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But it was far more in the master’s interest to motivate his slaves by positive means. Far more important than whipping in managing the slaves was figuring out how to motivate. No plantation owner wanted slaves who were sullen, discontented, and hostile, who did just enough to get by. They wanted devoted, hard-working, responsible men who identified their fortunes with the fortunes of their masters. Such attitudes cannot be beaten into slaves. They had to be elicited.²²

To achieve the desired response the planters developed a wide-ranging system of rewards. Some rewards were directed toward improving short-run performance (prizes for the individual or the gang with the best picking record on a given day or week). The prizes were such items as clothing, tobacco, whiskey, and very often cash. When slaves worked during times normally set aside for rest, they received extra pay—usually in cash.²³ Occasionally planters even devised elaborate schemes for profit sharing with their slaves.

All this evidence points to the fact that slaves lived at various levels of income. The average pecuniary income received by a prime field hand was roughly fifteen percent greater than the income he would have received for his labor as a free agricultural worker. Some slaves saved their money and were quite wealthy after the war. Simon Phillips, a slave from Alabama says, “People has the wrong idea of

nineteenth century. It must be remembered that, through the centuries whipping was considered a fully acceptable form of punishment, not merely for criminals but also for honest men or women who in some way shirked their duties. Whipping of wives, for example, was even sanctified in some versions of the Scripture. The Matthew’s Bible, which preceded the King James version, told the husband, in a note at 1 Pet. 3, that if his wife was “not obedient and healpfull vnto hym endeouareth to beate the feare of God into her heade, and that therby she maye be compelled to learne her duitie and do it.” During the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries whipping was commonly employed as a punishment in the North as well as in the South. Not until the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century did whipping rapidly fall from favor in the free states.

To attribute the continuation of whipping in the South to the maliciousness of masters is naïve. **Although some masters were brutal, even sadistic, most were not.** The overwhelming majority of the ex-slaves in the W.P.A. narratives who expressed themselves on the issue reported that their masters were good men. Such men worried about the proper role of whipping in a system of punishment and rewards. Some excluded it altogether. Most accepted it, but recognized that to be effective whipping had to be used with restraint and in a coolly calculated manner. Weston, for example, admonished his overseer not to impose punishment of any sort until twenty-four hours after the offense had been discovered. William J. Minor, a sugar planter, instructed his managers “not [to] cut the skin when punishing, nor punish in a passion.” Many planters forbade the whipping of slaves except by them or in their presence. Others limited the number of lashes that could be administered without their permission.

The decline of whipping as an instrument of labor discipline outside of the South appears to have been heavily

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influenced by economic considerations. With the rise of capitalism, impersonal and indirect sanctions were increasingly substituted for direct, personal ones. The hiring of free workers in the marketplace provided managers of labor with a powerful new disciplinary weapon. Workers who were lazy, indifferent, or who otherwise shirked their duties could be fired — left to starve beyond the eyesight or expense of the employer. Interestingly enough, denial of food was rarely used to enforce discipline on slaves. For the illness and lethargy caused by malnutrition reduced the capacity of the slave to labor in the fields. Planters preferred whipping to incarceration because the lash did not generally lead to an extended loss of the slave’s labor time. In other words, whipping persisted in the South because the cost of substituting hunger and incarceration for the lash was greater for the slaveowner than for the northern employer of free labor. When the laborer owns his own human capital, forms of punishment which impair or diminish the value of that capital are borne exclusively by him. Under slavery, the master desired forms of punishment which, while they imposed costs on the slave, did so with minimum impairment to the human capital which the master owned. Whipping generally fulfilled these conditions.

While whipping was an integral part of the system of punishment and rewards, it was not the totality of the system. What planters wanted was not **sullen and discontented slaves who did just enough to keep from getting whipped. They wanted devoted, hard-working, responsible slaves who identified their fortunes with the fortunes of their masters.** Planters sought to imbue slaves with a “Protestant” work ethic and to transform that ethic from a state of mind into a high level of production. “My negros have their name up in the neighbourhood,” wrote Bennet Barrow, “for making more than any one else & they think Whatever they do is better than any body Else.” **Such an attitude could not be beaten into slaves. It had to be elicited.**

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Much of the managerial attention of planters was focused on the problem of motivating their hands. To achieve the desired response they developed a wide-ranging system of rewards. Some rewards were directed toward improving short-run performance. Included in this category were prizes for the individual or the gang with the best picking record on a given day or during a given week. The prizes were such items as clothing, tobacco, and whiskey; sometimes the prize was cash. Good immediate performance was also rewarded with unscheduled holidays or with trips to town on weekends. When slaves worked at times normally set aside for rest, they received extra pay—usually in cash and at the rate prevailing in the region for hired labor. Slaves who were performing well were permitted to work on their own account after normal hours at such tasks as making shingles or weaving baskets, articles which they could sell either to their masters or to farmers in the neighborhood.

