much on their quality."<sup>53</sup>

On other occasions, slaves whose shoes wore out before the next scheduled distribution had to do without. This would, of course, have been a greater problem when slaves received one rather than two pairs of shoes a year. One reason for the annual fall distribution may have been that, if the shoes wore out before the next issue, slaves would go barefoot in the more clement summer months at a time when the work of weeding and laying the crop by was somewhat less onerous. In other cases, the want of shoes occurred at times which must have caused slaves a great deal of discomfort. For example, John Craighead wrote from his plantation in Iberville Parish to his partner Andrew Hynes, that, with the temperatures near freezing, he was "about to commence making Sugar without . . . shoes for the negroes."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ration Book 1859-1863 (Volume 90), Gay Papers; Letter from Maunsell White, Deer Range to Charles H. Mason, Esq., Editor of the Economist, Cannelton, 14 September 1849, Maunsell White Letterbook, Archives, LSU.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from John B. Craighead, Iberville, to Colonel Andrew Hynes, Nashville, 1 October 1837, Box 5, Folder 41, Gay Papers.

With the prospect of going barefoot in inclement weather, some slaves sought to extend the life of their shoes by caring for them in the manner recalled by ex-slave Catherine Cornelius. To preserve the leather and make them more supple and comfortable, she claimed the slaves "greas[ed] shoes wid meat skin en put on pot blackenin." The slaves' use of blackening may have been an attempt to imitate the appearance of the black shoes worn by house slaves.<sup>55</sup>

Planters throughout the Louisiana sugar region adhered, fairly consistently, to the general pattern of two clothing issues per year, one for summer wear, the other for winter. Failure to meet this schedule caused planters or their representatives some concern. W. W. Lawless, overseer on Charles Mathews' Chaseland Plantation, on the Bayou Lafourche, wrote to the owner "I have no stuff as yet for the summer clothing for the Negroes & the Seamstresses here have nothing to do & will be late to get the clothing made." Mary Weeks' overseer, John Merriman, reported that, at her Grande Cote Island plantation, "the Negro clothing is very indifere[n]t stuff and I think the quantity insufficient as I have received only two hundred and thirty yards--I also received some Bore Stuf, but no cotton for tops, nor none for shirting, do you wish the men to have jackets this season."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit. Similar practices prevailed in other shoe-wearing rural populations. Thomas Hardy, in Jude the Obscure, mentions "a piece of flesh, the characteristic part [penis] of a barrow-pig [castrated boar] which the country-men used for greasing their boots." Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (1895, rpt. New York, 1973), 33.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from W. W. Lawless (Overseer) to William C. Leich, Bayou Lafourche, 21 March 1858, Box 2, Folder 20, Mathews (Charles L. and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Letter from John Merriman, Grande Cote, to Mary Weeks, New Iberia, 12 July 1840, Box 8, Folder 28, Weeks Papers.



There were a number of causes for this concern. Planters who delegated the responsibility for making clothing to slave seamstresses on the plantation would not want these people to be idle for lack of cloth, and they also realized, no doubt, that the slaves would be healthier and would work better if suitably outfitted for the demanding tasks they performed. Conversely, it is as likely that slaves, deprived of what they considered their due ration of clothing, would have shown their disapproval, perhaps by attacking the plantations' productivity through sundry job actions. As in many other areas of plantation life, overseers and planters underestimated at their peril the power of slaves. Relations between slaves and whites on the plantation did not reflect total power dominance by the "master class." Planters, if they wanted the estate to run efficiently, had to recognize and respect what was often a very delicate balance of reciprocal rights and obligations in such areas as privacy, holidays, rights to property and its disposal and other established routines of plantation life. It is, therefore, likely that slaves could exert pressures to make planters conform to the established routine of clothing distribution.

Extant records show that slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations usually received their regular ration of clothes. It is doubtful, however, that these allocations suited the needs of an extremely hard-worked labor force. Ceceil George, who was sold as a slave from a cotton plantation in South Carolina to a sugar plantation in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, recalled that "in de ole country (S.C.) dey had spinning wheels made dere own cloth--made gloves, caps for de head. . . . In dis country [Louisiana], dey give yo' de ole clothes,

one pair shoes a year, no stockin's an' in de winter, sometimes yo' so cold--Lawd (Lord) have mercy

Contemporary travellers and commentators disagreed on the adequacy of slaves' clothing. Accounts range from a description of slaves "with their bodies half exposed to the severest of cold weather;" and James Pearse's comments on their "scanty dress," to the views of Solon Robinson, that the slaves were "all neatly dressed," and William Howard Russell, that slaves' clothing "seemed heavy for the climate." One can assume that slaves in such an extensive plantation system experienced this entire range.<sup>57</sup>

The summer and winter clothing issues were, however, unlikely to fulfill the needs of working slaves unless augmented by various supplemental allocations. Some plantations made additional allotments of such items as hats, socks and outer and under garments. While ex-slave Ceceil George complained that slaves on the la Houssaye plantation were given "no stockin's," Maunsell White ordered, for his Deer Range Estate, "20 doz. of knit woollen socks for [the] negroes," specifying that he wanted the larger and better quality items which sold for \$1.50 to \$2.25 per dozen. White also wrote of having "splendid

<sup>57</sup> Interviewee--Ceceil George; Interviewer--Maude Wallace: Date--1940: F.W.P.-Interviews, Louisiana State Library.

<sup>58</sup> The Planter's Banner (Franklin, St. Mary's Parish, Louisiana), XIV (2 August 1849), 1; James Pearse, A Narrative of the Life of James Pearse (Rutland, Vt., 1825), 83; Herbert Anthony Kellar, ed., Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturalist (Indianapolis, 1936), II, 167; Russell, My Diary, 380.



over coats made for the people that work in the Field, Blue & green of a large size, so that they last them 3 years." Similarly, Rachel O'Connor issued slaves overcoats ("good warm blanket coat[s]") for winter wear, and on other plantations, slaves received similar outer garments, or shorter coats and jackets such as roundabouts and "joseys." Included in the slaves' 1850 clothing allocations on William Minor's Southdown Plantation were a pair of woollen socks, a nightshirt and a pair of cotton drawers, while, in addition to their regular fall allocation, slaves on John Randolph's Nottoway Plantation got josies, woollen pants, jackets and socks at various times during the winter months. Winter headgear usually comprised felt or glazed hats, or woollen caps for the men, and woollen caps, or kerchiefs suitable to be tied turban-style, for the women. (See Appendix 4-h for contemporary prints depicting the working garb of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves.)<sup>59</sup>

Clothing allowances supplemental to the regular semi-annual distributions frequently favored certain groups of slaves on the plantation. Slaves in positions of authority, such as drivers and tradesmen, received extra and superior clothing. Moses Driver, for example, a slave driver on the Gay Estate, received "woolen pantaloons" in addition to the regular allowance given the other slaves on the plantation, while, in the previous year, of the 51 men supplied with winter

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Ceceil George, loc. cit.; Letter from Maunsell White, New Orleans, to Dr. Thos. E. Wilson, Louisville, 9 November 1848; Letter, White to James P. Bracewell, 10 August 1849, White Letter-book; Letter from Rachel O'Connor to David Weeks, 20 November 1833, Box 4, Folder 17, Weeks Papers; Ledger 1862-1865 (Volume 8), Randolph Papers; Diary 4--1850, Minor Papers.

clothing, 10 received "pantaloon only," 33 "coats only," 6 "pantaloon and coat," one a frock coat and one a roundabout.<sup>60</sup>

The care of sick slaves included supplying them with extra clothes, as shown by the run on flannel which caused a rise in its value in New Orleans during the cholera epidemic of 1832. A. T. Conrad wrote to his sister Mary Weeks, who herself owned a sugar plantation in St. Martin's Parish, that planters were providing their slaves with flannel, to be worn "next to the skin," and woollen socks in order to prevent infection. This had caused flannel to become a scarce commodity in the city.<sup>61</sup>

Pregnant women were another "special status" group that benefited from an extra clothing issue. Louisiana planters, like their Jamaican counterparts, rewarded fecund slave women. Rachel O'Connor, for instance, gave a calico dress to each slave woman on her estate who bore a child.<sup>62</sup>

Slave owners in Louisiana, of course, had a legal obligation to supply slaves with clothing. Codification of slave laws throughout the early nineteenth century aimed at ensuring the provision of "adequate" clothing for slaves. Contractual obligations for the hiring out or employment of slaves by parties other than the owner included stipulations about their clothing. A series of contracts from 1844-47

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<sup>60</sup> Memorandum Book 1840 (Volume 27); Estate Record Book 1831-1845 (Volume 8), Gay Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from A. T. Conrad, New Orleans to Mary Weeks, 29 October 1832, Box 4, Folder 14, Weeks Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Rachel O'Connor to A. T. Conrad, 12 April 1835, Box 6, Folder 22, Weeks Papers.

between John Randolph of Nottoway Estate and C. A. Thornton for the use of Thornton's slaves on Randolph's sugar plantation included specifications about clothing them. Similarly, a partnership contracted in 1847 between William F. Weeks, Alfred C. Weeks and Mary C. Moore "for the purpose of cultivating and carrying on a Sugar plantation on Grande Cote in the Parish of St. Mary" specified that, "The Slaves working hands furnished by the parties together with their children and such as may be old and infirm . . . shall be clothed, fed, and receive all necessary medical attendance, at the Expense of the partnership and shall [be] humanely treated." In 1857-59, John Moore, a St. Mary Parish sugar planter, hired two adult male slaves and a 26 year-old female slave, along with her two infant children, to William Cary for \$500.00 a year plus clothing, feeding, good care, payment for medical attention and the stipulation that they be treated "as a good master should and not . . . [put to] any work to jeopardize life or limb." Although there is no indication in the preceding contracts of what specifically constituted adequate clothing, one can infer that since the convention of a semi-annual distribution was so widely established throughout the Louisiana sugar region, it provided the standard of adequacy.<sup>63</sup>

Clothing slaves was not a heavy financial burden for planters. John Palfrey, who had a sugar plantation on the German Coast just west of New Orleans, calculated, in 1815, the cost of clothing a ten year-old slave girl for the previous 4½ years at \$22.50, an average of

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<sup>63</sup> Box 1, Folder 6, Randolph Papers; Box 14, Folder 40; Box 34, Folder 168, Weeks Papers.

