

Response

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RESPONSE

Since its publication in 1996, the booklet *Southern Slavery As t Was* by Steve Wilkins and Douglas Wilson(1) has circulated without critical review or response. The authors are both leaders in existing ministries. Wilkins is the pastor of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana, as well as the founder of The Southern Heritage Society, and a member of The League of the South's board of directors. Wilson is the pastor of Christ's Community in Moscow, Idaho, and a noted author and speaker. According to Wilkins and Wilson, the true meaning of the Civil War and the "various biblical and constitutional arguments that swirled around that controversy"(2) can be grasped only when we are delivered from believing that "[s]lavery is…such a wicked practice that it alone is sufficient to answer the question of which side was right in that unfortunate war."(3)

Wrong About the History of Southern Slavery:

A Response to Steve Wilkins and Douglas Wilson's History of Slavery

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Since its publication in 1996, the booklet *Southern Slavery As It Was* by Steve Wilkins and Douglas Wilson(1) has circulated without critical review or response. The authors are both leaders in existing ministries. Wilkins is the pastor of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana, as well as the founder of The Southern Heritage Society, and a member of The League of the South's board of directors. Wilson is the pastor of Christ's Community in Moscow, Idaho, and a noted author and speaker. According to Wilkins and Wilson, the true meaning of the Civil War and the "various biblical and constitutional arguments that swirled around that controversy"(2) can be grasped only when we are delivered from believing that "[s]lavery is…such a wicked practice that it alone is sufficient to answer the question of which side was right in that unfortunate war."(3)

Why They Wrote This

Wilkins and Wilson's concern for the history of Southern slavery is tied to their millennialism. Though unstated in the booklet, we learn in other related literature that the gospel of Christ and the application of "biblical law" will totally transform culture worldwide and establish a glorious millennial kingdom.(4) In this view only the temporal realization of a Christianized world by a victorious church can fulfill the predictions found in Scripture.(5) The process of fulfillment began "as the gospel spread throughout the Gentile world"(6) culminating in the establishment of Christendom, "[b]eginning with the time of Constantine…"(7) The South is a continuation in the process of fulfillment along with other "nations which together, with varying degrees of success, acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ over them."(8) These were all imperfect versions of a steadily emerging and monolithic Christianized world. Wherever and whenever nations commit themselves to the gospel and biblical law, they are imperfect but genuine manifestations of Christ's lordship.

The American South is an especially important preview of the millennial kingdom in this outlook. The Confederate South is recast as "the last nation of the first Christendom."(9) Since "the Confederate Army was the largest body of evangelicals under arms in the history of the world,"(10) then Christ's kingdom must have been temporally emerging on earth, drawing nearer to worldwide approval. Appomattox is not just the scene of the war's end; "the first Christendom died there, in 1865."(11) Nevertheless, a glorious era will eventually be brought about through the efforts of the church. At that time the South and all the other earlier manifestations of the coming kingdom will finally enjoy vindication: "the South will rise again."(12) The resemblance of these opinions to the sentiments of a recent address by the President of The League of the South is noteworthy: "As I gaze out my window on this, Robert E. Lee's birthday, and see the battleflag wafting in the breeze, I'm more sure than ever that God will give us a name and a place among the nations of the earth."(13)

The generally received history of Southern slavery makes it difficult for us to imagine that such a nation could be a preview of Christ's kingdom. Wilkins and Wilson have prepared a historical reconstruction of American slavery to soften our skepticism. Like press secretaries with a public relations nightmare on

their hands, they shift between anecdotes, fragments of statistical data, and ex-slave testimony, admitting that some inhumane treatment must be acknowledged, but "these abuses came from a distinct and very small minority."(14) We are assured of "facts which are seldom addressed in public, though they are not altogether unknown."(15) Slave narratives, interviews with ex-slaves conducted during the 1930s,(16) are promised to hold information which will both surprise and inform us about the institution of slavery. Numerous citations from Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross*(17) are marshaled to challenge those who have been "carefully schooled in the abolitionist propaganda."(18)

