

technical mastery, which, of course, has nothing to do with allegiance for or against the contemporary *avant garde*.

One of the virtues of Mr. Curtis' book is that it sets Maugham's work in the social context of the author's rapidly changing England. Where Maugham is best, he is dealing with three peculiarly Edwardian concepts of man: the "genius," the gentleman, and the cad—endlessly representing and reexamining them in subtle and oblique relation to his own autobiography, and observing above all their tragi-comic dissolution in the post-Imperial England of the 1920's and 1930's. The same is true of his Edwardian women: the brittle literary society lady, and the golden Kentish (or otherwise native) whore. These types, which were once dismissed as quaint anachronisms, are now of increasing historical interest, telling us much about the new distortions in present English society. For this reason these parts of Maugham's work will find their own honored place, especially in classic stories like "Rain," "The Yellow Streak," and "The Poet."

Mr. Curtis, in a memorable closing salutation, feels that such elevation is unnecessary:

I have ascended the North Face of Henry James, and the Annapurna of Proust, and I have been greatly exhilarated by the conquest of these great mountains, planting here and there many puny flags of understanding. . . . But I cannot live there permanently. I come back to the open, green, cultivated lowlands of Maugham.

Indeed, Maugham's hills and gentle inclinations are not comparable with the James Range, and are hardly visible from Mount Dostoevsky. Whatever his limitations, Maugham was a very skilful storyteller who will continue to give pleasure to his readers for a long time, particularly through his short stories. His admirers should regard that a tribute, not a slight.

Reviewed by GABRIEL GERSH

The Redeemable South

Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery, Volume I, by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974. 286 pp. \$8.95.*

Time on the Cross: Evidence and Methods—A Supplement, by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974. 267 pp. \$12.50.*

TIME ON THE CROSS presents us with a favorable view of the *ancien régime* of the Southern United States, a view arising from an unexpected quarter—economic historians of unimpeachable egalitarian credentials—and resting upon the most massive and systematic accumulation of evidence ever made. In sum, *Time on the Cross* refutes every point in that elaborately constructed negative stereotype of the Old South which brought on the Civil War, motivated conquest and reconstruction, and has more recently supported the glib ascription of current racial problems to "the heritage of slavery." As a result we must recast certain accounts of good and evil in American history which we had been told were forever closed.

Our recapitulation of the authors' conclusions must be brief and general, dangerously simplifying the qualifications, sophistication, and specificity of the original, and ignoring temporarily the particular nature of their evidence: According to *Time on the Cross*, the typical standard of living of the nineteenth century Southern slave, measured by life expectancy, birth rate, diet, clothing, housing, and medical care, was not only broadly speaking adequate, but, more important, was superior to what was enjoyed by the black population after slavery and by much of the laboring white

populations of Europe and America then and later. By these measures the Southern United States was the most favorable environment in the New World, and perhaps in the world, for black people. Further, the patriarchal "Victorian" family was the inculcated norm of plantation society: "breeding" was nonexistent, miscegenation was statistically insignificant, and "selling down the river" was a real but infrequent event which may have disrupted no more black families than the westward expansion of the frontier did white families. Plantation labor was not directed chiefly by physical coercion nor was it grudging, unskilled, or inadaptible. Slaves generally were neither rebels, saboteurs, nor skulkers but took an intelligent interest in the economic success of the plantation. Moreover, a greater percentage of slaves was engaged in skilled crafts and managerial functions than was true of blacks long after slavery. The black people of antebellum America were, then, a laboring class not much different from what might be found in many other places and climes. The "slave" system, though erecting obvious barriers at many points, allowed a not insignificant degree of physical and psychological freedom that was often found preferable to the limited alternatives available to blacks elsewhere, and its evils appear less damning when measured against the real conditions (rather than the theoretical virtues) of other contemporary societies. Indeed, it appears that there was a measurable deterioration after slavery in the living standards, life expectancy, real compensation, work skills, and family stability of the black population. In other words, in the destruction of the old regime ground was lost that has only been recovered in this century, for those who destroyed it were better at rending than mending.

Nor was the Old South the backward, poverty-stricken, oligarchical society of hostile polemics, in which not only the slaves but the mass of whites were beyond the pale of civilization. To the contrary, Southern society was dynamic and prosperous. Its ag-

riculture, on both slave plantation and yeoman farm, was more productive and efficient than the Northern. Far from stagnating, the Southern economy expanded at a rate in the late antebellum period that has few equals in history. Southern per capita income was equal to Northern, just as evenly distributed among whites, and higher than that of most of Europe in even recent times. Moreover, the slave received back in a lifetime ninety percent of the income he produced, "well within modern limits of exploitation," according to the authors. Any excess profits of the labor of slaves accrued not to their Southern owners but to worldwide consumers of cotton. In sum, the Old South's day-to-day view of itself as a settled, ethical, paternalistic order, so often derided as an absurd or pathological mythology, had an undeniable basis in reality.