\$5.00 a year. For adult slaves, of course, the cost would have been somewhat higher. As noted above, shoes cost from \$1.00 to \$1.25 per pair during the period under study, and boots around \$2.00 or a little more. John Randolph was buying men's jackets in 1860 at "\$3.50 less 10 pr. ct." each, and a couple of years previously had paid \$210.43 for "65 Suits of Kerseys [i.e. winter suits] for negro men," that is about \$3.25 per suit. Clothing bills for the Uncle Sam Plantation in the late 1850s itemized the cost of various articles of slave garb: kersey pants for men cost \$1.25 per pair, kersey coats \$2.50 each, while for children these articles were \$1.12½ and \$2.00 respectively. Lowell [cotton] pants cost \$1.00 a pair, and heavy "log cabin" pants cost \$1.50, while the price of shirts ranged from 60 cents for lowell twilled to 50 cents for flannel, and "Campechy" hats [straw hats from Mexico] cost \$2.00 per dozen. Presumably, the flannel shirts issued to slaves on Benjamin Tureaud's Houmas and Whitehall plantations in 1852 were superior to those of the slaves on Uncle Sam Estate, for they cost \$1.25 each.<sup>64</sup>

The cost of clothing slaves was considerably less if planters bought cloth and had it made into apparel on the plantation; and it would be even less expensive if the cloth itself was spun and woven on the estate. Maunsell White calculated that, in 1849, he was paying an average of 12½ cents per yard for cottonade, jean and lowell cloth,

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<sup>64</sup> Letter from John Palfrey to Chew and Relf, New Orleans, 16 October 1815, Box 1, Folder 5, Palfrey (William T. and Family) Papers, Archives, LSU; Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, Randolph Papers; Box 1, Uncle Sam Plantation Papers, Archives, LSU; Box 1, Folder 2, Tureaud Papers.

while six years later, John Randolph paid somewhat less than 10 cents a yard (550 yards for \$53.25) for "Cotton sheeting from the Penitentiary where he also bought 20 pounds of thread for \$5.00. In 1860, Lewis Stirling's Wakefield Plantation bought seven-eighths weight osnaburg at 11 cents a yard and four-fourths weight at 13 cents. The heavier kersey cloth used for winter clothes sold for 27 cents a yard in 1857, while 25 years earlier linsey-woolsey had cost 50 cents a yard and wool cloth 45 cents a yard. When these prices are equated with the annual yardage given slaves--summer issue about ten yards for a woman and six yards for a man, winter issue about twelve yards for a woman and nine yards for a man, with lesser amounts given to children, the expense of clothing slaves was a modest one.<sup>65</sup>

At least one planter, however, formulated a plan to decrease further her expenses in clothing slaves on her estate. Rachel O'Connor, who owned a plantation in the Bayou Sara sugar region north of Baton Rouge, was, in 1835, "buying negro crops [corn] at five bitts pr. barrel, out of which they [the slaves] buy their summer clothing for themselves." She did not mention those slaves who, for such reasons as age, infirmity, or inability, either did not grow crops or had a poor harvest. Those slaves, presumably, would either have received a supplemental allocation at the plantation's expense, have been

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Maunsell White to Charles H. Mason, 14 September 1849, White Letterbook; Journal 6, Plantation Book 1853-63, Randolph Papers; Box 9, Folder 58, Plantation Diary 2 October 1831-25 February 1833, Stirling Papers; Letter from Ally Meade to Mary Moore, 2 October 1857, Box 30, Folder 139, Weeks Papers.

cared for by other members of the slave community, or, possibly, have to make do with one set of clothing per year, spending the summer months sparsely clad in worn-out garments.<sup>66</sup>

On some large plantations, slave seamstresses worked year round sewing up clothing. Ex-slave Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled "winter clothes was made in summer an' summer clothes was made in winter . . . by old lady Betsy Adams . . . de seamstress." Sewing up slave clothing was, of course, not the only work done by seamstresses, for they were also often responsible for making clothing for the planter and his family, and for other domestic duties. In fact, Braxton Bragg, a Louisiana sugar planter and later a leading Confederate general, apparently did not use the skilled seamstress on his estate for making slave clothing. In a letter to his wife, Bragg mentioned that "Rose is a fine looking girl, 18 yrs, said to be a faithful trusty house girl and fair seamstress. Nancy also sews, and one of the field hands makes negro clothing." In 1861, Richard Pugh, a Lafourche Parish sugar planter, paid \$800.00 for a "Black Woman, Louise, aged about 34 yrs--a superior french Cook, Washer & Ironer, fluter & Seamstress." Louise's skills were probably applied to the cuisine and wardrobe of the Pugh family, while less accomplished bondswomen sewed the clothing for slaves on the plantation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Letter from Rachel O'Connor to Mary Weeks, 14 December 1835, Box 6, Folder 23, Weeks Papers.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Ross Hite, loc. cit.; Letter from Braxton Bragg to his wife, 10 February 1856, Braxton Bragg Papers, Archives, LSU; Folder 3, Pugh (Richard L.) Papers, Archives, LSU.



On the Weeks family's Grande Cote plantation through the mid-1850s six slaves worked to sew the men's summer clothing. In one year, for example, Charity, Phoebe and Mary made 19 sets of shirts and pants of the first size, Nancy, Silvia, Nelly and Charity made 34 sets of the second size, while Silvia also sewed 24 pairs of boy's pants. On the Grande Cote Estate, the slaves worked under the direction of the planter's wife. She provided the slaves with bolts of cloth and paper patterns for the various sizes of clothing. The slave seamstresses cut the cloth according to the patterns and quantities required, then stitched up the garments.<sup>68</sup>

On Andrew and Ellen McCollam's relatively small Ellendale sugar plantation, the number of slaves (about 25) did not warrant slave seamstresses working full-time making clothing. As on other estates of similar size, those slaves employed in sewing alternated this task with other routine plantation work. A series of entries in Ellen McCollam's plantation diary provides evidence of this:

- [5 August 1847] Took Cinthy in to make up the negro clothing
- [16 August 1847] Cinthy commenced sewing again. She left off last Monday to make brick.
- [13 September 1847] Cinthy and Chatty sewing.
- [2 October 1847] Cinthy sewed three days and a half

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<sup>68</sup> Notebook 1853-1857 (Volume 9), Weeks Hall Memorial Collection, Weeks (David and Family) Collection, Archives, LSU; Letter from William F. Weeks to John Moore, 5 August 1855, Box 26, Folder 112, Weeks Papers.



The fall issue of clothing, on which Cinthy and Chatty worked, was distributed on 17 October 1847. In the following two years, the one or two slave women delegated to sew slave clothing alternated between this work and field work. Witness, perhaps, to the inadequacy of the clothing distributed were the two cryptic entries in the diary--

[23 August 1848] Had 8 shirts stolen out of the wash

[10 September 1849] I had a pair of sheets table cloth stolen out of the garden

No mention is made of their recovery, or of a culprit being apprehended.<sup>69</sup>

The care of their clothing, after its distribution, was the slaves' responsibility. In this, as elsewhere, there was no uniformity of experience. William Howard Russell observed slaves with their "stockings worn away" and a Franklin Planter's Banner correspondent remarked on slaves whose clothing was "thick with filth exuded from their skins." On Lewis Stirling's plantation there was evidence of greater concern for hygiene. The 1851 plantation journal made note of tasks performed by the slave work force, and, for example, on Tuesday, 21 October 1851, while "Men & boys were employed putting dirt Round the Matlas of Seed Cane . . . the Women and Girls [were] washing up their Clothes." Three ex-slaves, Catherine Cornelius, Martha Stuart and Louise Downs, all recalled that the slaves were responsible for washing their own clothes. Martha Stuart remembered that this was done at "a big wash place at de bayou, a great big spring," and she

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<sup>69</sup> Diary and Plantation Record of Ellen McCollam, II, McCollam Papers.

also mentioned that slaves "press[ed] 'em dey ownself." The clothes which the slaves pressed, however, were probably their own Sunday garments.<sup>70</sup>

Jamaican slaves, similarly, were responsible for the care of their clothing. J. B. Moreton indicated that clothes-washing was part of an intrafamily division of labor for slaves living as husband and wife:

Those who live in pairs together, as man and wife, are mutual help-mates to each other: the men build the huts and assist to work their grounds; the women prog for food, boil pots at noon and night, louse their heads, extract chiggers from their toes, and wash their frocks and trowsers.

William Beckford observed that Jamaican slaves did their washing at river banks, where they also performed their personal toilet, while Moreton provided a description of the washing techniques of the "black women [who] take of beating and rubbing the clothes with stones and stumps of grass to save the expence of soap." This process, he claimed, wore clothes out "amazing fast."<sup>71</sup>

### iii

The description of slaves' clothing embraces two discrete phenomena: work clothes the planters provided, and "best" clothes the

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<sup>70</sup> Russell, My Diary, 380; Planter's Banner, XIV (2 August 1849), 1; Cotton Record Book 1833-38, 1851-59 (H-13, Volume 14), Stirling Papers; Interview with Catherine Cornelius, loc. cit.; Interview with Martha Stuart, loc. cit.; Interviewee--Louise Downs: Interviewer--Octave Lilly, Jr.: Date--1938: Dillard Project, Archives, UNO.

<sup>71</sup> J. B. Moreton, West India Customs and Manners (London, 1793), 98, 150; Beckford, A Descriptive Account, 230.

slaves furnished for themselves. Apparel issued by the planter often favored those slaves at the top of the planter-structured hierarchy on the estate--drivers, tradesmen and other head people--as well as such "special status" groups as pregnant and nursing women and the sick. Slaves most able to earn money could more readily provide themselves with clothing to be worn when not at work on the plantation.

An analysis of the clothing of slaves on sugar plantations in Jamaica and Louisiana is not readily amenable to broad generalizations. The diversity of slaves' apparel overshadows any discernible patterns of regularity.

Little consensus existed among planters as to what clothing they considered necessary to supply slaves, nor did they conform to legal stipulations on the subject. Plantation records show that even on a single estate some slaves received adequate apparel while others did not. At the level of the plantation society, the hundreds of thousands of people enslaved in the two plantation systems experienced wide disparities in clothing allocations. The evil of this distribution pattern involved not only the inequities but also that those slaves who suffered most were frequently those least able to withstand deprivation; particularly the elderly, the young and the weak.

On the other hand, the ways in which slaves accumulated private wardrobes testify to the vitality of the slave community. Slaves eagerly sought to provide themselves with clothing other than their plantation work garb. When slaves spent money which they earned, clothing ranks among the staple items, along with foodstuffs, tobacco and alcohol,

that they invariably purchased. Lack of income meant that some slaves could spend little on clothing themselves and, consequently, could only acquire the humblest of habiliments, while other slaves wore nothing other than what the plantation supplied. Even slaves who garnered minimal earnings, however, customarily purchased clothing.

Slaves appear to have used clothing formally to distinguish between their lives as enslaved laborers and the time over which they had greater control--days off, holidays, sundown to sunup. When working for the planter, slaves never wore the clothes they had bought for themselves, and, conversely, slaves divested themselves of planter-supplied garb, if they could afford to, in favor of their own clothes when their time was their own.

The emphasis slaves gave to clothing offers the historian important insights into the structure of slave communities on sugar plantations in Jamaica and Louisiana. The direction of their expenditures permits an understanding of how slaves defined themselves, and what they construed as self-improvement. For all sugar plantation slaves, money was scarce and earning it difficult, and yet, what slaves did procure they consistently spent on the same priority items. Further the very existence of these purchasing practices testifies to the vigor of the slave communities and the vitality of their autonomous economic activities.

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[illegible]

## Appendix 4-a (continued)

		Osnaburg (yds.)	Baize (yds.)	Thread (skeins)	Needles	Hat
Superannuated						
9 men & 11 women	received	6	4	4	4	1
Children unfit to work						
19	received	3	1½	2	-	1
24	received	3	1½	2	-	-
Stockkeepers						
5 men	received	8	4	4	4	1
2 men	received	6	3½	4	4	1
Others (status unknown)						
4 men	received	8	4	4	4	1
1 man	received	4	2½	4	4	1
1 woman	received	4	2½	4	4	1

Source: Journal of Somerset Plantation, Hinton East, Proprietor, 1782-1796, MS 229, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica.

