

# SLAVERY

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**W**HEN Abraham Lincoln, at his Second Inaugural just a few weeks before Appomattox and his own death, uttered the vow that war must be waged until the curse of slavery was wiped out, "until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword," he confessed the remorse that Americans have suffered ever since for their national sin of slavery. In this immortal speech he sadly suggested that "American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came."

These are words that a Calvinist, if not an Abolitionist, would speak, and yet we know that Lincoln was neither. What he felt after four years of terrible war was not unlike what we feel today—a sense of guilt—as we confront the American dilemma, white democracy with second-class Negro citizenship, and try anew to resolve this dilemma by eliminating segregation in our schools and cities. The present predicament of the Negro troubles us all the more because we remember his past in slavery—

remember that his people were the only race ever to be reduced by the millions through several centuries to chattel bondage at the hands of another race.

That is why I would invite you tonight to consider with me some aspects of slavery, especially as a racial problem. Let us look at it through the eyes of historians, who are the keepers of the morgue of man, never content to let the past fade away, always intent on refining what we remember into a closer approximation of the truth. When Lincoln offered his hypothesis that slavery was "one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come," he forecast the verdict of historians in recognizing its inevitability in certain times, certain places, and certain circumstances. What men do, even to one another, it seems they must do. The historian who tries to explain *why* they do it cannot invoke free will as if men had a choice between grace and evil. He must ponder, alongside human motives, the force of social pressures and physical circumstances.

Slavery is one of the oldest human institutions. It has been with us from the beginning of recorded time and is not yet everywhere abolished. It was a commonplace of the ancient world. "Its validity as a system of labor," the late W. L. Westermann reminds us, "was never seriously questioned. No attempt to abolish it was made by any ancient government. Nor did any ancient religious body, even Christianity, challenge the right of its believers to own slaves."<sup>1</sup> In dealing with a civilization which we very much admire, like that of classical Greece, where we find the roots of our own civilization, the historian has been too embarrassed to be very critical of an institu-

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (ESS)*, XIV, 74.

tion which Plato and Aristotle accepted as both natural and inevitable. For Aristotle the definition of a free man was simply that he "does not live under the restraint of another" or, under the greatest duress, in slavery.<sup>2</sup> Historians, from a Victorian like Grote to a contemporary American like Chester Starr at Illinois, have shown a consistent tendency to play down the role and soften the realities of slavery in the Athens of Periclean times.<sup>3</sup> Their moderate views may be in part a reaction to the sweeping claims of Marxists, as in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, which opens with those ringing words, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Free man and slave . . .," etc. But, with Marxism discredited long ago as a philosophy of history, it is more likely that enlightened liberals have taken a lenient view of the importance of slavery in the ancient world because of their own moral conviction that human bondage is wrong. More recently, the studies of Moses Finley at Cambridge, and of European scholars like Lauffer, lead us to see ancient slavery for what it was—a dominant, pervasive institution, harsh in its actuality, and unrelieved by any humanitarian movement for its abolition.<sup>4</sup>

There were probably 80,000–100,000 slaves in Athens during the fifth century, an average of three or four slaves to every free household; the two largest slaveholders,

<sup>2</sup> *Rhetoric* i 9.

<sup>3</sup> Thus William Linn Westermann asserts: "The view that ancient society was based upon slavery is . . . quite incorrect as a generalization." And, typically, "slavery in the early Roman Republic . . . was of the mild type . . ." (*ESS*, XIV, 76, 77).

<sup>4</sup> Moses I. Finley (ed.), *Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (London: Heffer, 1960), p. 150.

