

**Keeping Them in Line: The Power Struggle Between Master and Slave in
Antebellum America and Its Impact on Literary Works of the Period**

Jamicia Croskery

Master of Liberal Arts, English.

Auburn University at Montgomery

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Dr. Eric Sterling, Director

Dr. Robert Evans, Second Reader

Dr. Matthew Ragland, Associate Provost

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late Aunt Charlotte Senetta Watkins, whose death caught everyone who knew her by surprise. She always loved and supported me and my dreams. She always offered me a new way to do things and helped me to think outside of the box. As an aunt, she was warm, gentle, sweet, fun, and loving. I have a very close, small family, and Aunt Charlotte is the first limb to fall off of my family tree. I love her dearly, and although she is no longer physically with me, I know she is with me spiritually, which is why I dedicate this thesis to her. Fly high, Aunt Charlotte. I will forever keep your name, memory, and love alive.

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“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” – Jeremiah 29:11

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Abstract:

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss and analyze the actions of both slaves and slave masters during slavery in America. In my thesis, I discuss the slave trade, which helped shape the behavior of both slaves and slave owners. The slave trade affected the ways slaves tried to survive, the ways they showed their resistance, and the drastic measures slave masters resorted to in order to maintain power and control so that they too could survive. In addition, I discuss the ways slave masters tried to maintain power and control over their slaves and how slaves resisted slavery in America. I also include and discuss some obscure African-American slave poems of the nineteenth century that have not been analyzed previously.

As an undergraduate and graduate student, I have read and researched articles, narratives, books, and additional materials (such as folk tales) that have helped me tremendously in writing my thesis.

From Africa to America

1.1: Introduction and Illustrative Poems

Slavery in America is a well-known historical event. Ever since the slave trade began in the sixteenth century, slaves took drastic measures in order to survive the dreadful journey to the New World. The slave trade, also known as the *triangular trade* because of the triangular route ships followed, was the process that brought African slaves to the *New World*, or America. The ships transported valuable goods to different parts of Africa, and these goods were then traded for slaves. After receiving their traded goods, slave traders chained captured slaves and would force them to march for several days or weeks to a slave fort where they waited for the latest slave ship to depart.

Although crew members were not considered slave masters, they still controlled the slaves, and they resorted to drastic measures in order to maintain power and control on the ship, so that they too could survive the harsh conditions on board. A poem whose author is identified only as “G” – a poem published in May 1825 in *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* and not republished since then – gives some sense of how it might have felt to be taken and enslaved. In this case the speaker of the poem is an African prince whose captivity seems all the worse to him because of his once-great status:

*Written on perusing in the last number,
the account of the African Chieftain.*

And must this mighty spirit yield
This frame robust give up its breath;
Not nobly on the bloody field
Where valour sinks in death.
But bound with an inglorious chain,
The scorn of every coward slave;
The thought is madness—I disdain
To die but with the brave.
Break! break! these fetters and I'll bring
A precious treasure to your hand—
Know I'm the brother of a king,
Who rules a golden land.
These massy rings assert my fame,
I've wealth concealed within my hair;
More shall be yours, if more you claim,
But save me from despair.
Thus spake the Chieftain, while the tear
Stole silent down his manly face;
Not death, not death, he cried, I fear—
I fear but this disgrace.

Bold mountains of my native land,
 I'm lost—nor ever more shall see
 Those rugged heights, that daring stand
 And say we shall be free.
 O give me drink, my hopes are dead,
 In mercy break this cursed chain;
 Act like the lion, take my head,
 But not prolong my pain.
 Souls of the mighty Chiefs, whose blood
 Flow'd freely on that dreadful day,
 You saw my deeds, how firm I stood,
 Take, take, this chain away. G.

Although the precise identity (and even the racial background) of the author of this poem is unknown, the poem is valuable as a record of how many slaves probably did feel, or at least of how their feelings were imagined by opponents of slavery in the early nineteenth century.

Another poem, also published in 1825 in *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* (in the October 1 issue), also depicts what it must have been like to be enslaved. In this poem, however, different kinds of slaves are mentioned, not just an enslaved member of African royalty:

TO THE FIRST SLAVE SHIP.

“In August, 1620, a Dutch man of war landed twenty negroes for sale,
at Jamestown ; the *first slaves* ever brought into the Country.”—

Beverley's history of Virginia.

First of that race, which curst the wave

And from his rifled cabin bore,

Inheritor of woe,—*the slave*

To bless his palm tree's shade no more.

Dire engine!—oe'r the trouble[d] main,

Borne on in unresisted state,

Know'st thou within thy dark domain,

The horrors of thy prison'd freight?

The fetter'd chieftain's burning tear,

The parted lover's, mute despair,

The childless mother's pang severe,

The orphan's agony are there.

Hear'st thou *their* moans whom hope has fled,

Wild cries, and agonizing starts?

Know'st thou thy humid sails are spread

With ceaseless sighs, from breaking hearts?

Ah! could'st thou from the scroll of fate

The miseries read of future years,

Stripes, tortures, unrelenting hate,

And death gasps drown'd in ceaseless tears,
Down, down beneath the cleaving main
Thou fain wouldst plunge where monsters lie,
Rather than ope the gates of pain
For time, and for eternity.
Oh Africk! what has been thy crime?
That thus like Eden's fratricide,
A mark is set upon thy clime,
And every brother shuns thy side.
Yet are thy wrongs, thou long distrest!
Thy burden by the world unweigh'd,
Safe in that *Unforgetful Breast*
Where all the sins of earth are laid.
The sun upon thy forehead frown'd,
But man, more cruel far than he,
Dark fetters on thy spirit bound,
Look to the mansion of the free!
Look to that realm where chains unbind,
Where powerless falls the threatning rod,
And where the patient sufferers find,
A friend,—a father in their God.

L. H. S.

In this case, the author's initials – "L. H. S." – suggest that the poem was written by a white woman named Lydia Huntley Sigourney, who lived in Hartford, Connecticut. In fact, the poem was several times attributed to her in the nineteenth century, although it does not seem to have been republished in a modern edition. Sigourney is typical of many white abolitionists who lamented the way black Africans had been treated by white slavers.

As her closing lines suggest, Sigourney is also typical of various people of her time who thought that belief in Christ could offer some hope to the people who suffered from slavery, especially the enslaved themselves. This belief is also expressed in another poem from yet another issue of the African Repository – in this case the issue of June 1, 1826:

Stanzas.

Light of the world arise! Arise!

On Africa thy glories shed;

Fetter'd, in darkness deep she lies

With weeping eye, and drooping head.

Through gloomy wilds which shade her shore,

The blood-stain'd murderer seeks his prey;

Those shrieks,—that light—'tis seen no more,

The victims where, O where are they?

Why heed their doom? for hope can give
 To death e'en beauty's softest light;
 It conquers pain, its raptures live,
 When fades whate'er of earth is bright.

But what avails if yet unknown,
 Hope's kindling flame and living power?
 Come they not from the eternal Throne?
 Cheer they the sinner's dying hour?

Light of the world arise! arise!
 Millions in tears await the day;
 Shine cloudless, forth, O cheer our eyes,
 And banish sin and grief away.

The author of this poem is not identified, although another nineteenth-century source suggests that it may have been written by “Rev. W. Croswell,” who seems to have been a white missionary (*History of the American Baptist African and Haytien Missions* 68-70). We do, however, know the author of the following poem. Based on the location and initials printed at the end of the work, this seems to be another poem by Lydia Huntley Sigourney. It was printed in the March 1, 1829 issue of the *African Repository*:

Appeal to New England for Missions to
 Africa.

When injured Africk's captive claim,
 Loads the sad gale with startling moan,
The frown of deep, indignant blame,
 Bend not on *Southern climes* alone.

Her toil, and chain, and scalding tear
 Our daily board with luxuries deck,
And to dark Slavery's yoke severe,
 Our fathers helped to bow her neck.

If slumbering in the thoughtful breast,
 Or Justice or Compassion dwell,
Call from their couch the hallowed guest,
 The deed to prompt, the prayer to swell.

Oh, lift the hand, and Peace shall bear
 Her olive where the palm-tree grows,
And torrid Africk's deserts share
 The fragrance of Salvation's rose.

But if with Pilate's stoic eye.
 We calmly *wash* when blood is spilt,

Or deem a cold, unpitying sigh

Absolves us from the stain of guilt;

Or if, like Jacob's recreant train,

Who traffick'd in a brother's woe,

We hear the suppliant plead in vain,

Or mock his tears that wildly flow;

Will not the judgments of the skies,

Which threw a shield round Joseph sold,

Be roused by fettered Afric's cries,

And change to dross the oppressor's gold?

Hartford, Conn.

L. H. S.

This poem is especially interesting for the ways it implicates northerners in general (and New Englanders in particular) in responsibility for the slave trade. Sigourney suggests that ancestors of present-day northerners helped discover the trade in the past, and she also suggests that current northerners benefit from the trade and therefore have a responsibility to help end it. White southerners, she suggests, are not the only persons who have blood on their hands.

Rules and Regulations

2.1: Slave Codes and Laws

Once slaves reached America, they were inspected and auctioned off like chattel. They were sent to different plantations and worked a variety of tasks. Many slaves were mistreated by their masters and were forced to resort to drastic measures in order to survive, as well as to demonstrate their resistance towards slavery.

Slave masters needed to maintain power and control over their slaves because they had almost as much reason to fear their slaves as their slaves had to fear them. Although slave masters had several resources that slaves lacked, slaves could revolt at any moment, or they could endanger the lives of slave masters through other dangerous means.