Some rewards were directed at influencing behavior over periods of intermediate duration. The rewards in this category were usually paid at the end of the year. Year-end bonuses, given either in goods or cash, were frequently quite substantial. Bennet Barrow, for example, distributed gifts averaging between \$15 and \$20 per slave family in both 1839 and 1840. The amounts received by particular slaves were proportional to their performance. It should be noted that \$20 was about a fifth of national per capita income in 1840. A bonus of the same relative magnitude today would be in the neighborhood of \$1,000.

Masters also rewarded slaves who performed well with patches of land ranging up to a few acres for each family. Slaves grew marketable crops on these lands, the proceeds of which accrued to them. On the Texas plantation of Julian S. Devereux, slaves operating such land produced as much as two bales of cotton per patch. Devereux marketed their crop along with his own. In a good year some of the slaves earned in excess of \$100 per annum for their

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families. Devereux set up accounts to which he credited the proceeds of the sales. Slaves drew on these accounts when they wanted cash or when they wanted Devereux to purchase clothing, pots, pans, tobacco, or similar goods for them.

Occasionally planters even devised elaborate schemes for profit sharing with their slaves. William Jemison, an Alabama planter, entered into the following agreement with his bondsmen.

[Y]ou shall have two thirds of the corn and cotton made on the plantation and as much of the wheat as will reward you for the sowing it. I also furnish you with provisions for this year. When your crop is gathered, one third is to be set aside for me. You are then to pay your overseer his part and pay me what I furnish, clothe yourselves, pay your own taxes and doctor’s fee with all expenses of the farm. You are to be no expense to me, but render to me one third of the produce and what I have loaned you. You have the use of the stock and plantation tools. You are to return them as good as they are and the plantation to be kept in good repair, and what clear money you make shall be divided equally amongst you in a fair proportion agreeable to the services rendered by each hand. There will be an account of all lost time kept, and those that earn most shall have most.

There was a third category of rewards. These were of a long-term nature, often requiring the lapse of a decade or more before they paid off. Thus, slaves had the opportunity to rise within the social and economic hierarchy that existed under bondage. Field hands could become artisans or drivers. Artisans could be allowed to move from the plantation to town where they would hire themselves out. Drivers could move up to the position of head driver or overseer. Climbing the economic ladder brought not only social status, and sometimes more freedom; it also had significant payoffs in better housing, better clothing, and cash bonuses.

Little attention has hitherto been paid to the manner in which planters selected the slaves who were to become the

did occur, some of the families of slaves were broken up. The question is how widespread was this?

Data contained in the sales records in New Orleans, by far the largest market in the interregional trade, sharply contradict the popular view that the destruction of slave marriages was at least a frequent, if not a universal, consequence of the slave trade.

These records, which cover thousands of transactions during the years from 1804 to 1862, indicate that about 2% of the marriages of slaves involved in the westward trek were destroyed in the process of migration. Nor is it by any means clear that the destabilizing effects of the westward migration on marriages was significantly greater among blacks than it was among whites.²⁸

There is no reason to believe that the age and sex structure of interstate sales at New Orleans were markedly different from those of other south-central cities. Moreover, New Orleans, more than any other city, dominated the interregional slave trade, receiving annually about one third of the slaves sold between states.²⁹

The Myth of Slave Breeding

The thesis that systematic breeding of slaves for sale in the market accounted for a major share of the net income or profit of slave holders, is often espoused. This thesis involves two interrelated concepts. First, it is assumed that the slave owners interfered in the normal sexual habits of slaves to maximize female fertility through such devices as mating women with especially potent men. Second, it is assumed that this raising of slaves occurred with sale as the main motive.

Unfortunately for the thesis, the many thousands of

Of course, the traditional interpretation of the interregional slave traffic is not confined to economic issues. To many, the most critical aspect of the slave trade was its corrosive effect on the integrity of the slave family. Since most issues regarding the impact of slavery on the black family are considered in a later chapter, the discussion here is confined to an examination of the contention that the interregional slave migration resulted in the widespread division of marriages, with husbands wrung from wives and children from both.