Anyone familiar with Wilkins and Wilson's cited source materials will not be persuaded by their attempt to mitigate slavery's relevance to the war nor the conditions and circumstances which accompanied it. An examination of the evidence cited in their own booklet for the frequency of slave punishment devastates the reconstruction they urge us to accept. They present no research capable of supporting their sweeping revision of American slavery. The slave narratives cited by Wilkins and Wilson are a valuable primary source for studying slavery, and they present these interviews as evidence of "an amazingly benign picture of Southern plantation life,"(19) but many troubling and inconvenient facts arise in the narratives which create a different picture.

Good Master

Wilkins and Wilson report ex-slaves' "[a]ffection for former masters and mistresses; expressed in terms of unmistakable devotion,"(20) or "a wistful desire to be back at the plantation."(21) They maintain that "in the Narratives, out of 331 references to master, 86% refer to their masters as "good" or "kind."(22) Would our own definition of "good" be satisfied if we read the references? Most likely, the references to "good" and "kind" observed by Wilkins and Wilson are not unlike the following examples taken from the narratives.

Ex-slave Ank Bishop says "Dey was good to us 'caze Lady Liza's son, Mr. Willie Larkin, was de overseer for his ma, but cose sometime dey git among 'em an' thrashed 'em out."(23) Bishop says that the master was "good," but in the same sentence he says there were group thrashing or whippings. He then elaborates a little more about plantation life. "One time on de niggers runned away, old Caesar Townsy, and dey sarnt for Dick Peters to come an' bring his nigger dogs. Dem dogs was trained to ketch a nigger same as rabbit dogs is trained to ketch a rabbit."(24)

Aunt Tildy Collins recalls that "Ole Marster was good to all he niggers;" but "[s]ometime a no 'count nigger tek an' runned erway; but de oberseer, he put de houn's on he track, an' dey run him up a tree;"(25)

The master in both of these examples is called "good" but he also uses dogs to track down his runaway slaves. Do Wilkins and Wilson think of such a man as "good"?

Jennie Bowen remembers, "We useta have a mean oberseer, white folks, an' all de time dere slaves on our place a runnin' away."(26) The overseer is mean and slaves are running away; nevertheless, Bowen later on concludes, "We-alls had a good time an' us was happy an' secure."(27)

A "good" situation did not mean slaves could avoid the abuse of an overseer nor did it keep them from wanting to run away. Do Wilkins and Wilson think this is "good"?

Oliver Bell tells his interviewer, "Us all b'longed t' Mr. Tresvan De Graffenreid an' Mistu Rebecca; an' dey was all good to us. Ol' Mistus read de Bible to us an' got us baptized in de river at Horn's bridge;"(28) Bell makes it clear that "it warn't so bad wid us. De white folks was good to us niggers."(29) Bell goes on, "One day my mammy done sumpin' an' ol' marster made her pull her dress down 'roun' her waist an' made her lay down 'cros de door. Den he taken a leatier strop an' wopped her. I 'members dat I started crying an' Misus Beckie said, 'Go git dat boy a biscuit.'"(30)

These interviews demonstrate that "good master" was a widely used term, a kind of moniker, the relative meaning of which must be determined in each case. Ex-slaves who refer to masters as "good" or "kind" have different things in mind. A good master could be someone who allowed no whipping or a master who offers a biscuit to a boy while simultaneously humiliating and whipping his mother in front of him. Bell, himself, understood this. "What I seed of slavery was a bad idea, I reckon, but ev'ybody thought dey marster was de bes' in de lan'. Us didn't know better. A man was growed plum' green 'fo he knew de whole worl' didn't belong to his ol' marster."(31) Most masters were probably called "good." Wilkins and Wilson fail to see that the threshold of benevolence was simply adjusted to whatever conditions the slaves were forced to endure. The fact they called their masters "good" is not a tribute to the master, but to their determination to find some goodness in a bleak world.

