Introduction

> It is natural that the oppressed should hate the oppressor. It is still more natural that the oppressor should hate his victim. Convince the master that he is doing injustice to his slave, and he at once begins to regard him with distrust and malignity.
>
> – Chancellor William Harper of South Carolina[1]

Decades of study have led us to a conclusion that some readers will find unpalatable: In most respects, southern slaveholders said what they meant and meant what they said. Notwithstanding self-serving rhetoric, the slaveholders did believe themselves to be defending the ramparts of Christianity, constitutional republicanism, and social order against northern and European apostasy, secularism, and social and political radicalism. Just what did slaveholders say and mean? Southerners, having measured their "domestic slavery" against other ancient and modern social systems, declared their own social system superior to alternatives and a joy to blacks as well as whites. Viewing the free states, they saw vicious Negrophobia and racial discrimination and a cruelly exploited white working class. Concluding that all labor, white and black, suffered de facto slavery or something akin to it, they proudly identified "Christian slavery" as the most humane, compassionate, and generous of social systems.[2]

The westward movement of planter households significantly altered economic development, national politics, and southern culture. More specifically, the difficulties and hardships of emigration strengthened relations between masters and slaves and a sense of the interdependence of plantation households. In 1853, a planter with the nom de plume "Foby" decreed: "All living on the plantation, whether colored or not, are members of the same family and to be treated as such. . . . The servants are distinctly informed that they have to work and obey my laws, or suffer the penalty." The master "possessed all judicial, legislative, and executive power and arrogates the settlement of disputes to himself." With these few sentences, "Foby" depicted the master-slave relation in a paternalistic household that entailed duties, responsibilities, and privileges

without denying despotism and violence. Kindness, love, and benevolence did not define paternalism, which depended on the constant threat and actuality of violence. The household, as celebrated by apologists, may often have softened attitudes and behavior, but countervailing pressures remained and often prevailed. Above all, commodity production required profit maximization, which more often than not entailed severity. Mary R. Jackman observes in *The Velvet Glove*, her arresting sociological study of paternalism: "The presumption of moral superiority over a group with whom one has an expropriative relationship is thus flatly incompatible with the spirit of altruistic benevolence, no matter how much affection and breast-beating accompanies it. In the analysis of unequal relations between social groups, paternalism must be distinguished from benevolence." Jackman adds that the dominant group's characterization of subordinates as having distinct personal attributes frees superordinates to claim that the needs of the subordinates are also distinct from those of the dominant group.[3]

From the long-settled Southeast to the newly settled Southwest, self-serving slaveholders equated paternalism with benevolence. "The government of our slaves," Governor George McDuffie of South Carolina declared, "is strictly patriarchal, and produces those mutual feelings of kindness which result from a constant interchange of good offices." "Omo," a planter in Mississippi, advocated plantation hospitals and improved medical attention for slaves, explaining that whether a slave lived or died, "We have the satisfaction of knowing that *we have done what we could – we have discharged our duty*." Even candid masters who recognized grave faults in slavery judged it necessary for the preservation of a humane social order. Representative Waddy Thompson of South Carolina raised the specter of all-out race war in the wake of emancipation. He berated "that very worthy band of gentlemen, the fanatics of the North, a most notable set of Philanthropists, who seek to place the black race in a worse condition than they now are." The Presbyterian Reverend Robert L. Dabney of Virginia, an imposing theologian, deftly related the southern vision of the family to rejection of the free labor system. All civilized societies, he wrote, depressed labor, but free labor societies spawned impoverishment and Malthusian population crises. Masters' households, he insisted, absorbed laborers and created a floor beneath which the living standards could not sink.[4]

The expression "our family, white and black" – easily dismissed as romantic flourish – bared essential characteristics of a worldview. Although it contained ideological posturing, gaping contradictions, and a dose of hypocrisy, it contained as well a wider vision that lay at the core of the slaveholders' sense of themselves as men and women. That vision had as its inspiration a mixture of beliefs and needs. As Christians increasingly committed to walking in the ways of the Lord during the second Great Awakening and its aftermath, planters felt it their responsibility to care for their slaves spiritually as well as physically. In the wake of slavery's progressive domestication in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and nineteenth-century lower South, planters needed to think about and communicate their expectations of both their slaves

and themselves in relation to their slaves. Those expectations reflected as well planters' needs to think well of themselves as slaveholders and slaves' needs to foster and manipulate planters' feelings in order to encourage care and limit abuse.

