

THE JOURNAL

NEGRO HISTORY

DISCIPLINING INDUSTRIAL SLAVES IN THE OLD SOUTH

The whole South is like one of her own cottonsteamers—such as I have just left, filled from the hold to the topmost deck with the most inflammable matter; everything heated up to the burning point, and a furious draught blowing from end to end, and a huge high pressure boiler in her belly pressed to bursting. . . . On such a volcano is based the institution of slavery. . . . The remedy proposed for this state of things is repression, severity Terrorism does not pacify a people. It only changes complaint into conspiracy. . . .

James Stirling, *Letters from the Slave States* (1857).

Perhaps the most serious problem facing antebellum southern whites was the control of their black population. Slave discipline was difficult enough on isolated plantations where ninety per cent of the bondsmen worked; to control those 200,000 or so slaves who, by 1860, worked in southern industries was more perplexing still.¹ For not only did industrial slaves resist as frequently as did plantation slaves, but many Southerners doubted, along with James Henry Hammond, “whether their [the slaves’] extensive employment in manufactures and mechanic arts is consistent with

¹ For further information on the use of slave labor in southern industries, such as the processing of agricultural staples; the extraction of ores, metals, turpentine, and lumber; the manufacture of textiles, iron, tobacco, and hemp; and the construction and operation of transportation facilities, see my doctoral dissertation “Industrial Slavery in the Old South, 1790-1861” (University of California, Berkeley, 1968), directed by Professor Kenneth M. Stamp. An abbreviated version of this article was presented before the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Baltimore, October, 1966, where it was ably criticized by Professor Willie Lee Rose of the University of Virginia.

safe and sound policy. Whenever a slave is made a mechanic," concluded the Carolinian, "he is more than half freed, and soon becomes, as we too well know, and all history attests . . . the most corrupt and turbulent of his class."²

It is true that, in the final analysis, all discipline rested upon violent coercion; but such brutality was not characteristic of industrial slavery. Whippings, trackings with dogs, jailings, shacklings, patrols, and threats of sale were common to be sure. Merciless suppression of insurrections certainly occurred.³ But the most intelligent masters of industrial slaves necessarily experimented with more sophisticated means of controlling and increasing the productivity of their workers which were probably more effective in the long run. These subtle methods of discipline are analyzed below.

The most common disciplinary methods were the routinizing of daily work, religious indoctrination, the total mastery of living and working conditions, and the pass and badge system. For example, masters continually directed overseers strictly to follow work schedules. "Two leading principles are endeavored to be acted on," advised a Georgia ricemiller in his instructions to his overseer. "1st, to reduce everything to system, 2d, to introduce daily accountability in every department." Accordingly, the slaves received specific tasks, a Negro driver was responsible for each gang, and every evening the drivers and slave foremen reported to the white overseer in the owner's presence.⁴

Masters discovered that slave singing not only helped to routinize industrial work but it increased and regulated production. Though many travelers interpreted the singing of industrial slaves as an indication of contentment, singing had actually become a calculated disciplinary device. "We encourage their singing as much as we can," confided the manager of a Richmond tobacco factory to poet William Cullen Bryant, "for the boys work better while singing."⁵

² DeBow's Review, 8 (1850), 518.

³ R. Starobin, "Industrial Slavery," ch. 3; K. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956), ch. 3 and 4.

⁴ *Southern Agriculturist*, 6 (1833), 571-572.

⁵ P. Godwin, ed., *The Prose Writings of William Cullen Bryant* (New York, 1884, 1964 edition); cf. *Louisville Journal*, Nov. 29, 1830, typescript, misc. papers H (Filson Club). Singing was also, of course, a means of slave communication.

Many employers considered Christian indoctrination an effective means of controlling industrial slaves. Through religious instruction bondsmen learned that slavery had divine sanction and that disobedience was as much an offense against God as against temporal masters. Slaves received the Biblical command that servants should obey their superiors. They also heard of the punishment awaiting insolent slaves in the hereafter and of the salvation rewarding faithful service. "My plantations are visited by . . . Episcopal clergymen . . . each Sunday," disclosed one ricemiller. "I have found the greatest advantage from this & I know many [slaves] who perform their service for me as a religious duty." An itinerant preacher at a Virginia coal mine "was gratified to learn from the managers, that many of them [the slave miners] are orderly and consistent in their deportment, and that generally, there is a marked difference between the conduct of those who profess and those who do not profess religion."⁶

Large slaveowning industrialists occasionally built chapels at their establishments and hired clergymen to preach to their slaves on Sundays. Many sugarmillers and ricemillers held regular Sunday services, especially during the milling season. One North Carolina cotton manufacturer occasionally allowed preaching, revivals, and baptisms. A Virginia coal mining company permitted a circuit-rider to preach to its slave colliers during a work-break down in the pits. Later, this company reportedly had built a church for its black miners.⁷

The distribution of food and clothing was carefully controlled to discipline industrial slaves. For example, Moses Austin divided his slave leadminers into several "messes," each of which received a precise portion of food. The "forge

⁶ Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, 156-162; R. L. Allston memo, n.d., (South Carolina Historical Society); *Niles' Register*, 65 (1843), 108-109.

