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## **Social Stratification in York County, Virginia, 1860-1919: A Study of Whites and African-Americans on the Lands of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station**

Kenneth Edward Stuck  
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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN YORK COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1860-1919:

A Study of Whites and African-Americans  
on the Lands of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

Kenneth E. Stuck

1995

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## DEDICATION

For my parents and my wife

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER I. OVERVIEW	2
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW	8
CHAPTER III. YORK COUNTY 1860-1870	14
CHAPTER IV. YORK COUNTY 1870-1919	33
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	57

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. 1880 Agricultural Census Data, Project Area	38
2. 1880 Agricultural Census Data, Nelson District	42
3. 1888 York County Land Book Data, Project Area	44
4. 1919 York County Land Book Data, Project Area	45



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. African-American and White Population, York County, 1860-1910	15
2. African-American and White Population, Bruton and Nelson Districts, 1860-1910	17
3. African-American Occupations, York County, 1870	25
4. African-American Occupations, York County, 1910	26
5. African-American Occupations, Bruton District, 1870	27
6. African-American Occupations, Bruton District, 1910	28
7. African-American Occupations, Nelson District, 1870	29
8. African-American Occupations, Nelson District, 1910	30
9. African-American and White Land Ownership in the Project Area, 1880	40
10. African-American and White Land Ownership in the Project Area, 1910	48

## ABSTRACT

The field of social stratification currently embraces two theories of stratification: the functionalist theory and the conflict theory. The former stresses a value consensus as the basic factor controlling the social order and maintaining a level of social integration. The latter sees the social order as based on force and constraint, and stratification as the result of a struggle for power. This study will use the tenets of the conflict theory to examine the social relationships between whites and African-Americans in a portion of York County, Virginia, now occupied by the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station.

This study will focus on the economic relationship between the whites and the African-Americans using data from the United States Census, land records, deed records, maps, and secondary sources. Such data will show that the white landowners used their social power to control the economic and social mobility of the African-Americans through a changing and evolving system of labor contracts, paternalism, and legalized segregation. African-Americans were able to acquire land, but only at the behest of white landowners. Furthermore, they achieved a limited upward social and economic mobility made nearly impossible because of the control exercised over them by the white landowners.

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CHAPTER I  
OVERVIEW

Introduction

In the past several decades, the number of studies about the stratification of American society has increased dramatically, as has the study of social stratification in general. Many of the American studies have focused on the part African-Americans play in this stratification, especially during the 1940's through the 1960's - the Civil Rights era (Jones 1946; Noel 1968; Grigsby 1971). Very few of these studies, however, acknowledge the beginnings of modern American stratification in the post-Civil War era. This thesis will use comparative data gathered about whites and African-Americans and the conflict theory to analyze the social structure of a small geographical area in York County, Virginia, in the years following the Civil War to show how African-Americans attempted to achieve upward economic mobility through the purchase of land, only to be stymied by the power structure the whites created to limit their advancement. While African-Americans achieved a certain economic and status mobility within the lower levels of the white community through land ownership, substantial economic mobility and further equality with the whites who owned large tracts of land was not a reality.

## The Problem

Social stratification has existed in every society in the history of the world. There are no known examples of utopian, classless societies where every person is equal and all goods and services are distributed equally. There has always been a group or groups within a society that are seen as the leaders and who hold more power, prestige, and status than anyone else. Sometimes, a long intense study and observation of a society is necessary to properly identify the "leader" group; at other times the group is obvious.

That whites were the dominant group in Southern society at the end of the Civil War is not in question. African-Americans newly freed from slavery, or previously free and now adjusting to greater freedom, were still subordinate to white control. The question arises as to whether or not the African-Americans attempted to end this control of their lives. The hypothesis of this study is that a group of African-Americans, occupying land that in 1918 would become the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, attempted to gain economic and social mobility through the acquisition of property and while achieving landownership, failed to affect any changes in the social order of the community due to white control of resources and the continuation of the plantation system after the Civil War.

The conflict theory is one of the two main theories that are currently in use in stratification studies. The other is the functionalist theory which posits that a value consensus is the basic factor controlling the social order

and maintaining a level of social integration (Allardt 1968). Those who follow the integration theory see social stratification as the end product of the functional specialization needed in any society. In contrast, the conflict theory sees the social order as based on force and constraint, and social stratification as the result of a struggle for power (Allardt 1968). The debate over whether there is a true distinction between the two theories and whether any synthesis can be achieved occurred in the recent past with no final consensus (Dahrendorf 1959; Lenski 1966).

