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PLANTATION SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA: 1824-1860

by MARGARET T. ORDOÑEZ

ECONOMIC independence from the North was a desired goal of antebellum southern leaders of the nineteenth century. Southern Commercial Convention participants strongly supported such independence at their meetings held irregularly between 1837 and 1860. They proposed that Southerners should trade directly with Europe for manufactured goods in exchange for cotton and other products produced in the South. In Leon County, Florida, newly-settled planters had arranged for direct trade with Liverpool by 1831. Plantation supplies such as Negro clothes and blankets, bagging, iron, and salt from Liverpool sold at lower prices than similar goods from New York in 1835. Although the exchange with Europe continued spasmodically, the desire for more independence from the North was evident in the contemporary Tallahassee newspapers.¹

Efforts to resist reliance on goods shipped from Europe to northern ports or manufactured in the North resulted in attempts to bring about self-sufficiency on southern plantations. Analysts disagree about the extent of this self-sufficiency, however. Eugene Genovese notes in *The Political Economy of Slavery* that census returns from the "Cotton Belt" reveal little home manufacture on plantations and only small amounts of clothing produced in the home. He refers to large purchases of northern manufactured clothing and sales of second-hand clothing in bulk for southern slaves. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll* Genovese amends his earlier opinion by saying some slaveholders, "especially the biggest," bought

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1. Tallahassee *Floridian & Advocate*, April 7, 1831; Tallahassee *Floridian*, March 28, 1835, January 27, 1838, February 9, 1939; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, November 16, 1850. Professor Genovese wrote that such trade between the South and Europe was unrealistic due to the small amount of manufactured goods brought into the South and the large amount of raw produce shipped out of the South. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1967), 160.

cloth to make clothing on the plantations, but he places little emphasis on this production. He does not mention plantation production of yarn and cloth.²

Period writers, plantation records, and merchant accounts from Leon County indicate that yarn, cloth, and apparel production was quite prevalent on plantations throughout the area. Slaves on Leon County plantations made most of their own clothing during the antebellum era. This practice enabled plantations to become more self-sufficient, and it proved to be more economical, particularly for the larger agricultural operations. The cost differential between purchasing all required clothing and producing a major portion of it was enough for planters to expend both their time in supervision and the slaves' time in production of garments. In Leon County basic work clothes were made most often from fabrics which had been purchased, although some slaves spun the yarn and wove the cloth for their clothing.

The most typical slave clothing fabrics purchased from Tallahassee merchants were cheap and offered little variety in fiber content, structure, or design. Garments produced from these fabrics, along with hats and shoes purchased locally in bulk, supplied the physical needs of their wearers, but due to their sameness and solely utilitarian nature, they failed to meet the slaves' need for some individuality and self-respect.

Slaves comprised the major portion of the population of Leon County from the establishment of Tallahassee as a territorial capital in 1824 until the 1860s. The slave population in the county ranged from sixty-nine to seventy-three per cent of the total inhabitants during this period. There were 9,089 slaves in 1860.³ As government buildings, churches, schools, stores, homes, and places of entertainment were built in Tallahassee, more and more land was cleared in the outlying areas for cultivation—mainly of cotton and corn. These products, along with a variety of vegetables, fruits, and forage crops, in the northern half of the county made Leon the most prosperous of the middle Florida

2. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, 161, 165-66, 277; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 551.

3. U.S. Census Office, *Sixth Census, 1840; Seventh Census of the U.S.: 1850, 400; Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1864), 54.

counties before the Civil War. With the greatest number of slaves and the largest amount of improved land, Leon County planters out-produced farmers in nearby areas.⁴ Their profits were increased as a result of their ability to produce the basic clothing items needed by the slaves.