These reciprocal if unequal relations, expectations, and motives informed slaveholders' embrace and deployment of the age-old idea of the family as the basic unit of society. Forging that idea into a neo-Aristotelian doctrine of human interdependence, they launched a counterrevolution against secular rationalism, radical egalitarianism, and majoritarian democracy. They ended with one or another version of "slavery in the abstract" – personal servitude as the proper condition of all labor regardless of race. We have explored the growing attraction of "slavery in the abstract" in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order* (New York, 2008). In *Fatal Self-Deception*, we begin with a sketch of the slaveholding household. Planters came to include slaves in their understanding of their households, but not white servitors or free blacks. Chapter 3 explores this difference. Even when a governess joined the family at table, the planter understood her to be a stranger and a hireling – unless and until, that is, he or his son married her. Slaves often judged white servitors as of inferior class to the planter family. At the same time, slaves often associated with lower-class whites in the neighborhood – on hunts, at grog shops, and in gaming. Whites and blacks frequently mingled in worship as well – often to listen to black preachers.[5]

Countless Southerners, slaveholding and nonslaveholding, congratulated themselves on their Christian virtue, but not without considerable querulousness and troublesome opposition. Chapter 1 starts with a contrary judgment – Jefferson's indictment of slavery in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. On balance, the majority of slaveholders in the South increasingly came to reject this indictment, judging mastery a discipline and a responsibility that at once benefited the slave owner and the slave, morally and materially.

Although unconvinced, J. S. Buckingham of England reported around 1840 that well-traveled Southerners believed that blacks faced extinction if deprived of their masters' protection. In the 1850s, George P. R. James, the novelist and British consul in Virginia, grumbled in *The Knickerbocker Magazine* that planters, with their "tenderness and affection," failed to notice that blacks worked poorly and lacked the capacity to achieve civilization. When Anderson, a slave in St. Mary's Parish, Louisiana, ran away, John Palfrey, his master, remarked, "I am not otherwise uneasy about him but that he may eat green corn, melon, or whatever he may find there, which will be sure to make him sick & if not taken in time may operate fatally." During the War, Northerners and Europeans met Southerners who saw themselves as protectors of blacks against an emancipation that they expected to prove fatal.[6]

Slaveholders saw themselves as the best, the sincerest, indeed, the only friends that American blacks had. John C. Calhoun and Nathaniel Beverley Tucker recoiled from the suggestion that their slaves would be better off as

free men. The antislavery Thomas Colley Grattan, the British consul at Boston, asked Calhoun about the reaction of the last slave he had liberated. Astonished, Calhoun replied, "I liberate a slave! God forbid that I should ever be guilty of such a crime. Ah, you know little of my character, if you believe me capable of doing so much wrong to a fellow-creature." At the Nashville Convention of 1850, Tucker, scolding Ohio for its hostility to blacks, asked God to forbid that he would ever want to introduce paternalistic southern slavery into a black-hating Ohio that would abuse the privileges of masters and behave inhumanely toward its slaves: "No, sir – I would not so wrong the Negro." For the slaveholders, the Bible did not call for equality in this world, but it did firmly uphold the unity of the human race. Thus, the pseudoscientific racism prevalent in the North represented gross apostasy.[7]