#### Project area

The project area selected for this study is the land presently occupied by the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station. The total land area is slightly over 10,000 acres. This project area was selected for three main reasons: 1) the author had co-researched a previous study of African-American life in the area (McDonald et al. 1992); 2) the existence of the African-American and white community in the project area is temporally framed from the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the acquisition of the land by the government in 1918; and, 3) due to the government takeover of the land, a complete record exists of landowners in 1918 for the project area, allowing for an in-depth chain of title research into the deeds. The historic and present boundaries of the Naval Weapons Station remain almost unchanged. The project area is bounded on the north by King's Creek and the York River; on the east by the York River; on the southeast and south by

Virginia State Route 238; on the southwest and west by United States Interstate 64; and on the northwest by King's Creek.

### Data Base

The statistical information contained in this study was obtained from a variety of state and federal records, the most informative of which were the United States Census returns from York County for the years 1860 through 1910. In addition to the regular ten-year census data, information was obtained from the 1860 Slave Schedule for York County, the 1865 Population Schedules of African-Americans in York County, and the 1880 Agricultural Schedule for York County. The information obtained from the 1890 Population Schedules, or regular census, was obtained not directly from microfilm copies of the handwritten originals but from a book of general census information that was less specific than the original census. It was necessary to rely on the less specific information because the original copies of the 1890 United States Census were destroyed in a fire before copies could be made and before the 70-year confidential period for census materials had expired.

Two other important sources of information were the York County Deed Books and Land Books located in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court in Yorktown, Virginia. The existence of the 1918 plat commissioned by the United States Navy of the land it intended to purchase for the Naval Weapons Station, complete with existing property lines and owners' names, was also of great help. The identity of

property owners could have been retrieved through the use of the Deed Book Index, but the plat allowed for the placement of the property owners in proper perspective to one another. This information, combined with the age, sex, color, and occupation information obtained from the census returns, helped to construct the racial makeup and concentration of landowners in 1918, and provided the tools to produce an accurate picture of property acquisition in the project area from 1860 until 1918.

Other sources of information used in this study include the official records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (commonly called the Freedman's Bureau), existing maps of the area, and numerous general secondary sources. Unfortunately, many African-Americans in the late nineteenth century left no written wills, no probate inventories, no diaries or other personal papers that might increase the knowledge of African-American life.

Before proceeding, the bias inherent in some of the materials used in this study should be discussed. Information gathered from the U.S. Census returns from 1860 to 1910 is used liberally in the following pages, but while informative and interesting, should be viewed with caution. The returns from 1860 and 1870 more than likely missed a certain amount of the African-American population due to the political and social unrest of the time and the sometimes less-than-enthusiastic attitude of the census marshals. It has been estimated that the 1870 census missed as much as six to seven percent of the African-American population in the South (Schweninger 1990). The credibility of the census was



improved by the use of county records, tax assessments, and land deeds to help confirm some of the census information. The 1890 census was, as previously mentioned, destroyed by fire in 1921 and only the summary figures survive. The 1900 and 1910 census are very reliable because improvements were made in the field to assure a more complete recovery of information. All of the census records included in this study were cross-checked with other sources as best as possible; the author takes full responsibility for any incorrect information included in this study.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature involving social stratification and the relationship between whites and African-Americans in the decades following the Civil War indicates few, if any, studies that specifically deal with both topics. Much of the work done in social stratification since the 1950's has been concerned with theory building. The conflict theory of social stratification, the theory guiding this study, has its roots in the writings of Karl Marx and the attempt by Bendix and Lipset to pull those writings together into some form of general theory (Bendix and Lipset 1953). Bendix and Lipset attempted to separate the Marxian theory from its political implications, because Marx intended his theory to be a tool for political action. Bendix and Lipset indicate in their essay, through the use of Marx's own writings, that Marx believed that a struggle between the classes was inevitable because the proletariat would develop a class-consciousness and struggle to free itself from the control of the bourgeoisie. This became the basis of the conflict theory which regards social stratification as the result of the struggle for power.

As stated in the previous chapter, Allardt (1968) recognized the existence of both the conflict theory and the functional theory of stratification. Allardt also

contemplates the possibility of a synthesis of the two by reviewing the works of Dahrendorf and Lenski. Allardt says that Dahrendorf, in his work Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (1959), indicates that no synthesis is possible because society is double-headed and two theories are necessary to explain each head. Lenski, according to Allardt, is much more optimistic, perhaps overly so. In Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification (1966), Lenski sees good and bad in both theories and suggests that the good in each can be combined into a new theory of social stratification. In an attempt to construct this new theory, Allardt says Lenski needs to explain stratification by factors and variables that are independent of the stratification variables. Allardt suggests using surplus of goods and services and the strength of social constraints existing within a society as explanatory factors. By cross-tabulating the two factors, Allardt is successful in supporting Lenski's proposition of master trends in society, and he also accounted for deviations in the trends (Allardt 1968). Allardt also criticizes Lenski for stressing different criteria of equality when discussing technologically primitive and advanced societies. Allardt believes there should be a distinction between absolute and relative equality. Allardt points out that in America the criteria for equality means achievement, which means elimination of elitism and denial of ascriptive rights, but means other inequalities can be justified in terms of difference of achievement. Allardt acknowledges Lipset's (1963) work on America as the first new nation and what Lipset said about

African-Americans. Lipset acknowledges that the equality of opportunity is not enough to make an African-American a full citizen or assure his/her movement in society. Securing the same rights for African-Americans would seem to require equality according to need. In a final note, Allardt sees Lenski's work as a departure from the functionalist tradition and may form the basis of a synthesized theory (Allardt 1968).

