

John A. Quitman and His Slaves: Reconciling Slave Resistance with the Proslavery Defense

By ROBERT E. MAY

THE RECENT RICH OUTPOURING OF WORKS ABOUT SOUTHERN slavery and black culture by Eugene D. Genovese, Herbert G. Gutman, Lawrence W. Levine, John W. Blassingame, Leslie Howard Owens, and others represents one of the most exciting and remarkable developments in the course of American historiography.¹ In less than a generation our comprehension of a vital part of our past has increased immensely.

It will take time, however, for all the seeds planted by this historiographical revolution to bear fruit. The implications and utility of new findings are not always apparent to scholars working with tangentially related questions. The purpose of this article is to suggest the value of assimilating this research on slavery into southern political biography. Traditionally, biographical studies have divorced southern leaders from the institution which defined their political universe. When the slaveholdings of politicians were discussed, the attention provided them was usually fleeting or superficial. Thus, Avery Odelle Craven's study of Edmund Ruffin allotted only four pages to Ruffin's relations with his slaves. Craven discovered "a lovable tyrant," whose plantations functioned in a harmonious and positive atmosphere. Craven apparently saw little need to go beyond describing white-black bonds of affection, the initiative given Ruffin's black foreman, and humane living conditions (particularly in health care). Matters such as slave desertion during the Civil War merited no explanation. The new conscious-

¹ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976); Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977); Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Owens, *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South* (New York, 1976). This article is a revision of a paper given at the Southern Historical Association meeting in November 1978. The author wishes to express his appreciation to Harold D. Woodman for his suggestions.

MR. MAY is associate professor of history at Purdue University.

ness about the functioning of slavery has made such omissions less acceptable. Responding to the altered historiographical atmosphere, more recent biographers of antebellum southerners—such as Clement Eaton in his study of Jefferson Davis—have provided far more comprehensive treatment of master-slave relations.²

An important paradox of the politician-slave relationship, however, remains relatively unexplored. One of the most significant discoveries in recent works about slavery is that black resistance to bondage was virtually universal throughout the Old South and that this resistance interfered with the functioning of southern plantations and households. Biographers can no longer assume that slave-owning politicians interpreted southern civilization as idyllic because nothing in their immediate environment seriously challenged such an outlook. Erasing such assumptions, however, poses a dilemma. Can it simply be assumed that friction and resistance to slavery was endemic to all households and plantations of southern politicians? If friction was pervasive, were southern politicians mere hypocrites, rationalizing their society's way of life to mask their economic stake in slave labor? Or, is it probable that politicians shared the ambiguities reflected in Mary Boykin Chesnut's diary, a document revealing a mind plagued by constantly shifting images of slave behavior and values?³ Perhaps a subconscious process of self-deception was intrinsic to the political defense of slavery.

Such questions are particularly fascinating when applied to pro-slavery extremists, for their protestations in defense of the slave labor system rang the loudest. Though it can be argued that their ideologies evolved by mere membership in a master class with a given *Weltanschauung* and that interactions with slaves were irrelevant for value formation, it is more logical to assume that their attitudes reflected, at least in part, what they perceived about slaves on a day-to-day basis.

This essay considers the plantation and household slaves of one southern fire-eater, Mississippi's John Anthony Quitman (1798–1858), in an effort to demonstrate the feasibility of examining the relationship of southern radicals and their slaves. Quitman, like most southern radicals, has received inadequate consideration from historians, and virtually nothing has been said about his own

² Craven, *Edmund Ruffin, Southerner: A Study in Secession* (New York and London, 1932), 4 (quotation), 18–21, 237; Eaton, *Jefferson Davis* (New York and London, 1977), 33–46. Another recent biography which considers the functioning of slavery in depth is Archie V. Huff, Jr., *Langdon Cheves of South Carolina* (Columbia, 1977), 177–212.

³ Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, edited by Ben Ames Williams (Boston, 1949), 38, 92–93, 135, 140, 158, 201, 265, 292, 293, 368, 433, and *passim*.

plantations and slaves. William L. Barney's recent treatment of Quitman in *The Road to Secession*, for instance, attributes his ideological extremism almost exclusively to his role as a political and social "outsider" in the South by virtue of his New York birth and northern upbringing.⁴ Barney exaggerated Quitman's status as outsider—Quitman had achieved a secure "insider" status in Mississippi's political world and elite society *prior* to his advocacy of nullification in 1832—and disregarded some very revealing information in Quitman's records and papers about his attitudes toward slaves.⁵

Quitman, widely perceived as Mississippi's disciple of John Caldwell Calhoun, devoted far more energy to defending southern rights than to organizing a cohesive philosophical, class, religious, or racial justification of slave labor. He was an advocate of the proslavery philosophy, who never really organized his thoughts into a consistent whole. Quitman was more activist than ideologue. He was an outspoken proponent of nullification in the early 1830s, and while governor in 1850 he attempted to lead his state out of the Union. In the mid-1850s he also headed a conspiratorial organization which hoped to liberate Cuba from Spanish rule by means of a filibustering expedition and subsequently to have the island annexed to the Union as a new slave state.⁶ Much of his commitment to slavery is implicit in his persistent advocacy of states' rights and the Calhounian ideology rather than a consistently developed theme in his speeches and letters.

⁴ Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York, Washington, and London, 1972), 86–98. For parallel interpretations of proslavery extremists, with some variance of emphasis, see Drew G. Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Baltimore and London, 1977); David H. Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXVII (February 1971), 3–18; and Ronald T. Takaki, *A Pro-Slavery Crusade: The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade* (New York and London, 1971), 86–102.

⁵ Within a decade after his arrival in Natchez in 1821 (and before his initial declaration of nullification principles) Quitman had served in the state legislature and as judge of the Mississippi Superior Court of Chancery and had been appointed a director of the branch of the United States Bank in Natchez. He was also a member of the Board of Visitors of nearby Jefferson College, was active in a variety of civic enterprises such as the Mississippi Agricultural Society, and was influential in statewide Masonic affairs. Quitman's correspondence never indicated any concern that his political career might suffer because of his northern origins.

