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AN OLD CREED FOR THE NEW SOUTH: SOUTHERN HISTORIANS AND THE REVIVAL OF THE PROSLAVERY ARGUMENT, 1890-1920*

John David Smith
The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

American Negro slavery emerged in the 1890s as a major topic of discussion for southern historians.[1] Not that the subject had been ignored by earlier students, for antebellum authors had contributed a rich body of literature to it. But these works were too polemical, the writers too much involved in the great sectional controversy, for them to be balanced. Scholars of the immediate postwar years tended to ignore slavery because it was now dead and the nation was primarily involved in the problem of reunion. By the closing decades of the century, however, an interest in slavery had revived; the journals of these years were filled with articles on the institution. Such an outpouring of slavery literature caused a reviewer in 1901 to remark how "unusually fertile" had been the last decade of the nineteenth century in books about slavery.[2] Ten years later, an early student of slave historiography marveled at the "perennial interest" in slavery among historians and foresaw no prospect of an end to the flood of works on the subject.[3] Although most frequently discussed in the context of the antebellum plantation economy, slavery also was considered analogous to conditions in the postbellum South. Such influential writers as Theodore Roosevelt and William E. Dodd identified slavery with the social and economic issues of their own day: peonage, serfdom, and "industrial democracy."[4] Others related it to the contemporary "Negro problem."[5]

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* A shortened version of this paper was presented at The Citadel Conference On The New South, Charleston, South Carolina, 20 April 1978.

1. See John David Smith, "The Formative Period of American Slave Historiography, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1977).
2. "On the History of Slavery," *Publications of the Southern History Association*, 5 (July, 1901): 304.
3. William T. Laprade, "Some Problems in Writing the History of American Slavery," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 10 (April, 1911): 134.
4. Roosevelt to James Ford Rhodes, 29 November 1904, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Dodd to Edwin Mims, 15 September 1906, Edwin Mims Papers, Joint University Libraries, Nashville; Dodd to Oswald Garrison Villard, 3 July 1906, Oswald Garrison Villard Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. In 1911 historian David Y. Thomas wrote of "the industrial slavery which is now gripping the North and slowly creeping over the entire nation." "Social Aspects of the Slavery Question," *The Dial*, 51 (1 November 1911): 330.
5. See, for example: John Spencer Bassett to Oswald Garrison Villard, 17 November 1905, Villard Papers; *Race Problems of the South, Report of the Proceed-*

Influenced by the forces of nationalism at work in these years, historians analyzed slavery rather than assigned blame for its origins.[6] Heretofore an emotionally charged issue, slavery, during the Progressive Era, came to be examined calmly, "scientifically." "Scientific" historians, sharing the general awe of Darwinian science, emphasized the evolution of institutions such as slavery, whereas they had formerly sat in judgment on men and measures. In 1880 a reviewer in *The Nation* argued "Slavery takes its turn with other fossil remains in adorning our cabinets of curiosity and of science, and in being studied under the microscope."[7] Oblivious of the anti-black bias of the times—a prejudice they shared—the new generation of historians claimed objectivity and impartiality.

Whether the study of slavery served "scientific" or polemical ends, most writers revived the fundamentals of the old proslavery argument. They challenged views of the Abolitionists and of neoabolitionist historians like James Ford Rhodes and W.E.B. DuBois who proclaimed slavery a moral evil. "As time healed the wounds of war, and [as] a new South rose upon the ruins of the old,"[8] the proslavery literature evolved anew, offering a variety of apologies for the institution. Although students have recognized elements of proslavery thought in the white supremacist ideology of the Progressive Era,[9] its pervasiveness in the literature of that era has not been adequately examined.

The proslavery theorists of the New South espoused many of the same arguments popularized by their predecessors of the Old South. Jennie C. Morton, editor of *The Register of the Kentucky State His-*

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ings of the First Annual Conference Held Under the Auspices of the Southern Society for the Promotion of Race Conditions and Problems in the South . . . At Montgomery, Alabama, May 8, 9, 10, A.D. 1900 (New York, 1969; orig. pub., 1900), *passim*; S. C. Baker, "The Southern Negro—His Present Erotic Tendencies," *The Carolina Medical Journal*, 45 (March, 1900): 89-94; Mrs. W. Carleton Adams to Ulrich B. Phillips, 25 October 1904, Ulrich B. Phillips Collection, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

6. "Magazines," *Southwestern Journal of Education*, 4 (September, 1886): 4.

