The Sweetness of Life

This book examines the home and leisure life of planters in the antebellum American South. Based on a lifetime of research, the late Eugene Genovese (1930–2012), with an introduction and epilogue by Douglas Ambrose, presents a penetrating study of slaveholders and their families in both intimate and domestic settings – at home, attending the theater, going on vacations to spas and springs, throwing parties, hunting, gambling, drinking, entertaining guests – completing a comprehensive portrait of the slaveholders and the world they built with slaves. Genovese subtly but powerfully demonstrates how much politics, economics, and religion shaped, informed, and made possible these leisure activities. A fascinating investigation of a little-studied aspect of planter life, *The Sweetness of Life* broadens our understanding of the world the slaveholders and their slaves made, a tragic world of both "sweetness" and slavery.

Eugene D. Genovese, one of the most significant and distinguished historians of his time, spent a lifetime studying the society of the Old South. His books include *The Political Economy of Slavery*, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, *In Red and Black*, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, *The Southern Dilemma*, *A Consuming Fire*, and *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, which was awarded the Bancroft Prize. With his wife, the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, he wrote *Fruits of Merchant Capital*, *The Mind of the Master Class*, *Slavery in White and Black*, and *Fatal Self-Deception*. A past president of the Organization of American Historians, Genovese died in 2012.

Douglas Ambrose is the Carolyn C. and David M. Ellis Distinguished Teaching Professor of History at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. The author of *Henry Hughes and Proslavery Thought in the Old South* and coeditor of *The Many Faces of Alexander Hamilton*, Ambrose was a student of both Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese.

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The Sweetness of Life

Southern Planters at Home

EUGENE D. GENOVESE

Edited by
DOUGLAS AMBROSE

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For Anne Marie and Katie Fasulo

and

In Memory of Louis Fasulo (1951–2005)

Those who have not lived before the Revolution will never know the sweetness of life.

– *Talleyrand**

* "Celui qui n'a pas vécu [au dix-huitième siècle] avant la Révolution ne connait pas la douceur de vivre."

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Editor's Preface

I

Eugene Genovese died on September 26, 2012. In the five and a half years before his death and after that of his beloved wife Elizabeth Fox-Genovese on January 2, 2007, he dedicated himself to numerous projects. The first resulting publication, *Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage*, appeared in early 2008.[1] The second, nicknamed "the Betsey project," resulted in five volumes. Working with his good friend David Moltke-Hansen, who served as the project's general editor, Genovese helped oversee the publication of the first four volumes, each devoted to a particular theme, of Betsey's shorter writings. The fifth volume, a reader, contained mostly selections of those essays deemed most significant from the four thematic volumes.[2] While this work was nearing completion, Genovese published in 2011 the third and final volume of his and Betsey's "master class" trilogy: *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South*.[3] In declining health, shortly before his death, Genovese was attempting to put the finishing touches on *The Sweetness of Life*. Although not part of the "master class" series, it drew on many of the same materials to explore the way of life planters idealized, often in the face of daily experience, and committed to defend to the bitter end.

He sent out the manuscript for review by friends; he died as the reviews were coming in. Although by most measures a productive scholar,

[1] Eugene D. Genovese, *Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage* (Wilmington, DE, 2008).
[2] David Moltke-Hansen, ed., *History and Women, Culture and Faith: Selected Writings of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese*, 5 vols. (Columbia, SC, 2011–2012).
[3] Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholder Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge, 2011).

Genovese did not publish as frequently as some, mainly because of the intensiveness of his research, but he always was able to write quickly once he had concluded that research. By late 2011, he no longer had the energy to write at his usual pace. He did incorporate some of the suggestions and edits that his friends provided, but by the summer of 2012 he simply lacked the strength to compose the introduction and conclusion to the manuscript. As Genovese told me during that summer before he died, he did not mind death, but he deeply resented his increasing incapacity to work on his unfinished final monograph.

Several months after Genovese's death, I received the computer files of *The Sweetness of Life*. The chapters themselves were in good shape; the writing was polished, most of the footnotes nearly complete. Practically every page of *The Sweetness of Life* rests on and reflects a lifetime of research. Yet, the volume has qualities that set it apart from nearly all of Genovese's other work. *The Sweetness of Life* concentrates primarily – but not exclusively – on describing rather than analyzing the Old South's master class. That descriptive focus encompasses, as does no other book he wrote as sole author, white women and children. Individual chapters indicate the lack of a tight, overarching argument; each chapter on the recreational and leisure habits of antebellum southern elites stands more or less on its own, without tight connections to chapters that precede or follow it. Thus, although the chapters have no clear ordering principle, I have decided not to alter Genovese's organization of them; they appear below as he had arranged them. The decision to present them as he had left them demonstrates my general editorial approach to the text; I have added some minor corrections and edits, but the chapters that follow closely resemble the manuscript Genovese left behind when he died.