⁶ For Quitman's activist role as southern extremist consult Cleo Hearon, "Nullification in Mississippi," *Mississippi Historical Society, Publications*, XII (1912), 43–46, 55–59, 62, 71; John McCardell, "John A. Quitman and the Compromise of 1850 in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXXVII (August 1975), 239–66; James H. McLendon, "John A. Quitman, Fire-Eating Governor," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XV (April 1953), 73–89; Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854–1861* (Baton Rouge, 1973), 22–76; John F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman* . . . (2 vols., New York, 1860; cited hereinafter as Claiborne, *Quitman*).

Nonetheless, Quitman's position on slavery falls solidly within the general contours of the proslavery argument. He asserted that the history of the Negro race over five thousand years proved that blacks were incapable of self-support and that they would relapse into "barbarism" without the "protecting care and supporting intellect of the white Caucasian man."⁷ God, therefore, had willed this benevolent mission to whites, and the South's acceptance of this duty had led to its prosperity and been beneficial to the nation at large.⁸ Speaking in Congress in 1856 he lectured his Republican colleagues that "negro slavery, as it exists in the South, has not only been hitherto one of the chief sources of our national prosperity, but is . . . an element of moral and military strength . . ."⁹ Quitman, on the other hand, professed little respect for the northern free-labor system, where "factory wretches" worked eleven-hour days in "fetid" conditions while their intellects were destroyed "watching the interminable whirling of the spinning-jenny."¹⁰ His private perspective, moreover, conformed to his public affirmations. The Quitman plantations functioned satisfactorily, and his bondsmen were appreciative of their condition. He described his slaves as "faithful, obedient, and affectionate" and declared that he would prefer "abject penury" to selling a single slave.¹¹

Quitman owned four plantations: Springfield, purchased in 1834 and located on the Mississippi River about nine miles from Quitman's home ("Monmouth") just outside Natchez; Palmyra, another Mississippi plantation (Warren County), in which Quitman gained an interest by virtue of his marriage to Eliza Turner in 1824; Live Oaks, in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, near the town of Houma, which Quitman started developing in the mid-1830s; and Belen, on Bee Lake (near the Yazoo River) in Holmes County, Mississippi, which Quitman did not develop into a plantation until the mid-1850s. The plantations were managed by white overseers.

⁷ Quitman speech at Tammany Hall, February 22, 1856, quoted in *New York Times*, February 23, 1856, p. 3.

⁸ *Journal of the Senate of the State of Mississippi . . . Regular Session* [1850] (Jackson, 1850), 323-24 [Quitman's inaugural message to the state legislature]; John Quitman to Jackson, Mississippi, Pierce and King Association, July 17, 1852, quoted in *Vicksburg Tri-Weekly Whig*, August 3, 1852; Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 138-39; Quitman to William A. Stone, July 19, 1855, quoted in *New York Times*, August 8, 1855, p. 2.

⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 3 Sess., Appendix, 118 (December 18, 1856).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119 (second and third quotations); John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, January 18, 1843 (first quotation), Quitman Family Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C.; hereinafter cited as Quitman Family Papers, SHC).

¹¹ Quitman to J. F. H. Claiborne, January 27, 1840, quoted in Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 186. Quitman, however, did sell a slave two years later. He entered in his daybook in June 1842: "Sold to Dr. Thistle girl Sally and received per her a small girl Rachel—in cash and Dr. Thistle's note 51 50 due 1 Mch next for 49." John Quitman Daybook, June 21, 1842, John Anthony Quitman Papers (Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, La.; hereinafter cited as Quitman Papers, LSU).

Palmyra and Belen were cotton plantations. Springfield was a combination cotton plantation and dairy farm. Live Oaks was a sugar and molasses plantation. Both Palmyra and Springfield generated extra income by providing wood for Mississippi River steamers, and Quitman ran a ferriage operation for crossing the river at Springfield.¹²

The number of slaves Quitman owned varied from year to year, but he definitely must be classified as a large slaveowner. Most slaves were concentrated at Palmyra, where, for instance, there were 311 slaves under sixty years of age in 1848. The other plantations were on a smaller scale: Live Oaks had 45 slaves in 1840 and 85 in 1850; Springfield had 39 slaves in 1842; Belen had 29 slaves under sixty in 1855 and 32 slaves under sixty in 1858. Quitman's staff of household servants supplemented this force, and he occasionally hired extra bondsmen.¹³

Quitman was neither a harsh nor a paternalistic master. Rather, he functioned on the spectrum between those two extremes. He certainly was not one of the rare slaveowners who disavowed the whip. Slaves received whippings for breaches of discipline. A slave discovered in the Palmyra kitchen, for instance, was given a "few cuts." The lash also was used in matters of judgment for such offenses as picking "trashy" cotton or an insufficient amount. Occasionally, Quitman's slaves experienced the sudden, irrational violence of the type so frequently described in slave narratives. An

¹² Deed Records, Adams County, Vol. U, 414-16; Warren County, Vol. L, 283-84; Vol. R, 242-47; Vol. S, 312 (microfilm copies in Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss.); John Quitman to Henry Quitman, April 30, 1835, Quitman Family Papers, SHC; Contract dated December 20, 1834, John Anthony Quitman Papers (University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.). At Live Oaks Quitman employed his brother and after an interval his son as a resident overseer. Initially, Quitman had no title to Palmyra. His wife had a part interest in it, and legal control remained in the hands of the trustees of the estate of Eliza's father. Quitman and his wife sold their interest to Eliza's brothers, Henry and Fielding Turner, in 1836. Quitman subsequently became Henry Turner's partner in running Palmyra, and in 1842 both of them acquired title to the plantation by buying out Eliza's other surviving brother George W. Turner.