7. Review of Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, in *The Nation*, 31 (2 December 1880): 398.

8. William MacDonald and others, "Textbooks in American History," *Educational Review*, 16 (December, 1898): 488.

9. Claude H. Nolen, *The Negro's Image in the South* (Lexington, 1968; orig. pub., 1967); Lawrence J. Friedman, *The White Savage: Racial Fantasies in the Postbellum South* (Englewood Cliffs, 1970); Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York, 1971); Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning* (Philadelphia, 1972); Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal: Intolerance and Intellectual Leadership in the South 1890-1914* (Baltimore, 1972).

torical Society, summarized in 1907 what many historians believed were the broad benefits of the peculiar institution for blacks and whites. According to Morton:

> The negroes were cared for in slavery as no other poor people of any nation were ever cared for in the world before or since. . . . They were given an industrial education, the best in the world for them. They were, what it seems impossible to make them in Africa, a people; trained to peaceful pursuits in the common but no less essential industries of farm and domestic life, their native barbarity controlled and suppressed, if not eliminated by discipline and authority, their labor was made advantageous to the South on the plantations and to Kentucky on the farms.

The new proslavery school considered the peculiar institution benign and instructive. In an analysis entitled "Some Features of the Old South," Burke Aaron Hinsdale, a professor at the University of Michigan, maintained that under slavery the African was pointed in the direction of progress. Similarly, U.G. Weatherly, a faculty member at Indiana University, asserted that "On the side of cultural and institutional development the negro's history was almost a blank until he was brought to America as a slave." Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, a Harvard historian and geologist, claimed that "The uncomplicated, social framework of slavery" facilitated the gradual wearing away of the blacks' ancient habits while they adapted to life in America. Instead of apologizing for slavery, a writer in the *American Journal of Sociology* argued that slavery deserved credit for advancing the backward Negro.

> That the negro's present state of semi-barbarism is the result of generations of slavery is a fallacy. . . . As a matter of fact slavery, so far from degrading the negro, has actually elevated him industrially, mentally, and even morally, the term of his involuntary tutelage to the white race raising him to a vastly higher level than that ever occupied by his kinsmen in Africa.

Many of these authors accepted Thomas Nelson Page's dictum that slavery provided "the only semblance of civilization which the Negro race has possessed since the dawn of history."[10]

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10. Morton, "Life in Kentucky in the Days of Negro Slavery," *The Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, 5 (January, 1907): 45; Hinsdale, "Some Features of the Old South," *Magazine of Western History*, 5 (November, 1886): 4, 5; Weatherly, "Discussion," *American Journal of Sociology*, 13 (May, 1908): 824; Shaler, "The Nature of the Negro," *The Arena*, 3 (December, 1890): 28; "The Future of the Negro in

In several of the proslavery articles the slave owner became a patriarch, a defender of the helpless and a supporter of the weak. According to Robert D. Johnston, one of the last surviving generals of the Confederacy, planters "felt the deep responsibility of" slave ownership and were cognizant of the power of human life held in their hands. Also typical of this attitude was an author in the *Political Science Quarterly* who praised the "patriarchal polity" of the plantation "with all its moral advantages for the Negro." Although in 1912 economist Lewis C. Gray considered slavery a "repressive influence," he admitted that the institution afforded blacks guidance. It offered a "friendly paternalistic relation" uniting master and slave.[11]

Many historians emphasized the benefits—abundant food and clothing and comfortable housing—available to the slaves. Slave families rarely were divided for sale, they said, and the task system allowed individual bondsmen considerable free time. Masters recognized the obligations involved with slave ownership and provided their slaves with preachers, unlimited medical care, and old age security—features rarely noted by critics of slavery. The virtues of slavery were also proven to proslavery writers by the institution's favorable comparison with the slave's life in Africa and the postwar conditions under which the blacks lived. Many agreed with D.A. Haller, a student at Hampden-Sydney College, whose prize-winning essay on slavery concluded that the Negroes received more benefits from slavery than did the whites. A.R.H. Ranson, a former slave owner and Confederate staff officer, found a simple explanation for the favorable treatment the slave received: it was in the best self-interest of the owner to treat his slave with kindness.