Some of the chapters may strike the reader as incomplete, appearing more as catalogs than as tightly focused arguments. This is especially true of Chapters 4 and 5, whose titles, "Vignettes: Sundry Pleasures" and "Vignettes: Charms of High Life," capture the snapshot-like character of their content. Some chapters end abruptly. Some do not draw on some relevant scholarship, and this is not surprising, as much of it appeared after Genovese wrote. And some readers may find it curious that Genovese ends this volume by focusing on "matters not so sweet" even as he suggests that the overall "sweetness" of planter life helped lead the slaveholders into a death struggle to defend it. But these qualifying judgments in no way vitiate the book's value. The chapters, and the book as a whole, seek not to advance a particular interpretation, but rather to depict details of life: the joys of eating oysters or attending a concert by

Jenny Lind; the burdens and rewards of entertaining visitors; the rituals and social negotiations of courtship and marriage. Each chapter reveals Genovese's profound intimacy with his sources and his subjects. All of his scholarship has displayed this mastery of the material, but *The Sweetness of Life* does so in a distinct manner.

One senses that Genovese had been accumulating for decades the bits and pieces of evidence that fill the chapters in this book, storing them away like gems until he could mount them appropriately. His primary lifelong scholarly objective – establishing the distinctive character of southern slave society and the hegemonic leadership of the master class – led him to concentrate on the evidence that most effectively supported that goal. The preference of many mistresses for a dish of syllabub after dinner or the penchant of young men in the 1850s for double-breasted reefing jackets was not the sort of evidence that advanced that purpose. But when Genovese encountered accounts of planters' eating habits or fashion tastes or musical interests he knew that these matters, no less than the slaveholders' religious beliefs or political convictions, were parts of who they were, parts of the world they made and lived in relation to others.

Much of Genovese's scholarly work speaks to "big" historical themes – "the world the slaves made," "the mind of the master class," "slavery and bourgeois property in the rise and expansion of capitalism," "the political economy of slavery." Yet he knew that one needed to have a wide and deep knowledge of the people engaged in those big themes to understand and write convincingly about them. Although he ran the risk, especially in his earlier work such as *The Political Economy of Slavery*, of depicting the masters as a class and paying little attention to the particular constituent elements of it, he knew that however much classes acted as units within broad historical processes, they consisted of living human beings struggling to make sense of the meaning of life. And it is those human beings, whom he encountered in the sources in which he immersed himself during more than fifty years of research, who live again in the pages of the present book. No aspects of their lives, however apparently trivial to modern eyes, escaped his notice.

In *The Sweetness of Life* Genovese continued the pursuit of his "lifelong ambition of writing a comprehensive book on the slaveholders."[4] He ended up writing not one book, but several, and he knew that the

[4] "Eugene D. Genovese and History: An Interview," in Robert Louis Paquette and Louis A. Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History* (Charlottesville, VA, 2000), 207.

larger project would not be "comprehensive" without a detailed account of the slaveholders' leisure. Genovese once wrote, "No subject is too small to treat. But a good historian writes well on a small subject while taking account (if only implicitly and without a single direct reference) of the whole."[5] *The Sweetness of Life* treats what many might see as a "small" subject, and Genovese certainly makes few direct references in the book to his "comprehensive" argument regarding the slaveholders and their place in history. Nor does he devote much attention to scholarly debates, as he did in much of his other work on southern history. But *The Sweetness of Life* adds immeasurably to that argument, revealing to us, as all of Genovese's work sought to do, that "the history of every people," including that of antebellum southern masters, "exhibits glory and shame, heroism and cowardice, wisdom and foolishness, certainty and doubt, and more often than not these antagonistic qualities appear at the same moment and in the same men."[6]

Although discrete chapters may lack sharpness in argument, taken together they vividly depict the wide variety of leisure activities in which southern slaveholders participated. These chapters required only a light editorial hand. The introduction and conclusion are, however, another matter. Genovese had composed a brief introduction, and I have included a version of it following the preface. In a private conversation a few months before he died, Genovese told me he knew that he would have to provide a more formal introduction, but, as mentioned earlier, he lacked the strength to write it. My edited preface seeks to fill that void, discussing *The Sweetness of Life* within the context of Genovese's *oeuvre*. Since the original manuscript lacks a conclusion, and Genovese left no rough or partial draft of one, I have added a brief epilogue. It evaluates the contributions of *Sweetness of Life* to an understanding of antebellum southern history and discusses in what direction Genovese's scholarship may have been headed had he not died.

II

"I have come," Genovese states in his brief introduction, "neither to praise nor bury the slaveholders but to limn some of the features of their

[5] Eugene D. Genovese, "American Slaves and Their History," in Eugene D. Genovese, ed., *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (Knoxville, TN, 1984 [1970]), 103.

