

they may say to each other in private. Where possible, euphemisms are employed, and if they are from the academy, so much the better.

Quoted from "Deconstructing the Underclass: The Term's Danger as a Planning Concept," in *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Summer 1990, vol. 56, no. 5. A similar critique of the sanctioned stereotypes conveyed in popular usage of social science terms for the poor are made by Maxine Baca Zinn in "Family, Race, and Poverty in the Eighties," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1989, vol. 14, no. 4, and Mimi Abramovitz, in "Putting an End to Doublespeak About Race, Gender, and Poverty: An Annotated Glossary for Social Workers," in *Social Work*, vol. 36, no. 5, September 1991.

19. Pierre Bourdieu makes this case most forcefully in *Distinction: A Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). In particular, see the section, "Classes and Classification," pp. 466–477.

20. On this particular usage of "continuum," see Lee Drummond, "The Cultural Continuum: A Theory of Intersystems," *Man*, Vol. 15, 1986.

21. Ethnographies of poor whites, like *Hard Living and Uptown*, have followed in the novelistic style first established by Oscar Lewis, best evidenced in works like *La Vida* (New York: Vintage, 1965). In this mode, the lives of poor people are rendered in copious detail in the form of a stylized realism, eschewing analysis, as if the concrete presence of the travails of such people conveyed a simple, unalloyed or "natural" truth.

22. The entertainment value of accounts of poor whites is most clear in writings on Appalachia. See Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990) and Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

23. The sense of culturelessness that pervades white Americans' sense of self has long been a frustration for ethnographers who work in this country. In particular, see Herve Varenne's *Symbolizing America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986) and its criticism of the counter-obsession of field-workers who consider only the "exotic" aspects of life in the United States worthy of study.



PARTNERS IN CRIME

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND
NON-SLAVEHOLDING
WHITES IN
ANTEBELLUM GEORGIA

TIMOTHY J. LOCKLEY

On the night of Saturday, February 5, 1838, in Savannah, Georgia, two men perpetrated a theft from the cabinet-making shop of Mr. Isaac Morell, where they were both employed. Once they had entered the store, these "partners in crime" attempted to pick the locks of Morell's desk, where they knew the takings for the week were kept. This attempt failed, and they eventually forced the lock with a pair of chisels, finding inside \$118 in bills and coins. With the theft completed, the pair made good their escape on the Augusta road that same night. Thomas Walsh set off in pursuit of the fugitives and within a week of the theft had tracked the pair 135 miles to Augusta, arrested them, and returned them to Savannah. After

some interrogation by Isaac Morell, one of the criminals confessed in front of several witnesses. This confession was produced as evidence during the trial at the May session of Chatham County Superior Court.¹ Despite a plea of Not Guilty, no evidence was produced at the trial in favor of the defendant, and the prisoner was found guilty and sentenced to three years' hard labor at the state penitentiary in Milledgeville. The records of that institution record his admittance there on the 3rd of July 1838, and his eventual release on the 3rd of July 1841. While there is perhaps nothing unusual about his conviction itself, what is fascinating is the fact that this crime was planned and carried out by a male slave by the name of George and a white youth named Henry Forsyth. We have no records of what punishment if any was given to the slave, but the fact that Forsyth served three years at hard labor shows the relative severity with which his case was regarded. By his criminal involvement with an African American, Henry Forsyth had crossed the racial lines which divided Southern society. Why he chose to do this is in part the subject of this essay.

The daily life of the non-slaveholding white population in the antebellum South is generally underrepresented in current historiographic trends. Serious scholarly research in Southern history from U. B. Phillips onwards, has tended to delineate a paternalistic view of slavery and of Southern society generally.² This typology seems to have gained general acceptance as a convincing picture of the antebellum South. Recent studies of slavery have added significantly to our knowledge of religion, crime, society, and economics.³ Yet these studies, while discussing the importance of the planter elite to everyday slave life, generally neglect the role of the non-slaveholders in the lives of slaves. Although it is difficult to give an exact figure for the number of non-slaveholding whites in the South, as such a figure would inevitably fail to take into account regional differences, current estimates state that 70 to 75 percent of the white population in the antebellum South did not own slaves.⁴ Therefore it seems logical to begin a thorough exploration of the relationship African Americans had with the majority of the white population—the non-slaveholders.

