

The Geography of Time and Labor in the Late Antebellum American Rural South: *Fin-de-Servitude* Time Consciousness, Contested Labor, and Plantation Capitalism*

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SUMMARY: Over the past few decades the conceptual metaphors of time, space, and labor have been an organizing focus of the geohistorical discourse of social change. This essay explores the involvement of contested time and labor in shaping the fragmented social geographies of the late antebellum American South. The examination is focused on the intraregional differentiation of time and labor systems and on their ramifications for the development of agrarian capitalism in the context of southern plantations. The descriptive and analytical evidence supports the new staple theory. The physical character of staple crops such as cotton, sugar, tobacco and rice made determinant influences on cultivation methods, seasonal routines, labor organizations, *mentalité*, and the development of plantation capitalism.

INTRODUCTION

Time and space have recently become central concepts in the discussion of social transformation. The time–space rationale has also been a unifying thread in the debate over the emergence of postmodernism and postmodernity. This essay tries to incorporate such mundane sociological themes as labor and power into weaving historically-contingent regional geographies of time and space in the context of the plantation, an “agricultural estate operated by dominant owners and a dependent labor force to supply a large-scale market by means of abundant capital”.¹

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1. For the geographical and historical justifications to the incorporation of these themes, see Yi-Fu Tuan, “Space, Time, Place: A Humanistic Frame”, in T. Carlstein *et al.* (eds), *Making Sense of Time* (New York, 1978), pp. 7–16; John Agnew, “Sociologizing the Geographical Imagination: Spatial Concepts in the World-System Perspective”, *Political Geography Quarterly*, 1 (1982), pp. 159–166; Fernand Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*”, in *On History*, transl. S. Matthews (Chicago, IL, 1980), pp. 25–54. The definition of the term *plantation* that I use here is from Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz’s “Haciendas and Plantations in Middle America and the Antilles”, *Social and Economic Studies*, 6 (1957), p. 360.

The critical roles that time and labor played in opening the era of capitalist societies have been well captured by Max Weber, Karl Marx, and R.H. Tawney. Inspired by the seminal commentaries of these predecessors, later generations of sociologists, historians, economists, anthropologists, and historical geographers have further problematized the agenda. Of particular note are Jacques Le Goff's comparison of church time and merchant time, E.P. Thompson's insightful analysis of the retreat of task-oriented tradition in the course of the rise of capitalist industrial society, and E.J. Hobsbawm's critical review on the nineteenth-century confrontation between the owner who tried to buy the cheapest labor at the highest productivity and the worker who made every effort to sell his labor at the highest price for the minimum unit of output, and on the resultant "rules of the game" by which workers sold labor as a commodity and employers utilized labor intensively to the effect of scientific management.² More recent forays into the realms of time and labor feature the *Annales* repertoire of *mentalité* and Gramscian culturology of hegemony.

Still unclear, however, is how socially-constructed time consciousness, spatial logic and labor systems have unfolded in different geographical settings. Among the least understood have been the *peripheries* in capitalist world systems – regions that supply semiperipheries and core with raw materials produced by coerced labor. Responding to the pleas for renewed emphasis on the centrality of labor, time and space and drawing insights from "new" staple theory,³ this study presents a geohistorical and sociological characterization of the late antebellum (1830s–1860) American rural South. The conceptual utility of the trilogy of time, space, and labor is tested on the ground of rural plantations. These plantations were a periphery where contentious relations between the dominant and the dominated were manifest through the medium of staple crops within contested time consciousness and labor systems.

The main thesis of this study is threefold: (1) Staple crops had a strong influence on seasonal routines, labor organization, and plantation capitalism; (2) Southern time was "socially constructed", "invented" and "negotiated"; and (3) the chances for the consolidation of plantation capitalism were higher when labor is closer to the task-type system on a gang-task labor system continuum.

2. Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, transl. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, IL, 1980); E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), pp. 56–97; and E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964).

3. I. Berlin and P. Morgan (eds), *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville, VA, 1993); M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997); David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80 (1990), pp. 418–434; and Carville Earle, *Geographical Inquiry and American Historical Problems* (Stanford, CA, 1992).

TIME AND LABOR IN THE LATE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

Throughout much of US history, the primary temporal references have been clock time and the Gregorian calendar. However, prior to the promulgation of standard time zones in 1883, there was a sectional cognitive division of time along the Mason–Dixon Line. Southern time, if the term may be used, orchestrated much of the civic and public lifestyle of the antebellum American South. In urban environs, timepieces announced the time for schools, churches, courts, markets, and factories, and it cautioned the townspeople in emergencies.⁴ The multiplicity, variety and density of urban life necessitated a high degree of temporal coordination.⁵ In the countryside, *land* and *labor* lords monopolized and reified time in their attempts effectively to manage field labor, enhance productivity, and ultimately increase profitability.⁶

Deepening commercialism broke down the differentiation of town and country, aligning rural time with urban time.⁷ The symbiotic nature of rural pace and urban clock time stems to a great extent from the fact that antebellum Southerners – townspeople, planters and backcountry plain folks – derived much of their wealth and social status from land and from coerced labor. What tied town and country to the thread of Southern time was capitalism, in other words. If merchant capitalism was behind the consolidation of quantitative time reckoning in towns, it was plantation capitalism that placed rural societies on the solid fundament of modern time consciousness.⁸

Humanist geographers view *place* as not merely a center of individually-felt values and meanings but a setting for social interaction.⁹ As a distinctive place, the rural South set the stage for the “peculiar” interaction between planters and slaves. In their relations nothing was more contested than issues involving time and labor. In the Southern context, time and labor were two sides of a coin, for, as Karl Marx suggested, “the plantation

4. James W. Gibbs, *Dixie Clockmakers* (Gretna, LA, 1979).

5. D. Landes, “The Ordering of the Urban Environment”, *Past and Present*, 116 (1987), p. 198; Martin Bruegel, “Time That Can Be Relied Upon”, *Journal of Social History*, 28 (1995), p. 549.

6. A planter living on the Georgia–Alabama border sounds to have been obsessed by this principle when he said that “let there be order – start by time, work by time, rest and sleep by time”; James O. Breeden (ed.), *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Westport, CT, 1980), p. 50.

7. A. Giddens, “Time, Space and Regionalisation”, in D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds), *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (New York, 1985), p. 294; Smith, *Mastered by the Clock*, p. 40.

8. Mark Smith, “Old South Time in Comparative Perspective”, *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), p. 1433.

9. Allan Pred, “Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 74 (1984), p. 279.

economy takes out of the human chattel the utmost amount of exertion in the shortest space of time".¹⁰

Planters translated "Big House" (plantation house) time, which was defined in their own terms, into field time by ringing bells or blowing horns. This hegemonic time caused commotion and triggered almost frenetic reactions among slave workers.¹¹ Some slaveowners were explicit in their use of clock and watch: they carefully measured the time required to complete certain tasks and used the survey results in assigning daily workload.¹² The clock was an effective means of improving work efficiency and labor productivity. The mechanical time indicated by the clock hands also served well the objectives of maintaining order and disciplining slaves on plantations. In their quest for the "despotic sway of mastery", the dominant class considered it counterproductive to create spaces for chattel people freely to determine their own pace of daily work.¹³ The masters always tried to keep the slaves busy and disciplined.

Slaves' attitudes toward time and labor were framed by African traditions, staple crops, institutional constraints, and masters' personalities.¹⁴ There was a tendency toward implicit, and sometimes explicit, slave resistance in response to owners' rationalization and quantification of time and the resultant increase in the speed and intensity of labor that wasted enslaved bodies and free time. To the extent that slaves had control over their time, seasonal changes and agrarian routines coupled with major religious events to serve as major temporal references in the organization of everyday life. In this situation, labor was free of haste, careless of exactitude, and unconcerned with productivity.

10. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vols (1867; Chicago, IL, 1909), vol. 1, pp. 256–257, 293.

11. Charley Williams, a former Louisiana slave, recalls vividly how plantation people reacted to the sound of the bells: "When the day began to crack, the whole plantation break out with all kinds of noises [...] and you can hear a old bell donging way on some plantation a mile or two off, and then more bells at other places and maybe a horn [...] Bells and horns! Bells for this and horns for that! All we knew was go and come by the bells and horns! Old ram horn blow to send us all to the field." See B.A. Boktin (ed.), *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions, and Folkways of the People of the South* (New York, 1949), p. 587.

