

Presented at **Southern Sources: A Symposium Celebrating Seventy-Five Years of the Southern Historical Collection**, 18-19 March 2005, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## The Unconquerable Archive

**Edward E. Baptist**  
**Cornell University**  
**18 March 2005**

*The images of men's wits and knowledge remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time and capable of perpetual renovation. Neither are they fitly to be called images, because they generate still, and cast their seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite opinions in succeeding ages.*—Francis Bacon, the *Advancement* (W.A. Wright, ed., Oxford, 1900), I, viii, 6, p. 72

*As good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man, kills a reasonable creature, God's image, but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself. . . a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.*—John Milton, *Areopagitica* (Merrit Y. Hughes, ed., *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, New York: Macmillan, 1985), 720.

After Laura Clark Brown first invited me to write about the relationship between the sources of the Southern Historical Collection and the historiography of the antebellum South, the direction of my first meditations took me by surprise. The task had seemed deceptively simple, for historians love archives. If they are our tools then there is none more suited to the task than this one: none whose handle fits so smoothly to the hand; no other that can heft so much of time's weight. The Southern Historical Collection is the best place to research the central issue of antebellum southern history: the development of plantation slavery and the experience of those who tried to survive it. Yet as I reflected, I could not get around the difference between what this archive is and what we historians have done or left undone. In many ways the millions of documents that live here have not shaped the work of professional historians of antebellum slavery. Now by this I do not mean that the archivists, at the Southern or elsewhere, have failed. They are among the heroes of this story. Nor do I mean to tell you a predictable story of good guys and bad guys among the historians. This story does contain some villains, but good sometimes comes from even their bad intentions, as in the case of J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton. Most important of all, however, are others: human and heroic in ways that we do not always recognize. These heroes are the documents of the unconquerable archive.

Of course, documents are paper, and the people that made them are all dead. Living in them are words—mere words, perhaps—and yet words are most of what we can know of people even when

they are alive. We often treat documents as the representations or even the very beings of people who, though dead, still count. Historians in particular already believe—or so I will argue by deductive reasoning from our best practices—that we owe obligations of justice to dead human beings and their words. Too often, however, the historiography of southern slavery has failed to meet these obligations. The shifting nature of historians’ successes and failures in this area owes something to the debates of historians over time. Yet perhaps far more significant have been the seismic shifts in thought and assumption created by the processes of nationalism, modernization, and globalization. Huge, world-historical changes over the last two centuries—and especially ones that have taken place during the first seventy-five years of the Southern’s life—have built and perhaps even built upon the changing connections between the historian and the archive. In that spirit I steal my title from Jonathan Schell’s recent work of synthetic world-history, *The Unconquerable World*, which argues that historical developments have left the modern superpower much less able than it realizes to bend the world to its political will by war. Since the rise of the modern nation-state, which in turn gave rise to the superpower, was the seedtime of the historical profession of today, perhaps there is a lesson here about still unfulfilled relationships between historians and their archives.

For Schell, the nation-state and modern war sprung from the same nexus: the revolutionary era that began in 1775 and ended sometime after 1804. New states emerged, and old ones changed. Some of these states were more successful than others, at least in the sense that they quickly grew strong enough to overwhelm all other societies. This growth owed much to the wave of colonization and global looting that began in the fifteenth century. It owed much to the exploitation of vast millions of enslaved African people, driven to the Americas in the train of a microbial army that left the latter continents populated mostly by native ghosts. But the triumph of these states also owed much to the new willingness of people who now called themselves “Frenchmen,” “Germans,” or “Americans” to identify themselves and their interests with the idea of the nation, and with its government. Many eagerly gave it their lives, mobilizing to fight in vast citizen armies that far exceeded in size those of previous centuries. Competition to produce the strongest national militaries, and the nation-states’ provision of fertile technological, capitalist, and industrial environments drove exponential growth in their ability to produce and project military power. These changes did not just affect Europe. The process of competition reached a first climax in the Napoleonic wars, but over the course of the nineteenth century, these developments generated a second wave of European (and European settlers’) expansion. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the nation-states of the west could collectively claim to have subdued almost every other human society on the face of the globe.<sup>[1]</sup>

The profession of history rose as a response to these developments, for conquering nations needed justifications. Indeed, many today still believe the main purpose of historical study is the justification of the nation.<sup>[2]</sup> The implications of their desire to justify the present through the past are most interesting.<sup>[3]</sup> In those days historians went to secure the consent of the past to national mythologies. This is an odd bit of business worth considering, for it implies something very important about particular assumptions about history, assumptions that we may well share today. To understand how deeply engrained is the idea that the past makes claims that the present must respect, one might first reflect on the opposite view, as stated by Thomas Jefferson. In a well-known letter, he wrote: “The dead have no rights. They are nothing, and nothing cannot own something. Where there is no substance, there can be no accident.”<sup>[4]</sup> The dead, he argued, are not persons to whom the living owe the obligations of justice, law, or morality.

Historians do not believe Jefferson’s argument, and never have. The nationalist historians certainly did not, for they sought to secure the consent—or seeming consent—of the dead to an account of history that would make the nation-state seem inevitable and good. Today we still do not believe that the dead are nothing. Why would you be reading this text right now if you do not think that the dead matter,

even if matter is what they are not? And what matters most to us now is what they have to say, for nothing expresses more clearly the accidents of individuality and experience that make our general human substance so unique and particular as persons, than what we have to say. You may say that the dead are not alive, and so their throats are closed and voices stilled. Perhaps, yet historians—and you may count yourself as one of them—seem to be very interested in what they have to say. Those of the antebellum South, in particular, trek to the Southern Historical Collection because there the keepers store the words of dead people, in folders and boxes and stacks and recordings and databases. Archivists, historians, and, in fact, society as a whole spend treasure and time uncoun­ted to recover, preserve, and read those words. Historians go back to them again and again, and say that they have heard different things from them than other people have heard from them.