As to the nature of the evidence which supports these findings, *Time on the Cross* is the most conspicuous example to date of "cliometrics"—the describing of the past by generalizations drawn from concrete data, expressed in quantitative terms, and tested for validity according to the formal laws of statistics. Clearly statistics cannot answer questions of value nor satisfy moral absolutists. But, allowing always for an unavoidable ambiguity in defining categories (what is a "skilled" worker?), certain kinds of descriptive and comparative facts can indeed be established more reliably by statistics than by less self-correcting and systematic researches. To put it another way, there is nothing "scientifically" conclusive about "cliometric" assertions, but competently arrived at and understood as averages, they are entitled to credence in establishing the groundwork of given facts from which value judgments ought to proceed. The work in hand has already received extensive methodological scrutiny and will receive more. The net of this scrutiny is to modify minor points, to require further data on some major points, and to change very little the broad thrust of the conclusions. In fact, the book's significant defects are two: the generalizations about the slave

family rest upon insufficient data; and, after they overcame their own skepticism, the authors presented their findings in a way they knew to be deliberately provocative to various academic celebrities. In response, the official purveyors of "black history," who enjoy a large but sensitive vested interest, have reacted typically with abuse, sometimes perfunctorily disguised as argument. (One review concluded that if the South was not inhumanly backward, then it must have been inhumanly efficient; if Southerners were not lazier than Northerners then they must have been more ruthlessly utilitarian. Exactly what facts describe the South is moot, but that, whatever they were, they were evil, is axiomatic. No sensible middling explanation can arise because historic images of the South are merely stage props for moral self-preening.) On the other hand, some scholars, including the authors, have found comfort and constructive hope in the realization that black Americans can recognize in their forebears more sympathetic and successful human beings than the bloodthirsty rebels or dehumanized chattels which their erstwhile advocates have alternatively pictured them to be.

Methodology aside, there are other reasons for accepting the *Time on the Cross* view as essentially correct or at least as more nearly correct than its opposite. It comports with common sense and with the instinctive feelings of those who are familiar with the best cultural survivals of the Old South in its human personalities, white and black. Moreover, it only tells us in different form what our best historians have told us already. Avery Craven understood (1942) that "slavery" amounted practically to a labor system not too different from contemporary "free" labor. Lewis C. Gray in a classic work on Southern agriculture (1933) clearly portrayed the viability of the plantation economy. Frank Owsley,

whose researches (1949) have never been successfully refuted, demonstrated that the Old South was not oligarchical. Howard Floan explained how urban, puritan observers perceived in the South's dispersed and informal society a backwardness that was more apparent than real. (In fact, almost all Northerners and Europeans who were intimately acquainted with the old regime defended it.) C. Vann Woodward has often made the point that the black population was in several respects more depressed in 1900 than in 1860.

Our best reason for accepting this picture of the Old South as essentially true, however, is our instinctive suspicion of its enemies—those who labored not to ameliorate its real evils but to destroy it for exaggerated sins of their own imagining. The Old South, imperfect, archaic even in its own time perhaps, did not deserve the hatred, slander, fire, and sword which it received. One might in fact reasonably request a refocusing of attention from the peculiar South to its peculiar critics. Such a refocusing will tell us much about the intermittent aggressions against the social fabric which have convulsed our larger society, for the irresponsible consciences which eradicated the Old Regime without heeding the consequences in blood, in disaster to the constitutional settlement, or even in the uprooting of the supposed beneficiaries of their zeal, are with us still. Further, in redeeming the South we redeem the nation's past, lately held hostage to guilt by the heirs of those same self-beatified saints. For, after all, that half or more of the founders and early guardians of the republic who arose from the plantation gentry were not really criminals against humanity, and, given the long view of the crimes and follies of mankind, our ancient sin was not nearly so irredeemable as permanently to damn our national enterprise.

Reviewed by CLYDE WILSON

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Henry Regnery is the founder and chairman of the board of the Henry Regnery Company, Publishers.

George H. Nash received his Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1973 and has published articles in *National Review*, *The Alternative*, *Labor History*, and other periodicals. He is currently working on an extended study of modern American conservatism, which will be published by Basic Books this fall.

Stephen J. Tonsor is professor of European intellectual history at the University of Michigan. He has published widely in both scholarly and popular journals.

Leo R. Ward is professor emeritus of philosophy at Notre Dame University and the author of many works on social philosophy and literature.

James V. Schall, a Jesuit priest and professor of government at the University of San Francisco, is presently teaching at the Gregoriana University in Rome. He is the author of *Redeeming the Time*, *Human Dignity and Human Numbers*, and *Play On: From Games to Celebrations*.

James E. Dornan, Jr. is chairman of the department of politics at Catholic University of America. His articles have appeared in *National Review*, *Intercollegiate Review*, and *The Occasional Review*. His lengthy monograph on the military balance in the post-SALT era, entitled *Detente and the Impending Strategic Crisis* has been published recently by the ACU Education and Research Foundation.

Peter C. Hughes is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of politics at Catholic University of America and also serves on the staff of Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia.

Thomas J. Noer is professor of history at Carthage College. His articles and book reviews have appeared in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Newsletter*, *The Historian*, and the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*.

Marion Montgomery, professor of English at the University of Georgia, has published novels, collections of poems and critical books. His latest are *Fugitive* and *The Reflective Journey toward Order: Essays on Dante, Wordsworth, Eliot, and Others*.

The book reviews are contributed by: *J. M. Lalley*, associate editor of *Modern Age*; *Allen T. Blount*, retired colonel of the Army Engineers' Corps, who has made an extensive study of African affairs; *Felix Morley*, formerly editor of the *Washington Post*, now living in retirement in Gibson Island, Md.; *G. Paul Holman, Jr.*, acting director of the Russian area studies program at Georgetown University; *Thomas H. Etzold*, professor of history at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio; *Martin Plax*, professor of political science at Case Western Reserve University; *Thomas Molnar*, a specialist in philosophy and European intellectual history; *Thomas Auxter*, professor of philosophy at the University of Florida; *Gabriel Gersh*, professor of English, Hunter College; *Clyde Wilson*, professor of history, University of South Carolina.