Slave Counterpoint

Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry

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No one from being a person

can become a thing.

—John Davis

5 : Patriarchs, Plain Folk, and Slaves

The free and the unfree engaged in endless and varied encounters. To comprehend these kaleidoscopic contacts between masters and slaves, whites and blacks requires complex formulations. However cruelly whites exploited blacks, their fates were intricately intertwined. However much masters treated their slaves as chattels, the humanity of their property could not be ignored or evaded. However total the masters' exercise of power, negotiation and compromise were necessary to make slavery function. However sincerely planter patriarchs stressed mutuality and reciprocity, their authority ultimately rested on force. However sentimentally and benevolently some late-eighteenth-century masters viewed slaves, their relentless denial of rights to bondmen increasingly placed slaves outside society. However unequivocally daily existence brought blacks and whites together, growing race consciousness and class distinctions thrust them apart. However deep a chasm opened between whites and blacks, channels of communication arose to bridge it. However fundamentally slavery was the result of interaction between master and slave, nonslaveholders intruded to shape the institution's character. The intricacy of eighteenth-century white-black relations defies easy definition.

The core contradiction of slavery—treating persons as things—accounted for much of the complexity of master-slave relations. Although slaves were defined legally as property and thereby subject to unparalleled dehumaniza-

tion, they were also human beings, simultaneously called on to respond in a multiplicity of ways to the demands placed on them. Bought and sold like cattle, bequeathed and inherited like furniture, won and lost like lottery prizes, slaves nevertheless were flesh-and-blood human beings with whom working relationships had to be established, negotiations arranged, and accommodations reached. Slaves suffered a deprivation of freedom so extreme as to be likened, in Orlando Patterson's words, to "social death," yet they were also part of society. In spite of the barbarity with which many masters treated their slaves, the bonds of common humanity served as the ligaments of a shared social order. Perceptive contemporaries were aware of this interdependence. In 1743, Commissary James Blair of Virginia observed that slavery "had become a molding power, leaving it a vexed question which controlled society most, the African slave or his master." Modern commentators have deepened Blair's insight. Masters and slaves, blacks and whites, in C. Vann Woodward's words, "shaped each other's destiny, determined each other's isolation, shared and molded a common culture." Eugene Genovese began his magisterial *Roll, Jordan, Roll* with the following statement: "Cruel, unjust, exploitative, oppressive, slavery 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."[1]

The dominant social ethos and cultural metaphor of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Anglo-America, patriarchalism, embodied the ideal of an organic social hierarchy. Invoking the Great Chain of Being, one Virginia lawyer argued in 1772: "Societies of men could not subsist unless there were a subordination of one to another. . . . That in this subordination the department of slaves must be filled by some, or there would be a defect in the scale of order." Deeply ingrained assumptions about the workings not only of society but also of politics elevated the role of father to mythic heights. From this perspective, patriarchs anchored a social system based on the protection that the powerful offered the weak, just as monarchs defined a political system where royal power defended the people in return for their obedience and loyalty. Indeed, masters might draw a precise parallel, as Henry Laurens once did when he reflected, "Never was an absolute Monarch more happy in his Subjects than at the Present time I am." Suffusing the thought of the age, the patriarchal outlook was an austere code, emphasizing control, obedience, discipline, and severity.

1. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 38–45; Blair, as cited in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, I (New Haven, Conn., 1972), 245; C. Vann Woodward, *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston, 1964), 5; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 3. The epigraph derives from John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America . . .* (Bristol, 1803), 92.

Yet patriarchalism also involved protection, guardianship, and reciprocal obligations. It defined the gentleman planter's self-image and constituted the ideals and standards by which slaveholding behavior was judged.[2]

Other discourses, other ways of thinking about slaves, made inroads on the patriarchal ideal. Slaves were chattel, and masters thought of and acted toward them using the language of property. Anglo-American masters were also profit-conscious, operated in a market economy, and employed the language of commercial capitalism. The importance of money in defining personal relations in colonial North America can never be exaggerated. Nevertheless, for much of the eighteenth century, neither the discourse of property nor the discourse of capitalism overrode, though they certainly encroached on, the masters' sense of slaves as dependents. Being part of a household cushioned slaves from the full force of free-market commercialism. Harsh profit-and-loss purgatives had not yet voided the body politic of its traditional notions of duty, mutuality, and patriarchal care.

Nevertheless, patriarchalism was reformulated over the course of the eighteenth century. Masters began to speak less of duties and obligations, more of individual rights, particularly property rights. Slaves were more and more defined as people without rights; and, because they were viewed increasingly as property, they were said to enhance their owners' independence. Whereas the patriarchal ethos held that even the lowliest person was part of an organic society, the denial of rights could place the slave completely outside society. In part because slaves were being seen as perpetual outsiders, masters could emphasize solicitude rather than authority, sentiments rather than severity, in their governance. This shift in emphasis was partly a response to political events but also resulted from the development of a more affectionate family life, the rise of evangelicalism, the growth of romanticism, and the increase of humanitarianism. It was a reflection in the realm of ideas of broad-gauged changes affecting Revolutionary America. Austere patriarchalism slowly gave way to mellow paternalism.

At the same time as the inclusiveness of patriarchal ideology was being undermined, the everyday world of masters and slaves, whites and blacks became more fractured. Over the course of the eighteenth century, a rapidly growing slave population, increasingly independent living quarters, larger plantations, and an influx of Africans distanced blacks from whites. These forces were more intensely experienced in the Lowcountry than in the Chesa-

2. *Robin* v. *Hardaway*, 1 Va. (Jeff.), 58, 62–63 (1772), as cited in A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., and Barbara K. Kopytoff, "Racial Purity and Interracial Sex in the Law of Colonial and Antebellum Virginia," *Georgetown Law Journal*, LXXVII (1989), 1969; Harold C. Syrett et al., eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 27 vols. (New York, 1961–1987), III, 605–608.

peake, for master-slave relations were more impersonal and usually harsher in the Lowcountry than in the Chesapeake. Thus, although masters and slaves always interacted less closely and intimately on Lowcountry rice estates than on Chesapeake tobacco plantations, the gap between these two regional patterns widened as the century progressed. Nevertheless, people everywhere in mainland North America increasingly aligned themselves according to the color of their skins. The articulation of a racist ideology, which intensified in the late eighteenth century, contributed to the growing cleavage that separated whites and blacks.[3]

The duality of growing separation and common bonds applied as much to the relationship of plain white folk and blacks as it did to large planters and their slaves. Because in the late seventeenth century poor whites associated closely and openly with slaves, the growing gap between them was notable. Relations between poor whites and blacks were also part of a larger tangled web that enmeshed patriarchs, plain folk, and slaves. The existence of a large group of plain white folk, for example, encouraged planters to seek their support and recognition. To the degree that nonslaveholders honored slaveholders, they enhanced the large planters' social legitimacy. Slaves in turn saw proud, free white men defer to powerful masters, reinforcing in their eyes the authority of large planters. Paradoxically, the ties established between patriarchs and plain folk could strengthen those between grandees and slaves.

My aim in this chapter is to provide a way of conceptualizing the social dynamics of white-black relations in the eighteenth-century South, to provide an overview for succeeding Chapters 6 and 7, which explore the exchanges and transactions of quotidian life. If a single message can be gleaned, it is that southern society was bedeviled by a perennial conflict of irreconcilable opposites, the most fundamental of which was inherent in the very notion of human bondage. Consequently, masters and slaves, whites and blacks were bound together in amicable and antagonistic, cooperative and conflictual, harmonious and hostile ways. The contradictions varied over time: patriarchalism and later paternalism were changing ideological attempts to resolve or mediate these contradictions. They varied across space: relations between masters and slaves, whites and blacks were always more intimate in the Chesapeake, more distant in the Lowcountry. And, finally, they varied according to the dynamic interplay of race and class: in part, relations were bipolar—be-

3. Compare the whole thrust of Mechal Sobel's *World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), which ignores these trends; for example: "Ultimately, an ideology based on white superiority did divide poor whites from blacks; however, a very long history and black and white interaction preceded the marked separation of the nineteenth century" (45).

tween whites and blacks—but they were also triangular—between masters, plain folk, and slaves. Encounters between blacks and whites, masters and slaves overflowed with complexities and teemed with ambiguities.