The way in which we interpret these documents shares key characteristics with other human dialogues. The words in the documents contain many layers of ever-changing meaning. Historians, for instance, disagree with each other about what dead people have said, because one text can speak to each of us in different ways. We also disagree with what the texts themselves have said, and find not only falsehoods but reprehensible ones hidden there. The presence of lies shows that the living voices of people remain in the archive. Mere ink and paper cannot tell lies. Neither can magnetic tape, nor even headstones or ashes. Only people can tell lies or truths. Dead people make claims—living, changing claims, claims with whatever moral weight we assign to truth and falsehood, life and death, crime and law—about events now past through words stored in documents. And although some critics emphasize the ways in which readers impose their own frames upon the text's image, even dead people can say new things that surprise us. Many of the researchers who have sat at the polished desks of the Southern Historical Collection's reading room upstairs have felt something like the shock experienced by Saul and the witch. Each of them, in a separate way, heard unexpected news from the shade of Samuel. One heard the past say that the present was not what he thought it would be. The other, perhaps was shocked to hear the dead speak at all, although she had practiced her craft as if they could. In words from the documents of the past we meet shades and spirits foreign to our experience, meanings set up as stumbling blocks to bruise us with stubborn disagreement.

The epistemology of our dialogues with documents raises the closely connected issue of the ethics of our response to their calls and challenges. Although documents can surprise us, lie to us, or even offend us, we could choose—as in any conversation—not to listen, to pick monologue over dialogue. We could ignore, distort, or deny. We could conquer the archive by imposing our account of the past over the strident voices of the dead. We could even destroy the artifacts that preserve words, like embarrassed descendants or governments past and present. Yet if we converse with someone, we have already assumed the implicit obligation to hear them out and think fairly about their words, and furthermore, to report their words fairly and truthfully. We choose whether or not to fulfill that obligation. Likewise the obligation to listen, to consider, and to tell the truth clearly applies to historians who consider the past. Historians' everyday practices of note-taking, citation, and charity of interpretation reveal that they believe, or ought to believe, that we must take dead people and their claims seriously in the present and evaluate them fairly.

At the core of common-sense practices of history resides the assumption that historians should hold up their end of a living dialogue with dead people. This position on the virtues of dialogue rests on a broader ethical imperative. At the foundations, historians believe—whether they admit it or not—that they ought to act in our dealings with the dead in accordance with a general principle of justice that one might normally think of as applying to the living. One might express this definition of justice as: “to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them”—a principle simple in expression, perhaps, though maddeningly complex to enact.<sup>[5]</sup> The principle also runs like a gathering thread through historians' changing understandings of their mission. We began by courting the favor of the dead as if they were

alive. Now, one hopes, we acknowledge the living obligation to give them the words that are not only what belongs to them, but their very being: to give them a fair hearing and to retell truthfully.

The early professional historians, however, did not say that what they were doing was engaging in a conversation with the dead. They claimed, as they moved to define their profession in the late nineteenth century, the more exalted status of science. The reasons for this claim lie embedded in the histories of the nation-states in which the historical profession emerged. The more republican versions of the nation-state sought to secure not only the consent of the past, but of their present citizens to their government. They were all, however, in the business of conquering, whether they were conservative (Britain, Germany, Belgium, even perhaps Russia) or republican (the United States, France, the Netherlands) in origin. Geopolitical conquests needed justification, but other kinds of conquest also shaped historical thinking. For the science and technology, well-fertilized by the state and the market economy, that gave the Western nations a constantly growing war-fighting power and made global conquest possible also appeared to conquer all nature. By the late nineteenth century its acolytes claimed they were rendering the world into an ordered truth that was both absolute and submissive to human knowledge, by taking accidents or particular facts and from them abstracting statements about general substance. Though the founders of the historical profession acted in some ways as if they assumed, *contra* Jefferson, that the dead were people whose consent they valued, they also consciously desired the paradigmatic glamour of science for history. So they turned to conquer the facts of the past just as, armed with science and technology, the western nations' armies had conquered the world.

Yet by seeking to subdue—like armies, like scientists—the facts of the past, the founders of the discipline of history and the modern historical archive misunderstood. The data they collected could not lead to unchanging and objective truths. It came as complex and constantly shifting words, interpretations of fallible dead people who were themselves interpreters of the past and present. Further, historians who wanted to mobilize the dead in vast citizen-armies of documents to defend the nation could not live out “that noble dream” of objectivity, even if that were possible. Goals and theories alike blinded them to their blindness. This describes those who studied at Johns Hopkins in the 1890s as accurately as it does those a generation earlier at Göttingen, and this was as true for those who came from Virginia, like Woodrow Wilson, as for Frederick Jackson Turner of Wisconsin.

The task of the professional historian of the American South was if anything the most complicated of all. He bore the simultaneous responsibilities of defending the South and making it part of the American nation. Cleverly, this generation of southern historians came up with an argument that did both at the same time. Building on the lost-cause interpretation of history that the white South had developed as its own common-sense understanding of its highly problematic recent past, the new professional historians of the region characterized the sectional conflict, Civil War, and reconstruction as a colossal blunder. The mistakes were, at the bottom, caused by the unwillingness of white abolitionists to accept the “scientific” “reality” of racial inequality. White Americans had fallen into division over the alleged wrongs done to an inferior people unsuited for freedom—enslaved blacks. The consequence of these errors against the science of the day was the maiming of the all-important nation-state. While the South lost the ensuing war not by lack of valor but by lack of numbers, the North in its error compounded the devastation inflicted on their white brethren. “Tragic misjudgments” led to Reconstruction, in which an “inferior race” “ruled” a “superior race” until the brave Redeemers forced northerners to see the error of their ways.<sup>[6]</sup>

The task was complex, no doubt, but historians from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line were ready to justify a national reconciliation enacted at the expense of African Americans. William Dunning, though a northerner, purveyed the southern Redeemer point of view from his Reconstruction seminar at Columbia University. Herbert Baxter Adams had already trained numerous southerners at Johns

