Introduction

There was nothing unusual about the transactions: four sales – tobacco, a fine tooth comb, calico, and sugar – listed in sequence. Others bought more or less that day in early March 1855 – a bunch of twine, an assortment of hats, a box of caps. The clerk who logged the day's business surely recognized the purchasers, as the store's daybook listed their names several times before. Often grouped together in the ledger, they showed up once or twice a week. Elijah, Mattison, Dick, and Giss were regular customers.[1]

Of these men, we know little more. Their names do not appear in census rolls. They left no memoirs. No wills or probate documents explicate their identity or achievements at death. The tattered pages of storekeeper Stephen McCulley's daybook from Anderson, South Carolina, offer the most lasting history of these men's lives. Yet these records hint at key relationships and vital choices enacted both in Anderson and across the Old South. The surnames appearing next to those four transactions did not belong to the buyers of goods. Mr. Bailey, Mr. Boaseman, Mr. McCulley, and Col. Sanders claimed those names and, tragically, the men themselves. Elijah, Mattison, Dick, and Giss were slaves, people called property, discovered here in the undeniably human act of commodity exchange.

What can this ledger tell us of the men and women – black and white, enslaved and free – ensnared in the peculiar institution's web? Interrogating columns of names and numbers impels us to explore the tangled interaction of human value and material worth slavery represented.

Of the bondpeople themselves, we can but wonder:

> What did they see as they crossed the store's threshold? Did they know exactly what they wanted or did they survey the counter? Could they wander the store and note an

[1] Entry of 3 March 1855, Account ledger, 1854–1856, Store Accounts of Stephen McCulley, SCDAH.

item for future purchase? Could they haggle for a better price? Might they have imagined a time when they could realize all their material needs and desires?

We could consider the clerk too:

Acquainted with his customers' usual purchases, did he reach for the bin of tobacco or the barrel of sugar when the men walked through the door or did he await their request? Did he follow their eyes as they scanned the mercantile space or was the banality of the interaction such that he barely glanced their way? Did his tone change when he shifted from white customer to black? Or, did familiar cordiality mark their exchange? Did he transmute into their equal in this moment of market liminality?

Finally, we might contemplate an unseen but perpetually looming presence:

Did masters approve of bondpeople's purchases? Did they monitor transactions? Did they sanction trade? Did they worry the money and goods the men came to possess might weaken their ability to discipline and control? Or, were these moments welcomed as opportunities to meet psychological and material needs that they were unwilling or unable to meet themselves?

The scratched notations only hint at the world behind the numbers, but the questions we ask reveal a singular truth. Such transactions were politics distilled – snapshots of struggle in which slave and master negotiated the limits of each other's power. The fading ink here simultaneously conceals and reveals a world of social contradiction, hurt, and worry, which is the main subject of this book.

Interpreting slavery as political struggle is nothing new. In his masterwork, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Eugene Genovese argued that masters and slaves of the Old South were tangled in an organic and reciprocal system of rights, privileges, and responsibilities. The hegemonic regime imposed by masters offered rational order and good government. In return, slaveholders demanded steady labor, faithful service, and most importantly, gratitude. Mastery, however, was not as simple as these dictates suggest. The terms, boundaries, rituals, and customs of this system were forever shifting in contentious dispute, entangling both in a web of endless negotiation and incipient violence.[2]

Genovese saw the relations of master and slave as distinct and different within the hemispheric conflicts over labor of which slavery was the most essential and barbarous. In contrast to Brazil or Cuba, where the violence of the warfare state was the norm, by the 1820s, southern masters had developed an ideology and cultural ethos that declared them fit to rule precisely because of the paternalistic character of slavery developed there. More than this, the reciprocity of rights and duties that paternalism imposed on master and slave

[2] Although Genovese asserted his paternalist argument most forcefully in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, his earlier work on the topic bears close reading as well. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). For a compilation of Genovese's early essays, see *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), esp. pp. 102–157.

was not simply a defensive measure or conservative alibi.[3] At its height, in the last decades of the antebellum era, along the Atlantic seaboard it assumed an aggressive, distinctly anti-capitalist cast.