⁷ *Charleston Courier*, July 19, 1844; receipt, June 1, 1846, Williams-Chestnut-Manning Papers (Univ. of South Carolina Library); Hudson Diaries, 1855 (Univ. of North Carolina Library); Nov. 30 and Dec. 1956, vol. 2, Warmoth Papers (UNC); C. C. Jones Diaries, 1857-61 (Tulane Univ. Library); Holt Diary, Aug. 8 and Sept. 13, 1852, and April 24, 1853 (UNC); *Richmond Whig*, June 26, 1846; *Niles' Register*, 65 (1843), 108-109. Under certain circumstances, of course, religion could have a liberating effect upon oppressed bondsmen.

hands eat in one kitchen collectively, its being so convenient we can oversee the whole," reported an iron manufacturer. A ricemiller explained to his overseer:

It has always been my plan to give out allowance to the negroes on Sunday in preference to any other day because *this* has much influence in keeping them at home that day. Whereas, if they received allowance on Saturday for instance Some of them would be off with it that same evening to the shops to trade & perhaps would not get back until Monday morning. . . .

"Don't give Booker any summer shoes because he stole Monroes 1856. . . . Don't give John & Charles any summer shoes, because they killed a shoat," wrote a gristmiller in his "Memo for 1857."⁸

Industrial housing arrangements were often planned to prevent slaves from escaping. The New Orleans Gas Company's fifty bondsmen inhabited tenements inside the plant, which was surrounded by iron gates and brick walls fifteen feet high. "The whole of our concern is surrounded with a brick wall ten feet high," wrote the manager of an Alabama textile mill which lodged its slaves within the grounds; "no one is admitted after work hours except the watchmen or one of the owners."⁹

To facilitate identification and to minimize escapes, bondsmen were required to wear badges or to carry passes when they left the industrial site. Badges were mandatory in most urban centers, passes in rural areas and in some towns as well. Thus, to one traveler the management of Dismal Swamp slave lumbermen was "interesting and instructive. . . . Early in February—they go into the swamp in gangs, each gang under a white overseer. Before leaving, they are all examined and registered at the court-house, and 'passes,' good for a year are given them, in which the features and marks upon their persons are minutely described." The demand for passes

⁸ Moses Austin's memorandum, 1815, E. C. Barker, ed., *The Austin Papers* (Washington, 1919), I, 247-249; Jordan, Davis & Co. to W. Weaver, Sept. 8, 1832, Weaver Papers (Duke Univ. Library) C. Manigault to J. F. Cooper, Jan. 10, 1848, Manigault Letterbook (SCHS); "Memo for 1857," Ledger, 1856, vol. 5, Walton Papers (UNC).

⁹ H. Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans* (Garden City, 1942), 190-191; Patton, Donegan & Co. to Haddock, Haseltine & Co., Dec. 11, 1847, Patton, Donegan & Co. Letterbook (Huntsville Public Library). Cf. R. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities* (New York, 1964), ch. 3.

was apparently so great that the New Orleans Gas Company used printed forms.¹⁰

Neither passes nor controlled living arrangements, however, could substitute for close, personal supervision by responsible whites. Slaves working by-the-piece had to be carefully watched and their work correctly counted to prevent them from cheating their employers. One master only suspected his slave ricemiller of improperly filling the barrels. Other masters were particularly vexed by slave woodcutters. "You will please have them [barrel staves] counted by some one you can depend on after they are hauled down," wrote a North Carolina fishery-owner to his overseer, "for I suspect your Negroes might give you an account of more than they cut & I know that my Coopers will not account for all that are carried down if the counting is left to them."¹¹

* * *

Another effective means of disciplining workers and increasing their efficiency was the system of rewards and incentives associated with industrial slavery. Such indirect controls consisted of the simple device of granting holidays and the more sophisticated one of giving money or commodities to slaves. Holidays were not simply an obvious way of resting the hands but an integral part of a subtle system of supervision of slave labor. Rest periods were less a slave's right than a master's privilege, because employers granted recesses or denied them according to whether the slaves had worked well, refrained from resistance, or remained healthy. The dates and lengths of holidays were varied so that activities of Negroes could be carefully regulated and their expectations enhanced.