Reporting on the financial success of many Florida planters, a newspaper correspondent stated in 1849 that "all or a portion of their Negro clothing was made at home."⁵ Despite the time and raw materials needed to make clothes, many planters, their wives, or overseers directed the slaves in these tasks. "The clothing of a plantation of negroes [*sic*] is in itself a great care; the cutting, fitting and sewing, by several seamstresses for both sex [*sic*], must be superintended the year round, and when they weave the cloth, there is the carding, the spinning, the reeling, warping, etc., also to be directed."⁶

Gins prepared the cotton fibers for carding, although records from neighboring counties show that children often picked seeds from the cotton.⁷ The fibers then were carded in preparation for spinning. Tallahassee merchants sold cotton cards for up to sixty-two and one half cents per pair and wool cards for thirty-seven and one half cents.⁸ Wool was also produced

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4. Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, April 21, 1860; *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*, 402-10; *Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1864), 18-22.
 5. Marianna *Florida Whig*, January 20, 1849, cited in Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860* (Gainesville, 1973), 140.
 6. Ellen Call Long, *Florida Breezes: Or Florida, New and Old* (Jacksonville, 1883; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1962), 179. Long's father, Territorial Governor Richard Keith Call owned 118 slaves in 1860 according to the 1860 Leon County tax books as cited in Julia Hering Smith, "The Plantation Belt in Middle Florida, 1850-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1964), 319. See also Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 219.
 7. The children could have been removing seeds from Sea Island cotton fibers which release seeds more easily than the shorter staple cotton that was more suitable for ginning. George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, 19 vols. (Westport, Ct., 1972), *Florida Narratives*, XVII, 213, 254, 258. William A. Carr operated a cotton gin on his plantation near Lake Jackson. He owned seventy-seven slaves according to the Leon County tax rolls for 1860, reported in Smith, "Plantation Belt," 319, and Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 219.
 8. Tallahassee merchant records for the years 1843-1861, reviewed in Margaret T. Ordoñez, "A Frontier Reflected in Costume, Tallahassee, Leon County, Florida: 1824-1861" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State

on some plantations, and wool yarn was mixed with cotton yarn to produce a variety of fabrics, such as kersey, lasting, and linsey.⁹

Slaves spun yarn for weaving and sewing. A former slave from Leon County reported that all the cloth for Negroes was made from homespun thread. "Every house of any note could boast of a spinning wheel and loom. . . . It was common to know how to spin and weave."¹⁰ Handmade fabric was usual, although sales in local merchants' record books indicate that commercial cloth was also in demand. Another Leon County black remembered being taught to spin and weave when she was about ten years old.¹¹

Although local merchants' records contain references to purchases of commercially-produced sewing thread, spinning yarn for the construction of garments also took place on the plantations. The amount of sewing thread sold by the merchants was inadequate to sew the amount of fabric sold for slave clothing. The Chemonie plantation overseer's records show slaves' spinning sewing thread as well as "making Negro cloth."¹² A hand-weaving factory that produced fabric for slaves was located on the El Destino plantation grounds.¹³

Records show that planters, as well as slaves, used hand-woven cloth for clothing. A former slave from the Arthur Randolph plantation stated that his mother lived in the Randolph "mansion" and wove cloth for the family and slaves from cotton grown on the plantation.¹⁴ Other slave owners reportedly wore

University, 1978), 258. These records, from fourteen merchants, included day books, account books, inventories, and statements of accounts due.

9. Records show that in 1856 George Nobel Jones, owner of Chemonie and El Destino plantations, sent 207 pounds of wool to the Southern Rights Manufacturing Company in Monticello to be washed and carded. Kathryn T. Abbey, "Documents Relating to El Destino and Chemonie Plantations, Middle Florida, 1828-1868, Part I," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VII (January 1929), 191. In the South cotton often was substituted for linen, and the fabric was still called linsey.
10. Rawick, *Florida Narratives*, 349.
11. *Ibid.*, 59.
12. Kathryn T. Abbey, "Documents Relating to El Destino and Chemonie Plantations, Middle Florida, 1828-1868, Part II," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VII (April 1929), 303-25. Fifty slaves lived at Chemonie in 1841, *ibid.*, 326.
13. Manuscript sketch accompanying the El Destino and Chemonie plantations papers, Special Collections, Robert L. Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee.
14. Rawick, *Florida Narratives*, 242. Randolph owned fifty-one slaves in 1860.

homespun clothing, and if they wore the products of their plantations, their slaves surely did too.¹⁵

Determining even an approximate total amount of yarn, fabric, and sewing thread produced on plantations in Leon County is not possible from presently available data, but certainly slaves on some of the plantations ginned, carded, and spun fibers into yarn and then wove the yarn into cloth. Planters also purchased fabric from merchants to supplement the homemade supply or to furnish all the cloth for the very common plantations activity of sewing clothes for slaves.