Genovese's paternalist thesis has attracted praise, criticism, and extraordinary misunderstanding.[4] His interpretation draws heavily on Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and his fiercest critics are those who find fault with the Italian political philosopher's model of class rule. Ruling classes consolidated their power, Gramsci argued, by imposing their worldview upon dependent and subordinate masses. Rather than the persistent application of force, rulers offered concessions as a means of mitigating and minimizing revolutionary disruptions to their power. Outgunned and overmatched, working people had few choices. They took their struggle onto the terrain of culture to seize concessions – moral, ethical, or political – to rally support and maintain common cause.[5]

Understanding the master-slave relation as hegemonic contest troubles those scholars who wish to see "black kinship and black community life on their own terms."[6] Enslaved people's values, attitudes, and behaviors derived from interactions within the bound community. African culture or, at least a creolized version of it, played a far greater role in shaping slaves' lives than did masters' strictures. Song, dance, personal style, foodways, and family relationships reflected this overtly resistant and insular culture. Slaves rejected their owners' worldview outright, these scholars argue, standing firm against emotional, psychological, and political incursions into the world they scratched out for themselves.[7]

[3] See Walter Johnson's retrospective review of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* for the most strident, recent interpretation of paternalism as planter alibi. Walter Johnson, "A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five," *Common-Place* 1, no. 4 (2001), http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/reviews/johnson.shtml.

[4] For a representative example of the tendentiousness of some of this criticism, see James D. Anderson, "Aunt Jemima in Dialectics: Genovese on Slave Culture," *Journal of Negro History* 61 (1976): 99–114.

[5] Genovese, *In Red and Black*, 391–422; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 25–49, 147–149. Gramsci's ideas are fully articulated in his prison notebooks, written while a political prisoner under Mussolini's fascist regime from 1926 to 1934. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), esp. p. 161.

[6] Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 185.

[7] Scholarly literature advancing this perspective is vast. For representative examples, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); John C. Inscoe, "Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983): 527–554; Stephanie

At the heart of such criticism lies debate over the nature of resistance – what it consists of, who it affects, and how it is carried out. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Genovese praised the groundbreaking work of Herbert Aptheker – who famously argued for a "revolutionary tradition" in the American slave community – but maintained that Aptheker's exclusive focus on "overt resistance … did not lay bare the essence of the slave experience." Compared to enslaved populations globally, Genovese argued, "slaves of the United States had always faced hopeless odds" and not surprisingly, he found "little evidence of a revolutionary folk tradition" among them. Seeking to "measure the smoldering resentment of an enslaved people who normally had to find radically different forms of struggle," Genovese challenges our understanding of how subordinate classes show discontent, pointing to "a record of simultaneous accommodation and resistance to slavery."[8] At great cost, he argued, contest surrendered concessions to forestall catastrophic capitulation:

> Accommodation itself breathed a critical spirit and disguised subversive actions and often embraced its apparent opposite – resistance. In fact, accommodation might best be understood as a way of accepting what could not be helped without falling prey to the pressures for dehumanization, emasculation, and self-hatred. In particular, the slaves' accommodation to paternalism enabled them to assert rights, which by their very nature not only set limits to their surrender of self but actually constituted an implicit rejection of slavery.[9]

Critics claim that this interpretation minimizes slave agency, painting bondpeople as witless victims and guileless pawns. It diminishes the conscious political power bondpeople directed against their oppressors. The paucity of overt and large-scale insurrection, these scholars argue, stems simply from the vast forces arrayed against them. Instead of launching suicidal uprisings, bondpeople's daily acts of resistance chiseled away at masters' power. Wielding the "weapons of the weak" so imaginatively explored by the likes of James Scott and Robin Kelley, bondpeople engaged in politically-conscious and communally-rooted behavior that fundamentally "recalibrated" the master-slave relation.[10]

M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[8] Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 587–597.

[9] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 597–598.

[10] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994). For an insightful description of the ways in which slaves "recalibrated" power relationships in southern communities, see Anthony E. Kaye's *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). For specific reference to slaves' efforts to "recalibrate the balance of power in their society," see p. 12.

Beneath all of this criticism lies profound discomfort with the term "paternalism" itself. Genovese's word choice here has perhaps obscured, over the years, much that a close examination of his texts might reveal. In the nearly fifty years since Genovese first described the shift from patriarchal to paternalist relations in the antebellum period, critics have read masterly beneficence into paternalism, assuming that the racism that was so rampant in the work of Ulrich Phillips – whose scholarship Genovese greatly admired – pervades Genovese's own model. Nothing could be further from the truth, Peter Kolchin assures us in a thoughtful 2004 assessment of Genovese's career. Although close examination of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and *Fatal Self-Deception*, his more recent work co-written with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, reveal an admiration for southern slaveholders, these works do not point to a defense of them. "Kindness, love, and benevolence did not define paternalism," they reaffirmed in their recent work, reminding us unequivocally that the system "depended on the constant threat and actuality of violence."[11]