The more masters tried to control slaves, the more slaves resisted slavery; thus, the struggle for power was a never-ending battle between master and slave.

Slaves were considered chattel who had no basic rights and did not deserve them. There were laws and codes by which slaves had to abide. These laws were unfair and unjust; however, they were enforced by the government to make sure slaves were held

liable for their actions and were kept subjugated. Slaves knew that slaveholders considered them inferior because of their race; therefore, they were required to show respect and obedience to all whites. Acting “‘out of place’ – a phrase which covered the whole range of etiquette – might bring a quick reprisal on the spot or a trip to the Mayor’s Court and a ‘correction’ in the municipal jail” (Wade 181).

Slaves were not allowed to leave plantations without permission and thus were required to travel with written passes. The passes usually gave the name of the slave and his or her owner, the location where the slave was going, and the time when he or she was expected to return back to the plantation. If a slave was caught wandering without a pass, he or she could be taken to jail. Although slaves would be taken to jail, they normally did not stay there long because “masters insisted that their property not be detained needlessly” (Wade 185). In addition, slaves were needed for labor; therefore, as long as a slave was in jail, he would not be able to perform any labor, which diminished the plantation owner’s profit. Slaves could neither testify in court nor speak unless spoken to; therefore, a sentence, normally a whipping or some type of labor, was given without a slave having a fair trial or being able to defend himself. Nevertheless, whipping “served the system of bondage by permitting stiff penalties without depriving the master of his chattel’s labor for any extended period” (Wade 186).

Slave codes were enforced to keep slaves in line. For example, it was illegal for slaves to carry firearms. Furthermore, slaves were forbidden to receive an education so that they would not be empowered or do things such as reading or altering the aforementioned travel passes. Marriage was not legally recognized between slaves

because they were considered chattel who had no rights and could be bought and sold at any time. All of these codes were enforced to keep slaves inferior and in their place.

On plantations, masters devised their own set of rules to keep slaves in line. Slaves had a curfew that was strictly enforced and “the master or overseer was to tour the cabins at night to see that none were missing” (Stampp 149). Any slave out past curfew would be punished normally by being flogged.

2.2: The Fugitive Slave Law

The laws against slaves were very unjust and fair. Many slaves resisted the laws and codes by running away, which only made the government enact stricter laws. Certain states within the United States had abolished slavery, and it was thought that a lot of slaves would try to run away to those free states. The Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1793, and it stated that all runaway slaves were to be returned to their masters and any individuals who assisted them in their flight would suffer a consequence of being fined and even imprisoned. Nevertheless, “widespread resistance to the 1793 law later led to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which added further provisions regarding runaways and levied even harsher punishments for interfering in their capture” (History.com Staff).

As slaves further resisted the act by trying to escape North and to Canada, especially through the Underground Railroad, the Fugitive Act was amended (and

changed to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850) to enforce stricter rules regarding runaway slaves.

Protest against the Fugitive Slave Act was widespread, especially in the north, and was sometime expressed in poetry. Many poems about the Act have already been printed in modern editions. The following poem, however, was published in England in a book by an anonymous author. The book, published in London in 1861, was titled *The Icon Poems: Sibylline Leaves from Icon, and Other Poems*. A footnote explained that “[t]hese lines were written at a time of great political excitement in the United States, owing to the effects of the ‘Fugitive Slave Law.’” In the poem, titled “The Good Citizen.” the author cautions against use of violence to oppose even a law as unjust as this one:

Sick at heart, I pray,
 My God, to thee,
 May the curse of our land
 To Hades flee!
 Long have our brethren
 Been sorely oppressed!
 Long hath the lash been heard!
 O! let it rest!

Forgive this nation’s law,
 Though it be banned,
 Both by thee, God, and man,

On every hand,
Save where the CURSE hath made,
Alas! to tell,
Hearts black as pirate's trade,
Cruel as Hell.

Obey thy country's law,
Though it be ill,
Nor ever weapon draw,
For good or ill,
Upon thy fellow-man,
Countrymen, too,
Days of dread—terror fled,
Thus to renew.

Thank God for government
Righteous and free,
Save where ONE blast has rent
Liberty's tree.
Pray to him, that the right
Mighty may prove;
Let the VOTE, not the FIGHT,
Plague-spots remove.

To distress and its voice,
 Aye lend an ear,
 Though the thief, deep in vice,
 Or the slave appear!
 Relieve thy fellow-man,
 Whate'er his crime;
 Aid the poor fugitive,
 Ask not his clime.

Another anti-slavery poem seems to allude to the Fugitive Slave Act, or at least to the escapes that prompted passage of the act. This poem by Elias Smith, contained in an 1840 collection of *Anti-Slavery Songs*, seems not to have been republished since then:

FUGITIVE'S TRIUMPH.

Go, go, thou that enslav'st me,
 Now, now thy power is o'er ;
 Long, long have I obeyed thee,
 I'm not a slave any more ;
 No, no— oh, no !
 I'm a free man ever more!

Thou, thou brought'st me ever,
 Deep, deep sorrow and pain;

But I have left thee forever,

Nor will I serve thee again.

No, no—oh, no!

No, I'll not serve thee again.

Tyrant! thou hast bereft me

Home, friends, pleasures so sweet;

Now, forever I've left thee,

Thou and I never shall meet;

No, no—oh, no!

Thou and I never shall meet.

Joys, joys, bright as the morning,

Now, now, on me will pour,

Hope, hope, on me is dawning,

I'm not a slave any more !

No, no—oh, no,

I'm a FREE MAN evermore !

Whether or not the actual author of this poem was himself an African American is difficult to say, but clearly the poem expresses the desire for, and joy of, freedom felt by many of the people who were able to escape their condition of slavery.

Yet another poem, based on the life of an escaped slave named Archy Moore, was composed by William Henry Burleigh and published in 1841 in Philadelphia and seems

not to have been republished since then. Burleigh imagines Moore as a man so full of anger at having been enslaved that he foresees an eventually violent overthrow of slavery:

Archy Moore.

From my heel I have broken the chain;

I have shivered the yoke from my neck!

Free!—free!—as the plover that rides on the main-

As the waters that dash o'er our deck :

In my bosom new feelings are born-

New hopes have sprung up in my path—

And I leave to my country defiance and scorn,

The curse of a fugitive's wrath!

My country?—away!—for the gifts which she gave

Were the whip and the fetter—the life of a slave!

Thank God! that a limit is set

To the reach of the tyrant's control!

That the down-trodden serf may not wholly forget

The right and the might of his soul!

That though years of oppression may dim

The fire on the heart's altar laid,

Yet, lit by the breath of Jehovah, like Him

It lives, and *shall* live, undecayed!

Will the fires of the mountain grow feeble and die?

Beware!—for the tread of the Earthquake is nigh!

Proud Land!—there is vengeance in store

For thy soul-crushing despots and thee-

When Mercy, grown faint, shall no longer implore,

But the day of thy recompense be-

When thy cup with the mixture of wrath

Shall be full—the Avenger, in power,

Shall sweep like a tempest of fire o'er thy path,

Consuming the tree and the flower-

And thy mountains shall echo the shriek of despair,

While the smoke of thy torment shall darken the air!

Wo! wo! to the forgers of chains,

Who trample the image of God:

Calls for vengeance the blood of the bondman, which stains

The cursed and the verdureless sod |

Ye may tread on the poor—but not long !

Ye may torture the weak—while ye dare !

But wo!—for the arm of a People is strong

When nerved by revenge and despair!

Let the fetter be tightened !—the sooner 'twill break!

Trample on!—and the serf shall more quickly awake!

* * * * *

My country!—the land of my birth !

Farewell to thy fetters and thee!

The by-word of tyrants—the scorn of the earth-

A mockery to all shalt thou be!

Hurra! for the sea and its waves !

Ye billows and surges—all hail!

My brothers henceforth—for ye scorn to be slaves,

As ye toss up your crests to the gale!

Farewell to the land of the “charter and chain,”-

My path is away o’er the fetterless main!

In this poem, Moore imagines escaping not simply to the north but to the ocean and, presumably, to someplace other than America.

Slavery in America

3.1: Life on the Plantation

Slavery was an integral part of the capitalistic American society. Slaves were needed for domestic and field labor because “the hungry European market for rice, sugar, and tobacco could not be satisfied without laborers to work . . .” (Streissguth 9), so slaves needed to work efficiently so that crops could be planted and harvested, and profit could be made. Once slaves were purchased, “[I]mmediately owners and their overseers sought to obliterate the identities of their newly acquired slaves” (“Arrival in the Americas”). A name is a person’s identity. Slave masters exercised their power and control over slaves by changing their slaves’ names and forcing them to recognize and respond to their new names and identities. In other words, by changing their slaves’ names, masters showed that they had complete power and control over their slaves.

Furthermore, by changing a slave's name, masters further emphasized that slaves were chattel and could be stripped of their names and identities because they were property: "Contrary to legend, most slaveholders did not give their slaves ridiculous or fanciful names" (Genovese 448). Names signified respect and status; therefore, a master was unlikely to give his slaves idiotic names. Sometimes, masters "gave their slaves surnames; most often, with or without their masters' consent or even knowledge, the slaves took surnames for themselves" (Genovese 445). There were some slaves who embraced the name-changing because it gave them a sense of completeness. For examples, some slaves chose to take the name of former masters, whether kind or cruel, because it gave them a real history, background, and identity, especially if their ancestors shared the master's same last name.