MASTERS AND SLAVES

The inherent contradiction of treating a person as property lay at the heart of slavery. In theory, the slave was a thing, a piece of property, a beast of burden, and could be treated with all the impersonality accorded a mere possession, an extension of the master's will. The slave's existence was wholly contingent on the master's volition. Yet slaves continually demonstrated that they had wills of their own, that they were sentient, articulate human beings, that they were members of society as well as capital assets. In reality, masters implicitly, if not always explicitly, recognized the humanity of their slaves. The slave could never become the thing he or she was supposed to be.[4]

The slaves' status as chattel was at the root of the callousness and dehumanization they faced, setting them apart from other compulsory laborers. Slaves experienced a more encompassing denial of rights than did other forced laborers. The slave suffered not only loss of control over labor-power but also loss of control over person. This deprivation of freedom was so extreme as to be qualitatively distinct from all other forms of unfreedom. Further, the slave was an outsider. Uprooted from one society and introduced into another, slaves were denied the most elementary of social bonds. A defining characteristic of slaves was their legal "kinlessness" or "natal alienation."[5] If brutality in human relations is common and if societies always inflict gross injustices on those who have nothing to offer but their labor, what singles out slaves is the sheer nakedness of the exploitation to which they were subject.

Whenever North American colonists felt most abused, they likened their condition to slavery or compared their fate to that of blacks. Nor was this merely a rhetorical ploy of upper-class colonists. In 1668, a Virginia maidservant who had been raped by her master claimed that he "would make her worse than a negro by whoreing her." A widow in Charles County, Maryland,

4. There is a sharp difference of opinion about the importance of the concept of property to a definition of slavery. For the view that it is unimportant, see, among others, Igor Kopytoff, "Slavery," *Annual Review of Anthropology,* XI (1982), 207–230, esp. 219–221; and Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* esp. 18–34. Perhaps the best counterargument comes from the late Moses I. Finley. See, for example, his *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1983), 73–75. I find Finley's position most useful for a study of New World slavery. I have also been influenced by David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966); and Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective,* Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Occasional Papers in Social Change, no. 2 (Philadelphia, 1976), 13.

5. Finley, *Ancient Slavery,* 74–75; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* 5–6.

in the late seventeenth century, complained of the treatment her son had received when in the household of Ralph Shaw. She alleged that Shaw used her son as "a servant or rather a white Negro clothing him in such things as Negroes are usually Clothed and Putting him under an overseer to make tobacco and corne instead of going to Schoole." Work became associated with servile drudgery, leading a Lowcountry resident to declare, "Where there are Negroes, a white Man despises to work, saying, *what, will you have me a Slave and work like a Negroe?*" Convicts likened their situation to slavery, and one claimed that slaves were "better used."[6]

Yet, as this last comment suggests, the slaves' status as perpetual property—the primary source of their more systematic dehumanization as compared to other forced laborers—could work to their advantage. A slave might be treated with greater consideration than a servant or convict precisely because he or she was a capital asset. A white overseer charged with murdering a white maidservant in late-seventeenth-century Virginia saw himself as a victim of exactly such reverse discrimination. He had been made a scapegoat, he alleged, for a mulatto, whom his employer wanted to "clear . . . because he was a slave for his life." Even while acknowledging that some Virginia masters "use their Negros no better than their Cattle," Governor William Gooch made a claim that would be heard with resounding regularity down the years. "Far the greater Number [of slaves]," he asserted, "having kind Masters, live much better than poor Laboring Men in England." Such claims of humane treatment of individual slaves by individual masters, however accurate and however widespread, go no way to lessening the inhumanity of slavery as an institution, for the indictment of slavery rests, not on the issue of treatment, but on its denial of freedom. But they do go some way to pointing up one of the many ironies of slavery—

6. Accomac County Orders, 1666–1670, 112, in J. Douglas Deal, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore during the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1993), 111; Charles County Court, V, no. 1, fol. 410, X, no. 1, fol. 375, in Lorena Seebach Walsh, "Charles County Maryland, 1658–1705: A Study of Chesapeake Social and Political Structure" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1977), 139; Allen D. Candler, comp., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia,* 26 vols. (Atlanta, Ga., 1904–1916), V, 476, in Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 129–130; *Account of the Ordinary of Newgate,* June 4, 1770, 43, in A. Roger Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718–1775* (Oxford, 1987), 151; Elizabeth Sprigs to John Sprigs, Sept. 22, 1756, in Merrill Jensen, ed., *English Historical Documents: American Colonial Documents to 1776,* vol. IX of David C. Douglas, ed., *English Historical Documents* (New York, 1955), 489. More generally, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 232–246; and Jack P. Greene, " 'Slavery or Independence': Some Reflections on the Relationship among Liberty, Black Bondage, and Equality in Revolutionary South Carolina," *SCHM,* LXXX (1979), 193–214.

namely, that the humane treatment of some slaves was predicated on the very source of their most systematic dehumanization: their propertied status.[7]

Because law distills some of any society's most cherished values, it provides a graphic demonstration of the degradation to which slaves were subject. One of the first Virginia acts relating to slaves concerned their punishment. Passed in 1669, the act was appropriately entitled "An act about the casuall killing of slaves." It declared that, in case a slave died from a beating administered for insubordination, the master or his agent was to be exonerated, "since it cannot be presumed that prepensed malice (which alone makes murther ffelony) should induce any man to destroy his owne estate." Andrew Burnaby considered this immunity enjoyed by masters the most repugnant feature of Virginia society, tantamount to an open season on slaves.[8]

As Virginia's commitment to slavery deepened, a specialized form of justice—or, more appropriately, injustice—arose to deal with slaves. After 1692, a slave who committed a capital offense was denied the "sollemnitie of jury" or right of appeal and could be convicted on the evidence of his or her own confession "or the oaths of two witnesses or of one with pregnant circumstances." Whereas free persons charged with capital offenses had to be brought to the capital for trial ("'tis a maxim," declared an act of 1656, "that no deliberation can be too much pondered that concernes the life of the meanest man"), no such concern was extended slaves, who were tried in their respective counties. Slaves were made even more vulnerable in 1705, when the slave code awarded owners the full value of an executed bondman, whereas the act of 1723 reduced the number of necessary "credible witnesses" to one. By the first

7. Accomac Wills and Orders, 1682–1697, 91a, 93a–96a, in Deal, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia,* 104; Governor Gooch to the Bishop of London, May 28, 1731, Fulham Palace Papers, XV, SR 650, microfilm, CW. William Eddis thought that white servants in North America "groan[ed] beneath a worse than Egyptian bondage." Because blacks were "a property for life," they were, in his estimation, "almost in every instance, under more comfortable circumstances than the miserable European" (Eddis, *Letters from America,* ed. Aubrey C. Land [Cambridge, Mass., 1969], 38).

