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**NEGRO SLAVERY IN LOUISIANA**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**The Department of History**

**by**

**Joe Gray Taylor**

**B.S., Memphis State College, 1947**

**M.A., Louisiana State University, 1948**

**August, 1951**

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## ABSTRACT

The institution of slavery existed in Louisiana for almost two centuries. This work attempts to paint a reasonably detailed picture of the institution. In so far as possible, this picture is presented from the point of view of the slave.

Source materials pertaining to slavery proved to be abundant. As a special class of human beings, Negro slaves were subject to numerous police regulations, and these regulations, directly or indirectly, reveal much of their way of life. As property, slaves required deeds, bills of sale and other legal documents. Various aspects of slavery were noted in the newspapers of the day. Travellers were particularly interested in the scene they observed in South Louisiana, and many of them left records of what they saw. Plantation records reveal much concerning the Negroes who worked them, while letters and other private papers of the period also contain much information concerning the peculiar institution. In addition, there are a number of secondary works which throw light on one facet or another of Louisiana slavery.

Thus there was no dearth of materials on which to base this study. It was always necessary to remember, however, that most of these sources described slavery from the point of view of the white slaveholder. Thus the material had to be examined closely. White Louisianans, especially after the beginning of the sectional contro-

versy, were prone to see in slavery what they wanted to see. Hostile observers from England or the North likewise found what they wanted to find.

A picture of human bondage as it existed does emerge from the records, however. The institution had its inception in Louisiana as a means of securing labor needed in the settlement of the colony. The Negro proved to be such a good worker that the planters of Louisiana were never able to procure as many slaves as they desired. When the African trade was cut off, except for a trickle of smuggled blacks, emigrant masters and the interstate slave trade kept a supply of Negroes coming into the state.

Negroes were mainly occupied with agricultural labor in Louisiana, but the more skilled and the more fortunate among them did almost as many kinds of work as white men. In Louisiana, where the rich soil was highly productive when cultivated by disciplined plantation labor, slavery was profitable.

The Negro himself was more concerned with other aspects of his life. He received adequate food and did not suffer from lack of clothing. His housing was not luxurious, but he was not often exposed to the elements. His master was always concerned that his health be protected when he was well and restored when he was ill. The slave found opportunities for recreation and took advantage of them. He responded to Christianity with great fervor, but during the early part of the nineteenth century his instruction in religious principles was often neglected. This neglect was being remedied as the Civil War approached.



Emancipation of slaves was not unusual during the colonial period, but it became progressively more difficult under American administration. Eventually manumission was entirely prohibited, and an effort was made to coerce free Negroes into returning to slavery. The Louisiana terrain and the distance to free territory made it practically impossible for the slave to attain his freedom by running away. However, those features of the terrain which made escape all but impossible made pursuit difficult, and the runaway might remain at large for weeks or months.

The discipline of Negro slaves involved race relations as well as the control of a servile population. The slave code was savage throughout the existence of the institution, though it did offer the bondsman some protection from abuse. Slave crimes were frequent and, when they involved racial trespass, were swiftly and severely punished. Other offences, which offered no threat to slavery or the dominant position of the whites, were treated far more severely in the statute books than in actual practice.

Insurrection and miscegenation were the great fears of white Louisianians. One full fledged but unsuccessful insurrection took place in 1811, and there were a number of plots and conspiracies later, but white dominance was never seriously questioned. Miscegenation could not be eliminated, but the problem it posed was solved by classifying as a Negro any person known to have any Negro blood. Louisiana Negroes were not fond of slavery, but they made the best of a situation they were powerless to change.

## THE SETTING

In many parts of Louisiana, slavery found an almost ideal setting from the geographical point of view. Alluvial soil makes up one third of the area of the state. The left bank of the Mississippi River is composed of arable alluvium below Baton Rouge, and on the right bank another immensely fertile strip of soil extends from the northern boundary of the state almost to the Gulf of Mexico. The valley of the Red River affords another fertile area, differing from the lands along the Mississippi only in the color of its reddish brown soil. Along the banks of the lesser rivers, such as the Atchafalaya, Black and Ouachita, there is further alluvial soil. In the south central part of the state, the so-called sugar bowl, along the banks of Bayous Lafourche, Terrebonne, Boeuf and Teche, affords other acres of black land.

This black and red soil, the gift of the rivers, was well adapted to the cultivation of cotton and sugar. The short growing season, as compared with more southerly climes, was an obstacle to sugar culture, but a protective tariff compensated for this handicap. There were attempts to grow cotton as far south as New Orleans before the Civil War, but excessive autumn rains rendered this staple less profitable than sugar. In general sugar reigned supreme south of the latitude of Baton Rouge; cotton had exclusive dominion north of Red River. The region in between grew cotton or sugar as the

inclination of planters or relative price advantages dictated.

A feature of the Louisiana terrain is the extremely low altitude of the alluvial regions. The land nearest the rivers and bayous is highest. Therefore agriculture, during the ante-bellum period, was confined largely to the lands bordering the watercourses. This tendency was strengthened by the necessity of using the rivers and bayous as a means of transporting produce to market. In the southern part of the state, the farms and plantations extended back from the streams only a few miles at most. The same principle held true, to a lesser extent, for the alluvial lands farther to the north. Hence the plantations fronted on the watercourses and came to an end at the swamp, where the lack of altitude made drainage impractical or unprofitable.

Slavery was not confined to the alluvial soils, though Negroes were found there in the greatest numbers. In the Florida Parishes and the northwestern part of the state were low hills, covered originally with pine and oak forests. These lands, while never fertile as compared with the alluvial regions, and though subject to erosion, were usable for cotton cultivation. Along the small streams were a few tracts of highly productive land which supported plantations, but the uplands were mainly occupied by small farmers who owned few or no slaves. A distinction may be made between the areas which were originally covered with oak and those which supported pine forests. The oak bearing hills were more productive, and hence more sought after.

A prairie, interrupted by the Mississippi delta, extends across

the southern part of Louisiana. Part of this plain is made up of pine barrens, especially near the eastern and western boundaries of the state. These pine barrens supported a few poor whites before the Civil War, but practically no slaveowners. In the Attakapas region of southwestern Louisiana the prairies were treeless and were used mainly for cattle grazing. The cattlemen used many acres but had little need of slaves. During recent years this region has been devoted to rice cultivation. To the south the prairies shade off into the salt marshes of the Gulf of Mexico, inhabited only by those who earn their living from the sea.<sup>1</sup>

Hernando De Soto and other Spanish explorers passed through Louisiana, but in 1682 La Salle claimed the area for France. La Salle's attempted settlement, three years later, was abortive, but a permanent lodgement was effected at the present site of Biloxi, Mississippi, by Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, in 1699. A French post was established at Natchitoches in 1714, and the Spaniards set up a rival post a few miles to the west shortly afterward.

In 1712 the infant Louisiana colony was turned over to Antoine Crozat, a wealthy merchant. Crozat was soon bankrupted by his acquisition, and in 1717 surrendered his rights to John Law, the famous banker. Law, whose colonial operations were soon organized

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<sup>1</sup> This brief account is based largely upon personal observation. An excellent summary of Louisiana's general geographic features may be found in Roger W. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840-1875 (University, Louisiana, 1939), 1-16. See also Louisiana, a Guide to the State Compiled by Workers of the Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana (New York, 1945), 1-66.

into the Company of the Indies, contributed to the development of Louisiana through his promotional schemes, though the colony never proved profitable. An especially significant development was Bienville's founding of New Orleans in 1718. Under Governor Bienville a set of regulations for Negro slavery, the code noir, was promulgated. The colony survived a war with the fierce Natchez Indians in 1729, but it remained weak throughout the French period.

France, defeated in the Seven Years War, turned Louisiana over to her ally, Spain. The Spanish government was not eager to assume control of its new possession and sent no officials until 1766. These officials were promptly driven out by the colonists, and a military expedition under Count Alexander O'Reilly used force to pacify the province in 1769. Spain retained control of Louisiana, then an immense territory extending from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada and from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, until 1801. In the peace settlement which followed the American Revolution, Spain added adjacent West Florida to her holdings. Throughout the period of Spanish rule Louisiana continued to grow, but very slowly.

By the Treaty of San Ildefonso of 1801, Napoleon I forced the Spanish government to retrocede the province to France. Even before France had officially taken possession, the First Consul had transferred Louisiana to the United States. Twenty days after the Tricolor was raised over the Cabildo, it was replaced by the Stars and Stripes. William C.C. Claiborne became the first American governor.

There was considerable dispute as to whether West Florida had been included in the Louisiana Purchase. This question was effectively

settled in 1810 when a revolution drove the Spanish officials from Baton Rouge, and American authority was accepted by the inhabitants. Mobile remained in Spanish hands until the War of 1812. The eastern parts of West Florida were attached to Alabama and Mississippi, the western portion to Louisiana. Those Louisiana parishes east of the Mississippi River and north of Bayou Manchac are still known as the Florida Parishes.

Under American administration, that part of the Louisiana Purchase which now constitutes the state of Louisiana was set up as the Territory of Orleans, distinct from the vast and largely uninhabited remainder. Even the Territory of Orleans was thinly settled; rural habitations were confined almost entirely to the rivers and bayous. American settlers, encouraged to some extent by the Spanish authorities, had begun to enter the area before 1803, and they came in much greater numbers afterward. By 1810 the population of the territory was 76,500, well in excess of the requirement for statehood. The Territory of Orleans became a state under the old name of Louisiana in 1812.

The period from 1803 until 1860 was one of almost continuous agricultural expansion. American settlers, seeking rich soils, poured into Louisiana. The northern part of the state, except for isolated areas, became as typically American as any other section of the South. The southern parishes remained predominately French in culture throughout the ante-bellum period, but rapid Anglo-Saxon economic domination forecast eventual cultural dominion. It is the purpose of this study to examine the institution of slavery

in the setting which Louisiana afforded.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brief histories of Louisiana are William O. Scroggs, The Story of Louisiana (New York, 1943) and Garnie William McGinty, A History of Louisiana (New York, 1949). Charles Gayarre, History of Louisiana (New Orleans, 1885), 4 vols., and Alcée Fortier, A History of Louisiana (New York, 1904), 4 vols., furnish more detailed accounts.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF SLAVERY IN LOUISIANA

While Iberville and Bienville were founding Louisiana, French colonies were flourishing in the West Indies. Negro slaves had been carried into these islands at least by the middle of the seventeenth century. Louisiana, though on the same continental land mass as French Canada, more nearly resembled the islands in climate, and as a result its agriculture was to be much like that of Martinique and Guadeloupe. The demand for Negro slaves to carry on this agriculture began even before there could be any certainty that the infant settlements would endure. Louisiana's cry for more and more Negroes was to continue until the Civil War brought human bondage to an end in the United States.

A few Negroes came to the colony in the first years, probably from the Indies. By 1712 there were perhaps twenty in all Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> These were too few to begin the work that had to be done if the settlements were to prosper, and it was only natural that the French pioneers should experiment with Indian slavery. The example of Spain was before them and, perhaps more important, the example of the Indians themselves. Long before any permanent white settlements had been made on the Mississippi, the Indian tribes of the valley were enslaving

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<sup>1</sup> Gayarre, History of Louisiana, I, 115.



and selling war captives.<sup>2</sup> This was particularly true of the Chickasaws and Illinois, who were well within the grandiose boundaries of early Louisiana. Nor, apparently, were the French the first white men to buy Indian slaves from the Southern tribes. In 1700, while on his voyage of exploration up the Mississippi, Iberville noted that two "Englishmen" were among the Chickasaws, inciting wars "to raise as many slaves as they could, whom they buy and make in them a great commerce, which distresses all the savage peoples."<sup>3</sup> These traders no doubt came from South Carolina. Carolinians, whether because of shrewd business practices or because their trade goods were superior, were so successful that the French sometimes purchased Indian slaves from them. Bienville's nephew was killed while on a slave trading expedition into South Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Though they may have been backward in the beginning, the French rapidly acquired the technique of dealing in Indian slaves. The famous La Salle had noticed that the savages would pay more to redeem a member of their own tribe than for an ordinary slave, and set forth a plan to buy captives for return to their own people, thus making a profit on each transaction.<sup>5</sup> By 1720 there were so many "voyageurs" who stirred up wars among the Indian nations "to procure slaves whom

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<sup>2</sup> N.M. Miller Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana during the French Regime, 1699-1763 (New York, 1916), 97.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Margry, Découvertes et Établissements des Français dans L'ouest et dans le Sud de L'Amérique Septentrionale (1614-1754), IV (Paris, 1881), 406.

<sup>4</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 229.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 226.

they buy\* that officials of the colony were ordered to arrest these entrepreneurs and to confiscate their property.<sup>6</sup>

As had been the case in the West Indies, the Indian slave proved unsatisfactory and the trade in Indian slaves unprofitable. The Negro, "coming out of a state of culture superior to the American Indian, was to show himself better adapted . . . to the necessity of intense and sustained physical exertion, as a stationary agricultural worker."<sup>7</sup> Indian slaves in Louisiana were never numerous; there were only 118 in the settlements on the Mississippi in 1721, and only 229 in the whole colony in 1726, when Negroes had begun to be brought in in some numbers.<sup>8</sup>

[As early as 1706 the officials in charge of Louisiana sought permission to exchange Indian slaves with the islands for Negroes. Such permission was always refused, but to some extent the trade went on nonetheless. The comparative desirability of the black is indicated by the fact that two or three Indians were to be traded for each Negro. Bienville pointed out to the crown that such a trade would have certain advantages; Indians would be unable to run away from the islands, and in Louisiana fear of the Indians would prevent flight on the part of the Negroes.<sup>9</sup> Though there were a few Indian slaves in Louisiana well after the middle of the eighteenth century,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Margry, Découvertes et Établissements, VI, 316.

<sup>7</sup> Gilberto Freyre, The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization (New York, 1946), 180.

<sup>8</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 230.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 228. Gayarre, History of Louisiana, I, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 230.

the savage was always less valuable than the African. This was demonstrated in 1729 when an Indian man brought a credit of only 540 livres on the purchase of a Negro woman for 1,300 livres, even though, other things being equal, females were worth considerably less than males.<sup>11</sup>

A patent to the Louisiana colony was issued to Antoine Crozat in 1712. This grant gave him practically complete economic control of the settlements made and to be made, and among his privileges was the right to bring in one shipload of slaves a year. Crozat was unable to take advantage of this privilege, or neglected doing so, because no slaves were imported from Africa during his time. It should be noted, however, that a few Negroes were being obtained from the West Indies.<sup>12</sup> From the colonial point of view the failure to deliver Negroes was the great weakness of the Crozat regime. When a charter was issued to John Law's Mississippi Company, which soon became the Company of the West and then the Company of the Indies, it contained a requirement that 3,000 slaves a year be introduced into Louisiana. No such number as this ever came in twelve months' time, but the company did make an effort to supply the demand. The first slave ships probably landed at Mobile in 1718,<sup>13</sup> and 500 Negroes were brought in during the spring of 1721.<sup>14</sup> By 1728 about 2,600 had been

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<sup>11</sup> "Records of the Superior Council of Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IV (1921), 334.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, IV (Washington, D.C., 1935), 245.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gayarré, History of Louisiana, I, 263.

imported,<sup>15</sup> and there were about 7,000 in the colony when the Company of the Indies came to an end in 1731, though only 6,000 of these had been imported legitimately.<sup>16</sup>

[Many of the blacks whose presence in the colony is thus unaccounted for may have been born in Louisiana, though whether the birth rate equaled the death rate so early is at least open to debate. Others came from the West Indies; in the colonial records there are references to Negroes from Martinique, or simply "from the islands."<sup>17</sup>] As early as 1723 a slave accused of theft bore the nickname "Englishman" and could not speak French, though the record does not say whether he spoke English.<sup>18</sup> Surely some slaves had been smuggled in by English vessels. Since a smuggler sailing up the Mississippi would be exposed to considerable danger of detection, it seems likely that most of the contraband slaves were landed on the Gulf Coast. In 1736 a settler who lived near Mobile made an agreement with an English ship to establish a slave market on an island near the mouth of the Mobile River.<sup>19</sup> In later years, though always forbidden, trade with the English reached greater proportions,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>16</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 239.

<sup>17</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VI (1923), 302. "Abstracts from Old Papers," Ibid., I (1917), 226.

<sup>18</sup> "Abstracts from Old Papers," Ibid., I (1917), 226.

<sup>19</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 239.

<sup>20</sup> Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, IV, 247.

and went on throughout the Seven Years War.<sup>21</sup>

The slave trade between Africa and Louisiana was not greatly different from that carried on with the other European colonies in America. As will be seen later, most of the slaves brought by the Company of the Indies came from the Senegal, but the method of procuring them was much like that on the Gold Coast. When a ship arrived in an African port, the captain made an agreement with the local ruler, who reserved "to himself the preference in all dealings, he for the most part having the greatest number of slaves, which are sold at a set price, the women a fourth or a fifth cheaper than the men."<sup>22</sup> The Negroes offered for sale were examined carefully by the surgeon who accompanied the slaving ship,<sup>23</sup> and those with defects were rejected. The surgeons watched particularly for concealed age, defective limbs and venereal disease. It was especially necessary to be on guard against buying those past their prime, because the native traders shaved every hair from the slaves' bodies and put oil on their skins so that outward signs of age were concealed. Examination of the teeth usually uncovered such frauds as this.<sup>24</sup> Not only the aged, but also the very young were undesirable. A ship owner who contracted with a captain for a slaving voyage in 1737 agreed to pay

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<sup>21</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 460.

<sup>22</sup> "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, I, 292.

<sup>23</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IX (1926), 137.

<sup>24</sup> "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, I, 293.

a bonus of ten livres for each adult landed in New Orleans, five livres for each child from ten to fifteen years, but nothing for younger children.<sup>25</sup>

The horrors of the slave ship's voyage to America are too well known to be dealt with in detail here. The unfortunate blacks, often convinced that they were being taken to the New World to serve as food for the whites, and transported under conditions so terrible as to make death seem preferable, mutinied when opportunity offered and sometimes threw themselves into the sea. Even when a voyage was comparatively uneventful, the mortality rate might be staggering. In February, 1729, a ship arrived in Louisiana with 177 left alive out of 284 Negroes who had been taken aboard in Africa.<sup>26</sup> Four years later a somewhat better performance was recorded when only sixty out of 250 failed to survive the voyage.<sup>27</sup>

A Frenchman who commanded a slave ship left the following account:

. . . many of the slaves we transport from Guinea to America are prepossessed with the opinion, that they are carried like sheep to the slaughter, and that the Europeans are fond of their flesh; which notion so prevails with some, as to make them fall into a deep melancholy and despair, and to refuse all sustenance, tho' never so much compelled and even beaten to oblige them to take some nourishment; notwithstanding all which, they will starve to death; whereof I have had several instances in my own slaves both aboard and at Guadeloupe. And tho' I must say I am naturally compassionate, yet have I

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<sup>25</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IX (1926), 126-27.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., VI (1923), 298.

<sup>27</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 242.

been necessitated sometimes to cause the teeth of these wretches to be broken, because they would not open their mouths, or be prevailed upon by any intreaties to feed themselves; and thus have forced some sustenance into their throats.<sup>28</sup>

{ That the French made an earnest effort to supply the labor needs of the colony was attested by English observers. In 1727 the factors of the British Royal African Company wrote from Gambia that the French were attempting to supply the Mississippi region with "a large number of Negroes."<sup>29</sup> In 1735 Francis Moore noted that so great was the demand for slaves "at the Mississippi" that the French traders had broken a price fixing agreement with their English competitors, and instead of forty were giving "50 Barrs [of iron] per head."<sup>30</sup> The colony's demand for slaves was never satisfied, but the company need not bear all the responsibility for this condition. One serious obstacle in the way of bringing in slaves during the early years was the scarcity of food in the colony. When 574 blacks were put ashore in 1723, so little food was available that a ship was immediately sent to the Indies to bring back enough to keep the valuable shipment alive.<sup>31</sup> Another obstacle, more serious in the long run, was that the settlers, though they clamored for more Negroes, were in many

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<sup>28</sup> "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, I, 289.

<sup>29</sup> "Gambia Factors to the Royal African Company," May 19, 1727. Ibid., II, 340.

<sup>30</sup> "Francis Moore's Travels in Africa," Ibid., 394.

<sup>31</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 233.

cases unable to pay for those they already had.<sup>32</sup> Nor did the colonists cooperate with the authorities; the company eventually found it necessary to forbid their selling slaves outside the colony.<sup>33</sup>

*Here* The Company of the Indies sold the slaves it transported to Louisiana at a fixed price per unit. The unit was the ingenious pièce d'inde, which will be described in more detail below. In the beginning the price was 660 livres, but as time went on and the paper money in use in the colony depreciated, the price rose until in 1734 it stood at 1,800 livres.<sup>34</sup> Purchases were ordinarily made by paying half down and the remainder at the end of a year, but those who had been in Louisiana less than two years could wait twelve months after taking delivery of the slave before paying the first half, and then another year before completing the contract. Payment could be made in products of the country, at a value fixed by the company, as well as in colonial money, and a discount was allowed when full payment was made upon purchase. Since adults were patently worth more than children, a system of classification was worked out. The company assumed that no slaves over thirty years of age would be brought from Africa. Women over fourteen and men seventeen or above were singly pièces d'inde; two children ten or above, or three children

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<sup>32</sup> Colonial records abound with long-standing debts to the company for slaves. See "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, II (1919)-XXVI (1943), passim.

<sup>33</sup> "Ordonnance des directeurs . . .," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, IV, 641.

<sup>34</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 246-47.



eight to ten were equivalent to one adult.<sup>35</sup>

Since prices were fixed and the demand exceeded the supply, it was necessary that Negroes be assigned to the planters who most needed or deserved them.<sup>36</sup> When a shipload of slaves arrived, it was boarded by a surgeon who examined the cargo and set aside the ailing for treatment. Then a numbered badge was put about the neck of each of the healthy specimens. Planters who had been granted the privilege of buying came before the "ordanneteur" and drew from a sack numbers corresponding to those worn by the Negroes. They were permitted to buy the blacks whose numbers they drew. The sick were first offered to those who had been too far down the list to obtain a healthy slave. If any remained, they were sold at auction.<sup>37</sup> From the slave's point of view, this means of deciding his future probably seemed no more unjust than the auction of later years, but the auction had one advantage in that those who brought the higher prices could take pride in that fact.

The African origin of the Negroes of colonial Louisiana cannot be traced with any accuracy. The French largely controlled the Senegal region in Africa, and the Royal Company of the Senegal was the great French slave trading concern.<sup>38</sup> It is generally assumed that

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<sup>35</sup> "Regulations of the Company of the West, 1718," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, IV, 638-39.

<sup>36</sup> Margry, Découvertes et Établissements, V, 625.

<sup>37</sup> M. Dumont, Mémoires sur la Louisiane, II (Paris, 1753), 241-42.

<sup>38</sup> N.M. Miller Surrey, Calendar of the Manuscripts in the Paris Archives and Libraries Relating to the History of the Mississippi Valley to 1803, I (Washington, D.C., 1926), 128.

the greater part of the Negroes in the French colonies came from the Senegal,<sup>39</sup> and there can be little doubt that many of those in colonial Louisiana were Senegalese. A number of references to "Senegal Negroes" may be found in the colonial records,<sup>40</sup> but this term could have applied to any slave who had sailed from a Senegalese port. Tribal names should serve as sources of information, and a number of them are to be found, but whether because of corrupt spelling or other reason, some of them cannot be identified in available references. "Fondas"<sup>41</sup> and "Sembas"<sup>42</sup> remain anonymous. The "Poullars"<sup>43</sup> may have been the people whom Mungo Park knew as the "Foulahs (or Pholeys)," who were located near the Gambia River.<sup>44</sup> According to Woodson, the Biafada are a tribe of Portugese Guinea,<sup>45</sup> and these people are probably the "Biefada" of the Louisiana records.<sup>46</sup> The "Sanges"<sup>47</sup> may have been Songhays, a once powerful tribe which

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<sup>39</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 232. Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, IV, 245.

<sup>40</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VI (1923), 488; XII (1929), 145, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., VI (1923), 489.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., V (1922), 383.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., I (1927), 567.

<sup>44</sup> Mungo Park, Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London, 1799), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Carter G. Woodson, The African Background Outlined: or Handbook for the Study of the Negro (Washington, D.C., 1936), 13.

<sup>46</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, I (1927), 527.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., XI (1928), 289.

centered in the bend of the Niger River.<sup>48</sup>

There can be no doubt about the identification of the Bambaras, and this people seems to be mentioned more than all others.<sup>49</sup> Their habitat was about the headwaters of the Niger, a considerable distance inland.<sup>50</sup> Probably members of this tribe were captured in warfare with the coastal peoples and then shipped out of Senegalese ports. Unlike their neighbors to the north, they were never converted to Mohammedanism and retained a form of animism and ancestor worship. The Bambaras are still an important tribe today and are described as "tall and slender in build, with finer features, fuller beard and lighter skin than the neighboring peoples." Essentially they are agricultural, growing millet and other food crops, including rice. During the fourteenth century they were masters of "the most powerful Sudanese state of which there is authentic record."<sup>51</sup> According to DuBois, many Moslem Berbers paid them tribute in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>52</sup>

[ That a small amount of evidence is available as to the African background of the slaves brought to Louisiana is of little moment, because even a superficial examination of the records makes it clear that they were a cosmopolitan group. In addition to those peoples

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<sup>48</sup> Jerome Dowd, The Negro Races: A Sociological Study, I (New York, 1907), 2.

<sup>49</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IV (1921), 348, 352; VI (1923), 284, and elsewhere.

<sup>50</sup> Dowd, The Negro Races, I, 2.

<sup>51</sup> C.G. Seligman, The Races of Africa (London, 1932), 61-62.

<sup>52</sup> W.E. Burghardt DuBois, The World and Africa (New York, 1947), 212.

mentioned above, many blacks from the Congo<sup>53</sup> and Guinea<sup>54</sup> are encountered. The slaves who came into Louisiana from the islands could have come originally from any part of the slave coast, and the origin of the Negroes smuggled in by the English, whether they came by way of the British colonies<sup>55</sup> or direct from Africa,<sup>56</sup> might have been equally diverse. Moreover, no sooner were these various African peoples brought into Louisiana than they began mixing their blood with one another, with the Indians and with the whites. The Spanish domination brought a certain amount of new white and Negro blood into the colony, and a further contribution was made by the great migration of Anglo-Saxons and their slaves, beginning even before the Louisiana Purchase. Whatever the origins, before the end of two centuries these people had become a part of the new race of American Negroes, a race with the blood of many tribes and many nations coursing through its veins.

The Negro was admirably fitted for his task in the New World. Most of the slaves were prisoners of war, taken in a kind of warfare which spared neither women nor children,<sup>57</sup> and were therefore representative of their tribes. The careful physical examination given by the purchasers in the slave ports eliminated the diseased and

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<sup>53</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VI (1923), 533.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 526.  
Historical Quarterly, VI (1923), 337.

<sup>55</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 245, 259.

<sup>57</sup> "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, I, 297.

<sup>57</sup> "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, I, 297.

infirm, and the horrors of the middle passage must have ruthlessly eliminated the weak. Perhaps, also, those most unfit for servitude were the victims of merciless discipline on shipboard or after arrival in America, or eliminated themselves by suicide.<sup>58</sup> Yet there was no lack of resentment of slavery on the part of those who survived. The records of Louisiana contain their share of rebellions and mutinies.

*John* The Negro's culture in Africa was not a low one.<sup>59</sup> Barbot noted that the people of Guinea, though they could not read and write, used a "means of accounting, by means of small cords or strings, knotted in several parts, on which they soon make their calculations."<sup>60</sup> The culture of the slave coast and the adjacent inland areas, though non-literate and non-mechanical, was "comparable in many respects to Europe in the Middle Ages." The economic system was intricate and efficient, and based in large part upon money. Political organization was based upon the local group, adding difficulties in the way of efficient government, but still "adequate to administer widespread kingdoms."<sup>61</sup>

Not least important, the African peoples were accustomed to hard work. The climate of western Africa favors agriculture in the sense of causing rapid growth of crops, but weeds grow just as rapidly,

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<sup>58</sup> See above, 13.

<sup>59</sup> See above, 9.

<sup>60</sup> "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade, I, 297.

<sup>61</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York, 1941), 296-97.

and insects and other hazards are in proportion. Thus the Negroes were not "pampered by nature." On the contrary, "The African's ability for sustained toil, his need to work and to work hard if he is to extract a living from the soil, have been noticed by all those who have made serious first hand studies."<sup>62</sup> There was conditioning for labor in America in "a sort of plantation system . . . under which absentee ownership . . . demanded the utmost return from the estates, and thus creating conditions . . . resembling the regime the slaves were to encounter in the New World."<sup>63</sup> Moreover, among the crops cultivated on the slave coast were many of those which were grown on plantations in colonial Louisiana. About the Gambia River Mungo Park found the Africans cultivating cotton, indigo and tobacco, as well as maize.<sup>64</sup> How early plants native to America were carried into Africa cannot be determined, but it seems reasonable to assume that it must have been during the sixteenth century. At any rate, the early settlers of Louisiana appreciated the agricultural knowledge of the Negroes; two ship captains sent to Africa for slaves in 1718 were officially instructed to secure some who were familiar with the cultivation of rice.<sup>65</sup>

There was a great amount of work to be done in colonial Louisiana, and the slaves did much of it, though European laborers were imported.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>64</sup> Park, Travels in Africa, 9-10, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Flauche Dart, "The First Cargo of African Slaves for Louisiana, 1718," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 176-77.

<sup>66</sup> Margry, Découvertes et Établissements, V, 627.

The chief crops were rice, indigo, corn and tobacco, though some cotton was grown and many foodstuffs, especially yams and beans. But before the land could be used the thick natural growth of the Mississippi delta had to be cleared away. In addition to agriculture, slaves learned many specialized trades; there were blacksmiths, bakers, indigo makers and hunters among them. There is even a recorded instance of a slave boy being apprenticed to a locksmith,<sup>67</sup> and the province's hangman was a Negro named Louis Congo.<sup>68</sup> Naturally, slaves who had acquired a skill were more valuable than ordinary Negroes.<sup>69</sup> The blacks themselves recognized this state of affairs. An emancipated woman who sought to buy the liberty of her son complained bitterly of the price set by the appraisers, stating that it was far too much for a drunkard, thief and slave without a trade such as her son.<sup>70</sup> This instance might also serve as an example of how quickly Negroes adjusted themselves to the hypocrisy of European legal procedures.

The records reveal slaves' performing almost as many kinds of work as had to be done in the colony. They were frequently called out for public levee work in emergencies,<sup>71</sup> and each landholder had

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<sup>67</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IV (1921), 230-31.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., III (1920), 414.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., V (1922), 412.

<sup>70</sup> "Index to Spanish Judicial Records," Ibid., XIV (1931), 621.

<sup>71</sup> Laura L. Porteus, trans., "Governor Carondelet's Levee Ordinance of 1792," Ibid., I (1927), 516. "Abstracts from Old Papers," Ibid., I (1917), 234.

the responsibility for ordinary maintenance of the part of the levees which lay on his property.<sup>72</sup> One task which usually fell to the slave children was keeping birds out of the rice fields by beating "continually on a frying pan or kettle,"<sup>73</sup> a technique which may be as old as the cultivation of rice. There are a number of instances of slaves' being hired out by their masters as paddlers for trips up the Mississippi to the Illinois country. In such cases the owner bore the loss if natural death occurred, but the man hiring the Negro must pay for him if he should die at the hands of the Indians.<sup>74</sup> Slaves were also used as crew members on larger boats.<sup>75</sup> The people of colonial Louisiana would have been amused at the reluctance of their Confederate descendants to use Negro troops. Armed slaves rendered such valorous service against the Indians after the Natchez massacre of 1729 that it was proposed that those who had given the best account of themselves be freed. Consideration was also given to a plan to form a regular company of black soldiers.<sup>76</sup> As a matter of fact, Africans fought on both sides in these campaigns, because a number of runaways were with the Indians.<sup>77</sup>

A onetime inhabitant of the colony has left an account of the

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<sup>72</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 93.

<sup>73</sup> Dumont, Mémoires sur la Louisiane, I, 415.

<sup>74</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IX (1926), 319-20.

<sup>75</sup> Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 74, 454.

<sup>76</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IV (1921), 524.

<sup>77</sup> Gayarre, History of Louisiana, I, 415.



life of the Negroes on the larger plantations. Then, as later, the owner often did not personally supervise his slaves, but hired an overseer. "Sometimes also they choose for this employment a Negro of trust, who as a mark of distinction carries a whip in his hand." The workers had their breakfast at the master's house, and were in the fields by the break of day. Two or three hours of rest in the middle of the day were usually given, after which work continued until sundown. In the evening, before eating, the slaves might "grind rice or corn to make meal." Women went to the fields "as well as the men, and when they have suckling children, they carry them behind their backs, and follow the others."<sup>78</sup>

Most of the slaves "font des deserts," that is to say, they clear lands which they cultivate to their own profit; they grow cotton, tobacco, and other products which they sell. There are settlers who give their Negroes Saturday and Sunday for their own; and during this time the master is relieved of care for their nourishment: they work then for other Frenchmen who do not have slaves, and who pay them. Those who live in the capital or its environs take advantage, ordinarily, of the two hours rest given them at noon to go cut wood that they afterward sell in the city; others sell ashes, or the fruits of the country when one is in season. Some of the Negroes do so well that they have earned the wherewithal to buy their liberty, and have built their habitations in this province in imitation of the French.<sup>79</sup>

Thus there was hope for some slaves, but there was hopelessness for others. The canard that Negroes never commit suicide or become insane is given the lie by colonial records.<sup>80</sup> Dumont says that the

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<sup>78</sup> Dumont, Mémoires sur le Louisiane, II, 241-42.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 242-43.

<sup>80</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XI (1928), 131, 141.

slaves were fed rice, maize, and other foods grown in the colony,<sup>81</sup> but their diet was not good enough to prevent some dirt eating.<sup>82</sup> The roster of slave crimes of violence is in itself testimony to despair. Running away, when only the jungle-like forests of the sparsely settled province offered refuge was an act of desperation.

There was running away in plenty, and the Bambaras, whose background was far from savage, were frequently among those who took to flight. As early as 1727, a recaptured Indian runaway reported that he had taken refuge with fifteen other fugitive slaves in a village, and that these fifteen were armed with guns and ammunition which they were determined to use to protect their freedom no matter who might come against them.<sup>83</sup> Some of the more enterprising Negroes who fled were able to get to Cuba.<sup>84</sup> During the American Revolution a group of runaways built themselves a village in the forest near New Orleans, and were actually employed by a lumberman.<sup>85</sup>

The punishment for running away was so terrible as to give pause to all but the most courageous or the most desperate. Dumont reveals, with fetching candor, that the recaptured "maron" was tied down, face to earth, and given one to two hundred lashes. The number of blows

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<sup>81</sup> Dumont, Mémoires sur la Louisiane, II, 243-44.

<sup>82</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, III (1920), 148.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., XIV (1930), 156.

<sup>85</sup> "Index to Spanish Judicial Records," Ibid., XVIII (1933), 516-20.

was adjusted <sup>to</sup> the the culprit's strength, but even so it was necessary to keep a lighted torch at hand to thrust into his face when "he no longer cries out," because in "the rage which this chastisement causes" he might suffocate himself by swallowing his tongue. The Negro's skin, "in shreds" at the conclusion of the lashing, was washed with a "piquant ointment," and then he went into irons, not to "go out at all until after having promised to be more wise."<sup>86</sup>

The code noir, put into effect by Bienville soon after the founding of New Orleans, required that Negroes receive instruction in the Roman faith. On pain of confiscation, they could not be placed under the supervision of a non-Catholic, and Sundays and holidays were to be strictly observed. It was also required that Christians among the blacks be buried in consecrated ground.<sup>87</sup> Not enough evidence is available to justify conclusive statements as to how completely these provisions of the code were carried out. Certainly there are many references in the records to unbaptized Negroes,<sup>88</sup> but there are references to believers also.<sup>89</sup> Those who had not received the sacrament of baptism might nonetheless have received religious instruction.

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<sup>86</sup> Dumont, Mémoires sur la Louisiane, II, 243-44.

<sup>87</sup> Le Code Noir, ou, édit du roy, servant de réglemant pour le gouvernement & l'administration de la justice, police, discipline & le commerce des esclaves nègres, dans la province & colonie de la Louisiane. Donne' a Versailles au mois de mars, 1724 (Paris, 1728), Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 11.

<sup>88</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, V (1922), 594-95.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 599.

The colonial church has left no record of opposition to slavery. Indeed, the Jesuit Fathers in New Orleans were sued in 1737 for neglecting to return to a minor's estate several slaves they had hired, even though the lease had expired,<sup>90</sup> and a Negro accused of theft in 1781 was discovered to be the property of "Reverend Father Hilario, Capuchin Priest of the Parish Church of Attakapas."<sup>91</sup> But whatever the attitude of the church toward slavery, it does not seem to have felt that the Negro communicant was inferior in the sight of God. In 1736 the body of a slave girl, already buried, was ordered removed to consecrated ground when it was found that she had been baptized.<sup>92</sup> The church at Mobile was careful to record the death of a slave who died there in 1746, "the eve after confessing his sins."<sup>93</sup>

All African religious traditions were not removed from the Negro mind by its transfer to this continent. African practices endured into the twentieth century, being adapted to outward conformity to the customs of the dominant race.<sup>94</sup> In eighteenth century Louisiana this process of adaptation had no doubt begun, but could hardly have been accomplished with any completeness. African traditions were being reinforced throughout the colonial period by the arrival of Negroes fresh from Africa. Thus it is not surprising

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>91</sup> "Index to Spanish Judicial Records," Ibid., XVI (1933), 151.

<sup>92</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Ibid., V (1922), 599.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., IV (1932), 521.

<sup>94</sup> Herskovitz, Myth of the Negro Past, passim.

that there should be a record of "a service" being "sung in Negro style and language" as a preliminary to mutiny,<sup>95</sup> or a reference to an alleged poisoner as a practitioner of witchcraft.<sup>96</sup> It should not be thought, however, that African traditions predominated. For all practical purposes, African culture gave way to the culture of the master race.

The colonial records throw some light on the mixing of races which went on in colonial Louisiana. No statistics are available, but evidence that the process did take place is conclusive. In the first place, when Negroes ran away and joined the Indians, children of mixed blood must have resulted. There was some interbreeding between red and black slaves. In 1745 a master whose Negro woman had run away suspected that she had been enticed by an Indian who had lately been caught in his Negro cabins.<sup>97</sup>

The code noir flatly prohibited the marriage of whites with Negroes, and forbade the concubinage of whites with slaves. A white master whose slave woman bore a child by him was to suffer the loss of both mother and child.<sup>98</sup> These latter provisions of the law were unrealistic. Some evidence exists of actual marriage between white men and Negro women, though it is hardly conclusive. In 1723 a white locksmith and his wife, "a negress," were accused of theft.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XII (1929), 144.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., IV (1921), 355.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., XIV (1931), 580.

<sup>98</sup> Le Code Noir, Article 6.

<sup>99</sup> "Abstracts from Old Papers," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XII (1929), 144.

Early in the Spanish period, in 1769, a marriage contract was made between a white man and "Charlotte, natural daughter of . . . a free mulatress, and the late Roy Villeray," the father of the bride having been a white man.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps a quadroon was not considered a Negro in the eighteenth century.

The existence of extra-marital relations between whites and Negroes can be accepted without doubt. To some extent this had gone on on the slave coast, and it continued amidst the stench of the slave ships.<sup>101</sup> When the slave woman reached the New World she was in no position to resist white insistence. An extant account of an overseer, guilty of unspeakable brutalities, who was "especially vindictive to those women slaves who resisted his lust in the open field,"<sup>102</sup> is example enough. Such an instance leaves little uncertainty, nor does the testimony of a witness in court that a white man had given a slave to a free "mulatress," and that the slave had served the mulatto woman and the children this woman had by the donor for seven years.<sup>103</sup> Indications of miscegenation are also strong when another mulatto woman, suing for the right to buy her freedom, testified that "Her master bought her when he was a bachelor and that she had served him as his only household slave,"<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> "Index to Spanish Judicial Records," Ibid., VI (1923), 157.

<sup>101</sup> George F. Dow, ed., Slave Ships and Slaving (Salem, Massachusetts, 1927), passim.

<sup>102</sup> "Records of the Superior Council," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, IV (1921), 521.

<sup>103</sup> "Index to Spanish Judicial Records," Ibid., XII (1929), 341.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., XI (1928), 338.

or when Luis Jousson emancipated the slave boy Luis, a two year old mulatto, son of the slave Magdalene.<sup>105</sup> Citations are after all unnecessary, because the increasing number of references to mulattoes as time went on, and a realistic appreciation of the conditions which exist when women are the property of men both make the conclusion inevitable that there were many children born of mixed parentage. Nor do the sources available indicate any strong disapproval. Men in court frequently accounted for their whereabouts at a certain time by asserting that they had been "sleeping with a negress."<sup>106</sup>

Thus slavery was an accepted institution in colonial Louisiana from the time of the first settlements. Indian servitude proved impractical there as elsewhere, and Negroes were imported to supply the constant labor demand of a semi-tropical frontier. These Negroes were representative of the population of western Africa, because they came to Louisiana from the West Indies and through the efforts of English smugglers as well as in the ships of legitimate French slave traders. Bringing with them a cultural heritage which fitted them for their task, if not for their condition, most of them made the best of circumstances they could not control, though resistance never disappeared entirely. The Negroes brought to Louisiana retained some of the religious traditions of their homeland, but in the main they accepted the religion of their masters. Their lot was not an easy one, but their status in relation to their masters was perhaps higher than ever again before the Civil War brought emancipation.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., VI (1923), 534.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., XV (1932), 688.

## THE SLAVE TRADE IN LOUISIANA

To a large extent, the economic development of Louisiana depended upon a supply of slaves. After Bore had succeeded in making sugar from Louisiana cane, the progress of the new industry was hampered when Governor Carondelet prohibited further introduction of Negroes.<sup>1</sup> The people of the province realized that a continuous supply of blacks was essential to their prosperity and protested strongly when the United States closed the foreign slave trade.<sup>2</sup> Timothy Flint, who came into the state as a stern opponent of the institution, found it necessary to purchase blacks after he began farming near Alexandria.<sup>3</sup> Between 1803 and 1860 Louisiana changed from a frontier territory to a state wherein all the accessible good land and much marginal land was under cultivation. Negro labor made a great part of this agricultural advance possible, and the slave trade supplied the Negro labor.

The slave trade had a number of facets. Through voluntary sales, legal sales of the estates of deceased persons, known in Louisiana

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<sup>1</sup> Claude C. Robin, Voyages dans L'interieur de la Louisiane, de la Floride Occidentale, et dans les isles de la Martinique et de Saint-Dominque, pendant les années 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805 et 1806, II (Paris, 1807), 226.

<sup>2</sup> Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., The Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812 (Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., The Territorial Papers of the United States, IX. Washington, 1940), 261, 263, 265, 285, 305, 312, 315, 320.

<sup>3</sup> John Ervin Kirkpatrick, Timothy Flint, Pioneer Missionary, Author, Editor, 1780-1840 (Cleveland, 1911), 191.



as succession sales, and through foreclosures, blacks were transferred from one owner to another within the state. Some slaves were hired out or rented by the month or by the year. The selling of bondsmen into Louisiana from other states had begun before 1803 and continued until the Civil War. The importation of Negroes from Africa and the West Indies never ceased completely, though ~~the~~ bidden by law, until emancipation and war destroyed the demand.

The code noir protected Negroes from one possible abuse arising from their status as property. It forbade separation of husbands and wives, or of children under fourteen from their parents, whether by legal seizure or voluntary sales. Although slaves were to be considered movables, and to be divided among heirs without regard to primogeniture, those fourteen to sixty years of age were not liable to seizure for debt, except for part of their purchase price, unless the plantation upon which they were domiciled was also seized. Nor could there be any judicial seizure or sale of any real estate without including the slaves attached thereto.<sup>4</sup> The first territorial legislature after the beginning of American administration designated Negroes as real estate, subject to mortgage like other real estate. Under this legislation disabled slaves were not to be separated from their children against their will, but mothers and their children more than ten years of age could now be sold separately.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 40-44.

<sup>5</sup> Acts Passed at the First Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, 1806 (New Orleans, 1807), 150-90.

( It was not uncommon for one citizen of Louisiana to sell slaves to another citizen. ) A bill of sale dated December 4, 1801, at Bayou Sara, notes:

Caleb Weeks has bargained sold and delivered unto David Weeks a negro girl named Leah Savage and her child Caroline for the consideration of a negro boy named Harry and four hundred dollars paid to me in hand and I do acknowledge to have received the above named negro Harry.<sup>6</sup>

( The purchaser of slaves preferred local Negroes when he could get them at a reasonable price. ) When he bought a man or woman from one of his neighbors, he usually knew something of his or her disposition, working ability and health. Even when a planter bought local slaves about whom he had no personal knowledge, he could take comfort in the fact that they were already acclimated. Those Negroes who had been born in Louisiana and those who had been in the state long enough to become accustomed to the climate were not likely to lose time because of sickness to as great a degree as those imported from elsewhere. Even an otherwise undesirable local Negro might be preferred over a new arrival. In 1804, Pierre Lafitte, acting for the Widow Patin, sold Pierrot, "a native of the province of Louisiana, about thirty-seven years old," to Estevan Folch, governor of Spanish West Florida. Pierrot brought a low price, because he was "the same one which was sentenced to ten years imprisonment . . . which sentence is to be completed in the next coming year . . ." <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bill of Sale, December 4, 1801. Weeks (David and Family) Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>7</sup> Archives of the Spanish Government of West Florida, 1782-1816, 20 typescript volumes (Translation and transcription). Survey of Federal Archives. Original records in Nineteenth Judicial District Court, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. VIII, 352.

( Usually slaves and plantations were sold together.) In 1836 George W. Grove of Concordia Parish offered to sell 1,000 acres of land, of which 250 acres were cleared, ten good field hands, cattle, hogs, farming equipment and a year's supply of corn.<sup>8</sup> In the spring of 1840 Robert A. Crain, near Alexandria, wished to sell a 700 acre plantation and forty slaves.<sup>9</sup> After the crop of 1849 had been gathered, J.D. and R.B. Lynch offered to sell 1,554 acres, 300 of which were cultivated, equipped with a gin, Negro quarters and forty Negroes, of whom thirty were working hands.<sup>10</sup>

Often the person who wished to buy a slave appointed an agent to act for him. Such an agent made the following report in 1830:

In regards to your letter I attended to it immediatly. Mr. Cline showed me a likly negro fellow say about twenty-five years for six hundred used to the fields seemingly a fine boy. but a negro wench with her mulatto child of 4 years all that one can desire in beauty youth & talent she washes irons & pleats in perfection cooks & in full she possesses all the qualities that would suit you. I seriously advise you to give her the preference. she is willing for anything of warranted character in fact her face tells it she is about 29 years or less & \$700 demanded. I await your answer . . .<sup>11</sup>

In 1858 Edward G. Stewart commissioned John W. Gurley to buy a Negro for him. At first he desired a boy, "as he can be of equal service in the house while young and be of more value out of doors

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<sup>8</sup> Natchez Courier and Journal, January 1, 1836.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandria Red River Whig, April 25, 1840.

<sup>10</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, December 29, 1849.

<sup>11</sup> Alex Hait to Edward Hall, January 5, 1830. Hall (Edward) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

as he grows older."<sup>12</sup> Four days later Stewart had changed his mind, or his wife had changed it for him, pointing out "Christine with her six or seven children as an example and I think with her that in after years a girl would prove the most valuable, so a girl let it be."<sup>13</sup>

In 1843 Charity Hospital was authorized by the legislature to sell Marian, a Negro woman, and in the future to sell any Negroes belonging to the hospital if the administrators believed it beneficial.<sup>14</sup> Before 1855 wives had to obtain permission from the legislature before they could sell slaves which were a part of their dowries. Thus Lepida Denège, a free woman of color, was empowered to sell Clerine and Clerine's mulatto son Edward. These slaves had been donated to her by her father at the time of her marriage.<sup>15</sup> Likewise Judith Toulant, wife of Emil Légendre, was permitted to sell the slave Irma and Irma's three children,<sup>16</sup> and in 1854 a similar privilege was extended to Celeste Cantrelle.<sup>17</sup> Weary of such special acts, the legislature authorized the sale of dower property whenever a judge, after conference with the wife in his chambers, believed it advisable.

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<sup>12</sup> Edward G. Stewart to John W. Gurley, December 19, 1858. Gurley (John W.) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., December 23, 1858.

<sup>14</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Sixteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1843 (New Orleans, 1843), 21.

<sup>15</sup> Acts of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1852 (New Orleans, 1852), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>17</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1854 (New Orleans, 1854), 17.

The judge's consent was not to be given, however, if the proceeds of the sale were to be used to pay the husband's debts, or otherwise used for his advantage.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the local Negroes who came on the market in Louisiana did so through foreclosure or succession sales. Foreclosures were inevitable in an economy which was based so largely on credit, which dealt in products which fluctuated greatly in price and which was dependent upon the elements. The financial dangers of planting are illustrated by the history of Marengo Plantation, located five miles above Vidalia in Concordia Parish. In 1841 the Commercial Bank of Natchez foreclosed on this property in satisfaction of a mortgage signed by Charles N. Rowley. The plantation then consisted of 2,200 acres worked by eighty-five slaves.<sup>19</sup> Jacob Lansing apparently came to Rowley's aid this time, because in 1843 Jane Rowley sued Lansing and Charles Rowley and again forced the plantation and slaves under the auctioneer's hammer. During these two years the number of slaves on the place had increased to ninety-eight.<sup>20</sup> The new owner held Marengo until his death nine years later, when it was sold again in succession.<sup>21</sup>

Foreclosures took place during prosperous years as well as in times of depression. In 1861 Joseph Lallande seized and sold 109 slaves and 2,683 acres which pertained to Emily Plantation on Black

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<sup>18</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1855 (New Orleans, 1855), 254.

<sup>19</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, September 4, 1841.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., April 29, 1843.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., July 31, 1852.

River.<sup>22</sup> Even very large holdings might have to be sold by the sheriff. Pierre M. Lapice, whose misfortunes may have been due to the fact that he attempted to grow sugar north of Red River, lost three plantations containing 4,600 acres altogether, which were worked by 343 slaves. All the slaves were sold with the land.<sup>23</sup>

Succession sales, while they resulted from the death of a property owner rather than from bankruptcy, were very much the same as foreclosure sales from the slave's point of view. Negroes and other property were sold at public auction when this was necessary in order to settle an estate. The proceeds were turned over to the executors for distribution among creditors and heirs. One or several hundred Negroes might be auctioned. Five lots of slaves, each containing from one to sixteen individuals, were advertised as subject to succession sale in one issue of an Alexandria newspaper.<sup>24</sup> At Franklin the sale of the property of Jacques Dupré included no less than 320 Negroes.<sup>25</sup>

The following passages from a process verbal of a succession sale are illustrative:

. . . having pursued all other legal requirements I proceeded to offer for sale the negro man, Jerry and after crying the same for some time and receiving the various bids and offers the negro man Jerry was adjudicated to C.P. Bailey at the sum and price of nine hundred and fifty dollars, he Bailey being the last and highest bidder upon the terms and conditions

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<sup>22</sup> Harrisonburg Independent, January 4, 1860.