[6] Eugene D. Genovese, "William Styron Before the People's Court," in Genovese, *In Red and Black*, 216.

lives, which may help us to understand them better, however harsh the ultimate judgment rendered." Here, the "features of their lives" concern neither ideology, nor religious belief and practice, nor the politics of the sectional conflict, although all these are present in explicit and implicit ways. Instead, Genovese focuses on how the slaveholders spent their down time: how they entertained guests, what they ate, where they vacationed, and what cultural activities – music, theater, hunting, dancing, opera, circuses – they partook of. The book thus differs in a fundamental way from nearly all of Genovese's other scholarly works. From its opening chapter, *The Sweetness of Life* immerses the reader in the world of leisure that the slaveholders made, but Genovese does so in an almost disarming manner, setting a leisurely tone to describe the leisurely life. Although he makes clear that this world was inseparable from and made possible by the world of master–slave relations that his other work so carefully delineates, he is not primarily interested in analyzing the connections between leisure and the other dimensions of the slaveholders' world. One gets the sense from reading Genovese's rich descriptions of the various aspects of planter leisure life that he wants "us to understand them better" by seeing them as more than actors in the great drama that tore the nation apart. Although the "harsh ultimate judgment" – a judgment that Genovese always emphatically maintained they deserved – must be "rendered," his depiction of the slaveholders at home allows us to see them in their fullness and to better comprehend them and the world they made. But by looking at leisure – at the seemingly nonpolitical, nonideological dimension of life – *The Sweetness of Life* enhances our understanding of the masters' political, ideological, and psychological commitment to that world and, thus, their willingness to sacrifice so much to preserve it.

However much, therefore, *The Sweetness of Life* may depart from Genovese's other work in terms of content and tone, it must be understood as an extension of a number of Genovese's central concerns regarding the history of the Old South. What strikes the reader when considering all of Genovese's work is the consistency of his interpretation over time. Although he, like most academics, modified, qualified, refined, and in numerous ways tweaked his arguments, his work as a whole maintains its overall unity. Genovese was more fortunate than many scholars in that he had several opportunities to publish reflections on his own writings decades after they first appeared. In introductions to the second edition of *The Political Economy of Slavery*, first published in 1965 and republished in 1989, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (1969; 1988), and *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American*

History (1971; 1984), and in interviews and other forms of recollection, Genovese acknowledged how new evidence and other scholars' work had led him to reevaluate certain aspects of his understanding of the slave South. But those reevaluations never altered the foundation or the basic contours of the interpretive edifice he constructed over the course of his fifty-year career. Even his transformation from Marxist atheist to Roman Catholic in the 1990s did not substantively change his argument regarding the character of southern society and the nature of the sectional conflict. As he stated in an interview from the late 1990s, after he had returned to the Catholicism of his youth, "I developed my interpretation of the slave South from a self-consciously Marxist point of view, and I have found no reason to discard the essentials of that interpretation, which, if anything, I have strengthened over time."[7]

That interpretation, from first to last, understood the Old South as a modern slave society, in but not of the bourgeois, capitalist world that gave it life and, eventually, destroyed it in a great war between incompatible social systems driven by both ideological and material imperatives that those systems generated. The master–slave relation – an unequal but nonetheless contested struggle – provided the foundation of the southern social order and "permeated the lives and thought of all who lived in the society it dominated."[8] The slaveholders ruled southern society, albeit through constant negotiation with both their slaves and nonslaveholding whites. The hegemony the slaveholders exercised, like all hegemony, was never absolute or unchallenged, but it did allow them to protect the property basis of their power and their overall leadership of the Old South's economy, politics, and culture.

The Sweetness of Life reinforces and extends most if not all of these pillars of Genovese's interpretation of the slave South. Although one can read and enjoy it on its own terms – like all of Genovese's work, it displays his graceful prose, sly wit, sharp storytelling skills, and remarkable ability to evoke a time and place – it assumes even greater power when read as an integral if distinct part of Genovese's scholarly corpus. In a relaxed, gentle manner, Genovese demonstrates how much planter leisure life reveals his larger concerns with, among other topics, political and social negotiations among various white southerners; interactions – both friendly and not-so-friendly – between northerners and southerners; the

[7] "Genovese and History: An Interview," in Paquette and Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History*, 206.

[8] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge, 2005), 1.

slaveholders' position within a transatlantic cultural world; and the slaveholders' complex cultivation and exercise of cultural hegemony. Uniting and transcending all of these particular concerns looms Genovese's understanding of both the master–slave relation as "the determining factor within southern civilization" and the tragic nature of the slaveholders and their world.[9]

Genovese always understood classes as essentially relational. No class existed in isolation from others, and the classes that constituted a social order shaped one another through their various relations. Although, with the enslaved, the master class was his main focus and the master–slave relation the most critical element in determining that class's character, he did not neglect the role of nonslaveholding whites in shaping the slaveholders and southern society. Some of his work highlighted the extensive and often intense negotiations into which slaveholders had to engage with nonslaveholders.[10] In *The Sweetness of Life* those negotiations are not narrowly political. They instead lie implicit in an aggregation of untaught feelings, impressed into mind by customs, practices, and activities that, while having serious political consequences, primarily concerned cultural and social relations. Some leisure activities, Genovese demonstrates, such as public dances, cockfights, and hunting and fishing parties, promoted intermingling across class lines. Other episodes, such as masters making their private libraries available to poorer neighbors and encouraging – or at least not forbidding – their daughters to marry nonelite men, helped facilitate the social mobility that allowed talented and ambitious nonslaveholders to rise in status. Both of these sets of activities minimized or blurred difference, and thus the potential conflict, among the white classes.

