

THE SOUTH'S VISIBLE HAND: TEXTILE MILLS  
AND THE CONTROL OF WHITE LABOR IN THE  
ANTEBELLUM SOUTHERN PIEDMONT, 1830-1860

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Abstract:

Throughout the antebellum period, the concept of control was a fundamental cornerstone of white southern society. Plantations exhibited the most lucid example of this control where the master dominated not only slaves but the physical environment as well. Yet elite white southerners felt poor whites also needed controlling. Poor whites, a landless, migratory group, roamed the southern countryside in search of employment and steady wages. If poor whites found employment, it was often tenant farming and, at times, as day-laborers on southern plantations. Although allowed to work on plantations, planter elites held varying degrees of ambivalence towards poor whites as well as a disdain for whites working in the fields doing what they deemed work unbecoming a member of the white race.

This study centers upon the relationship between textile mill management and the poor white labor forces within the southern Piedmont between 1830 and 1860. Focusing on poor white textile laborers, it concludes that elite southerners viewed poor whites as fundamentally different from the rest of white southern society, basing these views on contemporary scientific, religious, and historical thought. Furthermore, plantations and textile mills, as well as mill villages, operated in strikingly similar ways. Poor whites, limited in their ability to purchase land already held by plantation masters, entered into industrial labor within textile mills and experienced numerous control measures within factories and mill villages. Ultimately, having experienced generations of harsh treatment by elites, poor whites entered into mill employment and did not take part in organized labor resistance or activism, unlike industrial employees in the Upper South and North. This deference can be attributed to a lack of rival foreign-born labor as well as psychosocial behaviors caused by the experience of poor whites in the antebellum Piedmont.

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## INTRODUCTION

Almost twenty-five years ago, Merritt Roe Smith remarked how the analysis of industrial communities, the so-called “class and community study,” had broadened scholarly knowledge of the subject. Yet Smith and his contemporaries complained that the work of New Labor historians was too myopic in scale, choosing to explore only specific locations, making synthesis virtually impossible to achieve. Philip Scranton observed that the studies varied “enormously in their emphasis on conflict, parties, culture, ethnicity, and institutions,” further hindering the task of reaching conclusions across a wide array of historical study more difficult. Likewise, Herbert Gutman—a trailblazer in the field of the New Labor history—reinforced the sentiments of Smith and Scranton, adding that monographic examinations of industrial communities failed to present an overall picture of nineteenth-century American manufacturing.<sup>1</sup>

The same can be said of the study of textile production in the antebellum South. While each article and monograph have added to scholarly understanding of cotton factories operating in the years before the Civil War, the historical focus has been limited to particular manufacturers in specific locations without investigating mills across the region using a common analytical framework. Furthermore, studies have chosen to concentrate on various aspects of the worker experience (e.g. management, activism, and resistance), and subsequently apply conclusions

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<sup>1</sup> Merritt Roe Smith, “Industry, Technology, and the ‘Labor Question’ in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America: Seeking Synthesis,” *Technology and Culture* 32 (July, 1991): pp. 555-570, 555-556. See also Philip Scranton, “None-Too-Porous Boundaries: Labor History and the History of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 29 (October, 1988): pp. 722-743, quotation found on pg. 729; and Herbert G. Gutman, “Whatever Happened to History?” *Nation*, November 21, 1981, pp. 552-554.



based on one mill to all mills.

In regards to the slow growth and lack of success in antebellum southern manufacturing, a small group of southern historians have attributed the slow growth of industry in the Old South to a planter propensity for an agrarian lifestyle. As the leaders of southern society, elite hegemony directed plantation agriculture and support for slavery. Albert Bolles, a southerner writing in the 1850s, finds the planter antipathy towards manufacturing almost preposterous, especially when comparing the seemingly abundant advantages the South possessed over the North:

[The North] was not the part of the United States in which [manufacturing] could be carried on the best advantage. The climate was dry and cold, entailing a large expense in warming and steaming the air of the mills. . . . The better place for the factories would have been in the Southern states themselves. There the climate was mild, the wages of free labor cheaper, baling, hooping, and pressing would have been almost entirely avoided, and transportation would have been only a nominal charge. . . . In the North, however, the population was denser, the climate was more invigorating, and the spirit of industry . . . taken possession of the people. . . . The South preferred the charms and independence of the agreeable agricultural life.<sup>2</sup>

Broadus Mitchell believes that the antebellum South resisted industrialism prior to 1880 because anti-poor white sentiments among elites prevented their employment as the principal hands within cotton mills. “[A] landed aristocracy shut out the average man from economic participation,” writes Mitchell, “but with the rise of cotton mills [after 1880] . . . whites were welcomed back into the service of the South.” In terms of antebellum labor markets in southern textiles, Gavin Wright shows that the white mill hands were not “cheap labor” which restricted sustained progress in the growth of textile production before 1875. Wright also contends that lack of the use of slaves as operatives within cotton manufacturing stunted industrial success.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quotation from Bolles cited in Gavin Wright, “Cheap Labor and Southern Textiles before 1880,” *Journal of Economic History* 39 (September, 1979): pp. 655-680, 655.

<sup>3</sup> Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of the Cotton Mills in the South*, 2d ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), viii; Wright, “Cheap Labor and Southern Textiles before 1880,” 679-680.

The study of the antebellum South has produced a plethora of academic studies that has been wide-ranging in its scope for nearly one hundred years. While focusing on a variety of topics, three of the main areas of exploration have fixated on the nature of antebellum southern society, the participation of southern elites in benevolence and reform initiatives, and the centrality of the planter class as the dominant members of the Old South. Accordingly, this idea of planter hegemony extended over slaves, yeomen, and poor whites and directed all southerners to adhere to the principles of proslavery ideology. The first studies to explore the tenor of the Old South's society presented the region as homogeneous with little to no diversity. Henry Wilson offered the first initial study in the nature of the antebellum South, and shows that the political power of the southern states was overwhelmingly controlled by slaveholders. Similarly, Clement Eaton postulates that planters dominated society, with state legislatures reflecting aristocratic power. In South Carolina, for instance, a compromise dating back to 1808 was made between the Tidewater and Upcountry sub-regions of the state where half of the lower house of the legislature represented propertied slaveholders. Thus, lowland aristocrats prevented legislation hostile to planter interests from being passed.<sup>4</sup>

Departing from the study of antebellum southern homogeneity, other historians have examined the peculiarities that existed within the Old South. W. J. Cash surveys the emotions and psychologies of southerners in the midst of economic changes, finding that southerners were an extroverted group prone to romantic idealism, hedonism, and self-consciousness. David Bertelson explores the southern pursuit of unlimited freedom in the personal and economic lives

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, 3 vols. (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1872-1877); Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South: The Emergence of a Reluctant Nation*, 3d ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1987). See also R. S. Cotterill, *The Old South: The Geographic, Economic, Social, Political, and Cultural Expansion, Institutions, and Nationalism of the Ante-Bellum South* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1936); William B. Hesseltine, *A History of the South, 1607-1936* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1936); and Francis Butler Simpkins, *The Everlasting South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

of planters, concluding that ultimately southerners rejected modern industrialism in lieu of leisurely lifestyles. Allan Nevins finds that the antebellum South was reactionary, undemocratic, and economically static. William W. Freehling's study of the Nullification crisis in South Carolina in 1832-1833 illuminated the irrational emotions of southern elites, as well as their self-conscious attitudes and defensive posturing toward antislavery attacks by northerners. Eugene D. Genovese concludes through a decidedly Marxist interpretation that the Old South was a feudalistic, pre-capitalist, pre-industrialist society that actively exploited its workers.<sup>5</sup>

The notion that the Old South was capitalistic in its economic views, as well as a diverse environment and pro-intellectualism is another subtheme within the study of the antebellum southern character. William W. Freehling finds that the Old South was economically, socially, and intellectually more diverse than previous historians like Genovese have noted. Similarly, Clement Eaton, Michael O'Brien, and James Oakes all reveal in their respective studies that antebellum southerners displayed a vibrant intellectualism. Continuing the trend in scholarship which purports the diversity and progressiveness of the Old South, Aaron W. Marrs and Jonathan Daniel Wells both explore the dynamic socioeconomic character of industrialists and a burgeoning southern middle-class that increasingly influenced antebellum society, culture, and economics through the cultivation of benevolence and reform.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Doubleday, 1941); David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, 8 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1947-1971); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, 1991); and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965) and *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974).

<sup>6</sup> See William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990-1991); Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); Aaron W. Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Another major theme within the historiography of the Old South focuses on the slaveholding planter class and their relation to the rest of southern society. Historians have questioned the domination of the antebellum South by planter elites and have also shown that there was indeed diversity within the culture of the region. Several revisionist studies have appeared that have challenged the assumed domination of planters. Shearer Davis Bowman juxtaposes southern planters with Prussian Junkers, illuminating the fact that Junkers in actuality were more repressive toward their societies than planter elites were over the Old South. William Kauffman Scarborough presents planters as bourgeois, cosmopolitan, highly-educated, well-traveled, and generally uninterested in either politics or holding political office.<sup>7</sup>

The studies of Lacy K. Ford, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Grady McWhiney, and Stephanie McCurry all propose that the white South, irrespective of class, possessed similar values. Ford's study of the South Carolina Upcountry reveals that the yeomanry exhibited virulent independence from the planter class, who, in turn, relied upon yeoman political support. Wyatt-Brown examines how the conception of honor affected all segments of the antebellum South with planters, yeoman, and poor whites. Honor fostered primal values of gentility, patriarchy, and masculinity, and the use of violence as the means of protection and perpetuation of these ideals. McWhiney, in his research on southern society, incorporated the so-called "Celtic fringe" argument to illuminate how all southerners exhibited Celtic folkways in their speech, attitudes, and customs which made them fiercely independent with a tendency towards bellicosity. McCurry, in her scholarship regarding the interaction between the yeomanry and planter elite of the South Carolina Lowcountry, notes that all southerners had a concept of the home as a fortress and protected their households from the encroachment of others.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-19<sup>th</sup>-Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and William K. Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> See Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*

Even within the world of antebellum southern politics, historians have found evidence of egalitarianism. Christopher J. Olsen finds that honor was crucial to not only the cultural values within all Deep South households and society, but also important within southern political arenas. Politics were personal in nature and vehemently antiparty, with personal relationships between planters and poor white constituents defining political interaction before the Civil War. In regards to poor white political participation, studies conducted by Marc W. Kruman, Bradley G. Bond, and Ralph A. Wooster reveal that property qualifications for state and local offices either declined or completely vanished by 1850. Consequently, common whites are found to have played an active role in state and county governments throughout the antebellum period.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Tracy McKenzie, Frank L. Owsley, William J. Cooper, and Thomas E. Terrill have conducted studies relating to the relationship between planter elites and both the yeoman and poor white classes. McKenzie shows that diversity indeed existed within the Old South through a socioeconomic comparison of various rural districts in antebellum Tennessee, revealing that planters did not wholly dominate southern society. Owsley explores plain folk (i.e. the yeomanry), finding they composed the bulk of southern landowners, producing food stuffs that

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(Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). On the concept of antebellum southern egalitarianism, see Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1992). Cecil-Fronsman shows that the yeomanry believed in egalitarianism but it was, for the most part, denied to them by the upper class. However, common whites adhered to the concept of honor which caused them to challenge planter supremacy.

<sup>9</sup> See Christopher J. Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Bradley G. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi, 1830-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); and Ralph A. Wooster, *The People in Power: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Lower South, 1850-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969) and *Politicians, Planters, and Plain Folk: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Upper South, 1850-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

were consumed not only by their own households but by plantation households as well. Cooper and Terrill show that significant economic ties existed between planters and yeomen.<sup>10</sup>

Subthemes of landownership, tenancy, and dependence have also appeared in the studies of Charles C. Bolton, Frederick Bode, Donald E. Ginter, Stephen Aron, Roger J. Kennedy, and Kenneth W. Noe. Bolton reveals that landless tenants and laborers composed upwards of thirty to fifty percent of southern whites, resulting in persistent poverty among poor whites. Bode and Ginter explore tenancy and state that it was an important element in antebellum southern agriculture. Aron shows that the desire for land in the West was prevalent among all sectors of southern society but was hard to obtain for poor whites because a majority of the land had been purchased by land speculators and affluent planter elites. Kennedy examines westward migration and concludes that planters rapidly depleted soil, forcing slaveholders to continuously search for new lands which, in turn, pushed poor whites further into landlessness. Noe's study of railroads in antebellum Virginia illuminates how railroads in fact widened the gap between rich and poor southerners, increasing tenancy and heightening class divisions in the Old South.<sup>11</sup>

No historical scholarship has hitherto examined the Piedmont textile communities in one study. By choosing to study several mills located across the Piedmont region, this dissertation postulates that textile factories generally operated similarly in regards to the overwhelming use of poor white labor, as well as through the enactment and imposition of rigid factory rules and the control of hands by mill ownership by reform initiatives (i.e. temperance and religion).

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<sup>10</sup> See Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949); William J. Cooper and Thomas E. Terrill, *The American South: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> See Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Frederick A. Bode and Donald E. Ginter, *Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Roger J. Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Kenneth W. Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Furthermore, in an effort to isolate and maintain consistent textile mill workforces, cotton industrialists introduced high rent rates for company-owned worker housing as well as high prices for goods to be purchased by operatives at company stores. In turn, in conjunction with low wages paid to mill hands, poor white laborers found themselves consistently in debt to factories which kept them tied to the mill by debt peonage.

This study promotes four distinct theses. First, it profoundly agrees with the body of scholarship initiated by Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, positing that planter elites believed poor whites comprised a distinct social group and were viewed almost as a separate race fit for servitude. Furthermore, beyond suggesting that planters maintained their dominance over all southern society, this study argues that through proslavery ideology, which included religious and scientific theories to support the institution of slavery, antebellum southern elites and their intellectual allies viewed poor whites and slaves through a racial lens. In particular, this dissertation considers planter hegemony, the plantation, and the institution of slavery—the cornerstone of the Old South—as having direct effects on poor whites, as well as factoring into how they were perceived and managed both within cotton mills and mill villages.<sup>12</sup>

Second, this dissertation places the establishment of cotton factories within the Piedmont South as part of the growth in global capitalism during the nineteenth-century. A growing movement among historians within the last decade has been involved with examining the connection between the growth of cotton, slavery, and capitalism. Placing capitalism of the nineteenth-century in a global context, Sven Beckert advances the concept he calls “war capitalism,” in which he shows that slavery, the exploitation of native peoples, imperial

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<sup>12</sup> See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

expansion, the assertion of sovereignty over others, and land acquisition aided in the evolution of capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

The traditional understanding of capitalism, in the sense of globalization and production, begins with the Industrial Revolution around 1780, but Beckert sees capitalism beginning far before the eighteenth-century and was rooted as early as the sixteenth-century. “[Flourishing] not in the factory but in the field” and based on slavery, early industrial capitalism did not exhibit such freedoms associated with nineteenth-century industrialization and often relied upon violence and coercion to function. “Latter-day capitalism rests upon the rule of law and powerful institutions backed by the state,” notes Beckert, “but capitalism’s early phase, although ultimately requiring state power to create world-spanning empires, was frequently based on the unrestrained actions of private individuals—the domination of masters over slaves and of frontier capitalists over indigenous inhabitants.”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, cotton factories were the primary industry within Europe and the United States that fueled the Industrial Revolution. For cotton cultivation to function adequately and provide high quantities for textile production, slave labor was used extensively to work southern plantations. Unlike other global commodities such as tobacco, sugar, or rice, cotton required two labor-intensive stages in its production: planting, cultivating, and harvesting in the field (e.g. slavery) and spinning and weaving in the factory (e.g. poor white labor). Because cotton was such a labor-intensive commodity, southern elites believed slaves were best suited to work on plantations and consistently produce high levels of cotton to be either exported to Europe or the North. As the southern manufacturing sector expanded following Nullification, cotton mills were increasingly established in the South, most notably within the Piedmont. To staff these factories, mill owners overwhelmingly relied upon the labors of poor whites. Ironically, while cotton was

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<sup>13</sup> Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, 2d ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), xv.

<sup>14</sup> Quotation by Beckert found in Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xvi. See also Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; and Calvin Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery, Family Over Freedom: Slavery in the Antebellum Upper South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).



the primary reason for the landless status of poor whites because of the extensive use of slavery to work cotton plantations, it was also their only viable source of employment.<sup>15</sup>

Third, this dissertation suggests that benevolence exhibited by southern cotton mill owners extended partly from genuine motivations of charity toward poor whites but also were expressions of control to keep poor white factory operatives laboring within mills and living within mill villages. For manufacturing to succeed in the South, it had to be on southern terms based on southern values. As a result, the southern industrial character became defined by the concept of controlling its operatives, namely the thousands of poor whites laboring throughout the textile mills of the Piedmont. Through the implementation of numerous measures, both physical and mental, white mill workers experienced strict management by superintendents and owners who sought to influence mill hands not only in their labor but also through reform in the guise of education, temperance, and Christian religion. Hence, “the organization of mills was not only motivated by the desire for profits by individuals who subscribed to the company,” remarked a textile manufactory owner, “but also by the desire to help the community to its feet through affording employment to poor people.”<sup>16</sup>

But the benevolence of southern industrialists needs to be viewed with some level of skepticism. Did factory owners genuinely express sentiments of benevolence as a legitimate measure of sympathy and charity toward poor whites? Certainly. However, Edward E. Baptist has shown that benevolence displayed by the southern elite did not come from any sort of *noblesse oblige* toward the enslaved or less fortunate. Instead, benevolence was the expression of the upper class acknowledging that they—in the case of planters—owned their slaves as well as

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<sup>15</sup> See also Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961); Philip McMichael, “Slavery in Capitalism: The Rise and Demise of the U.S. Ante-Bellum Cotton Culture,” *Theory and Society* 20 (June, 1991): pp. 321-349; and Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Quotation found in Julian J. Petty, *The Growth and Distribution of Population in South Carolina*, South Carolina State Planning Board, Bulletin No. 11 (Columbia: South Carolina State Council for Defense, Industrial Development Committee, 1943), 17.

owned their capacity to reproduce. Benevolence kept slaves happy who would then create more offspring, who could then either work on plantations or be sold for cash. In the case of industrialists operating textile factories, benevolence partially came out of expressions of reform so as to improve the lives of their poor white operatives but it also came out of the need to keep hands content. If textile workers were content, then they would not have a reason to rebel or otherwise react negatively to the environment of the mill and mill village. Moreover, because workers lived and worked in cotton factories within family groups, contented families would stay within the mill workforces, who would then have children who grew up to labor in mills. These children would ostensibly marry other mill children thus perpetuating the cycle of mill labor indefinitely.<sup>17</sup>

Lastly, this work challenges the notion of widespread worker resistance within the antebellum southern textile industry promoted by Bess Beatty, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, David C. Ward, Michael Shirley, and Douglas Flamming. In spite of some worker criticism and resistance, as the commanders of capital, manufacturers believed they alone should decide how that capital should be used. Left in a precarious position, workers chose to accept their situation but at other times resisted. A number of factors influenced a worker's bargaining power which included gender, age, ethnicity, and experience. In the antebellum South, the situation was more complicated as additional factors such as race, status (e.g. free or slave), and economic well-being (e.g. landlessness or land ownership) affected how wage-earners, particularly mill laborers, reacted to manufacturing.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 192-198.

<sup>18</sup> See Bess Beatty, "Textile Labor in the North Carolina Piedmont: Mill Owner Images and Mill Worker Response, 1830-1900," *Labor History* 25 (Fall, 1984): pp. 485-503 and *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987); David C. Ward, "Industrial Workers in the Mid-Nineteenth Century South: Family and Labor in the Graniteville (SC) Textile Mill, 1845-1880," *Labor History* 28 (Summer, 1987): pp. 328-348; Michael Shirley, "Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest in Antebellum Salem, North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 57 (August, 1991): pp. 427-452; and Douglas

Manufacturing provided workers with “safe” jobs and steady wages compared to the uncertainties of landlessness and day-laborer employment. Workers were paid pittance wages in southern textiles and for the most part, they possessed little control over day-to-day operations. However, some scholars maintain that within textile manufacturing before the Civil War, a blend of deference and defiance characterized employer-employee relationships and represented an emerging class consciousness among lower-class operatives. These give-and-take situations explored by several historians have been assumed to have occurred across the antebellum South.

Wishing to challenge the notion that textile workers expressed deference to industrialists and planters, Bess Beatty finds the “tag of docility” was a myth. In her study of North Carolina textiles, Beatty insists that mill hands were by no means deferential to management and that any impression of worker submissiveness should be abandoned. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, David C. Ward, and Michael Shirley buttress Beatty’s argument, each claiming that mill labor across the antebellum South actively resisted mill owner paternalism; they describe workers who perpetually sparred with management over wages, working hours, and factory conditions. For Douglas Flamming, worker deference stands as “one of the most tenacious myths in the history of southern textiles.”<sup>19</sup>

Shirley, keeping in line with theories suggested by Beatty, Hall, Ward, and Flamming, as well as studies conducted by Jonathan Prude and Cynthia J. Shelton, uses his case study of mill workers at the Salem Manufacturing Company of Salem, North Carolina as another example of worker negotiation with employers. Mill hands in Salem “embraced a policy of reciprocity” where management and workers were held mutually accountable. Operatives, protesting in “subtle but direct ways,” challenged supervisors when they failed to meet their obligations

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Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Smith, “Industry, Technology, and the ‘Labor Question’ in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America: Seeking Synthesis,” 559. See also Beatty, *Alamance*, 66; Hall, Leloudis, Korstad, Murphy, Jones, and Daly, *Like a Family*, 45, 108-109; Ward, “Industrial Workers in the Mid-Nineteenth Century South”; Shirley, “Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest,” 428; quotation by Flamming found in Flamming, *Creating the Modern South*, 56-57.

towards their workforce. While Shirley's study is certainly sound scholarship, he applies a distinct yeoman attitude (e.g. society defined by personal relationships) to all segments of the textile labor force in the South and discounts the experiences of poor whites who composed the majority of textile laborers.<sup>20</sup>

While there is certainly evidence of resistance among textile workers in the South before the Civil War, this dissertation suggests that resistance was at best sporadic and poor white textile laborers, for the most part, accepted manufacturing work. Labor activism resulting in strikes, the formation of trade unions and benevolent societies, and workplace violence did not occur at the levels experienced in the North and the large cities of the Upper South, with the exception of New Orleans. Several factors influenced these developments. In the North and urban areas of the South, large numbers of immigrants competed with native-born whites and slaves for manufacturing jobs. Often these conflicts led to the formation of class consciousness and, in turn, labor strife with management. However, in counties where southern textile mills were located, immigrant populations were exceedingly low, resulting in low competition for manufacturing employment between foreign-born and native-born whites. Concurrently, large southern cities possessed small slave populations whereas the textile manufacturers examined in this study resided in counties with high slave populations. The evidence suggests that large slave populations near manufacturing communities resulted in increased exposure of poor whites to planters and elite hegemony and, therefore, deference on the part of poor whites. Additionally, limited poor white labor resistance can be attributed to psychosocial factors, not class consciousness, to explain why poor whites chose to defer to mill management.

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<sup>20</sup> Quotations found in Shirley, "Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest," 428. See also Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and "The Social System of Early New England Textile Mills: A Case Study, 1812-1840," in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); and Cynthia J. Shelton, *The Mills of Manayunk: Industrialization and Social Conflict in the Philadelphia Region, 1787-1837* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

Between 1830 and 1860, the United States underwent dramatic changes in its economic development. With the onset of modern economic growth caused by industrialization and the spread of the factory system, came fundamental alterations in the modes of production. Tremendous numbers of individuals moved across the nation. Some moved mere miles from one rural county to another while others moved from the countryside to rapidly industrializing and urbanizing areas; others immigrated across the Atlantic settling in the large towns and cities, both North and South. The economic divisions between the two sections became increasingly evident as the North, although still maintaining a viable agricultural sector, increasingly concentrated on industrialization while the South remained largely rural, focusing on agriculture.<sup>21</sup>

The South did not remain idle in its industrial pursuits as factories, most notably textile mills, were established throughout the antebellum period. Nevertheless, the creation of a manufacturing sector in the southern states did not result in changes in the economic and social structure of southern society. Industrialization, accordingly, remained paternalistic in character and fundamentally influenced by the institution of slavery. “Industrialism in [the South] developed within our social framework,” wrote one southerner. “Hence, it had many sectional peculiarities—some of them strangely anti-social to visitors from other parts of the land. Ours was a patriarchal system, not only in the family but also in politics and economic life. This might have been expected among a people predominantly agricultural and stratified in society. Industrialism within our borders sprang from this mind-set.” In summation, as Tom Downey asserts, “Slaveholders sought manufacturing. They did not seek a manufacturing society.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> On the northern family farm during the antebellum period, see James L. Huston, *The British Gentry, the Southern Planter, and the Northern Family Farmer: Agriculture and Sectional Antagonism in North America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> Quotation found in G. Croft Williams, *A Social Interpretation of South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1946), 157; Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 119. See also Mitchell, *The Rise of the Cotton Mills in the South*, 23. Mitchell notes that slavery heavily influenced the development of manufacturing in the South before the Civil War.

The road to antebellum southern industrialization was laden with hesitation and reactionary behavior on the part of planter elites. Many felt that manufacturing would inevitably undermine slavery throughout the South. “The planters generally . . . perceive how [industry] effects their interest, and very frequently chime in with their cry,” Christopher G. Memminger, a South Carolinian planter and banker, wrote to James Henry Hammond. “I think our friend [William Gregg] of Graniteville, with those who are agog about manufacturers, without knowing it, are lending aid to this party, which is in truth, the only party from which danger to our Institutions is to be apprehended among us.” Underlying the fear of potential threats to slavery was the fear that poor white wage laborers employed in manufacturing could topple the entire southern social structure. “Drive out negro mechanics and all sorts of operatives from our cities,” warned Memminger, “and who must take their place? The same men who make the cry in the Northern cities against the tyranny of capital—and there as here would drive before them all who interfere with them. . . . For you know that even in our lower country, there are many who could be marshalled against the Planter, upon the idea that they were fighting against the aristocracy.”<sup>23</sup>

The conservative landed gentry of the South had always regarded industrialists as strangers to southern society and were “outside men of capital.” The Nullification Crisis of 1832-33 deepened the southern antipathy toward large-scale industry. The maturing industrial sector of the North called for tariff protection from the federal government, while in the South it seemed that federal favoritism of manufacturing over agriculture was to be obtained at the expense of slaveholders. Compounded by years of disappointing cotton prices suffered in the cotton-growing areas of the South, southerners felt increasingly exploited by northern industrial interests. “We want no set of manufacturers to *force* from us a certain portion of our income, for their own use,” cried planters from South Carolina before Congress in 1827.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> C. G. Memminger to James E. Hammond, April 28, 1849, William Gregg Papers (hereinafter cited as WGP), Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken.

<sup>24</sup> House Doc., No. 2, 20th Cong., 1st sess., *Memorial of the Inhabitants of Barnwell District, in S.C. Remonstrated Against Any Additional Duties on Imported Woolen Goods* (Washington, 1827), 4.

Nonetheless, while southerners vilified northern industry, nullification spurred the introduction of large-scale industrialization into the South to lessen, if not end, southern dependence on northern manufactured goods. Despite enthusiasm by a small portion of the southern populace for increased industry, the growth of manufacturing was more an economic and political need. The editor of the *Edgefield Hive*, Abner Landrum, declared that the South “[had] been most reluctantly driven to the manufacturing business which they would most anxiously have avoided, but which now in self-defense they are compelled to pursue.”<sup>25</sup>

Some northerners supported the free labor ideology and, in turn, justified large-scale industrialization, by arguing that free labor provided factor workers the opportunity as wage earners to achieve social mobility and become property-owners. “Free labor” referred to two separate economic conditions—wage laborers seeking employment in the marketplace and the property-owning small producer who enjoyed a measure of economic independence. Additionally, law and its enforcement aided in institutionalizing wage relationships along with legitimizing it as an expression of freedom. Thus, wage labor was defined as voluntary work relationships agreed upon between autonomous individuals.<sup>26</sup>

Northern free labor advocates glorified labor, remarking that work was dignified and not degrading, so that it would appeal to the working-classes. High earnings could also define social independence and set apart northern laborers from southern slaves and planter non-producers. Indeed, earning high wages provided more economic security than perhaps entrepreneurship. Contrastingly, northerners, more specifically the Republican Party during the 1850s, critiqued

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<sup>25</sup> *Edgefield Hive*, March 19, 1830. See also William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 303-306.

Freehling asserts that industrialization in the South before the Civil War was part of what he calls “The Great Reaction” making the manufacturing movement inherently reactionary and not pragmatic.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, 2d ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xvi. See also Christopher L. Tomlins, *Labor, Law, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market During the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

southern society and its usage of slavery as, in the words of William H. Seward, “socially pernicious.” The South, therefore, represented the antithesis of a free labor society, which, according to the North, was economically progressive, socially mobile, and politically democratic. Southerners, on the other hand, had created a society that was economically static with a rigid social hierarchy dominated by a slaveholding aristocracy. For Republicans, only two classes of whites existed in the South: aristocratic planters and poor whites. With no social mobility, there could be no social advancement. “In the slave states,” declared New York congressman, Timothy Jenkins, “there is in substance no middle class. Great wealth or hopeless poverty is the settled condition.”<sup>27</sup>

The Republican and, by proxy, northern critique of antebellum southern society, is partially correct. The northern view of a lack of a middle class in the Old South is erroneous as there did exist a viable, albeit nascent, southern middle class comprised of clerks, doctors, and lawyers, as well as small landholding yeomen. However, where the northern opinion of southern society is in fact highly accurate is the assessment of poor whites in the South before the Civil War. Poor whites did not achieve social mobility and this is due in large part because of slavery. There was no land to purchase with wages earned in factories or any other sort of employment as planter elites and the yeomanry owned the majority of land in the South. Wages went to rent and the company stores of mill villages, with few surplus funds available to purchase property. With no options available, poor white operatives remained in the cotton factories and mill villages.<sup>28</sup>

The significance of southern industrialists before the Civil War does not lie in their commercial successes as manufacturers in a region severely lacking an industrial sector; rather, the deepest significance lies in their collective ability to promote industrialism while simultaneously accepting slavery as the quintessential component of southern society.

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<sup>27</sup> Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, xxiv, 48-50; quotation by Seward found on pg. 40; quotation by Jenkins found on pg. 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



Southerners supported slavery as an economic and societal necessity, and so hardened by attacks from abolitionists and tariff supporters alike, that all southerners—industrialist and planter—accepted slavery as a matter of course. Ultimately, southern plantations and textile factories operated similarly in their pursuit of control of their workers, and to better understand this statement, both plantations and cotton mills need to be closely examined to determine their likenesses.

Chapter 1 systematically explores the similarities between plantations and mill villages, positing that plantations and mill villages achieved the same purpose: to keep labor isolated and cheap so as not to disrupt production rates and to control workers to quell labor activism. Chapter 2 explores the mindset of antebellum southern planter elites and how their intellectual allies helped to mold the negative opinions of poor whites through religion, pseudo-scientific theory, contemporary literature, and historical examples, particularly the French Revolution of 1789. Chapter 3 is an examination of the creation of the Piedmont region of the South, as well as the folk culture and work habits of those who came to compose the poor whites of the nineteenth-century South. Chapter 4 discusses the day-to-day management of poor whites within textile factories and how mill owners and managers enacted strict guidelines for workers. In conjunction with the introduction of factory rules and regulations, mill owners sanctioned reform initiatives through religion, temperance, and education within mill villages. While this benevolence partly came from places of genuine charity, benevolence was also a practical way to provide benefits for poor whites so as to keep them happy in the mill environment. Finally, chapter 5 examines why poor whites did not take part in labor activism with the same tenacity of industrial laborers in the Upper South and North.

## CHAPTER I

### THE VISIBLE HAND

Throughout the antebellum period, the concept of control was a fundamental cornerstone of white southern society. Plantations exhibited the clearest example of this control where the master dominated his entire surroundings. Southern planters were not alone in their managerial responsibilities of their slave workforce and utilized overseers who, in essence, acted as plantation “middle managers.” These men were so crucial to the regulation of slaves that some states such as South Carolina and Louisiana enacted necessary measures requiring overseers on plantations. The purpose of this chapter is to show that many similarities for the control of both poor whites and slaves were exhibited in two basic institutions of the Old South: plantations for slaves and textile factories for poor whites.

Elite white southerners did not feel that only slaves needed supervision in the antebellum South. Poor whites—a landless, migratory group—roamed the southern countryside in search of employment and regular wages. Poor whites tended to be tenant farmers and day-laborers on southern plantations, working alongside slaves in the fields. Thus, southern plantations were often integrated work sites revealing that the plantation was a complex, heterogeneous economic unit. Although poor whites labored on southern plantations, planter elites held a high degree of ambivalence towards poor whites generally but as well held a disdain for whites working in the fields doing what they deemed work unbecoming white men.

The need to industrialize the South emerged during the 1830s. Wishing to keep slaves in the fields, white industrialists sought to attract a large number of poor native whites for work in their factories. While southern industry included hired slaves, poor whites came to compose the bulk of the southern industrial labor force, most notably in cotton mills, during the antebellum period. Men such as William Gregg, Daniel Pratt, Francis Fries, and Edwin Holt espoused sentiments of benevolence and reform towards poor whites coming to work in their mills. These men, although showing levels of genuine charity towards poor whites, were also pragmatists and exploited the high number of poor whites to obtain a cheap, abundant labor force. To accommodate the influx of laborers, industrialists established housing in newly-constructed mill villages. These villages had schools, churches, and company stores, which increasingly allowed mill management to control their poor white employees. Indeed, poor whites, once obtaining employment in cotton mills and residing within the mill village, were stuck in the environment. Restricted from a majority of occupations in the antebellum South, these poor whites, although “free” laborers, were isolated and kept too impoverished to remove to any other locale. Therefore, textile factories and mill villages operated similarly to plantations. Mill owners and planters, utilizing mill managers and overseers, exhibited paternalistic attitudes towards their workers ensuring absolute control of labor.

By 1855, King Cotton and commercial agriculture was at its zenith in the Old South. With the antebellum South chiefly structured upon the ownership of African-American slaves, the fundamental organizing factor for southern society was white supremacy. On plantations, the white master and patriarch exuded full dominance over his landholdings, his immediate family, and his laborers with the slaves he owned being the most valuable “employees” on the entire establishment. In many ways, the antebellum plantation was akin to that of a factory as evidenced by its highly fixed work schedules and management techniques. This agricultural “factory in the field” produced significant amounts of cash crops ranging from tobacco, rice,

sugar, and cotton for exportation for consumption in northern United States and European markets.

Maintaining strict control over slaves necessitated the employment of white men as overseers, who took an active day-to-day approach to managing the plantation complex. Essentially, the overseer was the “middle manager” of the plantation, and his importance cannot be understated. William K. Scarborough shows that the overseer directly “determined the success or failure of planting operations on the larger estates devoted to the production of staple agricultural products.” Contemporary agricultural periodicals of the Old South reveal the southern esteem for overseers as well. A. T. Googloe, a planter from Green Hill, Tennessee, believed that overseers were perhaps the protectors of southern slavery. “I hold that the permanency of slavery is, to a very great extent,” wrote Googloe, “dependent upon the maintenance of the . . . profession [of overseeing].”<sup>29</sup>

M. W. Philips likened overseers to preachers. “[Ministers and overseers],” noted Philips “[are] the [ones who] point out the way and assist us to glory and the other to watch our worldly interests and be a protector of our firesides when we are absent.” One southern editor bluntly stated in his journal that overseers “[were] to the plantation what the mate is to merchantman.” The employment of a plantation supervisor not only imposed rigid command, the owner hoped, over the labor of a plantation’s slaves but also released the master to pursue a life of leisure and to take part in the political affairs and other leadership roles in the antebellum South.<sup>30</sup>

Initially, overseers originated from indentured servants who remained on the plantation of their employer once their terms of service had ended. As commercial agriculture spread

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<sup>29</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 64-66; William K. Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South*, 2d ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), xix; A. T. Googloe, “Overseers,” *Southern Cultivator* (September, 1860), 287.

<sup>30</sup> M. W. Philips, “Domestic Economy, Overseers, &c. A Few Thoughts on the Subject,” *Southern Cultivator* (November, 1856), 338; “Overseers,” *Southern Planter* (February, 1856), 48; Scarborough, *The Overseer*, 4.

throughout the southern colonies and eventually into the lands of the Old Southwest, overseers became an integral part of the plantation's managerial staff, particularly on estates whose slave population was thirty or more. Over time, three distinct categories of overseers arose. The first consisted of the planters' sons. Often southern boys gained experience that was applied to the management of their slaves once they acquired plantations of their own. These sons would either assist their father in the control of the plantation's slaves or go directly manage the labors of their father's bondsmen. Another category of overseers was the so-called "floating population" of amateur overseers. These "amateurs" were, more often than not, young men from among the plain folk or yeomanry who also wished to gain slave management experience through overseeing. They did not remain long on the same plantation, staying perhaps two or three years before moving on, causing a continuous turnover in the management of slaves. Hypocritically, while simultaneously emphasizing the need for overseers as critical components in the management of plantations, planters also derided their profession. Known for their "dishonesty, inefficiency, incapacity, and self-indulgence," amateur overseers caused the occupation to be viewed scornfully by white elites. However, most supervisors fell within the category of "professional." These were the stereotypical "middle manager" of the plantation and were, for the most part, competent employees of the plantation proprietor.<sup>31</sup>

The duties of overseers were extensive. To begin with, the overseer was first responsible to the master of the plantation and then to the slaves. Primary obedience to the planter underscores the total control that the planter aristocracy held over antebellum southern society and widely regarded that to become an overseer was "a voluntary degradation." An article within the *Southern Planter* remarked in February of 1856 that "[For] the same reason that the husband is allowed to rule the wife, *the master must rule the overseer.*" Various contemporary agricultural journals consistently reminded overseers that their duty on the plantation was to

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<sup>31</sup> Scarborough, *The Overseer*, 6.

please the master. “Devote your time and energies,” remarked *De Bow’s Review*, to “[carry] out the orders of [the] employer, strictly, cheerfully, and to the best of your ability. . . .”<sup>32</sup>

As planters owned and controlled their slave laborers indirectly through the use of an overseer, they often directly managed the overseer’s service on the plantation. Overseers were to remain on plantations much of the time. Planters firmly monitored overseer attendance at the county courthouse, militia musters, and even the sales of slaves in the local market. Planters considered these activities “serious [evils]” and the southern elite asserted that they lowered the standing of overseers within the community and in the eyes of the slaves. The deeming of public activities to be “serious evils” was more of a pragmatic than a conservative attitude on the part of planters. If the plantation manager were allowed off the plantation for an extended period, it was presumed that slaves would seize upon an overseer’s absence and become slothful at best and rebellious at worst. Plantation owners even went so far as to limit the free activities of an overseer on the plantation itself. Raising pigs, chickens, and cattle or even cultivating a small garden patch was not to be “[extended] . . . a hair’s breadth beyond the limit allowed.” Ordered to remain on the plantation and limited in his interaction with the community, overseers were socially isolated individuals and “lived in a virtual social vacuum.”<sup>33</sup>

In his care for the slaves, the overseer was responsible for every aspect of his laborers’ lives on a daily basis. The most crucial responsibility of supervisors was to ensure that slaves were obedient and orderly, so they did not inhibit cash-crop production. Slaves were to complete their tasks as carefully and punctually as possible. Some masters required that overseers maintain a roster of slaves to keep track of the various tasks assigned during a workday on the plantation. Diligently following this plantation manifest, supervisors called roll every Sunday morning and evening, keeping track of which slaves were absent, sick, or visiting other local plantations.