The attitude of the ex-slaves toward their former masters as recorded in the narratives resonates with the comments of Frederick Douglass on this same topic. He wrote that "slaves, when inquired of as to their condition and the character of their masters, almost universally say they are contented, and that their masters are kind."(32) He also writes,

I have been frequently asked, when a slave, if I had a kind master, and do not remember ever to have given a negative answer; nor did I in pursuing this course, consider myself as uttering what is absolutely false; for I always measured the kindness of my master by the standard of kindness set up among slaveholders around us.(33)

Discussion of the complex reasons which might explain a slave's evaluation of his or her master is beyond the scope of this paper, but an illustration of the same mentality may be seen in abused spouses. Whatever she experiences, an abused wife will describe her husband to most people as a "good" man until she is free from the threat of violence. Even then fear has a way of holding on. Douglass, even after he was free, feared retaliation because he felt there was always "the penalty of telling the truth, of telling the simple truth, in answer to a series of plain questions."(34)

Wilkins and Wilson would have us believe that the master and slave relationship was for the most part one of "remarkable affection"(35) on the basis of the ex-slave's evaluation. The testimony of former slaves is important, but the value assigned must involve consideration of other factors. As the examples given above show, and as Douglass makes clear, the testimony of ex-slaves to the goodness of their master must not be uncritically received. By citing such testimony, unattenuated by contexts and circumstances, Wilkins and Wilson produce a superficial and generally false picture of slavery in the South. I am reminded of a comment on the importance of careful historical research made by the character of Miss DeVine in Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*.

I entirely agree that a historian ought to be precise in detail, but unless you take all the characters and circumstances concerned into account, you are reckoning without the facts. The proportions and relations of things are just as much facts as the things themselves; and if you get those wrong, you falsify the picture really seriously.

Wilkins and Wilson further mislead their readers by implying they are the only ones ready to seriously consider the slave narratives. They assert "[t]he reports did not fit with the established and reigning orthodoxy, and consequently the Slave Narratives have been largely ignored ever since."(36) But the narratives have never been ignored. Since their publication in the late 1930's historians have thought the slave narratives to be "the most authentic and colorful source of our knowledge of the lives and thoughts of thousands of slaves, of their attitudes toward one another, toward their masters, mistresses, and overseers, toward poor whites, North and South, the Civil War, Emancipation, Reconstruction, religion, education, and virtually every phase of Negro life in the South."(37) Contrary to Wilkins and Wilson, George Rawick asserts that because of the narratives a "new historiography of slavery"(38) has been well under way for some time with "[d]ozens of other works … which show the impact of the narratives on the historiography of slavery and demonstrate their potential uses."(39)

Punishment of Slaves

Wilkins and Wilson also urge that whatever "sin and evil"(40) occurred in punishing slaves, it is wrong to "magnify it as though it were representative of the whole."(41) We are assured that brutal whippings were rare. The basis for this is presented as factual, but it is an unproven assertion as the following quote demonstrates.

…in the Narratives, out of 331 references to master, 86% refer to their masters as 'good' or 'kind' Quite a few would not allow whipping at all, and many only allowed it in their presence. (42) Important links are missing in this chain of argument. The reader is left wondering how we get from observing that 86% of the masters are called "good" or "kind" to the generalization that "[q]uite a few would not allow whipping at all, and many only allowed it in their presence."(43) Are we to assume that the 86% did not allow whipping and that only 14% did? We do not know because the authors show no real correlation between the narratives and their conclusions. The argument starts off statistically, but then shifts without any connection to vague generalizations such as "some" or "quite a few" or "many" or "in other instances." And where is the proof for asserting "whipping was as mildly applied as the corporal punishment normally practiced within families today"?(44) The evidence for this is certainly not found in Fogel and Engermans' *Time on the Cross*, the single source cited by Wilkins and Wilson

as statistical proof of their assertions.(45)