12. For more insights, read this advice from a Georgia overseer: "I gave a task for the day by stepping [off] the ground they have to hoe over, or time them by the watch on a row or two, and set the task by that for the day, and place each hand a day's work apart"; Breeden, *Advice Among Masters*, p. 68.

13. See D.G. Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1982).

14. On these points, see J. Walvin, "Slaves, Free Time and the Question of Leisure", *Slavery and Abolition*, 14 (1995), p. 4; M. Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, NJ, 1978); Berlin and Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture*, p. 2.

The enforcement of an inflexible work schedule turned time and labor into a symbolic arena for class struggle.¹⁵ Owners' attempts to internalize a capitalist time-discipline necessarily alienated workers' task-oriented time consciousness. The reproduction of the hegemonic mode of time and labor proved just as difficult as the conquest of space and distance. As a form of struggle and resistance, slaves "invented" traditions which made it difficult, if not impossible, for planters to extract additional doses of labor and time without offering concessions as a bargaining chip. In principle, the *labor* lords could claim unlimited access to slave labor; in practice they had to "negotiate" the terms of labor with the underpowered slaves.¹⁶

To the degree that commercialization, urbanization, industrialization, and a transportation and communication revolution set the pace of this dramatic transformation of the contours of time and labor, the time-*cum*-labor template was a mirror of social change. From a geographical standpoint, time and labor deserve special attention, for they present a *text* to be decoded in the process of reconstructing the contested, internally-differentiated social spaces of everyday life. The fragmented geographies of time and labor in the late antebellum rural South were reflected in the regional variations of plantation routines and labor systems.

THE GEOGRAPHIES OF TIME: PLANTATION WORK ROUTINES

Given the size of arable land and the degree of specialization, plantation agriculture can best be understood as an antebellum version of agribusiness. How planters handled work routines serves as a basis for evaluation of their aptitude for scientific management.¹⁷ No criteria were more suggestive in the assessment than the managers' ability to minimize time wasted and to streamline a series of operations through tight work schedules. Staple theorists maintain that the fragmented geographies of time were shaped by the types and physical character of staple crops, which were manifested in the regional differentiation of work routines: daily, weekly and seasonal (Figure 1; Table 1).

15. P. Meiksins, "Confronting the Time Bind: Work, Family, and Capitalism", *Monthly Review*, 49 (1998), p. 2. The collective rebellion against a factory time, a fixed work routine, and a monopoly of public time by factory owners is elaborated by G.B. Kulik in the context of industrial capitalism, "Patterns of Resistance to Industrial Capitalism, Pawtucket Village and the Strike of 1824", in M. Cantor (ed.), *American Working Class Culture: Explorations in American Labor and Social History* (Westport, CT, 1979), pp. 209–239.

16. Walvin, "Slaves, Free Time and the Question of Leisure", p. 5; Berlin and Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture*, p. 7.

17. J. Metzger discusses plantation agriculture from the perspective of business management. See his "Rational Management, Modern Business Practices, and Economies of Scale in the Antebellum Southern Plantations", *Exploration in Economic History*, 12 (1975), pp. 123–150.

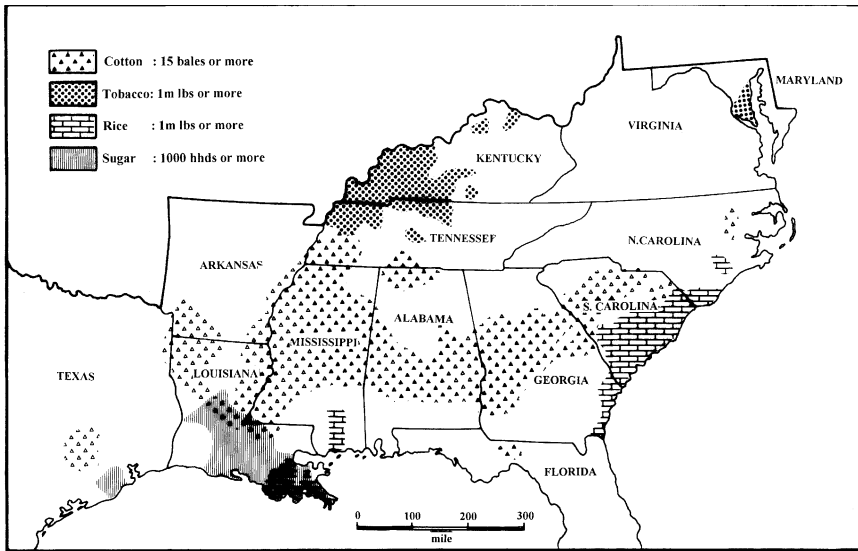


Figure 1. Staple-crop regions of the American South (products per square mile), 1860
Adapted from Sam B. Hilliard, Atlas of Antebellum Southern Agriculture (Baton Rouge, LA, 1984), pp. 71, 76–77.

The gradation of sunlight and the moon's rising and setting provided the basis for organizing the daily cycle.¹⁸ The sound of bells and horns at sunrise marked the time when plantation hands broke out into the fields. As a rule, planters worked their hands for fifteen to sixteen hours a day. The duration of daytime respite varied in accordance with weather conditions and the seasons. For practical reasons, summertime allowance was usually longer than that of other seasons.¹⁹ With the exception of the busiest time in any crop season for harvesting grains, picking cotton, cutting cane, and grinding sugar which required extra labor and time, daily work stopped at sunset. Since the performance of the next day's work was affected by the amount of sleeping time, planters paid special attention to bedtime management. They normally announced a curfew at nine or ten p.m. and made it a rule to have overseers check cabins to ensure all were in

18. For more on primitive time-reckoning, see Nina Gockerell, "Telling Time Without a Clock", in K. Maurice and O. Mayr (eds), *The Clockwork Universe* (Washington DC, 1980). See also David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, 1983); and G.J. Whitrow, *Time in History* (Oxford, 1988), p. 14.

19. Rest had strategic importance in enhancing work efficiency: "As the days get longer and warmer, a longer rest is necessary. In May, from 1 and a half to 2 hours; in June, two and a half; in July and August, three hours at noon [...]. Hands by being kept out of the sun during the hottest of the day have better health and can do more work through the season." (Breedon, *Advice Among Masters*, p. 65).

Table 1. Annual routines of the cultivation of major staple crops

Mth	Cotton ^a	Sugar ^b	Rice ^c	Tobacco ^d
Jan	Pick-gin-pressing	Planting cane; Plowing plant cane (PC)	Plowing; Ditching; Repairing banks	Burning plant bed
Feb	Digging stalk; Hauling seeds	Plowing and scraping; PC; Plowing stubbles; Making staves; Chopping wood; Spading ditches	Mashing	Sowing the seed
Mar	Bedding; Hauling seed; Middling; Planting	Plowing; PC; Hoeing stubbles; Cutting wood	Planting; Harrowing	Protecting the bed with brush
Apr	Planting; Scraping	Plowing and working PC and stubbles; chopping wood	Planting; “Sprout flow”; “Point flow”	Making hills
May	Plowing; Hoeing	Harrowing; Hoeing; Ridging up PC	1st and 2nd hoeing	Sowing plaster and fighting flies
Jun	Plowing, Hoeing	Cutting weeds; Ridging up cane	“Long flow”	Transplanting from the beds
Jul	Plowing; Hoeing; Sweeping	Working stubbles; Hauling woods	3rd and 4th hoeing	Laying by and topping
Aug	Plowing; Hoeing; Pick-gin-pressing	Gathering corn; watermelons; Clearing ground	“Lay-by water”	Worming and suckering
Sep	Pick-gin-pressing	Mat-laying stubbles; Clearing land	Harvesting	Cutting and sticking
Oct	Pick-gin-pressing	Cutting cane; Grinding	Harvesting	Housing for curing
Nov	Pick-gin-pressing	Grinding	Threshing; winnowing	Stripping and tying in hands
Dec	Pick-gin-pressing	Planting cane	Burning the stubble	Packing for market

Sources: ^a Plantation Record of J.H. McKnight. Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; O.C. Stine and O.E. Baker, *Atlas of American Agriculture*, Pt 4, Section A, *Cotton* (Washington DC, 1918); ^b Extract of the record for typical months in the year 1833 from the plantation known as the St James Sugar Refinery, in Ulrich B. Phillips (ed.), *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, vol. 2. *Plantation and Frontier* (Cleveland, OH, 1910), pp. 216–220; ^c E. Ruffin, “Culture of Rice”, *DeBow’s Review*, 9 (1850), pp. 421–426; ^d P.H. Mayo & Brother’s Calendar (circa 1870) cited in the front page of J.C. Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom: Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800–1860* (Durham, NC, 1938).

proper places.²⁰ Planters by and large forbade overseers from keeping hands in the field during rainy days. The time was not lost entirely, however. The “idle” moments simply meant something less than the normal, as it was filled with indoor work.