## Appendix 4-b

Clothing Issued Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny,  
on 6 June 1799

		Osnaburg (yds.)	Blanketting (yds.)	Hats	Caps
2 men	received	10	3½	1	
3 men	received	10	3	1	
22 men	received	6	3	1	
26 men	received	6	3		1
10 boys	received	3	2		
1 boy	received	3	2½		1
(also listed, "1 boy runaway," and "1 infant boy." No clothing ration for either.)					
36 women	received	6	2½		1
6 women	received	6			1
8 girls	received	6			1
3 female children	received	3			

Source: List of Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny, 6 June 1799,  
Gifts and Deposits, 7/7-1, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.



## Appendix 4-c

## Clothing Issued Slaves on Worthy Park Estate, 1793

	Number	Osnaburg (yds.)	Baize (yds.)	Check (yds.)	Hats	Caps	Coats	Blankets
Drivers & Driveresses	7	10-12	3	3	1	-	1	-
Head Housekeepers	2	10	3	-	1	-	1	-
Head Cooper	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Potter	1	7	2½	3	1	-	-	-
Second Boilermen	1	7	2½	3	1	-	-	-
Head Mason	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Sawyer	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Carpenter	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Blacksmith	1	10	3	3	1	-	1	-
Head Cattleman	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Muleman	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Home Wainsman	1	7	2½	3	1	-	-	-
Head Road Wainsman	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Head Watchman	1	10	3	3	1	-	-	-
Waiting Boys	2	7	2½	3	1	-	-	-
Groom	1	7	3	3	1	1	-	-
Seamstresses	2	10	3	-	1	1	-	-
Washerwomen	2	10	3	-	1	1	-	-
Cook	1	10	3	-	1	1	-	-

## Appendix 4-c (continued)

	Number	Osnaburg (yds.)	Baize (yds.)	Check (yds.)	Hats	Caps	Coats	Blankets
Midwife	1	7	3	-	1	1	-	-
Hothouse Nurses	2	7	3	-	1	1	-	-
Black Doctor	1	12	3	3	1	1	-	-
Coopers	6	10	3	3	1	1	-	-
Boilers	9	7	3	3	1	1	-	-
Distillers	4	7	3	3	1	1	-	-
Potters	2	7	3	3	1	1	-	-
Sugar Guards	2	10	3	3	1	1	-	-
Carpenters	9	7-10	3	3	1	1	-	-
Sawyers	3	10	3	3	1	1	-	-
Masons	2	10	3	3	1	1	-	-
Under Blacksmith	1	7	3	3	1	1	-	-
Home Wainsmen	6	7	2½	3	1	1	-	-
Road Wainsmen	7	10	3	3	1	1	-	-
Mulemen	14	7	2½	3	1	1	-	-
Hog Tenders	3	7	2½	3	1	1	-	-
Poultry Tenders	2	7	2½	3	1	1	-	-
New Negro Tenders	3	7	2½	3	1	1	-	-
Cattlemen and boys	8	5-10	2-3	3	1	1	-	-
Ratcatchers	2	7	2½	3	1	1	-	-

## Appendix 4-c (continued)

	Number	Osnaburg (yds.)	Baize (yds.)	Check (yds.)	Hats	Caps	Coats	Blankets
Great or First Gang	147	7	2½	-	1	1	-	-
Second Gang	67	7	2½	-	1	1	-	-
Third Gang	68	5-6	2	-	1	1	-	-
Grass or Weeding Gang	21	3-5	2	-	1	1	-	-
Vagabond Gang	13	5-7	2½	-	1	1	-	-
Pen Negroes	48	7	-	-	1	1	-	-
Watchmen	25	7	3	-	1	1	-	-
Grass Gatherers	7	7	2½	-	1	1	-	-
Hopeless Invalids	18	5-7	2½	-	-	1	1	1
Child Watchers	3	5	2	-	1	1	-	-
Pad Menders	2	5	2	-	1	1	-	-
Superannuated	2	2½	2	-	-	-	-	-
Infants	37	2-4	1-2½	-	-	-	-	-
Women with 6 children	3	10	3	-	1	1	-	-

Source: Michael Craton, Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 176-9.

## Appendix 4-d

Clothing Issued Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny,  
2 February 1798

Name of Slave	Status	Osnaburg (yds.)	Blue Baize (yds.)	Blanketing (yds.)	Osnaburg Frocks	Blue Frocks	Blanket Frocks	Osnaburg Shifts	Osnaburg Coats	Osnaburg Trousers	Blue or Blanket Trousers	Hats	Caps	Needles
Spize + "A Jacket & Pantaloons"	driver	12										1		
Lisbon	able field	7	2½									1		
Dago	-do-				1	1							1	
Cuffee	-do-	7	2½									1		
James	-do-				1								1	
Bob	-do-	6	2½										1	
Bob cor	-do-	6										1	1	
Random	-do-	7											1	
Jasper	-do-	7	2½									1		
Wilks	-do-	7	2½										1	
Hope	-do-	7												
Phillip	-do-					1						1	1	
George	-do-				1									
Charles	-do-				1	1				1			1	

## Appendix 4-d (continued)

[illegible]

## Appendix 4-d (continued)

[illegible]

## Appendix 4-d (continued)

Name of Slave	Status	Osnaburg (yds.)	Blue Baize (yds.)	Blanketing (yds.)	Osnaburg Frocks	Blue Frocks	Blanket Frocks	Osnaburg Shifts	Osnaburg Coats	Osnaburg Trousers	Blue or Blanket Trousers	Hats	Caps	Needles
Julinna	able women	7	4				1						1	
Betty	-do-	7	4				1						1	
Abigail	-do-	7	4				1							6
Ancilla	-do-			4				1	1					
Minerva	-do-	7	4				1					1		6
Fanny (washer)	-do-	7	4									1		6
Nancey (cook)	-do-	7	4									1		6
Hannah	-do-	7	4				1							6
Rachael (yaws)	-do-							1	1				1	5
Eve (sores)	-do-	7	4										1	5
Charity	-do-	5						1	1				1	
Bessy (doctress)	-do-	7	4										1	6
Jeany	weak women						1	1	1				1	5
Flora	-do-							1	1					
Patience	-do-						1	1	1				1	



## Appendix 4-d (continued)

Name of Slave	Status	Osnaburg (yds.)	Blue Baize (yds.)	Blanketing (yds.)	Osnaburg Frocks	Blue Frocks	Blanket Frocks	Osnaburg Shifts	Osnaburg Coats	Osnaburg Trousers	Blue or Blanket Trousers	Hats	Caps	Needles
Lettuce	weak women							1	1				1	
Hellena	-do-	7	4				1						1	5
Amy	-do-							1	1				1	5
Cleony	-do-	7	3½										1	5
Mumboe	-do-	7	3½										1	5
Princess	-do-							1	1					
Clarissa	Girls							1	1					
Frances	-do-							1	1					
Clarissa cor	-do-							1	1					
Pussey	-do-							1	1					
Lavina	Children													
Eve	-do-							1						

Source: Gifts and Deposits, 7/56-1, Harmony Hall Papers, Jamaica Archives,  
Spanish Town, Jamaica.

## Appendix 4-e

## Working Clothes of Slaves on Sugar Plantations in the British West Indies

Print 1 shows slaves planting canes. The women are shown wearing skirts, chemises and turbans, and the men shirts, pants and caps or hats. The two drivers who are standing supervising the work are wearing stylishly-cut coats as part of their dress.

Print 2 shows sugar cane being fed into a windmill. The women, again, are wearing full-length skirts, half- to three-quarter-length tops and turbans. The man unloading canes from the cart at the right-hand side of the picture is dressed in pants, a shirt or short jacket of a different color and what appears to be a woollen cap. The driver (left-center foreground between the mill and the white man--probably an overseer--who is at the extreme left foreground) again is dressed in a manner superior to the field slaves. His clothing consists of a glazed hat, a shirt, jacket and pants: he also appears to be wearing shoes.

Print 3 shows slaves, in their usual working garb, cutting and loading sugar cane. In this print, the driver (right foreground, talking with the white man on horseback) has an extremely elaborate costume--nattily-cut jacket and trousers, a ruffled neckerchief and, in his hand, a tall glazed hat.

## Appendix 4-e (continued)

Print 4 depicts field hands performing the arduous work of cane-holeing, again wearing what appears to be their full annual issue of work clothes. All the men in the picture are dressed in pants, a shirt and either a woollen cap or a hat. Their garb differs markedly from that of the driver (standing, left-center foreground): he has a cut-away jacket, and high collar and neckerchief, trousers and a hat.

Note: Although these prints depict slaves at work on sugar plantations in Antigua, the patterns of dress closely resemble those of Jamaican slaves.

Source: William Clark, Ten Views in the Island of Antigua (London, 1823).

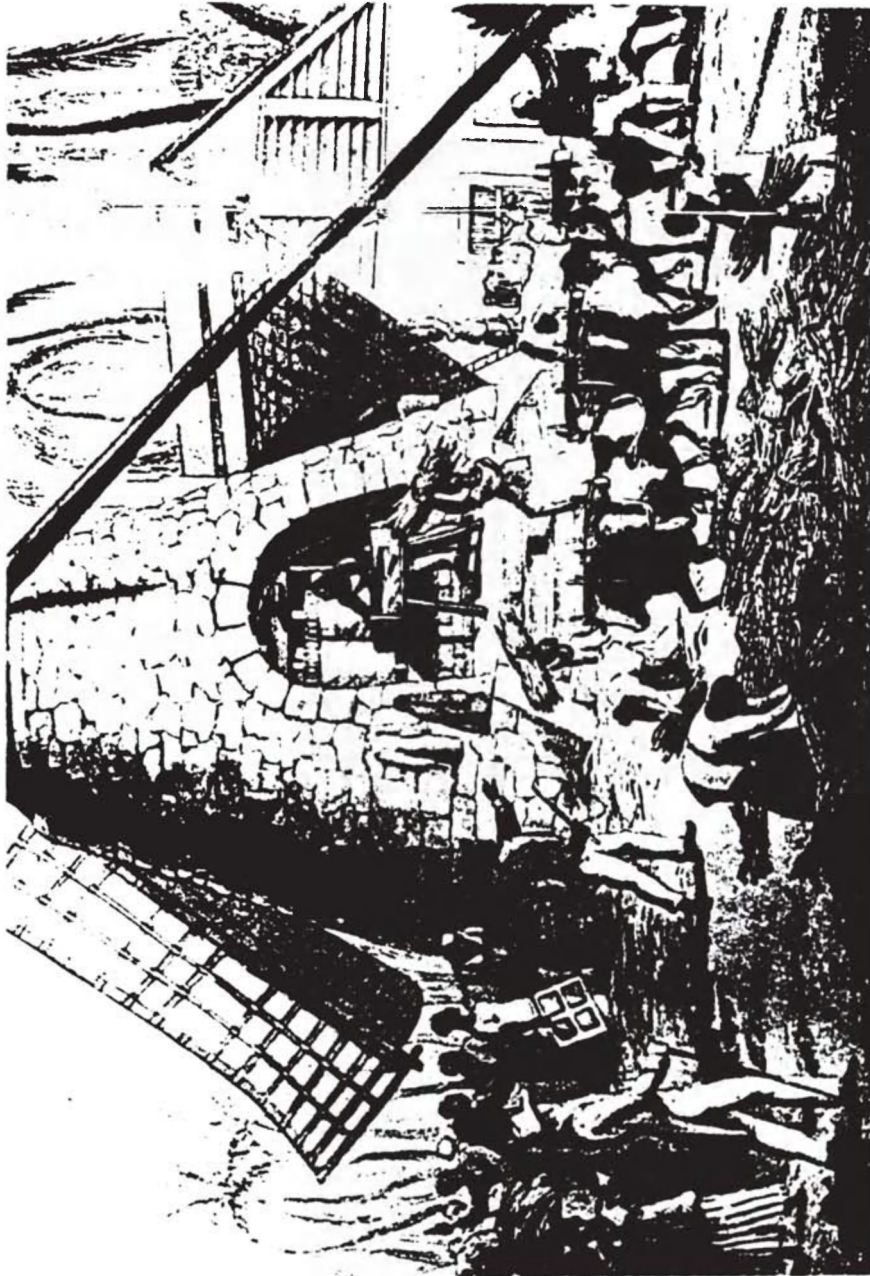
Appendix 4-e (continued)

Print 1



Appendix 4-e (continued)

Print 2





Appendix 4-e (continued)

Print 3



Appendix 4-e (continued)

Print 4





## Appendix 4-f

## Best Clothing of Sugar Plantation Slaves in the British West Indies

Print 1. "A Negro Festival drawn from Nature in the Island of St. Vincent," shows the elaborate dress worn by both male and female slaves. The clothing, and the ornate turban of the woman dancing (left-center), are markedly different from the working garb portrayed in Appendix 4-e.

