



The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery in the Colonial South

Alex Bontemps

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The Punished Self describes enslavement in the American South during the eighteenth century as a systematic assault on Blacks' sense of self. Alex Bontemps focuses on slavery's effects on the slaves' framework of self-awareness and understanding. Whites wanted Blacks to act out the role "Negro" and Blacks faced a basic dilemma of identity: How to retain an individualized sense of self under the incredible pressure to be Negro?

The first part of *The Punished Self* reveals how patterns of objectification were reinforced by written and visual representations of enslavement. The second examines how captive Africans were forced to accept a new identity and the expectations and behavioral requirements it symbolized. The third section defines and illustrates the tensions inherent in slaves' being Negro in order to survive. Bontemps offers fresh interpretations of runaway slave ads and portraits. Such views of black people expressing themselves are missing entirely from other historical sources. This book's revelations include many such original examples of the survival of the individual in the face of enslavement.

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