Despite the mountains of useful, insightful, and interesting work on slave life and culture that has grown up in at least partial response to Genovese's work, his critics have failed to provide a convincing alternative to the dialectic of accommodation and resistance that Genovese saw in the relation between master and slave. The "moonlight and magnolias" interpretation too often ascribed to Genovese's paternalist South has given way to romanticized and unrealistic assertions – and, indeed, expectations – of community solidarity and resistance among the enslaved. For Genovese, such studies demonstrate precisely what he and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese called the "political crisis of social history." That is, in marshaling all manner of cultural and community behavior to show how slaves wriggled out from under the thumb of oppressive masters, they obscure a central political fact. Regardless of how we complicate the narrative, at the end of the day, slaves remained slaves. The real scholarly problem, the Genoveses famously reminded us, is to explain "who rides whom and how" in the past.[12]

Historians of the internal economy – defined broadly as bondpeople's sale and purchase of goods produced or services rendered during their "off" time – have contributed mightily to these debates. Their work is certainly rich and tells much of the mechanics and larger meaning of the peculiar institution across space and time. Told most often in case study form, these analyses have documented the buying and selling of goods by slaves on and off the plantation in rural and urban environments, in the colonial and antebellum eras, and

[11] Peter Kolchin, "Eugene D. Genovese: Historian of Slavery," *Radical History Review* 88 (2004): 58; Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

[12] Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History: A Marxian Perspective," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1976), 219.

in North American and Caribbean contexts.[13] Property accumulation, scholars have argued, solidified bonds among kin and strengthened communities. Transactions across lines of class and race threatened an already porous southern social order. Most importantly, many historians and anthropologists have maintained, the internal economy affected the master-slave relation, serving as a means of self-expression and resistance to slaveholder rule. Finding full flourish in the 1980s and 1990s, such work has since become an indispensable component of research on slave life, economy, and culture and, significantly, a crucial cudgel in attacks levied against the paternalist thesis.[14]

Overlooked in many of these studies, however, is the simple tragedy of it all. The negotiation or bargain Genovese imagined brings to mind scripture and verse understood by most nineteenth-century Americans. "For what shall

[13] The rich historiography of the internal economy took root with questions posed by Sidney Mintz and Douglas Hall about Jamaican marketing practices and has since become a staple of work by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists in the region. See, in particular, Sidney W. Mintz, "The Jamaican Internal Marketing Pattern: Some Notes and Hypotheses," *Social and Economic Studies* 4 (1955): 95–103; Mintz and Douglas G. Hall, "The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System," *Yale University Publications in Anthropology* 57 (1960): 3–26. For an overview of Mintz's work, including several essays on internal economy, see Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). Other important contributions to the study of Caribbean internal economy include work by Hilary M. Beckles, Woodville K. Marshall, Dale Tomich, and Mary Turner. For an overview of the literature in the Caribbean, see Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas* (London: Frank Cass, 1991).

[14] Philip D. Morgan was at the forefront of this movement, authoring two essays exploring the nature of the task system in lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia. See Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Lowcountry," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983): 399–420 and "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700–1800," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 39 (1982): 563–599. Other important foundational work includes Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Larry E. Hudson, Jr., "'All That Cash': Work and Status in the Slave Quarters," in *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South*, ed. Larry E. Hudson, Jr. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1994); Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), esp. ch. 2; Timothy J. Lockley, "Trading Encounters between Non-Elite Whites and African Americans in Savannah, 1790–1860," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (2000): 25–48; Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Jeff Forret, "Slaves, Poor Whites, and the Underground Economy of the Rural Carolinas," *Journal of Southern History* 70 (2004): 783–824. For an overview of scholarship in this area, including essays by John Campbell, John Schlotterbeck, and Roderick A. McDonald, see Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan's edited collections, *The Slaves' Economy* and *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" St. Mark asked. So too did Christopher Marlowe in his telling of the "tragical tale" of Dr. Faustus. Seeking godlike power and knowledge properly denied to sinful man, Marlowe tells us, Dr. Faustus summoned the devil before him. Mephistopheles appeared offering worldly plenty – knowledge, magical powers, and riches beyond Faustus's wildest dreams. The benighted scholar had only to promise his soul to the devil twenty-four years hence.[15]