<sup>23</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, July 31, 1852.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandria Red River Whig, May 15, 1841.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, December 23, 1847.

aforesaid for the payment and here the said C.P. Bailey has furnished the three promissory notes of himself and Hardie Richardson and Leslie Bankston dated on date hereof for the sum of \$317.66 payable respectively one at one year --- one at two years one at three years with interest at eight percent . . .

I then offered the negro woman Louisa aged thirty-five years and her four children . . . and after crying the same for some time the same was adjudicated to C.P. Bailey at the sum and price of twelve hundred dollars . . .

I then offered the girl Eliza and after crying the same for some time the same was adjudicated to Daniel Bankston at the sum and price of twelve hundred dollars . . .

I then offered the negro boy Archy aged twelve years and the negro girl Margaret aged ten years and after crying the same for some time the negro boy Archy and the negro girl Margaret was adjudicated to James M. Schilling at the sum and price of two thousand dollars . . . <sup>26</sup>

Seldom were slave sales cash transactions. Sometimes when one slave was traded for another, as when John P. Smith traded one Negress to Arthemise Islain, a free woman of color, for another Negress and gave \$100 in addition, a cash payment was made to close the transaction.<sup>27</sup> More commonly, however, part of the purchase price was paid in cash, the remainder in two or three annual installments. Often the provisions for payment were complicated. When a man named Adams bought the mulatto Ben from one Cockerille for \$800, he paid \$200 in cash and gave a note due in sixty days for \$200 more. He was further to credit

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<sup>26</sup> Process Verbal of Succession Sale of Property of Rolla Self and Melissa Bankston, late widow in Community and Wife of C.P. Bailey, co-tutor of Minor heirs of Rolla Self, January 2, 1857. Ellis (E.J., T.G.W. and Family) Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>27</sup> Bill of Sale, December 7, 1848. Smith (John P.) Document. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

Cockerille with \$400 on a note held by himself so soon "as said Cockerille shall have paid and taken up two certain notes due . . . for two hundred and forty dollars."<sup>28</sup>

Somewhat unusual was the purchase of a plantation and thirty-two slaves from Daniel Hoard by R.H. Cox. Cox gave \$30,000 for this property, which was located in Pointe Coupee Parish. He paid \$2,000 in cash, and agreed to pay \$4,000 more in sixty days. The remainder he was to pay at the rate of \$6,000 a year, taking up specified obligations of Hoard, except that the last \$6,000 was to be paid to the vendor personally. Cox agreed that if any of the notes became delinquent Hoard was to take over his crop and sell it where he pleased. Not only did Cox accept these harsh terms, but he agreed to them in full knowledge that there was a suit in progress against Hoard which rendered title to the plantation questionable.<sup>29</sup>

Complicated terms of sale led to confusion in some instances, as when one Belloc secured seizure of the Negro woman Francoise from T.P. Roux. The heirs of "the late widow Bourgeois" petitioned that none of the proceeds from the sale of Francoise be turned over to Belloc until \$320 had been paid to the Bourgeois heirs, on the grounds "That the slave had been depending upon the estate of the late widow Bourgeois" and was sold to Roux "for the sum of \$320 payable at 1, 2, and 3 years . . . but which has never been paid to the said heirs and is yet due and owing . . ." The petition was granted, and the

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<sup>28</sup> Bill of Sale, January 20, 1851. Chaplin, Brezeale and Chaplin Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>29</sup> Deed, March 26, 1847. Hoard (Daniel) Document, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.



heirs presumably received their \$320.<sup>30</sup>

( Now and then, most commonly through inheritance, individuals came into part ownership of slaves. ) Often one of the parties to such an arrangement bought out the interest of the others, as when Jesse H. Chaney bought for \$5,000 the share in thirteen Negroes owned by David Melton.<sup>31</sup> Likewise Charles H. Webb gave Joseph Spurlock \$1,000 for the one seventh interest which Spurlock and his wife held in Webb's eleven blacks.<sup>32</sup> In 1849 Richard Featherstone sold for \$27,000 his undivided half interest in a Madison Parish plantation which consisted of 2,100 acres, 150 hogs, twenty-eight mules, five yoke of oxen and sixty-four Negroes.<sup>33</sup>

( Since joint ownership of Negroes so frequently proved unsatisfactory to one or more of the parties, it was avoided when possible. ) Thus it was when C.S. Bell and one Colonel Nicholas went into partnership on a sugar plantation below Donaldsonville. Each of the partners owned half the land, buildings and equipment, but, as Bell's wife emphasized in describing the arrangement, "There exists no partnership in the negroes." Each owner placed fifty working hands on the place and replaced any who died or became disabled. Expenses and proceeds were divided equally.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Petition, October 10, 1823. Bourgeois (Pierre and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>31</sup> Notarial Record, East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, May 2, 1836. Located in East Carroll Parish Courthouse, Lake Providence, Louisiana.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., October 29, 1839.

<sup>33</sup> Bill of Sale, February 14, 1849. Featherstone (Richard) Document, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>34</sup> Mrs. C.S. Bell to Mrs. Anna Butler, February, 1842. Butler (Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

(There were a number of cases in Louisiana history of slaves being purchased in order to be emancipated.) The St. Charles Parish Police Jury authorized the emancipation of the mulatto Charles in 1842 because Charles' late master had bought him in order to set him free.<sup>35</sup> Free Negroes often bought relatives in order to manumit them. Two free men of color who wished to emancipate their recently purchased sister were authorized to do so in 1832.<sup>36</sup> The woman Sukey bought her own freedom, then ". . . by unusual industry, economy and good character she afterward made a great deal of money, laboring day and night for the purpose of purchasing her offspring."<sup>37</sup> The authorities were usually sympathetic to such cases during the early part of the century and offered no obstacles to these emancipations.

The threat of sale was occasionally resorted to as a disciplinary measure,<sup>38</sup> and there were cases of Negroes' being sold because of bad behavior. John Bisland ordered his carpenter, Abraham, sold when this slave was arrested in New Orleans, where he had gone without permission to visit his wife.<sup>39</sup> When Edward W. Taylor sold the girl Sophie he specifically noted, "The above slave is not guaranteed against the

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<sup>35</sup> Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana, No. 45. St. Charles Parish (Hahnville), Series I, Police Jury Minutes. Prepared by the Statewide Records Project Division of Community Service Programs Work Projects Administration, III, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., II, 38-39.

<sup>37</sup> Hardesty v. Sukey Wormley, 10 La. An. 239, April, 1855. Helen Tunneliff Catterall, Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro, III (Washington, 1932), 636-37.

<sup>38</sup> F.M. Kent to Moody Kent, June 2, 1857. Kent (Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>39</sup> John Bisland to Dennistonn & Hill, September 2, 1817. Bisland (John and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

vice of theft."<sup>40</sup>

Oftimes, for obvious reasons, badly behaved blacks were sent away from home to be sold. A former Mississippian who had settled across the river in Louisiana wrote the following to his uncle in Mississippi:

Dr. uncle My Frennd Wm Jones Hay will hand you this letter. I send by him my Boy George one of the best Negroes I have got — have had to be from home so much that he become spoiled in fact I never would hav had any trouble with him if I could remain at home & dispens with a overseer. during my absence he run off but come in agan as soon as I got home & I am determined never to sell a Negro unless it is for fault of this kind & then to send him clear off George is a sound Negro in everry particular Sprightly a good cook & a good ox driver & all So handy with tools he has dun all my ruf carpenter work. he is the first Negro I bought after I left Miss & has been with me ever since I have been here he has a wife & children which I own.<sup>41</sup>

The State of Louisiana occasionally sold Negroes. Sometimes they were acquired through civil suits, but more often they were unclaimed runaways.) In 1842 the legislature ruled that the sale of the Negro Jeffrey to George May should be cancelled, "said slave being in the habit of running away." Jeffrey was to be sold again at auction "without any other guarantee than the title."<sup>42</sup> In 1845 the treasurer was ordered to sell at auction "the slave Mary and her child John, four years old, and Carmelite . . . with her child ten months

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<sup>40</sup> Bill of Sale, July 11, 1828. Weeks Collection.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Thomas T. Davis of Natchez, March 7, 1849. The signature of the writer is illegible. Gillespie (James A. and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>42</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Fifteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1841-1842 (New Orleans, 1842), 108.

old . . . on a credit of six months . . . Provided that the Treasurer will guarantee nothing but the title of said slaves."<sup>43</sup>

Negro men and women who had been sentenced to imprisonment for serious crimes were confined in the state penitentiary. Provision had to be made for the disposal of the offspring of women imprisoned for life, because title to Negroes so sentenced was vested in the state.) In 1848 the legislature ruled that children born to such women should, upon attaining the age of ten years, be turned over to the sheriff of East Baton Rouge Parish for sale at public auction. The sale was to be for cash, and the sheriff was to "pay the proceeds of the said slave to the State Treasurer, to become a part of the free school fund . . ."<sup>44</sup> During the year ending December 31, 1853, the state received \$2,061.15 from the sale of slaves.<sup>45</sup> Contributing to this sum was a ten year old boy "by the name of Joseph . . . the issue of Angelina, a slave condemned to the penitentiary for life. . . . The said boy brought a price of eight hundred dollars . . . which was duly paid over to the State Treasurer, to be placed in the school fund, agreeably to law."<sup>46</sup>

For two decades the state Internal Improvements Department owned a group of blacks who were used for road building and, especially, for

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<sup>43</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Seventeenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1845 (New Orleans, 1845), 73.

<sup>44</sup> Acts of the Extra Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1848 (New Orleans, 1848), 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> "Report of the Auditor of Public Accounts," Documents of the First Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1853 (New Orleans, 1854), 6.

<sup>46</sup> "Report of the Board of Directors of the Louisiana State Penitentiary," Ibid., 4.

rendering bayous navigable. These Negroes grew old in the state's service, and in 1860 the legislature ordered that after sixty days advertisement they be sold at auction for cash.<sup>47</sup> A planter who attended the sale noted, "They sold very high, considering that they were greatly advanced in years and were not guaranteed."<sup>48</sup>

Thieves stole and sold slaves just as they did any other property. In 1845 a report from St. Francisville said that a gang of kidnapers was stealing Negro children in that vicinity.<sup>49</sup> Two men were jailed for slave stealing in 1859.<sup>50</sup> Alexandria was a favorite haunt for Negro stealers. In 1860 the police jury there offered a \$500 reward for the "man who stole Mrs. Casson's slave," and this reward no doubt stimulated his capture a few months later.<sup>51</sup> At Shreveport a man suspected of stealing Negroes and selling them in New Orleans "was found hanging on a tree in the suburbs . . ." his hands and feet tied together.<sup>52</sup> In 1850, near Baton Rouge, a thirteen year old white child was kidnapped, presumably to be sold into slavery.<sup>53</sup> In 1844 a white woman who had been sold as a slave

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<sup>47</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Fifth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1860 (Baton Rouge, 1860), 177.

<sup>48</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, June 9, 1860. Pugh (Alexander H. and Family) Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>49</sup> Opelousas St. Landry Whig, July 17, 1845.

<sup>50</sup> "Annual Report of the Attorney General," Documents of the Second Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1859 (Baton Rouge, 1860), no pp.

<sup>51</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, January 11, March 21, 1860.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., October 26, 1859.

<sup>53</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, April 20, 1850.

and who had borne several children to her mulatto husband successfully brought court action for her freedom.<sup>54</sup>

It was not unusual for slaves to be hired out in Louisiana, though it may not have been so common as in some of the older slaveholding states. Many people in need of labor contracted with the slaves themselves for Sunday work. The usual wage for this labor seems to have been seventy-five cents a day. Thus on Sunday, September 26, 1841, a storekeeper hired six Negroes to cut hay for six escalin chacun.<sup>55</sup> The word escalin, which originally referred to a small Dutch coin, was used in South Louisiana to mean "bit." The storekeeper above paid the Negroes "six bits each." Edward G. Stewart tried to hire some of his neighbor's slaves to roll logs on Sunday in 1860, but ran into unexpected complications:

Two negre boys that promised me to come last Sunday backed out when they found I would not provide them with whiskey. John says that next Sunday he will take the risk and get some himself for them. If you were here yourself to deal it out it would probably do no harm but I have reason to think that John is not the proper one to administer it and in all probability the whole crowd will get drunk.<sup>56</sup>

Generally slaves were hired through arrangement with the master. One T. Carson, seeking a job as overseer in 1814, offered the labor of his Negro, "a good plough boy and an excellent cotton picker," as

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., June 1, 1844.

<sup>55</sup> Baucry Family Account Books, II, September 26, 1841. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>56</sup> Edward G. Stewart to John W. Gurley, March 5, 1860. Gurley Papers.

as well as his own services.<sup>57</sup> In 1829 Henry Marston "hired . . . a negro wench (Rose) & three children . . . for the sum of \$85 for the present year — all of them are to have two suits of clothes each . . . [and] one blanket is to be supplied for the whole."<sup>58</sup> Very specific terms were written out when T.T. Chewing of Carroll Parish hired "all my negroes" to William Bailey for \$4,000:

It is understood and agreed that said negroes are to remain on said plantation, and to work as other negroes work. Said Bailey is to feed and clothe them in the same manner as negroes are usually fed and clothed — said Bailey to pay their taxes for this year — no deduction from hire except in case of death — no deduction for sickness or running away.<sup>59</sup>

Sugar planters often tried to hire extra slaves for the grinding season and sometimes for the whole year. One such person so declared himself in 1828: "Ten or twelve negroes would be hired by the year to work on a sugar plantation where they will be well treated."<sup>60</sup> Planters along the river leased slaves from as far north as Mississippi when the grinding season approached.<sup>61</sup> Some extra hands could usually be secured from the rice planters in the southern parishes.<sup>62</sup> Seldom was it possible, however, to secure enough hands from neighbors to be

<sup>57</sup> L. Duncan to Thomas Butler, October 14, 1814. Butler Family Papers.

<sup>58</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, January 2, 1829. Marston (Henry and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>59</sup> Notarial Record, East Carroll Parish, April 10, 1841.

<sup>60</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, January 19, 1828.

<sup>61</sup> Diary and Plantation Record of E.E. McCollam, December 23, 1844. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>62</sup> J.B. Wilkinson, "Rice — Its Uses and Production," De Bow's Review, XVI (1854), 535.

assured of an adequate work force if an early freeze or heavy rains created an emergency on the sugar plantations. Therefore sugar planters were under constant pressure to buy more slaves.

The amount for which a slave could be rented depended upon the quality of the individual Negro, the demand for his services and general business conditions. De Bow thought that the necessity of paying four times as much as in Virginia for the hire of a slave in Louisiana reflected the higher prices and greater costs of maintenance in the latter state.<sup>63</sup> It seems more probable that slave hire was higher in Louisiana chiefly because the richer soil made slaves more productive than in the East. As a rule a slave's services could be secured for less in the piney woods parishes than in the plantation regions. Women earned as little as ten dollars a month for their masters in St. Tammany Parish in 1857.<sup>64</sup> A Rapides Parish planter reported in 1847 that Negro men, fed and clothed by the lessee, brought \$100 a year, women about eighty dollars. Those with special skills earned from forty to sixty dollars more. The writer noted that slaves were seldom hired at all.<sup>65</sup> If the records which have survived are representative, this estimate, while it may have been true for Rapides Parish in 1847, is too low to apply to the state as a whole. It was not unusual for a slaveowner to receive twenty-five dollars a

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<sup>63</sup> "Profits of Slavery in Louisiana and Virginia," De Bow's Review, V (1848), 188-89.

<sup>64</sup> E.P. Ellis to T.C.W. Ellis, February 6, 1857. Ellis Collection.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Boyce to Edmund Burke, November 10, 1847. Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1847 (Washington, 1847), 389-91.



month for his chattel's labor, and the average was somewhere between fifteen and twenty dollars a month.<sup>66</sup>

(The foreign slave trade was forbidden soon after the transfer of Louisiana to the United States. The inhabitants of the newly acquired territory believed that such a policy meant their ruin.) It would render, said an American who was in the territory in 1804,

. . . the plantations of little or no value, as Sugar, Cotton, Rice or Indigo cannot be cultivated to any extent, nor raised in large quantities without employing a number of hands, nor the levee . . . kept in repair: and that the heat of the climate & the marshiness of the country which for the most part is a mere swamp is unfriendly to the laboring class of white men.<sup>67</sup>

The importation of slaves from outside the United States was never legalized again, though smuggling did bring in some Negroes from Africa and the West Indies. Even so, Louisiana did not lack new supplies of blacks, because the older Southern states began sending their surplus slaves south and west. Some trade of this nature had begun even before the purchase of Louisiana. In 1802 Caleb Weeks of Spanish West Florida bought the girl Fan from Lewis Dunn of Virginia "for eighty pounds current."<sup>68</sup> The development of the interstate slave traffic was in part foreseen by Claude Robin, a French traveller who was in the province at the time of the

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<sup>66</sup> Mrs. Tabitha Warren to Mr. and Mrs. E.P. Ellis, January 30, 1836; E.P. Ellis to T.C.W. Ellis, February 6, 1857, Ellis Collection. Baucry Family Account Books, I, October 6, 1840. Monroe Ouachita Register, September 30, 1860.

<sup>67</sup> Hatch Dent to James H. McCulloch, July 14, 1804. Carter, Territory of Orleans, 265-66.

<sup>68</sup> Bill of Sale, September 29, 1802. Weeks Collection.

transfer. Robin noted that the price of slaves in the Southern United States was "two three times under what they are in Louisiana." He prophesied that planters would move to Louisiana with their Negroes, thus "doubling or tripling their fortunes by the effect of this passage alone."<sup>69</sup>

Before the War of 1812, enterprising citizens of Tennessee and Kentucky discovered that the new territory provided an excellent market for slaves. Andrew Jackson was only one of many who took advantage of the high prices obtainable in this market.<sup>70</sup> For example, on April 2, 1808, John Reed of Jefferson County, Kentucky, sold to David Weeks of "New Feliciana" a "certain African negro man named Sanbay, about twenty five years of age."<sup>71</sup> Some Negroes were brought into Louisiana from the East at the same time. Christian Schultz saw a shipload of such blacks on its slow voyage upriver to Natchez in 1808.<sup>72</sup> Most of the slaves from the East were landed in New Orleans and sold there, however.

The short-lived prosperity which followed the War of 1812 contributed to the slave trade by raising prices. Henry Fearon saw fourteen flatboats at Natchez in 1817, loaded with slaves for

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<sup>69</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, II, 419.

<sup>70</sup> Marquis James, The Border Captain (New York, 1929), 60-65.

<sup>71</sup> Bill of Sale, April 2, 1808. Weeks Collection.

<sup>72</sup> Christian Schultz, Travels on an Inland Voyage through the States of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, and through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New Orleans: Performed in the Years 1807 and 1808, Including a Tour of Nearly Six Thousand Miles, II (New York, 1810), 137-38.

sale.<sup>73</sup> The depression which succeeded this boom period did not act as a serious deterrent. The demand for Negroes in the Southwest was not radically reduced, and planters in the longer settled regions, finding their operations unprofitable, were willing to sell at lower prices. The slave population of Louisiana increased from 34,660 in 1810 to 69,064 in 1820, then to 109,558 in 1830. If the natural increase for Louisiana was the same as for the country as a whole — approximately twenty-five percent a decade — an estimate of the number imported is possible. Since by natural increase the slave population would have amounted to only 43,325 in 1820, some 26,000 bondsmen must have been imported between 1810 and 1820. On the same basis, 23,000 were brought in during the less prosperous years from 1820 to 1830.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps these figures should be increased somewhat to allow for emancipations, but it is probable that smuggling more than compensated for the number set free. It should be remembered that a great many of the 2,500 or so slaves who were introduced into Louisiana annually came with immigrating masters, not through the channels of the slave trade.

Even so, by 1817 the traffic in Negroes had reached such proportions that the Louisiana legislature felt it necessary to take action to prevent the introduction of undesirables. Slaves who had committed serious crimes were barred. The person who introduced

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<sup>73</sup> Henry Bradshaw Fearon, Sketches of America, a Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles through the Eastern and Western States of America (London, 1819), 267-68.

<sup>74</sup> Based on Frederic Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South (Baltimore, 1931), 382.

such a Negro and the master of the boat which transported him into the state were made subject to fines. The burden of proving that the black had committed no serious crimes was put upon the importer, but a certificate from the clerk of court of the county whence he came was accounted sufficient proof.<sup>75</sup>

Generally during this period the planter who wanted additional slaves went to New Orleans or Natchez to get them, but this was not always the case. One enterprising purchaser sent an agent to New York for Negroes, and this agent secured a shipload of "nearly eighty." These Northern blacks "did not average more than three hundred dollars" in cost. "I think this is doing pretty well," wrote the agent, "when even fresh imported Guinia Negroes were lately sold in NOrleans at \$1500."<sup>76</sup> Some planters, even at this early date, were fortunate enough to have persons with slaves to sell coming to their door. One Tennessean, not a professional trader, tried to dispose of part of his Negroes in this wise in 1824. From Natchitoches he wrote the following to his wife:

I arrived at this place after passing through the Attacapas, Oppaloosas and Alexandria, without being able to make one single sale of any description. The only alternative that offered to dispose of my property was to make an exchange for mules, to sell my negroes for cash at a fair price, was out of the question. I arrived in market just two months too late. I bargained last night for sixty mules and sold Celia, Judy and Pamela . . . I am sure I sold the girls for more than two hundred dollars more than I could have got for them in cash . . .

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<sup>75</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1816-1817 (New Orleans, 1817), 44.

<sup>76</sup> Sam Steer to John Minor, August 3, 1818. Minor (William J. and Family) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

My expenses has been enormous, but for the future will be less as I shall camp out altogether. I can scarcely enter a house in this country without paying five or six dollars for it.<sup>77</sup>

Slave prices varied greatly during the first quarter century after the Louisiana Purchase. Young men, who had the highest value, sold for less than \$500 in 1808, and women brought about \$350 at the same time. These low prices may have been a reflection of the economic depression which resulted from the Embargo and subsequent measures. Prices climbed constantly from 1810 through 1818 until healthy young men were worth over \$1,000 each and women only a little less. In 1818 Jacob Thompson of Tennessee sold James, twenty-five years old, to David Weeks for \$1,800.<sup>78</sup> Slave prices slumped as post-war boom was followed by post-war depression, and by the middle 1820's men were worth only \$650, women about \$500.<sup>79</sup>

Though prices were comparatively low, a section of Louisiana public opinion held that the slave trade was taking too much money out of the state.<sup>80</sup> As a result the legislature in 1826 prohibited the introduction of slaves for two years. Emigrants and citizens of Louisiana could bring in blacks whom they personally owned, but could not sell them for two years after their introduction. Those imported in contravention of the act were to be confiscated and sold, three

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<sup>77</sup> Alfred Flournoy to Martha Flournoy, April 23, 1824. Flournoy (Alfred) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>78</sup> Bill of Sale, June 14, 1818. Weeks Collection.

<sup>79</sup> These prices are compiled from observation of hundreds of bills of sale dated throughout this period.

<sup>80</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, September 22, 1827.

fourths of the proceeds going to the state and the remainder to the informer.<sup>81</sup> Though the slave trade was looked on with aversion, the demand for the traders' Negroes was too strong to be denied by legislation. The act was repealed in 1828 before it had run its full term.<sup>82</sup>

Slaves from the eastern states of the Old South had been coming into Louisiana from the time of the Louisiana Purchase, but before 1830, if extant bills of sale are any indication, the trade with states to the north exceeded that with the states to the east. One possible explanation of this situation is that the fertile lands of Alabama and western Georgia absorbed most of the surplus slaves from the East.<sup>83</sup> After 1830 the volume of trade with the Atlantic seacoast increased much more rapidly than that with Kentucky and Tennessee. Antonio Dalferes exemplified this trend. In 1828 he bought a Negro man from John Humley of Sumner County, Tennessee, but when he bought two more men a year later he dealt with Abner Robinson of Richmond, Virginia.<sup>84</sup>

The number of slaves coming into the state after the repeal of the act of 1828 was so great that the legislature felt it necessary to supplement the statute prohibiting the introduction of criminal

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<sup>81</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Seventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1826 (New Orleans, 1826), 114-18.

<sup>82</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Eighth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1828 (New Orleans, 1828), 22.

<sup>83</sup> James Benson Sellers, Slavery in Alabama (University, Alabama, 1950), 149-94.

<sup>84</sup> Bills of Sale, May 20, 1828, May 22, 1829. Dalferes (Antonio) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

blacks. In 1829 it was provided that every slave imported must be accompanied by two affidavits of good character signed by two freeholders of the county where he was purchased and certified by the clerk of court of that county. Each certificate of character had to include a description of the Negro, and both had to be attached to the bill of sale when the subject was sold. Penalties for violation were imposed on both sellers and buyers. Persons had to comply with the act when they brought slaves into the state for their own use. Copies were to be distributed to the governors of other Southern states.<sup>85</sup> It is unlikely that this law offered any serious obstacle to the slave trade. An eastern master who wished to sell a slave would obtain character certificates as easily as a recommendation is obtained today. Moreover, it was often considered good riddance when an unruly Negro was sold out of the community. Truly vicious Negroes were a very small part of the total sold into Louisiana or any other state of the Southwest, however.<sup>86</sup>

✓ The act of 1829 also forbade the introduction of any child ten years of age or under who was not accompanied by his mother unless there was proof that the mother was dead. The sale of such a child, or the sale of a mother without the child, was punishable by a fine of \$1,000 to \$2,000, and from six months to one year in prison. The slaves concerned were to be confiscated.<sup>87</sup> Attempted evasions of

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<sup>85</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1829 (New Orleans, 1829), 38-44.

<sup>86</sup> Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South, 275.

<sup>87</sup> Acts of the Ninth Legislature, 1829, 42-44.

this provision were apparently few in number. In 1855 a man named Hunter was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to six months imprisonment when he confessed to selling a mother without her children.<sup>88</sup> In 1859 the state attorney general reported to the legislature that another man had been indicted for the same offence, though the case had not been tried when the report was made.<sup>89</sup> The records of succession sales and foreclosure sales consulted for this study do not afford a single instance of a child under ten being sold without its mother unless designated as an orphan, although these records do afford numerous instances of families being broken up.

✓ A great many new settlers came into Louisiana during the early years of the 1830's:

Slaves were introduced into the country by thousands . . . The forests were being leveled and the farms extended as if by the hand of magic, and the people generally so absorbed in making money that they seemed to be infatuated . . .<sup>90</sup>

"A desire continually to purchase land and negroes," said one observer, "appears to be a characteristic of the planters."<sup>91</sup> Then came the news of the Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia. Already the state had been aroused by the quickening of abolition agitation. Now it was remembered that the importation of Virginia Negroes,

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<sup>88</sup> Opelousas Courier, June 23, 1855.

<sup>89</sup> "Annual Report of the Attorney General," Legislative Documents, 1859, no pp.

<sup>90</sup> Rev. W.E. Paxon, A History of the Baptists of Louisiana from the Earliest Times to the Present (St. Louis, 1888), 149-50.

<sup>91</sup> E.G.W. Butler to Thomas Butler, May 5, 1830. Butler Family Papers.



infected perhaps with an insurrectionary virus, had greatly increased during the past few years. The legislature met in special session, and the governor, after castigating abolitionists for their fanaticism and Virginia for exporting undesirable slaves, recommended protective measures.<sup>92</sup>

The legislature responded with an act which cut off the activity of all professional slave traders within Louisiana. Persons emigrating into the state and citizens were permitted to import slaves, except from Alabama, Florida Territory, Mississippi and Arkansas. No doubt importation from these areas was prohibited because they either were adjacent to Louisiana or so near its borders that slave traders could evade the law by offering Negroes for sale just across state lines. When emigrants and citizens did introduce Negroes, they were required, within twenty days after entering the state and within five days after entering the parish where the slaves were to be located, to go before the parish judge, render a description of each individual Negro, and swear that he had been imported for personal use and would not be sold for five years.

If any such slave was sold before five years had elapsed, he was to be set free and transported out of the state, and the person selling him was to be fined \$500 to \$1,000. Not only could slaves imported under the act not be sold for five years; neither could they be seized and sold under any execution, or for taxes, during the same period. A black introduced under the act could be removed from the

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<sup>92</sup> Journal de la Chambre des Representans de l'Etat de la Louisiane, Session Extraordinaire de la 10<sup>me</sup> Legislature, 1831 (New Orleans, 1831), no pp.

state only after five years, and if again introduced he again came under the provisions of the act.

Negroes imported by slave traders before passage of the act and unsold at the time of passage were to be sold or removed from the state within thirty days. Those in transit to Louisiana at the time of passage, and who arrived within six days by land or within twelve days by sea, had to be removed from the state within five days of arrival. Any slaves arriving by land or river after six days or by sea after twelve days were to be considered as having been introduced in violation of the law.

The act did not apply to travellers who were merely transporting slaves across the state. A citizen who was himself absent from the state but who had slaves en route for his own use could wait until he returned to take the necessary oath, but in the meantime his agent must make affirmations before the parish judge in his place. A false oath under the act was punished as perjury, and any simulated sale or contract made for the purpose of evading the law was punished by a fine of from \$500 to \$1,000, and the slaves concerned were freed and sent out of the state.<sup>93</sup>

This legislation was clarified and amplified the next year. An agent could not purchase slaves outside the state for the use of a citizen of Louisiana unless the agent had been for five years a citizen of the parish in which the slaves were to be domiciled. One exception was made in that the son or son-in-law of a purchaser could

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<sup>93</sup> Acts of the Extra Session of the Tenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1831 (New Orleans, 1831), 4-10.

act as agent without meeting these qualifications. Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri were added to the list of states from which the introduction of slaves, even by citizens for their own use, was forbidden. However, persons coming into Louisiana as permanent settlers could bring slaves from those states. The provisions of the original law which prohibited the sale of legally imported Negroes within five years of their introduction were amended to permit sales necessary to settle estates in probate. A slaveowner whose lands lay partly in another state was allowed to come and go with his slaves, but he had to submit a list of them to the parish authorities. This exception applied only to slaves acquired before the passage of the act of 1831.

Likewise a citizen who already owned Negroes in another state before 1831 could bring them into Louisiana, but he could not sell them for five years. When a citizen of Louisiana inherited blacks in Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas or Florida, he could import them with the permission of the governor, but they too must remain in the importer's possession for at least five years. A Louisianian who owned lands in Louisiana and slaves in another state could bring them to his lands for road and levee work, but had to post \$250 bond for each Negro. This money was refunded as soon as the blacks were removed from the state. Finally it was provided that the act should not inhibit the recovery of a slave taken from the state to avoid execution of a mortgage, or the recovery of runaways who had made their way across state lines.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Acts of the Third Session of the Tenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1832 (New Orleans, 1832), 140-44.

Apparently these acts did cut off the introduction of slaves by slave traders. For this reason Natchez was reported to be "inundated" with slaves for sale.<sup>95</sup> Yet the laws did not prevent the importation of Negroes into Louisiana by those not engaged in the trade. In March of 1833 the provisions of the law excluding blacks from Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee were revealed, and at the same time it was made possible for any voter and landholder in the judicial district where the slaves were to be domiciled to act as agent for a person wishing to purchase blacks.<sup>96</sup> R.F. McGuire, a physician who lived near Monroe, "Went to Missouri and bought Negroes for Lemy in the winter, Very cold . . ." <sup>97</sup> A list of depositions as required under the act which were made in East Feliciana Parish in 1833 show 235 Negroes' being introduced into that parish alone. This list may or may not have been complete, but if the figure given is a fair sample, three fourths of those who introduced slaves bought them themselves, while the remainder employed agents. Seventy-one of the blacks listed came from Kentucky and fifty six from South Carolina. Only thirteen came from Virginia, eighteen from Missouri, eight from Maryland and twenty-seven from Tennessee. Twenty-nine Negroes came from Mississippi, most of them brought in by families immigrating

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<sup>95</sup> Joseph Holt Ingraham, The Southwest, I (New York, 1835), 106-07.

<sup>96</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Eleventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1833 (New Orleans, 1833), 81-82.

<sup>97</sup> McGuire (R.F.) Diary. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. The date of this entry is uncertain, but apparently it was made in the spring or summer of 1834.

into Louisiana.<sup>98</sup>

[There is no reason for believing that anti-slavery sentiment was responsible for these efforts to prevent the importation of slaves by professional traders. Probably hostility to the trade on humanitarian grounds had some effect, but such an attitude implied no opposition to slavery itself. Instead, the primary purpose of the acts was to prevent the importation of undesirable Negroes who might foment insurrection.<sup>99</sup> A secondary motive may have been to slow down the growth of the slave population, which already outnumbered the whites in some parishes, but this too would have been dictated by fear of servile revolt.]

These measures did serve to demonstrate one fact. The interstate slave trade was essential to the economy of Louisiana in the 1830's. In that day of slow travel a man had to be away from his business for a month or more in order to go into another state to purchase Negroes. Yet many planters did go, or went to the expense of sending agents to buy for them. Even though many Negroes were obtained in this way, the demand could not be satisfied. Only the professional trader could supply the volume of blacks needed for Louisiana's expanding economy. [In 1834 the restrictive acts were repealed.<sup>100</sup>]

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<sup>98</sup> [Sworn Statements Concerning Sales of Slaves for Five Years after Purchase Date], 1833-1835. East Feliciana Parish Archives in custody of Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>99</sup> Journal de la Chambre des Representans, 1831, no pp.

<sup>100</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Eleventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1831-1834 (New Orleans, 1834), 6-7.

The middle 1830's were the beginning of the heyday of the professional slave trader. The exhaustion of the soils in the states on the eastern seaboard resulted in a surplus of slaves at the same time that the boom of 1835-1837 created a great demand in the Southwest. Moreover, Virginia and Maryland were turning more and more to the production of grains. "Slave labor was not essential to grain production and though it did prove profitable on the large river plantations its place in the economy of these states was greatly weakened."<sup>101</sup>

Not only were masters in the eastern states willing to sell slaves, but the Negroes themselves were reported by an observer who was hostile to the institution to be willing to go to the Southwest. Formerly the blacks in the East had looked upon sale to Louisiana as almost equivalent to a death warrant,<sup>102</sup> but by the middle 1830's their attitude had changed:

. . . the slaves in general do not now, as formerly, consider it a great evil to remove to the South, unless the removal occasions a separation of family connections. The increasing poverty of the planters of Virginia, and their consequent inability furnish a comfortable support for their slaves, increase the desire on the part of both master and slave to remove to a land of greater abundance.<sup>103</sup>

The tale was told of two bondsmen near Fredericksburg who ran

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<sup>101</sup> Avery Odelle Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (Illinois University, Studies in the Social Sciences, XIII. Urbana, 1926), 127.

<sup>102</sup> E.A. Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade of the United States, In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race (Boston, 1836), 50-51.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 118.

away, went to a trader, and asked him to purchase them and send them to New Orleans.<sup>104</sup> It was not unnatural that as more and more Negroes, and many of their masters, went to the Southwest, word should get back to Virginia that conditions were not so bad as they had been painted, that the climate was better, and that while the work was hard, the rations were substantial.

Some indication of the volume of trade from the eastern states comes from the historian of slavery in Virginia. Between 1830 and 1840 the slave population of the Old Dominion declined from 469,757 to 448,987. This decline is all the more remarkable when considered in relation to the fact that without imports and despite exports the number of bondsmen had increased from 293,427 in 1790.<sup>105</sup> During the same period the slaves in Louisiana increased from 109,558 to 168,452. This indicates, if the normal rate of natural increase is discounted, that some 31,500 had been imported.<sup>106</sup> In 1831 it was estimated that Virginia's exports were at the rate of 6,000 a year.<sup>107</sup> One student of the subject states that 40,000 slaves left Virginia in 1836 alone.<sup>108</sup> And Virginia was only one of the states exporting slaves to the Southwest.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>105</sup> James Curtis Ballagh, A History of Slavery in Virginia (Baltimore, 1902), 25.

<sup>106</sup> Based on Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South, 382.

<sup>107</sup> Ballagh, Slavery in Virginia, 25.

<sup>108</sup> John R. Spears, The American Slave Trade, an Account of its Origin, Growth and Suppression (New York, 1900), 183.

Slaves might travel to Louisiana in a number of ways. It was not uncommon for coffles to march overland, the men walking while women and children rode in wagons. In later years the overland journey might be accomplished by rail. Negroes from Kentucky, Tennessee or Missouri usually came down the Mississippi, and could be disembarked at Vicksburg, Natchez or New Orleans, whichever afforded the best market. Apparently most of the Negroes who came to be sold at New Orleans were transported by sea. Many traders kept one establishment in the East for buying and shipping slaves, another in New Orleans or Natchez for receiving and selling them. Such was the case with the famous firm of Franklin and Armfield.<sup>109</sup> Armfield operated the Virginia end of this business, and his reputation was such that Negroes who knew that they were going to be sold begged that they be turned over to him.<sup>110</sup>

While there was a slave market at Natchez, patronized by many Louisiana planters, New Orleans was the center of the trade in Louisiana. Although Memphis may have been "the most convenient place for the planters of . . . Northeastern Louisiana to obtain their slaves,"<sup>111</sup> but few slave buyers from that area seem to have availed themselves of the facilities of that town. Parish records and personal manuscript collections of even the northern parishes show that planters commonly purchased Negroes in New Orleans or instructed factors in that city

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<sup>109</sup> For a thorough study of the slave trader and his operations see Wendell Holmes Stephenson, Isaac Franklin, Slave Trader and Planter of the Old South (Baton Rouge, 1938).

<sup>110</sup> Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade, 150.

<sup>111</sup> Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South, 250.



to make purchases for them.<sup>112</sup> For the rest of the state the Crescent City was the natural market.

Apparently some sentiment against the slave trade existed in New Orleans, though this may have been founded upon fear of disease carried by the Negroes rather than upon humanitarianism. From January until April, 1835, the traffic was outlawed within the city.<sup>113</sup> Under normal circumstances the vendor of slaves was required to obtain permission from the municipality before he could carry on business. The slaves had to be kept in a building at least two stories high, and it was specified that the establishment should be clean and well ventilated.<sup>114</sup>

The city was naturally concerned lest imported slaves become the source of an epidemic. Traders were required to report to the mayor when any infectious diseases broke out among their stock, and to send the sick Negroes to Charity Hospital at their own risk and expense.<sup>115</sup> The dealer himself was likely to take whatever steps he could to avoid disease, because epidemics could wreak havoc with his fortune. During the cholera epidemic of 1848-1849 a trader took his sixty

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<sup>112</sup> Conveyance Records, 1806-1860, Concordia Parish, Louisiana. Located in Concordia Parish Courthouse, Vidalia, Louisiana. Notarial Records, East Carroll Parish. Gillespie Papers; Vidal (Joseph) Papers; Liddell (Moses, St. John R., and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>113</sup> A Digest of the Ordinances, Resolutions, By Laws and Regulations of the Corporation of New Orleans, and a Collection of the Laws of the Legislature Relative to the Said City (New Orleans, 1836), 139.

<sup>114</sup> A Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the General Council of the City of New Orleans (New Orleans, 1845), 28.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

blacks across Lake Pontchartrain to the more healthful pine woods, but to no avail. One man died the day after his arrival across the lake, and despite all precautions many of the others were lost within three weeks.<sup>116</sup>

A Negro who passed through the New Orleans market as a slave up for sale left an account of his experience. He had been shipped by sea from Norfolk, Virginia. "In the first place," he said,

we were required to wash thoroughly, and those with beards to shave. We were then furnished with a new suit each, cheap, but clean. The men had hat, coat, shirt, pants and shoes; the women frocks of calico and handkerchiefs to bind about their heads. We were now conducted into a large room in the front part of the building to which the yard was attached, in order to be properly trained, before the admission of customers. The men were arranged on one side of the room, the women on the other. The tallest was placed at the head of the row, then the next tallest, and so on in the order of their respective heights . . . Freeman [the trader] charged us to remember our places; exhorted us to appear smart and lively . . . During the day he exercised us in the art of "looking smart," and of moving to our places with exact precision.

. . . Next day many customers called to examine Freeman's "new lot." The latter gentleman was very loquacious, dwelling at much length upon our several good points and qualities. He would make us hold up our heads, walk briskly back and forth, while customers would feel of our hands and arms and bodies, turn us about, ask us what we could do, make us open our mouths and show our teeth . . . Sometimes a man or woman was taken back to the small house in the yard, stripped, and inspected more minutely. Scars upon a slave's back were considered evidence of a rebellious or unruly spirit, and hurt his sale.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> E.D. Fenner, "Report on Epidemic Cholera in New Orleans, 1848-49," E.D. Fenner, ed., Southern Medical Reports, I (New Orleans, 1850), 136.

<sup>117</sup> Solomon Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northrup, a Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River, in Louisiana (Auburn, New York, 1853), 78-80.

It is generally accepted as true that a social stigma was attached to slave trading in the Old South.<sup>118</sup> Little evidence exists that Louisianians shared this feeling, but whatever social disadvantages may have been incurred, slave trading was not unprofitable.) In the early thirties a young man bought in Maryland, Virginia or South Carolina for \$500 or less was easily sold in Mississippi or Louisiana for almost \$1,000.<sup>119</sup> Even when general economic conditions were rather poor, profits were still substantial. The firm of Hughes and Downing bought twelve Negroes in Kentucky in 1844 for \$5,292.50, or an average of \$441.04 each. Less than six months later they were sold in Natchez for \$8,695.00, an average of \$724.58 each. The average expense for each of these slaves was \$21.48, to which should be added \$22.00 as interest at ten percent on the money invested. Thus total costs per slave were \$484.52 and the profit some \$240.06.<sup>120</sup> While this account does not consider the cost of the managerial ability of Messers. Hughes and Downing, fifty percent is nevertheless an excellent return on capital over a six months period.

As transportation facilities improved, and the state became more thickly settled, more and more slave dealers took their chattels to the parish seats and exposed them for sale there. In 1840 H. and J.W. Taylor announced their arrival in Baton Rouge:

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<sup>118</sup> See Charles Sackett Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (New York, 1933), 157-58. Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South, 365-81.

<sup>119</sup> Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South, 30.

<sup>120</sup> J. Winston Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky (Chapel Hill, 1940), 152-53.

We have just arrived with a very superior lot of Virginia Negroes, comprising house servants, mechanics and hands. Persons disposed to purchase will please call . . . soon, where they may select from 40 as likely negroes as has ever been offered in the Southern market.<sup>121</sup>

In late 1856 the later celebrated Nathan Bedford Forrest led a coffle of slaves into Carroll Parish, and exposed them for sale for two weeks or more.<sup>122</sup> In 1859 G.P. and T. Doriss announced that they had twenty five slaves for sale at Alexandria, with forty more expected from the East.<sup>123</sup> At about the same time McCarty and Morgan had fifty Virginia, Missouri and North Carolina Negroes for sale at Trenton.<sup>124</sup> Another enterprising trader was John Miller, who announced in April, 1860:

The undersigned has just arrived at Lake Providence with a choice lot of field hands, cooks, washers, and ironers; also one first rate blacksmith. All of which I will sell on accomodating terms, for cash acceptances. Those wishing to purchase will do well to call soon.<sup>125</sup>

Any discussion of slave prices must of necessity be in general terms, because each Negro was a human being with individual characteristics which added to or detracted from his value. Age, health, size, skill and disposition were all important price-determining factors. In general slave prices advanced up to the Civil War, but the advance was erratic. As a further complication, it should be noted that while

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<sup>121</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, March 14, 1850.

<sup>122</sup> Notarial Record, East Carroll Parish, December 13, 1856 to January 3, 1857.

<sup>123</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, December 7, 1859.

<sup>124</sup> Monroe Ouachita Register, December 29, 1859.

<sup>125</sup> Lake Providence Herald, April 7, 1860.

women sold always at a lower price than men, the difference in price between the sexes did not always remain the same or proportionately the same. A young woman who could be expected to bear children was obviously a better speculative investment than a man. On the other hand, her inferiority in physical strength and the prospective loss of time from child bearing reduced the woman's value as a worker. Proportionately the difference in price between men and women decreased as time went on.

At the beginning of the decade of the 1830's ordinary male slaves were worth in the neighborhood of \$750 in Louisiana, women \$100 less. Slave values advanced rapidly until 1837, when men were selling at \$1,300 on the average. Women did not advance an equal amount; \$1,000 was a good price in their case. After the panic of 1837 prices dropped more rapidly than they had advanced before, and in 1839 an average field hand could be bought for about \$800. There was a rally in prices in the early 1840's. In February of 1842 the Baton Rouge Gazette informed its readers that "Negro men without fault" were selling in New Orleans for \$1,100, and that there were some 1,000 slaves for sale in the city.<sup>126</sup> This recovery was temporary, however, and there was an overall decline until 1850, with women selling as low as \$500. In 1850 Andrew E. Crane bought four men, all in their middle twenties and all guaranteed, from John Hagen, a New Orleans trader, for \$3,325, or roughly \$830 each.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, February 19, 1842.

<sup>127</sup> Bill of Sale, March 15, 1850. Crane (Andrew E. and Zachary) Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

[From 1850 until the beginning of the War between the States, the advance in slave prices did not falter. Planters were prosperous during this period, and were convinced that more slaves would add to their prosperity. In the last weeks of 1856 a field hand sold for \$1,250, a twenty year old girl for \$1,092, and a young blacksmith for a round \$2,000, all in Carroll Parish.<sup>128</sup> These prices were not high, however, in view of those which prevailed two years later. One planter made the following entry in his diary:

Went to Dr. Isonard's sale today, and in consequence did not go to the plantation . . . The negroes at Isonard's sale sold for \$2,300 for the men and upwards — one fourth cash and the balance payable in two equal installments. They were not overlikely.<sup>129</sup>

A week after this the same planter attended another sale and paid \$2,300 for a Negro man. He noted that "Negroes did not sell over high . . ."<sup>130</sup> In the spring of 1860 he recorded the following:

I went in the negro market today and found negroes fully \$100 higher than I expected to see them, they range from \$1700 to \$1800 for men and from \$1500 to \$1650 for women, and there are not a very likely set at that offering — I am going to buy anyway.

I bought four negro men of Elam today at \$1750 each, they are the best I have seen in the city I have seen a great many, and I think I will buy all I intend tomorrow . . . for I am getting tired.

I bought today four women for \$1500 each six for \$1600 each and one woman and her boy 11 years

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<sup>128</sup> Notarial Record, East Carroll Parish, December 13, 1856 to January 3, 1857.

<sup>129</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, January 22, 1859. Pugh Collection.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., January 29, 1859.

old at \$2400 & one man for \$1700 cash and a  
Blacksmith for \$2,500 . . . making in all 25 head.<sup>131</sup>

A study of the traffic in Negroes in Louisiana would be incomplete without note of the foreign slave trade. The banning of this business which followed the transfer of the province to the United States created great discontent among the people,<sup>132</sup> and no doubt disposed them to buy slaves illegally. Galveston, Texas, early became a center of illegal trade in African Negroes. The Mexican Revolution of 1806-1807 offered privateers an opportunity to use Galveston Island as a base for attacks on Spanish shipping. "When slaves were taken, their live cargo was either landed at Bayou Lafourche . . . or marched overland to Alexandria . . . The price of a negro at Galveston was a dollar a pound."<sup>133</sup> Some trade was more direct than this. On April 14, 1808, two American ships, the James and the Franklin, cleared Havana for New Orleans carrying ninety-eight slaves, forty-three of whom were fresh from Africa.<sup>134</sup> But the pirates of the Gulf of Mexico seem to have been the chief source of smuggled blacks. Vincent Nolte, a German merchant who was in New Orleans in 1813, said that the slave trade with the pirates, who would accept only specie, created a dearth of coin in the city. Slaves bought from the pirates for \$200 or less sold

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., March 13 through March 15, 1860.

<sup>132</sup> W.C.C. Claiborne to James Madison, March 31, 1804. Dunbar Rowland, ed., Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne 1801-1816, II (Jackson, Mississippi, 1917), 76-77.

<sup>133</sup> J.D.B. De Bow, "Texas — a Province, Republic and State," De Bow's Review, XXIII (1857), 243.

<sup>134</sup> D.C. Corbitt, "Shipments of Slaves from the United States to Cuba, 1789-1807," Journal of Southern History, VII (1941), 549.

in New Orleans for more than \$600.<sup>135</sup>

Jean Lafitte transferred his headquarters to Galveston soon after the Battle of New Orleans. James Bowie, inventor of the famous knife, was one of those who did business with this pirate.

One of Bowie's brothers left the following account of these dealings:

. . . he sold his land . . . and used the means, thus obtained, in speculating in the purchase of Africans from the notorious Lafitte, who brought them to Galveston, Texas, for sale. James, Resin and myself fitted out some small boats at the mouth of the Calcasieu, and went into the trade on shares. Our plan of operation was as follows: — we first purchased forty negroes from Lafitte at the rate of one dollar per pound, or an average of \$140 for each negro; we brought them into the limits of the United States, delivered them to a custom-house officer, and became the informers ourselves: the law gave the informer half the value of the negroes, which were put up and sold by the United States Marshal, and we became the purchasers of the negroes, took the half as our reward for informing, and obtained the marshal's bill of sale for the forty negroes, which entitled us to sell them within the United States. We continued to follow this business until we made \$65,000, when we quit and soon spent all our earnings.<sup>136</sup>

It is quite evident that African Negroes continued to be brought into Louisiana after the foreign slave trade became illegal in 1808. In 1818 it was reported: "Fresh imported Guinia negroes were lately sold in NOrleans at \$1500."<sup>137</sup> The archives of the United States

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<sup>135</sup> Vincent Nolte, Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres, or Reminiscences of the Life of a Former Merchant (New York, 1854), 189.

<sup>136</sup> A.R. Kilpatrick, "Early Life in the Southwest — the Bowies," De Bow's Review, XIII (1852), 380-81. See also Winfield Hazlitt Collins, The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States (New York, 1904), 43.

<sup>137</sup> Sam Steer to John Minor, August 3, 1818. Minor Papers.



Custom House at New Orleans indicate that rumors of illegal slave importations were being investigated throughout the 1840's and 1850's.<sup>138</sup> The actual extent of the illegal trade before the Civil War is a matter of much controversy. W.E.B. DuBois estimates that 270,000 Negroes were smuggled into the United States as a whole between 1808 and 1860.<sup>139</sup> William Lowndes Yancey, during the Civil War, asserted that not more than 500 Africans had been introduced after 1808.<sup>140</sup> Yancey's figure is far too low, but in all probability DuBois has set his figure much too high. There was certainly a revival of the African trade just before the final break between the sections. William Howard Russell saw African Negroes in Alabama in 1861,<sup>141</sup> and Stephen A. Douglas saw others, apparently part of the cargo of the Wanderer, at Memphis in 1860.<sup>142</sup> In 1860 the British consul at Galveston reported to his government: "A planter from Louisiana had told him he was on his way to Indianola Texas to

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<sup>138</sup> Excerpts from the Letter Books of the United States Custom House New Orleans, Louisiana, 1834-1912. Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana, 1937-1938 (Typescript), passim.