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<sup>32</sup> “Overseers,” *Southern Planter* (February, 1856), 49; “The Duties of an Overseer,” *De Bow’s Review* (March, 1855), 339.

<sup>33</sup> “Overseers,” *Southern Planter* (February, 1856), 49-50; Scarborough, *The Overseer*, 196-197.

Thomas Affleck, a planter from Washington, Mississippi, felt it entirely necessary to keep such logs. “Affleck’s Plantation Books” were in effect “how-to” manuals for overseers and written proof that supervisors maintained discipline and high production levels for their slave workers. Plantation owners scrutinized these plantation books for the best possible management methods.<sup>34</sup>

Overseers generally established nine hours as a typical workday for slave labor. The two systems of labor employed on southern plantations were the gang system and the task system. The gang system was the most common and was adaptable to virtually all staple crop cultivation. Any size of the available slave population owned by the proprietor allowed for the delegation of responsibilities either directly to the slaves or through the employment of an overseer. The task system was utilized along the rice coasts of Georgia and South Carolina. Usually during a nine-hour schedule, tasks were assigned to individual slaves for completion and considered “as much work as the meanest full hand can do . . . working industriously.” Frederick Law Olmsted noted that while visiting a Mississippi plantation, the slaves dared not stop working and look up. “All worked very steadily,” recalled Olmsted, “and though the presence of a stranger on the plantation must have been rare, I saw none raise or turn their heads to look at me.”<sup>35</sup>

Assisting the overseer in the assignment of tasks and labor regulation were black drivers. Drivers are best described as black foremen who served directly under the overseer in the hierarchy of plantation management. Drivers maintained discipline and order on the plantation in

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<sup>34</sup> “Management of a Southern Plantation—Rules Enforced on the Rice Estate of P.C. Weston, Esq., of South Carolina,” *De Bow's Review* (January, 1857), 38; Thomas Affleck, “System on the Plantation: Letter from Mr. Affleck,” *Southern Cultivator*, March 1, 1855, 75.

<sup>35</sup> “Management of a Southern Plantation,” *De Bow's Review* (January, 1857), 39-42; Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Peter Smith, 1952), 228, 247; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-4*, 2 vols. (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1907), I, 44.

<sup>36</sup> Edwin A. Davis, ed., *Plantation Life in Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846 as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet A. Barrow* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 140; Letter from William Capers to Charles Manigault, August 5, 1860, reprinted in Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents: 1649-1863, Illustrative of Industrial History in the Colonial & Ante-Bellum South*, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1909), I, 337.

conjunction with rules provided by the proprietor and overseer, and even having the ability to whip their fellow slaves when needed. Drivers were so imperative within the management apparatus of plantations that supervisors who previously worked with them on other estates at times recommended them for purchase by their current employer. William Capers, the overseer for Charles Manigault, informed Manigault to buy a slave named John, an experienced driver. “Buy him by all means,” urged Capers, “there is but few negroes more competent than he is. . . .” Although not the master or overseer, drivers supervising gang work must have instilled fear into slaves and as a general rule on plantations, the driver was whipped far less than the other field hands to ensure loyalty.<sup>36</sup>

Drivers examined and approved of work concluded by fellow slaves and then released them to return home. Once home, slaves were allowed to complete their housework and work for themselves. At night, drivers inspected the slaves’ quarters and roused slaves from their beds in the mornings to begin the workday. Barnyard bells were rung by the plantation watchman two hours and then a half hour before sunrise. In some instances, particularly in the Upper South where there were not enough slaves to warrant the employment of an overseer, drivers from among the relatively small number of slaves owned by yeoman farmers acted as superintendents managing the farm labors of the slaves. J. H. Bernard of Port Royal, Virginia employed a black foreman after Bernard’s previous supervisor was released because his position was deemed unnecessary. Likewise, Edmund Ruffin, the infamous secessionist and agricultural reformer, used a slave named Jem Sykes to run his plantation “Marlbourne” when he was absent, sometimes for several months at a time.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Scarborough, *The Overseer*, 17. See also Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 145. Smith’s study relates the theory of time-consciousness with plantation labor in the antebellum South. Planters and overseers, wishing to be time thrif, regularly used clocks, watches, and bells to effectively regulate the work schedule of slaves thereby creating efficiency and order much like that of factories.



The welfare of slaves was methodically planned out by planters. Slaves were investments, and it was wise for plantation owners and their managers to maintain a proper upkeep of the lives and labors of the slaves. Food rationing was tediously monitored so that slaves were never given less than their regular allotment. If there was doubt as to how much food a slave received, overseers saw to it that they gave slaves larger quantities rather than limited amounts. It was also the responsibility of both overseers and drivers to ensure that every slave was clean and well-washed to maintain good hygiene within slave cabins.<sup>38</sup>

Overseers, therefore, were the primary caretakers of slave health on the plantation. They were to provide sufficient clothing and not to expose slaves to harsh weather conditions. Punishments were not to be excessive or too severe; this was especially true for pregnant slaves. Overseers provided quality food and care for pregnant slaves and made sure that infants were nursed by their mothers up to three times during the day until the slave children reached eight months of age. “There is no class of working people in the world better cared for than the Southern slave,” opined Dr. Robert R. W. Gibbes in a letter to Governor R. F. W. Allston of South Carolina. “In addition to the regular allowance of bacon, meal, and molasses, with at some seasons potatoes, all who are disposed to be industrious have gardens, and poultry, which are sources of comforts as well as of profit.” By ensuring that slaves were well-treated on plantations, planters were able to boast of the supposed munificence of southern slaveholding and the “peculiar institution.”<sup>39</sup>

At the root of the foundation of southern slavery and its perpetuation in the Old South was the threat and use of violent actions to preserve white supremacy and discipline for slave laborers. While overseers strived to provide sufficiently for the welfare of the slaves under their

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<sup>38</sup> “Management of a Southern Plantation,” *De Bow's Review* (January, 1857), 38; “The Duties of an Overseer,” *De Bow's Review* (March, 1855), 339.

<sup>39</sup> George Noble Jones to W. G. M. Davis, January 22, 1855, reprinted in Ulrich Bonnell Phillips and James David Glunt, eds., *Florida Plantation Records from the Papers of George Noble Jones* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1927), 123-124; “Southern Slave Life—Communicated through Gov. Allston of S.C.,” *De Bow's Review* (April, 1858), 323-324.

charge, the penultimate responsibility of supervisors was maintaining control through threats and, if need be, the use of violent action. There were two critical tools that overseers, as well as the whole of Old South society, used to manage slaves: the whip and the slave patrol. Whipping, although not as frequently employed as northern contemporaries purported, was nonetheless used to coerce slave workers into preserving discipline and ensuring hard work. “If [slaves] require whipping, whip them, and be done with it,” extolled *De Bow’s Review*. Slave patrols were an interesting activity within the Old South. All classes of white males, from planter elites to yeoman farmers to poor whites, participated in slave patrols that were used to corral the slave populace. Thus, slave patrols were a communal management technique organized and applied to control antebellum southern slaves.<sup>40</sup>

Whether they endured harsh management by overseers or because of the day-to-day control of their lives, slaves actively undermined overseers. Slaves regarded overseers as another employee of the plantation who, unlike the master, did not hold any imperative authority over their work. Slaves often directly appealed to their masters if they were unnecessarily or severely punished. Much to the consternation of overseers, the carrying of complaints of slaves to the plantation proprietor negated their absolute control over slave laborers.<sup>41</sup>

Ironically, although believing overseers were critical to facilitate a successful plantation, planters exhibited a lack of trust in regards to the overseer’s ability to efficiently manage agricultural production. Supervisors argued with sound logic to be given control over routine farming practices; after all, overseers were the ones held responsible for crop yields and, by proxy, the rates of return from staple crop production. In the states of the Old Southwest (Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana, and Arkansas), the cotton boom of the 1850s created intense pressures upon overseers to produce high yields of cotton. If rates of return were deemed

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<sup>40</sup> “Overseers at the South,” *De Bow’s Review* (September, 1856), 277. See also Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 94-98.

<sup>41</sup> “Overseers,” *Southern Planter* (February, 1856), 50.

unsatisfactory by plantation owners, overseers were more often than not released from employment. Hugh Fraser Grant, a rice planter who owned three estates in Glynn County, Georgia, fired his overseer after yielding a poor rice crop in 1856. Although the planting of a substandard seed caused the bad harvest, Grant believed that after investigating a low yield in his rice crop, the “bad management of [his] overseer” was the most likely cause.<sup>42</sup>

After dismissing an overseer that had allegedly not carried out their duties “properly,” plantation masters were inclined to hire another supervisor for lower wages. The constant complaints issued from planter elites, the undermining of overseer authority by slaves, and dogged micromanagement by plantation owners, created low morale among overseers, producing lessened initiative as well as discouragement and frustration. As a consequence, in many ways, planters were accountable for the nomadic lifestyle of many overseers throughout the region and retarded the development of a more distinguished group of plantation managers during the antebellum era.<sup>43</sup>

The use of slave labor based upon the alleged inferiority of blacks in the Old South was a “relative concept” in that they did not constitute the only labor employed on the plantation. In fact, many poor whites labored on plantations across the rural South. The use of poor white labor was approached with varying degrees of ambivalence and trepidation by planter-politicians because the employment of poor whites contradicted their claims of the high status of white farmers in the South compared to the North. Frederick Law Olmstead observed that planters felt that slaves were more efficient laborers because they were slaves; they, therefore, were required to work under the threat of physical punishment. Despite this sentiment, Olmstead witnessed many local southern economies in the Old South where slaves and poor whites worked alongside

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<sup>42</sup> Albert V. House, ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism in Ante-Bellum Georgia: The Journal of Huge Fraser Grant, Ricegrower* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 93.

<sup>43</sup> Scarborough, *The Overseer*, 196-198.

each other. During his travels in northern Alabama and southwest Virginia, Olmsted saw poor whites plowing cotton fields while slaves hoed.<sup>44</sup>

Although poor whites worked as agricultural laborers on plantations, plain folk were nevertheless designated as “transients” and untrustworthy. Many planters believed that poor whites could not be relied upon to finish their work or follow simple directions. Even so, poor whites were able to secure employment in the plantation economy. For example, a Louisiana sugar plantation that possessed not only a significant slave workforce but also employed skilled white laborers culled from white tenant families residing on the estate. Poor whites acted as valuable agricultural workers in the central Piedmont of North Carolina working alongside slaves on local farms. Elias Thomas, a former slave owned by a planter family in Chatham County, North Carolina, remembered his master employing “both men and women of the poor white class” for work on the plantation. As Jacqueline Jones has acknowledged, “most subregions of the South included complementary white and black and free and slave labor forces.”<sup>45</sup>

The employment of plain folk in the antebellum South reveals that the Old South consisted of tangible “organic” communities at odds with the traditional society professed by planter elites. Slavery was at its heart an economic institution that was defined by the forced labor of black bondsmen. But the economic system of plantation slavery within the antebellum South was also represented by the work of poor whites. On the plantation, the working lives of both poor whites and slaves collided. Many cotton, rice, tobacco and sugar fields were not racially homogeneous and composed of only black slaves but were instead worksites comprised of both white and black labor.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 192-194; Eaton, *A History of the Old South*, 285; Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, I, 231.

<sup>45</sup> Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 98-99; Jones, *American Work*, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, *American Work*, 202.; Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, II, 27.

Planters often used poor white laborers, particularly immigrants, to perform the most dangerous tasks on their estates. Immigrants, principally Irish and German, began arriving in great numbers in the United States following the Great Famine in Ireland and the abortive German revolutions of 1848. Ditch-digging, building levees, and any other work considered hazardous was assigned to immigrant workforces. A Virginia Tidewater tobacco planter hired an “Irish gang” to drain swamps preferring to use poor immigrants rather than slaves. Draining swamps was dangerous work, and a slave’s life was “too valuable” to be risked laboring in such doings. “If a negro dies,” the planter recalled, “it’s a considerable loss, you know.” On a sugar plantation located outside Donaldsonville, Louisiana, a man named John Loghlin managed three Irish laborers who had recently arrived in the United States in 1860. Loghlin found that the Irishmen were sometimes not given a wage and would instead accept alcohol as their payment. “When [Loghlin] wants them to do a job,” remarked an observer, “he gives them plenty of ‘forty-rod’ . . . . Next morning they will sign anything, and go anywhere with him.”<sup>47</sup>

During the late antebellum period, planter elites pondered the merits of hiring poor white laborers as agricultural workers as a means to control the “vagabonds” and “idlers” of their society. Some believed that plantation labor negatively affected the attitudes of poor whites. One Tennessee yeoman observed that poor white workers were “not a bit better than negroes” and required constant supervision. Critics also alleged that poor whites working on plantations negatively affected slaves. Planters viewed poor whites as lazy and unreliable and thought slaves mimicked these tendencies. “They are about the laziest two-legged animals that walk erect on the face of the Earth,” declared David R. Hundley, “We do not believe the worthless ragamuffins would put themselves to much extra locomotion to get out of a shower of rain.” These sentiments

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<sup>47</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South*, 3d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), 186-187; Phillips and Glunt, eds., *Florida Plantation Records from the Papers of George Noble Jones*, 51; Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, II, 181. See also Roger W. Shugg, *The Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers During Slavery and After, 1840-1875* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939).

highlight not just the contemporary conundrum of supporting free labor in the Old South but the base hypocrisy of antebellum southern society itself. As Jacqueline Jones observes, within a slave society, poor whites, as well as free blacks, “represented potential sources of alternative and supplementary labor even as their very existence mocked the rhetorical premises of the slaveholder’s republic: that all black people were slaves, and that all white people, rich and poor, prospered in relation to black people.”<sup>48</sup>

Contemporary southerners were curious as to the origins of poor whites. A large portion of elites believed that poor whites were descendants of the paupers of Europe and colonial indentured servants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Others made much bolder assertions. Hinton Rowan Helper believed that it was perhaps the maintaining of the institution of slavery by elite southerners as the cause of white southern poverty and the formation of the poor white class. Seen as nuisances by planter elites, poor whites were an obstacle to planter expansion into uncultivated cotton lands. As early as 1803, following the Louisiana Purchase, land speculators purchased large quantities of land suitable for the cultivation of staple crops, notably cotton. These lands were sold at high prices, which were too expensive for the poor whites of the South. As planters and the institution of slavery gradually consumed prime cotton lands, poor whites across the South were left as “stranded frontiersmen” and without substantial employment opportunities.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, I, 255-256, II, 235; Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization*, 170; Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 66; William J. Cooper, Jr., ed., *Social Relations in Our Southern States* by Daniel R. Hundley (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 262-263; Jones, *American Work*, 202.

<sup>49</sup> Cooper, ed., *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 251, 258; Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 525-526; Shields McIlwaine, *The Southern Poor-White: From Lubberland to Tobacco Road* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 17; Hesselstine, *A History of the South*, 324-334. See Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson’s Lost Cause*, 163. Kennedy’s view is that poor whites were persistently undermined through the collusion of land speculators and planter elites which prevented poor whites from purchasing land at lower prices. See also Hinton Rowan Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South* (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1859), 183. Unlike Daniel R. Hundley, Helper believed that southern slavery was a divisive issue in the antebellum South and in many ways created the poor white class.

While in many ways contributing to their landlessness and lack of opportunity, southern elites debated about the social and economic futures of poor whites. Elites felt poor whites deserved some semblance of respect and economic opportunity as fellow members of the white race. In 1850, Governor James Henry Hammond of South Carolina noted that within his state alone approximately 50,000 poor whites resided. Before the South Carolina Institute in 1851, William Gregg, a leading southern industrialist, expressed what they viewed as the tragedy of poor whites throughout the South. “A noble race of people,” announced Gregg, “reduced to a condition but little above the wild Indian of the forest, or the European gipsy [sic].” With the growth of southern industry, poor whites received the opportunity to acquire gainful employment and better a seemingly hopeless social and economic condition.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the antebellum era, southern factories had difficulty attracting yeomanry into industrialized work. This problem was more acute in the cotton belt region of the South. Yeoman farmers, wishing to emulate and one day become members of the planter aristocracy, often turned down factory jobs. The choice to work in a cotton mill would have instantly blunted any ability for a member of the yeomanry to acquire more land and slaves and, therefore, rise to the ranks of the planter class. Besides the hypothetical reduction of social mobility for southern yeomanry, anti-industrial and anti-wage labor attitudes were still rampant during the mid-1850s. Widely held as a position of low-standing and possessing a dearth in worker dignity, one southern editor bemoaned factory work as “hostile to all the principles of a democratic government.” “The usual, the ordinary, the normal condition of the whole laboring class, is that of physical suffering, cankering, corroding care, and mental apprehension and pain,” stated southern social

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<sup>50</sup> William Gregg, “Manufactures, Mining, and Internal Improvements: Practical Results of Southern Manufactures,” *DeBow’s Review* (June, 1855), 777; Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 525-527; George M. Weston, *The Poor Whites of the South* (Washington, D.C.: Buell & Blanchard, 1856), 3-4.

commentator George Fitzhugh in 1854. For poor whites, employment in industry meant food, clothing, and shelter earned by regular wages.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the almost apocalyptic tones of reformers in the United States, industry, although not as extensive, was established in the antebellum South. Though almost entirely engaged in commercial agriculture, the antebellum South possessed the opportunity to build factories, particularly cotton mills. The founding of cotton mills in the Old South not only provided employment opportunities for poor whites but offered investment opportunities for southern merchants and planters. As early as 1828, poor whites were lured into the southern textile industry by factory owners and managers for employment.<sup>52</sup>

Although manufacturing works such as the Tredegar Iron Works of Richmond, Virginia continued to employ slaves on a consistent basis, textile mills increasingly turned to the use of poor white free labor as slaves were in soaring demand during the cotton boom of the 1850s. Consequently, factories operating across the South began rejecting the idea of hiring slave or free black laborers for their establishments in hopes of factory work appearing more “genteel” for whites interested in industrial employment. William Gregg, operating his cotton mill in Graniteville, South Carolina, thought slaves ill-suited for industry and naturally meant for agricultural labor. His theory was that since poor whites owned few possessions, especially land, mills afforded the prospect for plain folk to earn an honest living. Ultimately, however, the employment of poor whites was a much cheaper long-term option than employing slave operatives.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Richard W. Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 61 (January, 1960): pp. 26-40, 29-30; George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, 1854), 165.

<sup>52</sup> Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories,” 28-29. See also Ernest M. Lander, “Slave Labor in South Carolina Cotton Mills,” *Journal of Negro History* 38 (April, 1953): pp. 161-173.

<sup>53</sup> Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865,” 32; Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 120-122, 208. See also Tom E. Terrill, Edmond Ewing, and Pamela White, “Eager Hands: Labor for Southern Textiles, 1850-1860,” *Journal of Economic History* 36 (March, 1976): pp. 84-99, 86.



Northern textile mills directly influenced the vast majority of southern factories. The southern textile industry, particularly in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, was modeled after textile mills operating in the North, specifically those of Lowell, Massachusetts. Some southern industrialists were native to the North. Daniel Pratt, the founder of the Prattville, Alabama establishment, was originally from New Hampshire and emigrated to the South during the cotton boom of the 1850s. William Gregg, Edwin Holt, and other southern industrialists had traveled to New England during the 1840s, and their experiences had profound effects not only on the establishment of southern industry but the character of southern mill villages from the 1850s onward. Nevertheless, to counter the prevailing notion that southern factories inherently mimicked factories of the North and Europe, southern factory owners and managers strived to present their industrial environments as clean and healthy places of work. Southern white elites also feared that factory employees residing in nearby mill villages would be living in “hot-beds of crime.”<sup>54</sup>

Despite economic pragmatism, the recruitment of poor whites into southern industry exhibited sentiments of benevolence and reform. Behind charity and reform expressed by mill proprietors, white elite paternalism, like that found on plantations, was central to the control of poor whites within southern industry. The physical embodiment of this paternalism was the mill village. The establishment of mill villages ensured owners that their employees lived within the local village built by the factory enabling management to dominate or influence practically every aspect of worker life. “It is only necessary to build a manufacturing village of shanties . . . to have crowds of these poor people around you, seeking employment at half the compensation

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<sup>54</sup> Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865,” 35; Martin T. Olliff, “Life and Work in a Progressive Cotton Community: Prattville, Alabama, 1846-1860,” *Agricultural History* 68 (Spring, 1994): pp. 51-61, 54; Bess Beatty, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 54-56; Eaton, *A History of the Old South*, 423-424; Bess Beatty, “Lowells of the South: Northern Influence on the Nineteenth-Century North Carolina Textile Industry,” *Journal of Southern History* 53 (February, 1987): pp. 37-62, 48.

given to operatives in the North,” stated Gregg. “It is indeed painful to be brought in contact with such ignorance and degradation; but on the other hand, it is pleasant to witness the change, which soon takes place in the condition of those who obtain employment.” The building of mill villages was successful and by 1860, over three hundred cotton mills were in operation from Virginia to Texas, employing approximately 25,000 to 30,000 white operatives.<sup>55</sup>

In conjunction with the building of villages and rigid supervision by factory superintendents, manufactories built public schools, churches, and company stores for their employees. Southern industrialists established public schools for the children of mill families to provide an education that had been non-existent before living in the village. Education was an important issue for many contemporary southerners in regards to poor whites. George Fitzhugh stated that elites in the South must “Educate all Southern whites” to ensure southern civilization would flourish. Poor whites, having been viewed by elites as “native, genuine Know-Nothings,” village schools gave ownership the opportunity to remodel poor white culture. Schools located within mill communities were controlled entirely by the company with the school board consisting of mill management and the teachers’ salaries paid by the owners. Accordingly, all educational aspects within the factory village were directly influenced by the owner and his managers.<sup>56</sup>

Southern elites viewed poor white folk religion as “very superstitious.” “Poor simple souls!” exclaimed Daniel R. Hundley after learning that poor whites’ religious practices included palm readings, card cutting, and looking at coffee grounds in the bottom of the cup. Although practices of this sort were part of poor white folkways and common among plain folk, white elites and mill management felt it necessary to reform these religious beliefs. Like the village mill

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<sup>55</sup> Jennings J. Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 27; Broadus Mitchell, *William Gregg: Factory Master of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1928), 24-25; Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865,” 38.

<sup>56</sup> Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 165; Cooper, ed., *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 265; Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages*, 63.

school, ownership built churches. Churches were often comprised of membership of workers and management, which fostered friendly employer-employee relationships. Mill ownership usually determined the denominations of mill churches and poor white employees were expected to conform to the faith of management. For example, while Edwin Holt's Alamance operation's church was Episcopalian, the Arkansas Manufacturing Company mill village church was Presbyterian. In some instances, there were multiple denominations within a mill village. Daniel Pratt allowed three faiths (Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian) to function within his Prattville mill village. Sabbath schools were often established along with mill churches to provide further religious instruction to poor white employees. Elizabeth Merrell, the wife of Henry Merrell, owner of the Arkansas Manufacturing Company in Royston, Arkansas, ran the local Sabbath school.<sup>57</sup>

Another facet of owner control and influence within villages was the company store. The company store was a convenience both for workers and management. While employees did not have to travel far to obtain goods, ownership attained full control over the spending of worker wages. For Henry Merrell, the company store was an "essential" feature of his village. "By means of our store," wrote Merrell in his memoirs, "we kept our hands close at their work, and controlled labor that could not have been steadily controlled by wages in money. With the money, our hands would have spent their time, a great part of it, in straggling many miles away to make their purchases. Paying them in supplies, we made a handsome profit to ourselves, & kept the hands under our influence." As a result, the wages earned by poor whites remained perpetually in circulation within the village allowing ownership to profit not only from the production of textiles but also by the purchases of goods from their employees.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cooper, ed., *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 266; Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages*, 63; Beatty, *Alamance*, 64; Olliff, "Life and Work in a Progressive Cotton Community," 57; James L. Skinner III, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell: Industrial Missionary to the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 282.

<sup>58</sup> Skinner, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell*, 243. See also Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); and Walter

The fear of difficulties from their poor white laborers increasingly antagonized management throughout the antebellum era. Factory management attempted to quell the paranoia of the upper class by stating that industrial labor would grant poor whites self-respect and not lead to a life of crime or beggary. To further assure elites that factory managers were safeguarding the poor (and thereby hopefully garnering elite interest and investment of capital), factory proprietors enforced the restriction of alcoholic sales in their villages. Any employee who drank too much was subsequently dismissed from their employ from the mill.<sup>59</sup>

For the Augusta Manufacturing Company of Augusta, Georgia, the ability to acquire labor to operate its two mills became incessantly troublesome in the late 1850s. Culling poor whites from the rural areas outside Augusta had usually provided more than enough workers for the factories. Workers recruited from rural Georgia experienced problems transitioning from farm to factory life during the antebellum period. At first, the receiving of wages at a fixed rate was attractive to plain folk, but after this novelty had faded away, workers became gradually unreliable. Also, moving from the country into the urban areas of the antebellum South often lowered the morale of laborers in southern industry; in turn, they often became depressed and lethargic. Once arriving in the urban South and manufacturing, these same workers were confronted with regulated labor and lifestyles.<sup>60</sup>

Many factory managers stated that “only hunger would induce them to work” and requested that local businesses stop feeding their workers. The threat of starvation is an interesting concept for not only the control of poor white workers but as a form of punishment. Unlike the ability to whip slaves on plantations, white workers could not be physically coerced into work, so management had to discover other methods, such as starving workers, as

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Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> Richard W. Griffin, “The Augusta (Georgia) Manufacturing Company in Peace, War, and Reconstruction, 1847-1877,” *Business History Review* 32 (Spring, 1958): pp. 60-73, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Griffin, “The Augusta (Georgia) Manufacturing Company,” 67.

motivation. One observer noted that he had never witnessed a more pathetic group of people in his life. “If they were niggers,” he said, “they would not sell for five hundred dollars a head.”<sup>61</sup>

To combat employee lackadaisicalness, strong-willed manufacturer Henry Merrell reacted swiftly and often ruthlessly. Merrell tended to employ former overseers not only as factory hands but as managers within his factory. “I had therefore to look among the rank and file of my own operatives for young men,” recalled Merrell, “to be my future mechanics and overseers.” Merrell had no tolerance for mischief and insubordination among his laborers. His establishment utilized a factory bell that informed his workers the hours of work. “Any man idle any part of that time,” said Merrell, “should submit to a reduction of his pay in proportion.” The threat of reductions in wages caused Merrell’s workforce to obey his schedule to the letter. If workers were unruly, Merrell intrepidly enforced his will. He watched his workers’ every move methodically and let it known that he and his managers were the supreme authority within the factory. “I watched them closely,” wrote Merrell in his autobiography. “[And] where I became satisfied they wronged me, I made it up to myself in the prices of the merchandise they got from me in exchange for their labor.” As a result, the Arkansas Manufacturing Company was one of the most efficient antebellum companies throughout the entire South.<sup>62</sup>

Mill villages were isolated units and intentionally established away from southern urban areas. Villages were so isolated that neighboring mills rarely came into contact with each other. The majority of southern industrialists viewed factories located in cities, such as the Tredegar Iron Works, as a dangerous proposition. Within the city, it was difficult to control the morality of poor white operatives and, consequently, maintain a steady, efficient labor force. If operatives gambled away wages, imbibed alcohol, and took part in activities considered sinful and otherwise lewd, factory owners assumed that workers would not function properly within an industrial

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Richard W. Griffin, “Pro-Industrial Sentiment and Cotton Factories in Arkansas, 1820-1863,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 15 (Summer, 1956): pp. 125-139, 137; Skinner, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell*, 83, 166-169, 152, 260.

setting. Elites mistrusted poor whites in cities of the and believed they should remain self-contained within mill villages. “[The] Poor White Trash are wholly rural,” declared Daniel R. Hundley. “[Hence], the South will ever remain against any species of agrarianism, since such mob violence always originates in towns and cities, wherein are herded together an unthinking rabble.”<sup>63</sup>

Housing in villages was strictly segregated along class lines. It was not uncommon for a geographical barrier to separate workers from management within mill communities. At Gastonia, North Carolina, mill management constructed worker housing across a stream that ran between employee and management residences. As was characteristic of other mill villages throughout the South, worker housing was often barren and without much shade. Mill management, however, often lived on plots that possessed ample amounts of shade where they lounged with families on Sundays.<sup>64</sup>

The most attractive feature of mill work for poor whites were steady wages found in industrial employment. Although the poor whites did receive regular wages for their work in mills, the pay was not adequate. Most poor white operatives earned between \$8 to \$12 per month for females and between \$10 and \$16 per month for males. Daily wages ranged from between seventy-seven to ninety-six cents per day, both below the national average of \$1.11. These wages were not fixed and were subject to change by the employer. Henry Merrell often docked pay or reduced wages of his poor white employees if he thought his workers insubordinate or lazy. The earning of consistent incomes also reveals that receiving a wage from industrial employment locked poor whites into a lifetime of mill work. Without the ownership of land, poor whites could not labor as farmers and could not earn a stable wage in other occupations within the South and were wholly dependent on their employers for a livelihood. Frederick Law Olmsted noted

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<sup>63</sup> Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages*, 39; Mitchell, *William Gregg*, 107; Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 258.

<sup>64</sup> Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages*, 39.

that “laborers in [mill villages] . . . are in such a condition that, if temporarily thrown out of employment, great numbers of them are at once reduced to a state of destitution, and are dependent upon credit or charity for their daily food.” Lacking the safety net of land and the ability to farm small plots for livelihoods, the wages earned in mills, while insufficient, were the only means of survival for many poor whites in the antebellum South.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Eaton, *A History of the Old South*, 285; Mitchell, *William Gregg*, 60; Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 213.

## CHAPTER II

### MINDS OF THE MASTER CLASS

In 1834, standing outside of his Richmond Manufacturing Company in Augusta, Georgia, Daniel de Bruce Hack, Sr. witnessed a loathsome sight. Situated on the public road between Augusta and Louisville, Kentucky, Hack typically observed emigrants leaving the Georgia Piedmont or planters traveling along the thoroughfare transporting cotton bales to market in Savannah. On this particular day, Hack saw thirty or forty poor whites migrating along the road in front of his factory. The more curious of the poor whites, or “crackers” as Hack derogatorily labeled them, often stopped to observe the textile mill in operation. “They [came] from a distance of more than two miles,” noted Hack. “[They] stop to see the ‘fixments’ as they call the machinery.”<sup>66</sup>

Although having never seen so many poor whites traveling at one time, Hack was familiar with the poor whites who worked in his mill. In the first few years of operation, it became apparent to Hack and his management staff that poor whites—who comprised the majority of the factory’s employees—were a destitute lot. Calling them “indolent” and “moral vagabonds,” Hack found inebriation among operatives so commonplace that he established a temperance society to combat drunkenness at his factory. Hack believed that the abhorrent

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<sup>66</sup> Daniel de Bruce Hack, Sr. to Mary Fairfax, December 6, 1834; Daniel de Bruce Hack, Sr. to John Thomas Deakins, April 20, 1835, Daniel de Bruce Hack, Sr. and Daniel de Bruce Hack, Jr. Papers (hereafter DBH), Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia (hereafter HL-UGA).



attitude of poor whites led to the frequent turnover in his mill's labor force. "There is at present about sixty inhabitants," remarked Hack, "though they are not half you keep."<sup>67</sup>

Far from an anomaly, many antebellum southerners shared Hack's negative sentiments regarding the poor whites of the South. These adverse opinions originated within the planter class that dominated the socioeconomic outlook of the antebellum South. Maturing through the advancement of proslavery philosophies and strengthened by the southern intelligentsia during the 1840s and 1850s, proslavery advocacy aimed to legitimize and promote chattel slavery in the antebellum southern United States in the face of northern criticism, abolitionism, and free labor ideology.<sup>68</sup>

However, many southern intellectuals took their proslavery theories one step further in the guise of "Slavery in the Abstract," advocating the defense of chattel slavery as a positive good and promoted the idea that all manual labor—white or black—represented a form of personal servitude. "It is impossible," declared the *Southern Cultivator*, "that there shall be any other agreeable and effective system of labor than the patriarchal whether it be among *similar* or *different races*." If the laws of the market solely existed to govern commodity exchange and not interfere with labor relations between employers and employees or masters and slaves, then human labor was to be understood as a social relation and not be reduced to commercial property. Furthermore, as the guardians of southern society who were bound by Christian duty, southern planters and their intellectual counterparts maintained that it was the responsibility of slaveholders to control all laborers under their charge. "Slaveholders are responsible to the world

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel de Bruce Hack, Sr. to "Friend," February 7, 1834; Daniel de Bruce Hack, Sr. to Michael Cleary, Jr., April 18, 1834, DBH, HL-UGA.

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed assessment of slaveholder hegemony within antebellum southern society, see Brian Schoen, "The Burdens and Opportunities of Interdependence: The Political Economies of the Planter Class," in L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Robert E. Bonner, *Mastering America: Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

for the humane treatment of their fellow human-beings,” extolled James Henry Hammond.

“Every man in independent circumstances . . . is to the same extent responsible to the whole human family for the condition of the poor and laboring classes in their own country. . . . The fact cannot be denied, that the mere laborer is now, and always has been, everywhere that barbarism has ceased, enslaved.”<sup>69</sup>

The antebellum southern textile industry and its reliance predominantly upon poor white labor within factories provides an interesting challenge to the perceived black and white paradigm of antebellum slavery. The traditional narrative of the Old South shows all whites, whether rich or poor, to be the masters of southern society while all blacks, free or slave, languished at the bottom of society as racial inferiors. Although slaves and whites did compete for jobs in textile manufactories just as they did elsewhere in the antebellum southern economy (e.g., iron industry and railroads), views of poor whites held by southern intellectuals, planters, and industrialists defy the widespread belief that all whites were equal in the South. Bigoted opinions of the origins of the poor white class, along with biblically-based, historically-based, and scientifically-based writings of southern intellectuals affected how elite whites and the yeomanry negatively perceived poor white neighbors, thereby leading southerners to question the racial character, origins, and place for poor whites within southern society.

As historian Christopher J. Olsen notes, elite southerners “paid daily homage to the mythic god of white male democracy and equality” only during election season. Planters seeking political office were reliant upon common whites to cast votes and displayed respect towards poor whites while disregarding them with contempt afterwards. The Old South adhered to a hybrid of both the consensual governance and patron-client models of control. Yeoman farmers and even poor whites possessed more independence than peasants in other parts of the world such as Brazil

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<sup>69</sup> *Southern Cultivator* 12 (July, 1861), 208; quotation by Hammond found in Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 57. See also Wish, *George Fitzhugh*; Faust, *A Sacred Circle*; and Tise, *Proslavery*, for the involvement of intellectuals in the formation of proslavery ideology.

or Russia. However, slavery influenced southern society tremendously, establishing a pervasive monoculture and exaggerated patriarchy that placed an overwhelming amount of power in the hands of slaveholders. Within the concept of consensual governance, elites exercised power through an unspoken agreement which was supported by the masses. Planter-politicians, as community leaders, created and instituted public policy that did not require active manipulation of the lower orders of society. The patron-client model emphasized class hierarchy and elite hegemony. Planters used their economic and cultural power to achieve and maintain control over southern society, ruling through manipulation of poor white neighbors.<sup>70</sup>

While the tenets of Slavery in the Abstract encapsulated the movement advocating both white and black servitude, elite southern support of such a theory centered upon an inherent paranoia about the poor white masses seizing power within southern society. Elites believed the revolutions in Germany in 1848 and the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848 gave birth to destructive principles and anarchy in which the proletariat gained power through radical insurgencies that toppled pre-existing social orders that had been led by a landed aristocracy. Southern elites feared that such social movements would presumably spread to the North and into the South, as they had already spread across Europe in the late eighteenth-century, and then again in the Revolutions of 1848. Such an insurgency threatened the foundations of the southern social order. With elite southerners feeling that the North could not withstand radicalism due to its free labor system, antebellum southern elites believed that the institution of slavery and advocacy of Slavery in the Abstract stood as the bulwark against an encroaching radicalism being fostered by

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<sup>70</sup> Quotation by Olsen found in Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 122. See also Randolph B. Campbell, "Planters and Plain Folks: The Social Structure of the Antebellum South," in John Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 48-77; William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860*, 2d ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 195-198; J. Mills Thornton, III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 156-161; and Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 112-126. Bolton in particular argues that a pure democracy was non-existent in the Old South as planter-landlords used intimidation to persuade their poor white tenants to support elite political aspirations.

Europe and the northern states of the Union. As industrialism spread across the South during the 1830s and 1840s, these theories and fears of the rural southern masses fundamentally shaped how southerners viewed and treated poor whites within their society and affected the treatment of poor whites employed in the textile industry.<sup>71</sup>

The proslavery movement, initially organized out of self-defense, was a self-conscious, almost reactionary, need to explain to northerners that the institution of slavery was a necessary evil; it morphed into the aggressive doctrine of Slavery in the Abstract, which strived to illuminate the positive ideal of bonded labor. Proslavery logic, which cast enslavement—broadly defined—as a necessity and indeed a proper condition for much of the white race, came to represent the ideal of intellectuals and southern elites for the southern social order by the mid-nineteenth-century. James Henry Hammond, the planter-politician from South Carolina, believed that the use of the term “abstract” did not refer to philosophical abstractions in regards to race relations. On the contrary, for Hammond, slavery existed as the normal condition of *all* labor, white or black. Hammond’s infamous “Cotton is King” speech delivered in the Senate in 1858 emphatically asserted that every society throughout civilization rested on a “mud sill”—that is the inherent existence of a servile laboring class.<sup>72</sup>

Promoters of Slavery in the Abstract based their theories upon biblical, historical, and scientific justification. God divinely sanctioned slavery, as revealed in the Bible, thus legitimizing the institution and encouraging the assimilation of all dependent (i.e. unfree) labor into a form of slavery with chattel slavery as the most extreme form of dependent and unfree labor. Jasper Adams, Episcopalian minister and president of the College of Charleston, openly professed that Christian religion sought to control the thoughts of its followers as well as their actions. Only the superior members of the white race could truly appreciate freedom. The Presbyterian Reverend Samuel Cassells of Savannah preached that those of the white race who

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<sup>71</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 1-2.

were deemed inferior did not deserve freedom because those on the bottom of the social strata were “no more fit for freedom than . . . brute animals.” Abel P. Upshur believed that poor whites were lower in the social strata than black slaves and “[exhibited] the worst vices and the most degrading habits of our nature.” “There is not . . . [in the South] much of that rude and levelling democracy,” Upshur stated in 1839, “which seeks to establish a perfect equality, forbidden by the very nature of man.”<sup>73</sup>

Beyond a Judeo-Christian basis for the establishment of slavery as the natural state of servile laborers, antebellum southerners and proslavery advocates received encouragement from ancient slave systems, most notably those of Greece and Rome. These old servile institutions, coupled with knowledge of medieval European serfdom, allowed the proponents of Slavery in the Abstract to combine ancient and modern slave systems irrespective of racial qualifications. Despite the fact history showed that ancient civilizations enslaved everyone no matter their race, educated southerners drew upon the racial categorizations of the Greeks and Romans whose societies created distinctions among races considered to be “white” for justifications of racial slavery in the South. For example, southerners interpreted cultures in the ancient East, specifically Scythians, Syrians, and Jews as “races” born for slavery. Elite southerners and intellectuals employed these same concepts to argue that slavery was justified by the mental and physical differences that separated the white and black races. These same principles, the ones that relied on scientific racism, were used in characterizing poor whites across the antebellum South. Even though slavery in the southern United States exhibited virulent racism, its justifiers ventured beyond racial boundaries; in the words of Eugene D. Genovese, the subject of southern slavery was at its root a “class question with a profound racial dimension.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Quotations of Adams and Cassells found in Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 228, 240; Abel P. Upshur, “Domestic Slavery,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (October, 1839): pp. 677-687, 679.