In a study of social stratification within a society, it must be remembered that the study cannot separate the society from its historical basis. The distinctions between positions in society have been a central component of conservative and radical social thought. Stratification must be seen in conjunction with all the broad processes of society, including its history (Jackson 1968). In fact, several historical studies about African-Americans in the decades following the Civil War have contributed, probably unknowingly, to the study of stratification. C. Vann Woodward, in his superb work Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (1951) examined the economic destruction incurred by the South during the war. Woodward determined that the destruction of farm machinery and the loss of draft animals from southern farms during the war affected African-Americans more than whites. Woodward explained this conclusion by showing that these items were in short supply after the war and probably in the hands of white planters, since they had controlled these items before the war. Woodward also postulated that, due to the implementation of sharecropping and tenant farming contracts between whites and African-

Americans, the freedmen were not able to buy land or the tools necessary to farm it. Woodward, though not admitting it outright, has postulated the existence of a society based on power, control, and conflict, which sounds very much like stratification's conflict theory.

Another study of African-Americans during or near the time period considered by this thesis is Carter G. Woodson's The Rural Negro (1930), a very interesting book based on the responses of rural African-Americans to a questionnaire delivered to them in the late 1920's. Woodson collated all the information into an intriguing picture of the South. Woodson fully established the continued existence of the plantation system and the continued existence of tenant farming and sharecropping. He also reported on the success of some African-Americans in acquiring land of their own, and he admits that in many cases the African-American landowners are no better off than the tenants or sharecroppers, due to poor access to necessary equipment or to general poor condition of the land that whites sold to them (Woodson 1930).

Woodson's recognition of the success African-Americans were having in acquiring land, if not in farming it, begs the question of how the African-Americans viewed land-ownership. He indicates that ownership of land was important to the African-Americans as a symbol of making a living without white control. This symbolism indicates the presence of a struggle for power and control and a use of the conflict theory before it was accepted by the academic community.

Another study of African-Americans and whites in the post-Civil War South is Crandall Shifflett's Patronage and

Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900 (1982). Shifflett confirms the existence of the plantation economy in Louisa County in the late nineteenth century and shows that the African-American population was forced into a surplus-extraction type of agriculture controlled by the white landowners. By proving this, Shifflett supports many of Woodward's conclusions and also shows the existence of a struggle for power between the whites and the African-Americans.

The final study to be considered here is Jay R. Mandle's The Roots of Black Poverty (1978), which is an exposé of the post-Civil War southern plantation economy and its control over African-Americans. Mandle sees the plantation as a mode of production in the Marxian sense and sets out to prove that the main features of this mode of production were tenancy, sharecropping, repression, and enforced immobility that was placed upon African-Americans. He believes that these factors were key to the limited economic development experienced in the South. Mandle argues that the institution of share tenancy and sharecropping continued white control over the mostly African-American labor force and guaranteed the survival of the plantation mode of production. His Marxian approach is easily identifiable as an implementation of the conflict theory.

All of the aforementioned historical studies discuss the questions of economic development among whites and African-Americans in the South following the Civil War. All of them also, either knowingly or unknowingly, are following the idea of a struggle for power and control between the whites and

African-Americans, which is part of the basis of the conflict theory. In the following chapters, this study will show the economic and social conflict between whites and African-Americans on the Weapons Station land by using comparative data of the two groups and general comparisons from some of the works mentioned above. This study will show that the African-Americans had successfully achieved an equality of opportunity with a portion of white society, but did not reach equality of achievement due to the power of the white landowners.