Hopkins in Baltimore. The Southern Historians spread across the network of northern schools: William Dodd at Chicago, Richard Dabney at Indiana, John Spencer Bassett at Williams, Woodrow Wilson at Bryn Mawr, Wesleyan, and then Princeton. None of them showed any interest in conceding southern claims. And why should they? Northern white historians intoned the same shibboleths.<sup>[7]</sup> They believed in the “reality” of race and racist claims. They wanted a unified and white nation. And they were also casting their eyes abroad at prospective conquests—other darker peoples, as the United States now took its place among the other imperial nation-states.<sup>[8]</sup>

White scholarly and lay audiences alike accepted reunion on southern terms, and they were quite willing to let a southern-dominated version of antebellum slavery become historiographical consensus. Justification came from the claims of Georgia-born Ulrich B. Phillips of Georgia that slavery was unprofitable, and that planters “knew” their Negroes. Slavery became a sort of burden borne by the white South for the sake of the nation-state as a whole. Northerners evidently believed Phillips’ account, if tenure at Wisconsin, Michigan, and Yale is any indication, and they also mostly accepted the white southern claim that they could and should continue to handle the “race issue” in their own way. Phillips, widely credited with placing the study of southern slavery on a firm archival base, also convinced because he used the technology associated with a “scientific” history.<sup>[9]</sup> In particular, he deprecated reliance upon travelers’ accounts and planters’ memoirs, and even used newspapers to produce price series for southern slave markets. Most importantly of all, he located, preserved, and promoted the use of surviving southern planters’ letters, diaries, and ledgers.<sup>[10]</sup>

Phillips’ work helped inspire J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to help found the Southern Historical Collection. Indeed, Phillips supported the establishment of the collection, and Hamilton in return promised Phillips unfettered access to the materials.<sup>[11]</sup> While Hamilton was part of the nationalist racist, allegedly scientific version of early southern history, he regarded documents as more than data. After criss-crossing the South for most of the 1920s and 1930s in a quest for surviving caches of family papers, he had borne away so many manuscripts in his succession of battered old Fords that counterparts in other southern states bitterly bemoaned the depredations of “Ransack” Hamilton.<sup>[12]</sup> In a way, Hamilton regarded the documents he sought as lives to save. Citing Milton’s defense of books, he mourned the death of a document as “literary homicide . . . the utter and irremediable destruction of an author.”<sup>[13]</sup> Yet Hamilton was tone-deaf to the nuances of the words he gathered. Despite claims to an “objective,” “scientific” history, he and his peers relentlessly imposed their predetermined conclusion—slavery was good and that African Americans were and always would be inferior to whites. In Hamilton’s UNC lecture hall, where graduate student C. Vann Woodward squirmed in irritation while Hamilton “h[eld] forth in the old time way” about blacks “for the benefit of appreciative” male undergraduates.<sup>[14]</sup>

Hamilton could not think critically about the complex sources that he gathered, any more than could Phillips, whose works are a massive exercise in the *post hoc* justification of slavery. His best-known works, *American Negro Slavery* (1918), and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929) may possess some of the virtues ascribed to them over the years.<sup>[15]</sup> However, they are problematic for many reasons. They never consider African Americans as independent minds, historical actors, or centers of moral responsibility. One would expect these flaws from an historian who insisted on dedicating *Life and Labor in the Old South*, his most well-researched work, “To the Dominant Class of the South.”<sup>[16]</sup> Even the claims of defenders to the effect that “He was racist, but his sources were good” are shaky. The manuscript sources did not always play the advertised role in his analysis. In his chapter on the experience of slavery in *Life and Labor in the Old South*—“Life in Thralldom,” he calls it—only ten of the eighty-three footnotes cite non-printed manuscript sources. Critics have argued that he used statistics in a selective and misleading fashion that gave an account of slavery based on the largest plantations. They have documented his extremely selective quotations of slavery’s contemporary observers. He of course

ignored the testimony of black survivors of slavery, except on one or two occasions when they seemed favorable to his argument.<sup>[17]</sup>

In the decades after Phillips' death in 1934, however, the United States and the world changed, and so did many human beings' conversations with their pasts. The sustained opposition of generations of African American activists tore open the cotton curtain, and historians could play a role in this process.<sup>[18]</sup> In fact, the attack on formal segregation amplified the voices of African American scholars who had been sapping the underpinnings of the old pro-slavery scholarship by using the tools of Roulhac's archive itself. In *The Militant South*, for instance, John Hope Franklin turned the white nationalist history of the Old South on its head. Under his questioning, dead leaders and institutions spilled the beans like incompetent suspects in the precinct "box." They confessed that they had created a militarized, mad state and society devoted to suppressing internal dissent. This sounded both unattractive and familiar to twentieth-century readers, and sapped the willingness of a significant number of whites to accede to the continued invocations of the white nationalist bargain over race. <sup>[19]</sup>

Even from segregated tables and separate reading rooms, experts in the use of the archives built to confirm nationalist histories could turn the voices of the dead against the powers of this world. African American scholarship posed a counter-truth to the plantation orthodoxy, undermining nationalist and scientific attempts to enlist the past. The limits they imposed on historiographical conquest mirrored developments in the wider world. By 1945, the great nation-states ran up against the limits of conquest. Constant innovation and competition made them strong enough to dominate the rest of the world, but paradoxically left them unable to wage war against each other. At least that was true when they faced off against each other—after 1945 the threat of nuclear war between the great powers immobilized both the United States and the Soviet Union. Direct war was even less useful as a political tool than it had been when the powers of Europe matched citizen armies, machine guns, and trench lines between 1914 and 1918. All-out war between the major powers had already reduced the value of conquest, now it would leave no world to conquer at all.