8. William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia* . . . , 13 vols. (Richmond, Va., and Philadelphia, 1809–1823), II, 270; Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North-America, in the Years 1759 and 1760* . . . , 3d ed. (London, 1798), 22–23. See also John Clayton to Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, Dec. 20, 1716, CO5/1318, fols. 95–98, microfilm, CW; Marion Tinling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684–1776,* I (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), 297; and William M. Wiecek, "The Statutory Law of Slavery and Race in the Thirteen Mainland Colonies of British America," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXXIV (1977), 258–280. A study that stresses the legal importance of the slave as property in ways compatible with my analysis, but treating the relationship at much greater length and with greater sophistication, is Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619–1860* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996).

quarter of the eighteenth century, the basic criminal law of slavery was in p
Although the law was uniform and not arbitrary (owners could defend t
slaves in court either personally or through a lawyer), the slave was subject to
rapid, harsh, and singular justice.[9]

South Carolina's slave code took shape, if anything, even more quickly an
was even harsher in intent than that of Virginia. Carolina's special courts (c
two justices and three freeholders) were created two years earlier than those in
Virginia, and the policy of reimbursement for executed slaves was introduced a
decade earlier. Moreover, whereas Virginia moved over time to make its special
courts less severe—in 1748, for instance, a slave was to be acquitted if the court
was divided; in 1772, a sentence of death required unanimity from four jus-
tices—South Carolina moved in the opposite direction. A law of 1696 specified
that murder cases involving slaves needed to be based not just on an examina-
tion of "all evidences, proofs and testimonies" but also on "violent presump-
tion and circumstances"; and, in 1714, majority verdicts were made permissible
in capital cases, whereas only three persons were required to decide noncapital
crimes. No free person could be executed for killing a slave in eighteenth-
century South Carolina; in Virginia, it was at least a theoretical possibility.[10]

Punishments were also more stringent further south. For striking a white
man in Virginia, a slave received thirty-nine lashes by the act of 1705, reduced
to thirty lashes forty-three years later. In South Carolina, an act of 1714 made
the same offense punishable by death, lessened to a "severe whipping" and the
loss of an ear for a first offense eight years later. But this lowered sentence was a
minor concession, for the death sentence was still reserved for any action that
"bruised, wounded, maimed or disabled" a white person. South Carolina law
was also brutally specific concerning the type of physical punishment to be
administered. Explicit provisions in the South Carolina code for nose slitting,
"gelding" (though permissible in Virginia before 1769, when it was reserved
only for cases of rape), and ankle-cord cutting were absent from the pages of
Virginia's statute books. In the eighteenth century, at least seven South Car-
olina slaves were burned alive for alleged crimes. As late as 1830, a South

9. Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, I, 398, III, 102–103, 269–270, IV, 127. As an indication of the sort of "justice" often meted out to slaves, the views of one white Virginian are pertinent. He returned home from court angry because "we had a Jury on those Negroes and one Damn'd Fool hung the Jury, a clearer case never was; there was many Lawyers present and at least 30 bystanders and they were to a Man in our favour—we are to have another Tryal next Friday" (Bowler Cocke to William Cocke, Feb. 22, 1791, Armistead-Cocke Papers, W and M).

10. Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 10 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1836–1841), VII, 343, 355 (misdated 1712), 358, 365–366; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, VI, 106, VIII, 523. For more on the murder of a slave, see Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law*, 165–171.

Carolina slave faced execution by fire. In Virginia, by contrast, only two slaves are known to have been burned to death, the second in 1746. Well might Josiah Quincy exclaim, when he visited South Carolina in 1773, that the "Legislators [have] enacted laws touching negroes, mulattoes and masters which savor more of the policy of Pandemonium than the English constitution."[11]

Once again, however, the slaves' propertied status mitigated the full rigor and severity of the law. In South Carolina, for example, the public treasury was deemed incapable of supporting the full reimbursement for executed slaves. In 1714, the maximum sum allowable was only fifty pounds. In 1740, it was raised to two hundred pounds precisely so that "owners of slaves may not be tempted to conceal the crimes of their slaves to the prejudice of the public." But two hundred pounds was insufficient compensation for a prime field hand, and some slave crime was concealed on this account. A visitor to South Carolina in 1772 claimed that one could see "daily instances of the most execrable villains being sold, or sent off the province, or no farther than Winyaw, even for the horrid crime of administering poison which is an evil of the first magnitude." Most losses fell on tradesmen, he argued, because wealthy slaveowners saw to it that their slaves never came to trial. In the following year, the grand jury of Georgetown district echoed the visitor's complaint by again pointing to the "insufficiency of the valuation of negroes and other slaves that are executed, by which means, many notorious Villains are not brought to Justice." Similar complaints were heard in Virginia. According to Landon Carter, Virginia justices were disinclined to try too many felony cases or to hand down too many death sentences because of the amount of compensation chargeable to the public. During the Revolutionary war, one magistrate acquitted a slave of treason on the grounds that he was a chattel, and thereby a noncitizen. Propertied status occasionally had advantages.[12]

11. Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large,* III, 459, VI, 110, VIII, 358; Cooper and McCord, eds., *Statutes at Large,* VII, 343, 360, 366–367, 377; Lowry Ware, "The Burning of Jerry: The Last Slave Execution by Fire in South Carolina?" *SCHM,* XCI (1990), 100–106; Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705–1865* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988), 15, 92; Mark Antony De Wolfe Howe, ed., "Journal of Josiah Quincy, Junior, 1773," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings,* XLIX (1915–1916), 457. On "gelding," see Adam Culliatt, *SCG,* Apr. 14, 1757; Workhouse, *SCG and CJ,* Jan. 26, 1768 (this captured fugitive reported that his master castrated him and another slave); and Journal of South Carolina House of Representatives, Dec. 19, 1794, 221, available in Willam S. Jenkins, ed., *Records of the States of the United States of America,* microfilm series (Washington, D.C., 1949). To my knowledge, no evidence of castrated slaves survives from 18th-century Chesapeake runaway advertisements, but, between 1740 and 1785, four Virginia slaves were sentenced to castration for the attempted rape of a white woman (Schwarz, *Twice Condemned,* 157).

12. Cooper and McCord, eds., *Statutes at Large,* VII, 366, 403; "The Stranger," *SCG,* Sept. 17, 1772; Georgetown District Grand Jury presentments, ibid., Dec. 27, 1773; Jack P. Greene,

Informal attempts to protect slaves from the rigors of the law are difficult to discover, for obvious reasons, but sometimes they come to light. In the Low country, Robert Raper informed Thomas Boone in 1770 that he had sent his slave man Abraham to Pon Pon because he had committed two or three robberies in the vicinity of his Cooper River plantation and "was very near being hanged." In the following year, two of Governor James Grant's boatmen robbed a store in Saint Augustine, East Florida. Grant's manager had initially hoped to keep the affair private, but the storekeeper demanded a search warrant and discovered most of his stolen property. The manager offered a handsome reimbursement, but the storekeeper "was advised by people in town not to make it up," provoking the manager to bewail "the disposition of the Mobility." Chesapeake slaves also benefited from private arrangements designed to evade the law. In 1729, a ship captain had arranged, with various masters of slaves involved in a robbery of his storehouse, to take back the stolen goods and avoid a trial. The Virginia Council charged him with compounding the felony. A less blatant example of protection occurred one winter when Vincent Marmaduke ignored a magistrate's warrant committing a runaway slave named Tom to the Westmoreland County jail. As he explained, "The weather at that time being very Cold, I thought proper to Keep him out of Gaol and from the good behaviour of sd fellow since, I shall continue him out of Gaol." Tom had then been in Marmaduke's employ for four months.[13]

A defining characteristic of slavery was its highly personal mechanisms of coercion; the whip, rather than resort to law, was its indispensable and ubiquitous instrument. Virginians, as Edmund Morgan has pointed out, were casual and matter-of-fact about the lashings and dismemberings they meted out to their slaves. Thomas Jones could happily tell his wife of having "chear'd" a slave with thirty lashes on Saturday and another thirty on Tuesday. In Charles County, Maryland, in 1772, a small planter killed a slave by hanging him from the beams of his house for six hours, by whipping him one hundred times with

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ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752–1778*, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), 676 (hereafter cited as *Carter Diary*); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 129. See also Thomas Wright, *SCG*, Oct. 30, 1762, for a master's unhappiness at his slave's "unjust" punishment.