The editors of *Southern Quarterly Review* might be suspected of disingenuousness for their declaration in 1847, "Manumit them, place them in collision with the white race, and you ensure their destruction." But in 1844 the Methodist Bishop James O. Andrew wrote privately to Leonore, his wife, that he could not free their slaves, "How could I free them? Where would they go, and how support themselves?" Thomas G. Clemson wrote to Calhoun, his father-in-law, that although slavery hurt whites economically and was "very bad for the State," it did protect blacks. The Massachusetts-born Episcopal Reverend George W. Freeman of North Carolina, later bishop of Arkansas, wrote a proslavery tract while ministering to slaves. He concluded that emancipation would end badly. Antislavery Cumberland Presbyterians had trouble convincing church brethren that the slaves could survive emancipation. Even the radical antislavery German press in Missouri acknowledged that many pious slaveholders hesitated to free slaves, fearing that freedom would ruin them. For all the sincerity and piety that went into the making of this common southern attitude, it contained a grim implication, spelled out by Representative James Garland of Virginia in 1835 and reiterated in 1841 by the Reverend T. C. Thornton, the president of Centenary College in Mississippi. Garland warned abolitionists against inciting slaves to rebel and murder women and children: "We should revenge to the utmost their blood upon the heads of those who shed it." Thornton charged that abolitionists were flirting with racial extermination, warned that Southerners, honor-bound to defend their rights, would exterminate blacks rather than capitulate to northern aggression. More softly, the antislavery Henry St. George Tucker of Virginia justified slavery as a "stern necessity." Immediate emancipation invited a war of racial extermination, for the blacks could not be assimilated to political life. Yet, as a judge, he bent the law to facilitate emancipation by will.[8]

When the War ended, no few white Southerners asserted that emancipation lifted a burden from them. Blacks now had to sink or swim on their own. Whites, dispirited by the collapse of their national revolution, faced social chaos and the loss of political and economic power. They had long insisted that blacks could not survive without white masters. Now, determined to survive

one way or the other, they inadvertently worked to transform dire prediction into self-fulfilling prophecy.

This abrupt and wrenching end to the world of the slaveholding paternalist did not end paternalism, which continued to shape memories of slave owning and of some features of interracial, interpersonal relations. Yet the model of the household as the center of "our family, white and black," no longer held. We initially developed our understanding of the dynamics and consequences for slaves of this worldview in *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (EDG, 1974), then explored its Atlantic origins in *Fruits of Merchant Capital* (EF-G and EDG, 1983). Four years later, *Within the Plantation Household* (EF-G, 1988) analyzed the operation of the plantation household as the center and model of social, economic, and cultural production and reproduction. *The Mind of the Master Class* (EF-G and EDG, 2005) explored the evolving religious and historical dimensions of this worldview, while our *Slavery in White and Black* (2008) examined its logical implications and articulations. In *Fatal Self-Deception* we consider the underlying emotional drives and the end of the world shaped by paternalism, concluding an investigation that has taken more than four decades.

In the interval, paternalism has gained critics but also currency. For example, since the publication of *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, it has been argued that paternalism was a myth simply because slaveholders betrayed their organic conceit of "my family, black and white," when they sold their slaves. Here, we explain how slaveholders managed to square that circle and still understand themselves as paternalists. Because the ground beneath their feet was unstable does not mean that they were insincere. Indeed, their desperate need to deceive themselves propelled Americans, black and white, into our greatest national tragedy.

1

"Boisterous Passions"

> The Devil was to be overcome, not by the power of God, but by His righteousness. . . . But since the devil, by the fault of his own perversity, was made a lover of power and a forsaker and assailant of righteousness – for thus also men imitate him so much the more in proportion as they set their hearts on power, to the neglect or even hatred of righteousness, and as they either rejoice in the attainment of power, or are inflamed by the lust of it. Not that power is to be shunned as though it were something evil; but the order must be preserved, whereby righteousness is before it. For how great can be the power of mortals? Therefore let mortals cleave to righteousness; power will be given to immortals.
>
> – St. Augustine[1]