A typical weekly schedule involved working six days in a row with a day or day and a half of leave. Saturday work was less in duration and intensity than that of weekdays. Some planters drew only a half-day’s work from their slaves on Saturday; others called the day at two or four o’clock in the afternoon.²¹ As for Sundays, most state laws made it clear that slaves could not be compelled to work. When planters had something to accomplish on holidays, they had to pay for the extra labor.²² Slaves did their best to take advantage of the invaluable opportunities for improving economic status. During the busiest time of a crop season in particular the chattel people willingly sacrificed leisure time, hiring their labor out at night and on Sundays. For the extra labor, they were compensated with cash, daily necessities, or free time to take care of domestic work.

The harvest season, while conducive to the enhancement of slaves’ economic welfare, had a gloomy side as well. Plantation owners evaluated work performance, and some of them administered a “settlement-night” punishment based on their evaluation.²³ Another important aspect of the weekly routine was associated with maintaining living conditions, hygiene in particular. Planters set aside at least one day a week – normally Saturday or Sunday – for inspections of slave cabins. Religious services were also observed on weekends.

Biological requirements of staple crops and climatic contingencies set the pace of the annual routine. The alternation of intensive and extensive labor was characteristic of a crop season. Because of climatic and biological requirements, major plantation crops had to be planted within a short space of time. The so-called slack season arrived soon after planted crops grew large and strong enough to outrun weeds. Plantation workers were then released from the field during the off-season, before resuming the back-breaking work of harvest. In this manner the staple crops were

20. Breeden, *Advice*, p. 76.

21. Even in industrializing England, it was not until the 1840s that working hours began to decrease. See Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, p. 357.

22. For instance, the state of South Carolina decreed, as early as 1740, that slaves could pursue their own businesses on Sunday. See John Campbell, “As ‘A Kind of Freeman’?: Slaves’ Market-Related Activities in the South Carolina Up Country, 1800–1860”, in Berlin and Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture*, p. 244. The first section of the Black Code of Louisiana, approved in 1806, also decreed that “the inhabitants shall leave to their slaves the free enjoyments of Sundays, and shall pay them for their labor on said day, when they will employ them at the rate of fifty cents”; Henry Bullard and Thomas Curry (comp.), *A New Digest of the Statute Laws of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, LA, 1842), p. 48.

23. Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* (1837; New York, 1969), p. 194.

deeply involved in determining the duration of free time and the intensity of labor. The completion of major crop work was celebrated with festivals and holidays.²⁴ The most anticipated were Christmas and New Year's Day. Plantation workers also greeted and spent corn-shucking days in a festive mood. These and other celebrations provided working people with a brief respite from the monotonous toil in the fields. Planters tried to use the time incentive to defuse tensions that had reached the highest level.

Staple-crop cultivation was an organizing focus of the annual routine and the most important and influential in the rural South was "King" cotton. Cotton cultivation proceeded in the following order: cutting old stalks, plowing ridges and furrows, bedding, planting, harrowing, hoeing, laying-by, picking, ginning, pressing, and baling.²⁵ The labor demand for cotton work reached its peak in fall and early winter when the cotton was picked, pressed, and baled for market. Although the intensity of labor was not comparable to that for picking, May and June turned out to be equally demanding months, for plowing, scraping, and hoeing. Labor requirements decreased drastically during the interim between the two peaks, particularly after the crop was *laid by* in mid-July.

As a detailed example of time utilization, I analyzed a diary from J.H. McKnight's Pre Aux Cleres Plantation in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana.²⁶ According to the document, the plantation produced, in the crop season 1852–1853, approximately 275 bales of cotton, drawing labor from twenty-one field hands and two hired laborers. Energy required for tilling, plowing, and transportation was provided by two horses, eight mules, and six work oxen. There were also a wagon, a cart, eighteen plows, three sweeps, four harrows, and three planters, which were harnessed to the draft animals. Where exceptional care had to be taken, e.g., for weeding and scraping, plantation slaves used twenty-two hoes stacked in the barn.

Table 2 presents the result of the analysis of annual work on the plantation. As is evidenced from this, work days increased in March, July,

24. P.C. Weston provided the following holidays to his slaves: "No work of any sort or kind is to be permitted to be done by negroes on Good Friday, or Christmas day, or on any Sunday [...]. The two days following Christmas day; the first Saturdays after finishing threshing, planting, hoeing, and harvest, are also to be holidays, on which the people may work for themselves." (Phillips, *Plantation and Frontier*, p. 117).

25. For a concise introduction to cotton, see Stine and Baker, *Atlas of American Agriculture*, Pt 5: The Crops, Section A: *Cotton*. The outer boundary of cotton production is determined by climatic factors: an average summer temperature of 77° F beyond which commercial production becomes unprofitable, an about 200-day frostless season, and an average annual precipitation between thirty and fifty inches. The best conditions for cotton production are found where a mild spring with light but frequent showers merges into a warm moderately moist summer, followed by a dry, cool, and prolonged autumn (p. 9).

26. J.H. McKnight, the owner of the estate, recorded with consistency all the details occurring on his plantation over the period 1852–1854; *Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, 1852–1854*, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Table 2. *Annual work on Pre Aux Plantation in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana (in days)*

Work	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Cotton	17	24	26	18	22	26	26	26	24	14	17	17	257 (60.9%)
Rainy	0	0	0	0	1	(5)	4 (3)	(5)	6 (4)	0	3	0	24 (17)
Wet	0	6	0	0	2 (1) ^a	(1)	0	(2)	(1)	2 (1)	4	2	20 (6)
Cold	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(6)	4 (3)	4	0	20 (9)
Fair	11	18	26	18	19 (11)	(20)	(22)	19 (17)	11 (9)	8 (7)	6	15	193 (86)
Crops	6	6	4	2	3	0	1	10	5	1	9	9	56 (13.3%)
Rainy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	7
Wet	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	7
Cold	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Fair	3	5	4	1	3	0	1	6	3	0	7	6	39
Tasks	12	7	15	24	4	2	3	0	3	4	17	18	109 (25.8%)
Rainy	1	0	0	1	1	1	3	0	2	0	1	0	10
Wet	0	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	10
Cold	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	7
Fair	8	1	15	22	3	1	0	0	1	3	12	16	82
Total	35	37	45	44	29	28	30	36	32	19	43	44	422 (100%) ^b
Rainy	1	0	0	2	2	6	7	7	10	0	5	1	41 (9.7%)
Wet	1	13	0	1	2	1	0	4	1	4	5	5	37 (8.8%)
Cold	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	8	1	30 (7.1%)
Fair	22	24	45	41	25	21	23	25	15	11	25	37	314 (74.4%)
No work									1				1
Sundays	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	52
N/A	3									12			15

Notes: ^a Figures in parentheses indicate work days for picking out of an entire cotton work; ^b A total of 422 work days exceeds an annual total of 365 days because of the integration of other plantation works into calculation.

Source: *Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, 1852–1854*, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

and June. Statistics show that cotton cultivation constituted the largest portion of the plantation activities, accounting for 60.9 per cent of total work days, followed by miscellaneous work (25.8 per cent) and the cultivation of other provision crops (13.3 per cent). Work days under rainy condition made up 9.7 per cent, with the proportion jumping to 18.5 per cent when we consider labor in the field under wet or damp weather. The most striking fact, however, is that nonworking days, with the exception of fifty-two Sundays, added up to only one, Christmas.

