

Reinterpreting "*Gone with the Wind*"

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(This is the first installment in this three-part essay "reinterpreting" popular films that have been willfully and flagrantly mischaracterized by Cultural Marxists.)

In addition to hiding significant truths from the American people -- by spinning narratives that are **ALWAYS** lies -- the left in this country also consistently misinterprets film or literature containing a conservative theme or lesson. As Cultural Marxists, the left is obliged to infect every vestige of American society and culture with their malignant ideology to provide it with an opportunity to metastasize.

When a compellingly honest work appears, these disinformation agents willfully misinterpret it to suit their ideology, often in contrast to the clear and unmistakable message of its author. Their purpose is to obscure the true message of the film or book, so that it becomes cloudy or ambiguous to its intended audience. Three films that experienced this phenomenon were *High Noon*, *Bonfire of the Vanities* and *Gone with the Wind*.

Few films have dared to depict the institution of American slavery in an honest and objective manner, but Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* -- and the film based on it -- were two that undertook this difficult and courageous task. The explanation for the conspicuous absence of other such works is probably found in the old adage that "*the victors write the histories.*" Although fictional, *Gone with the Wind* attempted to present an accurate and realistic picture of *antebellum* slavery in the South, in contrast to many earlier and embellished works of fiction such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. *Naturally, Gone with the Wind has been routinely denounced as "an undeniably racist artifact" that "unabashedly romanticizes" slavery.*

Margaret Mitchell's motives for writing *Gone with the Wind* may remain obscure, but she artfully debunked many of the myths surrounding slavery found in earlier works that helped enflame abolitionist sentiments in the North, and ultimately fueled the *War of Yankee Invasion*. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of these, which according to Wikipedia "...had a profound effect on attitudes toward African Americans and slavery in the U.S., and is said to have helped lay the groundwork for the American Civil War." Even Queen Victoria of England read the book -- a pre-release copy from its author -- which may explain why England never officially recognized Secession by the Confederacy.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the disciplining of slaves was profoundly exaggerated to serve the propaganda efforts of the *Abolitionist Movement*. The book is replete with sympathetic black characters who are regularly hunted down, whipped nearly to death, wrenched from their families to "sell down the river," and its females sold as "sex slaves." (Although preposterous, that last claim was certain to provoke the proper white ladies among Christian abolitionists.) Most anecdotes illustrating cruelty in Harriet Beecher Stowe's book were based on *second-person* through *fifth-person* accounts of either slaves or abolitionists, so their accuracy is even more dubious than conventional hearsay.



In fact, the exaggerations of the abolitionists in the mid-19th Century very much mirrored the later heated rhetoric of prohibitionists in the *Women's Christian Temperance Movement*. They forced the ratification of *Prohibition* in many state legislatures while American men were fighting in Europe and had no say. Indeed, it's no coincidence that Harriet Beecher Stowe was both a leading *Abolitionist* **AND** *Prohibitionist* of her day. Driven by the kind of single-minded zealotry often found among very wealthy women with little to do, Stowe threw herself into the abolitionist movement with a dilettante's understanding of the institution as it was practiced in the South.

Fortunately, the typical and far more humane relationship that existed between owner and slave depicted in *Gone with the Wind* has significant empirical evidence to support Mitchell's characterization. A new school of historians has evolved since World War II, calling itself the *New Economic Historians* or "*Cliometricians*." Theirs is a discipline that relies exclusively on empirical evidence rather than the recycling of conventional falsehoods parroted by victorious propagandists drawing on dubious fictional accounts such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.



One pertinent work in this genre is *Time on the Cross*, a book by two academic historians (one, a Nobel Laureate) devoted to shedding light on the subject of *antebellum* slavery in America. It is no overstatement

to say that many common misconceptions about *antebellum* slavery were effectively debunked by this book. Many conclusions of the "Cliometricians" who researched the institution of slavery reveal far greater compatibility with the manner in which it was portrayed in ***Gone with the Wind*** than with that depicted in ***Uncle Tom's Cabin***. (See Robert Fogel & Stanley Engerman. ***Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery***. Little, Brown & Co., 1974.)

Sources of the data used by authors of ***Time on the Cross*** included Census Records found in the *National Archives*, materials found in the archives of southern states, and records preserved by many southern historical societies. They were able to obtain old business records of most large plantations that included the names and brief life histories of slaves working those plantations. The authors also accessed Wills and other legal documents of large planters. One unique body of data yielded by their research were the prices paid for thousands of slaves. The authors consider these sources of data to be "***...a more complete body of information on the operation of the slave system than has been available to anyone interested in the subject either during the antebellum era or since...***"

In a highly condensed form, these are a few of the many conclusions reached by the authors of ***Time on the Cross*** (TOC):

#1. The common claim that slave-owners intentionally worked their slaves to death at an early age is an evil and grotesque falsehood. Slaves were a VERY EXPENSIVE CAPITAL INVESTMENT: The average price for a male slave between the ages of 20 and 25 in 1850 was approximately \$800, the equivalent of \$31,000 in current, inflated dollars. Their profitability continued into their mid-60s, when they were often and paternalistically assigned less strenuous tasks. (TOC, pp. 75-77.)

#2. As a capital investment, slaves were expected to bring a financial return over the course of their working lives. Thus, it was in the interest of owners to maintain the stability of slave families in order to ensure morale. **SELLING SLAVES "down the river"** as punishment was a rarity. As the authors put it, based on their evidence: *"Most slave sales were either of whole families, or of individuals who were at an age when it would have been normal for them to have left the family."* (TOC, pp. 5, 49-53.)

#3. **LIFE EXPECTANCY** is often considered the best general measure of a demographic group's well-being. The average life-expectancy of U.S. slaves born in 1850 (**36 years**), was equal to that of free Frenchmen, and compares favorably with life expectancies of free populations in Italy (35 years,) Austria (31 years,) Chile (31 years,) Manchester, England (24 years,) and the residents of Boston, New York and Philadelphia (24 years each) at that time. (TOC, pp 125-126.) **(Editor's Note: Deaths during childbirth and childhood diseases probably account for these surprisingly low life-expectancies around the globe.)**

#4. Rather than a subsistence **DIET**, slaves were fed a varied diet often possessing a **higher caloric content** than the diets of most free men of their day. Their diet was also **higher in certain essential nutrients** than the diets of most whites, including those of their owners. (The authors attribute this seeming anomaly to the high levels of Vitamins A and C found in sweet potatoes, a frequent food source for slaves that were often considered an *"inferior good"* by whites.) (TOC, pp. 112-115.)

It's not a coincidence that the more benign and paternalistic characterization of slavery depicted in Margaret Mitchell's fiction (and its film adaptation) are more compatible with the evidence unearthed by professional economic historians, than was slavery's depiction by zealous abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Many abolitionists were blinded by their zealotry, but able to convince themselves that they were doing "God's Work." They no doubt rationalized their exaggerated rhetoric on the basis of the principle that "***the end justifies the means.***" Unfortunately, relying on such sources as "evidence" does not make for a sound historical record.