The timing of holidays varied according to industry and master, but almost all industrial slaves, except sugarmillers, enjoyed a few day's relaxation at Christmas. This recess

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 4; F. L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York, 1861), 153; J. Mackay to J. K. F. Mansfield, Oct. 27, 1835, Mackay-Stiles Papers, vol. 34 (UNC); blank printed pass of New Orleans Gas Works, Slavery Papers (Emory Univ. Library).

¹¹ J. Haynes to C. Manigault, Nov. 24, 1847, Manigault Papers (Duke); S. Armistead to B. Nicholls, Oct. 14, 1822, Nicholls Papers (North Carolina Archives).

coincided with the long-established hiring period for tobacco, hemp, and iron manufacturers and for others who interrupted operations late in December to rent slaves.¹² Though most hired slaves thus received a vacation at the end of the year, owners occasionally requested employers to detain slaves during the recess if it was inconvenient for them to return home.¹³

Once the custom of returning hired slaves to their masters for the holiday season was broken, as it often was, bondsmen were entirely at the mercy of their employers, who often compelled them to continue work. Five slaves were thus forced to remain aboard the Savannah River dredgeboats during the Christmas recess as punishment for infractions of discipline. Other bondsmen had their rest periods spoiled when they were compelled to stand on the hiring block. On the other hand, some hired slaves enjoyed longer vacations than those employed by their owners. For example, the Charleston and Savannah Railroad's hirelings, most of whom came from Virginia and North Carolina, annually made a three-weeks' steamboat excursion to visit their owners and friends.¹⁴

Most enterprises, except sugar mills, shut down on Sundays; for good work slaves might enjoy half of Saturday as well. A North Carolina gold mine observed all Sundays, as well as Easter Monday, Whitmonday, July 4, September 29, a five-day Christmas, and designated "Negroes day," during which slaves mined gold for themselves or to share with their owner. Some employers granted occasional holidays to deserving slaves or permitted relaxation at the end of arduous work periods. Several slave wool manufacturers got one afternoon "to take a rabbit hunt," another afternoon to go to a circus, and a wintry morning to skate with their master, who, however, often drove them long hours, sometimes sever-

¹² The Slave Time Books, 1833-39 and 1837-52, Graham Papers (Univ. of Virginia Library), for example, reveal that Christmas was observed from Dec. 25 to Jan. 1, every year, without exception, at this iron works.

¹³ H. S. Clark to D. W. Jordan, Nov. 12, 1851, Jordan Papers (Duke), J. Chew to W. Weaver, Dec. 5, 1830, Weaver Papers (Duke), for example.

¹⁴ J. Mackay to J. K. F. Mansfield, Dec. 1 and Dec. 30, 1835, Mackay-Stiles Papers, vol. 34 (UNC); Charleston *Mercury*, Dec. 15 and 24, 1859.

al days and nights in succession.¹⁵ At a cotton gin Negroes who had been promised a four-day vacation after the crop was ginned considered this insufficient compensation for their unusual exertions and succeeded in extracting an extra day's rest. ". . . The negroes interrupt me at this moment, with clamors that I must give them tomorrow, (Monday) as an additional holiday, which they have had since last Wednesday evening," wrote the ginner to his brother. "I wanted them to wait until all of yours came up; but they prefer the present, & I have consented for them to take it."¹⁶

The entire pattern of holidays was askew in the Louisiana sugar industry where refining of the crop often remained incomplete by Christmas or New Year's Day. Variables such as ripeness, the weather, the health of the slaves, the number of runaways, and the breakdown of machinery inevitably contributed to the delays that compelled most sugar millers to celebrate Christmas early, late, or not at all. One year, the Bayside mill observed Christmas December 6 through 8, while the Magnolia mill waited until February 16. For various reasons, but usually to punish slaves for inefficient work or bad behavior, some refiners eliminated recesses entirely. Hudson's sugar mill skipped Christmas holidays in 1852, 1853, 1954, and 1856—a common pattern at other refineries.¹⁷

Entrepreneurs consciously used holidays both to control their industrial slaves and to increase their productivity, and clearly had no intention of liberating their bondsmen. One ricemiller instructed his overseer to slaughter a steer and to distribute extra allotments of bacon, molasses, corn, and rice during the milling period, only if the slaves behaved themselves. A turpentine manufacturer, who had given his slaves two hogs, a barrel of flour, and potatoes for their Christmas dinner, promised that "I shall due my very Best to keap the negroes all strat & satisfyde. I hope that they will behave well." Another ricemiller attempted to reduce the number of

¹⁵ Burwell-Taylor Expense Book, 1832-39 (UNC); F. L. Fries Woollen Mill Diary, 1840-42 (NCA).

¹⁶ J. Liddell to M. Liddell, Dec. 28, 1851, Liddell Papers (Louisiana State Univ. Library).