Print 2. The contrast between working garb and Sunday best is shown in this illustration of a Jamaican women ca. 1840.

Print 3. Slaves, elaborately attired (and women bejewelled), celebrating a Christmas Junkanoo or John Canoe festival.

Print 4. This scene of an Antiguan mission station in the mid-1840s, shows men and women in best clothing. The women are all wearing beads.

Print 5. Slave dance in Dominica (ca. 1810). The slaves are all elaborately attired, although shoeless. Note again the ornate turbans, one topped by a broad-brimmed hat, and jewels worn by the women.

Source: Print 1; reprinted in Terence Brady and Evan Jones, The Fight Against Slavery (New York, 1975), 121; Print 2: James M. Phillipo, Jamaica: Its Past and Present State (London, 1843), 236; Print 3:

## Appendix 4-f (continued)

reprinted in Michael Craton, Searching for the Invisible Man (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 24; Print 4: reprinted in Cyril Hamshere, The British in the Caribbean (London, 1972), 128-9; Print 5: "A Negroes' Dance in the Island of Dominica," by Brunias, published by Thomas Palser, London, ca. 1810, reprinted in J. H. Parry and Philip Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies (London, 1971), 168-9.

## Appendix 4-f (continued)

Print 1



Appendix 4-f (continued)

Print 2





## Appendix 4-f (continued)

Print 3



## Appendix 4-f (continued)

Print 4



Appendix 4-f (continued)

Print 5





## Appendix 4-g

## Best Clothes of Sugar Plantation Slaves in Louisiana

This print, entitled "Winter Holydays in the Southern States. Plantation Frolic on Christmas Eve," accompanies an article entitled "Christmas in the South" written by T. B. Thorpe for Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. The print purportedly shows "Sandy Bill" and "Aunt Patsy," slaves on the estate of "a wealthy planter of Louisiana," dancing to the accompaniment of banjo and fiddle. Among the items of "best" clothing discernible in the print are the full, collared blouses, dresses, shawls, kerchiefs and "tignons"\* of the women, and the coats, short jackets, high-collared shirts and neckerchiefs of the men.

\* The "tignons" slave women wore were Madras handkerchiefs bound turban-like around the head. This fashion reportedly came to Louisiana from the French sugar islands of Martinique and St. Domingue, and thus links the clothing of Louisiana sugar slaves with their West Indian counterparts. Various Jamaican sources, as noted earlier in this chapter, referred to the Madras handkerchiefs or "toques" worn by female slaves there. Slave women in the two plantation societies, therefore, commonly wore similar headgear, derived from an African clothing heritage.

Source: T. B. Thorpe, "Christmas in the South," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 26 December 1857, p. 62.



## Appendix 4-c (continued)



## Appendix 4-h

## Working Clothes of Sugar Plantation Slaves in Louisiana

Prints 1 to 6 accompany an article entitled "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," written by T. B. Thorpe for Harper's New Monthly Magazine. They depict the working garb of sugar plantation slaves: men's jackets, shirts, trousers, woollen caps and wide-brimmed straw hats; women's full skirts, chemises and turbans. Prints 7 and 8, which show Louisiana sugar plantation slaves harvesting cane and transporting it to the sugar mill, are details from a sketch by Alfred R. Waud entitled "The Sugar Harvest in Louisiana." This sketch, in which slaves' work clothes are clearly depicted, is housed in the Historic New Orleans Collection and is reproduced on the cover of R. J. Le Gardeur, Jr., et al., Green Fields: Two Hundred Years of Louisiana Sugar (Lafayette, La., 1980).

Source: T. B. Thorpe, "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 7 (Nov. 1853), 746-67; R. J. Le Gardeur, Jr., et al., Green Fields: Two Hundred Years of Louisiana Sugar (Lafayette, La., 1980).

## Appendix 4-1 (continued)

Print 1

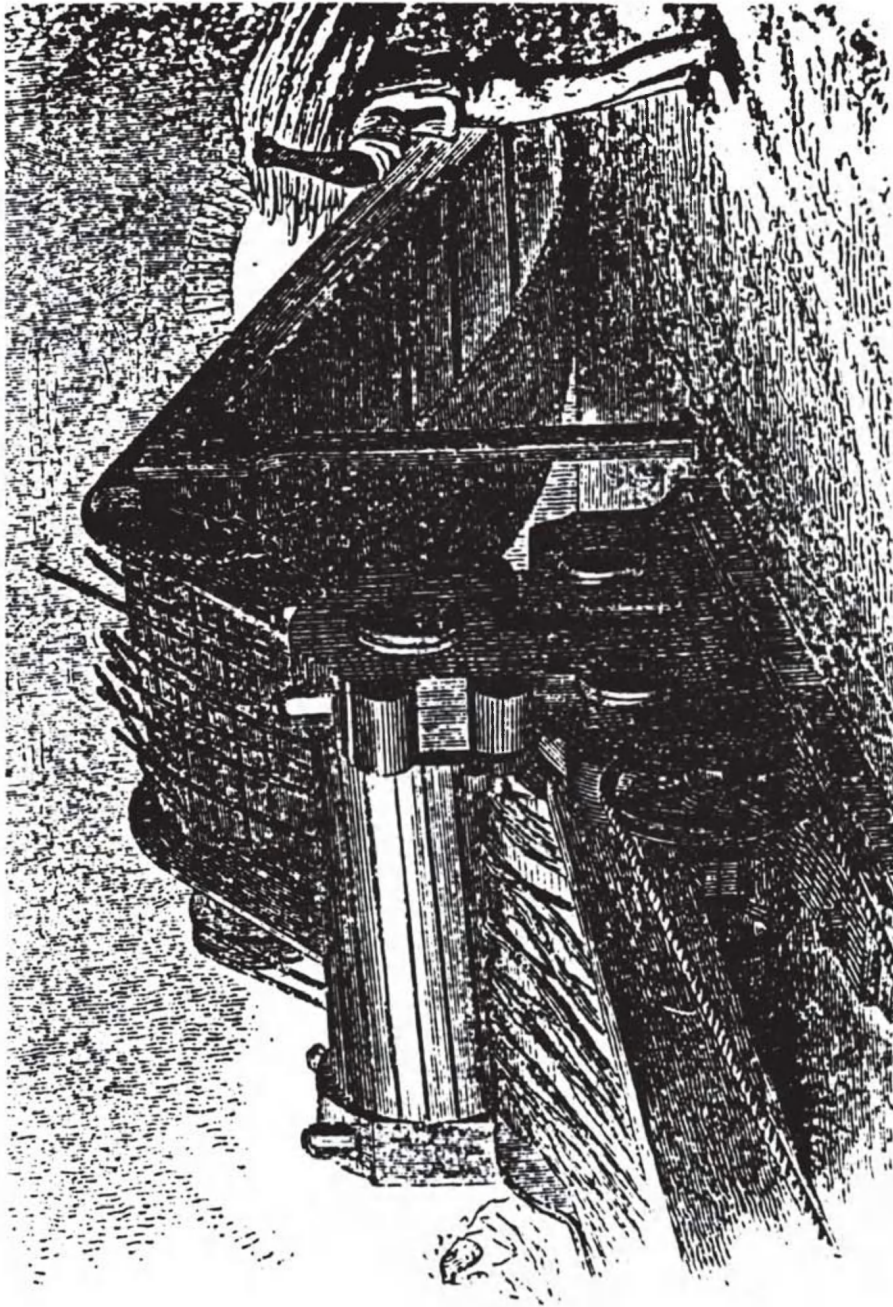


GATHERING THE CANE.



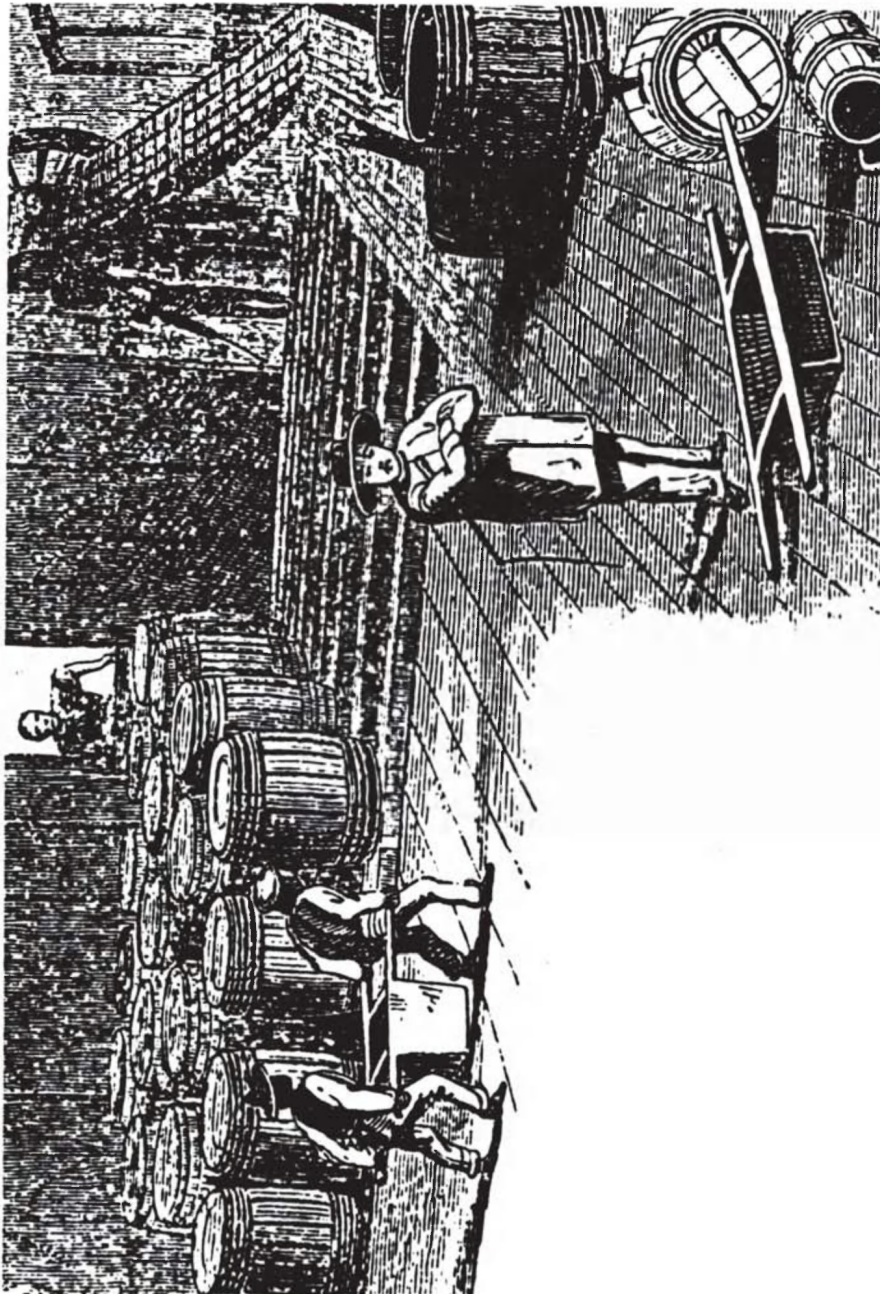
## Appendix 4-f (continued)