Wilkins and Wilson assert the slave narratives support their opinions: "There was mistreatment, there were atrocities, there was a great deal of wickedness on the part of some but, as the Narratives make plain, these abuses came from a distinct and very small minority."(46) This is overstatement with maybe a little baloney. George Rawick observes that "the narratives almost uniformly render accounts of whippings. One can almost conclude that whippings were daily affairs on most plantations by simply counting the number of interviews that mention whippings…"(47) Rawick's observation is confirmed by the most cursory examination of the narratives. The following examples of ex-slaves interviewed during the 1930s report whipping with great frequency and numerous acts of torture, including murder. Walter Calloway recounts the lifelong side effects of a single whipping on a young girl.

us purty good, but we hab to wuk hard. … Oh, yassuh, Marsh John good 'nough to us an' we git plenty to eat, but he had an oberseer name Green Bush what sho' whup us iffen we don't do to suit him. Yassuh, he might rough wid us but he didn't do de whuppin' hisse'f. He had a big black boy name Mose, mean as de debil an' strong as an ox, and de oberseer let him do all de whuppin'. An', man, he could sho' lay on dat rawhide lash. He whupped a nigger gal 'bout thirteen years ole so hard she nearly die, an' allus atterwa'ds she hab spells of fits or somp'n. Dat make Marsh John pow'ful mad, so he run dat oberseer off de plantation an' Mose didn' do no mo' whuppin.(48) Aunt Amy recalls the torture and humiliation of her brother and her own experience of being beaten with a cat-of-nine- tails.

brother an' had him stretched out jus' lak you see Christ on de cross; had him chained, an' I set down on de groun' by him an' cried all night lak Mary an' dem done. Dat oberseer was de fus' one dat over putt me in de fiel', an' he whupped me wid de cat er nine tails when I was stark naked. Den dere was anudder mean man… who was always a-beatin' nigger women case dey wouldn't mind him.(49) She goes on in her interview to describe the technique of whipping slaves until they were bloody, then "anointing" their flesh with a mixture of red pepper and turpentine.

de road an' I ax him whut ail him an'he say: 'I's been in de stocks an' been beat till blood come, Den ole Massa 'ninted my flesh wid red pepper an' turpentine an' I's been most dead but I is somewhat better now.' Unker Tiptoe belonged to the meanes' ol' marster around here.(50) Overseers or masters accomodated a pregnant woman during her whipping by digging a hole in the ground. The expectant mother would then lie face-down so that her stomach was in the hole. Henry Cheatam recalls how, as a young boy, he watched his pregnant aunt beaten until she miscarried.

…old Miss had a nigger oberseer an' dat was de meanest debil dat eber libbed on de Lawd's green yearth. I promise myself when I growed up dat I was agoin' to kill dat nigger iffen it was de las' thing I eber done. Lots of times I'se seen him beat my mammy, an' one day I seen him beat my Auntie who was big wid a chile, an' dat man dug a roun' hole in de groun' an' put her stommick in it, an' beat an' beat her for a half hour straight till de baby come out right dere in de hole.(51) Cheatam is not the only one to witness such unspeakable brutality against expectant mothers. Mandy McCullough recalls, "One woman on a plantation not so far from us, was expectin', an' they tied her up under a hack-a-berry tree, an' whipped her until she died."(52)

Laura Clark, another ex-slave, recalls how people were stripped, beaten, and then "annointed" with a mixture. The overseer, she recalls,

had a whuppin' log what he strip 'em buck naked and lay 'em on de log. He whup 'em wid a wide strop, wider'n my han'd, den he pop de blister what he raised and 'nint 'em wid red pepper, salt, and vinegar. Den he put 'em in de house dey call de pest house and have a 'oman stary dere to keep de flys offen 'em 'twell dey got able to move.(53) She reports people being beaten to death with the handle of a whip and then buried immediately in the field.