> He took care of his slave because it was money in his pocket to do so, and money out of his pocket if he did not. . . . That the negro was better housed, better fed, better clothed, and better looked after in sickness than now, was simply because the owner had money at stake.[12]

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the Southern States," *Popular Science Monthly*, 57 (June, 1900): 145, 148. H. E. Belin, "A Southern View of Slavery," *American Journal of Sociology*, 13 (January, 1908): 517; Page, "The Negro: The Southerner's Problem," *McClure's Magazine*, 23 (May, 1904): 96.

11. Johnston, "The Negro in Slavery Days," *Alexander's Magazine*, 6 (September 15, 1908): 200; William Chauncy Langdon, "The Case of the Negro," *Political Science Quarterly*, 6 (March, 1891): 31; Gray, "Southern Agriculture, Plantation System, and the Negro Problem," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 40 (March, 1912): 99.

12. Belin, "A Southern View of Slavery," pp. 517-22; Charles L. C. Minor, "The

Spokesmen of the new proslavery approach praised slavery for providing "confidential, affectionate relations" between the two races. They recognized the value of black-white interaction under slavery which unfortunately was missing since 1865. Shaler, the son of Kentucky slave owners, recalled "three of the slaves of the household whose faces were enduringly printed on my mind before my mother's found its place there." He considered enslavement "the one condition in which very diverse races may be brought into close social relations without much danger of hatred." In the opinion of Mississippian Alfred Holt Stone, a recognized expert of the day on the peculiar institution, slavery was not the cause of modern race friction but actually it "furnished a base of contact [between the races] which as long as it existed minimized the problems which result from racial contact." He attributed the strong master-slave bond to slavery, a condition which prevented the development of rivalry between the races and thus impeded "race hatred." Stone emphasized the importance of the human element in slavery—"It was mild or harsh as the individual [master] was mild or harsh." Slavery was at its best, he continued, as seen in the "ties which existed between the higher type of master and the higher type of slave." Even the editor of the New York *Independent*, highly critical of the treatment of contemporary blacks by whites, credited slavery with bringing together the races and thus ameliorating the conditions of the bondsmen. It was in some ways preferable, he said, to the "feudalism" of the Progressive Era when blacks were denied opportunity for social and economic betterment.[13]

These ideas formed the essence of the new proslavery argument shared by hundreds of historians and popular writers in those years. From among them, four representative figures—a physician, an ex-

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Old System of Slavery, Its Compensations and Contrasts to the Present Labor Conditions," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 30 (January-December, 1902): 127; Richard Malcolm Johnston, "The Planter of the Old South," *Publications of the Southern History Association*, 1 (January, 1897): 39; Jonathan Lesslie Hall, *Half-Hours in Southern History* (Richmond, 1907): 132; Haller, "Slavery and Its Influence in the Old South," in *Studies of the Old South* (n.p., 1916): 12, 13, 15; Ranson, "Plantation Life in Virginia Before the War," *Sewanee Review*, 21 (October, 1913): 432.

13. Johnston, "The Planter of the Old South," p. 39; Louisa Preston Looney, "The Southern Planter of the Fifties," *Publications of the Southern History Association*, 4 (July, 1900): 251-52; Shaler, *The Autobiography of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler* (Boston, 1909): 21, 37; "The Peculiarities of the South," *North American Review*,115 (October, 1890): 485; "Race Prejudices," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 58 (October, 1886): 516; Stone, "Is Race Friction Between Blacks and Whites in the U.S. Growing and Inevitable?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 13 (March, 1908): 682; *Studies in the American Race Problem* (New York, 1908): 255, 259; editorial, "Feudalism or Slavery," *The Independent*, 55 (2 April 1903): 806.

slave, and two professional historians—illustrate the differing perspectives which prompted the new apology for slavery.