Most slaves were given simple names; however, as an act of resistance, some slaves kept their African names, but when threatened with being flogged or worse, they had to adapt to their new names and identities in order to escape punishment and survive.

3.2: Slave Labor

Life on the plantation was a major adjustment for slaves. In addition to being stripped of their African names and identities, slaves were forced to labor hard and make profit for their masters: "Men served as cooks, coachmen, butlers, and valets. Many enslaved men also worked as artisans along with their owners" (Williams 35). The women were expected to cook, clean, and nurse their mistress' children. Either male or female slaves could work in the fields, which was a life of hard, endless labor. One of the most powerful of various poems about such labor is a work called "The Song of the

Hoe," which was published in 1849 and which apparently has not been subsequently reprinted:

THE SONG OF THE HOE.

With sinews weary and worn,

With tears that ever flow,

A woman stands in tow cloth rags,

Plying her mattock and hoe—

Dig! Dig! Dig!

In weariness, weeping and woe,

And still with a heart with sorrow big

She sang the "Song of the hoe."

Work—work—work!

While the master is sunning himself,

And work! work! work!

While the wretch is counting his pelf:

It's O, to be a slave—

A slave under an Arab's hand—

Where woman has never a soul to save,

If this be a Christian land.

And work! work! work!

With an infant strapped to the hip,

Work! work! work!

With the crack of the driver's whip.

Plant—and hill—and pick,

And pick, and hill, and plant,

'Till I almost sleep with bowing low,

And murmur liberty's chant.

Oh! men, with sisters dear!

Oh! men, with mothers and wives!

It is not cotton you're wearing out,

But human being's [sic] lives.

Dig! Dig! Dig!

In sorrow, and sickness, and want;

Digging at once with a feeble hand,

A grave—and a hole for a plant.

"A grave!" I long for a grave!

There is rest from the weary task;

O! glad should I be would death appear,

I would smile at his hideous mask.

It seems so like a friend!

Because of my bitter grief;
O, God! that this life might end,
That death might bring relief!

Work! work! work!
My labor never flags:
And what are my wages? a bed of earth,
A quart of corn and rags!
To be robbed of my children dear,
To hear them cry in vain;
To see my husband sold like a brute,
Marched off in the clanking chain.

Dig! dig! dig!
From dawn till the stars are bright
Dig! dig! dig!
No hope to make labor light.
Hill—and plant—and pick,
Pick—and plant—and hill:
Till the heart is faint and the blood's on fire,
And the lash cuts to the quick.

Work! work! work!

Through winter, dreary and lone,

And work! work! work!

When spring and summer are come;

While the birds, on a free, light wing,
Seem to mock me with freedom's song.

While smarting still from the stinging lash,
My unpaid toil prolong.

Oh, but to breathe the breath

Of Northern breezes sweet,
With God's blue heavens above my head,
And Canada under my feet!

O for the start of day
Of the bloodhound so cruel and fleet!
Swift as the wind would I speed away,
My brethren in freedom to greet.

Oh, for one short hour,

Oh, for one resting day;
No moment to feel love's soothing power;
No moment to rest or pray.
A little weeping would ease my heart.

But my tears away I dash,
My tears must stop for every drop
Calls down the merciless lash.

With sinews weary and worn,
 With eyes red with tears' hot flow,
Columbia's daughter, in tow-cloth rags,
 Still she plies her heavy slave hoe.
 Dig! Dig! Dig!
In weariness weeping and woe,
And still with a heart with sorrow big,
She sang this "Song of the hoe."

The slaves were very skillful and crafty, which alarmed poor whites who felt threatened by their competition and the danger that they could represent. In order to secure jobs and diminish slaves,

[W]hites challenged black people's ability to perform intellectual work. Diminishing their intellect was yet another way to justify enslaving African Americans, and it had the added benefit of preserving some type of work for whites, and creating and maintaining clear social and economic boundaries between blacks and whites. (Williams 36)

House servants, who could be male or female, tended to the house, cooked, and cared for the master's children. Although they were not outside in the fields, they (in order to survive and not be punished) had to make sure their work was up to par because they were under closer scrutiny by their masters than field slaves.

Work and profit were very important during slavery in America: "enslaved people in the North and the South performed a wide array of labor, but from the 1600s to 1865, the vast majority worked in agriculture producing the cash crops that generated the wealth of the nation" (Williams 39-40). Slaves worked hard to produce sugarcane, cotton, rice, tobacco, and other goods.

Cotton was a hot commodity, and slaves were needed to pick the cotton. After Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, which made it easier to remove seeds from cotton fiber, slave labor actually increased:

. . . white Americans dislocated approximately one million African Americans through the domestic slave trade, moving them from the Upper South to the Lower South and westward, destroying families, and severing community ties in order to create plantations and cultivate cotton.

(Williams 46)

Slaves worked a variety of jobs, which helped the nation prosper. Paradoxically, slaves often took pride in their work because, by exemplifying great skill, craft, and labor, slaves resisted the notion that they were inferior and emphasized that they were talented and intelligent beings whose humanity and skills deserved recognition. Nevertheless,

there is no denying that the work of most slaves was hard, backbreaking, and depressing, as the following poem by John Pierpont (and apparently not reprinted since the nineteenth century) suggests:

OFT IN THE CHILLY NIGHT.

BY PIERPONT.

Oft in the chilly night,
 Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
When all her silvery light
 The moon is pouring round me,
Beneath its ray I kneel and pray
 That God would give some token
That slavery's chains on Southern plains,
 Shall all ere long be broken ;
Yes, in the chilling night,
 Though slavery's chain has bound me,
Kneel I, and feel the might
 Of God's right arm around roe.

When at the driver's call,
 In cold or sultry weather.
We slaves, both great and small,
 Turn out to toil together,

I feel like one from whom the sun
 Of hope has long departed ;
 And morning's light, and weary night,
 Still find me broken-hearted :
 Thus, when the chilly breath
 Of night is sighing round me,
 Kneel I, and wish that death
 In his cold chain had bound me.

3.3: Slave Management

Slaves were forced to perform labor, so profit could be made. However, there were some slaves who resisted their work and refused to work at all. Masters got creative in thinking of ways to make slaves work, either by punishing slaves or rewarding them. Being that no two slaves were alike, careful consideration was to be made when managing slaves. Some had to be threatened, flattered, or even bribed.

In order to manage their slaves efficiently and keep them in line while working efficiently, masters had to ensure that slaves realized their place. Race was used as a justification for slavery, and masters used slaves' "blackness" to justify why they were inferior beings who were destined to be slaves. Slaves had "to know and keep their places,' to 'feel the difference between master and slave,' to understand that bondage was their natural status" (Stampp 145). In other words, they needed to understand that their "blackness" was the reason for their inferiority and bondage in slavery. This emphasis on blackness as a cause of slavery can be seen in an anti-slavery poem called "Topsy. Or the

Slave Girl's Appeal," which seems not to have been reprinted in its full form since its original publication in the mid-nineteenth century:

Come and list to little Topsy,
Hear a little slave girl's tale,
Sure I am, her simple story
Oft will make thy cheek turn pale.

"Ladies, I ne'er knew a mother,
'Spects I never mother had,
Nor a father, sister, brother;
Missus said "I was too bad."

Always was a little nigger,
Knows not yet how old I are;
But I thinks I'm rather bigger,
Since the time I came so far.

Tho' I still am very naughty,
And a sad, ungrateful child,
Yet, since good Miss Feely taught me,
I'm not quite so rude and wild.

Ah! when first Miss Eva touched me,

with her soft and pretty hand,
Not a more degraded nigger
Crept or walked upon the land.

Full of tricks, as thieving, lying,
Hating all with wicked hate;
Getting punished, roaring, crying,
That was my most wicked state.

Then Miss Eva looked so loving,
Spoke so sweetly in my ear,
Told me I was worth improving,
Said, 'I nothing had to fear.'

But I scarcely could believe her;
Always thought I was too bad
Nigger always be deceiver,
Always sorry, never glad.

Then she talked of God and heaven,
Said a nigger had a soul,
Blacks, like whites, could be forgiven,
Broken hearts could be made whole.

No! Miss Eva, never! never !

My old Missus always said

Niggers had no feelings ever,

Lash them, whip them, till they dead

No, Miss Eva, nothing change me,

'Cept my black skin turn quite white;

You and massa treat me kindly,

Still I never can do right.”

Tho' Miss Feely tries to like me,

Yet if I but touch her clothes,

With a push, she'll drive me from her;

Hates me like a toad, I s'pose.

While I talked the tears were dropping

From poor Missey Eva's eyes,

And my breath seemed nearly stopping

From her side I could not rise.

Missey weep for naughty Topsy

White girl cry for nigger black!

From that moment I felt better,

All my hatred turned quite back.

“Topsy, Topsy Eva loves you,

And she wants you to be good.”

What! Miss Eva love poor Topsy.

Wicked Topsy, wild and rude :

Missey died,—and went to heaven,

Where poor Topsy hopes to go

Hopes to have her sins forgiven,

Black girl’s soul made white as snow[.]

Uncle Tom had told Miss Eva

All about a Savior’s love

Topsy 'spects the time is coming

When she'll meet them both above.

Here I am, a slave no longer,

Good Miss Feely made me free, -

Every day my love grows stronger

For Miss Feely’s love to me.

Still I'm ignorant and careless,
Little do and little know,
But I hope with kinder teaching,
Every day I'll wiser grow."