The nation-states' triumphalist historiographies had also released other innovations into the world, creating other unexpected effects that mirrored in ways great and small the struggles over the American South's past and present. These included the many uses of the language of national self-determination first expressed by bourgeois revolutionaries in the west, the consequences of promises of individual rights and cultural modernization, and the models mapped out by the nationalist historians of all Western revolutions.<sup>[20]</sup> In the face of independence movements, exhaustion from world and cold wars, and growing anxiety of some metropolitan populations over the contradictions evident in colonialism, the direct-rule colonial empires conquered in the nineteenth century all fell. Western nation-states experienced chastening and paradoxical setbacks; more powerful than ever on the battlefield, they were less able than nineteenth-century ancestors to subdue what became known as the "third world." Decades of guerrilla war in places like China, Algeria, southern Africa, and Vietnam showed that a people at war might never win a single battle. They might never get representative government. But if they do not surrender, perhaps even the greatest military and technological power cannot conquer them from the outside.<sup>[21]</sup>

Cold war and simmering decolonization might seem distinct from hot but wordy battles over the historiography of enslavement in the American South, but these phenomena pulsed together in complex exchanges. From the 1950s onward, works by Kenneth Stampp and others used the sources collected by Hamilton and others to demolish Phillips' image of the planter as a kindly white paternalist. The bibliography of Stampp's *Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, for instance, cites fifty collections from the SHC. With the tableau of genial masters and childlike slaves also fell the imagined historical precedent of twentieth-century white southern leaders' claim to the competence to govern

local race relations without federal oversight.<sup>[22]</sup> The civil rights and black cultural movements drove the new scholarship on slavery, and these movements both exposed and gained strength from every challenge to the nation-state's power. The rabid extremes of segregation in the South gave the Soviet Union plenty of rhetorical ammunition to use against its rival, so from Truman through Johnson, successive administrations reluctantly offered the growing civil rights movement federal oxygen. The example of decolonization movements and the later perception of both American defeat and American moral failure in Vietnam made more scholars in the United States willing to criticize the history produced by the racist consensus that had sealed nationalist reunion a lifetime earlier.<sup>[23]</sup>

The archive of slavery's past was giving new responses to new questioners and different questions, and the present continually reshaped those conversations. From the early 1960s onward, African American direct action—non-violent or not—against American racism helped spur historians to seek evidence of resistance both dramatic and mundane to the exercise of enslavers' power.<sup>[24]</sup> Scholars also disputed the claim that enslaved black people had possessed no worthwhile culture at all. As African American cultural movements gained new publicity outside of the academy, historians combed the sources for evidence of the survival of African customs and beliefs, and their relevance to black resistance.<sup>[25]</sup> Yet the existing archive was too limited for these purposes. Hamilton's aims, the realities of antebellum writing, and the winnowing of time focused it on planter-created sources. And from their records alone one might end up seeing the slave quarters through the big house's distorted glass.<sup>[26]</sup>

In response, social and cultural historians of slave society identified new sources to add to the archive of slavery. Most important were an array of narratives from ex-slaves—the published “fugitive” autobiographies of the nineteenth century, and several thousand interviews conducted (primarily by the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, or WPA) with surviving ex-slaves in the 1930s. These sources vastly expanded the possibilities of understanding the slave South, and beginning in the early 1970s a field of fresh histories sprang up from newly turned soil.<sup>[27]</sup> Using the WPA and other ex-slave sources, its authors wrote of slave culture, whether surviving elements of African ideas and practices, or ways of life and thought created on this side of the Atlantic. They spoke of resistance, family life, and soon of enslaved women's history.<sup>[28]</sup> Other scholars found right in planters' papers things that Hamilton could not see. Indeed no one could, without looking closely. In reported conversations with slaves, exasperation with persistent runaways, and uncomprehending reports of strange practices that masters could not stamp out lived the evidence of enslaved people's community, culture, and resistance.<sup>[29]</sup>

Yet the new histories had their own troubled relationship to the dead whose words collected in slavery's expanding archive. Some critics noted strains where scholars were determined to prove the existence of resistance, to refute the idea that the slave was all-suffering Uncle Tom or traumatized Sambo. Others asked about the consequences of emphasizing resistance, community, and culture to the exclusion of power, trauma, and politics.<sup>[30]</sup> Inevitably, some picked from the archives' vast terrain only the little pebbles of information that supported their own theories about resistance, community or the lack thereof, hegemony, and consent.<sup>[31]</sup> Too few of those who worked with the WPA documents heeded the warning of the interviews' editor, George Rawick: “There is no great virtue to, or historical breakthrough in, using the slave narrative only to buttress ancient arguments and preconceived notions. The reading of the narratives ought to lead to fresh questions, new insights, a new historiography of slavery.”<sup>[32]</sup> Indeed historians too often did not join the archive—especially the WPA interviews—in a conversation as listeners who took their sources seriously as fellow historians of slavery.

In fact, by the late 1990s, many scholars had dismissed the WPA interviews as sources. The ex-slaves were too old by the time they talked. They were too young when they lived as slaves. The interviewers were racist local whites who intimidated or misquoted them. While these complaints are not all unjust, they could imply that the ex-slave narrators—unlike, let us say, depressive planters with literary

ambitions and peculiar sexual appetites—ought to be ideal sources, purely objective purveyors of raw data, or we cannot use them to understand enslavement’s hard history.<sup>[33]</sup> Like any other group of people, ex-slaves were not merely repositories of memory who sat still until the 1930s when an interviewer turned their keys and unlocked their data. Instead, they were individuals who had been part of a centuries-long conversation among African Americans about enslavement. The stories they told were conserved, passed along, and refined before interviewers and professional historians ever heard them. This may reduce their value as pure evidence of things that definitely happened in slavery times, things that we can slot as data into an analytical matrix. Yet that does not mean that the stories told are not true, and true on several important levels.

