

Visions of Complete Mastery and Subtle Tyranny
West Indian Lessons on Self-Provisioning in the Age of Abolition
1804-1860

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“The practice which prevails in Jamaica of giving the Negroes lands to cultivate... is universally allowed to be judicious and beneficial; producing a happy coalition between the master and the slave. The Negro who has acquired by his own labour a property in his master’s land, has much to lose, and is therefore less inclined to desert his work.”

Bryan Edwards, 1794¹

When Bryan Edwards wrote his two-volume history of the West Indies in the 1790s he fully manifested the ethos of West Indian elites of the time: he was a planter-agronomist, a politician, and a polemicist-historian.² Emerging from this trifecta, his history of the West Indies was a response to the concerns of the day; it aimed to employ history as a means to alter the course of contemporary struggles. Most notably, Edwards sought to defend slavery from external attacks of abolitionists and the internal danger of slave resistance. The above passage by Edwards, which deals with the practices of self-provisioning by the enslaved, took aim at both of these issues; by allowing for—or endorsing—slave provisioning, Edwards hoped to mollify the enslaved and to better field moral and political attacks from abolitionists.³ The passage represents the orientation of a man who had known of the great 1760 slave rebellion in Jamaica, who witnessed the attempts to end the slave trade in the 1780s, and who was paying close attention to the ongoing slave insurrections in San Domingue. His arguments represent the multifaceted program devised by planters who knew violence and brutality alone were not sufficient to maintain their wealth, status, and power.⁴ Edwards’ commentary on self-provisioning captured one of the ways in which food production systems were bound to the

¹ Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies: To Which Is Added, an Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo. Abridged from The History Written by Bryan Edwards ...* B. Crosby; for Mundell & Son, Edinburgh; and J. Mundell, Glasgow, 1798, Volume II, 135-136

² Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, he would later add a third volume, which is included in this essay.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Michael Craton. 1982. *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 127; for information on the initial fight for ending the slave trade in the 1780s see Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

conversations and practices of slavery, freedom, resistance, and political economy. This essay will argue that, during the final decades of slavery in the American South, planters turned increasingly to Edwards' "happy coalition" as a rhetorical, and practical, means to address the ever-strengthening forces of abolitionism across the Atlantic world.⁵

Edwards' view was dominant among West Indians prior to emancipation, but this fact did not survive the Abolition Act of 1833.⁶ The "happy coalition" shattered when the laboring population was no longer subject to bondage. The successor-system to self-provisioning, subsistence-oriented production, drew vitriol from white contemporaries.⁷ Thomas Carlyle's *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (1849)—later re-published under a more forthright name in regard to its racist contents—perfectly captured the hostility that subsistence farming stoked.⁸ Carlyle blamed the upheaval and flux of the post-emancipation era on the actions and "innate" qualities of black West Indians. For reference, in the decade preceding Carlyle's publication British West Indian sugar production fell 35% from pre-emancipation levels.⁹

⁵ This essay uses South Carolina as an illustration of how these dialogues and developments affected plantation practices and the rhetoric thereof, but independent "slaves' economies" during this period were not isolated to S.C. alone; for instance, contemporaries in Louisiana were also engaged in similar practices of independent accumulation and disposal of personal property, Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 145.

⁶ Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds. 1991. *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas*. London, England; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 7.

⁷ The rise of semi-peasant and peasant lifestyles were linked directly to the practices of self-provisioning in the West Indies by both contemporaries and historians. Oftentimes the very same provision grounds that slaves occupied during slavery became the basis of their semi-autonomous ways of life after slavery. Planters attempted to induce sufficient labor that was required to grow sugar and to extract rents, but this was a fool's errand in most instances. The issue of subsistence was particularly harsh in Jamaica, as there were extensive interior locations that could be exploited for subsistence, so if the planters' attempts to establish control over subsistence or the means thereof drove the freed population off the free population had readily-available alternatives. See Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 158-159; William Grant Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labor in the British West Indies*, Reprints of Economic Classics (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1968).

⁸ The term "Negro" was replaced with a harsher racial epithet in the pamphlet version of the publication.

⁹ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 120: other crops took similarly dramatic falls during this time, but sugar is cited alone because of its being of primary importance.

Carlyle argued that chronic labor shortages, which arose because the free black population could support itself “easily” through subsistence farming, were at the core of the plantation complex’s collapse. Thus, the white population was left in a state of ruin and want because “his black neighbor, rich in pumpkin, [was] in no haste to help him. Sunk to the ears in pumpkin, imbibing saccharine juices... he can listen to the less fortunate white man's "demand," and take his own time in supplying it.”¹⁰ While his sense of ultimate causation was nonsensical, Carlyle was correct about one of the key proximate causes: labor shortages that stemmed from viable alternatives to laboring on plantations. Thus, Carlyle’s overtly racist and sardonically anti-liberal prose indicated that the “happy coalition” was not without potential “pitfalls.”

For Carlyle, irresponsible humanitarians, unknowing liberal political-economists, and racist caricatures of the formerly enslaved were all necessary for his dramatic image, but they were not alone sufficient for ruin of the West Indies. The ability, willingness, and desire of the laboring population to engage in subsistence farming was the ultimate source of undoing for the plantations; these practices were encouraged, enabled, and—above all—sought during slavery in the form of self-provisioning. Subsequently, the formerly enslaved population of the West Indies pursued the same activities more fully outside of bondage.¹¹ Thus, Edwards’ “happy coalition” within slavery had given rise to the utter ruin of his successors after emancipation. Food, and the production thereof by the free population, was the critical component of this imperial nightmare; it was the “saccharine juices” of Carlyle’s pumpkins that undid the planter class, and those who sought to learn from the West Indian experiment would be ill-advised to wholly ignore this point.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ For discussion on the dynamics of this process, see “The Flight From the Estates Reconsidered: The British West Indies, 1838-1842,” in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, eds., *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present: A Student Reader*, 1st American ed (Princeton : London : Kingston, Jamaica: M. Wiener Publishers ; James Curry Publishers ; IRP, 1996).

When considering the lessons offered by these authors, it is important to note that both found considerable readership in the South, so their insights were certainly, and directly, accessible to the Southern planters.¹²

The trials of West Indian emancipation were not merely the concern of the British, as it was yet another blow to the long-standing tradition of slave-holding in the Americas. The final success of the Haitian Revolution in 1804, the abolition of the Anglo-slave trade in 1807/1808, and the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1830 captured the tone of the day: either through violence or metropolitan decree, slavery was at risk of complete and utter obliteration.¹³ In this context, the South stood as one of the few remaining slave-holding powers in the Americas, and they were looking on at the developments of the Caribbean intently in order to gain lessons on how to remain viable in the face of their own “outsider” government while remaining strong in relation to the ever-present danger of slave revolution.¹⁴

Here Carlyle’s pumpkins and Edwards’ coalition are of essential importance because they offer two visions of what food production systems could do for a plantation society; they can be a bulwark of prosperity and “tranquility” or they could be the seed for the total collapse of the regime. The offerings of these visions were vastly different, but they were decidedly compatible within the context of the American South. In fact, both visions were taken to heart by Southerners, and both were used to galvanize their system in the face of abolitionism. Carlyle’s

¹² The *Commercial Review*’s reprint was far from the only one in the American Context, as both Northern and Southern presses printed either the work itself or responses thereto, and his readership had long been established prior to his essay on the West Indies see William Silas Vance, “Carlyle in America Before ‘Sartor Resartus,’” *American Literature* 7, no. 4 (1936): 363–75; for proliferation of Edwards’ work see Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*, 2008, 43; Bryan Edwards’ histories and commentaries were reprinted in America at least as early as 1805, see “Advertisement” *National Intelligencer*, published as *National Intelligence*, And *Washington Advertiser*, (Washington DC), September 27, 1805, 4

¹³ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (New York: Verso, 1988), 506.

¹⁴ Some even going so far as to engage in meta-analysis of the relevant British publications regarding the results of emancipation, as seen in “Emancipation in The British West India Islands.” E M S. *The Southern Quarterly Review*; New Orleans Vol. 7, Iss. 14, (Apr 1853): 422.

destruction and loss, which was joined by the even more dramatic images of a free black nation in Haiti, constituted an impetus for action on the part of the planters and an example of the “folly” of abolitionism; Edwards’ “coalition” offered a means to address the challenges posed by Atlantic abolitionism through the “moralization” of the political economy of slavery.

Carlyle’s tale of a society in ruin was one that rung loudly in the ears of a Southerner who hoped to maintain the political and moral viability of slavery. They took to his attack on liberals, and they identified with his condemnation of a metropolitan government that was willing to unknowingly meddle in their affairs.¹⁵ The editor’s introduction to *The Commercial Review*’s reprint of his essay notes that Carlyle’s commentary should prompt “Northern fanaticism to pause and reflect.”¹⁶ Yet, it must be said that Carlyle’s account would seemingly push planters away from a system in which the laborer took control of their subsistence needs, as such practices were largely to “blame” for the fall of the West Indies. Here the lessons of Edwards, and others, were more attractive to the planters.¹⁷ Planters in the South, particularly in South Carolina, embraced the “happy coalition” in rhetoric and in practice in spite of Carlyle’s forebodings, as they felt confident that they could evade the essential catalyzing event of emancipation that Edwards and his ilk had failed to prevent.¹⁸ They were more powerful than their British predecessors in political capacity, economic importance, and martial potential, as

¹⁵ The struggle of West Indian planters to retain metropolitan influence mirrored the sectional struggle of North v. South within the broader federal Republic; importantly, Southerners’ relative weakness in the Republic also mirrored the failing of the West Indian lobby in parliament in the 1820s and 1830s: “The South: Her Strengths and Resources, &c,” in *The Southern Cultivator*, Volume XVII, 1859, 294.