That the interregional slave trade resulted in the destruction of *some* slave marriages is beyond dispute. What is at issue is the extent of the phenomenon. Data contained in sales records in New Orleans, by far the largest market in the interregional trade, sharply contradict the popular view that the destruction of slave marriages was at least a frequent, if not a universal, consequence of the slave trade. These records, which cover thousands of transactions during the years from 1804 to 1862, indicate that more than 84 percent of all sales over the age of fourteen involved unmarried individuals. Of those who were or had been married, 6 percent were sold with their mates; and probably at least one quarter of the remainder were widowed or voluntarily separated. Hence it is likely that 13 percent, or less, of interregional sales resulted in the destruction of marriages. And since sales were only 16 percent of the total interregional movement, it is probable that about 2 percent of the marriages of slaves involved in the westward trek were destroyed by the process of migration. Nor is it by any means clear that the destabilizing effects of the westward migration on marriages was significantly greater among blacks than it was among whites.

The New Orleans records also throw into doubt the claims that sales of single children under thirteen were very frequent and that such children "were hardly less than a staple in the trade." For only 9.3 percent of the New Orleans sales

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productivity to reinforce each other than to conflict with each other. Both cruelty and affection had their place on southern plantations.

The Myth of Slave-Breeding

The thesis that *systematic* breeding of slaves for sale in the *market* accounted for a major share of the net income or profit of slaveholders, especially in the Old South, is espoused in one degree or another by most members of the anti-Phillips school. This proposition was given a considerable fillip by the work of Conrad and Meyer, who found substantially higher returns on women than men in the Old South. "Slavery was profitable to the whole South," they concluded, because "the continuing demand for labor in the Cotton Belt" insured high "returns to the breeding operation on the less productive land in the seaboard and border states."

The words "systematic" and "market" were underlined in the previous paragraph to emphasize that what is implied by the breeding thesis is more than the existence of general incentives for the encouragement of large slave families. *Systematic breeding for the market* involves two interrelated concepts: 1, interference in the normal sexual habits of slaves to maximize female fertility through such devices as mating women with especially potent men, in much the same way as exists in breeding of livestock; 2, the raising of slaves with sale as the main objective, in much the same way as cattle or horses are raised.

The evidence put forward to support the contention of breeding for the market is meager indeed. Aside from the differential in profit rates produced by Conrad and Meyer, the evidence consists largely of unverified charges made by abolitionists, and of certain demographic data. However,

hours of research by professional historians into plantation records have failed to produce a single authenticated case of the “stud” plantations alleged in abolitionist literature.

Nor was the sale of slaves all that profitable. The sweet potato crop brought more income to slave owners than the interregional sale of their bondsmen.³⁰

Furthermore, the proponents of the breeding thesis have been misled by *their* failure to recognize the difference between human beings and animals. What increases fertility among animals actually reduces fertility among men. Promiscuity increases venereal disease and reduces fertility. Emotional factors are of considerable significance in successful human conception. To imply that these factors would not be present in black people is inherently racist.

Clearly, had there been widespread sexual misconduct, the effects on slave morale would have been disastrous. Disraught and disgruntled slaves did not make good field hands. Consequently, most planters shunned direct interference in the sexual practices of slaves, and attempted to influence fertility patterns through a system of positive economic incentives—incentives that are akin to those practiced by various governments today.

Instructions from slave owners to their overseers frequently contain caveats against “undue familiarity” which might undermine slave morale and discipline. No set of instructions to overseers has been uncovered which explicitly or implicitly encouraged selective breeding or promiscuity.³¹

Sexual Exploitation?

Didn't sexual exploitation undermine and destroy the black family? Critics of the South have consistently answered in

subsequent corrections of the work of Conrad and Meyer have shown that rates of return on men and women were approximately the same. And the many thousands of hours of research by professional historians into plantation records have failed to produce a single authenticated case of the “stud” plantations alleged in abolitionist literature.