Topsy's tale, my friends, is ended,
'Tis the tale of every slave;
Let your feelings be suspended
Your attention we would crave.

Shall we still uphold a system
Which our nation's glory stains?
Leave to misery the victim
Whom foul slavery retains?

No! our better feelings token,
Christianity declares,
Slavery's chains must be broken
God will hear the black man's prayers.

Sighs and groans each hour ascending
Will not disregarded be
God his ear in mercy bending,

Soon will set the negro free.

Bolton, England, Oct. 19th, 1852.

This poem is especially interesting because it shows how slave owners tried to destroy the slaves' self-respect and make them think they were worthless. Physical punishment was bad enough, but psychological oppression could be devastating in its own ways.

Another poem that deals with the race of African Americans as a justification for enslaving them is a long anti-slavery poem by James Reid of Hebron, New York. Reid, an opponent of slavery, wrote a long work titled *King Slavery's Council; or The Midnight Conclave: A Poem* (1844). In this poem, which has not been reprinted since it was originally published, a defender of slavery is given a chance to explain why blacks deserve to be enslaved:

It is a fact fools only will dispute,
 That negroes have not souls more than the brute:
 And hence it may, most fairly be presum'd
 That they like them, by nature's laws are doom'd,
 To be forever servants to the Whites,
 To minister unto their appetites.
 Their flattened nose, their cu'rly woolly hair,
 Their oily lamp black skin, aloud declare,
 That they belong to quite another race,
 And so should occupy a lower place.
 But more, their dull and obtuse minds likewise,

In strength of intellect, which scarcely rise
 Above what writers uniform describe,
 As manifested by the monkey tribe:
 Conclusive shows that nature has designed,
 They should be slaves to others of mankind. (13)

Slave-owning whites used these kinds of arguments to justify slavery to themselves and others. But of course they also transmitted the same kinds of ideas to the slaves themselves, thereby enslaving their bodies by denigrating their minds and souls.

Masters knew that they had to train their slaves and break them into working how they wanted them to and “in most cases there was no end to the need for control – at least not until old age reduced the slave to a condition of helplessness” (Stamp 144). The first step to managing slaves was to set up a disciplinary plan. A slave needed to understand that his master was in charge and that he was to obey his master’s orders at all times because failure to do so would result in punishment. It was up to the master to establish rules and make sure that his slaves abided by the rules. If a slave did not obey his master, it was up to the master to make sure that the slave was punished, in order to exemplify that disobedience of any kind would not be accepted and that failure to obey and respect the master would result in punishment.

Furthermore, masters needed to instill fear in their slaves not only to break them in, but to maintain power and control over their slaves as well. Slaves needed to fear whites completely, so much that a small white child could order an adult slave to do something, and he or she would obey out of fear. This fear would arise out of the notion that any white person was superior simply because of his or her race. In addition, masters

instilled the fear of being sold to a worse plantation, where slaves were treated mercilessly, if slaves did not labor hard or attempted to runaway.

On the contrary, some masters sought to manage their slaves by being kind to them. They believed that if they showed benevolence towards their slaves, then the slaves would feel appreciated and thus want to impress their masters. In addition, some masters believed that “negroes, like children, instinctively loved a kind master who ministered generously to their wants” (Stampp 163). In other words, if a master was kind to a slave and told the slave that laboring benefitted the slave as well, then it was more likely that a slave would be obedient and labor efficiently.

When it came to managing slave labor, a lot of masters used either punishment or rewards. Rewards were given to slaves who performed their work efficiently; however, rewards, or incentives, were also given to bribe slaves to work harder. For example,

A farmer explained his method thus: ‘If I ever notice one of ‘em getting a little slack, I just talk to him; tell him we must get out of the grass, . . . and then, maybe, I slip a dollar into his hand, and when he gits into the field he’ll go ahead, and the rest seeing him, won’t let themselves be distanced by him. (Stampp 164)

Although masters could have simply praised slaves for their good work, they saw the important and benefit of adding a cash reward to encourage slaves to keep up their hard work.

Besides cash rewards, masters would reward hard-working slaves with their own plot to grow their own crop. This was a very effective incentive because slaves could grow and sell their own crops or exchange it for valuable goods, which gave them a sense of having their own purpose and independence. In addition, slaves could grow their own food, which would limit them having to steal food from their masters. Because slaves had their own crops and profits to make, the chances of them rebelling or running away greatly decreased because it would be very senseless to leave all of that behind or chance having it all taken away by being acting out of line.

There were some masters who were not fond of the idea of allowing slaves to grow and sell their own crops because it made them too independent, and slaves needed to depend fully on their master. Therefore, instead of allowing slaves to grow and sell their own crops, some masters would continue to give out cash rewards and cash bonuses, especially during the holidays. If cash were not given, masters would reward their slaves with food and clothing, and “the value and quantity of the presents often depended upon their conduct during the past year.

There were some masters who resisted the rewards and incentives system altogether. They believed that those methods and acts of persuading slaves to work was ineffective because some slaves did not respond well to the incentives and others took advantage of the rewards system; therefore, they had to be made to work and punished for ineffective labor. These masters also believed that without punishment, masters would lack control over their slaves. There were a lot of ways a slave could be punished. For example, masters “demoted unfaithful domestics, foremen, and drivers to field labor.

They denied passes to incorrigibles, or excluded them from participating in Saturday night dances” (Stampp 172).

In addition, slaves included on a “punishment list” had to serve other slaves food without getting any of the food themselves. Denying a person food is already a cruel, degrading act; however, forcing someone to serve someone else food without getting any himself is putting the idea in the server’s mind that he or she is not worthy enough to eat and should work harder and obey so that he or she too could eat as well.

Furthermore, in order to punish slaves, some were sold away from their loved ones. In *The Peculiar Institution*, Kenneth Stampp discusses some of the creative ways slaves were punished, which tended to be more mentally abusive than physically abusive. For example, “A Maryland tobacco grower forced a hand to eat the worms he failed to pick off of the tobacco leaves” (Stampp 172).

Another example involved one slave being punished by having to dine with the white family. This act was mentally abusive because there are some people who do not like eating in front of others, so if this slave had to dine with the white family and they were all laughing at his table manners in comparison to theirs, which would definitely be humiliating for him. In addition, “A Louisiana planter humiliated disobedient male field-hands by giving them ‘women’s work’ such as washing clothes, by dressing them in women’s clothing, and by exhibiting them on a scaffold wearing a red flannel cap” (Stampp 172).

When masters resorted to drastic measures to punish slaves and keep them in line, slaves would run away. However, the power struggle between master and slave would continue, and once caught, slaves were chained in iron shackles. Although masters

devised a variety of punishments, flogging, severe whipping, was used the most. Flogging was not supposed to be used to the point of severely injuring a slave; however, it was to be used to demonstrate that slaves were inferior beings who were to obey whites and work hard or else they would be flogged. In other words, “the number of lashes should be in proportion to the nature of the offense and the character of the offender” (Stamp 175). A master was to whip when in a cool, state of mind so that he would not go overboard with lashing and possibly destroy his property.

The depression and despair caused by whipping in particular and slavery in general can be seen in a little-known poem attributed to Thomas Hill. It was published in 1843 and apparently has not been reprinted since then. In this poem, titled “The Mother’s Prayer,” Hill depicts the ways punishments and other sufferings could break a slave’s spirit:

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER.

Thou knowest, O God, my griefs,
 Thou see'st my bitter tears,
 Thou knowest all my sufferings past,
 And my foreboding fears.

My husband they have sold ;
 Alas ! the bitter day !
 Too true to leave me willingly,
 They forced him far away.

Our prattling infants, too,

Most piercing thought of all,
Sold into strangers' cruel hands,
What evils may befall!

I pray, O God, that thou
Wouldst take them from the earth,
I ask their death, who once from thee,
More madly, asked their birth.

O'er me, weighed down by care,
Pierced through by sorrow's stings,
O'er me, from day to day the same,
The slave-whip ceaseless swings.

I pray, O God, for him
Who causes all this woe;
Though he no mercy has for us,
To him thy mercy show.

No vengeance would I ask,
Let not thy wrath be felt,
But let thy goodness touch his heart,
Its stubborn hardness melt.

One thing at least I trust,
My only hope it is,
There'll be no slavery in the world

That follows after this.

James Reid, in his long anti-slavery poem from 1844 titled *King Slavery's Council*, details the psychological, physical, and even spiritual sufferings of black people crushed under slavery:

Consider well, ye Democrats and Whigs,
 So practiced in political intrigues,
 How many human beings have been sold,
 Since ye the nation's counsel have controled?
 How many vows of husbands and of wives,
 Ye have made void, embittered all their lives?
 What children ye have from their parents torn,
 That father's care and mother's kindness mourn?
 What stripes, what tortures, and what nameless wrongs,
 Your present strife for power, to slaves prolongs !
 And ponder well, how many of those slaves
 Each year descend as heathens to their graves,
 Whom ye've deprived of all, not only here,
 That life would make desirable or dear;
 But legislative power, in all its might,
 Has been applied to shut out gospel light;
 Done all you could, as 't were by madness driven,
 To shut 'gainst them at last the gates of heaven. (56-57)

To Reid and other opponents of slavery, the suffering of slaves here on earth was bad enough; even worse was the fact that so many slaves were prevented from learning and embracing the Christian truths that would save them from eternal punishment.