Hipponicus and Nicias, exceptions to be sure, owned 600 and 1,000 slaves, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Slave ownership was much more widespread, and the work done by slaves much more diversified, than in the American South. Greek slaves could not have been too content with their lot, at least not in the silver mines of Laurium or on the farms of Attica, since, according to Thucydides, twenty thousand of them fled their bondage in the last ten years of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>6</sup> Flogging was a frequent punishment; we read about it everywhere in Greek literature. To Aristotle the slave was merely an instrument for the master's use, and he callously observed that "one must take care of the instrument in the measure which the work requires."<sup>7</sup> Of any organized protest against slavery, there is no sign at all, neither in the philosophical writings of a Plato nor in the political speeches of the demagogues, whose followers among the free and poor demanded, not that slavery must go, but that debts be canceled and the land redistributed.<sup>8</sup>

In ancient Rome, slaves were even more numerous and more harshly treated than in Greece. Because we view the Romans as hardheaded conquerors and lawgivers, we have always accepted it as fact that slavery was at its worst in Rome. Here again, however, there has been considerable difference of opinion among historians. Carcopino, the French archeologist, paints a pretty picture of imperial Rome in the second century when he declares

<sup>5</sup> *ESS*, XIV, 76; Finley, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-51.

<sup>6</sup> Thucydides vii. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Gustave Glotz, *Ancient Greece at Work* (New York: Knopf, 1926), p. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Finley, *loc. cit.*

that "the practical good sense of the Romans, no less than the fundamental humanity instinctive in their peasant hearts, had always kept them from showing cruelty toward the *servi*. They had always treated their slaves with consideration, as Cato had treated his plough oxen."<sup>9</sup> But we may question these pleasant words in view of the fact that Cato himself believed "in the maxim that slaves should 'work or sleep' " and admitted that he fed his own bondsmen as cheaply as he could and sold them off "like old iron" as fast as they were worn out in the fields.<sup>10</sup>

"Yet Cato, hard and rapacious as he was," observes another French historian, Paul-Louis, "rose in the early morning to go to the fields, knew his slaves by name and worked at their side. The *latifundia* (or plantations) of Etruria and . . . Sicily were, however, places of torture for the workers. They were interned in huge barracks . . . and under the surveillance of armed guards day and night. They were treated worse than oxen. . . . Even when ill or exhausted, they were called upon to toil until their last breath."<sup>11</sup> Such were the conditions that led to the great slave revolts which wracked the Roman Republic in what Toynbee called "the secession of the proletariats."

That Roman agriculture depended almost wholly on slave labor after the Carthaginian Wars of the third century B.C. has never been questioned. Slave gangs made

<sup>9</sup> Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (edited by Henry T. Rowell and translated from the French by E. O. Lorimer [New Haven, Yale University Press, 1960]), p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Paul-Louis, *Ancient Rome at Work* (New York: Knopf, 1927), pp. 142-43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

plantation farming possible; without it the urban population of Rome would have starved; and, to provide slave labor, the peoples of conquered cities were sold into bondage by the thousands. In a single day of the year 167 B.C., for example, 150,000 people were enslaved in the towns of the Greek province of Epirus by order of the Roman senate.<sup>12</sup> With the organization of the Empire came *Pax Romana*, the "Peace of Rome," which ended the mass recruiting of slaves in war, and the transformation of slavery into the serfdom of the Middle Ages was foreshadowed by Valentinian's edict of A.D. 377 forbidding the sale of rural slaves separately from the land they worked.<sup>13</sup>

This all-too-brief look at slavery in the ancient world may usefully remind us that human bondage was not an institution peculiar to the ante-bellum American South. Apologists who pleaded the "Pro-Slavery Argument" of 1852<sup>14</sup> had every historical justification to claim that a Greek democracy based on slave labor was the ideal of the Old South.<sup>15</sup> It is significant, however, that they took Athens, with its milder form of slavery, and not Rome as their ideal. And in one essential respect their analogy was false, because the slaves of the ancient world were practically all white and of the same race as their masters, while the slaves of the Old South were all Negroes. This is not to say that there was no race-consciousness in

<sup>12</sup> *ESS*, XIV, 77.

<sup>13</sup> M. M. Knight in *ESS*, XIV, 77-78.