Print 2



## Appendix 4-h (continued)

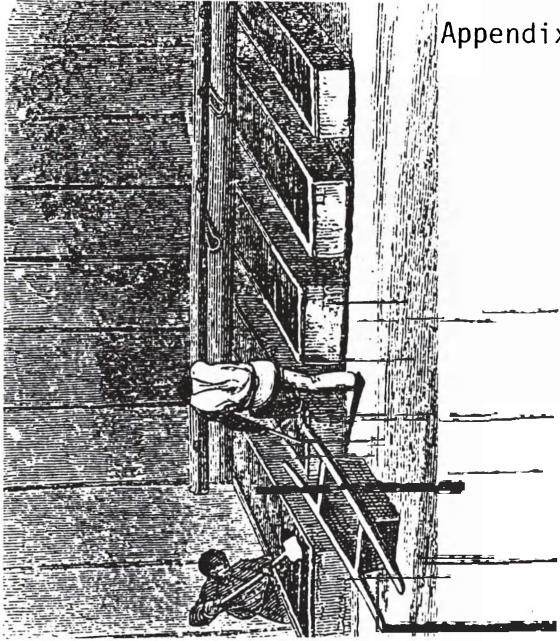
Print 3





## Appendix 4- (continued)

Print



## Appendix 4-h (continued)

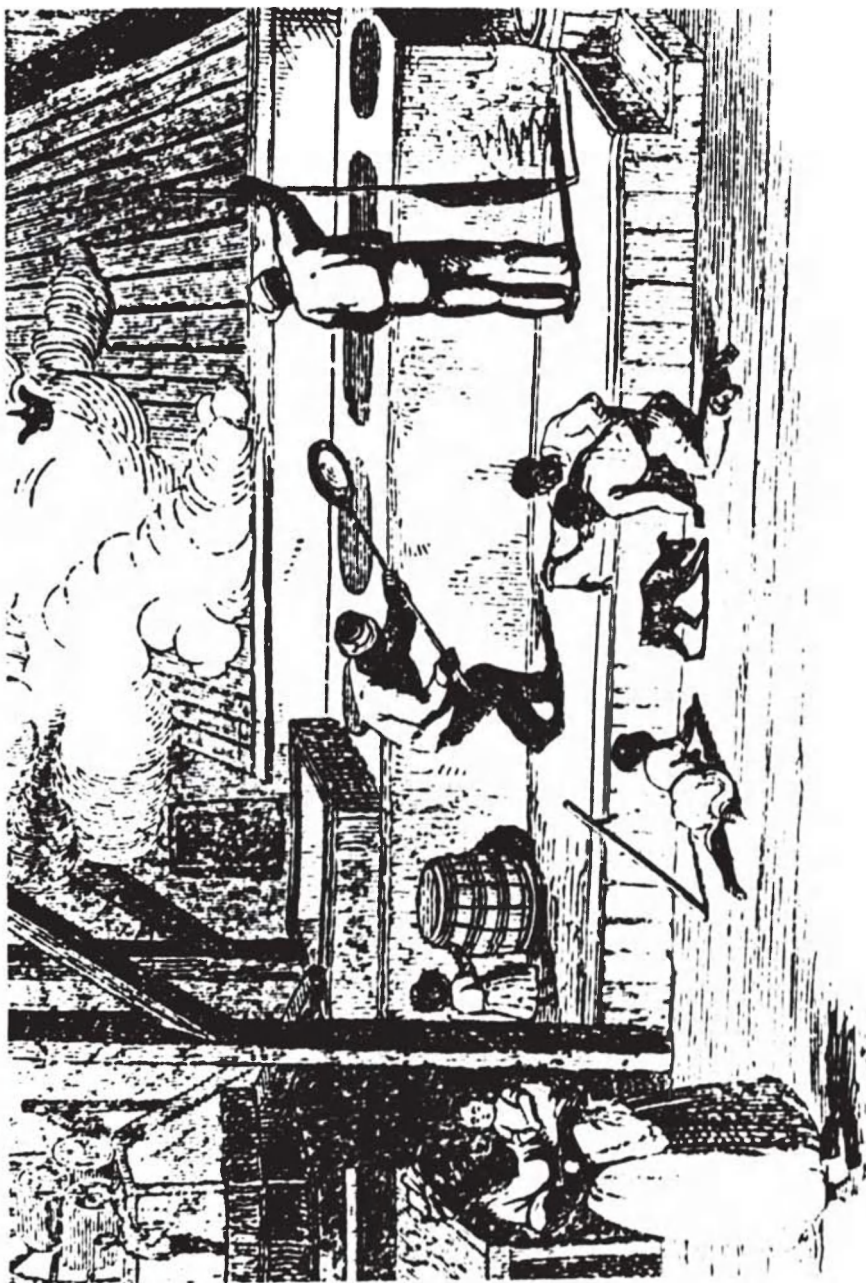
Print 5





## Appendix 4-h (continued)

Print 6



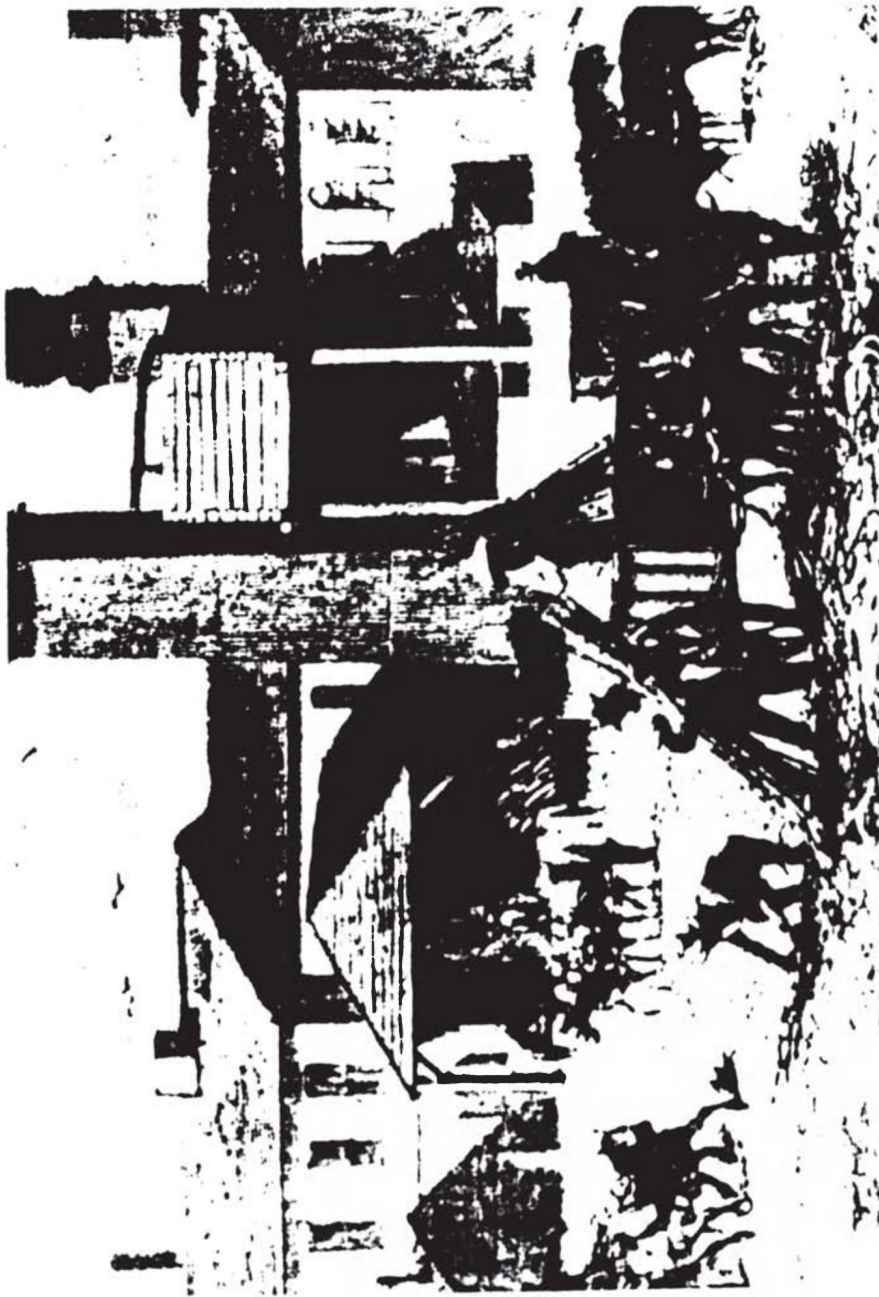
## Appendix 4-h (continued)

Print 7



## Appendix 4-h (continued)

Print 8



## Conclusion



The historiography of slavery has often tended to obscure the complexity of slaves' lives by focusing too heavily on their role as plantation laborers toiling, sunup to sundown, for the planter. Despite the oppressiveness of the institution of slavery, people enslaved within it were not reduced to mere respondents who performed at the behest of the planter and reacted to stimuli controlled by him. Defining slaves solely in terms of planter, crop and plantation labor conceals the fullness of their lives, the variety of their roles within their families and their communities. The independence and creativity of slaves was manifest in their economic activities: an analysis of the internal economy, therefore, permits the historian a rare and important insight into the private lives of a people who have too often been defined in terms of how they acted in the presence of their oppressors.

The private economic activities of slaves have not been subject to extensive scholarly analysis. The presence of the internal economy, however, has long been acknowledged. Primary documents, both manuscript and printed, abound with salient information on the topic, while the historiography of slavery contains frequent allusions to this dimension of slave life.