¹³ Manuscript Census Returns, Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedules, National Archives Microfilm Series (cited hereinafter as NAMS) M-704, roll 129, frame 57; Manuscript Census Returns, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Adams County, Mississippi, Schedule 2, Slave Population, NAMS M-432, roll 383, frames 140-41; Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, Schedule 2, Slave Population, NAMS M-432, roll 247, frames 316-17; Personal Property Tax Rolls, Warren County, 1848; Holmes County, 1855, 1858, Auditor's Office, Record Group 29 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); "Slaves on Springfield March 1, 1842," Springfield Plantation Account Book, John Anthony Quitman Papers (Mississippi Department of Archives and History; cited hereinafter as Quitman Papers, MDA). The federal census of 1850 listed only twenty-seven slaveowners in Mississippi with more than two hundred slaves. Quitman, therefore, was of the slaveholding elite, though not of its very upper crust. J. D. B. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States . . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census . . .* (Washington, D. C., 1854), 95.

overseer killed a black youth in 1844.¹⁴ Live Oaks must have been a particularly fearsome place during its formative years; Quitman's brother Albert, who had gained a reputation of strict disciplinarian in the merchant marine, managed it until his death there in 1845. Labor conditions were brutal, and transfer to the Louisiana place was sometimes used as a punishment for unruly slaves at Quitman's other holdings.¹⁵

Punishment and discipline, on the other hand, were consciously moderated by reason. "Harshness makes the negro stubborn," wrote Quitman; "praise, and even flattery, and, more than all, kindness, make them pliable and obedient." Quitman sought firmness balanced by compassion, and this philosophy apparently was shared by his brother-in-law Henry Turner and most of Quitman's overseers.¹⁶ The Live Oaks overseer who succeeded Albert Quitman won commendations from a neighboring planter as "kind to the people at the same time that he requires them to perform their duty"¹⁷ Punishment on Quitman's holdings was carefully meted out, and sometimes it was not imposed if there were extenuating circumstances. A runaway, for example, went unpunished upon his return because "he seemed penitent and is usually a good boy." In the kitchen incident mentioned above, the slave involved, upon promising improved behavior in the future, was let off without the usual number of lashes.¹⁸ Turner suggested that one overseer be dismissed because he was "too fond of his whip" and observed that the ideal overseer should be accustomed to managing slaves "without being cruel."¹⁹

There were, in addition, incentive systems operating within Quitman's slave economy, and slaves, much as described in Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pushed Quitman to carry out his part of the reciprocal concessions. Slaves demanded and received pay (usually converted into shoes and calicoes) for chopping wood on Sundays, their day of rest.²⁰ Slaves raised chickens for Quitman's Monmouth household and insisted upon prompt pay-

¹⁴ Henry Turner to John Quitman, October 12, 26, 1843; October 20, 1844, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵ Louisa Quitman to John Quitman, December 19, 1835; John Quitman to Henry Quitman, December 7, 1836; Henry Turner to John Quitman, September 26, 1842, *ibid.*

¹⁶ John Quitman to Albert Quitman, May 9, 1839, Claiborne, *Quitman*, 1, 190.

¹⁷ John M. Pelton to Eliza Quitman, December 19, 1846, Lovell Family Papers (University of the South Library, Sewanee, Tenn.).

¹⁸ Henry Turner to John Quitman, October 12, 1843 (quotation); March 17, 1852, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁹ Henry Turner to John Quitman, November 19, 1852 (second quotation); March 16, 1853 (first quotation), *ibid.*

²⁰ Henry Turner to John Quitman, June 7, 1842, *ibid.*; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 134, 313-15.

ment: "Harry takes down some chickens which the negroes have furnished. I have given him a bill of same—can you send me the money by letter. They are very troublesome in the way of asking for their dues when not paid"²¹ Quitman allowed his slaves to develop their own community life in their quarters, sanctioning visits to other plantations at night and partying at designated times. Mid-winter at Live Oaks after the cane was rolled, for instance, brought a round of dances, marriages, and other festivities.²²

Relations between the Quitman family and the household servants were definitely paternalistic. Monmouth's domestics were never called slaves by family members, who rather referred to them as Negroes, as servants or, occasionally, as "darkeys." Quitman considered his servants distinct, but nonetheless real, extensions of his own family. How intimate an extension he seems never fully to have decided. In one letter he apparently intended to instruct his daughter to pass his "love" on to the servants but thought better of it and rewrote the sentence using the term "regards" instead. But he did care for his domestics beyond their monetary value and services provided. One gets a sense of these ties from a letter he wrote to his son during the yellow-fever epidemic of 1853. Quitman mentioned that he had been so occupied with "nursing and prescribing for sick negroes" that he could not provide his son with accurate information about his own family's health. He explained that upon returning from a recent trip, he had found "Flora, Joe & Dick [all servants] quite ill," and that "poor Flora" had died and been buried by the family.²³

Quitman's wife and children shared these bonds of affection. One of his daughters, noting the death of a servant in a neighboring household, said, "I know how hard it would be for us if Aunt Dicey or Harry should die." The Quitmans demonstrated their care by frequently extending privileges to house servants. Quitman had an Episcopal minister in Natchez make a special trip to Monmouth to conduct the wedding ceremony of his body servant to another household domestic; Quitman's son permitted a servant to attend a Negro ball in New Orleans and to delay his (the servant's) return to Monmouth "at his earnest solicitation."²⁴ Servants came to expect

²¹ Henry Turner to John Quitman, November 18, 1853, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

²² Henry Turner to John Quitman, February 16, 1844; Mary L. McMurren to Eliza Quitman, August 11, 1856; Antonia Quitman to John Quitman, January 13, 1857; Louisa Chadborne to John Quitman, January 6, 12, 1857; Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, December 27, 29, 1856; January 10, 1857, *ibid*.

²³ John Quitman to Antonia Quitman, March 24, 1856, *ibid*; John Quitman to F. Henry Quitman, September 14, 1853, John Quitman Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.; cited hereinafter as Quitman Papers, HSP).

²⁴ Louisa [Quitman] Chadborne to John Quitman, September 14, 1855 (first quotation), Quitman Family Papers, SHC; Natchez *Mississippi Free Trader*, December 19, 1848; F.

gifts on special occasions, such as the return of family members from trips to New Orleans. The giving of presents to the servants at Christmas—some purchased, some hand-me-downs—was a yearly ritual by which the family affirmed (from its viewpoint) its personal obligations and emotional ties to household servants. House servants also maintained considerable initiative in personal matters, such as the naming of their children.²⁵

Concern by Quitman and his family for household servants was reciprocated. Aunt Dicey, the family's black mammy for many years, was very protective of Quitman's children and would spend considerable effort in nursing them when they were sick. When a kitchen fire occurred at Monmouth servants came running to put it out. Quitman's servant John loyally cared for Quitman when he fell sick on a railroad trip to Jackson in 1845. There were many other times when family servants rallied during crises.²⁶

Moderation and paternalism, however, did not spare Quitman from persistent resistance by both house servants and field hands. Antimaster patterns of behavior interrupted the smooth flow of plantation life and household affairs with some regularity. If Quitman genuinely believed that owner-slave relations were harmonious, he either purposely overlooked such behavior among his slaves or failed to comprehend its import. This is not to suggest that Quitman and his family faced overt servile insurrection. Quitman's blacks, so far as the available records indicate, neither struck whites nor openly threatened them. Because of this, the paranoid "crisis of fear" that seems to have afflicted so many southerners apparently was not felt by Quitman's family. The Quitmans lived to the very eve of the Civil War virtually oblivious of the dangers of slave rebellion and believing, as Quitman put it, that southern society was "based upon a more solid foundation" than northern society. In one instance, when the overseer at Live Oaks suggested that a num-

Henry Quitman to Eliza Quitman, March 10, 1856 (second quotation), Quitman Papers, MDA.