¹⁷ Bayside Plantation Journal, 1860 (UNC); Magnolia Journal, 1858-59, Warmoth Papers (UNC); Hudson Diaries (UNC).

slaves feigning sickness during the arduous milling period by promising each slave who did not lose time an extra bushel of rice. "It should be taken into view that a great quantity [of sugar] has been consumed by the negroes [during the grinding season], for when we begin to harvest every one eats," admitted Thomas Spalding in a passage on "Expenses" in his widely read *Observations on the Sugar Cane*.¹⁸

What industrial slaves themselves thought of such holiday periods can only be inferred from their behavior and fragmentary surviving opinion. Evidently, the bulk of industrial slaves used holiday periods feverishly to relish extra allotments of food, as a time for merrymaking, or as an opportunity to catch up on lost sleep. Moreover, in the opinion of at least one industrial slave, the Baltimore ship-caulker Frederick Douglass, holidays kept bondsmen "occupied with prospective pleasures within the limits of slavery. . . . These holidays are conductors or safety valves to carry off the explosive elements inseparable from the human mind, when reduced to the condition of slavery."¹⁹

Holidays were often festive occasions, during which masters arranged dinners, dances, games, and "marriages." Extra allowances of rice, flour, or corn were doled out; beeves or hogs might be killed; molasses, vegetables, or tobacco were sometimes distributed; and clothing, trinkets, or money was occasionally handed out to the slaves.²⁰ Since these gratuities were presented not only at Christmas but on other occasions, however, they thus comprised part of the complex system of discipline-by-reward. Another part of this

¹⁸ Instructions to G. Swanston, May 26, 1838 and Instructions for Overseer for the Year 1841, Arnold-Screven Papers (UNC); B. Grist to J. Grist, Dec. 25, 1860, Grist Papers (Duke); Plantation diary in 1859 Almanac, Allston Papers (SCHS); T. Spalding, *Observations on the Sugar Cane* [1816], reprinted in E. M. Coulter, *Georgia's Disputed Ruins* (Chapel Hill, 1937), 262.

¹⁹ F. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, 1855), 253-254.

²⁰ McCollam Diary (LSU); McCutcheon Journal, 1838-42 (LSU); Sparkman Journal (UNC); Pré Aux Cleres plantation journals, 1852-54 (LSU); R. J. Arnold plantation journal, vol. 3, Arnold-Screven Papers (UNC); Comite journal, 1857, Kilbourne Papers (LSU); A. B. Fiagg plantation journal, Plimton Collection (Columbia Univ. Library); *Harper's Monthly*, 7 (1853), 767; "Christmas Presents: 1842—Dec 25th," plantation book, 1841-44, Liddell Papers (LSU); "Memo of Money Paid or given to the Negroes in 1854," Stirling Papers (LSU).

disciplinary device was the payment of money to industrial slaves.²¹

That many bondsmen were actually paid money has generally been interpreted as an incipient wage system which was supposedly an innovation of the last decades of the pre-Civil War period. It has been held, moreover, that such cash payments indicate that the institution of slavery was undergoing radical structural transformations easing the bondage of the Negroes. Slaves receiving money were, it is said, in effect being liberated or placed in a realm of "quasi-freedom," a "shadow-land" between bondage and liberty. Thus, money payments were subverting slavery from within. "The payment by industries of extra money to . . . slaves for their personal use," argues one historian, "was an incipient stage of wages . . . Also there was developing . . . a tendency to rely more and more on the incentive motive instead of on force and thus liberalize to some extent the 'peculiar institution.'"²²

An examination of the manner, timing, history, and effects of cash incentives suggest that they were not a step towards emancipation but rather a technique of slave control which had long existed and which supported the slave system. Industrial slaves received money for many different kinds of work. Some were paid for raising foodstuffs, fabricating clothing, or collecting useful materials in their spare time. Others were paid for working overtime—"overwork," as it was ironically called—at specific tasks, while still others received what was sometimes known as "Sunday money" for "extra-work"—odd jobs done at night, on Sundays, or on holidays. The form of payment was also important: some bondsmen received direct payments in cash or kind; others worked for credits, against which they drew cash or goods.

"Overwork" payments were common to almost every type of southern industry. A tobacco manufacturer paid some

²¹ Surviving business records suggest that about half of all industrial slaves—hired and owned—received incentive payments in either kind, cash, or credit.