<sup>74</sup> Quotation found in Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 3, 212; Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South*, 243-244; Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 106, 113.

While it was clear that the black and white races exhibited physical differences defined by separate skin color, those who supported proslavery ideology identified distinct “races” within the white race to justify further inequality. The theory of polygenesis proposed that multiple descents occurred within a race. While polygenesis initially proposed these genetic differences to support the proslavery movement to justify morally and scientifically black slavery, proponents of polygenesis also applied the theory beyond a black-white paradigm.<sup>75</sup>

Though modern-day science overwhelmingly refutes polygenesis as a base theory and as undeniably racially-prejudiced, many nineteenth-century contemporaries supported polygenesis to identify racial distinctions among fellow whites. Polygenesis and its advocates moved toward the identification of a larger and larger number of human races by the late antebellum era. In 1839, Samuel Morton, the noted natural scientist from Philadelphia, identified five such races; by 1848, Charles Pickering, another naturalist from Pennsylvania, identified eleven.<sup>76</sup>

Contemporary sociology, scientific theory, and historical dynamics affected the reshaping of racial boundary lines. Initial European and eventual American confrontations with Native Americans and African slavery developed racial science in the United States that resulted in the American school of ethnology, the precursor to modern-day anthropology. Three debates composed ethnological examinations in the 1850s: Darwinism, de-generationism, and hereditary versus environment. The thesis of Charles Darwin’s within *Origin of Species* (1859) rested on the concept of monogenesis and the force of environmental factors such as climate to cause racial

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<sup>75</sup> Richie Davis Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 42-45. Watson, Jr. posits that the theories of polygenesis were applied to illuminate the differences between the North and the South before the Civil War. These differences were not merely defined by northern industry and southern agriculture, free labor and slavery, but on the settlement of both sections by two separate white races, with the South being settled by Normans, a cultured refined race, and the North settled by Saxons, a boorish, barbaric race.

<sup>76</sup> Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons*, 43.

differences. Polygenesis advocates countered them by stating that observable differences in nature were due to biological inheritance and natural hierarchies.<sup>77</sup>

Darwin's theses, which tempered the debate between polygenesists and monogenesists, nonetheless fostered the establishment of de-generationism. This theory promoted the idea that subspecies formed through poor breeding practices, particularly interracial procreation and poor environmental conditions. De-generationists often took a progressive, Whiggish worldview, arguing that technology was the savior of the human race and driving force of social advancement not only in the United States but throughout the world. Hereditary over environment philosophy hypothesized that the evolution of a species lay somewhere in-between genetics and one's environment to create subspecies. These three debates were critical in the shaping of the ideology and practice of white supremacy and elevating the primacy of race. This established a clear color line separating whites from non-whites and legitimized white dominance.<sup>78</sup>

The division of the white race into subclasses seemed natural and logical to contemporary scientists and antebellum Americans. Robert Knox, author of *The Races of Men* (1850), theorized that not only physical characteristics but temperament and morality were part of a race's biological inheritance. For Knox, the biological determination of racial characterization was best understood in the context of the Celtic and Saxon races. The Saxon, the race which settled the southern colonies and rose to prominence through representation by the planter elite, possessed the noblest characteristics and was "the only race that truly comprehends the meaning of liberty." Knox was far less favorable to the Celtic race which he defined as the Scottish, Irish,

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<sup>77</sup> Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 53-54. See also Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986); Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*; and Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) for discussion of the origins and applications of racial theory within ethnology in the mid-nineteenth-century United States.

<sup>78</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 54-55. See also Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39, 347, 423, 493.

Welsh, and French peoples. He ascribed the anachronistic institutions of “feudality” and “primogeniture” to Celtic culture, casting Celts as naturally subservient to the aristocratic Saxons.<sup>79</sup>

The Celts, specifically Scots-Irish, who immigrated to the New World in the seventeenth-century, who had faced discrimination by the British, did no better once they arrived in the American colonies. During the early years of American independence, those Scots-Irish who migrated as indentured servants fared even worse in the eyes of elites in the South. Benjamin Henry Latrobe, settling in Virginia at the end of the eighteenth-century, found poor whites to be “idle, besotted, and fever-smitten.” John Palmer spoke of poor whites in South Carolina in 1808 as an “idle set of people.” Reverend William Capers, a Methodist minister in Wilmington, North Carolina, described poor whites in the area as “lazy, dissolute, and beyond redemption.” These negative perceptions persisted well into the nineteenth-century up to the eve of the Civil War. A contributor to the *Southern Literary Messenger* lamented the “certain *Celtic* element . . . among us.” The well-known southern scientist, Josiah Nott, bemoaned the presence of Celtic poor white southerners but optimistically stated that the “Celts are fading away before the superior race, and that they must eventually be absorbed” by the refined race of elite southerners.<sup>80</sup>

Antebellum southern intellectuals feared that brutal class warfare would be the result of the unhindered reign of free labor within industrializing nations. In the aftermath of the French

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<sup>79</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 44, 46; quotations found in Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1850), 46.

<sup>80</sup> Quotations by Latrobe, Palmer, Capers, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and Josiah Nott found in Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 214; Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons*, 44; “Northern Mind and Character,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 31 (November, 1860): pp. 343-349, 347; Reginald Horsman, *Josiah Nott: Southerner, Physician, and Racial Theorist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 47. See also Grady McWhiney and Forrest McDonald, “The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation,” *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May, 1975): pp. 147-166; McWhiney, *Cracker Culture*; and David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Rebuking the negative connotations associated with Celtic southerners, McWhiney and McDonald promote the so-called “Celtic fringe” interpretation within antebellum southern historiography noting that Celtic folkways permeated southern culture. Fischer’s thesis supports that of McWhiney and McDonald, noting that Scots-Irish and Irish immigrants settled the southern backcountry forming a distinct Celtic-Southern culture among what became southern poor whites.



Revolution of 1789 and several decades before the French Revolution of 1848, proslavery theorists predicted that northern and European societies would collapse due to rampant capitalism which would reduce the laboring classes to an explosive impoverishment. In a free labor system, capitalists obtained the labor of others but were not bound to protect the whole person in their old age, in sickness, their families, or any other feature of life. Southerners found this particular aspect of free labor exploitative and irresponsible, as paternalism on the part of capitalists did not exist. Only support from the institution of slavery could protect society from dissolution into class war. Whereas free labor created friction between capital and labor, slavery guaranteed the protection of the natural condition of the lower class (i.e. slaves and poor whites) by demanding that capitalists, via self-interest, take care of their property. Thus, slavery forestalled class struggle.<sup>81</sup>

For elite southerners to view poor whites as a lower class within the antebellum South, they first had to recognize themselves as an upper class. The development of class consciousness among elite southerners is critical for understanding why Slavery in the Abstract became a central part of proslavery ideology. Upon achieving hegemony in their society, slaveholders slowly reflected on how their region was perceived by the world and how best to command subordinates. During the antebellum era, George Fitzhugh played a critical role in the development of southern class consciousness. Although an eccentric and an extremist within the southern intelligentsia, Fitzhugh and his social views played no small part in influencing an entire region and its understanding of race and class.<sup>82</sup>

One of the key ideas argued by Fitzhugh was the principle of patriarchy which he used to criticize the social results of the wage labor system in the North. Because Fitzhugh believed the

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<sup>81</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in Black and White*, 4; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 11; "Speech on the Justice of Receiving Petitions for the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia," in Clyde N. Wilson, ed., *Selections from the Letters of James H. Hammond* (Spartanburg, SC, 1978), 15-50.

<sup>82</sup> Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 118-119.

North was free from the responsibility of the fate of their workers, northern industrialists were free to pursue avarice and other immoral activities. However, in the South, slavery existed as the responsible form of labor creating comfortable lives for all who lived within southern society. “Slavery did not allow one class to take advantage of another,” argued Fitzhugh. “[Slavery] taught the masters their obligations to the lower orders.”<sup>83</sup>

The history of the slaveholding, planter-dominated South is a history of a civilization which rose out of its colonial origins, grew with the genesis of the cotton gin, reached an apex in the cotton boom of the 1850s, and collapsed along with the dream of southern independence in the wake of Appomattox. Upper class cohesion rested on the principle of a “mudsill” social structure and subordination of all those deemed inferior, whether they were of the white or black race. Hostility to the centralization of power became a compulsive obsession by southern elites. Having already obtained power over southern society, elites feared any challengers to their hegemony. Social democracy steadily receded in the face of aristocratic pretensions, and proslavery doctrines created suspicion toward urbanization which, in turn, led to an almost religious fanaticism in the pre-Civil War South about agrarianism. Ultimately, the worldview of the slaveholding minority among the populace came to define the idea of southern civilization.

Fitzhugh, like many other members of the southern intelligentsia, realized that if the sole proprietorship of one’s labor defined one’s humanity, then all moral values must be reduced to market values. Labor becomes a commodity and forms a market society, not just a market economy. The South possessed a market economy; it did not maintain a market society. Accordingly, the South’s relationship to labor produced characteristics fundamentally antithetical to that of the bourgeois marketplace. Characteristics of the bourgeois marketplace are as follows:

- 1) Human freedom is defined as independence from the will of others.

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<sup>83</sup> James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 82. Huston demonstrates that while Fitzhugh is an important contributor to sociological thought in the nineteenth-century South, he was widely considered bizarre by his contemporaries.

- 2) Freedom means the ability to enter voluntarily into a labor relationship where one becomes dependent upon the other (e.g. employer-employee relationship) and is mutually beneficial.
- 3) Individuals are the proprietors of their own person and govern their capacities.
- 4) The individual cannot alienate the property in their person, yet the individual can alienate his/her ability to labor. The individual, therefore, owes nothing to society.
- 5) Human society is composed of a series of market relations.
- 6) Because human freedom is defined by the independence from the will of others, the freedom of the individual can only be rightfully limited by the rules and obligations necessary in the securing of freedom for others.
- 7) The government, and by extension political society, is a human creation for the protection of private property and his/her liberty and for the delineation and enforcement of individual rights.<sup>84</sup>

Slavery in the Abstract was created so that a market society could not be established.

The cornerstone of southern society was the institution of slavery; furthermore, the relationship between master and slave was an organic, not a market, relationship. The southern market economy can be understood as the following:

- 1) His/her dependence on others defines one's humanity.
- 2) Individuals must sacrifice their freedoms to ensure protection and support.
- 3) Individuals owe everything to society.
- 4) Humans have only the liberties that society gives to the individual.
- 5) Some men—but never women—deserve liberty, others do not, because of mental abilities.

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<sup>84</sup> Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 124. For a more detailed discussion of bourgeois marketplace relations, see C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

- 6) To ensure his or her protection and support by others, the individual can alienate the whole of his property in his/her person as well as alienate his/her capacity to labor.
- 7) Human society is defined by structural relationships in which man holds property in man.
- 8) Because humanity is defined by the dependence of the individual upon another, individual freedom is limited to the property-holders as a class. The property-holder assumes responsibility for their dependents.
- 9) The government, and by extension political society, exists to safeguard man's property in man and for the maintenance of orderly society and modes of production between those who own and those who are owned.<sup>85</sup>

If indeed dependence on others defined one's humanity, and slavery represented the natural order of labor, then a crucial question remained: What was best for free white workers and the destitute of the Western world? The answer, according to proponents of Slavery in the Abstract, was the enslavement of all labor, for the happiness and protection not only of the individual but also of society. William Gilmore Simms put the matter bluntly. "Pity it is," exclaimed Simms, "that the lousy and lounging *lazzaroni* of Italy, cannot be made to labor in the fields, under the whip of a severe task master! They would then be a much freer—certainly much nobler animal—than we can possibly esteem them now." Articulating the argument for Slavery in the Abstract represented the psychological projection of the master-slave relationship to all of society.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 125-126.

<sup>86</sup> Quotation by Simms found in William Gilmore Simms, "The Morals of Slavery," in Chancellor William Harper, James Henry Hammond, William Gilmore Simms, and Thomas Roderick Dew, eds., *The Pro-Slavery Argument, As Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States: Containing the Several Essays On the Subject* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1853), 265.

Fitzhugh strove to create an unblemished association between class and labor and, ultimately, to servitude. “The association of labor, like all associations,” observed Fitzhugh, “requires a head or ruler, and that head or ruler will become a cheat and a tyrant, unless his interests are identified with the interests of the laborer.” Exploitation and class stratification were inevitable—they were natural occurrences. Slavery, whose guiding principle was the responsibility of master towards the slave, resulted in less hardship and despair for the worker than that experienced by the northern free laborer. The textile operative in the South could rely on the paternalism of the mill owner and the community of the mill village as part of his dependence upon another for his well-being. By contrast, the wage labor operative of the North was at the mercy of the capitalist and the cash nexus because the capitalist wanted only to extract labor at the lowest cost and had no relation with the laborer as a human being. If the lower strata of southern society only desired food and shelter, then Slavery in the Abstract and industrial labor could be made attractive. The elite, who alone were fit to govern southern society, could enjoy their liberty of refinement and leisure. “To secure true progress,” warned Fitzhugh, “we must unfetter genius, and chain down mediocrity. Liberty for the few—Slavery, in every form, for the mass!” Not to follow such logic would inexorably lead to class warfare within the southern social structure.<sup>87</sup>

Fear of limitless class warfare and a proletariat revolution vexed the minds of elite southerners. The establishment of the United States came through rebellions but the American Revolution, an immensely conservative movement, protected the institution of slavery by protecting the status quo established in colonial American society. The French Revolution, however, sought to completely transform society and every segment of its social structure. The French monarchy, ancient albeit corrupt and decaying, was overthrown. The legally privileged

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<sup>87</sup> Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 160; Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 161; Quotation by Fitzhugh found in George Fitzhugh, “Cannibals All! or Slaves Without Masters,” [1857], in Harvey Wish, ed., *Antebellum Writings of George Fitzhugh and Hinton Rowan Helper on Slavery* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), 63.

nobility had their power stripped away along with the abolishment of a feudal property system. Accordingly, revolutionaries, mostly represented by the rural and urban masses, eradicated long-existing social structures and established institutions. Slaveholders, the elite of southern society, recoiled at such events in which the social order was upended and an unnatural leveling of all classes was established. The ascension of the Girondists over liberal monarchists troubled southerners to varying degrees; Jacobin massacres in August and September 1793 worried them; the Haitian slave revolt and black revolutionary republicanism terrified them.<sup>88</sup>

Following the events surrounding the French Revolution, southerners further promoted conservative social and political principles. Anti-Jacobin tempers began spreading throughout the South. William B. Griffith, a prominent lawyer from Mississippi, described the transformation of French society as “abominable.” Thomas Cooper, the once-radical supporter of emancipation, became conservative before he took his position as president of South Carolina College in 1820. The Presbyterian polemicist, William Hutson of South Carolina, declared that if Americans were to support French political philosophy “a dark future, yet unread” would follow.<sup>89</sup>

At the root of southern disdain and fear of Jacobin philosophy—beyond slaves becoming free—was the prospect of opening politics to the masses. Political theorists and clergymen alike referred to the proletariat in France as “the worst in the world” while hailing the religious revival wrought by the Second Great Awakening as the savior of the United States from atheism and anarchy. Religious leaders increasingly promoted Biblical justifications of slavery using examples from Scripture, such as the Canaanites, to show God’s support for slavery. In the Book of Genesis, Noah cried “Cursed be Canaan! A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.” The phrase “servant of servants” is interpreted as the “meanest slave,” with all the descendants of Canaan condemned to hereditary bondage. After God had destroyed Babylon—the former

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<sup>88</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Quotations found in Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 17.

oppressors of Israel—God decreed all Canaanites to be the slaves of the Israelites; King Solomon annually levied slaves from the Canaanites for his armies.<sup>90</sup>

Like their secular counterparts, southern clergy encouraged advocated Slavery in the Abstack through the advancement of the “Bible argument.” Most, if not all, southern divines interpreted biblical slavery as not racially distinct, and while blacks existed as naturally fit for slavery, many whites did as well. Southern theologians, well-educated in the subjects of history and political economy, significantly influenced the thoughts of educated southerners. Comprising the largest portion of the antebellum South’s educators, southern clergy exercised vast educational authority throughout southern academies and Sabbath schools, and dominated secular and denominational colleges by occupying all the chairs of history, political economy, and moral philosophy during the nineteenth-century.<sup>91</sup>

For southern clerics, the laboring classes potentially stood as threats to civilized society in the South. The struggles of the proletariat in revolutionary France as well as in Europe and the North led southern clergy to conclude that working-class rebellion and anarchy prevailed if southerners did not take appropriate steps to controlling both white and black laborers. Recurrent among theologians and theological tracts was the theme of class warfare. The *Southern Presbyterian Review* remarked in 1850 that if steps were not taken to stunt the threat of free labor, then class warfare would be “inevitable.” Reverend Thornton Stringfellow of Virginia, the most prominent of proslavery Baptists, maintained that one in seven families residing in New England were homeless as a direct result of free labor. “No right-minded man or woman,” commented

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<sup>90</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 63-64; quotation on pg. 63; Genesis 9:25; Isaiah 14:2; I Kings 9:21.

<sup>91</sup> For a more extensive analysis of southern evangelical support for slavery and the concept of “ecclesiastical sectionalism,” see J. C. Mitchell, *A Bible Defense of Slavery and the Unity of Mankind* (Mobile, AL: J. Y. Thompson, 1861), 13; Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*; Startup, *The Root of All Evil*; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*; Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Stringfellow, “who had the means, could even consent to have a family without a home; and no State should make wealth her boast, whose families are extensively without homes.” The leader of the Methodist Church in Virginia, Reverend William A. Smith, dryly announced in 1844 that white labor would eventually replace black labor in the South. There were no differences between serfdom, peonage, and slavery for Smith. In fact, each system of labor equated to slavery and laborers existing in a state of slavery fared better than those wage-workers in free societies.<sup>92</sup>

Southern slaveholders, previously lukewarm toward evangelical Protestantism, readily took part in the Christian crusade not only to save souls but to support what became viewed as a stabilizing and conservative political force. “All attempts which have been made in modern Europe to render government more free than the intelligence of the people would warrant,” grieved George McDuffie in 1826, “have resulted in bloody and disastrous reaction. The people have no abstract right to any power which they cannot exercise with intelligence.” Daniel R. Hundley reiterated McDuffie’s sentiments affirming that the French Revolution drove the masses to madness. For Hundley, those who rioted for individual liberties also sought to abolish slavery. “Anti-slavery sentiments were first propagated by the ultra-socialists and communists—those miserable *sans-culottes*,” remarked Hundley, “who during the memorable French Revolution, raised the cry of ‘*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*.’” The *Southern Quarterly Review* was succinct in its denouncement of French revolutionary activity declaring: “Never before appeared, on the great political theatre, such actors . . . such vice. Never were there such a comminglement [*sic*] and

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<sup>92</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 34-37, 42-43; Reverend Abner A. Porter, “North and South,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 3 (January, 1850): pp. 337-380, 342; Thornton Stringfellow, “Statistical View of Slavery,” in E. N. Elliott, ed., *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, On This Important Subject* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot, & Loomis, 1860), 529; William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States; With the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (Nashville: Stevenson and Evans, 1856), 17-18, 53-54; William A. Smith, “The Relations of Capital to Labor, and of Slavery to the Workingmen and Non-Slaveholders, as Called Forth by the Present Crisis,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, February 4, 1861.



chaos of all that was great and mean. The world for a season was madly intoxicated with liberty.”<sup>93</sup>

Northern conservatives also believed that democracy must have limits if political virtue were to prevail and, like their southern counterparts, shuddered at Jacobinism and the radicalism of the French Revolution. But southerners believed northerners did not fully commit to the limitations of democracy and liberty. The North repudiated slavery while supporting individualism based on free labor. The North built their house on sand; the South must build its house on rock.<sup>94</sup>

Most disturbing to slaveholding southerners was the French Revolution’s effect upon Africans in the Americas. Denmark Vesey’s insurrectionary plot in Charleston in 1822 and Nat Turner’s revolt in 1831 exemplified white fears over the wanton liberties of poor whites and blacks alike when stimulated by radical democratic ideas. Southern whites did not even trust white émigrés from Saint-Domingue, who relocated to the United States following the Haitian Revolution in 1804. Southern intellectuals such as James Henry Hammond, Edward Bryan, Daniel R. Hundley, and James Warley Miles tirelessly propagandized that the Haitian Revolution succeeded because of French revolutionary rhetoric. Blacks, according to their logic, did not possess the intelligence to prevail over white masters. For Hammond, Bryan, Hundley, Miles, and others, French revolutionaries introduced radical political philosophies to the white proletariat in France who then passed along such ideas to the Haitian slaves. It was the *Amis des Noirs*, the French abolitionists, not slaves, who ultimately brought the Haitian Revolution.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 18, 24; Edwin L. Green, ed., *Two Speeches of George McDuffie* (Columbia, SC, 1905), 23-24; Cooper, ed., *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 16, 148; “French Revolution,” *Southern Quarterly Review* 5 (January, 1844): pp. 1-103, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 28.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 38; J.H. Hammond, “Lecture on the North and South,” *Southern Quarterly Review* 15 (July, 1849): pp. 273-311, 308; Edward B. Bryan, *The Rightful Remedy, Addressed to the Slaveholders of the South* (Charleston, SC: Walker & James, 1850), 47; James Warley Miles, *The Relations between the Races at the South* (Charleston, SC: Evans & Cogswell, 1861), 7.

Sovereignty could only be assigned to certain classes of the people and not to everyone. Revolutionaries blundered, cried proslavery theorists, when courting the support of the impoverished masses. For society to function adequately, there must exist limits on personal rights and freedoms. As industrial capitalism took root during the antebellum era, southerners expressed trepidations regarding the social costs of industrial capitalism, most explicitly in the free labor system. Subsequently, southerners paid increasing attention to those who indicted free labor. Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi published his sixteen-volume work *Histoire des républiques italiennes au moyen age* (“History of the Italian Republics in the Middle Age”) which gained a substantial following among southerners for its conservative views on human freedom and individual rights as well as its critiques of free labor. Echoing opponents of free labor that included southern ideologues like George Fitzhugh, Sismondi abhorred egalitarianism and radical democracy. “General ideas exercise a durable influence only on minds capable of comprehending them,” declared Sismondi in 1832. “Let liberty exist for all; but let power remain with those who can distinguish the means by which to attain [them].” Southern periodicals lavished heavy amounts of praise for Sismondi’s work as it presented a society that southerners could support where only the most qualified members of society could possess freedom and power over the lower orders.<sup>96</sup>

Southerners persisted in their denunciation of French political beliefs following the 1848 revolution. While the administration of James K. Polk and some congressional leaders openly congratulated the French people for “[consolidating] liberty” in its establishment of a republican government, southern congressmen, especially John C. Calhoun, denounced events in France. For many of those in the South, the French Revolution of 1848, much like the revolution of 1789, exhibited radical social reform that would only lead to bloodshed and chaos. Calhoun’s fellow

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<sup>96</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 40, 309-310; quotations by Sismondi found in “Ticknor’s History of Spanish Literature, Part I,” *Southern Quarterly Review* 2 (September, 1850): pp. 85-122, 91.

senator from South Carolina, Andrew P. Butler, conveyed his misgivings about the French masses and their “wild excitement” following the overthrow of King Louis Phillippe.<sup>97</sup>

Other southern congressmen echoed Calhoun’s and Butler’s wariness. Joseph R. Underwood of Kentucky remarked to his associates that any prior attempt by the French to establish republican government had “signally failed.” Senator Arthur Bagby of Alabama agreed and advised colleagues to withhold any praise for revolutionary events in France. Providing liberty for the masses frightened other southern politicians. Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama criticized the violent radicalism of the French proletariat and refused to condone those “who . . . overturn a throne, to plunge into the wild, unrestricted, and reckless experiment of ideal liberty.” William Haskell of Tennessee wished to “avoid any commitment . . . to any of the excesses” of French revolutionary activity. When Senator William Allen of Ohio introduced a resolution congratulating French revolutionaries, almost half of the southern Democrats in Congress cast votes against Allen’s resolution.<sup>98</sup>

Political economists such as Thomas Roderick Dew recognized industrialization as inevitable but feared how bourgeois social relations hindered social cohesion and furthered class conflict. According to Dew, serfdom and slavery protected society by sustaining organic ties between serfs and lords, slaves and masters. With the onset of liberty for the masses came conflict and class warfare. Peasant rebellions erupted following liberation during the fourteenth-century such as Wat Tyler’s revolt in 1381 in England as well as the German Peasants’ War between 1524 and 1525. “The hope of freedom,” opined Dew, “produces sullenness and insubordination on the one side, and revenge and cruelty on the other.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Quotations of Underwood, Bagby, Hilliard, and Haskell found in Richard C. Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Autumn, 1994): pp. 359-377, 363-364.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 364-365, 367.

<sup>99</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 310; Thomas Roderick Dew, *A Digest of the Laws, Customs, Manners, and Institutions of Ancient and Modern Nations* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1853), 398.

A fundamental antipathy toward northern free labor existed at the heart of the proslavery ideology. Henry Hughes, the political economist residing in Port Gibson, Mississippi, rejected individual rights based upon white racial supremacy. Hughes championed the establishment of an authoritarian state that wholly controlled the economic and social life of southern society; he went so far as to campaign for the replacement of slavery with a concept he referred to as “warranteeism.” In warranteeism, the master or “warrantor” did not own the “warrantee,” but rather acted as an “agent” for the state and enforced the warrantees under his charge to labor as part of the “civil obligation” of both the warrantor and warrantee.<sup>100</sup>

Like Hughes, George Fitzhugh believed that unfree labor represented the only proper foundation for social order and urged the eradication of the institutions that created free labor. Free labor epitomized the failure of free society by impoverishing the working class. They had not true liberty but only desperate need. “A liberty . . . very much like that of domestic animals,” harangued Fitzhugh, “that have gone wild—the difference in favor of the animals being that nature had made provision for them.” Poor whites repulsed Fitzhugh who likened them to parasites “infesting the country.” It was a necessity to enslave poor whites in order to support and sustain them but also to prevent crime within southern society. “The advocates of universal liberty concede that the laboring class enjoy more material comfort, are better fed, clothed and housed, as slaves, than as freemen,” Fitzhugh lectured in 1854.<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps more than any other southern ideologue, Fitzhugh lambasted northern free society. Free laborers worked long hours of up to fourteen hours per day within poorly-ventilated work rooms. Drinking polluted water and eating mediocre food, the free laborer ended their day sleeping in quarters akin to “cellars” and did so irrespective of sex. Fitzhugh believed there to be a natural correlation between liberty and crime for free laborers, ultimately ending in unnatural

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<sup>100</sup> Douglas Ambrose, *Henry Hughes and Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 3-5.

<sup>101</sup> Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 34-35.

death, incarceration, and in extreme cases, execution. “The elevation of the scaffold is the only moral or physical elevation that . . . distinguishes the condition of the free laborer” from that of the slave. Concurrently, the unfree laborer experienced a munificent life in the land of milk and honey. “Consciousness of security, a full comprehension of his position, and a confidence in that position,” the unfree laborer lived free of all the cares and anxieties that free workers faced on a daily basis such as old age, sickness, and unemployment. By the 1850s, J. D. B. De Bow, editor of the most influential magazine in the South, *De Bow’s Review*, routinely printed articles by George Fitzhugh. De Bow, a believer in Slavery in the Abstract, announced to his readers that the theory and those of Fitzhugh had been “adopted by many” throughout the South.<sup>102</sup>

Few among the middle class and yeomanry left any record of their deeper, more intimate views on society and its organization regarding poor white enslavement. The evidence about the spread and influence of the doctrine of Slavery in the Abstract among middle-class southerners is much more indirect. However, speeches and pamphlets of polemicists residing outside of the plantation belts, particularly those living in the upcountry and Piedmont regions, outlined the doctrine lucidly. Fitzhugh was the most overt among his contemporaries regarding poor white enslavement. In his 1857 work entitled *Cannibals All!*, Fitzhugh indicated that poor whites corrupted southern society by enabling the “weak” and “idle” to languish in the poor houses of the South. Poor houses could only operate through taxation of the better elements of southern society. “In collection of the poor rates, in their distribution, and in the administration of the poor-house system, probably half the tax raised for the poor is exhausted. Of the remainder, possibly another half is expended on unworthy objects.” To enslave poor whites would alleviate the responsibility of the southern public to provide welfare for those residing in poor houses. “The master having the control of the objects of his bounty,” acknowledged Fitzhugh, “takes care

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<sup>102</sup> Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 36-37; on De Bow, see Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 19.

that they shall not become burdensome by their own crimes and idleness. . . . The duty of protecting the weak involves the necessity of enslaving them.”<sup>103</sup>

The communication and technological revolution between 1840 and 1860, exemplified by such innovations like the steam printing press, railroad networks, and telegraph, led to the spread of the tenets of Slavery in the Abstract. Printed materials accounted for half of the mail in the United States during the nineteenth-century. The South, with far fewer cities than the North and a decentralized, largely rural, population, depended heavily on printed communication. Circulation of published materials containing intellectual tracts remained mostly in elite circles and wealthier residents of southern villages and rural areas. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that southerners who came to listen to intellectual materials read by their local elites became subject to the viewpoint of the elites and to those who originally wrote them, which, in effect, established a propaganda network among rural southerners. “Propaganda is self-preservation,” proclaimed Henry Hughes. Proslavery advocates urged newspapers and their editors who printed intellectual tracts to receive increased funding from state governments. As a result, newspapers became powerful tools towards spreading the gospel of Slavery in the Abstract to all segments of southern society.<sup>104</sup>

Images of poor whites presented by southern intellectuals played a crucial role in the ideology of elite white supremacy and poor white social and racial inferiority. Southern literary depictions of poor whites provided damning evidence against the foundations of elite white supremacy logic and required explanations for discovering how free white peoples could stand inferior in status to Native Americans, blacks, and poor whites. Such a conundrum was attempted to be solved by a variety of southern intellectuals. William Gilmore Simms and John Pendleton

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<sup>103</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 4; Fitzhugh, “Cannibals All!” 122.

<sup>104</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in Black and White*, 5-6.

Kennedy authored numerous works presenting poor whites to be naturally inferior as a race and in need of protection and guidance by natural superiors.<sup>105</sup>

“Plantation novels” offered conservative paternalism reflected in antebellum southern fiction in the guise of historical romance literature. These tales featured a heroic male protagonist from the planter elite who defeated would-be assailants from poor white backgrounds and thereby defended the virtues of planter class women and the honor of the planter class as a whole. Planter men were shown to be honorable, courageous individuals possessing both physical strength and manly virtue. This depiction was put adjacent to the image of poor white antagonists who were portrayed as brutish, evil, and criminal. Literary depictions of poor whites heavily focused on lineal degeneracy and biological inferiorities as root causes of their behavior and status both as a race and as a class. Kennedy describes his poor white villain to be physically deformed. “The person of this individual might be said, from its want of symmetry and from a certain slovenly and ungraceful stoop in the head and shoulders,” writes Kennedy, “to have been protracted rather than tall. It better communicated the idea of toughness in a greater degree than strength.” Ransy Sniffle, the dirt-eating rogue within Augustus Baldwin Longstreet’s *Georgia Scenes* (1835), is likewise presented as physically deformed with large growths on his skin. Longstreet, like Kennedy and other writers of southern fiction, use deformities of the flesh to mirror the inner moral depravity of poor whites.<sup>106</sup>

Northern abolitionist literature shared southern writers’ perceptions of poor whites. Harriet Beecher Stowe, in particular, perhaps more than any other northern writer, did more to popularize and nationalize the usage of “poor white trash” in antebellum vocabulary. While

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<sup>105</sup> Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in Black and White*, 55; William Gilmore Simms, *Richard Hurdis: A Tale of Alabama*. 1838. Reprint. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995); John Pendleton Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson: A Tale of Tory Ascendancy in South Carolina, in 1780*. 1835. Reprint. (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 56; Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, 27; Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes: Characters, Incidents, &c., in the First Half Century of the Republic*. 1835. Reprint. (Nashville, TN: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1992), 33. On the subject of physical deformities and the southern honor code, see Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*.

Stowe's usage of "poor white trash" did not appear in the pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), it became prominent in both the *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1854) and *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856). In *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, poor whites are described as a "miserable class" and a "material for the most horrible and ferocious of mobs." Stowe, like the antislavery writers, George Weston and Hinton Rowan Helper, attributed the genesis of poor white depravity to the economic and political environment of the South created by slavery. "The institution of slavery has produced not only heathenish, degraded, miserable slaves," wrote Stowe in 1854, "but . . . a class of white people who are, by universal admission, more heathenish, degraded, and miserable."<sup>107</sup>

By the late antebellum period, wealthy southerners, as well as the non-slaveholding yeomanry, came to understand that the only possible remedy for the poor white social question lay in the outright exclusion of un-propertied laboring classes from politics and economic advancement. They hoped to accomplish this by denying poor whites the rights of individualism and consigning them to a form of personal dependence. "It may be," noted Reverend George D. Armstrong of Norfolk, Virginia, "that such a slavery, regulating the relations between capital and labor, though implying some deprivation of personal liberty, will prove a better defense of the poor." Slavery in the Abstract, in theory and among its proponents, therefore, stood as the bulwark against the oppression of free labor society and became a system of paternalism and personal dependence. Additionally, there existed a widely espoused belief that slaves, when presented with the prospect of freedom, would openly choose enslavement over freedom due to their seemingly hopeless future as wage-earners in a free society. Zephaniah Kingsley, writing in the 1820s, suggested that slavery transcended race entirely by stating that slavery signified a "necessary state of control from which no condition of society can be perfectly free." For

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<sup>107</sup> Quotations in Wray, *Not Quite White*, 57-58.



Kingsley, no civilization could maintain itself without some measure of personal servitude; class interests, not race or racial superiority, should determine social relations.<sup>108</sup>

Slaveholders understood their world to be perfectly ordered. Each class labored within a natural state for the advancement of civilization. Antebellum southerners contended that they perfected the division between classes into naturally-constituted functions. “It is here on this point,” wrote Beverly Tucker of Virginia, “of the necessity of forcing those to labor who are unable to live honestly without labor, that we base the defense of our system.” In the 1830s, within his influential essay “Slavery in the Light of Social Ethics,” Chancellor William Harper of South Carolina identified slavery as one of the foremost institutions in the history of the civilized world. “Let it be remembered that all the great and enduring monuments of human art and industry—the wonders of Egypt—the everlasting work of Rome—were created by the labor of slaves.” Harper equated slavery with moral cultivation, for without slavery the slave was incapable of intellectual, moral, and religious improvement. God, Harper continued, did not mean that all men should be created equal; in fact, egalitarianism must end for society to thrive. “There must be general mediocrity, or the highest cultivation must exist along with ignorance, vice, and degradation.” Without slavery, society collapsed into “degeneracy and barbarism.” Edward Bellinger, Jr., a South Carolina politician speaking to his constituents in Barnwell District in 1835, put the matter before his audience much more succinctly: “In all countries slavery *will* and *must* exist.”<sup>109</sup>

The competitiveness and what was considered “dangerous” individualism created by wage labor alarmed elite antebellum southerners. Decency and social responsibility seemed to devolve into poverty and thievery. George Frederick Holmes believed wage labor was essentially slavery by another name. Holmes, while accepting racial inferiority for blacks with enslavement

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<sup>108</sup> Quotations by Armstrong and Kingsley found in *Ibid.*, 11, 14-15.

<sup>109</sup> Quotation by Tucker found in Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South*, 285-286; Chancellor Harper, “Slavery in the Light of Social Ethics,” in Elliott, ed., *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*, 576; quotation by Bellinger found in Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, 16-17.

as their natural position in civilization, acerbically promoted slavery as the tonic to solve the larger question of white labor. Quipping that the issues of slavery and free labor existed “identical” to one another, Holmes stated that “modern abolitionism and modern political economy have but one panacea for those threatened with starvation: let them die or rot.” In the face of such inhumanity, slavery appeared as the more rational and humane alternative. Refusing to mince words on the subject of the enslavement of whites, Holmes thought that the “interests of civilization and the interests of both the dominant and subject classes may frequently sanction the perpetuation of relations even in these circumstances.”<sup>110</sup>

The North, according to proslavery southerners, faced an economic catastrophe due to its system of free labor owing to the innate laws of political economy that governed capitalist society, which would inevitably lead to class warfare. The South, however, through the use of slavery, prevented such class warfare and made the “death struggle” between labor and capital impossible. The perceived inability of the North to combat the “evils” of wage labor had long been understood within the proslavery movement in tandem with the theory of enslavement irrespective of race. To assuage the inherent conflict between labor and capital, elite southerners argued that a manual laboring class must exist for civilization to survive. “Such a class, whether bonded or free, white or black, must exist in every community, as they are the indispensable foundation of the social fabric,” ranted James Barbour before the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, Virginia in 1825. The *Richmond Enquirer* declared in 1832 that those laborers hailing from the poorer classes, those who performed the work of “drudgery,” must always regard their employer as “superior, [although] of the same complexion.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> George Frederick Holmes, “Observations on a Passage from Aristotle Relative to Slavery,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 16 (April, 1850): pp. 193-205, 197-201; George Frederick Holmes, “Fitzhugh’s Sociology for the South,” *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Church, South* 9 (April, 1855), pp: 180-201.

<sup>111</sup> “On Slaves and Slave Labor: Extracts from a late Address of James Barbour to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, Va.,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 24, 1825; “Free Negroes and Mulattoes,” *Richmond Enquirer*, February 9, 1832.

