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Introduction

The Management of Enslaved People on Anglo-American Plantations, 1700–1860

special issue title used for Introduction as well, ok? Please feel free to provide an alternative title

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Could you please provide a short abstract (albeit 1 or 2 sentences) and keywords?

The subject of slavery in the British West Indies and the American South is too rich and diverse to be understood within a single historiographical paradigm, but it is noticeable that in recent years scholars have been increasingly drawn to examining slavery as a business, a type of commerce with distinctive and often highly innovative techniques of management, and with a long reach into other areas of business.[1] There is less doubt than in the past that Anglo-American slavery was always "modern" and always "capitalist," even if there is wide dispute about what precisely constitutes either "modernity" or "capitalism." In this special issue of seven essays on aspects of slave management, we follow Sidney Mintz in seeing the plantation system as a symbol of "precocious modernity." Mintz argued that, through their management of the enslaved, planters transformed slaves into new and essentially modern people. The work regimen slaves suffered, he noted, made enslaved people into "anonymous units of labour—alienated, expendable and interchangeable—as if they lacked individuality or any personal past." He echoed C.L.R. James who claimed that the sugar plantation modernized both planters and the enslaved. The latter, James believed, "from the start lived a life that was in essence a modern life. That is their history—as far as I am able to discover, a unique history."[2]

1 For an appreciation of slaveowners and slave traders as efficient businessmen in the antebellum American South, see Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "Cotton, Slavery, and the New History of Capitalism," *Explorations in Economic History* 67 (2018): 1–17; Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018); Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815–1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

2 Sidney Mintz, *Three Ancient Cultures: Caribbean Themes and Variations* (Cambridge, Mass.:

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Such assumptions have led historians and theorists of management to discover, or rediscover, how the managerial practices of enslavers from the seventeenth-century Caribbean to the nineteenth-century American South were important not just in understanding how slavery operated but in developing modern ideas and practices of the organization of labor.[3] This emphasis on slave management practices has coincided with a renewed stress on how slave owners' determination to reduce enslaved people to "commodities"—so that we can see slaveholders moving towards equating slavery with commodification, developing calculations which enabled enslavers to treat enslaved people as interchangeable—was combined with treating these interchangeable parts of "labor" with ferocious cruelty.[4]

In short, capitalist commodification and calculation of profit through a range of qualitative and quantitative management tools was combined with an insistence on control achieved through remarkably high levels of coercion. Enslaved people, in short, were acted upon by their owners so as to maximize profit, with their obedience ensured through force. Enslaved people acted against this process of dehumanization and commodification but with a limited degree of success. As Nicholas Radburn notes in his essay in this special issue, planters were generally successful in "breaking slaves" through a system of punishments and rewards, so that rebellious Africans were in the main turned into people who grudgingly obeyed their owners' dictates. They tended to have no choice in making such a decision, one which was often accompanied by the threat and fulfilment of harsh punishment. As Caitlin Rosenthal notes for antebellum American slaveowners, "planters' coercive capacity was extreme," and while "orderly columns and careful calculations obscured the nature of this power," it was clear that "the threat of violence was never far

Harvard University Press, 2010), 10–11, 189–212; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 392.

3 Bill Cooke, "The Denial of Slavery in Management Studies," *Journal of Management Studies* 40 (2003): 1895–1918; Marcel van der Linden, "Re-Constructing the Origins of Modern Labor Management," *Labor History* 51 (2010): 509–532; and Richard K. Fleischman et al., "Plantation Accounting and Management Practices in the US and the British West Indies at the End of their Slavery Eras," *Economic History Review* 64 (2011): 765–797.

4 For work by contributors which reflect these themes, see Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Nicholas Radburn and Justin Roberts, "Gold versus Life: Jobbing Gangs and British Caribbean Slavery," *William and Mary Quarterly* 76 (2019), 223–256; Laura Sandy, *The Overseers of Early American Slavery: Supervisors, Enslaved Labour and the Plantation Enterprise* (London: Routledge, 2020); and Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition* (London: Routledge, 2009).

away." Enslavers, she argues, "turned their control over capital into managerial control over labor: the violence of slavery ended in the emergence of capitalist business practices."[5]

Violence is central to many of the essays in this special issue. Nicholas Radburn uses the diaries of Thomas Thistlewood from Jamaica in the 1750s to chronicle the ways in which newly arrived Africans were brutalized through beatings, tortures, and sexual assaults until most of them reluctantly accepted their unfortunate position. Andrea Livesey draws on the work of Stephanie Camp, specifically her contention that enslaved people created "rival geographies" to the "big house"-centered narrative of the plantation landscape, to investigate a curious feature of the antebellum Louisiana landscape, the garconnière, in which teenage boys learned the rudiments of plantation mastery through the sexual exploitation of enslaved women, done out of sight of parents who pretended to look the other way from their sons' depredations.[6] And Natalie Zacek explores the reality and image of two women slaveholders who engaged in monstrous behavior, one fictional and one real, but whose lives has been made semi-legendary through its depiction in popular culture. She examines how we look at episodes of sensational violence in which beautiful, cruel elite Creole women inflicted punishment on enslaved people unable to protect themselves. Zacek asks, provocatively: could these women be seen as self-empowered individuals within societies in which even the richest and most socially elite white women had few arenas in which they could assert themselves, even if the methods they chose for such self-assertion were horrific?