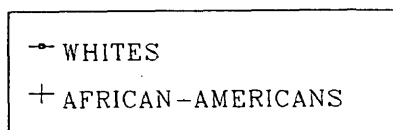
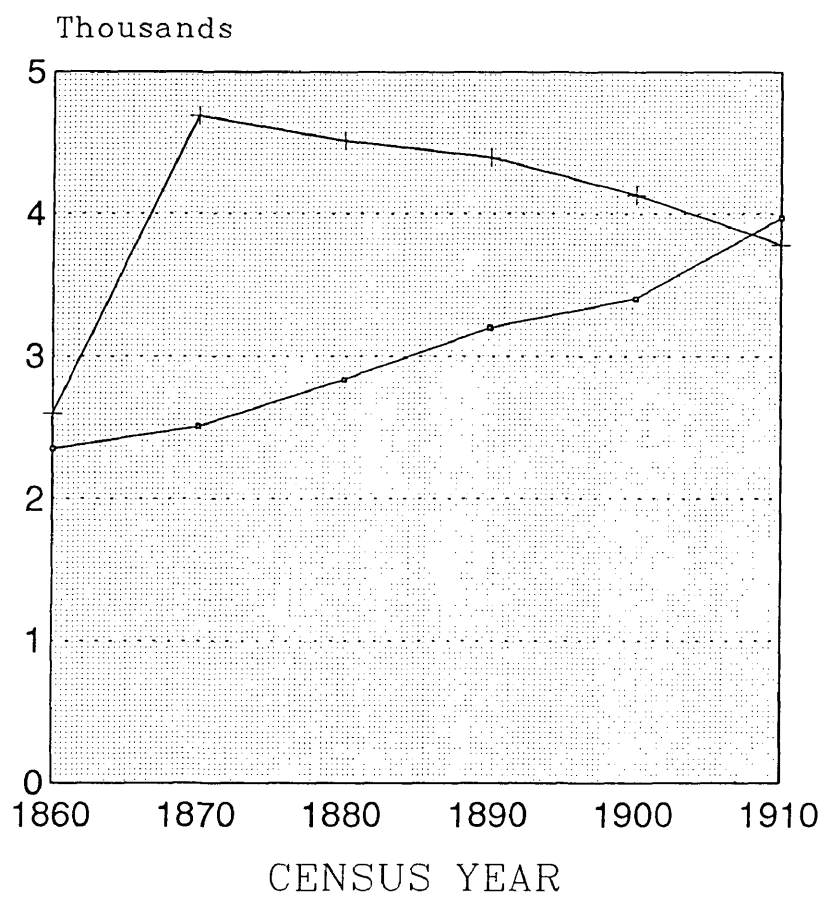
CHAPTER III  
YORK COUNTY 1860-1870

The decade encompassing the years of the Civil War witnessed a change in the makeup of York County's population and the modern continuation of stratification with whites continuing to hold power over the African-Americans. The legality of slavery had enforced social stratification for two hundred years, but the abolition of the "peculiar institution" opened the door for two developments: 1) the possibility that African-Americans would achieve de facto social equality rather than the little enforced de jure social equality implemented after the war; and 2) the possibility that some of the former slaves would purchase land and achieve an economic equality with the whites. This chapter will use census data and documentary sources to establish the potential basis for African American economic and social mobility, and analyze the reasons why this mobility had not occurred by the end of the decade.

The eve of the Civil War found in York County a rural society with a population almost equally divided between the economically dominant whites and a subordinate African-American group containing slaves and free African-Americans. The 1860 U.S. Census, the last population count before the war, recorded a white population of approximately 2,300 living in the county (1860 U.S. Census)(Figure 1). While more



FIGURE 1  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE POPULATION,  
YORK COUNTY, 1860-1910

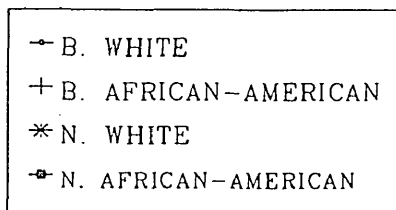
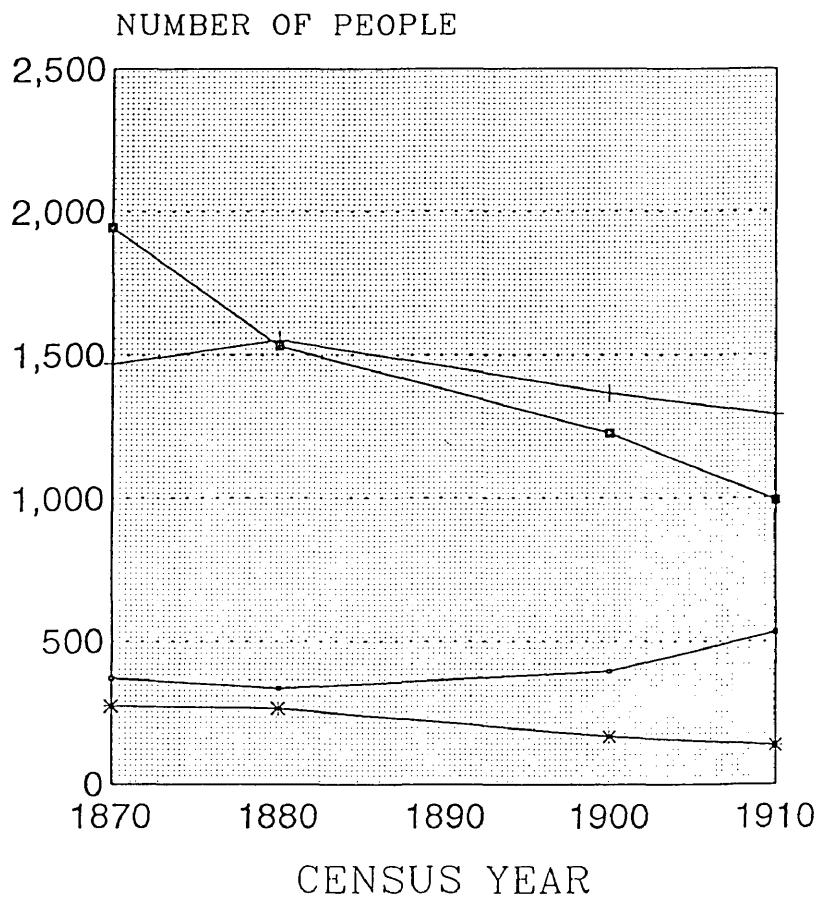