Maintaining Power and Control

4.1 Physical Tactics

Although some slaves took pride in their work, most resisted slave labor. Some slaves exemplified their resistance to slavery by being lazy and pretending not to understand their assigned work tasks. Slave masters resorted to harmful, physical tactics in order to maintain control over their slaves, as well as to keep them working hard and efficiently. It was very common for slave masters to flog their slaves. Furthermore, masters gave underlings permission to whip slaves as well.

Slaves were whipped so they would not try to escape or rebel against their master. It was common for a master to whip a slave in front of other slaves in order to instill fear and show them what happened to “bad niggers,” or “smart niggers,” phrases that would continue to be used from the period of American slavery through the Civil Rights Movement.

Richard William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman state that whipping “could be either a mild or severe punishment, depending on how it was administered. Some whippings were so severe that they resulted in death” (Fogel 144). Although some slaves were fatally whipped, most were not; after all, if a slave died, profit would be lost. In

order to maintain power and control, masters whipped their slaves to exemplify that they were to be respected and obeyed.

There were many reasons a slave would be whipped. If a slave went unpunished for disobeying or not finishing his or her work, other slaves would think it was acceptable to bend the rules; therefore, in order to maintain power and control, slave masters flogged disobedient slaves.

Furthermore, sometimes slaves were whipped just so they could be reminded of their inferior status. Flogging was administered “to ‘break in’ a young slave and to ‘break the spirit’ of an insubordinate older one. Although flogging was a common, if not the most common, tactic used during slavery in America, in order for slave masters to keep control over their slaves, there were other physical methods.

4.2: Rape

Rape was another tactic used by slave masters to keep control over their slaves. Although anyone can become a victim of sexual abuse and rape, during slavery, this act was more likely to happen to African-American women. Many narratives and films exemplify how common it was during slavery for African-American women to be raped by their white slave masters. For example, Kizzy in *Roots* and Hattie Pearl in *The Butler* are slave women who were raped by their slave masters.

Rape was used as a control method because the power acquired is arguably one of the sick satisfactions one gets from raping another. If one forces another to engage in a sexual act, then the aggressor is dominating and controlling the other person. So, rape was used as a physical (and mental) tactic to keep power because that is what the

aggressor was gaining from the victim . . . domination and control. In addition, slave men could not do anything to protect the women from being raped; therefore, rape was also used to demonstrate power over slave men as well.

Slave women were viewed as sexually promiscuous because of their cultural habits in Africa: “The idea that black women were exceptionally sensual first gained credence when Englishmen went to Africa to buy slaves. Unaccustomed to the manner in which people dressed when living in a tropical climate, Europeans mistook seminudity for lewdness” (White 29). It has long been a tradition for African women to expose their breasts and other parts of their bodies within their communities; doing so is part of their customs; therefore, when they were kidnapped and were wearing only partial clothing, African women were falsely considered to be sexually promiscuous.

Finally, slave masters viewed all slaves as their property; therefore, a master could do whatever he wanted to his property. Although some slave masters raped their slave women in order to maintain power and control, there were some slave women who refused to be damaged by the act of rape.

In her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs writes about sacrificing her purity just so she can survive: “It seems less degrading to give one’s self, than to submit to compulsion” (Jacobs 168). Harriet Jacobs was born a slave and early on she learned about modesty from “pure principles” (Jacobs 83) instilled in her by her grandmother; however, she sacrificed all of that and started a “relationship” with a white man named Mr. Sands so that she would not be raped by Dr. Flint and so that he would not have that type of control over her. Jacobs’ narrative demonstrates what a slave

woman had to endure and the sacrifices she had to make in order to survive her unfortunate circumstances during slavery.

Inevitably, rape produced many children with a mixed racial background. Such persons were usually called “mulattoes.” Even though they were partly white in their ancestry, they were still usually enslaved. The following poem, by Edward Hind, was published in 1853 but does not seem to have been republished since then:

MULATTO SLAVE SONG.

Who pleads for slavery from the skin
 Where black and white together blend?
 Where does your slavery's shade begin?
 Where does your pallid freedom end?
 Off with these fetters! set me free!
 You chain your flesh in chaining me!

No plea can justify my wrong!
 What can my darker brother's ?—speak!
 The plea that justifies the strong
 In trampling ever on the weak!
 Away, false Christian! such a plea
 Enslaved your race when his were free!

Did God create the black a slave?

The white his tyrant? tyrant, no!
 His arm as strong, his heart as brave,
 His thought as free as thine can flow!

Aspire unto the day shall see
 His body like his nature—free!

Another relevant poem apparently not republished since it first appeared in 1812 is by Joshua Marsden, a missionary apparently living in New York. Marsden's poem satirically describes the reactions of powerful white men who are outraged when Methodist preachers try to prevent them from sexually seducing their slaves. A footnote explains the origins of the poem as follows:

The following dialogue was written extempore from an authentic circumstance; a lively Methodist missionary in the Island of T—d, had awakened some mulatto girls, in the keeping of several official characters, which so exasperated the gentlemen, that they contrived to send God's minister to prison for the terrible crime. Some have said Paul was beheaded for converting one of Nero's favourite women.

Marsden's poem reads as follows:

THE CONVERTED MULATTOES,
 OR ENRAGED JUNTO.

SAYS the Judge to the Colonel, dear Colonel, I say,
 The Methodist dogs get our lasses away;
 Our lovely mulattoes and sweet jolly lasses
 Will all be undone by their canting grimaces.

Yesterday my dear Molly sigh'd sadly and said,
 It griev'd her to think what an ill life she led;
 She blubber'd, and whin'd about stuff and salvation,
 Till I swore she was mad, and got into a passion.

So I met the damn'd parson, and told him right roundly,
 If he preach'd any more so I'd drub him most soundly;
 But he like a canting knave told me he'd do it,
 I shook my cane at him, rascal, sirrah, you'll rue it.

And now, my dear Colonel, some method let's fall on,
 Or this devil will stamp, threaten, wheedle, and bawl on,
 Will rob us of all our mulattoes, I swear it,
 But confound the vile babbler, there's no one can bear it.

I'll go to old H—p [the island's governor] and tell him forsooth,
 For they say he has still a most lickerish tooth;

To watch his mulattoes, it has been asserted,
They'll slip through his fingers, and all get converted.

But stay, a good notion has enter'd my head,
I may but have dream'd it, or has it been said;
These rascally parsons will kindle sedition,
And therefore to stop them I'll quickly petition.

Yes, dam'em, petition, says the Colonel with speed,
Or else they'll sedition or something worse feed;
Their cant, and their clamour, there is no enduring,
For the villains launch out against drinking and wh—g [whoring].

Had I my own way, I would tip them a bullet,
'Tis the best recipe for a noisy man's gullet;
For were they allow'd to go on with their ranting,
The Island would echo with whining and canting.

So betwixt the gay Colonel and head of the bench,
Who lov'd his full bottle, his cards, and his wench;--
The parson was sent to the jail in a trice, sir:
To repent of converting mulattoes from vice, sir.

This poem seems to refer to slavery in a British territory, but it is clearly relevant to the fact that masters used their enslaved women for sexual purposes wherever slavery was practiced.

4.3 Mental Tactics

Physical tactics were commonly used to keep slaves in line; however, mental tactics were used as well and served the same purpose just as well. One mental tactic ties into the religious strategy, so they will be discussed together. When masters converted their slaves over to Christianity, they used the Bible to justify slavery and manipulate slaves by misinterpreting scriptures and telling slaves that they were to obey their masters because by doing so, they were being obedient to God.

Slave masters told their slaves that they were to be obedient to them because it was God's will. "The Curse of Ham" was a biblical story that was oftentimes used to justify slavery. In Genesis 9:20-27, Noah got drunk and fell asleep naked. His son, Ham, saw him and told his brothers, Japeth and Shem. Japeth and Shem covered Noah's naked body, but when he awakened from his drunken state, he knew that Ham had seen him naked and cursed Ham's son, Canaan:

Because Ham was the father of black people, and because he and his descendants were cursed to be slaves because of his sin against Noah,

some Christians said, "Africans and their descendants are destined to be servants, and should accept their status as slaves in fulfillment of biblical prophecy." (Evans)

Masters manipulated slaves into believing that they were meant to be slaves because the Bible said so. They purposely misinterpreted scriptures in order to justify slavery.

White pastors preached specific gospels to slaves that manipulated them into thinking that they were inferior, destined to be slaves, and were to accept their fate on Earth because things would get better in Heaven. In addition, white preachers preached the Ten Commandments, specifically the commandments against killing and stealing, so that slaves would refrain from trying to kill and steal from their masters. Religious teachings “not only benefit the slave in his moral relations, but enhances his value as an honest, faithful servant and laborer” (Stampp 156).

Slaves were taught to obey their masters because it was pleasing to God, “and they heard of the punishments awaiting the disobedient slave in the hereafter. They heard, too, that eternal salvation would be their reward for faithful service” (Stampp 158).

Slaves depicted their resistance towards slavery by attending night-meetings and worshipping in secrecy. Slaves would sing Negro spirituals to convey secret messages about worship meetings. Former slave Wash Wilson recalled:

When de niggers go round singin' 'Steal Away to Jesus,' dat mean dere gwine be a 'ligious meetin' dat night. De masters ... didn't like dem

'ligious meetin's so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night. (Raboteau)

Although slaves formed their own type of worship and had black preachers, the black preachers still had to preach sermons that were pleasing to whites so that they would not get in trouble. Nevertheless, in secrecy, black preachers resisted slavery by preaching about freedom. Religion was so commonly used to justify slavery that it became a common theme in African-American literature.

