

Isolation, Financial Benefits and Labor Control. The Use of Louisiana Plantation Tokens in Dutch Comparative Perspective, 1865-1960

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Samenvatting

Plantagegeld wordt vaak omschreven als ‘onverkend terrein’. Dit artikel onderzoekt dit geld door de verschillende toepassingen van plantagegeld uit Louisiana te beschrijven en te verklaren (1865-1960). Economische, geografische en praktische omstandigheden verklaren het gebruik van deze tokens, maar arbeidscontrole eveneens. Deze dwang nam laat in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw toe en nam vervolgens in de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw af. Dit artikel trekt parallellen met plantagegeld uit de Nederlandse Oost-Indische koloniën en roept op tot verder onderzoek.

Summary

Plantation tokens are often called an ‘unexplored territory’. This article investigates these tokens by describing and explaining Louisiana plantation tokens (1865-1960). Economic, geographic and practical circumstances explain their use, in addition to labor control. This coercion increased in the second half of the nineteenth century and decreased in the first half of the twentieth century. This article draws parallels with tokens from the Netherlands East Indies and calls for further research.

Introduction

On March 20, 1999, an exhibition was opened in Museum Bronbeek in the Netherlands on means of exchange in the Netherlands East Indies, the name of the former Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia, mainly referring to present-day Indonesia. A part of the exhibition was about plantation money in the period 1880-1906.¹ This type of money, commonly referred to as plantation tokens, was a privately issued currency used for payment of workers and spendable in the plantation company store or perhaps periodically redeemable in official currency. In the Netherlands East Indies, Asian ‘coolie’ laborers, mostly laboring on tobacco plantations on Sumatra and Borneo, were paid in these plantation tokens.

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¹ Zaalberg, 1999: 155.

Plantation tokens were a global phenomenon in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Token payments occurred in other parts of Southeast Asia, for instance in Malaysia,² Singapore and Brunei,³ but also in Africa – e.g. Belgian Congo,⁴ German colonies⁵ and Portuguese colonies⁶ – and the Americas – e.g. Central and South America,⁷ Puerto Rico,⁸ the rest of the Caribbean⁹ and the United States.¹⁰

Despite the almost global distribution of the use of tokens, systematic research into plantation tokens is rare.¹¹ The subject is often called an ‘unexplored territory’. However, a number of numismatic articles and catalogues have been published that contain examples of plantation tokens.¹² While providing useful lists of tokens and detailed information on their size, material and other characteristics, the majority of these studies do not discuss how they were used or, in many cases, who issued them, nor do they include detailed source references. Often, the existence of plantation tokens is mentioned in one or two sentences in studies on broader subjects, which also fail to provide detailed background information on the use of tokens.¹³ The numismatic studies of Zaalberg (1999) and Lansen & Wells (2001) on nineteenth and early twentieth century tokens from the Netherlands East Indian colonies provide the most important and complete lists of plantation tokens of the Netherlands East Indies; the original catalog was followed by Lansen’s publications from 2005, 2010 and 2018 on more recent findings.

These Dutch studies contain various explanations of the use of plantation tokens. Broersma explains the use of token money by lack of available official coinage and credit facilities.¹⁴ According to Zaalberg, employers in isolated areas used tokens so as not to have depend on the influx of coinage from elsewhere, but also in order to coerce and control their laborers – ‘the coolies’

² Pridmore, 1968.

³ Singh, 1996.

⁴ Wells, 2008.

⁵ Schimmel, 1988.

⁶ Salgado & Pascoal, 1992.

⁷ Rulau, 1992.

⁸ Vázquez, 2011.

⁹ Lyall & Schenkman, 1988.

¹⁰ Lurvink, 2018.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 7.

¹² E.g. Bressett, 2011: 396-397; Crawford, Farber & Scheman, 1996; Lansen & Van den Beek, 2018; Scholten, 1951; Singh, 1996; Wells, 2001 & 2008; Woodside, 1963; Zaalberg, 1999: 155-178.

¹³ E.g. Broersma, 1919 & 1921; Vissering, 1920.

¹⁴ Broersma, 1919: 147; 1922: 299.

were not allowed to leave the plantation.¹⁵ In his 2005 publication, Lansen agrees with Zaalberg's labor control arguments. Payment in tokens was meant to prevent unauthorized absenteeism of 'coolies'. Lansen notices further that most plantation tokens were used in the more isolated areas at Sumatra's east coast.¹⁶ In 2005, he questions the 'lack of cash' arguments,¹⁷ but in 2010, he explains the existence of plantation tokens with 'lack of sufficient small change'.¹⁸

Although none of these studies refer to underlying qualitative or quantitative analyses of primary sources, the 'isolation', 'lack of cash' and 'coercion' arguments are common explanatory factors mentioned in the few international studies on plantation and mining tokens. The aim of this paper is to describe and explain the use of plantation tokens in Louisiana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The use of tokens in Louisiana helps us understand possible uses of tokens elsewhere, although different locations might have generated different reasons or a different mix of them. Rich data are available on Louisiana plantation tokens, whilst information on the use of tokens from the Netherlands East Indies is rare.¹⁹ Comparison is possible, since post-slavery plantation labor dominated both areas.²⁰ The main labor force consisted of former enslaved Africans or indentured 'coolie' laborers, who experienced racial violence and therefore lack of power to protest.²¹ Payment in tokens was a common phenomenon in Louisiana and occurred on a particularly large scale on cotton and sugar plantations. Recent research on various types of 'non-cash' truck payments via plantation stores in Louisiana has revealed new data on plantation tokens.²² This article builds upon these new findings and additionally analyzes new material from Louisiana plantations, as a first step to explain the use of plantation tokens in general.