¹⁶ Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question*, 527.

¹⁷ The final half-century of slavery in the West Indies saw the near-wholesale acceptance of self-provisioning by the enslaved, Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *The Slaves’ Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas* (London, England; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1991), 2-4; there were, however, dissenting voices who were ever-leery of the effects of such a system on long-term viability, see Turnbull, Gordon. *Letters to a Young Planter; or Observations on the Management of a Sugar Plantation*. London: Stuart and Stevenson, 1785.

¹⁸ James Thome. and J. Horace Kimball. *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months’ Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the Year 1837.*, 1838, 380; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 134-135.

such, they would not blink in taking on Edward's lessons.¹⁹ The West Indians had "succumbed without a struggle" to the metropole as ships had been swallowed by the "Saturn of old"; the South aimed to avoid such a fate.²⁰

This work will primarily engage with the historiography of the broader Atlantic dialogues on the political economy of slavery during the eighteenth and nineteenth-century. The most relevant work from this sub-field is that of Edward Rugemer in *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (2008). Rugemer argued that the rhetoric and understandings that emerged and evolved in the South in the face of conflicts over slavery were linked directly to the developments of Atlantic abolitionism. Based upon a foundation of common language, and religion—and through economic relationships and a strong print culture—the Southerners built their political and rhetorical arsenal through the lessons of abolitionism and freedom in the West Indies.²¹ The planters were receptive to these lessons in a time where the whole of Atlantic slavery seemed to be at the precipice of total destruction; the fall of the Caribbean complex constituted "scientific" and moral proof that slavery should remain unimpeded in the South.²²

Notably, Rugemer argued that the works of Bryan Edwards were particularly influential in regards to shaping Southern ideas on the causative connection between abolitionist activities and increased slave resistance.²³ But the planters and politicians of the South—who were often

¹⁹ As constituent members in the federal Republic the South held significant power throughout much of the Antebellum period. While they were quick to compare their situation to the West Indians, their position was firmer than the West Indian Lobby's ever was. Rugemer, 2. Even prior to the total collapse of their power in the 1820s the West Indian Lobby struggled to effectually steer metropolitan policy, Charles R. Ritcheson, 1969. *Aftermath of Revolution; British Policy toward the United States, 1783-1795*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 8

²⁰ "The Slave Trade," *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina). Dec 16, 1857, 1.

²¹ Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*, 2008, 19-20.

²² *Ibid.*, 265.

²³ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

one and the same—took other lessons on political economy from the developments of the Atlantic world, too. In terms of Edwards’ readership, the very same men who learned his political lessons would have been equally open to his social and economic propositions as well as their undergirding rhetorical packaging. It was a case of a planter-politician speaking to planter-politicians, and we would be remiss to compartmentalize his overt messages regarding self-provisioning.²⁴

During the 1840s and 1850s, against the backdrop of rising abolitionism, the failure of the West Indies, and alarming violence from the enslaved themselves, Southern planters were increasingly drawn towards self-provisioning as a practical and rhetorical tool.²⁵ While South Carolina serves as the starkest illustration of this trend, slave narratives and contemporary scholarship on the “slaves’ economy” indicate that other areas in the South continued to allow for or encourage independent economic activities by the enslaved.²⁶ Edwards’ coalition found near identical echoes in both word and practice in the American South. The enslaved increasingly engaged in provision gardening and small-scale husbandry. With the tacit or explicit consent of the planters, they expanded other methods of achieving subsistence such as hunting and the cultivation of cotton and other market-oriented crops.²⁷ Together these activities enabled the enslaved to take more control over their material subsistence, consumption patterns, and social scope; from this, they actively pursued these activities regardless of planter endorsement.²⁸

²⁴ For example, James Henry Hammond was similarly an agronomist, planter, and politician—serving as owner-operator on his plantation in S.C., as the author of an agronomic guide in 1857, as a Governor, Congressman, and Senator, and as a polemicist as seen in *Cotton is King*.

²⁵ Justene G. Hill, “Felonious Transactions: Legal Culture and Business Practices of Slave Economies in South Carolina, 1787-1860” (Princeton University, 2015), 99.

²⁶ See McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of the Slaves* and Philip Morgan, Review of “River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom,” *American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (April 2014): 462–64.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; George P. Rawick and Federal Writers’ Project, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pub. Co., 1972), South Carolina, Volume IV, 100-102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

For the planters, self-provisioning represented a means to meet the moral, political, economic, and social challenges that they faced. Morally, it could feed their claims that their political economy was “moral” and righteous in spite of abolitionist attacks, as it could be seen as the foundation of a system that “civilized” the enslaved and could raise their material standard of living. This position could undercut the accusations of tyranny and brutality from critical commentators.²⁹ Economically, it could help to increase their profitability through externalization of provisioning costs and the insulation of their estates from commodity-market fluctuations; politically, this increased profitability and economic growth could feed the rhetoric about the unquestionable importance of the Southern economy for the national economy. Finally, socially, they could hope to increasingly mollify, or even control, the enslaved who were an ever-more-worrisome threat to both personal and system-wide safety and stability. In doing so they could, in theory, rely less upon violent extremes that became increasingly detrimental to their national image over the course of the century. Undergirding all of these points is the premise that food, its creation, and the control of its distribution can fit within a wide variety of rhetorical or managerial frameworks. Over the course of the nineteenth-century these factors became intimately related to notions of tyranny, social stability, national economy, and the very concept of civilization. The Southern planters increasingly bound their rhetoric of provisioning to these concepts to strengthen their institution against Atlantic abolitionism. The planters of the South hoped to market the “happy coalition” as something that could create social stability without tyranny and could “civilize” without sacrificing political economic viability.

²⁹ Often times Southern polemics compared the slaves’ conditions to those of Northern industrial workers as a classic appeal to hypocrisy, but meeting accusations head on offered unique benefits, see “The South and the Union: The Union Past and Present—How it Works, and How to Save It,” *De Bow’s Review*, Volume 18, 559.

The prevalence of self-provisioning practices across the South and the political and moral rhetoric thereof was inextricable from the Atlantic developments during the first half of the nineteenth-century. To be clear, these practices had long existed to some extent, and their ultimate roots were in the social power paradigm and economic pressures placed upon the plantation system, but the decades prior to the Civil War saw an intensification of these pre-existing systems that require further consideration. The concern of this work is of intensification, not origination³⁰ As we see in the work of Rugemer, Southern planters were responsive to the agronomic and political writings of men such as Edwards. Further, investigations into Southern printing culture and socioeconomic networks demonstrate the existence of intimate connections across the Atlantic that were conducive to the transfer of the knowledge over the merits and methods of self-provisioning.³¹ The effects of these connections are demonstrated by the fact that the agronomic practices and the articulations thereof from this period directly mirror those of their West Indian predecessors.

While their British counterparts had failed to save themselves, Southerners felt they could pursue similar managerial and rhetorical routes because they were confident in their comparative position. At the ground level, the planters believed that they maintained more effective social control than their British predecessors. This is not without justification, as the demographic balance in the South was much more favorable than that of the West Indies; thus, they had reason to believe they could allow for customary rights while maintaining control over the potential

³⁰ The slaves' economy dates back at least until 1712 in South Carolina, and many of the same practices that took place in the nineteenth century were similar to those of the previous century; however, the difference is scale in the context of increasingly restrictive laws in an Atlantic world of Abolitionist pressure, Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 146-147.

³¹ Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*, 2008, 43-44, 172.

offshoots of resistance.³² Further, politically, The British had been a colony subject to a true metropolitan government; the nullification crisis and other federal assertions worried the South, but the region was hardly as disempowered as the West Indians were on the eve of emancipation.³³ Finally, they were confident that their role in the political economy (and their justifications thereof) was fundamentally different than that of the British planters; the British had primarily grown a luxury—sugar—while the main crop of the South was an industrial necessity.³⁴ All told, the South was ready and willing to employ the lessons it learned from West Indian abolitionism and freedom because it offered potential solutions to the problems that they were faced with; the increased prevalence of rhetoric and practice in self-provisioning simultaneously a) stemmed from West Indian managerial and rhetorical precedent and b) aimed to keep them from following the same ultimate path of destruction as the West Indians; thus, the West Indian example served as both a means and an impetus to adopt the rhetoric (and practice) of self-provisioning.