specific figures for the project area are not possible from the 1860 U.S. Census, it is estimated that less than 1,000 whites lived in the northern part of the county which included the present-day project area. This estimate is established by analyzing the 1860 and 1870 U.S. Census returns. As stated, the 1860 census records approximately 2,300 whites in the county and the 1870 census approximately 2,600 whites (1860 U.S. Census; 1870 U.S. Census). The 1870 Census, however, was broken down into the respective districts established within the county by the Union Army. The Bruton and Nelson Districts cover the northern part of the county which includes the project area. For this reason, the statistics from these two districts will be used throughout this study for both whites and African-Americans. The returns for these two districts in the 1870 census record a total of approximately 700 whites, not all of whom lived in the project area (Figure 2). Since the white population of the entire county only increased by approximately 300 people, it is believed that the 1860 population of the northern portion of the county is similar to the number recorded in 1870.

The white population of the county was in the minority in 1860, however, as approximately 2,600 African-Americans were recorded as living there (see Figure 1). Of this number, a little over 1,900 were slaves and approximately 700 were free African-Americans (1860 U.S. Census, 1860 Slave Schedule). The fact that the African-American population outnumbered the white population in York County is interesting when whites outnumbered African-Americans by two-

FIGURE 2

AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE POPULATION,  
BRUTON AND NELSON DISTRICTS, 1860-1910



to-one in the state at the time (Logan 1970). The number of free African-Americans in the county is not surprising considering that Virginia recorded the second largest free African-American population, behind Maryland, in 1860 (Schweninger 1990). By using the 1860 Census, the 1860 Slave Schedule, and an 1863 map showing property owners and boundaries as they probably existed before the war, it is believed that a minimum of 209 African-Americans lived in the project area in 1860. This number was reached by taking the names of all 38 landowners shown on the 1863 map believed to own land in the project area and matching them against the U.S. Census returns in an effort to determine the color of the landowners. This revealed a total of 16 whites and 3 free African-Americans who lived within the project area and who possibly owned land. The 16 white names were then compared to the names of white slave owners recorded on the 1860 Slave Schedule. All 16 names were matched to owners, who were shown to own 206 slaves in 1860 (1860 Slave Schedule). The three free African-Americans owned no slaves, but presumably had family which would have added slightly to the actual figure.

Deed research conducted in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court in Yorktown, Virginia, revealed a total of 38 landowners within the project area in 1860. Of these, 37 were white and 1 was a free African-American. That the whites controlled the economic power in the project area is not in question. No firsthand accounts of the personal feelings or views of the slaves survive, due in large part to the fact that most of the African-American population could not write. It is believed that the absolute power of the white masters

over every aspect of a slave's life and the systematic use of force by whites against the slaves created within the slave society a negative self-image which only helped to increase white dominance (Dunning 1972). Such dominance may not have been absolute, however, as witnessed by the presence of a free African-American landowner within the project area in 1860. Thomas Banks had purchased a portion of Robert Anderson's farm in 1857 (York County Deed Book [YCDB] 16:387) and farmed it. Although free African-Americans were treated, socially and economically, little better than slaves, Banks' landowning, as well as the landownership achieved by 18 other free African-Americans listed in the 1860 census for York County, indicates a de facto equality of opportunity.

The Civil War and the resulting occupation of the peninsula by the Union Army in the early summer of 1862 acted as another opportunity for all African-Americans to gain equality. Union occupation brought freedom from slavery and a chance to acquire goods, such as land, that had been denied the slaves. The Union occupation first brought however, a large increase in the African-American population. The slave and free population of 2,600 in 1860 grew dramatically to around 4,300 in 1865 and continued to grow to almost 5,000 in 1870 (1860 U.S. Census; 1865 York County Census; 1870 U.S. Census). The huge increase was due to the freedom accorded the ex-slaves by the Union Army, which allowed a freedom of movement and placed the freedmen on land seized from the white landowners. The freedmen were allowed to farm the land for their own profit. Because of forceful intervention, the social relationship between the whites and the African-

Americans had been substantially altered.