Considering cotton cultivation alone, picking accounted for the largest share of labor input as measured by man-days, registering about 46.9 per cent of the total. Second most labor-intensive work was hoeing (19.9 per cent), followed by scraping (9.0 per cent), ginning and pressing (7.2 per cent), and plowing (5.5 per cent) (Table 3). Other minor work included digging and burning old stalks, hauling cotton seed, planting cotton, cleaning and repairing the gin-house, middling, bedding, topping, and drying. Cotton picking began in mid-August and ended in mid-January. On Pre Aux Cleres plantation, at least two pickings were done for each "cut" (cotton plot). The early picking of premature bolls and the last picking of remnant cotton yielded less than did the mid-season pickings. The frequency of so-called "thin picking" (category 1 in Figure 2) increased towards the end of the picking season. Intensive picking took place in the months of September, October, and November.

The staple-crop routine was superimposed upon other seasonal demands for labor such as the cultivation of subsistence crops. Although cotton called for sustained care and attention throughout the season, the distribution of work was such that other supplementary crops could be raised without interrupting the schedule for the main crop.²⁷ Put differently, the production of provision crops was complementary to rather than conflicting with staple-crop cultivation. The pattern did not therefore follow the so-called "safety first" strategy, since the subsistence crop did not take precedence.²⁸ The supplementary crops listed in the diary of J.H. McKnight include corn, peas, pumpkins, oats, potatoes, nuts, and watermelons. Without doubt corn was *the* most important subsistence crop. Corn cultivation involved cleaning stalks, plowing, bedding,

27. Stine and Baker, *Atlas of American Agriculture*, pp. 10–11. Oats, rye, cowpeas, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, sorghum, vegetables and fruits were grown in the gardens in considerable amounts. J. Metzger points out that early corn was planted before and, in the case of late corn, after the planting of cotton. The main work for the cultivation of corn was done in July after the cotton was laid by. Harvest of early corn in late August immediately preceded that of cotton. See Metzger, "Rational Management", pp. 130–131.

28. Gavin Wright and Howard Kunreuther's idea of "safety-first" strategy is based on the logic of competition between the two crops, with corn taking precedence over cotton. See their "Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Economic History*, 35 (1975), pp. 526–551.

Table 3. *Composition of seasonal work on Pre Aux Cleres Plantation in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana (in man-days)*

Work/Month	Apr 1852	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 1853	Feb	Mar	Total	%
Planting	21	14										59	94	2.30
Scraping	237	17		112									366	9.00
Plowing		55	78	49	25								224	5.50
Hoeing		284	345	112	68								809	19.90
Sweeping				23									23	0.60
Topping					2								2	0.04
Picking					233	398	418	378	317	169			1913	46.90
Hauling					6	24	24	21	18	10		16	119	2.90
Gin and pressing					14	31	37	52	65	52	38	4	293	7.20
Digging stalk										13	144		157	3.90
Bedding												9	9	0.20
Middling												13	13	0.30
Gin house					46	5							51	1.30
Drying					2								2	0.04
Cotton	258 ^a	370	423	296	396	453	479	451	400	244 ^b	182	118	4075	74.20
Other crops	61	65	11	22	29		5	53	75		152	141	614	11.20
Jobbing	135	22	42	207	28	1	11	6	8	11	105	225	801	14.60
Total	454	457	476	525	453	459	495	510	483	255	439	484	5490	100.00
Man-days lost ^c		20	42	26	57		40	20	9	10	21		324	

Note: ^a data missing (April 1-3, 1852); ^b data missing (January 16-29, 1853); ^c labor-time lost on account of sickness, shirking and runaways of slaves.

Source: *Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, 1852-1854*, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

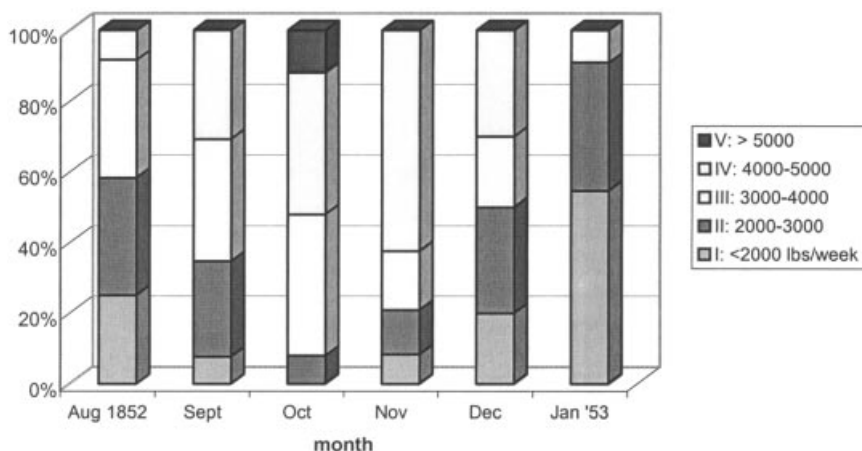


Figure 2. Monthly intensity of cotton picking on Pre Aux Cleres Plantation, Natchitoches Parish

planting, sweeping, harrowing, thinning, bending, gathering, and shucking. Labor demand for corn was highest at the times of gathering (November), planting (March), and tillage (February).

A slack season arrived after field hands laid the crops by. Up to that point the plantation workers had to pay special attention to prevent weeds from eating into the cash crops. During the slack season, however, this was no longer an issue, and now each hand was assigned to a variety of miscellaneous work.²⁹ During this loose period, McKnight's slaves opened new fields, erected fences, built and whitewashed cabins, repaired levees, maintained roads, constructed warehouses, cleaned chimneys, gathered timber and fodder, washed and sewed clothing, cleaned ditches, and killed hogs. Most of these tasks were carried out in July.

Sugar plantations, commonly known as "factories in the field", had a distinct annual routine which combined agriculture with manufacturing activities. A series of steps had to be taken to produce a hogshead of sugar, from the preparation of land and the cutting of cane to the boiling of cane juice.³⁰ More specifically, the broken soils were flushed, pulverized and

29. J.W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972), p. 155; Judith Carney, "Rice Milling, Gender and Slave Labor in Colonial South Carolina", *Past and Present*, 153 (1996), p. 114.

30. The Louisiana cane imported from St Domingo in 1797 was Otaheite variety. This was replaced in 1825 by much stronger ribbon cane introduced from St Simon Island near Savannah. The ideal places for the cultivation of cane are those with a mean annual temperature of 65°–86° F and an annual rainfall of about sixty inches. A mild and dry winter, succeeded by a somewhat humid spring with well-distributed rains, a wet summer, and a dry, clear autumn normally ended up with a good season. Cane does best on clay or loamy soils; W.C. Stubbs, *Sugar Cane*, 2 vols (New Orleans, LA, 1897), vol. 1, pp. 30–31.

bedded in January. Seed canes were then planted on the rows of the fields so arranged. Almost at the same time, canals and ditches were repaired and cleaned to facilitate the flows of irrigation and drainage waters. Whenever it was deemed necessary, the field hands scraped the beds with hoes. If everything went properly, the cane could be laid by somewhere in late June or early July.³¹

Labor demand in sugar cultivation was modest from July to September, before cutting began in October. There was no idle moment on Louisiana sugar plantations, however. After the cane was laid by, firewood had to be hauled to sugar mills in preparation for the coming grinding season. Approximately three to four cords of four-foot wood were required to produce a hogshead of sugar. Maintenance work also had to be completed during the slack season, including the opening of new plots, the gathering of small grains, and the preparation of hay for winter.³²

The beginning of cane cutting and sugar grinding broke the silence and dull moments on sugar plantations. The cutting normally started in October, when cane matured sufficiently enough for the mill. Since the content of saccharine in cane juice varied according to the timing of cutting, planters and overseers needed to show a keen judgement in deciding when it would be. Once in field, slaves gathered seed canes first and placed them in mats. This “mat-laying” was intended to protect the seed canes from freezing cold. Then the field hands removed the remaining canes and crushed them to get juice. They boiled the cane juice in sugar mills and packed the crystallized sugar into a container called the hogshead, of about 1,000 pounds in volume.³³

Rice is a hardy crop that can grow both under water and on dry field. Tillage, planting and hoeing in spring and early summer were just as labor intensive as the fall harvest. The slack season included June, July, and August, and during this mid-season respite field hands were freed from the unhealthy lowland rice paddy environment. In the coastal land of Georgia and South Carolina, planting began somewhere between 20 March and 1 April. Seeds were spread along the furrows on rice fields and covered with rakes, hoes, and boards. On the rise of the tide, slave workers lifted the outer door of a trench and allowed the fresh water (“sprout flow”) to flood the field for four or five days. Around the time when the young plants emerged from the ground, the “point flow” was let in. The water, which lasted for three to seven days, was aimed to protect the seeds from birds, soften hard clays, and kill weeds.