²² C. Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46 (1960), 663-678; R. B. Morris, "The Measure of Bondage in the Slave States," *MVHR*, 41 (1954), 219-240; J. H. Moore, "Simon Gray, Riverman: A Slave Who Was Almost Free," *MVHR*, 49 (1962), 472-484.

slaves from \$1 to \$3 overtime weekly. At a turpentine distillery, which paid cash for production above the required task, slaves annually earned sums ranging from \$2 to \$14 and averaging about \$6. (By comparison, free white workers in the South between 1800 and 1861 earned on the average about \$1 a day—\$300 per year.²³)

Many industrial slaves earned "extra-work" payments by collecting commodities or cultivating crops in their spare time. One master annually paid \$1 or \$2 to each of twenty-two slave sugarmillers for raising corn. The federal government permitted slave dredgeboatmen to sell driftwood collected from the Savannah River. A tanner kept a "List of Bark from different Negroes" which recorded sums owed slaves for gathering bark. Miners bought gold retrieved by bondsmen in their spare time, and iron manufacturers and ricemillers also paid cash to slaves.²⁴

Many enterprises adopted the credit system of payment. For example, at one Tennessee iron furnace slaves worked forty or fifty Sundays, chopped wood, and hauled cargoes to earn "extra allowances" of about \$20 in credits. The company kept a written account for every slave upon which could be drawn shoes, winter and summer suits, shirts, overcoats, tobacco, knives, and flour. At the end of the year, the value of goods obtained was subtracted from the accumulated credits; the slaves received cash for the remaining credits (usually about \$7 worth) or carried them over to the next year's account.²⁵

Extra payment for night, Sunday, and holiday work was widely practiced by such industries as sugarmills, sawmills,

²³ Paylists, various dates 1827 and 1828, account book, 1850-52, Leslie Papers (Duke); account book, 1853-55, and undated receipts ca. 1854 and 1858, Jordan Papers (Duke). Cf. J. C. Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom* (Durham, 1938), 203-206; K. Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era* (New York, 1930), 253-254; and Squire Gaines Account Book, 1843 (Univ. of Kentucky Library). For white wages, see R. Starobin, "Industrial Slavery," ch. 5.

²⁴ Weaver Papers (Duke and UV); *Farmers' Register*, 10 (1842), 411-413; "Negroes corn 1854," Ledger, 1852-55, Liddell Papers (LSU); Bayside plantation journal, 1850, 1852 (UNC); J. Mackay to J. K. F. Mansfield, Nov. 21, 1835, Macskay-Stiles Papers, vol. 34 (UNC); Hawkins Papers, vol. 16, 1845 (UNC); Burwell-Taylor Expense Book, 1832-39 (UNC).

²⁵ Account Books, Vol. I and II, 1854-60, Louisa Furnace (UNC); volumes 25, 29, 41, Pettigrew Papers (UNC).

railroads, and turpentine distilleries which required exceptional services or extraordinary quantities of items such as wood. For example, the Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Works, under both private and public ownership, paid hired and state-owned slaves small sums (averaging about one dollar monthly) for burning charcoal, hauling supplies, cooking food, pumping boats, unloading stone, and assisting blacksmiths on Sundays, holidays, and at night. The Savannah Fire Department's several hundred bondsmen each received 12½ cents per hour for fighting fires. The slave who reached a blaze first won a reward of \$1, while the next two slaves to arrive got fifty cents each, and all were eligible for merit awards ranging up to \$30 per fire.²⁶

The available evidence suggests that the incentive system was neither a late-ante-bellum innovation nor an indication that slavery was undergoing internal transformation leading to freedom. Indeed, business records reveal that money payments were as common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as in the 1850's. From 1796 to at least 1802, for example, slaves at the Cumberland Forge in Maryland did various chores at night and on holidays in return for small sums of money. From 1798 to at least 1808, both the Redwell Furnace and the Pine Forge in Virginia followed the same practice. As early as 1794, Georgia lumberman Alexander Telfair distributed bonuses, while from 1806 to 1823, Stump and Ricketts paid cash to their slave saw- and grist-millers in Alexandria, Virginia.²⁷ Not only did the cash reward system function fully in the early national period but many masters used it for long periods of time. For instance, tobacco manufacturer Robert Leslie made money payments

²⁶ London Papers (UNC); bills and receipts in Treasurers' Papers: Internal Improvements: Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Works (NCA); *Report of the Mayor of Savannah*, 1857, 29-30; *Digest of Ordinances, Savannah, 1858*, 157, 162; various receipts, account sheets, and letters, 1857, North Carolina Railroad Papers (NCA); J. Hogg Account Book, 1855-56, vol. 31 (UNC); "Memo . . . 3 Aug. '60," Fisher Papers (UNC).