²⁵ Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, December 25, 1853; John Quitman Daybook, December 12, 1849, Quitman Papers, LSU; Rosalie Quitman to Louisa Quitman, February 4, 1853; Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, January 14, 1856; Antonia Quitman to John Quitman, September 24, 1856; Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, December 25, 1857, all in Quitman Family Papers, SHC; John Quitman to F. Henry Quitman, January 11, 1847, Quitman Papers, MDA. Paternalism, however, apparently stopped short of the voluntary emancipation of household servants. There are no indications in either the Quitman manuscripts or county records that Quitman manumitted any slaves. See Terry L. Alford, "Some Manumissions Recorded in the Adams County Deed Books in Chancery Clerk's Office, Natchez, Mississippi, 1795-1835 [1855]," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXXIII (February 1971), 39-50.

²⁶ F. Henry Quitman to Eliza Quitman, December 20, 1847, Quitman Papers, HSP; John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, February 7, 1845; Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, December 29, 1858, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

ber of hired hands at the sugar plantation had been stirring up rebellion in the slave quarters, Quitman told his son Henry not to pander to the overseer's "childish petulance." Occasional allusions in family correspondence to property destruction in Monmouth's vicinity reflect some apprehensions, but it is unclear whether or not the Quitmans ascribed these occurrences to slave resistance.²⁷

Never threatening rebellion, Quitman's slaves expressed their resentment in various ways. At times, there were frequent runaways. Henry Turner noted on one occasion, "Last Evening George and Abram ran away and I presume will go to Natchez. William Smith the boy who ran away from me is in jail at Port Gibson and Crow [Palmyra overseer] will go after him in the morning—as fast as we get one set in others appear to take their place"²⁸ Quitman's slaves also resisted medical treatment. Quitman warned his brother Albert in 1839 that slaves feigned good health when they were sick because of their dislike of hospitals and "dieting," and he referred to slaves who had died because treatment came too late to save them. Turner recounted how a Palmyra slave disguised cholera symptoms for three days until he collapsed on the job and died within hours.²⁹ Such behavior might have reflected a death wish or suicidal tendencies. It is possible that the supposedly accidental drowning of one of Quitman's slaves in the Mississippi River was really a suicide. It is more likely, however, that Quitman's slaves resisted treatment because of skepticism regarding Quitman's treatments and because they particularly objected to quarantine care that separated them from the slave community. Quarantined slaves

²⁷ John Quitman to F. Henry Quitman, June 28, 1856, Quitman Papers, HSP. Quitman's remark on the relative stability of southern society is quoted in Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 138. For a representative comment on property destruction see Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, November 14, 1841, Quitman Family Papers, SHC. Eliza mentioned the burning of a cotton gin and fifty bales of cotton. An exception may have been in the winter of 1835–1836 after Mississippi had been rocked by a slave-insurrection panic. Acknowledging recent arson attempts in Natchez, Quitman wrote his wife advising vigilance and mentioning that he had alerted the Natchez Fencibles (a volunteer militia company which he had helped organize in 1824) to be on the watch. John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, January 15, 1836, Quitman Family Papers, SHC; Edwin A. Miles, "The Mississippi Slave Insurrection Scare of 1835," *Journal of Negro History*, XLII (January 1957), 48–60; William F. Gray, *From Virginia to Texas, 1835. Diary of Col. Wm. F. Gray . . .* (Houston, 1909), 55. Given the large numbers of river desperadoes who passed through Natchez, it is quite possible that concern over property destruction among the Quitmans was directed, at least part of the time, toward lower white elements. Eliza wrote John, in fact, on January 3, 1836 (Quitman Family Papers, SHC), that "gamblers" were suspected of having started the fires. Quitman attributed the problems that did arise in slave control to unnatural agitation by northern abolitionists. John Quitman to his brother, October 17, 1835, quoted in Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 139.

²⁸ Henry Turner to John Quitman, October 19, 1843, Quitman Family Papers, SHC. See also Turner to Quitman, September 26, 1842; October 12, 26, 1843; September 5, 12, 1845; February 2, 1852, *ibid.*

²⁹ John Quitman to Albert Quitman, May 9, 1839, Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 190; Henry Turner to John Quitman, April 20, 1849, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

would "slip off at night to the quarter, which invariably makes them [the healthy slaves] sick."³⁰ Other resistance was evidenced in a variety of forms. Slaves at Palmyra used a religious awakening in 1843 as a cover for misbehavior. There were also work slowdowns, and there may have been slave sabotage. Overseer Robert O. Love's curt entry in his Springfield journal that "Saml broke one of the new plows" may or may not have represented a pattern of deliberate resistance.³¹

"Pampered" house servants also manifested displeasure with their condition despite the privileges accorded them. Such resistance usually took the form of sullenness, sloppy work, and infringement of household regulations. Thus, Quitman had to apologize to Henry Clay for his "trusty servt.[s]" failure to locate magnolia trees for Clay during the Kentuckian's visit to Monmouth. "From some mistake," Quitman explained, "he was unable to find those to which I had directed him, and did not inform me of his failure until it was too late to make another attempt." Another servant ran the family carriage over a three-foot embankment on the way to a neighborhood wedding, injuring family members.³² Servants were reported as "lazy" and the cause of "trouble and vexation."