The enslaved understood from the start the stark realities that shaped the ways in which they were managed on Anglo-American plantations. They knew that they were purchased to do work that Europeans refused to do. Moreover, they understood that the principal objective of planters in purchasing and employing enslaved labor was to get as much work from enslaved people, at the lowest cost, in order their estates might generate surplus profits. Toney, an enslaved rebel in Barbados in 1675, declared, just before he was tortured to death in a horrific execution, that "the devil was in the Englishman that he makes everything work; he makes the Negro work, he makes the horse work, the ass work, the wood work, the water work, and the wind work."[7] As Justin

5 Caitlin Rosenthal, "Capitalism When Labor was Capital: Slavery, Power and Price in Antebellum America," *Capitalism* 1 (2020): 302, 331.

6 Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

7 Anon., *Great Newes from the Barbadoes* (London: L. Clinton 1676), 6–7.

Roberts notes, planters experimented with labor-saving devices, but output and profitability were always their primary goals, and labor saved was ultimately invested in other tasks, because planters owned all of their slaves' time. His essay on how the demands of work—symbolized by that humble agricultural instrument, the hoe—were in the end worse for enslaved health and well-being than the more dramatic instrument of the whip is evidence of the relentless nature of the profit motive in shaping how slaves were worked and managed.[8] Rosenthal pithily notes that 'rarely has labor been so dominated by capital as when labor *was* capital.'[9]

Enslavers, however, tended to elide the brutal truth of what they were doing to the enslaved. They did so in two ways. The first way was through the production of bureaucratic and accounting techniques, notably in the inventories of personal possessions held by slaveowners and compiled after their deaths, which listed, in cold and dispassionate fashion, the names, ages, condition, and, most importantly, the monetary values of the enslaved people whom they owned. A number of historians have highlighted how the creation of inventories was in itself a form of oppression, used to facilitate, justify, and normalize the horrors of enslavement and the ways in which enslaved people were ordered and managed. In other words, as Christer Petley comments in his essay, the archive of slavery was not so much a locution of information but a locus of power. As Stephanie Smallwood has argued, this sort of record-keeping was a site of knowledge production that mobilized oppressive "representational strategies" to support the daily practices in treating people as commodities.[10]

It is undoubtedly true that inventories reflect the violent dispossession of enslavement—their flattened prose and numbing dullness obscures their purpose in reflecting how people were transformed into property through the actions of words and the operation of laws protecting slave owners' investment in human property.[11] As Petley argues, studying the archives of slavery "recalls the process of acculturation that accompanies acts of atrocity." But the mass of detail in these conventional ledgers, bookended by stultifying officialese, were, Petley argues, as important as any other tool within the complex technologies that made slavery work. Inventories are direct evidence of how systems of slave

8 Chris Evans, 'The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650–1850,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 69 (2012): 71–100.

9 Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 38–39; Rosenthal, "Capitalism when Labor was Capital," 329.

10 Stephanie Smallwood, "The Politics of the Archive and History's Accountability to the Enslaved," *History of the Present* 6 (2016): 118.

11 Gloria McCahon Whiting, "Race, Slavery, and the Problem of Numbers in Early New England: A View from Probate Court," *William and Mary Quarterly* 77 (2020): 409.

management functioned in practice. The essays in this special issue tend, like most work on slavery, to rely on documents created by enslavers or their representatives. But, as Petley also notes, one can read these documents against the grain and gain some approximation, however roughly, of how enslaved people responded to their predicament. Both Radburn and Zacek reference the diaries of Thomas Thistlewood to understand methods of slave management. But, in the process, they allow us to imagine what coercion meant for enslaved people. Radburn details the travails that an enslaved African-born man named Derby had to endure from Thistlewood who punished him gruesomely for work-place infractions. We only know about Derby because Thistlewood chose to write about him. But, as Radburn shows we can learn about Derby's life, and, to an extent, appreciate why he acted as did, in perpetually resisting his master, despite receiving punishments for such resistance, even though the source we have for documenting Derby's life is irredeemably biased.