<sup>139</sup> W.E. Burghardt DuBois, The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870 (Harvard Historical Studies, I. New York, 1904), 112-30. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime (New York, 1918), 147.

<sup>140</sup> Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln, II (New York, 1950), 35.

<sup>141</sup> William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South (New York, 1863), 74.

<sup>142</sup> DuBois, Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 181-82.

buy African Negroes from a slave trader."<sup>143</sup>

In the late 1850's there was some sentiment in Louisiana in favor of legally reopening the African slave trade. In 1858 a legislative committee approved a bill which would have permitted citizens of the state to import slaves from Brazil, Cuba and Africa. The majority report defended the bill on constitutional grounds, holding that the people of Louisiana had never granted to the federal government the right to prohibit the foreign slave trade.<sup>144</sup> This bill was approved by the House of Representatives. State Senator Edward Deloney of Clinton wrote an article for De Bow's Review urging its passage by the Senate. The existing scarcity of Negroes, he said, brought about high prices, and high prices would encourage monopoly, thus increasing the scarcity. Because of an inadequate labor supply, the South was not producing to full capacity. Further, the contemplated influx of Negroes would spread slave ownership more widely among the Southern people, thus providing the institution with greater popular support. Lastly, the increased supply of slaves would make possible the settlement of new territories by slaveholders, thus restoring the South to equality within the Union.<sup>145</sup> A majority of the members of the Senate proved to be

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<sup>143</sup> Laura A. White, "The South in the 1850's as Seen by British Consuls," Journal of Southern History, I (1935), 38.

<sup>144</sup> Report of the Committee on Federal Relations to the Senate of Louisiana on the Bill Entitled "An Act to Authorize the People of Louisiana to Import Negro Slaves," Documents of the First Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1858 (Baton Rouge, 1859), 1-10.

<sup>145</sup> Edward Deloney, "The South Demands More Negro Labor," De Bow's Review, XXV (1858), 491-506.

too conservative for so radical a step, and the bill was never enacted.

Another attempt to reopen the African slave trade was disguised as the "African Apprentice Bill." As reported out of committee, this bill authorized the firm of J.H. Brigham and Associates

. . . to import into the state of Louisiana for agricultural and other laboring purposes, twenty-five hundred free Africans; Provided, they shall be indentured as apprentices, to labor for a term of years which the parties may agree upon among themselves, not less than fifteen years.<sup>146</sup>

The African Apprentice Bill passed the House of Representatives and was defeated in the Senate by only one vote. Opposition to the measure increased before the legislature met again. Newspapers denounced it as a fraud, which it undoubtedly was. In Caldwell Parish, when the incumbent senator died, voters at a nomination meeting demanded that the candidate pledge himself to oppose the bill.<sup>147</sup> Since Caldwell Parish was not a plantation region, these citizens may have been motivated by small farmer antipathy to the Negro. State sentiment had turned so definitely against the measure that the House of Representatives quickly tabled it by a vote of thirty-seven to seventeen when it was introduced again in 1859.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> "Report of the Special Committee to which was referred a Bill to grant the Authority of the State of Louisiana for the importation of free black laborers within the State," Documents of the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1857 (New Orleans, 1858), 2.

<sup>147</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, April 10, May 1, 1858.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., March 12, 1859.

When a committee of the House of Representatives recommended repeal of the federal statute against the foreign slave trade, on the grounds that it was unwise and unconstitutional, the minority report, after defending the constitutionality of the national act, went on to summarize the arguments against reopening the slave trade in any guise.

In the first place, the minority believed such a step to be "against the wishes of a very large majority of the people of the slave states and the entire sentiment and conviction of the people of the free states." Furthermore, the introduction of more Negroes would increase the production of cotton and sugar, and thus lower prices. An influx of slaves would reduce the value of the Negroes already held in Louisiana — "The present owners would be ruined . . ." The report cited Calhoun's opposition to the slave trade from Africa, and went on to insist that the natural increase of those in the country was enough to satisfy normal demand.

High prices existing at the time of the report were said to be no argument for reopening the trade, because these prices merely reflected the greater productivity which increased skill, better seed and improved implements had made possible. Also it was believed that the increased supply of gold from California and Australia had contributed to high slave prices.

Poor farmers would not benefit from an increased supply of Negroes, because the value of what they produced would decrease. This event would drive many slaveless whites out of the South, and it was these men who must defend the South if defence became necessary. The minority report pointed out that much of the soil in the South

was already exhausted, and that many of the acres yet uncultivated were unfit for slave labor. The argument that the poorer classes would be strengthened in their support of slavery was answered with the statement that the people of the South were already united to a greater extent than ever before. An attempt to revive the slave trade would foster division and discord.

Finally, said the minority report,

The effect of the introduction of these savages . . . upon our present civilized and happy negro population would no doubt be demoralizing and injurious. It would render them unhappy, discontented and insubordinate; the spirit of insurrection and revenge would take the place of the respect and affection they have for their owners now. It would be cruel and unjust on our part to place the savage African upon an equality with the civilized slaves of the Southern States, and that without any proper show of justice or reason to support it.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> "Minority Report of the Committee on Federal Relations of the House of Representatives Relative to the Repeal of the Laws of the United States against the African Slave Trade," Legislative Documents, 1858, 7-15.

## LOUISIANA SLAVES AT WORK

After slavery had become an established institution, Negroes were sometimes purchased as an investment, and the possession of them gave social prestige. As their numbers grew, slavery was justified as a method of regulating interracial relations. But Negroes were first brought to Louisiana to serve as laborers, and thereafter their whole existence was devoted to labor. It was the black man's ability to work that made him valuable. Slavery endured because the Negro was a worker equal to the task of clearing a wilderness and then cultivating the land his labor had made arable. So good a worker was he that a myth grew up. It attributed his ability to racial characteristics and denied that white men could toil under the Southern sun. So strong was this myth that it flourished while yeoman farmers toiled on their own acres and while planters hired Irish immigrants to do heavy work considered too injurious or too unskilled to demand the efforts of property as valuable as slaves.

The code noir provided that slaves should not be required to work on Sundays or feast days, although this prohibition did not apply to those sent to the market to sell produce. Masters were not to evade their responsibility for feeding and clothing their human property. This had sometimes been done by giving Negroes one day a week to work for themselves, then requiring them to support them-

selves with their earnings.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the prohibition of this practice resulted in better food and clothing for the bondsmen, but it also buttressed the institution of slavery by discouraging the development of Negro initiative.

This regulation was not always enforced because when the first legislature of the Territory of Orleans met in 1806 the slaveowner was given an option of clothing his slaves or giving them a plot of land to work in their own right. Feeding his charges was still the responsibility of the master. Feast days had no legal status under the new regime, but the Negro was still entitled to freedom from Sunday work. If it was necessary that work be done on that supposed day of rest, the black was to receive fifty cents in wages. This provision did not apply to carriage drivers, house servants, or those who were employed in carrying produce to market.<sup>2</sup>

During the half century preceding 1860, slaves were engaged in so many kinds of work that a general description is impossible. The tasks performed on sugar plantations were not the same as those discharged on cotton plantations; the chores on smaller farms were different from those on larger ones. Slaves worked on steamboats and as draymen, as house servants and as skilled craftsmen. Levees, roads and railroads were built by Negroes, and the state of Louisiana owned a group of men who served as an internal improvements corps.

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<sup>1</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 5, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

Cotton was Louisiana's most widely cultivated money crop.

Cotton and sugar fields met about the latitude of Baton Rouge, with cotton the chief staple north of that line. The northern Florida Parishes afforded considerable land fertile enough for cotton fields, and the valleys of the Red River and its tributaries, as well as the northern parishes bordering on the Mississippi River, were among the best cotton lands in the South. Moreover, cotton farming was not confined to the plantation. Any experienced man with land, a mule and willing muscles could put in a cotton crop and reasonably hope to show a profit at the end of the year. It does not follow that cotton was an easy crop to grow. On the contrary, the staple's successful cultivation required much work, favorable weather and more than a little knowledge. The great advantage of cotton was that it could be grown on a small, medium or large scale without a prohibitive investment in equipment.

Most of the slaves who worked in cotton fields did work on plantations. In 1860 almost seventy-five percent of all slaves in four northeastern cotton growing parishes were to be found on plantations which employed more than fifty Negroes. In the same parishes, slightly more than five percent of all slaves were owned in groups of five or less.<sup>3</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted left an impressive description of the work force of a Louisiana cotton plantation on its way to the fields:

First came, led by an old driver carrying a

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<sup>3</sup> Concordia, Madison, Tensas and Carroll Parishes. Eighth Census of the United States, Louisiana, 1860. Schedules 1, 2 and 4. Microfilm in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, of originals in possession of Duke University.



whip, forty of the largest and strongest women I ever saw together; they were all in a simple uniform dress of bluish check stuff, the skirts reaching little below the knee; their legs and feet were bare; they carried themselves loftily, each having a hoe over the shoulder, and walking with a free powerful swing like chasseurs on the march. Behind them came the cavalry, thirty strong, mostly men, but a few of them were women, two of whom rode astride the plow mules. A lean and vigilant white overseer, on a brisk pony, brought up the rear. The men wore small blue Scotch bonnets; many of the women handkerchiefs, turban fashion, and a few nothing at all on their heads.<sup>4</sup>

Cotton cultivation involved a great variety of operations, which no doubt served to prevent monotony. Ordinarily the gathering of the previous crop was completed before the first of the year. On a "settled" plantation, activities during January and February often varied from day to day. In 1857 on the Comite Plantation near Clinton, a general cleaning up followed the beginning of the new year. Rails were hauled and fences were repaired; stables were cleaned out and repaired if necessary. During a January cold snap twenty-five hogs were killed and salted down, and about a month later this pork was smoked. A new field was cleared, which necessitated much rolling of logs and burning of brush. Slaves were constantly being sent on errands as the plantation readied itself for the real business of the year. Plowing began before the end of February.<sup>5</sup> Small grains were planted in February or early March, and seed for the first corn crop was in the ground before the end of the third month. Usually the

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country (New York, 1863), 14-15.

<sup>5</sup> Comite Plantation Diary, 1857. Kilbourne (J.G. and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

strongest men cut trees and plowed while women and children burned brush and stalks from the previous year's crop, but there are records aplenty of women wielding axes and wrestling with plows. On one plantation, at least, women rolled logs while men plowed, but this was not common.<sup>6</sup> Plowing with the tools of the Old South was not an enviable task at best; breaking up a newground demanded great strength and greater endurance.

If the weather permitted, cotton seed were planted in April. The experienced farmer tried to choose a time when there was no excess of moisture in the soil. If the ground was too moist when opened to receive the seed, a hot sun might bake it, forming clods which hindered cultivation or a hard crust through which many of the tender plants could not penetrate. Cold weather was also a danger when seed were planted in wet ground; then the seed might decay before they germinated.<sup>7</sup> Often such nice considerations were disregarded because of the pressing need to plant the crop as soon as possible.

Cotton seed were planted thickly in wide rows, six to eight feet apart. A light plow was run down the center of the row; women and children followed the plow, dropping the seed into the furrow. A small harrow, pulled down the top of the row by one horse or mule, covered the seed. The actual planting, unless it was behind schedule, did not require the whole plantation work force. Usually, while cotton planting was going on, some of the men were preparing other

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<sup>6</sup> Plantation Diary, February, 1841. Liddell Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, April 7, 1841, Ibid.

fields, and many of the women were hoeing grass out of the corn which had been planted earlier.

Under normal conditions the young cotton plants would appear eight to ten days after planting. Soon afterward those areas where bad seed or standing water had prevented germination were replanted. If the season was so late that cotton plants would not have time to mature, corn might be substituted on the barren stretches of the cotton rows.

Hoeing, usually referred to as "chopping," was the next operation after the little cotton plants had made their appearance. For this task every hand able to use a hoe with discrimination was utilized. As a preliminary the rows were "scraped." A plow of special design threw back the earth from each side of the row, leaving the plants on a narrow ledge. Little harm was done to the plants, because cotton roots tend to grow downward rather than outward. Negroes with hoes followed the scraper. They cut away all grass which had come up with the cotton, and they cut down many of the little cotton plants. It was necessary that the plants be thinned out, because the seed were planted very thickly to insure a stand. Some planters preferred to leave single stalks some eighteen inches apart, while others left "hills" of several stalks at intervals of two or three feet. The available records do not indicate that one procedure resulted in a better yield than the other. When the hoe hands had finished with the row, earth was thrown back against it from the middles.

It was always necessary that cotton be hoed once more, and usually twice more. The plants needed no more thinning, but grass had to be eliminated. The rows were scraped each time, but a wider

ledge was left as the cotton increased in size. The number of hoeings depended upon the season; as a general rule, the more rain the more grass. If the spring was especially rainy or if the slaves were handicapped by sickness, the grass might get such a start that the whole crop could not be rescued. In such cases effort was concentrated upon the fields which could be saved, and the remainder was abandoned.

Late in June or early in July those fields that had been kept free of grass could be "laid by," because no further cultivation was necessary. By this time the cotton stalks were of such size as to make further working difficult, and they had enough foilage to shade the rows and discourage the growth of other plants. Although the real "laying by time" varied from year to year and from farm to farm, July the Fourth was the traditional date. Celebration of this holiday by the slaves was more in honor of "laying by" than in remembrance of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the corn was planted earlier than cotton, but it was cultivated in much the same way. Maize roots tend to grow outward more than downward, however, so the scraper could not be used to the same extent as in the cotton fields. Corn might be "scrapped" for the first hoeing, but not usually thereafter. Thus, since grass had to be removed from a greater area with the hoe, hoeing corn was harder work than hoeing cotton. The first crop of corn was laid by at about the same time as cotton, but a late crop was often planted. On many plantations the blades, or leaves, of this crop were used as fodder,

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<sup>8</sup> "A Southern Farm, Louisiana," De Bow's Review, XII (1852), 291.

and the Negroes spent a week or so gathering and binding them before cotton was ready to be picked. During the summer months hay was cut, potatoes dug and equipment made ready for the harvest to follow.

Cotton picking usually began about the middle of August, but the exact time depended upon the date of planting and the weather.<sup>9</sup> A dry summer meant that the cotton bolls would open earlier, and in an abnormally wet season they might not begin to open in quantity until the early part of September. Cotton picking, correctly done, requires considerable skill, and some Negroes were much better at it than others. Once picking had begun, nearly all hands were kept at it every day except Sunday that the weather permitted. Women and children spent practically all their daylight hours in the fields, and the men were with them except when other work, such as gathering corn and cutting wood, was absolutely necessary.<sup>10</sup>

The cotton picking scene on Southern plantations has been described so often as to be familiar to most readers. The Negroes, carrying baskets or long sacks, moved down the rows, pulling the open cotton from the bolls. When the sack or basket was full it was

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<sup>9</sup> An overseer noted in 1859 that he finished planting cotton May 1<sup>st</sup>, had a bloom June 15<sup>th</sup>, and began picking August 11<sup>th</sup>. In 1860 he began planting April 12<sup>th</sup> and finished May 3<sup>rd</sup>. The crop was "laid by" June 21<sup>st</sup>, one day after the first bloom made its appearance. Picking began August 13<sup>th</sup>. Plantation Account Book, 1859-1860. Butler Family Papers.

<sup>10</sup> The above information, except where citations occur, is not drawn from any one source. Newspapers, plantation diaries, letters and a few books proved useful. Solomon Northrup's Twelve Years a Slave, Lewis Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (New York, 1941), 2 vols., the Liddell Papers and the Kilbourne Papers were especially helpful.

weighed, emptied and returned to the picker. The amount picked depended upon the quality of the crop, the number of open bolls and, above all, the ability of the picker. Quite a few hands could take out 300 pounds in a day, but these were exceptional. Solomon Northrup, who had worked in the cotton fields as a slave, believed that 200 pounds a day was a fair average,<sup>11</sup> but this seems too high an estimate. On one plantation with twenty-four hands, a four day period involving seventy-one working days showed only eighteen instances of 200 pounds or more being picked. There were twenty-nine instances of less than 160 pounds being brought to the scales.<sup>12</sup> Of fifteen adult hands on another plantation, only one averaged over 200 pounds for the week beginning September 20, 1857. The average for all was in the neighborhood of 150 pounds.<sup>13</sup> The record books for other plantations show like results.<sup>14</sup>

The perusal of many records leaves the impression that less driving was required to get slaves to pick willingly than was necessary for other operations. One woman picked 240 pounds of cotton one day, gave birth to a baby the next, and picked 300 pounds in a day a month later.<sup>15</sup> A master who was ill away from home during the picking season returned after several weeks' absence and "Found

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<sup>11</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 166.

<sup>12</sup> Pre aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, undated. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>13</sup> Comite Plantation Diary, September, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Cotton Record Books, 1834-1836, 1841-1844. Randolph (John H.) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>15</sup> Pre aux Cleres Plantation Record Book, undated.

all the negroes well and their behavior was good during my absence and they did their duty in picking cotton ec."<sup>16</sup>

Concentration upon plantation records may give a false impression if care is not exercised. It was upon the plantations that the great majority of slaves did their work, and it was there that the most extensive records were kept, but much cotton was grown on small farms. Many Negroes toiled on these limited acres, side by side with the master and his family. Quite a few of these yeoman farmers eventually became planters, though many did not. In the more fertile regions the plantations gradually crowded them out, but this process was far from complete by 1860.

The records kept by one farmer are revealing. Henry Marston of East Feliciana Parish had 640 acres of uncleared land when he began operations in the early 1820's, but he owned only five slaves and hired four others. These nine hands did all sorts of work. They built corn cribs, cotton houses and houses for themselves. They made axe handles, harrows, watering troughs and cotton baskets. The women spun and wove some of the cloth used in making garments for themselves and the men. All these activities and others of like kind were in addition to regular tasks in making a crop and clearing land. When hoeing and picking cotton, all nine hands usually worked together, but otherwise there was considerable division of labor. Frequently Negroes were scattered over the place, doing various jobs without supervision. Marston, with nine blacks working, was mainly occupied with overseeing them, but he occasionally joined in the work. When

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<sup>16</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, November 6, 1826. Marston Papers.

he was absent the work went on without him. Marston used a whip for disciplinary purposes, but left no record of whippings for slackness in work.<sup>17</sup>

Practically all cotton plantations had a gin on the premises. Indeed, the possession of a gin was one of the great competitive advantages the planter had over the small farmer, whose crop was not large enough to justify the purchase of expensive machinery. The gins were rather primitive affairs, operated by manpower or horsepower. A crew of Negroes, the chief among whom was often dignified with the title of "engineer," operated the gin and pressed the lint cotton into 400 pound bales. These gins were excessively slow by modern standards; the gin crews were often working long after all the cotton had been picked.<sup>18</sup>

A man who worked as a slave on an Avoyelles Parish plantation during the picking season left the following account of the Negro's life during the harvest months:

An hour before daylight the horn is blown. Then the slaves arouse, prepare their breakfasts, fill a gourd with water, in another deposit their dinner of cold bacon and corn cake, and hurry to the field again. It is an offence invariably followed by a flogging to be found at the quarters after daybreak. Then the fears and labors of another day begin; and until its close there is no such thing as rest. He fears he will be caught lagging through the day; he fears to approach the gin house with his basket of cotton at night; he fears, when he lies down, that he will oversleep himself in the morning.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1822-1830.

<sup>18</sup> Comite Plantation Diary, December, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 171.



As a common practice planters attempted to plant six acres of cotton and three acres of corn per hand on newground, several acres more on previously cultivated land. Production seems to have averaged from six to ten bales to the hand, but there were striking exceptions. A Tensas Parish plantation owned by a Mrs. Ogden was reported to have produced nineteen bales to the hand in 1839.<sup>20</sup> At the other extreme, General Zachary Taylor made only sixty bales with eighteen hands on his West Feliciana plantation in 1823.<sup>21</sup>

Cotton was a crop known to almost the whole ante-bellum South; it was the sugar plantation which aroused the greatest interest in visitors to Louisiana. The story of the development of cane culture in Louisiana is well known --- how all attempts to make sugar from cane grown in the province failed until, in 1795, Etienne de Bore<sup>r</sup> succeeded. Thereafter sugar culture expanded until it reached its natural limits. These limits were, roughly, the Red River on the north, the left bank of the Mississippi to the east, the prairies to the west, and the meadows, or salt flats, of the Gulf to the south. On the other side of the prairies some sugar was grown in Texas, and the northern boundary of the sugar region went up or down as sugar or cotton brought the greater returns. Indeed, cotton was grown as far south as the latitude of New Orleans as the early American settlers poured into the territory. Excessive autumn rains, a tariff policy favorable to sugar and the adaptation of steam power to the sugar mills about 1822 assured the triumph of sugar in the southern

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<sup>20</sup> "Parish of Tensas," De Bow's Review, XIV (1853), 432.

<sup>21</sup> Brainard Dyer, Zachary Taylor (Baton Rouge, 1946), 55.

parishes. As early as 1804 there were fourteen sugar plantations below New Orleans and sixty-four above.<sup>22</sup> By 1858 the number in all the state had risen to 1,298.<sup>23</sup>

In 1821 John James Audubon visited ". . . the finest Plantation we have seen," the master of which owned "70 Negroes and Makes about 400 Hogshead of Sugar — besides raising Corn Hay, rice &c."<sup>24</sup> The tariff compromise of 1832 was reported to have turned many sugar planters back to cotton temporarily,<sup>25</sup> and a similar tendency, attributed to an anticipated advantage in cotton prices, was observed in 1856.<sup>26</sup> These were temporary checks, however, and sugar planting became almost a craze in Louisiana. Planters, "instead of appropriating a portion of their clear incomes to the comfort of their families . . . spend them and even more in purchasing additional hands, and in extending their plantations." The army officer who made this observation then went on to say: "Notwithstanding the opinion I have just expressed, I am very desirous to become a sugar planter."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jedediah Morse, The American Gazetteer, Exhibiting a Full Account of the Civil Divisions, Rivers, Harbors, Indian Tribes &c of the American Continent, also of the West India and Other Appendant Islands; with a Particular Description of Louisiana (Boston, 1804), no pp., alphabetically arranged.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston, 1937), 120.

<sup>24</sup> Howard Corning, ed., Journal of John James Audubon Made during His Trip to New Orleans in 1820-1821 (Boston, 1929), 109.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, November 15, 1845.

<sup>26</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, March 29, 1856.

<sup>27</sup> E.G.W. Butler to Thomas Butler, February 7, 1830. Butler Family Papers.

The operations of a sugar plantation were more complicated than those involved in cotton cultivation. The length of the growing season contributed to this state of affairs; often part of the next year's crop was planted before harvesting began. In addition, the activities of the sugar plantation included the truly industrial process of making sugar — an operation which demanded a high degree of organization and specialization among the slaves. Gathering fuel for the mill was a matter of prime importance which required much time. Yet the actual cultivation of cane involved as much work as did the cultivation of cotton, and the sugar plantation grew corn and other feed crops just as did the cotton plantation.

A sugar plantation diary has the following entry under the date of January 6, 1845: "The holidays having expired, recommenced field work, namely cleaning up land, ditching, ploughing, making fence, &c. &c."<sup>28</sup> Activities during the first two months of the year were not too different from those on cotton plantations at the same time, except that much cane was planted. Part of the crop was often planted in the early autumn before harvesting began, however, and part of each year's crop was second growth from the planted cane of the previous year.

[Cane was planted in rows six to eight feet apart, three or four stalks being laid parallel in the furrow and then covered with earth. The new shoots sprang from the joints of the planted stalks and were called plant cane. Some planters put the rows as little as three feet apart, others ten, twelve or even fifteen feet, but these were

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<sup>28</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, January 6, 1845. Palfrey (William T.) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

exceptional cases.<sup>29</sup> The number of acres to the hand varied. A contemporary stated in 1847 that nine or ten acres were planted to the hand as a general rule, but some planters recommended only seven acres, asserting that healthier hands and better cultivation resulted therefrom.<sup>30</sup> This acreage presumably included the corn grown on the plantation as well as the sugar. Usual yields were said to be from five to eight hogsheads per hand, though some small planters claimed as much as ten hogsheads for each slave employed. An experienced observer doubted the accuracy of these claims, suggesting that those who made them did not take into consideration "the work done by the planter himself and his children."<sup>31</sup>

Cultivation of the crop began as soon as weather permitted, because in southern Louisiana grass grows always, except in the coldest weeks. Plant cane was "scraped" like cotton, and then the grass was hoed away. Second growth cane, or ratoons, could not be plowed in this wise because of its greater root development, hence the grass was grubbed out. Hoeing and plowing were continued until the cane had attained such size that it could fend for itself and choke or shade out the grass that sprang up beneath it. In early June of 1861, William Howard Russell saw three gangs of slaves at work on the Roman plantation above New Orleans; twenty men were plowing out the cane middles; forty men were hoeing corn; and thirty-

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<sup>29</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, July 22, 1847.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., March 15, 1849.

<sup>31</sup> Aime Valcour, "Sugar Culture and Manufacture of Louisiana and the West Indies," De Bow's Review, VII (1847), 386.

six women were hoeing cane.<sup>32</sup> During the first six months of the year the sugar house and Negro quarters received needed repairs, vegetables were planted and harvested and, if a flood threatened, hands were diverted to the levee.

When the cane and corn crops had been "laid by," the slaves were by no means at leisure, though they were often given one day's holiday at this time. The usual summer jobs of fencing, cutting hay and gathering fodder remained to be done. Often grass and weeds clogged the drainage ditches and had to be cut out. Most important of all summer work was cutting and hauling enough wood to supply fuel for the sugar house when grinding time came. The sugar plantations extended back from the Mississippi or one of the bayous into the swamp, and it was from the swamp that the wood was taken. Some hands were often busy in the woods before the crop was "laid by." It was necessary to get the wood cut as early as possible, because the drier it was when burned the better the results which were obtained. Once cut, the wood had to be hauled during the summer or early fall before the swamps filled with water and while the primitive roads would still bear the heavily loaded carts. During the rainy season the roads were soon cut to pieces, so that the carts could not be pulled through the bottomless mud, even by oxen. Despite their best efforts, planters sometimes failed to accumulate an adequate supply of wood. Then the mill had to be shut down until more could be obtained, and plantation diaries were filled with mourning at the unsatisfactory results obtained with

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<sup>32</sup> Russell, My Diary North and South, 101.

green fuel.<sup>33</sup> One planter, whose cane was greener than he would have liked, was forced to finish sugar making with green wood. He used four and one half cords to the hogshead of sugar, more than twice the amount ordinarily consumed.<sup>34</sup>

October brought the time of most intense activity to the sugar plantation. The planter was always faced with a quandary. The longer his cane was allowed to grow, the better his yield would be, but he had to make every effort to get it out of the fields before a freeze came. Generally seed cane was cut in early October, after the hands had gathered corn and, often, peas. Some of the seed cane was planted immediately, the remainder "matalayed" for later planting. In this operation the cane, cut with the leaves undisturbed, was laid upon the ground and covered with a shallow layer of earth. Thus protected it would survive until spring, when it could be planted. From a fourth to a third of the crop was normally used for seed, depending, of course, upon how much of the plant cane of the previous year could be depended upon for ratoons.<sup>35</sup>

When the seed cane had been prepared, the slaves often had a holiday before the real harvest began. One planter noted on October 11, 1860: "Found today they are getting along very well winnowing cane . . . for seed. They will probably finish on Sunday or Monday --- and we shall go immediately after the potatoes are dug and a day is

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<sup>33</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, December 18, 1852. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Mather (Joseph) Diary, November, 1855. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>35</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, October 20, 1849. Palfrey Papers.

given to the negroes — to cutting cane for the mill."<sup>36</sup> Records indicate that cutting always began before the end of October.

The grinding season brought the hardest work of the year. Usually planters tried to augment their force at this time; the regular hands were too few to do all that had to be done. In 1828 J.B. Fritch of Donaldsonville advertised his desire to hire ten slaves to help in grinding, offering twenty dollars a month.<sup>37</sup> Cotton planters might send some of their hands down when picking was finished, or even before if surplus men were available.<sup>38</sup> Sugar planters frequently obtained additional hands from relatives who were engaged in cotton planting.<sup>39</sup> Nearly always a few slaves could be hired from the creole farmers along the bayous — men who owned only a few Negroes. Sugar planters had to give some consideration to the treatment they accorded hired slaves; one peppery creole wrote to A.E. Crane:

I saw the girl Emma this morning and she told me she was sick, I told her that if she was that she could stay home. She complains mightily about your feeding if it is so my girl shall not pass the grinding at your house. As for the rest of my boys, I have already hired them . . . I was to hire them they would to you, so I found just as good advantage elsewhere. I hired them according to their wishings . . .

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<sup>36</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, October 11, 1860. Pugh Collection.

<sup>37</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, August 30, 1828.

<sup>38</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, October 3, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. See also E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, December 5, 1844.

<sup>40</sup> Euphimon Hebert to A.E. Crane, October 6, 1856. Crane Collection.

These operations were performed during the grinding season: the cane was stripped of leaves and cut by slaves who wielded heavy knives; then it was hauled to the sugar house and pressed; the juice thus extracted was boiled several times, first to remove impurities and finally to crystallize the sugar; the sugar was then packed in hogsheads. Sugar was not the only product; molasses resulted from the same operation. The process was frequently an interrupted one; when a freeze came, the mill was shut down and all hands were set to "windrowing" cane. Windrowing involved cutting the cane and piling it in the middles, so that it was not so exposed to the elements. William T. Palfrey noted on November 24, 1851: "It having rained a good deal and the roads bad, & becoming very cold, left off cutting cane for the mill & commenced windrowing."<sup>41</sup>

Factors other than cold weather might interrupt the process. As suggested, the plantation roads might get in such bad shape that the cane could not be transported to the sugar house. Joseph Mather had to shut down his mill Christmas Day of 1855. He still had eighteen acres of cane standing, but the ground was too muddy for it to be brought in.<sup>42</sup> If the crop was larger than expected, the wood supply might prove insufficient.<sup>43</sup>

The grinding operation demanded that the labor force be well organized. John H. Randolph set up three shifts of eight hours each, which he called watches. Then he organized his hands, assigning

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<sup>41</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 24, 1851. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Mather Diary, December 25, 1855.

<sup>43</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, December 18, 1852. Palfrey Papers.



specific tasks to each. Six slaves were named firemen, three to serve the kettles, three to fire the engine. One hauler provided enough wood for all. Twelve hands, some of them women, loaded cane on the carrier which fed the grinder. Three men served as "calsifyer" hands, and as many worked with the receiver. Nine were "kettle hands." Eight men were assigned as carters, and ten others helped them load the carts. The largest group of all, thirty men and women, had duties as cane cutters. Lest the impression be given that Randolph worked his slaves only eight hours a day, it should be noted that all hands were assigned to two watches. Presumably to prevent monotony, some Negroes worked at one job one watch, another the next, but others remained at the same task both watches.<sup>44</sup> It is evident from this and other records that some Negroes acquired considerable skill in sugar making. In February, 1857, William T. Palfrey "Agreed with mr. William P. Kenifer to boil my next crop of sugar at \$1 per hhd and to use bysulphate of lime if required and to teach my negroes the use of it without charge."<sup>45</sup>

A somewhat exuberant visitor to a sugar plantation during the grinding season left the following description:

Human figures were moving in all directions over the place. Some laboring in the distant fields, others driving the slow moving oxen with a long drawling cry --- half naked negro boys shouting and yelling, were galloping horses as wild as themselves --- negresses of all sizes, from one able to carry a tub to the minikin who could "tote" but a pint dipper, laughing and chattering as they went, were conveying water

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<sup>44</sup> Plantation Diary, 1857. Randolph Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, February 26, 1857. Palfrey Papers.

from a spring to a wash house, in vessels adroitly balanced upon their heads. Slaves sinking under pieces of machinery, and other burdens, were passing and repassing from the boiling house and negro quarter.<sup>46</sup>

Inside the sugar house this observer had already noticed that the overseer

held in his hand a short handled whip loaded in the butt, which had a lash four or five times the length of the staff. Without noticing us, except when addressed by his employer, he remained watching the motions of the slaves, quickening the steps of a loiterer by a word, or threatening with his whip those who, tempted by curiosity, turned to gaze after us.<sup>47</sup>

The accidents which occurred so frequently during the grinding were testimonials to the industrial nature of the process. Farming accidents were also numerous, but cutting oneself with a cane knife or being kicked by a mule, while perhaps as fatal, were of a different nature from the mishaps which occurred in the sugar house. In 1846 one Jacob was very fortunate. He "was caught by the cane, carried on the mill, carried into the drum as far as his shoulders, and escaped with no other injury than having his collar bone dislocated and some severe bruises about his head."<sup>48</sup> Not so favored was a woman crushed to death between the rollers in 1857.<sup>49</sup> Death struck swiftly on the Pughs' Augustin Plantation when ". . . one of the ends of the boiler [sic] blew in two breaking down the boiler chimney wall . . . the bolt rebounded and passed straight through the shed, killing three women

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<sup>46</sup> Ingraham, The Southwest, I, 242.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>48</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 21, 1846. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>49</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, November 7, 1857.

instantly. . . . The boiler is not much injured."<sup>50</sup>

✓ It was the hope of every planter, and likewise of his slaves, to finish grinding by Christmas, but this often proved impossible. The work went on unceasingly, Sundays like other days, until grinding was completed unless weather forced a shutdown. Negroes were usually paid for their Sunday work; Solomon Northrup earned ten dollars in this way during one season.<sup>51</sup> Christmas Day itself was a work day if the plantation was pressed for time. The hands did receive "Christmas holidays" when sugar making was finished, but this might be late in January. Bad weather delayed the harvest in 1851-1852. The temperature remained below freezing for many days, reaching a low of sixteen degrees. A heavy snowfall formed such drifts that, according to one chronicler, the stirrups of a man on horseback dragged in the snow. On the Palfrey plantation, not only the sugar mill but the slave quarter as well ran out of wood. The Negroes were given Christmas Day as a holiday that year because it was impossible for them to do any work, but the conventional holidays did not begin until January 19.<sup>52</sup> In the winter of 1855-1856 an unusually large crop and moderately bad weather put the same plantation so far behind that the hands worked December 25, and their holidays did not begin until January 28.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, November 21, 1859. Pugh Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 195.

<sup>52</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, December, 1851, January, 1852. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., December, 1855, January, 1856.

Sugar plantations in general and the grinding season in particular were of bad repute. Abolitionists and English travellers told frightening tales of shortened lives and reduced birth rates. This legend may have been encouraged somewhat by the owners of slaves in other states. Fear of being "sold down the river" must have kept many a bondsman on his good behavior. The truth is that slaves on the sugar plantations looked forward to the grinding season. No one doubted that the work done during those months was more laborious than at other periods, but as Olmsted asserts, Negroes worked better then than at any other time.<sup>54</sup> The fact that more slaves ran away in spring and summer than in autumn is additional evidence leading to the same conclusion.

Only speculation can answer the question that naturally arises. Perhaps the fact that pay was received for Sunday work helped to keep the slaves contented despite the excessive toil. The much heralded esprit de corps of a plantation's black denizens might be offered as an explanation, but it seems doubtful that this was contagious enough to be transmitted to the extra hands who were hired. Probably the most influential factor in preserving high morale through these months was the fact that the grinding season was a sort of holiday in itself to the slaves. They were all working together, and their labors brought immediate results before their eyes. The master who was the source of all earthly rewards was present at the time, and it was much more important to make a good impression on him than on an overseer

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<sup>54</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States with Remarks on their Economy (New York, 1856), 668-69.

in the fields. An abundance of molasses was to be had, and all records agree that the Negro loved "long sweetening." A dram of rum or whiskey might keep spirits high on a cold night watch; and always ahead, when grinding should be finished, was a real holiday.

In contrast to conditions in the twentieth century, Louisiana was not an important rice producing state before the Civil War.

Some rice had been grown since the early period of settlement, but the amount was never great. The entire production of the state in 1859 was only 34,682 barrels, of which Plaquemine Parish produced 23,305 barrels. Other parishes producing more than 1,000 barrels were Avoyelles, St. Charles, Terrebonne, Vermillion and Washington.<sup>55</sup>

Rice was produced on small farms, most of which fronted on the Mississippi River. A system of water gates and ditches flooded the fields and drained the water into the swamp when it was no longer needed. The muddy fields were plowed in March, with oxen, and the seed were then sowed broadcast. The seed, about 150 pounds to the acre, were then harrowed under. Flooding was adjusted so as to keep the heads of the plants just above water. Weeds were pulled out of the muck by hand, and a good Negro could weed half an acre in a day. When the rice was ripe it was cut, dried for one day, then carried to the threshing house; there it was piled three feet or so deep, with the heads up, and threshed out by horses.<sup>56</sup> The majority of the rice farms consisted of less than fifty acres, and none of them

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<sup>55</sup> "Appendix," Legislative Documents, 1859, 3-108.

<sup>56</sup> R.A. Wilkinson, "Production of Rice in Louisiana," De Bow's Review, VI (1848), 53-57.

were larger than 200 acres. Each slave worked ten or eleven acres, which might produce from fifty to 100 barrels of rice.<sup>57</sup> A great deal of this rice was grown without the aid of slaves, but a few blacks did work in the rice fields. As a matter of fact, in colonial Louisiana Negro slaves had instructed the French settlers in rice cultivation.<sup>58</sup>

All Louisiana farming was not concerned with staple production; some farms worked by slaves were on a true subsistence level. The operations on these homesteads are well exemplified by the passage below, written by such a farmer to his wife:

I forgot when I left home to say anything about the business to be done. I want the Negroes to continue gathering the corn and after they get six loads in our crib, to put one load in Tom's and one in ours so as to divide it equally and when they have gathered it all to haul the fodder and divide it in the same way, and then haul in all the hay, to put up the cross fence and turn the horses in the field near the house, but to let nothing in the lower part of the field where the peas are until we can gather seed.<sup>59</sup>

In parts of Louisiana, especially the Attakapas region, cattle grazing was an important occupation. These Attakapas cattle were of Spanish descent and able to provide for themselves without a great deal of care. In 1858, after a small herd had repeatedly balked at going aboard a ferry across the Mississippi from Baton Rouge, the stubborn creatures were driven into the river, and a local paper

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<sup>57</sup> "Rice Culture in Louisiana," De Bow's Review, XVI (1856), 290-92.

<sup>58</sup> Dart, "The First Cargo of African Slaves for Louisiana, 1718," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 176-77.

<sup>59</sup> E.J. Ellis to Mrs. E.J. Ellis, October 17, 1859. Ellis Collection.

reported that they swam across with but a single casualty.<sup>60</sup> Some slaves were employed in herding these cattle,<sup>61</sup> but they must have been few in number. Olmsted reported that most Louisiana cowboys were Spaniards and that the slaves in the grazing region were mainly house servants.<sup>62</sup>

Many slaves were employed in what may be termed supervisory positions. These were commonly gang bosses on plantations, usually called drivers. The driver was ordinarily a middle-aged man, possessed of characteristics which made him respected by other slaves. Many of them were large in stature; a strong "voice of command" was helpful; and a strong right arm was sometimes needed. Often drivers carried a whip as a badge of authority.<sup>63</sup> A good driver was, of course, trustworthy, and it was necessary that he have a good understanding of the operations of the plantation. Promotions and demotions are noted in plantation diaries and letters. On a sugar

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<sup>60</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, July 10, 1858.

<sup>61</sup> William Darby, The Emigrant's Guide to the Western and Southwestern States and Territories: Comprising a Geographical and Statistical Description of the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio; — the Territories of Alabama, Missouri, Illinois and Michigan; and the Western Parts of Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. With a Complete List of the Road and River Routes, West of the Alleghany Mountains, and the Connecting Roads from New York, Philadelphia and Washington City to New Orleans, St. Louis, and Pittsburg. The Whole Comprising a More Comprehensive Account of the Soil, Productions, Climate and Present State of Improvement of the Regions Described, than Any Work Hitherto Published. Accompanied by a Map of the United States, Including Louisiana, Projected and Engraved Expressly for this Work (New York, 1818), 76-77.

<sup>62</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 628.

<sup>63</sup> Olmsted, Journey in the Back Country, 14-15.

plantation the mistress recorded: "About this time Rubin was made driver in consequence of Big Isaac having a sore leg."<sup>64</sup> On a cotton plantation the overseer "made driver of Arthur four days, and then put him to the hoe and drove him with the rest of the hands."<sup>65</sup>

Some few Negroes attained the dizzy eminence of overseer, though this seems to have happened only on small plantations where a white person was resident. John James Audubon saw one such slave on the St. Amand plantation above New Orleans in 1821:

the overseer a Good looking Black Man, told us of his being in the same employ for 8 years, and had obtained so much of his Master's Confidence as to have the Entire Care of the Plantation --- he spoke roughly to his underservants but had a good indulgent Eye, and no doubt does what he Can to Accomodate Master and All.<sup>66</sup>

It is possible that St. Amand was his own overseer to some extent, and the Negro in question may have taken an opportunity to impress an outlander with his importance. There can be no doubt, however, of the authenticity of the case described below:

This year has been a sad one to me indeed . . . Now my heart is nearly broke. I have lost poor Leven one of the most faithful black men [that] ever lived. he was truth and honesty, and without a fault that I ever discovered. He has overseed the plantation nearly three years, and done much better than any white man ever done here, and I lived a quiet life. . . . Poor Leven has left a promising crop.<sup>67</sup>

Every plantation of any size had specialists among its labor force. On Conway Plantation, in 1854, there was a working force 100

<sup>64</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, November 1, 1846.

<sup>65</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, June 22, 1829. Weeks Collection.

<sup>66</sup> Corning, Journal of John James Audubon, 110.

<sup>67</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, September 4, 1840. Weeks Collection.



strong. Seventy-five of these were classified as field hands by the overseer, and ten as "half hands." One Negro was listed as a foreman, and one as a driver. Four were termed plow boys, two stable boys, and one was listed simply as "in the garden." One sick nurse, one carter, one carpenter, one cooper, one bricklayer and one water-hauler made up the remainder, less one. This one little fellow was classified as a "water totter."<sup>68</sup> Negroes with skills beyond those of common field hands brought a premium when sold, and dealers were careful to inform the public when they had such trained men and women in stock. Even ability to use an axe or saw, or to drive a cart, were pointed out in advertisements.<sup>69</sup>

Slaves too old to work in the fields were often taught useful domestic skills. A visitor found the supernumerary hands spinning cotton and wool on the Porter plantation near Franklin.<sup>70</sup> Other Negroes specialized in livestock care. Thomas Afleck, an advocate of improved farming practices, recommended that "a steady old man" be made hostler, and that his duty be "to have the feed cut up . . . stalls . . . cleaned out" and to take care of sick and injured animals. Another trusty hand was to have nothing to do but feed and care for hogs: "with a large set kettle or two, an old mule and cart to haul his wood for fuel, cotton seed, turnips, etc. for feed, and leaves for bedding, he can do full justice to full 100 head, old

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<sup>68</sup> Seale (H.M.) Diary, 1854. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>69</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, December 1, 1827.

<sup>70</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, May 27, 1847.

and young.<sup>71</sup>

All skilled slaves were not to be found on plantations. Numerous carpenters, bricklayers and blacksmiths were located in the towns, and a smaller number of black craftsmen with other skills were encountered. Many of these seem to have belonged to white men who followed the same trade, but such was not always the case. During the early years of the nineteenth century quite a few of these Negro craftsmen were allowed to hire out their own time; the practice never completely died out, but it fell into disfavor before the end of the ante-bellum period.<sup>72</sup> If any distinction was made between white and Negro artisans, insofar as the work each did was concerned, it is not apparent in the records.<sup>73</sup> Most of the jobs done by Negro craftsmen were of a rough sort — building barns or slave quarters or laying brick for sugar houses — but the same statement can be made in regard to white workmen. Moreover, whites and Negroes worked on the same jobs. No specific record has been discovered proving that Negroes supervised jobs on which white men worked, but one observer noted that Irish helpers sometimes waited upon black masons.<sup>74</sup> A slave did supervise the construction of one of the buildings at Centenary College at

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas Afleck, The Sugar Plantation Record and Account Book, No. 2 (New Orleans, 1854), no pp.

<sup>72</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, May 27, 1847.

<sup>73</sup> The author, who comes from a family of carpenters, can testify that this practice continued well into the twentieth century in parts of the South. Equal professional status on the job was accorded to whites and Negroes, but this implied no weakening of the racial barriers which both races accepted as immutable.

<sup>74</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 588.

Jackson, but the men under him were also slaves.<sup>75</sup>

Negro artisans did offer competition to white men who followed the same trades, and there was some agitation against slaves' being allowed to engage in such work. The Irish seem to have been most inclined to object to black competition, as was perhaps natural since these newly arrived immigrants, lacking the Southern poor white's assumption of superiority, might fear being reduced to the economic status of the slave. In the 1830's a visitor to New Orleans witnessed a riot by white mechanics who were protesting against Negro competition.<sup>76</sup> Sir Charles Lyell noted the same sentiments in 1846, and believed that whites were rapidly replacing blacks in skilled work.<sup>77</sup> Probably this was true to a degree, but in 1858 a Louisiana newspaper complained: "Too many mechanics in our state are deprived of a comfortable support by negroes' usurping their places . . ."<sup>78</sup> In the late 1850's Olmsted was told that slaves were still competing with white craftsmen in New Orleans, but that "white working men were rapidly replacing the slaves in all sorts of work."<sup>79</sup> It may be that in New Orleans, where the Irish and other white proletarians were numerous and exerted significant political influence, that headway was made in

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<sup>75</sup> John Ellis to T.C.W. Ellis, June 23, 1856. Ellis Collection.

<sup>76</sup> Ambrose Cowperthwaite Fulton, A Life's Voyage, A Diary of a Sailor on Sea and Land, Jotted down during a Seventy Years Voyage (New York, 1898), 107-09.

<sup>77</sup> Sir Charles Lyell, A Second Visit to the United States of America, II (New York, 1849), 31, 125.

<sup>78</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, July 17, 1858.

<sup>79</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 589.

the fight against Negro workers. In the parish seats and smaller towns, this could hardly be true. Such gestures as were made came just before the Civil War when the slaveholding class was endeavoring to assure itself of the support of the Southern white workers. Negro carpenters, bricklayers and blacksmiths continued to exercise their skills as slaves until emancipation, and as freedmen for many years afterward.

As to the quality of the work done by Negro artisans, it is evident that if they successfully competed with whites their work was acceptable. This is not to say that their work was necessarily as good as that done by white men; they could be hired for less in many cases. One of the complaints against them was that their presence<sup>80</sup> reduced white wages. Nevertheless it appears indisputable that if the quality of labor performed by skilled slaves had been so low as to make it economically disadvantageous, Negro artisans would have disappeared. Their suppression would have constituted no threat to the institution of slavery, because it was in agriculture that the vitals of Negro bondage were to be found.

The crafts mentioned above were those in which the greater number of Negro artisans was trained, but slaves had many other skills as well. Joseph Bercier of Washington apparently used his four Negroes as workers in a tanyard.<sup>81</sup> The Pilots' Association at Lafayette owned a group of well trained seamen — so able that they

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<sup>80</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, April 21, 1860.

<sup>81</sup> Opelousas Courier, January 22, 1851.

made their escape on a pilot boat.<sup>82</sup> There are records of slaves who were engineers on steam ferries,<sup>83</sup> hunters,<sup>84</sup> and cigar makers.<sup>85</sup> The clerk of the district court at Baton Rouge sometimes left a Negro boy in charge of his office, but the lad must not have given satisfaction to the public, because his master was roundly denounced by the grand jury.<sup>86</sup> Negroes were used as stokers on steamboats, but a pilot told a traveller that Irishmen at a dollar a day were preferred because the loss was less in case of an explosion.<sup>87</sup> There is nothing improbable in this story; it is a well known fact that many planters preferred to hire Irish laborers for heavy ditching and clearing, such work being likely to endanger the health of valuable slaves.<sup>88</sup> It may be, too, that the skill in plantation operations possessed by blacks made them too precious to be wasted on relatively unskilled work.

Many travellers who visited New Orleans commented on the number of blacks employed there. A great many of these were free Negroes, but not all. The slave draymen were "a numerous class," and many cabmen were chattels.<sup>89</sup> In the early 1830's the waiters and other

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<sup>82</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 1, 1844.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., April 24, 1852.

<sup>84</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, December 26, 1850.

<sup>85</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, April 5, 1828.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., July 16, 1842.

<sup>87</sup> Edward Sullivan, Rambles and Scrambles in North and South America (London, 1853), 203.

<sup>88</sup> Russell, My Diary North and South, 104.

<sup>89</sup> Lyell, Second Visit to the United States, II, 125.

servants in the hotels were slaves, hired from their masters at twenty-five dollars a month.<sup>90</sup> As indicated above, many of these were replaced by white men before the end of the ante-bellum period. The market afforded the sight of many slaves engaged in the sale of produce, and also coffee, hot chocolate and ready-to-eat gumbo.<sup>91</sup> New Orleans was not the only city in which slaves sold produce; the same practice went on in other cities and towns of the state. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1853, a resident of Opelousas complained: "The neighboring planters forbid their slaves from coming among us with vegetables, milk, and eggs."<sup>92</sup>

In the Southern myth, house servants represent Negro slavery. They loom large in ante-bellum literature as well, because they were the slaves with whom both slaveholders and articulate visitors were most familiar. They were an upper caste, far removed from the lowly field hands. The house servant, whether nurse, cook, chambermaid, butler or coachman, lived in close contact with the master and his family. It is no exaggeration to say that in many instances they were emotionally a part of the family.

Good servants were not abundant. Many slaves were tried and found wanting, and sent back to the fields.<sup>93</sup> The best assurance of good servants was to bring them up in the household, but this was often

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<sup>90</sup> James Stuart, Three Years in North America, I (Edinburgh, 1833), 228.

<sup>91</sup> Captain Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, II (Philadelphia, 1829), 287.

<sup>92</sup> Opelousas Courier, September 24, 1853.

<sup>93</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, June 15, 1829. Marston Papers.

impossible in a newly developed region. Moreover, when this system was followed, it led to a surplus of Negroes about the house.<sup>94</sup> Yet well trained domestics were so few that a woman who knew how to iron brought a premium on the market.<sup>95</sup> Town dwellers who owned no slaves of their own liked to hire servants belonging to others. The supply was often not equal to the demand, as one editor complained:

House servants are in great demand in this town at present, and in fact have been so for a year past. This scarcity is not because there are not a sufficiency of Negro girls in the place, but because their owners, instead of hiring them in their youth to learn house work, cooking, &c. employ them in all kinds of peddling or hiring their time, until they become perfectly ruined, and unfit for any decent employment.<sup>96</sup>

Slaveholders came to depend greatly upon their servants, especially in caring for children. Bishop Polk's sister envied his wife's "faithful nurse (negro) to whose care she abandons her babes entirely. Only when she has a fancy to caress them does she see them. Eight children and cannot lay to their charge a single night's rest."<sup>97</sup> The Bishop also owned "a housekeeper who gives out, regulates, and is everything she ought to be."<sup>98</sup> The young mistress of a Carroll Parish plantation wrote to her relatives in New England that she could not visit them in the summer of 1853 because only her Negro nurse could

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, II (Edinburgh, 1833), 230-31.