Problems developed especially during Quitman's absences; his servants obviously thought that punishment was unlikely when Quitman's wife was in control. A letter from Quitman's wife while Quitman was serving in the state legislature is a classic in managerial frustration: "I have never communicated any of my domestic troubles to you, since you left me, and I am not sure that it is quite proper for me to do so now . . . but I cannot help it[.] Alfred and Fred have become perfectly lawless—they go off whenever and wherever they please, get drunk and of course do no work, but Alfred particularly has behaved with so much insolence, perfectly regardless of the most simple orders . . . We I should say I could not go to church because he, Alfred, took himself away upon his

³⁰ Henry Turner to John Quitman, May 29, 1843; April 20, 1849 (quotation), Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

³¹ Springfield Plantation Account Book, January 15, 1853, Quitman Papers, MDA; Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, November 15, 1842; Henry Turner to John Quitman, August 2, 1843; John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, September 7, 1843, Quitman Family Papers, SHC. Quitman's September 7, 1843, letter to Eliza, written from a Mississippi River steamer en route to Palmyra, noted the revival: "I learned when in Vicksburg from Joe Davis that Henry [Turner] was well but quite excited about some religious fanaticism at the upper Palmyra place. I can soon settle that matter & will stop to see it all quiet." In the fall Turner attributed runaways to attitudes induced by the previous summer's "religious excitement." See Henry Turner to John Quitman, October 26, 1843, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

³² John Quitman to Henry Clay, April 3, 1830, J. F. H. Claiborne Papers (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, January 14, 1856; Louisa Chadbourne to John Quitman, January 5, 1856, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

own amusement, tho' he had been told expressly that the carriage would be wanted"³³ Troublesome slaves could, of course, be transferred to field work, but there were not always acceptable candidates to replace them. When Eliza wanted to exchange Polly at Monmouth for Celia Brown at Palmyra in 1845, Henry Turner responded that such a change would be inadvisable since Celia Brown was addicted to whiskey and would "have it at any risk and again her temper is totally uncontrollable and when excited she is impudent to any one."³⁴

Household servants also ran away. The most shocking incident from the perspective of Quitman's family was the disappearance of "John" from a rooming house while the family was in Boston en route to a Newport vacation (Quitman was away in the Mexican War.) But, paradoxically, perhaps the best indications of servant unreliability are the constant reassurances in the Quitman family correspondence that servants were "faithful" or behaving well. Eliza remarked on one occasion, "The servants work and conduct themselves well. I never had so little trouble with them."³⁵ Such comments obviously would have been uncalled for had servant loyalty been taken for granted.

Further incidents of resistance by Quitman's slaves could be described, but there is no need. The point is not that Quitman's slaves were more unruly than southern blacks in general but rather that Quitman's plantations and household conformed to patterns of friction documented in the historical treatments of slavery as an institution. Life in this secessionist planter's world from the aspect of labor control was no idyll. Quitman must also have been aware that his labor problems were shared by other planters. The Mississippi newspapers were replete with advertisements of runaway slaves, and these were often for the slaves of Quitman's relatives, neighbors, and political associates. In the Vicksburg *Whig*, for instance, Quitman would have found that Seargent Smith Prentiss—a close ally in his fight against bond repudiation by Mississippi—was missing his thirty-year-old "boy" Isaac and that the Lawrence County jail was holding Daniel, a thirty-five-year-old mulatto belonging to fellow southern-rights activist Colin S. Tarpley. Two of Quitman's closest Natchez associates, Adam L. Bingaman and

³³ Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, January 3, February 21, 1836 (quotation); July 1842 [no exact date]; May 19, June 28, 1847; May 27, 1850; Louisa Chadbourne to Eliza Quitman, October 5, 1855, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

³⁴ Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, February 5, 1845; Henry Turner to John Quitman, May 2, 1845, *ibid.*

³⁵ Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, February 19, 1847; F. Henry Quitman to John Quitman, August 16, 1846; Louisa Quitman to Eliza Quitman, March 6, 1849; F. Henry Quitman to Eliza Quitman, April 25, 1850, *ibid.*

John B. Nevitt, suffered runaways according to advertisements and notices appearing in the *Jackson Mississippian*; and that same paper announced the detention in the Wilkinson County jail of a slave with scars on his left foot and left arm (the latter "occasioned by a burn") and missing part of a finger, who belonged to John M. Pelton, owner of the sugar estate adjacent to Quitman's Live Oaks plantation.³⁶ Surely, slave obstinacy must have been a common topic for casual conversation at social, business, and political gatherings of the planting gentry. How then could Quitman consistently and fervently defend slavery and the cause of southern rights? Given the periodic faltering of the slave system on his own premises, were there not any second thoughts? Can his position be written off as callous economic aggrandizement and greed?

Quitman saw nothing particularly praiseworthy in the slave system when he first arrived in Natchez from Ohio in 1821. A fascinating entry in his diary upon visiting a local plantation shows his initial skepticism about the peculiar institution: "The manifestations of joy of the slaves on the plantation at the approach of the holidays, was a novel scene to me. They repeatedly came from their quarters to the house and maneuvered round it with the music of horns, cow jaws, and singing. Poor creatures!—Yet they appear to be happy!!" But this antedated his accumulation of wealth from the toil of black field hands. Then, like most transplanted Yankees with slight antislavery leanings, he readily acknowledged the system's benefits.³⁷

It would also be a serious error to minimize the daily conveniences provided by house servants, conveniences which could provide Quitman sufficient cause to rationalize the system's evils. Whether serving in the Mississippi legislature, the Texas Revolution, the Mexican War, or Congress, or when out on the campaign trail Quitman consistently took a servant or servants along. His family was accustomed to day-to-day attendance by household servants at Monmouth and on social visits and trips to resorts. The Quitmans' domestics cooked, made beds, waited on the table, escorted the children home from school, fetched ice cream, chased bats out of the mansion, brought bedtime snacks up to the family, and performed a myriad of other functions. It is impossible to do full justice to the slave contribution to the aristocratic life-style at Monmouth. The point is that the Quitmans felt very comfortable around black labor. Quitman's daughter wrote typically during a

³⁶ Vicksburg *Daily Whig*, February 25, 1842; Vicksburg *Weekly Whig*, November 27, 1850; Jackson *Mississippian*, September 12, 1834; October 4 (quotation), 11, 1839.

³⁷ John Quitman Diary, December 24, 1821, Quitman Family Papers, SHC; Fletcher M. Green, *The Role of the Yankee in the Old South* (Athens, Ga., 1972), 131–32.

New Orleans visit in 1849, "Polly is very attentive & gives me not the slightest trouble, I could not have got along . . . without a maid." When the family occasionally confronted other kinds of labor, such as "idle dirty irish waiters" in the North, they became edgy.³⁸ Despite the difficulties in managing their servant labor and despite the modern view that servant labor is a luxury for the rich, the Quitmans found having slaves at their beck and call indispensable.