The demographic argument for the existence of slave breeding is based on two principal observations. First, the slave-exporting states had fewer slaves in the age group fifteen to twenty-nine, and more at very young and old ages, than the slave-importing states. Second, the fertility rate, measured as the ratio of children under one year to women aged fifteen to forty-nine, was slightly higher in the exporting than in the importing states. Neither of these demographic observations is sufficient to establish the existence of breeding for the market. The deviations of the age distribution in importing and exporting states existed not only for slaves but for free men. As such, they are proof that both free men and slaves migrated from east to west. But this point has never been in contention. What is in contention is the claim that the slave migration took place through market trading instead of through the migration of whole plantations.

As was shown in chapter 2, only 16 percent of the interregional movement of slaves took place through market trading. This small movement, an average of about twenty-five hundred persons per year, produced a gross income for the Old South planters in 1860 of just \$3,000,000, and a net income only a quarter as high. It is hardly likely that the fate of slavery in the Old South depended on an item which accounted for less than one percent of farm receipts. Indeed, one could more easily make a case for the indispensability of the sweet potato crop, since this item brought in more income to slaveowners than the interregional sale of their bondsmen.

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breeding on worker morale. For example, runaways, slow-downs, or other breaches of slave discipline, equivalent to the loss of three work days per year, would have wiped out the entire potential gain achieved by pushing the fertility rate to the biological maximum.

Proponents of the breeding thesis have been misled by their failure to recognize the difference between human beings and animals. That eugenic manipulation increases the fertility of animals does not mean it would have the same effect on human beings. Not only does promiscuity increase venereal disease (an issue which does not plague animal husbandry) and thereby reduce fertility, but emotional factors are of considerable significance in successful human conception. These emotional factors, of course, also carry over into the work routine. Distraught and disgruntled slaves did not make good field hands.

Consequently, most planters shunned direct interference in the sexual practices of slaves, and attempted to influence fertility patterns through a system of positive economic incentives, incentives that are akin to those practiced by various governments today. The United States, for example, provides tax benefits for marriage and children; France has direct subsidies for childbearing; the Soviet Union combines subsidies with honorific awards — mothers of unusually large families become “Heroes of the Soviet Union.” So too on the plantation.

First and foremost, planters promoted family formation both through exhortation and through economic inducements. “Marriage is to be encouraged,” wrote James H. Hammond to his overseer, “as it adds to the comfort, happiness and health of those entering upon it, besides insuring a greater increase.” The economic inducements for marriage generally included a house, a private plot of land which the family could work on its own, and, frequently, a bounty either in cash or in household goods. The primary inducements for childbearing were the lighter work load and the

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special care given to expectant and new mothers. The fieldwork requirement of women after the fifth month of pregnancy was generally reduced by 40 or 50 percent. In the last month they were frequently taken off fieldwork altogether and assigned such light tasks as sewing or spinning. Nursing mothers were permitted to leave for work at a later hour than others and were also allowed three to four hours during the day for the feeding of their infants. There were, of course, more long-range benefits, too. Women who bore unusually large numbers of children became “heroes of the plantation” and were relieved from all fieldwork.

The point of the preceding argument is neither to establish the total absence of attempts at eugenic manipulation nor to deny the existence of masters who used slaves to give vent to their lust, of overseers who treated slave women under their control as if they were members of a harem, and of sons of slaveowners who seduced girls at extremely tender ages. No doubt such sexual abuses were encouraged by a legal system which not only deprived slave women of the right to legal remedy but sanctioned the right of slaveholders to manipulate the private lives of their chattel.

But the question here is not the impact of the legal system; it is the impact of economic forces. While there were circumstances under which the economics of slavery encouraged widespread promiscuity and concubinage, circumstances which are described in chapter 4, the main thrust of the economic incentives generated by the American slave system operated against eugenic manipulation and against sexual abuse. Those who engaged in such acts did so, not because of their economic interests, but despite them. Instructions from slaveowners to their overseers frequently gave recognition to this conflict. They contain explicit caveats against “undue familiarity” which might undermine slave morale and discipline. “Having connection with any of my female servants,” wrote a leading Louisiana planter, “will most certainly be visited with a dismissal from my

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The Economic Viability of Slavery After the Revolution and on the Eve of the Civil War

Two episodes during the antebellum era have been singled out as proof that underlying economic forces were working toward the destruction of the slave system. Phillips located one of these episodes in the decade following the close of the American Revolution. Ramsdell located the other in the decade preceding the Civil War.