The first major event that captured the Atlantic connection that informed the actions of Southern planters was the Haitian Revolution. The Revolution, which broke out in 1791 and concluded with the establishment of the free black nation of Haiti in 1804, rocked the system of Atlantic slavery more than any event prior.³⁵ The most profitable slave-economy in the New World rapidly faded away. Even more dramatically, the white population was almost completely

³² For instance, the lowest percentage of white population in the South in 1850 was 11% in Georgetown County, U.S. Census Bureau. Racial Population Density, 1850. Prepared by Social Explorer. (accessed Oct 7, 2017); comparatively, on the eve of revolution, St. Domingue had a white population of only 6%, David Patrick Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2014), xii.

³³ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (New York: Verso, 1988), 452-457.

³⁴ Anthony E. Kaye, "The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World," *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 627–50, 627.

³⁵ David Patrick Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2014), xxxv-xxxvii.

expelled.³⁶ For the Southern planters, the Haitian Revolution represented the ultimate fears of the South: economic destruction, political “anarchy,” and the complete undoing of the social, and racial, hierarchies that formed the foundation of their regime. Haiti would continue to loom over the Southern planter’s mindset. It contributed to their modified programs of management and prompted a reorientation regarding how they defended the institution on the national stage.³⁷

American commentators were quick to relate the revolt to the slave systems from across the Atlantic. Commentaries on the general threat to the whole Atlantic system emerged from both pro-slavery parties and those who were sympathetic to the conditions of the slaves. For instance, Charles Brockden Brown reflected on the Revolution from the stance of one who was critical of slavery without espousing total abolition. Writing in 1805, Brown argued that if the slaveholders of the Atlantic world could not establish more stable control over the enslaved population that all European slave societies in the region “will vanish before the tempest” of revolution.³⁸ More pointedly, his account demonstrates the problem that Haitian independence posed for the racist, hierarchical thinking that undergirded American slavery. Black and mixed-race creoles built armies, made successful war against Europeans, established governments, and established a society. In the face of these facts, the boundless racial arrogance of white Americans posed as much a danger to the American regime as the Haitians themselves might.³⁹ Brown’s concerns outlived his conclusions—which called for the ending of the slave trade and amelioration of conditions—as fears regarding Haiti became commonplace in the years after his

³⁶ The 1805 Constitution made provisions for women who intermarried Haitian men and for the small populations of Germans and Polish to remain within the country: Republic of Haiti, “Haiti: 1805 Constitution.”

³⁷ “Mr. Everett’s Speech, on the Resolutions of Mr. M’Duffie,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), March, 27 1826, 2.

³⁸ “The Haitian Peril, Abolition, and Race,” in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 200.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

writing. The causes and implications of Revolution in the French Caribbean continued to weigh heavily on the minds of Southerners in how they formulated their defenses for slavery.

The potential influence of the Haitian Revolution on Southern planters over the issue of self-provisioning found explicit articulation in West Indian accounts of the event. Bryan Edwards' *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo* (London, 1797) epitomized this point. Edwards' work provided an early, accessible voice on the merits of self-provisioning in rhetoric and practice for the Southern planter-politician.

Edward's reaction to the Revolution offered several lessons on the rhetorical and practical benefits of self-provisioning. In terms of a "positive" message, Edwards demonstrated how a pro-slavery advocates could juxtapose self-provisioning to alternative systems within an argument of relative "benevolence." In discussing allowance-based provisioning, he noted that in such systems "oppression may, and certainly in some instances... doth, actually exist, either as to quantity or quality of food... the negro [without grounds or livestock] suffers... [and] is miserable."⁴⁰ In contrast, he argued that on plantations with self-provisioning that "the situation of the negro is in proportion to his industry; but generally it affords him a plenty that amounts to comparative wealth, viewing any peasantry in Europe."⁴¹ This message meant that, in a time of great stress, the planters received the point that self-provisioning offered a means to better exploit, control, and feed the enslaved while building a rhetorical framework of "civilizing benevolence" that could address broader concerns of abolitionism.

Furthermore, Self-provisioning could be an essential component of the "communal" or "familial" benevolence that the planters came to articulate as a defense of slavery. Edwards

⁴⁰ Bryan Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo...*, (London : Printed for J. Stockdale, 1797), 288.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

noted how self-provisioning instilled community and a sense “civilized” self-sufficiency among the enslaved. He cited that it made slaves quick to aid those among them who were vulnerable, such as slaves inexperienced with local agricultural practices, through their own “self-interest.” He noted that when new slaves arrived on his estate and were subsequently made into provisioning-apprentices that “I thought the manager would have been torn to pieces by the number and earnestness of the applicants to have an [apprentice] among them.”⁴² The benefits of social control and cost-externalization were merely incidental in his rosy account of these practices. Here Edwards rearticulated his notion of the happy coalition that benefited both the master and the slave; in the highly-stressed times of the Haitian Revolution, this message found a welcome audience in the South.

The message of Edwards is not merely one of happiness and comfort, as he also pointed to the essential linkage of the system to slavery as well as the coercive power that self-provisioning could provide. In terms of the latter, he implicitly suggests that grounds constituted something that the enslaved *feared to lose*; if allowing for grounds was a carrot, then taking them away was a stick.⁴³ More importantly, Edwards articulated the *limits* of self-provisioning. In discussing the Maroon communities of the West Indies, he argued that the Maroons displayed a remarkable “repugnance to the labour of tilling the earth.”⁴⁴ He argued that, if freed and given the opportunity, persons of color would work for subsistence and nothing more. For Edwards, self-provisioning in slavery was a tool for happiness and civilizing, but in freedom it gave rise to “degeneration,” and “barbarism.” Self-provisioning offered a “happy” medium where the

⁴² New slaves were assigned as an apprentice to the grounds of an established slave. They were to receive no allowances, and the established slave was charged with both supporting and educating the apprentice prior to their receiving grounds of their own, Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo*, 289.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁴ Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo*, 321.

interests of the master, slave, and society were all aligned. Many planters of the South were quick to take to this false image of the happy community; they were ready to sell it as a system achieved more than free or bonded alternatives could hope to do.⁴⁵

Southern fears regarding Haiti only intensified as time passed; throughout the 1820s Southerners continued to paint Haiti as a dystopic nightmare that captured why slavery in the South was proper. In 1824, the *Alexandria Gazette* specifically targeted free persons of color who considered emigrating to Haiti, warning them that it was always, and will always, be a society at war and in misery.⁴⁶ In turn, these accounts drove and justified the implementation of all efforts to maintain said order.

The implications of the Haitian Revolution were much greater than a simple smear campaign by Southern authors. Of particular note were the fears that arose from the image of Haitians entering the international community as equals. Fears of a recognized Haiti emerged rapidly, and unsurprisingly, as the Western powers were forced to cope with a nation of former slaves that was immediately proximate to the most-valued slave economies of the Atlantic world.⁴⁷ Southern fears were furthered by the image of black abolitionists from Haiti participating in the suppression of the slave trade; Americans were willing to allow for, and participate in, this suppression, but the involvement of those who wholly rejected the premise of racialized slavery was unconscionable. Further, the fall of San Domingue was not seen as an isolated incident, and the emergence of this new “Black Empire” was perceived as being a first step towards total collapse.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; for further discussion of how self-provisioning fit into the self-stylized image of the benevolent planter see Hill Edwards, “Felonious Transactions.”

⁴⁶ “Emigration To Hayti,” *Alexandria Gazette*, (Alexandria, Virginia), • October, 5 1824, 3.

⁴⁷ Both Cuba and Jamaica are situated as ready points of contact for ships leaving Haiti.

⁴⁸ “Recognized; France; Hayti; Consented,” *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, Virginia), July 30, 1825, 3.

The 1820s saw these fears proliferate in response to the official recognition of the Haitian nation by the French in 1825; former slaves entering the sphere of international politics was a terrifying notion for Southern planters.⁴⁹ It all the more reminded them that they needed to strengthen their grip on their domestic situation even further. Both Northerners and Southerners were terrified at the images of Haiti, and all were forced to wrestle with the notion of what an end to slavery could entail for the Republic. Even those who had reservations about the morality of slavery were forced to consider that a more “palatable” state of bondage was preferable to total destruction, and self-provisioning could fill a role in such a program.⁵⁰

Some of the most striking examples of Southern hysteria regarding Haiti were seen in their fears that Haitians would, or even had, found ways to the American South to foment slave resistance and racial disorder. Not only did the “Black Empire” have plans for the Caribbean, but they were laying the groundwork to undermine the slave regime of the South. In 1823, the *Charleston Courier* warned that recognition of Haiti would allow for “Negro Myrmidons from San Domingo... to parade our streets free from the restraints of our Municipal Laws.”⁵¹ The allusion here is rather overt: Americans accepting Haitians as equal in sovereignty would be tantamount to the Trojans accepting a wooden horse as a gift from the invading Greeks.⁵²

The idea of Haitians directly participating in the destruction of slavery in the Atlantic world tormented the Southern mind, but the more realistic concern stemmed from the fact that a slave revolt had defeated the armies of one of the richest and most powerful Empires of the age. Until the Haitian Revolution slaveholders’ fears remained there without a living example of their full realization. Haiti made it clear that the fear of the slaves taking their freedom by force could

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “The Haitian Peril, Abolition, and Race,” in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 200.