Indeed, the voices of those once enslaved speak in multiple ways, and they exert an unconquerable if non-violent resistance to the last seventy-five years of historiography. Consider the following account from one ex-slave interviewee. Louisiana slave Pierre Aucuin was sold by his mother’s owner at the age of two. Years later, Aucuin married a woman named Tamerant and had three children. One day, he needed a haircut. His regular barber was unavailable, so Tamerant went to work on his hair. “You know, Pierre,” she said, looking at his emerging scalp, “this scar on the back of your head sets me a-thinkin’ way back when I was a gal . . . I had a little brother then . . . the master sold my little brother from us, and five years later they sold me from my ma and pa. Since then I ain’t seen none of my folks.” Tamerant continued, not yet realizing what she was saying: “One day my little brother and me was playin’, and he hit me and hurt me. I took an oyster shell and cut him on the back of his head right where you got that scar.”<sup>[34]</sup>

Something like this accidental incest motif, which appeared repeatedly in the remembrances of ex-slaves, could be maddening if we wanted to figure out whether or not slave culture was “authentic,” “African,” “creolized,” “resistant,” or “hegemonized.” Such conclusions about slave life might be of direct use to us in our particular present, but none can be sustained from this particular source—which perhaps explains why historians rarely, if ever, cite it. Pierre Aucuin—for he was the ex-slave interviewed, by the way—here worries about matters completely different from those that have obsessed the historians who have tried to raise the flags of their interpretations over the conquered corpse of the past. Aucuin does not tell us much about how families worked. He does not tell us how often incest took place. If this is Aucuin’s story about slavery, whether he means it as metaphor or as documented fact, he tells us enough to let us know that he did not think slavery was a school for teaching civilization, as Phillips might have said. Nor does his story suggest that slaves felt that families were a stable source of identity. Aucuin emphasizes the destructions of family and even of personality created by the domestic slave trade, factors which Eugene Genovese barely mentions. Even more recent accounts of the domestic slave trade or of a complex slave quarters divided by gender, accumulation, and religion might not find a place for incest stories like this one. This is not just because as “facts” Aucuin’s story does not fit neatly into any of the interpretations mentioned, but also because he sets the meaning of slavery in a different place than do most of these scholars.

Within Pierre Aucuin’s storytelling lurks a secret that makes him impervious to every attempted conquest by all our historiographies of slavery. This mystery is as much one of genre as of content. He emphasizes, like many other survivors of the South’s forced labor camps, the long-term effects of human evil, the disruption by white people of family and personal life, and the invasion and manipulation of black sexuality. Historians have not talked about these aspects of enslaved people’s lives nearly as much as ex-slaves did. Other former slaves tell us much about all of those things, often in forms other than stories about incest. Yet his story shares in common with all these others not only the claims of his content, but the most importantly the claim that we have to put front and center the way in which ex-slaves told (or did not tell) the stories of their past. He offers the listener the burden of his own story: that African Americans shaped, or sometimes failed to shape, their own culture and their own selves as much by



history-telling as by history; that they believed that what one understood about experience was as important as what one experienced.<sup>[35]</sup>

Such words implore us to discover the rich interpretations of enslavement embedded in the meditations of ex-slaves. There we could begin a new exploration of slavery's past that would be different from the white-nationalist, black-nationalist, and anti-black-nationalist historiographies of the last seventy-five years. For here and everywhere the archive evades our attempt to force its data into any of these generations of paradigms about captivity. And what is true of the ex-slave vernacular historians is true of many of the documents of the archive in general. They all set up their own alternative system of values and follow it. Each is the product of a mind that was an historian of his or her own time. To avoid trying to conquer this archive, we must hear the story that dead people are telling us—to their categories; to their ways of telling.<sup>[36]</sup> Joining now-dead people in conversation is never easy, for their uncompromising difference from us leads them to say things that to us may be new or difficult. Yet we really have no other choice. The dead will not consent to our attempts to fix and limit the meaning of their words, to conquer them for our historiographies.

The archive refuses to consent to being chopped up, parsed out, and squeezed into the casings of our stories. This non-consent may once again remind the reader of Jonathan Schell's description of our changing world. For he argues that by the late twentieth century the world had come to be unconquerable for reasons in addition to the limits placed on superpowers by nuclear and guerilla war. Nonviolent non-cooperation, from Gandhi's *satyagraha*, to direct action in the American South, to the fall of Communism in the Soviet empire, to the collapse of apartheid in South Africa suggest that non-consent can overthrow seemingly invincible powers that would not be defeated by war. The democratic nationalisms of the last two centuries, which helped make the power of the imperial nation-state, also created the conditions and, to some extent, the ideals for this development. So did technology, although words, not armies, are the secret to this unconquerability. The speed of communication has facilitated many developments, including international terrorism. But the increasing inability of nation-states and empires to suppress words has made it much easier to organize and sustain resistance by non-cooperation. This can work just as easily against would-be empires imposing an ideal as against the communist empire that fell a few years ago.<sup>[37]</sup>

The archive has always been and will always be unconquerable, as long as it exists. Power might go through it to prune everything that could ever speak in a distinct voice—the analogy of nuclear war, which would forever destroy that which it means to conquer. Then there would be no dead people to speak or seem to speak on power's behalf. We also know that the archive's innumerable voices will never yield us the final version of a history conquered by objective, scientific knowledge sought by the early professionalizers. When Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. arrived at Johns Hopkins in 1910, William Dunning confirmed him in his "impression that nothing very important remained to be discovered."<sup>[38]</sup> Yet the closer we have looked and the further we have gone, the more voices within the documents we have discovered, and the further we are from a final answer. This in itself might merely be another keen insight into the obvious. But there are whole oceans of voices muttering in the Hollinger boxes of the Southern Historical Collection, stories to which historians of American slavery have not yet really listened. The vast archive collected by Ransack Hamilton and his successors remains in many ways understudied, and in many ways its concerns and preoccupations, both obvious and not-so-obvious, have not shaped the historiography of enslavement in the forced labor camps of the vast American South.<sup>[39]</sup>