<sup>95</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, October 25, 1828.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., October 7, 1848.

<sup>97</sup> Hilliard (Mrs. Isaac) Diary, February 4, 1850. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

care for her child.<sup>99</sup>

Not all house servants were denizens of spacious plantations. Many, as noted above, were in the towns. Many others shared the rude lives of yeoman farmers. It might be well to call these Negroes part-time house servants, because when grass threatened the cotton fields they sallied forth from the kitchen and took up the hoe. Often they worked side by side with their masters and mistresses in the fields. No estimate of the total number of Negroes in this category is possible, but thousands of farmers owned one or a few slaves, and common sense indicates that many of them did do house work. Olmsted and A.A. Parker noted a few slaves of this kind west of Opelousas, but they were to be found everywhere.<sup>100</sup>

The duties of some house servants involved more than the usual household tasks. The following passage is from a letter written in 1833:

I suppose you have by this time discovered the virtues and good qualities of my femme de chambre and have determined whether or not she will suit your purpose. If you determine to keep her, I wish you to send down the one you offer in exchange by the first opportunity, and if not to send down Charlotte — that is if she wishes to come for if her taste has

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<sup>99</sup> Mrs. Hiram Tibbetts to Mrs. Sophia Tibbetts, January 23, 1853. Tibbetts (Hiram B.) Letters, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>100</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, a Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States, II (New York, 1861), 35-40. A.A. Parker, Trip to the West and Texas: Comprising a Journey of Eight Thousand Miles, through New York, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Louisiana and Texas, in the Autumn and Winter of 1834-5. Interspersed with Anecdotes, Incidents and Observations (Concord, New Hampshire, 1835), 115.



undergone a change and she would prefer the society of New Iberia to New Orleans and you know anyone there who wishes to purchase her you may sell her — I do not wish her, however, sold to anyone but a good master <sup>101</sup>. I could not think of letting her go under \$8,000.

Privately owned slaves were used on public works when the situation demanded such a course. Masters were required to provide slaves for the upkeep of roads and levees, and an elaborate set of rules and regulations was adopted to insure compliance with the law. A regular stint of work was required each year, and additional hands could be called out in time of emergency. Masters seem to have registered no objection to this practice, though the fact that punitive provisions directed at those who failed to comply became more severe would indicate that evasions were not unknown. <sup>102</sup>

The ante-bellum railroad building period saw the employment of great numbers of Negro men in roadbed construction and track laying. When the road was completed the slaves could still be useful in cutting wood for the locomotives. To some extent the use of Negroes for railroad construction constituted a paradox, because the same arguments which held good on the wisdom of employing Irishmen rather than Negroes for ditching and clearing on plantations should have dictated the hiring of Irish section hands. Perhaps this was the case in many instances, but

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<sup>101</sup> C.M. Conrad to David Weeks, November 30, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>102</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1814-1815 (New Orleans, 1815), 8-10. Acts of the Ninth Legislature, 1829, 76-104. Acts of the Second Session of the Thirteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1837-1838 (New Orleans, 1838), 94. Police Jury Minutes, St. Charles Parish, I, 16-17. Proceedings of the Police Jury of the Parish of Concordia: Passed at Their Special and Regular Sessions from August 1856 to April, 1863 (Natchez, 1873), 149-55.

there were many cases where slaves were used. In 1857 the Baton Rouge and Opelousas Railroad Company listed thirty-five male Negroes valued at \$49,000 among its assets.<sup>103</sup> In 1860 the contractors for the construction of the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Texas line advertised that they wished to hire 200 slaves for work in the "pine woods country west of the Ouachita River." These contractors offered board, clothing and \$300 a year for good Negro men. The owner was to pay all medical costs, and to lose any time over one week that his slave was incapacitated by sickness. The owner was also to lose any time lost through running away, but the contractors professed to be "owners of slaves and accustomed to manage them" and promised to "treat the negroes humanely."<sup>104</sup> A newspaper that complained on July 17, 1858 that slaves were usurping the places of white mechanics rejoiced two weeks later that "Negro labor is fast taking the place of white labor in the construction of Southern railroads."<sup>105</sup>

Negroes did some work for themselves. Many masters allowed them to grow their own vegetables, and some encouraged them to cultivate sizable plots of corn. Negroes so favored were often required to pay for their own summer clothes from the proceeds of their corn fields.<sup>106</sup> Quite a few slaveholders objected to this practice, averring that bondsmen who were allowed to grow crops of their own, however small,

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<sup>103</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, April 25, 1857.

<sup>104</sup> Monroe Ouachita Register, September 13, 1860.

<sup>105</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, July 17, 31, 1858.

<sup>106</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, December 14, 1835. Weeks Collection.

were prone to confuse mine and thine. During the early 1800's Negro slaves were the owners in fact, if not in strict legal right, of quite a few head of livestock.<sup>107</sup> The problems which arose from this practice were the same as those in connection with crops, and the custom seems to have died out before mid-century. Few slaves had the time to devote to fields and livestock of their own at any rate.<sup>108</sup>

Many Negroes found opportunities to earn money. The law provided that slaves should be paid for work they did on Sunday, with certain exceptions, and often, when a master hired out his slaves, he gave them a part of the returns. } Indeed, quite a few masters rewarded their slaves with money as a matter of course when they had performed their duties well.<sup>109</sup> Bondsmen often worked for their owners' neighbors on Sunday, the usual wage for such work being seventy-five cents. A farmer who lived on the road between Opelousas and Lake Charles hired slaves on Sunday for this amount, but paid Choctaw Indians whom he also employed only half as much.<sup>110</sup>

As noted above, a few highly skilled Negroes were allowed to hire out their own time, turning over a stated minimum amount to their

<sup>107</sup> Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana, No. 28. Lafayette Parish (Lafayette), Series 1. Police Jury Minutes. Prepared by the Statewide Records Project Division of Community Service Programs, Work Projects Administration, I, 11.

<sup>108</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 370-71.

<sup>109</sup> Unsigned letter to Benjamin Tureaud, December 30, 1852. Tureaud (Benjamin) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. Edward G. Stewart to John W. Gurley, April 22, 1860. Gurley Papers. -

<sup>110</sup> Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, II, 39.

masters. Strong objections were raised to this practice. The slave might fail to obtain employment or squander his wages, then be forced to steal or establish a "house of disgraceful character" in order to compensate his or her master. At the other extreme, the provident Negro might accumulate money, improve himself, and cause envy and discontent among his less favored peers.<sup>111</sup> Adding to the complaints directed against slaves' being allowed to hire their own time was the fact that such blacks as these competed most directly with white workmen.

A little known chapter of Louisiana history is concerned with slaves owned by the state. In 1834 the Board of Public Works was authorized to purchase up to 150 slaves to be used on internal improvements.<sup>112</sup> The next session of the legislature set up a system whereby 200 Negro men were to be purchased by special commissioners.<sup>113</sup> Apparently the panic of 1837 prevented the carrying out of these plans, but the idea did not die. In the year 1842 a number of slaves became the property of the state by confiscation, and it was ordered that they be turned over to the Board of Public Works. At the same time it was ordered that all male Negro convicts should be put under the same body. In the future all slaves forfeited to the state, all slaves sentenced to death whose sentence was commuted to life imprisonment,<sup>114</sup> and,

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<sup>111</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, May 27, 1847. West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, March 13, 1858.

<sup>112</sup> Acts of the Eleventh Legislature, 1833-1834, 106-08.

<sup>113</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Twelfth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1835 (New Orleans, 1835), 195-97.

<sup>114</sup> Acts of the Fifteenth Legislature, 1841-1842, 518.

eventually, all unclaimed runaways, were to be disposed of in the same manner.<sup>115</sup> The use of black convicts was ultimately abandoned on the grounds that the costs of guarding them exceeded the value of their labor,<sup>116</sup> but the state continued to use its other slaves on public works until 1860.

The state-owned laborers were used for road building and, especially, clearing bayous for navigation. For instance, in 1843, they were instructed to "cut and put out of the way all overhanging timber and to remove whatever obstructions may impede the navigation . . ." of Bayou Vermillion "between Perry's Bridge and the Vermillionville Bridge."<sup>117</sup> In 1844 the state engineer was instructed to employ the state force "in cutting out and clearing a road from near Thibodeauxville on the Lafourche, to a convenient spot on the Mississippi River."<sup>118</sup> The supervisors of these Negroes had much confidence in their charges, or were neglecting their duties, because a newspaper complained that the state snag boat "has been left for two weeks in charge of the negroes without even an overseer."<sup>119</sup> In 1844 the state engineer reported that the state was in possession of "eighty-eight active and hardy slaves," eighty-three of whom were employed on the boats used in internal

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<sup>115</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1857 (New Orleans, 1857), 172-75.

<sup>116</sup> "Report of the Committee on the Penitentiary," Documents of the First Session of the Seventeenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1845 (New Orleans, 1845), no pp.

<sup>117</sup> Acts of the Sixteenth Legislature, 1843, 71-72.

<sup>118</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Sixteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1844 (New Orleans, 1844), 41.

<sup>119</sup> Opelousas St. Landry Whig, May 8, 1845.

Improvement work.<sup>120</sup>

In 1857 the state engineer included the following in his report to the legislature:

If we . . . must enter into a more extensive system of improvements, a necessary corollary is, that a larger number of slaves must be purchased. One hundred hands is not an unusual number to work one of our common plantations of eight or ten hundred acres, and yet a smaller number have been . . . accounted sufficient to make all the public roads, levees, and render navigable the thousand and more streams of the entire state. . . . I am aware that many are dissatisfied . . . Much of their dissatisfaction arises from the fact that they see but a little of what is done by the state forces, and . . . they forget that one state slave is not worth fifty of their own slaves . . . I fear not a comparison in a point of economy, between state slave labor and white labor, for our internal improvements.<sup>121</sup>

Those who fought to maintain an internal improvement service made up of state owned slaves eventually lost their battle. The Negroes already in the service grew old, and the legislature appropriated no funds for buying more. Finally those who remained were sold at public auction. A planter noted in his diary: "I attended the sale of the State negroes today. They sold very high, considering that they were greatly advanced in years and were not guaranteed."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "Report of the State Engineer," Documents of the Second Session of the Sixteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1844 (New Orleans, 1844), no pp.

<sup>121</sup> "Report of the State Engineer," Documents of the First Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1856 (New Orleans, 1857), 9.

<sup>122</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, June 9, 1860. Pugh Collection.

## NOTES ON THE ECONOMICS OF LOUISIANA SLAVERY

In no single case has it proved possible to pick out an individual Louisiana planter, examine his accounts, and from the figures make a definite statement that slavery was in his case profitable or unprofitable. John H. Randolph of Iberville Parish, for instance, accumulated a large fortune, a relic of which survives in the famous Nottaway mansion near White Castle. But Randolph married into the Liddell family, and perhaps acquired some of his capital by his marriage. Furthermore, he engaged in land speculation, and much of his liquid wealth may have come from this source. He became wealthy, but how much of his wealth was derived from his ownership of slaves cannot be stated.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly all planters sold their crops through factors in New Orleans, and at the conclusion of each business year the factors sent out statements to the planters whom they served. Many of these statements are to be found in manuscript collections. A hasty opinion based upon these documents would be that plantation operation was generally unprofitable, since planters were usually in debt to their factors at the end of the year. Examination of orders placed with the factors and other correspondence with them reveals, however, that a large part of the goods for which planters were charged were

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<sup>1</sup> Randolph Papers. Liddell Papers.

bought for consumption, not for productive purposes. A negative balance with the factor often resulted from the planter's purchasing hundreds and thousands of dollars worth of luxuries through the year.<sup>2</sup>

The low standard of living of some slaveholders gave an impression of poverty at times. But in itself a low living standard, as compared with that of the longer-settled regions, was not conclusive evidence. During the early days of settlement the people who moved into Louisiana had to be satisfied with a bare subsistence. Enough time had to elapse for wealth to accumulate before conspicuous consumption could manifest itself. Even after economy was no longer necessary, many families who had grown accustomed to the old way of life continued it. A.A. Parker spent the night in the western part of the state with a man who owned \$20,000 worth of land and slaves. This planter, said Parker,

lived in a log house with only two rooms, and without a window in it. Our supper was fried beef, fried greens, sweet potatoes, cornbread, and a cup of coffee, without milk or sugar; which we ate by the light of a fire, as he had neither candle nor lamp.<sup>3</sup>

There can be no doubt that Louisiana as a whole prospered during the ante-bellum era. The wealth of the state increased constantly. New Orleans, it is true, was sustained by trade, but this trade was mainly in agricultural products, many of which were produced in Louisiana. The well tilled and well equipped cotton plantations which Olmsted saw along Red River,<sup>4</sup> the skillfully drained sugar fields in

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Gillespie Papers. Weeks Collection.

<sup>3</sup> Parker, Trip to the West and Texas, 113.

<sup>4</sup> Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, I, 14.



the southern part of the state, houses, churches and fine horses all represented in large part capital which had been accumulated since the first settlement of the lands. So did the slaves who tilled the alluvial soil. Much of this wealth had been created by these slaves. If wealth was created, and it cannot be doubted that it was, then slaveholding must have been profitable to the owners of this type of property, because the surplus was theirs. The slave had no claim on the wealth he created beyond a bare minimum of food, clothing and shelter for the rest of his life.

The whole question of whether or not slavery was profitable in Louisiana boils down to whether or not the slave produced, during his lifetime, a large enough surplus over his maintenance and the interest on the capital he represented. This is not a simple matter of adding up the dollar value of production, then subtracting from this sum the cost of maintenance and interest. As Phillips points out, the capital investment on a slave reared by his master would include insurance on the mother's life at the time of his birth, the production lost during her confinement and insurance upon the slave's own life. Also there had to be some provision against the risk of his escape.<sup>5</sup> Of these factors, insurance on the mother's life and her loss of time during confinement and after would amount to a negligible sum. While the risk of escape might have been significant in the border states, in Louisiana it was not of great import. The factor of insurance on the slave's life does demand consideration.

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<sup>5</sup> Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 359-60.

Furthermore, the natural increase of slaves must be considered as a credit item.

It has been suggested that slavery may be profitable under a one crop economy when that one crop demands year round labor and when a large amount of labor may be employed on a small amount of land, thus making close supervision possible.<sup>6</sup> These conditions were met in Louisiana. Sugar and cotton were the one crop, each in its respective region. Much corn was grown, but it did not require skills not available to slaves accustomed to sugar or cotton. Sugar was so completely a year round crop that planting often began before the harvest. Cotton picking sometimes went on into February, and plowing for the new crop never began later than March. The plantations were large, frequently running to more than a thousand acres, but the slaves worked in gangs for planting, hoeing, picking cotton and for the grinding season in the sugar district.

Slave labor was to some extent inefficient, though Louisiana planters seldom complained on this score. Carelessness and inefficiency may safely be inferred, nonetheless, since the Negro slave, whatever his racial characteristics, had little incentive to improve his work because he could not improve his condition. However, whatever racial and conditional inefficiency there may have been, on the plantations in Louisiana it was in part neutralized by efficient direction. Wise and skillful masters and overseers could increase the production of their slaves through a combination of routine, minimum tasks, rewards

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<sup>6</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, I, 463.

and punishments. The threat of the lash may not have been so effective an incentive as responsibility for self-support, but it was enough to keep hoes moving and cane knives slashing. All observers agreed that the hardest work done by slaves was that accomplished on sugar plantations during the grinding season, and this work demanded technical skills.<sup>7</sup> Yet Negroes worked better at this season than at any other time of year.<sup>8</sup>

There is much evidence to indicate that the skill and efficiency of slaves was increasing as the years passed. The dollar production of the South as a whole, divided by the number of slaves, increased from \$16.10 in 1810 to \$37.11 in 1840 to \$51.90 in 1860. These figures reflect changes in the price level and improved methods and implements independent of slave skills, of course, but they should indicate some increase in Negro efficiency. In the sugar parishes of Louisiana the sugar acreage per hand increased from two in 1802 to three and one third in 1827, and to almost five acres in the 1850's.<sup>9</sup>

The plantation was the most efficient means of utilizing slave labor, and Louisiana tended to become more and more a plantation region as the Civil War approached. The percentage of slaves held in large groups was increasing. In 1850 slightly more than thirty-five percent of all slaves were held in groups of nineteen or less. This proportion had decreased to twenty-nine percent by 1860. There was also a slight

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<sup>7</sup> Plantation Diary, 1857. Randolph Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 668.

<sup>9</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, I, 467.

decrease in the percentage of all slaves held in groups of more than nineteen but less than fifty. The percentage of all slaves owned in groups of from fifty to 100 increased slightly, while the percentage of the total number held in groups of 100 to 500 increased from 19.8% to 26.8%.<sup>10</sup>

It is evident from the above that larger plantations could outbid smaller ones for slaves. The obvious conclusion is that larger units could use slave labor to more advantage. There was a point beyond which concentration could not economically be taken, however. Phillips postulates a half hour's walk from the slave quarter to the outer fields as the upper limit of any plantation unit. This amounted to about a two mile radius from the quarter.<sup>11</sup> The number of units could be multiplied, but with a proportionate reduction of the amount of supervision the owner could give. When the Preston estate, including slaves, was purchased for \$1,000,000, the West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter observed:

| Although a very large amount of money may be invested in a large sugar plantation, we doubt if it ever pays more than a fair percentage on the investment. We never heard of a large plantation yet, making as much money for its owners in proportion to the means employed as a medium sized one --- one making from three to seven hundred hogsheads. These very large sugar plantations are all humbug, and show a silly vanity in the owners' wishing to be considered as large sugar planters.<sup>12</sup> |

Some writers, mainly Northern, presumed that slavery had degraded the yeoman farmers of the South to poor white status. Recent research

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips, Life and Labor, 136.

<sup>12</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, February 13, 1858.

indicates that this conclusion was erroneous.<sup>13</sup> The question still remains as to whether slavery was profitable to the slaveholders of this class. The yeoman farmers were a large group; over half of those who owned slaves in Louisiana owned fewer than ten.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted here that while small farmers made up so large a part of the slaveowners, they held less than sixteen percent of all slaves.<sup>15</sup> The lands of these yeomen were found among the planters in both the sugar and cotton regions, though the increasing concentration of slaveholding indicates that they were being driven from the best lands. Presumably, then, they were not able to hold their own in competition with the great planters on alluvial soil. It does not follow that their operations were unprofitable.

The fact that planters were gradually supplanting yeomen on the best acres does not force the further conclusion that the farming operations of the yeomen were unprofitable. There may be degrees of supra-marginal production. Olmsted believed that a farmer with six slaves was fortunate to earn \$150 cash in a year from cotton farming.<sup>16</sup> Even if this Northerner's estimate was correct, yeoman farmer operations were not necessarily at an economic loss. These men were engaged in subsistence farming, and cash return was often net return. Two succession sales in St. Landry Parish included exactly six slaves. In

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<sup>13</sup> Harry L. Coles, Jr., "Some Notes on Slaveownership and Landownership in Louisiana, 1850-1860," Journal of Southern History, IX (1943), 381-94.

<sup>14</sup> Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 320.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, I, 530.

<sup>16</sup> Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, I, 18.

1833 the deceased, in addition to his slaves, had owned 159 acres of land, two horses, a mule, an "old buggy," a printing press, and a house and lot in Opelousas. Twenty years later another man left an estate in addition to his six slaves which included 640 acres of woodland with two buildings thereon, sixty "horse creatures," thirty-two head of "gentle cattle," fifteen head of "wild cattle," five creole horses, a stallion, an oxcart, branding irons, farm implements, carpenter tools, household furniture and kitchen utensils.<sup>17</sup> Such men had made more than a bare subsistence.

The exhaustion of the soil is another crime often charged against slavery. It has never been shown, however, that land cultivated by slaves in the South was depleted any more surely than land worked exclusively by whites. Actually, the type of farming engaged in practically everywhere in the South tended to reduce the fertility of the soil rapidly. Land was plentiful and labor comparatively scarce, hence the aim of the farmer was to get as great a yield as possible per worker, not per acre. In Louisiana as in the other slave states, production was usually computed per hand. Under the conditions that existed a lower unit cost of production could be obtained by extensive cultivation, thus reducing fertility, than by an intensive method which would have maintained the land and given a greater yield per acre. Soil depletion did take place, but it is to be blamed upon the type of cultivation, not upon the fact that slave labor was used.

Indeed, slave labor was successfully used for intensive agriculture

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<sup>17</sup> Opelousas Courier, January 8, 1833, September 17, 1853.

in Virginia before 1860.<sup>18</sup> Sugar planting was to some extent an intensive operation. An elaborate and expensive drainage system was required, and the land which could be successfully utilized was largely limited to that adjacent to the rivers and bayous. Before the end of the slavery period the natural fertility of the sugar lands had been impaired, and there were no fresh soils to which operations could be transferred. This situation was remedied by rotating fields with legumes and by plowing in bagasse and animal manures. So successful were these intensive methods that the yield per hand was greater in the 1850's than it had been earlier.<sup>19</sup>

No positive statement can be made as to a slave's productive value in dollars, because too many variables are involved. But it is possible to demonstrate that in Louisiana productivity was much in excess of the cost of maintenance. In the 1840's Louisiana cotton lands were estimated to yield easily 2,000 pounds of lint cotton to the hand, which was stated to bring a return on investment of seven percent when cotton sold for only five cents a pound.<sup>20</sup> It is probable that this estimate of the rate of return is too high for five cent cotton, but prices reached such a low level for only short periods during the 1840's. Though fluctuations in cotton prices were violent, the New York price was more often above ten cents than it was below

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<sup>18</sup> Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the History of Virginia and Maryland, 127.

<sup>19</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, I, 467, II, 706-08, 749-50.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., II, 709.

this figure from 1810 to 1860.<sup>21</sup> On many occasions prices were twelve cents to fifteen cents, and four times the price was above fifteen cents. If it be suggested that these high prices came during short crop years, it is only necessary to remember that farmers' dollar income in general is higher when crops are short than when production is normal. But even when cotton sold for eight cents, the 2,000 pound yield per hand would bring a gross return of \$160 per hand.

According to Gray, each hand on the sugar plantations cultivated about four acres of cane during the 1850's, and a yield of one hogshead to the acre was considered normal.<sup>22</sup> This is a conservative estimate; a writer in De Bow's Review thought that five to eight hogsheads per hand was not excessive.<sup>23</sup> Accepting the lower estimate of four hogsheads to the hand, however, we may note that the average price of sugar during the decade of the 1850's was sixty-four dollars a hogshead.<sup>24</sup> Thus, on the sugar plantations each hand earned a gross return of \$256 for sugar alone. Actually the gross return in dollars was greater than this, because the molasses by-product of sugar making was also salable.

The greater gross return per hand for the sugar industry does not necessarily mean that profits were greater in this form of operation.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, American Negro Slavery, chart opposite p. 370.

<sup>22</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, II, 751.

<sup>23</sup> Valcour Aime, "Sugar Culture and Manufacture of Louisiana and the West Indies," De Bow's Review, VII (1847), 386.

<sup>24</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, II, 1033.



The capital investment on a sugar plantation was much greater in land improvements, machinery and slaves than was the case on a comparable cotton plantation. A sugar plantation with 750 acres of land, 160 slaves and all necessary equipment demanded an investment of about \$200,000. A cotton plantation with 120 slaves, 1,600 acres of land and necessary implements required only some \$96,000 in capital.<sup>25</sup>

It should be noted here that in plantation parlance a hand was a slave able to do a full day's work. As a rule of thumb, derived from numerous lists of slaves and their ages, half the slaves on a plantation could be counted as hands. Maintenance costs must be calculated per slave. Therefore it may be advisable to consider the gross dollar value of cotton production per slave as eighty dollars, at a price of eight cents. Similarly, the gross dollar value of sugar production per slave would amount to \$128 at a price of sixty-four dollars.

The cost of maintenance alone did not approach these sums. As will be seen, the rations given to slaves were substantial but cheap. To a large extent Louisiana Negroes supplemented their diet with fish and game and with vegetables which they grew themselves. Huts were not costly, and they were frequently erected by the slaves who lived in them. Clothing was inexpensive, and on many plantations the time of old women, and of all women on days when the weather did not permit work in the fields, was devoted to making garments. In some cases

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., I, 542.

cloth was woven on the premises.<sup>26</sup> Nor was the cost of clothing for children so great as that for adults. Until Negro children were old enough to work they often received no shoes, and their only garment was a long shirtlike affair which was sometimes called a frock. The total cost of maintenance when all food and clothing was bought was never more than fifty dollars per hand, and less for those who did not work. Only on rare occasions was it necessary to buy all the food and clothing for slaves on a plantation.

Slaves produced a great part of their own food. Even on the sugar plantations, where every acre was needed, each hand cultivated about two acres of corn and peas in addition to his four acres of cane. In the cotton regions, the acreage of corn per hand was much greater. Except in the southern parishes, planters usually killed and cured much of the pork which was issued to the Negroes. Under ordinary circumstances the cash expense for food, clothing and shelter did not amount to twenty dollars a year per slave.

The conclusion then follows that the surplus product value per slave over the cost of maintenance in Louisiana ranged from sixty dollars to \$108, on the basis of eight cent cotton and sixty-four dollar sugar. And there were many years when prices were above these figures.

Adding considerably to the imputed income from slave property was the natural increase. Leaving aside all question of deliberate breeding, we can say that no planter was so moral and high-minded as not to be gratified by the multiplication of his human property.

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<sup>26</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, November and December, 1825. Kilbourne Papers, December, 1857. Weeks Collection, 1825-1840.

Because of the slave trade and immigration, the rate of increase for Louisiana slaves cannot be isolated. The rate for the South as a whole, however, was about twenty-five percent a decade.<sup>27</sup> It is logical to assume that the rate would be somewhat higher on large well managed plantations where the children were carefully attended to, and where mate selection was convenient. Another factor which might weigh the scales in favor of a higher than average birth rate among Louisiana slaves is the fact that the state imported many Negroes. Those blacks brought into the Southwest by the slave trade naturally included a higher proportion of young men and women than did the slave population as a whole. "If the natural increase on Louisiana plantations was as much as thirty percent a decade, then a plantation with 100 slaves whose average value was \$500 would return its owner a dividend of young Negroes amounting to \$15,000 every ten years. This amounted to fifteen dollars a year per slave. The natural increase on a well managed plantation might well pay the cost of slave maintenance."

Louisiana planters were well aware of this state of affairs. One man, after prolonged debate with himself and his wife, decided in favor of buying a girl rather than a boy because her children would add to his wealth.<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Rachael O'Connor, who rewarded her women with a dress of gay calico when they produced a baby, because "they do much better by being encouraged a little,"<sup>29</sup> wrote as follows to her

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<sup>27</sup> Bancroft, Slave Trading in the Old South, 383.

<sup>28</sup> Edward G. Stewart to John W. Gurley, December 19, 1858. Gurley Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Rachael O'Connor to A.T. Conrad, April 12, 1835. Weeks Collection.

sister-in-law:

I have just been reading your letter over again, and noticing Louisia and Patty being in a thriving way, caused me to recollect of our sister's fine luck, they have had five little negroes born in less than two months, one of the women had twins, the children are all alive and well. . . . they have two more women that she expects to be confined hourly —<sup>30</sup>

When William Howard Russell visited the huge Burnside estate, the overseer proudly "pointed with his whip to the glistening fat ribs and corpulent paunches of his wooly headed flock [of Negro children]. 'There's not a plantation in the state,' quoth he, 'can show such a lot of young niggers.'"<sup>31</sup>

Phillips concluded, on the basis of slave prices during the 1850's, that the slave's earnings were not enough to justify the institution economically.<sup>32</sup> Certainly slave prices were high during the 1850's, and they reached unprecedentedly high levels in 1859 and 1860. At five percent the interest on a field hand's value, at \$1,500, amounted to seventy-five dollars; planters often paid considerably more than five percent interest. However, in 1859 and 1860 cotton was bringing eleven cents a pound, and sugar sold at a near-record eighty-two dollars a hoghead in 1860.<sup>33</sup> At these prices a hand engaged in cotton culture would earn a surplus over maintenance of \$200, and one working in the sugar fields would earn \$300 more than the cost of his upkeep.

Most of the slaves Louisiana planters bought, and practically all

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<sup>30</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mrs. Mary C. Weeks, September 15, 1828.  
Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Russell, My Diary North and South, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 390-92.

<sup>33</sup> Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, II, 1027, 1033.

of those for whom they paid these high prices, were full hands. Hence, discounting the risk of premature death or disability, the planter could easily afford five percent, and perhaps even ten percent, on the capital invested. It should be noted also that in the 1850's production was considerably greater per hand than it had been during the previous decades. The minority report of a legislative committee, opposing the reopening of the African slave trade, recognized the fact that better seed, better implements and better methods were largely responsible for the high level of slave prices.<sup>34</sup> Whether productivity had increased enough to justify the exceptionally high prices of 1859-1860 completely cannot be determined, but speculative mania was not entirely responsible.

Most Louisiana planters carried no insurance upon the lives of their slaves, though a few did do so. The account books of W.A. Britton, agent for the Nautilus Mutual Life Insurance Company, contains records of the premiums paid by planters upon the lives of their slaves. These premiums varied with the age of the slave and the amount of insurance, of course, but ten dollars a year was about the normal amount for a field hand in his prime.<sup>35</sup> The risk taken by those planters who did not carry insurance may be assumed to have been no greater.

Another factor which had a definite bearing on the profitability of slavery was the cost of rearing a Negro to working age and the cost

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<sup>34</sup> "Minority Report of the Committee on Federal Relations," Legislative Documents, 1858, 7-15.

<sup>35</sup> Britton (W.A.) Account Books, 1847. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

of his maintenance after he had become too old to work. The allowance for old age did not need to be a large one. The death of most slaves came after they were well past their prime but before they had ceased to be useful to some degree. There were many plantation tasks which old men or old women could perform.

Nor was the cost of maintenance of children comparable to that for adults. By the time a boy or girl was twelve or thirteen years old, his or her productiveness probably equalled the cost of maintenance. Within a short time productiveness would pass the marginal point and begin to yield a surplus. In 1830 the Louisiana Supreme Court expressed its opinion that fifteen dollars would suffice to pay the cost of rearing young Negroes "up to the time at which they become useful."<sup>36</sup> Fifty dollars is probably a generous estimate of the average cost of rearing a Negro and caring for him in old age. And the liquidation of this cost was spread over about thirty years of the slave's productive life.

Medical cost was one other care attributable to the utilization of slave labor. This expense might rise to considerable sums in individual cases, but on the average it was a small amount per year. Any estimate is little more than a guess, but on the basis of the records examined three dollars a year seems a generous allowance. It should be remembered that treatment of minor ailments was a function of master or overseer.

Remembering always that estimates of costs are estimates, it is

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<sup>36</sup> Kemp v. Womack, 2 La. 272. December, 1830. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 490.

now possible to apply them to hypothetical plantations. The cotton plantation of 1,600 acres, 120 slaves amounting to sixty working hands and necessary implements represented an investment of \$96,000. At 2,000 pounds of lint cotton to the hand, the gross product per slave, at a price of eight cents, amounted to eighty dollars. To this should be added fifteen dollars for the natural increase, making a total of ninety-five dollars. Against this gross product should be charged twenty dollars for cost of maintenance, ten dollars for risk of premature death, a two dollar allowance for youth and old age, and three dollars for medical care. The total debit per slave, less interest, amounts to thirty-five dollars. Therefore the surplus over costs for each slave was sixty dollars, and \$7,200 for 120 slaves. This amounts to a return of seven and six tenths percent on total investment, less whatever wages of management are imputed. A similar computation for a sugar plantation with 160 slaves, representing an investment of \$200,000, gives a return of nine percent, based on a price of sixty-four dollars a hogshead.

An economic sin which was frequently charged against the planters of the Southwest was "Negro fever," the desire to continually buy more land and slaves with which to grow more sugar or cotton in order to buy more land and slaves. Probably such criticism was not justified. The function of plantation management was to combine land, capital and labor so as to secure the greatest possible return over costs. The expansion of plantation units was a manifestation of this function. Corporations are seldom criticized today for reinvesting surplus earnings in order to attain the economies of large scale production.

Planters were apparently attempting to do the same thing.

Slavery was attacked on moral, religious and economic grounds. Moral defence was largely sophistry. Religious defence was based on legalistic interpretation of scripture. But the institution, as it existed, was economically profitable to the master class in Louisiana. Whether another system, under the same conditions, would have been more profitable is a question which can never be answered.



## SLAVE LIFE IN LOUISIANA

Though the primary reason for the slave's existence was his labor, his life cannot be wholly described in terms of the cotton field and the sugar house. He ate, slept and wore clothes. He became sick and received medical care. He married and enjoyed some degree of family life. Like other human beings he needed recreation, and he found it.

The code noir provided that slaves should be adequately fed and clothed,<sup>1</sup> and the first territorial legislature required that each slave should receive a barrel of corn or its equivalent in rice, beans "or other grain" each month. Negroes who were not given a plot of ground to cultivate on their own account, so that they could devote the earnings from their produce to buying their own clothes, were to receive one shirt and trousers of linen for summer wear and a linen shirt with woolen trousers and greatcoat for winter.<sup>2</sup> Eventually legislative attempts to define adequate food and clothing were abandoned, but failure to feed and clothe properly was considered cruelty.<sup>3</sup>

As might be anticipated, there was considerable variation in the allowance of food given to Negroes and in the manner in which it was

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<sup>1</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

<sup>3</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

given out. Few complaints that rations were inadequate are to be found, however. Ferrin du Lac, in his imaginative description of the province during the last years of Spanish administration, asserted that the blacks were poorly nourished. He said that they received only a barrel of corn a month and had to secure the rest of their food, as well as their clothing, by Sunday work.<sup>4</sup> Meat may have been lacking in this diet, but one barrel a month was a generous allotment of corn. Assuming the barrel to have been standard, this amounted to fifteen pecks a month, three times the usual issue of a peck a week in later years, when no complaints were heard.

The usual practice throughout the ante-bellum period was to allow each adult Negro a half pound of pork and a quart of corn meal a day. Thus Henry Marston gave his people two and one half pounds of pork on Tuesday, May 28, 1822, "to serve each hand to whom given until Sunday."<sup>5</sup> Stephen Henderson asked in his will that his slaves be given three pounds of pork or beef a week, and "as much good fresh corn meal as they stand in need of."<sup>6</sup> A planter, writing for De Bow's Review, reported that on his plantation:

The food is given out daily, a half pound [of  
pork] to each hand that goes to the field, large and

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<sup>4</sup> Perrin du Lac, Voyages dans les deux Louisianes et chez les Nations Sauvages du Missouri, par les Etats-unis, L'Ohio et les Provinces que le bordent, en 1801, 1802 et 1803; avec un aperçu des moeurs, des usages, du caractère et des coutumes religieuses et civiles des Peuples de ces diverses contrées (Lyon, 1805), 410.

<sup>5</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, May 28, 1822. Marston Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Heirs of Henderson v. Rost and Montgomery, Executors, 5 La. An. 441. May, 1850. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 605.

small, water carriers and all; bread and vegetables without stint, the latter prepared in my own garden, and dealt out to the best advantage, endeavoring to have something every day of the year.<sup>7</sup>

As indicated by the above quotation, the basic meat and cornbread was not the only food slaves ate. The salt meat diet was varied occasionally with fresh pork or beef. When a planter or overseer failed to satisfy the slave's appetite for fresh meat, the disgruntled servant knew how to take the initiative. One overseer ruefully noted: "Four pigs missin see where one was cleaned near the old house . . ."<sup>8</sup> Milk, honey, fruit and berries, not to mention molasses, were all tasted by bondsmen on occasion. ✓

Since Louisiana was a frontier during much of the slavery period, it was to be expected that game and fish should supply part of many Negroes' diet. The raccoon's flesh was "esteemed by many . . . negroes, who hunt them at night or entrap them."<sup>9</sup> When John James Audubon killed a hawk on a sugar plantation above New Orleans, a group of slaves working there begged it from him, "saying it was a great treat for them."<sup>10</sup> Solomon Northrup admitted that raccoon meat was palatable, but insisted that there was "nothing in all butcherdom so delicious as roasted possum."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 370.

<sup>8</sup> Comite Plantation Diary, June, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

<sup>9</sup> A.R. Kilpatrick, "Historical and Statistical Collections of Louisiana," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Corning, Journal of John James Audubon, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 200-01.

The rivers, lakes and bayous of Louisiana teemed with fish, and masters apparently encouraged their slaves to avail themselves of this supply of food. Opposite Baton Rouge, in 1821, Audubon ". . . saw a Negro Man fishing by deeping a Scoup net every moment in the Watter immediately at a point Where the current ran swift forming an eddy below, he had taken several tolerably Large Cat Fishes."<sup>12</sup> Northrup added to his food supply by building a successful fish trap,<sup>13</sup> and William T. Palfrey reported in 1853 that his "Negro man Anderson fell from his fish wharf and drowned."<sup>14</sup> Horace Gaither, whose plantation was near Vidalia, went to an extreme with a fish diet when, for breakfast and supper, he gave his hands cornbread, boiled potatoes and boiled catfish. The Negroes were no doubt pleased that at dinner he gave them "as heretofore, fat pork, greens and turnips, with sweet potatoes in their season."<sup>15</sup>

Some planters issued a week's supply of food at a time, while others gave out a ration each day. Many preferred to have meals cooked in a central kitchen, so that the Negroes did not have to cook their own meals. Those who followed this practice believed that there was less waste in the handling of food, and that the health of the blacks was better protected.<sup>16</sup> One practice, revolting to the

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<sup>12</sup> Corning, Journal of John James Audubon, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 203.

<sup>14</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, May 26, 1853. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>15</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, June 2, 1860.

<sup>16</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, I (1851), 326.

fastidious modern, was the feeding of children from a common trough. This may not have been the normal procedure, but it was reported by four ex-slaves from four different parishes.<sup>17</sup>

The money cost of feeding slaves was remarkably low. Since most of the food used was grown on plantation or farm, the cost of production must be considered, but even so, the expense was slight. The state supreme court thought that food and clothing for a young Negro from birth "up to the time they become useful" amounted to no more than fifteen dollars. This was true because children ". . . required in this climate, little clothing, and were probably fed on bread and other cheap food," while they were growing up.<sup>18</sup> Board for a jailed runaway was fixed by law at twenty-five cents a day,<sup>19</sup> but this figure seems to have been set high so as to make masters strive to prevent their slaves' running away, and perhaps to make the sheriff more zealous in performing his duty. In 1844 a number of witnesses testified in a civil suit that the cost of feeding a grown slave for a year was less than thirty dollars. One man asserted that "he would consider two bits per day unreasonable, as he boards white men at that and makes money at it." The court apparently agreed and awarded a sum which amounted to thirty-eight dollars a year.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John B. Cade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," Journal of Negro History, IX (1935), 300.

<sup>18</sup> Kemp v. Womack, 2 La. 272. December, 1830. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 490.

<sup>19</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

<sup>20</sup> Sheriff v. Boyle, 7 Rob. La. 82. March, 1844. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 557-58.

There seems to have been more variation in the issuance of clothing than in food rations. Olmsted described forty Negro women on their way to work as "all in a simple uniform dress of bluish check stuff,"<sup>21</sup> and on many plantations the clothing issue was, no doubt, largely uniform. Nevertheless, newspaper advertisements for runaways demonstrate that there was a great variety in dress. Edward and Lila, a mulatto couple who escaped from D. Creswell of Mansfield, were "genteely dressed."<sup>22</sup> In 1827 the runaway Jack wore an osnaburg shirt, trousers of cotton and wool, and a small blanket capet,<sup>23</sup> while Moses had on a white waistcoat and "black and white striped pantaloons." The provident Moses also took a pair of yellow and white striped pantaloons with him.<sup>24</sup> Gayer yet was Primus. When he absconded in 1828 he wore a black wool hat, green trousers and a red flannel shirt.<sup>25</sup> In 1847 Elijah was described as wearing a white hat and a red shirt.<sup>26</sup> During the winter of 1857, Aaron wore a "green blanket coat, brown cloth coat, white linsey pantaloons, a beaver hat, small rim and no crown."<sup>27</sup>

In general slaves received a more extensive allotment of clothing

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<sup>21</sup> Olmsted, Journey in the Back Country, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, September 26, 1859.

<sup>23</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, September 20, 1827.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., October 6, 1827.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., January 5, 1828.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, May 6, 1847.

<sup>27</sup> Opelousas Courier, January 7, 1854.

than the early laws required. Men usually were given two cotton shirts and two pair of cotton trousers for summer wear, while women received two cotton dresses. During the winter women wore dresses made of linsey-woolsey, a shift of cotton and a jean or blanket overcoat. Men for cold weather had jean or blanket overcoats, cotton shirts and jean trousers. Both sexes wore heavy horsehide shoes, though many of them worked without shoes during the summer months. It was customary to issue a blanket to each adult slave every other year. Men wore straw hats in summer and wool caps in winter; women tied handkerchiefs about their heads all year.

One planter's practice was

. . . to give for winter a linsey suit, one shirt of best towelling, one hat, one pair of shoes, a good blanket, costing \$2 to \$2.50, every other year (or I prefer, after trying three years, a comfort). In the summer two shirts, two pair pants, and one straw hat. Several of my negroes will require two pair pants for winter, and occasionally a third pair . . . Others require another shirt and a third pair of pants for summer. I seldom give two pair of shoes.<sup>28</sup>

Stephen Duncan, Junior, worked out the following schedule for clothing allotment:

March 1	---	1 pr. shoes to all <u>who work out</u>	
April 1	---	Each man and boy	2 shirts
		Women & girls	2 pr Lowell pants
			2 shifts of fine cotton
			1 gown of the same
			1 petticoat of Lowell
		Child	2 slips of cotton
Nov. 1		to each and all	1 pr shoes
		men and boys	1 shirt of fine cotton
			1 pr jeans pants
		all who work out	1 jeans overcoat

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<sup>28</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 370.

	Women & girls	1 linsey gown 1 fine cotton shift 1 jeans overcoat
	Child	1 linsey slip 1 slip of fine cotton
Christmas	Men & boys /women and girls/	1 wool hat 1 calico gown & 2 hks <sup>29</sup>

Clothing for slaves improved with the passage of time. Just before the cession to the United States, Perrin du Lac reported that the Negroes in the lower part of the province worked almost naked during the summer. "The natural parts are hidden only by a bit of cloth which is attached to a belt before and behind . . ." <sup>30</sup> Robin, the French traveller, said shortly afterwards that he had "seen barbarous masters leave them during the winter in a revolting nudity." <sup>31</sup> To some extent, working in a near-naked condition may have been the choice of the slaves themselves. On many plantations, especially during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, they were given pieces of land to cultivate, and were expected to buy their own summer clothing from their earnings. <sup>32</sup> The preference of some Negroes for gay apparel may have been at the expense of everyday wear. Robin noted that women who worked almost naked during the week "transformed themselves on Sunday into great ladies." <sup>33</sup>

It was certainly true that slaveowners gratified the desire of

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Duncan, Jr., Account Books, IV. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>30</sup> du Lac, Voyages, 410.

<sup>31</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, III, 178-79.

<sup>32</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, December 14, 1835. Weeks Collection.

<sup>33</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, III, 200.



their female servants for bright raiment. It was the custom on most plantations to give colorful calico dresses and gay bandannas as Christmas presents. Sometimes such gowns were presented for other reasons. In April, 1835, Mrs. Rachael O'Connor wrote the following to her factor in New Orleans:

I must request the favor of you to add twenty eight yards of cheap calico in your memorandum for me. please to let it be gay. I have always given a dress of such to every woman after . . . [she has] a young child. I am now in debt to four that has young babes, and fine ones too, they do much better by being encouraged a little.<sup>34</sup>

Neither the food Negroes ate nor the clothing they wore is available today for inspection, but some of the houses they lived in may still be seen. Some of these surviving quarters are still inhabited, perhaps by descendants of the slaves who lived in them a hundred years ago. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the quarters which may be seen today were typical of their kind. The fact that they have survived indicates that they were of better construction than most of those which have disappeared. Practically all of the still visible slave cabins were built of brick, and this was not the rule by any means.

It is true that slave housing improved as frontier conditions were overcome and as a more settled society developed. During the early years of the nineteenth century the housing of planters as well as their slaves was frequently primitive.

In 1851 a slaveowner made the following recommendations:

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<sup>34</sup> Rachael O'Connor to A.T. Conrad, April 12, 1835. Weeks Collection.

Housing for Negroes should be good; each family should have a house, 16 by 18 feet in the clear, plank floor, brick chimney, shingle roof; floors elevated 2 feet above the earth. There should be no loft, no place to stow away anything, but pins to hang clothes upon. Each house should be provided with a bedstead, cotton mattress, and sufficient bedclothes for comfort.<sup>35</sup>

Olmsted visited some Negro quarters in the Red River area. One group of houses had walls made of hewn plank, set vertically, and "chinked with rags and mud." These cabins were "roofed with split clapboards and provided with stick and mud chimneys." The earth furnished a floor, and there were no windows. Beds and stools were the only furniture. On a larger plantation he noted "exceedingly comfortable though cheap and rude, quarters." The cabins were of adequate size "with brick chimney and a broad shed or gallery before the door."<sup>36</sup> Sir Charles Lyell was pleased with his brief visit to the Negro houses of Samuel Davis, opposite Natchez. These were "all neatly built and well whitewashed;" the geologist "could perceive how much the comfort and bodily wants of the slaves had been attended to."<sup>37</sup>

Housing was not so good in all cases. William T. Palfrey, who often demonstrated concern for his people's welfare, paid only twenty-five dollars to have a slave cabin built.<sup>38</sup> (It was the rule nearly everywhere in the state that a room was assigned to each family.) When families were large, this rule did not leave a great deal of vacant

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<sup>35</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 370.

<sup>36</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 629-30.

<sup>37</sup> Lyell, Second Visit to the United States, II, 155.

<sup>38</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, March 9, 1857. Palfrey Papers.

floor space. It should be remembered, of course, that the cabin was mainly a place to sleep; during daylight hours the slaves were busy elsewhere. Even so, a physician blamed a whooping cough epidemic which killed thirteen children near Trinity in the spring of 1850 upon "the old and decayed houses, which had been partly underwater during the overflow."<sup>39</sup> If the census of 1860 is to be believed, slaves on large plantations were likely to be better housed than others. Generally there was a separate house for every four or five Negroes on these larger units. Farmers who owned fewer than ten slaves often made one house serve for all, except when some servants slept in the master's dwelling. Sometimes no separate housing at all was provided. The census taker in Carroll Parish in 1860 made the entry "large and comfortable" after the enumeration of slave cabins in many instances. In other cases he was pointedly silent.<sup>40</sup>

The slave's health was a constant concern of his master. Illness was sure to result in loss of work time, and the death of a young Negro, who would normally have had many productive years ahead of him, was a heavy financial loss. Plantation diaries abound with instances of attention being given to the health of the work force. An overseer wrote on August 8, 1853: "The plantation very healthy only 2 sick this morning them quite slight 6 births this year one death five pregnant

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew R. Kilpatrick, "Report on the Medical Topography, Meteorology and Diseases of Trinity, La., and Its Vicinity during the Year 1850," E.D. Fenner, ed., Southern Medical Reports, II (New Orleans, 1850), 178-79.

<sup>40</sup> Eighth Census of the United States, Louisiana, 1860. Schedule 1.

women 9 sucklers."<sup>41</sup> Joseph Mather was concerned in 1855 when he noted that many of his slaves were "complaining of slight diarrhea."<sup>42</sup> In 1859 a sugar planter welcomed a rainy day, "not on account of the crop . . . but our cistern was going dry, and a change of water now might seriously affect the health of our negroes."<sup>43</sup>

Looseness of the bowels was the most frequent complaint of the slaves of Louisiana. This malady occurred most frequently, of course, in the spring, when new vegetables were consumed, but it was not uncommon during the rest of the year. Ralph Butterfield, a physician who contributed to De Bow's Review, blamed most such illness on poor preparation and selection of food, and bad water.<sup>44</sup> Masters and overseers were often suspicious when digestive disorders recurred too often. One slaveholder wrote in 1849:

We have now 6 or 10 complaining lightly of bowell complaint but none of them appears to me to be sick. I am really tired of the words bowell complaint. The Negroes have found out how to lye up under its influence and take advantage of it in more than half the cases at least.<sup>45</sup>

Intestinal worms were a frequent cause of illness among Negro children. A physician reported that about Trinity worms prevailed universally, "among children of all colors and classes, and these,

<sup>41</sup> Seale Diary, August 8, 1853.

<sup>42</sup> Mather Diary, May 24, 1855.

<sup>43</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, September 18, 1859. Pugh Collection.

<sup>44</sup> Ralph Butterfield, "The Health of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XXV (1858), 571-72.

<sup>45</sup> Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, April 13, 1849. Liddell Papers.

together with dentition, kill nearly all who die."<sup>46</sup>

Respiratory diseases were also common among the slaves. These ranged from the common cold to tuberculosis. No statistics are available which would permit a valid comparison of the incidence of the more serious respiratory maladies under slavery and freedom, but the layman, consulting the available records, might be surprised that slaves were affected so little. One student of the period concludes that the health of the Negro slaves in the lowlands, assumed to be a less healthful location, was little if any worse than that of the whites in the piney woods. "That farmers in the cool hills should suffer greater mortality than planters and slaves in the hot lowlands shows that poverty shortened more lives than did climate."<sup>47</sup> Certainly masters made every effort to protect their Negroes from illness. A planter on Bayou Sale used "a large portable awning for the protection of his Negroes from sudden showers during wood chopping, or at any other time when away from their cabins."<sup>48</sup>

Malaria affected slaves as well as their masters. The cause was unknown, so the preventative methods which were taken were largely useless. Inspection of food, early issuance of woollen clothing and scrubbing cabins did little to ward off "the fever," which most commonly struck in the late summer and early autumn.<sup>49</sup> The planter who forbade

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<sup>46</sup> Kilpatrick, "Report on the Diseases of Trinity," Southern Medical Reports, II, 184.

<sup>47</sup> Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 52.

<sup>48</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, August 9, 1849.

<sup>49</sup> Comite Plantation Diary, August, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

his people's doing any night work may have had better success,<sup>50</sup> though mosquitoes could easily get into the cabins. Some slaveowners did issue mosquito nets to their hands,<sup>51</sup> but if they believed that this helped prevent malaria and yellow fever they left no record of the fact.

Fortunately, the use of quinine for the treatment of malaria was known. Even so, many planters preferred a general course of treatment rather than specific remedies. In 1839 a father gave the following advice to a son who had commenced operations as a planter in Catahoula Parish:

You ought not to have neglected your children they ought to be attended to every month, having a pitcher of warm suds mixed with molasses a few days previous to the change in full of the moon — and then give them a spoonful of the mixture at or about the change or full for three or four mornings in succession — and it may be necessary if symptoms of worms are indicated to add to the dose from 2 or 5 grains of calomel . . . For malaria/ after giving your people medicine and purging them out, you ought to have a tea made strong of the inner bark of willows adding red pepper to make it strong. Let them take a wine glass or two of it every hour or two when they have no fever. If you have ginger add a spoonful or so in the tea. I give this in place of quinine, and for several days after the fever has left them. It may be always necessary to give them small doses of cathartic medicines to keep their bowels open while they are recovering from sickness . . .<sup>52</sup>

Various home-made and commercial potions were available for the treatment of muscular soreness or slight wounds. One of the most

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<sup>50</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 371.