⁵¹ “Municipal Laws--N0. III,” *Charleston Courier*, 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*

become a reality. The danger of becoming a “continental Haiti” weighed on the understandings and actions of the South. In an 1826 commentary on the state and place of slavery in the broader Republic, “Mr. Everett” states bluntly that “I would cede the whole continent to anyone who would take it – to England, to France, to Spain; I would see it sunk to the bottom of the ocean, before I would see any part of this fair America converted into a Continental Hayti.”⁵³ This account fully captures what Haiti had come to represent for the Southerners and their sympathizers, total loss.

In response to the lessons offered by Haitian freedom the planters sought to strengthen their program of control through a variety of measures. One such measure was their increased consideration of the merits of self-provisioning systems. As early as 1828 planters advocated for the system specifically because it addressed the problems that, according to Charles B. Brown, Haiti epitomized: regardless of white-supremacist ideology, slaves were undeniably human with a full range of capabilities and desires both cognitive and physical - any attempts to control them needed to be predicated on this understanding.⁵⁴

Here, again, we return to the “happy coalition” of Bryan Edwards. Slaves could never be fully dominated through sheer force; thus, inducement would serve as the backbone of a stable slave society. In 1828, a contributor to the *Southern Agriculturalist* (Charleston, S.C.), R. King Jr., noted that corporal punishment created resentment and resistance more than it did compliance. His thoughts on how self-provisioning and personal property accumulation directly mirrored those of Edwards; he argued that “Every means are used to encourage them, and impress on their minds the advantage of holding property.... [N]o Negro, with a well-stocked poultry house, a small crop advancing, a canoe partly finished, or a few tubs unsold... will ever

⁵³ “Mr. Everett's Speech, on the Resolutions of Mr. M'Duffie,” *Charleston Courier*, 2.

⁵⁴ “The Haitian Peril, Abolition, and Race,” in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution*, 200-201.

run away.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, he also indicated that these systems had the potential to better utilize the land-resources available to the planter thereby better enabling self-sufficiency. In doing so, King articulated a concern that had long pushed West Indians towards self-provisioning, and he also indicated one of the key reasons that planters would increasingly consider the practice in the American South. These practical benefits would prove fundamentally important for the rhetorical benefits of self-provisioning.

Men such as King were reacting to the increased pressures at the local, national and Atlantic levels through the implementation of a system that dated back to seventeenth-century Barbadian sugar planters.⁵⁶ His account demonstrates how the perceived benefits of the system were linked to the Southern planters’ goals of more effective agronomy and social control.⁵⁷ An essential point for consideration here is that even those who opposed slavery would have potentially been open to such an “ameliorative” program, particularly in the context of Haiti serving as an example of control-lost. Self-provisioning as a practice could mollify the enslaved, but in rhetoric it could, somewhat paradoxically, soothe those who had not fully committed themselves to anti-slavery mindsets.⁵⁸ Racialized concerns for “civility” and social safety, which were exasperated by the Haitian Revolution, opened a door for self-provisioning to occupy a place in the Southern planters’ rhetorical arsenal. For those who accepted the notion of

⁵⁵ Found through Hill, “Felonious Transactions”; while Hill’s analysis is impressive, she does not take account of the broader sources and premises of the program described in: King, R. Jr., “On the Management of the Butler Estate, and the Cultivation of Sugar Cane.” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, Volume III, Part I, 1828, 523-529: 524.

⁵⁶ See transcription in Peter Thompson, “Henry Drax’s Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Sugar Plantation,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2009): 565–604.

⁵⁷ In addition to the fears regarding slave unrest, the planters of South Carolina were increasingly distraught regarding the sustainability of their agricultural systems, particularly pertaining to the relative cost of labor and the exhaustion of soil resources, “Miscellaneous Agricultural Items,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, Volume III, Part III, 1828, 43-46: 46.

⁵⁸ For discussion on the paradoxical nature of slavery amelioration as both pro-slavery and anti-slavery see Christa Dierksheide, *Amelioration and Empire: Progress and Slavery in the Plantation Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

“essential” racial differences, Haiti served as an example of their beliefs and self-provisioning would serve as a means to “civilize” persons of color as much as possible without resorting to the “dangerous” ideas of universal freedom and racial co-existence.⁵⁹

As we see above, the planters and politicians of the South were deeply invested in the events that transpired across the Atlantic World; as Rugemer notes, by the late summer of 1831, the planters’ political programs were shaped by the rising tide of abolitionism both violent and non-violent on both sides of the Atlantic. Publications in both the North and the South paid close attention to the active suppression of the slave trade by the British Royal Navy (in conjunction with the American Navy) as well as the debates over total abolition in the British Parliament, which gained increased intensity over the course of the 1820s.⁶⁰ By 1828, Southerners openly articulated the point that the “problem” of Atlantic abolitionism and the solutions thereto needed conceived of in like-terms. A contribution to the *Statesman and Gazette* (Natchez, Miss.) dated October 1828 explicitly linked William Wilberforce’s crusade to end slavery in the British Empire, domestic manumission societies, John Quincy Adam’s contempt for slavery, the fall of San Domingue, and the danger of a American slave Revolution in the South.⁶¹ The author perceived both the attack on, and the requisite defense of, slavery as a global problem that requires global solutions as their opponents sought for “the slave holders of the world [to] be like the whales of the ocean, with the trasher at their back and the SWORD *fish at their belly*.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Apprehensions about the potential for “innate” differences among races were common, and the “capacity for civilization” weighed heavily on the conversations over the nature of slave regimes, the effects thereof, and the potential implications of abolition. For discussion on these apprehensions see Winthrop Jordan *White over Black, American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 544-545, et al; concerns over questions of civilization were also Atlantic in origin, see Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects, Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*.

⁶⁰ “In the House of Representatives,” *Savannah Republican* (Savannah, Georgia), March 4, 1825, 2.

⁶¹ “Mr. Adams and the Emancipation of Slaves and the violation of the faith of the administration,” *Statesman and Gazette* (Natchez, Mississippi), October 16, 1828, 2.

⁶² *Ibid*.

Correspondingly, broadly-thinking Southern planters conceived of themselves as political-economic aggregators who were open to global solutions for their local and national woes: irrigation systems from China, feed strategies from Holland, and rhetoric from the West Indies all found a place in their agronomic and political understandings.⁶³ With this orientation, they followed the path of West Indian planters in using self-provisioning by the enslaved as a rhetorical tool against political and moral attacks by abolitionists.⁶⁴

On the eve of the Nullification Crisis in 1830, the *Daily Intelligencer* cited that the West Indian's subjection to metropolitan abolitionism was analogous to the South's position in the Federal Government.⁶⁵ The author argued that Southern representation in Congress was merely a legitimizing device, and that they were "to all intents and purposes re-colonized, as much so as if the British Parliament had supreme legislative power."⁶⁶ The importance here is not just that the Southern-oriented commentator is drawing comparisons in the power structures of the British Empire and the Federal Republic, but rather that they are also explicitly tying the political paradigm to the nature and functioning of the slave economy.⁶⁷ While their political position was unquestionably stronger than their counterparts, Southerners identified with the West Indian's struggles, and they also understood that their socioeconomic order—and how they represented it—would need to change in a way that better-served their fight against freedom. The political

⁶³ Agronomic texts were eager to engage with global innovations in the preaching and practice of agronomy as seen in "Letters addressed to the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, on the means of improving the health, of the Lower Country" Johnson, Joseph. *The Carolina Journal of Medicine, Science, and Agriculture*; Charleston Vol. 1, Issue 2, (Apr 1, 1825): 131.

⁶⁴ One of the most explicit examples of this in the British context is that of William Beckford, *Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica: Impartially Made from a Local Experience of Nearly Thirteen Years in That Island* (T. and J. Egerton, Military Library, Whitehall, 1788).

⁶⁵ "Mr. McDuffie's Speech—Concluded," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington D.C.), May 25, 1830, 2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; on the identification with the British see Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation*, 118.

⁶⁷ "Mr. McDuffie's Speech—Concluded," *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 25, 1830, 2.

reorientation described by Rugemer was inextricable from socioeconomic practices and understandings as they pertained to provisioning.

The terrors of Atlantic abolitionism in the first three decades of the nineteenth-century were intimately related to changes in how the political economy of slavery was executed and understood. In this context, another key event further drove the planters towards the system: Nat Turner's would-be Revolution further pushed the planters to reconsider how they approached the problems of social control, agronomic practice, and the relationships therebetween; self-provisioning offered a means to create a social *détente* at the local level while the planters attempted to address the inextricable problems of local, national, and Atlantic abolitionism.⁶⁸ This *détente* was essential for the stability of the regime locally, but, more importantly for our purposes, it offered a way to make slavery more "palatable"; self-provisioning could serve as a key component of a program that limited the brutality that followed the Nat Turner rebellion and undermined claims to "benevolent" slavery.