With the possible exception of clothing for house slaves, most of the slaves' work shirts, pants, and dresses were products of the plantation. No available local merchant records or correspondence with non-Florida firms indicate purchases of large amounts of garments—only bulk purchases of fabric, shoes, and hats. The construction of garments was a year-round activity on some plantations and part-time on others. Eight seamstresses received pieces of fabrics to sew in the slave quarters on the Edward Bradford plantation. The cutting of the garment pieces was supervised closely by Mrs. Bradford, probably to insure accuracy and the best utilization of the fabric. "This was repeated week after week, year in and year out." The mothers of slave families on the Bradford plantation were "never required to do their own sewing."¹⁶

On other Leon County plantations the records indicate that the mistress also superintended the work of several seamstresses. At the Chemonie plantation in 1847, "making Negro clothes" for about twenty-five hands was a task assigned to one or two persons during the summer months. One reference in the plantation journal mentions "sewing, asneburg [sic] pants."¹⁷ Garments made in large quantities by seamstresses using fabrics purchased in bulk meant that there was hardly any choice for the slaves

See Smith, "Plantation Belt," 321, and Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 220.

15. Long, *Florida Breezes*, 186; Smith, "Plantation Belt," 59.

16. Mrs. Nicholas Ware Eppes, *The Negro of the Old South: A Bit of Period History* (Chicago, 1925), 5-6. The Bradford plantation, Pine Hill, had 178 slaves in 1860. See Clifton Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail, An Agricultural Chronicle of Leon County, Florida, 1860-1967* (Gainesville, 1968), 11-12.

17. Long, *Florida Breezes*, 165, 179; Abbey, "El Destino and Chemonie Plantations Part II," 294-302.

as to color or style. If there was any variety it was due to the slaves making alterations in their own garments.

Some planters directed their slaves to make their own clothing from fabric given them. One planter wrote about his field hands' receiving their allotments: "Twice a-year [*sic*] they have the necessaries served out to them, for clothing, &c., which they make up agreeably to their own taste."¹⁸ If slaves made their own garments on their own time, the planter could assign other tasks to would-be-seamstresses, but the quality of construction must have varied according to the skill of the sewers. This, however, would have afforded them the opportunity for diversification. Sewers could vary the garment design, within the limits of the amount of fabric available, and could dye the cloth different colors. Dry goods and drug stores sold indigo, turkey red, madder, and other dyes, as well as mordants, although indigenous vegetable dyes such as wild indigo, poke berries, walnuts, and tree bark were more likely to be used.¹⁹ A local writer stated, however, that allowing slaves to make their own clothes was less common than having specific slaves assigned to do the sewing.²⁰

The invention of the sewing machine made it possible to speed up the sewing process and perhaps to increase the strength and durability of seams. A woman interviewed in 1860 for a Tallahassee newspaper noted that sewing machines were "one of the best labor-saving machines in use."²¹ In 1860, L. M. Folson of Centerville in the northern part of the county advertised that he was the agent for the "celebrated" Grover and Baker sewing machine, and included testimonials from local residents and planters. R. W. Fisher was one of those quoted: "Most of my sewing on my plantation is done by a *negro [sic] girl* not fourteen years old."²² A Jefferson County planter stated that a Moore's

18. Achille Murat, *America and the Americans* (New York, 1849), 81.

19. Merchant advertisements appeared often in the Tallahassee *Floridian*, 1831-1848; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, 1849-1864; and Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, 1841-1861; Rawick, *Florida Narratives*, 338; Comte de Castlenau, "Essay on Middle Florida," Arthur R. Seymour, trans., *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (January 1948), 228.