The plantations investigated in this article operated company stores, the only places where plantation tokens were redeemable. In Louisiana, small plantations cooperated with independent country stores; only relatively large plantations, with many laborers, needed or were able to operate their own store. Before the abolition of slavery, only eight Louisiana plantations that bordered the Mississippi River operated plantation stores, as *Norman's chart of the Lower Mississippi River* from 1858 shows, while hundreds of plantations bordered this river in Louisiana alone (Map 1). After the abolition of slavery in 1865,

¹⁵ Zaalberg, 1999: 155.

¹⁶ Lansen, 2005: 106.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 103.

¹⁸ Lansen, 2010: 4.

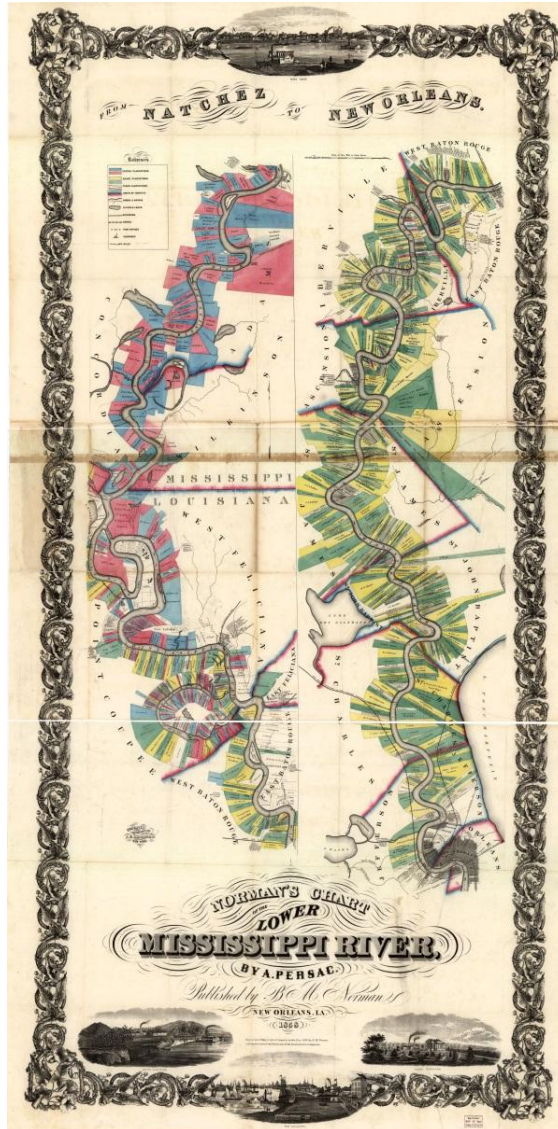
¹⁹ Lansen, 2005: 106, 112.

²⁰ Baay, 2015; Van Rossum, 2015.

²¹ Bosma, 2013; Lurvink, 2018; Stoler, 2011; Vissering, 1920.

²² Lurvink, 2018: 206-215.

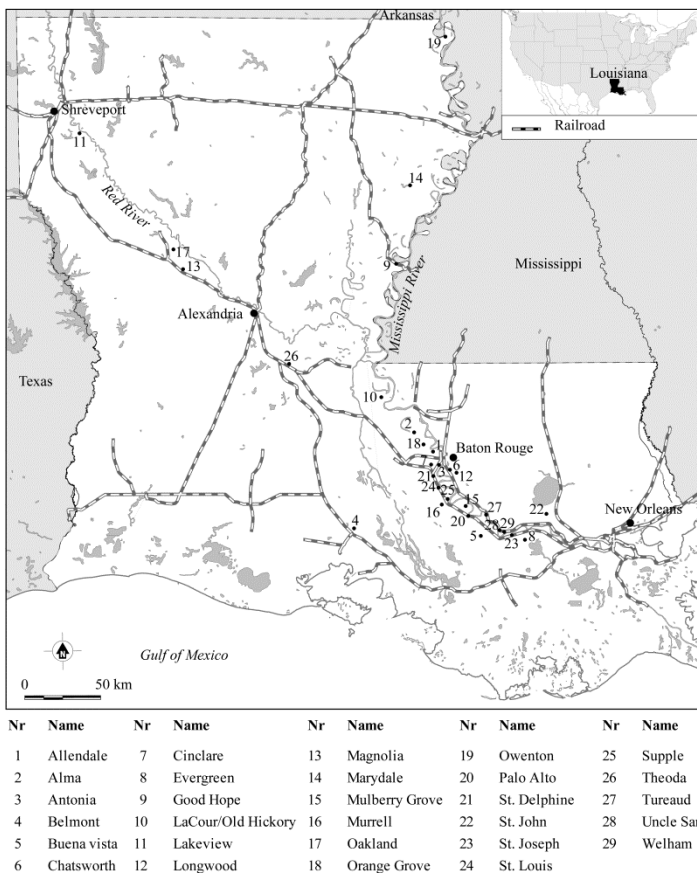
this number increased since the former slaves had to acquire life necessities themselves and required payments, which were both arranged via the store.²³



Map 1. Norman's chart of the lower Mississippi River, 1858.
Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/78692178/>

²³ *Ibid.*: 48.

Due to lack of data, however, it is impossible to determine the number of plantation stores that existed in this period. In-depth archival research and field-work resulted in tracing 38 Louisiana plantations with stores in the period 1865-1910: 24 sugar plantations, 8 cotton and 6 plantations of which the crops are unknown (map 2). Tokens were used on 22 (~58%) of these plantations. The available data consider the types of tokens used, plantation store accounts books and location. In order to investigate whether isolation explains the use of tokens on Louisiana plantation with a company store, this article investigates the isolation of these plantations. The location of nine of the plantations is unknown, and these are therefore excluded from the isolation investigation. To determine the degree of isolation of the plantations and their stores, three maps and historical GIS railroad data were georeferenced in Google Earth.