Let me name a few of the types of documents that contain these troubling and rewarding voices. In the process I may be able to make a few suggestions about areas in which the Southern Historical Collection could add to the archive—or add to our ability to hear the voices already collected, which might be

much the same thing. First, many, perhaps even most of the documents in antebellum planter papers located at the Southern are either about or are the products of movement and migration, including the movement of enslaved people. James Oakes and a few other scholars have written about this, focusing on the things that this process can tell us about the planter class, but we still have much to learn about how the incessant movement of enslavers shaped the lives of the enslaved. [40] For instance, what are we to make of this letter written by—or mostly by—white migrant Sarah Sparkman? From a wayside campground by the road through Tennessee, she reminded her brother back in Chowan County to “remember that we can meet at a Throne of Grace and that the same all Seeing Eye is over us.” She then closed by writing down messages for eight of the dozens of “servants” whom the Sparkman-Brownrigg clan was marching to Lowndes County, Mississippi. The one dictated by Dave Brownrigg read:

My Dear Wife, I write these few lines to inform you of my health which is much better than it has been. I can walk all day and have a good appetite . . . if I only knew my Master was well and you with I should be quite happy to get my Master to say something for you in his letter for it would comfort to me to hear from you all. . . my Dear Wife[,] may we meet again is the Prayer of your husband Dave Brownrigg.[41]

While we have made various estimates of the number of separations in this process, we have generally assumed a vast difference between migration with owners (not so bad) and migration as the commodity of a slave trader (very bad.) This message suggests a more menacing image of the planter migration that shaped the South. It also suggests the kinds of performances that whites required from black families who wanted to maintain contact over the distance that those same whites had created by fiat. By inference it tells us of the thinness of the ice on which black performers always skated.

The forced migration of enslaved people pervaded their lives and planters’ papers, but also drove historical change in the South between the Revolution and the Civil War. Documents could tell a different history “from the bottom up,” a narrative of the antebellum South that pivots not on the discovery of regional identity, the rise of Jacksonian parties, or the growth of proslavery ideology. Those are super-structural developments that emerged from a moving foundation—the westward-marching feet of enslaved people, a different army that also made the nation-state. Change grew upward like cotton from the raw, newly cleared dirt of southwestern fields. Even the ensuing political narrative would emerge in part from the cyclical reappearance of pyramid bank schemes that rested on slaves mortgaged by new states’ political leaders.[42]

Every planter family’s papers are full of documents that talk about buying and selling, and despite excellent ongoing work the economic history of slavery remains underdeveloped.[43] In the years since *Time on the Cross* was published relatively few historians of American slavery have taken up quantitative projects. Yet even if one is not a committed quantifier, slavery was of course an economic institution. We need to think more about how both enslavers and the enslaved thought of slavery as an institution of profit and loss. The consequences of their economic decisions shaped enslaved people’s lives and the world. Excellent recent scholarship has examined the economic decision-making of enslaved people who made, bought, and sold goods with their time off and their small amounts of money. But slaves themselves were accounted as property, and the vast proportion of economic and business sources in planters’ papers should push us to think carefully about the ways in which whites’ borrowing, lending, and entrepreneurial behavior shaped the lives of the enslaved.

In the Minor Family Papers, for instance, we find that these Mississippi valley planters (and their Liverpool cotton factors) constantly interchanged slaves, cotton and news of the world market for cotton, prices for all commodities, and banks and the politics of banks.[44] Southern planters usually

talked about enslaved people as economic goods rather than as people. One's conversation with those documents might therefore necessarily be marked with sharp disagreement, yet there is as much to learn from an argument as from any other dialogue. From such an encounter one might learn more about the pressures planters brought to bear on the enslaved. These documents clearly connect planters and the enslaved people they manipulated to the wider history of speculations, booms and busts, and American commercial growth. Earlier studies addressed this only obliquely, seeking instead to answer questions asked by planters about their own essence—were they capitalist? Did they make a profit? Now we might use the voices of the enslaved to set the agenda of new questions about whites' economic behavior. In the shadow of every column of figures in every ledger is another set of calculations. The enslaved and the formerly enslaved themselves wondered, and so we should in justice ask of the planter ledgers that were so often kept hidden from the enslaved questions like these: How exploitative were the planters? How irrationally did they act in booms and busts, and at what human costs? What was the loss to the enslaved, and the profit to the enslaver of each human day, year, and life taken? What would this add up to in terms of the unspeakable "R" word—reparations? Here there are new opportunities for sources. Banks and other financial institutions face increasing pressure to come clean about their antecedents. In the recent J. P. Morgan Chase case, laws have forced longstanding financial services corporations to hire history consultants to comb through everything in their records that might reveal connections of these companies or their antecedents to profits directly derived from enslavement. The Southern Historical Collection fills up every summer with scholars who would be glad to do such work free of charge.

At least one more genre of slavery's archive offers new opportunities—that of the slave letter. These are not common, but they are more common than you think, and they introduce some fascinating possibilities. There is no document more evocative of the voice of the enslaved, none more unconquerable than the 1853 letter of Virginia Boyd in the Rice C. Ballard Papers. Aside from Phillip Troutman's not-yet published monograph on the domestic slave trade from Virginia, I do not believe that any published work focuses on interpreting these sorts of documents.<sup>[45]</sup> I am also certain that other such letters are out there, somewhere, perhaps in the hands of African American descendants. Would the holders of these documents send them to the Southern Historical Collection? The University of North Carolina would need to make an effort to preserve African American history parallel in intensity and commitment to that launched long ago by Hamilton, in order to win trust and preserve such documents. But the Southern Historical Collection has another opportunity to help cultivate the preservation of the history of the enslaved by the descendants of those who initially told that history in the first person. The massive upsurge of interest outside the academy in black genealogy has helped to inspire and create a market for a number of new and wonderful resources. These include the collections of *Documenting the American South*, and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall et al's wonderful database of sources on early Louisiana, *Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1718–1820*, as well as electronic versions of the VPA narratives. From these, a new world of record-linking is emerging, making more possible the discovery of individual life histories, deeper community studies that trace migration patterns, and the correcting of old histories. The SHC could become a site where scholars and lay researchers interlink computer-based research with the manuscripts.