The changing of the centuries-old social order was extremely apparent in the tax books of York County. The 1861 and 1862 York County Land Books are a study in upheaval. The 1861 Land Book recorded a minimum of 17 white landowners from the project area, 14 of whom owned slaves (1861 York County Land Book). All of the whites had taxable property. Conversely, the 1861 Land Book listed only three African-Americans from the project area, all with the last name "Banks" and all with some taxable personal property, probably living on the land of Thomas Banks (1861 York County Land Book). A total of 165 taxable African-Americans, which meant male and over the age of 21, were listed in the 1861 Land Book as compared with 493 taxable whites for the entire county. In 1862, however, for the Bruton and Nelson districts, there were a total of 658 taxable African-Americans, 267 of which had taxable personal property consisting mainly of household goods or cattle. Only 152 taxable whites were recorded within the two districts, 116 of whom had taxable property (1862 York County Land Book). The explosion of African-Americans with taxable property not only shows the influx of African-Americans to the Union-occupied area, but also suggests that the African-Americans may have been confiscating white-owned goods for their own use and possession. It seems unlikely that so many people who had just come out of enforced servitude would possess very many goods. The freedmen were taking control, to a small extent, of their economic status for the first time, exploiting an equality of opportunity, as later written by Lipset (1963).

The Union Army seized a minimum of 14 white-owned farms in the project area during the final three years of the war and allowed over 1,000 African-Americans to live on the land and farm it for their own profit (1865 York County Census). For the vast majority of the freedmen, this marked the first time that they ever harvested anything without the threat of a master's punishment. The fact that the freedmen were working for their own profit may have created a desire to work harder. The white population, however, was dealing with the confiscation of its land and the loss of its extremely cheap labor force. While the 1865 York County Census indicates that some whites were renting land to the African-Americans, the formation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands by the Union in 1865 threatened the whites with a permanent loss of their land (Quarles 1964). A map of the project area created by the Bureau in 1866 shows that six of the largest white-owned farms had been seized by the Bureau and turned over to the freedmen as the starting point for a community (Anonymous 1866). This land must have, in some way, destroyed part of the negative self-image proposed by Dunning that the African-Americans had of their social standing. With the presence of the new farms, the fact that agriculture was the only life most of these people understood, and the feeling that their future was somehow tied to the land (Quarles 1964), it seems logical that freedmen would see true landownership as attainable and as an economic equalizer with the former white masters who would no longer control their fate.

The Federal Government's return of the confiscated lands

to the prewar white owners in 1866 seriously damaged the ability of the African-Americans to achieve economic equality with the whites. With the return of their land, the whites used their power to reclaim the African-Americans as a subordinate labor force. The whites hoped to keep the plantation system viable, and two factors appear to come together to help them achieve that end. The first factor was the development of the tenantry system which had actually been partially developed by the Union Army during the occupation. In many places on the 1865 York County Census of African-Americans is the notation that farmers were "working for a share." The second factor was that access to employment opportunities outside of the plantation were curtailed by the slow growth of manufacturing in the South after the war and the failure to provide agricultural land to the African-Americans (Mandle 1978). Dunning agrees that while formal emancipation was a fact, actual control over their own lives was not possible because African-Americans did not have the weapons, e.g., land and political clout, to successfully engage in a struggle for a greater measure of equality (Dunning 1972). While the resurgent whites were under greater economic control from the North, the failures of the Northern whites to provide training to the African-Americans for a struggle for greater equality, and the negative self-image that was still a part of the African-American psyche allowed the Southern whites to regain economic control over the freedmen (Dunning 1972). The failure to provide land redistribution may have hurt the African-Americans most. The Freedman's Bureau had been formed with the slogan "forty



acres and a mule" and with the concept of widening the ownership of agricultural land, especially by race. The failure of the Bureau to achieve these ends allowed the basic social relations that existed before the war to continue (Mandle 1972).

The tenantry system established by the whites, who now had their power and status restored, was a powerful move to reassert authority over the African-Americans without using the physical force that had once been an option. Whites attempted to control the freedmen through wage labor, but many African-Americans were hesitant to enter into monetary contracts with the former masters (Mandle 1972). Although the exact origin of the tenantry system is unclear, sometime between 1865 and 1870 the white landowners began to enter into share-tenant contracts with African-Americans. In the share-tenant relationship, the white landowner had complete control over all the managerial functions of the land and the freedman provided only labor (Mandle 1972). This total control assured the white landowner that the African-Americans would remain on the land for the full season because they did not get paid until the crop had been harvested and sold (Mandle 1972). This fact limited the mobility of the African-Americans and confined them to the plantation. This system was adopted in many places in the South, such as Georgia (Brooks 1914) and Mississippi (Woodson 1930).

Another form of tenantry, plain tenant farming, also developed at this time. Plain tenant farming was when a land owner, usually white, rented a piece of land to a tenant,

usually an African-American. The tenant had full control over what to plant on the land and provided all of the equipment necessary for the job. The tenant usually paid the renter between one quarter and one half of the crop (Mandle 1972). Plain tenant farming probably developed in tandem with the share-tenant system.