13. Robert Raper to Thomas Boone, July 3, 1770, Robert Raper Letterbook, West Sussex Record Office, England, microfilm, SCHS; David Yeats to James Grant, Aug. 31, 1771, bundle 250, Papers of General James Grant of Ballindalloch, sometime Governor of East Florida, in ownership of Sir Evan Macpherson-Grant, Bart., Ballindalloch Castle Muniments, Scotland; H. R. McIlwaine et al., eds., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, IV (Richmond, Va., 1930), 198; Vincent Marmaduke to Robert Carter, Mar. 2, 1782, Carter Family Papers, VHS.

more than thirty birch rods, and by inflicting wounds six inches long and half an inch deep on his back, shoulders, sides, and stomach. A jury acquitted the planter of murder. Absolutely chilling are the sentiments committed to a diary by a young Virginia girl after a slave had killed her cat. "A vile wretch of new negrows," she raged, "if he was mine, I would cut him to pieces, a son of a gun, a nice negrow, he should be kild himself by rites." Robert "King" Carter boasted of curing a runaway by taking off his toes. If anything, Carolina masters gained an even worse reputation than their Virginia counterparts. In the early eighteenth century, the Reverend Francis Le Jau witnessed a slave woman burned alive and a slave man put into "a hellish Machine" shaped like a coffin. Masters in his neighborhood, Le Jau observed, "hamstring, maim, and unlimb those poor Creatures for small faults." In 1711, an English immigrant spoke encouragingly to her relatives back home of the advantages of the Carolina environment. Craftsmen or husbandmen can succeed, she predicted, provided they "get a few slaves and can beat them well to make them work hard." Eighty years later, another immigrant to the Lowcountry noted that on first arrival he "could not bear to see a negro corrected" but that within five years "he could bear to flay one of them alive." The estates of South Carolina planters contained the instruments of coercion: mouthpieces, pairs of "iron negro fetters," and "Negro spurs." The famous scene, so movingly rendered by Crèvecoeur, of a slave suspended in a cage, preyed on by birds and insects, and barely alive, derived, appropriately enough, from South Carolina.[14]

14. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 312–315; Thomas Jones to his wife, Oct. 22, 1736, "Jones Papers," *VMHB,* XXVI (1918), 285; Jean B. Lee, *The Price of Nationhood: The American Revolution in Charles County* (New York, 1995), 68; "Diary of a Little Colonial Girl," *VMHB,* XI (1903–1904), 213; Robert Carter to Robert Jones, Oct. 10, 1727, Robert Carter Letterbook, 1727–1728, UVa; Francis Le Jau to SPG, Mar. 22, 1709, A4/142, Feb. 20, 1712, A7/395–398, Feb. 23, 1713, A8/346–348, SPG; St. Julien R. Childs, "A Letter Written in 1711 by Mary Stafford to Her Kinswoman in England," *SCHM,* LXXXI (1980), 4; George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His "Travels through Life" Together with His Commonplace Book for 1789–1813,* American Philosophical Society, Memoirs, XXV (Princeton, N.J., 1948), 219–220; J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer,* ed. W. P. Trent and Ludwig Lewisohn (New York, 1925 [orig. publ. 1782), 242–245; and for a similar account to that of Crèvecoeur, see George Fenwick Jones, "The 1780 Siege of Charleston as Experienced by a Hessian Officer: Part Two," *SCHM,* LXXXVIII (1987), 72. For typical inventories listing mouthpieces, etc., see those of William Ritch, June 28, 1751, Inventory Book, WPA, CXXXII, 55–56; of Silas Kerslake, Feb. 4, 1754, ibid., CXLIV, 164–165; of William Eding, Apr. 20, 1756, ibid., CLIII, 889–891; of Capt. William Lawton, Dec. 19, 1757, ibid., CLV, 310–315; of John Hogg, 1759, ibid., CLIX, 371–373, SCDAH. For customary violence by masters, see Harold E. Davis, *The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1773–1776* (Chapel

PLATE 17. Portrait of a Man / Virginian Luxuries. *Artist unknown. Circa 1810. Double-sided painting. The obverse of a portrait of a man, this hidden side represents the seamy side of Virginia life. Courtesy Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg*

And yet precisely because a slave entered into no contractual relationship with his or her master but was instead subject to direct personal domination, so he or she could be more readily considered part of the household. The slave was not simply a factor of production with whom an employer maintained a limited relationship—a condition that was becoming familiar to some laborers in eighteenth-century British America—but was a part of the master's household. Not for nothing were slaves termed *famuli* in the ancient world. They were the original *familia*, a group of *famuli* living under the same roof. Anglo-American masters were party to this tradition. They referred to their slaves as their "people," as their "folks," or as part of their "family." Slaves were almost uniformly known by familial, not formal names—Jack for John, Matt for Matthew, Sukey for Susanna, and so on—and they largely lacked surnames. As Michael Zuckerman has argued of William Byrd: "His attachments were never confined within the sealing circle of spouse and fledglings. On the contrary, they were diffused far and wide among a heterogeneous plantation commu-

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Hill, N.C., 1976), 131; Mrs. Elizabeth Sindrey Estate Account Book, 1705–1721, October 1708, SCHS; Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709–1712* (Richmond, Va., 1941), 2, 46, 112, 113, 117, 119, 419.

nity, conceived in its entirety as his family and explicitly so described." Seen from this vantage point, slavery was but one of a number of subordinate statuses in the Anglo-American world—one that rested on a personal rather than an impersonal basis.[15]

It is easy to deride these personal ties. Orlando Patterson has claimed: "No authentic human relationship was possible where violence was the ultimate sanction. There could have been no trust, no genuine sympathy, and while a kind of love may sometimes have triumphed over the most perverse form of interaction, intimacy was usually calculating and sadomasochistic." As much as one might like to believe this, too much evidence contradicts it. An inhumane institution like slavery could still encompass within it warm and caring human relationships. Charles Ball, who experienced slavery, is an excellent witness. Indeed, Patterson might enlist him as an ally, for Ball once declared that there "never can be any affinity of feeling between master and slave." Yet Ball also recollected "instances of the greatest tenderness of feeling" on the part of masters toward their slaves and described one mistress as "a true friend to me." Strong personal ties, a measure of trust, even sympathies did arise between many a master and slave. True, there was always the ever-present threat of violence, but these human associations were no less authentic for that.[16]

A spectacular example concerns John Gibb of Queen Anne County, Maryland. In 1740, he provided for the manumission of his nineteen slaves, giving each a share of his clothing and land. Gibb's niece, Janet Cleland, contested the will and won a ruling in her favor from the Maryland Prerogative Court. The nineteen slaves in turn appealed this decision. Cleland claimed that the slaves had taken advantage of their master during his last illness. They had refused to work unless he provided for their freedom. Gibb's executors disputed this claim and instead made the telling observation that the master had trusted his slaves far more than his niece. Depositions from neighbors confirmed elements

15. György Diósdi, *Ownership in Ancient and Preclassical Roman Law* (Budapest, 1970), 19, 22–23, 30; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "family"; Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981), 7; Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, Conn., 1977), 2. On planters' referring to their "folks," etc., see, for example, Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), 23–24; and Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 163. On the use of familial names, see Newbell Niles Puckett, "Names of American Negro Slaves," in George Peter Murdock, ed., *Studies in the Science of Society* (New Haven, Conn., 1937), 478–481; Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Explicatus* (New York, 1984), 101; Michael Zuckerman, "The Family Life of William Byrd," in his *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 97–144, esp. 113–114.

16. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 12; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains* (New York, 1970), rpt. of *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man* (New York, 1837), 53, 298–299.

of both stories. There were certainly strong bonds between master and slave, but the central question revolved about whether the bondpeople had won their master's respect, even love, or whether they had been able to manipulate a weak man to the point that he favored them at the expense of his kin (who, at the time the will was made, included his brother and a nephew as well as the niece). Either possibility is, of course, surprising. Perhaps most surprising, however, is that the jury of lawyers who heard the appeal overturned the court ruling. Apparently, they believed the slaves. Of course, if manumission rates are a barometer for gauging the level of concern for slaves, then emotional attachments between masters and bondpeople may seem extremely shallow.[17]

But feelings of compassion, even friendship, could exist between master and slave without manifesting themselves in a manumission document. Elias Ball, a loyalist in exile, wrote to his brother in South Carolina thanking Old Tom for his gift of Indian corn and expressing concern that the slave did "not get the things I sent him. I gave them to the Capt . . . and he brought them back which realy vext me much not for the value but the disappointment to the old man. Have sent them out again in the hopes he may now receive them." Another loyalist couple, James and Margaret Parker, of Norfolk, Virginia, agonized over what to do with their slaves when they realized that they faced long-term exile. Margaret spoke of her "grief" at the thought of her "poor creatures" finding "masters that would not use them as well as we have done." James thought their slaves should be hired "as I cannot bring myself to think of selling the poor creatures who have served us so well. . . . I would rather suffer a little myself as sell them for any consideration to a Tyrant who would use them cruely."[18]

Viewed from the perspective of personal relationships, slavery can assume the appearance of the most extreme form of service, differing only in degree,

17. Proceedings of the Special Court of Delegates, 1751, MHR, cited in Ross M. Kimmel, "Slave Freedom Petitions in the Courts of Colonial Maryland," MS, 27–29. On the unavailability of manumission in both Virginia and South Carolina, see David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore, 1972), 4, 10; Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), 46–47; Theodore Stoddard Babcock, "Manumission in Virginia, 1782–1806" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1974); Larry Darnell Watson, "The Quest for Order: Enforcing Slave Codes in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1760–1800" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1980), 164; Richard S. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776–1810," and Philip D. Morgan, "Black Society in the Lowcountry, 1760–1810," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1983), 74–75, 115–117.