Map 2. The 29 plantations from Louisiana that were researched. The location of nine plantations was unknown, and these are therefore excluded from the isolation investigation. Map created by Jaap Fokkema, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

This article is divided into three parts. The first part defines the tokens in general and describes and shows the shapes and materials of Louisiana tokens in comparison with tokens found in the Netherlands East Indies. The second part analyzes and compares the various uses of plantation tokens, and the third part offers explanations for these uses. The conclusion summarizes and discusses the main findings of this research.

Shaping the Tokens: Louisiana vs. Netherlands East Indies

The use of plantation tokens was a common phenomenon in Louisiana and the Netherlands East Indies in the late nineteenth century. Tokens were privately issued coins: not official tender, but valid only in a particular company plantation store or *kedei* in the Netherlands East Indies, or could periodically be exchanged for official currency.²⁴

Plantation tokens were part of a worldwide phenomenon.²⁵ In addition to plantations, tokens were used for payments in the Americas on, among others, strawberry farms, coffee plantations, in the timber industry (Figure 1) and by coal and nitrite mining companies.²⁶ Tokens were used as well in American bars, bakeries and restaurants, and for public transportation, but here they were not used for the payment of wages, but as deposit money or discount and savings cards – the customer purchased a token in advance for payment or received a discount token when purchasing a number of products.²⁷ In the Belgian Congo and some other African colonies, tokens were used as receipts for tax payments and as customer queuing tokens and employee identification medals in banks and railroad companies.²⁸ Tokens were also used in the Dutch oil industry in Southeast Asia in the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁹



*Figure 1. 50 c. token 'good only at company's store',
Natalbany Lumber Co. Token Collection Louisiana.
LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)*

²⁴ Lurvink, 2018; Wells, 2010; Lansen & Wells, 2001: 9.

²⁵ Lurvink, 2018: 2-6.

²⁶ Lurvink, 2018: 54-55; Wells, 2010; Crawford *et al.*, 1996: 7-11; Fishback, 1986: 1011.

²⁷ Crawford *et al.*, 1996: 7.

²⁸ Wells, 2008: 37-40.

²⁹ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 155-156.

Plantation tokens were used on various types of plantations: cotton, palm, rice, rubber, sugarcane and tobacco.³⁰ In the Netherlands East Indian colonies, the tokens have been described as ‘vouchers’, ‘homemade coins’, ‘corporate currency’, and ‘plantation money’.³¹ In Louisiana, ‘plantation scrip’ and ‘brozine’, probably derived from the word ‘bronze’, were the most common terms in addition to ‘tokens’. Occasionally, the names ‘doo-ga-loo’ and ‘cherry balls’ were used in Louisiana.³²

The tokens varied in shape, color and material. The token catalogue *Louisiana trade tokens* discusses sixteen different shapes, including hexagonal and octagonal. However, round was the most common shape of tokens, resembling official coins.³³ The same applies to tokens used in the Netherlands East Indies.³⁴ Some tokens were created from official coins. For instance, Wells found tokens in Guatemala, where German coffee growers stamped their initials on small-denomination German coins and turned them to use as tokens on coffee plantations.³⁵

The tokens analyzed in this article were made of aluminium, brass, bronze, copper and cardboard, and had a variety of shapes. Aluminium tokens were made from the 1880s, but more frequently in the twentieth century when the production costs fell sharply due to the development of new technologies. For instance, sugar laborers on Welham plantation (Figure 2) in Louisiana received aluminium tokens that they could officially use only in the plantation company store for merchandise or other specified goods (Figure 3). The tokens were shaped differently for each value: round for one dollar, 5 and 10 cents; flower for 25 and 75 cents; and octagonal for 50 cents (Figure 4).³⁶ The brass plantation tokens used at Granada plantations were different for each value as well (Figure 5). Although the majority of the tokens displayed in Lansen & Wells’ catalogue on the Netherlands East Indies are round, the book contains examples of tokens with other shapes as well. For instance, Sumatra tobacco plantation Toentoengan used several types of octagonal-shaped copper tokens (Figure 6), Tandjong Alam used eye-shaped copper and nickel tokens (Figure 7), and Tanah Radja used triangle-shaped copper and nickel tokens (Figure 8).³⁷ Tenom Rubber Company from British North Borneo used octagonal-shaped copper, nickel and metal tokens (Figure 9) as well as round tokens.³⁸ Shaped

³⁰ Lurvink, 2018; Wells, 2008: 39; Lansen & Wells, 2001; Jaynes, 1986: 246.

³¹ Broersma, 1922: 299; Lansen & Wells, 2001: 15.

³² Crawford *et al.*, 1996: 7.

³³ Crawford, 1996: 21.

³⁴ Lansen, 2005: 105.

³⁵ Wells, 2010.

³⁶ LSU Rural Life Museum; Cangelosi, 1979: 1-2.

³⁷ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 133, 137, 143.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: 184.

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tokens of Herrings & Co. differed by plantation, enabling people to identify easily which plantation was involved. In other cases, shape indicated denomination; this was presumably useful for illiterate workers.³⁹ The size of the tokens illustrated in this article are estimated.



Figure 2. Welham sugar plantation's main house. The house was demolished in 1975 after it was sold to the Marathon Oil Company. Robert Tebbs Photograph Collection, Louisiana State Museum (Baton Rouge)



Figure 3. Welham sugar plantation store. The building was donated to the LSU Rural Life Museum in Baton Rouge in 1975. Picture by Karin Lurvink, 2011



Figure 4. Round, flower and octagonal-shaped aluminium tokens from Welham Plantation. Token Collection LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)

³⁹ Wells, 1987.