In *Sula* by Toni Morrison, one of the ways the Master tricks his slave is by using Heaven: "A joke. A nigger joke. That was the way it got started. Not the town, of course, but that part of town where the Negroes lived, the part they called the Bottom in spite of the fact that it was up in the hills" (Morrison, *Sula* 4). In *Sula*, the farmer makes a promise to one of his slaves that he will give him some land. When the slave asks for the land, his master plays a trick on him by telling him that another land, worse than what the slave had originally been promised, was better because it was closer to Heaven:

But it's high up in the hills," said the slave.

"High up from us," said the master, "but when God looks down, it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven--best land there is." So the slave pressed his master to try to get him some. He preferred it to the valley. (Morrison, *Sula* 4)

The valley was nicer than the bottom, but because the slave thought the land was closer to Heaven, he did not care: "He preferred it to the valley" because it was closer to God.

This anecdote exemplifies the Master using religion and mental trickery in order to maintain control over his slave.

The idea of using Christianity to justify slavery appears in many poems of the period. Normally these poems mock such justifications, either openly or implicitly. In James Reid's *King Slavery's Council*, for instance, a character named Infidelity outlines the religious case for slavery. Obviously Reid presents these arguments ironically – as examples of the hypocrisy of Christian slave owners. Infidelity says that if slaveholders can justify slavery by citing scripture, then

Christians will have no reason to complain.
 The scriptures teach that Abraham the good,
 The slav'ry cause in practise understood.
 And that a great proportion of his wealth,
 Was not acquired by force, nor fraud, nor stealth,
 Consisted in his slaves, as we are taught,
 Born in his house or with his money bought.
 Again when Moses led with mighty hand,
 The tribes of Israel up from Egypt's land,
 Thro' seas, thro' deserts, and thro' wilderness,
 The heathen Canaanite to dispossess;
 And gave them laws divine, to regulate
 The Hebrew policy of church and state,
 It was decreed a richer Hebrew might,
 Six years enslave a brother Israelite.

And they of heathen nations round them nigh.
Bondmen and maidens were allow'd to buy,
Who were henceforth perpetual slaves to be,
Nor go like others out at jubilee:
But after them descend in children's line,
A patrimony to the end of time.
And lest it might be thought, in after days,
When gospel light shone forth in brighter rays,
That Jewish law as well as Jewish' rite,
Were abrogated by the gospel's light,
'Twas taught by him who spake as never man,
Has ever spoken since the world began,
That he came not to make the prophets void,
Neither design'd the law to be destroy'd;
But rather came their precepts to fulfil
And leave its obligations binding still.
And thus we find, that, Philomel the good,
The law and prophet's precepts understood.
For he the ties of consanguinity
Regarding not, reduced to slavery,
His brother "in the flesh," as we are told,
By Paul, who wrote of him.in times of old.
Therefore my friends you see, plain as the light, .

That slavery is and ever has been right.
 That reason and the scriptures both agree,
 The negro has no claims to be set free.
 I then would ask, and ask that all may hear
 As well spectator as my fellow peer:
 By what authority and by what right,
 The Abolitionists both day and night,
 Go lectur'ing round, both out of doors and in,
 To show the world that slavery is a sin.
 You must then rise my friends, rise in your wrath—
 Let righteous indignation mark your path,
 Let ev'ry argument be keenly plyed,
 And leave no measures and no means untried,
 No arrows spare: what can be done, that do,
 Until these fanatics, this motley crew, ,
 Are driven from the field of public strife,
 And refuge take in shades of private life. (13-15)

Another example of an anti-slavery poem (from the 1849 collection of *Anti-Slavery Songs*) even raises the possibility that slaves might reject Christianity because the Christian religion was so often used to justify slavery. The poem is preceded by a note saying that the “power of the American slave claimants' [sic] piracy, is fortified by his alliance with American Christianity. Is it surprising that the victim of such combined

oppression, turns his back on a religion that consigns him to chattelism?" The poem (apparently unpublished since its original appearance) immediately follows the note:

THE SLAVE'S APPEAL TO THE INFIDEL.

Oh Infidel ! to you I turn,

In this my deep distress,

In Christian hearts no love will burn

For the slave in his bitterness.

My Master seeks the Christian's might,

To sanctify his wrong,—

And pliant Christians say 'tis right—

That I to him belong.

They take the Bible in their hand,

As warrant to steal children by,—

And thus we suffer through the land,

In wicked, bitter slavery.

I have appealed to them so long.

Have borne so long their bitter scorn,—

Their *Government* they must prolong,

Their Churches "*locks*" must not be shorn.

If churches rise at our expense

And governments sink as we ascend,

Then with the churches we'll dispense,

And governments wish none to defend.

Oh Infidel! against our cause

You, too, are mostly to be found;

Are you not shackled to the laws

That leave us unto slavery bound?

Come out, and show that human heart

Has to the Infidel been given;—

Then happier than the Christian's part

Will be your hope of Heaven.

Finally, one more example of a poem contemplating the relationship between slavery and Christianity might be cited. In her lengthy work titled *The Pleasures of Piety*, (1824), an Englishwoman named Eleanor Dickinson included these lines:

Lo! where Oppression rears his giant form,

On Indian shores, where sweeps the Atlantic storm:

Hark! from his lash what groans of anguish rise,

What cries of sorrow vibrate through the skies:

What forms are those that 'neath his rod,

Shrink from his presence, and obey his nod?

Afric's unhappy sons! compelled to roam
In hateful bondage, from their native home;
Scourged like the brute, which spurns its master's will,
Degraded, wronged, abused, but human still !
How looks the God of Heaven from above
Upon these sable children of His love?—
Regards He not their cry, sees not their tear,
Their bitter plaints, their sighs, will He not hear?
Assuredly He will, and in that scroll
Which the last awful day shall view unrol, [sic]
Records them all—then, whose the deeper stain,
The slave's who wore, or his who forged the chain? (58-59)

Dickinson's lines, which apparently have not been reprinted since they were first published, are among the many, many lines of poetry that either defended or condemned slavery by appealing to Christian beliefs.

Nat Turner's Rebellion

“I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened—the thunder rolled in the heavens, and blood flowed in streams.”—Nat Turner

5.1: Nat Turner's Life

Life on the plantation was very hard for slaves. The work conditions and unfair treatment were enough to frustrate any slave, especially Nat Turner. Nat Turner was born on October 2, 1800 in Southampton County, Virginia. Ever since he was a child, Turner believed he was a prophet. His mother had often told him that he was destined for greatness, and Turner believed her. Turner believed that he was able to see and imagine what others could not, which made him a special little boy.

Turner was not the typical slave child. He was far more intelligent than the others. He also learned to read and write, which was forbidden for slaves. Other slaves knew Turner was gifted. In *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Turner discussed how slaves would look to him for help because of his intelligence:

I was not addicted to stealing in my youth, nor have ever been — Yet such was the confidence of the negroes in the neighborhood, even at this early period in my life, in my superior judgment, that they would often carry me with them when they were going on any roguery, to plan for them.

Growing up among them, with this confidence in my superior judgment, and when this, in their opinions, was perfected by Divine inspiration, from the circumstances already alluded to in my infancy, and which belief was ever afterwards zealously inculcated by the austerity of my life and manners, which became the subject of remark by white and black. (Turner 23)

Turner's intelligence was marked by his fellow slaves and they sought his help and guidance. Turner did not seek trouble as his peers did. He knew he was destined for greatness; therefore, he spent the majority of his time praying and fasting. His superior intelligence along with his well-behaved manners and religious devotions were admired by other slaves, who looked up to him as a leader.

5.2: Nat Turner's Rebellion

Turner often had visions, which he spoke about with his fellow slaves, who believed that they came directly from God. Turner would often envision blacks and whites in battle. These visions convinced him that he was a prophet and that he had to do something to fulfill them. The sign that made Turner realize it was time to begin his work was a solar eclipse. Turner recruited several other slaves to join him in his rebellion; it

was not hard for him to convince people to join his rebellion, since he already had a group of followers. The rebellion went as follows:

On August 21, 1831, Turner and his supporters began their revolt against white slave owners . . . Turner gathered more supporters—growing to a group of up to 40 or 50 slaves—as he and his men continued their murder spree through the county. They were able to secure arms and horses from those they killed. Most sources say that about 55 white men, women and children died during Turner's rebellion. (Nat Turner)

Nat Turner led one of the bloodiest, most successful slave rebellions in America. He managed to kill many whites, paying no mind to their gender or age. Turner and a small group of slaves killed Turner's owner and the owner's family first. Afterwards, the slaves went to different plantations and began killing other whites and recruiting slaves to join their rebellion.

The slaves were on their way to Jerusalem, Virginia when their rebellion came to an end:

But before they could reach their destination, they were stopped by a heavily armed white militia. The Governor had called about three thousand militiamen to put down the rebellion. Seeing that they were greatly outnumbered, the insurgents disbanded, and many fled into the woods and swamps.

Turner was able to escape and hide out for six weeks. He was later found, tried, and convicted. He was sentenced to death and skinned: “Fifty-four other men were executed by the state. In addition, to terrorize the local African-American population, some of the militia decapitated about fifteen of the captured insurgents and put their heads on stakes” (Wood).