Although the internal economy has received more attention from recent scholars, even the earlier studies of slavery referred to it. In American Negro Slavery, Ulrich Phillips detailed "the assignment of gardens and patches to such slaves as wanted to cultivate them at leisure times," pointing out that slaves also had "the privilege of marketing their produce and poultry 'at suitable leisure times.'" V. Alton Moody's pioneering study, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, chronicled

the work slaves did for themselves and the manner in which they disposed of their earnings, while J. Carlyle Sitterson, in his analysis of the cane sugar industry in the southern United States, mentioned that planters encouraged "slaves to cultivate crops of their own and to raise chickens for sale . . . as a means of earning their spending money."<sup>1</sup>

While the scholarship of Phillips and others correctly noted the presence of an internal economy, the manner in which they explained it fails to do justice to the slave community. In conformity with his overall view of the institution of slavery, Phillips interpreted the slaves' economic activities as a manifestation of planter policy. The internal economy, thus, was a component of an incentive system designed both to extract more work from slaves and to reconcile them to their status in bondage. In his scenario, Phillips viewed slaves solely as respondents to planter stimuli.

Kenneth Stampp, in The Peculiar Institution, echoed this perspective. He subsumed his analysis of slaves' internal economies under the heading of "rewards and incentives." Stampp failed adequately to view this aspect of slave life from the perspective of the slaves. Rather than consider the internal economies as phenomena which slaves, at considerable sacrifice to themselves, were actively involved in establishing and developing, Stampp reiterated Phillips by explaining

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (New York, 1918), 268; V. Alton Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations (New Orleans, 1924), 64-71; J. Carlyle Sitterson, Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South (Lexington, 1953), 98.

the economies as carrots dangled by planters so that they could better manipulate the slaves.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly planters accrued benefits from the economic activities of slaves on their plantations. Slaves' money-making ventures, for example, provided planters with cheap and convenient supplies of a variety of goods and services. Nonetheless, it is not adequate to view the internal economy solely from the planters' perspective as a scheme to manipulate the slave labor force.

Recent scholarship on slavery emphasizing the perspective of slaves and exploring the vitality and diversity of slave family and community life has prompted reappraisal of the internal economy. The work of such scholars as John Blassingame and George Rawick has made it apparent that plantation slaves were neither powerless nor passive respondents. Blassingame claimed that "the relationship between slave and master was one continual tug of war." The analogy of a "tug of war" implies that both protagonists had strengths and were engaged in a competitive struggle. Slaves relied on such strengths as resistance while the planters often resorted to coercive power and vicious punishments. Goals sought by planters included the presence on their estates of a quiescent, productive labor force, while slaves used their strengths to improve conditions of work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York, 1956), 164.

<sup>3</sup> John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York, 1979), 317; George P. Rawick, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, vol. 1: From Sundown To Sunup: The Making of the Black Community (Westport, Conn., 1972).



Slaves, however, were not only concerned with effecting change in their lot as praedial laborers; they also secured influence over their private lives. Despite the oppression and tyranny of the institution of slavery, slaves achieved control over various facets of their family and community lives. Central to such developments was the dominion slaves had over the hours when they did no work for the plantation, over territory in the quarters and grounds on which they dwelt and raised crops and livestock, and over the accumulation and disposal of personal goods and earnings.

Plantation slaves invariably had some discretionary time. The amount of time off varied, depending on such factors as crop and season, and, indeed, often was insufficient to permit the slaves to recuperate from the labors they had just performed. Nevertheless in both Jamaica and Louisiana plantation slaves had periods of free time which they could use to their own benefit. In his study From Sundown To Sunup: The Making of the Black Community, George Rawick stressed the importance of this discretionary time, which slaves used "to take care of their own chores." The free time, Rawick claimed, "helped create the slave community by giving slaves time to pay attention to and develop their own lives and needs, even though it often demanded the utmost ingenuity to do so."<sup>4</sup>

Private economic activities comprised an important element in the community and family life developed by slaves in their time off from plantation labor. The recent historiography of slavery provides

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<sup>4</sup> Rawick, Sundown To Sunup, 70.

three examples which show the importance of the internal economy to the world the slaves made. Despite the disparities of time, place, crop and labor regime, the findings of Neville Hall, Ira Berlin and Nigel Bolland display remarkable consistency. In his analysis of "Slaves Use of their 'Free' Time in the Danish Virgin Islands in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century," Hall asserted that, at the weekly Sunday market in Christianstead, St. Croix, "the available market produce were, overwhelmingly, the result of the slaves' creative initiative in the use of their 'free' time, particularly in the cultivation of their provision grounds."<sup>5</sup>

Ira Berlin's recent essay on the evolution of Afro-American society included reference to slaves on cattle pens in the Carolina and Georgia lowcountry in the early eighteenth century securing "time for their own use." Furthermore, Berlin claimed that:

the insistence of many hard-pressed frontier slaveowners that their slaves raise their own provisions legitimated this autonomy. By law, slaves had Sunday to themselves. Time allowed for gardening, hunting, and fishing both affirmed slave independence and supplemented the slave diet. It also enabled some industrious blacks to produce a small surplus and to participate in the colony's internal economy, establishing an important precedent for black life in the lowcountry.<sup>6</sup>

Slaves thus developed their private economies when the Georgia and Carolina lowcountry was an underdeveloped frontier region. As

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<sup>5</sup> Neville Hall, "Slaves Use of their 'Free' Time in the Danish Virgin Islands in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century," Journal of Caribbean History, 13 (1980), 29; Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society in British Mainland North America," American Historical Review, 85 (1980), 44-78; Nigel Bolland, "Slavery in Belize," BISRA Occasional Publication, 7 (1979), 3-36.

<sup>6</sup> Berlin, "Time, Space," 57.

Berlin pointed out, however, "blacks kept these prerogatives with the development of the [rice] plantation system." Indeed, the growth of townships and the tendency of plantations to staple monoculture "enlarged the market for slave-grown produce." Whereas some rice plantation slaves took their goods to market, in other cases, "planters traded directly with their bondsmen, bartering manufactured goods for slave produce." Although "planters found benefits in slave participation in the lowcountry's internal economy," Berlin pointed out that "the small profits gained by bartering with their bondsmen only strengthened the slaves' customary right to their garden and barnyard fowl."<sup>7</sup>

The development of an independent economy continued until the abolition of slavery. "By the Civil War," Berlin claimed, "lowland slaves controlled considerable personal property--flocks of ducks, pigs, milch cows, and occasionally horses--often the product of stock that had been in their families for generations."<sup>8</sup>

Berlin echoed Rawick in stressing the importance of the use of slaves' free time in helping "create the slave community." "Participation in the lowcountry's internal economy," Berlin noted, "provided slaves with a large measure of control over their lives. The autonomy generated by truck gardening and the task system provided the material basis for lowland black culture."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rawick, Sundown To Sunup, 70; Berlin, "Time, Space," 66.

Similarly, Nigel Bolland's study of slavery on logwood estates in British Honduras showed "that the slaves maintained a degree of control over their family and community life." This control enabled slaves to develop their own economic system. A 1783 description of Honduran slave life, cited by Bolland, indicated that the slaves on logwood estates were "ever accustomed to make Plantation as they term it, by which means they support their wives and children, raise a little Stock and so furnish themselves with necessaries." Although slaves consumed some of what they raised, they also "participated in a rudimentary marketing system whereby some of their produce was taken into the town of Belize for sale."<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the earlier analyses of slaves' economic activities, the works of Berlin, Bolland and Hall emphasized the active, creative participation of slaves in the formation and operation of the internal economy. Lowcountry rice plantation slaves had "prerogatives" and "rights" concerning their private economies which gave them both "autonomy" and "control over their lives," while "control over their family and community life" enabled slaves on logwood estates in British Honduras to develop a "marketing system" that involved transporting and selling goods in the colony's townships. Similarly, the internal economy of sugar plantation slaves in the Danish Virgin Islands emerged from "the slaves' creative initiative in the use of their 'free' time."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bolland, "Slavery in Belize," 4, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Berlin, "Time, Space," 57, 65-6; Bolland, "Slavery in Belize," 4, 11; Hall, "Slaves Use of 'Free' Time," 29.

The diversity and ubiquity of the economic activities of slaves in Jamaica and Louisiana testifies to the "creative initiative" of the slave communities. The lot of slaves in these sugar-producing regions encompassed more than the relentless cycle of work, rest from work, and work again. Despite such limitations imposed on slaves by the plantation regime as excessive labor, poor diet, clothing and housing, cruel punishments and inadequate medical treatment, slaves were yet able to participate in, and to a large extent determine the form of, not only the internal economies, but also a variety of other family and community institutions.

Although involvement in these private economies afforded slaves benefits and rewards, participants had to make extraordinary efforts and sacrifices. None of the money they earned came easily, all of the work they performed in its pursuit required hard physical effort, which, of course, came in addition to the gruelling plantation labor they had to do. Slaves, however, made this effort, and assiduously protected their rights both to do so, and to benefit from the fruits of their labor.

Analysis of the internal economies shows that the profits accrued by individual slaves varied widely. The amount of money a slave earned could fluctuate considerably from week to week and year to year, while there were often sizable disparities between the earnings of slaves throughout the sugar regions and even on a single plantation. While some slaves made next to nothing, others were more successful in earning cash.

The significance of private economic endeavors to slave life and the slave community, however, does not rest solely with the quantities of money accumulated. The implications of the presence of autonomous economic activity are, ultimately, of greater importance than its volume.

Participation in the internal economy prompted slave enterprise not subservience. Whereas plantation labor followed the will and direction of the planters, slaves' economic activities entailed independent decision-making and choices. Notwithstanding their status in society as chattels, and on the plantation as bonded laborers, the operation of the internal economy afforded slaves extensive autonomy and independence. In the prosecution of their money-making ventures, slaves made planting, harvesting and marketing decisions, chose how to spend the earnings they had accumulated, assessed how best to apportion their free time and weighed the advisability of this or that theft. Slaves conducted their economy essentially beyond the control of planters and its operation involved them in a way of life patently at odds with their ascribed position in slave society.

In his essay "On the Totality of Institutions," Samuel Wallace noted that "all institutions of a society . . . have some power over the individual." Institutions, of course, vary in their control over individuals; the extent to which individuals have autonomy and independence of action is predicated on the power that the institution within which they are operating has over them.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel E. Wallace, "On the Totality of Institutions," in Total Institutions, ed. Samuel E. Wallace, (Chicago, 1971), 1.



In slave societies, the "peculiar institution" of slavery exerted extensive control over slaves. Black slavery in the Americas, however, did not exercise total control over the Africans and Afro-Americans confined within it: it was not a "total institution." Despite the de jure definition of chattel slavery which presumed the total subservience of the slaves to the will of the masters, and notwithstanding that some slaveholders wanted total control over the slaves they "owned," documentary evidence shows that slaves invariably exercised autonomy in certain realms of activity. The choices open to slaves in their economic systems, their religious and cultural practices, their arts and their family and community lives, differed less in essence than in degree from the choices open to individuals within less oppressive institutions. Whereas less harsh institutions allow individuals within them greater freedom of action in these areas, the exercise of such choices by slaves stands as testimony to the tenacity with which they secured and protected their individuality.

