

The Master-Slave Relationship In North America

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Fear, Possession, and the Structure of the Master-Slave Relationship

The master-slave relationship is based on the fearful relationship that runs on both sides. The element of possession lies in the mindset of a master who thinks a slave is his possession, just like household things for a house owner. The masters posed dominance over the slaves and treated them with brutality. The master's perception of the slaves of the black community was that they lacked willpower and moral values.

The beginning of slavery started as a justifiable thing where masters used to justify that they would train slaves in discipline. Slave women were a matter of sexual assault. They were targeted by both the masters for their desirability and their mistresses for jealousy. The paper will talk about the nature of the masters and the sufferings of the slaves, along with the narratives from the interviews and the conditions of the slaves in which they worked. The slave codes and punishment in different regions would also be a part of the paper.

The enslavement was begun in 1630-1640. The onset of slavery as the system emerged with the advent of colonial America by 1740. The antebellum era before the Civil [War of 1812](#) was renowned for its supporters of slavery. This period had the famous inculcation of ownership seed and property practice. This period also marked the Industrial Revolution. Chad Luck, in his book, "The Body of Property..." talks about the nature of ownership and possession of masters in antebellum culture. He raised questions like, what does it feel like to own something? Or how something becomes a property of oneself? He stated that ownership is not an abstract legal form but a lived relationship that emerged within a space in the 18th-19th century. He showed a correlation between the loss of property and anxiety. [1]

The case of possession is how one feels that something belongs to him. The possession or ownership was discussed from the perspective of the law in the 18th century. John Locke's view is that ownership is built when the owner combines his efforts with the thing. However, ownership is also linked to title and claim. The hypotheses were checked through a legal wild case of *Pierson vs. Post*. Stating that the declaration of possession is for the one who has a certain control over the thing. [2]

Law, Forced Labour, and the Institutionalization of Slavery

The mindset of the white community in the early times was based on enforced labour, so it started to build at the institutional level after the legalization of possession by the common law. The slavery law was built on the base of the dominance of the masters and their right to exercise power over the slaves. Slaves were considered “chattels” that were owned or possessed by the owner by the law, and they had the right to do whatever they would like in their possession. The slaves were just like an entity, chairs or just like cows who were totally under the control of the owner, and the owner’s behaviour was entirely his own affair. [3]

The slave codes happened in 1661 that gave authority to the masters or owners over the life and death of the slaves. The code imagined the slaves as “brutish” and “heathenish”. The slave code banned the slaves from possessing any weapon, horse or mule and from meditation. Slave codes all varied with the variation in the culture. For instance, the Bermuda slave was prohibited from wearing bright colour clothes or carrying a stick until they were declared lame. The Bahama slaves could be beaten if they were found selling eggs, liquids or gambling. Slaves were not allowed to have their own land or property. The slaves could not file any charge against whites; otherwise, they would be doomed, and no testimony would be offered in their defence. [4]

The punishments given to slaves varied with the region and cultural background. The punishment act of Montserrat 1663 empowers the white masters to kill a slave for stealing crime. The virginal Act of 1783 passed the membrane cutting or nose slitting on the crime of stealing. The punishment on the personal level was coercion along with flogging. The mutilation also adhered to the flogging. The Barbados Act defined harsh punishment for common offences, such as hanging the slave to death of hunger and thirst; he could have been hanged and then cut into pieces, or he could be burnt to ashes. [3] Pain or physical torture was added along with solitude and labour in the American prison system. The punishments were solitude, watchfulness, cutting off communication and physical pain in the Auburn prisons. [5]

Domestic Slave Trade and the Commodification of Human Life

With the emergence of the domestic slave trade in the 18th century, many slaves were sold out from the upper South. The slave traders settled up business, and they used it as a threat to slaves for their work. The slaves were so frightened that if they sold out, they would never see their families again. The slaves and their closest family people were sold frequently. It is evident from the slave’s narrative written in Léonard narrative:

"As near as I can remember, my mother and sister were sold and taken to New Orleans, leaving four brothers and myself behind. We were all placed out. At six years of age, I was placed with a Mr. Bradford, separated from my father, mother, and family."