For Dr. Paul Brandon Barringer the merits of slavery were obvious: blacks fared better as slaves than as freedmen. Invoking statistical and scientific evidence, Barringer joined a number of writers who concluded that "Only the hothouse environment of slavery" shielded blacks "from the rigors of natural laws."[14] A descendant of slave-owning North Carolinians, later professor of medicine at the University of Virginia, and then president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute,[15] Barringer drew heavily upon statistician Frederick L. Hoffman's conclusions of Negro degeneracy and retrogression.[16] Without the discipline of slavery the Negro was allegedly "reverting to barbarism with the inordinate criminality and degradation of that state." This, Barringer suggested, was the source of the contemporary "Negro problem." According to Barringer, blacks who were "intelligent, upright [and] honest" were generally former slaves. Free-born Negroes, he said, were prone to commit crimes and disrupt American society. It was slavery, asserted Barringer, that gave antebellum blacks their modicum of civilization.[17]

In Barringer's opinion, slavery protected the Negro from the "natural law" of competition with the whites, the "fitter" race. Under "the superb moral influences of slavery," he argued, the black man "came quite near the gentleman, illiterate perhaps, but not ignorant." Barringer remarked with astonishment that with only moderate restraints on the blacks the peculiar institution served successfully both as a correcting and an uplifting force. He credited it with teaching the slave three key lessons in life: "to respect, to obey, to work." The only solution to the "Negro problem," in Barringer's judgment, was that whites once again take charge of the training of the blacks by serving as teachers in trade schools. He informed members of the Tri-State Medical Association of Virginia and the Carolinas:

> We all know that we had a good negro in this country once, and that was in slave times. This was the salient feature of slavery—an inferior race as moral as the higher. But the masters knew the slave

14. John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts From Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority 1859-1900* (New York, 1975; orig. pub., 1971): 209.
15. Anna Barringer, *The Natural Bent: The Memoirs of Dr. Paul B. Barringer* (Chapel Hill, 1949): 61-67 and *passim*.
16. Hoffman, "Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro," *Publications of the American Economic Association*, 11 (August, 1896).
17. Barringer, *The Sacrifice of A Race* (Raleigh, 1900): 3, 15, 28.

> in those days. Generations of experience with him in all types had long since shown him that a little steady force applied in childhood would guide him aright, and that the adult would be a respectful and respectable, obedient and faithful servant. But he knew him well enough to know that underneath this thin veneer of decent life and manners was the nature of a savage, which had to be shaped aright while the cells were still soft in youth, or it was useless to try. The training of the child was the all.

By concluding that "the phylogeny of the negro is carrying him back to barbarism," Barringer established himself as a leader in relating the contemporary understanding of heredity to slavery and race.[18]

The basis of historian James C. Ballagh's proslavery interpretation was found not in the condition of contemporary blacks but in slavery's institutional features. A native Virginian, Ballagh received his Ph.D. in 1895 from The Johns Hopkins University, then the foremost center for the training of "scientific" historians. Ballagh's father, one of the first Protestant missionaries to enter Japan, was an outspoken critic of slavery. His son was a pioneer in his own right—an innovator in the teaching of southern history at Johns Hopkins. But unlike his father, young Ballagh preferred to be "objective" in his approach to slavery. Influenced by the New South rhetoric of Henry W. Grady and others, Ballagh believed that "the thinking Southerner" could not defend slavery and should welcome the "New South" as "the willing daughter of the Old." Nevertheless in *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (1902) Ballagh analyzed the institutional components of slavery in a manner that smacked of the old proslavery rationale.[19]

On the question of speculation in slaves, for example, Ballagh argued that masters preferred suffering a financial loss by keeping too many slaves rather than selling them. This attitude grew from the "mutual attachment" shared by masters and chattels. Anticipating Eugene D. Genovese's later thesis, Ballagh claimed that in exchange for his master's support, the slave assumed the roles of "playmate, pedagogue, brother, exemplar, friend and companion." In such a relationship, he continued, unrestrained whippings were unusual and

18. Ibid., pp. 16, 22; Barringer, *The American Negro: His Past and Future* (Raleigh, 1900): 5, 10, 11, 15, 20, 23; "Negro Education in the South," *Educational Review*, 21 (March, 1901): 241.