<sup>14</sup> Professor Dew, Chancellor Harper, Governor Hammond, and Gilmore Sims. See Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), II, 102.

<sup>15</sup> Parrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.



classical Greece, where all foreigners were known as barbarians and no Greek was ever held a slave in his own particular city-state, but it was a vague racial consciousness more akin to our feelings of national ancestry and to the antagonisms we have experienced in the melting pot of immigration. The ancient world was not divided by a color line; even the darker-skinned Nubians and genuine Negroes from the Sudan who were to be found in imperial Rome were never discriminated against for their color or their race. The racial dilemmas we confront were unknown in ancient times. What made the slavery of our Old South a peculiar institution was its unique component of difference in race because whites had enslaved blacks.

Southern apologists recognized this fact by justifying slavery as the necessary condition of an inferior race. Because he is "lazy and improvident, slavery is the Negro system of work" was the typical declaration of a literary apologist like William J. Grayson in *The Hireling and the Slave*.<sup>16</sup> To prove the biological inferiority of the Negro, Dr. Josiah C. Nott, of Mobile, wrote a strange ethnology in 1854 entitled *Types of Mankind*, in which he argued that Negroes actually comprised a different and lower human species than white men. This pseudo-anthropology fed on many medical superstitions about the physiological peculiarity of the Negro race.<sup>17</sup>

The childlike Negro—lowly, ignorant, and lazy—is a familiar figure in the plantation legend of the Old South. Along with magnolias and moonlight and lovely belles

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

stands the featured "good master," always moved by paternal affection for his faithful slaves. But, as Stanley Elkins points out, "the other side of the coin . . . [was] the most implacable race-consciousness yet observed in virtually any society."<sup>18</sup> In the southern mind the syllogism was fixed: "All slaves are black; slaves are degraded and contemptible; therefore all blacks are degraded and contemptible and should be kept in a state of slavery." The logic of such racial prejudice could hardly be understood by southern white children as long as they were nursed by colored slaves and played with black children. As they grew up, however, they adopted the convictions of their elders that the blacks were born to be servants of the whites.

The Negro himself was infected by the southern faith that he belonged to an inferior race. He came to have the servile psychology of a "Sambo," the shuffling, obsequious character so often caricatured in the popular minstrel shows of the nineteenth century. A folk tale recorded as late as the 1930's reveals the spirit in which the Negro accepted and sought to explain the stigma of his color.<sup>19</sup>

"All folks was born black," begins this quaint tale, "and those that turned white just had more sense. The Angel of the Lord came down and told a whole bunch of Negroes to meet on the fourth Friday at the dark of the moon and wash themselves in Jordan. He explained that they would all turn white and straighten the kinks out

<sup>18</sup> *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> B. A. Botkin (ed.), *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York: Crown, 1944), pp. 428-29.

of their hair. The Angel kept preaching and preaching, but those fool niggers didn't pay him no mind. Angel can't teach a nigger nothin'. When the fourth Friday came, a mighty little sprinkling of them went down to the river and commenced to scrub. The water was mighty low. It wasn't like the Old Mississippi—excusing the Lord's river—it wasn't any more than a creek. You ought to have seen that crowd of niggers sitting on the fence snickering at those that went in washing. Snickering and throwing slams. More niggers than you ever see in Vicksburg on circus day.

"Those that went in the river kept scrubbing and washing, especially their hair, to get the kinks out. Old Aunt Grinny Granny—great-grandmammy of all those niggers—she sat on a log all day long, eating cheese and crackers and low-rating those who were washing. When first dark came, she jumped up and clapped her hands: 'Fore Gawd, dem niggers *is* gittin' white!' Granny jerked off her head kerchief and went tumbling down the bank to wash her hair, and all those fool niggers followed her. But the water was all used up, just a tiny drop in the bottom, no more than enough to moisten the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet. So dat's why a nigger is white in dem places."