Turner and his followers wanted to send a message to whites that they resisted slavery and were willing to resort to barbaric methods in order to change their present situation and their race’s future. His rebellion frightened slave masters around America, which caused them to resort to drastic measures in order to maintain power and control over slaves and on their own plantations. Stricter slave codes were created and enforced, and emancipation in Virginia was rejected: “The fact that Nat Turner's revolt touched off any consideration of emancipation demonstrates its importance in the history of the South” (Schafer 361).

Slave revolts rarely occurred because slave laws and codes were enforced to limit slaves’ movements and meetings. In addition, “a slave revolt anywhere in the Americas, at any time, had poor prospects and required organizers with extraordinary daring and resourcefulness” (Genovese 594), which most slaves did not have. Most masters believed their slaves to be good chattel and not capable of leading or participating in any type of insurrections; however, the thought of a slave revolt actually occurring was enough to frighten masters and thus make them enforce strict rules and punishments in order to keep their slaves in line.

Slaves led or participated in revolts in order to demonstrate their resistance towards their enslavement. They were weary of their hard labor and bondage, and desired a better

life for themselves. Although it was uncommon because of the strict slave codes and laws, “for the slaves, the revolts, however rare, served a purpose” (Genovese 597), and if a revolt was unlikely to occur, slaves found other ways to demonstrate their resistance towards slavery.

Relatively few poems seem to have been written about the possibility of slave rebellions. Perhaps the fear of what might happen was so great that few poets wanted to contemplate the possibility. However, one poem, by a writer from Delaware named John Lofland, did raise explicitly the possibility the slaves would be revenged – if not at their own hands, then perhaps by God:

ADDRESS

To the Legislature of Delaware, on Slavery, Jan. 1826.

O SLAVERY! thou dreadful curse display'd,
 Thou fiend of hell in human robes array'd,
 Thou tinsel'd trapping of a generous mind,
 Go glut thyself with gold to misery blind;
 Go dip thy hands in fathers', mothers' blood,
 Or plunge a dagger in the warm heart's flood;
 More generous far at one determined blow,
 To stop the heart-pulse than to lengthen woe.
 Even now I see the suppliant at thy feet,
 For mercy and for liberty entreat;
 The galling chain fast binds him to the ground,
 While his pain'd eyeball spurns its peaceful bound;

Detested coward, eldest born of hell,
Fiend of the midnight haunt, I know thee well,
Thy Gorgon eye proclaims thy fell decree—
Wounds, blood and death—the name for Slavery:
But mark me, fiend!—the time shall soon arrive
When human traffic shall no more survive;
When blood beneath the lash shall cease to pour,
And shock'd humanity shall weep no more.
Mark me, thou ghost of feeling and my song,
Pale pity weeps the injured negro's wrong;
And if not her angelic voice shall plead,
And heal the wounded victims that now bleed,
Heaven's awful vengeance shall those horrors tell,
And plunge thee headlong in the flames of hell.
Even now the knell of awful vengeance tolls,
Along Columbia's happy hills it rolls.
Detested monster, lightning seize thy form,
And thunders shake thee in the midnight storm;
May whirlwinds dash thee in the tempest dire,
And dread volcanoes belch on thee their fire,
Wide yawning earthquakes open at thy feet,
And dark oblivion thy wild vision meet;
Until thy name is lost, and known no more,

On fair Columbia's blest and peaceful shore.

In this poem, the speaker can only contemplate the possibility of divine and metaphorical vengeance, but perhaps readers of these lines could also imagine what might actually happen if blacks themselves were able to revolt and commit real revenge.

Surviving at all Costs

6.1: Flight to Freedom

One of the well-known ways slaves resisted slavery was by flight. It was common for slaves to run away in search of a better life, usually at night. Although “the number of runaways was not large enough to threaten the survival of the peculiar institution, because slaveholders took precautions to prevent the problem from growing to such proportions” (Stampp 109), slaves still attempted to run away in order to demonstrate their resistance towards their bondage.

Most runaways were young men in good health; however, it was not uncommon for females to run away as well. There were some slaves who ran away multiple times and were punished, and there were some who ran away only once and never tried again. Besides fleeing because of their enslavement, some slaves would run away to escape their hard labor. If slaves were over-worked and endured unfavorable conditions, they were more likely to run away. Female slaves would run away to escape being raped by their masters. In addition, some female slaves were mistreated by their mistresses, which also made them want to run away.

Slaves “who were treated well, fed properly, and worked moderately ran away even when they knew that it would cause them hardship and, eventually severe punishment” (Stamp 111). This fact exemplifies that even those slaves who were treated in a relatively humane way still ran away in order to demonstrate their resistance towards slavery and their bondage.

One especially interesting poem about a runaway slave seems to have been written by a Canadian author. It was published in Montreal in 1857 in a collection titled *Rhymes for the Times* and seems to have gone unnoticed and unprinted since then:

THE RUNAWAY SLAVE; A TALE.

“HO! hunters, here’s a job for you !

A young mulatto lady

Has run away; ye must pursue—

So get your horses ready.

“She fled before the break of day

And left her *all* behind her;

I *calculate* she’s gone that way,

Your dogs will surely find her.

“If she should gain the *Under Ground*,

To Canada they’ll send her;

I wonder where she can be found,—

What trifles did offend her!

'Tis true, I sold her only child,

And this has sadly grieved her ;

But I was merciful and mild,

And thought I had relieved her.

“And when she laid him last to rest,

How fondly did she kiss him;

But he was such a little pest

I thought she'd never miss him.

“So when the Negro-trader came,

His lawful trade pursuing,

I thought it neither sin nor shame

To do as all are doing.

“For you're aware we all allow

A negro is a chattel,

And so we buy and sell him too

As Britons do their cattle.

“But when she found her child was gone

She made a *deal of bother*,
I really never thought till then
That she was such a mother.

“I never saw such agony,
Nor heard such lamentation,
But you must bring her back to me—
She’s worth my whole plantation.

“And when you overtake *the gal*,
Don’t let the dogs abuse her ;
I can afford to pay you well,
But can’t afford to lose her.”

The hunters brought their horses out
To seek the missing booty,
Pursued their way with yell and shout,
And Congress called it duty.

They plung’d their steeds through mire and mud,
Determin’d to reclaim her,
Their dogs advancing far ahead,
They found and overcame her.

How long they fought, no tongue can tell,

But she was overpower-ed,

And there the feeble creature fell

By savage dogs devour-ed.

And ere their masters come in sight

All animation ceases,

The dogs in their extreme delight

Have torn the slave to pieces!

Ye northern freemen! wake to wrath

At this narration awful,

An injured woman bit to death,

While Congress makes it lawful !

But do ye not regard with awe

The words that God hath spoken ?

His righteous and his higher law

By Congress proudly broken.

The wrath of God may yet descend

And strike his foes with terror,

And show slaveholders in the end

Their folly and their error.

6.2: Pace of Work

Slaves resisted slavery by controlling the rhythm and pace of their work. It was essential for slaves to work hard, so by working lazily and incompetently, slaves were showing their resistance to slavery. Slave masters thought their slaves were lazy, stupid, and incompetent, and slaves were smart enough to exploit those negative stereotypes that slaveholders harbored against them.

Slaves would intentionally abuse animals, break items, and misinterpret directions, which was their way of showing their resistance to slavery: “Never quite certain whether slaves were deliberately lazy and deceitful or simply incapable of satisfactory labor, masters were never sure of the appropriate response” (Malvasi 203). Masters feared a rebellion could occur at any time and already thought slaves were incompetent individuals; therefore, slaves were less likely to be severely punished, if at all, for their careless work.

Slaves were known for singing Negro spirituals. In order to maintain power and control over the pace of slaves’ work, slaves would be encouraged “. . . to sing happy, up-tempo songs while they worked in the fields” (Malvasi 203). Slave masters encouraged slaves to sing happy songs because they thought the songs would encourage the slaves to work at a faster pace. In order to exemplify their resistance, slaves would sing sad, depressing songs instead.

A number of such songs are reported in a book that seems not to have been reprinted since its original publication in 1859. Edited by Edward Alfred Pollard and titled *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*, it reports a number of songs that slaves sung before the Civil War. One song that Pollard includes goes as follows:

"Go back, angels! Go back, angels!

Go back into Heaven, little children!

Go back, little angels!

And I don't want to stay behind—

Behold the Lamb of God!

Behold the Lamb of God!

And I don't want to stay behind."

+ + + + +

"Oh, carry me away, carry me away, my Lord!

Carry me to the berryin' ground,

The green trees a-bowing. Sinner, fare you well!

I thank the Lord I want to go,

To leave them all behind.

Oh, carry me away, carry me away, my Lord I

Carry me to the berryin' ground."

+ + + + + +

"I am gwine home, children; I am gwine home, children,

De angel bid me to come.

I am gwine down to de water side—

Tis de harvest time, children,

And de angel bid me come." (34-36)

Besides employing music, slave masters also tried to maintain power and control over slaves' work pace with a clock, but slaves resisted it:

Slaves resisted, and were sometimes able to ignore, their masters' efforts at running the plantation clock on time. Their partial success resulted from paternalistic masters being quick to believe their child-like slaves incapable of comprehending clock time. (Malvasi 204)

Slave masters and overseers would chime bells and blow horns to keep slaves on task with their work. In addition, the sounds would be used to let slaves know when it was time to eat, time to rest, and time to work. Nevertheless, slaves resisted the clock-schedules by pretending to confuse what the sounds meant. In other words, slaves either ignored the sounds or failed to complete tasks in the proper time.