…dey had reg'lar men in de fields wid spades, and iffen you didn't do what you git tole, de overseer would srop dat strap 'roun' his han' and hit you in de haid wid de wooden handle 'till he kilt you. Den de mens would dig a hole wid de spades and throw 'em in hit right dere in de fiel' jes lack dey was cows - didn't have no funeral nor nothin'.(54) When traveling off the plantation, slaves were expected to carry a pass issued by their master, stating the date and times they could travel. William Colbert describes the whipping of his brother for being an hour late arriving home.

…de massa keep a beatin' til little streams of blood started flowin'

down January's chest, but he neber holler. His lips wuz a quiverin' and his body waz a shakin', but his mouf it neber ioen; and al de while I sat on my mammy's and pappy's steps a cryin'. De niggers wuz all gathered about and some uv 'em couldn't stand it; dey hadda inside dere cabins. Atter while, January, he couldn't stand it no longer hssself, and he say in a hoarse, loud wisper: "Massa! Massa! Have mercy on dis poor nigger.(55) These are just a few examples from the narratives, presented at length to convey something of the magnitude of material available. There are many other examples of punishment throughout the sixteen volumes available. Slaves remember overseers or masters who would "whup you in a minute,"(56) or "whipped until the blood run down,"(57) or who "had regular days to whup all de slaves wid strops. De strops had holes in "em so dat dey raised big blisters. Den dey took a hand saw, cut de blisters and washed 'em in salt water."(58)

Not only does a reading of the narratives betray a widespread culture of whipping, but the narratives also present masters who forbid it as the exception, not the rule. When ex-slaves testify to the kindness of their masters, they speak as if whipping were part of their milieu. Molly Almond recalls that "[w]e had a mean oberseer dat always wanted to whup us, but massa would't 'llo no whuppin'."(59) Charity Anderson remembers that her "[m]assa was a good man…But, honey all de white folks wan't good to dere slaves. I's seen po' niggers 'mos' tore up by dogs and whupped 'tell dey bled w'en dey did'n' do lak white folks say."(60) Ex-slave Emma Chapman reports in the narratives that

There was no whipping allowed on the curry [sic] plantation… [t]he patrollers had no jurisdiction over the Curry slaves. They were given permits by the Currys to go and come, and Emma said if one of the patrollers whipped of "ole Miss's slaves, she would have sure sue'd them." Emma laughingly said the slaves on other plantations always said the Curry slaves were "free niggers," as they could always get permits, and had plenty to eat and milk to drink.(61) Chapman's account makes it clear that the exceptional feature of the Curry plantation was that no whipping was allowed. In making the assertion that brutality was rare, Wilkins and Wilson are making the exceptional situation a rule. They are not the first to make this mistake. Southern statesman and President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis was against whipping on his Louisiana plantation.(62) He was known for educating and befriending his slaves. As a defender of slavery, no one spoke more passionately about the wonderful quality of life enjoyed by his slaves. Davis' error, however, was to assume all slaveholders had his same attitude. He knew little about or ignored attitudes and conditions elsewhere. As William C. Davis points out,

The fact is that by 1848, the rising spokesman for Southern interests had traveled far more extensively in the North than in the slave states. He had seen only a little of Louisiana and nothing at all of Alabama, Georgia, Florida, the Carolinas, or Virginia. He had seen with his own eyes very little of slavery other than on the banks of the Mississippi from Vicksburg to New Orleans."(63) It would appear that just as Davis needed to travel more in the South, Wilkins and Wilson need more extensive travel through the body of evidence and narratives they have cited, or they have chosen to ignore the obvious. That one can read the narratives or related materials filled with accounts of systematic brutality and assert "[t]here has never been a multi-racial society which has existed with such mutual intimacy and harmony in the history of the world"(64) or maintain an "overwhelmingly positive view of slavery"(65) is inexcusable.