18. Elias Ball to Elias Ball, Jan. 26, 1788, Ball Family Papers, USC; Margaret Parker to James Parker, c. 1782–1783, 920 PAR I 22/21, Parker Family Papers, Liverpool Central Libraries, England.

not in kind, from that of the poor in England or of servants in North America. The English poor, as Edmund Morgan has pointed out, were considered "vicious, idle, dissolute," addicted to "every Kind of Vice." They were confined to workhouses and put to work for the general good. There was even talk in eighteenth-century Britain of enslaving them. Contempt for the poor approximated that shown blacks "even to the extent of intimating the subhumanity of both."[19] In British America similar views were expressed about white servants. They were "filth and scum," "miserable Wretches," "insolent young Scoundrels." They were shiftless, irresponsible, disloyal, and dishonest. They often met with brutal and savage treatment, not far removed from that extended to blacks. Indeed, seventeenth-century planters treated their servants sufficiently like commodities to make wholly explicable their ease in dealing with slaves. The similarities in the treatment of slaves and servants, and in attitudes toward slaves and the poor, help explain how the overwhelming majority of Anglo-Americans took slavery for granted.[20]

And yet much as the poor or servants were viewed and treated like slaves, the attitudes and treatment were not equivalent. Consider those humans who were said to display beastlike qualities. Those on the margins of respectable society—the poor, servants, the Irish, the insane—were often likened to animals. Even children could be compared to wild, untamed colts and women to breeding sows. But no group attracted more discourses on their animal nature or experienced an everyday treatment so close to animal domestication as did black slaves. Many eighteenth-century treatises dwelled on the supposedly brutish nature and beastlike sexuality of blacks. The routine activities of slavery reinforced the allegedly animal-like qualities of slaves. Masters generally bought slaves at market, often branded them, and sometimes gave them names normally reserved for dogs and horses. Masters sometimes bought metal neck collars for their slaves much as they did for their pets. They bridled, haltered, padlocked, and even dismembered and castrated their delinquent slaves as if they were domesticated livestock. The punishment for running away on the plantation of William Byrd II was the "bit," treating slaves much like horses. Masters sold fugitive slaves "as they ran," much as they did cattle on the hoof. Symbolic of this equation between slaves and livestock was the exchange effected by two South Carolinians. When Daniel Lesesne asked John Parker to put in a bid for his slave boy Jamey, Parker obliged by offering either fifty pounds sterling or

19. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom,* 320, 325. See also J. H. Plumb, *In the Light of History* (London, 1972), 102–113.

20. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom,* 236; Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* (New York, 1984), 130.

his sorrel horse. Lesesne decided to take the horse. Other bargains were available in a slave society. Masters sometimes entered into partnership to purchase a half or a lesser fraction of a human being. It was even possible to win a slave in a card game, much like gambling on horses at the track.[21]

Visitors to North America were often struck by the similarities in how slaves and animals were viewed and treated. What Edward Kimber found "really shocking" in Virginians was their display at slave marts, where "Buyers handle [their intended purchases] as the Butchers do Beasts in Smithfield, to see if they are proof in Cod, Flank and Shoulders." Likewise, David M. Erskine saw a parallel in the Virginian practice of hiring out blacks much "as horses are in England." If anything, matters were even worse in the Lowcountry. In South Carolina, Luigi Castiglioni discovered, blacks "are scarcely reputed to be human beings." He met one Lowcountry master who asserted that blacks were "a kind of animal closer to monkeys than to man." Crèvecoeur observed that Carolinians looked on their slaves "with half the kindness and affection with which they consider their dogs and horses," whereas Benjamin West thought that a South Carolina planter would "shoot a Negro with as little emotion as he shoots a hare."[22]

21. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1983), esp. 36–50, 92–117; Jordan, *White over Black*, 28–40, 54, 156, 228–234, 238; Wright and Tinling, eds., *Secret Diary*, 46, 199; William Gregory, *VaG* (P and D), Oct. 22, 1772; James French, ibid. (D and H), Oct. 31, 1777; James Narvell, *SCG*, Sept. 10, 1763; William Thompson, ibid., July 7, 1777 (sale "on the run"); deposition of John Parker, Sept. 28, 1787, Miscellaneous Records, XX, 9, SCDAH; inventory of John Wyatt, Feb. 21, 1798, Charleston County Inventories, C, 326–327, and inventory of Patrick Martin, Jan. 30, 1799, ibid., 358 (buy fraction of a slave); John Torrans to James Grant, May 30, 1769, bundle 552, Papers of General James Grant of Ballindalloch; Charles William Janson, *The Stranger in America* (London, 1807), 360; Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1938), 95 (slaves won in gambling).

22. [Edward Kimber], "Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America," *WMQ*, 1st Ser., XV (1906–1907), [149]; letter of Oct. 18, 1798, David M. Erskine Travel Diary, UVa; Antonio Pace, trans. and ed., *Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels in the United States of North America, 1785–1787* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1983), 164–165; Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 242–245; James S. Schoff, ed., *Life in the South, 1778–1779: The Letters of Benjamin West* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1963), 33. See also Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements*, 54; Baron Ludwig von Closen, *The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen, 1780–1783*, ed. and trans. Evelyn M. Acomb (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1958), 187; John C. Van Horne, ed., *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: The American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717–1777* (Urbana, Ill., 1985), 129; Robert L. Brunhouse, ed., "David Ramsay, 1749–1815: Selections from His Writings," American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, N.S., LV, pt. 4 (1965), 61; Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1942–1958), II, 674–675; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in*

Ambiguities and contradictions were intrinsic to slavery. The fundamental contradiction—that slaves were at one and the same time property and human beings—made for deeply ambivalent relations between masters and bondpeople. Masters and slaves were the opposite extremes of a magnetic field, poles apart and yet holding one another in suspension, each defining the other. As much as masters and slaves distrusted each other, they also needed each other, watched each other, and moderated each other's behavior. This is not to say that the slave societies of the Chesapeake and Lowcountry crackled with tension or that slaveholders were stretched on a rack of anxiety. Problems obviously arose in the attempt to define persons as things. There was confusion, for example, whether slaves should be considered real or personal property. There might have been confusion in the minds of Elizabeth City County justices about how to charge Sam and Peter, who apparently helped a mulatto woman escape from her owner; they settled on an action for theft rather than for kidnapping. Slave codes were themselves a testament to the essential contradiction of slavery. Slaves were simultaneously defined as chattel and denied positive protection by the law, yet they were held morally responsible for their actions. Most members of slave societies, however, simply accepted the ambiguity inherent in property endowed with a soul. Their societies repeatedly demonstrated a capacity to survive and absorb severe contradictions.[23]

Patriarchalism

One of the reasons why slavery with all its attendant ambiguities could be readily assimilated into the early modern Anglo-American world was a long-standing patriarchal tradition that had clearly defined the relationship between master and servant. Manuals of household government in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England spoke of servants as they did of wives and children. All were subservient members of the family, living under the authority of the paterfamilias. Gentlemen were not to let their care stop at their own children. "Let it reach to your menial servants," they were instructed, for "though you are their master, you are also their father." The relationship between master and servant received the highest ideological sanction in the concept of patriarchalism. Patriarchal doctrines can be found, as one historian

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America (New York, 1989), 402. In the U.S. Constitution, noted John Leland caustically, "a slave is possessed of 3 fifths of a man and 2 fifths of a brute" (*The Virginia Chronicle . . .* [Norfolk, Va., 1790], 9).