In *Notes on the State of Virginia,* a distressed Thomas Jefferson penned an indictment of slavery that reverberated for decades, causing Southerners no end of pain, anger, and soul searching:

> There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it. . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances.[2]

Jefferson had predecessors for his anxiety over slavery's effects on masters. Educated Southerners knew Locke's psychological portrait of children as natural seekers of dominion. And they knew Montesquieu's critique of the master's unlimited authority, which Jefferson, in effect, paraphrased. The slaveholder, Montesquieu wrote, "insensibly accustoms himself to the want of all moral virtues, and thence becomes fierce, hasty, severe, choleric, voluptuous, and

cruel." The Reverend David Rice, father of western Presbyterianism, and other late eighteenth-century emancipationists assailed slavery for undermining the moral and political virtue of the white community, especially of its young men. In the 1760s, George Mason of Virginia denounced slavery for impairing the morals of whites, much as it had impaired the morals of the Romans and led to the decay of ancient civilization. Mason returned to the theme at the federal Constitutional Convention: "Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant." Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut taunted him: If so, Mason and other Virginians should free their slaves. Ebenezer Hazard of Philadelphia described southern gentlemen in 1778: "Accustomed to tyrannize from their infancy, they carry with them a disposition to treat all mankind in the same manner they have been used to treat their Negroes."[3]

St. George Tucker in his edition of *Blackstone's Commentaries* (1803) denied that Virginians had a sanguinary disposition, but, quoting Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* at length, he held that slavery unfitted blacks for freedom and unfitted whites for equality. David Ramsay of South Carolina sounded an alarm, although, in his *History of the Revolution*, he praised the masters' humanity and kindness. In the 1830s, Ezekiel Birdseye of East Tennessee, an abolitionist, picked up the theme without mention of Jefferson. In letters to the *New York Emancipator and Republican* and to Gerrit Smith, he spoke of planters' sons as violent men who pursued "fashionable sports." Growing up amid scenes of violence against slaves and lacking proper parental supervision, they learned to indulge their passions. In 1832, community leaders and students at the University of North Carolina heard a version of Jefferson's moral indictment from William Gaston, a distinguished jurist, whose published lecture went through five editions by 1858. The proslavery J. A. Ingraham of Natchez lamented that too many girls had "negresses" to wait on them hand and foot and bring them their first glass of water in the morning.[4]

Black and white abolitionists summoned Jefferson's spirit in their crusade against slavery, notwithstanding their condemnation of his putative "hypocrisy" in remaining a slaveholder. Antislavery moderates, too, appealed to Jefferson to condemn slavery as a nursery for tyrants. The Baptist Reverend Francis Wayland, president of Brown University, remarked, "Those who enslave the bodies of others, become in turn the slaves of their own passions." Ralph Waldo Emerson spent little time in the South, but he lacerated Southerners for their "love of power, the voluptuousness of holding a human being in [their] absolute control." Southerners wanted slaves primarily for the "immunities and the luxuries" they made possible. In an address in 1845 on the anniversary of West Indian emancipation, Emerson spoke of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama as "semi-barbarous" and "debauched." Angelina Grimké contended that hundreds of thousands of Southerners "do not hold their slaves, by any means, as much 'for purposes of gain,' as they do for the lust of power." She added that the power lodged in a slaveholder made any man a tyrant – that no human being could be trusted with such authority over another. In 1856, Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts extended Jefferson's

warning of "boisterous passions": The slaveholders' rule at home, made them feel entitled to rule everywhere. Adam Gurowski, a Pole who fought for the Union, depicted "the slavery gentleman" as a "scarcely varnished savage" ruled by "reckless passion and will."[5]