If the North represented chaos where the state did not control its producers, then the South represented order and reconciliation between capitalism and total control over its producing classes. Threats of mob violence in northern cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia induced the belief that the “starvation and licentiousness” of the “miserable being called *workies* in the free States,” could only be quelled by the use of military intervention. William Gregg, the great industrialist from South Carolina, defended Slavery in the Abstract as the basis for southern prosperity. While Gregg did not openly call for the literal enslavement of white operatives in southern factories, he nevertheless regarded slavery as a positive measure. Addressing the South Carolina Institute in 1851, Gregg noted that while labor and capital assumed a naturally antagonistic stance towards one another, it would not be so in the South.<sup>112</sup>

The debate between the free labor of the North and slavery in the South revolved around the idea that while northern industrialists actively exploited their labor by the rules of capitalism—that property owes labor only pittance wages and nothing else. “There is nothing patriarchal, nothing paternal, nothing filial in [free labor],” extolled C. W. Howard, the editor of the *Southern Cultivator*. “Of all the annoyances of life, a Yankee . . . is, perhaps, the most annoying—industrious . . . but insolent, capricious, uncertain, levelling, and unthankful.” The South, through the practice of slavery, successfully combined capital and labor, thereby avoiding the exploitation of their workforce. While the slaveholder practiced capitalism, proslavery ideology posited that the southern form of capitalism was positive when compared to what transpired in northern cities and factories. Southern capitalists directed their laborers for the end means of obtaining profit but the labor of elites extended beyond the fields of their plantation or the floor of their manufactory. This extra “work” involved the cultivation of “intellectual culture” and the creation of enlightened society.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> William Gregg, “Address to the South Carolina Institute,” *De Bow’s Review* 11 (August, 1851), 130.

<sup>113</sup> Quotation by Howard found in Paul S. Taylor, “Plantation Laborer before the Civil War,” *Agricultural History* 28 (January, 1954): pp. 1-21, 13.

Guided by the principles set forth by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* (1776), elite southerners attempted to reflect an ideal capitalism where profits led to the minimization of their personal labors. Poor whites of the South spent their entire existence performing manual labor without the time and, according to elites, the mental capacity to improve themselves and society. The successful capitalist enjoyed the ability to acquire an improved and refined understanding of cultural pursuits that allowed them to influence society and rid it of unwanted ideas and other various “rude” elements. Northern farmers plied their trade as beasts of burden devoted to the toils of physical labor. New England manufacturing and mercantile capitalists, although exempt from physical labor, nevertheless faced obstacles in the control of free laborers in their manufactories. In contrast, southerners felt they reflected the best qualities of classical political thought by exerting total control over their labor through the practice of slavery and a disdain towards the free labor system.<sup>114</sup>

Although previously unenthusiastic to the idea of widespread southern industrialization, the decline in cotton prices following the Panic of 1837 and the burgeoning sectional conflict during the late 1840s and into the 1850s, compelled southern ideologues to begin supporting industrialization to forestall northern monopolization of manufacturing goods. In their attempt at industrialization, southerners would avoid the depredations caused by the system of free labor. The editor of the *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle* nervously reflected upon southern industrial inferiority. “Slaveholders must demonstrate in a large way . . . that slave labor . . . is as profitable . . . and as useful to the world as free labor is at the North or can be at the South. We can only prove our view by attaining prosperity.” Antislavery writers during the 1840s attacked proslavery arguments; they sensed weakness concerning the profitability and sustainability of slavery.

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<sup>114</sup> Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 10-11.

Daniel Goodloe used data obtained from the 1840 census to present “elements of social improvement” to show how the North stood as the economic superior to the South.<sup>115</sup>

Southern manufacturing had lagged northern development in the years before the Civil War. As wage labor became increasingly concentrated in the Northeast and the South’s slave economy became more intensely devoted to cotton cultivation, a glaringly obvious gap in economic activities between North and South opened up by the end of the antebellum period—despite the existence and growth of the southern manufacturing sector. A Marxist approach maintains that the slow pace of manufacturing in the South was due in large part to problems posed by slavery, resulting from a deflection of investment away from industry, fear of factory operatives, planter hostility to a new class of industrialists, and the inability to make slaves perform industrial work. James Henry Hammond supported Taylor’s plea not only to bar slaves from industrial employment but also to provide employment for poor whites lest they challenge elite southern hegemony; they argued that when a slave entered a factory, the slave “is more than half-freed, and soon becomes . . . the most corrupt and turbulent of his class.” Another basis for planter wariness about manufacturing, according to John Ashworth, was the resistance of slaves who sought to stem further exploitation. In turn, this resistance restricted southern economic development. “In inhibiting the development of industry (and of cities) in the South,” writes Ashworth, “the slaveholder was simultaneously advancing a class interest,” with elites wary of the ascendance of a rival class within southern society.<sup>116</sup>

As the slaves were the source of profit for the masters, planters, in the name of maintaining control over their slaves, restricted industrial opportunities to protect and advance

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<sup>115</sup> Shore, *Southern Capitalists*, 31; Daniel R. Goodloe, *Inquiry into the Causes Which Have Retarded the Accumulation of Wealth and Increase of Population in the Southern States: In which the Question of Slavery Is Considered in a Politico-Economical Point of View by a Carolinian* (Washington, D.C.: W. Blanchard, 1846), 5-8.

<sup>116</sup> J. H. Hammond, “Southern Industry,” in De Bow, *Industrial Resources*, III, 24-34, 37; quotations found in John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90-92.

their class interests. The presence of a vast number of non-slaveholding poor whites across the South stood as an obstacle to a master's economic freedom. The planters, by strengthening their relationship to slavery, exacerbated tensions with poor whites. The elite attitude toward work highlights this conundrum. On the one hand, slavery's usage created an ambivalence towards any labor performed by slaves; this disparagement of the work of slaves, which was the underpinning of racial slavery, caused slaveholders and many non-slaveholding whites to begrudge manual labor and claim to be above this form of work. On the other hand, slaveholders had to consider their non-slaveholding, poor white neighbors. These whites performed the hard work manual labor required and which in many ways was identical to the work assigned to slaves. How could southern elites industrialize while simultaneously scorning manual labor and promoting its usage? The answer was in the use of poor white labor.<sup>117</sup>

This policy appealed to proslavery ideologues because it helped to perpetuate and strengthen the division of labor along racial lines—despite the hypocrisy of this notion as racial lines blurred in regards to those performing manual labor. Enough trepidation over industrialization existed that William Gregg had to admit in 1855 that the public had “misgivings” towards manufacturing in the South. Opponents of industrialization even went as far to attack publicly those who promoted southern industrial endeavors. A series of articles published in the *Montgomery (Alabama) Atlas* reminded Daniel Pratt that despite his ability to establish a profitable manufacturing enterprise in Prattville, Alabama that there was “no evidence of [Pratt's] ability to mark out a path for the Southern people.” The author of one particular essay was blunt and haughtily regarded Pratt and other industrialists as a lower class compared to aristocratic planter elites by stating that Pratt had acquired his wealth “through manufacturers rather than agriculture [and] had [allowed industrialists to] step above [their] station.” William

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<sup>117</sup> Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, 94, 95-98.

Howell, the editor of the *Autauga (Alabama) Citizen*, called Pratt “The Great I Am” in connection with Pratt’s promotion of textile manufacturing in Alabama.<sup>118</sup>

In 1843, George Tucker, the Virginian economist, remarked that the populations of the slaveholding states were in decline after having suffered from a lack of immigration caused by slavery. Subsequently, Tucker predicted the “euthanasia” of the institution of slavery. The abolitionist Lewis M. Tappan reiterated Tucker’s viewpoints on the economic inferiority of the South. Tappan argued that slaveholders concentrated the majority of land and slave-ownership in their hands, thereby leading directly to the impoverishment of the South’s non-slaveholding white population. Tappan urged southern non-slaveholders to unite in the name of self-interest, view emancipation as an economic boon, and abolish slavery in every southern state.<sup>119</sup>

The points presented by northern antislavery advocates greatly influenced southern elites and ideologues during the late antebellum period. Southern commercial conventions and the establishment of periodicals such as the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1842 and *De Bow’s Review* in 1846 reflected the regional anxiety over possible defects in the southern economy. While recoiling at antislavery and abolitionist attacks, proslavery leaders acknowledged the truths of some charges made against slavery and southern society. As the need for reform initiatives became apparent, reform advocates such as William Gregg and James H. Taylor came to represent the most organized element of antebellum southern leadership to reconcile slavery’s compatibility with manufacturing development.<sup>120</sup>

In an address before the South Carolina Institute in 1849, James H. Taylor, a textile manufacturer from Charleston, noted that while proponents of industry did not wish to overthrow the institution of slavery or planter hegemony, they nevertheless strove to “present facts” of the

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<sup>118</sup> *Montgomery (AL) Atlas* cited in *Ibid.*, 98-100; *Autauga Citizen*, October 5, 1854.

<sup>119</sup> George Tucker, *Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth in Fifty Years as Exhibited by the Decennial Census* (New York: Press of Hunt’s Merchant Magazine, 1843), 108-118; Lewis M. Tappan, *Address to the Nonslaveholders of the South on the Social and Political Evils of Slavery* (New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1843).

<sup>120</sup> Shore, *Southern Capitalists*, 32.

“wonderful results produced by a diversity of industrial pursuits.” Because cotton mill advocates were initially viewed as challengers to the accepted socioeconomic order, they persistently found it necessary to defend their motives against suspicious planter-elites. J. D. B. De Bow, a supporter of industrialization and textile manufacturing in particular, consulted Charles Tillinghast James, a textile engineer from New England, to enlighten De Bow’s readers on the economic and social benefits of manufacturing.<sup>121</sup>

Northern periodicals became increasingly interested in the growth and potential success of southern manufacturing, particularly textiles, in the latter stages of the antebellum era. Freeman Hunt, editor of the New York-based *Hunt’s Merchant Magazine*, began consulting James and other northern industrialists in regards to the possible increase in southern industrialization. As Hunt stressed within the pages of his publication, the citizens of the South “wished for information on the subject of cotton manufacturers in order to know whether it was, or was not, prudent . . . to engage in the business.” A writer for the *New York Herald* investigating Gregg’s Graniteville Manufacturing Company in 1849 witnessed the fertile ground for southern-based industrial activity when he noted that textile mills in the South “would successfully compete with New England manufactories” for years to come.<sup>122</sup>

The emphasis on competition and the underlying threat of northern manufacturing reached its apex by 1850. Speaking before the South Carolina Institute in 1849, James H. Taylor revealed his anxieties over northern businessmen establishing factories in the South. “Be assured,” warned Taylor, “*northern enterprise and capital* will not long overlook the opening for business here prescribed.” James Henry Lumpkin, a Georgia Supreme Court judge and cotton mill supporter, urged the South to adopt widespread industry or risk being wholly subject to the

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<sup>121</sup> *Constitution of the South-Carolina Institute, Adopted January, 1849* (Charleston, SC, 1849), 11; “The Future of the South,” *De Bow’s Review* 10 (February, 1851): pp. 132-146.

<sup>122</sup> Charles T. James, *Letters on the Culture and Manufacture of Cotton: Addressed to Freeman Hunt, Esq., Editor of Hunt’s Merchant Magazine* (New York: George W. Wood, 1850); Charles T. James, “Culture and Manufacture of Cotton,” *Hunt’s Merchant Magazine* 22 (March, 1850), 309-11; Herbert Collins, “The Southern Industrial Gospel before 1860,” *Journal of Southern History* 12 (August, 1946): pp. 386-402, 391.



North indefinitely. “Doubt it who,” Lumpkin prophesized, “the South is destined to become the seat of the cotton manufacturers of the world. The competition has been *forced upon us*, and our people are beginning to be thoroughly aroused from their apathy.”<sup>123</sup>

In conjunction with the basic need to modernize the southern economic infrastructure, reformers increasingly recognized that the future of poor white, non-slaveholders was linked with the long-term future of the slaveholding South. William Gregg’s *Essays on Domestic Industry* exemplified the southern strategy to alleviate southern economic ills while preserving and strengthening the institution of slavery knowing that poor whites must become part of the solution rather than become part of the problem in the southern economy. Gregg foresaw a landscape of dilapidated homes, exhausted soil, and indolent citizens unless investment in industry, specifically textile manufacturing, occurred. The unjust taxation of the South to support northern industry was undeniable, according to Gregg. To persist in angrily denouncing the tariff and hoping for cotton prices to remain high was folly. Only investment in domestic manufacturing could save the South from a tragic fate.<sup>124</sup>

The growth of southern industrialization frightened some northern industrialists. Faced with growing southern competition, *Hunt’s Merchant Magazine* increasingly portrayed northern industry as “struck with horror” at a viable southern manufacturing sector. There became a need to “discourage [the South] from the attempt to improve the advantages they possess for a successful competition with the North.” Ultimately, however, while southern publications printed attacks on southern industrial pursuits by the North to spur southern cultural and monetary investment in manufacturing, only widespread enthusiastic opinion towards industrialization could cause industry to flourish in the South.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Collins, “Southern Industrial Gospel,” 391; Joseph H. Lumpkin, *An Address Delivered before the South-Carolina Institute at Its Second Annual Fair on the 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1850* (Charleston, SC, 1851), 23.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33; William Gregg, *Essays on Domestic Industry*. 1844. Reprint. (Graniteville, SC: Graniteville Manufacturing Company, 1941), 3-15, 105-113.

<sup>125</sup> James, “Culture and Manufacture of Cotton,” *Hunt’s Merchant Magazine*, 185-186.

William Gregg promoted textile manufacturing using his Graniteville Manufacturing Company as the primary example of southern success. Southern textile manufacturers pointed to the resource advantages the South possessed compared to its northern competitors. Expenses in bagging, ropewalks, river and ocean transportation, insurance, commissions, and drayage charges were far less expensive for the South than shipping cotton to the North. Planters could bypass the costly transportation costs to New England cotton mills by delivering their cotton to southern mills via rail or the vastly more affordable southern river transport system. If the development of southern manufacturing reduced the cost of producing cotton goods while simultaneously allowing planters to take surplus cash typically allocated towards shipping costs and funnel the excess funds back into slave property and land purchase, then support of southern manufacturing seemed inevitable.<sup>126</sup>

Because cotton growing overshadowed all other economic activity across the region, it was only logical that advocates of southern textile manufacturing began to seek approval from cotton planters—the leaders of southern society—for industrialization. The editor of the *Columbia (South Carolina) Telegraph* announced within *Farmer and Mechanic* magazine in 1849 that the over-production of cotton directly resulted in a concentration of labor in cotton cultivation. By utilizing poor white labor in textile production and the manufacture of “that surplus staple at home,” the costs of exporting cotton would be drastically reduced. Although textile owners possessed enough capital to establish cotton manufacturing enterprises, financial support on the part of wealthy planters was paramount. As with many aspects of the crusade to establish cotton production in the antebellum South, industrialists urged planters to be the patrons of the industry. “Let such planters as are desirous of the introduction of manufacturers,” declared J. D. B. De Bow, “instead of investing the net income of their crops in land and slaves,

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<sup>126</sup> Letter from William Gregg to Freeman Hunt, December 20, 1849, printed in *Hunt's Merchant Magazine* 22 (February, 1850), 108; Collins, “Southern Industrial Gospel,” 394.

appropriate it to the purpose of manufacturing” so that “an association might be formed with sufficient means to commence the work in every important district in a very short time.”<sup>127</sup>

Besides the reduction in shipping costs and outdoing northern economic competition, southern industrialists advocated manufacturing as providing social welfare for the people of the South and ameliorating the condition of poor whites. As “public benefactors,” industrialists and planters simultaneously alleviated economic and social burdens across the South. The welfare of poor white southerners took on an air of missionary activity. “We may really regard ourselves as the pioneers in developing the real character of the poor people of [the South],” crowed William Gregg. Thus, the cotton mill entrepreneur, along with the planter-financier, aligned their interests in a social movement that embraced the poor white population of the South and, like slavery, patterned capital-labor relations on paternalism.<sup>128</sup>

The introduction of cotton mills would provide employment opportunities for shoemakers, blacksmiths, and carpenters, along with employment for the “non-producing” poor whites while still allowing cotton plantations and cotton planters to predominate within the southern economy and society. Gregg assured planters who invested in or personally owned cotton factories that profits would follow and that mill owners would still direct their labor. Mill owners would use floor managers to manage personally operatives just as their plantation overseers directed slaves. Gregg shrewdly appealed to the planter contempt for drudgery alongside their devotion to profits, leisure, and refinement. Furthermore, Gregg forcefully explained that the capitalistic outlook of elite southerners must become more progressive to preserve its cherished values. For manufacturing to excel, it became critical for the “non-producing” poor whites to become respectable laborers. The “thousands of poor, degraded

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<sup>127</sup> Collins, “Southern Industrial Gospel,” 394; *Columbia Telegraph* cited in *Farmer and Mechanic*, New Series, III (1849), 377; J. D. B. De Bow, *The Industrial Resources, Statistics, etc. of the United States and More Particularly of the Southern and Western States*, 3 vols., [1854]. Reprint. (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1966), II, 116.

<sup>128</sup> Collins, “Southern Industrial Gospel,” 399.

whites” throughout the South would continue to hold the South back and remain “worthless consumers.” In short, only employment in manufacturing could put an end to the existence of parasitic poor whites, by tying them to the southern economy through the concept of Slavery in the Abstract.<sup>129</sup>

Those within the proslavery movement and southern elite feared something more sinister from poor whites if their futures were not aligned with the slaveholders of the South. James H. Taylor, through an article published in *De Bow's Review* in 1850, succinctly expressed what many proslavery advocates and southern leadership feared from the poor white masses. “The poor man has a vote, as well as the rich man,” noted Taylor, “and in our state (South Carolina) the number of the first will largely overbalance the last. . . . It is this great upbearing of our masses that we are to fear so far as our institutions are concerned.”<sup>130</sup>

Keeping slaves tied to plantation agriculture was imperative to earn the support of planter elites, and industrialists had to quell as well any possible competition between poor whites and slaves on factory floors. If textile manufacturing employment became exclusive to poor whites, advised Taylor, then the southern proletariat would form “the deepest principle of self-interest” towards cooperation with elites and become “a firm and uncompromising supporter of our institutions.” Not to do so could doom planter hegemony and signal the death knell for slavery as poor whites “would be in hostile array to our institutions” and potentially form a biracial cabal to overthrow the established southern social order.<sup>131</sup>

Ultimately, the slave society of the South permeated everything in its surrounding environment, including textile manufacturing. As the need to industrialize increased in the years preceding the Civil War, industrialists of the textile industry urged the South to support

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<sup>129</sup> Gregg, *Essays*, 39-51, 69-79, 105-113; Shore, *Southern Capitalists*, 33.

<sup>130</sup> J. H. Taylor, “Manufacturers in South Carolina,” *De Bow's Review* 8 (January, 1850), pp: 24-29, 25.

<sup>131</sup> Taylor, “Manufacturers in South Carolina,” 25-27. See also Christopher Clark, *Social Change in America: From the Revolution Through the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 136, 161; and Wilma F. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 73-82.

manufacturing and the use of poor white labor in its mills. Wishing to distinguish itself from the wage labor of the North and its supposedly corrupting influences, southern industrialists reconciled the use of wage labor in textile mills with the slave society of the South through the use of “Slavery in the Abstract.” Poor whites, although viewed as different from other whites in the antebellum South, were not beyond a redemption that was to be achieved through patriarchal control in factories and within mill villages.

## CHAPTER III

### POOR WHITES OF THE PIEDMONT

The imagery of grandees living on palatial estates commanding the obedience of a legion of slaves who attended their every want and need are the stereotypical understandings of plantation owners—the elite of antebellum southern society who dominated the political, social, and even the religious life of all southerners. In the study of history, it is important to remember that recognizing contemporary perception is vital when examining events of the past. Elite southerners and their intellectual allies along with numerous other writers who traveled in the nineteenth-century South contributed exponentially to a common characterization of southern plantation lords and even more so to the perception of poor landless whites residing throughout the region. Travelers such as Frederick Law Olmsted observed that “the majority of the Negroes at the North live more comfortably than the majority of [poor] whites at the South.” George Weston was direct in his opinion of poor whites, who declared that they led an existence of “barbarism.”<sup>132</sup>

Europeans had long cast negative opinions of anyone who differed from white society in the slightest ways. White Europeans promoted the idea that the inhabitants of societies not involved in trading and mercantilism were inherently savage; once taken into a state of slavery, these “barbarians” received salvation. Evaluation of African culture and lifestyle by Englishmen

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<sup>132</sup> Olmsted, *A Journey in the Backcountry*, 237, 297-299; Weston, *The Poor Whites of the South*, 5.

fostered the negative portrayal of native Africans and their subsequent low place on the scale of human value. Even before the English arrived on the shores of West Africa, Europeans understood the African as an indigent creature bereft of any semblance of civility. “There is no nation under Heaven more prone to Venery,” wrote Leo Africanus, a Moroccan Moor who converted to Christianity, in 1521. “The Negroes likewise lead a beastly kind of life, being utterly destitute of the use of reason, of dexterity of wit, and of all arts. Yea, they so behave themselves, as if they had continually lived in a Forest among wild beasts. They have great swarms of Harlots among them; whereupon a man may easily conjecture their manner of living.”<sup>133</sup>

Elite southerners applied these same negative stereotypes to poor whites in antebellum society. Pseudo-scientific study denoted certain racial features existent within poor white families that marked them as exhibiting a debased identity and one fit for servitude. Indeed, poor whites were likened to “white trash,” and described as wild Indians roaming the southern countryside. In the opinions of the elites and industrialists, only the civilizing effect of paternalism and controlled labor in factories could save these poor whites from their barbaric existences.<sup>134</sup>

Northern Republicans and some southerners such as Hinton Rowan Helper argued that slavery provided immense advantages to planter elites by creating a distinctly un-republican society characterized by disparities in wealth and little political power among non-slaveholders. Free soil advocates maintained that social equality could be achieved through the imposition of availability of land created extensive opportunities for family farms, and the number of

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<sup>133</sup> Beverly M. John, “The Construction of Racial Meaning by Blacks and Whites in Plantation Society,” in Thomas J. Durant, Jr. and J. David Knottnerus, eds., *Plantation Society and Race Relations: The Origins of Inequality* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 41-43; quotation by Africanus cited on pg. 43. For a detailed examination of English sentiments towards Africa, Africans, and blackness, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 33-34.

<sup>134</sup> Gregg, “Manufactures, Mining, and Internal Improvements,” 777.

commercial and manufacturing firms provided ample employment. Northerners resented the spread of slavery into the western territories because they feared the “Slave Power” would inevitably overthrow the rights of all white Americans.<sup>135</sup>

Proslavery spokesmen retorted all civilizations rested on a “mudsill” of debased laborers. Their contention was that Europeans and northerners were forced into this role, but in the South, the “mudsill,” consisting of inferior blacks, performed these duties because they were fit for nothing else. By the theory of racial superiority, whites were free and equal citizens living in a republican society. Two contending schools of thought have arisen among southern historians regarding the status of non-slaveholding whites. The first posits that the antebellum South represented an egalitarian democracy existing for all white males regardless of class. This “*Herrenvolk* democracy” is bolstered by white racism in which non-slaveholders supported slavery in exchange for privileges given to all southern whites.<sup>136</sup>

Concurrently, other historians postulate that aristocratic slaveholders controlled all segments of southern society including the yeomanry and poor whites. Planter elites, although respecting yeomen autonomy, used the ideal of slave ownership and planter status as a type of “carrot” that the yeomanry could earn over time. In addition, Harry L. Watson contends that the southern political arena consisted of social and political conflicts that sought to preserve southern liberty. In this context, a particular kind of community comprised all classes of white males united on principles of racism and protection of white liberty and black slavery. Watson said the routines of free labor in which the average white person could advance through their work. This concept gained widespread acceptance in the antebellum North. The high level of that southern

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<sup>135</sup> Harry L. Watson, “Conflict and Collaboration: Yeomen, Slaveholders, and Politics in the Antebellum South,” *Social History* 10 (October, 1985), pp: 273-298, 275.

<sup>136</sup> Watson, “Conflict and Collaboration,” 276. See also Frederickson, *White Supremacy*, 54.



whites believed that slavery existed in the yeomanry's best interest; however, slaveholders kept the upper hand socially and politically throughout southern society.<sup>137</sup>

Gavin Wright has shown with great precision that the bulk of wealth in the cotton South was held in the hands of planter elites and that there was an unequal distribution of wealth compared to areas of the rural North. The investigations of Steven Hahn in the Georgia Upcountry during the late antebellum period reveal that land ownership and open-range grazing created yeomen economic independence despite disparities in wealth when compared to planters. Non-slaveholders grew the majority of their food but traded with local merchants and artisans for what they could not produce within their household economies. Seeking to preserve their independence in the face of market pressures and a competitive capitalist system, the yeomanry of north-central Georgia chose to barter and produce staples for sale only as an economic necessity. Though the plain folk cherished liberty, the presence of property-less and dependent poor whites within their community fostered insecurity because such people, it was believed, had no respect for property rights and were given to criminal behavior.<sup>138</sup>

While the yeomanry valued their independence, they could not choose to be completely isolated from commercialism, though as a class they alternatively viewed it with hostility and indifference. State-sponsored efforts to expand banking, railroads, or any other form of economic development potentially jeopardized their personal security and could lead to debt and bankruptcy and the loss of landholdings. The conflict between planters and yeomen appeared most lucidly in the settled areas of the western and lower South. As soon as whites controlled these areas

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<sup>137</sup> Watson, "Conflict and Collaboration," 276; Ira Berlin, "White Majority: A Review Essay," *Social History* 5 (May, 1977), pp: 653-660. See also Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 20-24. Baptist shows that yeomen on the Florida frontier consciously imitated landed gentry once they obtained planter status. This emulation effectively created aristocratic culture on the southern frontier.

<sup>138</sup> Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 4; Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 17. See also Gavin Wright and Howard Kunreuther, "Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Southern History* 35 (September, 1975): pp. 526-551, 527-528. Wright and Kunreuther show that poorer households in the South concentrated on raising corn rather than growing cotton with corn being consumed by the household.

following warfare and the expulsion of Native Americans, planter emigrants from the across the South streamed into the alluvial regions of the Mississippi Delta and Black Belt. The upcountry and piney woods areas became settled by whites who could not purchase prime lands and, in turn, became less commercially-involved.<sup>139</sup>

Almost immediately political conflicts arose between the two groups. In Mississippi, planter representatives during the state's constitutional convention requested property-holding restrictions to be placed on office-holding along with life tenure for judges, appointed rather than elected offices, *viva voce* voting, and other elitist political features. Yeomen representatives accused such measures on the part of elites to be undemocratic. Following the Panic of 1819, yeoman and planter factions argued over the merits of debt, banking, and currency. In Virginia and the Carolinas, laws and long-standing customs limited popular access to public office. Nevertheless, popular participation in party politics was extraordinary with voter turnouts during local, state, and national elections reaching high percentages of the eligible white male electorate. While class-based antagonisms fueled rigorous debate among planters and yeomen, as owners of property, the planters and the yeomanry, coalesced in defense of the perpetuity of a slave-based society and attacked free soil supporters, Republicans, and abolitionists.<sup>140</sup>

Lost in the quagmire of commercialism and political bickering were the poor whites who could neither purchase any meaningful quantity of land nor provide a voice in politics. Elites resented poor white political participation. In 1856, the *Edgefield Advertiser* pressed for disenfranchisement for poor whites and for South Carolinians to “defy . . . the Pauper vote” by implementing a poll tax to restrict the “loafing vagabond and idle drone” from voting. To assist banks in the wake of the Panic of 1857, the Georgia legislature passed a bill instituting a poll tax on poor whites. Governor Joseph E. Brown vetoed the law, thereby causing outrage among the

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<sup>139</sup> Watson, “Conflict and Collaboration,” 290. See also Joshua D. Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 248-249.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-291, 296.

elite; they lamented that Brown, in a “low and miserable effort,” chose to “array the prejudices of the poor against the rich.”<sup>141</sup>

Slavery upheld the patriarchal tone of southern society and the basis for planter hegemony and yeoman acquiescence. The material importance of personal independence reinforced white male dominance in the yeoman household. If slaves were owned, power over bondsmen, in conjunction with superiority over white dependents, strengthened the value of personal liberty. For yeomen, witnessing the plight of slaves, as well as landless whites in the communities of the South, served as a constant reminder of the importance of independence and what might come of propertied families should they lose their autonomy.

However, poor whites, planters, and yeomen were not so different. Poor whites, like the yeomanry, cherished the virtues of hard work, independence, and religious devotion, and did not languish in imbecility and laziness as elite whites charged. Indeed, in many ways, elite southerners themselves were responsible for the station of poor whites in the South in the decades before the Civil War. The class and racial construct of “poor white trash” was more of a creation of affluent southern elites than it embodied any truths about the natural state of existence for poor whites. The institution of slavery permeated every facet of a southerner’s life and influenced both their present and future place in society. Slavery itself was ultimately responsible for the creation of the poor white class more than any other factor. The spread of planters and, by proxy, slavery into prime cotton lands, pushed poor whites into the periphery of southern society.<sup>142</sup>

For the elite planter, a primary factor in his control over society was as much psychological as it was economic. “Democratic sanity,” a term coined by the clinical psychologist, Na’im Akbar, offers a social psychological profile of elite southerners. Defining sanity as a function of dominance, Akbar notes that whatever behavior the dominant group exhibits is described as “sane.” The danger is found in the fact that if the behavior of the

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<sup>141</sup> *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 16, 1856; *Augusta Chronicle*, December 30, 1857.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

dominant group is aberrant or otherwise pathological then that behavior is still understood to be considered normal. Democratic sanity within the slaveholding elite is identified through the notion that slaveholders were saviors of a savage population (i.e. blacks and poor whites).

Control of others was, therefore, a part of the psycho-social survival instinct of the slaveholding elite. As a result, planters and proslavery advocates presented the plantation and the institution of slavery as the central organizing feature of antebellum southern society with white dominance—and more specifically, *elite* white dominance—as the natural result. “Slavery is . . . the extreme manifestation of the ego perversion of dominance—the subjection of another human being to a pure utilitarian use,” writes Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey in their psychological study of slavery, *The Mark of Oppression* (1962). “Once you degrade someone in that way, the sense of guilt makes it imperative to degrade the subject further to justify the entire procedure. If you do not use the human being whose attributes you despise, you can escape the ambit of his influence by pure avoidance; if you use him, you cannot avoid the consequences. The only defense now is to *hate* the object.”<sup>143</sup>

The term “white trash” illuminates the tension and a societal paradox within members of the white race in the antebellum South. It lies somewhere between sacredness and the profane; moral and immoral; clean and unclean. As Matt Wray notes, to be labeled “white trash” establishes “a monstrous, transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms, a dangerous threshold state of being neither one nor the other.” To be poor “white trash” was to exist as an inherent threat to the symbolic and literal social order of the antebellum South.<sup>144</sup>

In a racial analysis, “white trash” can be understood as a racial slur. The use of the term coincides with periods of ethno-racial conflict caused by the influx of white immigrants from

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<sup>143</sup> Na'im Akbar, “The Evolution of Human Psychology for African Americans,” in Reginald Jones, ed., *Black Psychology* (Berkeley, CA: Cobb and Henry Publishers, 1991), 44; Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 179.

<sup>144</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 2. See also Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1, 5-6.

Western Europe, most notably Germans and Irish, during the mid-nineteenth-century. The rise in whiteness studies over the past three decades have sought to reveal the historical development of white skin privilege and race-based social domination in the United States by asking two fundamental questions: What does it mean to be part of the racial majority and how have different social groups achieved that over time? The colonial and early national periods in the history of the United States created poor white trash by labeling and stigmatizing segments of the population as immoral, lazy, and dirty as well as by implying that these people represented dangerous and threatening forces to the established social order.<sup>145</sup>

Beginning in the early 1840s, social observers started to investigate and actively debate the reasoning behind the impoverished condition of poor whites. These observers of American social character, both at home and abroad, offered a plethora of evidence explaining the abominable lives of poor whites. Drawing upon preexisting folk concepts, literary works, and nascent scientific theories involving human development, sociology, and anthropology, southern social scientists arrived at the conclusion that poor whites were less than superior, even inferior, to blacks and Native Americans.<sup>146</sup>

Two groups competed for the authority interpreting poor whites in the antebellum South: abolitionists and proslavery secessionists. For abolitionists, slavery degraded and dehumanized non-slaveholding whites. As victims of their environment, poor whites could only be redeemed

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 47. See also David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) as well as Roediger's *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso, 1994) and *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Become White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Kirby Moss, *The Color of Class: Poor Whites and the Paradox of Privilege* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*; Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Whiteness, Racism, and Identity," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall, 2001): pp. 48-56; Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Eugene D. Genovese, "'Rather Be a Nigger Than a Poor White Man': Slave Perceptions of Southern Yeomen and Poor Whites," in Hans L. Trefousse, ed., *Toward a New View of America: Essays in Honor of Arthur C. Cole* (New York: Burt Franklin Publishers, 1977). Fields posits that whiteness exists as an organizing concept replacing racism with race and equates race with racial identity. Whiteness, therefore, is the ideological counterpart of race relations.

<sup>146</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 47.

through free labor and reform through temperance and education. Contrarily, proslavery advocates believed poor whites created their poverty and that their low place within society was biological in origin. Furthermore, class inequality was unavoidable and, indeed, desirable and in no way an impediment to democracy.<sup>147</sup>

Emerging perspectives over urban cores versus rural peripheries shaped how northerners and southerners viewed poor whites. These perspectives advanced the idea that rural life and rural people were fundamentally different from people residing in urban areas. Both Marx and Friedrich Engels spoke of these differences and the redeeming aspects of urban life when they stated in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) that the bourgeoisie possessed the ability to “[rescue] a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life.” Elite rural southerners viewed urban areas, especially those in the North, as bastions of corruption and decay to be avoided for the safeguarding of moral and physical virtue.<sup>148</sup>

Understanding the rural environment of poor southern whites is critical to separate fact from fiction regarding their origin. Poor whites were overwhelmingly found in the region stretching from the state of New York into eastern Alabama in an area known as the Piedmont. Ranging between seventy-five to a hundred miles in width, it extends across the clay hillsides and rock-bottom river valleys of Virginia and North and South Carolina from the Appalachian foothills to the geological fall line of the Atlantic Coastal Plain below. Although a significant feature of Virginia, Georgia, and Alabama, the Piedmont dominates the geographical landscape of the Carolinas, accounting for nine-tenths of North Carolina’s geography. The South Carolina

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 49; Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity,” 48-49.

<sup>148</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 49-50.

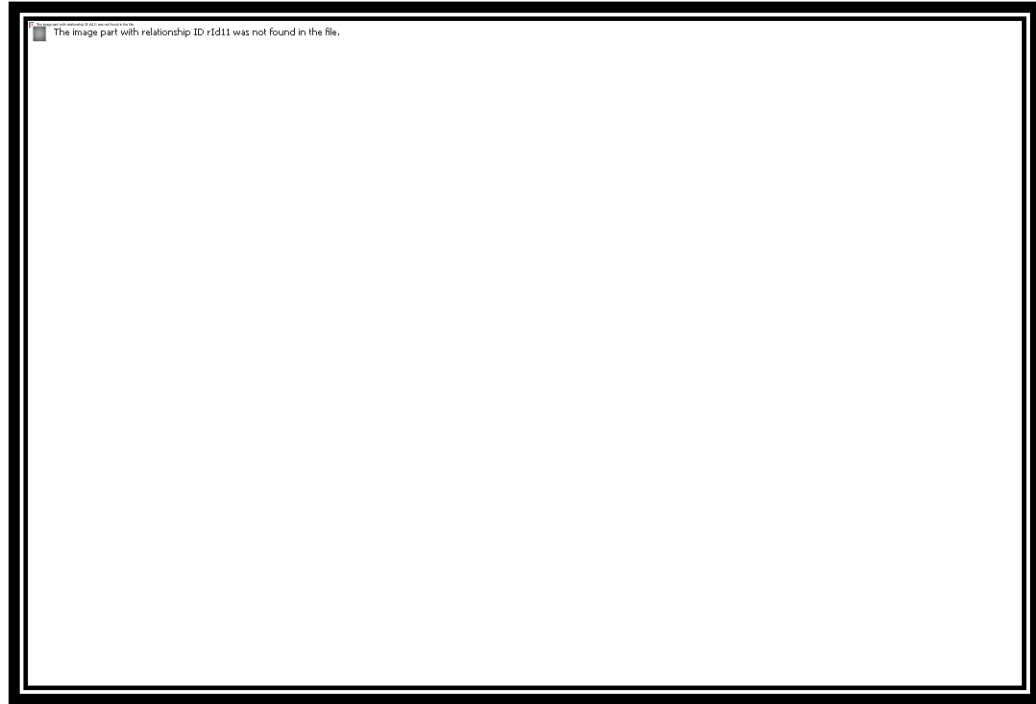


Figure 1: Southern Piedmont, c. 1860

Piedmont comprises one-third of the state's thirty thousand square miles with nearly two-thirds of South Carolina lying below the fall line.<sup>149</sup>

The Piedmont region has significantly affected the histories of the five southern states it touches. In the Carolinas, the backcountry boundaries of both states during the colonial era were determined by the interests of Great Britain and the colonists residing in the Low Country. As the Piedmont extends naturally and culturally across numerous state lines, it can be compared with other southern regions such as the Southern Appalachians and the Black Belt. The Piedmont “may simply be taken as the pioneer fringe of an industrialism that is advancing upon the whole South,” wrote geographer Rupert Vance in 1932. “Those on the ground lack perspective while many people in the North fail to realize the size and importance of the industrial transformation

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<sup>149</sup> Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1.

under way.” Although written in the early 1930s, Vance’s statement applies to industrial life and culture a hundred years previous.<sup>150</sup>

The Piedmont and the centrality of textile production and the existence of poor southern whites is a story whose origins lie in the 1830s. To understand the Piedmont, one must, in the words of historian Allen Tullos, “[need] to know when to tell about, and when to leave off telling about, the South.” The Piedmont has shared in all that is southern, much like the other regions both inside and outside what is defined as “the South” in the United States. Because of this, the cultural and geographic area of the Piedmont has led to the creation of a distinct past for those who lived, worked, and died in the region. Industrialization in the Piedmont, of which textile factories became the core industry lasting well into the twentieth-century, was created from the world of the planters. Its capitalist paternalism is rooted not only in the predominant socioeconomic system of the antebellum South—slavery—but also in deferential social patterns and customs of the region’s population of English, German, Irish, and Scotch-Irish of the eighteenth-century.<sup>151</sup>

In the years following the American Revolution up to the Civil War, the Piedmont became the heartland of an antebellum southern yeomanry as well as a landless, migratory class of poor whites. This is not to promote the idea that the Piedmont did not have the only self-sufficient farmers of the entire southern United States or that it lacked the wealthy planters found in the Black Belt. Rather, the region found itself a land where relatively equal amounts of the three strata of the social structure of the antebellum South came into contact with each other which, in turn, significantly affected the socioeconomic destiny of the region before, during, and after the Civil War.

Throughout the eighteenth-century, most emigrants arrived in the Piedmont by following the Great Wagon Road, which led from southern Pennsylvania into the Shenandoah Valley of

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<sup>150</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.