Slave masters believed that slaves were unable to grasp the concept of the time-clock because they were too incompetent to understand its purpose. Paternalistic slave

masters knew that “the harder they pushed their slaves, the more likely they were to resist, rebel, or run away” (Malvasi 205); they knew that being kinder to their slaves and offering incentives to them would create a working environment with which everyone could be content; therefore, as long as productivity was achieved, most slave masters did not severely punish or push slaves to work.

6.3: Slave Communities

Often, when hard times arise, people cling together. By clinging together, people can lean on one another and pray or at least hope for better days. During slavery in America, slaves would live together, worship together, and encourage each other. Slaves also worked to maintain their cultural life within their communities.

Within the slave communities, there was a sense of joy that they shared with each other to help them cope with their circumstances: “In the cabins and quarters, people found the emotional space to express their fears, their resentment, and their hopes among other slaves who shared the same anxieties” (Williams 81).

The slaves within the communities knew each other well. They worked alongside each other, worshipped together, and enjoyed leisure time with each other. They were able to comfort each other and give each other a sense of calmness because they endured slavery together. They would often gather to pray, dance, and chant songs in order to survive their horrific conditions.

Within the slave communities, there were slave families: “The slave family was the ultimate unit of survival. Slaves also formed extended families complete with ‘play’ cousins, aunties, uncles, etc. to fill in the gaps of missing mothers, fathers, and siblings”

(Thomas 5). Marriage was not legally recognized among slaves because they were considered property and could be bought and sold at any time, without their spouse; however, slaves still resisted that law by having families of their own.

Under paternalism, there were slave masters who did not mind their slaves “marrying” because it would benefit them: “First, they would be more likely to produce children who would belong to the mother’s owner. Second, owners thought that people who were part of a family were much less likely to attempt to escape, leaving their loved ones behind” (Williams 79).

Marriage and the creation of families served as an attempt by slaves to escape the harsh realities of slavery: “Caring about family members helped to give meaning to life and created significant emotional connections that could distract from and ameliorate the pain of the labor and the violence of slavery” (Williams 81). Slave families would spend time together singing spirituals and comforting each other.

Slave families resisted slavery in several ways. For example, it was pivotal for slaves to keep hold of their heritage and customs: “At night and on Sundays they attended religious services or entertained themselves” (Williams 82). The slave community would worship together because they knew better days were coming. Black religious leaders would preach sermons explaining that in due time, slavery would cease to exist and then slave masters would reap what they sowed.

Slave families showed their resistance towards slavery by the way they raised their children. Slave parents instilled in their children African customs. Furthermore, parents would tell their children stories about Africa and their ancestors, which helped the slaves keep hold of their past and keep their legacy going. In addition, slave parents

would give, and then call their children, African names, instead of the names given to them by their masters. However, some “were naming their children after local whites to whom they looked for friendship and protection in a dangerous world” (Genovese 447).

As their masters understood, slaves enjoyed music and dancing. Whites “recognized the importance of music to the blacks and seldom interfered with slaves’ singing or making music” (Wade 147). Masters accepted their slaves’ interest in music by allowing them to have dances, to play the fiddle, and even to sing Negro Spirituals while working. Although masters rarely allowed slaves to play the drums, slaves demonstrated their resistance by tapping sticks, clapping their hands, or creating other ways to mimic the sound of drums.

6.4: Folk Tales

Slaves were very crafty in depicting their resistance towards slavery. In order to exemplify their resistance towards slavery, as well as empower themselves, slaves would gather to tell stories, specifically folk tales. Being that slaves were not allowed to read or write nor receive an education, folk tales were used to educate and teach slaves, primarily the children, about the world around them. In addition, folk tales taught children how to act. For example, through folk tales, “black parents taught their children to watch their tongues, neither telling the master incriminating information about fellow slaves nor talking back in a manner likely to bring punishment” (Wade 152).

Folk tales also served other purposes as well. Within the folk tales lay hidden messages that exemplified black men and women’s resistance against slavery: “When slaves arrived in the New World from Africa in the 1700s and 1800s, they brought with

them a vast oral tradition. The details and characters of the stories evolved over time in the Americas, though many of the motifs endured” (Cunningham).

Brer Rabbit became the popular trickster in folk tales. He always managed to deceive those above him: “The character’s adventures embody an idea considered to be a universal creation among oppressed peoples—that a small, weak, but ingenious force can overcome a larger, stronger, but dull-witted power” (Brer Rabbit | American Folklore.) Slaves enjoyed telling folk tales not only because doing so helped them stay connected with their heritage, but also because it showed their resistance to slavery.

The slaves identified with Brer Rabbit because he was an oppressed figure who was always triumphing against his oppressors, and slaves hoped for the day when they too would become victorious against their slave masters. In other words, “Brer Rabbit stories were primarily escapist tales that allowed frustration and anger to be projected into another realm, where the weak did put down the powerful” (Wade 153).

Brer Rabbit Fools Sis Cow exemplifies slaves’ resistance against slavery is exemplified:

Now Brer Rabbit was skipping down the road one day heading for his home in the briar patch when he spotted Sis Cow grazing in the field. It was a mighty hot day and Brer Rabbit was thirsty. Some milk would be real fine on such a warm afternoon . . . (Schlosser)

It was a hot day and Brer Rabbit was thirsty; however, Sis Cow would not give him any milk. During slavery in the South, slaves worked long, hard hours, sometimes in very hot weather.

It was common for slaves to be deprived of food and water when they wanted and needed it; therefore, slaves demonstrated their resistance towards slavery by depicting Brer Rabbit's need to quench his thirst when there is a cow around with plenty of milk, yet the cow will not give him any. In other words, Sis Cow treated Brer Rabbit the same way as slave masters treated slaves; there was plenty of food and drinks to go around, but slave masters still limited what slaves consumed.

It was common for slaves to steal food, which is exactly what happened in *Brer Rabbit Fools Sis Cow*. Brer Rabbit cleverly devised a way to get Sis Cow's milk. He tricked her into thinking he needed help to get persimmons out of a tree; Sis Cow tried to help him and ended up getting stuck.

By making Sis Cow the oppressor too incompetent to realize that she was being deceived, slaves exemplified their attitudes towards their slave masters. For example, masters thought slaves were naturally lazy; therefore, they played into that notion to set their own pace of working. Just like Sis Cow, slave masters were tricked and trapped into one way of thinking about slaves, which in turn made them look incompetent and even inferior.

Folk tales also helped give slaves a sense of hope. Through the art of oral tradition, slaves could tell a folk tale however they wanted to. Folktales “. . . gave slaves a chance to create alternate realities in which they could experience revenge and other forbidden impulses . . .” (Sambol-Tosco). Folk tales helped communicate slaves'

resistance towards their bondage. It was a way for the slave communities to bond together, as well as console each other through their difficulties.

Conclusion

Ever since slaves first arrived in America, they were expected to labor hard for the profit of their masters. It was a horrific time for both masters and slaves as they both struggled for power and control, but particularly, of course, for slaves because they were oppressed and were victims of whippings and other horrific punishments. There were several slave codes and laws created by the government to keep slaves in line. For example, they were not allowed to marry legally, own weapons, vote, or leave the plantation without permission. In addition, slaves were not allowed to gather in large groups unless a master or overseer was present. Marriage was not recognized amongst slaves because they were considered chattel who could be bought and sold at any time.

The life of a slave was very sad and depressing. Many had to live under the rule of a strict master; however, some did not. Most masters took care of their property and punishment them for working efficiently. Some of the punishments slaves received were cash bonuses, time-off from work, and their own plot of land to grow their own crops, which they could then sell or exchange for goods.

Nevertheless, there were some masters who believed that slaves needed to be forced to work, not merely persuaded. They believed that slaves needed to fear their masters because that was the only way that slaves would work effectively and obey their rules. Many slaves resisted their enslavement and ran away. Some were successful, but many were not. The Fugitive Slave Law was enacted to punish runaway slaves. In addition, anyone who was caught assisting slaves in disobedient behavior would be fined or imprisoned.

Slaves, whether on the field, in the house, or in a factory, labored constantly. They were forced to work long, hard hours, regardless of their rhythm and pace, or they would suffer punishment, normally a whipping. However, as a reward, some slaves were allowed holidays off and normally the weekend off from laboring.

The struggle between slave and master was a never-ending battle. The more restrictions masters imposed upon their slaves, the more slaves resisted. Slave masters resorted to drastic measures in order to maintain order and control over their slaves. Flogging was the most common method used to punish slaves; however, mental tactics were used as well. Religion was commonly used by masters to justify slavery. White preachers would purposefully misinterpret scriptures, claiming that the Bible supported slavery, in an effort to discourage revolts while encouraging slaves to obey their masters because a better life was supposedly waiting for them in heaven. In addition, the story of the "Curse of Ham" was also used to justify slavery.

Slaves were thought to be incompetent individuals, specifically because of their race. They used this notion to their advantage in order to control the pace of their work and purposely work inefficiently, as well as to manipulate their masters. Slaves resisted

slavery by keeping hold of their African heritage. They would call their children African names and teach them African customs.

Folk tales were used to teach children how to behave and act around their masters. In addition, folk tales were used to demonstrate slaves' resistance towards their enslavement. Brer Rabbit was the tricker most slaves identified with because although he seemed powerless, he always was victorious over those above him. Folk tales gave slaves a sense of hope that they too would one day be victorious over their masters.

Through slave communities, worship, and folk tales, as well as by holding on to their heritage and customs, slaves showed their resistant attitudes towards their masters and towards slavery, which ultimately helped them start a non-violent approach to combating slavery.

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