31. Stubbs, *Sugar Cane*, pp. 146–161.

32. W. Prichard, “Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation under the Slavery Regime”, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 14 (1927), pp. 173–176.

33. Prichard, “Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation”, pp. 168–169, 172.

After the water receded, the beds were hoed twice to remove weeds and grasses. Then the fields remained dry for a day or two in an attempt to destroy the uprooted weeds before the next water was let in. The “long flow” was raised to the top of the plant so as to float off trash and bugs. After this and the third and fourth hoeings, the “lay-by water” was applied. The final watering helped support the stalks of mature rice by keeping down wind. The water was drained from the field a couple of days before the reaping began in the early September.³⁴

A tobacco almanac started in February with the clearing of a plot of land for seedbed.³⁵ Workers slash-and-burnt trees and spread the ashes over the surface to form an organic coat. They removed the stumps of dead trees and tilled the ground. In the beginning of March, tobacco seeds were sown in the bed. Sometimes, when weather turned frosty, it was necessary to build a covering layer of tree branches and leaves on the entire plot. As soon as young plants appeared, special care and attention needed to keep weeds away from the plot.

In March and April, tobacco patches were plowed and worked up into hills. The transplanting of young plants from the seedbed to the patches was ideally scheduled for rainy days or right after the rain. Transplanting continued in the middle of rain until the seedlings were planted out. After the plants were relocated to the new patches, tobacco worms slowly moved in around June and rapidly spread in July. If unchecked, they would totally ravage the young plants. All hands were mobilized, therefore, in destroying the worms from morning till night. Interestingly enough, all the efforts and vigilance would not have been enough, had it not been for the assistance of turkeys and ducks. Many tobacco cultivators raised the poultry mainly for the purpose of checking the spread of the worms. The strategy was quite effective: a turkey could destroy five times as many worms as five men could do in the same period of time.

In August, tobacco was laid by as the plant grew strong enough to endure the devastating attacks from weeds. That same month, tobacco had to be topped if it had not been done before. Topping was done to draw up into the tobacco leaves the critical nutrition which otherwise wasted away in the course of spreading through flowers and seeds. The degree of maturity of tobacco was indicated by the change of color. The green tint on the leaves turned into yellow by mid-September, signaling the timing for cutting. The tobacco plants thus collected were stored at drying houses and then relocated to tobacco houses. They were laid up in bulk until stripping began.

34. See Edmund Ruffin, “Culture of Rice”, *DeBow’s Review*, 9 (1850), pp. 421–426; S.B. Hilliard, “Antebellum Tidewater Rice Culture in South Carolina and Georgia”, in J.R. Gibson (ed.), *European Settlement and Development in North America* (Toronto, 1978), p. 111.

35. For more details, see Ball, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball*.

The short- and mid-term routines in the cultivation of cotton, sugarcane, rice, and tobacco were subsets of a long-term transition. The long-term transition refers to the shift of plantation regimes from specialization to diversification and vice versa in response to the changing social, economic, political and agro-ecological situations. Alternating world demand for raw materials and regional agro-ecological contingencies, *inter alia*, were the major driving force behind the periodic shifts in plantation regimes.

The first decades of the nineteenth century were a period of geographical expansion and specialization in the plantation economy. The availability of fertile land and slaves, generous land policies, increasing world demand for plantation crops, and high crop prices sustained the regime.³⁶ The monoculture in consecutive years, however, caused a series of problems such as soil exhaustion, decreasing productivity, and dependency on the Midwest for foodstuffs (corn and hogs). The old South (Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia) had to pay a high price for the abuse of soils as early as the 1820s. Similarly, wasteful cultivation methods and decreasing income brought deprivation and destruction to the lower Southern states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The lack of alternative sources of income, the large amount of fixed capital invested in slave labor, the inelasticity of plantation organization, and pervasive indebtedness made it hard to discard the age-old practice of monoculture.³⁷ In order to break out of this deadlock situation, a fundamental restructuring of the plantation *genres de vie* was required. And the moment arrived when the long-term economic cycle hit bottom in the 1840s.

The late-antebellum depression generated agitation for retrenchment, scientific management, progressive agriculture, food self-sufficiency, and soil improvement – diversification, by any name.³⁸ The amelioration of exhausted soils was at the center of the diversification strategy. It held the key to profitability, productivity, self-sufficiency, and ecologically sound

36. L.C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (1933; Gloucester, MA, 1958), p. 910.

37. Stine and Baker, *Atlas of American Agriculture*, pp. 19–20. This supply-side reaction is also emphasized in the European context by Witold Kula in his *Economic Theory of the Feudal System* (London, 1962).

38. The degraded soil condition was at the center of the debate. An anonymous writer to *Southern Cultivator* identified the causes of the problem: “Now cotton is the life and soul of commerce, and wields a powerful influence on the destination of nations. The prurient itching of many farmers to be rich, has blinded them to the ruinous effects of their careless mode of cultivation, and left them neither inclination or leisure to restore their worn-out lands”; *Southern Cultivator*, 10 (1852), p. 201. In a similar vein, Karl Marx pointed out the harmful effects of capitalist agriculture on soils. See his *Capital*, p. 555. For a graphic description of the scene of soil impoverishment, see F.L. Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (New York, 1861), esp. p. 530.

land use. With soils largely exhausted, planters turned to composts, green manure, lime, barnyard manure, cottonseed, and guano.³⁹ At this critical juncture, progressive planters rediscovered the traditional wisdom of crop rotation which combined staple crops, corn, small grains, and leguminous plants.⁴⁰ A renewed emphasis on leguminous crops, in particular, marked the turning point in the whole process. In the South, cowpeas slowly gained recognition as the “great renovating crop”. Cowpeas, which were normally planted in furrows adjacent to corn, could accumulate over 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre in a few months.⁴¹

The new plantation regime was ecologically sound, economically profitable and, above all, self-sufficient. The diversification regime enriched the soils, saved considerable time and labor which otherwise might have been wasted in preparing organic manure, and made it possible to use land for consecutive years without fallows. Using the extra time and labor released, planters raised a variety of crops for domestic consumption: corn, peas, beans, oats, rye, fiber crops, and sweet potatoes.⁴² Hogs fed by the residue of the crops supplemented the dietary requirement of antebellum Southerners. The new regime embodied the “acme of plantation management”, or self-sufficiency.⁴³ The diversification regime, as we will see, improved slaves’ welfare and raised plantation capitalism to a new level.

39. The best contemporary references on the issue of manuring may be Edmund Ruffin’s monograph, *An Essay on Calcareous Manures* (1832; Richmond, VA, 1852) and Justus Liebig’s influential *Organic Chemistry in Its Applications to Agriculture and Physiology* (London, 1840).

40. See Carville V. Earle, “The Price of Precocity: Technical Choice and Ecological Constraint in the Cotton South, 1840–1890”, *Agricultural History*, 66 (1992), pp. 25–60. J.H. Couper’s “principles of a rotation of crops” shed light on contemporaries’ attitude toward the relation of soils and crops: (1) In the selection of crops, consult climate, soil, situation, the demand resulting from markets, and other circumstances which constitute the peculiarities of local position; (2) Plants possessing a system of broad leaves are to be alternated with those having narrow leaves; (3) Fibrous rooted are to be alternated with tap and tuberous rooted vegetables; (4) The recurrence of the same plant, on the same field, or of plants of the same character, is to be removed as far as possible. And their return should be so much the longer delayed as they have the longer occupied the soil; (5) Plants which, during their growth, require the operations of stirring the earth and weeding, are to be alternated with those which do not; (6) The application of manure is to be made to the most valuable and exhausting crops; (7) The succession of crops should be so arranged that the work which they require shall follow in easy, regular and economical order; and (8) Land should be left bare as short a time as possible, and should be kept covered with plants valuable in themselves, or which contribute to the increased value of those which are to follow (*Farmers’ Register*, 1 (1834), p. 12).