An examination of the material which Wilkins and Wilson cite as proof of their assertions gives no support to their proposals. There were masters who did not commit acts of brutality, even some like Jefferson Davis who did not practice whipping, but there is certainly no proof offered by Wilkins and Wilson that "abuses came from a distinct and very small minority." The authors present no quantitative study of the narratives sufficient for constructing their sweeping generalizations or supporting their incredible claims. That such assertions can be made is quite puzzling since the narratives document that whippings, even severe and brutal, were very routine. Like the opinions of Jefferson Davis, Wilkins and Wilson's booklet provokes incredulity and withers when it is exposed to the broader reality of slavery in the South.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Steve Wilkins, Douglas Wilson Southern Slavery As It Was (Moscow: Canon P, 1996)
- 2 Wilkins et al. 7.
- 3 Wilkins et al. 7.
- 4 Douglas Jones, Douglas Wilson Angels in the Architecture (Moscow: Canon P, 1998) 145-160.
- 5 e.g., Psalm 2:12; 22:27-28; 110:1; c.f. Romans 4:13-18.
- 6 Jones, et al. 203.
- 7 Jones, et al. 203.
- 8 Jones, et al. 203.

- 9 Jones, et al. 203.
- 10 Wilkins, et al. 13.
- 11 Jones, et al. 203.
- 12 Jones, et al. 205.
- 13 Michael Hill, "President's Message Jan-Feb 1999" <http://www.dixienet.org/dnframeset2.html>.
- 14 Wilkins et al. 26.
- 15 Wilkins et al. 8.
- 16 George Rawick, ed. The American Slave: A composite Autobiography, 19 vols. (1941; Westport: Greenwood P., 1972.)
- 17 Robert Fogel, Stanley Engerman Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery (Lanham: University P of America, Inc., 1974.)
- 18 Wilkins et al. 22.
- 19 Wilkins et al. 24.
- 20 Wilkins et al. 24.
- 21 Wilkins et al. 25.
- 22 Wilkins et al. 29.
- 23 Rawick Alabama and Indiana Narratives 24 (my emphasis).
- 24 Rawick 25,35.
- 25 Rawick 84 (my emphasis).
- 26 Rawick 42.
- 27 Rawick 43 (my emphasis).
- 28 Rawick 27 (my emphasis).
- 29 Rawick 28 (my emphasis).
- 30 Rawick 28.
- 31 Rawick 28 (my emphasis).
- 32 Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written By Himself ed. W.L. Andrews, W.S. McFeely (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) 21.
- 33 Douglass 22.
- 34 Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written By Himself ed. W.L. Andrews, W.S. McFeely (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) 21.
- 35 Wilkins et al. 23.
- 36 Wilkins et al. 23.
- 37 George Rawick, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography vol.1 From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community (Westport: Greenwood P. 1972) appendix, 171.
- 38 George Rawick, ed., introduction, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Supplement, Series 1; v.1 Alabama Narratives (Westport: Greenwood P. 1977)introduction xxxix
- 39 Rawick xxxix.
- 40 Wilkins et al. 28.
- 41 Wilkins et al. 28.
- 42 Wilkins et al. 29.
- 43 Wilkins et al. 29.
- 44 Wilkins et al. 29.
- 45 C.f. Appendix A.
- 46 Wilkins et al. 26.
- 47 George Rawick The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Supplement, Series 1; vol. 1 Alabama Narratives (Westport: Greenwood P. 1977) xxxii (my emphasis).
- 48 George Rawick, ed. Alabama and Indiana Narratives vol. 6 of The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography (1941; Westport: Greenwood P. 1972) 51 (my emphasis).
- 49 Rawick 59 (my emphasis).
- 50 Rawick 60 (my emphasis).
- 51 Rawick 66 (my emphasis).
- 52 Rawick 90-91 (my emphasis).
- 53 Rawick 72 (my emphasis).
- 54 Rawick 72 (my emphasis).
- 55 Rawick 81-82 (my emphasis).
- 56 Rawick 88.
- 57 Rawick 90-91.
- 58 Rawick 105.
- 59 Rawick 10.
- 60 Rawick 12.
- 61 Rawick 64.
- 62 William C. Davis Jefferson Davis: the Man and His Hour (New York: HarpersCollins 1991) 180-181.
- 63 Davis 180.
- 64 Wilkins et al. 24.
- 65 Wilkins et al. 25.