Virginia. The first settlers were part of the Scotch-Irish migration that brought approximately 200,000 people from the Ulster province of Ireland to the American colonies between 1720 and 1775. These immigrants, of whom over fifty percent were indentured servants, were seeking to leave behind an oppressive system of rack-renting under local and absentee English landlords; economic sanctions against the wool industry; the collapse of the linen trade; anti-Presbyterian laws which included forced taxation to support the Anglican Church; bad crop years; famines; and the profiteering of corn speculators. Drawn to the Piedmont by land bounties proclaimed in the advertisements of ship owners and by the letters of family and friends who already journeyed to the American frontier, immigrants arrived in droves.<sup>152</sup>

After arriving in Philadelphia, the primary port of entry for the Scotch-Irish, as well as English, German, and Welsh settlers, immigrants traveled beyond William Penn's coastal settlements and settled first the Cumberland Valley, establishing townships such as Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Fermanagh, and Tyrone, reflecting their Ulster heritage in the New World. The immigrants traveled down the western edge of the Shenandoah Valley to avoid French settlers and Native American tribes beyond the Appalachians and German groups residing to the east. As migration continued during the 1750s and 1760s, the Scotch-Irish traveled the Wagon Road from Philadelphia through the Shenandoah Valley and into the Carolinas and on to Georgia. Before the steady influx of whites in the Piedmont, well-traveled trading paths connecting settlements of the Siouan Indian peoples such as the Catawba, Saponi, and Saura ran throughout the Piedmont stretching from the mountains to the coast. The white settlement of the Piedmont forced the Catawba and other local tribes to relocate further west. The Cherokee, who maintained open commercial contact with white settlers, withdrew into the mountains after 1750 in an attempt to preserve their cultural identity. They contended with the ravages of smallpox and other diseases

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 47; Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 610.

brought by their contact with whites, and, ultimately, with forced removal into Indian Territory by Andrew Jackson.<sup>153</sup>

Many of the immigrants who arrived into the Piedmont backcountry brought few possessions other than clothing and tools. While some settlers possessed a limited number of livestock in the form of horses, cattle, or hogs, most settlers did not and began hiring their labor out to established landowners in hopes of earning enough to purchase farms of their own. Many could not raise enough to acquire land and remained landless tenants and day-laborers for life.<sup>154</sup>

From the beginning of Piedmont settlement, the region was a farmer, and not a planter, society. Over time, however, as communities became more settled and churches were organized, propertied residents arrived and brought wealth, education, and pedigree to the Piedmont. Although somewhat diluted by backcountry circumstances and being unlike the established grandees of the coastal areas, class distinctions became gradually more evident along with deferential relations of a traditionally patriarchal society. The distinctive regional society of the Piedmont was created, in the words of the cultural geographer, Donald W. Meinig, “by peoples whose origins, social character, economic interests, and political concerns differed sharply from those of the older coastal societies.” While the Great Wagon Road provided the corridor for white settlement of the Piedmont, the Irish, who traveled the Wagon Road, cast an enduring color upon the temperament and culture of the region. Tough, tenacious, and relatively homogeneous as a cultural group, the Irish intimidated, killed, and expelled the area’s native population until they became—by way of numbers, aggressiveness, and stubbornness—the new “natives” of the Piedmont and stood in stark contrast to the refined, genteel planters of the region.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 47; Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 622.

<sup>154</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 48. See also Robert L. Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina, 1729-1765* (Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, 1940), 162-163.

<sup>155</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 48-49; Donald W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), I: 292-293. See also James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 292-295; R. J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1718-1775* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 41, 76, 222-223; and Warren R.

By 1790, tens of thousands of Irish had settled in Upcountry Georgia and, by the early decades of the nineteenth-century, in eastern Alabama. Large numbers of migrants originated from Virginia. For instance, North Carolina's population contained 10,838 Virginia natives by 1850. Many who settled in the Georgia Piedmont emigrated from Piedmont counties in Virginia, forming the "Little Virginia" sub-region comprising Cherokee and Cass counties. "In each colony the story was generally the same," writes P. Richard Metcalf. "The pioneers spread throughout the forests, cleared what land they chose, fought bloody skirmishes with Indian occupants, and cared little for the claims of seaboard governments for jurisdiction or administration." Backcountry settlers had few uses for colonial or state governments other than requesting aid in the removal of local Native American tribes. Although many Irish pioneers strongly supported independence from Great Britain during the American Revolution, their interests primarily laid with the obtaining of as much autonomy as possible, either by the Crown or later the state and federal government.<sup>156</sup>

Piedmont settlers established a folk society and customary laws of their own after their settlement in the southern backcountry. Among this folk culture and lifestyle was the practice of hunting, small-scale agriculture, and the household production of whiskey and other spirits. While German families tended to stay in place once they arrived in the Piedmont, Scotch-Irish families continually moved throughout the countryside. Moving in groups the size of families to small communities, thousands of Germans traveled down the Shenandoah Valley and into the Carolina Piedmont between 1745 and 1775, establishing Lutheran and German Reformed settlements in the Yadkin and Catawba river valleys. The Moravians, a Protestant ethnographic group of Czechs from the Moravia region of the modern-day Czech Republic, purchased the

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Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>156</sup> David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 137, 139, 144; P. Richard Metcalf, "Scotch-Irish," in Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West* (New York: Crowell, 1977), 1092; Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 50.

Wachovia tract of land in Forsyth County, North Carolina, organizing the communitarian colony of Bethabara in 1753; they were some of the first settlers in Salem (modern-day Winston-Salem), North Carolina. Some German immigrants entered South Carolina from the Yadkin and Catawba valleys, but most Germans who traveled from Pennsylvania and Virginia settled in North Carolina rather than continuing further south. With a reputation for industriousness and frugality, Piedmont Germans soon became heavily involved in industrial pursuits and established factories such as the Salem Manufacturing Company in Salem, North Carolina.<sup>157</sup>

The availability of water power throughout the Piedmont made it an ideal location for operating factories as the region lies below the fall line. The growth and extent of commercial agriculture was built upon a myriad of conditions such as the natural limits of cotton and tobacco cultivation; the availability and acquisition of fertile land; labor supply—free or slave—to cultivate crops; and access to markets with a demand for these staples. As such, the backcountry settlements of the Piedmont were gradually subject to the geographic expansion of the Slave South, and, subsequently, the arrival of planter elites who both broadened and strengthened the slaveholding class in the region.<sup>158</sup>

The lower South Carolina Piedmont possessed excellent land suitable for the cultivation of cotton which attracted planters and farmers as early as the 1780s. The increasing foreign demand for cotton for textile factories facilitated the discovery of short-staple cotton that could be grown over virtually all of the Deep South, unlike long-staple sea-island cotton. With the invention of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in 1793, enterprising planters took advantage and moved *en*

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<sup>157</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 51-52; Metcalf, "Scotch-Irish," 1093; E. Estyn Evans, "The Scotch-Irish: Their Cultural Adaptation and Heritage in the American Old West," in E. R. R. Green, ed., *Essays in Scotch-Irish History* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 73-84; Gotthardt Dellman Beraheim, *History of the German Settlements and of the Lutheran Church in North and South Carolina*. 1872. Reprint. (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1979), 189; Guion Griffis Johnson, *Antebellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 12. See also Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 2-4.

<sup>158</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 77-78. See also Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 17-18.

*masse* into the lands of the Piedmont and Old Southwest. Accordingly, the vast majority of Upcountry fortunes were garnered between 1800 and 1830. The potential for profits from cotton production also lured yeoman farmers into the Piedmont. With the entrance of the yeomanry into commercial agriculture, yeoman freeholders had to confront several vexing questions: How much effort should go into producing only enough to be self-sufficient and how much to the cultivation of cotton? How many acres should be allocated towards wheat, corn, hogs, or cotton?<sup>159</sup>

As more freeholders entered commercial agriculture, the more specialized the freeholders became. With increasing contact with the fluctuations and whims of the cotton market, the more the cherished independence of the yeomanry was threatened. Sub-regions developed as the cotton culture expanded within the Piedmont, particularly in South Carolina and Georgia. Steven Hahn emphasizes that while the upper Piedmont of Georgia became distinctly yeoman in character, the lower Piedmont of the state was dominated by planters. Likewise, in South Carolina, Lacy Ford reveals that the lower Piedmont districts of Edgefield, Abbeville, Fairfield, Newberry, Chester, Union, and Laurens contained majority black populations by 1840 similar to the plantation areas of the South Carolina Low Country and the black belt of the Deep South. However, the districts of the upper Piedmont of South Carolina (Anderson, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg, York, and Lancaster) contained populations over sixty-five percent white by 1850 and were predominantly yeoman in nature with small farms dispersed throughout the antebellum era.<sup>160</sup>

Piedmont North Carolina was much more diverse in its agricultural pursuits. Turpentine was primarily produced in the longleaf pine region of the eastern section of the state. Along the coast, rice existed as the staple crop, especially in the counties of New Hanover and Brunswick.

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<sup>159</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 78; Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 13; Lacy K. Ford, "Social Origins of a New South Carolina: The Upcountry in the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1983.

<sup>160</sup> Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 18; Ford, "Social Origins of a New South Carolina," 20-22; Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 78-79.

Along the Virginia border, tobacco was the staple of choice while food crops predominated south of the tobacco belt. Farmers in the North Carolina Piedmont were the slowest to embrace the cotton culture. Subsequently, no counties contained a black majority by 1860. By the Civil War, only two areas of North Carolina produced a significant amount of cotton: the eastern counties of Edgecombe, Bertie, Pitt, Martin, and Lenoir; and in the Piedmont counties of Mecklenburg, Iredell, Union, Anson, and Richmond. Throughout North Carolina, cotton production only amounted to three percent of all staples produced within the state by 1850. As commercial activity expanded in the North Carolina Piedmont, small farms, not plantations, dotted the landscape. In 1860, the average acreage of a farm located in the Piedmont was 278 acres, which amounted to approximately seventy acres less than the state average and more than 150 acres less than the mean holdings of planters situated in the Coastal Plain. Ownership of land in the Piedmont was more widely distributed than in any other region of the state; however, over half of the free white population remained landless.<sup>161</sup>

Poor whites held the same values of honor, virtue, paternalism, and religious fervor as their yeoman and elite counterparts. Through their involvement in agriculture, poor whites, yeomen, and elites were tied together through networks of socioeconomic obligations that included trade, labor exchanges, and other services. The white antebellum South, despite the claims of elite southerners, was not a highly segregated community. Commercial relationships and kinship networks between all segments of white society created reciprocity in communal obligations. The poor worked for the rich while yeoman farmers relied upon the help of planter neighbors in the transport of their surplus crops to market.<sup>162</sup>

In the Piedmont, whites of both high and low status lived within proximity to each other. Francis W. Pickens, a state senator from South Carolina and eventually the state's governor,

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<sup>161</sup> Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 79-81.

<sup>162</sup> Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 47-48.

reported real estate holdings worth \$45,000, along with personal property totaling \$244,206 in 1860. His next-door neighbors on one side were the Gallman family, middle-class yeomen whose property was valued at \$5,200. Pickens's other neighbors was the family of David Kissie. Kissie worked as a mechanic owning a scant \$150 of personal property. Kissie did not own his land and was also illiterate.<sup>163</sup>

Despite overtures by elites that poor whites lacked any work ethic, poor whites mirrored yeoman households in their belief of hard work. For example, John Fletcher Flintoff of North Carolina was born into a poor white family who owned no land. Flintoff's early years were spent laboring for wages alongside his father upon local farms and plantations. Writing in his diary shortly before enlisting in the Confederate army in 1864, Flintoff urged his children to avoid working for others if at all possible. "Remember [*sic*] my Father was a poor man. . . . He was not able to leave his children anything to start upon the journey of life. . . ." Through hard work and faith, Flintoff obtained an education at Centenary College in Jackson, Mississippi and eventually acquired 217 acres of land as well as seven slaves. "I exhort you to be industrious, kind, persevering, thoughtful, economical, love and serve God and [be] good to each other," pleaded Flintoff. He stressed piety in life and wished his children to join the church at a young age as he did when he became a Methodist at age ten.<sup>164</sup>

Flintoff's life is an exception to the rule of poor white life in the antebellum South. He was incredibly fortunate to have received a college education as well as to have the opportunity to purchase land and slaves. Flintoff's good fortune nevertheless illuminates the work ethic and faith among poor whites which contemporary elites panned as virtually non-existent. Although not a planter and certainly not wealthy by any standard, Flintoff represents but one among the

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<sup>163</sup> Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 48.

<sup>164</sup> Quotes by Flintoff found in Carl R. Osthaus, "The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk: Labor and Religion in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 70 (November, 2004): pp. 745-782, 745. See also Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites*; and Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., "Plain Folk Reconsidered: Historical Ambiguity in Search of Definition," *Journal of Southern History* 71 (November, 2005): pp. 803-830.

thousands of poor white southerners who shared in his strong work ethic and orthodox Christianity.

Hard work and manual labor were believed to be honorable and not begrudged. While poor white laborers performed work for others in factories or on plots of land not their own, their labors were still performed for the benefit of their families and considered admirable and, ultimately, worthwhile. Antebellum southern spokesmen for proslavery ideologies celebrated the leisurely lifestyles of the planter elite along with the virtue maintained by membership of the aristocracy while simultaneously denouncing poor whites as lazy white “trash.” While poor whites did not possess the independence of planters or yeomen, they still understood the value of hard work and the ability to provide for one’s family.

The Protestant work ethic and the ensuing scholarly discussion over it can be traced to Max Weber and his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Weber found the connection between capitalism and religion in the Protestant ethic, an ethic that was based on a moral obligation to labor for the glorification of God. God called the world to productive work and held idleness as a grave sin. As labor could result in the accumulation of wealth and thus result in an idle lifestyle, asceticism became an ethos for Calvinists, as it rejected leisure and the spontaneous enjoyment of life. Weber’s thesis, despite its academic detractors, has heavily influenced modern scholarly conceptions regarding the nexus of capitalism, economic progress, work ethic, and religion. Weber’s writings have been undergirded as the explanation of the historical images of northern industriousness and southern listlessness.<sup>165</sup>

Weber believed that the strongest region exhibiting the Protestant work ethic to be Puritan New England and Quaker Pennsylvania; he mentioned few positives relating to the colonial and antebellum South. In a dissenting article, Edmund S. Morgan argued that the Protestant ethic was not solely found in the northeast but influenced all American colonists by the

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<sup>165</sup> Osthaus, “The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk,” 747-748.



the time of the American Revolution, with the South, represented by Thomas Jefferson, who Morgan notes as the most “methodically industrious man” to have ever lived. The task of applying the Protestant work ethic to poor white southerners—whom Morgan did not discuss—was the subject of works conducted by Rhys Isaac and Christine Leigh Heyrman, who both suggest landless southerners developed an immunity to the supposed adverse effects of slavery; they countered the arguments of Morgan who believed slavery “eroded the honor accorded work” and the “industry and frugality of both master and slave. . . .” Isaac and Heyrman posit that the influence of the First Great Awakening effected a widespread conversion among poor whites and thereby encouraged and even sanctified a humble existence built upon the principle of spiritual, rather than material, wealth. This attitude challenged the hedonistic, leisurely lifestyle of the planter elite.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the decline in religious fervor across the United States as the nation embraced secularization during the Age of Jackson, the Second Great Awakening reignited evangelical Protestantism in both the North and South. Unlike the First Great Awakening, the Second occurred during a market revolution which encouraged a dedication to work alongside economic advancements and industrial capitalism. Thus, many Americans began living lives that were instilled with both secular and religious principles. A strong work ethic became fused with morality, particularly among a growing Protestant middle class. Unlike Morgan, Daniel T. Rodgers notes that the South was shown to be a deviant society that was attacked by northern Republicans for perverting the value of dignified labor and for keeping their region economically

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<sup>166</sup> Osthaus, “The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk,” 748; Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 24 (January, 1967): pp. 3-43, 3-7, 23-24, quotation on pg. 7; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), chapter 8; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 3-27. While Morgan later recanted his attitudes toward the lack of a southern work ethic, C. Vann Woodward nevertheless criticized Morgan’s initial appraisal of the South’s work efforts. See Edward Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003); and C. Vann Woodward, “The Southern Ethic in a Puritan World,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 25 (July, 1968): pp. 344–370.

backward, impoverished, and degraded. Echoing Rodgers's view of southern economic life, Eric Foner writes that Republicans believed "[shiftlessness] and exploitation were the rule" in the South. The South represented a "nightmarish inversion of Northern work values, where idlers ruled, and laborers stood in chains."<sup>167</sup>

Focusing specifically on the South, David Bertelson's *The Lazy South* (1967) agreed with the later claims of Rodgers and Foner by arguing that antebellum southern lackadaisicalness was due to what Bertelson calls the doctrine of "allurement." The lands of the southern colonies attracted English settlers with the allure of obtaining vast fortunes from the cultivation of tobacco and its sale on the international market without intense labor. The growing demand in the Old World led to unrestricted freedom for obtaining wealth, thus causing an unfettered individualism and a lack of community spirit. As a result, southerners became attentive to goals of self-interest and not the good of the community as a whole. The promise of material reward came at the expense of godly community and local and regional economic development.<sup>168</sup>

Eugene D. Genovese describes a planter elite who dominated every aspect of southern life from economics to politics. The elite, who exhibited lifestyles of luxury and ease, influenced all segments of southern society to be listless as well. For Genovese, even the southwestern planters of Mississippi and Alabama—the *novis hominibus* of the Old South—did not possess a solid work ethic. Genovese concludes that slavery created sentiments of contempt for labor and in particular, manual labor. Taking southern laziness one step further, Grady McWhiney suggests that both planters and plain folk, both ethnically Celtic, lacked the work ethic and consciously avoided steady labor. As simple, easy-going farmers and herdsmen, antebellum southerners carved their unenterprising lives out of the fields and forests and the labors of slaves.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Osthaus, "The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk," 748; Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), xi, 8-17, 31; quotation found in Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 11, 46.

<sup>168</sup> David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10, 90, 96-97, 216.

<sup>169</sup> Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 48; McWhiney, *Cracker Culture*, 44-45. See also Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South From Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation,"

Despite the earlier work of Frank L. Owsley and Herbert Weaver who found poor whites to be hard-working, the opinions of Genovese, McWhiney, Rodgers, and Bertelson persisted in historiography of poor whites through the 1970s. But by the 1980s and into the 1990s, the so-called “Big House” interpretation within southern history began to wane in popularity as revisionist studies increasingly portrayed plain folk as hardy, productive members of southern society. The accumulation of wealth, however minuscule, provided poor whites with a sense of independence. The primary objective was the garnering of respect through achieving personal independence and self-sufficiency. The plain folk exhibited a belief in upward mobility based upon the idea that if someone worked hard they would reap rewards over time. Work, therefore, was not a sign of degradation but rather a means of separating themselves from slaves by acquiring and maintaining independence through property ownership. These facts are especially important as poor whites were actively compared to, and at times considered, lower than slaves.<sup>170</sup>

Most antebellum southerners, other than the small number of planters, experienced and understood the centrality of hard labor. These attitudes toward work and the self-esteem it brought challenged southern unity that separated the influential but small minority of planter elites from the farmers, day-laborers, and factory workers, who understood and accepted hard daily labor as part of their lives. Work and a desire for self-sufficiency blurred class lines despite the elites’ relentless desire to maintain a rigid social hierarchy. For poor whites, everyone worked whether young or old. Children were economic assets, and it was not uncommon for boys ranging in age from eight to ten to be able to plow fields and become full field hands by

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*American Historical Review* 85 (December, 1980): pp. 1095-1118. McDonald and McWhiney find the South lazy through the use of utilizing data from gross output and crop yields taken from census records and then comparing those findings with estimated times needed to produce standard crop yields. The conclusions of McDonald and McWhiney show low southern agricultural productivity compared to northern farmers leading to the idea that southerners did not labor intensively.

<sup>170</sup> Osthaus, “The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk,” 752. See also Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South*; McKenzie, *One South or Many?*; and Richard G. Lowe and Randolph B. Campbell, *Planters and Plain Folk: Agriculture in Antebellum Texas* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1987).

thirteen or fourteen. Girls assumed work tasks at an early age as well and, besides their jobs on a farm, poor white females also learned the methods of running a household which included sewing, washing, cooking, and gardening. In every sense, participating in the household's economy signaled adulthood for poor white children, and because school attendance was almost non-existent before they were introduced to textile mill labor, hard work was experienced at a very early age throughout their lives.<sup>171</sup>

Women were integral to the survival of poor white families. As members of the household that owned no slaves, women were forced to participate in the daily drudgery of laboring as sisters, aunts, mothers, and wives. They worked on farms, or the looms of the local textile manufacturer then proceeded home to care for husbands and for children. Women carried heavy pots and cooking equipment; handled farm implements; and, once they entered industrial employment, worked loud, confusing, cumbersome machinery, compounding their toils and stresses in their lives.<sup>172</sup>

Just as their yeoman counterparts, a poor white female's reputation was based on how efficiently she ran her household and provided for and aided in the survival of her family. For men, participation in hard labor on a daily basis further established their reputation as strong, honorable males beyond the brawling, gambling, and drinking culture discussed by many southern historians. Neighbors judged each other's industriousness and establishing one's reputation and status required work. The external sense of honor achieved through earning a respectable reputation was matched internally by one's self-esteem at surviving in a world of toil.

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<sup>171</sup> Osthaus, "The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk," 759.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 761. See also Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 9-10, 40; and Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 6-7, 16, 47. Bynum asserts that poverty "violated norms of white femininity" effectively defeminizing white women in the antebellum South.

The pride in work felt throughout poor white society extended from a belief that upward mobility could be experienced by industry, economy, and daily labor.<sup>173</sup>

The teachings of John Wesley, John Calvin, and Martin Luther persisted throughout the antebellum southern backcountry as poor whites testified to the connection between hard work and evangelical Protestantism. The revivalism of both the First and Second Great Awakenings fueled the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, which rose to challenge the established Episcopalian and elite cultures of the southern grandees. The rivalry and dissenting attitudes of evangelical faiths with that of the Anglican and Catholic churches represented the clash between ascetic, church-based, modest lifestyles of evangelicals juxtaposed with the worldly, hedonistic behaviors of planter-elite religion.

The evangelical lifestyle influenced the daily activity of plain folk even if it did not quell the passions that led to drinking, gambling, and brawling. Although initially evangelicals were dissenters, they changed their previously Puritanical practices to enter into the mainstream of American culture by the 1830s. While only approximately one-third of antebellum southerners were active members of a church, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian congregations were upwards of two to four times larger than the number of registered church members. Evangelicals expected that church should shape both society and the individual with the gospels directly influencing and improving all aspects of life. As a result, religion was instrumental in developing the mentality of antebellum southerners, whether high or low in their society. “Southern evangelicals placed their hope in the plain folk,” writes Carl R. Osthaus, “the hard-working,

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<sup>173</sup> Osthaus, “The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk,” 764-766. See also Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* 90 (February, 1985): pp. 18-43; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); and Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* for detailed discussions on the centrality of violence and honor in antebellum southern male culture.

worthy poor . . . who were viewed rich in faith and its rewards but lacking in luxuries and long-term security.”<sup>174</sup>

Poor whites found themselves at a disadvantage in antebellum southern society despite exhibiting a strong work ethic and Christian piety. Derogatory attitudes by planters, an inflexible credit-based economy, and slavery all negatively affected the lives of poor whites—all of which ultimately pushed them into industrial labor in textile factories of the Piedmont. James Henry Hammond, although an ardent proponent of black inferiority and the use of poor whites as factory hands, classed white day-laborers and factory operatives as “hirelings” only capable of “treachery and stupidity.” “[Of] our own race among the low bred and uneducated class . . . not one in ten is in morale a whit superior to a negro.” William Thomson, a Scottish artisan traveling in the United States during the 1840s, observed poor white and elite social and labor interactions. Thomson remarked that rich and poor were not “upon an equality—far from it. For if a man is poor, there are a hundred and fifty ways in which he will feel it.”<sup>175</sup>

Poor whites of the Piedmont experienced the commodification of land like their landless counterparts in the Appalachia. In Appalachia, the commodification of land caused by the colonial Virginia land system encouraged settlement and speculation, which affected Virginia’s former territory, Kentucky. Virginia reaffirmed the validity of its 1705 headright law in 1776 which granted four hundred acres of land to any settler with conditional rights to gain additional property if homesteaders built cabins, raised corn, surveyed land, and registered deeds with

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<sup>174</sup> Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 14-15; Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7; Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 92; John B. Boles, “Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South: From Religious Dissent to Cultural Dominance,” in Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *Religion in the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 26-27; quotation from Osthaus, “The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk,” 778.

<sup>175</sup> J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 67-68; quotation found in William Thomson, *A Tradesman’s Travels in the United States and Canada, in the Years 1840, 1841, and 1842* (Edinburgh, 1842), 16.

county courts. Thus, the headright system stimulated farmers living in the Virginia and North Carolina backcountry to settle in the new lands of Kentucky and other regions of Appalachia.<sup>176</sup>

Virginia's policy of granting land to its soldiers for their service in the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, as well as selling treasury warrants that could be redeemed in land shares to pay off Virginia debt incurred during the American Revolution, also contributed to Appalachian land commodification. Land companies also gained vast amounts of land through royal grants before American independence. When the settlement of Kentucky began in 1775, land companies and speculators competed with one another for land rights. When Kentucky gained statehood in 1792, white settlers hoped for greater control over the distribution of land. As the result of the headright system, lands redeemed through treasury warrants, and the awarding of land to veterans, the settlement of Appalachia outpaced the land available. Henry Clay, denouncing Kentucky land laws as a "vicious system" in 1829, also recognized the opportunities for attorneys to gain wealth through the high volume of land litigation as land claims flooded Kentucky courts. Clay had moved to Kentucky in 1797 to take advantage of what he called a "lawyer's paradise." Thousands of poor white settlers could not afford legal representation and lost possession of claimed lands to the sons of wealthy planter emigrants and gentry from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. By 1860, approximately fifty percent of Appalachia's white populace were landless.<sup>177</sup>

Throughout the Piedmont, the rigidity of the credit-based economy often forced poor whites into crushing debt. Without homestead law protection, whites could not pay their debts

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<sup>176</sup> See Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>177</sup> Quotation by Clay found in Billings and Blee, *The Road to Poverty*, 38. See also Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 139; John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Malcolm J. Randolph, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Lee Soltow, "Land Inequality on the Frontier: The Distribution of Land in East Tennessee at the Beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Social Science History* 5 (Summer, 1981): pp. 275-291; and Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

and, in turn, became landless. Once pushed off their land, planters purchased it at reduced prices. In Randolph County, North Carolina, five thousand acres of land was purchased at auction by a group of nine planters once poor white families were forced to sell in 1851.<sup>178</sup>

A possible cause for the high rate of landlessness among poor whites was the occurrence of economic panics in the antebellum period. Farmers in Moore County, North Carolina pleaded the state legislature for assistance in the wake of economic distress. An observer wrote that a “large majority of the people are farmers and are deeply in debt. . . . The consequence will be serious. . . . In vain have the people toiled and labored and economized. . . . The property of the poor is rapidly passing into the hands of the rich—for a mere trifle.” Poor credit led to little confidence by the community, inhibiting the social mobility of poor whites further reinforcing southern society as one based on personal impressions and reputations.<sup>179</sup>

Indebted poor whites faced massive amounts of economic pressure from creditors to pay their debts, and faced with such pressure, poor whites had little to offer other than their labor instead of cash payment. Jonathan Worth, an influential credit broker in the central North Carolina Piedmont, used his influence to encourage poor whites struggling with debt to work as laborers for business associates. He advised poor whites to enlist the labors of family members, as well. Worth instructed his agents that if the family of the indebted poor whites would not join in the needed work, he did not want them to work for him at all. If poor whites could not pay their debt, typically they faced incarceration. However, the Insolvent Debtors Law passed by the North Carolina state legislature in 1848 provided protection for poor whites by releasing debtors from prison who had been incarcerated more than twenty days following an oath taken saying the indebted owned no property totaling over \$10 in value. Although faced with the stigma of

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<sup>178</sup> Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 24.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



incarceration, poor whites' prison terms were relatively light as they constituted a valuable labor source across the Piedmont.<sup>180</sup>

Complicated race relations between poor whites and blacks—free and slave—presented more obstacles for poor whites in the decades before the Civil War. Slavery and white racial supremacy represented freedom and independence to proslavery advocates. The presence of the yeomanry in the region bolstered this claim, yet landless whites across the South stood in glaring contrast to the rhetoric of southern elites. Poor whites did not fare much better than slaves and free blacks; in fact, free blacks earned better wages than poor whites in some instances. In Randolph County, North Carolina, a free black man named Manuel received \$13.50 per month working for a local slaveholder. Concurrently, a poor white, Simeon Parker, made \$12.50 a month working the same job as Manuel.<sup>181</sup>

Poor white economic life increased the amount of interaction with free blacks and slaves on a level unfamiliar to other sections of white society. “Negro and poor white man did the work,” remarked one southern tenant farmer from Tennessee. Interactions were relatively amiable, but fits of violence occurred arising from mutual sentiments of distrust and hate. Slaves often fought with “white trash” because poor whites antagonized and physically quarreled with their black counterparts. A white day-laborer, after having stolen chickens from a plantation in Georgia, severely beat the slave children who caught the man during his theft. Fearing repercussions by the plantation owner, the poor white man fled the area.<sup>182</sup>

Despite these negative interactions between poor whites and blacks, both groups participated in positive, albeit illegal, economic activities. Slaves provided items such as food and clothing to poor whites in exchange for items unavailable on plantations, namely liquor, but also, although rarely, cash. Punishment for trading with slaves if one was a poor white was harsh.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>182</sup> Quotation found in Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 44.

Though yeomen actively engaged in illegal trading, their punishment was relatively light. For example, while a yeoman named Benjamin Sainstring was convicted on two counts of trading with a slave and received a \$50 fine, a poor white named Adam Boggs received a forty-day prison sentence.<sup>183</sup>

Social interactions between poor whites and blacks reveal deep connections between the two groups based on cooperation and, at times, romantic involvement. Both free blacks and whites in the Piedmont mingled frequently and often gathered at one another's homes. Card playing and drinking were common social activities. A poor white named Archibald Campbell in North Carolina was sentenced to jail for playing cards with a black man in 1840, with authorities noting that he "knew no difference between playing with a white man or sporting with a colored one, not knowing that the laws of the country forbid the latter." In 1850, a landless poor white woman named Mary Yeargin of Randolph County, North Carolina was arrested for the unlawful assembly of free blacks on her premises and held in jail on \$100 bond. Although infrequent, social interaction between poor whites and blacks led to interracial sexual activity. A free black man from Randolph County named John Chavis was murdered by the brother of a poor white woman who discovered their relationship. These dalliances undoubtedly occurred throughout the South.<sup>184</sup>

Social interaction was not limited to free blacks and poor whites as poor whites also interacted with slaves. Alford Hartley of Davidson County, North Carolina conspired with slaves belonging to a local planter named Madison Davis to steal chickens. Davis caught his slaves and Hartley in the act leading to Hartley being charged in court with theft and Davis personally punishing his slaves. Poor whites even went so far as to aid slaves in running away from their masters. A former Georgia Upcountry slave named Sally Brown recalled poor whites in Georgia helping her escape to freedom because poor whites in the area "didn't [all] believe in slavery."

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>184</sup> Quotations found in Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 47-48.

Runaway notices in Piedmont North Carolina often mentioned poor whites aiding runaways. Those slaves who escaped their masters found that hiding among poor whites could be quite advantageous by posing as free black workers on poor white farms. Runaways earned food, clothing, shelter, and if possible, small amounts of cash while poor whites gained workers for their farms, while the runaways often worked only for food and shelter rather than wages. “We looked upon the poor white folks as our equals,” recalled a former slave. “They mixed with us and helped us to [avoid] our masters. They looked upon our masters as we did.”<sup>185</sup>

Landlessness and tenancy nevertheless caused poor whites to be held in contempt by elites and placed at perhaps the lowest position in the southern social hierarchy. A former Virginia slave remembered poor whites had to receive passes to travel in the countryside just like slaves. “[To] sell anythin’ an’ to go places, or do anythin’. Jest as we colored people, dey had to go to some big white man like Colonel Allen, dey did. If Marster wanted to, he would give dem a remit or pass; an’ if he didn’t feel like it, he wouldn’t do it. . . . Ol’ Marster was more hard on dem poor white folks den he wuz on us niggers.”<sup>186</sup>

Tenancy rates were high, and often poor whites were limited to simply squatting on owned or public land. Unclaimed tracts of land did exist during the antebellum era but often this land would be purchased by gentry or yeomanry seeking to increase their holdings. State grants were available, but poor whites rarely acquired land through them. Between 1832 and 1835, only eighteen percent of all land grants went to landless whites in the North Carolina Piedmont; between 1850 and 1852, only twenty-seven percent obtained available public lands. A fundamental lack of finances is the likely cause of these low rates. North Carolina charged ten cents per acre for state-granted land and poor whites often could not even afford these meager prices. Poor whites also found it difficult to fulfill their legal obligations through obtaining titles necessary for state land ownership, thereby leading many poor families to squat. Squatting on

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 49, 51.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 51.

unoccupied land was always a risky venture unless in the most remote areas of the South. The threat of discovery by land owners and the lack of unclaimed land forced poor white squatters into tenancy; these turned their existence into a vicious cycle. It is estimated that as much as twenty-five percent of all farmers in North Carolina alone worked as tenants by 1860. Forty percent of all South Carolinians were landless in 1850.<sup>187</sup>

Faced with destitution, many poor white families depended on poor relief offered by their state government. Many of the poor in Edgefield District, South Carolina were put to work under the supervision of superintendent hired by the state; local taxes subsidized their labor. At times, this amounted to thirty percent of the total tax in the county. Issues arose regarding vagrancy in the Piedmont, and the establishment of vagrancy acts was meant to stop wandering persons in South Carolina in the years before the Civil War but was also aimed at preventing land squatting. With the presence of landlessness came the fear of crime, particularly theft. The lines of an infamous tune sang in the vicinity of Edgefield and Barnwell, South Carolina alluded to this potential criminality. "Barnwell District, Aiken Town / O Lord in mercy do look down! / The land is poor, the people too / If they don't steal, what will they do?" If arrested for vagrancy, many poor whites in Edgefield were sent to the county poorhouse. Between 1850 and 1860, nineteen poor residents of the county lived in the local poorhouse working on sixty acres of farmland owned by the institution "[producing] nearly a sufficiency of corn to support the place."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 27-29; Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 50; Bode and Ginter, *Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia*, 91. See also Frederick A. Bode and Donald E. Ginter, "A Critique of Landholding Variables in the 1860 Census and the Parker-Gallman Sample," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15 (Autumn, 1984): pp. 277-295; Robert E. Gallman, "Self-Sufficiency in the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South," *Agricultural History* 44 (January, 1970): pp. 5-23; and Joseph D. Reid, Jr., "Antebellum Southern Rental Contracts," *Explorations in Economic History* 13 (January, 1976): pp. 69-83.

<sup>188</sup> First quotation found in Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 50; second quotation found in *Edgefield Advertiser*, November 14, 1860.

The experience of poor whites in the antebellum South is strikingly similar to what happened to southerners a century later when federal subsidies assisted landowners in the Cotton Belt but forced tenants to work as farm laborers or relocate to cities for employment. Few, if any, records have been left to historians by poor whites, so it is difficult to ascertain completely the exact nature of contracts between poor whites and their landlords during the antebellum period. Very seldom were these negotiations written down, as the agreements were informal and flexible, thereby favoring employers. But there is enough hard data in the way of census records, company records, and day and wage books to formulate an understanding of not only the declining economic status of poor whites but also their condition upon entering into industrial employment.<sup>189</sup>

For example, in 1860 in Hancock County, Georgia, the census enumerator lists 210 men as “farmers” yet they owned no real estate. The term “farm laborer” or “tenant” is not used in the designation of the occupation of these individuals. Conversely, use of the term “renter” does occasionally appear. The census enumerator lists 198 “farm laborers” while simultaneously avoiding the utilization of the word “renter” or “tenant.” No reliable conclusions can be made using these facts alone but what can be inferred is that landless farmers held the status of a farm laborer and, consequently, a low station in the antebellum southern socioeconomic hierarchy.<sup>190</sup>

Upon checking the 1850 and 1860 census schedules, it becomes apparent that individuals listed as “farmer,” “renter,” or “tenant” in 1850 changed their occupation altogether by 1860. In 1860, 198 persons were listed as “farm laborers” within Hancock County with ninety-nine percent owning no real estate and 91.6 percent owning no personal property. There were ninety-six individuals listed as “factory workers” who labored in the local textile mill. Textile mill

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<sup>189</sup> James C. Bonner, “Profile of a Late Ante-Bellum Community,” *American Historical Review* 49 (July, 1944): pp. 663-680, 668.

<sup>190</sup> Bonner, “Profile of a Late Ante-Bellum Community,” 668. Pre-Civil War Hancock County, Georgia provides an excellent case study which can be reasonably used to describe the whole of the antebellum southern Piedmont.

workers, however, had an even lower economic status than farm laborers with 0.9 percent owning real estate and zero percent owning personal property.<sup>191</sup>

The hopes of land ownership drew migrants into the Piedmont and other areas of the South. In the study of the northern frontier, Frederick Jackson Turner and his students promoted the thesis that frontier migration engendered equality and social mobility. The results were the opposite in the migrations to the South where inequality increased throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading to landlessness and poverty. For instance, by 1800, over half of all Kentuckians owned no real estate.<sup>192</sup>

Elites fared better than those migrants who came from yeoman or poor white backgrounds because planter families possessed the capital to purchase large amounts of land. Arriving from the Virginia Tidewater into the Alabama Piedmont, Henry Tayloe acquired 1,620 acres within the first few years of his arrival. Tayloe, seeking to exploit his poorer neighbors, who needed cash to buy land of their own, became a creditor and charged high rates of interest on loans. "I have no scruples toward the Alabamians," wrote Tayloe. "I came here to make money."<sup>193</sup>

Forced to become wage earners because they could not afford to buy land, and land being unavailable because planter elites already purchased it, poor whites experienced a psychological toll that was hard to recover from. The slave system "twice removed" poor whites and created a class of landless southerners as a result of the territorial expansion of large-scale plantation-based commercial agriculture. "The tide of small farmers advancing toward the frontier in search of new opportunity," writes Ulrich B. Phillips, "was followed in many areas by a tide of planters

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 670-671. See Bode and Ginter, *Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia*, 91. Bode and Ginter show that the term "tenant" as it was used in the 1860 census included both those who rented land and those who sharecropped. In strictly legal terms, a true "tenant" was someone who rented land, while a sharecropper was a farm laborer who shared their crop in lieu of cash payment to land owners. Renters also maintained control over their crop whereas croppers did not.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>193</sup> Quotation found in Fischer and Kelly, *Bound Away*, 221.

who sought new openings where their capital might be employed more advantageously.” While these displaced, would-be small farmers at times were able sometimes to acquire holdings of land and become members of the yeomanry, many “retrograded in the scale of life, drifted to the barren tracts, and lived from hand to mouth as anemic poor-whites. . . . The very nature of the plantation system caused this phenomenon.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Quotation found in Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Origin and Growth of the Southern Black Belts,” *American Historical Review* 11 (July, 1906): pp. 798-816, 799-800.