The second way in which enslavers obscured the dreadful truths about what their slave management practices entailed is through their written comments on how enslaved people could be controlled. Some of their writings confirm just how brutal the management of slaves could be, especially in the Caribbean. Roberts cites the sugar magnate Simon Taylor, who reminded his absentee employer that enslaved people could not be worked—"thrashed"—to death, as they are not "Steel or Iron." Planters were aware that enslaved people could be "worn" out by ill-usage, even if, as an antebellum Mississippi planter callously remarked, it was standard procedure to "wear out one Negro to buy another." Other writings, however, indicate that slave owners deluded themselves that they were humane managers of enslaved property. The fabulously wealthy Jamaican planter Richard Beckford wrote a manual of slave management in 1754, of which Thistlewood was much enamored, suggesting that enslaved people needed to be treated with care, "inured to labour by degrees," and treated as if they were members of plantation families. The South Carolina slave mistress Eliza Lucas Pinckney, whose management of slaves is outlined at length in Inge Dornan's essay, expanded on this theme. She declared that she wanted to "make a good Mistress to my servants," treating them "with humanity and good nature." She enjoined herself to "not be tyrannical or peevish or impatient towards them, but to make their lives as comfortable as I can."[12]

Pinckney's statement reminds us not only of how enslavers deluded themselves about their actual intentions but also that slave management was far

12 Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Mary Bartlett [1742], in Constance Schulz, ed, *The Papers of Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry* http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/PinckneyHorry/ELP0115.

from being the sole preserve of masterful white male planters. Gender is a significant issue in this special issue, as seen in the essays by Zacek, Livesey, and Dornan and, to an extent, in the essay on enslaved overseers by Laura Sandy and Gervase Phillips. In some ways, gender made little difference in how enslaved people were managed—Zacek shows that a slave mistress could treat the enslaved as cruelly as a male slave owner such as Thistlewood. As Inge Dornan shows in her essay, white women were highly involved in all aspects of South Carolinian slavery, and were increasingly inscribed into the colony's slave laws over time, remedying an earlier ambivalence by white South Carolinians to connecting white women to slavery. Nevertheless, South Carolina moved from 1740 into a slave regime which was predicated on slavery becoming "domesticated," and where masters, and now mistresses, were expected to combine the firm smack of strong governance with an avowed humanity towards enslaved people. In this new environment, women such as Eliza Lucas Pinckney, who considered a "good Mistress" to be someone who acted with "humanity and good nature," became crucial to this new vision of a more refined method of slave management, in which the brutality of past times was hidden by a commitment to domestic governance, evangelicalism and education.[13]

And race was not always an absolute dividing line, as Sandy and Phillips illustrate in their essay on Virginian and South Carolinian planters' increasing tendency from the mid-eighteenth century to choose enslaved men to act as their managerial representatives, as overseers of the work patterns of the enslaved. The logic of using enslaved men as overseers overcame an increasingly rigid racial hierarchy, in which all whites were considered superior to all people of color. In contrast to the Caribbean, in which racial hierarchies within slave management systems mandated that whites retained all major supervisory roles, planters in Virginia and South Carolina, including such influential men as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, turned to experienced and skilled enslaved Creole men to serve as overseers, aware that these men could "manage" enslaved workers as capably as any white man. Moreover, black overseers were barred from leaving the plantation, and were comparatively cheap to employ. As Sandy and Phillips argue, "this was a significant development. It firmly establishes the emergence of the profit-maximizing planter presiding over a complex, diversified agricultural enterprise organized according to recognizably modern management practices." The racial friction generated by the

13 For the domestication of slavery in the 1740s, see Edward B. Rugemer, *Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance in the Early Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2018), 114–115.

promotion of enslaved men to positions which the white community usually considered their province alone, even if the whites occupying such roles were increasingly derided for their lowly class origins by members of the social elite, such as Jefferson, was secondary to the profit motive—a theme in this essay which links it to the articles by Roberts, Radburn and Petley.

The essays in this special issue, in short, extend and deepen our understanding of the relationship between coercion, control, and persuasion that was part of the repertoire of managers of enslaved people, and which formed the context within which enslaved people struggled to maintain their dignity, humanity, and some degree of autonomy, or at least removal, from the gaze of their oppressors. The essays arise out of a workshop at the University of Manchester, organized by Natalie Zacek, who has curated and edited these essays along with myself. We believe that the essays in this special issue offer a rich menu of information and arguments about how slave management worked in theory and in practice in plantation societies from the Chesapeake and South Carolina to Louisiana and to Jamaica. They range from Christer Petley's meditation on inventories as a form of management tool; to Justin Roberts' and Nick Radburn's examination of the ways in which enslaved people were put to work, and how devastating patterns of work on sugar estates could be when combined with extreme management demands; to Inge Dornan's and Natalie Zacek's revelations about how female slaveowners could be as brutal in their treatment of enslaved people as any men; to Laura Sandy's and Gervase Phillips' exposure of the significant role that "privileged" enslaved overseers in Virginia and South Carolina played in controlling and disciplining enslaved workers while subtly undermining racial hierarchies which could not envision people of African descent in any position of authority; and to Andrea Livesey's exploration of how the architecture of the plantation could be an extension of the body and a way in which the body speaks, in this case in Louisiana, creating what Livesey calls a "risk space" for sexual violence in the human geography of the plantation. Together, these essays extend our understanding of the tensions inherent in slave management systems, in which power was disproportionately in the hands of the people enforcing discipline and work rules, and where the objects of such disproportionate force were conceived of as being simultaneously objects of property and human beings. It should provide readers with new perspectives on Anglo-American slavery, from work to gender to the ways in which slave-master relationships are portrayed in popular culture, which are thought-provoking and, in the end, deeply troubling.

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