<sup>51</sup> Plantation Diary, Liddell Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, August 22, 1839,

Ibid.

unusual of these, especially recommended for sore fingers, was to dig some earthworms and

. . . put them in a vial and cork it close, and then put the vial in the middle of a loaf, and bake it until done as other bread is baked and let it remain until cold, which will turn the earthworms to oil, and rub your thumb. it can do no harm if no good.<sup>53</sup>

Accidents were sure to occur among workers who used edged tools and worked with domestic animals as much as Louisiana Negroes did. Many slaves were killed or injured by the machinery in the sugar mills. Sometimes they did damage to one another. On Tuesday, August 9, 1853, an overseer noted: "Fanny bit Tena on Sunday Evening She has done no work since." Ten days later he remarked that "Tena is mending but sloly [slowly] yet I hope she will be well soon."<sup>54</sup> In 1860 a sugar planter visited a neighbor and found that his host "had a negro bitten by a rattlesnake this morning. When I left about 12M he had felt no pain and was dead drunk from whiskey."<sup>55</sup> In 1856 William T. Palfrey recorded that "Negress Ruth's child 'General' died, being overlaid & smothered in the night by its mother."<sup>56</sup>

Slaveowners feared nothing more than epidemics. Their Negroes lived most of their lives in isolation from other communities, and under almost communal conditions. Thus they were especially susceptible to contagious disease once it had appeared among them.

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<sup>53</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, August 24, 1823. Weeks Collection.

<sup>54</sup> Seale Diary, August, 1853.

<sup>55</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, July 17, 1860. Pugh Collection.

<sup>56</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, February 10, 1856. Palfrey Papers.

Yellow fever epidemics, while perhaps dreaded more than any others because of the mortality among whites, usually did not affect Negroes. Even when slaves were attacked by the disease, they were likely to recover. Such was not invariably the case, however. The yellow fever epidemic of 1853 carried away blacks as well as whites. This was true in rural areas as well as in New Orleans.<sup>57</sup>

Lesser contagions wreaked death and illness among slaves here and there. Dengue fever, though seldom fatal, caused much suffering and could put all the hands on a plantation in bed for a week or more.<sup>58</sup> Typhoid fever was often fatal. An unusually deadly epidemic of this ailment struck Mansfield in 1850, having been brought in from Virginia by a recently purchased slave.<sup>59</sup> Scarlet fever could be just as deadly as typhoid. A physician who practiced near Monroe noted in 1847 that this scourge was causing "a great fatality among the negroes, especially on Breard's & Paragoud's plantations."<sup>60</sup> Whooping cough was another frequent affliction, and it caused many deaths among Negro children. Bellevue plantation lost a number of infants to whooping cough in the spring of 1859,<sup>61</sup> and William T. Palfrey lost five children to the same

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<sup>57</sup> E.D. Fenner, "The Yellow Fever of 1853," De Bow's Review, XVII (1854), 39-42.

<sup>58</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, September 29, 1854.

<sup>59</sup> R.T. Gibbs, "On the Medical Topography and Diseases of the Parish of DeSoto, La., with an Account of an Epidemic of Typhoid Fever which Prevailed in Mansfield in the Year 1850," Southern Medical Reports, II, 185-203.

<sup>60</sup> McGuire Diary, August, 1847.

<sup>61</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, 1859. Pugh Collection.



malady in March, 1860.<sup>62</sup> In 1861 mumps struck thirty-nine of the eighty-seven slaves on Thomas W. Butler's La Carpe Plantation. Thirty-one of these affected were adults.<sup>63</sup>

Cholera was the most feared of all epidemic diseases insofar as the slaves were concerned. If there were no other literature on the subject, the outbreaks of cholera could be traced by means of the agonized entries in plantation diaries. An especially severe outbreak came in 1833. It was reported as killing blacks more surely than whites,<sup>64</sup> and around New Iberia it affected so great a proportion of the Negroes that planters were "almost destitute of hands to save their forthcoming crops."<sup>65</sup> In Rapides Parish the planters were reported to be "leaving their crops and camping out in the woods with what negroes they have left a live."<sup>66</sup> Other epidemics of cholera occurred later, the most noted being that of 1849-1850, which was so severe that President Taylor proclaimed a national day of prayer.

It is a difficult matter to estimate how severely these epidemics struck Louisiana Negroes. The most lurid reports always came from a distance, but it is certain that tens of thousands did die. Bishop Leonidas Polk's sugar plantation near Thibodaux had a force of 376 Negroes. In 1849 no less than 273 of these had cholera, and sixty-

<sup>62</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, March, 1860. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Ledger, 1861. Butler (Thomas W.) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>64</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, July 6, 1833.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., July 27, 1833.

<sup>66</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, June 16, 1833. Weeks Collection.

nine cases were fatal. On the Osborn place, also in Lafourche Parish, there were thirty-eight cases out of forty-one Negroes, with twelve deaths. Death often came within a few hours of the attack. Such mortality as occurred in these two instances was not unusual in Lafourche Parish, but it may be that incidence and mortality were higher there than elsewhere in the state.<sup>67</sup> Cholera broke out in Trinity in the spring of 1850 when the town was overcrowded because of a flood in the adjacent swamp lands. In this instance white people were stricken more severely than Negroes, though the slaves on General Edward Sparrow's nearby plantation died in large numbers.<sup>68</sup>

Certainly, though rumor magnified the ravages of cholera, it was serious enough. A German immigrant who arrived in New Orleans during an epidemic made fourteen dollars a day digging graves.<sup>69</sup> Negroes were demoralized when the disease appeared anywhere in their neighborhood.<sup>70</sup> During the epidemics many "Negroes were released from their ordinary work and would wander about in groups with despair depicted on their countenances, as if waiting each for his time to die."<sup>71</sup>

Laymen and physicians alike were confounded by cholera, which "travelled backward and forward . . . and without any regard to weather,

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<sup>67</sup> William A. Booth, "On the Cholera of Lafourche Interior," Southern Medical Reports, I, 196-235.

<sup>68</sup> Kilpatrick, "Report on the Diseases of Trinity," Ibid., II, 157-85.

<sup>69</sup> An Immigrant of a Hundred Years Ago, A Story of Someone's Ancestor (Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1941), 32.

<sup>70</sup> Unsigned letter to Benjamin Tureaud, June 6, 1855. Tureaud Papers.

<sup>71</sup> Rev. John Pipes, Life Work (Nashville, 1888), 152.

food, or preventative measures."<sup>72</sup> Among the medicines used in treatment were calomel, opium, camphor, Dovers' powder, brandy, pepper, mustard, salt, emetics, ginger, hot baths and astringents. A patented product known as Dr. Cartwright's Pills was highly regarded.<sup>73</sup> The following entry describing the treatment of an afflicted Negro is found in a physician's diary:

Hill took colera here last night, gave him 40 grains calomel, 20 grains gum camphor & 20 of cayenne pepper, separated every hour with a grain of morphine twice. Mustard plasters on stomach and ankles & injections of camphor and laudanum. a sweat proper came out in 3 hours, he slept 6 hours. Rained heavily 3d at night. Hill died the 5th . . .<sup>74</sup>

Another commentator on cholera prevention reported the following:

I know several instances in which intelligent planters, having large families, commenced apparently the most judicious precautions against cholera, as soon as they heard of its arrival on the continent. They had all filth removed from about their negro quarters, the cabins whitewashed and lime thrown under them, and strict attention paid to the quality of food used; yet in no instance was the epidemic warded off by these precautions, but in several it prevailed with extraordinary virulence.

The most successful prophylactic course I have heard of was practiced by a good Methodist acquaintance of mine who is a pretty large sugar planter. As soon as cholera appeared on his place he made all hands quit work, and permitted them to go into a regular frolic. Whiskey and the fiddle were called in requisition, and for two or three days the plantation presented a scene of unrestrained merriment and mirth; he did not permit them to drink to intoxication, but sufficient to produce a pleasant exhil-

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<sup>72</sup> Booth, "On the Cholera of Lafourche Interior," Southern Medical Reports, I, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 196-235.

<sup>74</sup> McGuire Diary, April, 1849.

aration. He informed me that hardly a new case occurred after the commencement of the frolic . . .<sup>75</sup>

A Southern myth holds that Negroes rarely if ever become insane. This legend had its beginnings before the Civil War. An official of the insane asylum at Jackson reported to the legislature that slaves did not lose their minds because of "the protection the law guarantees to them, the restraint of a mild state of servitude, the freedom of all anxiety respecting their present and future wants . . ."<sup>76</sup> It is true that Negroes were seldom sent to the asylum. A mild form of insanity might not prevent a slave, under plantation discipline, from being a satisfactory hand. Even if his mental condition rendered him perfectly useless, he could be kept on the plantation for less than the \$150 a year that masters had to pay the asylum. In view of these considerations, it is not surprising that there was only one slave inmate at Jackson in 1858.<sup>77</sup> Court records show conclusively that insane slaves were more common than asylum records indicate.<sup>78</sup>

Slaveowners did not hesitate to call in a physician when they felt that his services were needed. Much of the medical treatment given to slaves was from the hands of masters and overseers, but serious illnesses received professional medical care. Almost always

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<sup>75</sup> "Mortality and Hygiene in New Orleans," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 476.

<sup>76</sup> Dr. Stanford Chaille, "A Memoir of the Insane Asylum of the State of Louisiana at Jackson," Legislative Documents, 1857, 9.

<sup>77</sup> "Annual Report of the Board of Administrators of the Insane Asylum at Jackson," Legislative Documents, 1858, no pp.

<sup>78</sup> Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, passim.

the record of a slave's death notes that a medical man was in attendance. For example, on January 7, 1849, Mrs. E.E. McCollam noted in her diary: "Sent George after Dr. Loga for Marshal, who is sick." The next day she wrote: "Marshal died . . . this morning . . . Dr. Loga stayed with him all night everything was done to save him . . ." <sup>79</sup>

Many plantations had hospitals on the premises, and on some of the larger units a woman was designated as sick nurse. This was a higher office than that of the mere nurse who cared for the children while their parents were in the fields. William Howard Russell visited the hospital on the Burnside estate above New Orleans and was told by the overseer, "Once a nigger gets in there, he'd like to live there for the rest of his life." <sup>80</sup> Dental treatment was obtained from dentists established in nearby towns, or from itinerants who travelled from plantation to plantation looking for dental work to do. <sup>81</sup> Some planters sent Negroes to New Orleans for specialized treatment. William T. Palfrey sent his man Lloyd to Dr. Stone's Hospital to have a fistula removed in 1855. <sup>82</sup> Three years later he sent the woman Hannah "to N.O. to be placed in an infirmary." This woman recovered sufficiently to run away fifteen months later. <sup>83</sup>

As might be expected, family life among Negro slaves was not on

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<sup>79</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, January 7, 8, 1849.

<sup>80</sup> Russell, My Diary North and South, 105.

<sup>81</sup> Chambers (Rowland) Diaries. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>82</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, July 3, 1855. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., February 15, 1858, June 22, 1859.

a high level. Marriages among them had no legal status, and husbands and wives could be sold separately without any regard to their relationship. Some protection was given to family ties, however. Mothers and their children less than ten years of age could not be sold separately, and at public sales, when there were Negroes "disabled through old age or otherwise" who had children, they were to "be sold with such one of their children as they care to go with."<sup>84</sup>

When a man and woman decided to live together, some sort of ceremony was usually held. This might amount to no more than obtaining the consent of the master; it might involve the curious ceremony of jumping over a broomstick;<sup>85</sup> or it could be a full religious marriage. Bishop Polk always married his slaves with a religious ceremony, an occasion for pomp and celebration unless the couple had "misbehaved" before the wedding. In the latter case, the wedding was short and private.<sup>86</sup> Sometimes Negro preachers tied the marital bonds.<sup>87</sup> In the Catholic parishes the marriage rites were often performed by priests, especially on plantations whose owners were Catholic.<sup>88</sup> It should not be assumed that such ceremonies were the rule, however. "The formality of a marriage ceremony by a priest or other person

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<sup>84</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

<sup>85</sup> Cade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," Journal of Negro History, XX (1935), 303-04.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Q. Mallard, Plantation Life before Emancipation (Richmond, 1892), 50.

<sup>87</sup> Mrs. L.S. Tibbetts to Mrs. Sophie Tibbetts, January 23, 1853. Tibbetts Letters.

<sup>88</sup> Roger Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana (New Orleans, 1939), passim.

authorized to solemnize marriage was sometimes resorted to, but this was by no means a general usage."<sup>89</sup>

Masters preferred that slaves marry on their own plantations, but this was not always possible. Nor was the rule always enforced even when enforcement was practical. When marriage did take place between slaves on different plantations, it was customary to allow the husband to visit his wife on Wednesdays and Saturdays after work was completed. On Comite Plantation, for instance, the entry was made in the overseer's diary almost every Wednesday and Saturday that "Jourdan, Simon and Lewis goes to see their wives."<sup>90</sup> Passes for such visits were often good for a month at a time.<sup>91</sup> When husbands and wives were located too far apart to see each other regularly, they often tried to persuade the master of one to become the owner of both.<sup>92</sup> One slaveowner said of a runaway: "His object is to force me to sell him, so as to be near his wife."<sup>93</sup>

There is ample evidence that Negro slaves, in general, did not take marital ties too seriously. Robin noted soon after the turn of the century that "love" was the Africans' chief interest; he wondered where they got the strength for nocturnal adventure after their labors

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<sup>89</sup> August and Joseph Pierre v. Fontenotte *et al.*, 25 La. An. 617. November, 1873. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 701.

<sup>90</sup> Comite Plantation Diary, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

<sup>91</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Lafayette Parish, I, 204.

<sup>92</sup> Edward G. Stewart to John W. Gurley, March 18, 1860. Gurley Papers.

<sup>93</sup> Opelousas Courier, January 7, 1854.

in the fields. He remarked that they much preferred to conduct their affairs on plantations other than the one whereon they lived.<sup>94</sup> The records of a Baptist church in the Florida Parishes show that many Negro members were excommunicated for adultery.<sup>95</sup> An interesting situation, not wholly explained, is evident from the following passage from a letter: ". . . and now Milly is not to be found — gone out of the way on purpose — poor Jim is sadly distressed as he has left a good wife and three fine children behind him."<sup>96</sup>

It is remarkable that any family affection at all could exist under slavery. The absence of a real condition of marriage and the lack of control over children would have been enough to thwart ordinary filial or parental emotion. Yet real ties of affection did exist. Whole families sometimes ran away together. Children often demonstrated real love for their parents. A mistress wrote to her niece in 1840:

In your next please to let me know how old Sam & John are. Patience wishes to hear from her son very much since his poor old father died, & Sam's children keep asking about their father more than usual since they lost their oldest brother Leven. he was everything to them.<sup>97</sup>

Without recreation slavery would have been intolerable, even for so amiable and tractable a people as the American Negroes. Their play, like their language and religion, they borrowed from the whites. Some

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<sup>94</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, III, 195-97.

<sup>95</sup> Hephzibah Church Books, passim. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>96</sup> A.A. Fowler to Mrs. Mary C. Weeks, January 5, 1829. Weeks Collection.

<sup>97</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Frances Weeks, October 2, 1840. Ibid.



early travellers noted dances in New Orleans which may have been of African origin,<sup>98</sup> but outside the city no such record exists at all.

A witness described these dances as follows:

In the afternoon a walk in the rear of the town will . . . astonish . . . ~~the~~ bewildered imagination with the sight of twenty different dancing groups of the wretched Africans . . . They have their own national music, consisting for the most part of a long kind of narrow drum of various sizes, three or four of which make a band. The principal dancers or leaders are dressed in a variety of wild and savage fashions, always ornamented with a number of the tails of the smaller wild beasts, and those who appeared most horrible always attracted the widest circle of company. The amusements continued until sunset, when one or two of the city patrols show themselves with their cutlasses, and the crowds immediately disperse.<sup>99</sup>

Quite naturally, in an area so recently wrested from the wilderness, hunting and fishing were recreations available to many of the blacks. These sports not only furnished entertainment, but also supplemented the often monotonous slave diet. In the spring they caught crayfish by the bushel, and in the southern part of the state they learned to catch and eat crabs. The slave made little or no distinction between rough and game fish. Gar, mudfish, catfish and drum were eaten with as much or more gusto than gamer species.

Despite strict laws regarding slaves' possessing firearms, many Negroes did have guns and did hunt.<sup>100</sup> East Feliciana Parish found it necessary to devise strict regulations for slaves who tramped the

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<sup>98</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 203.

<sup>99</sup> Schultz, An Inland Voyage, II, 197.

<sup>100</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, December 26, 1850.

fields and woods in search of game.<sup>101</sup> The black man's gun added squirrel, turkey, duck, rabbit, and perhaps venison and bear to his diet, and also contributed to the master's table. Some hunting required no firearm. Small animals were caught with simple snares, and the raccoon and opossum were hunted at night with dogs. If the hunter had an axe to cut the tree where the quarry took refuge, or a boy to climb it, no rifle was needed.

Among the lesser pleasures of the Louisiana slave's existence was the use of tobacco. Like their masters, many of them preferred to chew the heavenly weed rather than to smoke it. On some plantations a regular tobacco ration was given out.<sup>102</sup> On others, and on farms too small to deserve the name, the Negroes were permitted to grow and cure tobacco for their own use.<sup>103</sup>

Despite many legislative efforts to prevent it, there can be no doubt that many Louisiana slaves cheered their idle moments by drinking alcoholic beverages. If judgement can be based on newspaper editorials and legislative acts, there was never a dearth of grog shops where the black man could obtain an illegal dram. One editor lamented the fact that ample food and clothing meant little to the Negro if he could not

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<sup>101</sup> D.B. Sanford, ed., Police Jury Code of the Parish of East Feliciana, Louisiana, Containing a Digest of the State Laws, Relative to Police Juries, and also, a Digest of the Ordinances of the Parish of East Feliciana, Having the Force of Law, up to May 1, 1859, Inclusive (Clinton, Louisiana, 1859), 98-101.

<sup>102</sup> Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Book, May 29, 1853.

<sup>103</sup> Kilpatrick, "Historical and Statistical Collections of Louisiana," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 58.

get whiskey.<sup>104</sup> In Baton Rouge the slaves apparently took advantage of temperance meetings as an opportunity for "drinking and carousing."<sup>105</sup> Edward G. Stewart was disgusted to discover that two slaves whom he had hired for Sunday work refused to carry out their bargain unless part of their pay was in whiskey.<sup>106</sup> The editor of the Franklin Planters Banner, in an editorial entitled "The Gates of Hell," stated, "It is no uncommon sight to see staggering drunken negroes in our streets at 9 or 10 o'clock at night, and hear them cursing like madmen."<sup>107</sup> Some masters gave a dram to their slaves on festive occasions.<sup>108</sup>

More favored blacks shared the pleasures of their masters. They attended the balls and other entertainments of the whites as interested spectators. Sometimes they were present in such numbers as to furnish a real obstacle to the proceedings. They were to be seen on the outskirts of the crowds at Fourth of July orations and political debates.<sup>109</sup> In the early days of cooperative house raising and log rolling, the slaves shared in the work and the jubilation. Nor were blacks denied the gratification of seeing horse races. Apparently, despite strict laws forbidding such wagers, they made bets with white men. In 1853 a Negro

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<sup>104</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, December 6, 1856.

<sup>105</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, September 24, 1852.

<sup>106</sup> Edward G. Stewart to John W. Gurley, March 5, 1860.  
Gurley Papers.

<sup>107</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, January 24, 1850.

<sup>108</sup> "Mortality and Hygiene in New Orleans," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 476.

<sup>109</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, December 13, 1849.

who had won a racing wager from a white man was shot by the loser.<sup>110</sup>

The Fourth of July was a day of merrymaking, both as a patriotic occasion and as the traditional date for laying by the crops.<sup>111</sup> Every Saturday afternoon was a holiday on many plantations, and Sunday on all, except in the sugar parishes during the grinding season. In the colonial period Holy Days had been observed to some extent, but this practice was certainly not widespread at the middle of the century, if it existed at all. On the sugar plantations it seems to have been customary to give the Negroes a day for themselves just before the grinding began.

But Christmas was the great holiday for the slaves. On the cotton plantations all field work ceased on the day before Christmas Eve and usually did not begin again until New Year's Eve. Sometimes the return to work was delayed until the second day in January. On the sugar plantations the Negroes were given as much or more free time, but the holidays could not begin until the grinding was ended. Hence the revelry might not take place until late in January.

While any number of variations occurred, the activities of the holidays were much the same everywhere. On Christmas Eve, or on the first day of the holidays, a dinner and a ball were held. On a large plantation the denizens of its slave quarter might be the only revellers, but often the Negroes from several plantations gathered together, one master serving as host one year, another the next. Solomon Northrup

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<sup>110</sup> Opelousas Courier, April 2, 1853.

<sup>111</sup> "A Southern Farmer, Louisiana," De Bow's Review, XII (1852), 291.

left the following description of one of these dinners:

The table is spread in the open air, and loaded with varieties of meat and piles of vegetables. Bacon and corn meal at such times are dispensed with. Sometimes the cooking is performed in the kitchen of the plantation, at others in the shade of wide branching trees. In the latter case, a ditch is dug in the ground, and wood laid in it and burned until it is filled with glowing coals, over which chickens, ducks, turkeys, pigs and not infrequently the body of a wild ox are roasted. They are furnished also with flour, of which biscuits are made, and often with peach and other preserves, and tarts, and every manner and description of pies. . . . White people assemble in great numbers to watch the gastronomical spectacle.

They seat themselves at the rustic table, the males on one side, the females on the other. . . . Unalloyed and exultant happiness lights up the dark faces of them all. . . . All around the bountiful board a multitude of eyes roll in ecstasy. Giggling and laughter and the clatter of crockery and cutlery succeed.<sup>112</sup>

✓ After the dinner came the ball, with dancing far into the night.

Often there was a slave on the plantation who could play a musical instrument, and if not, some nearby black musician could be obtained.<sup>113</sup>

Often such talented slaves earned money for themselves by playing for white dances. Shreveport was favored with the Shreveport Ethiopian Band, which was such an institution that it was recognized in the city ordinances.<sup>114</sup> The Christmas ball might be further enlivened by weddings, though these were sometimes held in the master's house. One plantation mistress wrote as follows to a relative in New England:

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<sup>112</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 215-16.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>114</sup> William Wallace Wood, ed., The Charter, Ordinances, Police Regulations and Laws of the Corporation of the Town of Shreveport, In Force on the 20th Day of July, Anno Domini 1849 (Shreveport, 1849), 54.

"We had no less than three marriages on the same evening among our Negroes. they were married in due form by a black priest and wound up with a supper and a dance they enjoy a Christmas week as much as it is possible for them to do and anything like a wedding sets them crazy."<sup>115</sup>

The American Negro's traditional love of dance music was not dulled by slavery. On many plantations the blacks were permitted to hold dances at seasons other than Christmas. Songs which became popular in the towns were soon being sung by slaves in the fields.<sup>116</sup> Jacob, who ran away from Daniel S. Sparks of St. Mary's Parish in 1831, was one of many runaways who took their fiddles with them.<sup>117</sup> Wise masters encouraged music and dancing. Said one: "I have a fiddle in my quarters, and though some of my good old brethren in the church would think hard of me, yet I allow dancing; ay, I buy the fiddle and encourage it, by giving the boys occasionally a big supper."<sup>118</sup>

The slave's liking for music, dancing and other group recreation was strong enough to survive in the face of considerable opposition. Some of this opposition came from the evangelistic churches, but there was official disapproval as well. Apparently this official displeasure arose from the fear that insurrection might be plotted at social gatherings of slaves. In 1834 the Jefferson Parish Police Jury forbade

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<sup>115</sup> Mrs. L.S. Tibbetts to Mrs. Sophie Tibbetts, January 23, 1853. Tibbetts Letters.

<sup>116</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, October 15, 1842.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., March 13, 1831.

<sup>118</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 371.

"Every person . . . to give dancing or drinking, or any other amusement to slaves," and ordered the patrols to "visit the places where they may suspect any such thing to exist."<sup>119</sup> After 1844 any master in Avoyelles Parish who permitted gatherings of slaves other than his own in his quarter was liable to a fine of twenty-five dollars.<sup>120</sup> Any person in Shreveport who gave "a ball or other entertainment" which caused "a night time assemblage of slaves . . ." was "to be considered guilty of disorderly conduct."<sup>121</sup> As late as 1860 the Lafayette Parish Police Jury ruled "That it shall be unlawful for any one to permit or suffer a negro ball or other assemblage of slaves to be held on his premises."<sup>122</sup>

Such ordinances as these were failures. Negro balls continued to be held, almost universally at Christmas and at other times in many cases. The whites often came out "to see the Negroes dance and enjoy themselves."<sup>123</sup> Northrup tells of one master whose "portly form mingled with those of his dusky slaves, moving rapidly through all the mazes of the dance."<sup>124</sup> When the slaves from several estates

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<sup>119</sup> Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana, Prepared by the Historical Records Survey Division of Professional and Service Projects Works Progress Administration. No. 26, Jefferson Parish (Gretna) Series 1, Police Jury Minutes, I, 31.

<sup>120</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Avoyelles Parish, II, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Wood, Charter of Shreveport, 26.

<sup>122</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Lafayette Parish, II, 58.

<sup>123</sup> Cade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," Journal of Negro History, XI (1935), 334.

<sup>124</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 181.

participated in a ball, a noisy and joyous procession might wind from one quarter to the next as a conclusion to the evening's entertainment.<sup>125</sup>

The joys of the dinner and ball were merely the beginnings of the pleasures of the Christmas holidays. On Christmas morning the custom was for Negroes large and small to leave the quarter and gather outside the big house. After due interval the master and his family appeared to receive the season's greetings and to reciprocate with gifts. The gifts could be anything the master chose to bestow, but more often than not the women received a bright handkerchief, a gay calico dress or both. Often the men were given new hats, but it was not unusual for them to receive a small sum of money. The gifts for children had a wide range, but candy was a frequent choice.

After shrieks of joy and renewed shouts of "Merry Christmas," the happy Negroes dispersed. Nearly always the adults were given passes to go anywhere they pleased, within reason, for the remainder of the holiday period. "They may be seen at these times hurrying in all directions, as happy looking mortals as can be found on the face of the earth. . . . In visiting, riding, renewing old friendships, or, perchance, reviving some old attachment . . . the time is occupied."<sup>126</sup>

One of the favorite means of amusement for the Negro men during

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<sup>125</sup> Cade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," Journal of Negro History, IX (1935), 334.

<sup>126</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 218.



the holidays, and on free Sundays too, for that matter, was to go to the nearest town. This led to many disapproving editorials and, on paper at least, to the establishment of strict curfews. In Baton Rouge, for instance, the Gazette complained of "crowds of Negroes . . . congregated" about "a ten pin alley near the steamboat landing."<sup>127</sup> In Clinton the situation became so annoying that the citizens, at a mass meeting, adopted a resolution asking that planters keep their Negroes out of town during Christmas week, adding "that if they do allow their slaves to come to town, a pass from sunrise to sundown shall be the extreme limit for such a pass."<sup>128</sup>

It is probable that Louisiana slaves were, as a whole, not unhappy. They certainly enjoyed elementary security, because it was to the owner's interest to feed, clothe and house them adequately. They did not live in luxury, but only a small group of fortunate whites enjoyed a standard of living which would be considered comfortable today. The medical care slaves received was primitive, but it was apparently the same as that received by their owners. Their hours of work were long, and usually performed under rigorous discipline, but every master knew that slaves should not be forced to overwork. And there were periods of relaxation which the records left by their masters indicate were enjoyed to the fullest extent. The few records left by Negroes affirm those of the whites in this respect. The slave who chose to do so could no doubt reflect on his misfortunes at great length. But it

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<sup>127</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 7, 1845.

<sup>128</sup> Clinton American Patriot, December 29, 1855.

indicates no approval of human bondage to conclude that the normal Negro slave took life as it came, forgot his sorrows as soon as possible, and enjoyed his pleasures as much as possible.

## RELIGION AMONG LOUISIANA SLAVES

In his Study of History, Arnold J. Toynbee asserts that the American Negro has responded to the challenge of being transported to the United States by "rediscovering in Christianity . . . original meanings and values. . . . He has discovered that Jesus came into the world . . . to exalt the humble and meek." The Negroes who survived the middle passage came from many tribes, and differed in their religious practices as they did in their languages. The black man "came to America spiritually as well as physically naked; and he has met the emergency by covering his nakedness with his enslaver's cast off clothes."<sup>1</sup> Negroes were forced to adopt Christianity as a common denominator for the same reason they were forced to adopt the French or English language. This would have been true even if it were not assumed that the white man's religion was superior ethically and spiritually to the beliefs brought from Africa.

This is not to say that no traces of African rites and beliefs survived. Remnants of voodooism may yet be found among Louisiana Negroes; a voodoo murder took place in Shreveport in 1937.<sup>2</sup> Such elements were stronger during the slavery period than they are today, simply because the bondsmen were at most only two or three generations

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, A Study of History (Abridgement of Volumes I-VI by D.C. Somervell. New York, 1947), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Louisiana Guidebook, 100.

away from Africa. During much of the colonial period, moreover, Louisiana was in contact with French San Domingo, where voodooism survives today as practically an independent religion.

Contemporary accounts of voodoo practices are not numerous, but a few do exist. In 1808 Christian Schultz witnessed slaves dancing to tom-toms in New Orleans. The leaders of the dancers were "always ornamented with the tails of the smaller wild beasts, and those who appeared most horrible always attracted the widest circle of company."<sup>3</sup> In 1825 Hephzibah Baptist Church expelled "Jack a black man belonging to James Nettles" on the ground "that he had kept a secret [*sic*] when murder was intended" and also for "pretending to witchcraft."<sup>4</sup> Witchcraft was not necessarily African, of course, but it may safely be presumed that Negro practices which a frontier church regarded as witchcraft were of African origin. In the same year, 1825, Henry Marston noted in his diary, "I was obliged to give Basil a severe flogging today for lying about a phial which was found in his possession containing two ground puppies [*salamanders*] as they are called --- the negroes were under some apprehensions that he intended to do mischief."<sup>5</sup>

Catholicism was the state religion in colonial Louisiana, and masters were required by law to give their slaves instruction in its rites and doctrines.<sup>6</sup> This task was lightened by the fact that Negroes

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<sup>3</sup> Schultz, An Inland Voyage, II, 197.

<sup>4</sup> Hephzibah Church Books, April 16, 1825.

<sup>5</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, November 25, 1825. Marston Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Le Code Noir, Article 3.

were not numerous before 1800, and it is likely that some degree of religious instruction was given to nearly all of them. The Capuchins devoted considerable attention to the blacks from the beginning, and they were successful in baptizing most of them during the early years.<sup>7</sup> The Jesuits, devoting their missionary zeal to the Indians, had slight interest in the slaves.<sup>8</sup> They did occasionally perform slave marriages, and this brought complaints from the Capuchins, who regarded Negro marriages as one of their functions.<sup>9</sup> Lay whites took an interest in the religious training of their bondsmen, and men and women of high estate often served as godparents when adult Negroes were baptized.<sup>10</sup>

Even so, many churchmen felt that the blacks were neglected. One priest complained that "masters . . . were solely bent on getting profit from the work of their slaves, but cared not a whit about the salvation of these poor wretches." Many Negroes, he asserted, died without baptism, despite the fact that they were eager to be instructed.<sup>11</sup> Many other complaints of like nature were voiced. To some extent these complaints were the result of "overzealous austerity;" the historian of Catholicism in Louisiana believes that in general the

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<sup>7</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Delanglez, S.J., The French Jesuits in Lower Louisiana (1700-1763) (The Catholic University of America Studies in Church History, XXI. Washington, 1935), passim.

<sup>9</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 120, 155.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 75.

slaves received good religious care during the colonial period.<sup>12</sup> The physical difficulties of travel made the care of blacks on outlying plantations troublesome, however, and on many such estates the sacrament of marriage and observance of the Sabbath were neglected. The existence of these conditions prompted Charles IV of Spain to order in 1789 that chaplains be installed on such plantations, that quarters for unmarried men and women be segregated, and that particular attention be given to slave marriages.<sup>13</sup> Like other royal decrees pertaining to the welfare of Negroes and Indians in the Spanish colonies, this one was observed only when it was convenient to do so.

Catholicism in Louisiana was affected, during the late eighteenth century, by the rationalism then in vogue in France. Robin believed, as a result of his observations in the province in 1803, that religion in Louisiana was only a matter of form. He asserted that only a few Negroes, officers of the government and women attended church.<sup>14</sup> Such an attitude on the part of the whites certainly led them to regard the religious training of their slaves as something to be neglected or to be carried out in a perfunctory manner.

Despite this neglect on the part of the laity, clerical missionaries had succeeded by 1800 in laying a solid foundation for Catholicism among the Negroes of the colony. The work of the Ursuline Nuns was important in achieving this goal. At their school they did not confine their teaching to boarding students, but also organized classes for

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 185, 205.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>14</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, II, 123-24.

slave girls and women.<sup>15</sup> Catholicism had accomplished much of what it had set out to do with the Negroes. With the cession of Louisiana to the United States, Protestant missionaries began to supplement the work of their Catholic rivals.

Few among the early Protestants who did evangelical work among Louisiana slaves have left records. The famous but eccentric Lorenzo Dow crossed the Mississippi to preach in 1804, but what, if anything, he accomplished is not recorded.<sup>16</sup> Another missionary who did have a great effect on both whites and blacks in Louisiana was Joseph Willis, a free mulatto. Willis, a devout Baptist who came originally from South Carolina, first appeared in Louisiana the year of the cession, but this first mission met with little success. He was not discouraged and returned a few years later. This time he gathered a following in the neighborhood of Opelousas. In 1810 he sent a petition to the Mississippi Baptist Association, requesting ordination. Two years later the Association appointed "brethren Hadley and Scarborough" to ordain Joseph Willis "in the Opelousas and constitute a church in the vicinity where he lives."<sup>17</sup> Father Willis, as he was called, was a revered figure among Louisiana Baptists of both races until his death.

James Skylie, a Presbyterian divine, was among the first of that denomination to do missionary work among the slaves of Louisiana.

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<sup>15</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Lorenzo Dow, The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil; as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow, In a Period of over Half a Century; Together with His Polemic and Miscellaneous Writings, Complete (New York, 1852), 100.

<sup>17</sup> A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association from Its Organization in 1806 to the present Time (New Orleans, 1849), 21-29.

Skylie began preaching in the Florida Parishes about 1811.<sup>18</sup> The coldness and intellectualism of the Presbyterian doctrine and service was not a form of worship which greatly appealed to the emotional Negro or, for that matter, to the uneducated white of the frontier. In 1825 there were only thirteen Presbyterian churches in Louisiana and Mississippi combined, and the greater number of these was in Mississippi.<sup>19</sup> The Presbyterian congregation in New Orleans contained only twenty-four members as late as 1833.<sup>20</sup> Another Presbyterian missionary was Timothy Dwight, who worked in the Red River region. He must have been the moving spirit of the church there, because when he departed in the late 1830's, Presbyterianism languished in central Louisiana.<sup>21</sup>

Apparently the first Methodist to devote himself primarily to the Louisiana Negro was Peyton S. Greaves, who in 1827 conducted a Sunday school in New Orleans which was attended by seventy-five Negro children.<sup>22</sup> The development of the Episcopal church was slow, and no outstanding leader appeared until Leonidas Polk became Bishop of Louisiana. Polk himself stated that in 1841 he found not a single

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<sup>18</sup> Henry Alexander White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders (New York, 1911), 252.

<sup>19</sup> Louis D. Voss, The Beginnings of Presbyterianism in the Southwest (New Orleans, 1923), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Louis D. Voss, Presbyterianism in New Orleans and Adjacent Points. Its Semi-Centennial held in 1873, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Organization of the New Orleans Presbytery (New Orleans, 1931), 54.

<sup>21</sup> Voss, Beginnings of Presbyterianism in the Southwest, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Alan Cross, The History of Southern Methodism in New Orleans (New Orleans, 1931), 16.



Episcopal church west of the Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> Despite the dearth of churches, many planters who settled in Louisiana were Episcopalians, and some of these provided for the instruction of their slaves. William Taylor of Pointe Coupee Parish, who was forced to cross the Mississippi to St. Francisville when he wished to attend services, saw to it that children born to his slaves were christened soon after birth.<sup>24</sup>

A few references to "Campbellite" Negroes may be found in the records of ante-bellum Louisiana. Apparently, however, the followers of Alexander Campbell gathered their members, white and Negro, from already established congregations of other denominations. The Baptist church at Cheneyville, which contained Negro members, was divided into two quarrelling groups by a "Campbellite" schism.<sup>25</sup> The Christian church was never strong in Louisiana, however, and there is no particular record of slave reaction to the arch-fundamentalist Christian doctrine.

The place of the Negro in the churches during the years of slavery was a difficult one. In general Carter G. Woodson is correct in saying, "Most Southern white men had no idea of elevating Negroes to the status of white men, not even in matters of religion."<sup>26</sup> Yet

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<sup>23</sup> W.M. Polk, Leonidas Polk, Bishop and General, I (New York, 1915), 169. Cited in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor (William) Diary, 1838-1842. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>25</sup> Faxon, Baptists of Louisiana, 156-70.

<sup>26</sup> Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church,<sub>2</sub> (Washington, 1945), 135.  
(Washington, 1747), 177.

this statement cannot stand without qualification.

Negroes and whites never ceased worshipping side by side in Catholic churches. Many travellers noted the contrast between the joint prayer of masters and slaves in St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans and the practice in Protestant churches, where the blacks were either excluded or "mewed up in some remote corner, separated by barriers from the body of the church."<sup>27</sup> Some white Catholics objected to this state of affairs. "At St. Martinville, masters sought to drive slaves away from the Holy Table, but the pastor promptly stopped this abuse."<sup>28</sup>

The scanty records available indicate that the distinction between white and Negro, within the Protestant churches, increased with the passage of time. This subject must be approached with caution, however. The eventual separation of congregations into white and Negro components may have been desired more strongly by the slave than by the master. When freedom came as a result of the Civil War, the freedmen themselves insisted on separate churches.<sup>29</sup> There is little reason to assume that they felt differently as slaves.

The minutes of Hephzibah Baptist Church, located in East Feliciana Parish, and one of the first Baptist churches in the state, indicate that the blacks had a responsible status within the church during the

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<sup>27</sup> Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, II, 210-11. See also Ingraham, The Sunny South, 356, and Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, II, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 433.

<sup>29</sup> Francis Butler Simkins, The South Old and New, A History, 1820-1947 (New York, 1949), 219.

early years of the nineteenth century. There is no evidence that they played a significant part in church government, but the minutes make no distinction between white and Negro conversions and withdrawals. On July 17, 1814, the minutes read: "Received by experience [sic] Sharlet Dees; and a negro woman named Jane and one of the name of Sely and also Levi Curtis and Mary Curtis."<sup>30</sup> Two years later "Sister Lacy her negro woman Jany and Elcy West was dismissed by letter."<sup>31</sup>

\* Not only did Hephzibah Church admit and dismiss slaves in exactly the same manner as whites, but it subjected them to the same discipline as whites and furnished them with some protection against abuse. In regard to discipline, in 1826 "A black brother by the name of Bill was chargd [sic] of being consarned [sic] in acts of theft [sic] for which he was excludd."<sup>32</sup> In 1832 the congregation excluded "Black Phillis, for leaving her former husband and cohabiting with another man."<sup>33</sup> And a "Black Br. by the name of Lightebough" was called before the church after being accused of "a fault of intemperance."<sup>34</sup> To protect a slave member from abuse the congregation in 1820 "took up the conduct of Br. Wil<sup>m</sup> West for whipping his black brother; the church considered there was no cause for his doing so and he was excluded for the same by the church —"<sup>35</sup> In September of the same year the question,

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<sup>30</sup> Hephzibah Church Books, July 17, 1814.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., November 20, 1819.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., August 13, 1826.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., November 10, 1832.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., March 9, 1833.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., March 18, 1820.

"Shall a member be held in fellowship that treats his slaves with barbarity?" was posed to the congregation. Presumably the question was debated, but the minutes simply state that "The answer was no."<sup>36</sup>

The Methodist and Baptist churches had the greatest appeal for the Negro, but the attitude of white members toward black communicants and the part that Negro members played in the churches must be pieced together from shreds and tatters of information. The wife of a Methodist minister who had recently moved away from Covington revealed a sympathetic attitude toward the slave women of her denomination: "Tell Aunt Jenny . . . I trust she will be faithful, tell her to say to the colored society to be faithful, for there are not many that have such privileges as they have."<sup>37</sup> A Methodist missionary to the blacks asserted, "Many of these hardy sons of Africa, though ignorant and superstitious, gave evidence in life and death that they had been born into the spiritual kingdom of our Lord . . ."<sup>38</sup>

Although the Negroes showed more appreciation, in general, for the informality of Baptist and Methodist worship than for the coldness of Presbyterianism or the ceremonials of the Episcopalians and Catholics, there were nonetheless many Negro communicants in these three churches.

The descendants of Negroes who had been on South Louisiana plantations during the colonial period were usually Catholic. If the master was of a religious turn of mind, and himself a Catholic, new

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., September 16, 1820.

<sup>37</sup> Harriet B. Steager to Mrs. Emily Ellis, February 8, 1844. Ellis Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Pipes, Life Work, 153.

members of the plantation labor force might be instructed in the Roman faith. Some Catholic curates made serious attempts to evangelize the slave population. Father Martial had considerable success with colored boys in New Orleans in 1818. In 1844 Father James Francois made a foray into Protestant territory and baptized fourteen Negro children on the plantation of William Dix, near Vidalia.<sup>39</sup> Mme. Alicot, a young Frenchwoman, did a great deal of religious work among the slaves and aided in the formation of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, an order for Negro women.<sup>40</sup> This order is evidence of segregation within Catholicism. West of Opelousas Olmsted talked with an old slave who had been sold into Louisiana from Virginia forty years before. He had become a Catholic, but whispered in Olmsted's ear: "Oh Sar, they don't have no meetin' o' no kind round here."<sup>41</sup>

Likewise, many slaves were members of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches. Indeed, in rural Louisiana, there were often more Negro than white members in these denominations, and there was one Negro Presbyterian minister in the Red River region.<sup>42</sup> By 1850, when the Episcopalian Diocese of Louisiana had been firmly established by Bishop Polk, "The number of persons of color ministered to largely

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<sup>39</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 278, 471.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>41</sup> Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, II, 35.

<sup>42</sup> B. Charles Bell, Presbyterianism in North Louisiana to 1929 (Shreveport, Louisiana, 1930), 32.

outnumbered the whites . . .<sup>43</sup> Many of these slaves were Episcopalians or Presbyterians because their masters were of that faith. The owner of Ferriday plantation, across the river from Natchez, had the Reverend Joseph Stratton speak to his people at every opportunity.<sup>44</sup> The influence of the master upon the religious choice of his slaves was demonstrated in 1858 when "The servants on the Magnolia Place" in Plaquemines Parish "were withdrawn from the ministrations of the [Episcopal] church."<sup>45</sup>

All the efforts of the various churches had not made Louisiana into a completely Christian commonwealth by 1850. In 1833 there were only 270 Baptists west of the Mississippi, "besides about fifty black persons who had been baptized in the Parish of St. Mary too remote to unite with any church."<sup>46</sup> In 1844 the Reverend Theodore Clapp, then a Presbyterian, asserted that there were 40,000 nominal Catholics in New Orleans who were really atheists and that the Protestants were no better. The city rose in wrath, but Clapp's congregation stood behind him.<sup>47</sup> Philander Chase, who became Episcopalian Bishop of Ohio and then of Illinois, journeyed through the Felicianas in 1839. He wrote, "The planters are all hospitable, but few of them

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<sup>43</sup> Rev. Herman Cape Duncan, The Diocese of Louisiana: Some of Its History, 1838-1888. Also Some of the Histories of Its Parishes and Missions, 1805-1888 (New Orleans, 1888), 40.

<sup>44</sup> Stratton (J.B.) Diary, June 5-9, 1849. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>45</sup> Duncan, Diocese of Louisiana, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Paxon, Baptists of Louisiana, 184.

<sup>47</sup> Voss, Presbyterianism in New Orleans, 56.

are religious."<sup>48</sup> In 1845 St. John's Episcopal Church in Thibodaux had only twenty-four members, of whom fourteen were Negroes.<sup>49</sup> No slaves at all were baptized into the Presbyterian Church at Baton Rouge before 1848.<sup>50</sup>

△ A series of tables published in De Bow's Review in 1854, but based on the census of 1850, demonstrated the religious backwardness of Louisiana. There were only 229 clergymen of all faiths within the state, which was the lowest number for any Southern commonwealth except thinly settled Florida. Virginia and Tennessee boasted more than 1,000 clergymen each, while Mississippi had more than twice as many as Louisiana. To continue the comparison with Mississippi, Louisiana had the service of 622 lawyers as compared with 590, and almost 4,000 merchants to Mississippi's 1,506. Louisiana had only 306 churches, again fewer than any other Southern state except Florida. Tennessee and Virginia had more than 2,000 each, while Mississippi had over 1,000, and newly settled Texas had 341. In the number of people whom the churches could accommodate, Louisiana ranked somewhat higher than Florida, Arkansas and Texas, with accommodations for 109,615 people. Mississippi, ranking just above Louisiana, had enough pews to seat 294,000 worshippers, and Virginia, at the head of the list,

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<sup>48</sup> Philander Chase, Bishop Chase's Reminiscences, an Autobiography. Second Edition: Comprising a History of the Principal Events in the Author's Life to A.D. 1847. With a Portrait and Four Engravings. II (Boston, 1848), 470.

<sup>49</sup> Duncan, Diocese of Louisiana, 108-09.

<sup>50</sup> History of the First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1927), 19.

had church accomodations for 856,436 persons. The wealth of the Catholic sugar parishes of Louisiana and the prosperity of New Orleans were revealed in the valuation of church property. Only in Virginia, South Carolina, Maryland and Kentucky were the churches valued at more than the \$1,782,470 claimed for Louisiana.<sup>51</sup>

A series of articles, devoted to various parishes of Louisiana, was published in De Bow's Review in the early 1850's. These articles give further information concerning religious conditions in the state. In Assumption Parish there were three Catholic churches and but one Protestant church in 1850.<sup>52</sup> East Baton Rouge Parish fared better in 1852 with eight churches and "also a large congregation of the church called the 'Christians' who have no established place of worship."<sup>53</sup> At Jackson there were in 1851 three Protestant churches which were in use, one Catholic church in process of construction and an Episcopal edifice which had been abandoned.<sup>54</sup> From Terrebonne Parish an observer reported that the unfinished Catholic church was well attended, but that the two Methodist churches in the parish did not fare so well. Circuit riding ministers seemed "to meet with little encouragement and are frequently starved out."<sup>55</sup> The saddest story of all was reported from Concordia Parish:

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<sup>51</sup> De Bow's Review, XVI (1854), 88-90.

<sup>52</sup> Andre Le Blanc, "The Parish of Assumption," Ibid., IX (1850), 292.

<sup>53</sup> J. Carrighan, "Historical and Statistical Collections of Louisiana," Ibid., XII (1852), 24.

<sup>54</sup> James S. Peacock, Ibid., XI (1851), 266.

<sup>55</sup> G.W. Pierce, Ibid., 611.



Religion here is only talked of as one of the by-gones. For more than twelve (to the close of 1850) months, I presume not more than one sermon was preached in the whole parish. There are very few people who make any pretensions to religion. Those of my acquaintance who are members of any church are Methodist Episcopal.

There are a few who profess to be Baptists, but they have no preacher nor any church building. There are also a few who are Christian Baptists, or commonly called Campbellites, but they have no organization or clergy.

There is but one church edifice in the parish . . . and although built by the joint contributions of the neighbors, is tacitly considered a Methodist Episcopal church, and has never been preached in by any other denomination.<sup>56</sup>

While the doleful accounts noted above were being written, religious progress was going on. At Thibodaux, in 1848, a Sunday school established by the rector of St. John's Episcopal Church gave instruction to seventy-one white children and 130 Negroes.<sup>57</sup> A Presbyterian church was established at Houma soon afterward, and Presbyterian membership in the Lafourche region grew to such an extent that the Presbytery of New Orleans met at Thibodaux in 1856.<sup>58</sup>

The Baptists were evangelizing whites and Negroes all over the state. At Franklin a baptismal ceremony was held in Bayou Teche in 1846.<sup>59</sup> Even New Orleans, which a frontier Baptist had reportedly denounced as "the mother of harlots and hard lots . . . where niggers

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<sup>56</sup> A.R. Kilpatrick, Ibid., 62.

<sup>57</sup> Duncan, Diocese of Louisiana, 108-09.

<sup>58</sup> Voss, Beginnings of Presbyterianism in the Southwest, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, July 9, 1846.

are as thick as black bugs in spiled bacon ham, and gamblers, thieves and pickpockets are skitin about the streets . . .<sup>60</sup> was a field of operations for Baptist missionaries. By 1855, in addition to white churches, there were four Negro Baptist congregations in the city.<sup>61</sup> Over the state as a whole Baptist membership increased so rapidly that it became necessary to set up new administrative divisions every year or so.<sup>62</sup>

Nor was Methodism to be left behind either in New Orleans or the state at large. By 1847 there were thirteen Methodist appointments with 1,328 white and 1,280 Negro members in New Orleans alone.<sup>63</sup> The circuit system was well adapted to a newly settled region, and there were more Methodist churches in the state in 1850 than there were of any other denomination.<sup>64</sup> The Methodist conference which met at Mansfield in 1854 reported 5,085 white and 5,459 black members, a gain of 1,000 over the previous year.<sup>65</sup>

On many plantations it was not necessary for the slaves to go to church in order to receive religious instruction. Masters provided for services on the plantations, and the churches made considerable

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<sup>60</sup> William P. Brannen, "Where the Lion Roareth and the Wang-Doodle Mourneth," Franklin J. Meine, ed., Tall Tales of the Southwest (New York, 1930), 252.

<sup>61</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, February 3, 1855.

<sup>62</sup> Paxon, Baptists of Louisiana, 219-384.

<sup>63</sup> Cross, History of Southern Methodism in New Orleans, 25.

<sup>64</sup> De Bow's Review, XVI (1854), 94.