The lack of other employment opportunities beyond the plantation also forced the African-Americans to accept the resurgent power of the whites. The occupations recorded by the census for African-Americans shows just how limited jobs were for the African-Americans. A total of 840 jobs were recorded for male African-Americans in the entire county in 1870. Of these, 705 were recorded as farmers or farm laborers, fully 84 percent of the employment market (Figure 3). By 1910, the percentage of farmers and farm laborers versus recorded occupations has decreased to 75 percent, but it is very obvious that agriculture was the main occupation among African-Americans in the county (Figure 4). These numbers hold true for the Bruton and Nelson Districts, with agriculture providing 89 percent of the African-American occupations in the Bruton District in 1870 and 72 percent in 1910 (Figures 5 and 6), and the percentage in the Nelson District holds steady at 81% in 1870 and 1910 although there was a large loss in the overall number of occupations and a large movement from farm laborer to farmer (Figures 7 and 8) (1870 United States Census; 1910 United States Census).

Although the general social relations between the African-Americans and the landed whites generally did not change, the African-Americans were successful in achieving a

FIGURE 3  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS,  
YORK COUNTY 1870

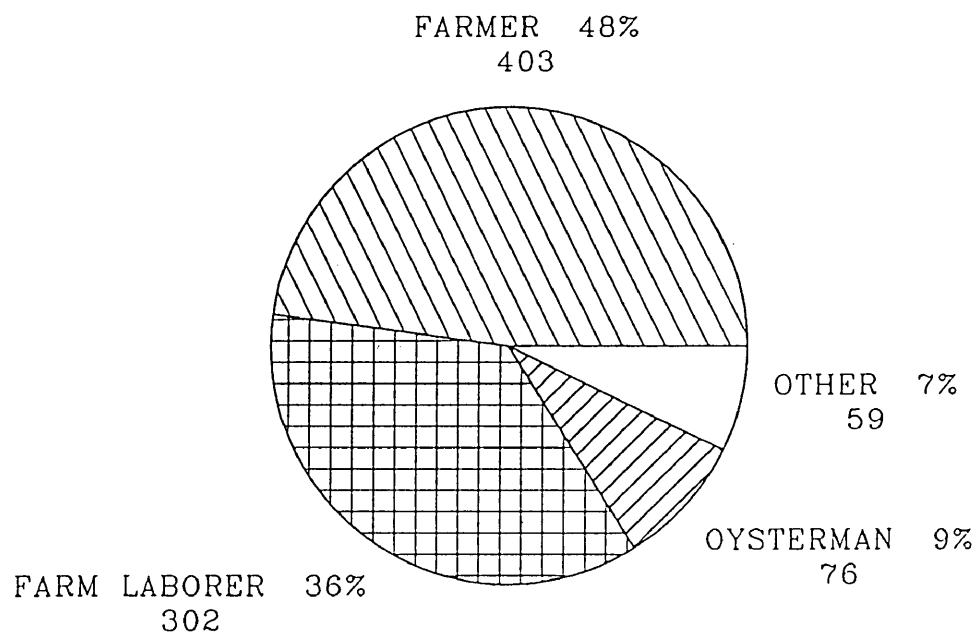


FIGURE 4  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS,  
YORK COUNTY 1910