19. George Donald Fairborn, "Men and Things," Philadelphia *Bulletin*, 6 August 1936; anon., "James Curtis Ballagh," *Old Penn*, 12 (4 October 1913): 41, in James C. Ballagh Biographical File, University of Pennsylvania Archives; Ballagh review of Albert Bushnell Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, in *American Historical Review*, 12 (July, 1907): 903-4; Ballagh to Herbert Baxter Adams, 17 September 1897, Herbert Baxter Adams Papers, The Johns Hopkins University.

chaining "more apparent than real." Because most slaves lived on small farms, "bad treatment" was exceptional and often was confined to slaves "hired out" by their masters.[20]

And Ballagh found little in slave life that was depressing. Laughter and music emanated from the slave quarters, he argued, and the plantation Negro possessed many qualities found in his master. According to Ballagh the slave was:

> cheerful, polite, and respectful to his superiors . . . without sycophancy and without fawning. He was well-bred like his master, and his manners were rather those of a person accustomed to liberty by the reign of law and order than to servile oppression. He often showed a dignity and self-respect that brought into striking contrast the pert inquisitiveness and false pride of the lowest stratum of the laboring whites.[21]

Before Ulrich B. Phillips work, Ballagh credited the plantation system with developing the slaves into the South's master workmen. Field hands learned skills from observing house servants and plantation craftsmen alike. Carpenters, smiths, and cobblers—"the black aristocracy of skilled laborers"—had ample free time to practice their crafts off the plantation and apply their earnings toward emancipation. Bondsmen also learned trades when "hired out" for labor on public works, on ships, and in mines. Slave religion, said Ballagh, was still another aspect of slavery that benefited the bondsmen. Masters cared for their slaves' moral and spiritual needs by providing Sunday schools and allowing the blacks to attend white churches. Although slaves usually were seated in separate galleries, Ballagh maintained that in the Old South "The color line was political and social, not religious." His interpretation of slavery for the entire antebellum period assumed that blacks retained an element of their seventeenth-century status: in day-to-day affairs they were "servants" and were "slaves" only before the law.[22]

Few black historians, with the exceptions of Harvard-trained W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson, had preparation in "scientific" history comparable to Ballagh's. But blacks wrote frequently on slavery nonetheless, most of them criticizing the institution as base and exploitive.[23] Some, best represented by Booker T. Washington,

20. Ballagh, *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1902): 98, 99-102, 106.
21. Ibid., p. 107.
22. Ibid., pp. 108, 113-115.
23. See Smith, "The Formative Period of American Slave Historiography, 1890-1920," chapters VII and VIII.

revealed contradictory views by portraying slavery both as a curse and a blessing to the Negro. Ever complex in motive and method, Washington "gave a deceptive appearance of freely bowing to Southern demands by repeating much of the white man's propaganda."[24] In order to appear to northern philanthropists as the moderate spokesman of his race and because of a genuine ambivalence toward the institution, Washington balanced his criticisms of slavery with remarks more typical of the proslavery apologist.

Washington, an ex-slave and a black leader of national importance, recognized the irony of his admitting that the Negro received some benefits from slavery. "As with every other human thing," wrote Washington, "there is more than one side to slavery, and more than one way of looking at it." Although he declared he "would be the last to apologize for the curse of slavery," many of Washington's statements countenanced the institution. In 1909, for example, he wrote that "There was much in slavery besides its hardships and its cruelties; much that was tender, human, and beautiful." Washington also credited slavery with introducing Africans to the basic elements of civilization. It taught the blacks to worship Christ, to speak the English language, to wear clothes, and to live in a house—in Washington's words—"no inconsiderable step in the direction of morality and Christianity."[25]

Given his faith in the gospel of work it is not surprising that in Washington's opinion the Negro profited most from the economic benefits derived from slavery. Despite the cruelty and oppression of the institution, slavery, he acknowledged, afforded American blacks their "first lesson in anything like continuous, progressive, systematic labor." In *The Future of the American Negro* (1899) Washington explained that during the 250 years under slavery "God . . . prepared the way for the redemption of the Negro through industrial development." Slaves, Washington continued, held a virtual monopoly on the Old South's work force. Besides making southern whites dependent on the blacks, slavery also served as a training school for skilled laborers. Even though the blacks were tutored by their masters "for

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24. Nolen, *The Negro's Image in the South*, p. 146.