<sup>65</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, January 7, 1854.

effort to find ministers to fill these appointments. All churches, Catholic and Protestant alike, suffered from a lack of qualified missionaries for work among the slaves.<sup>66</sup>

There are innumerable records of church services on plantations. In 1850 the Reverend John Pipes was preaching to from 600 to 1,000 slaves every Sunday on the old Hampton plantation above New Orleans. Messrs. Preston and Manning, who owned this estate, were Episcopalians, but they took the Methodist sacraments with their slaves. Pipes records that the Negro children learned the catechism by heart and "could sing like nightingales."<sup>67</sup> Bishop Polk, in addition to preaching to his slaves himself on occasion, paid a young minister \$300 a year to serve them regularly. On Sunday afternoons the children on his estate were examined on the catechism.<sup>68</sup> In 1855 the Episcopal church ministered to 3,600 Negro members, including those on thirty-one plantations.<sup>69</sup>

One master spoke of his religious care of his blacks as follows:

I require every servant to be present each Sabbath morning and Sabbath evening at family prayers. In the evening the master or sometimes a visitor if a professor, expounds the chapter read. Thus my servants hear 100 to 200 chapters read each year, anyhow. One of my servants, a professor, is sometimes called on to close our services with a prayer.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., May 13, 1854.

<sup>67</sup> Pipes, Life Work, 149.

<sup>68</sup> Hilliard Diary, February 3, 1850.

<sup>69</sup> Duncan, Diocese of Louisiana, 13.

<sup>70</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 371.

In many cases Negro ministers preached to the slaves. Three congregations of black Methodists in New Orleans had slaves as ministers, under white supervision.<sup>71</sup> In Bienville Parish white and black Baptists, most of whom had come to Louisiana from Edgefield District in South Carolina, heard the sermons of a free mulatto named Henry Adams, who had moved west with them.<sup>72</sup> Another Negro Baptist minister was John Jones, who was ordained by the Grand Cane Association in 1856. Jones' duties were mainly "to minister the word and ordinances of the gospel to the colored people," but he "frequently, by request, preached to large congregations of whites."<sup>73</sup> The Hephzibah Baptist Church appointed a committee on "the subject of the instruction of the servants of the church and neighborhood" which reported that "it is our duty to instruct them in the Scriptures and to have regular preaching for their benefit once a month . . ." The regular minister was to deliver the sermon when convenient, but at other times "Henry, servant of Squire Jordan" was to preach.<sup>74</sup> In general, only the Baptist and Methodist churches encouraged Negro ministers. There is one instance of a black Presbyterian minister,<sup>75</sup> but no Episcopal or Catholic priest was a black man.

Material taken from denominational records may give a false

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<sup>71</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, October 27, 1855.

<sup>72</sup> Paxson, Baptists of Louisiana, 241.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>74</sup> Hephzibah Church Books, March 5, 1859.

<sup>75</sup> Bell, Presbyterianism in North Louisiana, 32.

impression of the strength of sectarian feeling in ante-bellum Louisiana. As a matter of fact, such feelings were not strong among the whites, and there is good reason to assume that they were even weaker among the slaves. The only instance of serious acrimony between Protestant churches occurred when the "Campbellites" won away part of the Baptist membership in certain areas.<sup>76</sup> Most of the early Protestant church buildings in the state were union churches, open to all Christian faiths.<sup>77</sup> A demonstration of this lack of antagonism was given in 1840, when a Presbyterian minister addressed the Mississippi Baptist Association, which represented some Louisiana churches, on the subject of ministerial support.<sup>78</sup> Even between Protestant and Catholic there was little rancor, even though some Protestants showed more zeal in attempts to convert Catholics than in attempting to carry the teachings of Christianity to the slaves.<sup>79</sup>

Though they accomplished much for the blacks, the churches were never able to give them their full attention. Catholic missionaries made "spasmodic and unorganized" efforts, but never claimed to have accomplished their purpose. "There was always present the prejudices of the slaveowners and the peculiar attitude of many toward the slaves" which increased the difficulty of the work.<sup>80</sup> The Episcopalians were

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<sup>76</sup> Paxon, Baptists of Louisiana, 156-70.

<sup>77</sup> Voss, Presbyterianism in New Orleans, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association, 208.

<sup>79</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, April 28, 1855.

<sup>80</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 433.

increasing the number of missions which served slaves up to the outbreak of the Civil War, but it is noteworthy that in 1855 their church had only 3,600 Negro members.<sup>81</sup> In 1855 the New Orleans Presbytery regretfully asserted, "The colored people have not received from us that systematic, preserving and successful attention . . ." given by other denominations.<sup>82</sup> The Baptist state convention of 1852 felt it necessary to urge ministers to devote more time to slaves, and such appeals were to be repeated.<sup>83</sup> The Methodist conference, in 1855, demonstrated the fact that taking Christianity to the Negroes was secondary to other activities of the church. This conference left five out of ten appointments to colored missions unfilled, and three of those which were supplied were put under one man. Of the remaining forty-two appointments, thirty-seven were filled.<sup>84</sup> It should be remembered, of course, that nearly all congregations included some slaves, and therefore nearly all appointees ministered to some Negroes.

In the 1840's the movement toward placing slave members of the various churches in separate congregations gathered force. An important reason for this policy may have been racial prejudice on the part of the whites, but this was not the only reason. The ignorance of the Negro, fostered by the laws prohibiting his instruction in reading and writing, made a sermon designed for the better class of whites unsuit-

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<sup>81</sup> Duncan, Diocese of Louisiana, 13.

<sup>82</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, April 28, 1855.

<sup>83</sup> Paxton, Baptists of Louisiana, 42.

<sup>84</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, January 31, 1855.

able for him. Moreover, the black's emotional response to a moving message was often distasteful to white members of congregations, especially when the shouts, groans and amens came at inappropriate times. One newspaper, commenting on this tendency of the Negro, thought, "If some man of taste and judgement could stand by them and tell them when it is proper to groan, it would be a great relief, not only to the minister, but to the audience."<sup>85</sup>

The fact is that the Negroes themselves preferred separate churches. This was especially the case when they were allowed to have a minister of their own race, who shared their emotional approach to religion. When the Methodist conference met at Franklin in 1854, one of the delegates complained that the Methodist missionary cause in New Orleans was handicapped because slaves preferred to join the all-Negro Bethelites. Ministers for the Bethelites were supplied by the African Methodist Church, whose headquarters was in the North. The speaker demanded that the New Orleans authorities do something about "such an insidious nest of abolitionists in their midst."<sup>86</sup>

Whatever lack of success the churches had in their attempts to Christianize the slaves was in part due to the attitude of the whites. Not all slaveholders were sufficiently benevolent to encourage the teaching of religion to their slaves.<sup>87</sup> Some newspapers expressed opposition to religious ministrations to the Negro population. The

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<sup>85</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, March 21, 1850.

<sup>86</sup> New Orleans Semi-Weekly Creole, January 24, 1855.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., June 21, 1854.

Baton Rouge Gazette blamed murder and insurrection upon "incendiary preachers" who appealed "to the worst passions of human nature." This newspaper insisted, "A stop must be put to their ranting and raving."<sup>88</sup> The disapproving editor of the Franklin Planters Banner said of a Baptist baptismal service, "There was really nothing interesting in the ceremony," and sneeringly added, "There is something ludicrous in this thing of ministers taking niggers so lovingly in their arms and 'ducking' them by way of securing their salvation."<sup>89</sup> This same newspaper was unable to endorse a program for the religious instruction of slaves: "We do believe that the 'ranting' which is sometimes called religion is of more injury than benefit; the more enlightened systems are at the same time unfit for the slave."<sup>90</sup> There is no evidence that such journalistic attitudes had any significant following among slaveholders. When masters neglected the religious training of their slaves, it was more likely caused by indifference rather than disapproval.

Most slaveowners did encourage religion among their bondsmen. This was especially true, of course, of masters who were themselves religious, and many of these devoted their own time to instruction. Salomon Northrup belonged to a Baptist minister for a time, and found him conscientious in the spiritual care of his blacks.<sup>91</sup> Many masters

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<sup>88</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, January 9, 1841.

<sup>89</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, July 9, 1846.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., June 3, 1847.

<sup>91</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 97.



erected chapels on their plantations and paid ministers to officiate in them. On sugar plantations the sugar house often served as a chapel. One planter's son, near Jackson, "with conscientious faithfulness and regularity devoted himself to . . . [the slaves'] moral and religious training."<sup>92</sup> John McDonogh left the following instructions in his will:

See to it that the overseers, every morning and evening, assemble the people in prayer . . . have them taught (little children and all) the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed, and (if permitted by law) hold Sunday schools . . . for . . . old and young, and they be made to attend the whole day. Let there be a house erected on each plantation for a church.<sup>93</sup>

Masters were not completely neglecting their own interests in encouraging religious consciousness among their slaves. The word preached to the Negro usually emphasized Christian humility above all else, and "Servant obey thy master" was a frequent text. James Smylie, the Presbyterian missionary mentioned above, proudly claimed that the gospel made slaves better servants.<sup>94</sup> Harriet Martineau concluded that slaveowners preferred pious Negroes, as such slaves "consider nonresistance a Christian duty, and are able to inspire a wonderful degree of patience in their fellow sufferers."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Duncan, Diocese of Louisiana, 115.

<sup>93</sup> State v. Executors of McDonogh, 8 La. An. 171. April, 1853. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 628.

<sup>94</sup> James Smylie, A Review of a Letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe to the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the Subject of Slavery (Woodville, Mississippi, 1836), no pp.

<sup>95</sup> Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, I (London, 1838), 250.

So far as the available records speak, no church in Louisiana, nor any congregation, ever publicly or privately condemned the institution of slavery. Most of them actively defended it. Catholicism, aware of membership both North and South, was careful to take no stand, though individual Catholics in Louisiana were as ardent in their defence of slavery as their Protestant fellow citizens. The Protestant churches were more outspoken.

As early as 1814, the Mississippi Baptist Association made the following recommendations to Negro communicants:

After considering their case and the many difficulties they labor under . . . that they use their utmost diligence in obeying their masters, and that prior to their assembling together to worship, they be careful to obtain written permission from their masters or overseers.<sup>96</sup>

The Presbyterians, who held that it was the duty of masters not only to allow but to persuade household servants to take part in daily family devotions,<sup>97</sup> and who dared complain of the law which forbade teaching slaves to read and write,<sup>98</sup> never challenged the rightness of the institution, and they defended it vigorously against Northern attack.<sup>99</sup> By 1820 the Baptists had formally justified slavery by the Old and New Testaments, and held that since the master bore responsibility for the souls of his servants, it was the servants' duty to subordinate themselves to the master in every possible way.<sup>100</sup> Louisiana churches saw

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<sup>96</sup> Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association, 42.

<sup>97</sup> Extracts from the Records of the Synod of Mississippi and South Alabama from 1829 to 1835 (Jackson, Mississippi, 1880), 17.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 38-40.

<sup>99</sup> Smylie, Review on the Subject of Slavery, no pp.

<sup>100</sup> Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association, 72-74.

no need to go farther than the Bible in defence of slavery, and there was no significant opposition to breaking away from the Northern churches on the slavery issue. The defence of the institution from the New Orleans pulpit of Dr. Benjamin M. Palmer in 1860 was one of the factors which incited Louisiana to early secession.

Most of the slaves in Louisiana received some degree of religious instruction, but the instruction received by some of them must have been superficial. A great deal remained to be done, but the amount of religious training and information made available to Negroes was increasing rapidly at the time of the secession crisis. A foundation of Christianity among the Negroes had been laid down, and strong and numerous churches were to be erected upon this foundation when freedom had come. The white churches of Louisiana not only did not oppose slavery, but actively defended it, with the one exception of noncommittal Catholicism. Nor were the churches hypocritical in defending slavery; their interpretation of scripture was a literal one, and the learned among them were aware that there had been slaves among the early Christians. The records leave no doubt of the slave's hearty and contagious enthusiasm for Christianity, and there is no reason to suppose that the spiritual values he received were less worthy than those acquired by other Christians.

## THE HOPE OF FREEDOM

A consideration of slave emancipation in ante-bellum Louisiana must be based almost entirely upon official records. Collections of private papers seldom contain any note of emancipations, and the columns of newspapers are equally barren of information. Legislative acts, police jury minutes and court records are the chief sources, but these records often omit the facts that the student would most like to know. Legally, almost all slaves who were emancipated earned their freedom by "long and faithful service," but this phrase could be used to describe many kinds of service.

Despite the paucity of information, a great many slaves did secure their freedom in Louisiana before the Civil War. The free Negro community in New Orleans was a large one. The code noir assumed the existence of a free Negro population early in the colonial period. These free colored people were under certain handicaps under the code. They were forbidden to receive donations by will or inter vivos from white persons, and were required to treat white persons with respect. On the other hand, they were granted "the same rights, privileges and immunities which free persons enjoy." Any master twenty-five years of age or older could manumit his slaves, but only with the permission of the Superior Council of the colony. This latter provision was intended to prevent masters from selling slaves their freedom, and thus tempting the blacks to engage in crime in order to secure the

price of liberty. The Superior Council was instructed to grant permission for good reason.<sup>1</sup>

Many slaves were freed under French and Spanish administration. Judicial cases frequently involved free Negroes as parties or dealt with emancipation.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish laws regarding emancipation were kept in effect during the first four years of American rule. In 1807 the territorial legislature turned its attention to the subject.

Under the act of 1807, no slave could be freed unless he was at least thirty years of age and had not been guilty of bad conduct for the preceding four years. An exception to these restrictions could be made if the black concerned had saved the life of his master, his mistress or one of their children. The master who desired to free one or more of his Negroes was required to appear before a judge and make an affidavit of his intentions. The judge then posted a notice of the applicant's intention to emancipate his slave or slaves, and allowed forty days for objections to be registered. If no objections were made, the judge issued documents which made the slave a free man. The ex-master was required to make sure that the freedman should not become a charge upon the state, whether through insanity, sickness, old age or otherwise. The executor of an estate who was under instructions to emancipate slaves belonging to the

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<sup>1</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 34, 44, 53-54.

<sup>2</sup> "Records of the Superior Council of Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, II (1919)-XXVI (1943), passim. "Index to Spanish Judicial Records of Louisiana," Ibid., VI (1922)-XXVII (1945), passim.

estate followed the same procedure as the owner of a slave.<sup>3</sup> Since there was usually only one judge in a parish, this act was amended in 1813 to allow parish judges to free their slaves before a justice of the peace. Hitherto it had been necessary for them to go before a superior court.<sup>4</sup>

There was no way, except by saving the life of a member of his master's family, that a slave under thirty years of age could be emancipated in accordance with the law of 1807. Emancipation of underage Negroes required a special act of the legislature in each instance, and much of the time of the legislature was taken up with such cases. Between 1823 and 1827, seventy-four Negroes were manumitted by special legislative acts. In early 1827 the legislature ruled that a master who wished to free a slave who had not attained thirty years should present a petition setting forth his motives to his parish police jury. If three fourths of the members of the police jury approved, the slave could be freed. Negroes who had been born outside Louisiana could not be emancipated in this manner.<sup>5</sup>

An act of 1830 placed a barrier in the way of emancipations with a provision that any person who freed a slave must post a bond of \$1,000 to guarantee that the freedman would leave the state within thirty days. Combined with this ruling were a number of other attempts

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<sup>3</sup> Acts Passed at the Second Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, 1807 (New Orleans, 1807), 82-89.

<sup>4</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the First Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1813 (New Orleans, 1813), 102-04.

<sup>5</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Eighth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1827 (New Orleans, 1827), 12-14.

to reduce the number of free Negroes in the state.<sup>6</sup> An act of 1842 provided that a Negro who returned to the state after being freed and expelled was subject to five years imprisonment, and it was specifically stated that a master could not take a slave to free territory and then bring him back to Louisiana without making him subject to the same punishment. In other words, a Negro who went into free territory with his master's permission automatically became free. When a slave went into free territory without the consent of his master, however, and was then recovered and returned to Louisiana, his status was not to be affected. The same act forbade the introduction into the state of any statu liber — a slave who would become free at some specified time in the future — and ordered that all such Negroes already within the state should be sent out at the expense of the last owner as soon as they became free.<sup>7</sup>

Under the act of 1830, the master who freed a slave was not required to post bond if the slave was emancipated for meritorious service. An amendment the next year clarified this provision. When three fourths of the members of a police jury agreed to the manumission of a Negro for meritorious service and approved the decision at the next meeting, the master was not required to post bond, and the freedman was not required to leave the state.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1830 (New Orleans, 1830), 90-94.

<sup>7</sup> Acts of the Fifteenth Legislature, 1841-1842, 309-18.

<sup>8</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Tenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1831 (Donaldsonville, 1831), 98-100.

In 1846 the legislature reversed itself regarding the status of a slave who had been in free territory with his master's consent. After the act of 1846 no slave was to be considered free because he had been in free territory "with or without the consent of his owner."<sup>9</sup> This was in accord with the tendency to add to the obstacles in the way of manumission.

From the early years of American administration, emancipation had become more and more difficult. Before 1852 all emancipated Negroes had to leave the state unless three fourths of the members of the police jury which approved the manumission consented to their remaining in Louisiana. However, the police jury often did consent to the slave's remaining, and the number of free Negroes continued to increase. Therefore in 1852 the legislature ruled that no slave could be emancipated under any conditions unless he was to be sent out of the United States within twelve months. The master who set a slave free was required to post \$150 which was to be used to pay for transportation to Africa. Slaves who were already in the process of emancipation when this act was passed were to be hired out until their earnings were enough to pay for their passage. Manumitted Negroes who did not leave for Liberia within twelve months were to revert to slavery.<sup>10</sup>

The passage of the act of 1852 resulted in another flood of petitions to the legislature for special authorizations to emancipate.

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<sup>9</sup> Acts of the First Session of the First Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1846 (New Orleans, 1846), 163.

<sup>10</sup> Acts of the Fourth Legislature, 1852, 214-15.



Between 1852 and 1855 thirty Negroes were freed by special legislative act, and only six of these were required to leave the state.

By a new act passed in 1855, the difficulty of emancipation was further increased, though the necessity of the manumitted Negroes<sup>1</sup> being sent to Liberia was removed. Under the new law a person who desired to emancipate a slave had to bring suit against the state to that effect in a district court. The plaintiff was required to pay all costs of his suit whether he won or lost. The state was to be represented before the court by the district attorney, and this official was to urge all possible objections upon the jury. In case the jury decided in favor of the plaintiff, it was then to decide whether or not the freedman was to be allowed to make his residence in Louisiana. If he was permitted to remain, his former owner was required to post a bond of \$1,000 to guarantee that he would not become a public charge.<sup>11</sup>

The slave code of 1855 was declared unconstitutional by the Louisiana Supreme Court. Most of its provisions pertaining to slaves were reenacted in 1857, but not those concerning emancipation. On the contrary, the legislature ruled in 1857 that "from and after the passage of this act, no slave shall be emancipated in this state."<sup>12</sup> Apparently this action was taken in response to widespread public opinion.<sup>13</sup> The ending of emancipation would seem to have been blow

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<sup>11</sup> Acts of the Second Legislature, 1855, 377-91.

<sup>12</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Baton Rouge Weekly Advocate, December 13, 1856.

enough to the slave's hope for freedom, but in 1859 it was made possible for free Negroes to choose masters and become slaves. Furthermore, if a mother with children under ten years of age so enslaved herself, the children automatically became slaves.<sup>14</sup> The politicians of Louisiana had accepted their own arguments concerning the blessings of slavery for the Negro, and apparently assumed that the Negroes would hasten to take advantage of an opportunity to enjoy those blessings.<sup>15</sup> This expectation on the part of the whites was doomed to disappointment. The disadvantages of freedom were preferred to the degradation of slavery.<sup>16</sup>

As indicated above, it is most difficult to arrive at motives for emancipation, but some conclusions can be reached from the records which are available. Quite a few of those who were emancipated were relatives of free Negroes. Thus, in 1825, Hanna, a free woman of color who lived in St. Mary's Parish, was authorized to set free her two children, both of whom were technically her slaves.<sup>17</sup> In 1826 Marie Claude Guillory was permitted to emancipate her two great-grandchildren, Silesia and Rose.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that free

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<sup>14</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1859 (Baton Rouge, 1859), 214-15.

<sup>15</sup> New Orleans Daily Crescent, September 1, 1859. Cited in Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, I (New York, 1947), 530.

<sup>16</sup> Monroe Ouachita Register, April 12, 1860.

<sup>17</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Seventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1824-1825 (New Orleans, 1825), 132.

<sup>18</sup> Acts of the Seventh Legislature, 1826, 40.

Negroes could not always obtain permission to free relatives whom they owned. The Iberville Parish Police Jury unanimously rejected the petition of Honore Roth to be allowed to emancipate his ten year old daughter, Estelle.<sup>19</sup>

The question arises: how did these free Negroes become the owners of their children and grandchildren? In some cases this might result from a man's buying his wife; the children would then be his slaves. But in the main the answer lies in the fact that it was much more difficult to manumit Negroes under thirty years of age than those above that age. Hence when a slave woman or, more rarely, a married couple was emancipated, the children might be transferred to them as property. Thus, in 1823 Marie Marth, a free Negro woman of West Baton Rouge Parish, was extended permission to manumit the two children born to her while she was a slave "and now her property."<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes masters proposed to emancipate Negroes who had passed their prime. Three slaves more than sixty years of age were recommended for emancipation to the St. Charles Parish Police Jury on one day in 1847, and all three of these old bondsmen received their freedom.<sup>21</sup> It may have been that such action on the part of the master

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<sup>19</sup> Iberville Parish (Plaquemine) Series I Police Jury Minutes, 1850-1862. Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana, Prepared by the Historical Records Survey Division of Professional and Service Projects Works Projects Administration, Number 24, I, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Sixth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1823 (New Orleans, 1823), 36.

<sup>21</sup> Police Jury Minutes, St. Charles Parish, III, 83.

was an attempt to avoid the maintenance of the blacks concerned after they had ceased to be productive. This suspicion grows stronger when police juries are noted to have rejected some such petitions.<sup>22</sup> To attribute such a motive to more than a few slaveholders, however, would probably be unjust. At all times after 1807 the ex-owner of a freedman was responsible to some degree for seeing to it that the Negro did not become a public charge, and often bond had to be posted to this effect. It is more logical to assume that these aged blacks were truly set free as a just "reward for long and faithful service." Many of them probably remained on the plantations as pensioners, their lives little if any different from those of superannuated slaves.

A few slaves were given their freedom as a reward for revealing conspiracies among their fellows. Lewis Chaynsy, a mulatto of Rapides Parish, achieved his freedom in this manner in 1837. The legislature appropriated \$1,500 to compensate the man's master for losing him and gave the mulatto an additional \$500 for himself.<sup>23</sup> The legislature took similar action in order to grant freedom to an informer in Lafayette Parish in 1841.<sup>24</sup> In St. Charles Parish the police jury agreed in 1829 to emancipate Jenny and her son Wally because Jenny had been one of the principal causes of the discovery of a plot "of the Negroes

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<sup>22</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Iberville Parish, I, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Acts of the Thirteenth Legislature, 1838, 118.

<sup>24</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Fifteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1841 (New Orleans, 1841), 32-33.

against the whites."<sup>25</sup>

✓ Long and faithful service was the usual reason advanced for the emancipation of slaves. Thus seven Negroes who belonged to the estate of one J.B. Cajus of Orleans Parish were to be set free as a reward "for the long, faithful and meritorious service by them rendered."<sup>26</sup> In Carroll Parish the Negro man Ben, Clarisse his wife and "her" three children, all belonging to the estate of the late Samuel Estelle, were freed for "meritorious service" by legislative act in 1852, but were ordered to leave Louisiana within three months.<sup>27</sup> Arnaud Lauve was authorized to emancipate his slave, Mary Therese, in 1825 "as a reward for services rendered by her to his family."<sup>28</sup> Don Louis R. Orillon of Iberville Parish freed his mulatto Charles, ". . . stating in his petition that the said slave is a sober, quiet and industrious man, and has rendered long and faithful service."<sup>29</sup> The emancipation of Nanny, of Tensas Parish, was "for faithful and meritorious service rendered by her during the long and painful illness of her . . . master."<sup>30</sup> In 1854 the woman Clarisse of Orleans Parish was set free because she "did, in the year 1851, save from impending

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<sup>25</sup> Police Jury Minutes, St. Charles Parish, II, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Acts of the First Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1853 (New Orleans, 1853), 273-74.

<sup>27</sup> Acts of the Fourth Legislature, 1852, 200.

<sup>28</sup> Acts of the Seventh Legislature, 1824-1825, 198.

<sup>29</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Iberville Parish, I, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Acts of the Fourth Legislature, 1852, 122.

death a child" of her mistress "whose clothes had taken fire."<sup>31</sup>

Some emancipations and attempted emancipations were for unusual reasons. In 1828, for instance, the St. Charles Parish Police Jury rejected the petition of Etienne Rienne, who wished to free an infant recently born to his slave Henrietta. Rienne wanted to free this baby because it was Henrietta's thirteenth child.<sup>32</sup> In 1827 a young girl named Cynthia was confiscated because she had been illegally introduced into Louisiana. The legislature ordered her emancipated "on account of her youth and color rendering doubtful whether she is a slave or not." The attorney general was instructed to bind Cynthia out to a respectable family until she should be eighteen years of age.<sup>33</sup>

A few slaves were fortunate enough to be able to buy their freedom. For this to be possible, the Negro had to be one of that small minority which was permitted to hire out its own time. Under such circumstances, the slave was usually required to turn over some amount agreed upon in advance to his master as "wages," but could keep any surplus earnings for himself. Thus some were enabled to accumulate enough to buy themselves.<sup>34</sup> In 1853 Amadeo Landry was authorized to emancipate Eulalie, "the said slave having purchased

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<sup>31</sup> Acts of the Second Legislature, 1854, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Police Jury Minutes, St. Charles Parish, II, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Acts of the Eighth Legislature, 1827, 74.

<sup>34</sup> J.B. Jordan to J.W. Lugenbeel, October 1, 1850. Carter G. Woodson, ed., The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written during the Crisis, 1800-1860 (Washington, 1926), 119-21.

her freedom in the year 1849."<sup>35</sup> A Negro woman named Sukey arranged with a man named Hardesty to buy herself and her child, and provided him with half the purchase price. In addition to "paying her wages" she had "also paid the balance . . ." by 1834, and was emancipated; ". . . by unusual industry, economy and good character she afterward made a great deal of money, laboring day and night for the purpose of purchasing her offspring."<sup>36</sup>

A few slaves received their freedom through legal technicalities. During the early part of the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for wealthy Louisianians of French extraction to make trips to France. If such travellers took slaves with them, the slaves became free under French law, and Louisiana courts recognized them as such.<sup>37</sup> Apparently the same reasoning applied to Negroes who had been in free territory within the United States with the consent of their masters. These possibilities of freedom came to an end in 1846 when the legislature ruled that going into any free territory, with or without the consent of the owner, did not affect the status of the slave.<sup>38</sup> A Negro who had been born in free territory was considered free, however, even though he had been kept as a slave from childhood. When Marres sued for his freedom in 1830 the state supreme court ruled that he

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<sup>35</sup> Acts of the First Legislature, 1853, 271.

<sup>36</sup> Hardesty v. Sukey Woreley, 10 La. An. 299. April, 1855. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 636-37.

<sup>37</sup> Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, passim.

<sup>38</sup> Acts of the First Legislature, 1846, 163.

was "clearly entitled to it," because "he was born in the Northwest Territory" after the passage of the Ordinance of 1787.<sup>39</sup>

Legal technicalities could also prevent a slave's obtaining his freedom. When Nole demanded that she be emancipated in accordance with the will of her former owner, the courts rejected her plea on the ground that her behavior had not been good for the four years previous to the request, as was required by law. According to the court, she ". . . had been of bad reputation, thievish and insolent." While freedom was thus denied to Nole, the court reserved the right of her children to sue for their freedom when they reached the age of thirty.<sup>40</sup> This same provision of the law prevented the emancipation of Carmelite, whose master operated a whorehouse. The court regretted the necessity of rendering such a decision, because "The misconduct of the slave, which was the obstacle to emancipation, was the necessary result of the vile and profligate employment and associations to which . . . [her master] subjected her."<sup>41</sup> Justice was not always blind. The Louisiana Supreme Court rebuffed the attempt of a free son of a free man of color to nullify that part of his father's will which provided for the emancipation of an older son. This older son had been born while his mother was yet a slave; there-

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<sup>39</sup> *Merres v. Chexnaider*, 8 Mart. N.S. 699. March, 1830. Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, III, 489.

<sup>40</sup> *Nole v. St. Romes and Wife*, 3 Rob. La. 484. January, 1843. *Ibid.*, 549.

<sup>41</sup> *Carmelite (a slave) v. Lacaze*, 7 La. An. 629. November, 1852. *Ibid.*, 625.



fore, since he had not been emancipated, he was technically a slave at the time of his father's death.<sup>42</sup>

A survey of the information available concerning emancipation leads inevitably to the conclusion that concubinage and the resulting blood relationship of masters to slaves was the predominant reason for manumissions in Louisiana. In no other way can be explained the fact that there were so many mulattoes among the slaves emancipated. No exact count is possible, but it is not an extravagant estimate to say that three fourths of all the Negroes emancipated after 1803 had a large measure of white blood. In 1860 only 9.83% of the slaves in Louisiana were mulattoes, but no less than eighty-one percent of the free people of color were so described. Mulattoes made up a much higher percentage of the free persons of color than of slaves in all the Southern states, but the percentage was highest of all in Louisiana.<sup>43</sup> Granting the debatable proposition that mulattoes were more able than Negroes to give "long and faithful service," it would still be doubtful that they were three times as able. Nor does any serious reason other than concubinage appear to explain why so many young women with young children were emancipated.

However convincing such an argument, it need not stand alone. Master-relatives of Louisiana mulattoes sent them to the North, so that

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<sup>42</sup> Mathaurin y. Liveudais, 5 Mart. N.S. 301. January, 1827. Ibid., 482.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph C.G. Kennedy, Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington, 1864), xiii.

they could be freed and educated without scandal. Levi Coffin gives an instance of a Louisiana judge who did this with the daughters borne to his brother by a slave woman.<sup>44</sup> Police juries often rejected petitions for the emancipation of mulattoes and their children. In 1852 the Iberville Parish Police Jury unanimously rejected "The petition of Edward Gay Testy, ext. of Andrew Hynes, praying to be permitted to emancipate . . . the slaves Eliza Ann aged about 26 years and her children . . . and the mulatto girl Margaret aged about 20 years."<sup>45</sup> In 1848 the legislature authorized David H. Boulton of Natchitoches to set free the mulatto woman Florestine and her eight children. The oldest of these children was only ten.<sup>46</sup>

Evidence still more conclusive is to be found in court records. In regard to a case heard in 1845 the Louisiana Supreme Court noted, "The testimony establishes that the deceased was living in open and notorious concubinage with a mulatress named Fanchon, who . . . was [later] emancipated . . ."<sup>47</sup> One John Anderson provided in his will that his slave Phebe should be freed, and left her one hundred acres of land, \$1,000 which was to be invested in bank stock, and four

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<sup>44</sup> Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad; Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives who Gained their Freedom through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents (London, 1876), 179-80.

<sup>45</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Iberville Parish, I, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1848 (New Orleans, 1848), 34.

<sup>47</sup> Heirs of Compton v. Executors, 12 Rob. La. 56. October, 1845. Catterall, Judicial Cases, III, 572.

Negroes. These four slaves were almost certainly Phebe's children, probably by her master, because that the will provided that upon Phebe's death the bequest was to go to "a yellow boy," son of one of these slaves.<sup>48</sup> One Sinnot provided that his natural son Thomas, a mulatto, should be set free and should inherit all his property. Sinnot's wife was to have possession for the rest of her life, however.<sup>49</sup>

Another planter's will ordered that Leonora and her two sons be emancipated, acknowledged paternity of the sons, left Leonora an income of \$150 a year for the rest of her life, and left the sons \$5,000 which was to be paid to them when they became of age.<sup>50</sup> A slaveholder named Trumbull acknowledged five children by his slave Rachael, provided for the emancipation of mother and children and left them one third of his property. In this case the act of 1857 had gone into effect before the provisions of the will could be carried out, and the slaves could neither be freed nor receive the bequest.<sup>51</sup>

A few masters demonstrated in their wills a distaste for the institution of slavery. Perhaps the most famous instance was the will of Julien Poydras. Poydras owned four plantations in Pointe Coupee

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<sup>48</sup> Anderson's Executors *v.* Anderson's Heirs, 10 La. 29. March, 1836. *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>49</sup> Succession of Sinnot, 3 La. An. 175. February, 1848. *Ibid.*, 588-89.

<sup>50</sup> Leonora (f.w.c.) *v.* Scott, Executor, 10 La. An. 651. September, 1855. *Ibid.*, 640.

<sup>51</sup> Turner, Curator, *v.* Smith *et al.*, 12 La. An. 417. June, 1857. *Ibid.*, 655.

Parish and two more in West Baton Rouge Parish. He ordered these plantations sold and the proceeds divided among his heirs, but the sale of the estates was to be under conditions:

Any slave dwelling on any habitation of mine must be regarded as irremovably attached to it. This shall be published in advance and the positive obligation resulting therefrom must be subscribed to by the purchasers and their successors through inheritance or otherwise, as also the explicit and unqualified obligation of freeing from the bonds of servitude all the slaves of both sexes sold with my habitations, even the children of female sex, born or to be born, comprised in those sales, after owning same slaves for twenty-five years, without intermission, from the day of their purchase. Those among said slaves who after twenty-five years, may still be under the age required by law for their enfranchisement will be bound to work for the purchasers of such habitations up to the moment when they reach the age required to be set free. Furthermore the purchasers of such habitations shall by contract bind themselves and their successors by inheritance or otherwise, to take care of, treat with humanity and keep on these same habitations, without obliging them to work, all the slaves of either sex, acquired from my estate, who will visibly have reached the age of sixty; and moreover give them twenty-five dollars a year for their sustenance and the relief of their old age. These stipulations are absolute, and in the name of humanity all men and in particular public officers in this state are by me authorized and requested to have them endorsed and respected.<sup>52</sup>

It is perhaps needless to say that attempts to carry out this will led to seemingly endless legal controversy. Cases resulting from the Poydras estate were in the courts for decades afterward. The will was never fully executed. The anti-emancipation act of 1857 intervened, and this was followed by general emancipation as a result of the Civil War.

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<sup>52</sup> Last Will and Testament of Julien Poydras (Translated by Rev. E. Royer. Typescript), April 16, 1822. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

The American Colonization Society had some adherents in Louisiana. In 1832 John Ker of Concordia Parish gave this organization \$100 and pledged himself to give an equal amount for each of the nine years to follow.<sup>53</sup> In 1835 H.M. Childers of Carroll Parish provided in his will that his Negroes be freed and transported to Africa.<sup>54</sup> The society was not formally organized in Louisiana until 1846, but as may be seen from the instances above it had some influence before that time.<sup>55</sup> In 1838 Stephen Henderson announced in his will that he had "always been opposed to slavery," but that since it was recognized by the United States Constitution, he could see no prospect of ending it without "destroying the greatest government in the world." The testament provided that all his slaves should be sent to Liberia if they were willing to go, and that those who went should receive \$100 each. Those who did not choose to go to Africa were to remain slaves. Transportation to Liberia was to be gradual; ten Negroes were to go in the first five years and twenty in the first ten years; all those born after the testator's death were to go to Liberia when they reached the age of twenty, if females, or twenty-five if males.<sup>56</sup>

John McDonogh was one of the outstanding members of the American Colonization Society in Louisiana. He also directed in his will that

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<sup>53</sup> The African Repository, VIII (1832), 109.

<sup>53</sup> The African Repository, VIII (1832), 109.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., XI (1835), 336-37.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., XXV (1849), 7.

La. An. <sup>56</sup> Heirs of Henderson v. Rost and Montgomery, Executors, 5

his slaves be sent to Liberia.<sup>57</sup> Even so, Louisiana was not one of the society's bright spots. Louisiana planters were as indifferent to colonization as they were to all other questions except the price of sugar or cotton. "In Louisiana," stated the African Repository, "less has been done . . . [than in other slave states]. Excepting in New Orleans, we have very few friends in that state who take any particular interest in the cause."<sup>58</sup> Statistics bear out this statement. Between 1820 and 1850, inclusive, Louisiana sent only 177 emigrants to Liberia, as compared with 2,258 from Virginia during the same period.<sup>59</sup>

✓Emancipation in Louisiana had come to an end before 1860, and there had even been an effort to coerce free people of color into returning to the bonds of slavery. No doubt this was a result of the slavery controversy. The people of Louisiana, accepting the positive good defence of slavery, came to believe in their own arguments. If slavery was the best of all possible conditions for the Negro, then the free Negro was a social enormity. Whenever possible this enormity was to be eliminated by being driven from the state or returned to slavery. If the direction in which ante-bellum legislation in Louisiana tended had been maintained, it might well have come to pass that the free Negro would have been completely

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<sup>57</sup> State v. Executors of McDonogh, 8 La. An. 171. April, 1853. Ibid., 628-30.

<sup>58</sup> The African Repository, XXII (1846), 39.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., XXVII (1851), 149-50.

eliminated within a decade or so. When such ideas as these were predominant, to have permitted further emancipations would have been nonsensical. By 1860 the only hope of freedom remaining to a Louisiana slave lay in flight, or in the violent destruction of the entire slave system in the Southern states.

## RUNAWAYS

In Louisiana, as elsewhere in the South, masters and society found it necessary to be on guard against runaway slaves. If a Negro escaped permanently, his master lost valuable property. If he remained at large temporarily, his labor was lost for however long he was gone. This was a total loss for that length of time, because the slave's labor was a perishable product. Economic loss was not the only factor to be considered, however. The escape of one Negro encouraged others to do likewise, and unless success in such an undertaking was made almost impossible, the whole system was in danger of collapsing. Moreover, instead of leaving the area, the runaway often remained in the woods nearby. So long as he remained at large he was not only a bad influence upon other Negroes but, since he must eat, a threat to property. Often, if we may believe the records, the runaway was a serious danger to life and limb.

By the time of the settlement of Louisiana, France had had enough experience with the institution of slavery to be aware of these problems. The code noir provided that the slave who remained at large a month or more should have his ears cropped and be branded on one shoulder. For a second offence he was to be hamstrung and branded on the other shoulder. Should he somehow manage to drag himself away a third time he was to suffer death. Appeal to the superior court of the province was



permitted before a sentence of hamstringing or death was carried out. Free Negroes, who were thought likely to conceal fugitives, were to be fined thirty livres for each day a runaway was harbored in their homes. The owners of runaways were empowered to seek them out, or to have them sought out, in any way they might think proper.<sup>1</sup>

There were further measures designed to prevent slaves' running away during the later years of French and Spanish administration, but the basic pattern had been set by the code noir. In justice to French and Spanish officials, it should be noted that although branding of runaways was not uncommon, hamstringing and death were very rarely resorted to. After American administration had begun, the code noir was continued in effect until 1806, when the first legislature of the Territory of Orleans turned its attention to slavery legislation. This body put a fairly comprehensive slave code into effect and did not neglect the problem of the runaway. The masters of those who fled were required to inform a magistrate, who made an official record of the fact. The magistrate was also to be informed when the fugitive returned. Whoever captured an absconding slave in the woods, under arms, or in an encampment was declared to be entitled to ten dollars for the capture. He was to receive in addition fifty cents per league for the distance the prisoner was transported to jail. This reward was no doubt high enough to encourage slave-hunting. Since the master had to pay these costs of capture when claiming his property, he was likely to do what he could to keep his slaves from running away. In

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<sup>1</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 32-35.

case a master neglected to inform a magistrate when one of his slaves fled, he was responsible for any property damage done by the Negro before this formality was observed.

Other provisions of this act were also designed to discourage flight and to assure capture when flight had not been prevented. When an absconding slave was lodged in jail, his master was responsible for the cost of his maintenance, and for the cost of advertising his detention. If the imprisoned Negro was not claimed within two years, he was to be sold to the highest bidder, and the costs of his capture and captivity were to be paid from the sum received for him. Any surplus was to be held for a year and a day and then, if still not claimed by the former owner of the Negro, was to be devoted to public use.

To prevent running away and to assure the capture of those who did, the legislature provided in the same act that any slave found on horseback without written permission was to receive twenty-five lashes and be sent back home at a cost to his master of ten cents a mile. Any armed slave, and any slave whatsoever who refused to surrender upon demand, could be fired upon. If killed, the Negro was to be appraised, and his master was to receive compensation up to but not exceeding \$300. A search for runaways could be carried on anywhere on any plantation without prior notice, except that the searchers could not enter the dwelling of the owner or "other places under lock and key." No slave was to be sent off a plantation without written permission from his master or overseer, and if one was found abroad without such permission he was to receive twenty lashes and be sent

back to his master at a cost of one dollar. Any person who gave a pass to another person's slave without authority was liable to a fine of fifty dollars or thirty days imprisonment. Lastly, any slave found away from his master's plantation might be seized by force, though he could not be killed unless he resisted arrest. Any free person injured in the pursuit of a runaway was to be rewarded by the territory, and if a slave engaged in such pursuit was wounded, his master was to be compensated.<sup>2</sup>

✓ The second session of the territorial legislature set up patrols "for the internal police of the territory" and provided that if the patrol arrested a runaway, it was to be rewarded according to the provisions of the act of the first session.<sup>3</sup> In 1809 it was provided that slaves who had fled into Louisiana from Spanish territory were to be returned to their owners, and the owners were to be assessed no unusual charges.<sup>4</sup> This act was apparently intended to encourage cooperation with the Spanish authorities in dealing with runaways. As early as 1804, a number of slaves had fled from Natchitoches, hoping to find freedom in Spanish territory.<sup>5</sup> Spanish officials probably distrusted Americans when the question at issue concerned slaves. The records of the Spanish government of West Florida show

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<sup>2</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

<sup>3</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1807, 98-102.

<sup>4</sup> Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Second Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, 1809 (New Orleans, 1809), 4-6.

<sup>5</sup> Marquis of Casa Calvo to Governor Claiborne, November 6, 1804. Carter, Territory of Orleans, 158.

that the kidnapping of free Negroes and slaves from West Florida for sale in New Orleans was not unknown.<sup>6</sup>

When Louisiana was admitted to the Union in 1812, the new legislature did not find it necessary to make extensive changes in the existing laws concerning runaway slaves. When the rules previously drawn up for patrols were found inadequate for specific situations which might arise within the parishes, the legislature authorized the police jury of each parish to make such regulations for the pursuit of slaves and the apprehension of fugitives as might be necessary, so long as these regulations were not contrary to the laws of the state.<sup>7</sup> St. Charles Parish, for one, took advantage of this privilege. In that parish, according to the police jury, slave catchers were to receive a ten dollar reward for the capture of a Negro belonging to an owner outside the parish. This reward was to rise to twenty-five dollars if the runaway was armed. Should the fugitive belong to a plantation within the parish, the reward was to be only three dollars, though it rose to ten dollars for a local fugitive if he was under arms.<sup>8</sup>

Legislative acts concerning runaways during the 1820's and 1830's were mainly devoted to establishing central depots to which runaways unclaimed for two months or longer were to be transported. The first such act, in 1826, made the jails of Orleans and East Baton Rouge

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<sup>6</sup> Archives of the Spanish Government of West Florida, X, 144-52.

<sup>7</sup> Acts of the First Legislature, 1813, 158.

<sup>8</sup> Police Jury Minutes, St. Charles Parish, I, 41.

Parishes depots. Slaves kept for two months in other parishes without being claimed by their masters were to be brought to these depots. The two parishes could use the prisoners on public works, but had to maintain them while so doing.<sup>9</sup> Because transporting the prisoners to New Orleans or Baton Rouge was a hardship, or because mileage was not so remunerative as boarding the captives, or for some less apparent reason, this state of affairs did not please the people of other parishes. As a result, the legislature created many other depots during ensuing years. Alexandria became a third depot, and the Ascension Parish jail a fourth, in 1827.<sup>10</sup> St. Landry Parish was likewise privileged in 1833,<sup>11</sup> Iberville in 1847, and St. Tammany in the same year.<sup>12</sup> The object of establishing depots would seem to have been defeated by their multiplication. The system did not always function as intended. In 1838 the legislature resolved that the state treasurer should call upon the sheriffs in charge of the different depots to render a statement of the unclaimed runaways sold since the beginning of the system. It was further resolved that these officials be compelled "to pay into the treasury the amount due by them to the state."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Acts of the Seventh Legislature, 1826, 90-94.

<sup>10</sup> Acts of the Eighth Legislature, 1827, 30-32.

<sup>11</sup> Acts of the Eleventh Legislature, 1833, 51-52.

<sup>12</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the First Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1847 (New Orleans, 1847), 79, 98.

<sup>13</sup> Acts of the Thirteenth Legislature, 1837-1838, 25.

When a fugitive slave died in prison, the jailor was in danger of losing the fees due to him. In such cases the legislature often passed acts for the relief of unfortunate officials. In 1828 the treasurer of the state was authorized to pay \$136.75 to the sheriff of Ascension Parish as compensation for expenses incurred in regard to the deceased runaway Assento.<sup>14</sup> Five years later Thomas Norvell was granted seventy-five dollars for medical services he had rendered to two slaves who died in the Baton Rouge depot, while Thomas Lawler received \$125 for keeping a runaway in jail at Opelouses for sixteen months.<sup>15</sup> A somewhat different note was struck in 1824 when the police jury of St. James Parish was empowered to use a sum of money found on a fugitive two years before, but yet unclaimed. The police jury was instructed to reward John Thibaut, who had made the arrest.<sup>16</sup>

Despite their value, some runaways did go unclaimed. The accumulation at New Orleans was heavy, for that city was the Mecca of many fugitives. In 1845 the legislature ordered that the keepers of the three municipal jails should advertise Negroes confined as runaways once a week for three months. At the end of three months any unclaimed slave who had been imprisoned as long as twelve months prior to March 10, 1845, was to be sold at auction after thirty days advertisement of the sale.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Acts of the Eighth Legislature, 1828, 120.

<sup>15</sup> Acts of the Eleventh Legislature, 1833, 102-03.

<sup>16</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Sixth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1824 (New Orleans, 1824), 156-58.

<sup>17</sup> Acts of the Seventeenth Legislature, 1845, 134.

An act of 1848 systematized the procedure in fugitive slave cases. Any person who captured a runaway was to send him to his owner, if the owner lived nearby, or to the parish jail. The owner was responsible for numerous expenses. The captor was to receive six dollars if the Negro had been taken in the woods, three dollars if on a road or plantation. He was to receive ten cents a mile for taking his prisoner to the master or to jail. If the fugitive was lodged in jail, the jailor paid these fees, charging them against the owner. The committing magistrate and the jailor received a dollar each for receiving and confining the Negro. The prisoner's board was twenty-five cents a day, and the jailor was required to advertise his detention three times in the nearest newspaper. When the master claimed his property he paid all these costs, as well as another dollar to the magistrate for receiving proof of ownership and fifty cents to the jailor for delivering the slave into his custody. These expenses were to be itemized, and no board was to be charged for the days the captive had been used on public works.<sup>18</sup>

When his slave Villis ran away and was taken up in St. Charles Parish in 1851, Andrew E. Crane paid the following fees: jail fees, \$10.75; turnkey, \$2.00; arrest and mileage, \$4.50; and advertisement, \$5.00. Total costs in this instance came to \$22.75.<sup>19</sup> Such a sum, among people who often had little or no cash money, was considerable. Yet these charges had the support of public opinion, because they

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<sup>18</sup> Acts of the Second Legislature, 1848, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Sheriff's Receipt, January 3, 1851. Crane Collection.

continued in force for fifteen years --- until the institution of slavery vanished. The possibility of incurring such costs might be expected to prompt masters to take precautions against their slaves' running away. When, despite precautions, a Negro did flee, his master would make every effort to apprehend him before he fell into the hands of the law.

A comprehensive act including all phases of slavery legislation was passed by the legislature and approved by the governor in 1855,<sup>20</sup> but this act was declared unconstitutional by the state supreme court. Most of the provisions pertaining to runaways were reenacted in 1857. The act of 1857 kept the same system of fees established in 1848, and it made Baton Rouge a central depot for all runaways kept in any parish for sixty days without being claimed by the owner. Such Negroes were to be transported to Baton Rouge by the sheriff of the original parish, the sheriff being entitled to mileage coming and going at the rate of ten cents a mile. The state treasurer was instructed to pay all allowable expenses incurred in the parish of original arrest. When the owner claimed his property, he was to pay all expenses incurred in both jails, and the state treasury was to be reimbursed from this sum. Any Negro not claimed within twelve months was to be turned over to the supervisor of the slaves owned by the state, and in this event the state treasurer was to pay the fees due to the keeper of the depot. The prisoner was to be worked as one of the state hands, but his master could still claim him by submitting

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<sup>20</sup> Acts of the Second Legislature, 1855, 377-91.



proof of ownership and paying all accrued expenses.<sup>21</sup>

By 1855 runaways constituted such a problem that the legislature enacted that harboring a runaway should be punished with a fine of from \$200 to \$400. Furnishing a slave with false free papers was considered a forgery, punishable by fourteen years in the state penitentiary. Aiding a slave in running away was punishable as slave stealing, which carried a penalty of from two to twenty years in prison. Special measures were designed to prevent slaves' making their escape aboard ships leaving New Orleans.<sup>22</sup> There can be little doubt that the national slavery controversy contributed to the rigor of these enactments.

The great mass of Louisiana slaves remained at home. Most slaves knew little of the world away from their masters' plantations, were content with the only life they had ever known and believed that running away was wrong. The slave was innately conservative. The quarter had no mansions, but the swamp offered no comfortable beds. The plantation diet was not sumptuous, but rabbits were hard to catch. The whip of the overseer sang on the plantation air, but many never felt its bite. Those who did feel it often preferred the lash to moccasins, mosquitoes and alligators. Indeed, the alligators were said to prefer black meat. The runaway was apt to be regarded as a delinquent in the

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<sup>21</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 172-75.

<sup>22</sup> Acts of the Second Legislature, 1855, 377-91. This act was declared unconstitutional, but most of its provisions which pertained to runaways were reenacted in Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 172-75.

quarter as well as in the big house, though if he remained nearby he might be able to beg a bite of food at night.)

If, as is evidently the case, the great majority of Louisiana slaves did not attempt to escape, who were those who did make an effort to cast off their bonds? Newspaper notices of runaways and their arrest are the most convenient sources of information, but such notices must be used with care. A judgement based entirely upon newspaper sources would hold that a startlingly high proportion of fugitives were of the "upper class" of slave society — skilled workmen, near-white mulattoes and, especially, young mulatto women. Probably such a judgement would be a false one. The proportion of such outstanding Negroes reported as arrested and confined in jail is not nearly so high as the proportion reported as running away. Perhaps such slaves made good their escape, but when the obstacles are considered this hardly seems likely in many instances. More plausible is the conclusion that masters were quicker to advertise the escape of such valuable chattels than the flight of the common run of Negroes. The ordinary field hand, ignorant almost beyond modern comprehension, was likely to remain in the woods near the plantation. If he did venture afar off, he might be expected to blunder into the hands of a patrol. But more intelligent fugitives, if the countryside was not warned against them, might make good their escape or get far enough away to add greatly to the expense of securing their return.

