

## **Columella and the Difficulties of Management in Ancient Rome and the American South**

### **Columella and his Proximity to the Vilicus**

Nec tantum operis agrestis sit artifex, sed et animi, quantum servile patitur ingenium, virtutibus instructus, ut neque remisse neque crudeliter imperet semperque aliquos ex melioribus foveat, parcat tamen etiam minus bonis, ita ut potius timeant eius severitatem, quam crudelitatem detestentur. *Rust.* 1.8.10

Not only should he be skilled in the work of the farm, but also, as much as his servile nature allows, instructed in the virtues of the mind, so that he does not give orders gently or cruelly, and always favors some of the better slaves, and yet he should also be sparing of even the less good, in such a way that they fear his harshness rather than detest his cruelty.

### **Duties of the Slave Driver (Papers of William J. Minor)**

He must obey all the orders of the Overseer. He must see that all the hands under him in the field do their duty and punish them in a proper manner unless they do. He must not allow any loud talking or quarreling in the fields or in the Quarters on the place. He must give the whole of his time and attention to the interest of the place. He must report everything he sees going wrong or that he believes to be wrong w[h]ether the person guilty of the crime is under his particular orders at the time or not. He must take care that the people do not leave the Quarters without permission, that they are all at their houses at the proper time after the wringing of the bell. He must wring the bell morning and evening at such hours as he may be ordered to by the overseer. Immediately after wringing the bell in the morning he must call the overseer. He must not allow the negroes to use or keep or drink spirituous liquors of any kind, and above all he must not do it himself. He must never in punishment cut the skin of bruise in any way the persons punished. If he is resisted he must call others by name to help him, if they refuse he [must] report the case to the Overseer. He must never strike with any thing else but the lash of his whip. He **must treat all the negroes alike, showing neither love nor hatred to any one, but be just in all things to all. He must conduct himself that there shall be no complaint of his being too intimate with the wives and daughters of the other men.** He must by no means attempt to become the Ondidonk over the people for if he does burnt brandy should not save him from the most severe punishment. (dated Southdown Sept. 21, 1862)

### **Duties of the Overseer (Papers of William J. Minor)**

He must give the whole of his time and talent to the interests of his employer. **He must treat all the negroes with kindness and humanity, both in sickness and in health—**when sick, he must see that they have every necessary attention and convenience, and that the doctor's directions are strictly attended to in every particular—He must see that the hands are at work as soon as they can [take] to work, and that one and all do a good day work according to their strength. He will give most particular attention to the hands at work in the field while engaged in the planting of crops of various kind—at other periods he will give as much of his time to the field hands as he can possibly spare from

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the other necessary duties of the plantation... **he must not strike the negroes with anything but his whip, except in self-defense—He must not cut the skin when punishing, nor punish in a passion—He must not use abusive language to nor threaten the negroes, as it makes them unhappy and sometimes induces them to run away.** (instructions for Waterloo, Sundown, and Hollywood)

### **Recommendation for the Vilicus to Act With Moderation**

Iam illa, quae etiam in maioribus imperiis difficulter custodiuntur, considerare debet, ne aut crudelius aut remissius agat cum subiectis; semperque foveat bonos et sedulos, parcat etiam minus probis, et ita temperet, ut magis eius vereantur severitatem, quam ut saevitiam detestentur” (*Rust.* 11.1. 25).

He will have to consider those principles which are observed with difficulty in larger spheres of ruling, that is, to not treat either too cruelly or too leniently those placed under him; he should always favor the good and diligent, and be sparing even more of those who are not good, and manage in such a way that they respect his strictness rather than hate his cruelty.