Paul Buck was the first to highlight the difficult lives of non-slaveholding whites in a slaveholding society. While his depiction of the miserable existence of rural poor whites is most likely accurate, Buck's belief that the racial ties that existed between non-slaveholding whites and the white elite was the gel which held Southern society together in defense of slavery is more

open to question.⁵ Avery Craven undermined Buck's racial solidarity view by arguing that the material existence of non-slaveholding whites and African Americans was similar in terms of housing, diet, and standard of living.⁶ This conclusion was later backed up by archaeological research which discovered a startling similarity between the diet of slaves and overseers on many low-country plantations.⁷ However, these archaeological studies also concluded that overseers maintained the visible social position of a white person by living in a brick instead of a wooden house, and by using china instead of earthenware. Being white in the antebellum South was clearly as much a sociological status as a biological fact. White people were perceived as superior to African Americans in almost every respect, and as such, they were expected to live up to certain standards of living and behavior. The lowly existence of non-slaveholding poor whites would seem to vitiate this racial stereotype by demonstrating to all that whiteness per se was not a ticket to the life of leisure. Living in a society which was based on a system of human bondage, and having little or no part in that particular system, gave non-slaveholding whites a unique social status.⁸

In his study of slave attitudes towards non-slaveholding whites, Eugene Genovese argued that the marginalized and degraded life of rural non-slaveholding whites earned them the derision of bondpeople.⁹ Genovese characterizes this attitude of the slaves as primarily a class, rather than a race based world view. Yet he does not explore whether non-slaveholding whites shared this class based world view. In recent years two studies of poor white life in North Carolina and Mississippi have been published. Each defines non-elite whites in a different way; Bill Cecil Fronsman chose to include all but the planter elite, while Charles Bolton studied only the landless and slaveless population. Neither study attempts to treat the contacts between non-slaveholding whites and African Americans in a comprehensive way, but both note that these contacts did exist.¹⁰ While this current essay explores only one aspect of non-slaveholding white and African American relations, namely the criminal, these groups also interacted on a social level, a religious level, and an economic level.¹¹

Unlike some areas of the South, the South Carolina and Georgia low-country did not possess a numerical majority of non-slaveholding whites. The peculiar geography of the coastal plain which generously supported both rice and sea island cotton had led to the rise of an elite aristocracy living in luxury on the coastal plantations and in the gentrified towns of

Charleston, Beaufort, and Savannah. The premium placed on swamp land due to its rice-growing capability had effectively driven the poorer farmers from this area by the early nineteenth century, and had forced them to migrate to back-country areas to find affordable lands.¹² However, some non-slaveholding farmers did survive in the more inaccessible parts of the rice coast, in locations without river access, or in dense pine woodlands. The tax list for Liberty County in 1801 demonstrates this clearly.¹³ Of the 289 people listed as taxpayers, 194 (68 percent) owned slaves. However, regional differences within the county make this figure somewhat artificial. In the main coastal areas around Sunbury and Newport, up to 85 percent of the population owned slaves, whereas the inland area near the Canochie River was generally populated by non-slaveholders, with less than 18 percent of residents owning slaves.

LIBERTY COUNTY TAX DIGEST 1801

District	Number of Taxpayers	Number of Non-Slaveholders	Percentage of Non-Slaveholders	Average Number of Slaves per Taxpayer
No. 1	101	16	15.84	11.6
No. 2: Newport	97	23	23.71	15.8
No. 3: Sunbury	35	10	28.57	11
No. 4: Canochie	56	46	82.14	0.5
Entire County	289	95	32.87	10.8

In 1838 Fanny Kemble, a famous English actress who married the planter Pierce Butler and lived on Butler's Point plantation near Darien in 1838 and 1839, described these rural people as those who "too poor to possess land or slaves, and having no means of living in the towns, squat (most appropriately it is so termed) either on other men's land or government districts—always the swamp or the pine barren—and claim masterdom over the place they invade till ejected by the rightful proprietors."¹⁴ The obvious problem is that these non-slaveholding farmers rarely figure in the historical records. Often illiterate and highly independent, these farmers needed little contact with the outside world, and without legal contracts, business or family letters,

and other written documents it is almost impossible to describe their lifestyle accurately.