20. Long, *Florida Breezes*, 165. Mrs. Long also mentioned slave women sewing and knitting as they sat in the doorways of their homes on the Fred Cotten plantation. According to Leon County tax book, 1860 as reported in Smith, "Plantation Belt," 319, and Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 219, the Cotten plantation had 274 slaves in 1860.

21. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, July 7, 1860.

22. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1860. R. W. Fisher owned forty-five slaves that year according to the Leon County tax book, 1860, as reported in Smith, "The

Patent Family Sewing Machine had been used for eight months on his plantation: "It will sew from the finest to the coarsest cloth. It has done all the sewing for the family and made all the negro [*sic*] clothes— will sew with any kind of thread. I can recommend the Machine to any person that wants one, as being as good as any in use."²³

Fabric to be made into slave clothes was purchased in long pieces and in bales. Pieces of cloth sometimes measured over 100 yards in length, and bales of fabric varied from 350 to 1,000 pounds, averaging 650 pounds. Based on an examination of over 2,150 sales transactions involving 38,289 yards of fabric sold by Tallahassee merchants from 1840 to 1861, an analysis indicates one-third of the fabric sold was cut in lengths over 100 yards. These long pieces of fabric may have had a variety of uses, but a major purpose was slave clothing.

Fabric sold by Tallahassee merchants in small quantities cost almost three times more than cloth cut in long lengths. Obviously planters, whenever possible, purchased cheap fabric in large quantities, because they could cut costs by buying fabric in bulk. The result was that clothing made from only one or two lengths of fabric was monotonous and lacked individuality.

The least expensive serviceable fabrics were selected. Analysis of Tallahassee merchants' sales reveals that six materials were usually selected for slave clothing. Five were made of cotton or linen— osnaburg, domestic, shirting, sheeting, and stripes.²⁴ Kersey, the sixth, was composed of wool or a wool and cotton mixture. Often mentioned in newspaper advertisements as slave cloths, these fabrics almost always sold for less than twenty-five cents per yard. Half their sales were for one bit (twelve and one half cents) or less, with one bit the most overwhelmingly popular price. Kersey cost more because of its wool content.

Two other characteristics of the typical slave fabrics further

Plantation Belt," 320, and Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 220. In the advertisement Folson used the term, "servant" rather than slave in stating that young servants could use his reliable and durable machine.

23. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, July 7, 1860.

24. Sales entries of cotton and linen fabrics often used for slave clothes had the width measurement included. Width designations were based on quarter yards— eighteen inches or two quarters was written 2-4; forty-five inches or five quarters was written 5-4, etc. See Mary Brooks Picken, *Sewing Materials* (Scranton, 1924), 187.

distinguished them from more expensive fabrics. While the more costly fashion fabrics varied in price seasonally, cloth used for slave garments did not vary much in price during the year. Fashionable fabrics often cost less during the second and third quarters of the year, but the six typical slave fabrics, particularly shirting, osnaburg, and kersey, had little price variation. The price of shirting and osnaburg also changed less from year to year than all the other fabrics studied over the twenty-year span prior to 1860.

The slave fabrics' sale prices differed from those of fashion fabrics over the period from 1844 to 1861. With 1844 prices as a base, slave fabrics after 1846 averaged consistently higher than their 1844 prices, but fashion fabrics averaged lower than their base year price. By 1846 the national economy was improving after a depression period, and an era of material prosperity had begun. Slave prices were increasing, and so were the costs of fabrics used for slave apparel. The downward trend for fashion fabrics could have been the result of the lowered duties on imported materials due to the 1846 Walker Tariff.²⁵

In addition to the typical slave fabrics of osnaburg, domestic, shirting, sheeting, stripes, and kersey, a few other fabrics could be identified as being used occasionally for slave clothing. This is determined by records which show sales of lengths of cloth longer than was necessary for a single garment. These included kersey, homespun, denim, calico, ticking, drill, cottonade, and jean. Newspaper advertisements mentioned these fabrics as being available for slave clothing.