23. Elizabeth City County Orders, 1747–1755, 461, as cited in Schwarz, *Twice Condemned,* 135; Davis, *Problem of Slavery,* 248–251; Jordan, *White over Black,* 103–104; M. Eugene Sirmans, "The Legal Status of the Slave in South Carolina, 1670–1740," *Journal of Southern History,* XXVIII (1962), 462–473; Gaines M. Foster, "Guilt over Slavery: A Historiographical Analysis," ibid., LVI (1990), 665–694.

There is, in fact, a mutual

dependence between the master

and his slave.

—Charles Ball

6 : Economic Exchanges between Whites and Blacks

Relations between masters and slaves, whites and blacks acquired meaning only through countless human transactions. Too frequently, slavery is seen from an institutional perspective, and too often the treatment of slaves is inferred only from statute law, intellectual treatises, or dominant social attitudes. Such perspectives need to be supplemented with explorations of actual behavior, of the extensive daily contacts that occurred across the racial divide. The everyday encounters—the boundary-crossing, melding, jostling, downright collisions—of whites and blacks form the subject of this and the next chapter.

The growing divide that separated whites from blacks should not obscure an equally important development—the emergence of channels of communication across racial lines. Relations between the two races were conducted more at arm's length over the eighteenth century, but various ligatures bridged the gap. Over time, relations between masters and slaves, blacks and whites became routinized at key connecting points.

Because slavery was first and foremost an economic enterprise, masters and slaves, whites and blacks had to interact simply to get the job done. A principal avenue of encounter, then, was created by the communication and delegation of command. But this communication was never straightforward. Although power originated at the top of the system, it could not be exercised without accounting for the nature of the response from below. This active and recipro-

cal relationship was evident in all economic transactions, from running an errand to managing a field gang.

CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

A seemingly trivial but nevertheless recurrent economic activity—errand running or message taking—illustrates the complexity of even the simplest economic transaction. It would be easy to envisage the relationship of master and messenger as uncomplicated: the master calls in the slave, gives directions, hands over the object to be delivered or list of items to be picked up, and the order is executed. In practice, of course, simply by entrusting slaves with valued communications or possessions—large sums of money, for example—the transaction had already become less impersonal. Why else, for example, would a slave, entrusted with a valuable object, make "promises" to deliver it safely?[1]

Moreover, a confidence, once extended, could always be betrayed. When a peahen, which Henry Laurens had secured for an English correspondent, did not survive the trip from plantation to town, the master did not doubt the cause. It was the fault, he raged, of a "vile Scoundrell of a Negro [who] kill'd it on the Journey." Messengers and errand boys found other ways to annoy—by varying their itinerary or by "forgetting" to undertake parts of their mission. It might have been little more than literary convention, but it speaks to the initiative of slaves when letters between slaveholders were hurriedly concluded with a nod to the restless slave, only too impatient to begin the journey. Certainly, more than convention was involved when Henry Laurens's Scipio, on a trip from Charleston to Georgia, peremptorily "Saddle[d] his Horse" and took his leave before Lachlan MacIntosh could respond to one of Laurens's requests. After prolonging what was to have been a two-day stay into a week, Scipio suddenly discovered the virtues of haste.[2]

1. Dudley Digges to William Dabney, Dec. 18, 1758, Dabney Family Papers, UNC. For examples of these transactions, see John Symmons to Edmund Berkeley, Nov. 2, 1768, Berkeley Family Papers, microfilm, CW; Robert Carter to George Turberville, Dec. 24, 1774, Robert Carter Letterbook, II, 157, Robert Carter Papers, Duke; William Washington Account Book, 1779, LC; George Weedon Account Book, January 1780, CW; James Macleod to M. Page, July 21, 1790, Mann Page, Jr., Papers, microfilm, CW. Merchant account books indicate that slaves transported large and valuable consignments between store and plantation. See, for example, James Poyas Merchant Day Book, 1764–1766, SCHS; King William Court House Store Ledger, 1773, microfilm, CW; George Buckner Ledger, 1781–1797, VSL. Dr. Alexander Garden even sent a slave overseas to gather fish specimens (James Edward Smith, comp., *A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus, and Other Naturalists, from the Original Manuscripts*, I [London, 1821], 331).

2. *Laurens Papers*, II, 123, VII, 228. For changes of itinerary or lapses of memory, see ibid., III, 481, 508–509, IV, 633; Jack L. Cross, ed., "Letters of Thomas Pinckney, 1775–1780," *SCHM*, LVIII (1957), 72; and Robert Carter to Col. John Taylor, July 14, 1789, Carter Letter-

Masters went much further in their conception of the messenger's role than simply entrusting slaves with valued objects or messages. For one thing, not all communications were written. Confiding in a slave messenger gave him or her an opportunity to engage in inadvertent or deliberate distortion. Certainly one Virginia overseer thought himself the victim of deception when he demanded of his employer, "Ther may not be any mor messages sent by Tom osterman [because] I have found him to be so treachrous I cannot put any confidence in anything he sais."[3]

Even with written communications, messengers were expected to elaborate on events. Eliza Lucas learned that her friend Mrs. Pinckney was unwell, not from the letter she had received, but from the bearer, her slave Togo. Slaves often took the initiative on such occasions. Dudley Digges wrote that a slave messenger of his told him the following: "I don't know whether truly or not that there is Tobacco enough [on one of Digges's quarters] to make one or two [more] Hhds." The opportunity to embellish a story or supply information allowed the slave a fleeting moment at center stage, with whites hanging on every word. Denial of information, in contrast, was no doubt perversely pleasurable. One South Carolina slave, according to an exasperated Eliza Pinckney, would not "utter a sentence more than he is commissioned to do for the world. I asked him many questions, particularly about [her son-in-law's] wound and whether it was still bad but I could not get anything out of him more than it was a scratch, though Harriet [her daughter] calls it a deep Gash." Control of the word gave otherwise defenseless slaves a measure of power.[4]

Not just individual masters but the state had to confront the problems of using slaves as messengers. Public mail services, established in the southern colonies in the late colonial period, employed slave riders. The fact that slaves could, in the words of Hugh Finlay, "take no oath" had to be overlooked. Although dehumanized in this way, the slave who carried the public mail between Fredericksburg and Gloucester in Virginia forced whites to recognize

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book, VIII, 306–307. For hurried conclusions to letters, see Hugh Nelson to B. Muse, Mar. 29, 1779, Battaille Muse Papers, Duke; Robert Carter to John Sutton, Feb. 24, 1781, Carter Letterbook, IV, 47; and Robert Taylor to N. Jamieson, Apr. 3, 1781, Neil Jamieson Papers, LC.

3. Solomon Nash to Robert Carter, May 3, 1788, Carter Family Papers, VHS. For a useful oral message, see Virgil Maxcy Diary, Aug. 1, 1801, NYPL.