This entire archive is an unconquerable world of dead people who yet tell us stories, and constantly changing ones, at that. We can dismiss none of them, and we can accept none of them as pure fact. But if we want to learn something genuinely new about the past—and maybe, through a circuitous historical route, about the present and future—we need to continue to pay consistent attention to the categories, the kinds of story-telling, the types of voices which the archive itself uses. Historians faced with the enormous contemporary implications of slavery in the American South, and the enormous complexity of interpreting its sources, have too often resorted to attempts to conquer the archive. They have dismissed some sources, reduced others to mere bits of evidence, and picked which ones to take on

their own terms. Presentist concerns have flattened and hidden the stories told by the dead. Yet neither power nor prejudice can conquer the archive, though they have maimed its limbs at some times and stunted its growth at others. "Scientific" history has not done it, though it has confused us and confuses us still. As long as the words remain, no interpretation of the sources can be final. Despite the worst aims of J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, the good that he did, even if only by accident, will outlast the wrongs he committed. He saved voices that would eventually speak loudly enough to help overturn the worldview whose aims he sought to serve by saving planter papers in the first place. You could only rule and control the dead by destroying all their words. They will yet wear down every attempt we make to shape them according to our monologues. By turns troubling, confusing, and contradictory, they are as unconquerable as the world.

## Notes

[1] Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003). The historiography on nationalism and the last two hundred-odd years is of course vast. Significant to my own thinking is: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: 2d ed., Verso, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U. S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Samet, *Willing Obedience: Citizens, Soldiers, and the Progress of Consent in America, 1776–1898* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1992).

[2] See the conclusions of Jon Wiener, *Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, and Politics in the Ivory Tower* (New York: New Press, 2005). He documents that those who criticize the past of the United States today can expect to be attacked as untruthful by conservative culture warriors. The syllogism: if the United States is criticized, then the critique is untrue; or if the United States is criticized, the criticism equals mere “revisionist history” (as if there is another kind); or if the story told is not a political narrative about the rise of the United States to greatness, it is unimportant. All these approaches do not justify the United States in the present, and thus they must be bad history that does not fulfill the purpose of the discipline.

[3] Though hardly unprecedented, even in earliest stages of the American South: “Let us look into their antecedents,” said Nathaniel Bacon of his opponents whose justifications to power he was trying to undermine, “and see if they be not Vile.”

[4] Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816.

[5] Coffin quoting Walter Brueggemann in William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville, Ky. and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 63. I have not been able to trace this precise formulation in Brueggemann’s own work, but it seems wonderfully apt for summing up many theories of justice, whether systematic or common-sense, secular or religious, conservative, liberal, or radical. Of course, all depends on the meaning given to allegedly simple words like “giving,” “everyone,” and “theirs.” Brueggemann is notable for his argument that the theology of the Torah preaches distributive justice. He also notes the longstanding traditions in western and other cultures (he emphasizes “Grecian”) of “retributive” justice, which in turn give something to the injured that that system of justice considers ought to be theirs. See Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 735–42.

[6] Of course, the Southern Historians, following the lead of Jefferson Davis and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, were also likely to defend their flanks by arguing that states’ rights and not slavery was the cause of the war. But they betray their true analysis when they talk about what had to happen to bring about reconciliation after the North won the war by what they depicted as sheer weight of force. Here in general I build on the scholarship on Reconstruction and reunion as a project of historiography and memory, especially David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2001); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, And the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and their

forebear C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

[7] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77–80. Southerners expended great energy in keeping backsliders in line, but they were largely successful in doing so. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 180–91.

[8] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 382–83 on Dudley Miles of Columbia. I must credit Derek Chang for reminding me of the implications of this confluence of trends in the 1890s. Blight does not focus on this issue but one might profitably connect the surrender of the North to the same sort of issues discussed by Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Reginald M. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); and numerous works that are beginning to emerge on the Spanish-American War and its aftermath.

[9] John David Smith, “‘Keep ‘em in a Fire Proof Vault’—Pioneer Southern Historians Discover Plantation Records,” in *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: A Southern Historian and His Critics*, John David Smith and John C. Inscoe, eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 153–68.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, 160.

[12] Indeed, Phillips supported the establishment of the collection, and Hamilton in return promised Phillips unfettered access to the materials: Smith, “‘Keep ‘em in a Fire Proof Vault,’” 160.

[13] Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton, “Three Centuries of Southern Records, 1607–1907,” *Journal of Southern History* 10, no. 1 (10 February, 1944): 3–36. Quotes are from 19–20, and second section is quoted by Hamilton from William Palmer.

[14] John Herbert Roper, *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 85.

[15] Eugene D. Genovese, “U. B. Phillips: Two Studies,” in *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations of Southern and Afro-American History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 259–98.

[16] Daniel Joseph Singal, “Ulrich B. Phillips: The Old South as the New,” in *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips*, Smith and Inscoe, eds., 215–34 (esp. 215).

[17] Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929), 188–219; for critiques of Phillips’ use or mis-use and non-use of sources, see Ruben F. Kugler, “U. B. Phillips’ Use of Sources;” W. K. Wood, “U. B. Phillips, Unscientific Historian;” Richard Hofstadter, “U.B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend,” in *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips*, Smith and Inscoe, eds. For a defense, see Eugene D. Genovese, “U. B. Phillips: Two Studies.”

[18] See the role played by the historiography of Reconstruction, especially works by John Hope Franklin and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

[19] Carter G. Woodson, Rayford Logan, Charles Johnson, and Benjamin Quarles to name only some of the most prominent examples. The most prominent example is, of course, John Hope Franklin. John

Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1947) and John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800–1861*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956.)

[20] Sometimes they mapped out these models unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally so. Ho Chi Minh read Jefferson, but Marx, all the French socialist historians of the French Revolution, and Lenin meant for the models, diffused by their historical accounts, to take root and spread in new soil. But the best example of the use and indeed the rewriting from a “Third-World” perspective of the nationalist revolutions is C. L. R. James’ account of both the Haitian and French Revolutions in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938) which consciously sought to offer a model for African independence movements.