The historian fares rather better with municipal records. City government tended to create many different types of records; and while their survival is somewhat haphazard, they permit us to describe some aspects of the criminal relationship which existed between non-slaveholding whites and African Americans. Tax lists from both the city of Savannah and Chatham County allow us to isolate non-slaveholding whites because residents were, in part, taxed on the number of slaves they owned. City Council Minutes and Mayor's Court records show who was prosecuted for trading with slaves, who "entertained Negroes," and what the fines for such offenses were. The minutes from Chatham County Superior Court occasionally include trial testimony, thus providing an invaluable window into the mindset of criminals and detailed descriptions of their behavior. Hence we know significantly more about the lives of non-slaveholding whites in an urban rather than rural environment. In Savannah, non-slaveholding whites occasionally worked side by side with African Americans. The 1820 Federal Manufacturing Census for Chatham County listed seven industrial businesses which definitely employed both white and black workers, and since this census did not list traditional artisans such as carpenters or cabinet makers, it is likely that many more non-slaveholding whites (such as Henry Forsyth) were employed in shops or workshops that involved regular contact with African Americans.

It is the consequences of such personal contacts forged in the work place between the races that Henry Forsyth's case reveals.¹⁵ During the trial Thomas Walsh testified to the fact the Forsyth worked for Mr. Morell but was not an indentured apprentice, and the records of the state penitentiary reveal that Forsyth was only eighteen at the time of confinement in 1838. It is certainly possible that this job, working for an important cabinet maker in Savannah, was Forsyth's first taste of employment. Forsyth was born in Georgia, and while he does not appear in any of the tax or census lists for the period, city residents without property, who were not heads of households, could often be overlooked by official statisticians. On his release from prison in 1841, Forsyth returned to marry in Savannah, despite having sought originally to leave the city. During the trial several witnesses testified to the fact that Forsyth had been unhappy in Savannah, stating that he quarreled frequently with his brother (who apparently also worked for

Morell), and that this was the original motive for the theft. Therefore we have a picture of a young man, newly employed in a trade, but most likely poorly paid, who for family reasons—and perhaps for a desire to start afresh in Augusta—decided to leave his place of birth and employment for the possibility of a new life. Forsyth's obvious problem was that relocation would cost money, something which he apparently lacked. Thus, most likely in an attempt to solve his financial problems and facilitate his migration, Forsyth turned to the idea of theft.

Isaac Morell was clearly a man of some substance. In 1837 he paid tax on merchandise valued at \$11,000, and recorded his personal property as one slave (presumably George), a dog, and a house in Liberty Ward worth \$1,250. As a cabinet maker, Morell could afford to charge high fees to his wealthier customers, and he was certainly prosperous enough to have substantial amounts of ready money in his store. How then did George come to be involved in the crime? Clearly George and Forsyth knew each other fairly well, and it is certainly possible that a friendship of sorts had grown between them. In his confession to Morell once he had been returned to Savannah, Forsyth stated that the original idea of the theft had been George's, as George knew where the key to the store was kept. George's motive for participation in the theft is more difficult to determine. The fact that he joined Forsyth in traveling to Augusta, rather than seeking to escape to freedom in the Northern states, would seem to suggest that George's paramount objective was to leave Morell's service. By traveling with Forsyth, he received the protection afforded by any white person to an African American, while enjoying the freedom that being "owned" by Forsyth would have entailed. It is clear that to undertake this risk, George must have trusted Forsyth not to abuse the relationship they had.

Isaac Morell testified at the trial that there was \$100 in bills, \$15 in bills of exchange, and \$3 in silver in his desk that Saturday night. However, Forsyth stated that when the money was divided at Sister's Ferry, he only took the change bills, one \$10 bill, one \$5 bill, and a silver dollar. Apparently George took the other \$87—later he gave Forsyth another \$8 or \$10 when they were in Augusta. Why George took the larger share of the money is unclear. Maybe as Forsyth claimed, George was the main catalyst behind the theft, and as the mastermind, he claimed the lion's share of the proceeds. Perhaps Forsyth was unwilling to carry such a large sum of money by himself, and preferred to place the responsibility and possible consequences

of detection firmly on the shoulders of the slave. Yet overall, the details of what happened to the money suggest that George was a true partner in this crime, and that he was able to assert himself sufficiently in the relationship to obtain his share of the proceeds.