Figure 5. Round, flower and octagonal-shaped brass tokens from Granada Plantation in Sunshine, Louisiana. Token Collection LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)



Figure 6. Octagonal-shaped yellow copper 5 and 20 cents tokens, Toentoengan, Sumatra. Collection A.J. Lansen & Baldwin's Auctions Ltd



Figure 7. Eye-shaped nickel 10 cents token 1891 issued by Herrings & Co. for Tandjong Alam, Sumatra. Collection A.J. Lansen



Figure 8. Triangle-shaped nickel 1/2 dollar token 1890 issued by Herrings & Co. for Tanah Radja, Sumatra. Collection A.J. Lansen



*Figure 9. Octagonal-shaped nickel brass 50 cents token,
Tenom Rubber Co Ltd., British North Borneo.
Baldwin's Auctions Ltd*

In addition to metal tokens, plantation tokens in Louisiana were often made of cardboard. Sugar plantation St. Joseph, for instance, used cardboard tokens in various colors (Figure 10) to pay their laborers. The tokens were only redeemable in the St. Joseph plantation store (Figure 11). Other examples of employers operating plantation stores and using cardboard tickets include River Lake Plantation (Figure 12) and Belmont Plantation (Figure 13). The makers of the majority of the tokens analyzed are unknown, because makers' names were not noted on the tokens themselves and documentation is often scarce or has not survived. In the Netherlands East Indies, several denominations of non-metal tokens were used as well. The most common materials were paper and bamboo (Figure 14).⁴⁰



*Figure 10. Colorful cardboard tokens from St. Joseph Plantation.
St. Joseph plantation store tokens, St. Joseph Plantation (Vacherie)*

⁴⁰ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 8, 207-210, 212-213.



Figure 11. St. Joseph plantation store. It was in operation until 2002 and one of the longest running stores in the area. Interview with Joan Boudreaux at St. Joseph Plantation, June 16 (Vacherie). Picture taken by Karin Lurvink, 2011



Figure 12. Colorful square cardboard tokens from River Lake Plantation. Token Collection LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)



Figure 13. Colorful round cardboard tokens from Belmont sugar plantation. Belmont Plantation Scrip, Mss. 2584, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection (Baton Rouge)



*Figure 14. Bamboo plantation token, Java, Tjirohani.
Baldwin's Auctions Ltd*

Using Tokens

The small denominations of tokens show that, on a number of plantations, tokens were not only used for wage payments, but as a full means of exchange. According to historian Jan Lucassen, the highest denominations of coins were often produced only for payment of wages. The lowest denominations, however, “fulfilled the role of small change in canteens, plantation shops, and the like”,⁴¹ since wages consisted mainly of rounded amounts. One dollar was the denomination found most often in Louisiana, British North Borneo and Sumatra.⁴² Tokens of one, two and three cents, however, were created and used as well in all these areas and likely served as small change in the plantation store (Figure 15-18).⁴³ According to Lansen & Wells, only low denominations were used on Java (Figure 19).⁴⁴



Figure 15. Orange cardboard 1c. token Allendale Store in Port Allen, Louisiana. Token Collection West Baton Rouge Museum (Port Allen)

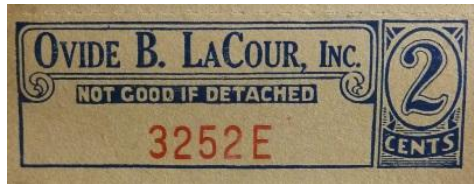


Figure 16. Paper coupon 2c. used at the Ovide B. LaCour Store on plantation Old Hickory owned by the LaCour Plantation Company, Louisiana. Produced by the Southern Coupon Company from Birmingham, Alabama. Token Collection LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)

⁴¹ Lucassen, 2007: 57.

⁴² Lansen & Wells, 2001: 15; Lurvink, 2014: 145.

⁴³ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 74, 109, 142, 184, 208, 210; Lurvink, 2014: 145.

⁴⁴ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 15, 147.



Figure 17. Copper token 1c. used at tobacco plantation Blimbing, Sumatra.
Collection A.J. Lansen



Figure 18. Copper token 3 c. used
at tobacco estate Tjinta Radja,
Sumatra. Collection A.J. Lansen



Figure 19. Brass token 1 c. used at
tea corporation Waspada, Java.
Collection A.J. Lansen

Previous research and the analysis of the 22 Louisiana plantations tokens, reveal that tokens were used for the payment of wages: payment of monetary wages only valid in the plantation store, piecework wages, or in-kind payments. The occurrence of one practice did not exclude the other, and existed simultaneously. The payment of monetary wages was most common ($n = 22$), followed by in-kind payments piece wages ($n = 5$) and piecework wages ($n = 2$). The analysis further shows that tokens were used to provide credit ($n = 5$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Louisiana plantations using tokens, showing how their use per type of wage (piece wage, in-kind, store) and credit.

Name plantation	Piece wage	In-kind	Store	Credit
Alma	no	no	yes	no
Allendale	no	no	yes	no
Antonia	no	yes	yes	yes
Belmont	yes	no	yes	no
Greenwood	no	no	yes	no
LaCour/Old Hickory	no	no	yes	no
St. Joseph	no	no	yes	no
Uncle Sam	yes	no	no	no
Welham	no	no	yes	no
Youngsville	no	no	yes	no

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Lakeview	no	no	yes	no
Magnolia	no	no	yes	no
River Lake	no	no	yes	yes
Granada	no	no	yes	no
Theoda	no	no	yes	no
St. Delphine	no	no	yes	yes
St. John	no	yes	no	yes
Hecal	no	yes	no	no
Heriard	no	yes	no	no
Maxwell	no	yes	no	no
Island	no	no	yes	no
J.H. Liening & Son	no	no	no	yes
Total “yes” (% of total)	2 (~9%)	5 (~23%)	16 (~73%)	5 (~23%)

Wage payments

Tokens were mostly used for the payment of monetary wages to be spent in the plantation store (Table 1). One dollar, 50 cents, 25 cents and 5 cents were the most common denominations of plantation tokens in Louisiana,⁴⁵ and since their fixed daily wages of the laborers varied between 50 cents and one dollar, it is likely that they received their wage in tokens. In Sumatra these denominations were common as well, although the daily wages of Sumatran ‘coolies’ were a bit lower, at 33 cents per day.⁴⁶

Secondly, on some plantations (~23%), laborers were paid in tokens only valid for a certain product, such as flour, meat, bread or rice. For instance, figure 20 shows tokens used on plantation Hecal in Mound, Louisiana. One dollar equaled “one ration of meat”, 50 cents was similar to “one ration of flour”, and 25 cents to “one ration of meal”. On another plantation, cardboard bread tokens of 10 cents were used (Figure 21).⁴⁷ In the Netherlands East Indies, tokens redeemable for rice only were used on rubber and tobacco plantations on Sumatra (Figure 22).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Lurvink, 2014: 145.