Foreign and northern travelers generally endorsed *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Charles Wesley protested that white children had slaves of their own age "to tyrannize over, to beat and abuse out of sport," and George Whitefield, notwithstanding his accommodation to slavery, said much the same. In later years, Horace Fulkerson, touring the lower Mississippi Valley, remarked that slavery had deeply affected the character of masters: "Accustomed to implicit and unquestioning obedience, they could illy brook contradiction and opposition from their equals." In the 1850s Frederick Law Olmsted, an architect and newspaper correspondent, stopped at a dirty house in northeastern Tennessee. The "disgusting" bed offended him less than a white boy's shocking language to a slave girl who showed up a bit late to attend to him. Visiting a successful planter in eastern Texas, Olmsted found two sons: "One was an idle young man. The other was already, at eight years old, a swearing, tobacco-chewing young bully and ruffian." The planter ordered his son to stop cursing, only to be met with, "Why? You do it." The Reverend Robert Everest of England spoke harshly: "As in ancient Europe, so in modern Asia, the young lord, or slave-owner, is brought up from his cradle to know no control of his will, and he consequently becomes a tyrant. The young American slave-owner is, in this respect, on a par with the young Asiatic." An historian's caveat from Daniel Blake Smith: If Jefferson were right about boisterous passions, we should find planter families highly charged, but personal correspondence and diaries show little evidence.[6]

Europeans especially picked up on Jefferson's remarks about child rearing. David Macrae, speaking for some British travelers, thought southern children generally better disciplined than northern, who defied and denigrated parents. Yet Frances Trollope justly railed at "the infant tyranny of white children towards their slaves." She indignantly reported the "puny bullying and well-taught ingenious insult of almost baby children towards stalwart slaves, who raised their heads toward heaven like men, but seemed to have lost the right of being so classed." Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, the English novelist, was appalled to hear of a plantation mistress who slapped an adult male slave in the presence of children. Catherine Cooper Hopley, an English governess in Virginia, disciplined the children in her care, warmly thanked by their mother, who admitted that she herself had no such success. Hopley admired Southerners but regretted that parents "are too indulgent, too much accustomed to control an inferior class, and to allow their children to control that class, to reconcile to themselves the idea of compelling obedience in their own children when once past infancy, which would perhaps be placing them too much on a par with the negroes."[7]

Two famous women – Harriet Martineau of England and Fredrika Bremer of Sweden – reflected for posterity. Martineau asked, "What is to be expected

of little girls who boast of having got a negro flogged for being impertinent to them, and yet are surprised at the 'ungentlemanly' conduct of a master who maims his slave?" Yet she also wrote of "strong and strongly disciplined" women who ruled over "barbarous" communities, enforced rules, and provided for people incapable of taking care of themselves. She considered women who shrank from their duty "perhaps the weakest women I have anywhere seen." Bremer, visiting a plantation in Georgia, admired southern ladies as wives and mothers but thought young girls largely inactive and of little help to their mothers. She sadly noted, "Parents, from mistaken kindness, seem not to wish their daughters to do anything except amuse themselves and enjoy liberty and life as much as possible." Bremer, who thought they would be happier if they made themselves more useful, recounted the judgment of a "noble lady of New Orleans": Surrounded by slaves from the cradle, the white child commanded them, expected satisfaction of any caprice, and demanded stern punishment for a slave who thwarted his will.[8]

In 1836, ten prominent Presbyterians in Kent denounced slavery as an encouragement to the moral depravity of masters and slaves and, echoing Jefferson, singled out masters as under constant temptation to indulge passions and appetites. Henry Clay, by reputation a kind master, hired the young Amos Kendall to tutor his children. Kendall commented on Clay's preteen boys, Thomas and Theodore: "Yesterday Mrs. Clay being absent, Thomas got into a mighty rage with some of the negroes, and threatened and exerted all his little power to kill them." A few months later: "Hearing a great noise in the kitchen, I went in and found Theodore swearing in a great rage with a knife drawn in attitude to stab one of the big negroes." Mary Jane Chester, a student at Columbia Female Institute in Tennessee, exemplified another white attitude when she sent her love to servants. "I wish that Nancy was here to do up my clothes & to help me Dress." John Evans, overseer to George Noble Jones, wrote to his employer, "I informed the People that they had another young Master by the Name of Noble Wimberley." James Sanders Guignard of the low country began life like many of his class: On his eighth birthday, his grandmother gave him a present – a black girl. No wonder, then, that William David Beard, a nonslaveholding renter, lashed out at the lazy sons of slaveholders who made slaves fetch them a glass of water.[9]