Having no reservations regarding slavery as an institution, Quitman had none to mask. Neither he nor his family entertained second thoughts about the propriety or morality of their holding blacks in bondage. The family papers fail to disclose the kind of guilt feelings delineated by Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., as the motivation for southern defensiveness over slavery.³⁹ Though there may have been a subconscious rationalization to some extent, it had little to do with hypocrisy. Profits and convenience explain some of Quitman's advocacy of slavery, but the answer goes further than that.

For one thing, Quitman never experienced the constant rhythm of slave resistance. As a public man with multiple interests, he was frequently absent from Monmouth and was rarely at his plantations. He had a political career that extended somewhat unevenly over three decades including service as chancellor of his state, as a member of both houses of the Mississippi legislature, as a delegate to the Mississippi constitutional convention of 1832, as governor of Mississippi, and as United States representative from Mississippi. Political participation, of course, necessitated far more than mere officeholding. Quitman attended countless political meetings (many of them in Jackson, the state capital) and engaged in grueling campaigns. Military activities also drew Quitman away from household and plantation concerns. As one of the organizers of the Natchez Fencibles (a volunteer militia organization) and its captain for years and as a multiterm high-ranking officer in the general militia of Mississippi he immersed himself in rounds of inspections, drills, parades, balls, and other militia functions. His service in the Texas Revolution called him away for all of April and May in 1836. His service as a volunteer general in the Mexican War meant an overall commitment of about two years, if his time at a court of inquiry at Frederick, Maryland, in June 1848 is included. Involvement in Cuba filibustering plans from 1850 to 1855 necessitated trips to New Orleans, Washington, D. C., and numerous other locales for purposes of recruitment, finance, organization, and appearance in

³⁸ Louisa Quitman to Eliza Quitman, March 6, 1849; Louisa Chadbourne to Eliza Quitman, December 13, 1857, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

³⁹ Sellers, "The Travail of Slavery," in Sellers, ed., *The Southerner as American* (Chapel Hill, 1960), 40-71.

court.⁴⁰

Quitman's entrepreneurial and community functions supplemented his political and military careers and further diverted his attention from home matters. During his early days in Mississippi, when his livelihood depended on his legal practice, he was compelled to ride the judicial circuits and was gone from home for long periods. Later, following the circuit could be dropped, but Quitman still put in numerous appearances in court, and his broadening interests encompassed a variety of matters requiring his presence. Morton Rothstein, William K. Scarborough, and others have recently demonstrated that planters, including the "Natchez nabobs," could be eminently commercial men "constantly expanding their enterprises and seeking new investment opportunities"⁴¹ John Quitman—who became immersed in land speculations, banking activities, Mississippi railroad development, the Natchez Steam Packet Company, and southern commercial conventions—certainly conformed to this description. An officer of a number of corporations, Quitman went to Europe for months in 1839 seeking funding for his Mississippi Railroad Company. Quitman thrust himself into Masonic concerns, which led to several terms as grand master for the lodges of Mississippi. His social conscience led him to become involved in antigambling and antidueling societies and in membership on various educational boards of trustees, including those of Jefferson College and the University of Mississippi.⁴²

With such a schedule, Quitman was not far removed from being

⁴⁰ Robert E. May, "John A. Quitman and the Southern Martial Spirit," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XLI (May 1979), 155–81; James H. McLendon, "John A. Quitman in the Texas Revolution," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LII (October 1948), 163–83; Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 227–400; Ray Broussard, "Governor John A. Quitman and the Lopez Expeditions of 1851–1852," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXVIII (May 1966), 103–20; C. Stanley Urban, "The Abortive Quitman Filibustering Expedition to Cuba, 1853–1855," *ibid.*, XVIII (July 1956), 175–96.

⁴¹ Rothstein, "The Natchez Nabobs: Kinship and Friendship in an Economic Elite," in Hans L. Trefousse, ed., *Toward a New View of America: Essays in Honor of Arthur C. Cole* ([New York], 1977), 97–112; Scarborough, "Slavery—The White Man's Burden," in Harry P. Owens, ed., *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery* (Jackson, 1976), 106–107 (quotation); Carl N. Degler, *Place over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Baton Rouge, 1977), 52–55. For an attack on the idea that an agrarian, antientrepreneurial spirit pervaded the Old South see David R. Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism: Virginia, 1847–1861* (Baton Rouge and London, 1977).

⁴² Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Jefferson College, June 6, 1835–July 23, 1842 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi* (Nashville, 1910), 81; Vicksburg *Sentinel*, January 25, 1845; Emmett N. Thomas, ed., *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge, F.&A.M. of the State of Mississippi (1818–1914)* . . . (Atlanta, 1914), 9–16, 27–28, 30; Jere W. Roberson, "The Memphis Commercial Convention of 1853: Southern Dreams and 'Young America,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXXIII (Fall 1974), 279–96; Claiborne, *Quitman*, I and II, *passim*.

an absentee slaveowner. His diverse responsibilities meant that he was as likely to be in town, in nearby locales such as Washington (Mississippi) or Vicksburg, in Jackson, or outside the state, as he was to be at Monmouth. Though he did visit his holdings occasionally and kept up on their condition by mail, he had to leave many decisions and most discipline to his overseers, to Henry Turner, and to his wife. Because of this, and since Quitman's slaves had a tendency to put their best foot forward in their master's presence, Quitman was disposed to shrug off as atypical aberrations those instances of slave resistance of which he was aware. Quitman's domineering masculine attitude reinforced this proclivity. He never fully respected his wife's judgment, viewed her complaints about slave disorder as overreaction, and therefore ignored or minimized incidents of resistance. When Eliza wrote him that the overseer at Springfield was an alcoholic, that the slaves there were idle, and that she had dismissed the overseer, he sharply rebuked her. "I fear you have done wrong in discharging Rees," he wrote. "These reports are generally exaggerated . . . I would rather trust to him even if he drinks, than to a stranger who knows nothing of my plans for the place."⁴³