Some practices did reflect the tension within the South between the aristocratic tendencies of the masters and the nonslaveholders' more democratic, egalitarian displays. Although planters may have assumed an attitude of noblesse oblige in certain circumstances, by offering, for example, their carriages to "poorer neighbors off to a wedding or other special occasion"[11] or entertaining the surrounding community with a barbeque or similar feast, they had to avoid putting on airs that

[9] Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Peculiar South Revisited," in John B. Boles and Edward T. Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge, 1987), 79.

[10] See, for example, Eugene D. Genovese, "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," *Agricultural History,* 49, 2 (April 1975), 331–342; Genovese and Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception,* 40–59.

[11] Eugene D. Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life: Southern Planters at Home* (Cambridge, 2017), 85.

might alienate nonslaveholders who jealously guarded their civil and political equality and were sensitive to aristocratic pretensions. So too, as much as masters followed the latest transatlantic fashions in dress, they "had to be careful to dress in a manner congenial to local taste." Genovese tells the story of aspiring Democratic politician Powhattan Ellis of Mississippi, whose tastes for silk stockings and perfume, mocked by rivals, "ruined his [political] career." And Genovese also points to instances in which the cultural and social expectations that accompanied slaveholder status helped solidify the slaveholders' class hegemony but also posed serious threats to individual masters. Those with political aspirations, Genovese notes, "needed a reputation for generosity and willingness to help those in distress. They had to spend freely on entertaining supporters and could not easily refuse to endorse their notes." More than a few masters paid a high price for such "generosity," and, as Genovese makes clear, it was often the slaves of the generous master who paid that price as financially strapped slaveholders sold off their human assets. By simply describing these aspects of the masters' leisure life, Genovese reminds us of how class relations – among slaveholders, nonslaveholders, and slaves – were inextricably bound together and informed apparently nonpolitical leisure activities in southern slave society.

Genovese's interest in the Old South, he once said, flowed from his recognition that the Civil War – or War for Southern Independence, as he preferred to call it – was the defining event in American history. Like many Americans fascinated by that war's scale and significance, Genovese sought to understand what could have produced such a long and bloody conflict. As he memorably put it in his first book, "I begin with the hypothesis that so intense a struggle of moral values implies a struggle of world views and that so intense a struggle of world views implies a struggle of worlds – or rival social classes or of societies dominated by rival social classes."[12] The political context in which the slaveholders operated placed them side-by-side and often face-to-face with Northerners whose political power and ideological convictions increasingly threatened the slaveholders' welfare. Yet this process of ruling class conflict, which Genovese believed became irrepressible, not only took time but also required that many of the ties that had bound Southerners and Northerners together had to weaken so that each side could ultimately

[12] Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (Middletown, CT 1989 [1965]), 7.

see the other as antithetical to its survival and flourishing. *The Sweetness of Life* details many of the ways in which leisure united North and South through common interests and activities – and how those interests and activities, like the political union itself, became gradually marked by suspicion and antagonism.

Although many of the chapters in this book describe instances in which Northerners and Southerners shared certain tastes or enjoyed some common activities – say, a love of oysters or a passion for pianos – Chapter 7, which focuses primarily on vacationing at the various spas and springs in antebellum America, contains the most sustained discussion of relations between Northerners and Southerners. These fashionable vacation spots welcomed patrons from all sections of the country, allowing slaveholders to mingle with Yankees at Saratoga in New York or at White Sulphur Springs in Virginia. This chapter also, and not surprisingly, devotes the most attention one finds in the book to both intrasouthern and intersectional political matters. The resort communities had an unwritten rule that "political proselytizing fell into the category of things just not done," but, Genovese immediately adds, "politics was everywhere." "The significance of the springs for southern politics can hardly be exaggerated, however much it proceeded *sotto voce*."[13] Southern political leaders informally caucused among themselves, cementing alliances and planning strategy. In addition to this internal southern political maneuvering, the springs also revealed the deepening sectional conflict. Between the 1830s and 1850s, "increasing numbers of Southerners received hostile receptions at northern springs" and "increasingly, Northerners and Southerners kept to themselves and interacted with cold formality." Some southern voices "cried out against summer treks to the North," objecting to everything from the draining of southern wealth to the "resentment, insults, and South-baiting" that slaveholders received from white and black Northerners. Yet, notwithstanding these objections, the sectional intermingling persisted. "Northern springs remained attractive," Genovese notes, and "possibly half of the Southerners who traveled to summer vacation spots in the 1850s still went north."[14] The description of relations between Northerners and Southerners, like most of the discussions in *The Sweetness of Life*, depicts an uneasily, even brittle, shared world of both conflict and coexistence, of "rival social classes" – here one of leisure and relaxation rather than of political union – that has not yet proved incapable of accommodating both of them.

[13] Genovese, *Sweetness of Life*, 210.
[14] ibid., 203–205.