41. Stubbs, *Sugar Cane*, p. 105.

42. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, p 827.

43. R. Russell, *North America: Its Agriculture and Climate* (Edinburgh, 1857), p. 265.

THE GEOGRAPHIES OF LABOR: TYPES OF LABOR
ORGANIZATION

The enhancement in efficiency, productivity, and profitability of plantation agriculture was a function of the systematic coordination of labor in the field and work places. Plantation owners, therefore, devoted a great deal of managerial skills to the effective organization of labor systems. Decisions on the types of labor organization for the cultivation of certain crops were made on the gang-task continuum after considering the physical character of crops, cultivation methods, composition of laborers, and the degree to which direct supervision was required. The fragmented geographies of labor generated sharply contrasting staple-region cultures.⁴⁴

Certain agricultural activities require simultaneous actions of workers, while others need actions that follow one another in a prescribed order.⁴⁵ A gang system was one way of meeting these requirements of synchronization and sequence: field hands were ranged in a line and were to “proceed in regular rows, the pace being set by one or two key laborers under direct and close supervision of a driver”. Three gangs were typically involved in planting sugarcane. One gang cut the tops and flags from the stalk. Another gang laid the canes in the drill, placing two stalks side by side. Finally, the third gang carrying hoes pulled soils upon the stalks to the depth of about three inches.⁴⁶ A cotton-planting system featured five gangs: *plowmen* who ridged up the unbroken earth, *harrowers* who broke up the clods, *drillers* who created the holes to receive the seeds, *droppers* who planted the seeds in the holes, and *rakers* who covered up the holes.⁴⁷

Sugarcane cultivation was most effective under the gang system. The large volumes involved in planting and cutting made it impractical to assign the work or measure the job performance by person.⁴⁸ Moreover, the proportion of the number of slaves to each overseer was highest in sugar plantations. The efficiency of the gang system depended to a large extent on the combination and arrangement of the gang members and on

44. Phillip D. Morgan, “Task and Gang Systems: The Organization of Labor on New Land Plantations”, in Stephen Innes (ed.), *Work and Labor in Early America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), pp. 211–213. The best place to get familiar with the rationale of intraregional differentiation is G. W. Skinner’s series of work on regional systems: “The Structure of Chinese History”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 44 (1985), pp. 271–292; “Regional Systems in Nineteenth-Century France” (1986), *Precis*; “Nobi as a Regional System”. Paper Prepared for the Second Workshop of the Nobi Regional Project, Aichiken Sangyo Boekikau, Nagoya, 6–10 January, 1988.

45. W.E. Moore, *Man, Time, and Society* (New York, 1963), p. 8.

46. S. Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853; Baton Rouge, LA, 1968), pp. 159–160.

47. R.W. Fogel and S.L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston, MA, 1974; New York, 1989), p. 203.

48. Morgan, “Task and Gang Systems”, p. 26.

the coordination of each team's work.⁴⁹ The operation of the plantation was, therefore, a matter of the economies of scale and scientific management. One significant ramification of the gang system was that every hand had to stay in the field until the completion of daily work or the onset of darkness. Accordingly, this system provided slaves with little room to pursue their own economy.⁵⁰

A task system refers to a labor organization in which each hand was assigned to certain amount of work. Once the assigned job was completed, the worker was free to use the remaining hours as he/she pleased.⁵¹ The task system was prevalent in the tidewater low-country states (the coastal areas of the Carolinas and Georgia) and identified with the cultivation of rice.⁵²

The hardy character of the plant, which could do well with less intensive care and a low degree of interactive actions, and the straightforward work for cultivation made rice an ideal candidate for the task system.⁵³ Another integral factor for the consolidation of the labor system was the distinct irrigation system, which preconditioned an articulated division of labor.⁵⁴ Divided by drainage ditches, canals, and dikes into identifiable segments, rice fields were suitable for the individual or communal task work.⁵⁵ From this system the term *task* came to mean either a unit of land measurement (a quarter-acre) or a unit of labor (nine hours of work).⁵⁶

Opinions concerning the task system were mixed to say the least. Opponents feared that the system would encourage hasty and careless work and allow slaves too much freedom. Proponents, on the other hand, viewed the task system as humane and therefore effective in motivating field hands to work industriously.⁵⁷ They anticipated that the system would increase profitability and reduce the costs of supervision. The question was then how to distribute tasks: what kind of work, how much, and to whom? The issue of ensuring justice in the allocation of tasks was

49. Variables considered in the arrangement of laborers included sex, age, skill, and strength of gang members. A typical arrangement was as follows: "the best hands with good judgment and quick motion; the weak and inefficient class; and the second class of hoe hands"; *De Bow's Review*, 6 (1848), p. 149.

50. Campbell, "As a Kind of Freeman?", p. 245.

51. Morgan, "Task and Gang Systems", p. 190.

52. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, p. 551.

53. Phillip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Nap Blacks, 1700 to 1880", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 39 (1982), p. 568.

54. For more on the irrigation hydraulics of tidewater rice region, see Hilliard, "Antebellum Tidewater Rice Culture in South Carolina and Georgia", pp. 91–115.

55. Metzger, "Rational Management", p. 142.

56. Phillips, *Plantation and Frontier*, pp. 115–117.

57. Joseph P. Reidy, "Obligation and Right: Patterns of Labor, Subsistence, and Exchange in the Cotton Belt of Georgia, 1790–1860", in Berlin and Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture*, p. 140; Morgan, "Task and Gang Systems", p. 197.

resolved by taking into consideration the sex, age, and physical conditions of slaves and the types of work to be done. Based on these criteria, planters divided field hands into full hands, three-quarter hands, half hands, and quarter hands.⁵⁸ Child slaves were assigned to light tasks such as running errands, carrying water, taking care of infants, driving stock, harnessing horses and mules, and feeding poultry.

Under the task system, the daily routine was defined sharply. Once the assigned task was completed, the plantation hands could have the remainder of the day at their disposal. They used precious free time to produce a wide range of provision and cash crops such as rice, corn, potatoes, peanuts, tobacco, pumpkin, vegetables, and even cotton.⁵⁹ Freed, at least for a moment, from the tyranny of the planters' time, slaves set the pace of work, defined standards of workmanship, and, above all, worked hard. Taken together, the task system did much to enhance the autonomy and welfare of the plantation working class.

The gang and task systems were, however, two extremes on the continuum of labor organization, with a variety of intermediate types. In all probability, most planters fused the two systems into a flexible work organization in an attempt to optimize productivity. For example, prizing and stripping of tobacco could be effectively executed under a task system, while the need to pay constant attention to the cultivation of the plant forced planters to organize gangs and oversee the process of tillage, topping, worming, suckering, and curing.⁶⁰ Likewise cotton needed coordinated work in the stages of planting and weeding, while picking was normally task-oriented. Collective task was another hybrid type, whereby slaves were divided into sex or age groups and assigned to certain piecework.

SOUTHERN MENTALITÉ

Time and labor in the antebellum rural South were representations of collective attitudes, material interests, ideologies, and power relations between planters and slaves. If class-consciousness is "the way in which contested experiences are handled in cultural terms",⁶¹ the contentious experiences of slaves and their masters represented the struggle for the hegemonic reproduction of their own cultures. The polarized class-consciousness in the process created a distinct Southern *mentalité*.

58. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, p. 553.

59. Campbell, "As a Kind of Freeman?", p. 244.

60. Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America", *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), p. 77.

61. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), p. 10.