Black children as well as adults had to call white children "little massa" or "little missie," sometimes without the "little." Anna Matilda King of Georgia, worried sick over debts, wrote to her husband, Thomas Butler King, "I wish we could get rid of ALL at THEIR VALUE and leave this wretched country. I am more and more convinced it is no place to rear a family of children. . . . To bring up boys on a plantation makes them TIRANICAL as well as lazy and girls too." That was 1844. In 1858, she wrote to her husband, "We have not done well by our noble sons. Each one should have been made to go to work for themselves as soon as their education was completed." Richard Taylor of Louisiana, son of President Zachary Taylor, thought the moral effect of slavery on his sons deplorable. Elisha Hammond of South Carolina lectured his son,

James Henry Hammond, the future governor and senator: "More than half the young men raised in the Southern States are sooner or later ruined by disapation [*sic*] but this I trust will not apply to you." During the War, Lucy Breckenridge of Virginia wrote,

> I feel that I am a true abolitionist in heart – here I have been crying like a foolish child for the last half hour because I saw Jimmy chasing poor, little Preston all over the yard beating him with a great stick, and Sister not making him stop but actually encouraging him. . . . I shall never forget Viola's expression of suppressed rage – how I felt for her. My blood boiled with indignation. I never saw such a cruel-tempered and wicked child as Jimmy. I guess *my* sons had better not beat a little servant where I am! I am so thankful that all of us have been properly raised and never allowed, when we were children, to scold or strike a servant.[10]

Slaves described the warm and wonderful relations they had as children with the white boys, some of whom remained friends for life, but more often, they underscored Jefferson's charges. They told of three-year-old white boys whom black children had to call "master" or get whipped; of boys who grew up with black playmates to polish their boots, put away their toys, clean up after them, carry their schoolbooks, and do their bidding; of boys who thought nothing of hitting or kicking an old slave who displeased them. And then, there were white boys who, without malice or nastiness, simply took for granted privileges and prerogatives of every kind. Solomon Northup, whose slave narrative breathes authenticity, told of a slaveholder's ten- or twelve-year-old son who took special delight in whipping slaves, even the venerable Uncle Abram. Northup conceded the young monster some noble qualities, but wrote: "Mounted on his pony, he often rides into the field with his whip, playing the overseer, greatly to his father's delight."[11]

Indeed, overseers' sons, with their fathers' approval, often lorded over adult slaves as well as children, brandishing whips and playing little tyrant. "Come on, nigger," the son of an overseer called to the slave boy his father had bought. "I'm no nigger." "Yes, you is, my pa paid $200 for you. He bought you to play with me." James W. C. Pennington, Maryland's "fugitive blacksmith," described how white children imitated their father and the overseer, demanding obedience from the slave boys whom they "tortured." Here and there hints appeared of sibling rivalries between the white and black boys. Gus Feaster told of a slave who taught himself to read and won his master's approval for his pluck and brains. The master's two sons beat him badly one day but probably never again, for their father "wo[re] Bill and Jule out" for it. Henry Gladney of South Carolina recalled, "Little Marse John treat me good sometime, and kick me 'round sometime. I see now dat I was just a little dog or monkey, in his heart and mind, dat 'mused him to pet or kick me as it pleased him." The eight-year-old Rebecca Jane Grant was whipped for refusing to call a slaveholder's son half her size "massa." Privileged whites told of teasing black playmates – or adult slaves – unmercifully, playing pranks and tormenting them without