Appendix

Bennet Barrow and Time on the Cross

Since Wilkins and Wilson rely so heavily on Time on the Cross¹ as evidence that whippings were not as bad as we might think² it is important to examine this work more closely. It should be noted that the authors of Time on the Cross, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, admit that "[r]eliable data on the frequency of whipping is extremely sparse."³ It is significant that they base their conclusions on "[t]he only systematic record of whipping now available for an extended period from the diary of Bennet Barrow, a Louisiana planter who believed that to spare the rod was to spoil the slave."⁴ Presumably this diary holds evidence of someone more "representative of the whole," of slave owners, meting out punishment not unlike the way one might discipline misbehaving children. An examination of Bennet Barrow's diary, however, gives no support to such an impression.

According to the editor of Barrow's diary, Edwin A. Davis, Bennet Barrow was a well-to-do Louisiana planter who "bought and sold land, raised cotton, experimented with sugar cane, and grew or produced most the supplies required on a large plantation."⁵ He was, in fact, "typical of his time and section."⁶ Barrow's whipping is considered by Davis to be "of the mild variety."⁷

The "mild variety" of Barrow's kind needs further explanation. Davis notes that Barrow's punishment was "only severe enough to be conducive to good discipline,"⁸ but "[b]rutal whippings, followed by duckings [dunkings] were administered on occasion,"⁹ and "[s]ome runaways were severely beaten upon being caught."¹⁰ How the term "severe" should be understood is made clear by an episode in Barrow's diary.

Runaways in Louisiana and other slave states were hunted with trained dogs. Davis cites the diary's account of the pursuit of such a slave. Barrow "ran and trailed [him] about a mile, treed him, made the dogs pull him out of the tree, [b]it him badly, think he will stay home a while."¹¹ An even more brutal example comes later. When a runaway is chased and caught, Barrow writes, the "dogs soon tore him naked…" Apparently, Barrow wanted to make an example of this same individual for the other slaves, so he arranged a horrifying instant replay: "…took him home before the negro[es] at dark [and] made the dogs give him another over hauling."¹² Examples like this leave no doubt that Bennet Barrow, presented as being representative of plantation owners in general by Fogel and Engermann in Time on the Cross, committed acts of extreme brutality and carefully recorded them.

Fogel and Engerman's statistics are as questionable as their impression of Barrow. Regarding the actual number of whippings on Barrow's plantation they write,

His plantation numbered about 200 slaves, of whom about 120 were in the labor force. The record shows that over the course of two years a total of 160 whippings were administered, and average of 0.7 whippings per hand per year. About half the hands were not whipped at all during the period.¹³ Fogel and Engerman's average is actually off by 69 percent.¹⁴ A close examination of Barrow's diary reveals that "two years" is really a period of 23 months.¹⁵ The number of whippings is not 160 but 175.¹⁶ The number of slaves is not 200 but 129.¹⁷ The labor force of 120 is really somewhere between 59 and 71.¹⁸ Utilizing all available records, including manuscript returns contained in the National Archives from the 1840 Census,¹⁹ Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch conclude,