III

In opening *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* Genovese's tour de force on "The World the Slaves Made," he wrote that slavery, although "cruel, unjust, exploitative, [and] oppressive," "bound two peoples together in bitter antagonism while creating an organic relationship so complex and ambivalent that neither could express the simplest human feelings without reference to the other."[15] In all his work on the Old South, Genovese insisted that the worlds of masters and slaves were made together. Such ties did not preclude the existence of spaces in which both had degrees of autonomy, but the classes developed in relation to rather than in isolation from one another. Although *The Sweetness of Life* focuses on slaveholders and their leisure, Genovese makes clear throughout the book that much of that leisure world reveals the ubiquitous presence and inescapable influence of slaves. Whether noting the presence of slaves providing service at dinner parties and other social functions, the contributions of African cooks to the South's distinct cuisine, or the enlistment of slaves in young slaveholders' romantic maneuvers, Genovese depicts how interwoven blacks and whites were in the southern social and cultural fabric. In this volume, Genovese refrains from analyzing slavery as a system of production and instead concentrates on illuminating the organically grown folkways that slavery generated even as he regularly reminds us that how masters and slaves understood shared activities could vary dramatically.

In noting these different understandings, Genovese echoes implicitly arguments from *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and *Fatal Self-Deception*, especially that being bound together in an organic relation hardly implied harmony between classes. In Chapter 4, for example, Genovese discusses the elaborate holiday parties many masters provided for their slaves. These masters, he notes, "doubtless gave their slaves an elaborate holiday with a view toward reconciling them to their lot and improving their productivity and discipline but also to reassure themselves of their own kindness and sense of Christian responsibility." That need for reassurance led these "self-serving exploiters" to see slave singing and dancing as "testimony to the slaves' contentment under kind masters." But the masters and mistresses failed to "grasp the satirical treatment of whites in songs and dances." What a slaveholder saw as affirmation of his benevolence towards "my negroes," the slaves themselves understood as an occasion not only for carnavalesque mockery of the master class, but also for

[15] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 3.

"enjoying each others' company and finding pleasurable moments in a grim world" (Chapter 4, 49, 48).[16]

Although some aspects of the relations between masters and slaves in *The Sweetness of Life* support Genovese's argument regarding the different meanings each class often derived from shared experiences, he does not focus on those relations to convey that argument. Interested as he is in capturing the fullness of his subjects' lives, Genovese often discusses slaves not because doing so advances a specific scholarly interpretation, but because they lived within the world he wishes to describe. Slaves accompany masters on hunting and fishing parties; they travel with them to summer destinations; they help accommodate guests who take advantage of their masters' hospitality; they sleep in their owners' bedrooms. What emerges most clearly from *The Sweetness of Life* is not the profundity of an argument about the master–slave relation, but, instead, the presumption of slave presence in nearly all aspects of the slaveholders' lives. One sees this especially in those episodes in which Genovese notes how foreign and Northern visitors to the South expressed shock at both the ubiquity of slaves and the intimacy with which masters and mistresses interacted with them. In his section on bedrooms in Chapter 2, for example, Genovese discusses how when "Catherine Hopley arrived from England to teach on a plantation, a slave girl offered to sleep on the floor of her bedroom," a practice common to many plantations, especially those in the low country. "Startled rather than charmed, Hopley declined." Similarly, "Frances Trollope raised her eyebrows when a Virginia gentleman told her that, since his marriage, he and his wife had grown accustomed to having a black girl sleep in their bedroom."[17] However much such accounts reveal the slaveholders' callousness toward those whom they subjected to such indignities, the casualness with which they acted vis-à-vis their slaves speaks volumes to the depth of their unconscious acceptance of the basic legitimacy of their world. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, abolitionists challenged slaveholders to examine the premises and assumptions on which their social order rested. *The Sweetness of Life* indirectly but powerfully reminds us that many Southerners either failed to accept that challenge or did so and found those premises and assumptions valid. The slaveholders who inhabit the pages of this book bespeak the confidence and the "fatal self-deception" with which they lived their lives – and with which they marched their society into a long and cataclysmic war to protect the social basis of those lives.

[16] Genovese, *Sweetness of Life*, 160, 152–153.
[17] ibid., 79.

Genovese alternates between casually describing a world of habit and custom in which masters assume the existence and legitimacy of slavery and interjecting sudden reminders of the brutal realities of slaveholding. By doing so, he captures both the all-too-human character of the masters – their aspirations to gentility, their love for their spouses and children – and the inhuman system that made possible those aspirations and, to a large extent, provided the means to express that love. Ice houses often permitted planters to keep food and beverages chilled throughout the summer, and southern publications advised slaveholders on how best to build and maintain these vital elements of gracious living. "On one matter" related to ice houses, Genovese notes, "the press remained silent: Ice houses also served as places to whip slaves severely out of the sight of squeamish whites."[18] In his detailed examination of the place of pianos and piano playing in slaveholder homes in Chapter 2, Genovese touchingly portrays loving husbands and doting fathers who "took unabashed delight in having wives and daughters play on good instruments" and who "swelled with pride at the musical accomplishments" displayed.[19] A master who "delighted to present a piano to his devoted wife and to accommodate a charming daughter's pleading and teasing" produced scenes of domestic refinement and familial love. Genovese then suddenly shifts the thrust of the discussion. "Yankee troops," he notes, apparently "sensed the pleasure pianos brought the young ladies, for they relished chopping them up. The more cultured shipped the pianos home to their own women." Although he recognizes that "meanness and greed" probably motivated most of these actions, he gently but devastatingly suggests that "perhaps the soldiers sensed that even some planters could only satisfy the passion of their sweet young things by selling a slave to pay for the piano that brought so much pleasure to family and friends."[20]