Participation in the internal economy affected the lives of Jamaica and Louisiana sugar plantation slaves on the individual, family and community levels. Individually, slaves experienced the material and psychological rewards derived from a work regime which was self-motivated and self-organized, and whose proceeds went to those who labored. Slaves mastered the arts of husbandry, and became proficient in the skills of barter and marketing both as retailers and consumers. Accompanying the material benefits of the internal economy were the psychological compensations slaves derived from exercising freedom of action.



As many of the plantation accounts chronicling the economic activities of the sugar estate slaves reveal, efforts were organized often not around the individual slave, but the slave family. Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, in their seminal essay An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective, agree. "Small kin groups," they found, "provided a basis for economic cooperation, [and] were able to develop within some of the most oppressive slave systems."<sup>13</sup>

The importance of family in the organization of the internal economy was apparent both in the accumulation of earnings and their disposal. Members of slave families contributed to the economy of the family unit according to their dispositions and abilities. Elderly slaves, whose plantation duties were often less onerous, tended the kitchen gardens and livestock and operated various cottage industries while stronger adults bore the burden of the heavier labor.

The bundle of preferences exhibited by slaves in their purchasing habits consistently reflected the primacy of family. In the disposal of their earnings, slaves faced various choices as consumers. The purchases they made and the manner in which and the reason why they made them reveals how slaves sought to improve themselves, and to what and to whom they gave priority. In this dimension of the internal economy, kinship again appeared as the basic unit of "economic cooperation."

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<sup>13</sup> Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective (Philadelphia, 1976), 38.

At the community level, the money-making ventures slaves engaged in provided the economic foundation for the development of Afro-American slave culture. Marketing patterns, both on and off the plantation, assumed social importance since they permitted not only economic independence, but also distance from the planters' control. For example, a broad range of social activities on the part of the slave community accompanied the purely economic dimensions of market-day. Furthermore, the financial competence that the internal economy created helped establish the unique trends of life and society within the slave communities insofar as the autonomy of slave culture was reflected in patterns of purchasing and consumption. Standards and styles of clothing, furnishing, eating and drinking, so central to the development of slave culture, ultimately derived from the economic independence of slaves, as did such other social activities as gambling. Clearly, the internal economies of sugar plantation slaves in Jamaica and Louisiana were similar to those of rice plantation slaves in lowcountry Georgia and Carolina, which Ira Berlin found "provided the material basis for . . . black culture."<sup>14</sup>

Links have also been established between the internal economies of slave populations and the structure of post-Emancipation economies. Sidney Mintz and Douglas Hall, in their article on "The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System," "established that both the peasant economy and its marketing pattern [in post-Emancipation Jamaica] originated within the slave system." They contended that "after Emancipation, many new markets would appear, and the scope of economic activity open

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<sup>14</sup> Berlin, "Time, Space," 66.

to the freedmen would be much increased. But Emancipation, insofar as marketing and cultivation practices were concerned, widened opportunities and increased alternatives; apparently it did not change their nature substantially."<sup>15</sup>

The centrality of the internal economy to the "free" time pursuits of slaves on Louisiana and Jamaica sugar plantations suggests that these private economic activities had an impact on the formation and development of Afro-American culture, slave and free, that went beyond purely fiscal considerations. The slaves, their families and their communities, not only accrued material benefits from the money-making endeavors, but also established individual lifestyles and relationships with kin and fellow-slaves that contributed to the creation of discrete social structures which endured through slavery and into freedom. Indeed, Sidney Mintz and Douglas Hall claimed that "it is upon the polinks [provision grounds] that the foundations of the free peasantry were established." Although their hypothesis may oversimplify what was a complex economic system, recent scholarship lends support to this position. "In the Danish Virgin Islands, the slaves by the use of the discretionary time, legally and illegally at their disposal, had created certain modes of being and behaviour that were distinctly theirs," Neville Hall pointed out. "By emancipation they had created

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<sup>15</sup> Sidney Mintz and Douglas Hall, "The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System," Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 57 (1960), 18, 24.

a culture, neither wholly African nor yet European, retaining, adapting, borrowing and adopting."<sup>16</sup>

The economic activities of slaves thus had profound impact on many dimensions of slave life and formed a basis for the establishment of an enduring Afro-American culture. The internal economy, however, also brought slaves into contact with the free population of the plantation societies. The forms of such contact differed markedly from the plantation relationships of taskmaster and slave laborer. As participants within the internal economy, slaves established and protected their autonomy, and exercised considerable power over those with whom they traded. The influence and control over the free population that slaves derived from their economic activities suggests indeed that the internal economy played an integral role in the formation of white culture in slave plantation societies. An analysis of the internal economy thus permits an understanding of both the private world that the slaves made, and "the role of the powerless in affecting, and even controlling important parts of the lives of the masters."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 9; Hall, "Slaves Use of 'Free' Time," 42.

<sup>17</sup> Mintz and Price, Anthropological Approach, 16.

## Bibliography

### Bibliography

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### Note on Manuscript Sources

The paucity of slave testimony hampers the study of Afro-American slavery. Where such testimony exists, and the United States is undoubtedly the most richly endowed of the former slave societies in these materials, it is in the form either of published accounts of exceptional individuals or of reminiscences of ex-slaves taken many years after Emancipation. None of the other former New World slave societies match the United States in such slave testimony. The comparative study of black slavery, therefore, must rely heavily on records left by slaveholders.

Planters throughout the Americas left copious records in every form imaginable: plantation records, government testimony, published histories, reminiscences and accounts, newspaper and journal articles and advertisements, wills, mortgages, inventories, correspondence, paintings and drawings. All of these materials, if used circumspectly, aid in understanding the "peculiar institution."

In conformity with the adage that, for the historian, truth is not in accounts but in account books, this study has, wherever possible, relied on manuscript plantation records. In their public testimony, planters incorporated the biases of their attitudes to slavery and race; in their plantation records they did not grind this ax--they were concerned merely with tabulating such daily routines on their estates as work schedules, crop production, weather, slave fertility, morbidity and mortality, thefts, runaways and punishments. Where it has been necessary to use the public testimony of planters in this study, account

must be taken of the biases inherent in the evidence. As an unadorned chronicle of the day-to-day occurrences on the sugar estates, however, the plantation records are less prone to these distortions.

Slave colonies whose planter class exhibited a high rate of absenteeism pose additional problems. Many Jamaican planters, for example, did not live on the island, preferring to remain in Britain and delegate responsibility for running their sugar estates to attorneys, managers and overseers. For the historian seeking to locate extant manuscript materials, this high rate of absenteeism has both benefits and drawbacks. Planters who did not live on their estates usually desired to be kept well-informed of the state of the crop, the slaves and the buildings. Consequently, the papers of planter families often contain extensive chronicles of the organization of the plantations recorded by those the planters delegated to supervise them. Planter families, however, lived throughout the British Isles, and the records they left are similarly distributed. Research in the manuscript collections of Jamaican sugar estates thus necessitates travelling to both Britain and Jamaica, and visits to geographically dispersed archives in both locations. Louisiana sugar planters usually lived on their estates, and their plantation records remain primarily within the state, with the largest repository at the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. Where relevant materials are located elsewhere, such as in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, microfilm reproductions are often available in the various archives in Louisiana.



The cultivation and processing of sugar was a large-scale endeavor involving the labor of scores, often hundreds of slaves. The operation of this complex agricultural-industrial system entailed extensive organization which resulted in an abundance of records cataloging every aspect of life and labor on sugar estates. Another function of size was continuity. Large sugar slave plantations in both Jamaica and Louisiana exhibited a permanence and durability that differed markedly from the more ephemeral existence of smaller agricultural holdings. Indeed, large sugar estates in both societies not only endured through decades during slavery, but also often remained operational and under the guidance of the same owners after Emancipation. Continuity of ownership resulted in continuity of records-keeping. The study of slavery on sugar plantations thus is facilitated by the abundance and detail of the plantation records, and the consistency with which records for the same plantations were kept through the years of slavery reveals patterns and rhythms in the lives of those who lived on the estates that would not be discernible from more fragmentary chronicles.

The records of a number of Jamaican sugar estates exhibit both detail and continuity. The Papers of Nathaniel Phillips<sup>\*</sup> cover a 55-year period from 1759 to 1814 and comprise personal and business correspondence, probate records and an exceptional body of accounts and papers for Phillips' Pleasant Hill and Phillipsfield estates. Included

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<sup>\*</sup> A listing of all manuscript materials used in this study, including the location of the collections, follows this note.

in the plantation records are tables of slaves' ages, occupations and valuations, chronicles of slave births and deaths (including cause of death) and schedules of work and accounts of crops. The correspondence between Phillips, who was an absentee owner throughout most of the period, and his delegates on the plantations, supplies extensive detail of day-to-day life on the estates.

The Penrhyn Castle Manuscripts cover a 125-year period from 1709 to 1834, and include a wealth of detail on the organization of the Pennant family's Kupius, King's Valley and Thomas River estates. The correspondence between the absentee Pennant owners, especially Lord Penrhyn and G. H. D. Pennant, and their attorneys David Ewart and Rowland Fearon, are replete with references to the treatment of slaves, while slave lists and plantation accounts divulge much concerning the regulation of the estates and the lives of the slave laborers.

A series of plantation books for Worthy Park Estate, which runs from 1783 to 1845, provides another example of the comprehensive nature of the records kept by sugar planters. These records, which Michael Craton has made such good use of in A Jamaican Plantation: A History of Worthy Park 1670-1970 (with James Walvin; London, 1970) and Searching For The Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), reveal in great detail the organization of the sugar estate and the lives of the slaves on it. Cataloged in the plantation books, for example, are slave work schedules, food and clothing rations, slave fertility, morbidity and mortality, runaways and punishments.

Other plantation records that are similarly rich in detail and span long periods during slavery include the Gale Morant Papers (1731-1845), Dickinson Family Papers (1745-1801), Duckenfield Hall Plantation Records (1719-1877) and William and James Chisholme Papers (1730-1812). Numerous other Jamaican plantation records used in this study are more fragmentary, or chronicle a shorter period of time. They are, nevertheless, of great value in revealing the character of slave life on the sugar estates of the island. The Harmony Hall records (1797-99 and 1812-14), for example, disclose changes in clothing allocations to slaves in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century; the Braco Estate Journal (May 1795 to November 1797) gives a daily breakdown of the work slaves performed in this thirty-month period, as well as listings of slave births and deaths and the food allocations. The Somerset Plantation Journal (1782-86) contains material similar to the records of Braco Estate, while the correspondence between absentee owners and their Jamaican-based agents contained in the Gordon of Buthlaw and Cairness Papers and the Hamilton of Pinmore Papers clearly shows the patterns of interaction between slaves and whites--there are, for example, in both sets of papers, a number of references to the sale, by slaves, of goods and services to whites on the estates.

The excellent bibliography compiled by K. E. N. Ingram, Sources in Jamaican History 1655-1838: A Bibliographical Survey with Particular Reference to Manuscript Sources (2 vols.; Zug, Switzerland, 1976), is an indispensable aid to research on sugar slavery in Jamaica. Ingram provides an exhaustive listing of manuscript materials, their location

(and the availability elsewhere of microfilm copies) and a detailed description of their contents.