Even so, the frequency with which above average Negroes ran away is striking. Alfred, captured at Donaldsonville in July, 1850, was

a bricklayer.<sup>23</sup> Tom Anderson, a carpenter who escaped from Robert Barrow in 1855, could "read and write, though not very well."<sup>24</sup> A fiddler carried his instrument with him when he ran away from a St. Mary's plantation in 1831,<sup>25</sup> and Frank, mulatto carpenter and blacksmith, "had some two or three hundred dollars in money about him when he left."<sup>26</sup> Oscar, very black and stout, was a good talker who had "a fondness for steamboats" and was expected to "attempt to obtain employment on some of them."<sup>27</sup> A slave preacher burned down some buildings before escaping from near St. Francisville in 1833.<sup>28</sup> Tom, who had been employed as a drayman in New Orleans, had some money and was expected to try to pass as a free man.<sup>29</sup> George, advertised at the same time, was freckled and had red hair.<sup>30</sup> Joe, who fled from Pierre Broussard in 1827, was a mulatto who spoke French, English and Spanish.<sup>31</sup> Ned, who spoke French and English, was expected to try to pass as a white man.<sup>32</sup> A literate slave carpenter in West Feliciana

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<sup>23</sup> Donaldsonville Vigilant, July 6, 1850.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton American Patriot, January 24, 1855.

<sup>25</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, March 12, 1831.

<sup>26</sup> Opelousas Courier, November 11, 1854.

<sup>27</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, May 23, 1857.

<sup>28</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, June 16, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>29</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, August 4, 1827.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., June 9, 1827.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., August 29, 1846.

Parish sold passes to other slaves in the neighborhood for five dollars a pass. When his activities became known he wrote himself a pass and departed.<sup>33</sup> Hundreds of such individuals ran away and were advertised by their owners, but few were so highly praised as Giles, who escaped from Bennet Barrow early in 1861. According to Barrow Giles was

. . . an awkward looking fellow in appearance, but quite the reverse. Few negroes are more sensible than he is. He is . . . a good field hand, cook, accustomed to the water, a good house servant, etc. I am satisfied that freedom is his object . . . He has decent clothing with him, and no doubt will make a decent appearance as remarked. He is a negro of good sense and much ingenuity; and there are few better qualified to make their escape than he is . . .<sup>34</sup>

A large number of young mulatto women were advertised as runaways. This might seem to contradict the legend that such women were a favored class in the Old South, at least insofar as creature comforts were concerned. Whether because of good reason or vanity, the owner of this type of fugitive often suspected that she had been enticed away. Harriet, a mulatto woman who escaped from H.M. Hyams, was presumed to be "harbored in Alexandria or its vicinity."<sup>35</sup> S.W. Gordon wrote of his seventeen year old Jude that "being rather bonny in her appearance . . . it is possible that she would attract the attention of a certain class of amateurs."<sup>36</sup> Charlotte, who escaped from a West Baton Rouge

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<sup>33</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mrs. Mary C. Weeks, April 9, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>34</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 11, 1861.

<sup>35</sup> Alexandria Red River Whig, November 14, 1840.

<sup>36</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, November 10, 1859.

Parish plantation, was a mulatto eighteen years of age, "straight and well formed . . . speaks English and French."<sup>37</sup> And a dark mulatto girl named Patience, who ran away from Joseph Fusilier of St. Landry Parish in the summer of 1854, was "aged about 22 years, 5 feet in height, speaking French only and very quick, she has a beautiful face and fine features for a slave."<sup>38</sup> The following advertisement appeared in the Concordia Intelligencer in 1854:

RAN AWAY

On the 2<sup>d</sup> instant from the residence of the subscriber in Concordia Parish, La., Adeline, 24 years old, good looking, well formed, good size, yellow girl — large eyes, heavy eyebrows, wears no. 6 shoes — speaks French and occasionally it may be detected when speaking English, her person marked with small pox, but little, if any, on her face.

I have reason to believe she has been furnished with a pass or assisted off by a white man. A suitable reward will be paid for her apprehension, and \$250 for evidence that will convict any white person of enticing or assisting her off.

George W. Green<sup>39</sup>

Lest the impression be given that all runaways were either men of above average accomplishments or beautiful young women, it might be noted that a seventeen year old girl, captured near Vidalia, was described in the official notice as having "hair close shaved" and as being "rather stupid."<sup>40</sup> A grown man who hid in the fodder house

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<sup>37</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, March 7, 1840.

<sup>38</sup> Opelousas Courier, September 30, 1854.

<sup>39</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, December 10, 1854.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., May 6, 1854.

house of the McCollam plantation near Donaldsonville was dragged from his refuge by a small yard boy.<sup>41</sup> Stephen Henderson offered only a ten dollar reward for his runaway, Jane, whom he described as "stout built . . . much given to talking and very much addicted to lying."<sup>42</sup>

[As might be expected, most fugitives were young adults.] The terrors of swamp and patrol might be expected to daunt children and those past their prime. An attempt to reach the North and freedom demanded physical fitness and a mental temper that immaturity and old age could seldom supply. Resort to the depths of the swamp involved as much physical endurance, though perhaps not the same moral determination, as the odyssey to the North. Most runaways were between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five. There were, of course, exceptions to this general rule. A sixteen year old boy confined at Baton Rouge in 1827 had probably run away before, because he not only had "severe marks of the whip" but was branded on his chest.<sup>43</sup> A steamboat bound for Cincinnati left a thirteen year old boy at Waterproof in 1847. This lad may not have been an actual fugitive and was probably, as the advertisement described him, "A Lost or Stay [sic] Negro." Rather than being confined in jail, he was put under the care of a local planter.<sup>44</sup> Some sort of record must have been set when a nine year

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<sup>41</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, September 16, 1845.

<sup>42</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, May 25, 1844.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., December 29, 1827.

<sup>44</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, February 27, 1847.

old boy was locked up as a runaway in St. James Parish. He had been discovered plodding down the road on an old blind horse.<sup>45</sup> At the other extreme, a seventy year old man was jailed at Baton Rouge in 1831,<sup>46</sup> and Peter, sixty years old, who "bends over very much when standing up," was arrested at Donaldsonville in 1848.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, there is no record of the circumstances which drove these old men to run away.

Sometimes groups of young men took to their heels together, though most often flight was an individual act. It was not unusual, however, for a number of individuals who had run away separately to come together in the swamps and form gangs. Sometimes a mother fled with her children. Lucinda, arrested near Opelousas in 1855, had two sons, eight and ten years old, with her.<sup>48</sup> Romance no doubt played a part when William, belonging to the firm of Strong and Burr, ran away with General Hampton's Phillis. These two, both mulattoes, were expected to try to pass as free.<sup>49</sup> In 1840 an overseer wrote the following to his employer:

Linzy has taken to the woods with his wife and childe he is well armed he has the little double barreled gun and his butchers knife so much for letting the most trusty have firearms my opinion is that he will join the party that stole our bote or that is his

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<sup>45</sup> Bringier Messenger, July 7, 1855.

<sup>46</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, December 29, 1827.

<sup>47</sup> Donaldsonville Vigilant, October 16, 1848.

<sup>48</sup> Opelousas Courier, January 13, 1855.

<sup>49</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, May 16, 1829.

aim.<sup>50</sup>

Some fugitives can be placed in no neat category. Near St. Francisville in 1844 a runaway removed most of his clothes, left with them a prayer book and a testament, and drowned himself.<sup>51</sup> He left no note to say that he despaired of ever succeeding in flight and preferred death to slavery, or that he was so filled with remorse for his sin in running away that he could no longer face the world. Similarly incomprehensible was George, arrested at Donaldsonville in 1848. This man, only thirty, had both ears cropped and bore many whip scars on his back. His right hand had been mangled by a cotton gin. The toes were cut off his right foot, and his left foot had been amputated at the ankle.<sup>52</sup> The records are silent as to why this man hobbled away from his master's plantation.

\* Many Negroes might be called habitual runaways. Some of them were determined to reach free soil and refused to be discouraged by repeated failures, but many others, perhaps the greater number, were malcontents who would have been dissatisfied under any circumstances. Isaac, who escaped from M.D. Bringier of Ascension Parish, was "known as a very wicked fellow, capable of committing any crime." He was not unintelligent, however, and he was determined. For previous escapades he had had one ear cropped and had been branded on one shoulder and

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<sup>50</sup> John Merriman to F.D. Richardson, November 11, 1840. Weeks Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, May 18, 1844.

<sup>52</sup> Donaldsonville Vigilant, October 4, 1848.



on his chest. When ready to depart in 1830, he set fire to a storehouse and in the confusion which followed seized a supply of clothing and \$350 in money.<sup>53</sup> Of like disposition, apparently, were the mulatto George and the elderly Edmond, who ran away from G. Mason Graham "without any justifiable provocation." Graham announced that they were "both outlaws, having each run away more than three times," and that "all persons are hereby authorized to shoot them wherever they may be met with."<sup>54</sup>

While the reasons for running away were many and varied, certain circumstances were especially likely to result in flight. Fugitives were frequently slaves who had recently been sold. It was only natural that many of those uprooted from their homes, families and friends should flee from their new masters. None of the esprit de corps which held longtime residents of a plantation together bound those newly purchased. Presumably, too, many of those bought from slave traders were habitual runaways, originally sold for that reason. Instances are numerous. Manual had just been bought from Alabama when he ran away from Thomas G. Hicks' plantation in the Red River region in 1836. The fact that Manual had been scarred by whipping may have indicated that flight was habitual with him.<sup>55</sup> Ellick, brought to New Orleans from Norfolk by sea, fled from the sugar planter who bought him, and

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<sup>53</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, September 25, 1830.

<sup>54</sup> Alexandria Constitutional, September 8, 1860.

<sup>55</sup> Alexandria Planters Intelligencer, May 25, 1836.

was jailed in East Baton Rouge Parish after being "shot in the posterior by those who arrested him."<sup>56</sup> In 1858 Primus, whom Edward Palfrey had bought from a dealer in Charleston, South Carolina, ran away a short time after being put to work.<sup>57</sup>

Often several newly purchased Negroes ran away together. Such was the case with Dick, Watty and Jack, who fled from John Waddell's plantation ten miles below Natchitoches. These men had recently been brought from North Carolina, and their owner expected them to try to make their way back to that state.<sup>58</sup> Two other Negroes, imported from Virginia by a Louisianian named William Bird, ran away so soon after their arrival in South Louisiana that they knew no local place names.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, many fugitives were endeavoring to return to homes from which they had been taken by the slave trade. Tom, who ran away from R.C. Martin in 1840, was expected to be "lurking about Mr. Brice's or Franklin Ford's," since he had relatives at those two places.<sup>60</sup> When Mrs. Rachael O'Connor of St. Francisville sent several young men to work on A.T. Conrad's sugar plantation during the grinding season, three of them tried to make their way home without permission. They were captured at Baton Rouge and sent back to Conrad. Mrs. O'Connor defended her Negroes and blamed their misbehavior upon the cruelty of

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<sup>56</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, December 13, 1828.

<sup>57</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, July 4, 1858. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>58</sup> Alexandria Planters Intelligencer, May 25, 1836.

<sup>59</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, November 10, 1827.

<sup>60</sup> Alexandria Red River Whig, April 25, 1840.

Conrad's overseer.<sup>61</sup> John Lewis, a copper mulatto who belonged to B.F. Young of Concordia Parish, made his way back to Nashville once and attempted the feat a second time.<sup>62</sup> The records do not say whether it was a parent, a wife or a child that this man was so determined to see again. It is known that Abraham, who fled from John Bisland, was trying to rejoin his wife in New Orleans.<sup>63</sup> Literate and bearded Cicero was expected to "try to get to Louisville, Ky., where he was raised."<sup>64</sup>

The most frequent cause of slaves' running away was fear of punishment or resentment because of punishment already administered. This is not hard to understand; the lash was the standard means of correction. In 1838 William Taylor of Pointe Coupee Parish noted in his diary: ". . . yesterday morning three negroes ran away . . . They had left the plantation the other night without permission & when they returned in the morning being advised by someone that they were known to have been around all night they ran away to avoid being whipped."<sup>65</sup> In 1845 the mistress of a plantation recorded that "Alfred ran away because I was going to have him whipped for stealing chickens."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, November 20, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>62</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, March 9, 1854.

<sup>63</sup> John Bisland to Dennistonn & Hill, September 2, 1817. Bisland Papers.

<sup>64</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, August 4, 1854.

<sup>65</sup> William Taylor Diary, May 14, 1838.

<sup>66</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, September 29, 1845.

The following entries, taken from a plantation diary, are self-explanatory:

Friday June 12th [1829] . . . I have now to mention that last evening in consequence of Rose (the hired wench) taking upon herself to countermand orders given to Ned by Mrs M: — I tied her and gave her about 20 to 25 lashes — This morning she is missing; having left the plantation last night — It is presumed she has gone to her former home —

Monday June 15th [1829] . . . yesterday I attended the Clinton Public worship . . . and heard a good sermon from M Chamberlain — While there was informed of the wench Rose being in jail, and accordingly took her out at an expense of \$14.25 Today concluded to put Rose into the field and have once more taken Sibb into the house . . .

Thursday July 23 [1829] . . . On Tuesday the 21<sup>t</sup> the hired negro wench Rose was delivered of a boy — but he died about sunset of the same day.<sup>67</sup>

Sheer cruelty sometimes drove slaves to flight. The line between cruelty and good discipline was a hard one to draw when a leather lash was the common tool for punishment, but even the laws admitted that cruelty existed. Certainly there must have been sadists among slaveholders, and property in human beings gave their passions full sway. Whip scars on young girls indicate more than normal "correction," and there were numbers of such instances.<sup>68</sup> A slave confined as a runaway at Alexandria in 1831 must have had unusual respect for his master's arm. He preferred remaining in jail to going home and refused to tell who he was or where he came from.<sup>69</sup> Etienne, only eighteen years old,

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<sup>67</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, June, 1829, July, 1829. Marston Papers.

<sup>68</sup> See the Baton Rouge Gazette, March 29, 1828.

<sup>69</sup> Alexandria Red River Whig, January 23, 1841.

was much scarred and had iron rings on both legs when discovered and put off the steamboat DeWitt Clinton at Donaldsonville in 1849.<sup>70</sup> A height of horror worthy of the twentieth century was recorded when a Negro man named Reuben was jailed at Baton Rouge on June 3, 1831. The jailor laconically noted in the official advertisement that "He has been lately gelded, and is not yet well."<sup>71</sup> It might well be noted here that outstanding evidences of cruelty in newspaper columns decreased after the early 1840's. Few such notices as those reported above are to be found in papers published in the 1850's. The question remains as to whether the nature of slaveholders had been improved or whether the abolition agitation in the North made editors careful as to what they published in their papers. It is perhaps significant that Theodore Dwight Weld's American Slavery as it is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses first appeared in 1839. In this book Weld had assembled hundreds of cases of cruelty taken from Southern newspapers.

It is quite evident that many Negroes ran away to avoid work. The fact that so many attempted escapes occurred in spring and fall is evidence enough of this. One Littleton, jailed at Alexandria, objected to the work on Mrs. Emily King's plantation, where he had been hired out.<sup>72</sup> William T. Palfrey had much trouble with absconding blacks during plowing time in 1857. Seldom were fewer than two of his Negroes in the woods, and often the list of those absent amounted

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<sup>70</sup> Donaldsonville Vigilant, February 7, 1849.

<sup>71</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 11, 1831.

<sup>72</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, February 15, 1860.

to three or four.<sup>73</sup> It is fairly clear that when slaves ran away during the busy season but remained in the neighborhood of the plantation, as many of them did, the desire to avoid work was an important motivation. Generally there were more runaways in the spring than in the autumn, though the work was harder during the latter season. The pride that many hands took in their cotton picking prowess may explain this paradox in the case of the cotton growing regions. On sugar plantations grinding, though a time of backbreaking toil, was something of a holiday. Furthermore, the nearness of the Christmas holidays probably had its effect in keeping potential runaways at home in the fall.

In addition to the reasons already given for running away, and aside from the desire to escape forever from slavery, instances occurred which fit into no category. An overseer, discharged for drunkenness, took a Negro girl with him. The patrol that captured this pair "returned the girl, but unfortunately let the thief go because he begged [sig] so hard."<sup>74</sup> Mrs. E.E. McCollam noted: "Esther gone off last night because I will not let her run about at night I put a chain around her ankle She got a key and unlocked it She was found this evening at Madame Mollier's."<sup>75</sup> A master near Opelousas advertised in early 1854: "I gave my negroman Aaron a pass for a week to work about Opelousas, as his wife was in the neighborhood, dated 25<sup>th</sup> December last, since which

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<sup>73</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, March-May, 1857. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mrs. Mary C. Weeks, May 6, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>75</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, May 22, 1847.

he has not returned. . . . His object is to force me to sell him, so as to be near his wife."<sup>76</sup>

It might be noted in passing that when the British tried to stir up the slaves in Louisiana, encouraging them to run away, they had no success. An observer believed that "this has been a subject of conversation among them [the slaves] but I am of opinion they have but little confidence in the promises of our enemy . . ."<sup>77</sup> The British army had already been defeated at New Orleans when the above words were written.

It is a difficult matter to determine how many slaves tried to escape to freedom. Certainly many of them did, but a study of the available information on runaways in Louisiana leads to the conclusion that most fugitives did not have this end in view. Certainly later events proved that the field hand's conception of freedom had little relation to reality. There is no reason to suppose that Negroes who lived ten, twenty or fifty years prior to the Civil War were better informed. It was in the interest of masters to prevent their slaves' getting such knowledge, and the laws were designed to this end. There were many well informed and intelligent blacks who did know what lay to the North, but under the conditions that existed there must have been tens of thousands who had little notion of freedom or how to attain it. Untaught and untravelled, seldom in contact with their

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<sup>76</sup> Opelousas Courier, January 7, 1854.

<sup>77</sup> Gideon Firtz to Thomas Freeman, Surveyor General, February 2, 1815. Survey of Federal Archives, "Miscellaneous Letters, Papers, Protests . . . from the United States Land Office," (Typescript) (New Orleans, 1940), 19. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

masters, the gangs of field hands had to depend upon the grapevine for their information. Perhaps the grapevine transmitted news rapidly, but it almost certainly transmitted news inaccurately.

The above conclusions seem plausible, but they are not final. A slave told Olmsted that freedom was a frequent topic of comment among the Negroes,<sup>78</sup> and Olmsted himself was convinced that Louisiana bondsmen were aware of the underground railroad.<sup>79</sup> Many Negroes did attempt to reach free soil, and some succeeded. According to De Bow's Review, ninety slaves from Louisiana made good their escape during the year ending June 1, 1850.<sup>80</sup> Some of these may have still remained within the state, and others may have been captured before they reached free territory.

The records afford instances of slaves' seeking to cast off their shackles permanently. Soon after taking over the administration of the Louisiana Purchase, Governor W.C.C. Claiborne complained that many Negroes were stowing away on ships and thus getting safely out of the province.<sup>81</sup> When Philander Chase was a young rector in New Orleans, he bought a boy for \$500. Three months later his boy escaped aboard a ship bound for Liverpool.<sup>82</sup> In 1844 seven men belonging to the Pilots' Association at Southwest Pass "stole the pilot boat at Lafayette,

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<sup>78</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 684.

<sup>79</sup> Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, II, 37.

<sup>80</sup> "Census Statistics, 1850," De Bow's Review, XII (1852), 682.

<sup>81</sup> W.C.C. Claiborne to Capt. Johnson, July 18, 1804. Rowland, Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, II, 257.

<sup>82</sup> Chase, Reminiscences, I, 75.



loaded it with six months' provisions and put out to sea." It was doubtful that they could be caught because they were all "seafaring negroes, and man a swift craft."<sup>83</sup>

Failures were more often noted than successful escapes. A.T. Conrad's man Frederick stowed away on a steamboat at New Orleans and was discovered when the boat reached St. Francisville.<sup>84</sup> In July of 1827 a man named Ben, belonging to a Mr. Richardson, got aboard a packet at New Orleans and was not discovered until the craft was out to sea. Some of the passengers knew the Negro, so he was confined when the ship reached New York and sent back to Louisiana at the first opportunity.<sup>85</sup> A Negro belonging to Theodore Lavand of New Orleans stowed away on a ship bound for Liverpool, was discovered when out in the Gulf, and was transferred at sea to the Emporium, bound for New Orleans from Marseilles.<sup>86</sup>

Northerners opposed to slavery were to be found in Louisiana, and they occasionally took action consonant with their principles. Although he refused to take a fugitive black aboard, a ship captain whom Solomon Northrup approached was sympathetic.<sup>87</sup> In 1828 a Mrs. Ann Lynch was jailed at Baton Rouge for aiding a slave girl in an attempt to get away. Mrs. Lynch had concealed the girl in her berth

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<sup>83</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 1, 1844.

<sup>84</sup> A.T. Conrad to David Weeks, February 9, 1830. Weeks Collection.

<sup>85</sup> A.T. Conrad to David Weeks, December 16, 1827. Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, May 23, 1840.

<sup>87</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 196-97.

on a steamboat bound up the Mississippi from New Orleans.<sup>88</sup> The steward on an ocean-going ship in New Orleans harbor was discovered concealing a fugitive in 1840.<sup>89</sup> In 1857 a carpenter from Indiana was arrested for forging a pass for a slave plasterer who was working with him.<sup>90</sup> Peter Seymour of Indiana and Pierre Reney, a Canadian, received ten and five year prison sentences respectively for aiding a slave to escape in 1838.<sup>91</sup> In 1856 a man whose name is not available in the existing records was convicted and sent to the penitentiary from the Fourteenth Judicial District, composed of St. Mary's, St. Martin and Vermillion Parishes, for aiding a slave to escape.<sup>92</sup> Only the unsuccessful attempts gained publicity. When an escape was accomplished, the Negro was out of the state and out of the South, and those who had aided him had no desire for their participation to become known.

The slave who ran away might accomplish the feat through long planning, or he might take to his heels on the spur of the moment. Frequently he who planned to escape first secured a pass. It was to make a pass less useful in getting away that the Lafayette Parish Police Jury ruled in 1846 that passes given to slave men so that they might visit their wives on other plantations were to be good for only twenty-

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<sup>88</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, January 19, 1828.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., May 30, 1840.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., May 20, 1848.

<sup>91</sup> New Orleans Courier, October 22, 1838.

<sup>92</sup> "Report of the Attorney General," Legislative Documents, 1856, 16.

four hours from the time issued.<sup>93</sup> Sometimes absconding blacks had genuine passes, sometimes they had them provided by literate slaves or white accomplices, and occasionally the better educated fugitives might write their own.<sup>94</sup> Many, of course, set out with no pass at all.

Careful preparation involved securing a supply of food and clothing. In some cases it might include learning to swim.<sup>95</sup> Since many masters kept dogs to send after runaways, it was often advisable to take steps to meet this possibility. The potential fugitive might try to make friends with the hounds. One, at least, adopted the plan of beating his master's dogs at every opportunity. Eventually he so cowed them that they slunk away when they struck his scent.<sup>96</sup> There might be dogs other than the master's to contend with, however. Some professional slave catchers kept packs of hounds trained for the pursuit of runaways. One McHenry Husband, who lived near Opelousas, kept such dogs. His charge was twenty-five dollars for catching a runaway and five dollars a day for hunting. His pack had such a reputation that if the fugitive returned to the quarter of his own accord after the dogs had been put on his track, Husband still received his twenty-five dollars.<sup>97</sup> A fleeing Negro might hope to evade such a pack as this

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<sup>93</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Lafayette Parish, I, 170.

<sup>94</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, July 24, 1830.

<sup>95</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 237.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>97</sup> Opelousas Courier, May 17, 1856.

only if the weather was unusually dry, so that his scent did not stick to the ground, or by taking to the water and leaving no trail.

The slave who fled without preparation might slip away unnoticed at night, or he might make a wild dash for his freedom during the day. Those who ran away from an armed overseer took considerable risk. William Taylor noted in his diary in 1841:

Was informed that Jack had, during my absence, run away — that the overseer ordered him to stop or that he would shoot him — that Jack only ran the faster, seeing which the overseer Mr. Price fired his shotgun loaded with small shot & wounded him in the left side — this did not stop him and it was only two nights later that he was caught. Dr. Smith was sent for who, on examination, pronounced the wound slight. The overseer was right. I sincerely hope it will stop the man from running away again.<sup>98</sup>

The man or woman who hoped to escape from slavery had little hope of making his or her way overland. The roads were patrolled, and the reward for capturing a runaway was enough to make any lone Negro an object of suspicion. The swamps were satisfactory for hiding, but to get out of the state through them was a different matter. Only woodsmen of great ability could hope to obtain food on the run, and the mud and undergrowth both offered serious obstacles to travel, even on foot. The bayous were highways in nineteenth century Louisiana, but for that very reason the fugitive slave did not dare to use them. Yet they were a serious barrier to a man on foot. Even if the pedestrian runaway did manage to get out of Louisiana, he had to cross other slave states before he could reach free territory. If he went

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<sup>98</sup> William Taylor Diary, December 19, 1841.

up the west side of the Mississippi, he must cross the Red, Arkansas and Missouri Rivers, and cross slaveholding Arkansas and Missouri. Should he bear too far to the west, he might fall in with the slaveholding tribes of Indian Territory. If he went to the east of the Mississippi, he had to cross Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky, and even after the Ohio River was crossed he might still be sent back. Because of these obstacles, most runaways who hoped to reach the North tried to do so by water.

Because water offered the most feasible escape route, freedom-seeking fugitives sought to reach New Orleans or some other river port. New Orleans offered several advantages. It had a large free Negro population, so an unaccompanied black might not be noticed on the streets. Ships were constantly leaving the harbor, bound for the free states of the North or the free countries of Europe. Also, New Orleans offered to the knowing a place to dispose of goods that might have been stolen before flight or while at large.<sup>99</sup> It was with reason that many masters suspected their runaways of making for New Orleans. So many fugitives passed through Jefferson Parish on their way to the Crescent City that the adjoining district asked for extra police allowances.<sup>100</sup>

Once in the city, the fugitive might hope to avoid detection until he could conceal himself aboard a steamboat bound to Cincinnati or Cairo, or aboard an ocean-going ship sailing for New York or Europe.

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<sup>99</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Jefferson Parish, I, 262.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Sometimes a sympathetic crew member might offer aid, though this must have been uncommon. The penalties for aiding a slave to escape were too severe to encourage the practice. Apparently most stowaways were caught before the craft left the harbor, and many others were discovered and put ashore before reaching free territory.

The runaway who reached the Mississippi farther to the north found fewer opportunities to get aboard ship, but to some extent this may have been compensated for by a relaxation of vigilance. Sometimes, in return for work, a fugitive could find temporary refuge with woodcutters. These forest dwellers, who provided steamboats with fuel, were not overly concerned with fine points of law.<sup>101</sup> From a woodyard the fugitive might hope to get aboard a northern bound boat.

As previously noted, most runaways remained in the swamps of Louisiana, whether through choice or necessity. Many of them did not stray far from their masters' plantations. When E.E. McCollam's Kit ran away in 1847, he evaded a pack of hounds sent after him, but still did not leave the vicinity. On the contrary, he came back to the quarter at night, presumably for food, and McCollam whipped one woman for not reporting his presence. Kit was at large for seventeen days, and was finally captured in the plantation sugar house.<sup>102</sup>

There was a definite tendency on the part of slaves on a plantation to protect their fellows who had taken to the woods. On

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<sup>101</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 11, 1861.

<sup>102</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, April, 1847.

August 2, 1840, William Taylor of Pointe Coupee Parish "announced to my people that I would not give out their allowance of meat today, because the 2 runaways Levy and Regis were every night within quarters and consequently protected by some of them."<sup>103</sup> Negroes were not so prone to render aid to a slave who was not felt to be a part of the plantation group. If the runaway had been newly purchased, the old hands might help capture him.<sup>104</sup>

Some of the Negroes who went into the swamps became outlaws, and these were a real danger to those who encountered them. In 1856 several travellers were held up and robbed by such a band near Plaquemine.<sup>105</sup> When they had the advantage of numbers, such groups of outlaws had little to fear from lone white men who discovered them. An Opelousas newspaper reported in 1845:

On Tuesday last, one of our friends was out hunting, and observing some negroes, called on them to stop. The negroes retreated for a while, but finding him pursuing, and having increased their numbers to some eight men, they turned on him with clubs &c and he only saved his life by flight.<sup>106</sup>

Even a lone and unarmed fugitive might offer effective resistance to capture. In 1854 one Theodule Mire, while hunting near Bringier, came upon a runaway Negro fishing for crawfish. Mire levelled his gun at the slave, and walked him out of the woods at gun point. But he pressed too close behind his prisoner. The black turned quickly,

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<sup>103</sup> William Taylor Diary, August 2, 1840.

<sup>104</sup> Palfrey Plantation Diary, April 14, 1859. Palfrey Papers.

<sup>105</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, April 19, 1856.

<sup>106</sup> Opelousas St. Landry Whig, January 16, 1845.

seized the white man's gun and ammunition, and returned to the forest.<sup>107</sup>

When they were caught, the fate of such outlaws was swift and sure. In Iberville Parish, Primus, the leader of a group of runaways, was convicted of firing on two white men and threatening two others. "He was sentenced to be hanged and afterward beheaded . . . The sentence was carried into execution."<sup>108</sup>

\* The ingenuity of some absconding blacks was worthy of note. In 1850 the good Methodists of Baton Rouge must have been surprised. A runaway Negro was discovered to have set up housekeeping in the loft of their church. From this unsuspected haven he had ventured forth and fed himself by pilfering from nearby kitchens.<sup>109</sup> A fugitive whose hiding place was discovered by hunters in 1857 had not allowed his status to interfere with his comfort. In the depths of the forest, so concealed that it was found only by accident, he had erected a shelter which "contained, besides sundry articles of kitchen and household furniture, including a bedstead, two middlings of pork, a demijohn of whiskey, quantities of flour, corn meal, sugar, coffee, salt, powder and shot, &c. and also a deck of cards."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Bringier Messenger, April 28, 1854.

<sup>108</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, August 8, 1840.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., May 4, 1850.

<sup>110</sup> Opelousas Courier, February 7, 1857.



## CONTROL OF SLAVES IN LOUISIANA

In Louisiana the existence of a large slave population composed of an alien race made strong controls an absolute necessity. On the plantation and on the farm good order was required if work was to be accomplished. The people who lived in towns were faced with the problems posed by an urban slave population and had to give serious thought to the control of rural blacks who flocked into the villages and hamlets on Sundays and holidays. Among the slaves, as among the whites, there was a criminal element against whose depredations society had to be defended. The haunting fear of insurrection never faded, and on several occasions it proved well founded.

Blended with all these aspects of slave discipline was the question of relations between the two races. The gap between black and white, in the Southern mind, was infinitely greater than the gap between master and slave. The white Louisianian made no attempt to bridge a chasm which he regarded as impassable. Since he believed that the Negro's status could not be improved, the white man devoted himself to preserving his own status. Whether through rationalization or true conviction, he had no fear of the Negro's rising in the social scale; his concern was lest his own race descend toward the level of the blacks.

The status of slave was a peculiar one, strange to the twentieth century's conceptions, though perhaps less foreign to its realities.

The essential fact of the slave's condition was that he was property, belonging to his master as much as a horse, a cow or any other animal. He could be bought, sold or rented, and his personal wishes counted only insofar as his master chose to regard them. His servitude was not for a term of years, but for life, and if he had little hope of freedom for himself, he had little more for his progeny. His labor was for his master's benefit; he could not accumulate property of his own. Whatever his abilities might be, even should he be emancipated, the color of his skin made forever hopeless any ambition to attain the heights occupied by the dominant whites. As a matter of fact, some slaves were emancipated, and some of this favored few attained wealth. But even the wealthy free Negro, though he might cast a ballot, was forbidden to cross the line bounding those who had the slightest taint of African blood. Even such attainments as these were far beyond the realm of hope for the great majority of Louisiana Negroes.

✓ Judgement based upon the letter of the law indicates that the position of the bondsman in Louisiana became more hopeless with the passing of time. Under the code noir of colonial Louisiana, slaves enjoyed several privileges which they were later to lose. Religious instruction was guaranteed to them, and all the rules of marriage, except the consent of parents, applied to them. While the code stated that everything possessed by the slave belonged to his master, it was nonetheless assumed that the master would allow his slaves some possessions of their own, and this type of "property" was even made subject to judgement under certain conditions. Negroes were permitted

to testify as witnesses when white witnesses were not available, except that they could not testify against their masters. Husbands and wives could not be sold separately, nor could children under fourteen be sold away from their mothers. Slave women were protected from the lust of their owners by a provision which made them the property of the colonial hospital if they bore a child by their owner.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that certain rights were guaranteed to slaves under the law did not necessarily mean that these rights were respected. It is quite possible that the contrary may have been the case. One observer reported, at the time of the transfer of Louisiana to the United States, that disregard of the laws protecting slaves was the rule rather than the exception.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever may have been the attitude of colonial masters toward those sections of the code noir reviewed above, the privileges thus granted to the slaves disappeared soon after the beginning of American administration. In the black code adopted for the Territory of Orleans in 1806, the only reference to the slave's religion was a provision which said that sick Negroes should be allowed the "temporal or spiritual assistance which their situation may require." No legal status whatsoever was given to slave marriages. Rather than permitting the bondsmen to hold property as a quasi-right, the new dispensation provided that "no slave shall be permitted to buy, sell, negotiate, trade or exchange any kind of goods or effects," and specifically

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<sup>1</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 2, 6-7, 22-24, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, III, 178-79.

forbade slaves to possess boats "or manage or bring up for [their] . . . own use, any horses, mares, or horned cattle . . ." No longer could a slave testify against a white under any circumstances. Nothing except the conscience of the master forbade husbands' and wives' being sold separately, and after 1806 any child more than ten years of age could be sold away from its mother. Negro women had no legal protection against Caucasian lust; the new law specifically stated that the slave's "subordination to his master and to all who represent him is not susceptible to any modification or restriction . . ."<sup>3</sup>

✓ So far as the law could assure them, the Negro had some guarantees under both colonial and American codes. He was entitled to elementary security. Each month he was to receive a minimum ration of one barrel of corn or its equivalent in rice, beans "or other grain," and one pint of salt. Also he was entitled to a plot of ground to cultivate which should be productive enough to enable him to buy his own clothing, or to be provided with one linen shirt and one pair of trousers for summer wear, and a shirt plus a woolen coat and a woolen pair of trousers in the winter.<sup>4</sup> In practice, the slave usually received more than the legal minimum in both food and clothing.

The problem of discipline was first encountered on the plantation and, to a lesser extent, on the small farm and in the home. The slave owner, even if he disregarded all public responsibilities and

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<sup>3</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Le Code Noir, Article 18.

all questions of race relations, had a direct economic stake in keeping order among his chattels. An unruly labor force, like an unruly beast of burden, would not do the work of a well trained force kept in good order. The analogy to draft animals is not far-fetched. Until the importation of Africans ceased, "brute" Negroes were worked with the regular hands for short periods at a time until they became accustomed to their surroundings and learned to do the work they were expected to do. If this gradual procedure was not followed, newly imported slaves might commit suicide or die of chagrin.<sup>5</sup> The training of young Negroes born in Louisiana differed only in the fact that a great part of the necessary conditioning had taken place as a matter of course before they were old enough to work. All sustained labor requires compulsion, and if no incentive is present to encourage self-discipline, the necessary compulsion must be applied from above.

One of the best disciplinary measures was a set routine. The more habitual a round of activity became, the less supervision was necessary. This military truism was accepted by slaveholders. The work to be done might depend upon the season, but the hours of rising, eating and the cessation of labor could be kept nearly the same throughout the year. This routine had become so well established before the beginning of the American occupation that the territorial legislature made it statute law. Masters were ordered to give their black workers an hour for breakfast and two hours rest at noon from May through November. The noon recess was to be one and one half

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<sup>5</sup> Robin, Voyages dans Louisiane, III, 170.

hours from November through April. If the master provided the slaves' food already prepared, the hours of work could be increased thirty minutes per day.<sup>6</sup> In practice this was not an unvarying formula of universal application. The routine might differ on adjoining plantations, but when large numbers of slaves were employed, some routine was necessary. A planter who employed no overseer reported to De Bow's Review in 1851:

My hours of labor . . . is from daylight until 12M; all hands then come in and remain until 2 o'clock P.M., then back to the field until dark. Some time in May we prolong the rest three hours; and if a very hot day even four hours. Breakfast is eaten in the field, half an hour to an hour being given; or they eat and go to work without being driven in and out --- all stopping when my driver is ready.<sup>7</sup>

Routine, while an almost indispensable ingredient of good discipline, was not in itself sufficient to insure an obedient and reasonably industrious work force. Punishment for unruly behavior or slackness in work was a matter of course. A master or overseer familiar with his charges knew what could be expected from each of them. When that expectation was not realized, many forms of punishment were available.

Of all means of correction, the lash was the most commonly used. The law provided that "flogging, or striking with a whip, leather thong, switch, or light stick" should not be considered cruelty.<sup>8</sup> Resort to whipping was commonplace, and the blows were oftentimes deliv-

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<sup>6</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

<sup>7</sup> "Management of Negroes," De Bow's Review, XI (1851), 370-71.

<sup>8</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

ered with such force as to leave scars, as was quite evident from the descriptions of runaways published in the newspapers of the day. Though whipping was usually the province of the master, overseer or Negro driver, the weaker sex sometimes resorted to blows. One lady noted in her diary: "I feel badly got very angry and whipped Lavinia. O! for government over my temper."<sup>9</sup> Upon entering a boarding house in New Orleans a traveller found "The mistress, a lady weighing a little less than two hundred . . ." soundly chastising one of her female slaves.<sup>10</sup> Slaveholders of New Orleans who lacked the weight or inclination to administer corporal punishment with their own hands could write a note setting forth the number of lashes to be administered and make the culprit carry the note to the municipal jail. There the jailor meted out the blows and sent back a note attesting the fact. Presumably this was a convenience offered to the citizens of the city rather than a public function.<sup>11</sup>

Occasionally a slave turned on the person administering the punishment:

On Sunday night last after supper Mrs. Bowman found fault with one of her female servants and undertook to chastise her herself. but the girl returned the blow and proved too strong for her mistress — threw her down and beat her unmercifully on the head and face, which swelled greatly and turned . . . black . . . the girl is confined

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<sup>9</sup> Magruder (Eliza L.) Diary (Typescript), July 5, 1852. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>10</sup> Atwater H. Cowles, Incidents of a Southern Tour: or the South as Seen with Northern Eyes (Boston, 1857), 30.

<sup>11</sup> James Stuart, Three Years in North America, I (Edinburgh, 1833), 240.

and I expect will be hung. she is an uncommonly smart yellow woman & a first rate house servant . . . bought in N. Orleans six or seven years ago . . . I have no doubt of some mean white man being the cause of the trouble. What a pity he had not been born black.<sup>12</sup>

Whipping, while the most common form of punishment, was not the only kind. In the case of some servants, demotion to field hand was more effective than blows.<sup>13</sup> "The driver, the carpenter, the carriage driver and the house servant constituted the Negro aristocracy. To be cast out of that favored circle . . . was a disgrace almost more to be feared than death."<sup>14</sup>

A popular plantation account book contained the following recommendation:

When it can be done without too great loss of time, the stocks offer a means of punishment greatly to be preferred. So secured . . . where no communication can be had with anyone, nothing but bread and water allowed, and the confinement extending from Saturday, when they drop work, until Sabbath evening, will prove much more effective in preventing a repetition of the offence, than any amount of whipping.<sup>15</sup>

Just as incentives encouraged good work, they encouraged good discipline. Occasional holidays, passes and gifts of money were the usual incentives. As one absentee planter wrote: "Now — how much silver will you require — Let me know! The crop has been a large one — the boys have no doubt worked well — and a little money

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<sup>12</sup> Rachael O'Connor to A.T. Conrad, May 26, 1836. Weeks Collection.

<sup>13</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, April 8, 1845.

<sup>14</sup> Mallard, Plantation Life before Emancipation, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Afleck, Sugar Plantation Record and Account Book, No. 2, no pp.



given to them would do good."<sup>16</sup>

If the granting of privileges aided in developing good discipline, the threat of withdrawing them was effective in maintaining it. The black who depended upon his master or overseer for permission to visit his wife on another plantation thought twice before committing an offence which might cost him his precious pass. When her own chickens began to disappear, Mrs. E.E. McCollam took away the poultry that the plantation slaves had previously been allowed to keep as their own.<sup>17</sup> General unruliness or slackness in work might lead to group punishment when individual responsibility could not be fixed. In 1840 a master cut out his hands' allowance of meat for one day because some among them had been giving food to runaways.<sup>18</sup> In 1855 Joseph Mather made all his hands work one Sunday as punishment, though he did not name in his diary the offence that brought this about.<sup>19</sup>

On large plantations the overseer was usually responsible for discipline. He was recognized legally as the master's representative in dealing with slaves. His knowledge of the work to be done, either in sugar or cotton culture, had much to do with the success of his operations, but the most essential quality of a good overseer was the ability to handle Negroes.<sup>20</sup> His other knowledge availed him little

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<sup>16</sup> Unsigned letter to Benjamin Tureaud, December 30, 1852. Tureaud Papers.

<sup>17</sup> E.E. McCollam Plantation Diary, August 2, 1840.

<sup>18</sup> William Taylor Diary, August 2, 1840.

<sup>19</sup> Mather Diary, August 17, 1855.

<sup>20</sup> Phillips, Life and Labor, 327.

if he was unable to get work out of the slaves under his supervision. If his control was too harsh, the force under his command was apt to be disaffected. The passive resistance of Negroes was often enough to checkmate the overseer who had won their ill will. On the other hand, if he was too lax in his discipline, the results were just as bad. An account book much used on Louisiana plantations carried the following advice to overseers:

It is indispensable that you exercise judgement and consideration in the management of the negroes under your charge. Be firm and at the same time gentle in your control. Never display yourself before them in a passion; and even in inflicting the severest punishment, do so in a mild, cool manner, and it will produce a two fold effect. When you find it necessary to use the whip — and desirable as it would be to dispose of it entirely, it is necessary at times — apply it slowly and deliberately, and to the extent you are determined, in your own mind, to be needful before you began. The indiscriminate, constant and incessant use of the whip, is altogether unnecessary and inexcusable. . . . Never threaten a negro, but if you have occasion to punish, do it at once, or say nothing until ready to do so. A violent and passionate threat will often scare the best disposed negro to the woods. Always keep your word with them, in punishment as well as rewards. If you have named the penalty for any certain offence, inflict it without listening to a word of excuse. Never forgive that in one which you would punish in another, but treat all alike, showing no favoritism. . . . Whenever an opportunity is offered you for rewarding continued good behavior, do not let it pass — Occasional rewards have a much better effect than frequent punishments.

Never be influenced by a course of good behavior on the part of the negroes to relax the strictness of your discipline; but, when you have by judicious management brought them to that state, keep them so by the same means. . . . The only way to keep a negro honest is not to trust him.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Afleck, Sugar Plantation Record and Account Book, No. 2, no pp.

However able an overseer might be, the occasion might arise when he was forced to resort to the ultimate in the use of force in order to preserve discipline. Outright defiance could not go an instant unanswered. The overseer on Forest Home Plantation in Concordia Parish gave the following testimony to a coroner's court holding an inquest over the dead body of a Negro:

On Tuesday morning the driver Bill came to me and stated that Samuel had become unmanageable, was destroying cotton, that he had ordered Samuel down to be whipped, that Samuel then swore he would not be whipped. Bill then told him he would get the overseer. Samuel swore he might get who he choose, and followed the driver, threatening to cut him to pieces with his hoe.

I went to the field along with the driver, and found Samuel working, probably one hundred yards from the rest of the hands, he came to the end of the row as soon as I rode up. I asked him what was the matter, he said there was nothing only the driver had an ill will at him. I told him to wait till the driver got up as I always wished to hear both parties, as soon as Bill got up I asked him what was the matter, he bill immediately told me the same as he had done at the house. I then asked Samuel if he had refused to get down for punishment when the driver ordered him, he answered at once, Yes by God, I did and I am not going to be whipped by anybody, either black or white. I told him to stop, as I allowed no negro to talk in that way and that he knew that. I then ordered him to throw down his hoe and get down, he swore God damn him if he would I repeated the order, and he again swore he would not. I moved my horse nearer to him when he turned and ran off. I kept my horse standing and called to the rest of the hands to catch that boy, not one of them paid the least attention to me but kept on at their work. I then started after Samuel myself, and overtook him and turned him. I ordered him to throw down his hoe and stand he swore God damn him if he would, and again ran off. I ran at him again and again turned him and repeated my order got the same answer he started again and I after him got within four or five yards when he wheeled around, with his hoe raised in both hands and struck at me with his full force my horse swerved aside and passed him his hoe descending I think within one or two feet of my head, pulled my horse up, and drew my pistol. Samuel was then standing with his

hoe raised. I fired across my bridle arm when he fell.<sup>22</sup>

Common as a disciplinary measure over the whole South was the patrol, a group of white freeholders who rode the roads at night. In Louisiana the patrol was originally appointed under the militia law, but its administration was eventually left in the hands of the individual parishes.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the method of selection, the patrol seems to have been intended primarily as a safeguard against insurrection, serving largely to prevent nocturnal gatherings of slaves. Secondly it was a deterrent to runaways. Slaves found abroad at night without a pass were arrested and either sent back to their masters' plantations or confined in the parish jail. Though patrolling was considered a civic duty, in some areas those who composed the patrol were compensated directly by the slaveholders, each paying a share proportionate to the number of slaves he owned.<sup>24</sup> Patrols were frequently lax in carrying out their duties, but throughout the ante-bellum period they were effective enough to make the "paterollers" a group of bogey men in Negro folk tales.

Negro slaves were perhaps more prone than freemen to commit crimes. Certainly this assertion can be made in regard to crimes against property, because nothing in the slave's past, present or future, save the fear of punishment, was likely to give him respect for

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<sup>22</sup> Inquest Record, Concordia Parish, undated. Copy by Doris V. Casper. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>23</sup> Acts of the First Session of the Fifth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1821 (New Orleans, 1821), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 237-38.

property rights. Without property of his own or the hope of acquiring it, he had no reverence for the property of others.

The criminal code applying to slaves was savage. Eleven offences were punishable with death. As could be expected, murder, attempted murder, rape or attempted rape of a white woman and insurrection were among the capital crimes. Leading likewise to the scaffold, however, were such crimes as striking master, mistress, their child or their overseer so as to draw blood, arson or attempted arson, the third offence in striking any white person, or even the first offence if the victim was grievously wounded, robbery by violence or threat of violence, and breaking and entering.<sup>25</sup> During the territorial period death was the penalty for burning produce, but punishment for this offence was left at the discretion of the court in later legislation.<sup>26</sup>

Other crimes punished at the discretion of the court were threatening an overseer, revolting against an overseer while being punished by him, insulting a white person and larceny. Punishment at the discretion of the court might include imprisonment, but it usually amounted to a severe lashing. The law specifically provided that a slave who took wood from the land of<sup>27</sup> person other than his master was to receive thirty-nine lashes.<sup>27</sup>

State laws in regard to minor slave crimes might be supplemented by parish or municipal ordinance. The City of Shreveport ruled that

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<sup>25</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

<sup>26</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 190-95.

<sup>27</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

a slave found out of his or her proper domicile without a pass after nine o'clock at night was to receive thirty-nine lashes, and the same penalty was provided for any Negro found "drinking or gaming or in the commission of any disturbance or disorderly conduct within the limits of the town." The owner of the slave was required to pay the costs of this action, and if he did not do so the costs and a fine not exceeding twenty dollars were to be worked out by the unhappy Negro at the rate of thirty cents a day.<sup>28</sup> With their masters' permission, bondsmen could come into Clinton on Sunday morning, but had to behave themselves civilly and were forbidden to remain later than eleven o'clock in the morning. No assemblage of Negroes was to be permitted after that hour.<sup>29</sup> In Jefferson Parish the City of Jefferson provided that any slave found "on the levee, or in the streets and highways, within the limits of the city, after nine o'clock P.M., without a pass or permit" should receive a lashing.<sup>30</sup> The supplementary ordinances of East Feliciana Parish specified the laying on of thirty lashes if a bondsmen insulted a white person in any manner not covered by a state statute. It was also ordered that no slave should hunt with a gun, except on his master's plantation with written permission. Lastly, all blacks in East Feliciana Parish were forbidden to keep dogs, or to assemble in groups of more than six except at

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<sup>28</sup> Wood, The Charter of Shreveport, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Samford, Police Jury Code of the Parish of East Feliciana, 101-02.

<sup>30</sup> The Ordinances and Resolutions of the City of Jefferson, together with the Acts of the Legislature Relating to the City Government (New Orleans, 1859), 66.

work and at church.<sup>31</sup>

A slave was subject to accusation by any free person under oath. The justice of the peace before whom the accusation was made then ordered the Negro to be arrested and confined in jail. If the crime was capital, the trial was held before two justices of the peace and ten slaveholders who lived in the parish. Non-capital cases were tried before one justice of the peace and four resident slaveholders. The justice before whom the accusation was made called upon another magistrate to aid him in selecting a jury, and regular summons were issued to those who were selected. Failure to obey such summons was punishable in the same manner as failure to appear when called for regular jury duty. For a capital case, one justice and nine slaveholders constituted a quorum, and if fewer than nine jurors appeared, the magistrate might fill out the court with slaveowners from the vicinity of the trial.

Prosecution of capital cases was the duty of the district attorney, but if he failed to appear the court might appoint any licensed attorney to act as prosecutor. The accused slave was entitled to six peremptory challenges and might challenge any number of times for cause. If two or more slaves were tried at the same time for the same offence, no more than six peremptory challenges in all could be used. The testimony of other slaves under oath was admissible in the trial of slaves. All members of the court, including the presiding justices, had a voice in determining guilt or innocence, and a unanimous vote

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<sup>31</sup> Samford, Police Jury Code of the Parish of East Feliciana, 98-101.

was required to either acquit or convict. If the court was unable to agree on a verdict, it had "the power to decree the infliction of such corporeal punishment as it may consider deserved . . ."

If the defendant was convicted of any crime punishable with death, the justices or the justice who presided were required to sign a sentence to that effect, but the jury had discretionary power to assess a lesser punishment than death. In the case of lesser crimes, where punishment was left at the discretion of the court, it could in no instance extend to deprivation of life and limb. When a slave was sentenced to death, except for rebellion, his value was assessed by the court which had condemned him. This assessment was limited to \$300 during most of the ante-bellum period, but it was eventually allowed to be as high as \$750. The latter figure was a generous one for a Negro inclined to crime. The value of the slave, as assessed by the court, was to be paid to the master from state funds appropriated for the purpose, but the master was required to convey title for the Negro to the state. The same procedure was followed in the case of life imprisonment. If a slave imprisoned for life was pardoned, the master could regain title by restoring to the state the amount of compensation he had received.<sup>32</sup>

Justice could be swift under this system. The files of one newspaper provide several pertinent examples. In 1829 a slave girl who "murdered her mistress a day or so ago, was tried yesterday,

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<sup>32</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.



found guilty, and condemned to be hung on Friday next."<sup>33</sup> In 1831 a news item noted, in reference to a reward notice, that "the Negro who is today advertised . . . has been hung — he assaulted, beat and wounded two other white men. Justice sometimes follows very closely the heels of crime."<sup>34</sup> Twelve years later a girl who had attacked her mistress with a butcher knife was jailed on Sunday, "tried on Wednesday, and condemned to be hung on Friday," all within the same week.<sup>35</sup>

✓ Executions of slaves, always by hanging, sometimes took place within the prison walls and sometimes were staged in public. The choice was left at the discretion of the court that tried the case.<sup>36</sup> Public executions were expected to serve as a warning to other Negroes. It was reported in 1851 that large numbers of blacks from town and country had "watched the execution of Mily Fox, convicted of poisoning her master's family."<sup>37</sup>

✓ Available records indicate that slaves were seldom brought to court for minor crimes. Such offences were corrected on the plantation or in the home. When William Taylor "Discovered early that 2 of my hogs were killed and stolen . . ." he "traced the thief by the blood of the hog" through the woods and across the fields to his

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<sup>33</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, July 4, 1829.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., July 2, 1831.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., July 1, 1843.

