Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management.

By Caitlin Rosenthal. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. 295. Paperback $35.

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This book is a valuable contribution to the history of American slavery. The author combines business history with an intimate knowledge of the accounting practices of plantation slavery, acquired through careful archival research, to produce a new perspective on plantation slavery's evolution into a machine-like operation. For historians of technology the author's frequent comparison of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slavery with industrial Taylorism of the twentieth century is arresting and sobering.

The author brings to this project her knowledge of accounting and business practices from two years of work in a major twenty-first-century business enterprise, as well as graduate-level historical studies. As a result, she provides an insightful analysis of plantation business records in both the West Indies and the colonial- and pre-Civil War-era United States.

Central to the book are what she calls the "paper technologies" of preprinted account books that were designed not only to document the production of sugar, cotton, and rice, but also the management of slave labor. These account books, utilized by larger plantations (which comprised the most advanced and productive sectors of plantation agriculture), demonstrated, in the author's words, how "violence and control [of slaves] complemented organizational innovation" (p. 13). In other words, this volume supports the view that slavery in the United States was a continually evolving institution that, had it not been for the Civil War, could well have become an ever-more effective means of exploiting human beings.

In this telling, American slavery was not doomed to fail by the demands of a capitalist economy. Instead, the author suggests that plantation slavery was in every way a modern business enterprise whose labor methods presaged later forms of industrial capitalism. In the author's view, the plantations' control over their labor forces allowed them to operate "as if a machine of many parts—a continuous-process assembly line on a grand scale" (p. 112). In contrast, early nineteenth-century Northern factory owners drawing on free labor "had to recruit workers and entice them to stay" (p. 66). Workers could—and did—quit or take time off at will, leaving factories to hire and train new workers if their machines were to keep running. Although they contended with occasional runaways, plantation owners did not experience such turnover problems.

Here is where the theories and strategies of Frederick W. Taylor's attempts to standardize work processes under the banner of "scientific management" come into the story. Finding that published works on slave management and Taylorism have a common intellectual heritage (p. 119), the author argues that "the master-slave relationship is quite similar to the

[later] capitalist wage-laborer relationship in scientifically-managed enterprises" (p. 203). Considering this in light of the very concrete post-Civil War continuation of "coercion, violence and deception" (p. 158) in managing African-American workers, one can see that the template of labor control established in 250 years of American slavery cast its long shadow well into the twentieth century, and perhaps further. Reflecting on her own experience in a modern accounting firm that provided advice on the contemporary management of labor, the author notes "how easy it is to overlook the conditions of production from the comfort of a countinghouse or the safety of a computer screen" (p. 198).

In this context, there is a vivid image of the authority of the plantation power structure versus the enslaved in Benjamin Henry Latrobe's 1798 watercolor illustration of the master-slave relationship at a Virginia plantation. Titled ironically *An Overseer Doing His Duty*, it depicts a white male overseer standing on a tree stump languidly smoking a cigar, with a long rod in hand, while two black women labor in a field in reach of the rod. This image reifies the power differential in plantation slavery.

Any student of the history of technology, or of American history, will find this volume instructive, thought-provoking and, for want of a better word, excruciating. The reduction of human beings to mere capital investments, to would-be machines, and to subjects of violence at the hands of capricious overseers and masters, is a heritage that cannot be ignored or minimized if the history of American technology is to be honestly taught and reckoned with.

DARWIN STAPLETON

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Contagion, Isolation, and Biopolitics in Victorian London.

By Matthew L. Newsom Kerr. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
Pp. 370. Paperback €93.59

Matthew L. Newsom Kerr's *Contagion, Isolation, and Biopolitics in Victorian London* explores the history of London's fever and smallpox hospitals, built by the Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB) between 1870 and 1900. In seven chapters and seventeen illustrations, the United States-based historian investigates the debates surrounding infectious disease, locating London's hospitals in a complex landscape of governance and social control. Newsom Kerr engages well-known and obscure printed sources, especially surrounding the series of health and social reform acts which punctuated nineteenth-century British politics. Examples are the Metropolitan Poor Act of 1867 and the Infectious Disease Act of 1889. Newsom Kerr's project is novel, illuminating for readers in the style of a Victorian detec-