Unfortunately, there is as yet no comparable bibliography of the manuscript sources for sugar slavery in Louisiana. A wealth of extant materials, however, enables research in the topic. Louisiana planters, like their Jamaican counterparts, incorporated painstaking record-keeping as a component in the complex organization needed for cultivating and processing sugar on their estates. The plantation manuscripts of Louisiana sugar plantations match those of Jamaican estates in their detail, scope and continuity over time. Contained within them are records of life and work that few other pre-twentieth century manuscript sources can rival.

The plantation records of the sugar estate of Edward J. Gay and Family, for example, run from the first decade of the nineteenth century, when the estate's founder, Joseph Erwin, began through the purchase of a gang of slaves to the outbreak of the Civil War and beyond. (In 1981, the Gay family still owns the former slave plantation and they still raise sugar cane.) The life and labor of slaves on the Gay sugar estate are revealed in great detail: quantities of food, clothing, shoes, blankets, bedding, tools and other utensils issued slaves; slave births (naming mother and child), illness (listing ailments and treatments), and death (giving cause of death and age of deceased); distribution of housing by family (giving ages and cash valuations for each slave); work schedules and sugar production; and, of particular importance to this study, extensive listings of the money slaves earned, the manner in which they earned it, and the expenditures they made, insofar as

they bought goods through the agency of the planter. In addition, family correspondence reveals aspects of the slaves' internal economy external to the plantation trading nexus--at markets and with river peddlers.

The Lewis Stirling and Family Papers (1797-1865), like the Gay papers, span the duration of sugar cultivation in Louisiana before the Civil War. The Stirling records predate that family's involvement in raising sugar; the early records show Lewis Stirling, the son of an immigrant Scotsman, building up a gang of slaves through inheritance and purchase. The Stirling papers, like the Gay papers, are rich in detail concerning slave life. Particularly important for this study are the listings of crops grown by slaves, the amounts of cash they received for them, and the manner in which they spent these monies. Herbert Gutman, in The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925 (New York, 1976), made excellent use of three Registers of Slaves (1807-51, 1846-65 and 1857-64) contained in the Stirling papers. These comprise a detailed record of slave births and deaths from the inception of the Stirling family's estates up to Emancipation.

The David Weeks and Family Papers (1801-1862) also predate that family's involvement in sugar cultivation, but, like the Gay and Stirling papers, trace the entire course of sugar slavery in Louisiana. They also reveal the complexity of slaves' lives under the regime of the "sweet malefactor." Other Louisiana sugar plantation records similarly rich in such detail are: William T. and George D. Palfrey Account Books (1832-1868), Thomas Butler and Family Papers (1830-1869), John

H. Randolph Papers (1844-1864) and Uncle Sam Plantation Papers (1845-1863).

Other plantation records, although more fragmentary, or spanning a shorter duration, nevertheless provide a wealth of evidence on the life of slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations. The plantation diary of Isaac Erwin only spans four years (1849-52), but gives a daily listing of slaves' labor schedules (including holidays and days off), as do Elu Landry's plantation ledger for 1848-9, the 1852 Ashland Plantation Record Book, Samuel McCutcheon's plantation diaries for 1838-40, the 1857-58 Residence Journal of R. R. Barrow, the Colomb Plantation Journal for 1851-62 and the Journal of Mavis Grove Plantation for 1856-57. The Benjamin Tureaud Papers include a ledger for the years 1858-59 listing slaves, the amount of money they earned, how they earned it and what they purchased with it at the plantation store. These data are, of course, particularly valuable in analyzing the slaves' internal economy. The journals of sugar planter Alexis Ferry contain a similar list for 1848.

The study of the economic activities of slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations benefits from the structure of the internal economy in that region. Unlike Jamaica, where most of the slaves' economic activities were conducted off the plantation, particularly at market, and therefore went unrecorded by planters, a large part of the internal economy of Louisiana sugar plantation slaves involved transactions with planters, and thus were entered into the plantations' records.

Research into sugar slavery in Louisiana is aided by the presence of a large body of slave testimony. In the late 1930s, two projects,

one organized under the auspices of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration and using only white interviewers, the other organized through Dillard University and using only black interviewers, undertook to collect the reminiscences of ex-slaves concerning their life in slavery. Since the ex-slaves were recalling events of some eighty years before, these records must be used circumspectly and with an eye to the distortions caused by the frailty of the human memory. (Among other sources of distortion was the race of the interviewer. This can be clearly seen in the differing responses ex-slave Catherine Cornelius gave to similar questions posed during separate interviews by a black and a white interviewer. See Paul D. Escott, Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979), for a methodology to deal with the biases in slave testimony.) Such records, however, have the potential for revealing dimensions of slave life unseen by planters and therefore unrecorded by them. The clandestine trading activities of slaves with river peddlers, for example, of which planters gave little account, are documented in the slave narratives, as are intricate details of other aspects of the private lives of slaves. All of the Louisiana slave narratives remain in archives in the state. Unfortunately, no comparable body of slave testimony exists for Jamaica, or, for that matter, for any slave societies other than those of the United States.

There follows a list of all manuscript documents used in this study. All of the printed materials consulted for the study are also listed below.



## MANUSCRIPT PLANTATION RECORDS

Jamaica

The Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica

Account Book of Carlton Estate, John Packharnis

Account Book of John Morant

Accounts of Jacob Israel Bernal

Braco Estate Account Book

Fyffe Collection

Georgia Estate Letter Books and Accounts

Harmony Hall Estate Account Book

Journal of Somerset Plantation

Lady Mary Hamilton's Trust Book

Letter of William Hylton

Letters of Charles Gordon Gray

Memorandum Book of Thomas Munro

Spring Plantation Accounts

Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica

Braco Estate Journal

Lists of Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate

Rooke Clarke Papers

Rose Hall Journal

Slaves on Harmony Hall Estate, Trelawny

Thetford Plantation Book

Worthy Park Estate Records

West India Collection, University of the West Indies,

Mona, Kingston, Jamaica

Dickinson Family Papers (microfilm of papers located at the Wiltshire  
Record Office, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, England)

Duckenfield Hall Plantation Records (microfilm of papers located at  
the Greater London Record Office, Middlesex Records, London,  
England)

Gale Morant Papers (microfilm of papers located at Exeter University  
Library, Exeter, England)

Holland, Fish-River, and Petersville Plantations Title Deeds

James Lyon Will and Accounts

Nathaniel Phillips Papers (microfilm of papers located at the National  
Library of Wales, Slebech Collection, Aberystwyth, Wales)

Papers of Caleb and Ezekiel Dickinson (microfilm of papers located at  
the Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, England)

Penrhyn Castle Papers (microfilm of papers located at the University  
College of North Wales, Bangor, Wales)

Thomas John Parker Papers

William Vassall Letter Books (microfilm of papers located at the Shef-  
field City Libraries, Sheffield, England)

University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland

Gordon of Buthlaw and Cairness Papers

Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Scotland

Abercairny Papers

Airlie Papers

Hamilton of Pinmore Papers

Kinloch/Wedderburn Papers

National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland

Papers of William and James Chisholme

Robertson-Macdonald Papers

British Library, London, England

James Pinnock Diary

Liverpool Papers

Public Record Office, London, England

Accounts of Blenheim and Cranbrooke Plantations, Estate of James Moffat

(WO 9-48)

Bodleian Library, Oxford, England

Barham Family Papers

Louisiana

Department of Archives and Manuscripts,

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Anonymous Planter's Ledger

Priscilla "Mittie" Munnikhuysen Bond Diary

Ashland Plantation Record Book

Braxton Bragg Letter

Louis Amedee Bringier and Family Papers

Bruce, Seddon, and Wilkins Plantation Records

Robert O. Butler Papers

Thomas W. Butler Papers

Thomas Butler and Family Papers

Alexandre E. DeClouet Papers

Isaac Erwin Diary

Nathaniel Evans and Family Papers

Edward J. Gay and Family Papers

Philip Hicky and Family Papers

Patrick F. Keary Letters

Kenner Family Papers

Charles Landry Mortgage

Elu Landry Estate Plantation Diary and Ledger

George Lanaux and Family Papers

Moses and St. John Liddell and Family Papers

Andrew and Ellen E. McCollam Papers

Samuel McCutcheon Papers

George Mather Account Books

Joseph Mather Diary

Charles L. Mathews and Family Papers

William J. Minor and Family Papers

William T. Palfrey Papers

William T. Palfrey and Family Papers

William T. and George D. Palfrey Account Books

Pharr Family Papers

Alexander F. Pugh and Family Papers

Richard L. Pugh Papers

Colonel W. W. Pugh Papers

John H. Randolph Papers

Slavery Collection

Lewis Stirling and Family Papers

Benjamin Tureaud Papers

Uncle Sam Plantation Papers

David Weeks and Family Papers

David Weeks and Family Papers - The Weeks Hall Memorial Collection

William P. Welham Plantation Records

Maunsell White Letterbook

Department of Manuscripts and Archives,  
University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, Louisiana

DeClouet Family Papers

Department of Archives and Manuscripts,  
Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

Robert Ruffin Barrow Papers

The Bringier Papers (Urquhart Collection)

Burruss Family Papers

Colomb Plantation Journal

Alexis Ferry Journals

Jean Baptiste Ferchaud Papers

David Rees Papers

St. Martin Family Papers

Sebastopol Plantation Papers

Henry Clay Warmoth Papers

Department of Archives and Manuscripts,  
Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans,  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Monnot/Lanier Family Collection

Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum,  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Book of Accounts of the Magnolia Plantation

Journal of Mavis Grove Plantation

Plantation Diary of Valcour Aime

The Historic New Orleans Collection,  
Kemper and Leila Williams Foundation,  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Appraisal of the Estate of Widow George Webre

Ashland (Belle Helene) Plantation Journal

Magnolia Grove Plantation Sale

Henri de St. Geme Papers



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Louisiana

Federal Writers' Project Files, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge,  
Louisiana.

Federal Writers' Project Files, Melrose Collection, Archives Division,  
Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches,  
Louisiana.

Marcus Bruce Christian Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts,  
Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New  
Orleans, Louisiana.

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Jamaica

Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica

Annabella Smith Letter

Lemon Lawrence Letter

Nugent Papers

The Omnibus; or, Jamaica Scrap Book by Jack Jingle

Petition of Stephen Fuller

Philafricanus Letter

Population of the Sugar Colonies

Record Book of the Court of the Parish of St. Ann, 1787-1814 (Slave Court)

Remarks on Wilberforce's Tenth Proposition

Robert R. Gillespie Letter

Simon Taylor Letters

Slave Exports

Slave Sale

Slave Sale Broadside

Slave Sale Receipt

Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica

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Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Scotland

Melville Castle Papers--Dundas

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Clarkson Papers

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Papers Relating to Jamaica, presented by C. E. Long

Quantity and Value of the Produce of the British West Indies

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Louisiana

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The Cottage

Destrehan Plantation

Laurel Valley Plantation

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Madewood Plantation

St. Louis Plantation

Southdown Plantation

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D. D. Arden Letter

Rosella Kenner Brent Papers

Consolidated Association of the Planters of Louisiana Collection

Hephzibah Church Book

Mrs. Isaac H. Hilliard Diary

Clarissa E. Leavitt Town Diary

W. L. Martin Papers

John A. Quitman and Family Papers

Hudson Tabor and Family Papers

Department of Manuscripts and Archives,  
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The Historic New Orleans Collection,  
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Slave Auction Broadside

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