Fatal Self-Deception

Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South

Slaveholders were preoccupied with presenting slavery as a benign, paternalistic institution in which the planter took care of his family, and slaves were content with their fate. In this book, Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese discuss how slaveholders perpetuated and rationalized this romanticized version of life on the plantation. Slaveholders’ paternalism had little to do with ostensible benevolence, kindness, and good cheer. It grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation. At the same time, this book also examines masters’ relations with white plantation laborers and servants – a largely unstudied subject. Southerners drew on the work of British and European socialists to conclude that all labor, white and black, suffered de facto slavery, and they championed the South’s “Christian slavery” as the most humane and compassionate of social systems, ancient and modern.

Eugene D. Genovese is a retired professor of history. He served as chair of the Department of History at the University of Rochester and taught at other institutions. He also served as president of the Organization of American Historians and of The Historical Society, and he was a member of the Executive Council of the American Historical Society. He is the author of nine other books, most recently Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1941–2007) was Eleonore Raoul Professor of Humanities at Emory University, where she was founding director of Women’s Studies. She served on the Governing Council of the National Endowment for the Humanities (2002–07). In 2003, President George W. Bush awarded her a National Humanities Medal; the Georgia State Senate honored her with a special resolution for her contributions as a scholar, teacher, and citizen of Georgia; and the fellowship of Catholic Scholars bestowed on her its Cardinal Wright Award. Among her books and published lectures are The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-Century France; Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South; Feminism without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism; and Marriage: The Dream That Refuses to Die.
Advance Praise for *Fatal Self-Deception*

“In this remarkable culmination of four decades of intense study, Eugene Genovese and the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese marshal their impressive knowledge of slaveholding Southerners. With no holds barred, they examine the disparate emotions and self-justifications of slaveholders’ ideas, including a true picture of the complex and even contradictory ideas of paternalism. Their analysis deepens our understanding of the social relationships that shaped the history of the American South, relationships with vast implications even today. Steeped in comprehensive research, *Fatal Deception* is cultural, social, legal, and philosophical history at its best – simply brilliant.”

– Orville Vernon Burton, Clemson University, author of *Age of Lincoln* and *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield County, South Carolina*

“This thoughtful treatise lets slave owners speak for themselves, showing how they struggled to square paternalism with the need for profit. Readers get a fresh look at the Southern master’s relationships with a host of household members. By drawing on an immense number of original sources, the Genoveses persuasively argue that slave owners practiced self-deception, not hypocrisy, by viewing their way of life as the best possible for all concerned.”

– Jenny Wahl, Carleton College
Fatal Self-Deception

 Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South

 EUGENE D. GENOVESE

 ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE
For Deborah Ann Symonds
Gifted Scholar and Wonderful Friend
and
For her partner, Melissa Cano, and their children, Sarah and Sam
The despot can never feel sure that he is loved…. The services of the indifferent seemed to us not acts of grace, and favours extorted appeared to give no pleasure. And so it is with the services proffered by men in fear: they are not honours. For how can we say that men who are forced to rise from their seat to honour their superiors desire to honour their oppressors? . . . These acts, I suppose, may not unfairly be taken for acts of servility.

– Xenophon*

* Xenophon, “Hiero,” *Scripta Minora*, tr. E. C. Marchant (LCL), 15.17. Greek philosophers and artists promoted the image of the tyrant as isolated, friendless, and in constant fear for his life.
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Preface

In previously coauthored books by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1941–2007) and Eugene D. Genovese, her name came first, on the principle of Ladies First or, if you prefer, “F” before “G.” This book, too, is a product of decades of professional collaboration in research, in the editing of each other’s drafts, and in countless discussions. Here, I place my own name first because, although Betsey contributed considerably to Fatal Self-Deception, her declining health prevented her criticizing, reviewing, and fine-tuning the drafts. Had she lived, she might well have made substantial changes in style and content. Hence, I assume full responsibility for errors and infelicities.

“The War” refers to the war of 1861–65. We use sic only when it seems indispensable. Words in italics are from quoted texts. The names of identified authors of anonymous publications appear in brackets. A question mark indicates that the author in brackets is probable. We use “Southerners” to mean the whites who constitute our principal subject. We identify blacks discreetly, although well aware that they were no less Southerners. If we had to qualify “Southerners” every time we referred to whites, the text would become well-nigh unreadable.