Advertisements touting the goods that Tallahassee merchants had to sell occasionally included the term "negro clothing," but in the lists of specific items to be found in the stores, only shoes, caps, hats, and fabrics were specified for slaves. No mention was found of second-hand clothes for sale in Tallahassee. The records did not list pants, coats, or shirts as being sold in large number for slaves, but they did contain many entries for large purchases of hats and shoes. Plantation records reflect the same situation. Wool hats for slaves sold for as little as fifty-four cents, while the minimum cost for "slave hats" of unspecified material was

25. Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South: The Emergence of a Reluctant Nation*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1975), 237; F. W. Taussig, *The Tariff History of the United States*, 7th ed. (New York, 1923), 114-16.

ten cents. Palm leaf and straw hats worn during the summer months were also quite inexpensive. Planters often bought these hats by the dozen.

On some plantations slaves made shoes, but many Leon County planters purchased shoes in quantity for their slaves. Stores carried large stocks of shoes; merchants advertised up to 2,000 pairs of shoes for sale in a single store as early as 1831. Bulk purchases involved over 100 pairs bought at one time. "Heavy brogans for plantation use," "course [*sic*] Negro shoes," and "stout and well made shoes for Negroes" were frequent descriptions. "Thick soled and double soled" were other terms used to describe slave shoes. "Russet," "kipped," and "pegged" brogans often were designated as slave shoes. In the late 1850s when slavery was becoming an increasingly sensitive subject in the South and throughout the country, "servants' shoes" began to be substituted for "slave shoes" in the advertisements.

The cost of shoes for slaves ran as low as \$.62 per pair, but the average price for shoes bought in quantity was \$1.07 per pair. Not buying the cheapest shoes indicated that durability was of some importance to the planters. Whether the slaves wore the shoes provided them is another question. One former Leon County slave stated that he could not remember seeing his mother ever wear shoes, even in the winter. He did not indicate if this, was by choice or necessity. Another slave from the Carr plantation recalled the owner's reprimanding slaves for pulling their shoes off and leaving them in the field. Lack of comfort could have been a factor, especially with new shoes that were made of stiff, sometimes untanned leather that gradually had to mold to the shape of the foot because the shoes were made on straight lasts, not shaped for left and right. The merchant and plantation records as well as slave narratives show that many blacks were provided with shoes for protection at least during the winter.²⁶

The prices of shoes and hats purchased in bulk followed the same trend that the slave fabrics established from the base years of 1844 to 1861, with an increase in price after 1846. The other ready-made apparel and accessories not specified for slaves averaged little change after 1846. The costs of fabrics and accessories for the slave clothing increased during the 1850s as the prices

26. Rawick, *Florida Narratives*, 3, 5, 251.

for slaves themselves rose. This increase in prices further encouraged the planter to seek out less expensive fabric and accessories to purchase in bulk quantities. None of the sources indicated that planters cut allotments of fabric, shoes, and hats to the slaves as prices rose. As slaves became more valuable property, the necessity for their adequate care also increased.

Slave owners and overseers did not all use the same basis for establishing allotments of fabric or garments, shoes, and hats. Reports described some slaves as "dirty," "ill-dressed," and "badly clothed."²⁷ One newly-arrived settler in Leon County, who was working to get started with her three slaves, used part of a wagon cover to make a bed case for one of the blacks and to make a shirt for another whom she described as "literally naked." She wrote in 1829: "and when Francis [Eppes] went last to Magnolia I was obligated to send for providence cloth for a habit apiece for Agnes and Nanny. They wore out each a suit completely in the journey, and have been so indecent lately, and indeed in such absolute want, that I did not think it right to carry my economy any farther."²⁸

These poorly dressed slaves seem to have been the exception rather than the rule, however. Other sources report that many of the slaves on plantations were clothed adequately. Advertisements for runaway slaves indicate that some slaves were dressed very well. Coats and hats often were described as part of the dress of a runaway.²⁹