In that one seemingly modest sentence, Genovese conveys a powerful sense of the evil of slavery. And, as he did in all his work, he establishes the intimate, inseparable connection between the planters' physical comforts and their slaves' labor and, especially, their slaves' physical bodies. Passages such as this make *The Sweetness of Life* a study that both gently immerses the reader into the graceful life of slaveholders and simultaneously assaults him or her with the human costs of that life. This necessary tension between Genovese's admiration for the masters as "decent men and women" who sought to build a worthy civilization and his horror at the

[18] ibid., 58.
[19] ibid., 71.
[20] ibid., 73.

enormity on which it rested may well be the most distinguishing characteristic of all his work, including, perhaps especially, *The Sweetness of Life*.

Consider thus his discussion of holiday celebrations in Chapter 4. Genovese moves seamlessly from noting the joy experienced by slaves during Christmas week to their "grim" mood at New Year's. Slaveholders celebrated the ushering in of a new year, but slaves knew that it meant that masters had to settle their business accounts. The harsh realities of business – of being entangled in and subject to the vicissitudes of local, national, and global markets – meant that some slaves "faced sale to cover heavy debts" or risked being hired out and thus being forced "to leave families and friends for a year's work elsewhere." Like pianos and icehouses, "the wonderfully festive spirit" of the Christmas holiday "had a dark side." January 1, for many slaves, became known as "heartbreak day."[21]

IV

The Sweetness of Life thus represents another chapter in what Genovese repeatedly called his "life's work." "I began my studies of the Old South as an undergraduate," he wrote in 1988, "with the idea of writing a history of the slaveholders."[22] A recurring theme in that history, one that *The Sweetness of Life* emphasizes from its very title to its last page, is the tragic nature of the slaveholding class. Although some have criticized Genovese for being overly sympathetic to the masters, he never permitted that sympathy for his subjects to excuse them from moral judgment. Indeed, for Genovese, the tragic character of the slaveholders resided precisely in their simultaneous holding of noble and ignoble qualities, of being both admirable and reprehensible at the same time. Even as an undergraduate "with a fierce and … dogmatic Marxist bias," he came to see the slaveholders as "surprisingly strong and attractive men … who stood for some values worthy of the highest respect and who contributed much more to modern civilization than they have been credited with." But he "also viewed them as objectively retrograde and as responsible for the greatest enormity of the age – black slavery itself." As he continued

[21] ibid., 161–162.

[22] Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (Middletown CT, 1988 [1969]), xxi. For other references to his history of the slaveholders being his "life's work," see Eugene D. Genovese, "Hans Rosenberg at Brooklyn College: A Communist Student's Recollections of the Classroom as War Zone," in Genovese, *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Culture War* (Columbia, MO, 1995), 22; Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, xv; "Genovese and History: An Interview," in Paquette and Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History*, 202.

through the decades to study the masters, his "respect and admiration for the best members of that class" rose markedly. "But so," he wrote in 1989, did "my sense of horror at what, despite the best of intentions, they wrought. For the way white folks done black folks, as a former slave woman put it, they won't ever pray it away. The juxtaposition of these two aspects of the slaveholders' life and legacy defines the genuine historical tragedy to which they succumbed."[23]

Genovese drew a sharp distinction between the historical judgment of the slaveholders – a judgment that demanded that they assume "collective and personal responsibility for their crimes against black people" – and our need to recognize that "the Old South produced great men who, at their best, stood for some lasting values and for a way of life in many ways admirable."[24] Although he suggested that those values and admirable aspects of their way of life exposed some of the shortcomings and erroneous assumptions underlying the individualism and atomization of modernity, his primary motive for devoting his life to the study of the slaveholders was to understand what he always called "our greatest national tragedy": the Civil War. The slaveholders – like all ruling classes – often proved guilty of "ideological posturing, gaping contradictions, and a dose of hypocrisy," but they nonetheless fashioned a world that they sincerely believed preserved and promoted the best of Western civilization.[25] They destroyed their world in a great "counterrevolution against secular rationalism, radical egalitarianism, and majoritarian democracy," and their defeat, Genovese always insisted, we must accept as just.[26] But the study of history, he also insisted, is about much more than seeing the just cause triumph and the evil side defeated. It is, as *The Sweetness of Life* so beautifully but subtly demonstrates, to be reminded of "that melancholy wisdom so trenchantly offered us by Santayana, 'The necessity of rejecting and destroying some things that are beautiful is the deepest curse of existence.' "[27]

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[23] Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, xxiv. See also Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (Middletown, CT 1988 [1969]), xxii; Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), xiii.