The manuscript received expert criticism from Douglas Ambrose, Stanley Engerman, Robert L. Paquette, Fay Yarbrough, and two anonymous critics recruited by Cambridge University Press. Karen E. Fields's painstaking and often biting criticism reinforced her reputation as one not to trifle with. David Moltke-Hansen devoted an extraordinary amount of time and energy to helping us get the book in shape. Our thanks to Christopher Luse and Scott Gavorsky for collecting materials, checking references and quotations, and criticizing style and content. We owe a large and continuing debt to the Watson-Brown Foundation for its generous support.
Abbreviations

ACP American Cotton Planter and Soil of the South
AR African Repository
DBR De Bow’s Review
EE Electronic Edition: Chapel Hill, N.C.
ERD The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, ed. William Kaufman Scarborough, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge, La., 1972–89)
HLW Writings of Hugh Swinton Legaré [ed. Mary S. Legaré], 2 vols. (Charleston, S.C., 1846)
JSH Journal of Southern History
LCL Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.)
Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>LSU</td>
<td>Louisiana State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCHR</td>
<td>North Carolina Historical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Russell’s Magazine</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Southern Agriculturist, Horticulturist, and Register of Rural Affairs</td>
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<td>SBN</td>
<td>The South in the Building of the Nation, ed. J. A. Chandler, 12 vols. (Richmond, Va., 1909)</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Southern Cultivator</td>
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<td>SCHS</td>
<td>South Carolina Historical Magazine</td>
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<td>SCTA</td>
<td>South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agricultural and General Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLM</td>
<td>Southern Literary Messenger</td>
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<td>SPR</td>
<td>Southern Presbyterian Review</td>
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<td>SQR</td>
<td>Southern Quarterly Review</td>
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<td>TRP</td>
<td>The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, ed. J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, 4 vols. (Raleigh, N.C., 1918)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNC</td>
<td>The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</td>
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<td>USC</td>
<td>University of South Carolina at Columbia</td>
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Acklen Family Papers*
Samuel A. Agnew Journal*
David Wyatt Aiken Autobiography (ms.)*
Elisha Allen Collection, at Georgia Department of Archives and History (Atlanta)
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Garnett Andrews Papers*
Arrington Papers*
Ashmore Plantation Journal*
Aylett Family Papers, at Virginia Historical Society (Richmond)
Eleanor J. W. Baker Diary, at Duke University
Everard Green Baker Diaries*
[Barbour Papers]: Plantation and Farm Instruction, Regulation, Record, Inventory and Account Book of Philip St. George Cocke, at University of Virginia
Barnsley Papers*
R. R. Barrow Residence Journal*
Mary Eliza Battle Letters, at North Carolina State Archives (Raleigh)
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Mary Eliza Carmichael*
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Carson Family Papers, in Small Collections: Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville)
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Langston Cheves Collection, at South Carolina Historical Society (Charleston)
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Cole-Taylor Papers*
Comer Farm Journal*
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Ingersoll Meredith Flournoy, comp., “Excerpts from the History of the Flournoy Family,” typescript at Louisiana State University
[Flournoy]: M. F. Ingersoll, ed., “Excerpts from History of the Flournoy Family,” at LSU

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Hughes Family Papers*
Fannie Page Hume Diary*
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Joseph Jones Collection, at Tulane University
Kimberly Papers*
M. P. King Plantation Record*
Mitchell King Papers*
Thomas Butler King Papers*
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Basil Manly, Jr., Papers*
Eliza Ann Marsh Diary*
Massenburg Farm Journal*
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Newstead Plantation Diary*
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Orange Grove Plantation Diaries, at Tulane University
Orange Grove Plantation Papers, at Tulane University
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Palfrey Papers, at LSU
Benjamin F. Perry Papers, at USC
Ebenezer Pettigrew Papers, at North Carolina State Department of Archives and History (Raleigh)
Louise Taylor Pharr Book*
Ulrich Bonnell Phillips Papers, at Yale University
Physician’s Fee Book, 1847–50*
Physician’s Record Book, 1855–62*
Pinckney Family Papers, at USC
Philip Henry Pitts Diary and Account Book*
Mary Junkin Preston Papers, at Washington and Lee University
John A. Quitman Papers*
David A. and Malinda Ray Papers*
Reid Papers*
Renwick Papers, at Duke University
David Rice Plantation Journal, at LSU
Alfred Landon Rives Papers, at Duke University
Roach-Eggleston Papers*
Nancy McDougall Robinson Collection, at Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Jackson)
Edmund Ruffin, Jr., Plantation Journal*
Henri de St. Geme Papers, at Historic New Orleans Collection
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H. M. Seale Diary, Jan. 10, 1857, at LSU
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John Walker Diary*
T. Watts, “A Summer on a Louisiana Cotton Plantation in 1832” (ms.), in Pharr Book*
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Weeks Papers, at LSU
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Maunsel White Papers*
Calvin H. Wiley Papers*
W. H. Wills Papers*
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