⁴⁶ Bosma, 2014: 168.

⁴⁷ Lurvink, 2018: 56.

⁴⁸ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 16, 81-84, 116-117.



Figure 20. Aluminium one dollar, 50 cents, and 25 cents tokens used at Hecal Plantation in Mound, Louisiana.
Token Collection LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)



Figure 21. Yellow cardboard “10 c. Bread” token.
Token Collection LSU Rural Life Museum (Baton Rouge)



Figure 22. Brass one dollar rice token issued by Herrings & Co. for tobacco plantation Goerach Batoe. Collection A.J. Lansen

Finally, piece rate wages were also paid in tokens (~9%). These wages depended on the total amount of work tasks that a laborer had completed. To illustrate, laborers on sugar plantation Uncle Sam (Figure 23) received piece wages; each task was printed on a different color cardboard token. In the two weeks or month before the official payday laborers could use these tokens as money in the Uncle Sam Plantation Store to purchase products. The store (Figure 24) was an integral part of the plantation’s operation. Ticket sheets (Figure 25) reveal that on paydays, the remaining tickets were counted; one half

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was paid in cash and the other half was written on a due-bill and paid at the end of the year.⁴⁹ The tokens were used more than once. When they were used, they were stamped or perforated (Figure 26). Piece wages occurred in the Netherlands East Indies as well but no tokens have been found.⁵⁰



Figure 23. Sugar Plantation Uncle Sam in Convent, Louisiana. The plantation was demolished in 1940. Picture by Richard Koch, 1936. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (Washington, D.C.)



Figure 24. Destrehan Plantation Store, Louisiana, constructed from three old houses of Uncle Sam Plantation. Picture by Karin Lurvink, 2011



Figure 25. Pay Roll Tickets Cashed 1895 from sugar plantation Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam Plantation Papers, Folder 391, Mss. 408, 602, 1252, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection (Baton Rouge)

⁴⁹ Lurvink, 2018: 57-58; Matranan, 2009: 211-220.

⁵⁰ Houben & Lindblad, 1999: 132-133.



Figure 26. Green cardboard piecework wage “Cane Cutting” token from sugar plantation Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam Plantation Papers, Box 20, Mss. 408, 602, 1252, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection (Baton Rouge)

Credit Provision

At five plantations in Louisiana, credit tokens were provided for credit purchases. Many cotton laborers in Louisiana worked as sharecroppers, who did not receive cash until after their harvest was sold. Meanwhile, they bought life necessities on credit in the plantation store. The plantation owner provided credit tokens, such as the Ingle System tokens (Figure 27 and 28), to sharecroppers for these credit purchases in the form of a monthly allowance. He accounted for the amount of supplied tokens in his ledger or via the Ingle System Check Cabinet that had received a patent in 1909. The sharecroppers used these tokens as currency in the plantation store. After they sold their harvest, they paid their debts. On sugar plantations in Louisiana, laborers received their wage on paydays every month or two weeks. Between paydays, they could purchase products from the store on credit with tokens as well. The total value of these tokens was deducted from the laborers’ wage.⁵¹



Figure 27. Round metal 50 cents Ingle System token, used at the Levert Brothers Store in Addis, Louisiana. C.091.009, Token Collection West Baton Rouge Museum (Port Allen)



Figure 28. Round metal one dollar Ingle System token, used at J.H. Liening & Son, Louisiana. Plantation Token Collection Marty Young, Pioneer Heritage Center LSU (Shreveport)

⁵¹ Lurvink, 2018: 38-39, 58-63.

There is some evidence of these credit tokens in the Netherlands East Indies as well. It is quite possible that the Herrings tokens denominated in rice and the Caracoles tokens in Chile denominated in bread, water, and so on served similar purposes – as advances on subsequent wages.

Explaining Tokens: Isolation, Financial Benefits and Labor Control

As outlined in the introduction the use of plantation tokens has been explained by a variety of arguments relating to isolation, lack of cash and labor control. However, these arguments are not based on systematic historical research. How can the use of plantation tokens be explained? As mentioned in the introduction, this article investigates tokens of 38 Louisiana plantations in the period 1865–1910 (Map 2). Tokens were used on 22 (~58%) of these plantations. The plantations without tokens left rich accounting data, and the analysis revealed no signs of the use of tokens.

In Louisiana, transportation was expensive and troublesome. The land was swampy and roads were practically nonexistent. The Mississippi River was the American ‘highway’ of the nineteenth century, and plantations that bordered this river were less isolated than plantations that could be reached only via smaller rivers or bayous. Louisiana cotton plantations were typically more isolated than sugar plantations (Lurvink, 2018: 23–30).⁵²

Only two (~29%) of the seven cotton plantations were located at the Mississippi River (Map 3). In contrast, twenty (~91%) of the 22 sugar plantations were located on the Mississippi River (Map 4). To determine the degree of isolation of the plantations and their stores, three maps – the 1835 La Tourette’s *Reference Map of the State of Louisiana*, the 1858 Norman’s *Chart of the Lower Mississippi* (Map 1) and the 1884 Richardson, *Map of the Southern Express Company* – and historical GIS railroad data were georeferenced in Google Earth. This map enabled measuring the number of miles each plantation was located from the Mississippi River, the nearest town and railroad, and comparing whether the plantations with tokens were more isolated than the plantations without tokens (Table 2).