We can best understand the importance of race in making the Negro a slave if we consider the hypothetical—and therefore quite unhistorical—question of what might have happened to the slave-bound South if the white people alone had been divided into free and unfree classes and if there had been no Africans in our land. Suppose, in short, that the indented white servants of the seventeenth century had not only been kept in their apprentice-like

servitude but that all children born of women in this condition had inherited the unfree status of their mothers, as the Negro slaves actually did from the Virginia statutes of the 1660's onward. Can we possibly believe that slavery would have lasted very long? With no color to mark their condition, some slaves would have escaped to the free lands on every frontier, as many indented servants did; many more would have amalgamated with their free white neighbors in or out of marriage, as so many Negro slaves did that the census of 1860 showed 13 per cent of the Negroes to be mulattoes;<sup>20</sup> and the rest would surely have been emancipated once and for all by the liberal spirit that prevailed during the American Revolution. Slavery in the Old South was, then, always a racial problem, with human bondage clearly defined by color, and the Negro subordinated and segregated in a racial caste. His servile status was never mitigated by the lack of race-consciousness and the mingling of races so common in South America.

Why was slavery, as Lincoln put it, "one of those offenses which . . . must needs come" to America? It was no fault of the Old South that a Dutch ship landed the first twenty "Negars" at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. They were bought as indentured servants, not slaves, and Negroes were not visible in any considerable numbers in Virginia until the end of the seventeenth century. Nor was it the fault of the South that the western coast of Africa had been opened to a transatlantic slave trade that according to the most conservative estimates brought

<sup>20</sup> Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 387.

fifteen million Negroes to the New World,<sup>21</sup> a traffic in human flesh that reached its peak in the eighteenth century with the transport of seven million Negroes, most of this number making the deadly Middle Passage across the Atlantic in British slave ships sailing out of Bristol and Liverpool.

Slavery was essential to the Old South because that region badly needed labor gangs for its plantations, and Negro slaves were the cheapest of all labor, held as they were for life on a subsistence standard of living. The vast disparity in the New World between the endless reaches of land that lay open to cultivation and the comparatively small population of settlers who took up their westward march across this land created a demand for labor without limit. Conditions in the Old World were just the opposite, with too many people crowded on too little land in the uneven ratio described by Malthus. But the Commercial and Industrial Revolutions combined to make both Britain and Europe a rich market whose demand for tobacco, rice, indigo, sugar, and, especially, cotton the South could not resist. All these export crops were most profitably cultivated on plantations, and, wherever there were plantations of any size, there had to be slaves to work them. The labor pattern of ancient Rome was repeated in the Old South, with the single racial difference that all slaves were Negroes.

True, it is conceivable as a matter of logic, but not of historical fact, that the South could have organized its agriculture in other ways. The slave plantation was not the only possible mode of growing export crops. In the

<sup>21</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1948), pp. 57-58.

North, for example, wheat was grown for export on free farms of increasing size, and with hired labor to supplement the work force of the family, even before the invention of the reaper. And with the emancipation of slaves after the Civil War, the South, through its Black Codes, substituted the peonage of share-cropping for the coercion of slavery. But these different and later methods of raising world crops on large landed domains were historically unacceptable to the earlier Old South because it had in the Negro the cheapest and most numerous labor force it could find. It was, in short, economic determinism that fastened slavery on the South.

And it was slavery alone, the bondage of the blacks, that made the Civil War inevitable. Here again we must pause to ponder how history might have taken a different course. Until the 1830's it was a historical possibility for the white people to relieve the colored of their bondage without resort to arms in civil war to make them free. Southerners as enlightened as Washington and Jefferson had never contemplated slavery as the permanent condition of the Negro in America. The humanitarian spirit of the whole Jeffersonian generation looked rather to the eventual emancipation of slaves; and it was to this spirit, expressed in the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, that Lincoln later appealed as proof that the Founding Fathers had never accepted slavery as a permanent American institution. Many a Virginia planter in those early liberal years, including Washington himself, freed his slaves in his last will and testament. Even a generation later, in the 1820's, there was more abolitionist sentiment in the South than there was in the North.