Was slavery a divine institution or an exploitative one? From a planter's point of view, the coercive institution was an "ordinance of God" and therefore a "blessing" to the slaves.⁶² In striking contrast, the bound people regarded slavery as an abusive institution that could be maintained only with the threat of the whip and by coercion. In the center of these contrasting beliefs were time and labor. The masters' paternalistic attitude toward time and labor was the antithesis of the slaves' call for time-and-labor justice. Time and labor in the context of antebellum political culture were a socially-constructed, fragmented, contested as well as negotiated episteme.

The dominant culture resented any stereotypical characterizations of their plantocracy. Planters at the same time worried that if they did not work hard their elite society might be degraded by the Southern caricature of sloth and lassitude. Indeed, planters were exceedingly sensitive to outsiders' sarcastic remarks like "you have a good deal of grass in your crop".⁶³ Driven by sensitivity to such a passing criticism, planters constantly reflected on their situations and worked to prevent the "Southern factors" (climate and slavery) from manipulating them.⁶⁴ Many progressive planters created a Southern version of the Protestant work and time ethic, devoting themselves to searching for more efficient ways of management. For them, slaves were no longer a status symbol but a costly investment.

Much of the slaves' culture – language, customs, beliefs, and material life style – set them a world apart from their masters. Although the subaltern accommodated themselves to the realities, they never doubted that slavery was an "unjust, exploitative and oppressive" institution. They were well aware of who raised the crops and generated the profits and of who lived on their labor and time. The heightened consciousness of the value of time and labor led slaves to seek a firm defense against the excess of the oppressive labor system.⁶⁵

From an elite-centric point of view, the term *paternalism* connotes an inviolable plantocracy, a hegemonic exercise of power, and a moral economy. As a distinct Southern ideology, paternalism tied planters and slaves to a web of material dependence, social deference, and psychological

62. The characterization of slavery as a divine institution was expressed by J.B. Thrasher in a speech before the Breckinridge and Land Club, 5 November, 1860 (Port Gibson, MS, 1861), pp. 5, 21.

63. T.B. Thorpe, "Cotton and Its Cultivation", in S. Bruchey (ed.), *Cotton and the Growth of the American Economy, 1790–1860* (1854; New York, 1976), p. 172.

64. The issue of Southern mental structure is explored in Joyce E. Chaplin's exemplary study, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993).

65. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York, 1976), p. 323.

identification.⁶⁶ The ideology was molded by the planters' characterization of themselves as the guardians of the indigent.⁶⁷

However, slaves' implicit and explicit daily resistance rendered the paternalism a contested and negotiated ideology, rather than a unilateral display of authority and generosity. It was a by-product of a symbiotic rather than a dichotomous process between "coercion" and "consent".⁶⁸ Planters relied not only on punishments but also on rewards in their management of plantation agribusiness, and more emphasis was laid on the latter as time progressed.⁶⁹ Cash payment, food, clothing, release from work, and big-time celebrations right after back-breaking labor helped sustain the planters' paternalistic claim to stewardship.⁷⁰ The use of rewards and compensations as a bargaining chip in plantation management was an inevitable choice, one of the few remaining incentives to command obedience and draw better work.

In the heyday of slavery, both parties conceded implicitly what could be acceptable, what was beyond endurance, and what might be tolerated through the "rituals" of mutual negotiation.⁷¹ In principle, Southern planters were in a far superior position to the unfree people, but in the absence of an outright threat to slavery they were willing to meet the slaves in the middle ground.⁷² In the process of driving concessions from the dominant class, slaves set the limits as clearly as they could.

PLANTATION CAPITALISM

The American South played the role expected from the periphery within world capitalist systems, namely, the production of raw materials for the European core and the semiperiphery. The late antebellum plantation

66. Lawrence T. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community", in W. B. Moore *et al.* (eds), *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society* (New York, 1988), p. 29.

67. Reminding the rest of the planters that they are guardians of slaves, a Virginia planter compared the character of slaves to the "plastic clay" which may be molded into agreeable or disagreeable figures according to the skill of the molder. See Breeden, *Advice Among Masters*, p. 35.

68. Perry Anderson gives an articulate interpretation of Gramsci's terminology of hegemony: "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", *New Left Review*, 100 (1976–1977), pp. 5–78.

69. "There are three modes of management [...] 1st corrections; 2nd coaxing by kindness; and thirdly, a mixed system of rewards and punishments. The latter I prefer" (statement of a Virginia planter expressed in 1852); see Breeden, *Advice Among Masters*, p. 45.

70. A Georgia planter is explicit on this point: "On some plantations it is the custom to have one of these jubilees about the Fourth of July, or as soon as the crop is 'laid by'. This festival may be made a powerful controlling power in the management of negroes"; Breeden, *Advice Among Masters*, pp. 262–263.

71. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 303; Berlin and Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture*, p. 7.

72. Charles B. Dew, "Disciplining Slave Ironworkers in the Antebellum South: Coercion, Conciliation, and Accommodation", *American Historical Review*, 79 (1974), p. 394.

economy as a mode of production denies any clear-cut characterization, however. It was far from a pure-slave mode of production but something quite different, “plantation capitalism”.⁷³ Plantation capitalism was framed not only by a semifeudal class structure and coerced labor system but also by a capitalist imperative of accumulation and commodification. Here in plantations, factors of capitalist production such as capital, market, labor, land, and technology were an initiating, operational, and cultural condition.⁷⁴ On top of that, slaves distinctively maintained their own semifree market economy in the midst of an institutional constraint. In addition to generating profits for their masters, slaves were also actively involved in improving their economic conditions.

The opportunity for slaves to secure a measure of economic independence arrived when the demand for labor reached the highest point in the crop season. Even though slavery denotes a coercive labor system, there was a limit beyond which planters could not press their claim to labor. They had to buy the extra time and labor, and it was against this background that the tentacles of capitalism penetrated into the rural areas.⁷⁵

Just as significant as the seasonal fluctuations of labor demand were the macroeconomic cycles of boom and bust. Of particular interest is the periodic depression because it was during this time that a “creative destruction” took place. As noted before, one of the extended depressions in the South was in the 1840s. The macroeconomic depression led to the “destruction” of the specialization regime (or monoculture) and the “creation” of the diversification regime, which had various implications for the organization of time and labor, food self-sufficiency, soil fertility, agricultural productivity, and plantation capitalism.

Haunted by the decrease in cash-crop prices, planters tried to minimize financial losses by producing provision crops on plantations and thereby retrenching expenditures for the purchase of the foodstuffs. Although the new regime kept slaves busy, it nonetheless helped to raise plantation capitalism to a new level. Thanks to the changes in agricultural practices, plantation people could be fed reasonably well. Slaves, in addition, supplemented daily nutrition and earned some cash out of the products from “slave gardens”. Besides these positive impacts, the self-sufficiency strategy (a different name for diversification) served the paternalist

73. J.H. Soltow distinguishes Atlantic “merchant capitalism” and the “plantation capitalism” of the South in “Cotton as Religion, Politics, Law, Economics and Art”, *Agricultural History*, 68 (1994), pp. 6–19.

74. For the elaboration on this point, see Wolf and Mintz, “Haciendas and Plantations in Middle America and the Antilles”, pp. 380–412.