Forsyth's case is just one example of a non-slaveholding white person interacting with a slave on terms which contravened the usual patterns of race relations in a Southern city like Savannah. The relationship between George and Henry Forsyth as outlined in the trial documents was clearly not one of domination or subordination based on race. Rather two people, who worked together on a daily basis, were able to overcome the obvious status differences between bondsman and freeman to mutual advantage and profit.

Nevertheless, the details of this case, however rich, do not prove that non-slaveholding whites interacted with slaves on a regular basis, or that such relationships were always on the same footing. Testimony from another trial in Chatham County Superior Court illuminates a different type of criminal relationship which could exist between non-slaveholding whites and African Americans. In 1839 John D. Roche was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for the simple larceny of a slave named January, the property of Colonel Stewart of Liberty County. Roche, in company with David Welcher, was traveling up the Georgia coast towards Savannah when they came across the slave, who called himself "Bob" and claimed to be on his way to Savannah after visiting family to the south. Gradually Roche came to believe that "Bob" was a runaway, which he communicated to Welcher before they reached Savannah. Once in Savannah, "Bob" was put to work for Roche and others, and occasionally Roche would claim ownership of the slave depending on who asked. Unfortunately for Roche a Savannah magistrate—William Pittman—recognized "Bob" as January belonging to Colonel Stewart of Jonesville, whom Pittman used to go hunting with. He took January to Daniel Stewart, the colonel's nephew, who agreed with this identification.

John Roche was a twenty-six-year-old Irishman whose professed trade was rum-selling. He received a five-year sentence for attempting to pass the slave off as his own, though he was pardoned eight months before the end of his sentence. The role of January in this crime reveals much about African American attitudes toward bondage. As a runaway January had little to lose by falling in with someone like Roche, who as a white person would offer a

measure of protection from the prying questions of the more suspicious-minded of Savannah's citizens. Indeed, Thomas Wilson testified at the trial that January had actually told him that he belonged to Roche. Maybe Roche was hoping that noone would claim January, and that he would be able to either keep or sell him as the occasion demanded. On his arrival in Savannah, Roche had apparently looked in the Savannah newspapers for an advertisement concerning this slave, but found none. As time went by, Roche no doubt became bolder in his belief that noone was going to claim the slave, and that he would be allowed to keep him, and but for the misfortune of meeting William Pittman he would probably have succeeded in his aim.

The relationship which existed between Roche and January was not the usual one of master and slave. Roche no doubt knew that if January talked to the right person and claimed to have been stolen, his own arrest would be the result. Equally Roche could easily have returned January to Colonel Stewart's plantation as a runaway, something January evidently did not relish considering that he had originally fled from there, and that he had made no attempt to leave Savannah during the several months the pair lived there. As an Irish immigrant, Roche may not have been aware of the seriousness with which his crime would be viewed by the white authorities.¹⁶ As in the case of Henry Forsyth, a non-slaveholding white and an African American had managed to supplant the usual pattern of race relations with one of their own manufacture, based more on mutual advantage than on unilateral oppression.

Of course, not all non-slaveholding whites who helped runaway slaves intended to keep the slave for their own use. Moses Roper, a fugitive slave from Florida, described how during a journey across southern Georgia he managed to get tickets and pass for himself by pretending to ignorant farmers that he had lost his travel pass.¹⁷ In January 1837, Cornelius McMannis was convicted of "concealing, harboring, & hiding a slave to the injury of the owner" and imprisoned in the common jail of Chatham County for fifteen days;¹⁸ and in the 1840s Lewis Paine, a Rhode Islander who worked in Georgia as a schoolmaster, received a six-year prison sentence for trying to assist a slave named Sampson to escape to the North.¹⁹ As an institution, slavery did little to help non-slaveholding whites as it was organized to preserve planter hegemony—thus it could not always hope to claim the loyalty of those whom it consigned to economic and social marginalization.