## CHAPTER IV

### BENEVOLENT DESPOTISM

Mill labor was under constant surveillance. To not be in place or not to be performing work adequately revealed in the minds of factory masters a hidden disorder among laborers; persistent and harsh rules, regulations, and punishments prevented a breakdown in industrial order. Superintendents or “overseers,” acting as extensions of the will of factory owners and the board of directors, personally directed the efforts of laborers within cotton mills. In the mill village, owners enacted numerous reform measures such as temperance, religion, and education as part of benevolence toward poor white laborers. While this benevolence extended somewhat from sincere sentiments of aid for poor whites, they nevertheless were expressions of control to keep poor white factory operatives laboring within mills and living within mill villages. Financially, factory owners controlled their labor force through the mill-owned company store and high rental costs which created debt peonage. In essence, poor white wage laborers were never truly free because they became tied to textile factories through isolation and debt. Confined to the mill and their cabins of the mill village, textile workers remained there for a lifetime.<sup>195</sup>

For one former worker of Graniteville, William Gregg asserted total control over his operatives in a variety of ways. “He acted in all his plans for the life of the people of Graniteville

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<sup>195</sup> See Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 169. Johnson shows in his study of the antebellum Mississippi Valley that planters displayed benevolence toward their slaves as part of an expression of control.



as a sort of benevolent despot,” recalled the former laborer, “and from a profound sense of moral obligation.” Whether it was on the factory floor or in the school of the mill village, Gregg and other southern textile mill owners sought to master their laborers inside and outside of the mill. Factory rules and the strict enforcement of rules were necessary to control worker actions in the mill and limit their movements. Like slaves on plantations, poor white mill operatives were mistrusted and as a result needed to be constantly watched.<sup>196</sup>

The disappearance of indentured servitude after the American Revolution increased the importation of contracted European workers into the United States, who previously worked with advanced British manufacturing equipment. In the North, British mechanics bound themselves for between one and two years but would also do so for as long as five or six years. In the South, any advanced mechanical knowledge was much appreciated, but skilled managers were also highly sought by southern textile firms. The American experience with the implementation of contract labor is unusual because it undermines the traditional narrative of “free” labor. Economic conditions dictated why certain labor types were chosen. Nowhere is this truer than in the antebellum southern experience with industrialization. Just as planters turned to slave labor following the end of the uses of indentured servitude in the seventeenth-century, so too did southern textile mill owners turn to the acquisition and control of poor white labor for their factories. While northerners did not much use contracts when the pool of native wage workers expanded, contract labor persisted in the textile industry of the antebellum South.<sup>197</sup>

The most explicit use of contractual labor agreements occurred at the Graniteville Manufacturing Company. The textile mill printed a labor contract to be read by the prospective employee, whereby it was then signed and filed at the company office. Ironically, a majority of

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<sup>196</sup> Quotation found in Wallace, “A Hundred Years of William Gregg and Graniteville,” 2

<sup>197</sup> Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 30-33. See also Charlotte Erickson, *American Industry and the European Immigrant, 1860-1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 4-6; and Montgomery, *Citizen Worker*, 13.

Graniteville mill hands were illiterate so they had to sign the document with an “x” after it was presumably read to them by a factory representative. Mill operative illiteracy must have been advantageous for Graniteville management as any real or perceived infraction on the part of their workforce could be punished and not challenged by the affected worker in any legal manner. Graniteville contracts outlined numerous rules for textile laborers, mostly involving the obedience to mill authorities regarding temperance and mandatory attendance by mill children to the village school. Contracts explained that fines would be levied against any mill family whose child was conspicuously absent from school, charging a fine of five cents per day until the student returned to class. Additionally, Graniteville’s labor agreement acted as a housing contract for operatives, notifying all tenants of company housing were to lease dwellings from month to month. Any family could be ordered to vacate the premises immediately upon the termination of laborer from the mill.<sup>198</sup>

Although the Graniteville Manufacturing Company provided written labor contracts for its employees, most other textile factories did not. The Board of Directors for the Cane Creek Cotton Factory, located near Snow Camp, North Carolina, established that the mill president and four directors could create all worker contracts as well as employee rules for the establishment. Labor contracts at the Salem Manufacturing Company (SMC) and Fries Woolen Mill (FWM) in Salem, North Carolina were oral agreements. Francis Fries, the one-time superintendent for SMC and later owner of FWM, arranged all contracts for both white wage laborers and slaves through personal negotiations with workers and slave masters. These “contracts” were then meticulously recorded in mill diaries as well as Fries’s personal journal. A worker at FWM named Jack Brown agreed to a three-year contract to work in the spinning room at \$18 per month. Fries hired Alf Stephens at a wage of \$14 per month and promised to provide a raise in pay if he felt Stephens to

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<sup>198</sup> Graniteville Manufacturing Company Rules, Graniteville Manufacturing Company Records, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. It is estimated that as late as 1860, approximately sixty percent of all Graniteville employees were illiterate.

be a good worker after the first month of labor. Unskilled laborers and those in debt had much less negotiating power with Fries. Edward Holland, a poor white from Forsyth County, North Carolina, agreed to work for SMC “Sundays or nights at all times” whenever Fries needed his labor. His contract was to last until Holland’s debts were paid to Fries and only continue if Fries wished him to stay employed at the factory.<sup>199</sup>

Hired slave contracts were negotiated between Fries and the slaveowner wanting to rent their slave. Just like the contracts between Fries and white wage laborers, slave contracts seemed to be oral agreements and recorded only in mill diaries and in Fries’s personal papers. A slaveowner named C. L. Banner hired out his slave, Ben, to work for Fries’s mill at a rate of \$.50 room and board per week with any additional cash rewards going directly to Banner. The slaves of R. L. Webber and Matthew Crews earned their masters \$10 per month and were to be boarded by the factory. If the slaves became ill, they were to return home.<sup>200</sup>

It is unclear how negotiations between Fries and slaveholders functioned but there is evidence that masters had more negotiating power than mill owners. For instance, whereas the slaves of C. L. Banner and Matthew Crews only received \$10 per month, the slave of Joseph Bodenheimer received \$12 for the first month’s work and \$13 a month thereafter. Presumably, when mills were in need of labor, masters could receive more wages for their slaves due to higher demand. Ultimately, however, there is scant evidence to support this theory. Yet when slaves did not perform their work as expected, Fries did not pay slave owners. When the slave of a man

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<sup>199</sup> Minute Book, Cane Creek Cotton Factory, October 1, 1836, July 7, 1837, Cane Creek Farmers & Mechanics Cotton Manufacturing Company of Orange and Chatham Records, Perkins Library, Duke University (hereinafter cited as PL-DU); Mill Diary, January 17, 1856, June 1, 1857, April 21, 1859, Fries Mill Collection, Moravian Archives; Francis Levin Fries Diary, November 15, 1842, Fries Diary, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>200</sup> Mill Diary, January 14, 1850, November 1, 1852, November 28, 1852, Fries Mill Collection, Moravian Archives; See also Bradford, “The Negro Ironworker in Ante Bellum Virginia,” 196. Bradford shows that slaves who were skilled typically cost factory owners between \$25-40 more than unskilled hands.

named Napier did not work diligently at his station and “[laid] idle” in the factory, Fries refused to pay Napier the slave’s full wages. As a result, the contracts of labor for slaves could be fluid and not rigidly-defined between mill owners and slaveholders.<sup>201</sup>

Industrial slaves typically lived in rural areas and worked on farms or plantations before their introduction to manufacturing. Most often, hired slaves were males, but women and children were also brought into factories. For those factory masters who owned their slave laborers, they profited from slavery’s intermediate product—marketable and productive slave offspring. Slave children became company assets and like their parents could be sold at good prices. In May of 1843, seven slaves owned by the Athens Manufacturing Company were sold at public auction to pay off the debts of the company. William Gregg offered nineteen young male slaves for sale in early 1847 to make room for poor white operatives at his mill. Therefore, for a southern manufactory to own and employ slave labor, the profitability of employing slaves was two-fold: increased earned annual profits on capital from slave employment and additional revenue streams from the sale of healthy, marketable slaves.<sup>202</sup>

Though hired slaves were used in textile manufacturing, their numbers were small, and mill labor forces were typically comprised exclusively of poor white labor or in some instances, integrated workforces such as in the Salem Manufacturing Company. Fabien Linden states that in industries where slaves were employed, there existed an inherent “social stigma” discouraging whites from seeking industrial employment. Consequently, there was a prevailing notion that southern whites refused to work in integrated workforces due to racial bigotry, as well as fear of social ostracism from fellow whites.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Francis Fries Memorandum Book, October 3, 1837, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives.

<sup>202</sup> Minute Book, May 16, 1843, Athens Manufacturing Company, Chicopee Manufacturing Company Records, HL-UGA; *Edgefield Advertiser*, January 13, 1847; See also Robert S. Starobin, “The Economics of Industrial Slavery in the Old South,” *Business History Review* 44 (Summer, 1970): pp. 131-174, 138.

<sup>203</sup> Fabien Linden, “Repercussions of Manufacturing in the Antebellum South,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 17 (October, 1940): pp. 313-331, 314. See also Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss, *A Deplorable*

When using the Salem Manufacturing Company as a case study and examining integrated workforces in the textile industry of the antebellum South, it must be understood as more of an exception than the rule, as there simply is not enough evidence of other factories using such techniques. Nevertheless, the existence of workplace integration at Salem reveals the interracial cooperation between poor whites and blacks in the antebellum South. Whites and blacks labored alongside each other on plantations and aided each other in numerous ways, both socially and economically. Accordingly, there is a lack of evidence in the records of the Salem factory for workplace tension between whites and blacks. In fact, astonishingly, there is proof of hired slaves serving as department foremen who supervised the labor of poor whites. When Edward Holland began work in the factory in the weaving department, a slave named Elic managed Holland's job until he was more experienced.<sup>204</sup>

Despite slave labor efficiency and a willingness on the part of poor whites to work alongside blacks, hiring slaves in textile mills presented problems for factory management. Superintendents were forced to keep a closer watch on what slaves were doing so as to guarantee the corporation was only paying for the time their slaves worked. Moreover, there were additional difficulties in dealings with slaveholders who leased their slaves. Not only did the health of slaves have to be carefully monitored, but any infraction of factory rules could not be punished through whipping, as slave masters would seek compensation for their damaged property. Fearing damage to their chattel, some masters purchased life insurance policies for their slaves.<sup>205</sup>

Because mill management was concerned about not hurting or overworking slave labor in their factories, slaves often were treated better than poor whites. Francis Fries often let slaves get

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*Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 34, 89-90; and Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South*, 55-56.

<sup>204</sup> See Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 47-48; Francis Levin Fries Diary, August 26, 1841, Francis Levin Fries Diary, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>205</sup> Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South*, 64.

extra rest while he made poor whites continue working without breaks. For instance, Edward Holland carded wool for almost twelve hours while two slaves took naps. The weaving department foreman and slave, Elic, was allowed to sleep until 9 am before he was required to begin work. When the circus came to Salem, Fries took several of the mill's slaves while Holland and another white mill hand named Hinchliffe were to remain at the factory and sort cotton. Preferential treatment for slave laborers surely caused some resentment among mill hands, particularly in the Salem factory, as the records show poor white absenteeism accompanying displays of favoritism towards slaves.<sup>206</sup>

Because white labor was not owned by cotton factories and could not be physically punished unlike slaves, strict day-to-day management of poor whites was necessary to curb resentment of hired slaves, thwart labor activism, and ensure compliance to mill ownership. Despite the presence of strong, Protestant work habits among white operatives, many factory masters believed that pre-industrial modes of worker behavior would creep back into their workplaces. Founding Fathers such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton were wary of the virtues of the laboring classes. “Unless God should send us saints for workmen and angels to conduct them,” wrote Hamilton, “there is great reason to fear for the success of [industrialization].” Consequently, industrial labor forcefully reshaped work habits and required workers previously unaccustomed to machines to adapt to new labor practices and necessities of production.<sup>207</sup>

Before 1843, which Herbert Gutman marks as the beginning of scientific management in American manufacturing, workers entered factories bringing with them preindustrial cultures and work habits that were irregular, agricultural, and undisciplined. Frustrated cost-conscious employers imposed strict rules to change such disruptive behavior. Southern textile mills

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<sup>206</sup> Francis Levin Fries Diary, July 29, 1841, July 30, 1841, August 3, 1841, September 14, 1841, Francis Levin Fries Diary, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>207</sup> Quotation found in Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 5.

introduced rigid guidelines for all employed laborers, focusing on controlling poor white behavior that included their movements within the factories. From the available evidence, it appears that the majority of factory management created rules and enforced them through mill superintendents, sometimes referred to as “overseers.” The very term “overseer” reflects what historian Walter Johnson refers to as “visual mastery.” Factory overseers acted as extensions of the eyes and ears of mill owners who were actively involved in the maintenance of proper order on factory floors. At the Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company in Concord, North Carolina, the factory’s Board of Directors ordered that all company rules and by-laws be printed into pamphlets and distributed to employees. Both charters of the Cane Creek Cotton Factory and Athens Manufacturing Company authorized the creation and enforcement of rules by their board of directors as well, but there is no evidence that company rules were printed and posted in the factories.<sup>208</sup>

At Graniteville, operatives were required to be in place by the second morning bell and to begin work “as soon as there [was] light sufficient for running the machines.” Worker movement was carefully monitored with no hands allowed to visit co-workers in other departments unless for purposes of work. Workers at Cane Creek Cotton Factory (CCCF) were not allowed to visit the factory’s offices on the second floor unless they obtained permission from the mill owner or superintendents. Furthermore, workers were not permitted to socialize with any fellow operative and no visitors were allowed to enter the factory to call upon mill laborers without the express consent of superintendents. Hands were expected to be at their workstations at all times and could only take restroom breaks after receiving permission from mill overseers. Factory rules for the Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company also employed female workers and forbade

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 166; Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, February 8, 1842, February 16, 1850, April 2, 1853, Concord Steam Manufacturing Company Minutes, Cannon Mills Records, PL-DU; Minute Book, October 1, 1836, July 8, 1837, March 5, 1839, Cane Creek Cotton Factory, PL-DU; Minute Book, March 23, 1835, January 1, 1836, Athens Manufacturing Company Records, HL-UGA.

any male employees to “utter any slandering word reflecting upon the good name and character of any female engaged in the establishment.” If any man was found guilty of such an infraction, they were to be immediately dismissed. Likewise, at CCCF, any employee who “[spoke] false or disrespectful” of any female operatives would also have their employment terminated.<sup>209</sup>

The enforcement of mill regulations was given to superintendents who used a variety of techniques to ensure worker compliance. Slaves could be whipped within factories, and though there is a lack of data to support its widespread usage, it can be reasonably assumed that slaves hired by companies were at times physically punished. Physical punishment did not occur in regards to poor white laborers. At Graniteville, James Montgomery, the factory superintendent, was required to provide monthly reports to the mill’s Board of Directors regarding all punishments issued by the superintendent and department heads toward employees. However, at the Roswell Manufacturing Company in Georgia, the mill superintendent, Henry Merrell, did resort to physical punishment on one particular occasion. Mill hands at Roswell had become lazy, drank alcohol during their shifts, behaved disorderly, and openly defied factory authority. After having been “insulted in a ruffianly manner,” Merrell confronted an Englishman named Atkinson, the leader of the surly workmen, who also served as a department head within the mill. Merrell initially docked Atkinson a day’s pay for his disorderly conduct, which led to a physical confrontation between the two parties. Merrell won the fight, promptly fired Atkinson, and threatened to beat any other laborer who defied the mill’s authority.<sup>210</sup>

Punishment of poor white mill workers amounted to one action: termination of employment, because physical punishment was ruled out, there was no other alternative to

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<sup>209</sup> Quotation found in *De Bow’s Review* 8 (January, 1850), 27-28; Minute Book, October 1, 1836, March 5, 1839, Cane Creek Cotton Factory, Cane Creek Farmers & Mechanics Cotton Manufacturing Company of Orange and Chatham Records, PL-DU; Board of Director Meeting Minutes, February 8, 1842, February 16, 1850, Concord Steam Manufacturing Company, Cannon Mills Records, PL-DU.

<sup>210</sup> Graniteville Manufacturing Company Charter, William Gregg Papers, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken; quotation found in Skinner, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell*, 152-153.



maintaining order. The superintendent of the Salem Manufacturing Company, Thomas Siddall, had a reputation as a no-nonsense manager and swiftly handled worker insubordination. In March of 1838, an operative named Hiram Phelps was hired to work in an unknown section of the factory. Phelps and Siddall became embroiled in an argument on Phelps's first day of work, leading Siddall to dismiss him from the mill. On October 6, 1847, Siddall fired Julia Tise, Eliza Shaw, and Lucy Leminshum within the span of several hours for unknown infractions.<sup>211</sup>

Not all textile factories relied solely on the management of superintendents. Francis Fries regularly worked alongside his operatives, and it can be surmised that he personally directed their efforts. Fries had been hired as the superintendent for the Salem Manufacturing Company in 1836 where he gained experience supervising mill work. Fries often aided hands in constructing new rooms to the factory as well as actively working in various departments of the company. For example, when one hand was out sick on a November day in 1841, Fries tended to the looms in the weaving department. Another day, Fries assisted operatives in carding wool.<sup>212</sup>

Obtaining qualified and efficient superintendents was a priority for the effective management of poor white mill laborers. Ostensibly through the employment of competent factory supervisors, cotton mills operated more effectively keeping workers controlled and production rates high. Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss believe that antebellum southern industrialists lacked the entrepreneurial shrewdness to search for and employ knowledgeable men to serve as factory managers because southerners were new to operating manufacturing enterprises. Using what is referred to as the "Entrepreneurial Inability Hypothesis," Bateman and Weiss theorize that southern mill owners were incompetent and did not possess the entrepreneurial know-how for seeking experienced superintendents. Likewise, Robert Starobin

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<sup>211</sup> Memorandum Book, March 21, 1838, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Mill Diary, October 6, 1847, Salem Manufacturing Company, Fries Mill Collection, Moravian Archives.

<sup>212</sup> Memorandum Book, November 8, 1836, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Francis Levin Fries Diary, June 26, 1841, September 14, 1841, November 18, 1841, Francis Levin Fries Diary, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

echoes the sentiments of Bateman and Weiss. In antebellum southern textiles, the “types of free white management available—personal supervision, native white technicians, and imported directors—had serious limitations,” writes Starobin.<sup>213</sup>

Northerners also contended that southern industry could not genuinely advance because its factories lacked the technical prowess and the managerial skill necessary for successfully operating large-scale enterprises. The few examples of southern achievements, according to antebellum northerners, could only be explained by the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of northern industrialists who migrated to the South in the years before the Civil War. Even then, the most competent northerners supposedly faced an inhospitable environment for any sort of manufacturing. “There is a prevailing impression among mill managers,” wrote the English industrialist, James Montgomery in 1859, “that the proprietors of Southern factories invariably refuse to pay their superintendents such high salaries as paid by Northern manufacturers. Hence, they, employing cheap men, may only expect cheap management.”<sup>214</sup>

For a textile manager to be successful, Montgomery insisted that the position required years of practical experience with machinery as well as the support of the community in which a factory operated. As Susanna Delfino has noted, it has been a long-standing belief that antebellum southern factories were often such small operations that owners could personally manage their workforces without the need for additional managerial staff. Just as planters required the services of overseers when their slave workforce numbered twenty or more, so too did cotton manufacturers need the assistance of mill managers. Consequently, within historical

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<sup>213</sup> Bateman and Weiss, *A Deplorable Scarcity*, 99-142; Starobin, “The Economics of Industrial Slavery in the Old South,” 148-149.

<sup>214</sup> Susanna Delfino, “Running Southern Manufactories: The Antebellum Origins of Managerial Professions,” in Jonathan Daniel Wells and Jennifer R. Green, eds., *The Southern Middle Class in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 105; quotation by Montgomery on pg. 105. See also Thomas C. Cochran, *Frontiers of Change: Early Industrialism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 133-134.

scholarship, the professional figures of southern managerial occupations and discussion of white-collar workers in manufactories, particularly within textiles, have been neglected.<sup>215</sup>

Between 1840 and 1850, all states but one within the southern Piedmont witnessed an expansion of textile factories. Georgia's cotton mills nearly doubled in quantity, growing from nineteen to thirty-five in just a decade. As a result of greater investment of capital in industry leading to the growth of textiles manufacturing across the Piedmont, cotton mills also grew in size, increasing the need for superintendents and department foremen. Factory owners could not reasonably direct the efforts of their workers personally as they did prior to 1840. Based on the quantitative data available, the average Piedmont textile establishment by 1850 employed seventy-three hands. In states such as Georgia where the number of operatives tripled in just ten years (See Table 1), obtaining factory overseers was fundamental to the proper management of mills that had grown too large for just owner oversight.

Early industrial ventures in the years preceding capitalistic developments within the American economy were often simple partnerships composed of several people—perhaps three or four individuals. Following the Industrial Revolution, textile enterprises became incorporated and involved in the mass production of commodities and employed hundreds of operatives. The primary difference between the two enterprises was the special requirements for capital outlay. Simple partnerships prior to industrial capitalism utilized the majority of their capital towards the acquisition of land. For example, if a small iron-making establishment wished to operate successfully, land assets, where limestone and mineral ore could be extracted, as well as charcoal, were needed. In the case of southern textile manufactories by the 1830s, the heaviest capital outlay required was for the purchase of expensive machinery from the Northeast and its subsequent transportation and installation in southern mills.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Delfino, "Running Southern Manufactories," 105-106. See also James Montgomery, "Why Southern Factories Fail," *De Bow's Review* 26 (January, 1859), 95-96.

<sup>216</sup> Delfino, "Running Southern Manufactories," 108.

Table 1. Textile Mills Operating in Piedmont South, 1840 and 1850

<i>State</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Textile Mills</i>	<i>Capital invested (\$)</i>	<i>Operatives</i>
Alabama	1840	14	35,575	82
	1850	12	651,900	715
Georgia	1840	19	573,835	779
	1850	35	1,735,156	2,272
North Carolina	1840	25	995,300	1,219
	1850	26	1,058,800	1,619
South Carolina	1840	15	617,450	570
	1850	18	857,200	1,019
Virginia	1840	22	1,295,020	1,816
	1850	27	1,908,900	2,953

Source: Mitchell, *Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*, 21.

Pre-industrial enterprises could be established in large part by the involvement of a few landowning investors. In order for the increased investment to obtain redeemable profits, the management environment for industrial firms changed from the pre-industrial pattern. Pre-industrial operations involved separate steps to be completed over vast stretches of land. At an iron forge, for instance, there was wood-cutting, limestone and ore digging, pig iron production, and so forth, all of which was necessary to produce semi-finished and finished products ranging from wrought iron to nails. While each of these procedures was interlocked and coordination needed to be achieved, these methods nevertheless relied upon the labors of highly skilled workers in charge of specific operations who knew when to intervene in the various processes and how to manage their assistants. By the era of the Industrial Revolution, the pace of work became determined by machines. In a textile factory, some procedures such as picking, carding, winding bobbins, and spinning required a high amount of coordination with close supervision of many hands concentrated in a single, closed-in space.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 108-109.

Delfino suggests that between the years 1840 and 1860, southern mill owners increasingly found themselves able to hire local and regional candidates for managerial positions. While certainly there is an indication of native southerners hired as mill superintendents—in particular, hiring managers with previous experience managing slaves—there is also evidence of northern and European supervisors employed in textile factories. For example, the superintendent of the Salem Manufacturing Company, Thomas Siddall, was an English immigrant who gained experience working in textile factories as a mechanic. When he immigrated to Fayetteville, North Carolina, Francis Fries actively pursued his services, eventually moving Siddall and his family to Salem and rented them a home near the factory. Henry Merrell exclusively sought the services of northern superintendents. “My own success depending upon a judicious choice of subordinate officers,” wrote Merrell, “I resolved to have (managers) from the North.”<sup>218</sup>

Yet the diversity of operating the various processes of manufacturing textiles made it necessary to recruit and hire lower-level managers to supervise different departments within the factory. The results seem to vary on the success of such hirings. While it was effective at the Salem factory with engaging Thomas Siddall, Henry Merrell experienced bad results at the Roswell Manufacturing Company. “Looking for trustworthy men among the lower class of white people at the South,” Merrell complained, “I have been only tolerably successful.” Merrell blamed the perceived slovenly and belligerent natures of poor whites for his failure in the hiring of qualified department heads for the mill. “With hands who looked upon their employer as their natural enemy, and no kindness could ever satisfy them to the contrary,” Merrell ended his search for mill managers among poor white operatives.<sup>219</sup>

Though a “southern-based network of knowledge and . . . technical community” was established by 1860, southern mill owners consistently relied upon northern advice in not only

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<sup>218</sup> Delfino, “Running Southern Manufactories,” 106; Minutes of the Aufseher Collegium, January 20, 1837, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives; Skinner, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell*, 149.

<sup>219</sup> Quotations found in Skinner, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell*, 169-170.

how to operate their factories, but in how to manage their hands as well. The agent of Graniteville, James Montgomery, wrote to Paul Whitin, a prominent manufacturer of cotton factory machinery operating in Northbridge, Massachusetts as to preventing worker illnesses in their factory. “Sometime ago, Mr. Gregg wrote you inquiring whether you could give any plan or direction about the best method of applying fanners to carry off dust from your old pickers and clear the picking room from the light dust which floats about to the great injury of the health of the operators. We would be glad if you would give us some plan or instructions how to effect this in the best way.”<sup>220</sup>

The role of superintendent was sometimes performed by someone who held a personal stake in the enterprise, usually someone who owned a high percentage of company stock. The manager of the Union Manufacturing Company in Randolph County, North Carolina, William Clark, sold his stock for \$2000 in 1860. Caleb Phifer, the superintendent of the Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company, consistently purchased stock in the corporation, owning forty-two shares in 1852 and fifty-one by 1853. By 1856, Phifer was the third largest stockholder in the company.<sup>221</sup>

By examining individual cases at a variety of textile firms, the evidence reveals that factory managers typically were young men, aged between twenty-five and thirty-three. For instance, Thomas Siddall was thirty-three when he was hired to manage the Salem factory. Henry Martin, whom Siddall recommended to serve as foreman of the weaving department, was twenty-five at the time he was hired. Likewise, at the Union Manufacturing Company in

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<sup>220</sup> James Montgomery to P. Whitin and Sons, February 12, 1858, P. Whitin and Sons Records, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (hereinafter cited as SCL-USC); quotation from Michelle Gillespie, “Building Networks of Knowledge: Henry Merrell and Textile Manufacturing in the Antebellum South,” in Susanna Delfino and Michelle Gillespie, eds., *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization: From the Antebellum Era to the Computer Age* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 124.

<sup>221</sup> Minute Book, January 30, 1860, Union Manufacturing Company, Union Manufacturing Company Papers (hereinafter cited as UMC), PL-DU; Board of Director Meeting Minutes, February 10, 1852, Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company, Cannon Mills Records, PL-DU.

Randolph County, North Carolina, Jesse Walker was aged thirty-one when the Board of Directors selected him as the factory superintendent.<sup>222</sup>

Mill supervisors were also paid well, usually earning between eight hundred to one thousand dollars per year. Textile owners such as William Gregg persistently advocated the cause of paying high salaries to experienced technicians to serve as cotton mill superintendents. The Columbia *South Carolinian* remarked that had the Saluda operation only paid its previous superintendent better than perhaps the factory would have been more successful. John Linton, the superintendent of the Athens Manufacturing Company, as well as Thomas Siddall and Henry Merrell, were paid one thousand dollars a year as mill managers. Jesse Walker was paid \$800 a year for taking over as superintendent for the Union Manufacturing Company in 1860. *De Bow's Review* noted in 1850 that the superintendent of the Coweta Falls Manufacturing Company in Columbus, Georgia, earned \$1000 per year, while one manager employed by the Howard Factory in Taylor County, Georgia earned \$900 per year.<sup>223</sup>

The managers of textile factories performed many other critical duties beyond the day-to-day supervision of operatives. Thomas Siddall conducted all business for the Salem mill when Francis Fries was out of town on business. Fries placed enough trust in Siddall's judgment that Siddall was even allowed to hire new hands as well as inspect, repair, and purchase new machinery as he saw fit. Jacob Graves, superintendent of the Saluda Manufacturing Company in Columbia, South Carolina, also regularly purchased machinery for the Saluda mill and oversaw their transportation from the North to the factory in South Carolina. Jesse Walker was often

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<sup>222</sup> 1850 Census, Northern Division, Cumberland, North Carolina, Roll M432\_627, Page 151A, Image 307; 1850 Census, South Division, Surry, North Carolina, Roll M432\_646, Page 243B, Image 172; 1840 Census, Southern Division, Randolph, North Carolina, Roll M432\_641, Page 147B, Image 301.

<sup>223</sup> Columbia *South Carolinian*, December 18, 1844; Minute Book, August 26, 1844, July 28, 1849, Athens Manufacturing Company (hereinafter cited as AMC), HL-UGA; Board and Wage Book, January 20, 1838, Salem Manufacturing Company, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Minute Book, January 30, 1860, UMC, PL-DU; Delfino, "Running Southern Manufactories," 124; "Department of Manufacturers," *De Bow's Review* 9 (October, 1850), 429-439. See also Michelle Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000) and Michael Gagnon, "Transition to an Industrial South: Athens, Georgia, 1830-1870," Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999.

appointed by the board of directors at the Union Manufacturing Company to visit local mills to gain information on how they conducted their business. John Linton, as the manager for the Athens Manufacturing Company, also acted as the corporation's secretary. Linton also purchased and sold factory slaves for the enterprise. Accordingly, the position of superintendent at the Athens mill was deemed a permanent post, with only the owner and the Board of Directors allowed to remove the manager by vote.<sup>224</sup>

Beyond the control of textile laborers within mills through rules, regulations, and punishments, the mill village, and company store came to represent the physical, spiritual, moral, and monetary authority of factory ownership. New Englanders understood villages as a place of cultural enlightenment. The so-called "village tradition" was, in reality, an invented concept meant to purport community ideals, representing a sort of Zion for all who resided within. Contemporary literary depictions such as Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822) provided the basis for the cult of domesticity and social reform, utilizing the village as "a most favorable milieu for the nurturing of human happiness and virtue."<sup>225</sup>

As New England textile mill village systems were transplanted to the antebellum South, the initial strategy of providing worker housing was modeled on the Waltham/Lowell system, by utilizing boardinghouses. Graniteville, the Salem Manufacturing Company, and the Autauga Manufacturing Company of Autaugaville, Alabama all experimented with the use of boardinghouses for the residential control of factory operatives. William Gregg believed that female laborers within Graniteville would be best controlled by living in the boardinghouses and under the close supervision of house mothers, who were older, unmarried women also employed

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<sup>224</sup> Letter Book, January 4, 1838, January 20, 1838, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Memorandum Book, February 21, 1839, April 25, 1839, November 1, 1839, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Jacob Graves to P. Whitin and Sons, June 27, 1848, PWS, SCL-USC; Minute Book, January 1, 1849, UMC, PL-DU; Minute Book, June 16, 1836, July 28, 1849, AMC, HL-UGA.

<sup>225</sup> Joseph S. Wood, *The New England Village* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 136, 138, 143. See also Hardy Green, *The Company Town: The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills That Shaped the American Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 18-20.



by the mill. Gregg quickly realized that single females without the support of families soon returned to family farms leaving the mill's labor force in a perpetual flux. Likewise, Francis Fries always employed the Waltham/Lowell system for his operatives at the Salem factory. The Autauga Manufacturing Company constructed eighteen cottages for factory operatives in 1849 who were staffed with house mothers to supervise female operatives.<sup>226</sup>

The use of boardinghouses proved advantageous for the operatives employed by the Salem mill. Many employees would supplement their incomes by taking in boarders. Henderson Ball boarded two young male hands and charged from \$4.50 and \$9.00 respectively a month extra. Henry Stulz received \$10.12 extra per month for boarding five mill workers. A widow named Constance Banner boarded not only young female operatives but seven slaves, making an additional \$16 per month. John Chitty purchased the house of James Christmann specifically for boarding mill hands in the home. Ultimately, however, it was more expedient for mill owners to construct self-contained villages comprised of cottages that housed whole family units that would labor in the mill. Families provided, in the opinion of William Gregg, "great moral restraint, and gives [a mill] an advantage over those who have to rely on the boarding-house system for help, where large numbers of young females are collected together from a wide range of country, away from parents' care." Boardinghouses were typically scattered throughout an area where a textile factory operated, whereas cottages could be built in a centralized location to be more carefully monitored. Additionally, around or near these villages, ownership could construct company

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<sup>226</sup> William Gregg to Freeman Hunt, October 22, 1849, William Gregg Papers, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken; Board and Wage Books, 1837-1846, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; *Montgomery Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser*, November 30, 1848, December 2, 1848; *Mobile Alabama Planter*, June 4, 1849. See also Randall Miller, *The Cotton Mill Movement in Alabama* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 79-80; and Bess Beatty, "I Can't Get My Bored on Them Looms: Female Textile Workers in the Antebellum South," in Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, eds., *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 253.

stores, as well as churches and schools to institute measures of spiritual and moral reform for operatives and their families.<sup>227</sup>

The Second Great Awakening signified the acceptance of millennialist evangelicalism as the faith of the burgeoning middle class in the United States. The mode of change of this “missionary crusade” was primarily achieved through the reform efforts of industrialists and evangelicals. Wishing not to control vice explicitly, reformers sought to liberate sinful workers by emphasizing temperance, education, and Protestant Christianity. Individual conversion and the imposition of reform measures within industrial communities were to be the bulwarks of stamping out sinfulness and to prepare for the second coming of Christ.<sup>228</sup>

Proto-industrialists combatted the shift from the pre-industrial economy to industrial capitalism through the brandishing of religious weaponry embodied within temperance societies, Sunday schools, and revivalism. Reformers believed industrialization was a crusade for civilization—a joint economic and religious venture to rescue the working proletariat from barbarism, so as to bestow upon them Christianity with an emphasis on ecumenical and temporal salvation. For evangelical reformers, for a free society to properly function, it must be taught how to govern itself through learning self-restraint built on a foundation of belief in God. In blunt terms, Tocqueville concluded that it was possible to guide a despotism lacking faith but not a nation steeped in liberty. Thus, revival religion and social control were linked and established order through individual self-restraint. The revivals in Rochester, New York and elsewhere in the North, were utilized to reinforce industrialist control over wage laborers employed in factories.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Quotation by Gregg found in D. D. Wallace, “A Hundred Years of William Gregg and Graniteville,” ms. copy, William Gregg Papers, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken; Board and Wage Books, 1837-1846, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Minutes of the Aufseher Collegium, November 7, 1836, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives.

<sup>228</sup> Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 5-6.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 136. See also Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Paul Faler, “Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, Shoemakers, and Industrial Morality, 1826-1860,” *Labor History* 15 (June, 1974): pp. 367-394; Stuart M. Blumin, *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago

Religious influences were strongest among skilled labor such as master craftsmen and journeymen, as well as middle-class factory owners, but weak among unskilled factory operatives. For employers, evangelical Christianity internalized beliefs which best suited them and became legitimate forms of dominating workforces through the representation of “society.” The tenets of northern religious reform were built on the foundations that every man, while not free from the control of his employer, was indeed spiritually free and possessed the ability to govern themselves. This notion stands in stark contrast from southern social and theological thought which posited freedom belonged only to those whites who deserved it while being simultaneously denied to slaves and poor whites.<sup>230</sup>

The revivals of Charles Finney at Rochester, New York temporarily solved problems with labor discipline and social control among workers in newly-established manufacturing cities. Those who attended Finney’s revivals were New England businessmen born in villages immersed in paternalism, with the roles of husband, father, and employer intertwined with one another. Employers and employees slept in the same household. Disputes, either verbal or physical, were a rarity. When they did occur, employers were present to decipher which event caused the altercation and punish accordingly. Wage earners could not be indolent, imbibe alcohol, or break the Sabbath because employers were ever-present. Thus, insubordination was uncommon, and employees acted more like houseguests rather than independent laborers.<sup>231</sup>

In the years immediately preceding the revival of 1831, the men who became converts of Charles Finney’s ideology resisted and dissolved the preindustrial, patriarchal control of their masters. In the transition from premodern to modern industrialism, the factory owner/master

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Press, 1976); and Alan Dawley and Paul Faler, “Working-Class Culture and Politics in the Industrial Revolution: Sources of Loyalism and Rebellion,” *Journal of Social History* 9 (Summer, 1976): pp. 466-480. Cross, Faler, Blumin, and Dawley show that religious revivals gained strength in manufacturing hubs such as Rochester, Lockport, and Utica, New York, as well as Lynn, Massachusetts, but did not attract followers laboring in canal towns and seaports. The urban revivals of the 1820s and 1830s are, therefore, clearly linked to the growth of manufacturers.

<sup>230</sup> Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, 137-138.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

broke from the traditional relationship of home-centered relations of production and, therefore, as the authority as head of household and moral governor of society. Disobedience and disorder became religious problems, and resistance in workshops rose and temperance became null and void. The attempt to secure control through coercive measures failed and paved the way for Charles Finney.<sup>232</sup>

The 1831 revival reconciled the moral dilemmas of free labor and the waning control of northern industrialists. Religious belief legitimized authoritarian controls as hard-handed employers and employees became part of a missionary army. Contradicting the teachings of Calvin, Finney said humanity was not inherently corrupt; yet humanity could indeed become corrupted. Such a socioeconomic relationship which created direct dependence by employees toward employers fell away as it prevented wage earners from personal realizations of grace that were achieved through individual conversion. Hundreds of workingmen joined middle-class churches throughout the 1830s, demonstrating that paternalism could be replaced with piety and a voluntary willingness for self-control. Free labor could provide for an ordered society, and if a wage earner chose not to attend church or chose to frequent the tavern, as free moral agents, they could elect to do so. However, if they did want to drink and carouse, they voluntarily opposed the coming Kingdom of God and were fired without qualms from factories. As a result, northern industrial capitalism became linked to a moral ordering of society based on individualism and self-control. The previous modes of control founded upon dependence, servility, and mutuality were deemed sinful and subsequently discarded. In the South, however, these methods of control were the pillars of society.<sup>233</sup>

Some scholarship suggests that reform in the antebellum South was limited because planter elites balked at exposing slaves and poor whites to progressive ideas. Abolitionism, in particular, was stifled to quell the potential for slave revolts. Reform movements were shown to

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 141.

be subversive due to their connection with northern ultraism and too radical for conservative-minded southerners. However, a great many whites in the antebellum South, especially those involved in manufacturing, actively supported less radical reform initiatives such as the promulgation of evangelical Protestantism, temperance, and public education.<sup>234</sup>

Southern reform closely paralleled the North in its timing and inspiration. The Virginia Society for the Promotion of Temperance was founded in 1826, just a few months after the Society for the Promotion of Temperance organized in Boston. Reform advocates, like their northern counterparts, asserted that industry and benevolence went hand-in-hand. Henry Collier, an Alabama Supreme Court justice and eventual governor, was concerned over the South's overreliance on agriculture at the expense of manufacturing, as well as being worried about the state's poor white populace. "In a country where the facilities for living are as great as they are at the South," noted Collier, "there are, and must continue to be thousands who, without any visible employment, live as an *incubus* upon the bosom of society." Following his visit to a factory in Cincinnati, Collier's enthusiasm for industrialization as a tool of benevolence and social order were only heightened. "No man can enter a well-regulated manufacturing establishment without being struck with the order and method prevailing; and is apt to leave with a higher appreciation of the blessings of industry. Let manufacturing be extensively undertaken, agriculture and the mechanic arts will soon catch the impulse; neatness, comfort and elegance will be seen about the homestead, and among the household."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> See John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 5. See also John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1982), 76-79; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 184-185; and Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 206. For works stressing the lack of southern reform, see Clifford S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830-1860* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1967) and Eaton, *Growth of Southern Civilization*, 293.