By 1831 the effects of the most glaring threats of abolitionism were somewhat limited because the embodiment of said dangers could be seen as distant by Southerners. The surge of abolitionism in the British metropole and the Revolution in Haiti were terrifying but decidedly foreign. Regardless, the planters were already building a conceptual framework for the fight against Atlantic Abolitionism at the local and national level. Yet, while some planters were effecting change, the wholesale swelling of self-provisioning as a means to meet these dangers was yet to materialize.⁶⁹ On August 22nd, 1831 Nat Turner and his band of rebels provided an

⁶⁸ Nat Turner and Kenneth S. Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner: And Related Documents*, Second Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017), 16.

⁶⁹ King Jr., "On the Management of the Butler Estate, and the Cultivation of Sugar Cane." *The Southern Agriculturalist*, Volume III, Part I.

essential, local source for the re-orientation of provisioning practices that the coming decades would see.⁷⁰

The Nat Turner rebellion embodied the fears that the Haitian Revolution had fostered among Southerners, and it was a necessary event that linked the local, national, and Atlantic concerns over slavery. Prior to their brutal suppression, the rebels killed dozens of whites; they inspired a sense of panic and terror across a region that scrambled manically to prevent what could have become the seed for a “Continental Hayti.”⁷¹ The revolt made it clear that the current modes of control were either ineffectual or undesirable; a legal and extralegal reorientation in socioeconomic practices and understandings was needed to better maintain the regime’s internal stability; by extension, these reorientations aimed to make the system viable externally in relation to accusations of tyrannical excess.⁷²

In the wake of Nat Turner, the South further tightened its legal frameworks that governed the lives of slaves. However, this reorientation did not find corresponding alternations in practice; for instance, South Carolinians increasingly pursued self-provisioning in spite intensified legal proscriptions. It is here that we see a particularly confounding development, as the same regimes that engaged in the practice and rhetoric of self-provisioning sought to proscribe such activities more fully. This contrast points directly to a duality that came to define the South’s approach to self-provisioning; legislators could partially proscribe it and courts would occasionally intercede against it, but the planters would tacitly or explicitly approve of both legal and extralegal forms of self-provisioning.⁷³

⁷⁰ Turner and Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Hill Edwards, “Felonious Transactions,” 205

An undergirding understanding for this duality can be seen in Southern reactions to Nat Turner. While their frenzied mass mobilization of armed forces represented fear, it also constituted an impressive show of martial potential.⁷⁴ Brutal repression represented anxiety, but its “effectual” nature also signaled the power that could serve as a backdrop to mollifying practices such as self-provisioning; *de jure* and martial domination over the enslaved made concessions in practice more palatable for the Southern planter. Like the West Indians before them, Southern planters knew the potential implications of ceding provisioning control to the enslaved; material empowerment or spatial independence are dangerous if they are not contained, but their martial confidence curtailed anxieties over this issue.⁷⁵ In theory, the planters could have their cake and eat it too through the simultaneous proscription in law and endorsement in practice, as they firmly believed they could quell slave resistance; their anxiety was genuine, but not all-encompassing in a way that it precluded the pursuit of such systems.⁷⁶

Southern choices to pursue a dualistic stance were also derived directly from their relationship with the national debate over abolitionism. Some abolitionists were clear to point out that there is a contradiction in “property” owning property. They pointed to the fact that any legal recognition of property would potentially obliterate the logical framework that supported slavery. As the abolitionist William Goodell noted “If the slave could possess property, he could dispose of it; he could make contracts; he might contract marriage; he might become a man, and,

⁷⁴ Turner and Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 16.

⁷⁵ Fears over ceding control were common among West Indians, as seen in the agronomic discussions over provisioning that warned of the dangers associated with spatial mobility, personal property, and economic self-reliance, see Gordan Turnbull *Letters to a Young Planter; or Observations on the Management of a Sugar Plantation*. (London: Stuart and Stevenson, 1785), 35, 40-41.

⁷⁶ Admittedly, fears would never subside, and it is fair to acknowledge that some combination of anxiety and confidence pervades all efforts to maintain chattel slavery, as seen in Carl Lawrence Paulus, *The Slaveholding Crisis: Fear of Insurrection and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017). Yet, the Southern planters were in a position of relative power compared to those in San Domingue, so they had reason to be more confident.

becoming such, cease to be a slave. The safety of the entire fabric requires that not one stone in the edifice should be missing.”⁷⁷

In order to better position themselves in the face of abolitionist attacks while encouraging a functioning system of self-provisioning, the planters pursued a dualistic approach in which law sat in contradiction to practice. In their technical proscription of slaves as independent economic actors—creating quasi-independent “grey area”—the planters hoped to benefit from the system without falling into the logical trap of acknowledging legal rights. While this approach is contradictory, or even nonsensical, it had the potential to sidestep the logical contradiction of “chattel” holding chattel.⁷⁸

When responding to abolitionist attacks, food was a central point of the moral debate. For instance, in a response to the work of Thomas Clarkson, James H. Hammond noted that—as a result of the immorality of industrial capitalism—the poor of England went “[not] for one day, but for whole days, without a morsel of food. They have remained in their beds of straw for two successive days, under the impression that in a recumbent posture the pangs of hunger were less felt”⁷⁹ Hammond juxtaposed this point to the—impressively fanciful—notion that “never did a slave starve in America.”⁸⁰ Thus, debates over food and “relative” tyranny offered a tool for Southern polemicists to attack their critics. While logically fallacious, *Tu quoque* arguments retain(ed) strong rhetorical pull within broader political and moral discourse.

Some abolitionists, such as Josiah Henson, engaged directly with arguments over how just or unjust a given provisioning system was, but in doing so they tacitly validated the notion that

⁷⁷ William Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice: Its Distinctive Features Shown by the Statutes, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts* (Amer. and Foreign Anti-Slavery Soc., 1853), 96.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 108: Goodell was gleeful in his catching the Southerners pleading for a logical dualism in self-provisioning, but his astuteness in no way precludes the role the duality could play in the rhetorical framework.

⁷⁹ James Henry Hammond and Thomas Clarkson, *Gov. Hammond's Letters on Southern Slavery: Addressed to Thomas Clarkson, the English Abolitionist* ([Charleston, Walker & Burke, Printers, 1845), 17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

there was potential for less-tyrannical mastery.⁸¹ However, some authors attacked the provisioning dualism head-on. The purely exploitative source of self-provisioning did not evade William Goodell. Goodell argued that self-provisioning was “manifestly inconsistent with the absolute and unlimited chattel-hood of the slave.”⁸² He pointed to the fact that this dualism arose purely from the self-interest of planters who desired greater profitability, social control, and rhetorical ammunition. Goodell, in his characteristically cutting tone, noted that “the slave is adjudged to be a mere thing, except where his master's interests or convenience require that he should be regarded a man.”⁸³ He highlighted the planters’ attempts to create a false logical “grey-area” that they hoped would go unmolested by systematic consideration. This faulty reasoning held that grounds, provisions, and stock were “such small and transient supplies” that they “would hardly be accounted [for as] *possessions or property*.”⁸⁴ Yet, Goodell’s commentary hardly constituted the rule for abolitionists; Southern rhetoric of provisioning was effective in its handwaving away from the reality of the practice that aimed to better exploit the enslaved while defending the institution from abolitionist attacks.

Regardless of the implications of abolitionist rhetoric, the underlying message taken from the developments of the first third of the nineteenth-century was that new means for social control—and representations thereof—were needed in the South. While brutality and martial dominance were means for control, the 1831 rebellion demonstrated how costly such methods were both in property and persons; with this in mind, the planters increasingly opted to adopt self-provisioning as a means for these ends.

⁸¹ “From the Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada,” in James G. Basker, *American Antislavery Writings: Colonial Beginnings to Emancipation* (Library of America, 2012), 539-540, 542.

⁸² Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice*, 96.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁴ Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice*, 101.

An article in the *Southern Agriculturalist* dated 1833 cited that the “complete dependence” of the slave on the master was essential for social stability, however, the author also noted that the enslaved growing their own food did not preclude such dependence.⁸⁵ In fact, while the planter argued against allowing inter-estate transactions to be carried on without express permission, they also believed that a degree of mutualism could be struck through the encouragement of independent production that stayed intra-estate. A key issue the planter raised was the distinction between *rights* and *privileges*; the enslaved could never feel they had rights to provisioning or property, but they could have both as a privilege.⁸⁶ The planter noted that “I never restrict them in any acts of industry, but reward them punctually for their exertions, by taking from them at a fair price whatever they justly have to offer.” In such a situation where the planter purchases goods—at a “fair” price—that the slaves produced (or if the slaves simply consumed them outright), he argued that the planter would both retain control and extract material benefits while the enslaved would be increasingly satisfied with their lot.⁸⁷

This program offered potential solutions for the increasingly negative image of Southern slavery. The horrific excesses of Southern militias in 1831 stood as a manifestation of both Southern brutality and the problem of tyranny that drove many abolitionists forward. As accusations accumulated over the course of the nineteenth-century, such outbursts of violence were detrimental to the Southern cause. As such, a managerial platform such as that of the 1833 article offered a means to effect social control that was more “palatable” than overt, marital domination. If debates over abolitionism were set against a de-escalated environment, then the South could hope to have a stronger footing in the public eye (an eye that often simply wanted to