The severe sentences handed down to those believed to be conspiring against slavery exhibit the determination of the elite to limit the possible damage non-slaveholding whites could do to the "peculiar institution." Some historians disagree with this argument, citing the general consensus with which the Southern states proceeded towards secession in 1860 and 1861.²⁰ They attempt to account for the supposed support of non-slaveholding whites for the dissolution of the union by stating that white people of all social classes in the South based their world view in racial terms. Charles Bolton's recent book has undermined this argument somewhat by pointing out that in the North Carolina piedmont, a combination of fear and elite pressure ensured that unionist poor whites did not take part in the secession vote.²¹ His argument would seem to be reinforced by the cases highlighted here, which show that some non-slaveholding whites were not prepared merely to ignore slavery but actively to undermine it by associating with slaves, thus blurring the racial divisions upon which the South was constructed.²²

In order to establish that non-slaveholding whites and African Americans regularly rather than sporadically interacted in the cause of mutual advantage, we must turn to a slightly different source. While there are relatively few records of testimony from the antebellum Superior Court of Chatham County, Fine and Information Dockets from the Mayor's Court regularly detailed the prosecutions of Savannah residents for many petty crimes, including entertaining slaves after hours or on Sundays. Trading on a Sunday, whether to slaves or to freemen, had been made illegal in 1762, and subject to a five- or ten-shilling fine. Trading with slaves had been restricted in the first Georgia slave code of 1755. Slaves were only permitted to trade in fruit, fish, and garden produce by themselves, though they could purchase other goods on their masters' behalf. By 1818 those convicted of trading illegally with a slave in Georgia could be fined up to \$500 and imprisoned for six months, though this docket reveals that the average fine for simply "entertaining Negroes" was more likely to be \$5 or \$10 unless there were aggravating circumstances. On June 22, 1837, Moses Fitts was fined \$30 for entertaining Negroes after 11 p.m. and for "resisting the watch."²³ The fact that Fitts attempted to prevent the watch from discovering his crime, or that he resisted arrest, evidently made his crime more serious in the eyes of the law.

Nearly all of the people fined for "entertaining Negroes" or trading with slaves in Savannah were non-slaveholders.²⁴ It is therefore clear that some white people who didn't own slaves themselves were willing to trade with bondpeople, in contravention of the law, on a regular basis.

Of course, the slaves themselves must have believed that it was in their best interest to participate in this trade, otherwise it would not have flourished. Recent scholarship²⁵ has shown the high degree of informal economic activity by slaves in the Georgia lowcountry. Rice production, because of its labor intensiveness, had lent itself to the task system, which could mean that "active hands get through their proportion generally by the middle of the day, others in two-thirds of the day, after which, they are left to employ the balance."²⁶ While some slaves no doubt spent their free time in rest and recuperation, many others engaged in the production of goods, crops, and livestock. Masters generally accepted this economic activity due to the way it tied the slave to the plantation. As one slaveowner stated, "no negro, with a well stocked poultry house, a small crop advancing, a canoe partly finished, or a few tubs unsold, all of which he calculates soon to enjoy, will ever run away."²⁷ Philip Morgan posited the idea that slaveowners often did not care what their slaves did with their spare time, as long as the regular daily work routine did not suffer.²⁸

What masters clearly disliked was the fact that goods stolen from the plantation could be sold under the cloak of legitimate trading. In May of 1836 the Grand Jury of Chatham County presented "as a nuisance that tends greatly to the fostering of crime, the practice of white persons within the precincts of this city buying of Negroes, cotton, iron and other articles that could scarcely come into the possession of the latter, but by theft. Although the law provides a punishment for this offense in ordinary cases, yet the requirements of proof are such and the difficulty of bringing home the charge to conviction so great, that the practice goes on with impunity to a great extent."²⁹ Examination of the minutes of the Superior Court reinforces the claim of the Grand Jury, with prosecutions for receiving stolen goods either being dropped for lack of evidence or resulting in an acquittal. Henry Bibb recalled that if a slave and a white person were caught trading in stolen goods, "the slave is often punished by the lash, while the white man is often punished with both lynch and common law."³⁰ It is certainly possible that planters operated a form of extra-legal justice to oust people suspected of trading with slaves from a particular locality.³¹ Non-slaveholding

whites who deliberately purchased stolen goods from slaves were perceived as undermining the plantation discipline which planters strove so hard to maintain. If non-slaveholding whites allowed the slave the freedom of economic bartering, which trading with a shopkeeper usually entailed, the slave was implicitly recognized as a person capable of making decisions, and treated almost as an equal, thus weakening both the legitimization of slavery and the theory of white supremacy.³²