A limited exposure to his labor system's imperfections, therefore, partly explains Quitman's casual response to problems on his holdings. Absenteeism, however, had an intellectual as well as physical dimension. Quitman and his family were in the steady presence of blacks and not just that of their own bondsmen. Quitman had his hair cut by Natchez's free black barber William Johnson. Family members constantly encountered servants in other households. At one May party, for instance, "the musician was an old negro, who scratched away the same tune over and over again."⁴⁴ Plantation and town society, within limits, was very integrated. Perhaps because of this, the Quitmans were remarkably free of hostile racial prejudice, though they did manifest traces of it, as when Quitman's daughter Rosalie complained of the family cook's "characteristic odor" as a "native gift."⁴⁵

⁴³ Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, November 15, 1842; John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, November 18, 1842, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

⁴⁴ William Johnson Diary, November 18, 1836, William R. Hogan and Edwin A. Davis, eds., *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge, 1951), 147; Louisa Quitman to John Quitman, May 2, 1843, Quitman Family Papers, SHC. Quitman apparently related to Johnson on a level approaching mutual respect. On one occasion Johnson wrote, "Gen. Quitman handed me a Letter to day that was given Him at Jackson for me. He did me proud, He did me proud." On another occasion Johnson tried to help extinguish a fire on Quitman's property on the Natchez bluff. It is unclear just how often Johnson cut Quitman's hair. William Johnson Diary, February 19, 1840 (quotation); January 29, 1843, *ibid.*, 277, 425.

⁴⁵ Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, December 25, 1858, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

Nevertheless, the Quitmans did absorb the prevailing racial stereotypes of their society, which regarded Negroes in general as simple, childlike, naturally lazy, and careless. Such stereotypes were hardly calculated to instill a curiosity in the master class about black behavior patterns, black culture, or black thought: one need not analyze the uncomplicated actions of children. Thus, Quitman and his family (mercifully for their private sanity) were so misled by their own racism that they had no inclination to investigate the implications of slave misbehavior. Rather, they operated from the assumption that their blacks recognized that being a Quitman slave was a privilege and that the bulk of their slave population revered them for providing an opportunity to serve. Family members frequently remarked how servants were saddened and tearful when the Quitmans departed Monmouth on trips ("Poor Aunt Dicey, Harry and Fidele, how lonely they will feel") and exultant to see the Quitmans return home. Field hands, they thought, harbored similar emotions. Quitman suggested, when his family visited Live Oaks for the Christmas holidays in 1856, "The poor negroes, what a new life opened to them by seeing among them my whole family."⁴⁶

Given such a myopic and simplistic perception of the black personality, it was intellectually impossible for any of the Quitmans to come to terms with those instances of black resistance they confronted. Slave misbehavior could be attributed to anything other than a resentment of bondage or a desire for freedom. An aura of unreality pervades the Quitmans' response to rebellious slaves. When the servant John bolted in Boston, Quitman expressed surprise that his servant could prove so "ungrateful," while his son and wife surmised that he had been drugged and kidnapped against his will and predicted that he would return if given the opportunity. Quitman's son reflected, "He has allway[s] been as kind, attentive & faithful as any one could be towards his master's family. . . . I myself have heard him say, that if it were in the power of these abolitionists to give him a *thousand freedoms he would not desert us & and his wife at home*"⁴⁷ When the servant Sandy over-turned the family carriage, it was attributed without hesitation to intoxication rather than to intentional misbehavior.⁴⁸ Difficulties

⁴⁶ Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, May 15, 1856; John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, January 6, 1856 [1857], *ibid.* See also Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, January 20, 1836; Louisa Quitman to John Quitman, May 2, 1843; Louisa Chadbourne to John Quitman, January 6, 1857; Antonia Quitman to Rosalie Quitman, December 6, 1857; Louisa Chadbourne to Rosalie Quitman, March 3, 1858, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, September 14, 1846; Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, April 2, 1847, *ibid.*; F. Henry Quitman to John Quitman, August 16, 1846, Quitman Papers, MDA.

⁴⁸ Louisa Chadbourne to John Quitman, January 5, 1856; Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, January 14, 1856, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

with field hands were consistently attributed to mismanagement by incompetent overseers. The Quitmans never considered that slaves might have been responding to bondage itself rather than to specific stimuli at a given moment.

Finally, it might be hypothesized that the longtime house servants who did remain "loyal" served to buffer the family from the realities around them. Since the Quitmans were economically, psychologically, and socially predisposed to believe in slavery, it took very little to reinforce their established convictions. Take, for instance, the symbolic implications of Isaac's return from Washington, D. C., in December 1855. Isaac, a family servant, had been, prior to this, a difficult slave to handle. On one occasion he had run away after being unfairly accused of stealing silver and had turned up years later in a New Orleans jail. Quitman's wife had requested his sale for insolence in 1850. But in the late fall of 1855, after accompanying Quitman to Washington, D. C., following Quitman's election to Congress, Isaac complained that he could not bear the cold in the capital. Quitman gave him a pass to return to Monmouth, and Isaac traveled by himself arriving home as promised. Isaac, of course, might have used the occasion to escape. The family could now excuse past misbehavior and wipe the slate clean. Quitman's daughter Louisa wrote that Isaac had been done "much injustice" and that she now believed him "a very kind hearted, well intentioned fellow."⁴⁹

Quitman's most loyal servant was probably Harry Nichols, who played a major role in the smooth functioning of Monmouth. The Quitmans entrusted Harry with a variety of responsible tasks, ranging from picking up merchandise in town to taking Quitman's infant granddaughter on a horseback ride to persuading indigent soldiers begging for food to leave the premises. Harry invariably proved competent, and other whites perceived him as a reliable source of information on conditions at Monmouth. Harry accompanied Quitman to Texas in 1836 and was at his side during the Mexican War, experiencing personal danger in his master's service. Quitman had Harry look after his baggage, procure food supplies for his table at the Mexican marketplaces, and do a number of other tasks. Writing from Victoria in Mexico, Quitman reflected, "I can

⁴⁹ Antonia Lovell, "The Story of Isaac" (handwritten pamphlet); Eliza Quitman to John Quitman, December 23, 1855; Louisa Chadbourne to John Quitman, January 5, 1856, Quitman Family Papers, SHC. Probably, Isaac's return had something to do with an unwillingness to separate from his relatively recently acquired wife. For Isaac's marriage see Annie Rosalie Quitman to Louisa Quitman, January 27, 1853, *ibid.* The local Natchez newspaper gave a proslavery twist to the story, alleging that Isaac had been approached by some Bostonians about running away, and that "he was afraid that he would be kidnapped into freedom" *Natchez Free Trader*, January 8, 1856.