Phillips based his case on scattered reports by planters who spoke of hard times. “Slave prices everywhere . . .,” he wrote, “were declining in so disquieting a manner that as late as the end of 1794 George Washington advised a friend to convert his slaves into other forms of property. . . .” However, Phillips was not able to use the series on slave prices that he so laboriously constructed to test these assertions, since his series only extended back to 1795. He simply accepted the scattered reports of distress as proof that “the peace of 1783 brought depression in all the plantation districts,” which lasted for more than a decade and which converted the previously profitable investment in slaves into a heavy burden.

As it turns out, slave prices showed some weakness after the Revolution, but there was not a sustained, severe depression. While slave prices were acutely depressed during the last years of the Revolution, they rebounded to roughly the pre-Revolutionary level by the mid-1780s and remained on a

the affirmative. They accuse slave owners and overseers of turning plantations into personal harems. Again, unfortunately for the thesis, the evidence on which these assumptions and conclusions are based is *extremely* limited.

Such arguments overlook the real and potentially large costs that confronted masters and overseers **who sought sexual pleasures in the slave quarters.**³² It would have been much easier, and less risky, for owners of large plantations to keep a mistress in town than to risk the possibility of the destruction of his own family by taking up with a slave woman. **For the overseer, the cost of sexual episodes in the slave quarters, once discovered, was often his job. Nor would he find it easy to obtain employment elsewhere as an overseer, since not many masters would be willing to employ as their manager a man who was known to lack self-control on so vital an issue.**

Further, to imply that black men would be indifferent to the sexual abuse of their women is to imply that they were somehow less manly than other men who would be indignant over such abuse. This common assumption about slave men is not only unrealistic and unsubstantiated but an insult to their humanity and patently racist.

The Strength of the Slave Family

Apart from the motive supplied by Christianity, slave owners had strong economic incentives to promote high standards of morality among their slaves. Planters encouraged strong families not only for the well-being of the slaves, but also for the well-being of the plantation. Strong families promote happiness and contentment. Happy, contented workers are good workers. Thus, even if a slave owner was not a Christian, there were important reasons to discour-

who sought sexual pleasures in the slave quarters. The seduction of the daughter or wife of a slave could undermine the discipline that planters so assiduously strove to attain. Not only would it stir anger and discontent in the families affected, but it would undermine the air of mystery and distinction on which so much of the authority of large planters rested. Nor was it just a planter's reputation in the slave quarter of his plantation that would be at stake. While he might be able to prevent news of his nocturnal adventure from being broadcast in his own house, it would be more difficult to prevent his slaves from gossiping to slaves on other plantations.

Owners of large plantations who desired illicit sexual relationships were by no means confined to slave quarters in their quest. Those who owned fifty or more slaves were very rich men by the standards of their day. The average annual net income in this class was in excess of \$7,500. That amount was more than sixty times per capita income in 1860. To have a comparable income today, a person would need an after-tax income of about \$240,000 or a before-tax income of about \$600,000. So rich a man could easily have afforded to maintain a mistress in town where his relationship could have been not only more discreet than in the crowded slave quarters of his own plantation, but far less likely to upset the labor discipline on which economic success depended.

For the overseer, the cost of sexual episodes in the slave quarter, once discovered, was often his job. Nor would he find it easy to obtain employment elsewhere as an overseer, since not many masters would be willing to employ as their manager a man who was known to lack self-control on so vital an issue. "Never employ an overseer who will equalize himself with the negro women," wrote Charles Tait to his children. "Besides the morality of it, there are evils too numerous to be now mentioned."

Nor should one underestimate the effect of racism on the

age immorality. Marriage was encouraged. Adultery was punished and divorce was discouraged by the whip.³³

Furthermore, slave families were not matriarchal as is commonly assumed. "For better or worse, the dominant role in slave society was played by men, not women. It was men who occupied virtually all of the managerial slots available to slaves. . . . Men occupied nearly all the artisan crafts. . . ." ³⁴ "It was the male who initiated the period of courtship. And it was the man who secured the permission of the planter to marry."³⁵

The husband was the head of the house and there was a strong familial bond between family members. This kind of bond is not the product of widespread promiscuity. One could argue that the black family has never been stronger than it was under slavery. It was certainly stronger under the southern slave system than it is today under our modern destructive welfare state.