²⁷ Cumberland Forge Ledger, 1796-97, and Daybook, 1802 (Library of Congress); Redwell Furnace Account Books 1795-99 and 1805-15 (Virginia Historical Society); Redwell Furnace Record Book (UNC); Pine Forge Account Book, 1804-08 (UNC); Account Books, 1794-1800 and 1808-12, Telfair Papers (Georgia Historical Society); Stump and Ricketts Ledger, 1806-23 (New York Public Library).

from 1827 to 1852, ironmonger William Weaver from 1827 to 1857, Ebenezer Pettigrew, the North Carolina shingler, turpentine distiller, and planter, from 1803 to 1854, and Telfair from 1794 to 1860.²⁸ Such evidence therefore indicates that the cash incentive system had, at least as early as the 1790's, become part of the slave system. If cash rewards were radically undermining bondage, one might expect slavery to have collapsed long before the 1860's.

Entrepreneurs who consciously used cash incentives to control their industrial bondsmen and to increase slave productivity clearly had no intention of "liberating" their slaves. For example, a Tennessee iron manufacturer kept account of breaches of discipline and subtracted them from his slaves' credit sheets. Sam Talley, a slave, thus lost \$10 for twenty days' runaway time, young Reuben Jackson was charged \$7.50 for ten days' absence, and Anderson Trotter was docked \$2 for his "interest in stolen bag." In his account books Ebenezer Pettigrew carefully balanced the extra work of his Negroes against their infractions of discipline. Pettigrew's slaves automatically forfeited their credits or had their accounts closed for thievery, absconding, or other troublesome activity. Though one slave lost his money for "infamous behaviour" and another lost his for "outrageous conduct in many ways for 5 years," Pettigrew indicated that well-behaved bondsmen eventually received their money. "Settled with Tom, George, Cromwell & Lewis for their ditching in the 9 feet ditch," he wrote. "This settlement is nothing more nor less than presents for their good behaviour while working in it."²⁹

Owners of hirelings, who would have opposed the incen-

²⁸ Paylists for 1827 and 1828, and account book, 1850-52, Leslie Papers (Duke); "Memo of . . . Cash furnished the Hands Decr. 1831," Jordan & Book, 1849-52; Bath Iron Works Negro Books, 1839-42 and 1846; Bath Forge Cash Book, 1849-51; Etna Furnace Negro Books, 1854-61 and 1856-59; Buffalo Forge Books, 1827-29, 1830-40, 1839-41, 1844-48, 1850-57; Buffalo Forge Time Book, 1830-43; and Buffalo Forge Wood Cutting and Coaling Record, 1831-41 (UV); Cf. memoranda of cash paid Negroes, 1854 and 1857, Weaver Papers (Duke); "Mema of . . . Cash furnished the Hands Decr. 1831," Jordan & Irvine Papers (Wisconsin State Historical Society).

²⁹ Account Books, Vol. I and II, 1854-60, Louisa Furnace (UNC); Account Books, 1817, 1824, No. 3, Pettigrew Papers (NCA); volumes 19, 25, 29, 41, 43, Pettigrew Papers (UNC). The Blue Ridge Railroad accounts, Feb.-Sept.,

tive system if it was liberating their Negroes, approved of money payments because they improved slave discipline. For example, two slaveowners who rented Negroes to the Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Works explicitly requested that their bondsmen be paid about a dollar monthly. "Deducted \$6.00 for 3 Days allowed Tom by his master this amt paid Tom and not included above [in the bill of hire]" was the notation next to one master's account.³⁰

Why industrial entrepreneurs approved of the bonus system was best summed up by Loammi Baldwin, director of construction of the Gosport Navy Yard. Baldwin required masters to pay to their hirelings a "bounty" of ten cents daily, and he steadfastly refused to rent slaves from masters who declined to do so:

. . . all the negroes employed on that work [the navy yard] had 10 cents a day allowed them on our rolls which was paid over to them by their masters; but if their masters refused to pay it over, we dismissed the blacks from our employment.

Baldwin insisted that slaves receiving bounties "work with as much steadiness and cheerfulness as the whites, and the fear of losing their ten cents, if they are lazy or inattentive, saves all the expense of overseers."³¹ A visitor to a Lexington, Kentucky, ropewalk offered the following supporting evidence:

every man and boy in this establishment . . . has his "steint" to perform, and each one is paid for what he does beyond it.

1859, vol. 43, Hawkins Papers (UNC), indicate that some industrial slaves managed to outwit even the complicated workings of the credit system of money payments.

³⁰ Monthly payrolls for Dec. 1860, Jan. 1861, and attached notes concerning slaveowners Bryan and Quince, London Papers (UNC); contingency bills, March 31 and June 30, 1860, Treasurers' Papers: Internal Improvements: Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Works (NCA). Promoters of slave-based industrialization agreed with slave-employing industrialists that cash incentives improved slave discipline and increased productivity; see, for example, letter by "Hamilton," *American Farmer*, series 1, vol. 9 (1827), 241, which was never publicly challenged.