<sup>235</sup> Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 75; quotations by Collier found in the *Tuscaloosa State Journal and Flag of the Union*, January 9, 1846.

Many southern industrialists believed that their mills and mill villages were indeed sources of salvation for their poor white laborers, saving them from lives of sin. William Gregg likened textile factories to religious missions. “Until Graniteville was established,” remarked Gregg, “there had been no systematic effort made for the moral and religious culture of factory operatives in any of the Southern States.” Wishing to place blame on society’s elite, Gregg charged that poor whites had been ignored by planters, “neglected by those possessing the capital of our own country.” For poor whites to be saved from a life of debauchery, they had to be controlled by a life of labor in textile mills. “These people must be brought into daily contact with the rich and intelligent,” extolled Gregg. “They must be stimulated to mental action, and taught to appreciate education and the comforts of civilized life.”<sup>236</sup>

Edwin Holt, the proprietor of the Alamance Manufacturing Company, also believed that the role of mill owner was to be “one of kindness and benevolence” toward poor white operatives. Francis Fries, described as the “master of equity,” by visitors to Salem, North Carolina, personally took in a poor white named John McElroy whom Fries noted as a “charity case.” “He had been neglected in mind and body,” wrote Fries, “He was afflicted with ring worms, boils, vermin, etc., and [his] mind required cleansing as much as the body.” Some poor whites arriving to mills were malnourished and unclean, having lived many years in poverty. Solomon Helsabeck, an itinerant minister in North Carolina, described one poor white family residing in the backcountry who lived for years without a chimney in their home and other families who “lived lives in an unpleasant state for some time.”<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> For Gregg’s belief in the mission of textile mills, see *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 16, 1856; Stockholder Meeting Minutes, October 22, 1849, Graniteville Manufacturing Company, William Gregg Papers, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken; quotations by Gregg found in Gregg, *Essays on Domestic Industry*, 22, 46-47.

<sup>237</sup> Diary, January 2, 1845, Edwin Michael Holt Diary, Alamance County Historical Museum, Burlington, North Carolina; Francis Fries to J. F. Shaffner, May 20, 1859, Fries and Shaffner Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection (hereinafter cited as SHC), University of North Carolina; Diary, January 29, 1856, April 19, 1856, Solomon Hilary Helsabeck Papers, SHC.

Temperance became a critical part of southern reform efforts in the antebellum period within textile mill communities. Although southern temperance initiatives were initially based on northern models, by the mid-1830s, the abolitionist influences within temperance caused trepidation among southern members. Gradually southern temperance reformers pursued policies formulated exclusively within the South, alongside a refusal to cooperate with northern publications and societies that voiced antislavery beliefs. Within the South's slave society, widespread planter elite support of temperance began from the beginning stages of the movement in the 1820s. Wealthy planters from South Carolina comprised the majority of the South Carolina State Temperance Society from the late-1820s onward. However, the adoption of total prohibition in 1836 threatened the social elites' ability to consume alcohol and planters defected *en masse*. After 1836, the southern temperance movement was mostly supported by the middle-class.<sup>238</sup>

The owners of textile factories actively supported temperance and introduced numerous measures within their mills and mill villages to combat the consumption of alcohol. The Aufseher Collegium noted that alcohol abuse was common among its workforce and urged Francis Fries to enforce temperance laws. The sale and consumption of alcohol were forbidden at Graniteville, not only for employees but anyone residing in the village. Leases to town lots contained temperance clauses and leaseholders were bound to prohibit any liquor on the premises, so as to prevent "riotous proceedings that . . . tend to demoralize the village." Anyone found guilty of the sale or consumption of alcohol faced fines or possible forfeiture of their lease. Daniel Pratt inserted temperance clauses into all Prattville land deeds forbidding the sale of alcohol under penalty of forfeiture. Pratt also used his political influence in the Alabama state legislature, which passed an act prohibiting alcohol from being sold anywhere within two miles of Prattville. At the Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company, no liquor was to be sold or

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<sup>238</sup> Ian R. Tyrrell, "Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South: An Overview and Interpretation," *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November, 1982): pp. 485-510, 486-490.

consumed in the factory or the surrounding area. The mill superintendent was charged with “[enforcing] good moral and orderly habits among all hands employed in the establishment.” The Cane Creek Cotton Factory was rigid in its enforcement of temperance in its factory and mill village. If any hands were caught drinking or selling liquor in the village, they were to be immediately dismissed.<sup>239</sup>

Though temperance was stressed within mill communities, the evidence suggests that the results varied among factory hands, with some operatives supporting temperance and others rejecting it. At the textile factory in Bivingsville, South Carolina, many workers advocated temperance, forming the Lawson’s Fork Division of the Sons of Temperance. On the first anniversary of the founding of the temperance society, the textile mill shut down for the day and celebrations occurred throughout the community. The owner of the factory, Elias C. Leitner, led a temperance parade with “little girls and young ladies . . . dressed in holiday style” marching alongside “young men . . . promenading in small companies.” All who marched in the parade were employees of the Bivingsville mill. Yet at other factories, temperance was viewed negatively. John Munro wrote to his friend, James Spear, in the spring of 1834 advising Spear not to seek employment at the Vaocluse textile factory near Graniteville. “In answer to your letter with regard to your coming out here,” wrote Munro, “I seriously and candidly would not advise you. . . . This is entirely a Temperance place. No liquor allowed to be used on forfeiture of [one] month wage.”<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Minutes of the Aufseher Collegium, January 24, 1842, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives; first quotation from *De Bow’s Review* 8 (January, 1850), 28; Curtis J. Evans, *The Conquest of Labor: Daniel Pratt and Southern Industrialization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 74; *De Bow’s Review* 10 (February, 1851), 226-227; Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South*, 140; second quotation from Board of Director Meeting Minutes, April 19, 1841, Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company, Cannon Mills Records, PL-DU; Minute Book, March 4, 1850, Cane Creek Cotton Factory, Cane Creek Farmers & Mechanics Cotton Manufacturing Company of Orange and Chatham Records, PL-DU. See also Henry Hughes, “On Temperance,” in Stanford M. Lyman, ed., *Selected Writings of Henry Hughes: Antebellum Southerner, Slavocrat, Sociologist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 190-193.

<sup>240</sup> Bruce W. Eelman, *Entrepreneurs in the Southern Upcountry: Commercial Culture in Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1845-1880* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 50; quotations found in *Carolina*



Spiritual reform within southern textile mills rose from evangelical revivals which swept through the southern countryside at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Evangelical denominations such as the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian faiths emphasized the personal experience of salvation. God saved the individual from damnation and assured not only life after death but also blessings in a temporal life. The essential part of the Christian message stressed paternalism. God's order in nature included societal relationships, and preachers consistently reminded their congregations of this point. Southern industrialists seized these opportunities to assert paternalism based on biblical law. Though religious revivals drew tens of thousands of southerners beginning in the early years of the nineteenth century, many church buildings and congregations did not take shape until the 1830s. The Second Great Awakening in the South coincided with the emergence of the southern middle-class composed of merchants, lawyers, clerks, and manufacturers. Not promoting Christian religion was tantamount to the apocalypse and doom of southern society in the view of evangelical southerners. "If the Christian Faith march not by the side, or lead the van of the tramp of nations," wrote the *Montgomery Advertiser* in 1857, "then the future is a cloudland, and they march steadily to an abyss which will swallow up and hide forever the glory and renown, the pride and pomp, the knowledge and art, which admitted no obligation to God, nor any debt to his Providence, nor any subjection to the mental forces of his grace."<sup>241</sup>

Mill ownership represented many denominations and owners held prominent lay positions within churches. For example, Simpson Bobo, Joseph Finger, and Joseph Wofford Tucker, all industrialists operating mills near Spartanburg, South Carolina, acted as lay leaders in the local Methodist church. Likewise, at the Alamance Manufacturing Company, Edwin Holt

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*Spartan*, March 27, 1851; John Munro to James Spear, May 5, 1834, Vaucluse Manufacturing Company Records, SCL-USC.

<sup>241</sup> Edward J. Cashin and Glenn T. Eskew, eds., *Paternalism in a Southern City: Race, Religion, and Gender in Augusta, Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 3-4; Eelman, *Entrepreneurs in the Southern Upcountry*, 108; quotation from *Montgomery State Advertiser*, March 11, 1857.

was a prominent lay leader in the local Lutheran church but provided religious services to his workers via a traveling minister. Textile owners took their religious duties seriously and believed they were actively saving their workers from sin and damnation. William Gregg hired a Reverend Cornish to visit Graniteville beginning in 1848, with Cornish preaching from a factory warehouse and drawing crowds between fifty and one hundred worshippers. Three churches had been constructed within the Prattville, Alabama mill village by 1851. The *Huntsville Southern Advocate* announced in 1851 that “a more moral, industrious, and thriving set of people you will seldom see anywhere” else in the South. “The cotton mill was successfully completed,” wrote the Aufseher Collegium in Salem, North Carolina in 1837. “May we succeed also in caring for the spiritual needs of the numerous strangers who come as workers in the factory!” The Moravian Church in Salem sought to convert not just poor whites to their faith but also slaves working in the mill. The local preacher noted that he had spoken with a mill slave named Miles and rejoiced when Miles expressed interest in joining the black congregation of the Moravian Church.<sup>242</sup>

Like Gregg and Edwin Holt, Daniel Pratt encouraged church attendance by the mill’s operatives. Prattville possessed Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches by 1846 and each church was located on land donated by Pratt. Similarly, like William Gregg, Pratt took a personal hand in the moral instruction of his workers, visiting every household and emphasizing the centrality of the church in their lives. Pratt’s wife, Esther, even went so far as to provide clothing for mill children so they would have no excuse to miss church services and Sunday school.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Edwin Michael Holt Diary, November 15, 1846, August 17, 1847, Collections, Alamance County Historical Museum, Burlington, North Carolina; Burton, *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions*, 54; Eelman, *Entrepreneurs in the Southern Upcountry*, 108; quotation from *Huntsville Southern Advocate*, March 5, 1851; Memorabilia of the Salem Congregation, January 10, 1837, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives; Report of the Negro Congregation In and Around Salem, July 16, 1843, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives.

<sup>243</sup> Evans, *The Conquest of Labor*, 86.

The establishment of Sunday schools became an important tool for mill owners to reinforce their religious charge towards their operatives. Advocates of Sabbath schools within textile villages believed that advancing precepts of Protestantism among poor white children taught mill youngsters concepts of morality and deference. Those devoted to benevolent reform firmly viewed the character of a child to be malleable and able to be shaped to fit within conservative southern society. “It is the peculiar excellence of Sabbath schools,” wrote a contributor to the *Alabama State Intelligencer*, “that they redeem the mind from the thralldom of ignorance and superstition, and promote . . . correctness of thought.” Accordingly, the Salem Manufacturing Company constructed a Sunday school to be attended by both adults and children as early as 1838.<sup>244</sup>

The creation and growth of secular, public schooling also benefitted mill families while also aiding owners and managers to control hands through education. Southern attempts at educational reform and initiatives supporting common schooling ebbed and flowed before 1830. A permanent public school fund was established in North Carolina in 1825, but with little to no oversight provided by the state government, funding could not be adequately distributed. As a result of reform impulses from the southern middle-class beginning in the 1830s, pushes for common schooling increased in veracity and took shape based on northern educational models. In 1839, North Carolinians urged a systematic approach to state education and passed the first school law, establishing county elections on public schooling. The Georgia state legislature allocated one-third of its surplus federal revenue for public education in 1836. By 1843, every Georgia county court had the legal authority to levy and collect taxes for the purpose of educating the state’s poor whites.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 78; quotations from the *Alabama State Intelligencer*, September 10, 1831; Memorabilia of the Congregation in Salem, North Carolina in the Year 1838, March 5, 1838, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives.

<sup>245</sup> Eelman, *Entrepreneurship in the Southern Upcountry*, 72. See also Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 135; Barbara L. Bellows, *Benevolence among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860* (Baton

Beyond education as a way for southerners to better their lives, common schooling became a measure for industrialists and elites to link education and labor with support for southern institutions. “[T]he mechanics of [South Carolina] would scarcely arrive at anything like perfection, until the laboring classes are better educated,” declared Spartanburg magistrate, Andrew Bonner, in 1853. Southern writers pointed to William Gregg’s Graniteville factory in South Carolina as the best example of the fusion of education, labor, and deference. Gregg’s factory school was established not only to improve the moral and intellectual character of mill operatives, but also influence support for elite hegemony in the South. “[T]here must be a steady unfluctuating working class—and that the cohesive element, thereby securing their constant and cheerful services is the church and schoolroom,” wrote John Earle Bomar and William H. Trimmier, editors of the *Carolina Spartan*, in 1855. “We can well conceive how strong sympathetic feeling will spring up between [poor whites] and their benefactors.”<sup>246</sup>

Throughout the antebellum era, illiteracy was a prevalent problem among not only poor whites, but the South as a whole. In 1840, 7.5 percent of the South was illiterate compared to only 2.1 percent of the North. In some southern textile counties, the number of those who could not read and write was as high as 13.2 (See Table 2) percent of the total free white population.<sup>247</sup>

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Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 2, 45, 60; Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Edgar Wallace Knight, *Public Education in the South* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1922), 133-138.

<sup>246</sup> Quotations from the *Carolina Spartan*, November 24, 1853, May 17, 1855.

<sup>247</sup> 1840 Census, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved November 15, 2015 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>; 1850 Census, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved November 15, 2015 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>. The calculated data for illiteracy rates in 1840 and 1850 were taken from dividing the total number of illiterate free whites aged twenty years or older and divided by the total number of free whites in a county. The United States average for illiteracy was 3.9 percent in 1840 and 4.8 percent in 1850.

Table 2. Illiteracy Rates of All Whites Aged 20 and Over in Counties with Textile Factories, 1840

<i>County, State</i>	<i>Total white pop.</i>	<i>Illiterate persons</i>	<i>% illiterate</i>
Autauga, AL (Prattville Manu. Co.)	6217	73	1.2
Clarke, GA (Athens Manu. Co.)	5603	316	5.6
Cobb, GA (Roswell Manu. Co.)	6630	473	7.1
Cabarrus, NC (Concord Steam Cotton Manu. Co.)	6971	83	1.2
Orange, NC* (Alamance Manu. Co.)	16771	897	5.3
Stokes, NC* (Salem Manu. Co.)	13418	1772	13.2
Edgefield District, SC (Graniteville)	15020	582	3.9
Augusta, VA (Staunton Manu. Co.)	15072	603	4.0

*Source:* 1840 Census, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved November 15, 2015 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

*Note:* Counties marked with asterisks denote original county of textile factory prior to county restructuring. The Alamance Manufacturing Company became part of Alamance County in 1849 and the Salem Manufacturing Company became part of Forsyth County in 1849.

As early as 1844, Edwin Holt provided a school for the education of mill children at Alamance. The male children of Salem Manufacturing Company employees could attend the Salem Boy’s School, but had to pay a fee of twenty dollars a year if they were non-Moravian “strangers.” Accordingly, boys who belonged to the Moravian faith attended school free of charge. Other than providing religious educations for mill children, Daniel Pratt also established secular academic institutions, noting it was “necessary for successful operatives to have a plain, practical education, as it is for them to operate with the hands.” At Prattville, a schoolhouse was constructed in 1845 and Pratt hired Thomas Avery, a schoolteacher from Pratt’s native New Hampshire, to instruct the children. Two years later, a “Ladies School” was built for female pupils. In 1860, Pratt created the Prattville Male and Female Academy and served on the institution’s board of trustees. Established as a school for the “education and moral training of

the children of factory operatives,” Pratt employed his niece, Augusta Morgan, as well as Eliza Abbot, a New Jersey-born teacher, as the academy’s instructors. As many as forty to fifty mill children attended the school.<sup>248</sup>

Perhaps the best example of common schooling for mill children occurred at William Gregg’s Graniteville establishment. Gregg introduced the first mandatory school attendance for children in the history of the South, with parents contractually obligated to send every child between the ages of six and twelve to the mill school. Teachers, books, and school supplies were provided by the company free of charge. Gregg visited the schoolhouse every day and personally monitored attendance. If a student was tardy or absent without cause, Gregg would enter the pupil’s home and escort them to class. If the student repeated the offense, he took them to his office where Gregg personally whipped the student. The third offense resulted in a fine of five cents per day and levied every day the child missed school.<sup>249</sup>

Gregg did not shy away from publicly embarrassing students from his school or their parents. On one specific occasion, a mill boy snuck off from school at recess to go fishing. Gregg learned of the boy’s truancy and went down to the stream where the boy was fishing, grabbed the boy, and took him to the mill office. Placing the boy on a bookkeeper’s desk outside the office, Gregg directed the boy’s parents and all other operatives to look at him while repeating “There stands a boy that would rather go fishing than get an education.” Management of the children during class must have been just as strict as the mill’s instructor was William Merchant, the mill’s superintendent. Interestingly, though the South continued to promote common

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<sup>248</sup> Edwin Michael Holt Diary, September 9, 1844, Collections, Alamance County Historical Association, Burlington, North Carolina; Minutes of the Aufseher Collegium, August 24, 1841, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives; quotation from Evans, *The Conquest of Labor*, 89; *Autauga Citizen*, June 18, 1854, March 4, 1857.

<sup>249</sup> Graniteville Rules and Regulations, Graniteville Manufacturing Company Records, SCL-USC; William Gregg to Freeman Hunt, October 22, 1849, William Gregg Papers, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken. See also Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South*, 140.

Table 3. Illiteracy Rates of All Whites Aged 20 and Over in Counties with Textile Factories, 1850

<i>County, State</i>	<i>Total white pop.</i>	<i>Illiterate persons</i>	<i>% illiterate</i>
Autauga, AL (Prattville Manu. Co.)	6274	504	8.0
Clarke, GA (Athens Manu. Co.)	5513	294	5.3
Cobb, GA (Roswell Manu. Co.)	11568	397	3.4
Alamance, NC (Alamance Manu. Co.)	7921	253	3.2
Cabarrus, NC (Concord Steam Cotton Manu. Co.)	6942	835	12.0
Forsyth, NC (Salem Manu. Co.)	9661	952	9.9
Edgefield District, SC (Graniteville)	16252	536	3.3
Augusta, VA (Staunton Manu. Co.)	18983	505	2.7

*Source:* 1850 Census, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved November 15, 2015 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

schooling throughout the 1840s, by 1850, the southern illiteracy rate climbed 1.6 percent to an overall rate of 9.1 whereas as northern illiteracy increased 1.2 percent (See Table 3). In both decades, southern illiteracy was 3.6 and 4.3 percentage points higher than the United States average.<sup>250</sup>

Through the imposition of high rental fees and credit extended from mill-owned company stores, the exploitation of poor white operatives were everyday occurrences. On plantations, slaves were exploited as unpaid laborers through their status as hereditary chattel. The exploitation of textile mill workers was subtler and often was exercised through fiscal measures, most notably debt incurred through rent in company housing and company stores. Mill hands employed by the Union Manufacturing Company in Randolph County, North Carolina, were exploited through high rents on worker dwellings in the mill village. Workers were charged ten

<sup>250</sup> Mill Diary, June 30, 1850, William Gregg Papers, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina-Aiken.

percent of the construction cost of cottages which was reported to operatives as costing \$400, amounting to forty dollars per month in rent. However, in actuality, worker housing only cost the company \$100 to build. Both Francis Fries and the Roswell Manufacturing Company kept workers indebted to their enterprises through the issuance of credit by company stores. The average wage at the Salem Manufacturing Company ranged anywhere from \$12 to \$15 per month. Although the Salem mill would pay laborers in cash, management preferred to pay workers in credit to be redeemed in goods from the company store. The cost of goods for one operative often amounted to upwards of \$25-30 per month, placing workers in debt between thirteen and fifteen dollars. Barrington King, the owner of the Roswell manufactory, charged his operatives for everything from bacon to other foodstuffs such as corn and potatoes. While other factories like Graniteville allowed workers to maintain small garden plots at their dwellings, King forbade such practices and instead operated a mill farm that was worked by free whites and hired slaves. Consequently, workers at Roswell were routinely in debt from having to pay extra for produce. Henry Merrell, the superintendent of Roswell, noted that the company store was meant to keep workers tied to the mill through debt. "By means of our store," noted Merrell, "[we] kept the hands under our influence."<sup>251</sup>

Although mill villages provided the positive benefits of reform through temperance and education for employees and their families, textile factories managed their operatives with harsh techniques. Operating as extensions of the will of industrialists, mill superintendents controlled the movement of hands, closely monitoring laborers both at their work stations and throughout the factory, and punishing workers when needed. In many ways, like slaves on plantations, mill

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<sup>251</sup> Board of Director Meeting Minutes, January 1, 1849, July 2, 1849, Union Manufacturing Company Papers, PL-DU; Mill Diary, January 17, 1856, June 1, 1857, April 21, 1859, Fries Mill Collection, Moravian Archives; Francis Levin Fries Diary, November 15, 1842, Fries Diary, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Board and Wage Books, October 15, 1840, May 10, 1842, Salem Manufacturing Company, Moravian Archives; Ledger, April 30, 1843, Barrington King Papers, Roswell Historical Society, Roswell, Georgia; Skinner, ed., *The Autobiography of Henry Merrell*, 243.



paternalism was used to influence the work behaviors and morality of poor white mill workers in accordance with the mindset of factory masters. Furthermore, while the education provided by mill owners aided in providing benefits to illiterate poor white children, educational institutions, like temperance, nevertheless operated as a mechanism for control. Yet poor white laborers did not react negatively to industrial labor, unlike operatives both in the Upper South and the North. To understand why poor whites did not take part in labor activism, it is necessary to examine the differences between industrialism in the North, the cities of the Upper South, and mill counties of the southern Piedmont, as well as examine the psychosocial behaviors of poor whites who entered textile mills in the antebellum period.

## CHAPTER V

### CLUBS AND CARROTS

Mechanic ideology in the nineteenth-century stressed the centrality of “producers” and viewed productive labor as a critical component in American civic virtue. Advocates of workingmen leveled criticism at those who owned the means of production as “aristocratic accumulators,” men who profited from the labor of others. Laborers who emigrated from Western Europe and arriving in the cities and towns of the Northeast and mid-Atlantic subscribed to the ideals of the working-class. In turn, these workers helped to politicize manufacturing centers as workforces often experienced oppressive environments in previous workplaces in England, Ireland, Wales, and elsewhere. This ideology was reinforced by religious fervor as native-born mechanics participated in evangelical revivals spurred by the Second Great Awakening. Producer ideology extended into the Upper and Border South as artisan evangelicals called upon fellow laborers to promote biblical traditions of equality against “unrighteous distinctions” within society. In particular, Methodism gained widespread support among native-born Protestants due to its emphasis on spiritual equality, self-improvement, and self-discipline.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Quotations found in Clark, *Social Change in America*, 174-175. See also Ronald Schultz, *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 222-228; and Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 5-11. On the role of religion within antebellum labor reform, see Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*.

As industrial working conditions changed during the 1820s and 1830s, labor divisions were exposed between those who produced and those who owned the factories, fostering anxiety not only among unskilled workers and management, but among skilled craft workers and members of a growing middle class who owned and controlled their trades. Simultaneously, these changes coincided with increased residential separation between producers and owners as well as a decline in working arrangements. While giving the franchise to all white males and bringing them into the political realm was progressive during the Age of Jackson, laborers became acutely sensitive to growing social divisions in the workplace, thus leading them to engage in labor agitation and to push for reform. Fundamentally, the North and South approached labor activism much differently and that process must be examined to further understand how northern and southern labor reacted to antebellum industrialism.<sup>253</sup>

Throughout the early 1820s and up to the Civil War, mechanics' organizations in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia began openly criticizing the Tammany Society in New York and other like-minded Democratic-Republican organizations as bastions of elitism, only supporting the interests of the elite who directed urban politics. By 1830, political parties supporting working-class interests were founded to influence labor reform through peaceful means by the vote. The nascent labor movement challenged the power of employers and wished to restore the lost independence of urban laborers. Workers across trades, men and women alike, campaigned or went on strike for increased wages, decreased hours of work, elimination of harsh managerial techniques, and the eradication of other poor working conditions. In the North, carpenters and joiners within Cincinnati went on strike in 1831 when employers increased working hours. Tailors and cabinetmakers in New York struck during the early 1830s over who set their rates of pay. At a factory in Trenton, New Jersey, workers and management

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<sup>253</sup> Clark, *Social Change in America*, 175. See also David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 18-20.

secured an arrangement where ownership paid half their wages in cash and the other half in credit to be redeemed in goods from the company store. When the cost of goods increased above agreed upon levels at the company store, workers went on strike again.<sup>254</sup>

Northern female workers participated in labor activism in large numbers. Dressmakers went on strike in New York in 1831; shoe binders did so as well in Massachusetts twice in the 1830s for unpaid wages. Women, like their male counterparts, advocated for equal rights in the workplace. Young females laboring in textile mills in Lowell struck when wages were cut and boarding house rents increased in 1834 and 1836. Forming the Female Labor Reform Association in 1845, female textile operatives sought equal treatment and a ten-hour work day.<sup>255</sup>

In the southern textile industry, labor unrest and activism did not appear in a significant number of episodes until the 1880s and 1890s when mill hands increasingly turned to the Knights of Labor and then to the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW). In 1900, following the firing of a female worker for leaving her loom unattended at Alamance in North Carolina, workers belonging to the NUTW went on strike in sympathy. Eventually, over five thousand workers were striking across the state. The Alamance Strike of 1900 represents the climax of two decades of worker unrest at that particular factory. Laborers participating in Populist political movements challenged the hegemony of planters, merchants, and manufacturers through interracial cooperation. Wishing to eliminate worker resistance, southern Democrats and mill owners used racially-charged rhetoric, fraud, and

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<sup>254</sup> Clark, *Social Change in America*, 176.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. See also Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement from Colonial Times to the Eve of World War* (New York: Free Press, 1979); Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); Barbara Cutter, *Domestic Devils, Battlefield Angels: The Radicalism of American Womanhood, 1830-1865* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women in Antebellum Reform* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2000); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and David S. Wright, *"The First of Causes to Our Sex": The Female Moral Reform Movement in the Antebellum Northeast, 1834-1848* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006).

intimidation to disrupt labor activism. State constitutional amendments disenfranchised blacks and poor whites which effectively limited worker political activity.<sup>256</sup>

There were only sporadic occurrences of textile worker labor resistance during the antebellum era in the South. While the so-called “tag of docility” certainly does not apply to textile laborers, there is a paucity of evidence to suggest that there was widespread labor unrest. Examination of various textile establishments show that organized attempts at enacting reform through activism or militancy did not transpire at the level it did during the New South or within most industries located in the Upper South before the Civil War. In only one instance does there appear to be an outright attempt to challenge authority in a textile mill. At the Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company in Cedar Falls, North Carolina, a female mill hand named Sophia Trogden was fired in 1856 for intentionally cutting the belts in the spinning room of the factory.<sup>257</sup>

One former textile mill worker at the Graniteville Manufacturing Company expressed his decided discontent with industrial labor, particularly the harsh conditions faced by fellow poor whites. “There is no class of people as much oppressed by labor,” howled a former mill hand, “as the operatives in Cotton Factories.” Another unidentified contributor to the *Edgefield Advertiser* believed that in an effort not only to outpace northern industry but also to exercise full control of

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<sup>256</sup> For a detailed examination of the impact of organized labor in the New South, see Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978), as well as Sydney Nathans, *The Quest for Progress: The Way We Lived in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983). The standard text for any discussion of southern Populism remains Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) but see also Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). On the disenfranchisement of the lower-class in the postbellum South and political opposition to labor activism, see Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); Michael Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and David L. Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

<sup>257</sup> Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company Day Book, Cedar Falls Manufacturing Company Records, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC.

their labor, Graniteville intentionally overworked its workforce. “[So] many poor, puny looking children . . . there confined and breathing a polluted atmosphere for thirteen hours per day.” A writer using the pseudonym “Pro Bono Publico” wrote to the *Edgefield Advertiser* saying that while he fundamentally agreed with southern manufacturing, he believed there to be many cases of abuse within the factory system of the South, resulting in textile mills as a “curse” for poor white laborers.<sup>258</sup>

Although strikes did occur in the antebellum North in the 1830s, the early labor movement there was decidedly defensive in nature. Those participating, whether workers or intellectuals, tried to prevent the encroachments of industrial capitalism from interfering with the tradition of pre-industrial modes of behavior. The factory system in the mid-nineteenth-century was a seemingly aggressive, revolutionary, and negative shift in the American economy which tended to depress both the physical and social standards of workers’ lives. In the experience of the worker, the reaction to oncoming industrialization at its onset was one of hesitation and an attempt to hold onto the past. Only after the realization that protest was futile in the face of industrial inevitability did workers choose to leave industrial occupations altogether or begin to organize with others in small, specialized unions for protection.<sup>259</sup>

Thus, labor activism among early industrial workers was often patterned according to the distance from the household to production and based upon pre-industrial socioeconomic behaviors. If workers were involved in the household production of goods, household laborers were less prone to activism and exhibited discontent by either refusing to take work or through the refusal of returning materials. Industrial workers, separated from household economies and working in cities alongside co-workers in similar circumstances, were more likely to be actively

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<sup>258</sup> Quotations found in *Edgefield Advertiser*, September 28, 1854, November 21, 1850.

<sup>259</sup> Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860: The Reaction of American Industrial Society to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1990), 198-199. See also David Zonderman, *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 33.

involved in labor movements because their work and living situations created solidarity and cohesion.<sup>260</sup>

Activism in the North during the antebellum period was primarily focused on reform seeking to rectify abuses in the length of the working day. Becoming known as the Ten-Hour Movement, a ten-hour day was achieved by most mechanics in the North in the 1850s, except those working in New England textile mills. Textile mill workers continued to work regularly twelve to fourteen hours a day until the 1850s. Agitation for legislative action became increasingly energetic and organized in Massachusetts with the movement carried out almost entirely by workers. Political support among labor reformers came by moral support with the burden of organizing, petitioning, and propaganda falling on the shoulders of textile workers. The ten-hour movement initially faltered by 1848 due to the high amount of changing personnel within textile factories. The movement that was revived in the 1850s was much more political in its strategy and methods. More importantly, it was not rooted in the working-class. As native white labor left textile employment increasingly throughout the mid-to-late 1840s and into the early-1850s, ten-hour reform was carried on by middle-class philanthropists.<sup>261</sup>

The initial cause for the failure of the ten-hour movement up to the 1850s was the entrenched Puritanical desire for protection of morality and a disdain for idleness. Operatives would suffer if they remained too long from the rigors and discipline of the factory environment. However, a much more practical reason for the failure of the ten-hour movement was that textile operations prevented ten-hour legislation from passing due to textile owner influence within the Massachusetts state legislature. When the movement revived in the 1850s, its leaders came from

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<sup>260</sup> Clark, *Social Change in America*, 177. See also T. Gregory Garvey, *Creating the Culture of Reform in Antebellum America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); and Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125-152.

<sup>261</sup> Ware, *The Industrial Worker*, 125-126. See also David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (New York: Verso, 1989), 65-80; and Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 34, 41-43.

the middle-class and operated through political machinery. Unlike the previous decades, many of the movement's leadership apparatus were members of the Massachusetts legislature and the ten-hour system became part of the Republican Party's platform in the state. One of the movement's new leaders was Benjamin F. Butler, an ambitious politician who would go on to earn the ire of the southern people as a Union Army general during the Civil War. Butler made ten-hour reform part of his campaign's platform when he ran for election to the state legislature in 1851. In 1851, the New England Industrial League was organized which called for workmen to organize and send delegates to state conventions in preparation for fall elections. Resolutions were passed in support of the ten-hour system and ten-hour reform adopted in New Jersey in 1851; Rhode Island in 1853; and finally, Massachusetts in 1855.<sup>262</sup>

The Panic and depression in the years following 1837 had a profound effect not only on the American economy and society but throughout the world as well. The flow of immigrants intensified and reached new heights in the 1840s, as the Great Famine in Ireland and religious persecutions in Germany pushed more and more immigrants into the United States. Traditionally economic depressions caused immigration rates to drop. For example, 48,000 Irish immigrants arrived in 1837 but fell to 11,000 in 1838 following the Panic of 1837. Several factors caused immigration to rise in the 1840s. The economic depression in the years immediately after 1837 was severe across European economies. In Great Britain, many families in England and Scotland risked transatlantic migration, seeking opportunities elsewhere, and 120,000 alone entering the United States in 1841. Factories throughout Great Britain closed and textile workers from Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Edinburgh sought new prospects in New England, New York, and Philadelphia. Pottery workers from the English Midlands immigrated to Wisconsin and other areas of the Ohio Valley.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Ware, *The Industrial Worker*, 127, 154. See also Mary Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

<sup>263</sup> Clark, *Social Change in America*, 180.



In the German states, the political revolutions in 1848 and the exile of radical liberals added to the flow of poor rural Germans weakened by peasant agriculture in areas of the Rhineland. The Industrial Revolution in Germany undermined the household-based proto-industries operating in peasant-farming regions. As industry expanded in the United States throughout the 1840s, German mechanics seized new opportunities and arrived in vast numbers that peaked in 1854 when 215,000 Germans immigrated.<sup>264</sup>

Between 1840 and 1850, the percentage male immigrants within the northern United States rose from 29.0 to 38.3 percent to 45.5 percent by 1860. In Pittsburgh by 1850, seventy percent of all manual laborers were foreign-born. The rapid influx of immigrant workers to the United States not only expanded manufacturing but nurtured conflicts with native-born labor, often leading to labor radicalism. Protestants in New England and elsewhere in the North were ever-suspicious of Roman Catholicism, a hostility that was rooted in the religious divisions within England during the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. Beginning in the late 1820s and continuing into the 1830s, anti-Catholic tracts written in England following Catholic emancipation in 1829 appeared throughout the United States, inflaming evangelical resentment toward Catholics. Anti-Catholic bigotry led to violence and discrimination towards newly-arrived Irish and Germans, as witnessed in a Protestant mob burning down a convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts in 1834.<sup>265</sup>

In contrast, the use of political activity on the part of antebellum southern textile workers was limited. Workers at Graniteville voiced concerns over working hours in the mill and were met with resistance by management. In 1854, operatives gathered to discuss labor reform in the hopes of the factory enacting a ten-hour workday. Many supporters of the ten-hour movement noted that most northern states like New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Massachusetts adopted ten-hour legislation. Additionally, workers at the Graniteville meeting raised issues

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 181-182.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 188.

concerning the health of factory operatives as well as the use of child labor. Many mill workers complained about the quality of air throughout the mill. Representatives of management attending the meeting disregarded the “polluted atmosphere,” declaring the workers had plenty of good air to breathe because they were supplied with large windows, providing ample ventilation.<sup>266</sup>

William Gregg, who was also in attendance, spoke in defense of child labor. Gregg stated that it was often difficult to compel parents to send their children to the mill school, even though attendance was compulsory. If children would not go to school, then they must work to stave off idleness and immorality. When the school opened in 1847, only sixty percent of Graniteville’s child population attended. To earn more income, parents often lied about the age of their children so they could forgo school and enter the factory workforce.<sup>267</sup>

An 1836 act passed by the Massachusetts state legislature forbade the employment of any child under the age of fourteen unless the child presented a certificate that he or she attended school for at least three months the previous year. The minimum age of employment was subsequently raised to fifteen in 1838. In the South, no such laws existed. Children aged eight or nine were often counted among textile mill labor forces, with some workers as young as six laboring thirteen hours a day. At the Salem Manufacturing Company, work sometimes lasted twenty-four hours, with hands only allowed two breaks during their shifts. In September of 1842, the Salem mill operated twenty-four hours a day for twenty-five straight days. Nevertheless, in 1853, the Mechanics’ Association of Georgia forced the state legislature to enact a law stating that the legal work day for all white persons under the age of twenty-one to be from sunrise to sunset with breaks allowed for the eating of meals. This law remains the sole piece of labor legislation passed in the antebellum South. Even after this legislation passed, mill management at the Roswell Manufacturing Company responded by reducing wages until hands agreed to return

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<sup>266</sup> Quotation found in *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 31, 1854.

<sup>267</sup> William Gregg, “Address before South Carolina Institute,” *De Bow’s Review* 12 (August, 1851), 136.

to the original prescribed work hours.<sup>268</sup>

The studies of Shirley and Beatty base their arguments for textile labor resistance and activism on the evidence of worker absenteeism. Shirley's focus is overwhelmingly from the perspective of mill hands coming from yeoman backgrounds and does not explore poor white reactions to mill employment. As a class, yeomen strove to maintain traditional ways of life through accommodation by adapting to mechanization and the routine of industrial labor, while also forcing mill management and production schedules to adjust to the yeomanry workforce. Thus, millwork came to represent personal relationships between employers and employees.<sup>269</sup>

Most workers who arrived at the Salem Manufacturing Company (SMC) in Forsyth County, North Carolina typically came from the neighboring counties of Guilford, Davie, and Davidson. Workers usually arrived in family groups but of the 367 families who worked for SMC between 1841 and 1849, eighty-five percent were female. Sixteen heads of household are identified from mill records and the 1850 census. Out of these sixteen families, ten families owned no property, while two families owned fifty-one acres or less and only one family owned one hundred acres or more. Therefore, 62.5 percent of the identified families came from landless, poor white backgrounds. These figures stand in stark contrast to Shirley's claim that Salem's mill hands came from a society characterized by yeoman farms and "widespread" landholding.

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<sup>268</sup> Francis Levin Fries Diary, July 30, August 2, August 3, August 6, 1841, September 21, 1842, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Mill Diary, October 17, 1850, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume I: From Colonial Times to the Founding of the American Federation of Labor* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 263; Minutes of Stockholders' Meetings, October 30, 1853, Roswell Manufacturing Company, Roswell Manufacturing Company Records, Roswell Historical Society, Roswell, Georgia.

<sup>269</sup> Shirley, "Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest," 430; Beatty, "Textile Labor in the North Carolina Piedmont," 485-486. See also Mary H. Blewett, "USA: Shifting Landscapes of Class, Culture, Gender, Race, and Protest in the American Northeast and South," in Lex Heerma Van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus, and Elise Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650-2000* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 531-560; Jeff Forrett, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 51; and Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 169-199.