25. Washington, "The Economic Development of the Negro Race in Slavery," in Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro in the South* (Philadelphia, 1907): 16; "The Negro's Life in Slavery," *The Outlook*, 93 (11 September 1909): 71; *The Future of the American Negro* (New York, 1968; orig. pub., 1899): 54-55; "The Negro's Life in Slavery," p. 78; "Christmas Days in Old Virginia," *Suburban Life*, 5 (December, 1907): 336-37, quoted in Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, 5 vols.; (Urbana, 1972-1976), I: 394-97; "The Economic Development of the Negro Race in Slavery," pp. 19, 24, 25.

selfish purposes," Washington praised both the "business contact" with southern whites and the "industrial training" provided by slavery. Because of such preparation, in 1865 the Negro was in "possession of all the common and skilled labour in the South."[26]

Washington's conservative philosophy of patience caused him to identify virtues in the slave system which were anathema to more radical leaders of his race. The Tuskegeean argued that for many Negroes the hardships experienced under slavery served to instill a "strength of mind and a clearness of vision." Drawing upon his own life experiences as a slave, Washington asserted that had he not been enslaved he would have missed the opportunity "to learn nature, to love the soil, to love cows . . . pigs . . . trees . . . birds . . . and creeping things." Also, much like the white proslavery writers, Washington explained that under slavery "the two races had become bound together in intimate ways that people outside of the South could not understand." Although not wishing to justify slavery, he maintained that the black man "got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did." Placing slavery in a comparative perspective, Washington summarized his view of the institution in 1901:

> Notwithstanding the cruelty and moral wrong of slavery, the ten million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestors went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe.[27]

Whereas Washington's proslavery statements were but one side of his views on the question, Ulrich B. Phillips held an unflagging commitment to the new paternalistic interpretation. The developments in the study of slavery in the years 1890 to 1920 reached their culmination in the writings of Phillips.[28] Among historians living in the first half of the twentieth century he was far and away the leading authority on slavery. In many ways Phillips symbolized the changes which occurred within the historical profession during the Progressive Era. He was born in 1877 in the west Georgia town of LaGrange, not far from the Alabama border. His father was of yeoman lower middle

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26. Washington, "The Economic Development of the Negro Race in Slavery," pp. 20-21; *The Future of the American Negro*, pp. 53-54, 55.

27. Washington, *My Larger Education* (Miami, 1969; orig. pub., 1911): 5-7, 27; *Up From Slavery* (New York, 1967; orig. pub., 1901): 24, 23.

28. See Smith, "The Formative Period of American Slave Historiography, 1890-1920," chapters IX and X.

class stock, but his mother, whom Phillips considered his constant "comrade and source of inspiration,"[29] had a plantation background. Before the Civil War her family had owned fifteen hundred acres of land and twenty-four slaves. Although born and bred in cotton country, Phillips was trained in "scientific" history at Columbia University under William A. Dunning. Phillips' role as a pioneer in the systematic use of plantation records is an important factor in his reputation as a "scientific" historian and as one of the South's foremost scholars.[30] He broke fresh ground by examining the interrelationship of race and class in southern society and by calculating the profitability of slavery on a cost basis. Phillips professed objectivity, yet he could escape neither the anti-Negro prejudice of the Jim Crow era nor his inherited perception of blacks as biological and social inferiors. Even so, through his many writings—especially his landmark *American Negro Slavery* (1918)—Phillips emerged as the Progressive Era's master of slave historiography.

In his works Phillips allowed the planters to speak for themselves and he adhered to their perception of slavery and the plantation. Phillips envisioned the plantation as a patriarchal community in which masters were generally solicitous to provide ample food, clothing, and medical care for their bondsmen. For the majority of the blacks, he wrote, "crude comfort was the rule." In Phillips' opinion, slave owners dedicated themselves to the material and spiritual well-being of their Negroes. He realized, however, that the planters' concern for the slaves was largely a result of economic self-interest. Stable marriages, for example, almost guaranteed the master a regular increase in the number of slaves. The teachings of Christianity, too, served the planter by schooling the blacks in morality, discipline, and respect for their "superiors."[31]

Essential to his understanding of American slavery was Phillips' belief that considerable give-and-take existed between master and slave. By focusing on this theme, Phillips, like Ballagh before him, prefigured the emphasis of Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974). In Phillips' judgment, masters were benevolent patriarchs both

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29. Phillips to J. Franklin Jameson, 24 August 1906, *American Historical Review* Editorial Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. For information on Phillips' early life I have benefited from Bell I. Wiley, "Ulrich Bonnell Phillips—The Man and the Historian," [notes for speech, 4 November 1963], pp. 1-12, and from John H. Roper to John David Smith, 11 October 1976, in possession of the author.