Using their inaccurate count of the number of whippings, their greatly exaggerated estimate of the number of hands, and their erroneous measurement of the length of time covered, Fogel and Engerman estimated that Barrow's slaves received "an average of 0.7 whippings per hand per year." This statistic is also wrong. Each of their errors contributed to the substantial underestimate of the correct average of 1.19 whippings per hand per year, a figure 69 percent larger than that reported by Fogel and Engerman.²⁰ It should be kept in mind that 1.19 whippings per hand per year does not include other forms of punishment employed by Barrow besides the whip. Edwin Davis, the editor of Barrow's diary, writes that he was "constantly devising ingenious punishments, for he realized the uncertainty was an important aid in keeping his gangs well in hand."²¹ Examining Barrow's diary, Gutman and Sutch note that "[d]uring the two year period under consideration, Barrow jailed, chained, beat with a stick, threatened with death, shot with a gun, raked the heads of, and humiliated his slaves."²²

Wilkins and Wilson maintain against evidence to the contrary that whipping was not excessive because "it was far more in the master's interest to motivate his slaves by positive means."²³ For a master to have "devoted, hard-working, responsible men who identified their fortunes with the fortunes of their masters"²⁴ he didn't utilize the whip, but "a wide-ranging system of rewards."²⁵ The record kept by Barrow, however, shows his slaves never quite "identified" with him in this way. If the list of whippings recorded by Barrow is accurate, the 66 slaves listed as cotton pickers in Davis' edition of his diary²⁶ were whipped regularly. Gutman and Sutch have observed that 50 of these men and women experienced the whip a total of 130 times in a 23-month period.²⁷ It is further determined, by comparing the list of cotton pickers in Davis' appendix with the list of those female slaves who gave birth, that seven of the women whipped by Barrow during this period were mothers, one of them no fewer than four times.²⁸

Reading about plantation owners such as Barrow can be perplexing. According to Davis Barrow's slaves "were well-fed and housed [and] they received gifts of money at Christmas time"²⁹ and Barrow "provided medical attention on every necessary occasion."³⁰ Surely this was due, in large part, to running a successful plantation with a reasonably contented work force. There was also a form of friendship existing between some slaves and masters as shown in the admiration expressed in Barrow's comment on the death of one of his slaves as "a very great loss, one of the best negroes I ever saw or [k]new, [and] to his family as [good as] a white person."³¹ Yet, as seen above, he would brutally punish or hunt them with savage dogs, and diligently record it on the same pages without reflection. If Wilkins and Wilson want to prove that punishment on the typical plantation was different than what is demonstrated above in Barrow's diary, they will need to look for the proof elsewhere. It is certainly not found in the work of Fogel and Engerman.

APPENDIX ENDNOTES

- 1 Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Lanham, MD: University P of America, Inc., 1974).
- 2 Steve Wilkins, Douglas Wilson *Southern Slavery As It Was* (Moscow: Canon P, 1996) 28-29.
- 3 Fogel et al. 145. (emphasis mine).
- 4 Fogel et al. 145.
- 5 Edwin Adams Davis, ed., *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana 1836-1844, as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow (19431; New York: Columbia University P., 1967) 11.*
- 6 Davis, 38.
- 7 Davis, 50.
- 8 Davis, 49.
- 9 Davis, 50.
- 10 Davis, 50.
- 11 Davis, 48.
- 12 Davis, 49.
- 13 Fogel, et al., 145.
- 14 Paul David, Herbert Gutman, Richard Sutch, Peter Temin, and Gavin Wright, *Reckoning With Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Oxford University P. 1976) 63.
- 15 David, et al., 60.
- 16 David, et al., 61.
- 17 David, et al., 62.
- 18 David, et al., 61.
- 19 David, et al., 62.
- 20 David, et al., 62.
- 21 David, et al., 49.
- 22 David, et al., 63.
- 23 Wilkins, et al., 29.
- 24 Wilkins, et al., 29.
- 25 Wilkins, et al., 29.
- 26 Davis Appendix, 419-421.
- 27 David, et al., 65.
- 28 David, et al., 65.
- 29 Davis, 41.
- 30 Davis, 42.
- 31 Davis, 38.