75. See W. Kula, “Money and the Serfs in Eighteenth Century Poland”, in E.J. Hobsbawm *et al.* (eds), *Peasants in History* (Calcutta, 1980), pp. 30–41.

manifesto well, as it reinforced the slaves' attachment to their backyard gardens and suppressed the temptation to rebel or run away. This illustrates the political manipulations of *places* or, if you want, *spaces*.⁷⁶

Slaves worked their gardens in the evening, on Saturday afternoons, or on Sundays.⁷⁷ Sarah Benjamin, a former Louisiana slave of a plantation in Claiborne Parish, provides an illuminating anecdote:

I dunno how many acres and how many slaves on dis plantation, day was all waked up fore daylight and to breakfast, dey works from day light till dark, sometimes specially in cotton pickin dem shillens wouldn't se dem parent till Sadty, dey go ter fields so early and gits in so late de chillens warnt awake ter see dem. When de slaves would come in from de fields dey would eat and go to bed unless it was moon shine nights if it was dey would work in their tobacco patch, de marster would give each man a terbaccer patch if he made more den he could use he could sell de rest and de money was his'n. De slaves on dis plantation nevah did work on Sadty evenin, unless de works in der own terbaccer patch.⁷⁸

Assuming the responsibility for organizing their semi-independent economic activities, slaves decided which crops to plant and how to distribute time.⁷⁹ When they worked for themselves, slaves did so with great intensity, agility, and desire. Using so-called "dead time", slaves raised livestock and poultry and cultivated corn, small grains, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, tobacco, and cotton. Plantation slaves traded these products with itinerant peddlers, riverboat merchants, country storekeepers, and their masters. With cash from the sale they purchased foods, drinks, coffee, tobacco, clothing, housewares, tools, and other items for domestic consumption.⁸⁰

76. The issues of the concessions of masters, the hegemonic manipulation of geographic place, and the slaves' engagement in the market economy are concisely summarized in the following comments of an Alabama planter: "In addition to land for his crop, each one has the privilege of having a garden in which to raise such vegetables as he most prefers. These little gardens contribute much of comfort and give a cheerful, home-like appearance to the quarter. Besides, they attach the negro to his home and makes him feel that he has more than a passing interest in the things about him"; Breeden, *Advice Among Masters*, p. 272. An anonymous South Carolina planter expressed a similar opinion: "All my slaves are to be supplied with sufficient land on which [the overseer will] encourage, and even compel, them to plant and cultivate a crop, all of which I will, as I have hitherto done, purchase at a fair price from them. This crop can be tended during their idle hours after task work is done, which otherwise would be spent in the perpetration of some act that would subject them to severe punishment"; *ibid.*, p. 267.

77. Sydney W. Mintz, "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?", *Review*, 2 (1978), p. 92.

78. G.P. Rawick (ed.), *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*; supp., series 2, vol. 2 (Westport, CT, 1979), pp. 255–256.

79. R.A. McDonald, "Independent Economic Production by Slaves on Antebellum Louisiana Sugar Plantations", in Berlin and Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture*, p. 298.

80. See Ball, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball*, p. 191; Russell, *North America*, p. 273. The author, traveling around the Natchez area, came across slaves purchasing tobacco, tea, fancy clothing for Sundays, and other consumption items with the money from a small garden, a pigsty, and a fowlhouse.

Some slaves hired out leisure time for cash payments and worked hard to hold on to the hard-won opportunities. This momentary experience in the wage-labor market enabled the unfree people to taste a quasi-freedom and to view themselves as something other than slaves.⁸¹ However marginal the experiences may have been, slaves tasted one of the key aspects of capitalism: the sale of labor and the enjoyment of its fruits.⁸²

Given the wide-ranging ramifications of such an infinitesimal amount of free time, it would be logical to turn to the task system to make a case for the elaborated plantation capitalism, for the labor system was more flexible and less rigorous than was the gang system. This generalization leads to the assumption that the transition to a free market society after the Civil War was much smoother and faster in regions where the task system was a prevalent type of labor organization. And it is the backyard gardens that deserve much credit for the enhancement of the welfare of slave communities and the consolidation of plantation capitalism. In the final analysis, however, what really helped the bound people to embrace the advent of postbellum capitalist societies without the “blessings” of the masters was their willingness to sacrifice leisure time for cash income: a self-imposed “industrious” revolution.⁸³

81. Charles Ball’s unexpected encounter with Sunday working reveals the dynamic character of the late antebellum rural South: “I expected that as these people had been compelled to work so hard, and fare so poorly all the week, they would be inclined to repose themselves on Sunday [...]. No horn was blown by the overseer, to awaken us this morning [...], but [...] I found our small community a scene of universal bustle and agitation. A large number of the men, as well as some of the women, had already [...] gone to work for wages [...]. Our overseer had [...] a field of near twenty acres planted in cotton, [...] but as he had no slaves, he was obliged to hire people to work it for him [...]. About 20 of our people went to work for him today, for which he gave them 50 cents each [...]. Perhaps forty in all went out through the neighborhood, to work for other planters. On every plantation, the people are allowed to make patches, [...] in some remote and unprofitable part of the estate, [...] in which they plant corn, potatoes, pumpkins, melons, & c. for themselves. These patches they must cultivate on Sunday, or let them go uncultivated. I think that [...] there were about 30 of these patches, cleared in the woods, and fenced [...]. She [Lydia] had onions, cabbages, cucumbers, melons, and many other things in her garden [...]. When the slaves go out to work for wages on Sunday, their employers never flog them [...] never give them abusive language [...]. The practice of working on Sunday is so universal amongst the slaves on the cotton plantations, that the immorality of the matter is never spoken of”; Ball, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball*, pp. 162–189.

82. Campbell, “As a Kind of Freeman?”, p. 243.

83. Mintz, “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?”, p. 95; Jan de Vries, “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution”, *Journal of Economic History*, 54 (1994), pp. 249–270. According to the author, the industrious revolution included two transformations: (1) the reduction of leisure time as the marginal utility of money income rose, and (2) the reallocation of labor from goods and services for direct consumption to marketed goods. The fact that many Southern states adopted laws to forbid slaves from trading or bartering their products without license and consent from masters is an indirect evidence for the deepening slaves’ domestic economy. See Gray, *History of Agriculture*, p. 528.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Time geography of the Lund School has been acclaimed as a superb model in dealing with time in a specific geographical and social context. With agency and structure as its key concepts, the time–geographic perspective opens up a new venue for the discourse of social processes, lending insights to structuration theory.⁸⁴ Yet critics point out that time alone cannot explain the power relations among individuals or between individuals and institutions.⁸⁵ The late antebellum rural South offers a geohistorical setting *par excellence* for the exploration of “politicized” geographies of time and labor which were firmly embedded in sweating slaves, long work days, rough crop fields, and contested *mentalité*.

The discussion so far has woven a causality web within the geohistorical context of the antebellum rural South, linking staple crops, time, labor, and plantation capitalism. The descriptive and analytical evidence confirms that there were regional fragmentations of the time and labor regime, which was in turn intertwined with the details of staple crops. Crop characteristics had a variety of impacts upon cultivation methods, work routines, labor systems, infrastructure, urban development, politics, and structures of regional economy.⁸⁶ As an extension of this logic, I have implied that the amount of a slave’s free time increased first in the sugarcane region, followed in ascending order by the cotton belt, tobacco region, and rice region.

The ordering at the same time denotes the regional differentiation of labor systems, with sugarcane and rice representing two ends on the gang-task continuum. It was the task system, as the so-called “low-country advantage” thesis postulates, that had the most significant impacts on the enhancement of slaves’ social and economic status and the internalization of the capitalist spirit.⁸⁷ The implication of this argument is that it was not the long hours of labor *per se*, but the obligatory and inflexible nature of the labor system that posed a fundamental barrier to the materialization of the Protestant way of thinking and the capitalist way of life.

84. D. Parkes and N. Thrift, *Times, Spaces, and Places: A Chronogeographic Perspective* (Chichester, 1980), esp. pp. 243–278.

85. Giddens, “Time, Space and Regionalisation”, pp. 270–271.

86. See Carville Earle, *Geographical Inquiry and American Historical Problems* (Stanford, CA, 1992), esp. chs 3 and 6. The first generation of traditional staple theory, such as Harold Innis, Robert Baldwin, and Douglass North, emphasizes the strategic role of staples as a main source of income for newly settled areas.

87. P.G. Hargis and P.M. Horan, “The ‘Low-Country Advantage’ for African-Americans in Georgia, 1880–1930”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 28 (1997), pp. 27–46. The authors confirm that the low-country Blacks acquired property earlier, enjoyed more economic opportunities, and were more effective in configuring the postbellum labor arrangements than their counterparts from gang-labor tradition.

An additional point is that the substitution of a diversification regime for a monoculture in the 1840s played an integral role in the elaboration of plantation capitalism. At a grass-roots level, slaves' industrious activities and the semi-autonomous use of time in the backyard gardens enlarged the public sphere. The slave garden became a "spatial" statement of black initiative and autonomy. In all, the antebellum version of the lumpenproletariat had learned, by the eve of the *fin-de-servitude*, how to internalize capitalist imperatives and well understood the capitalist "rules of the game" from lived experiences. It is high time to integrate the slaves' collective memory and experience into mainstream American working-class history.