On the one hand, the results show that owners of isolated plantations used tokens. For instance, the Frierson brothers used tokens on their cotton plantation Lakeview (Figure 29). This plantation was located in the isolated northwest of Louisiana, far away from the Mississippi. It was located fourteen miles from the nearest town and without direct access to a railroad; a visit to the nearest town required a trip of two days.⁵³

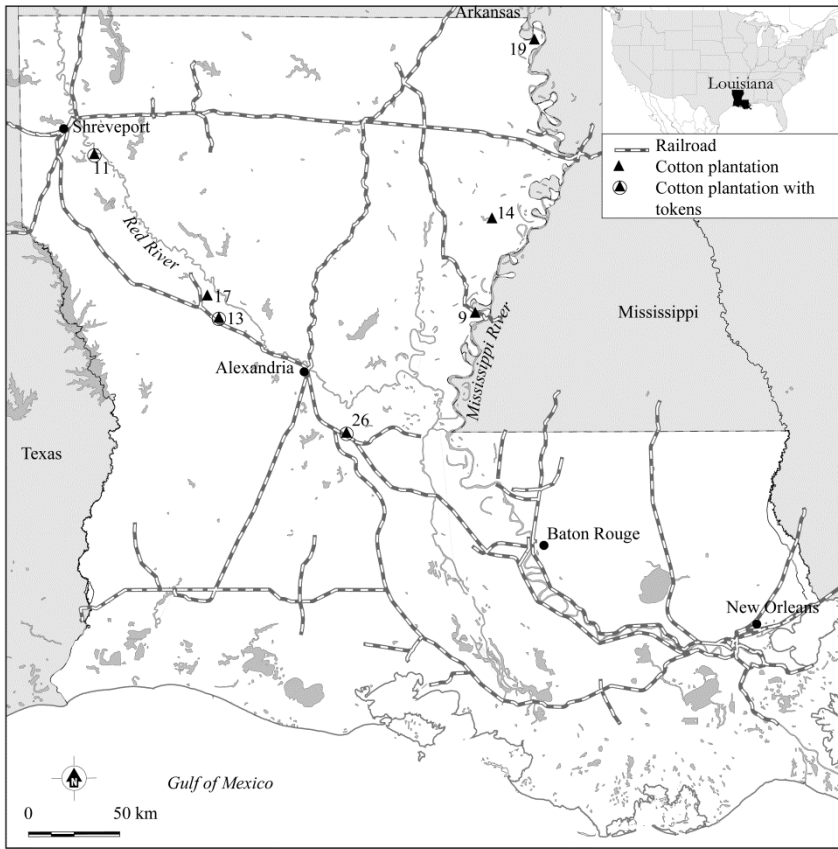
⁵² *Ibid.*: 23–30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*: 141.

Table 2. Louisiana plantations, showing their main crop, their use of tokens, their access to the Mississippi and their isolation

Name plantation	Main crop	Isolated? (y/n)	Tokens (y/n)
Good Hope	Cotton	yes	no
Lakeview	Cotton	yes	yes
Magnolia	Cotton	yes	yes
Marydale	Cotton	yes	no
Oakland	Cotton	yes	no
Owenton	Cotton	no	no
Theoda	Cotton	no	yes
Allendale	Sugar	no	yes
Alma	Sugar	no	yes
Antonia	Sugar	no	yes
Belmont	Sugar	yes	yes
Buena vista	Sugar	no	no
Chatsworth	Sugar	no	no
Cinclare	Sugar	no	no
Evergreen	Sugar	no	no
LaCour/Old Hickory	Sugar	yes	yes
Longwood	Sugar	no	no
Mulberry Grove	Sugar	no	no
Murrell	Sugar	no	no
Orange Grove	Sugar	no	no
Palo Alto	Sugar	no	no
St. Delphine	Sugar	no	yes
St. John	Sugar	no	yes
St. Joseph	Sugar	no	yes
St. Louis	Sugar	no	no
Supple	Sugar	no	no
Tureaud	Sugar	no	no
Uncle Sam	Sugar	no	yes
Welham	Sugar	no	yes
Total 'yes' (% of total)		7 (~24%)	13 (~45%)
Total 'no' (% of total)		22 (~76%)	16 (~55%)

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Map 3. The seven cotton plantations from Louisiana with and without tokens.

Map created by Jaap Fokkema, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Plantation tokens were used as well on the two isolated sugar plantations Old Hickory owned by the LaCour Plantation Company (Figure 16) and Belmont (Figure 13). In these remote areas, cash was relatively scarce and few or no alternative markets were available. Through payments in plantation tokens, these isolated laborers gained access to a wider variety of products compared to when they were paid in food rations alone or when they had to grow food themselves. Lurvink's research shows that the plantation store offered a variety of necessities and luxury items. In addition to tobacco, flour, cake and meat, the store offered toys, candy, physical hygiene products, clothing and mirrors. In increasingly consumerist societies, laborers requested these products.⁵⁴ Therefore, isolation and lack of cash might explain why plantation owners used tokens.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 143-158.