<sup>36</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 233.

<sup>37</sup> Carrolton Star, July 19, 1851.

neighbor's slave quarter.<sup>38</sup> Thieving habits on the part of a slave were not unforgivable. In 1828 Sophie, only fifteen years old, brought \$500 even though the bill of sale specifically stated that Sophie was not "guaranteed against the vice of theft."<sup>39</sup> A citizen of St. Landry Parish was so beset by his neighbors' Negroes that in 1853 he advertised in despair: "From this date I inform the public in general that I positively forbid anyone to milk my cows."<sup>40</sup> Some planters expressed strong objections to their slaves' being taken to court for minor offences. When Henry Marston's Tom was convicted of stealing meat from a neighbor and flogged in punishment, Marston noted that he believed "Tom as innocent of the crime as possible, and his punishment unjust." Marston also objected to the fact that he himself was "brought in . . . for costs."<sup>41</sup>

The slaveholder might look with relatively tolerant eye on thefts from the smokehouse or his larder so long as the black thief consumed his loot, but he was less tolerant when goods were purloined for trading purposes. Trading boats on the rivers and bayous were undoubtedly guilty of encouraging such filching, but little seems to have been done to correct this evil. The situation was brought to Governor Claiborne's attention in 1804,<sup>42</sup> but the planters were

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<sup>38</sup> William Taylor Diary, December 5, 1840.

<sup>39</sup> Bill of Sale, July 11, 1828. Weeks Collection.

<sup>40</sup> Opelousas Courier, August 6, 1853.

<sup>41</sup> Marston Plantation Diary, July 20, 1827. Marston Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Watkins Report, February 2, 1804. Rowland, Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, II, 5-10.

still subject to great annoyance on the traders' account when Olmsted visited Louisiana.<sup>43</sup> In the middle 1850's, William Kingsford noted small boats passing "from plantation to plantation, trading with the negroes . . . dispensing . . . luxuries, in the shape of ribbons, tobacco, gaudy calicoes, and questionable whiskey."<sup>44</sup> In 1855 two planters of Concordia Parish missed corn and pork from their stores and found the stolen articles aboard a trading boat which had received them from slaves. The owners of the craft were lodged in jail in default of bail, but two women whom they had aboard "had their tears dried by warm sympathizers on shore."<sup>45</sup>

It is evident that juries frequently exercised their discretionary powers in the trial of slaves and meted out sentences lighter than death for capital crimes. As a result, penitentiary records reveal some of the crimes committed by blacks. Of ninety-four slaves confined in 1856, thirty had been guilty of murder. Arson was not an uncommon crime, eleven Negroes being imprisoned for that offence. Poisoning was a favorite method of murder by female slaves. It cannot be determined how many of the murderers were poisoners, but five of the prisoners had been convicted of attempted poisoning. Other attempts to kill and assaults of various kinds accounted for the confinement of seventeen Negroes. Among the remainder two were accused of attempted

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<sup>43</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 674-75.

<sup>44</sup> William Kingsford, Impressions of the West and South during a Six Weeks Holiday (Toronto, 1858), 47-48.

<sup>45</sup> Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, April 13, 1855, April 20, 1855.

rape and one of assisting to rape. In accordance with Southern traditions, no convicted rapist was imprisoned. The attitude of the slaveowning class toward theft by their chattels is evident from the fact that only three of the penitentiary's black inmates had been sentenced for stealing. One of these had been convicted of simple larceny, one of robbery and a third of housebreaking. One slave was held for an unknown crime.<sup>46</sup> In 1858 the state's attorney general reported that ten slave trials had been held outside of New Orleans. These included four trials for murder and three for attempted rape. The three other offences were arson, manslaughter and striking an overseer so as to draw blood.<sup>47</sup>

Some sentiment in the state was opposed to imprisoning slaves at all. In 1853 this point of view was reflected in the report of a legislative committee:

. . . your committee is satisfied that slaves convicted of crimes ought not to be sent to the penitentiary, and that those who are now there, for crimes committed by them, ought to be removed from it, because confinement is to them no adequate punishment, but in many cases is actually preferred to their former condition.<sup>48</sup>

The slave who escaped conviction when accused of crime was sometimes p[er]mitted to remain at large and nonetheless. When the evidence against a woman who was charged with causing the death of her master's child was insuf-

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<sup>46</sup> "Penitentiary Report," Legislative Documents, 1856, 55-62.

<sup>47</sup> "Annual Report of the Attorney General, 1858," Documents of the First Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1858 (Baton Rouge, 1859), no pp.

<sup>48</sup> "Report of the Committee for the State of Prisons," Legislative Documents, 1853, no pp.

ficient to convict, though "circumstances" went "far to fasten guilt upon her," the court decided that she should receive 150 lashes.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, when a slave at Winnsboro was tried for striking his overseer, the court frankly reported: "We the court and jury empaneled for the trial of Charles, a slave, acquit him of any capital offence, and from motives of policy and not from the justice of the case, sentence him to receive one hundred and fifty four lashes."<sup>50</sup>

Ever present in the mind of the slaveholder and his non-slaveowning neighbors was the fear of servile insurrection. This fear was well founded. Insurrections were not common, but they did occur, and alarms were much more frequent than actual uprisings. Probably there was little fear that a rebellion could be successful, but there was real dread that the blacks, throwing off their bonds, might slaughter isolated families. In 1795 a revolt had taken place on one of the Poydras plantations in Pointe Coupee Parish and had resulted in a number of deaths.<sup>51</sup> The memory of this event and the horrors of Haiti were fresh in the minds of the people of Louisiana when the American flag came to the Cabildo. Fear lest the Negroes rebel never died away thereafter.

The dangers of rebellion were recognized in the code noir of 1724, wherein slaves were forbidden to carry arms, or even "big sticks," except when sent hunting by their masters. Negroes belonging

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<sup>49</sup> Harrisonburg Independent, July 25, 1860.

<sup>50</sup> Greensburg Imperial, July 23, 1859.

<sup>51</sup> Gayarre, History of Louisiana, III, 272.

to different masters were forbidden to gather together under any pretext, and aggravated disregard of this ban was to be punished with branding or death. Masters who permitted such gatherings were to be fined.<sup>52</sup> The territorial code continued the prohibition of arms carrying; slaves sent hunting had to carry a written permit and could not leave the plantations of their owners.<sup>53</sup> An act of the same period, relative to slave crimes, made rebellion punishable by death and provided that any bondsman who revealed "any plot, rebellion, raising in arms, or mutinous assemblies" should be set free and should receive any further reward which the legislature might see fit to grant.<sup>54</sup> These laws, accompanied by the rule that a white person should always be resident on a plantation where slaves were held, and reinforced by patrols, set up the basic machinery for defence against insurrection.

Events in Haiti had impressed the dangers of rebellion upon the territorial legislature. In 1804, Governor Claiborne expressed his uneasiness at the entry into Louisiana of Negroes from the Carribean.<sup>55</sup> In May of that year he informed James Madison that "The Emigration from the West Indies continues great; few vessels arrive from that quarter but are crowded with passengers, and among them many slaves."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 12-14.

<sup>53</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 126-28.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 190-212.

<sup>55</sup> W.C.C. Claiborne to Mayor Bore, April 23, 1804. Rowland, Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, II, 113-14.

<sup>56</sup> W.C.C. Claiborne to James Madison, May 8, 1804. Ibid., 134.

In 1805 a Frenchman named Le Grand was arrested for inciting free Negroes and slaves to revolt. The official who reported this incident begged for troops, saying that the demand for slaves was so great in Louisiana that Negroes from San Domingo could not be excluded successfully.<sup>57</sup> The legislature prohibited the entry of free Negroes from Haiti in 1806,<sup>58</sup> and also ordered planters to permit no slaves other than their own to frequent their slave quarters.<sup>59</sup>

These precautions were not unnecessary, because in 1811 the long dreaded insurrection came. Whether it was incited by events in Haiti cannot be told. None of the Negroes who participated in it left any record of their thoughts. Nor is it clear what the unhappy blacks sought to accomplish. However, since the revolt in French Santo Domingo had been so recent, and since a number of Negroes from that island had undoubtedly been introduced into Louisiana, it seems quite probable that the success of the West Indian revolt was the inspiration for the abortive Louisiana uprising of 1811.

The conspiracy originated in St. John the Baptist Parish, and it was widely believed that runaways were the leaders. Some five hundred blacks were involved, and their organization was advanced to the point that they were divided into companies, each under an officer. The array was armed with whatever weapons came to hand, mainly agricultural implements. The Negroes advanced down the River

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<sup>57</sup> John Watkins to Secretary John Graham, September 6, 1805. Carter, Territory of Orleans, 500-04.

<sup>58</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 126-28.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 186-90.

Road with flags flying and drums beating, and "On to Orleans!" was their cry. A number of houses and storehouses were burned, and a few whites were murdered.<sup>60</sup>

General Wade Hampton, who owned plantations in Louisiana, happened to be in New Orleans when news of the uprising arrived in the city. He accepted command of the available troops and marched up the River Road. At the same time a Major Milton led militia forces south from Baton Rouge. General Hampton's men were the first to encounter the rebels, but the blacks refused to give battle and began withdrawing to the north. At this juncture a group of planters from the west side of the Mississippi crossed over, charged the wavering Negroes and easily dispersed them. Then the slaughter began.<sup>61</sup> Sixty-six of the rebels were killed on the spot. Sixteen men accused of being leaders in the plot were taken to New Orleans "and immediately tried and condemned to death." Their heads were cut off and put on poles, and these poles with their grisly burdens "were stuck in the banks of the Mississippi River all the way up to St. John the Baptist Parish . . . as a warning to the others."<sup>62</sup> /

Although the law authorized no compensation for the masters of slaves executed for the crime of rebellion, a special act was passed

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<sup>60</sup> Lubin F. Laurent, A History of St. John the Baptist Parish (Typescript of original manuscript), Louisiana Room, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, 68-72.

<sup>61</sup> General Wade Hampton to the Secretary of War, January 16, 1811. Carter, Territory of Orleans, 915-19.

<sup>62</sup> Laurent, History of St. John the Baptist Parish, 71.



by the territorial legislature, providing payment of \$300 to the master of each slave killed or put to death as a result of the revolt of 1811. Owners of dwelling houses burned by the Negroes were to receive one third of the houses' appraised value.<sup>63</sup> The legislature also ordered, by resolution:

That the judges of the parishes of St. Charles and St. John Baptiste . . . shall, together with six inhabitants of their respective parishes, make an inquiry for the purpose of ascertaining the number and names of the slaves who have distinguished themselves during the late insurrection by saving the life of their master or of some other white person; and that they will report the same to the governor of the Territory within fifteen days from the date of this resolution, to be by him transmitted to the legislature.<sup>64</sup>

If any further action was taken on this resolution, no record of it appears.<sup>65</sup>

Apparently the legislature came to regret its generosity in recompensing the owners of slaves killed in the rebellion. During its third session the first legislature of the new state of Louisiana reiterated the principle that slaves executed for insurrection should be at the loss of the owner only. The legislature put slaves sentenced for striking master, mistress, or overseer in the same category.<sup>66</sup>

The rapid crushing of the insurrection of 1811 did not put an

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<sup>63</sup> Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, 1811 (New Orleans, 1811), 132.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>65</sup> See Rowland, Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, V, 93-101.

<sup>66</sup> Acts of the First Legislature, 1811, 18-20.

end to the fears of the people of Louisiana. The law regarding white supervision of Negroes was made more specific in 1815. Thereafter it was required that one white person should reside on a plantation for every thirty slaves, and parish officials were instructed to carry out inspections to make sure that this law was being obeyed. Offending planters were subject to a fine of from \$100 to \$500, of which one half was to go to the informer. Any planter who refused to give information concerning his establishment was to be regarded as an offender.<sup>67</sup>

There was considerable anxiety lest an insurrection occur at the time of the British invasion of Louisiana. At Opelousas a Negro accused seventeen others of being engaged in a conspiracy, and the alarm which this created was increased by the realization that most of the able bodied men were away on militia duty. The seventeen were tried, found innocent and set free. An observer on the scene reported that "Nothing to give uneasiness to the inhabitants of the country has been discovered."<sup>68</sup> Yet, in 1823, when it was proposed that the regular army troops in Baton Rouge be removed, the state legislature begged that the proposal be reconsidered, on the grounds that ". . . from the violent tendencies of a certain description of . . . [the state's] population, it is indispensably necessary that we should always have at some accessible point, an adequate organized force."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Acts of the Second Legislature, 1814-1815, 30-34.

<sup>68</sup> Gideon Firtz to Thomas Freeman, Surveyor General, February 2, 1815. United States Land Office Papers, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Acts of the Sixth Legislature, 1823, 92.

In 1829 a shipment of slaves mutinied aboard the Lafayette, bound from Norfolk to New Orleans. They were subdued, and the craft came into New Orleans Harbor with twenty-five of the mutineers "bolted down on the deck."<sup>70</sup> This incident may have contributed to the occurrence in Louisiana of an insurrection scare in 1830, before the Nat Turner uprising had taken place in Virginia. Early in 1830 the following was reported:

The negroes over Thompsons Creek had some idea of rising about Christmas [of 1829], & had the business planned, when a negro woman informed on them and had a stop put to there wickedness by hanging two negroes and a search made for one or two white men which made there escape so far. report says there were two more negroes that ought to be hung if justice had taken place, but there masters were rich, which proved excuse enough for them.<sup>71</sup>

The mention of white men as participants in an insurrection plot indicates that anti-slavery agitation had a part in fomenting fear of insurrection in 1830. In the same year the Lafayette Parish Police Jury provided a heavy fine for any free person who should be found in a slave quarter without permission of the master. The same ordinance forbade masters to allow the assembly in their quarters of any slaves other than their own. Such a law was already on the state statute books, but was probably being disregarded. The police jury went on to forbid masters' allowing their own slaves to dance at night.<sup>72</sup> This

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<sup>70</sup> Spears, The American Slave Trade, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, January 11, 1830. Weeks Collection.

<sup>72</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Lafayette Parish, I, 63.

last provision was certainly disregarded.

Again, it was in 1830 that an act was passed forbidding the instruction of slaves in reading and writing. The same law made it a capital offence to "write, print, publish or distribute" any matter which might "produce discontent among the free colored population of the state or insubordination among the slaves therein." It was likewise punishable by death to bring any such printed matter into the state, ". . . or to make use of language, in any public discourse, from the bar, the bench, the stage, the pulpit or any place whatsoever," that might encourage insubordination. The courts which were to try cases under this act were given discretionary power to mete out sentences less than death.<sup>73</sup> Thus neither the Nat Turner revolt nor the commencement of the publication of Garrison's Liberator can be held responsible for the restrictions on freedom of speech and press in Louisiana insofar as the subject of slavery was concerned. The activities of the early abolitionists, and the always-present fear of insurrection were no doubt the inspiration for these severe restrictions.

This is not to say that the news of the Nat Turner insurrection did not have an effect. When the news of this uprising arrived in New Orleans, the state legislature was called into extra session, and the governor, blaming the situation on pretended friends of the Negroes who really were "cruel enemies," recommended restrictions on the importation of slaves from other states. He also castigated

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<sup>73</sup> Acts of the Ninth Legislature, 1830, 96.

Virginia for exporting her undesirable Negroes to the Southwest.<sup>74</sup>  
 The legislature responded with vigor. An act was pushed through the extra session which not only forbade the introduction of slaves into Louisiana for sale, but also ordered those so brought in but not yet sold to be removed from the state. Citizens could import slaves for their own use, but under many restrictions. Among other things, Negroes so introduced could not be disposed of for five years under any circumstances. They were not even subject to seizure for debt.<sup>75</sup>  
 This act was, of course, too rigorous, and it was soon repealed.<sup>76</sup>

Newspapers, presumably as a matter of policy, gave little attention to the Nat Turner affair, though they stormed out at the abolitionists. The news was nonetheless carried over the state, and new urgency was added to the ever-present consciousness of danger. This heightened awareness of the possibility of slave insurrection led to false alarms such as the one described below:

. . . before I came home Mrs. Parrie had been told that all the negroes on little Robert Barrow's plantation had armed themselves and claimed their liberty. She instantly started screaming and crying as loud as she could for [my overseer] Patrick to start and see about them, which he refused to do, and said that if there was anything of that, his place was at home, and [he] must do all he could to take care of those under his charge. General Dawson raised his men and went there where he found the overseer and the negroes very busy at work gathering in the crop, as peaceable as lambs, and not one word of truth in the report. Neither do I see any reason

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<sup>74</sup> Journal de la Chambre des Representans, 1831, no pp.

<sup>75</sup> Acts of the Extra Session of the Tenth Legislature, 1831, 4-10.

<sup>76</sup> Acts of the Eleventh Legislature, 1832-1834, 6-7.

to be afraid. They the slaves all behave well, but shockingly frightened at the patrols being ordered out. Poor little Fan is afraid to go after the geese without a pass.<sup>77</sup>

Four years later the Fan is afraid to go after the geese without another wave of panic swept over parts of the state. The actual happenings of 1835, though much written about and by now a part of the folklore of river towns, are still obscure. The Murrel Clan, a loosely organized gang of outlaws which had long infested the river fronts of the towns and the canebreaks of the wilderness, definitely did have some scheme afoot which included the incitement of slaves along the Mississippi to rebellion. One student of the subject concludes that Murrel had been in contact with Northern abolitionists.<sup>78</sup> This may have been true, but although Murrel may have hoped for financial support from Yankee humanitarians, it seems much more in accordance with his record as Negro-thief, robber and murderer that plunder was the main object that he had in mind. In any case, it seems apparent that a slave uprising, led by whites, was planned for Christmas of 1835. After Murrel's arrest in Tennessee, for Negro stealing, the date for the revolt was advanced to July 4, 1835.

The plot centered about Natchez, Mississippi, and there it was discovered. Summary executions of slaves and clansmen, or alleged clansmen, followed hard and fast on one another. Ruthless use of the

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<sup>77</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, October 13, 1831. Weeks Collection.

<sup>78</sup> Robert M. Coates, The Outlaw Years, the History of the Land Pirates of the Natchez Trace (New York, 1930), 236-37.

whip brought confessions from nearly all of those who were accused.<sup>79</sup>  
 Whether the tentacles of the conspiracy actually extended into Louisiana may never be known, but the excitement it engendered ranged up and down the river, reaching a high pitch in August and September. As far south as Jefferson Parish the police jury ordered the syndics "to make at the shortest delay . . . a visit in the several quarters in their respective wards, & take into their possession the fire arms that the Negroes may have . . ." <sup>80</sup>

The popular state of mind in the Felicianas is revealed in the following series of letters:

The people has become greatly alarmed from some reports in circulation . . . I hope I have raised my slaves better than to have such wicked principles. It is the mean white men that is the sole cause of all. The country is full of Murrel's men, and I fear they may yet do harm. it is supposed they are determined on it. The gentlemen in this parish has concluded to raise money by subscription to hire a company of men to ride day and night as a guard over all the parish . . . they agree to pay twenty five cents for every slave they own. <sup>81</sup>

The people are afraid of all strangers and will not employ them particularly as overseers, fearing they might belong to the party that has caused so much trouble in so many parts. they are taken up on all occasions and whiped like dogs and confined untill they stand their trial. it is thought there is a great number of that Murrel party yet, and some are very alarmed. I expect that I should not feel so easy in mind if Mr. Germany was like the most of overseers, sneaking after the negro women (meaner than mean itself) which is the sole cause

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 276-301.

<sup>80</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Jefferson Parish, I, 91.

<sup>81</sup> Rachael O'Connor to A.T. Conrad, August 3, 1835. Weeks Collection.

of all that has happened among the negroes.<sup>82</sup>

. . . if they continue hanging as they have for some time past, we should be careful of the children, otherwise the world might be left without people. Our neighborhood continues very quiet, especially the blacks. not one has been found guilty of any bad act yet, but the white men are taken up on all occasions. they have one in jail that they expect to hang, which is more merciful than is common, for they generally whip them nearly to death. they call it Lintch's law, giving from two to three hundred lashes, and then let them go with orders to be out of the state in eight hours.<sup>83</sup>

Only two years passed before another insurrection conspiracy was discovered, this time in Rapides Parish. A Negro who had been brooding since 1829 over his demotion from house servant to field hand was said to be the leader.<sup>84</sup> When a yellow fever epidemic attacked the parish, killing many whites and prompting many others to seek the comparative safety of the piney woods, the time seemed ripe to strike, and the rising was planned for October 6, 1837.

Lewis, a slave belonging to David Cheyney, informed his master of the existence of the plot "two or three days before the massacre was to begin." Two of the conspirators were hanged on October 6, "and some 7 or 8 more were hanged on the 9th & 10th of the month, not in a legal manner but by a committee of the citizens formed for that purpose without the form and contrary to law."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., August 24, 1835.

<sup>83</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Frances S. Weeks, September 7, 1835, Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Cephas Carroll, Slave Insurrections in the United States, 1800-1865 (Boston, 1938), 179.

<sup>85</sup> McGuire Diary, October, 1837.



Solomon Northrup, a free Negro of New York who was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Louisiana, entered this area a few years after the conspiracy. He said that when he arrived the plot was still "a subject of general and unfailing interest in every slave hut on the bayou." According to Northrup, Lewis Cheyney was the organizer of the conspiracy and planned that the rebels should fight their way to Mexico. Then, becoming convinced that the plan would fail, Cheyney informed on his companions, "and, instead of stating truly the object they had in view, asserted their intention was to . . . murder every white person along the bayou." While Northrup gives no figures as to the number of Negroes hanged, he asserted that many who were innocent suffered with the guilty.<sup>86</sup>

There is nothing improbable in Northrup's account, which he had received second hand, except his implication that a great many blacks were killed. The legislature ordered compensation for only seven Negroes, at \$300 each, but this does not rule out the possibility that others were executed whose masters received no compensation. The parish police jury was authorized to levy a special tax on slaves, the funds from which were to be used to provide extra payment for those who had lost property to the scaffold. Lewis Cheyney's master was authorized to receive \$1,500 from the state upon emancipating the informer, and \$500 was appropriated for Lewis, to aid him in leaving the state.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 246-49.

<sup>87</sup> Acts of the Second Session of the Thirteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1837-1838 (New Orleans, 1838), 118.

Insurrection plots and rumors did not come to an end in the 1830's. A conspiracy in Lafayette Parish in 1840 resulted in nine executions. Again the legislature granted compensation to the owners of those executed, on the ground that "it is just that a loss incurred for the benefit of all the citizens of this State should be borne by the State." In this case the owner of the informer was to receive \$1,000 upon emancipating the Negro.<sup>88</sup> By this latter provision, the legislature may have given credit where credit was not due. In 1845, consenting to the emancipation of the slave woman Lecide, the Lafayette Parish Police Jury gave as one of its reasons "that it has been satisfactorily proven to the Jury that said . . . Lecide was the first to reveal the conspiracy of the year eighteen hundred and forty in the Parish of Lafayette."<sup>89</sup> An interesting note concerning this conspiracy appeared in the New Orleans Courier, which stated that the natural son of a planter named Clouset was the leader of the conspirators.<sup>90</sup>

A number of people felt that the gatherings of Negroes for church services encouraged the forming of insurrection plots. One editor commented in 1841:

We need not wonder if deeds of blood and murder should take place if incendiary preachers are allowed to hold forth with impunity at camp meetings and other places where our slaves congregate, and baldly make appeals to the worst passions of human nature.

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<sup>88</sup> Acts of the Fifteenth Legislature, 1841, 32-33.

<sup>89</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Lafayette Parish, I, 164.

<sup>90</sup> New Orleans Courier, September 1, 1840.

A stop must be put to the ranting and raving of these wolves in sheep's clothing.<sup>91</sup>

In 1842 the northern parishes along the west bank of the Mississippi River were aroused by a purported conspiracy. It was rumored that some 300 runaways, with arms, lurked in the swamps. Twenty Negroes were arrested, and several were hanged.<sup>92</sup>

The great insurrection panic of 1856 did not leave Louisiana unaffected. One newspaper commented: "So many rumors are in circulation respecting insurrections among slaves in many parishes of our state and adjoining states that we could fill our columns with them. . . . The whole matter appears to be much exaggerated."<sup>93</sup> The rumors of rebellion which circulated in 1856 were encouraged by the election of that year. A slave's supposed statement of approval for Fremont furnished grounds for an alarmist editorial.<sup>94</sup> It was suggested that free Negroes from the North, who were working as contract labor on the levee at New Orleans, were spreading abolitionist propaganda.<sup>95</sup> As a matter of fact, there seems to have been no plot of any kind in the state in 1856, and it is to the credit of its people that no judicial murder of slaves took place within its boundaries. In the northern parishes a committee of planters carried out an intensive

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<sup>91</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, January 9, 1841.

<sup>92</sup> Carroll, Slave Insurrections, 181.

<sup>93</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, December 27, 1856.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., December 6, 1856.

<sup>95</sup> "Annual Report of the Attorney General," Legislative Documents, 1856, 11-12.

investigation, but they found no evidence of illegal actions.<sup>96</sup>

Two incidents which might be interpreted as evidences of insur-  
 rectionary tendencies took place just before the Civil War. Late in  
 1859 a family named Peavy, residing near Winn, was accused of inciting  
 slaves to revolt and encouraging them to steal. When ordered out  
 of the country, the Peavys stood their ground. A committee of forty  
 "citizens" was organized to drive the unwelcome residents out, and the  
 Peavys, seven strong, returned their fire. The odds were too great,  
 and the defenders, after losing three killed, admitted defeat. No  
 Negroes took part in the battle.<sup>97</sup> In 1860 the slaves kept on two  
 plantations near Alexandria obtained some whiskey. They drank enough  
 to dull their discretion, and were heard shouting, according to report,  
 "Hurrah for Lincoln." Fortunately, the whites of the area kept their  
 heads, and none of the blacks was executed.<sup>98</sup>

— The discipline of slaves involved not only control of the blacks,  
 but also the regulation of relationships between blacks and whites.  
 Common decency dictated that the otherwise helpless Negroes be protected  
 from abuse. On the other hand, the accepted pattern of thought in  
 regard to race relations made it necessary that all levelling tendencies  
 be checked.

Since the Negroes were a subject race, having no right to defend

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<sup>96</sup> Harvey Wish, "The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,"  
Journal of Southern History, V (1939), 217.

<sup>97</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, January 4, 1860.

<sup>98</sup> Carroll, Slave Insurrections, 198-99.

themselves, the power of the law was invoked to protect them from cruelty. The code noir sought to guarantee adequate food and clothing to slaves, and a Negro who had been mistreated was allowed to appeal to the colonial officials. The proper officials were then to prosecute the offending master without cost to the slave. If an old, infirm or sick Negro was neglected by his master, he was to be placed under the care of the colonial hospital, and the hospital was to enjoy a lien on the master's property until the bill for this service was paid.<sup>99</sup>

Under the first slave code drawn up after the American occupation began, the obligation of adequately feeding and clothing the slave, and of caring for him in sickness and old age, continued as it was to continue so long as slavery endured. Under this code a person who willfully killed a Negro belonging to himself or to another was guilty of murder, and cruel punishment, "except flogging, or striking with a whip, leather thong, switch, or light stick," could lead to a fine of from \$200 to \$500. When a slave was abused without witnesses, the person in charge was to be held responsible, but the force of this rule was somewhat abated by a provision which allowed the accused under such circumstances to "clear himself by his own oath." The legislators may have hoped to alleviate the black's lot by an article which punished revolt against an overseer while undergoing chastisement by him with nothing more than lashes and the wearing of a chain for two years. Under other circumstances striking an overseer was a

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<sup>99</sup> Le Code Noir, Articles 20-21.

capital offence.<sup>100</sup> Any free person was entitled to bring action on behalf of a slave who was not properly cared for, and if the charges proved true, the justice who heard the case could take such action as he saw fit for the Negro's relief. Other provisions in the interest of humanity were that decrepit and disabled slaves could not be separated from their children against their will, and that children under ten years of age could not be sold separately from their mother. Neither could the mother be sold away from her children.<sup>101</sup>

With the passage of time, measures designed to prevent cruelty were more carefully drawn. Whoever inflicted or caused the infliction of cruelty upon the person of a slave, "whether by maltreating, flogging, failing to clothe and feed in a proper manner, by imprisoning, by putting in irons, or by illtreating in any other manner . . ." was subject to a fine of from fifty dollars to \$200. If it felt such action to be necessary, a court could order that the victim of maltreatment be sold at public auction, and the cruel owner was forbidden, under a \$1,000 forfeit, ever again to have the Negro under his rule. The magistrate to whom a complaint was made was specifically instructed to inform the district attorney, whose duty it was to prosecute the offender.<sup>102</sup>

Any consideration of the prevalence of cruelty to bondsmen must first face the problem of definition. If lashing constituted cruelty,

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<sup>100</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 190-212.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 150-90.

<sup>102</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

few slaveholders were innocent. For every planter who governed his Negroes "without the whip . . . by stating to them that I shall sell them if they do not conduct themselves as I wish,"<sup>103</sup> ten wielded the lash, or allowed their overseers to do so, as a matter of course. No strict definition is possible. A warm hearted mistress who could say of a sickly slave boy — " . . . the poor little fellow is laying at my feet sound asleep. I wish I did not love him as I do, but it is so, and I cannot help it"<sup>104</sup> — could also put an iron collar about a black woman's neck when the hapless creature was caught in bed with her overseer.<sup>105</sup>

✓ The most notorious case of cruelty was that of Madame Lalaurie. This sadistic woman had once been found guilty of abusing her slaves, and the court which heard the case had ordered that the Negroes be sold. Relatives bought them up, however, and put them back under Madame Lalaurie's control. Within the walls of her house on Royal Street, in New Orleans, she kept the wretched creatures in irons and amused herself by alternately starving and torturing them. The situation was revealed in 1834 when an old woman, chained in the garret, managed to set fire to the house. Madame Lalaurie, accompanied by her Negro coachman, made her escape from the city just

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<sup>103</sup> Thomas Marshall to Samuel Haisted, August 8, 1838. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>104</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, January 11, 1830. Weeks Collection.

<sup>105</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, April 2, 1834. Ibid.

ahead of an angry mob.<sup>106</sup>

There was a widespread belief that while the French planters in Louisiana did not work their slaves so hard as did the Anglo-Saxons, they did not care for them so well and were more prone to cruelty.<sup>107</sup> Whether or not there was any truth in this widely accepted proposition, it contributed to the natural antipathy between French and American elements of the population. Harriet Martineau believed that this hostility had a bearing on the case of Madame Lalaurie. The mob that attacked her house after her crime was revealed was mainly French, and it was motivated, in part, by the fact that she had discredited her French blood in the eyes of the Americans.<sup>108</sup> Miss Martineau was also told that an investigation of others suspected of cruelty to slaves had to be quashed because it might have incited rebellion among the already aroused Negroes of New Orleans.<sup>109</sup>

The Lalaurie incident was not the only publicized case of cruelty to slaves in ante-bellum Louisiana. Newspaper descriptions of runaways give many instances of whip scars, brands and manacles. In 1858 a New Orleans shoemaker named Francis Roueche was sentenced to

<sup>106</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, April 19, 1834, citing New Orleans Advertiser, April 10, 1834. An interesting and factual account of this affair is given in George W. Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana (New York, 1898), 192-232.

<sup>107</sup> Amos Stoddard, Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana (Philadelphia, 1812), 332-33. Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 650. Russell, Diary North and South, 106.

<sup>108</sup> Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, I, 265-66.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 267.



fifteen years imprisonment for beating a slave to death.<sup>110</sup> At Centerville a carpenter whipped a twelve year old boy until the child was mortally injured and then left him to die in chains. This man fled from the state when a warrant was issued for his arrest.<sup>111</sup> One Pat McGinty was fined \$200 for cruelty to one of his slaves in West Baton Rouge Parish in 1860.<sup>112</sup> Frederic Law Olmsted was told by a planter from the Red River region that another planter, presumably from the same area, had "mutilated" one of his male slaves in a fit of jealousy.<sup>113</sup> This story went through too many hands to be impressive as evidence, but if it was true, there had been a similar case three decades earlier. A runaway jailed at Baton Rouge in 1831 was still ill from having been castrated.<sup>114</sup>

The citing of individual cases of cruelty is of little significance. Crimes of like depravity were committed in the Middle Ages and are committed in the United States today, even by parents on the persons of their children. The use of the whip was vicious enough, but George Washington found it necessary, as did other masters who represented the highest principles. It is not likely that the population of Louisiana included a larger proportion of sadists than did

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<sup>110</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, July 17, 1858.

<sup>111</sup> Opelousas Courier, June 2, 1855.

<sup>112</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, January 14, 1860.

<sup>113</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 619.

<sup>114</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, June 11, 1831.

other groups of men and women of that and other periods. It may be debated whether or not slavery had a brutalizing effect on the souls of masters, mistresses and overseers, just as it may be debated whether war causes men to value human life less. It is an established fact that slavery as it existed in Louisiana made brutality necessary, just as it is an established fact that war makes the taking of human lives necessary.

The whites of Louisiana sought, at all costs, to prevent any tendency to bring the two races to the same level. In some respects this was more difficult than in the years following emancipation, because blacks and whites were much more in direct contact with one another under slavery than they were when the system had been destroyed. On the plantation the house servants and the masters family were almost always together, and children of both races romped together as a matter of course.<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, racial lines were strictly drawn, and slavery, though primarily a system of labor, was withal a means of controlling race relations. There was much truth in the statement of a native of New England who settled in Louisiana and wrote home: ". . . there is less of different classes of society [in Louisiana] which is to be accounted for by having in our midst a servile race who are bound to treat all white persons with respect."<sup>116</sup>

Countless examples of the subordination of the Negro, aside from that implicit in slavery, can be found. It was, for instance, illegal

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<sup>115</sup> Ingraham, The Southwest, I, 230-31.

<sup>116</sup> F.M. Kent to Moody Kent, June 2, 1857. Kent Papers.

for a white man to gamble with slaves or free Negroes.<sup>117</sup> Free Negroes were a much criticized element of the population because, among other things, "Their association and example has a most pernicious effect on our slave population;" and the spectacle of some fortunate bondsmen hiring out their own time was "scarcely less injurious to the slave."<sup>118</sup> The City of Shreveport forbade masters to allow their slaves "to go at large and trade, or to occupy any house or apartment thereof as a free person."<sup>119</sup> Yet measures of this sort were not the same everywhere. East Feliciana Parish allowed Negro slaves to keep an establishment for the sale of goods for their masters or mistresses, but would not permit them to have dogs.<sup>120</sup> In Jefferson Parish a white person was not allowed to attend a party given by free persons of color for free Negroes and slaves.<sup>121</sup> In many parishes it was illegal for parties to be held in slave quarters at all, and Lafayette Parish forbade any free person to visit "the slave quarter of anyone, after sunset, with or without the permission of the owner."<sup>122</sup>

The City of Shreveport did make one exception to its rather rigor-

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<sup>117</sup> Acts of the Third Legislature, 1857, 229-34.

<sup>118</sup> "Message of Robert C. Wickliffe, Governor of the State of Louisiana," Legislative Documents, 1856, 15-16.

<sup>119</sup> Wood, Charter of Shreveport, 26.

<sup>120</sup> Samford, Police Jury Code of the Parish of East Feliciana, 98-101.

<sup>121</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Jefferson Parish, I, 37.

<sup>122</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Lafayette Parish, I, 61.

ous regulations:

Resolved, That the Shreveport Ethiopian Band, to-wit: Isaac Johnson, Henry, Jim Brown, Norman, Norman Davis, Mike, Joe, Billy Field and Robin Moore have permission to assemble together to practice on their instruments: Provided They always notify one of the town constables of the time and place of their meeting . . . and always close their practicing and return home by 11 o'clock P.M.<sup>123</sup>

While there was no audible dissent to the accepted belief in the inferiority of the Negro, opinion in Louisiana was not always completely unanimous as to the virtues of slavery. Thomas Hamilton, who passed through the state, wrote in 1833 that he "never conversed with any American on the subject of slavery without his at once admitting the magnitude of the evil."<sup>124</sup> Many years later, Olmsted reported that many of the planters with whom he had talked in Louisiana recognized slavery as morally wrong.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, most of the people of Louisiana who gave any thought to the question were "firmly convinced that the slave is happier in his servitude than the negro is in any other position."<sup>126</sup> They agreed with the speaker who asserted that immigrants into the state should be able to see "that the well regulated state of slavery . . . was indispensable to the happiness of the slave, the prosperity of the slave, and the safety of the white . . ."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Wood, Charter of Shreveport, 54.

<sup>124</sup> Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, II, 225.

<sup>125</sup> Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 675-76.

<sup>126</sup> F.M. Kent to Moody Kent, May 17, 1858. Kent Papers.

<sup>127</sup> Robert J. Kerr, reporter, Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of Louisiana which Assembled at the City of New Orleans January 14, 1844 (New Orleans, 1845), 67.

One of the few instances which showed that a Louisianian might think the status of the Negro slave something less than ideal occurred during the constitutional convention of 1844-1845. Bernard Marigny asserted here that the status of Negroes had deteriorated since the American occupation began. The occasion for Marigny's speech was the debate on a three fifths basis of representation, and he represented the City of New Orleans. Even so, Marigny seems to have felt that slavery should be an evolutionary institution, not a static one. He demonstrated this by offering an amendment which would have empowered the legislature to confer the rights and privileges of citizenship upon deserving free persons of color.<sup>128</sup> This view, and his proposal, were entirely contrary to the prevailing opinions of the day, and Marigny was ignored.

On the social plane, segregation had begun long before the Civil War. One state senator asserted that "If out on a hunt he might sit down and take refreshment at a free colored man's table, but never yet did he shake hands with one of them, because he thought there was social contagion in the touch."<sup>129</sup> In New Orleans theater boxes were segregated,<sup>130</sup> and in Thibodaux no Negroes at all could attend the theater except domestic servants in charge of white

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 320-27, 761.

<sup>129</sup> Official Reports of the Senate of Louisiana, 1857 (Baton Rouge, 1857), 7-8.

<sup>130</sup> Schultz, An Inland Voyage, II, 196.

children.<sup>131</sup> In the churches segregation had begun before the 1840's,<sup>132</sup> and the New Orleans graveyard on Bayou St. John was divided into separate parts for Catholics and Protestants, and these parts were subdivided into sections for whites, free Negroes and slaves.<sup>133</sup>

Segregation to a greater degree would have pleased some white Louisianians. One disgusted editor complained that crowds of Negroes took the pleasure out of Fourth of July orations, public dinners and, especially, balls:

When an effort is made to clear the premises of these hunger stricken audacious ball room invaders, all the servants of the rich --- those darkies that compose the "nigger aristocracy" --- think it a woeful insult to compel them to go below stairs with common negroes, but expect to be permitted to stand immediately before the door of the ballroom . . . and their masters are too apt to think that poor folks' negroes must stay outside, but their favorite servants must be allowed to stand where they please to place them . . .<sup>134</sup>

These indications of Negro subordination do not point to the conclusion that there was no emotional attachment between the master and his black servant. Sir Charles Lyell relates how one of the families he visited in New Orleans was "plunged into grief by the death of a little negro girl . . . The sorrow felt for her loss was

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<sup>131</sup> Minute Book of the Societe Dramatique de bienfaisance de Thibodaux, August 6, 1861. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

<sup>132</sup> Cross, History of Southern Methodism in New Orleans, 16.

<sup>133</sup> A Digest of the Ordinances of New Orleans, 1836, 67.

<sup>134</sup> Franklin Planters Banner, December 13, 1849.

such as might have been felt for a relation."<sup>135</sup> Naturally it was when death struck that the white, who left the records, was most aware of his attachment to the black. When Alexander Pugh's man Charles died, Pugh noted in his diary: "His life was a very great one. I have always found him willing and obedient, and never knew him to fail to do anything he was put to do."<sup>136</sup>

The dominant whites of ante-bellum Louisiana believed that the surest way to eliminate distinctions between the two races was to mix their blood. Amalgamation was therefore to be avoided at all costs. Yet, under the circumstances of slaveholding, sexual relations between white men and Negro or mulatto slave women could not be prevented.

That miscegenation existed to some degree cannot be doubted. The many emancipations of mulatto children, the very existence of mulattoes and the demand in the slave markets for women of light color are evidence enough. To deny the existence of miscegenation would be to deny human nature.

The above statement cannot be bolstered by a great many specific examples. The middle nineteenth century was a period of great reticence concerning sexual matters in general; naturally little was committed to writing concerning miscegenation. There was never a period in Louisiana history when marriages between whites and Negroes were permissible. Since any sexual relationship between master and

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<sup>135</sup> Lyell, Second Visit to the United States, II, 128.

<sup>136</sup> Pugh Plantation Diary, June 21, 1860. Pugh Collection.

slave, or between white and Negro, was illicit, it was all the more likely to be concealed.

Yet some examples can be pointed out. Churchmen in colonial Louisiana complained that some planters lived "in scandalous condition with their slaves."<sup>137</sup> A.A. Parker, on his journey to Texas, "found a small log house" somewhere between Alexandria and the Sabine "in which a white man lived with a black wife. . . . With some people I suppose this would be thought commendable; but I confess it gave me unpleasant feelings to see half a dozen half bloods running about the house."<sup>138</sup>

Sometimes, perhaps inadvertantly, records reveal the paternity of mulatto slaves. The leader of a slave insurrection plot in 1840 was said to be the natural son of a planter in the neighborhood of the conspiracy,<sup>139</sup> and in 1841 the Avoyelles Parish Police Jury refused "The petition of Leon Guillot for permission to emancipate his four colored children . . ."<sup>140</sup> Levi Coffin, the "president" of the underground railroad, tells of a planter near New Orleans who sent his brother's children, technically slaves, to Coffin so that they could be freed without scandal.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 98-99.

<sup>138</sup> Parker, Trip to the West and Texas, 109.

<sup>139</sup> New Orleans Louisiana Courier, September 1, 1840.

<sup>140</sup> Police Jury Minutes, Avoyelles Parish, I, 425.

<sup>141</sup> Coffin, Reminiscences, 477-81.



The existence of several mulatto children by the same slave mother is a strong indication that some masters owned concubines. Some of them, indeed, recognized their mulatto children in their wills.<sup>142</sup> A slave trader at Lexington, Kentucky, one Lewis C.

Robards, specialized in nearly white fancy girls for sale in the New Orleans market.<sup>143</sup> Nor were all the men who kept such women unwilling to share with their friends. A woman valued at \$8,000 was sent by her master to another planter on trial, the recipient having the option of sending her back or sending a woman of his own in exchange.<sup>144</sup> A group of Northern abolitionists were much disgusted

when a young almost-white girl who had been sent North by her uncle-master to be set free preferred to return to the merchant in New Orleans whose mistress she had been.<sup>145</sup>

Masters on occasion had trouble with overseers who became too intimate with their female charges. Mrs. Rachael O'Connor, of West Feliciana Parish, was not reticent in writing of her experiences in this respect. One Patrick's romantic achievements with a slave girl led to his discharge, and not too long after his departure Mrs. O'Connor confided to a correspondent that "Charity has a fine daughter, just like Patrick."<sup>146</sup> Patrick was succeeded by a Mr. Mulkey, who

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<sup>142</sup> See above, 208-10.

<sup>143</sup> Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky, 150.

<sup>144</sup> C.M. Conrad to David Weeks, November 30, 1833. Weeks Collection.

<sup>145</sup> Coffin, Reminiscences, 179-80.

<sup>146</sup> Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, January 19, 1833. Weeks Collection.

made a good impression at first: "There is many an overseer that cannot get near the work done . . . that Mulkey can, and he don't appear to wish to abuse the negroes nor to have wives among them so far."<sup>147</sup> Mr. Mulkey was unable to maintain the esteem in which his employer first held him. "Mulkey is gathering the corn . . ." she wrote a year later. "I had raised a hope he would behave better, but I now think it very doubtful. he is a shameless being, nearly as bad as Patrick in the same way. if it was not for that he could oversee very well, but as it is he has too many ladies to please."<sup>148</sup>

Mrs. O'Connor's experience was such that she became a pessimist. She remarked of one of the applicants for Mulkey's position: "the single man was a smart looking young man, but he would soon be like the others, have six or seven ladies in the field that the rest dare not speak to, for fear of giving offence . . ."<sup>149</sup> To her sister-in-law Mrs. O'Connor wrote: "I am glad to hear of your house girls behaving so well. I have no doubt of your being right in judging mean white men being the chief cause of their disobedience. it is always the case where they are. they cause more punishment to be inflicted among the poor ignorant slaves than all else . . ."<sup>150</sup>

Since miscegenation did take place to a degree, and perhaps to a considerable degree, there was danger of that amalgamation of the

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., November 6, 1832.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., October 23, 1833.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., November 15, 1833.

<sup>150</sup> Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, July 6, 1834. Ibid.

racess which was so dreaded. Indeed, a Southern clergyman told Harriet Martineau that "parental affection" resulting from mixing of the races would put an end to slavery.<sup>151</sup> It is doubtful that miscegenation could ever have gone so far as to justify this prophecy, but if it had done so, a means of avoiding such a result was at hand.

The law of slavery, presumably for the sake of convenience, had always asserted that the child followed the status of the mother. Since the parties to miscegenation were almost without exception white men and women with some degree of Negro blood, the same rule could be applied to the problem of race definition. Thus, however great a proportion of white blood he had in his veins, and no matter whether the part Negro mother was slave or free, the offspring which resulted from miscegenation was a Negro. Since every person, by this practice, was indelibly branded as either white or Negro, amalgamation could not take place.

The wall thus erected was not to be breached. When a bill was introduced into the legislature to permit one Bordelon to legitimize his natural daughter, admittedly a beautiful and accomplished young woman, but technically colored, Mr. St. Paul of New Orleans objected, and the bill was never passed. Senator St. Paul, in accordance with the practice outlined in the preceding paragraph, ignored the fact that the blending of races, in this case, had already taken place:

To entertain such a bill would be to hold out a premium to lewdness and debauchery, and to an indiscrim-

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<sup>151</sup> Harriet Martineau, Society in America, II (New York, 1837), 118.

inate commingling of the black and white races . . . It was giving indirect aid and encouragement to that fanatical and abominable feeling of abolitionism which pervades the free states, and which with audacious presumption, approaches even the South. . . . As one on whose blood there rests no stain — as one of the superior Caucasian race . . . he had determined to set his face against every measure which ends, however remotely, to a blending of the races — races which God himself has marked with such visible distinctions.<sup>152</sup>

One other measure for the control of slaves, worthy of note, was the attempt to prevent their obtaining alcoholic beverages. The evidence indicates that this attempt was no more successful in the case of slaves than it was, almost a century later, when it was applied to the whole population of the United States. This measure was economic as well as social, of course, because the drunken slave was unable to work. It was nonetheless social, because under the influence of drink the Negro might forget the subordination which was his duty. That the social motive played a part is demonstrated by the effort to extend enforced abstinence to the free Negro.<sup>153</sup>

✓ Included among the acts of the first territorial legislature was one which forbade giving or selling alcoholic drinks to slaves without the written permission of their masters.<sup>154</sup> This provision and others to the same effect were on the statute books throughout the ante-bellum period.

Yet Negroes obtained whiskey, and if newspaper accounts are to

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<sup>152</sup> Official Reports of the Senate of Louisiana, 1857, 7-8.

<sup>153</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, February 27, 1850.

<sup>154</sup> Acts of the First Territorial Legislature, 1806, 150-90.

be credited, it was not difficult for them to do so. One editor lamented:

The negro's rations are always more than he can consume, and clothing amply sufficient for all seasons; yet the negro cares little for these comforts if he cannot get whiskey. . . . Notwithstanding that attention has been repeatedly called to the fact, that liquor was sold to the negroes at the ferry — that they lay drunk about the neighborhood on Sunday — that the poultry, pigs, &c was fast disappearing from the yards of our neighbors, nothing was done by planter, overseer or patrol to do away with an evil that was daily becoming more threatening.<sup>155</sup>

Arrests were made for selling liquor to slaves. The grand jury of East Feliciana Parish indicted one William Rist in 1853, asserting that Rist

did sell give and deliver unto a certain negro man Slave named adam the property of Micajah Harris the said William Rist being then and there a merchant or trader a quantity of Spirituous and intoxicating Liquor to wit the Liquor known as whiskey without the consent and authorization of <sup>156</sup> the said Micajah Harris the master of said slave adam . . .

✓ If occasional arrests for selling liquor to slaves were not enough to put a stop to drinking, neither was the temperance movement of the 1830's and 1840's. The Negro's appetite for intoxicants was apparently not dulled. In fact, according to the Baton Rouge Gazette, Negro "temperance meetings" on Sunday and "temperance balls" during the week merely gave the slaves who participated an opportunity "to assemble . . . once or twice a week to pass the night at drinking and carous-

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<sup>155</sup> West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, December 6, 1856.

<sup>156</sup> Indictment, March 21, 1853. East Feliciana Parish Papers, in custody of Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

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Since, in the overall view, the measures taken for the control of Louisiana's slave population were so successful, it was perhaps ordained by a merciful providence that efforts to prevent the slaves' obtaining alcoholic comfort were largely unsuccessful. The crime rate among Negroes was not overly high, taking into consideration the fact that almost any assertion of independence was a crime. Though the Negro population greatly outnumbered the whites in many areas, only one insurrection came to fruition. This one was quickly crushed, and all other conspiracies were detected before they could result in damage. Though miscegenation could not be prevented, the distinction between the races was as sharply drawn in 1860 as it had been earlier. The integrity of the slave system in Louisiana was never seriously questioned from within. To the whites of Louisiana, and apparently to the great majority of slaves, Negro bondage was a normal state of affairs.

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<sup>157</sup> Baton Rouge Gazette, September 31, 1842.

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## VITA

The writer was born February 14, 1920, on a farm near Mason, Tennessee. He attended the Mason Elementary School, Byars Hall High School at Covington, Tennessee, and Memphis State College. Having completed two years of college work in June, 1939, he taught two terms in a one room school on Island 37, Tipton County, Tennessee. For a year before entering the Army Air Force in June, 1942, he was employed at the Chickasaw Ordnance Works, Millington, Tennessee.

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