Although Shirley admits that landless whites “who suffered the most hardship during economic dislocations” did enter into employment at SMC, the data nevertheless suggests that a majority of SMC employees were indeed poor whites.<sup>270</sup>

Using the Salem Manufacturing Company as a case study for archetypal mill worker behavior is precarious as the factory ownership and management structure was something of an anomaly. Salem, North Carolina was founded in 1766 by German pietists hoping to create a community dedicated to the ideals of their faith. The Moravian congregation believed that all relationships within Salem were to operate within the framework of the Moravian church—piety, brotherhood, and above all, obedience to church authority vested in what was known as the Aufseher Collegium. The Collegium maintained patriarchal authority and the economic well-being of the community through landownership. All land was leased to individual heads of households under the strict guideline that all who leased land must belong to the Moravian congregation.<sup>271</sup>

The discipline of mill labor was understood as an extension of church authority with the primary goal of creating dependent labor to counter non-Moravians within the factory workforce. The Collegium assumed that non-Moravians or “outsiders” threatened the congregation’s morality. Before hands were hired, they had to provide certifications from neighbors testifying to their good character. Mill labor was also tied to the factory through the leasing of housing owned by the church as well as through work contracts sanctioned by church authorities. Workers’ physical movements were restricted and a “dark curfew” imposed for mill hands living in company housing; it required all labor to be in houses or boarding houses by sundown. If workers wished to travel away from the factory, a mill superintendent had to grant permission.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Shirley, “Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest,” 435; quotation found on pg. 435.

<sup>271</sup> Minutes of the Elders Conference, June 29, July 20, 1836, Salem Congregation Records, Moravian Archives.

<sup>272</sup> Shirley, “Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest,” 440; Salem Manufacturing Company, Rules and Regulations, Fries Mill Collection, Moravian Archives; Francis Fries Memorandum Book, August 9, 1838, Francis Fries Collection, Moravian Archives.

The Aufseher Collegium also attempted to regulate worker behavior through religion. Sensing that non-Moravians lacked proper spiritual direction, local clergy ministered to the workforce. A Sunday school opened on the mill's grounds in hopes of guiding SMC operatives, particularly children. While mill families took part in religious celebrations with the Moravian congregation at Christmas and New Year's Day, they found the denomination to be at times cold, too formal, and incomprehensible. During church services, hymns and sermons were spoken in German and with little emotion. Non-Moravian operatives increasingly turned to evangelical denominations, the Methodist faith being particularly strong among poor white hands. Shirley theorizes that by mill workers rejecting the Moravian faith provides key examples of labor protest occurring in Salem. By operatives choosing to practice evangelical beliefs over the prescribed Moravian religion, workers created barriers between themselves, mill management, and congregational leadership. Rejection of the Moravian Church, therefore, equated to the rejection of mill management. In this, Shirley is quite correct.<sup>273</sup>

However, Shirley's promotion of absenteeism is myopic and presented from a yeoman perspective. "By absenteeism, quitting the mill, and lack of deference toward management," Shirley writes, "the mill hands expressed their dissatisfaction with conditions in the mill to modify the production routine to meet their needs." Absenteeism was not unique to the Salem mill and took place at countless other factories not only in the South but across the United States. The managers of the Augusta Manufacturing Company in Augusta, Georgia incessantly complained about hands missing work.<sup>274</sup>

By examining mill worker absenteeism closer, it appears that it was indeed a yeoman phenomenon. Complaints by management expressed their dissatisfaction with single hands,

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<sup>273</sup> Shirley, "Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest," 443. See also S. Scott Rohrer, "Evangelism and Acculturation in the Backcountry: The Case of Wachovia, North Carolina, 1753-1830," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Summer, 2001): pp. 199-229, 201.

<sup>274</sup> Quotation found in Shirley, "Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest," 445; Griffin, "The Augusta (Georgia) Manufacturing Company," 67. See also Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order*, for an analysis on worker absenteeism in northern textile factories.

specifically young females, constantly being absent from the factory. These mill girls would be missing for days or weeks at a time, returning to family farms located near Salem. Francis Fries, the mill superintendent, reported frequent absences attributed to illness. On June 23, 1838, Fries wrote that only part of the factory was operating because a large number of hands were suffering from “summer complaint.” Illnesses were common when workers from rural backgrounds entered into factory employment and were routinely in contact with more people than ever before. Furthermore, the evidence of female operatives leaving mechanical work to return to family farms displays the safety net of yeomanry life. Workers could choose to work and then return to agricultural life if factory labor did not live up to expectations. Landless poor whites had no such luxury.<sup>275</sup>

Shirley himself notes that absenteeism “demonstrates the persistence of traditional preindustrial attitudes toward work, when work on the farms or in non-mechanized workshops was approached in a more casual manner and the routine was regulated by natural factors like the weather and physical exhaustion.” In this, Shirley is also right, but it still does not mean that absenteeism equaled activism. The introduction of regulated industrial labor caused workers in the North and cities of the urban South to form labor organizations that promoted political activity among operatives, along with striking and other forms of militancy. Textile workers, even the yeoman hands of Salem, formed no such organizations in the antebellum South. “But unlike northern textile workers, SMC operatives did not strike when wages were reduced. As participants in the rural culture of the southern countryside, early factory workers did not react to industrial production as members of a self-aware working class,” remarks Shirley. “Instead, these mill-hands made industrial decisions that determined how they responded to management actions.” Mill workers did make these decisions, but they were from the mindset of a yeoman minority, not a poor white majority.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Francis Fries Memorandum Book, June 23, 1838, Francis Fries Papers, Moravian Archives.

<sup>276</sup> Quotations found in Shirley, “Yeoman Culture and Millworker Protest,” 446, 452.

The pressures of industrial capitalism and immigration significantly affected urban areas in southern states. As industrialization grew in the South, so too did cities become commercial centers, and with the growth of business, came changes in how labor was managed. Before the Industrial Revolution, work was treated on a much more personal level in the South as well as in the North. Laborers were hired, work performed, and all dealings between employers and employees based upon one-on-one relationships. The expansion of manufacturing brought impersonal wage labor that came to define the relationship between labor and capital in the nineteenth-century United States.<sup>277</sup>

The traditional practice which governed work in the early nineteenth-century South was urban paternalism and was derived from the experience of slavery. Slavery, low pay, strictly-enforced work rules, and appeals to master-slave obedience defined management strategy and encouraged both employers and employees to understand their socioeconomic arrangement along patron-client lines. Benevolent but powerful bosses managed subordinate employees, utilizing restrictive measures of control and rewarding loyal clients. By the 1850s, however, the increased size of the southern industrial labor force and overall size of the average workplace, stressed the importance of cash wages and eroded urban paternalism in large cities such as Baltimore, New Orleans, St. Louis, Louisville, and Richmond. American-born mechanics witnessed a decline in living standards and became pressured by immigrant labor entering the workforce as well as mass production quotas. In turn, native white workers began lashing out at manufacturers to safeguard wage levels, job security, and working conditions.<sup>278</sup>

European immigration increased pressure on manufacturing jobs already held by native whites, free blacks, and slaves in the larger southern cities. In Baltimore, while the city increased in population at a rate of twenty-five percent during the 1850s, the percentage of black residents

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<sup>277</sup> Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>278</sup> See David R. Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

decreased, dropping from seventeen to thirteen percent, as pressure to exclude African-Americans mounted from immigrant laborers entering the market. Between 1850 and 1860, immigrants employed along the waterfront in Baltimore increased forty-three percent. At the same time, the native-born white population of the city declined from sixty-three to forty-six percent by 1860.<sup>279</sup>

At the expense of the American-born laborer, unskilled immigrants rapidly entered manufacturing employment. As in Baltimore, Irish and German-born workers came to dominate urban labor forces in St. Louis, New Orleans, Louisville, and Richmond. Germans comprised one-third of the total population of St. Louis and controlled seventy percent of all skilled jobs by 1860. Throughout the 1850s, New Orleans's Irish population increased twenty-five percent. The establishment of railroads connecting ports to cities facilitated the immense and rapid growth in the urban South. Louisville's population tripled as a result of foreign immigration, reaching sixty-eight thousand residents in 1860.<sup>280</sup>

Immigration and its relationship to industrialization changed how all who labored in southern cities understood their place in society and, in turn, how these roles defined the relationships between co-workers and with ownership. During the 1850s, industrialists, those who previously benefitted most from deference and urban paternalism, came to the realization that the traditional patron-client labor management methods would no longer be recognized by employees. Simultaneously, laborers began using trade unions and militancy as assertive ways to

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<sup>279</sup> Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, 59. See also Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*; and T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 18-21.

<sup>280</sup> Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, 59, 61-62. See also Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Jeffrey S. Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Earl F. Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 51-54; Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 113-114, 120; and Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 3d ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).



effect change in the workplace.<sup>281</sup>

Baltimore experienced perhaps the most acute confrontation. Nearly two-thirds of all Baltimore ironworkers labored in eight foundries who employed fifty or more workers each. To save money, the local iron masters meticulously divided tasks, cutting wages in the process, along with hiring increased numbers of unskilled laborers that could easily be replaced. One such iron master, Ross Winans, operating a foundry near the B&O's shop at Mount Clare, employed dedicated, salaried foremen to manage workers and to curtail freedoms and decrease resistance among them. Winans also showed paternalistic behaviors manifested in benevolence and philanthropy to unite workers, whom he deemed an "inferior class." His son, Thomas, maintained a soup kitchen which fed upwards of four thousand people daily. In addition, more than one hundred four-story worker housing units were built by Winans. Despite Winans's use of paternalism, urban laborers working at his ironworks went on strike in 1853, with approximately four thousand workers demanding a fifteen percent wage increase. The 1853 Mount Clare strike reveals ethnic conflict in heterogeneous urban labor forces. White, native-born workers belonged to the Order of United American Mechanics, a trade union barring immigrant membership. Foreign strikers, mostly Germans, formed a separate labor union.<sup>282</sup>

In other southern cities, economic disaster fostered conflict among employers and employees. The Panic of 1857 left nearly ten thousand workers unemployed in St. Louis, who forcefully lobbied the city government to create public work projects. Four labor organizations

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<sup>281</sup> See Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigration on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Cities* 24 (Spring, 1985): pp. 30-53; and Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *American Historical Review* 88 (December, 1983): pp. 1175-1200.

<sup>282</sup> Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, 64-66; quotation by Winans found on pg. 65. See also Frank Towers, "Job Busting at Baltimore Shipyards: Racial Violence in the Civil War-Era South," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (May, 2000): pp. 221-256.

formed in New Orleans before the Civil War: the Mechanics' Society, Typographical Society, Screwman's Benevolent Association (SBA), and United Laborers' Beneficial Society (ULBS). The Mechanics' Society and ULBS were openly militant labor unions. The SBA was composed predominantly of a conglomeration of multi-ethnic whites. Urging numerous strikes throughout the 1850s, the SBA frequently demanded higher wages and achieved a raise in daily wages from \$2.50 to \$3.00 after striking in 1854. Richard Trevellick organized a movement advocating a nine-hour workday for New Orleans shipyard workers.<sup>283</sup>

Benevolent associations within the South became prevalent during the antebellum period. As organizations comprised of skilled laborers, benevolent societies promoted worker solidarity and provided assistance across crafts with membership numbering into the thousands. In Petersburg, Virginia, where artisans composed between ten to fifteen percent of the town's total population, membership in the Petersburg Benevolent Mechanic Association (PBMA) numbered 2,629. Like industrial laborers elsewhere in the South, these artisans processed staple crops raised on local plantations.<sup>284</sup>

Whether or not these organizations involved themselves in labor radicalism, mutual aid societies offered a collective vehicle for worker political participation and safety nets for working-class families. Benevolent organizations existed outside of the Upper South and extended into the cotton-growing areas of the Deep South. In Georgia, the Savannah Mechanics Association (SMA), wary of artisan coexistence in a planter-dominated economy, emphasized worker training and dedication to craft skills, as well as monetary relief to its members. The Charleston Mechanic Society, operating as early as the 1790s, focused solely on restricting

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<sup>283</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 249.

<sup>284</sup> L. Diane Barnes, *Artisan Workers in the Upper South: Petersburg, Virginia, 1820-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 37.

membership in the artisan class to white men only, while fellow societies like the PMBA allowed free blacks to join.<sup>285</sup>

Although mechanic associations formed before industrialization, the composition and focus of such organizations changed in the antebellum era. Worker organizations began concentrating on the growing gap between those who controlled the means of production and those who produced. As a result, benevolence and mutual assistance created trade unions and fraternal societies. Such groups simultaneously accepted and denied class differences, increasing inequalities and displacement of the individual in an industrial economy. Fraternal organizations like the Freemasons and Odd Fellows used gender and race to foster collective identity among their members. While glorifying skilled labor, fraternalism justified social inequality by showing the artisan system as open to all, yet they illuminated class divisions between employers and employees. Antebellum southern worker associations like the PMBA and SMA acted in many ways as precursors to postwar labor organizations in the South like the Knights of Labor. By uniting both skilled and unskilled laborers in celebration and advocacy for society's producers, these groups made life more bearable on the factory floor and checked potentially hostile employer attitudes toward employees.<sup>286</sup>

The often chaotic struggle among workers in the antebellum urban South not only reflects the high level of workplace ethnic and racial diversity but also how this heterogeneity affected increases in labor activism and militancy. Pre-industrial attitudes meant to protect the interests of employees eroded in the face of capitalist industrialization and were replaced by worker hostility toward ownership. An example of this shift from deference to militancy is evident in the

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 37, 39.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 41. See Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 13-14; and McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 49-50. See also Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World*, 37-38, 47.

activities of the New Orleans Typographical Society. Dedicated to supporting employer-employee harmony as late as 1852, union members walked off the job in 1855 and 1858 when newspaper publishers imported cheaper workers from New Jersey as strike-breakers. In support of the workers, the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* cancelled their service with the Associated Press. In 1857, a foreman was found murdered in an alley near the factory, and suspicion of union involvement increased when the union described the manager as “arbitrary, dictatorial, and over-bearing to his fellow workmen.”<sup>287</sup>

Despite the inability of free blacks in the South to effectively organize, the other segment of black labor—the four and a half million slaves—were able to resist their masters in various ways. Although slaves could not form trade unions, they did manage to “strike” and otherwise resist overseers and planter “employers.” This resistance typically occurred through individual or collective action. As individuals, slave labor opposed their condition through intentionally damaging equipment, stopping work, or running away. Female slaves working in the plantation household at times resorted to sexual “activism” by providing sexual favors for their masters in return for preferential treatment. In uncommon instances, slaves used threats of violence against owners and overseers in reaction to brutal treatment. When a slave in Louisiana heard his wife had been whipped, he ran away from the sugar plantation to which he belonged. Several days later when the slave returned, the overseer approached him and the slave, “very much enraged,” raised his cane knife and demanded his wife never be whipped again.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Quotation found in Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, 68-69; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 249. See also Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>288</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 238-240; quotation found in Avery O. Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 78. On slave resistance, see John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86-89, 103-109; Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Jeffrey Crow, “Slave Rebelliousness and Conflict in North Carolina,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (January, 1980): pp. 79-102; and Nicholas Halasz, *The Rattling Chains: Slave Unrest and Revolt in the Antebellum South* (New York: D. McKay, 1966). See also Deborah White, “Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Family*

Collective action often took the form of work stoppages to protest whippings or other grievances. A group of slaves in Georgia ran away and refused to work until they could speak with the plantation's master. "Sir, I write you a few lines in order to let you know that six of your hands have left the plantation," wrote the overseer to his absentee employer. "They displeased me with their work and I gave some of them a few lashes. . . . On Wednesday morning they were missing. I think they are lying out until they can see you or your uncle Jack."<sup>289</sup>

Southern industrialists realized that although slaves should not be used exclusively in manufacturing, they could be utilized to thwart labor activism. In two notable instances, slaves were used in breaking strikes by white labor at the Norfolk Dry Dock Strike in 1830-31 and the Tredegar Iron Foundry Strike in 1847. White laborers sought raises in pay and improved working conditions during these strikes and soon learned that the availability of slave labor posed significant obstacles to labor activism. White mechanics during the Norfolk strike attempted to eradicate competition for jobs through the elimination of slave employment in their workplace. Slaves were often used to keep down labor costs, with skilled labor demanding industrial employment to be reserved for white artisans. The hiring of slaves gave factory owners and middle managers flexibility, both in costs of wages and in dealing with the complaints of white labor. When the Department of the Navy learned of the strike and contacted the shipyard to ascertain why slaves were hired in such large numbers, the head engineer replied that slaves only cost seventy-two cents per day compared to \$1.50-\$2.00 asked by whites. Beyond the racism that led to the unwillingness of whites to work alongside blacks, poor white southern textile laborers wanted to avoid the wage competition that slaves could cause, essentially leading to lower white wages. When white mechanics finally went on strike in Norfolk, management dismissed all who

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*History* 8 (Fall, 1983): pp. 248-261 and Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>289</sup> Quote found in Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 303-304. See also Norrece T. Jones, Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 1990).

organized the protest and replaced them with hired slaves. Any further protesting by whites over the introduction of slave labor was met with threats of dismissal by management, leaving whites powerless.<sup>290</sup>

White labor remained chastened for many years following the Norfolk strike. By threatening the use of slave operatives within factories, southern industrialists managed to prevent major labor disturbances throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Nevertheless, because industrial advocates in the South wished to emulate northern manufacturing success, many viewed slavery as the key to southern progress in industry as slavery presented a cheaper alternative than wage labor used in the North. Joseph Reid Anderson, the manager and eventual owner of the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia, believed the employment of slaves in the iron industry saved the company thousands of dollars in wages while also preventing labor activism. White artisans resented Anderson training slaves to hold skilled positions and were wary of any use of slaves. As Anderson increasingly hired slaves for the foundry, white operatives struck in May of 1847. Playing upon planter fears of poor white anarchy and labor radicalism, Anderson gathered planter support by stating the striking white workers undermined slavery and the authority of masters who hired out their slaves to the ironworks. White strikers refused to return to work and were ultimately fired and evicted from company housing.<sup>291</sup>

However, through the examination of census data, it appears that high numbers of immigrants did, in fact, influence industrial workforces in the Upper and Border South far more than the presence of slave labor, which counted little in southern industry. The rapid influx of foreign labor increased competition among ethnic groups and native-born whites. In cities like

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<sup>290</sup> Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class*, 183-185; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 261-262. See also Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South*, 52, 55-56.

<sup>291</sup> Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class*, 185-186. See also Patricia A. Schechter, "Free and Slave Labor in the Old South: The Tredegar Ironworkers' Strike in 1847," *Labor History* 35 (Spring, 1994): pp. 165-186; Charles B. Dew, *Ironmaker to the Confederacy: Joseph R. Anderson and the Tredegar Iron Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966) and "Disciplining Slave Iron Workers in the Antebellum South: Coercion, Conciliation, and Accommodation," *American Historical Review* 79 (April, 1974): pp. 393-418, 394.

Table 4: Total Foreign-born Population by County, 1860

<i>County, State</i>	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Total foreign-born pop.</i>	<i>% foreign-born</i>
Baltimore, MD (Baltimore)	266,553	61,775	23.2
Henrico, VA (Richmond)	37,910	6,357	16.7
Jefferson, KY (Louisville)	89,404	26,120	29.2
Orleans Parish, LA (New Orleans)	174,491	65,999	37.8
St. Louis, MO (St. Louis)	190,524	96,074	50.4
Alamance, NC (Alamance Manu. Co.)	11,852	33	0.003
Autauga, AL (Prattville Manu. Co.)	16,739	30	0.002
Cabarrus, NC (Concord Steam Cotton Manu. Co.)	10,546	59	0.005
Clarke, GA (Athens Manu. Co.)	11,218	87	0.01
Edgefield District, SC (Graniteville Manu. Co.)	39,887	177	0.002

*Source:* 1860 Census, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved November 15, 2015 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

St. Louis and New Orleans, where immigrants comprised thirty percent or more of the total population, benevolent worker organizations formed leading to striking and other forms of labor agitation in areas of the urban South (See Table 4).

Likewise, inspection of the number of immigrants residing in counties where textile mills existed reveal that foreign-born workers were virtually non-existent. These statistics provide a possible explanation as to why labor activism was low in antebellum textile mills. By removing immigrant labor as a significant factor within textile labor forces before the Civil War, native-born whites, who comprised the majority of mill workers, did not experience substantial competition for jobs, thereby reducing the potential for agitation, the formation of labor organizations, and striking. Concurrently, while textile mills were located in counties that did not

Table 5: Total Slave Population by County, 1860

<i>County, State</i>	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Total slave pop.</i>	<i>% slave</i>
Alamance, NC (Alamance Manu. Co.)	11,852	3,445	30.1
Autauga, AL (Prattville Manu. Co.)	16,739	9,607	57.4
Cabarrus, NC (Concord Steam Cotton Manu. Co.)	10,546	3,040	29.1
Clarke, GA (Athens Manu. Co.)	11,218	5,660	50.0
Edgefield District, SC (Graniteville Manu. Co.)	39,887	24,060	60.6
Baltimore, MD (Baltimore)	266,553	5,400	2.0
Henrico, VA (Richmond)	37,910	2,466	6.5
Jefferson, KY (Louisville)	89,404	10,304	11.5
Orleans Parish, LA (New Orleans)	174,491	14,484	8.3
St. Louis, MO (St. Louis)	190,524	4,346	2.3

*Source:* 1860 Census, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved November 15, 2015 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

retain significant numbers of immigrants, these counties did maintain high slave populations, which urban areas of the Upper and Border South did not possess. The evidence of substantial slave populations in textile mill counties suggests that slavery reduced the ability of textile workers to challenge mill management due to competition from slave labor, the increased presence of planters and, therefore, elite hegemony (See Table 5).

In parts of the antebellum South, white workers verbally attacked the institution of slavery as the cause of workplace ills. Alfred E. Mathews, traveling through the South in 1860, remarked how openly some poor white industrial laborers criticized slavery. “I have seen free white mechanics obliged to stand aside while their families were suffering from all the necessaries of life,” noted Mathews, “when slave mechanics, owned by rich and influential men, could get plenty of work; and I have heard these same white mechanics breathe the most bitter



courses against the institution of slavery and the slave aristocracy.”<sup>292</sup>

Workers in Fairfax County, Virginia called for a constitutional convention in 1860 which would result in “[bringing] the downfall of wire-drawing politicians and the rising up of respected laborers. Then will the old aristocracy be known as the dust that it is, and productive industry meet the reward that it merits.” At a public meeting in 1849, white laborers in Lexington, Kentucky denounced slavery and promoted its abolition, citing the institution as the primary ill of the working-class:

Resolved, That the institution of slavery is prejudicial to every interest of the State, and is alike injurious to the slaveholder and non-slaveholder; that it degrades labor, enervates industry, interferes with the occupations of free laboring citizens, separates too widely the poor and the rich, shuts out the laboring classes from the blessings of education, and tends to drive from the State all who depend upon personal labor for support. That while we recognize the right of property in slaves under existing laws, we hold that the laboring man has as full a right to his occupation and the profits of his labor, as the master to his slaves; and as slavery tends to the monopoly of as well as the degradation of labor, public and private right require its ultimate extinction.<sup>293</sup>

Southern non-slaveholder resistance to planter hegemony, slavery, and support for emancipation, was alarming to elites and viewed as a threat. Beyond abolition, any restrictions placed on the use of slaves within industry not only limited sources of profit but challenged slaveholder authority across the South. If white wage earners achieved victory through legislation or strikes, a dangerous precedent would be set leading to more restrictions on the power of slave owners. “They will question the right of masters to employ their slaves in any works that they may wish for,” declared the editor of the *Charleston Standard*, L. W. Spratt.

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<sup>292</sup> Alfred E. Mathews, *Interesting Narrative; Being a Journal of the Flight of Alfred E. Mathews of Stark Co., Ohio From the State of Texas, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, and His Arrival at Chicago on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, After Traversing on Foot and Alone a Distance of Over 800 Miles Across the States of Louisiana, Arkansas and Missouri, By the Most Unfrequented Routes; Together with Interesting Descriptions of Men and Things; Of What We Saw and Heard; Appearance of the People, &c., &c., &c.* 1861. Reprint. (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 8.

<sup>293</sup> Statement printed in *The North Star*, May 25, 1849.

“They may acquire the right to determine municipal elections. . . . Thus the town of Charleston, at the heart of slavery, may become a democratic power against it.”<sup>294</sup>

To combat such events from occurring, slave owners, while allowing for the continued existence of established manufacturing, monitored industry to reduce the risk of labor movements. Fearing immigrants as a potential cause of strife between slaveholders and non-slaveholders, immigration into the antebellum South was not universally supported. “The great mass of foreigners who come to our shores,” opined the *Morehouse Advocate*, “are laborers, and consequently come into competition with slave labor. It is their interest to abolish slavery, and we know full well the disposition of man to promote all things which advance his own interests.” Likewise, the *Charleston Standard* viewed immigrants as subversive elements to the power of slaveholders. “A large proportion of the mechanical force that migrate to the South are a curse instead of a blessing; they are generally a worthless unprincipled class—enemies to our peculiar institutions—pests to society, dangerous among the slave populations, and ever ready to form combinations against the interests of the slaveholder, against the laws of the country, and against the peace of the commonwealth.”<sup>295</sup>

Poor white deference to mill ownership can also be attributed to what Ulrich B. Phillips notes as the poor white class being “twice removed” from antebellum southern society—poor whites were removed from the social strata of the Old South as well as literally removed from the land. Backcountry migrants to the Piedmont region did not initially seek industrial employment but instead sought quality land to purchase and operate small farms. Once arriving in the Piedmont, poor whites discovered that land was unavailable as planter elites owned the majority of good farmland. With no land to buy nor the available cash to purchase it, poor whites

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<sup>294</sup> Quotation found in Foner, *The History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 262. See also James L. Huston, *Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 43-47.

<sup>295</sup> *Morehouse Advocate* cited in Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 590; quotation from *Charleston Standard* found in Foner, *The History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 265.

were forced into squatting, tenancy, day-labor employment, and eventually, factory labor. Ultimately, the Piedmont did not exist to provide an opportunity for social and economic equality; instead, the Piedmont reinforced the dominant, planter-based culture carried into it from the Virginia Tidewater and coastal areas of the Carolinas. The lack of prime real estate in Virginia by the 1820s helps to explain planter migration into the southern frontier.<sup>296</sup>

Fabian Linden, examining what he called the “submerged majority,” suggested that poor whites were by-products of an increasingly exclusive slave system; poor whites were forced to leave the land and seek employment in urban areas of the South. Urban wage earners who could not afford plots of land were nevertheless hopeful that factory work was a means to a land-owning end as southern mores attached prestige to an agricultural way of life. One Georgian poor white man wrote he “[desired] above all things to be a ‘Farmer’ but I must first have the means. Then the question is, how am I to obtain these? My only resources are a tolerably liberal education, a rather weak constitution, and a firm resolution to do something. . . .”<sup>297</sup>

The economic and social advantages elite whites had compared to poor whites caused much resentment among the latter, resulting in a distinct fatalistic outlook by poor whites. A poor white woman working as a seamstress in Augusta, Georgia complained that wealthy plantation mistresses often openly disrespected her, her “feelings . . . trampled upon,” causing the seamstress to feel “outraged.” The three-year-old daughter of James Darnal, a poor white in Augusta, was killed when she was crushed by a planter’s wagon whose slave was driving at the time. Darnal knew that nothing could be done to give him justice due to his lower station in society. He wrote to Georgia state senator, Alexander H. Stephens, seeking legal action to be taken against the planter but admitted that his poverty would prevent it. “I am poor and not able to contend with [the planter] and that is the reason he has not made me any recompense.” Thus,

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<sup>296</sup> Phillips, “The Origin and Growth of the Southern Black Belts,” 799-800; Fischer, *Bound Away*, 202, 275.

<sup>297</sup> Fabian Linden, “Economic Democracy in the Slave South: An Appraisal of Some Recent Views,” *Journal of Negro History* 31 (April, 1946): pp. 140-189, 140; quotation on 145-146.

brow-beaten by elite southern society over generations and left without any alternative to resist the harsh realities of textile mill employment, poor whites exhibited deference to their employers and managers.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Quotation found in Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*, 68; second quotation found in Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society*, 68.

## CONCLUSION

Mastery in textile manufacturing, like that of mastery upon plantations, was equivalent to the undermining of the society and culture of those masters sought to control. This mastery was achieved through deliberate mechanisms exemplified through pecuniary and non-pecuniary rewards, as well as punishments ranging from whippings of slaves to the docking of pay or termination of employment for poor whites within factories. On plantations, planters strove to assert both their dominance and legitimacy, whereas slaves sought to maintain networks of communication and a sense of community; in imitation of plantations, factory owners wished to express their dominance and legitimacy through strict rules and regulations, temperance, religion, and education. The relationship between a master and slave or an employer and employee was not static, but rather was constantly evolving. Participants confronted one another with opposing demands and expectations, seeking to enhance their power within a common framework. As Eugene Genovese describes this interchange in his treatment of paternalism on plantations, the process of oppression, challenges, and concession define the interdependence of masters and slaves, but can also be applied to factory owners and poor white employees.<sup>299</sup>

Planters and manufacturers both utilized control through religious measures. Masters viewed independent churches attended by slaves without white supervision as suspicious and, therefore, dangerous to white dominance on plantations. “[Raze] their church to the ground,”

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<sup>299</sup> See Drew Gilpin Faust, *Southern Stories: Slaveholders in Peace and War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 55. See also Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Last Foray: The South Carolina Planters of 1860: A Sociological Study* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971); and Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.)

extolled a mentor to James Henry Hammond. “[Keep] them from fanaticism for God’s sake as well as your own.” Hammond restricted religious services held by black preachers and began hiring white ministers to visit slaves on his plantation, eventually constructing a Methodist church for his slaves in 1845. Factory masters, like their planter counterparts, expressed control through Christian religion. Viewing Protestant Christianity as a weapon against supposed heathen beliefs and poor white sinfulness, manufacturers, imbued with the fervor of the First and Second Great Awakenings, established churches for their operatives along with Sabbath schools. Mill adults and their children were to receive proper religious educations so that they might better understand and ostensibly support southern institutions, including slavery. However, factory masters deviated from planters in regards to secular education, as planters typically forbid the educating of slaves.<sup>300</sup>

Both planters and manufacturers controlled their labor through work patterns. Planters, particularly new to mastery, found that slaves previously accustomed to less demanding systems of management, often resented the introduction of longer work hours. In response, masters increased the punishments of slaves by whipping those who refused to comply. Over time, as slaves were conditioned to the new pace of work, instances of physical punishments declined along with overt insubordination. To enforce the rigors of industrial capitalism upon poor whites unfamiliar with manufacturing labor, owners and mill superintendents created and subsequently maintained strict factory rules, which regulated the behaviors and movement of operatives. Punishments could not be pursued through physical means but based on the evidence at the Roswell Manufacturing Company and its superintendent, Henry Merrell, physical means could be used to threaten unruly workers whereas evidence for whippings is not present in any

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<sup>300</sup> Quotation from Faust, *Southern Stories*, 57. See also John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988); Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. Math, Jr., eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Startup, *The Root of All Evil*; and Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites*.

manufacturing records. However, as there is evidence of beating northern textile operatives, it can be plausible that physical punishments could have occurred within southern establishments.<sup>301</sup>

Factory superintendents and overseers on plantations also held similar positions in regards to responsibilities and acting as extensions of the will of masters, with the notable exception being Francis Fries, who personally supervised his operatives as an owner. Overseers were responsible to their workers and, ultimately, accountable to planters; likewise, superintendents were charged with managing poor white operatives and also reporting to a factory's owner and board of directors. Overseers and superintendents were responsible for distributing rewards as well as performing punishments to hands. Overseers did not seem to express the same level of control over their slaves as mill superintendents did over poor white laborers. Slaves actively undermined the position of overseers, by-passing overseer authority and directly communicating with planter-masters. Overseers were also not highly-regarded by their planter-employers, who often viewed their plantation managers as the low end of the white southern social order. In contrast, mill owners held superintendents as vital to the daily maintenance of a textile operation. Furthermore, mill managers earned high salaries of up to \$1000 per year, reflecting their standing within the textile mill community.<sup>302</sup>

Though surely it must have occurred for overseers on plantations, mill superintendents were actively recruited by textile owners to work in their factories. Francis Fries entered into repeated discussions with other local textile manufacturers seeking advice on where to look for

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<sup>301</sup> Faust, *Southern Stories*, 59; Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution*, 3d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). Wallace reveals that northern workers in the Chester Creek mill in Pennsylvania, particularly child laborers, had their ears pulled as well as experiencing slapping and whipping by superintendents.

<sup>302</sup> "Overseers," *Southern Planter* (February, 1856), 50; Scarborough, *The Overseer*, 196-197; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 228, 247; Minute Book, January 30, 1860, Union Manufacturing Company, Union Manufacturing Company Papers (hereinafter cited as UMC), PL-DU; Board of Director Meeting Minutes, February 10, 1852, Concord Steam Cotton Manufacturing Company, Cannon Mills Records, PL-DU.

qualified managers. “Our present [superintendent] is Mr. Siddall, with whom you are acquainted,” wrote Fries to Henry Martin, the power loom manager at a rival textile mill near Salem, North Carolina. “I would be very much obliged to you if you would let us know as soon as you can make it convenient, whether and upon what consideration you would come to this county, set up and superintendent the operation of [our] looms.” Duff Green, the proprietor of the Falmouth Manufacturing Company in Falmouth, Virginia, recruited James Boyden to become his new weaving department foreman, promising Boyden an increase in pay if he joined the Falmouth factory. At times, Fries was so involved in seeking competent management that he poached managers from other mills, earning the ire of rival manufacturers. A factory owner named Humphrey operating a mill near Greensboro, North Carolina accused Fries of stealing his weaving department foreman and called the action “beneath a gentleman of your standing.”<sup>303</sup>

Ultimately, slaves and poor white operatives were manipulated to the will of masters rather than just explicitly controlled through physical intimidation. Positive inducements were given on plantations and within textile factories to ensure worker compliance to the authority of owners. Picking contests and time off through holidays like Christmas and New Year’s provided incentives to slaves. While benefitting slaves and presumably planters, giving such positive rewards created issues on plantations. In reality, slaves were not passive recipients of rewards and came to demand or expect those types of benefits. Factory owners and superintendents also rewarded their workers through cash prizes and holidays. At the Staunton Woolen Factory in Staunton, Virginia, mill managers paid a cash prize for the hands who cleaned the mill the fastest, as well as the operative who most quickly repaired a road or other odd jobs around the factory. These cash rewards amounted between \$18 and \$23 every week. Francis Fries paid extra wages to female hands who made the least mistakes in the spinning and weaving departments as well as

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<sup>303</sup> Letter Book, Francis Fries to Henry Martin, January 20, 1838, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives; James Boyden to Duff Green, June 29, 1841, Duff Green Papers, PL-DU; Letter Book, Francis Fries to H. Humphrey, October 11, 1838, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives.



to pay extra for hands willing to work on Sundays. Fries also gave operatives the day off on religious holidays such as Christmas and Pentecost Monday. Interestingly, on one particular day in 1837, Fries induced his operatives to work harder by offering as rewards at the end of the day twelve bottles of beer and forty cents worth of cakes.<sup>304</sup>

The simultaneous use of both positive and negative rewards in the managing of either slave or poor white laborers led to the understanding that managing either a plantation or textile mill, as well as the meaning of mastery itself, was based upon symbolic and psychological control. Resorting to the sole use of physical punishment indicated that masters failed in the optimal management of their workforce. Through the use of both negative and positive inducements (i.e. “carrot and club” techniques), both planters and mill owners encouraged their laborers to internalize their inferiority, and both consciously and subconsciously recognize the legitimacy and authority of their masters.<sup>305</sup>

Isolation, segregation, and dependency found within mill villages reveals that mill employment and the mill village was much the same as what slaves experienced on plantations. Mill owners held vast amounts of authority over their poor white employees, acting as landlord, employer, teacher, clergyman, and judge. Furthermore, as Genovese notes, the mill village established a caste system in the South “[binding] the workers to the [slave] regime” through employment in mills and “flattering their feelings of racial superiority.” In the end, the employment of poor whites in mills exposed the class consciousness of antebellum southern elites. Slaveholders, as the patriarchs of southern society, could not establish a viable southern industrial sector without divulging the existence of a sizable population of poor whites created by the institution of slavery and upper-class ambivalence. Accordingly, southern elites “could take

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<sup>304</sup> Mill Journal, September 3, 1860, Staunton Woolen Factory, Staunton Woolen Factory Records, PL-DU; Board and Wage Book, August 15, 1840, Salem Manufacturing Company, Salem Manufacturing Records, Moravian Archives; Diary, May 16, 1842, Francis Levin Fries Diary, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Memorandum Book, August 2, 1837, Salem Manufacturing Company Records, Moravian Archives.

<sup>305</sup> Faust, *Southern Stories*, 61.

no step along the industrial road without exposing themselves to perils so grave as to endanger their existence as a class.”<sup>306</sup>

The similarities between plantations and mill villages, as well as slaves and poor white mill workers, are striking. Both were economic institutions where management (e.g., owners, overseers, and superintendents) expressed varying degrees of paternalism toward their workers. The mill owner showed feelings of “fatherly interest” towards his people, protected them, isolated them, and controlled virtually every component of their lives. Besides the obvious goal of earning profits, the aspects of benevolence and reform were pertinent reasons behind the establishment of mill villages. These sentiments were also evident on plantations. Contemporary southern elites thought slavery as a form of “improvement” for the supposed childlike and dependent slaves. Plantation beneficence was a positive attribute of slavery which southerners assumed caused slaves to become more active, more intelligent, and less obstinate. Religion and moral education were also provided for slaves on plantations just as it was within the mill village for poor whites. While mill management prohibited poor whites from consuming alcohol, slave morality was managed by masters and overseers alike. For example, slaves who committed adultery were punished by planters and subsequently whipped by overseers. Other than the use of physical punishment, the crucial difference between benevolence and reform on plantations and within mill villages is education. While education was readily provided to mill workers as “free” white laborers, education for slaves was often prohibited on plantations.<sup>307</sup>

Fundamentally, both plantations and mill villages trapped their workers into employment that lasted a lifetime. Although slaves were owned by their employers, poor white mill hands

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<sup>306</sup> Quotations by Genovese found in Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 235.

<sup>307</sup> Harriet L. Herring, *Passing of the Mill Village: Revolution in a Southern Institution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 4; Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, II, 156, I, 92-93. The control of slave morality must be viewed with a certain degree of cynicism. Slaves were only punished for adultery because the conflict of two male slaves over a female slave caused disorder in the slave quarter leading to a disruption in productivity, at least theoretically. Slaves were otherwise allowed to fornicate freely as this would lead to the production of slave babies perpetually providing new slave workers for the plantation complex.

were nevertheless economic dependents of southern industrialists. While poor whites were free laborers and could leave the mill to seek employment elsewhere, many southern elites barred poor whites from agricultural work under the rationale that integrated agricultural labor was a hindrance to the productivity of slaves and for whites it meant performing work done by a degraded race. Hence, the only viable employment opportunity for thousands of poor whites was within the southern textile industry. Mill villages became a “breeding ground” for both class and an antebellum southern caste system that lasted well into the twentieth-century. In the end, slaves were born, lived, worked, and died on plantations and buried in slave plots owned by the master. Similarly, poor whites became coupled with southern mills and mill villages as infants. These children dressed in “swaddling clothes bought on credit at the company store” grew into adulthood reared for a lifetime of labor in the mill only to die and be buried in the company cemetery.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Quotations found in Herring, *Passing of the Mill Village*, 5.

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