³¹ L. Baldwin to—Delalande, June 27, 1833, Baldwin Papers, vol. 41 (Baker Library, Harvard Univ.); L. Baldwin to Navy Department, ca. 1830, quoted in "Slaves on a Federal Project," *Business Historical Society Bulletin*, 8 (1934), 32-33. Cf. Woolley [Textile] Mill Papers (UK); Nolensville Turnpike Company Minutebook, 1855-59 (Tennessee State Library); T. K. Noble to J. Morgan, Dec. 24, 1857, Hunt-Morgan Papers (UK).

This keeps them contented and makes them ambitious, and . . . more labor is obtained . . . than could possibly be forced from them by severity. I saw no overseers in any of the rooms where the labor was performed.³²

What slaves themselves thought of such rewards can be reasonably inferred only from their behavior, for which the most complete evidence comes from industries using the incentive system over extended periods. For example, at William Weaver's ironworks, which made money payments for more than thirty years, slaves who chopped wood and hauled coal in their spare time each received about twelve dollars a year. Yet, there is no indication that slavery was either breaking down or being transformed into freedom at Weaver's establishment. These slaves certainly enjoyed spending their earnings, but slave resistance, to use another indicator, troubled Weaver no more at the beginning of the period than at the end. Weaver's bondsmen seemed as firmly enslaved in the 1850's as in the 1820's.³³

In the context of the holiday and incentive system, money payments were not an incipient form of wages; like other rewards they were given for extra work, not for required work. Bonuses were usually not given regularly, but randomly; the amount of payment was not fixed, but varied according to the liberality of the master. Indeed, the incentive system was so firmly under the control of the masters that it could legally be abandoned at any time without consulting the slaves, even though this might have annoyed the slaves. Bondsmen may have enjoyed their money, yet neither masters nor slaves ever seriously regarded cash payments as a slave's right; both continued to regard incentives as a master's exclusive privilege. Moreover, since bonuses never accrued until after the slave's required day's tasks were completed, masters insured that a certain amount of work would be done *before* overtime outlays took effect. In this way productivity tended

³² Louisville Journal, Nov. 29, 1830, typescript, misc. papers H (Filson Club). Cf. Olmsted, *Seaboard Slave States*, 127-128, 153-156, and 352-355; F. L. Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas* (New York, 1857), 19, 33; F. L. Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom* (New York, 1953 edition), 109; Stirling, *Letters*, 242, both of whom agreed that money payments improved slave discipline and productivity.

³³ Weaver Account Books (UV and Duke); cf. Douglass, *My Bondage*, 253-254.

to be increased. Money payments further enabled masters to obtain food, clothing, and supplies, as well as additional labor, at nominal cost. Slaves were kept at work and out of mischief during what would otherwise have been their spare time. Masters usually recouped their outlays eventually, since bondsmen ordinarily bought supplies chiefly from company commissaries. To be sure, some slaves saved their bonuses to try to purchase their freedom, but industrial slave self-purchase was never very common and was declining in the late antebellum decades. Moreover, the incentive system tended to weaken the slave's temptation to escape and to improve slave discipline. For, as a traveler observed in Lexington, Kentucky, hemp factories:

By active working, a slave could earn himself \$2 or \$3 a week, besides doing his master's work. This sum he is always allowed to expend as he pleases. Thus the stimulus of wages is applied behind the whip, of course the prime motor.³⁴

* * *

Slave-employing industrialists maintained control in part by creating and exploiting divisions within the ranks of the ruled. As human beings slaves did not differ from other workers, but the problem of control was made considerably easier for masters because of differences in color, tribal origin, and capability among the bondsmen. Moreover, as plantation practices were transferred to industrial settings, Negro slave managers were trained both for their skills and to help discipline their black brothers. In this respect industrial slave managers resembled plantation house servants and slave drivers, whose accommodationist role has long been suggested,³⁵ even if little analyzed.

Industrial slave managers had an ambiguous role regarding resistance and control. On the one hand, slave industrial workers and artisans were the natural leaders of most organized resistance movements. But, on the other hand, they frequently became their masters' most faithful agents to control the black masses. Even though slave managers them-

³⁴ Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, 19.

³⁵ Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, 151-153, S. Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago, 1959), ch. 1-3; E. D. Genovese, *et al.*, "The Legacy of Slavery and the Roots of Black Nationalism," *Studies on the Left*, 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1966), 2-65.

selves might have had aspirations to freedom, they often betrayed their fellow workers. Moreover, a paternalistic relationship sometimes developed between masters and industrial slave managers, revealing the primary accommodationist role of the slave managerial group.