⁸⁵ Anon., “On the Management of Slaves,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, Volume VI, No. 6, Part I, 281-282.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁸⁷ Anon., “On the Management of Slaves,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 286.

remain in willful-ignorance towards the violent excesses of the South). Notably, the author likened his plantation to a well-designed machine in which “all of its parts should uniform and exact, and the impelling force regular and steady.”⁸⁸ His program for provisioning and standardized, stable control aimed to create a sense of satisfaction “with the society on the plantation” among the enslaved while projecting an image of benevolent, civilizing mastery.⁸⁹ Through such a means, the Southerners could sell their system as untyrannical and stable; further, they could argue that it “civilized” the slaves through the acculturation of “productive” habits that were, in turn, essential for the health of the national economy.⁹⁰

Interestingly, and much like King Jr.’s mirroring of Bryan Edwards’ “happy coalition,” the 1833 article articulated a long-standing desire of Atlantic planters to benefit from independent production by the enslaved while not allowing it to “get out of hand.” The unnamed agriculturalist of 1833 proposed a program that was nearly identical to that of Gordon Turnbull in *Letters to a Young Planter* (London, 1785) where slaves could grow food and hold personal property so long as it remained strictly under the umbrella of the plantation socio-spatial order.⁹¹ The essential difference between the two works is that the American author more heavily emphasizes the concept of a productive, mutualistic “community” that could not be achieved by any other means. Needless to say, such an idealized, clean relationship is unlikely to have ever

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁹⁰ By 1830 the Southern regime was increasingly concerned with the public perceptions of their violent excesses, with the aftermath of Nat Turner focusing on the “mercy” whites exercised in the ensuing “trials,” Turner and Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 19-20; for commentary on indifference that fueled inaction regarding slavery see Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Anniversary of West Indian Emancipation,” in Basker, *American Antislavery Writings*, 470-471.

⁹¹ Gordon Turnbull, *Letters to a Young Planter; or Observations on the Management of a Sugar Plantation*. (London: Stuart and Stevenson, 1785), 35, 40-41; unlike Edwards, it is not entirely clear if Turnbull’s works were read or published in the South, but his approach is undeniably mirrored in the work of Southern planters. It is worth noting that both Turnbull and his descendants continued to have relations with North Americans, as seen in his son Alexander’s death notice in: “Deaths,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington D.C.), November 29, 1851, 3; for the lineage connection between Alexander and Gordon *St. George’s Chronicle, and Grenada Gazette*, (St. George’s, Grenada), March 7, 1835, 1.

arisen, but express articulation of the concept by this planter—in the immediate wake of Nat Turner’s rebellion—represents how seriously the planters were considering such methods as a means to create social stability that was marketable on the national stage.

In sum, by 1833 planters of the South were increasingly concerned with the interconnectivity of broader developments at the local, national, and Atlantic levels. At the local level Nat Turner made it clear that their systems for social control were not effective, and that in order to remain viable they needed to devise other forms of control. At the national level, they were increasingly pressured by the state of the federal government. The nullification crisis and the conflicts over the expansion of slavery echoed the struggles of their brethren in the West Indies, and they were increasingly mindful of the need to articulate political economic and moral defenses of their system. The Atlantic developments of abolitionism informed and shaped these lower-level developments; they gave shape and articulation to the planters’ fears *and* their strategies for addressing them via plantation practices and the representations thereof. One such method was one that was similarly Atlantic in origins, self-provisioning. By the 1820s and 1830s planters were beginning to, in spite of legal proscriptions and limitations, advocate for the employment of self-provisioning as a means for more effective social control and agronomy. With the abolition of British slavery in 1833/38, the intensification of anti-slavery and abolitionist thought in the North, and the fall of the British West Indies, these pre-existing understandings and concerns found new life and corresponding action.

It is important to note that the Atlantic connection behind self-provisioning knowledge was not solely predicated on the work of Bryan Edwards. Southerners drew inspiration from a variety of sources regarding the social, political, and economic benefits offered by self-provisioning. The Haitian Revolution, Nat Turner, the rise of Atlantic abolitionism were all

entering into a world where Southerners both had experience with self-provisioning in some capacity and had access to materials that preached the benefits of self-provisioning. For instance, Robert Charles Dallas' *The History of the Maroon War* (1803), which detailed the merits of self-provisioning extensively by tying it to the cheapening of provisioning costs and the bettering of social control through creating a social and material bond between the slave and the estate, found American reprints and published commentaries in both the North and the South.⁹² Dallas himself lived in the United States for a time, and his prominence was such that upon his death in France he still received honorary mentions in American newspapers.⁹³

Other West Indian proponents of self-provisioning as constituting a politically and socioeconomically powerful tool, such as William Beckford, had regular social and economic dealings with North American planters and he was also featured in Southern newspaper accounts.⁹⁴ Much like Edwards, Beckford preached self-provisioning as a means to answer social, economic, and political questions. He argued that self-provisioning "civilized" the enslaved and easily met their material needs; for the planters, he pointed to the benefits of cost-reduction made possible by allowing, or compelling, the enslaved to grow their own food on marginal lands rather than provisioning them in another way.⁹⁵ Thus, the planters had ready access and example for the role that self-provisioning could play in their schemes to remain profitable, safe, and politically viable. This conception of means was inextricable from the broader Atlantic world; both the problem and the potential solutions thereof were Atlantic in

⁹² Robert Charles Dallas, *The History of the Maroons, from Their Origin to the Establishment of Their Chief Tribe at Sierra Leone...*, 1803, Volume II, 410-415, et al; "From the History of the Maroons" *Alexandria Expositor for the Country*, published as *Alexandria Expositor, for the Country* (Alexandria, Virginia), April 12, 1804, 1; "Advertisement" *Commercial Advertiser*, published as *Commercial Advertiser*. (New York), November 24, 1803, 4.

⁹³ "Death Notice," *Spectator*, published as *New-York Spectator* (New York), January 4, 1825, 2.

⁹⁴ "Sale of Effects and Fonthill Abbey," *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), November 14, 1822, 1.

⁹⁵ William Beckford, *Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica...*, (London, Printed for T. and J. Egerton, 1790), 223.

scope. Yet, these developments alone were not sufficient to compel large-scale adoption. The British Abolition Act of 1833 would begin a series of Atlantic events that would, in conjunction with continued domestic concerns, push the planters to such a transition.

American commentaries on the developments associated with British emancipation, which fed Southern reactions, quickly took form and found proliferation following the abolition act of 1833. Both abolitionists and pro-slavery writers took to the genre of “reflections” with fervor. James Thome’s and Horace Kimball’s *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months’ tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837* represented one of the best early anti-slavery works. It captured both the fears and the hopes that the trials of the West Indies could inspire in Southern planters as well as the dialogues that they were engaged in. It is important to note that it was written prior to the finalization of abolition (outside of the curious case of Antigua), so the anxieties that it expressed actually antedated the bulk of emancipation’s effects.⁹⁶

In terms of fear, Thome and Kimball regularly, and somewhat surprisingly, pointed to estates that are struggling in the face of impending emancipation.⁹⁷ Under apprenticeship laborers were mandated to provide 40.5 hours of labor a week, a figure which was modest in terms of the extreme labor-demands of sugar cane production; in fact, many planters found that the hours cap and other such restrictions meant that the needs of the plantations were not sufficiently met by apprenticeship.⁹⁸ The authors went on to note how it was only tyrannical and foolish behavior by the planters that led to the exodus of laborers and the ruin of planters’ livelihoods, but this reasoning would provide little comfort to a Southern planter who could see

⁹⁶ Antigua opted to skip the “apprenticeship” period of quasi-slavery that the abolition Act of 1833 made provision for, Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 45.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁹⁸ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 95-97.

such stories as a harbinger of the impending social and racial anarchy associated with abolitionism.⁹⁹ What is clear in the account is that by 1837 both abolitionists and their opponents were thinking about what the on-the-ground relationships between former master and slave were and how pre-existing social conditions guided those interactions. In part, they saw this period as defined by the provisioning customs of the colony and the power-dynamics thereof; the planter who retained an effective labor force was the one who did not tread on the customary rights of the laboring population to keep their grounds.¹⁰⁰ Further, these on-the-ground issues fed directly into the moral and political debates over abolition.¹⁰¹

Yet this account and the broader debates that it represented did not merely provide lessons of danger and fear that drove the South to rework its managerial and rhetorical platforms, as it also offered potentially useful “positive” lessons. Politically and morally, the abolitionists positioned themselves behind the idea that properly-executed provisioning was the sign of a just, moral political economy; they looked at the free labor arrangements of Antigua, which included the maintenance of personal grounds, as an example of how free labor could, and should, work in the South. This is certainly not to say that abolitionists would accept slavery if slaves were well-fed or were allowed to keep grounds, but it does mean that there was rhetorical potential regarding the relationship between provisioning and tyranny that the planters could explore. An articulation of the conceptual linkage between provisioning, civilizing, morality, and productive economy opened the door for Southerners to use self-provisioning to address abolitionist attacks.¹⁰² The planter need not take on the assumption that the labor force would be free; he could engage in such practices and package it as a sign of good-will and a mild, “civilizing”

⁹⁹ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 381.