The frequent complaints of Grand Juries throughout the Georgia and South Carolina lowcountry would seem to suggest that white shopkeepers placed great importance on this trade with the slaves. In 1835 a number of shopkeepers petitioned the Savannah City Council to allow slaves to trade on Saturdays rather than on Sundays, thus facilitating economic contacts.³³ This petition was an attempt to end the frequent prosecutions of shopkeepers for trading with slaves on Sundays, regardless of the law. Some shopkeepers remained open all night to trade with slaves, fully aware of the difficulty many slaves had in finding the time to trade. As an example of the amounts of money trading with slaves could bring in, Charles Manigault in his plantation journal for April 7, 1845, recorded that the purchaser of a \$4,000 property near his own on Argyle Island was a Mr. Dillon who "has been keeping a grog shop in Savannah for several years, and made his money by trading with Negroes and has already established a grog and trading shop on his new purchase."³⁴ The illegal trade which existed between non-slaveholding whites and African Americans clearly worked on behalf of both. It gave the poor whites articles and foodstuffs normally beyond their price range, and it usually gave the slaves one of their more sought-after possessions—alcohol.

All three of Georgia's colonial slave codes prohibited the sale of liquor to slaves. In 1755 the penalty was set at 20 shillings for a first offense, and 40 shillings for a second offense, with a £20 good behavior bond. This evidently was not enough and in 1765 selling liquor to a slave would earn a £5 fine for a first offense and £10 for a second offense, and failure to pay the £20 good behavior bond would result in three months in jail. By 1826 selling alcohol to slaves in Savannah was punishable by a fine of up to \$30. Yet despite these penalties most slaves seemed to have access to alcohol when they wanted it, and the obvious source of supply would seem to be the non-slaveholding white population. The loophole of permitting slaves to purchase alcohol with a ticket on behalf of their owners was clearly exploited

to the full by shopkeepers and bondpeople alike. In January 1830 the Grand Jury of Liberty County complained of "the retailing of spirituous liquors to our people of color under the alleged sanction of the law, a practice manifestly destructive of the good morals & best interests of this community."³⁵ Some members of the white elite evidently believed that any racial mixing would foster an alignment between the African Americans and the white non-elite against the established order.

The reaction of the elite to a perceived threat from non-slaveholding whites is shown in the formation of the Savannah River Anti-Slave Traffic Association in November 1846. The ostensible reason given for the formation of the association was "the extensive and growing traffic unlawfully carried on with slaves by white persons and chiefly by retailers of spirituous liquors." However, the lengthy preamble to the regulations shows how those who traded with slaves were regarded by slave owners. It was claimed that slaves were "supplied liberally with spirits in return for what they carry to the dram shops, instructed that they have the right to steal the fruits of their own labors, and indirectly, not infrequently directly taught to regard their owners, and especially their overseers, as unjust and unfeeling oppressors." The willingness of these shopkeepers to undermine slavery through encouraging slaves to see the fruits of their labor as their own made them, in elite eyes, potentially a more dangerous threat to the Southern way of life than Northern abolitionists: "The abolitionist declaims, the negro-trafficker acts. The one though an open and insolent, is a distant and comparatively harmless enemy; the other is the disguised fiend, who unless expelled from among us will surely and rapidly accomplish our ruin." Slaveowners were particularly concerned that the trade in stolen goods between slaves and poor whites was making the owner and their slaves "natural enemies," thus undermining paternalistic relations. The growth in the number of dram shops, which could not remain profitable "without carrying on this unlawful traffic with slaves," encouraged slaves to take "every article of value that is exposed; clothes hung out in our yards, household and farming implements, every thing that can be sold becomes their prey."³⁶ The counter-measures proposed by these slaveowners included a prohibition on slave hire, restrictions on the goods slaves could own and trade to certain crops, curfews at night, and economic boycotts of stores suspected of dealing with slaves. This response to illegal trading between non-slaveholding

whites and African Americans demonstrates the lengths to which some members of the elite would go to protect their own interests.