The crucial debates in the Virginia legislature of 1831 ran strongly in favor of emancipation.

But in the 1830's this liberal climate of opinion changed quickly, completely, and permanently as the South closed ranks to meet the attacks on their "peculiar" institution by northern Abolitionists under the leadership of William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Weld. How quickly such a reversal of public opinion may occur we know from our own postwar experience of McCarthyism, a hysterical panic that obliterated the last traces of the spirit of reform so prevalent in the decade of the New Deal. Abolitionism, of course, was not the only specter that frightened southerners, but it did expose the race problem that would confront the whites in their social, economic, and political relations with the blacks if the Negro was not kept in slavery.

The fateful consequence of this conservative reaction in the Old South in the generation before the Civil War was the defensive and final commitment of the South to Negro slavery. No longer was the peculiar institution thought to be a necessary evil or simply an economic requirement of plantation agriculture. With the apologists of the Pro-Slavery Argument it became a positive good, not only a practical method for regulating the relations of two races that had to live side by side, but equally a proven way for reconciling the conflicting interests of capital and labor which the North would be wise to adopt if it were ever to avoid strikes, cure unemployment, and establish an equilibrium of classes as stable as the racial harmony the South had supposedly achieved with slavery. With such fantastic logic, southerners as intellectually competent as John Caldwell Calhoun of

South Carolina and George Fitzhugh of Virginia constructed their defense of slavery. The incredible and vicious conclusion of the Pro-Slavery Argument was to wipe out the color line and claim that slavery was as good for the white worker as for the black. Thus the Old South isolated itself and stood still, frozen as an archaic society pivoted on slavery, resisting the innovations of liberal progress throughout the Western world of the nineteenth century and deaf to the humanitarian voices crying out in England and the North.

The peculiar institution of slavery to which the South was committed dictated the political course of an entire generation before the Civil War. It made the war inevitable. The ceaseless political contest of North and South over the control of Congress and the presidency, and over economic issues vital to the development of the nation like the tariff, banking, land, and railroads, with each section courting the West as an indispensable ally, was peaceful as long as two major parties could represent all three sections and compromise their divergent economic and social interests. It was a titanic struggle between the industrial North and the agrarian South in the eyes of Charles A. Beard and the economic historians of the 1920's and 1930's. If they put too much stress on economic issues, this overemphasis was corrected in the 1940's by another historical school called the "revisionists," whose spokesmen were James G. Randall and Avery Craven. They leaned strongly to a psychological explanation of the Civil War, blaming political chicanery and Abolitionist propaganda rather than slavery alone. In a sweeping judgment of the Wilmot Proviso, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, and John



Brown, Avery Craven declared that "these uncalled-for moves and this irresponsible leadership were the very things which lifted the crusade of a band of 'crack-pot reformers' in the North and an extravagant group of 'fire-eaters' in the South to the proportions of a national conflict adjustable only by civil war."<sup>22</sup> Only a blundering generation, in the opinion of these all-too-rationalistic historians, could have stumbled into an unnecessary war.

But it makes no sense in our times, when we have fought two great world wars and live in peril of another, to believe that the most terrible civil war of all times, fought on our own soil, was less than inevitable. It had many roots and causes, no doubt, but Negro slavery—with a new emphasis on Negro—is the one cause of this war that no historian can shrug off. Allan Nevins sums it up eloquently in his book of ten years ago on *The Emergence of Lincoln*: "It was a war over slavery and the future position of the Negro race in North America. Was the Negro to be allowed, as a result of the shift of power signalized by Lincoln's election, to take the first step toward an ultimate position of general economic, political, and social equality with the white man? Or was he to be held immobile in a degraded, servile position, unchanging for the next hundred years as it had remained essentially unchanged for the hundred years past? These questions were implicit in Lincoln's demand that slavery be placed in a position where the public mind could rest assured of its ultimate extinction."<sup>23</sup> And, we may add,

<sup>22</sup> Avery O. Craven, *An Historian and the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> *The Emergence of Lincoln* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), II, 467.

this question is still with us—the Negro, not slavery.