30. See John David Smith, " 'Keep'em in a fire-proof vault'—Pioneer Southern Historians Discover Plantation Records," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, in press.

31. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918): 312, 297-98, 263, 277, 296, 316, 269, 321.

out of self-interest and genuine kindness. "Indeed," he asserted, "the slaves had many leverages, and oftentimes . . . ruled their masters more than the masters ruled them." Phillips suggested that "In quiet times," the slave owner ignored legislation and followed "his own interest in managing his slaves (or letting them manage him)." Writing in 1918 the Georgian regretted that critics of the South failed to comprehend the "spirit of camaraderie" between the races that existed under slavery.

> Men who view the old Southern regime from afar off and with a theorist's eye are likely to think it was an agency of race alienation. So far as my understanding goes this is fundamentally erroneous. The grouping of persons of the two races in the intimate relationship of possession tended strongly to counteract that antipathy which all races feel toward each other. The possession was not wholly of the slave by the master, but also of the master by the slave.

Phillips considered this paternalism a virtue of the slave regime. "It made for strength of character and readiness to meet emergencies, for patience and tact, for large-mindedness, gentility and self-control." Precursor of the agrarianism which surfaced in Nashville in the 1930s, Phillips preferred his romanticized perception of the plantation to the "impersonality of modern industrialism."[32]

Closely related to Phillips' vision of plantation paternalism was his conception of the peculiar institution as a school for blacks. He was not the first historian to employ the analogy;[33] nonetheless he popularized the image of the plantation as "a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization." Phillips also equated the plantation to the "modern social settlement" homes of the Progressive Era. It taught the blacks by precept and demonstration, offering instructions in civilization and vocational training. The Georgian recognized, however, that the plantation schools failed to graduate their "pupils upon the completion of their training." Although this was an unfortunate part of the system, Phil-

32. Phillips, "Black-Belt Labor, Slave and Free," University of Virginia, Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Papers, *Lectures and Addresses on the Negro in the South* (Charlottesville, 1915): 30; "The Slave Labor Problem in the Charleston District," *Political Science Quarterly*, 22 (September, 1907): 423; "The Plantation Product of Men," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Session of the Georgia Historical Association* (Atlanta, 1918): 13-15.

33. See, for example, Joseph Alexander Tillinghast, *The Negro in Africa and America* (New York, 1968; orig. pub., 1902) and Kelly Miller, *Out of the House of Bondage* (New York, 1971; orig. pub., 1914).

lips was confident that slavery "did at least as much as any system possible in the period could have done" for what he deemed an "inert and backward people."[34]

Phillips' last point was echoed by numerous other southern historians in these years. They agreed that American Negro slavery was as beneficent for blacks as for whites. Slavery held a curious attraction for these writers. Not since the late antebellum years had so much attention been devoted to the subject. Many scholars investigated slavery because it fit well into the legal-institutional focus of the new "scientific" history. Others identified slavery with the vital issues of their own day, thus giving an enlarged significance to the study of it. Writing in an age of extreme racial tension, and baffled by what they perceived as an insurmountable "Negro problem," these writers looked back nostalgically to slavery in order to gain some perspective on contemporary race relations. Like their forebears in the Old South they too employed scientific laws in their apology for slavery. Many concluded implicitly, if not openly, that the best interests of whites and blacks required some degree of legalized subordination of the latter to the former. The Jim Crow laws, poll taxes, literacy and property tests, and white primaries were effective measures in reestablishing legal barriers between the races. With their implementation the inferior status of southern blacks became codified much as it had been before emancipation. The new proslavery argument was a timely boost to southern Progressives who believed that their region would advance materially once the "Negro problem" was settled. By resurrecting many of the basic tenets of the old proslavery argument southern historians helped justify the second class citizenship accorded blacks in the Progressive Era. In doing so they offered an old creed for the New South.

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34. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, pp. 342-43.

LAGNIAPPE

nove the 17 1918

doctor dune please seand me some of that cournine towrnig the same kind of towrnig that ya fix four mrs. nacers Jones she wouse tell me aBout she say that wood Be the very thing four me i am shick and look to get down and if uy think it wood Be good four me in my countons pealesend it to Me

Fealy Reamo

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