¹⁰⁰ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 401.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 457.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 401.

temperament. It is right to think of this sort of lesson being taken, as the planters were not discreet about their willingness to coopt abolitionist writings and arguments for the use in their rhetoric on the morality of slavery's political economy.¹⁰³ This point could speak to those whose apprehensions over social "degeneration" or economic collapse were heightened by events in Haiti and Virginia.

In addition to the higher-level moral and political ammunition afforded by the early developments of abolitionism in the West Indies, the planters could extract rhetorical insights regarding their management practices. For instance, the practice of self-provisioning had existed in South Carolina for over a century by this time, and it had long been an important component in the broader power-dynamic among masters and slaves.¹⁰⁴ Tales of how well self-provisioning mollified a labor force in a dramatically unstable situation, such as in the post-emancipation West Indies, would have genuine allure for the planters of the South.¹⁰⁵ The provision grounds of Thome and Kimball's account represented a means for signaling social control that existed outside of overt brutality.¹⁰⁶ These early accounts hinted to the planters that a more complete mastery and more subtle tyranny seemed possible through self-provisioning. Through constructing such a system they could prove themselves more acceptable within the realms of moral and political debate while encouraging social stability and economic self-sufficiency. These notions would become increasingly attractive as the sense of impending destruction rose during the final decades of slavery.

¹⁰³ "The Low Price of Land at the South: Its Cause and Remedy," *The Southern Cultivator: A Semi-Monthly Journal, Devoted to Southern Agriculture, Designed to Improve the Mind, and Elevate the Character of the Tillers of the Soil, and to Introduce a More Enlightened System of Culture*, 1859, Volume XVII, 132.

¹⁰⁴ Hill, "Felonious Transactions," 2.

¹⁰⁵ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 401.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 458-461.

By the time Thomas Carlyle published his polemic in 1849, Americans had already extensively engaged with the developments of the West Indies; as such, both the existing rhetorical framework of the planter class and the impetus behind its creation were rooted significantly in the events of the Anglo-Caribbean. Importantly, rather than souring the Southern planters on the practice and rhetoric of the labor force growing its own food, the South continued to see a strong presence of self-provisioning. Moreover, as Justene Hill Edwards noted, planters in South Carolina actually intensified their reliance on the practice as a practical and a rhetorical boon for the slave regime.¹⁰⁷ The decision to rely on self-provisioning as a rhetorical tool was inextricable from the developments of the West Indies: they stood as an example for the Southerners of what may come to pass if they failed; they stood as an example to juxtapose their “untyrannical” system, which “civilized” and gave profits to the nation at large, to; finally, their history told a story of how self-provisioning could be used as a tool to help reach their “golden dreams” of a perfected political economy and an undying Southern “empire.”¹⁰⁸

The rhetoric and practice of self-provisioning had already transplanted itself into the South before the fall of the British West Indies, but the collapse of the plantation complex gave them a new tone and context. The peaceful imposition of emancipation in the British West Indies, and the results thereof, served as a more comparable case for the South to draw on in the face of abolitionism’s rise in the United States.¹⁰⁹ As Hill Edwards argued, self-provisioning was compatible with the rhetoric of “benevolent mastery” that was employed to oppose anti-slavery

¹⁰⁷ Hill Edwards, “Felonious Transactions.”

¹⁰⁸ “From the Editor,” *South Carolina Agriculturalist*, Volume I, 1856, 4-5, 13. For further discussion on the notion of Southern aspirations of empire and political economy see John D. Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (2009) and Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ “Experiment of the Independence of Negroes in Hayti” *De Bow’s Review*, Volume 25, 1858, 31-34: 32-33.

across the Union.¹¹⁰ This rhetoric was far from new, as Bryan Edwards and many of his British contemporaries expressly articulated a notion of mutualism in their works. Importantly, the rhetorical weight of the notion of “benevolence” rested partially on a comparative perspective, as there were clear examples of the excesses of slavery in the American context. Here the collapse of the West Indies and the “civilizing benevolence” of self-provisioning were joined; not only was West Indian freedom “disastrous,” but through means such as self-provisioning excessive violence and societal upheaval could be avoided; bondage was a “positive good.”¹¹¹ Thus, rather than serving as a warning for the South, Carlyle’s pumpkins served as a backdrop to their claims that their “coalition” was truly happy *and* necessary.

One of the most important components of self-provisioning rhetoric was its ability to serve as an example of a “perfect” medium that included the “essential” mastery of the white planter without the stark tyranny that triggered strong moral responses.¹¹² Ever the spin artist, the Southern planter could—much like the “mercy” and “civility” of the Nat Turner trials—point to self-provisioning and the associated activities as facilitating the “civilizing” of the slaves.¹¹³ The case of Lunsford Lane, who freed himself and eventually his family by his own labor, could serve as a “testament” to the merits of the Southern system of slavery rather than an attack thereon.¹¹⁴ Ardent abolitionists, Lane included, would have balked at the notion, but the aim of

¹¹⁰ Hill Edwards, “Felonious Transactions,” 174: importantly, she does not ascribe to the Genovesian thesis of paternalism, and neither does yours truly.

¹¹¹ John C. Calhoun, “Speech in the U.S. Senate, The Positive Good of Slavery,” 1837, <https://www.stolaf.edu/people/fitz/COURSES/calhoun.html>.

¹¹² At the core of this concept were theories of racial inferiority that were far from isolated to those who supported slavery, see Jordan, *White over Black* et al.

¹¹³ As stated above, the mockery of justice that followed the suppression of the Nat Turner rebellion was spun as a sign of Southern “mercy” and “civility,” see fn90.

¹¹⁴ The case of holding up successful former slaves as proof of the system’s “civilizing” nature is a cruel irony, but it is not to be surprising see “The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C.” 1842, in Basker, *American Antislavery Writings*, 423-424; the eyes of the beholder determined if such persons were received as signs of universal humanity or effective “civilizing.”

such rhetoric was never for such persons, but rather for the undecided or disinterested moderate; for those who firmly believed in racial hierarchy or feared the potentialities of emancipation such an interpretation offered a compelling reason to, at the very least, eschew radical propositions regarding slavery and racial injustice.¹¹⁵ As Ralph Waldo Emerson noted in 1846, those whose fancy for apathy, indifference, or racism outweighed their concerns over the human cost of slavery were essential parties to the affair of making property of humanity.¹¹⁶

The notion of civilizing was expressly included in how Southerners discussed self-provisioning, as both the 1828 and the 1833 articles emphasized that the coalition was not simply materially or socially beneficial but also culturally-so. Notably, this “civilizing” rhetoric of self-provisioning had a long history in the Atlantic world, as men like Bryan Edwards were sure to note such effects when they discussed the system.¹¹⁷ More strikingly, the rhetoric was intensified because it was juxtaposed to the developments of the West Indies where the “process” had not been completed prior to the imposition of emancipation. Racialized fear of degeneration found form in the accounts of the West Indies from the 1840s onward, and they provided essential context for the notion that Southern slavery was a force of good.¹¹⁸ Subsistence and provisioning was one of the grounds on which the rhetorical war over slavery was fought; in such a fight, facts

¹¹⁵ Southern polemics were explicit in making appeals that wholly disregarded any common ground with their opponents. If philanthropists were bloodthirsty zealots who could not be swayed, then appeals to the anxious, leery, or apathetic center were the route to take, Elliott, *Cotton is king, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on this Important Subject*. (Augusta, Ga.: Pritchard, 1860), 412.

¹¹⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Anniversary of West Indian Emancipation” in Basker, *American Antislavery Writings* 470-473.

¹¹⁷ The issue of the relationship of the “civilizing” effects of self-provisioning and the notion of racial inferiority was always a complicated one. Bryan Edwards believed the process could progress the slaves, but he remained uncertain about the ability of it to “convert” them fully, see Edwards, Volume II, 150-154; Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, 168.

¹¹⁸ One of the most comprehensive publications of the period can be read in E. M. S., “Emancipation in the British West India Islands.,” *The Southern Quarterly Review (1842-1857)*; *New Orleans*, April 1853.

and truth can often function as inconvenient, surmountable obstacles for those who were painting slavery in the South as civilized and beneficial for all parties involved.¹¹⁹

Comparisons of the South to the British West Indies by Southerners were particularly pointed, as they represented what happened if the “happy coalition” became broken. By the 1850s Southern planters pivoted from their implicit assertions of self-provisioning’s rhetorical merits to explicit statements of the idea; in 1858, a South Carolinian planter named Ben Sparkman noted that his encouragement of the slaves’ economic activity was aimed to purposefully signal to abolitionists how “enlightened” his management practices were.¹²⁰ With such a mindset, planters argued that on their plantations the enslaved were exposed to Christianizing masters who instilled, through means such as self-provisioning, a sense of “moral industriousness.” This point stood in stark contrast to their illustrations of West Indian freedom. The imposing pro-slavery tome *Cotton is King* (Augusta, Ga., 3rd ed. 1860) highlighted how the happy coalition of the West Indies broke in the face of a “broad, deep wave of moral death.”¹²¹ The “habits of industry” of Edwards’ coalition, which according the Hammond and his ilk created lives for the enslaved that were “prosperous beyond any peasantry in the world,” gave way to “degeneration” and slothful, godless, barbarism.¹²² In this view, freedom was “ill-suited” and “dangerous” for people of African descent; the planters positioned self-provisioning as an essential component of an optimized social system of slavery that engrained “civilization” and “happiness” in the lives of the slaves. Put bluntly, planters hoped to create a false-choice

¹¹⁹ W. Caleb McDaniel (2013) The Case of John L. Brown: Sex, Slavery, and the Trials of a Transatlantic Abolitionist Campaign, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 14:2, 141-159, 153.