Adequacy of cloth allotments is difficult to compute with existing data; shoe allotments are different. The number of slave shoes made or purchased often approximated the number of adult slaves on a plantation. An observer of plantation life in north Florida reported that slaves in the new territory had "the necessaries served out to them" twice a year.³⁰ Plantation records show these times to be summer and winter. Contracts and court records indicate clothing allotments for hired slaves. Three examples from Leon County specified a minimum of two

27. Tallahassee *Floridian & Advocate*, October 24, December 27, 1831.

28. Harriet Randolph to Mrs. Thomas Eston Randolph, September 8, 1829, in Randolph family papers, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

29. Tallahassee *Floridian & Advocate*, April 5, 1856; Tallahassee *Floridian*, May 25, 1839, February 13, 1841; Long, *Florida Breezes*, 219; Eppes, *Negro of the Old South*, 23, 85; F. A. Byrd to Colonel Osborn, December 18, 1865, F. A. Byrd Papers, Strozier Library, Special Collections.

30. Murat, *America and the Americans*, 81.

suits of clothes, a hat, and a pair of shoes. A minimum of clothing seems to have been considered adequate for slaves although one historian; John Blassingame, emphasizes that the "average" amount allotted per person might be adequate for one slave and not for another.³¹

Genovese figured that slaveholders during the last decade before the Civil War spent from \$7.00 to \$10.00 per year to clothe an adult slave, although some might have expended a larger sum. Data from the Tallahassee merchant records of the period indicate that the amount also could be much lower if the planter purchased the cheapest cloth and accessories. Making the cloth on the plantation would lower the charges at the stores even more. If a yearly allotment consisted of two pairs of shoes, two hats (one summer, one winter), and fabric for two kersey suits (pants and shirts or jackets) and two osnaburg suits (pants and shirts), the costs in Leon County would range from \$4.75 for the least expensive materials to \$7.75 for average-priced goods. Genovese's estimate for the same amount of clothing is higher than this but probably was based on manufactured garments rather than plantation-made items.³²

Some opportunities for slaves' acquiring additional clothing existed. House slaves were most often the ones to receive second-hand clothes cast off by members of the planter's family. This was less likely for field hands although they usually were included when gifts and clothes were given for special reasons. Headkerchiefs or other trifles were awarded for accomplishments like picking the most cotton. At Christmas, slaves might receive such items as "bright-hued" bandanas, dress fabrics, plaid shawls, hats, vests, or "Sunday" shoes.³³

Several sources indicate that slaves had opportunities to make some money either from extra labor or by cultivating gardens and bartering their produce. Stores in Tallahassee were open for business on Sunday, and slaves often were permitted to go to town to trade on their day off.³⁴ This way slaves could add to

31. Smith, "Plantation Belt," 127; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, April 5, 1856; Tallahassee *Floridian*, May 25, 1839, February 13, 1841; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community, Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972), 158.

32. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 551.

33. Long, *Florida Breezes*, 220; Eppes, *Negro of the Old South*, 7, 12.

34. Tallahassee *Floridian*, March 8, 1834; Murat, *America and the Americans*, 80.

their meager clothing allotments, and they also had the opportunity to achieve some distinction in their dress.

Both the planters and slaves in Leon County contributed to the clothing supply, thus decreasing reliance on the North for finished goods. The plantations benefitted economically from locally produced fibers, yarns, fabrics, garments, and shoes. Such plantation production of apparel was profitable even when the owners had to purchase some raw materials. Planters' allotments to slaves, however, often were adequate only to protect the slaves' health. The planters usually supplied only the basics; anything more than monotonous scanty provisions had to come from the slaves themselves. Some originality in dress was possible if the slaves designed and sewed their own family's clothing, or if they dyed colorless fabrics, altered second-hand garments, or bought additional items with their own money. Opportunity for creativity was present for slaves with time, talent, or desire, because the low-cost fabrics and accessories that the planters allocated offered little diversity. Achieving a distinctive or individual appearance in dress was the result of the slaves' ingenuity; planters were generally more concerned with the economics of an increasingly self-sufficient plantation system and supplied only provisions adequate for maintaining that system.