Living Conditions

The belief that the typical slave was poorly fed is without foundation in fact. There was no deficiency in the amount of meat allotted to slaves. On average, they consumed six ounces of meat per day, just an ounce less than the average quantity of meat consumed by the free population. The high consumption of meat, sweet potatoes, and peas made the slave diet not only adequate, but it actually exceeded modern recommended daily levels of the chief nutrients.³⁶

The clothing of slaves, though not lavish, was fairly standard for what the average free white man would have had. Many slaves had far better clothes than poor whites.

On the question of shelter, the most systematic housing information comes from the census of 1860, which in-

and many girls became pregnant at twelve, thirteen, and fourteen years of age. Sexual laxity on the part of the slaves, combined with a wide array of policies pursued by masters, reduced the black family to "cultural chaos." Bereft of "deep and enduring affection," fathers and mothers not only came to regard their children with "indifference" but often neglected them in sickness and even practiced infanticide.

No one's personality could, according to this view, fail to be affected by a regime so brutal that some have compared plantations to concentration camps and others have compared them to prisons. In the daily fire of such "total" exploitation, masters and overseers fashioned a distinctive type of "slavish personality" that Stanley M. Elkins identified as "Sambo."

Sambo, the typical plantation slave, was docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk was inflated by childish exaggeration. His relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment: it was indeed this childlike quality that was the very key to his being.

This, then, is the portrait contained in many current histories of the antebellum South. Both masters and slaves are painted as degraded brutes. Masters are vile because they are the perpetrators of unbridled exploitation; slaves are vile because they are the victims of it. How true to life is the portrait?

Food, Shelter, and Clothing

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beef, pork, mutton, milk, butter, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, peas, corn, wheat, and minor grains. While this list is short, it probably accounts for 80 percent of the caloric intake of slaves. Fish, fowl, game, sugar, as well as the various omitted vegetables and fruits, were choice items; but they did not constitute a large part of the diet for either whites or blacks during the middle of the nineteenth century.

Figure 33 shows that the average daily diet of slaves was quite substantial. The energy value of their diet exceeded that of free men in 1879 by more than 10 percent. There was no deficiency in the amount of meat allotted to slaves. **On average, they consumed six ounces of meat per day, just an ounce lower than the average quantity of meat consumed by the free population.** While pork was more important in the slave than in the free diet, the difference was not as large as is usually presumed. Slaves averaged 70 percent of the free population's consumption of beef. The milk consumption was low by free standards, but still amounted to about one glass per day for each slave.

By weight, grains and potatoes dominated the diet of both the free and slave population. Much has been made of the fact that corn was the principal grain consumed by slaves, while wheat was the principal grain in the free diet. Yet from a nutritional standpoint, both are excellent foods, high in energy value and with substantial protein content. Wheat is richer in calcium and iron, but corn has more vitamin A. What has completely escaped attention is the fact that while both slaves and free men ate large quantities of potatoes, slaves consumed virtually nothing but sweet potatoes, although most of the potatoes consumed by free men were white. The significance of this dichotomy is that sweet potatoes are a much better food than white potatoes. Sweet potatoes are especially rich in vitamins A and C and are also fairly high in calcium.

The high slave consumption of meat, sweet potatoes, and peas goes a long way toward explaining the astounding

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results shown in figure 34. The slave diet was not only adequate, it actually exceeded modern (1964) recommended daily levels of the chief nutrients. On average, slaves exceeded the daily recommended level of proteins by 110 percent, calcium by 20 percent, and iron by 230 percent. Surprisingly, despite the absence of citrus fruits, slaves consumed two and one half times the recommended level of vitamin C. Indeed, because of the large consumption of sweet potatoes, their intake of vitamin A was at the therapeutic level and vitamin C was almost at that level. Of course, the fact that the *average* daily nutrient content of the slave diet was good does not mean that it was good for all slaves. And even the best-fed slaves experienced seasonal variation in the quality of their diet, due to the limitations in the technology of food preservation during the antebellum era.

Data on slave housing are much more sparse than on slave diets. The most systematic housing information comes from the census of 1860, which included a count of slave houses. These census data show that on average there were 5.2 slaves per house on large plantations. The number of persons per free household in 1860 was 5.3. Thus, like free men, most slaves lived in single-family households. The sharing of houses by several families of slaves was uncommon. Occasionally, on very large plantations, there were dormitories for unmarried men and women. But these were exceptional. The single-family household was the rule.