The historians' debate about American slavery to which I have been referring did not actually begin until the 1890's when the sons of those who had fought the Civil War on both sides took it up. The many ante-bellum books on the subject were certainly not historical; they were passionate, partisan polemics, infused, when the authors were Abolitionists and northern travelers to the South, with a highly moral and ethical tone. Any sort of objective appraisal of slavery was simply impossible in the highly charged emotional climate of the years just before the war when the institution of Negro slavery was at stake. This contemporary debate came to an end with the ending of slavery as an existing fact. Following the Civil War, other problems, primarily those of reconstructing the South and reconciling North and South, claimed the attention and conscience of the nation for a whole generation.

It was James Ford Rhodes, a Yankee and the son of a Cleveland ironmaster, who set forth the first postwar interpretation of slavery in the eight volumes of his *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* as they were published from 1893 to 1917. And it is not surprising, as Jefferson Davis had feared, that the victorious North was writing the history of the Lost Cause, as victors always do, in terms of its own beliefs. So Rhodes wrote of slavery in the old moral tones, greatly sobered down, of the Abolitionists. To him slavery was an evil thing, and he could summarize his evidence and conclude his indictment by echoing the words of Henry Clay: "Slavery is a curse to the master and a wrong to the slave."

This view of slavery was accepted, with a perhaps sur-

prising lack of criticism and a complete absence of hostility, by young historians from the South like Woodrow Wilson and William E. Dodd. Their younger generation appeared ready to write off as "sins" the cherished ways of their slaveholding forefathers. Until Ulrich B. Phillips appeared. With an impeccable display of the new scholarship that had come out of graduate seminars pursuing German methods of research, he expounded once again the southern view of slavery, buttressed and bodied forth this time with plenty of actual evidence garnered from old plantation records. Thus he provided a new and informed opposition which gave fresh vitality to the historians' debate.

Phillips, a son of Georgia, could not believe that the gracious life and courtly values of the Old South had been based on an immoral institution. Trained in history at Columbia by the great Dunning, who, like his students, took a white view of Reconstruction, Phillips used the tools of his tireless profession to challenge and eventually to vanquish the followers of Rhodes, in the process creating a view of slavery which prevailed in American thinking until the 1940's.<sup>24</sup>

The basic premise in the version of slavery worked out by Phillips and his school was that of the biological and psychological inferiority of the Negro race. For this he has been labeled by Harvey Wish in a recent book as a "racist."<sup>25</sup> Nothing could be farther from the truth. Phillips himself liked the colored people, but he could see them as slaves only from where he stood on the front

<sup>24</sup> Phillips' two major books are *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton, 1918) and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929).

<sup>25</sup> Harvey Wish, *The American Historian* (New York: Oxford, 1960).

porch of the big plantation houses. He thought that they were children who never grew up to become adult, self-reliant human beings, and that consequently they always required protection and supervision, which he gave them as a YMCA secretary during the first World War. This being his view of the Negro, he found ample evidence in the old plantation diaries and account books to prove that slavery had been, not a system of inhumanity to man, but an institution which, to the common good of both races, balanced paternal benevolence with childlike faith and loyalty. Those historians who found it to be otherwise he dismissed as victims of the "theorist's eye and a partisan squint."