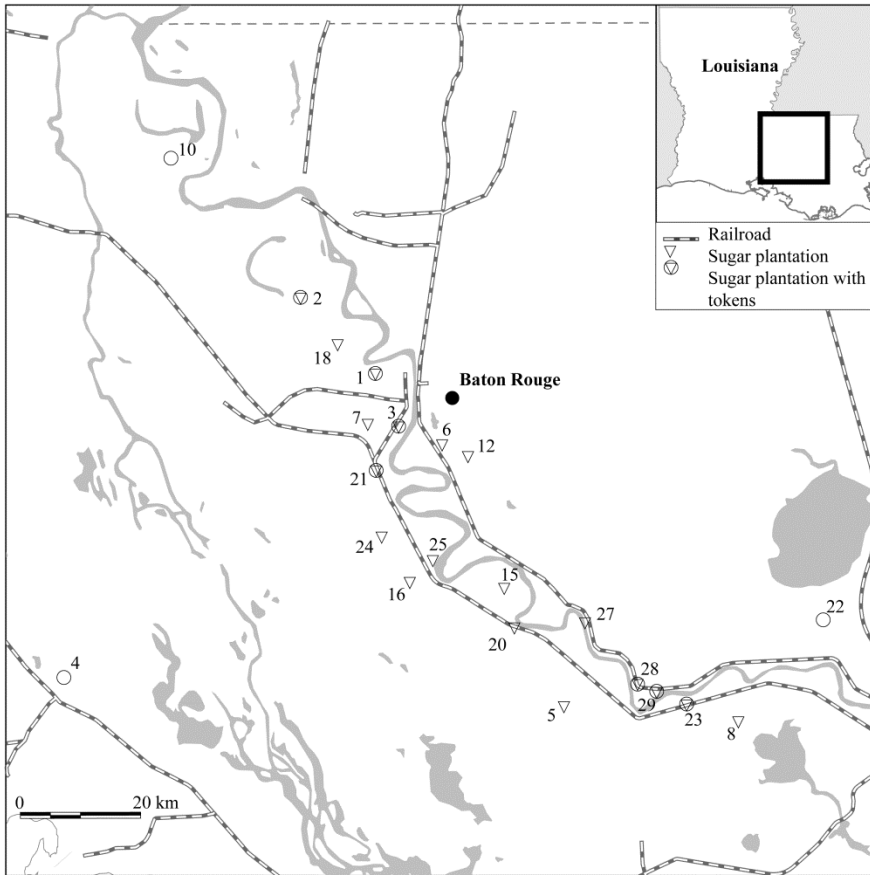


Figure 29. Aluminium one dollar token used by the Frierson Brothers on cotton plantation Lakeview, Louisiana. Plantation Token Collection Marty Young, Pioneer Heritage Center LSU (Shreveport)

On the other hand, the results of this analysis show no differences in isolation between plantations that used tokens and plantations that did not. This means that the factor of isolation did not differentiate between users and non-users. For instance, Alexander Blanche, owner of the isolated cotton plantation Marydale, did not use plantation tokens.⁵⁵ This plantation did not border the Mississippi, had no access to a railroad and was located eleven miles from the nearest town. However, the owners of the two least isolated cotton plantations, those that were located along the Mississippi River, did not pay their laborers in tokens either. Moreover, the four least isolated sugar plantations – Palo Alto, Murrell, Uncle Sam and Welham – were located in a town and next to a railroad and the Mississippi River. The owners of Palo Alto and Murrell did not use plantation tokens, while Uncle Sam and Welham did (Figures 25 and 4).

The results of the Fisher’s Exact Test revealed that isolated and not isolated plantations did not differ significantly in their use of tokens ($0.667 > 0.05$) (Table 3). This means that isolation was not a necessary condition for payment in plantation tokens. Therefore, the use of plantation tokens should be explained by another factor or a combination of factors.

Table 3. The number of plantations that used tokens, differentiated by isolation

	Tokens	No Tokens
Isolated	4	3
Not Isolated	9	13

The first explanation for the use of tokens in Louisiana in addition to isolation is a practicality. Louisiana experienced a general lack of cash after the American Civil War. In the 1870s, the United States suffered from lack of ‘greenbacks’ and coins, and experienced a long trend of deflation. The Southern states experienced an even greater lack of coins. The slaves were freed and became wage laborers who required payments involving many small denominated coins. Therefore, plantation owners faced a lack of cash to pay their laborers. Tokens were a practical solution for the plantation owners to proceed with some form of payment to their laborers.⁵⁶

Another practical reason for the use of tokens was that it eased the book-keeping. The Ingle System Check Cabinet, for instance, dispensed checks with

⁵⁵ Alexander Blanche Papers, LLMVC.

⁵⁶ Lurvink, 2018: 110–115.

the amounts of credit sales and eliminated the risks of errors of a manual book-keeping.⁵⁷ Furthermore, by using piece wage tokens, the planter saved on more elaborate accounting systems. He delivered a “receipt” for a unit of cane and the cutter could get paid at the end of a period according to how many receipts he had.

Financial motivations also explain the use of plantation tokens. Issuing tokens was cheaper than obtaining cash. Tokens cost less than face value. As mentioned before, after the Civil War, Louisiana planters experienced lack of cash, as well as capital and credit needed to finance their business. The use of tokens offered a solution.⁵⁸ In case of lack of cash, piece rate tokens were chosen over monetary tokens as an effort to increase productivity. In Louisiana, these tokens were most common on sugar plantations, where the workload was heavier than on other plantation types. After the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery, American employers complained that the former slaves feigned sickness and skipped work. Whether this was based on the truth or not, to prevent this, they started paying their laborers in piece wages, sometimes in the form of tokens. When paid in piece wages, laborers only received money when they finished a task, while with fixed daily wages, they would receive their wage anyway.⁵⁹ Lansen has given a similar argument to explain the use of tokens in Sumatra: to prevent unauthorized absence.⁶⁰

Lansen & Wells argue that rice tokens in the Netherlands East Indies forced plantation store owners and the laborers to purchase rice instead of addictive substances, such as opium, which decreased the productivity of the laborer.⁶¹ A similar argument applies to non-cash payments in relation to preventing alcohol consumption in the Dutch peateries and textile industry in the late nineteenth century.⁶² Drugged or alcoholic laborers were less productive, and tokens were therefore used to control their laborer. Another explanation for rice tokens emphasizes that rice had a stable value. It fluctuated less in value than the local currency, therefore offering a more stable income to the plantation laborer. When prices of rice did rise, the additional costs fell to the employer, but at the same time payment in rice tokens prevented wage increases.⁶³

Thus, to a certain extent, economic, geographic and practical circumstances explain the use of tokens. However, coercion played a role in the existence of token payments as well. Most American historians emphasize this coercion-

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 58-60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 132-133.

