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The Treatment Received by American Slaves: A Critical Review of the
Evidence Presented in *Time on the Cross*

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Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's two-volume work on American slavery, *Time on the Cross*,¹ has attracted considerable attention from both the popular press and the scholarly journals of history and economics.² In large part, this outpouring of attention is directed at the authors' claim that the physical and psychological well-being of American slaves was much greater than previously believed.³

*An early draft of this article was prepared during the summer of 1974 and presented to the American Economic Association's Summer Program for Minority Economists, the Economics Department Visiting Speaker Series at the University of Michigan, and the Mathematical Social Science Board Conference held in Rochester, New York, October 24–26, 1974. In revising that draft I have attempted to eliminate all errors and misunderstandings on my part which have been called to my attention and to make those changes which seemed to improve the clarity of my argument. In this regard I am grateful to the participants of these meetings for their comments and advice. Unfortunately, the constraints of time have prevented me from extending my comments or of taking advantage of the many suggestions which were offered for the supplementation of my evidence. I would like to express my particular appreciation to Paul David, Carl Degler, Albert Fishlow, Herbert Gutman, Roger Ransom, Kenneth Stampf, Peter Temin, and Gary Walton for advice and suggestions which, in my opinion, improved the final draft. Stanley Engerman and Robert Fogel generously provided me with the raw data which they relied upon and answered numerous questions which immeasurably facilitated my task. I wish to emphasize my gratitude to them.

¹Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, Vol. I: *The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, and Vol. II: *Evidence and Methods—A Supplement*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974. Hereafter these volumes are cited as FE, I and FE, II. All other references are listed alphabetically by author in the bibliography and are referred to in the text by the author's last name and the date of publication, for example: Smith, 1960.

²The book has been reviewed in *Time Magazine* (Foote, 1974), *Newsweek* (Clemens, 1974), *The Wall Street Journal* (Otten, 1974), *The Washington Post* (Genovese, 1974), *The Christian Science Monitor* (Woodman, 1974), *The New York Times* (Passell, 1974), *The New York Review of Books* (Woodward, 1974; Haskill, 1974), *The New Yorker* (Bliven, 1974), *The New Republic* (Lichtman, 1974), *The New Leader* (Rothman, 1974), *Atlantic Monthly* (Blassingame, 1974), *Esquire* (Muggeridge, 1974), *Commentary* (Glazer, 1974), and *Daedalus* (Davis, 1974), among other newspapers and magazines. The academic reviews include those by David and Temin (1974, 1975), Ransom (1974), Gutman (1975), Lebergott (1975), and Parker (1974).

³In addition to challenging the traditional view of slave treatment, *Time on the Cross* also discusses the Atlantic slave trade (FE, I, Chap. 1; FE, II, pp. 27–37), the profitability of slavery (FE, I, pp. 59–70; FE, II, pp. 54–79), the viability of slavery (FE, I, pp. 86–94, 103–106; FE, II, pp. 85–87), slavery in the cities (FE, I, pp. 94–102; FE, II, pp. 87, 152–155), and the efficiency of slavery (FE, I, pp. 191–209, 247–257; FE, II, pp. 126–151, 162–167). I have focused my attention on slave treatment since that topic represents, in my opinion, the major contribution of

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