Slave managers willingly assumed great responsibilities, successfully supervised complex industrial enterprises with little guidance from their employers, and responsibly directed black and white workers under their charge. "In all of these [rice milling] departments," wrote an observer of one such manager, "his authority was superior to that of the [white] overseer. . . . His responsibility was much greater than that of the overseer, and Mr. X. [the owner] said, he would trust him with much more than he would any overseer he had ever known."³⁶

Capability, loyalty, and responsibility earned some slave managers their employers' genuine respect and their masters' paternal esteem. Concerning a bondsman directed to escort a slave mechanic from a neighbor's iron works, one master confided

I . . . apologize for sending upon this business, a man of colour, but this can be no objection to a man of sense . . . he is my founder at Oxford [iron works]—has been raised there from childhood, and supported an unblemished character. For his integrity, good understanding & talents, from his infancy to his gray hairs—the utmost confidence may be given his communications—his honor and integrity untarnished and unexceptionable. . . .³⁷

Sandy Maybank, the slave head carpenter at the Reverend C. C. Jones's extensive plantation and ricemill, typified the paternalistic relationship which could develop between masters and slaves. Since Jones was often absent, he placed Maybank completely in charge of all mill construction and usually communicated instructions to the slave by personal letter. Indicating the responsibility placed in Maybank, Jones wrote him and the white overseer separate instructions, the tone of which further reveals Jones's fatherly respect for the black carpenter. "Dear Sandy," Jones began one letter,

³⁶ Olmsted, *Seaboard Slave States*, 426-429.

³⁷ D. Ross to—Douglass, Feb. 7, 1812, Ross Letterbook (VHS).

As I wished to have some work done I thought it would be best to write you a letter that you could keep and so have it by you, that you might not forget anything. . . . You can attend to this work as soon as you can & Porter & William will assist you in it. Am glad to hear that you have been generally well all the season & hope you may continue so. . . . Tell Mary Howdye for me—and your children. . . . Your mistress sends howdye for you and for Mary. I trust you are holding on in your high profession of the Gospel of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ. A Christian to do well must trust in the Lord Jesus Christ at all times, and constantly watch and pray. . . .

The master extended Maybank further privileges, including permission to answer his master's letters, to marry, and, when Jones's rice mill was not too busy, to hire his own time at nearby plantations and mills.³⁸

Similarly, other slave managers assisted their masters in maintaining discipline under industrial working conditions; as a reward they won their masters' paternal esteem. For example, Horace, a slave architect and civil engineer, built bridges throughout the Black Belt for Robert Jemison, Jr., a wealthy central-Alabama contractor, planter, sawmiller, and manufacturer. In fact, Jemison and Horace's owner were so pleased with the bondsman's performances that at the opening of the 1845-1846 session of the Alabama legislature they had a bill introduced to emancipate the bondsman. The bill passed both houses, and a few months later Jemison sent Horace, whose surname was now King, "the promised certified copy of the act of our last legislature. . . . I have had it made out on Parchment thinking it most suitable & that it would be most agreeable to you in this form." Thereafter, Jemison frequently consulted Horace King about construction projects, wages, and other business and personal matters. King evidently answered Jemison's queries, though, unfortunately, none of the ex-slave's letters survive. However, the tone of Jemison's correspondence with King suggests the cordiality existing between the two men. For example, Jemison wrote:

Dear Horace: Some two days ago Mr. Williams wrote to you [about] Columbus Bridge, Miss. If you can attend to this you will very greatly oblige both Mr. Williams & myself. . . . Will

³⁸ C. C. Jones to Sandy, Aug. 15, 1853, and C. C. Jones to T. J. Shepard, March 30, 1850, Jones Papers (Tulane).

you answer at yr earliest convenience whether we can get yr services and about what time will suit yr convenience best and we will endeavor to arrange things to suit.

In Haste. yr friend R. Jemison jr.³⁹

Upon such accommodationism as this did industrial slavery in part rest.

* * *

The control of industrial slaves, if not all American bondsmen, did not rest solely upon the indiscriminate application of terror. Rather, discipline consisted of a combination of severity with subtle coercion. Over the years, masters experimented with and adopted sophisticated disciplinary devices which increased efficiency, controlled resistance, and strengthened the slave system as a whole. To be sure, slavery was founded on brutality and violence was necessary to its continuation. But those who think that slaves could not be used in industry misunderstand the versatility of bondage. Those who think that repression of men is impossible without force misjudge the relationships between rulers and ruled.

ROBERT STAROBIN

*University of Wisconsin,
Madison*

³⁹ R. Jemison Letterbooks, 1844-46, 1851-53, 1852-54 (Univ. of Alabama Library); *Journals of Alabama House and Senate*, 1845-46. For the accommodationist role of other slave managers, see, for example, Moore, "Simon Gray, Riverman," 472-484; R. Starobin, "Industrial Slavery," ch. 3 and 5.