Fallible Faust took the deal Mephistopheles proffered. Masters and slaves did too in their daily struggle for power in plantation communities. But who was the slave and who the devil in the paternalist bargain? The answer is not as clear-cut as historical labels might suggest. Antebellum planters, to be sure, imagined godlike power though, as slaves well understood, that power was often put to hellish purposes. With one hand masters held the whip and with the other they held out riches, demanding that slaves take part in the feast they had set out for them. Time and again, slaves did, risking salvation for more immediate gains. Keeping mind and body sound required recognition of slaveholders' terms but, as we will see, not complete acceptance of them – for slaves could play devil, too. Bondpeople offered tempting riches of their own – the fruits of their labor, certainly – but, more importantly, mastery itself. By holding prating paternalists to their own Faustian bargain, bondpeople measured their masters. Day-to-day resistance and moral judgment meant that slaveholders' power required constant refiguring, refining, readjusting. Peace, security, salvation, mastery – all stood upon sand. Although planters may have won temporary victories, perfect power gleamed just out of reach.

Faustian tragedy, then, fell on all sides. This book explores the paternalist bargain as it played out in one particular area of slaves' lives – the internal economy. Here the seductive riches in Marlowe's story serve as metaphor and reality. The internal economy both offered and required expenditures of capital – economic, political, and social – to and from slaves and masters alike. It simultaneously strengthened and attenuated ties between master and slave. Mechanics of exchange encouraged connections beyond the material world so carefully constructed by masters, yet reduced the impetus to flee it permanently. So it was too with the ideas and values attending these transactions. "Dream worlds" of material possibility invited imagination of a most dangerous sort – bidding slaves both to create fantasies of freedom and to question the very foundations of their owners' power.[16]

But slaveholders could match these challenges with denigrating judgments of their own, using the internal mechanisms of market exchange to cast aspersions

[15] Mark 8:36–37; Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (London: Penguin, 1969), 259–339.

[16] The term, "dream worlds," refers to Rosalind H. Williams' discussion of late-nineteenth-century consumption in France. See Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

on the selling and especially spending bondpeople engaged in. Daniel Horowitz has called the value judgments that attend consumer behavior the "morality of spending," arguing that Americans have long struggled with the ethical implications of market expansion and material prosperity. That easy wealth could corrupt a sturdy republican citizenry led commentators and social critics – from de Tocqueville to Veblen to Progressive-era budget managers – to establish primers for principled purchasing. These guidelines, Horowitz argues, served less as helpful suggestions for reforming America's moral character than as weaponry for those who wished to distinguish themselves as social betters. Appraisals of who, what, and how goods were purchased served to ascertain social status, personal industry, and moral worth.[17]

Nowhere were these judgments more dangerous and damning than in the antebellum South. Morals and markets both inside and outside the plantation were inextricably entwined. Examining the ways that men and women who lived in this world spent their money has the potential to reveal the mechanisms of accommodation and resistance at paternalism's core.

Lawrence Glickman has noted that the definition of consumer society is an "essentially contested concept" with historians, anthropologists, and sociologists debating significance and meaning in terms of politics, material wealth, infrastructure, economy, consciousness, or simple chronology.[18] This project avoids attaching such a label to plantation communities. But it is useful to consider a set of general markers or characteristics for evaluating the evolution of consumer consciousness in society. Elaborating on John Benson's expansive definition,[19] Peter Stearns argues that a consumer society is one in which a substantive portion of the population can purchase goods and services that are not "necessities" and has the means, whether cash or access to credit, to be able to do so. Second, a substantive portion of the population must derive emotional satisfaction from not only the acquisition of goods but also the search for them, and that the qualities of "yearning" and "striving" necessarily must

[17] Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875–1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[18] Lawrence B. Glickman, "Born to Shop? Consumer History and American History," in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* ed. Lawrence Glickman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 10. The historiography of consumerism and consumer societies has grown exponentially over the past thirty years and I cannot do it justice in terms of scope or influence in this brief introduction. For a comprehensive overview of early work in the field, see Glickman's bibliographical essay in *Consumer Society in American History*, 299–314. For a more recent discussion of historiographic trends, see Frank Trentmann, ed., *Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[19] According to Benson, consumer societies "are those in which choice and credit are readily available, in which social value is defined in terms of purchasing power and material possessions, and in which there is a desire, above all, for all that which is new, modern, exciting and fashionable." John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880–1980* (New York: Longman, 1994), 4. Quoted in Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization," *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997): 105.

accompany this behavior. Finally, consumer behavior must affect and, more importantly, confuse social structures.[20]