not speak sufficiently well of this excellent servant. He is invaluable to me."⁵⁰

Harry's most welcome function may have been his confirmation, to the Quitmans, of their stereotype of happy, thankful servants. Harry played the role of docile slave to the hilt. There are so many references in the Quitman papers to Harry's smiling visage that one cannot escape the conclusion that he appeared, indeed, happy! He also knew how to say what Quitman wanted to hear, as Rosalie recorded on one occasion: "Papa left us about a week ago for the sea shore two or three days before he left He & Harry were bringing to light some past events 'No one knows all we have been through Harry do they?' Said Papa Harry fairly splitting with a smile replied with his usual 'That's a fact sir'." At San Jacinto, Harry reportedly echoed his master's own racism by commenting that the Mexican "yellow men" were "fools" for "fighting white folks."⁵¹ Harry also seemed appreciative of his station. Rather than complain about his separation from his children at Palmyra, Harry returned from a visit there thankful for the opportunity to see them. At the end of the Mexican War Quitman remarked that Harry was "delighted" about returning to his Monmouth duties. When Quitman was absent from Monmouth, Harry frequently insisted that family members send "his love to Master." At Quitman's funeral, Harry was observed as one of the most "heart-stricken mourners."⁵²

It is impossible to calculate how psychologically necessary for the Quitmans it was to have servants like Harry Nichols, whose endearing personality reassured them that the institution of slavery functioned the way that they liked to believe it functioned. It is clear, however, that the Quitmans found their relationship with

⁵⁰ John Quitman to F. Henry Quitman, January 11, 1847 (quotation), Quitman Papers, MDA. For more on Harry's service to Quitman during the Mexican War see John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, August 14, November 22, 1846; January 3, 1847, Quitman Family Papers, SHC. Harry's various functions in and around Monmouth can be traced in John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, May 12, 1840; January 29, June 17, 1842; John Quitman to Louisa Quitman, October 1, 1850; Louisa Chadbourne to John Quitman, September 14, 1855; Rosalie Quitman to John Quitman, December 9, 1855; Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, September 13, 1851; February 23, 1852, Quitman Family Papers, SHC; Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, April 9, August 2, 1853, Quitman Papers, LSU; John Quitman to F. Henry Quitman, January 28, 1844, Quitman Papers, HSP. For Harry's role with Quitman in the Texas Revolution see John Quitman to Henry Quitman, July 31, 1836, Quitman Family Papers, SHC; Claiborne, *Quitman*, I, 152.

⁵¹ Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, August 11, 1855 (first quotation), Quitman Papers, LSU; *Natchez Mississippi Free Trader*, December 19, 1848 (second quotation); Louisa Quitman to John Quitman, August 2, 1846; Rosalie Quitman to John Quitman, March 19, 1856; Annie Rosalie Quitman Diary, December 25, 1857; Louisa Chadbourne to Joseph Lovell, November 20, 1858, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

⁵² John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, October 27, 1847; Louisa Chadbourne to John Quitman, January 5, 1856; May 16, 1858, Quitman Family Papers, SHC; *Natchez Mississippi Free Trader*, July 20, 1858.

Harry very comforting and that they dealt with him on a distinctly relaxed level. While at Tampico during the Mexican War Quitman took a break from his duties to locate a photographer to take Harry's daguerreotype so that the kitchen help back at Monmouth could have a "laugh." After the portrait arrived Quitman's eldest daughter had no compunctions about sending a message to Harry through her father, kidding Harry about the weight he had added during the campaign.⁵³ Such casual banter on this and other occasions must have alleviated tension throughout the Quitman slave regime. When Quitman's daughter asked her father to tell Harry "we all miss him very much" when he was away in Mexico, she was subconsciously admitting the importance of Harry's role in confirming the family's convictions about the benevolence of their rule. Yet, as Gilbert Osofsky would have described it, Harry was probably "puttin' on ole massa."⁵⁴ Later, during the Civil War and following the occupation by Union forces of Natchez, Harry threatened to desert Monmouth and was dissuaded only by the granting of wages. Quitman, by then, was long dead, so his daughter Louisa (who had termed Harry "devoted" in 1858) must be consulted for an appropriate response. "Oh! deliver me from the 'citizens of African descent'," she exclaimed. "I am disgusted with the whole race. . . . They are all alike ungrateful and treacherous."⁵⁵ Monmouth's blacks had obviously forfeited their position in the "family."

In the end, it seems that the Quitmans, who thought that they knew their slaves very well, knew them not at all. Their fervent defense of southern rights and slavery was the product of both ideological conviction and their desire to perpetuate the economic and social benefits of the "peculiar institution." But the self-delusion intrinsic to this defense left them ill equipped to deal with the ultimate erosion of their way of life.

The above account of Quitman's slaveholdings is incomplete. Quitman did not maintain the type of plantation records that would have made possible an accurate statement on slave food, slave clothing, separation of families, and a number of other aspects of

⁵³ John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, February 27, 1847; Louisa Quitman to John Quitman, April 27, 1847, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

⁵⁴ Antonia Quitman to John Quitman, October 18, 1847, *ibid.*; Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' On Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York and other cities, 1969).

⁵⁵ Louisa Lovell to Joseph Lovell, November 20, 1858; August 17, 1863; February 7, 1864 (quotation), Quitman Family Papers, SHC. That the Quitmans experienced a sense of shock and disillusion when their slaves deserted them during the Civil War was typical for their class. See James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1977), 84-85; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 97-112; Gutman, *The Black Family*, 320-24.

life on Quitman's plantations. It is impossible to determine whether Quitman's holdings witnessed considerable sexual abuse or harassment of slave women. While the record regarding household servants is fuller than that regarding Quitman's field hands, the records of both suffer from the absence of slave narratives that would have provided, if available, some comprehension of slavery as seen from the perspective of Quitman's blacks. But an incomplete account is nonetheless more satisfying than slighting a central facet of Quitman's life.

Such an approach, if applied to other political leaders of the Old South, will both enhance an understanding of the thought processes of those individuals and will tend to incorporate black history with an ironic twist into the historiographical mainstream. As southern blacks become more visible in the history of southern whites, scholars will probably be forced to acknowledge that, as in the case of John Quitman, they were rendered nonpeople by the very whites who claimed to know them best.