[21] Schell, *Unconquerable World*; Robert Thompson, ed., *War in Peace: An Analysis of Warfare from 1945 to the Present Day*, 2d ed. (London: Orbis, 1985).

[22] Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1956), esp. 433–35.

[23] Thomas P. Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). This dynamic is evident in the lives and memoirs of some of the most important activists, e.g., Pauli Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

[24] They built on earlier works like those of W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction; An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, Columbia University Press; London, P. S. King & Staples, Ltd., 1943); Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951–1974); C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*. Carter G. Woodson’s founding of the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916 also spurred challenges to the view of slavery so pervasive in the historical profession.

[25] For some of these movements, see Sterling Stuckey, *Going Through the Storm: The Influence of African-American Art in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); William Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement in American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.) Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); and Grant Farred, *What’s My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) remind us that these movements were neither entirely new in the 1960s—nor were they confined to the United States and the context of the civil rights movement.

[26] This is true of large portions of Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974)—even more true of later works including: articles from *In Red and Black; Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); *Southern Tradition: The Achievements and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); and *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). And it is all the more true of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), although this last text is

clearly shaped by her disdain for modern feminism. Perhaps even more important than planter sources to Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), was a particularly strained (and early) psychiatric interpretation of Nazi concentration camps.

[27] Just to hit some of the highest notes: George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Leslie Howard Owens, *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831–1865* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Margaret Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Joseph E. Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Pantheon, 1992); Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.)

[28] For women’s history drawn in at least some part from such sources, cf. Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Thelma Jennings, “‘Us Colored Women Had to Go Through a Plenty’: Sexual Exploitation of African American Slave Women,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 1, 3 (Winter 1990): 45–74; David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Patricia Morton, ed., *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[29] Blassingame, *Black Community*; Gutman, *Slave Family*; Robert S. Starobin, *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974); Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design For Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), esp. 69–104.

[30] They span the gamut from Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, 30, 49–50, 319; to James Oakes, “The Political Significance of Slave Resistance,” *History Workshop Journal* 22 (Fall 1986): 89–107; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South,” *American Historical Review*, 93 (December 1988), 1228–52; to William Dusingberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way Life, Warren County and*



*Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and in a rather different way, Dylan Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.) In response to some of these critiques, other historians have drawn on James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.)

[31] The great offender here is Eugene Genovese, whose *Roll, Jordan, Roll* constructed a sweeping account of slave consent to planter hegemony that ignored the massive number of angry critiques of the domestic slave trade and forced migration generally in the WPA narratives.

[32] George Rawick, “General Introduction” to *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Supplement*, Series I, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1977), 11, xxxix. Ultimately, it seemed, many historians of slavery and what was once called the master-slave relationship rejected the WPA interviews for methodological reasons—but this was throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as I shall argue in a moment. See the important assessment of these interviews in Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas About White People, 1830–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. 113–16.

[33] Two systematic critics of the use of such interviews are: John Blassingame, “Introduction” in his *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xliii–lxii; and Donna J. Spindel, “Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27 (Autumn 1996), 247–61; Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, provides the major statistical analysis of the narratives. For an example of the widespread decision not to use the WPA, see Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life in the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 226.

[34] Pierre Aucoin from *Mother Wit: The Ex-slave Narratives of the Louisiana Writers’ Project*, ed. Ronnie W. Clayton, (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 21–3. See Gutman’s lengthy investigation of cultural barriers against even cousin-cousin intermarriage among enslaved Africans and African Americans in *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 88–93. Gutman does not analyze the incest tales as symbolic in any way. Other stories about incest appear in: “Tom Epps,” and “Georgina Gibbs” in *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 89, 105; “Cora Horton,” “Henry Brown,” and “Lizzie Johnson” in *The American Slave*; 102–3, 124–5, 321–4. Eliza Suggs, retells the same story, though she was born in 1875. Eliza Suggs, *Shadow and Sunshine*, (Omaha, Neb.: n.p., 1906), 75.

[35] I try to explain some elements of this argument in more detail in my essay: “‘Stol’ An’ Fetched Here:’ Enslaved Migration: Ex-Slave Narratives, and Vernacular History,” in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds. (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

[36] Other such themes appear throughout the WPA narratives, some of which more recent scholars of slavery have adopted, and some of which they have not. Mia Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*; Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*; and Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Woman and Everyday Resistance in the Antebellum South*.

[37] Schell, *Unconquerable World*.

[38] Quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 39–40.

[39] Peter Wood coins the term “slave labor camp” as a replacement for “plantation” (redolent of mint juleps and unacknowledged pleasures of exploitation) in his article “Slave Labor Camps in Early America: Overcoming Denial and Discovering the Gulag,” in *Inequality in Early America*, Carla Pestana and Sharon Salinger, eds. (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), 222–38.

[40] James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982); James Miller, *South By Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

[41] From Sarah Sparkman to My Dear Brother [John Brownrigg?], 4 November 1835, Folder 3, Brownrigg Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.

[42] Key steps in this direction include Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003); Johnson, *Soul By Soul*—although this is explicitly not focused on chronological change or the wider narrative of movement.

[43] Cf. the work of Peter Coclanis, a case of a scholar who is able to connect economic/business history with southern social and cultural history. Some new works discuss the buying and selling of human beings, and recently several historians have written important works on the slave trade and slave market. But most of these are (with the exception of Michael Tadman’s work) exclusively discursive rather than numerical or mixed in their analysis. Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.)

[44] See Minor Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, especially Folders 13–22.

[45] From Virginia Boyd to Col. Ballard, 6 May 1853, Folder 191, Rice C. Ballard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina. I do note the documentary work of Starobin, *Blacks in Bondage*; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, Randall M. Miller, ed., “Dear Master:” *Letters of a Slave Family*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); but I believe that the as-yet unpublished work of Phillip Troutman will add the first full-length analytical consideration of these texts.