[24] Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master* Class, 5; Genovese, *World the Slaveholders Made*, xxii.

[25] Genovese and Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception*, 5.

[26] ibid., 3.

[27] Eugene D. Genovese, "Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Two Studies," in Genovese, *In Red and Black*, 295.

Genovese left only a rough outline of an acknowledgments page. In it he thanks Barbara Orlsolits who "checked notes and quotations, collected materials, and offered encouragement and incisive comments on the text." He also thanks Hale Sheffield who "made available the letters on N. W. E. Long and related materials in his possession."

* * *

Preparing a great scholar's manuscript for publication proved a formidable intellectual and emotional challenge, especially since my relation with Genovese extended well beyond the mentor–student association. Humbled by the task, I leaned heavily on others to help me complete it. David Moltke-Hansen provided constant counsel and support. His friendship with Genovese and his immense respect for and understanding of Genovese's work made his comments and suggestions especially valuable. In the preface to *Fatal Self-Deception*, Genovese remarked that Karen E. Fields's "often biting criticism reinforced her reputation as one not to trifle with." Her extensive and incisive – and "often biting" – comments on a draft of *The Sweetness of Life* have improved it immensely. The manuscript also benefited from Fay Yarborough, who carefully read and critiqued an early draft. Genovese often remarked that a friend who is not a critic is no friend at all; Robert L. Paquette remains a most faithful friend and a superb critic. Mark E. Smith offered his characteristically thoughtful comments on the preface and epilogue. Joseph Capizzi offered valuable support and insights. William J. Hungeling, Genovese's friend and the executor of his estate, helped enormously, not least by shipping Genovese's hard drive and other important materials to me after his death. Robin Vanderwall provided indispensable assistance with the challenging task of turning multiple and non-uniform computer files into a coherent whole. Several Hamilton College students helped track down sources and polish up the footnotes; special thanks to Michael Adamo and Philip Parkes. At Cambridge University Press, Lewis Bateman demonstrated, yet again, why he is one of the most important figures in academic publishing. His professionalism, patience, and commitment to the project inspired and sustained me. Upon Lew's retirement, Deborah Gershenowitz and Kristina Deusch supplied encouragements and expert guidance. I am also grateful to Fred Goykhman for copyediting and to Bob Ellis for indexing the book. Sheila O'Connor-Ambrose read countless drafts, offered valuable comments, and kept me keeping on. Above all, she knows better than anyone how much this project constituted a labor of love to a man to whom we both owe more than we can ever calculate.

Editor's Note on Prices

Throughout *The Sweetnss of Life* Genovese cites amounts that masters and others spent on various items. In order to provide modern readers with some sense of what those amounts mean in terms of modern prices, I have compiled this basic guide. Economists and economic historians who measure the relative value of historic to modern prices warn that such calculations are complicated, and these figures are meant to suggest rough equivalences, not precise comparisons. I have provided commodity real price equivalents based on the calculations provided by MeasuringWorth, a website founded and supervised by Samuel H. Williamson of the University of Illinois, Chicago.[1] I have provided base-ten dollar amount equivalents from $1 to $1,000 for 1830, 1840, 1850, and 1860. All the modern amounts reflect 2014 dollars.

1830:

$1 = $26.50
$10 = $265
$100 = $2,650
$1,000 = $26,500

1840:

$1 = $28.30
$10 = $283
$100 = $2,830
$1,000 = $28,300

[1] www.measuringworth.com/

1850:

$1 = $31.30
$10 = 313
$100 = 3,130
$1,000 = 31,300

1860:

$1 = $29.40
$10 = $294
$100 = $2,940
$1,000 = $29,400

Abbreviations

AHR	*American Historical Review*
AS	*George Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, 19 vols. (Westport, CT, 1972)*
DBR	*De Bow's Review*
DD	*Robert Lewis Dabney, Discussions: Evangelical and Theological, ed., 3 vols. C. R.Vaughan (Carlisle, PA, 1982) DD* indicates material from vol. 4, also based on Vaughan's editing (Harrisonburg, VA, 1994)*
DGB	*Dictionary of Georgia Biography, 2 vols., eds, Kenneth Coleman and Charles S. Gruff (Athens, GA, 1983)*
DHUNC	*Documentary History of the University of North Carolina, ed. R. D. W. Connor, et al., 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1953)*
DNCB	*Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, ed. William S. Powell, 6 vols. Chapel Hill, NC, 1979–1994)*
EE	*Electronic edition*
ERD	*The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, ed. William Kaufman Scarborough, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge, LA, 1972–1989)*
HLW	*Writings of Hugh Swinton Legare [ed. Mary S. Legare], 2 vols. (Charleston, SC, 1846)*
HT	*The Handbook of Texas, ed., Walter Prescott Webb, ed., 3 vols. (Austin, TX, 1952–1976)*
JCCP	*The Papers of John C. Calhoun, ed. successively Robert Lee Meriwether, Edwin Hemphill, and Clyde N. Wilson, 26 vols. (Columbia, SC, 1959–2003)*
JSH	*Journal of Southern History*
LCL	*Loeb Classical Library*