The willingness of non-slaveholding whites to participate in criminal activity with slaves and free people of color significantly alters our perception of what race relations, as a whole, were like in antebellum Savannah and the Georgia lowcountry. The economic and criminal contacts which clearly existed between non-slaveholding whites and African Americans undermine the idea that all Southern white people based their world view on race. To some white people, and apparently, especially the poorer white people, the necessity of making a living was certainly enough to override inbuilt racial prejudices and to contravene written law, as well as unwritten social norms. Some non-slaveholding whites perhaps acted out of opportunism, or exploitation of the slaves' willingness to steal from their owners. Others saw slaves as valuable customers whose business could not be lost. It is certainly feasible based on the evidence from Chatham County court documents that some non-slaveholding whites had lost faith in slavery and the Southern way of life. As Charles Bolton has argued, the enslavement of African Americans had not ensured the economic or social liberty of all white people.³⁷ Poverty, a trait which bound bondsman and some freemen together, could exert a powerful unifying influence. Trading with and committing crime with slaves fundamentally went against established patterns of race relations, and such actions were perhaps in part motivated by a realization by some non-slaveholding whites that Southern society was based on a hierarchy which they were not, and could not be, a part of.

----- NOTES

1. *The State vs. Henry E. Forsyth. Chatham County Superior Court, Criminal Testimony 1837-1840* (Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia—hereafter GDAH) and *Chatham County, Superior Court Minutes, 1836-1839, Book 14*—hereafter Book 14 (GDAH) May 14 and May 25, 1838.
2. See U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (London: D. Appleton & Co., 1918) and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, Little Brown & Co., 1937); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: the World The Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).
3. See Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas* (London: Frank Cass, 1991); Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993);

- Eugene Genovese, "Black Plantation Preachers in the Slave South," *Southern Studies* (1991) 203–229; Loren Schweniger, "Slave Independence and Enterprise in South Carolina, 1780–1865," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 93 (1992) 101–125; Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Economies of Lowcountry Georgia 1750–1830* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995)—hereafter Wood. Jeffrey Young, "Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1835–1867: Paternalism Amidst 'A Good Supply of Disease and Pain,'" *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993) 673–706.
4. Bill Cecil Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992) 12.
5. Paul Buck, "Poor Whites of the Antebellum South," *American Historical Review* 31 (1925) 41–54.
6. Avery O. Craven, "Poor Whites and Negroes in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Negro History* 40 (1930) 16–17.
7. John Solomon Otto and Augustus Marion Burns III, "Black Folks and Poor Bukras: Archaeological Evidence of Slave and Overseer Living Conditions on an Antebellum Plantation" *Journal of Black Studies* 14 (1983) 185–200; Sue Mullins Moore, "Social and Economic Status on the Coastal Plantation: An Archaeological Perspective," in *The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life*, ed. Theresa A. Singleton (Orlando: Academic Press, 1985), 141–160.
8. For a discussion of the importance of slaveholding to social status see James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Knopf, 1990) 80, 94.
9. Eugene D. Genovese, "'Rather Be a Nigger than a Poor White Man': Slave Perceptions of Southern Yeomen and Poor Whites," in *Toward a New View of America: Essays in Honor of Arthur C. Cole*, ed. Hans L. Trefousse (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1977), 79–96.
10. The recent studies are Bill Cecil Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992) and Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994)—hereafter Bolton. Bolton states that at harvest some poor whites were employed alongside blacks "on a similar ground of dependence and poverty," 105.
11. A full-length study is currently in preparation of the multi-faceted relationship between non-slaveholding whites and African Americans in lowcountry Georgia; see Timothy J. Lockley, "African Americans and Non-slaveholding Whites in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1830" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1996).
12. See James Bonner, "Profile of a Late Antebellum Community," *American Historical Review* 49 (1944), 663–680; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985).
13. *Liberty Tax List 1801, Margaret Davis Cate Collection* (Georgia Historical Society, Savannah

Georgia—hereafter GHS). It is likely that this tax list is complete rather than a fragment. The 1800 Federal Census (Washington, 1801) recorded 1346 white people in Liberty County; if 289 paid tax in 1801 this would make for a mean household size of 4.65, which is an acceptable figure for the antebellum South. For similar statistical conclusions see Philip D. Morgan, "A Profile of a Mid-Eighteenth Century South Carolina Parish: The Tax Return of Saint James, Goose Creek," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 81 (1980), 51–65.

14. Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839* (London: Longman, 1863), 92.
15. David Roediger has argued that daily work contacts between slaves and non-slaveholding whites would undermine racist stereotypes held by both races. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), 24.
16. For the life of immigrants in the South, see Herbert Weaver, "Foreigners in Antebellum Towns of the Lower South," *Journal of Southern History* 13 (1957), 62–73; *ibid.*, "Foreigners in Antebellum Savannah," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 27 (1953), 1–17; and Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *American Historical Review* 88 (1983), 1175–1200. Berlin and Gutman established that up to 60 percent of the working population of Southern towns such as Charleston and Savannah were immigrants (1182, 1186).
17. Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn, 1838), 69–72.
18. Book 14.
19. Lewis Paine, *Six Years in a Georgia Prison* (New York, 1851).
20. See for example H. Hoetink, *Slavery and Race Relations in the Americas* (London: Harper & Row, 1973) 15; J. Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979) 11; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991) 12.
21. Bolton, 151.
22. For a discussion of the importance of race in the South, see U. B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," *American Historical Review* 34 (1928), 30–43.
23. Fitts had paid tax on four slaves in 1833 (*Chatham County Tax Digest 1833—GDAH*); however, at the time of his offense he had evidently lost his slaves and all other property (*City of Savannah Tax Digest 1837—GDAH*).
24. Of the forty-two people prosecuted for offenses involving slaves between 1830 and 1838 in Savannah, only four were listed as slaveholders in contemporary documents. Of the other thirty-eight, twenty-three could be found in parallel sources. All twenty-three claimed to have no slaves. One offender, Pierre Howard, was fined three times in the space of two years for entertaining Negroes on Sunday.

25. Philip Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Lowcountry," *Journal of Southern History* 29 (1983), 399–420; Lawrence McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community," in Winfred Moore et al., *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society* (London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 31–44; Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production By Slaves in the Americas* (London: Frank Cass, 1991); Wood.
26. Report of Basil Hall in 1828, in Mills Lane, ed., *The Rambler in Georgia* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1973), 66.
27. *Southern Agriculturalist* 1 (1828) 525.
28. Morgan, 411–413.
29. Book 14. Betty Wood has argued that whites who traded with slaves were evidently not sufficiently deterred by the penalties which could be imposed. Wood, 94–95, 147.
30. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (New York, 1849), 24–25.
31. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Community, Class, and Snopesian Crime: Local Justice in the Old South" in *Class, Conflict and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies*, ed. Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McGrath (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985) 199; McDonnell, 36.
32. Bolton, 51; McDonnell, 31, 35.
33. Claudia Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
34. James M. Clifton, *Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833–1867* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1978), 22.
35. *Liberty County Superior Court Minutes 1822–1859* (GDAH). See also *Memorial of St. Andrew's Parish to Its Representatives in Columbia November 27, 1844* (South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina—hereafter SCL), which describes the public houses of the area as "corrupters of the slave property of the planter."
36. Quotes in this passage are all from *Preamble and Regulations of the Savannah River Anti-slave Traffick Association* (SCL).
37. Bolton, 105.



BLOODY FOOTPRINTS

I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage . . . Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it. Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her.

—*Jeremiah 12: 7-9*

I wish someone would look up the names on the roster of Washington's army at Valley Forge and trace the bloody footprints of their descendants across the North American continent until they were washed up and washed out on the shore of the Pacific. What an all-American Odyssey it would make! What a great history of the Rise and Fall of American Civilization.

—*Oscar Ameringer, Socialist organizer, pre-World War I, Oklahoma*

Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.

—*Karl Marx, Capital*

REFLECTIONS ON
GROWING UP
POOR WHITE

ROXANNE A. DUNBAR

White Trash. I believe the first time I heard that term was when I saw *Gone With the Wind*, referring to some pretty creepy people, dirt poor, sneaking, conniving, violent tenant farmers, or migrant cotton pickers maybe. At the time I saw that blockbuster picture show my father was alternately a tenant farmer, migrant cotton picker, and ranch hand, but I did not for one minute identify with those whom the planters and the enslaved Africans termed white trash in that movie.

Oh no, I identified with Scarlett, with the O'Hara family, the original Scots Irish settlers, agrarian masters of the savage indigenous Irish who brought their skills of civilization (read colonization) to America to take the