⁶⁰ Lansen, 2005: 106.

⁶¹ Lansen & Wells, 2001: 16.

⁶² Lurvink, 2018: 75.

⁶³ Stoler, 1985: 41-42, 108.

argument and link it to American slavery and attempts to ‘re-enslave’ the former slaves after the abolition of slavery.⁶⁴ At the end of the nineteenth century, the economic problems and lack of cash decreased in the United States. Railroad construction improved plantations’ accessibility and increased the number of alternative markets, while the use of tokens continued. If paid in tokens, plantation laborers could not purchase at alternative stores where prices were often slightly lower. Additionally, they were unable to save money to buy their own piece of land. Therefore, they experienced the payment in tokens increasingly as a limitation to their freedom and started protesting. An important and bloody protest against payment with tokens was the Thibodaux strike of 1887: thirty black strikers were killed. This massacre marked the end of labor protest in Louisiana. In the 1890s, the Jim Crow segregation laws were passed and black laborers faced increasing racist violence. Therefore, black laborers were unable to protest against the payment of tokens.⁶⁵ Consequently, historian Rick Halpern argues that the payment in plantation tokens did not end, but became the norm after the racist Thibodaux Strike, but quantitative data to test this claim is lacking.⁶⁶

Other research confirms that payment in tokens in Louisiana continued into the 1960s.⁶⁷ In the Netherlands East Indies, token payments were common until the colonial coin and currency reform of 1908,⁶⁸ although government debates show signs that these payments still occurred in 1938.⁶⁹ As in Louisiana, racist violence towards ‘coolie’ laborers occurred in the Netherlands East Indies as well. The so-called *poenale sanctie*, for instance, allowed planters to punish their laborers severely.⁷⁰

Wells’ research shows that mission tokens were redeemable for cash, suggesting that workers were less coerced by tokens than opponents argue.⁷¹ It is likely that this was allowed as well by plantation owners in Louisiana in the twentieth century, because a law was passed in 1908 that prohibited payment in plantation tokens unredeemable for “current money of the United States”. After 1908, it was more likely that tokens were redeemed for cash. Two former laborers of Louisiana sugar plantation Cora remembered, “If you paid with tokens in the plantation store, the change you would get back was in normal money, [and] if you wanted cash to go to Baton Rouge or something, you could

⁶⁴ Lurvink, 2018: 72.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 160-161, 175-176, 187.

⁶⁶ Halpern, 2004: 23.

⁶⁷ Rehder, 1999: 153

⁶⁸ Potting, 1987: 129-134; Zaalberg, 1999: 155.

⁶⁹ Tweede Kamer, 1938: 1296.

⁷⁰ Breman, 2015; Stoler, 2011.

⁷¹ Wells, 2000: 6.

change some of your tokens in cash”.⁷² The possibility to exchange tokens to cash fits the ‘lack of cash’ argument, and not the ‘labor control’ argument. The former laborers said, however, that they did not change tokens for cash often, because their whole life took place on the self-sufficient and isolated plantation and they had to ask for permission.

Conclusion

Payment in plantation tokens was a global phenomenon in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but these tokens are often called an ‘unexplored’ territory. This article adds to our understanding of plantation tokens in general by outlining and explaining the various uses of plantation tokens from Louisiana and drawing on what is known about tokens used in the Netherlands East Indies, areas both dominated by post-slavery plantation labor. The plantations investigated in this article operated company stores, the only places where plantation tokens were redeemable. In Louisiana, only relatively large plantations operated their own store.

Little systematic research into the use of plantation tokens has been conducted, and what has been done often contains simplified or multiple explanations relating to ‘isolation’ and ‘lack of cash’, or ‘coercion’. This article showed that payment in tokens was quite complicated and that no single explanation for its various uses can be provided. Plantation tokens served as small change in company stores and were additionally used for a variety of practices: for the payment of monetary wages, in-kind payments, and piece wages, and to provide credit to workers.

On the one hand, isolation might explain the payment in plantation tokens since isolated plantations used tokens. On the other hand, isolation was not a necessary condition for plantations to use tokens. The results of this analysis showed no differences in isolation between plantations that used tokens and plantations that did not. This suggests that isolation is not a sufficient explanation and that the use of plantation tokens might be explained by a variety of reasons.

The first additional explanation is practical. Louisiana experienced a general lack of cash after the American Civil War and plantation owners, therefore, a lack of wealth and cash to pay their laborers. Tokens were a practical and cheap solution for the plantation owners to carry out some form of payment to their laborers. In the case of lack of cash, piece rate tokens were chosen over tokens with a monetary value in an effort to increase productivity. Furthermore, credit and piece rate tokens simplified the bookkeeping. Thus, to a certain extent, economic, geographic and practical circumstances explain the use of tokens.

⁷² Lurvink, 2018: 229-230.

Coercion, however, played a role in the existence of token payments as well. Louisiana became decreasingly isolated and the economy improved, while the use of tokens continued. Laborers started protesting the payment in tokens, but ceased protesting due to the coercive and racist climate in Louisiana. The use of plantation tokens continued into the 1960s.

Although this article tried to draw parallels to tokens used in the Netherlands East Indies, more research is needed to test to what extent the combination of explanatory factors found in Louisiana applied to this area as well.

End Note

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Biographical Note

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