QRMECS	*Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*
SA	*Southern Agriculturalist*
SBN	*The South in the Building of the Nation, ed. J. A. Chandler, 12 vols. (Richmond, VA, 1909)*
SLM	*Southern Literary Messenger*
SPR	*Southern Presbyterian Review*
SQR	*Southern Quarterly Review*
TCWVQ	*The Tennessee Civil War Veterans Questionnaires, ed. Coleen Morse Elliott and Louise Armstrong Moxley, 5 vols. (Easley, SC, 1985)*
TRP	*The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, ed. J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, 4 vols. (Raleigh, NC, 1918),*
TSW	*Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D. D., ed. J. William Flinn, 10 vols. (Columbia, SC, 1908)*
WMQ	*William and Mary Quarterly*

Manuscript Collections

* Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina

Samuel Agnew Diary*
James W. Albright Diary and Reminiscences*
Harrod C. Anderson Papers, at LSU
Ashmore Plantation Journal*
Everard Green Baker Diary*
Barbour Papers, at University of Virginia
Barnsley Papers*
Mary Eliza Battle Letters, at North Carolina State Archives (Raleigh)
Thomas L. Bayne Autobiographical Sketch*
Taylor Beatty Diary *
Mary Jeffreys Bethell Diary*
John Houston Bills Papers*
Priscilla Bond Diary, at LSU
Esther G. Wright Boyd Notes and Recollections, at Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville)
Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers *
Gustave A. Breaux Diaries, at Tulane University
Keziah Brevard Diary, at USC
Annie Laurie Broidrick, "A Recollection of Thirty Years Ago," at LSU
Catherine Barbara Broun Diary *
William Phineas Browne Papers, at State of Alabama Department of Archives and History (Montgomery)
Lucy Wood Butler Diary*
Cabell-Ellet Papers, at University of Virginia

Campbell Family Papers, at Duke University
Franc M. Carmack Diary*
Eliza Ann Carmichael*
Kate Carney Diary*
Carson Family Papers, at Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville)
Alexander Chesney Journal, at Library of Congress
Mary Jane Chester Papers*
Langdon Cheves III Collection, at South Carolina Historical Society (Charleston)
Eliza Clitherall Autobiography*
John Fletcher Comer Farm Journal*
Concordia Parish (La.) Inquest File, at LSU
John Hamilton Cornish Diary*
Thomas Edward Cox Account Books*
Edward Cross Papers, at University of Arkansas (Fayetteville)
Anne Tuberville (Beale) Davis Diary and Meditations*
Louis M. De Saussure Plantation Record Book
Dromgoole and Robinson Papers, at Duke University
Marcus B. De Witt Papers *
B. Franklin Doswell Papers, at Washington and Lee University
Durnford Letters, at Tulane University
John Early Diary*
William Ethelbert Ervin Journal*
Holden Garthur Evans Diary, at Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Jackson)
Alexander K. Farrar Papers, at LSU
Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher "Autobiography," Summer, 1844, at Duke University
Mary G. Franklin Papers, at Duke University
Lucy Virginia French Smith Diaries, at Tennessee State Library and Archives
Thomas Miles Garrett Diary*
Gayle Family Papers, at State of Alabama Department of Archives and History
Sarah Gayle Diary*
Julia A. Gilmer Diary *
Graham Philosophic Society Minute Books, at Washington and Lee University.
Iveson L. Graves Papers*

James H. Greenlee Diary*
John Berkeley Grimball Diary*
Meta Morris Grimball Journal*
William Hooper Haigh Diary and Letters*
Herndon Haralson Papers *
Henderson Papers*
Gustavus A. Henry Papers*
Carolyn Lee Hentz Papers*
William P. Hill Diary*
Mrs. Isaac Hilliard's Diary*
William H. Holcombe Papers*
Robert Philip Howell Memoirs*
Franklin A. Hudson Diaries*
Hughes Family Papers*
Fannie Page Hume Diary*
Susan Nye Hutchinson Papers*
Andrew Hynes Papers, at Historic New Orleans Collection
Meredith Flournoy Ingersoll, comp., "Excerpts from the History of the Flournoy Family" (typescript), at LSU
Jackson–Prince Papers*
Joseph Jones Collection, at Tulane University
Mitchell King Papers*
Thomas Butler King Papers*
Carl Kohn Letter Book, at Historic New Orleans Collection
Dewitt Langston, Jr., "Memories of My Family" [typescript in private possession of Caroline Langston] at LSU
Lea Family Papers*
Francis Terry Leak Diary *
Ledoux and Company Record Book, at LSU
George Lester Collection, at LSU
N. W. E. Long, C. S. A., Letters, 1862–1864, in Private Possession
Louisiana: West Feliciana Parish Police Jury Minutes, 1850
Eliza L. Magruder Diary, at LSU
Basil Manly Sr. Papers*
Basil Manly Jr. Papers*
Eliza Ann Marsh Diary*
Massenburg Farm Journal*
McBryde Family Papers*
Duncan G. McCall Plantation Journal and Diary, at Duke University
William McKean Letterbook, National Archives