¹²⁰ Hill Edwards, “Felonious Transactions,” 189-190.

¹²¹ Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King*, 137.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 138, 395-396.

scenario where the greatest life that could be lived by those of African descent was one in which they had niche, contingent “liberties” in bondage, or total loss and misery in freedom.¹²³

Anglosphere pro-slavery rhetoric was built upon the notion that productivity *of a certain kind* was morally essential. Much like Carlyle, the authors of *Cotton is King* drew clear distinctions between the morality of production that aimed to “merely” meet one’s “animal needs” and that of laboring towards the goals of the ascendant class of white male landowners.¹²⁴ Alternatives that did not feed the political economic regime were automatically to be dismissed as immoral and barbaric. That said, self-provisioning fit quite well with the regime and its political economic rhetoric. Central to the South’s argumentation was that their sectional economy was an essential and growing component of the national economy.¹²⁵ Self-provisioning coincided with this notion because it was part of a broader program to better utilize land and human capital within in the South. By externalizing the process of provisioning onto marginal lands worked by the enslaved in their “down time”—rather than purchasing provisions for the slaves—planters were both increasing their efficiency of land-usage and reducing their costs.¹²⁶ For those who were more open to the economic rhetoric of the South, self-provisioning could be packaged as a means to create a more stable and productive national economy through its creation of self-sufficiency and its potential to limit overproduction (in cases where self-

¹²³ *Ibid.*; King Jr., “On the Management of the Butler Estate, and the Cultivation of Sugar Cane.” *The Southern Agriculturalist*.

¹²⁴ The authors of *Cotton is King* were “generous” enough to note that the free black population of Jamaica had to work *two hours* a day rather than Carlyle’s above estimate (all of which are laughably inaccurate), Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King*, 398.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 58-64.

¹²⁶ Much like in the Caribbean, slaves noted that their self-provisioning time fell on weekends, holidays, and during the night, see John Glove’s account of hunting at night in *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, South Carolina, Volume II, 138; see Sylvia Cannon’s account on weekend work, *Ibid.*, Volume I, 180; Concerns over wasted or ill-used land were common throughout this period, and calls for both complete utilization of land resources and an increased diversification towards food crops were common, see David Clayton et al., *Southern Cultivator: And Journal of Science and General Improvement* (Columbia, S.C.), Volume 17, 1859, 351; Editor, *The South Carolina agriculturist : a journal of agriculture, horticulture, mechanics, rural taste and industrial improvement*, Volume I, 1856, 16.

provisioning took place on cash-crop-eligible land or caused labor allocation shifts). One proponent of this scheme noted that such a “division of labor” would save planters “millions of dollars annually.”¹²⁷ In short, self-provisioning fit well in the South’s political economic posturing and supported their position within the national economy.¹²⁸

Joining the arguments of economy and civilization were those against accusations of social tyranny and managerial brutality. Self-provisioning and the rhetoric thereof sought to address one of the most common (and well-founded) accusations of abolitionists: that the slaves were chronically under or malnourished and were even regularly on the brink of starvation.¹²⁹ Of particular note was the issue of protein-deficiency, which contemporaries often viewed as a marker of overall nutritional inadequacy.¹³⁰ Here planters argued that self-provisioning was a way to overcome such accusations; proponents pointed to slaves participating in small-scale husbandry, and there is evidence to suggest that both husbandry and hunting were components of self-provisioning schemes.¹³¹ The rhetoric of the planters went beyond private letters and agronomic texts, as idealized images of provisioning standards entered into Southern legal codes. While these codes were, like most statutes on chattel slavery, often ineffectual and mocked as such by abolitionists, they could be pointed to as a sign of “good-will.”¹³² Food and malnutrition

¹²⁷ “Should the South Diversify Her Products” De Bow’s Review Volume, 10, 460; as an aside, the planters were increasingly inundated with the rhetoric of formal political economy during this period, and they regularly made references to the un-sound mechanizations of liberals who espoused free-labor theory; their behavior was quite in line with the logic of Adam Smith’s conception of sunk costs v. perspective costs within established and functioning slave economies, for a game theory analysis see Barry R. Weingast, “Adam Smith’s Theory of the Persistence of Slavery And Its Abolition in Western Europe,” Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 2015.

¹²⁸ Hill Edwards, “Felonious Transactions,” 181.

¹²⁹ Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice*, 140; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 176-180.

¹³⁰ Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice*, 141

¹³¹ See Milton Marshall on hunting with master’s consent, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, South Carolina, Volume IV, 172; Benjamin Russel on keeping chickens, *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³² Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice*, 135-137.

were central to the arguments over “benevolence” and tyranny, and the somewhat varied nature of contemporary narratives regarding food invited planters to assert themselves in this area. For instance, Frederick Douglass’ account of slavery emphasized the tyranny that can be exercised through control over food, and his account was echoed by many in the broader corpus of slave narratives.¹³³ Alternatively, planters could frame such treatments as “bad mastery” rather than giving in to the categorical assertion that “mastery is bad”; if tyranny is conceived of as defined by purposeful material deprivation, then the masters could claim that they were not party to such tyrannical practices through self-provisioning, as in this situation the slaves were largely responsible for their own subsistence. The master would serve a mere, “benevolent” safety-net in this “civilizing” and economically-sound system.¹³⁴

The final consideration of self-provisioning rhetoric is one that emerged from the earliest accounts of the Americanized version of the “happy coalition”: self-provisioning as a mode of social control that did not rely upon as much overt violence. Brutalizations by plantation management against enslaved people were central to the maintenance and productivity of the slave regime as well as the abolitionist attacks thereon.¹³⁵ Slavery and violence are forever-bound, but the planters understood that self-provisioning offered a means to reduce the violence that undergirded their political economy; as the King Jr. noted, the practice could induce slaves

¹³³ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom. Part I. Life as a Slave. Part II. Life as a Freeman.*, 1855, 42-43, 54-55, 58; for further examples see narrative accounts of Victoria Perry, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, South Carolina, Volume III, 261, and Savilla Burrell, *Ibid.*, Volume I, 150.

¹³⁴ For instance, Lunsford Lane’s starkly antislavery tract could be used in this framework because he juxtaposes Mr. Boylan, who gave sufficient food to the slaves and was “very kind,” with the tyrannical Mr. Smith who withheld food and embodied tyranny, “The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C.” 1842, in James G. Basker, *American Antislavery Writings*, 425.

¹³⁵ For discussion on the centrality of violence in slave regimes see Edward Baptist, “Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Whipping-Machines, and Modern Power” in Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: PENN, 2016); for discussion on the complex nature of violence within plantation hierarchies, particularly intra-racial violence, see James M. Clifton, “The Rice Driver: His Role in Slave Management,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82, no. 4 (October 1981): 331–54.

to comply with the demands of the regime more regularly than if it were absent.¹³⁶ The violence of slave patrols and punitive corporal actions could be lessened, and in doing so the Southern regime hoped to better respond to accusations that their political economy was tyrannical, uncivilized, and unacceptable.¹³⁷

Altogether, self-provisioning was yet another means by which the planters could argue that their political economy was sound, moral, and essential to the “public good” both at the local and the national level.¹³⁸ In the face of increased abolitionist pressures during the final decades of slavery, Southerners took lessons from their predecessors and contemporaries in the West Indies. Like Bryan Edwards, they took on practices of self-provisioning as a means to better manage a slave economy, but they also used the image of his “happy coalition” to argue that their regime was unimpeachable. In doing so they mirrored the failed efforts of those they saw mutual struggle with, but their trials were—in their minds—fundamentally different because they were constituent parties in the metropolitan government, they produced an essential industrial good, and—above all—they had the means to wage war if they so chose to do so.¹³⁹ Furthermore, their adoption of the rhetoric and practice of Edwards was accompanied by the juxtaposition of such an order with that of Thomas Carlyle’s West Indies. The West Indian “experiment” stood as a harbinger of the perils of emancipation in Southern mentalities, practices, and rhetoric.. The lessons of “West India” pervaded how the planters perceived the role that food production systems could play in their struggle for power and control on the

¹³⁶ King Jr., “On the Management of the Butler Estate, and the Cultivation of Sugar Cane.” *The Southern Agriculturalist*.

¹³⁷ Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice*, 138-140.

¹³⁸ Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King*, 409.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 412.

national and local level; they were essential to their fight against the rising waters of Atlantic abolitionism. Yet, their efforts were in vain.

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