Unfortunately, the census did not collect information on the size or the quality of slave houses. Descriptions in plantation records and in travelers' accounts are fragmentary. They suggest a considerable range in the quality of housing. The best were three- or four-room cottages, of wood frame, brick, or stone construction, with up to eight hundred square feet of space on the inside, and large porches on the outside. Such cottages had brick or stone chimneys and glazed windows. At the other pole were single-room log cabins

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The quality of housing varied. Comments of observers suggest that the most typical slave houses of the late *ante bellum* period were cabins about eighteen by twenty feet. They usually had one or two rooms. Lofts, where the children slept, were also quite common. Windows were not glazed, but closed by wooden shutters. Chimneys were of brick or stone. Building material was either logs or wood. Floors were usually planked and raised off the ground.

Such housing may sound mean by modern standards but actually compared well with the homes of free workers in the *ante bellum* era. The typical slave cabin probably contained more sleeping space per person than was available to most of New York City's working-class in 1900.³⁸

The medical care was good. Generally, the slaves received the same medical care the family received. The doctor attending to the slaves was usually the same doctor who ministered to the planter's family. Good medical care is reflected in the statistics for life expectancy. U.S. slaves had much longer life expectations than free urban industrial workers in *both* the United States and Europe.

The Problems of Slavery

Slavery *was* attended with evils. As it existed in the South, it was not in any way perfect or utopian. But too often the *real* problems with slavery were not the problems we have been told about. However, as discussed earlier, Christians should be quick to notice the discrepancies between biblical slavery and that practiced in the South. These differ-

without windows. Chimneys were constructed of twigs and clay; floors were either earthen or made of planks resting directly on the earth.

Comments of observers suggest that the most typical slave houses of the late antebellum period were cabins about eighteen by twenty feet. They usually had one or two rooms. Lofts, on which the children slept, were also quite common. Windows were not glazed, but closed by wooden shutters. Some houses also had rear doors. Chimneys were usually constructed of brick or stone. The building material was usually logs or wood. Seams in the log cabins were sealed by wooden splints and mud. Floors were usually planked and raised off the ground.

While such housing is quite mean by modern standards, the houses of slaves compared well with the housing of free workers in the antebellum era. It must be remembered that much of rural America still lived in log cabins in the 1850s. And urban workers lived in crowded, filthy tenements. One should not be misled by the relatively spacious accommodations in which U.S. working-class families live today. That is an achievement of very recent times. As late as 1893, a survey of the housing of workers in New York City revealed that the median number of square feet of sleeping space per person was just thirty-five. In other words, the "typical" slave cabin of the late antebellum era probably contained more sleeping space per person than was available to most of New York City's workers half a century later.

The best information on clothing comes from the records of large plantations. These indicate that a fairly standard annual issue for adult males was four shirts (of cotton), four pairs of pants (two of cotton and two of wool), and one or two pairs of shoes. Adult women were issued four dresses per year, or the material needed to make four dresses. Hats were also typically issued annually (women received headkerchiefs). Blankets were issued once every two or three years. There seems to have been much more variability in

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ment needed for ministering to the sick. On smaller plantations, the "hospital" was merely an ordinary cabin reserved for the sick. In some instances, masters set aside several rooms in their own houses for use as a hospital. The rationale for hospitalizing slaves was twofold: it permitted the sick to receive special care including not only rest and medication but also special diets; it also isolated the sick slaves from the healthy ones and thus minimized the danger of contagion. Many planters insisted that slaves be removed from their cabins to hospitals as soon as their illness was made known.

Few plantations were large enough to justify the exclusive retention of a full-time physician. However, virtually all plantations of moderate or large size had at least one full-time nurse, usually an elderly slave, and many also had experienced midwives. The nurses and midwives worked under the direct supervision of the planter or his overseer. Planters sought to be, and overseers were expected to be, knowledgeable about current medical procedures and about drugs and their administration. Physicians were regularly brought onto the plantations to care for slaves whose health problems could not be treated adequately by the nurses, midwives, overseers, or planters. Some planters contracted for the physicians' services for a year at a time, paying a flat fee that was usually proportional to the number of persons covered by the contract. Others paid for services as rendered. In either case, the doctor attending to the slaves was usually the same doctor who ministered to the planter's family. Bills submitted by these physicians indicate, time after time, that they treated both slaves and members of the master's family during the same visit.

That it was generally the intent of planters to supply slaves with medical care of a relatively high quality does not imply that the objective was usually realized. Not only was the state of medical knowledge and arts quite primitive during the antebellum era, but the prevailing theory of