The slave market in the antebellum was a famous market for new or lean, and people used to sell the slaves for compensation or to pay their debt. Traders used the ads to expand their trade business. Even if a person died at that time without the division of property or slaves, the state was authorized to divide the savings by the law of inheritance. [6]

Talking about the expectations of masters from slaves and the attitude of the masters toward slaves came out through the interviews of the ex-slaves in the Save the Narrative collection. Slaves took the paternalistic approach; they showed that slaves were told that they were not masters of their destiny and they depended on their masters for everything. In another interview, ex-slave Berry Smith talked about ex-master, *"de Bullwhip an' de paddle"*. The master did not teach us anything but forced us to labour. [7]

Frederick Douglass, Literacy, and the Journey Toward Freedom

The autobiography of Fredrick Douglass, who wrote about the experience of slavery and the epiphanies he found through the journey to freedom, explains the crucial sufferings of the slave in the master-slavery relationship. The loss of the family described by Douglass,

"He was immediately chained and handcuffed, and thu.....by a hand more unrelenting than death. (3.5)"

In the above quote, Douglass explained the biggest fear of slavery, which is separation from family. He didn't see his father. He barely remembers his mother when she died, and he was not allowed to see her at the funeral because he was a slave. [9]

Material Deprivation and Everyday Life on the Plantation

Slaves earned fewer material benefits. Mostly, they were filled with basic things like food, cotton clothing, and crude lodgings. The chances for plantation slaves were high for cash; they sued to get the small cash as a reward for their good task. Wages were different according to the contracts and type of working conditions. The self-hired slaves who were allowed to be hired by the masters earned around \$100 per year. [8] Slaves men and women along with children worked 16 hours per day at harvest time and six days a week with half Saturday. They used to work as a group of 25 members. Skilled slaves who worked as cabinet makers earned equal wages to white people.

Men and women both were exploited under the act of slavery through sexual assault. The fertility of women in the 19th century was much more pronounced, with childbirth rates at proper times. The frontiersmen used enslaved women as legal wives for raising children as bond slaves and prostitutes. The north women were sold into brothels in North America.

Furthermore, the use of power by the masters to create dominance was expected from women, and sex was used as a mode of authority over submissive women. The master used sexual harassment and sexual abuse to punish the slaves. The punishment of the slaves as rape was desirable to the masters as it gave them a sense of power and control over the slave that she would comply with whatever the master desired.

Forced Reproduction and the Exploitation of Enslaved Women

Another brutality was the slave-breeding in which the enslaved women were forced to reproduce without their consent. The reproduction was done by the masters and sometimes through an arranged marriage between slaves of choice for reproduction planned by the master.

The control of the married women over their sexual lives was also under the control of the masters. If women produced healthy offspring, she was forced into rape or sexual assault for the profitable business of reproduction by the masters. The freedom of their personal sexual relationships was snatched from them. According to the narration from the ex-slave mentioned in Harlot Jacob,

"Women are considered of no value unless they continuously increase their owner's stock. They are put on a par with animals."

Sexual Violence and the Absolute Power of Slaveholders

Sexual abuse was one of the most brutal and intervening ways to show control over the lives of the slaves by the masters. Likewise, male slaves were also used by the female masters for pleasure, punishment, and dominance in the master-slave relationship. It is explained through a narrative from an anonymous slave from Georgia.

"In the time's white men when [went] with colored gals and women bold. Anytime they saw one and wanted her, she had to go with him, and his wife didn't say anything bout it."

The woman master used male slaves to feel that they had control over her life. The wives of the slaves were not allowed to stop it from happening. [10]

The Master-slave relationship is dominate-submissive and has imprisoned brutalities in history. The relationship benefitted both sides, but the masters of the equation achieved more than they were supposed to get. The slaves were handled by the feudal of the 18th and 19th centuries, who treated them as animals, possessions, or part of their settlement for their public and personal gain. Slaves were sold out and preserved because they were seen as investments for future profit. On the other hand, the slaves were abode by the necessities of life and by the law. The women faced brutal relationship realities and physical torture in the form of sexual torment. The end of slavery happened after a revolt in 1822. Slaves became rebellions and struggled to fight for their own survival.

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