The term "substantive" here is relative and allows for consideration of the development of consumer behavior and its impact across space and time. It also demonstrates the perils of applying anything less than a malleable framework for interpreting the significance of the slaves' internal economy to the bondpeople who participated in it and to the plantation system as a whole. As this project demonstrates, many antebellum slaves purchased goods and services unnecessary for subsistence; many of these enslaved consumers appear to have gained emotional satisfaction (some historians would even argue "empowerment") from not only purchased goods but also the process and choice involved in acquiring them; and finally, as debate in planters' prescriptive literature and legal statutes attest, slaves' ability to acquire goods and services simultaneously enhanced and challenged management strategies to promote slaveholder hegemony.

Viewing the internal economy through the lens of consumer studies illuminates the hidden power of material exchange. This book argues that the consumption of goods served as a vehicle through which social relations – and politics – were produced.[21] More than chains bound masters and slaves – shifting webs of exchange entangled both in profitable and perilous contests for power. The hegemonic nature of slaveholder authority compelled battle, even if the anxiety it produced did little to provide lasting security for either. Slaves' acquisition of goods came at costs more than monetary, slaveholders hoped: hopes for freedom became fetishized in goods consumed. As bondpeople grasped opportunities to express themselves and create new relationships, slaves ensured masters paid too, their actions demanding constant assessment and justification of authority.

Since the 1970s, economists, anthropologists, and sociologists have sought to uncover and define the structure and mechanics of exchange in a growing global "informal economy." Although these scholars debate terminology (underground, internal, informal, cash-in-hand, gray or black market) or the way economy is delineated, a couple of common principles have come to guide this literature. First, the boundaries of these economies are porous, with economic actors readily slipping between "licit" and "illicit" realms of exchange. And second, this exchange is interwoven and interdependent in the economic, social, political, and cultural life of resource-scarce communities. Attempting to disentangle this Gordian knot of exchange – sorting out the affairs of off-

[20] Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism," 105–106, 115–117.

[21] For discussion of the relationship between production and consumption, see Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, transl. and ed. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1993), 90–94; T. H. Breen, "The Meanings of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 250.

the-books peddlers, vendors, prostitutes, hawkers, tip-earners, haulers, and the like from the overarching political and economic structure that sustains and restricts them – serves only to highlight the deeply embedded, necessary, and adaptive nature of these networks.[22] The "slaves' internal economy" was no different. What was allowed or forbidden, given or bought, stolen or taken, remains maddeningly difficult to discern. This book aims to identify these forms of exchange, certainly, but also to show the ways in which masters and slaves blurred boundaries between them for, when it came to matters of economy, the master-slave relation involved constant manipulation of lines of material transfer.

Sociologist Arjun Appadurai emphasizes this point explicitly in a collection of essays addressing the "social life of things," cautioning scholars against static definitions of commodity exchange. In his view, "the commodity phase of the life history of an object does not exhaust its biography; it is culturally regulated; and its interpretation is open to individual manipulation to some degree."[23] The internal economy engaged the full "biography" Appadurai describes, demonstrating well the liminal qualities of the market sphere. In plantation communities, categories of transfer and acquisition – provision, commodity, contraband, and gift – proved difficult to distinguish. Masters and bondpeople each consciously and unconsciously muddled boundaries, appropriating meanings and materials that suited their needs best. This study embraces such calculated ambiguity, examining the range of ways in which goods flowed in and out of the quarters and thinking about the meaning slaves and masters assigned to each.

I have organized *Masters, Slaves, and Exchange: Power's Purchase in the Old South* with Appadurai's liminal and culturally-regulated "biography" in mind, emphasizing in particular the ways in which masters and slaves took advantage of and were exploited by malleable lines of exchange. Seeking to secure mastery, slaveholders manipulated the internal economy to manage bondpeople more effectively. Slaves' material exchange, they imagined, not only allayed long-term discontent, it potentially bolstered masters' self-perceived roles as models, protectors, and judges of slave spending and acquisition. Although the mechanics of commodity purchase, gift exchange, and provision

[22] Interdisciplinary work on so-called "informal economies" is rich, exciting, and expansive. For a thorough overview of early work in the field, see Abol Hassan Danesh, *The Informal Economy: A Research Guide* (New York: Garland, 1991). For thought-provoking recent work – and a book that proved important in my thinking on this topic – see Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[23] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 17. Here, Appadurai draws on the work of Igor Kopytoff whose important essay, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," is also included in this volume, 64–91.