4. Elise Pinckney, ed., *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739–1762* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 34; Dudley Digges to William Dabney, Mar. 5, 1759, Dabney Papers, microfilm, CW; Eliza Pinckney to [D. Horry], Mar. 9, 1768, Pinckney Family Papers, SCHS. For other elaborations, see "Journal of Col. James Gordon," *WMQ*, 1st Ser., XI (1902–1903), 198; John Howard to Dr. William Cabell, June 6, 1771, N. F. Cabell Collection, VSL; Richard Hutson to Isaac Hayne, Sept. 2, 1776, Charles Woodward Hutson Papers, UNC; Robert Carter to Col. John Taylor, July 14, 1789, Carter Letterbook, VIII, 306–307.

his humanity. Once, while performing his duties, he was waylaid by two white men, but "with the utmost fortitude and intrepidity resisted the said attack for which he received many dangerous wounds." His "valour" prompted a number of white citizens to petition for his emancipation.[5]

Slave messengers made whites acknowledge their humanity in another way. Because slaves were often the bearers of stray scraps of information, they were directly responsible for many rumors and panics that periodically swept slave societies. Often these rumors were harmless, as with the "wild and uncertain accounts" of comets in the sky regaled to one master. More serious was one southern woman's alarm "at the news of the small pox being in Town." Her fears, she noted, "are not quite removed as we have never had any certain accounts, none but what Negroes brings, and you know my Dear their is no depending upon what they say." But depend they must. Thus, Eliza Wilkinson described vividly the "confusion and distress" produced by the news of the imminent arrival of the British. The information derived from a "negro wench, who had been out visiting" one Sunday morning. Furthermore, slaves relayed information selectively. Eliza Wilkinson later complained of hearing nothing about the patriot forces under General Benjamin Lincoln, "unless from disaffected people, and negroes, and they were always the most disheartening accounts that one did hear." A slave society's susceptibility to rumor in turn made whites acutely aware of the significance of manipulating surface appearances. Even at moments of crisis, masters had, according to Charles Lee, to assume an "air of dignity and superiority." Outward appearances are usually of great significance in nonliterate societies, but in slave societies they were paramount.[6]

Taking messages and running errands, therefore, constituted one channel of communication that involved masters and slaves in a complex web of interlocking relations. The effects of this seemingly straightforward activity extended far beyond the economic realm. Its repercussions were felt in social, cultural, and even political terms.

Much the same was true of another basic economic concern—the health of slaves. Masters took a keen interest in their slaves' well-being for obvious pecuniary reasons. Some of their actions involved no more than the imper-

5. Frank H. Norton, ed., *Journal Kept by Hugh Finlay . . .* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1867), 90; Legislative Petitions, Middlesex County, Dec. 7, 1798, VSL. See also Robert Bolton, *Ga Gaz,* June 2, 1763.

6. Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752–1778,* 2 vols. (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), 440–441(hereafter cited as *Carter Diary*); Penelope Dawson to Miss Blair, Mar. 8, 1779, James Iredell, Sr. and Jr., Letters, Duke; Caroline Gilman, ed., *Letters of Eliza Wilkinson . . .* (New York, 1839), 13, 17; Charles Lee to R. H. Lee, Apr. 5, 1776, Lee Family Papers, UVa.

sonal prescription of drugs or the careful recounting of sums outlaid on their chattels' welfare. They were safeguarding a valuable asset. When one of Henry Laurens's slaves contracted smallpox, Laurens hurried to the plantation because he "could not trust so important a point wholly to the discretion of the Overseer." The "point" he had most in mind was "the great danger [to] my own Interest and the terrour of all the neighbourhood." Moreover, there is also more than a hint that some masters viewed slaves as experimental objects. Dr. Alexander Garden spoke proudly of the progress he had made in treating smallpox patients "partly by some *bold trials* on a negro" of his own. Landon Carter used harsh drugs on his slaves that he would not countenance for his own children.[7]

At the same time, masters involved themselves too personally and with too much care in treating slave illnesses for their behavior to be dismissed as mere calculating regard for pieces of property. William Byrd II, Michael Zuckerman has argued, showed "greater solicitude for his slaves than for his immediate family." Byrd's concern cannot be ascribed simply to self-interest; indeed, he often considered himself complicit in their sickness and implored God for forgiveness for his sins so that his "people" might be "restore[d] . . . to their health." Another great Virginia slaveholder like Robert Carter of Nomini Hall did not feel it beneath his dignity to examine his slaves personally. When one of them was thrown from a horse, Carter concluded that some of his ribs were broken only after he had carefully "felt his body." To see Landon Carter closely monitoring symptoms and dispensing medicines, as he did on numerous occasions, is to know that much of his self-image depended on these tasks. On one occasion, Carter declared that his soul "delighteth in releiving" his slaves' illnesses. Even when a master delegated his authority to an overseer, he might well enjoin his employee, as George Washington did, to "take all necessary and proper care of the Negroes committed to his management, treating them with humanity and tenderness when sick." Plantation wives often assumed the role of plantation doctor. Mary Willing Byrd was described by one traveler as taking "great care of her Negroes, mak[ing] them as happy as their situation will admit, and serv[ing] as their doctor." She had even made "some interest-

7. *Laurens Papers*, III, 237; Smith, comp., *A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 483 (emphasis added); Greene, ed., *Carter Diary*, 731. Masters sometimes used medicine as a punishment (Maude H. Woodfin, ed., and Marion Tinling, trans., *Another Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1739–1741: With Letters and Literary Exercises, 1696–1726* [Richmond, Va., 1942], 123). More generally, see Robert Nesbitt Medical Account Book, 1796–1804, USC; Wyndham B. Blanton, *Medicine in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (Richmond, Va., 1930); Blanton, *Medicine in Virginia in the Eighteenth Century* (Richmond, Va., 1931); and Diane Meredith Sydenham, "Practitioner and Patient: The Practice of Medicine in Eighteenth-Century South Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1979).

ing discoveries about their sicknesses." So close an attention did John Custis pay to a group of newly purchased, and diseased, Africans that he caught, as he believed, "a Negro distemper endemicall to Afrike."[8]

A more impersonal quality to health care in the Lowcountry can be inferred from the emergence of hospitals, both on plantations and in Charleston, a function of larger holdings and a wealthier planter class than was present in the Chesapeake. Consequently, individual plantations could more realistically support hospitals, and urban entrepreneurs could see a market in providing institutionalized health care for the large numbers of slaves either passing through or residing in the city. The scale of the operations and the attempts to appeal to planters, who in the Chesapeake generally took care of their own slaves, suggest that a distinction can be drawn between the two regions. In the Lowcountry, private hospitals were in existence by the 1740s, and at least seven were functioning in the early 1760s. There is no evidence of such hospitals in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake, where personal care was ubiquitous.[9]

Whether health care was extended personally or impersonally, its very availability created opportunities for slaves to take the initiative. Most obvious, slaves could feign an illness to escape work. Masters were often inclined to grant bondpeople the benefit of the doubt. Slaves requested particular doctors or changes of locale. Robert Carter acceded to the desire of his carpenter Daniel to see a man in the neighboring county who might cure his nosebleeds. Daniel Horry wrote from Santee to his mother-in-law in Charleston, informing her that one of his slaves who had "been a long time complaining of a violent pain in his Head and Eyes but no fever, imagines that the change of Air and a Jaunt to ChsTown will recover him." Horry humored his slave, gave him a fortnight's leave, and maintained a vestige of authority by suggesting a visit to

8. Michael Zuckerman, "The Family Life of William Byrd," in his *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 119–121; Robert Carter to Dr. Timothy Harrington, Oct. 30, 1787, Carter Letterbook, VIII, 23; Philip D. Morgan, "Three Planters and Their Slaves: Perspectives on Slavery in Virginia, South Carolina, and Jamaica," in Winthrop D. Jordan and Sheila L. Skemp, eds., *Race and Family in the Colonial South* (Jackson, Miss., 1987), 51; Greene, ed., *Carter Diary,* 636; Worthington Chauncey Ford, *Washington as an Employer and Importer of Labor* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1889), 33; Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782,* ed. and trans. Howard C. Rice, Jr., II (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1963), 431–432; John Custis to Peter Collins, 1742, John Custis Letterbook, typescript, CW. Africans introduced a more virulent strain of malaria into the plantation colonies than had come with the English from Europe.

9. For slave hospitals, Oliphant and Mackie, *SCG,* Mar. 6, 1749; *Laurens Papers,* Jan. 31, 1756; account book of Henry Laurens, Sept. 26, 1772, 491, CC; Peter Donald, *SC and AGG,* June 24, 1774; and Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America,* Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication no. 409, IV (Washington, D.C., 1935), 443.

Dr. Garden to see whether medicine might help. Another possible diplomatic illness (or was it stress?) is signified in an overseer's answer to a query about Hazard's seizures. "I never heard," the overseer wrote, "that Hazard had any fits but Once afore he was sold and then he had 4 or 5 fits at one time, and I don't know that he had any after untill the time he was burnt—tho' he certainly can tell you. The reason for his being low spirited I think is because he does not wish to live down that way."[10] It is impossible now to assess whether this illness was genuine. But, then again, the master had the same quandary.

