

• Race and Culture: Dower's "Race, Language and War in Two Cultures," Genovese's *Roll Jordan Roll* & Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone*. By Xaq Frohlich.

1) Genovese's interpretation of African-American slavery rests on the centrality of paternalism. Rather than depicting a cold, heartless system of slaveholder domination of slave, we are shown a culture of reciprocity, where slaveholders are compelled to protect and, to a certain extent, nurture slaves, and slaves return (or possibly dissemble) gratitude for their protection. A compelling demonstration of this mutuality is how slaves can appeal to slaveholders to get rid of particularly rough overseers. One thing I found lacking from Genovese's narrative was a description of the production system or economic structure in which to ground the interdependent dynamics of the slave's resistance-accommodation. Beyond a certain moral denial or sentimentality regarding their position as slaveholders, is it not also possible to explain the aversion to arbitrary abuse as reflecting business pragmatism? It is bad business to unnecessarily damage one's property. Genovese's interpretation is strengthened by the moral appeals in the slaveholders' narratives, but I think he may overstate their moral motivations.

2) Similarly, Genovese's account of slave culture is fairly hegemonic, not just through its dialectic method, but through its erasure of historical and geographical contingency. To explain this criticism I will offer another account of slavery history (which leans on Genovese's account), Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone*. Unlike *Roll Jordan Roll*, Berlin in *Many Thousands Gone* divides his analysis by a separate attention to different regions of the South, and traces the evolution of slavery across two centuries. Several significant trends arise that are absent in Genovese's account. The most striking one is the role of different "crop cultures" in influencing the evolving severity of slaves' living conditions – indigo, rice, cotton, etc. Berlin argues that overseers were more beholden to slave resistance just before crop harvest. The delicacy of harvest for some crops was such that slaves could better negotiate the terms of their living conditions with slaveholders because of their familiarity with disrupting the timing of harvest. This takes on a historically contingent significance because first generation slaves frequently had less experience with the crops, were less able to disrupt or resist harvest, and were therefore more conducive to overseer control. Moreover, the different seasonality of crops led to varying mobility and therefore differences in slave networks, such as city to countryside networks.

Another historical background to slave labor in the US is the importance of the Caribbean slave revolts in shaping American slaveholders' confidence in slave loyalty. In Genovese's account these events are only discussed for comparison, while Berlin makes a case that in certain regions the foreign revolts led slaveholders to revert to import slavery systems rather than domestic ones. (This international context is driven home by the fact that Spain controlled slave colonies in the Louisiana region as well as Florida.) The contrast between Caribbean slavery and Southern slavery again leads to a difference in interpretation. Genovese quote's one Southern slaveholder as remarking at the irony that in the Caribbean slaves have more legal rights, but are more poorly treated. We are left to understand that the legal abnegation of slave rights in the South partly compels slaveholders to accommodate the slave's demands for breathing space, a give and take social model. We could, on the other hand, attribute the difference in living standards to

the fact that slave communities in the Caribbean were less stable (due to constant importation) resulting in unstable communities and inhibited their ability to force accommodation. To understand Genovese's account, then, we must assume he is only discussing slavery in the 19th century context where slave populations were relatively settled. In this context Genovese introduces us to very persuasive examples of the mutuality of patrimony and its inherent tensions, for example, the slaveholder's sense of obligation to slave's demand for wife and family.