Strangely enough, the assumption that the Negro belonged to an inferior race was highly acceptable to the reformers of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive era. It permitted white liberals in the South to eliminate the Negro from politics so as to gain for themselves control of the Democratic party. And it accorded well with the fears of immigration from southern and eastern Europe that swept over the increasingly beleaguered Anglo-Saxon minority in the North. Northern Progressives crusaded for political and social reform in the cities and left the Negro as a race problem for the South to handle as if state rights had at last been granted. "Civic purity and racial purity became synonymous" in North and South alike. Fervent Muckrakers like Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell could be read in the same pages of *McClure's* with such exponents of racial inferiority as the young Virginian, Thomas Nelson Page.<sup>26</sup>

By the 1940's, however, after the New Deal, the perse-

<sup>26</sup> Elkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

cution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, and a world-wide war, liberalism had gone egalitarian and could no longer stomach racial bigotry. So history and historians swung with the times into reaction against the Phillips doctrine and back to the moral indignation of a Rhodes. Richard Hofstadter, of Columbia, launched the attack on Phillips with a criticism of his partial research, and other scholars, including those who helped Gunnar Myrdal to assemble the evidence for his account of *The American Dilemma*, brought up the heavy guns of anthropology and psychology to demolish all assumptions of racial inferiority. The conquest of Phillips thus begun was triumphantly concluded by Kenneth Stamp, of California, in his book, *The Peculiar Institution*, published in 1956. With a more thorough, less selective, and allegedly more "objective" review of the evidence, and in the light of the latest social sciences, Stamp once more underscored the abominable inhumanities of Negro slavery in the Old South.

But Stamp, no more than Phillips, could escape the necessity of debating the issue within the old moral framework of Rhodes. To discredit Phillips, he had perforce to meet him on his own grounds and do battle on the terms and with the weapons Phillips had chosen. The moral aspect of Negro slavery was still the primary question, as it had been for the Abolitionists, because the economists were arriving at better proofs than the historians that slavery had been a profitable system of labor. In exposing once again the inhumanity of slavery, Stamp stood on dubious psychological ground. He assumed that "Negroes *are*, after all, only white men with

black skins, nothing more, nothing less."<sup>27</sup> But is this assumption valid? The human races may be approximately equal in their biological inheritance and the range of their potential abilities. What appear to be racial differences may be only the result of different social or cultural environments. We do not know for sure, as yet, because the findings of psychology are not complete on this score, and history still has a collective verdict to render on the new nations of Negro Africa.

But the trouble with Stampp's basic view has nothing to do with assumptions of racial equality or inferiority. It is rather a question whether the Negro, as a slave, was only a white man with a black skin. Physically and biologically, perhaps we can agree that he was, but his psychology was servile, he generally lacked any education, he had no cultural inheritance apart from that of his white masters, and his opportunities for self-improvement and work in the higher arts of civilization were next to nothing. In all these respects he could not be the equal of a white man as long as he was a slave. Stanley Elkins, in his recent book on *Slavery*, compares the Negro slave to the prisoners in German concentration camps who lost the quality of even being men.

The American Negro, we repeat, and conclude, was altogether different from the white man while he was a slave. His psychology has been best described by an ex-slave, Frederick Douglass, who wrote in 1855: "Beat and cuff your slave, keep him hungry and spiritless, and he will follow the chain of his master like a dog; but feed and clothe him well,—work him moderately—surround him with physical comfort,—and dreams of freedom in-

<sup>27</sup> *The Peculiar Institution* (New York: Knopf, 1956), p. vii.

trude. Give him a *bad* master, and he aspires to a *good* master; give him a good master, and he wishes to become his *own* master.'"<sup>28</sup> So few were the Negro slaves or ex-slaves like Douglass who could read and write and were educated that the Negro has left us no records of what he endured in slavery and what he felt about his bondage. Everything we know about him comes from the indirect evidence of his white masters and neighbors. Like the human masses of all races in ancient and medieval times, and right down to the nineteenth century, the American Negro slave is a man without a history of his own. But as a Negro, still suffering from the handicaps of inequality and segregation, he is now one of us, an American looking for justice.

<sup>28</sup> *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1855), pp. 263-64.

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