Slaves took the initiative in another sense by becoming specialists in their own right. Slave doctors found themselves in demand to treat not only their fellow bondpeople but also neighboring whites, occasionally even their masters. Landon Carter was bled by his body servant, Nassau, "the best bleeder about," who performed the same service for other lesser planters, lower-class whites, and occasionally his master's children. For a while, Landon Carter even employed Isaac Haynes, a white clerk who had trained as an apothecary, to assist Nassau. So proficient was Nassau that he claimed, much to Carter's annoyance, that "on every recovery it is his doings." Other slaves also nursed whites back to health. One South Carolina account recorded a payment of two pounds, six shillings for the hire of a "Negro wench" during a planter's sickness.[11]

The clearest case of blacks' ministering to whites was during or immediately after childbirth. Black midwives, or "grannies," delivered everybody from humble slave mothers to the wives of the most eminent patriarchs. When his wife's delivery was delayed, William McCarty of Virginia wrote to a relative on his wife's behalf, "begg[ing] that you will let Winney stay till it is over." In wealthy families, the involvement of black women often persisted beyond the birth of a child. Robert Carter's wife, for example, summoned two slave women with "a good breast of milk" to Nomini Hall to suckle the great planter's child. Philip Fithian, along with other visitors to the South, was

10. Robert Carter to Randall Kirk, Sept. 12, 1785, Carter Letterbook, VII, 17; Daniel Horry to Eliza Pinckney, Apr. 4, 1781, Pinckney Family Papers; John Couturier to John E. Colhoun, Sept. 21, 1793, John Ewing Colhoun Papers, USC. See also Richard Hutson to Isaac Hayne, Jan. 15, 1766, Hutson Papers, UNC; and Robert Carter to Clement Brooke, Nov. 11, 1776, Carter Letterbook, III, 78.

11. Greene, ed., *Carter Diary*, 411, 505–506, 521, 667, 758, 769, 781, 793, 794, 797, 811, 946–947, 952, 993, 1111 (quotation); inventory of Maurice Jones, May 22, 1772, Inventory Book, &, 59–61, SCDAH. Robert Carter's chief medical aide, Tom Coachman, also performed services for slaves and local whites (Benjamin Dawson to Robert Carter, July 21, 1778, Carter Family Papers; Robert Carter to Dr. Timothy Harrington, Jan. 12, 1787, Carter Letterbook, VII, 172–173; John Peck to Robert Carter, Feb. 23, 1787, Carter Family Papers; Robert Carter to Newyear Branson, Nov. 10, 1787, Carter Letterbook, VIII, 39–40; Robert Carter to Sol. Nash, Mar. 1, 1788, ibid., 91–92; Elder William Dawson to Robert Carter, July 21, 1788, Carter Family Papers). The practice of slaves' ministering to other slaves is treated in Chapter 10.

surprised to "find it is common here for people of Fortune to have their young Children suckled by the Negroes!" It took a Carolina lady to point out one of the virtues of the practice. In a conversation in England with the Princess of Wales, Eliza Pinckney emphasized that Carolina children were nursed within the household, not put out, as was common in English upper-class circles. Even this spirited justification could not deflect the English women from dwelling on the idea of "suckling blacks," even leading one of the company to stroke the cheeks of Eliza's daughter and to wonder aloud how it had "made no alteration" in her complexion.[12]

Complexions might remain untouched, but the intimacy of black nurse and white child had far-reaching effects. For John Davis, close attachments flowed from the intimacy of black nurse and white child. "Each child has its *Momma,*" he claimed, "whose gestures and accent it will necessarily copy, for children, we all know, are imitative beings. It is not unusual to hear an elegant lady say, *Richard always grieves when Quasheehaw is whipped, because she suckled him.*" Davis's observations were not romantic speculations. David Greene freed Sue "because she suckled his wife in her infancy," and John Rutherford freed Titchy for "having carefully attended my Children during their Infancy." In 1784, Benjamin Guerard purchased his old nanny, a mulatto woman named Bess, so that he could liberate her out of "the great respect and Gratitude due from me most Justly to her, she having carried me in her arms when a very infant as my dry nurse." As Davis also mentioned, white accents could be traced to the intimate contact between black nurses and white children. Josiah Quincy detected influences along age and gender lines: white children "contracted a negroish kind of accent, pronounciation, and dialect," which they gradually lost as adults, although women were still "vastly infected" with black speech patterns. As a result, Quincy claimed, parents talked to "their very young children . . . as though they were speak[ing] to a new imported African."[13]

12. William McCarty to George Turberville, Oct. 5, 1784, Joseph Downs MSS, microfilm, CW; Robert Carter to Richard Dozier and Jeriah Bonham, Nov. 25, 1778, Carter Letterbook, XII, 75–76; Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773–1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* (Williamsburg, Va., 1943), 52; John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America . . .* (Bristol, 1803), 93; Harriott Horry Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney* (New York, 1896), 151–152. For more on slaves as midwives and nurses, see Greene, ed., *Carter Diary,* 306, 514, 840; Memorandum Book, July 25, 1772, William Ennals Papers, LC; Robert Carter to Bennett Neal, Sept. 15, 1781, Carter Letterbook, IV, 118–119, and to Presly Self, Dec. 22, 1785, ibid., VII, 20; account with Old Pegg the Granny, 1784–1787, William A. Washington Ledger of Accounts, 1776–1796, fol. 78, LC; "Letters of Rev. Jonathan Boucher," *MHM,* VII (1912), 6.

13. Davis, *Travels,* 93–94; will of David Greene, South Carolina Wills, XVII, 726, cited in Larry Darnell Watson, "The Quest for Order: Enforcing Slave Codes in Revolutionary

Seemingly straightforward economic transactions like the taking of a message or the care of a sick worker had far-reaching consequences. The master's monopoly of power was constrained not only by the need to achieve certain results, in production and profit, but also by the slaves' clear recognition of the master's dependence on them. This general truth can best be explored by investigating the interpenetration of white and black worlds at two key points of intersection: the workplace and the marketplace.

FIELD HANDS AND OVERSEERS

Over the course of the eighteenth century, there was a growing separation of blacks and whites at the workplace. As plantations grew in size and as masters established new outlying quarters or separate plantations, the close working relationship between master and slave, characteristic of frontier days, became less common, particularly in the older, more mature areas of both Chesapeake and Lowcountry. This development was always more intensely experienced in the Lowcountry than in the Chesapeake, but to some extent all seaboard slaves increasingly spent more time working beyond the purview of their masters.

This lack of intimacy was obviously compounded wherever overseers were employed. Even in late-eighteenth-century Virginia, where plantation operations never approached the impersonal and anonymous quality of the rice country, as many as one-half of the slaves in various tidewater areas lived on units headed by overseers. In late-eighteenth-century South Carolina, the proportion was much higher.[14] Overseers, therefore, represented, or rather personified, a major channel of communication between master and slave.

The position of overseer was fundamentally weak. Most occupants were young, single men—not individuals calculated to inspire trust from mature, well-established planters. The masters' lack of confidence in overseers as well as the ambitiousness of many of these young men on the make ensured a high turnover rate. Rarely did an overseer hold the same post for more than a year

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South Carolina, 1760–1800" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1980), 167; manumission to Tithy, Mar. 27, 1782, Miscellaneous Records, TT, 127, SCDAH; Benjamin Guerard's deed of manumission to Bess, Apr. 22, 1784, ibid., UU, 94–96; Mark Antony De Wolfe Howe, ed., "Journal of Josiah Quincy, Junior, 1773," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, XLIX (1915–1916), 456–457.

14. This assumes one overseer for two-thirds of units with more than 20 slaves. See Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 409–410. For an early-18th-century request to have overseers on Chesapeake quarters, see Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* (New York, 1984), 175. Because plantations were larger in South Carolina than in Virginia, it seems likely that more Lowcountry than Chesapeake slaves worked under overseers.