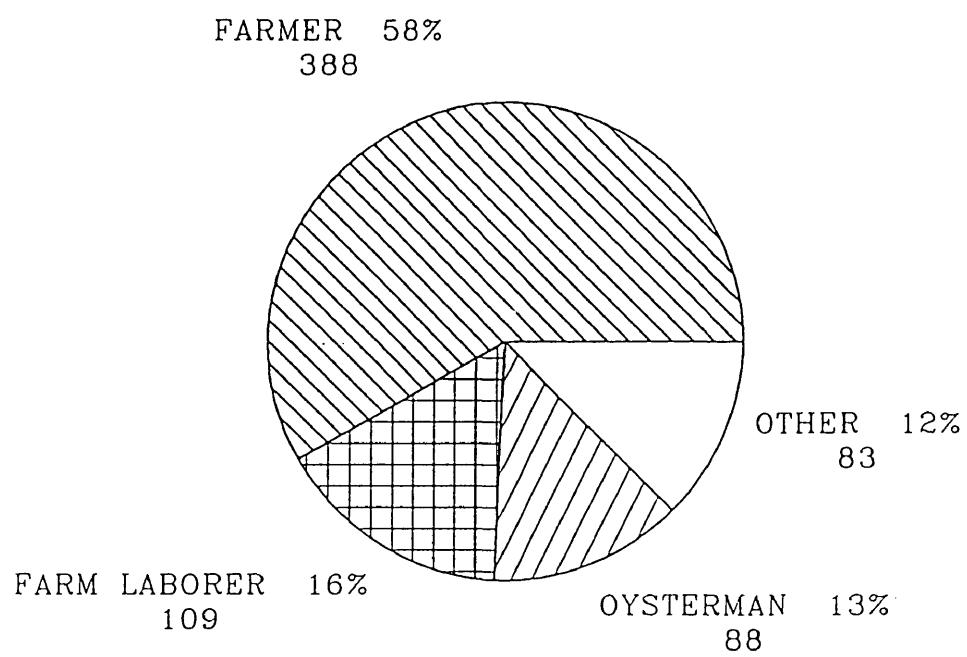


FIGURE 5  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS,  
BRUTON DISTRICT 1870

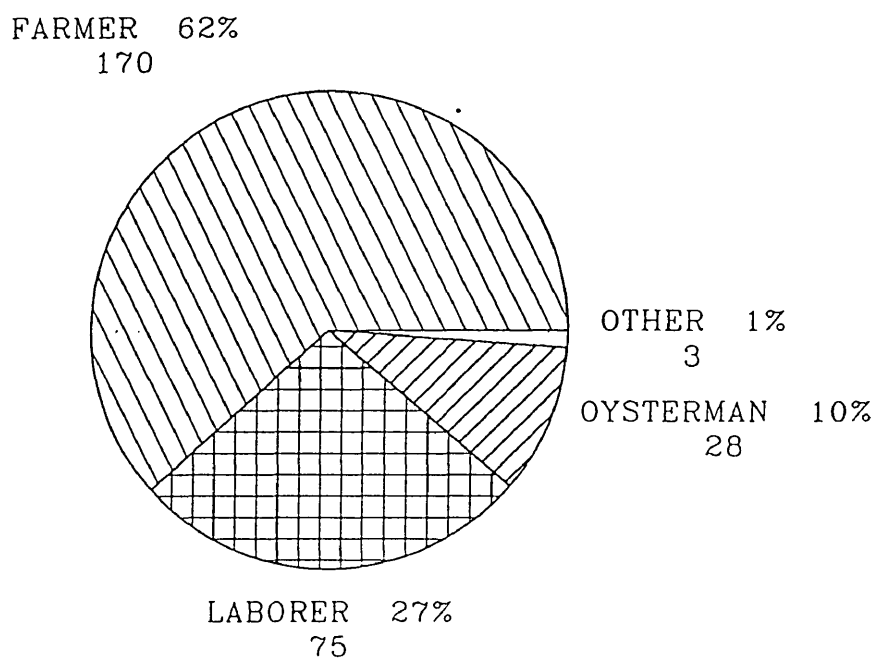


FIGURE 6  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS,  
BRUTON DISTRICT 1910

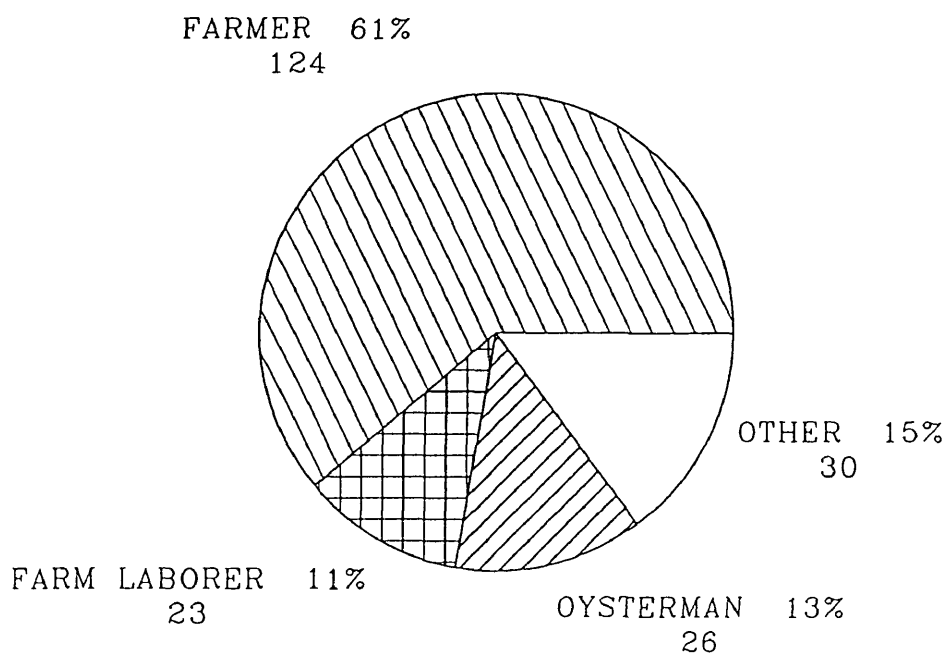


FIGURE 7  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS,  
NELSON DISTRICT 1870

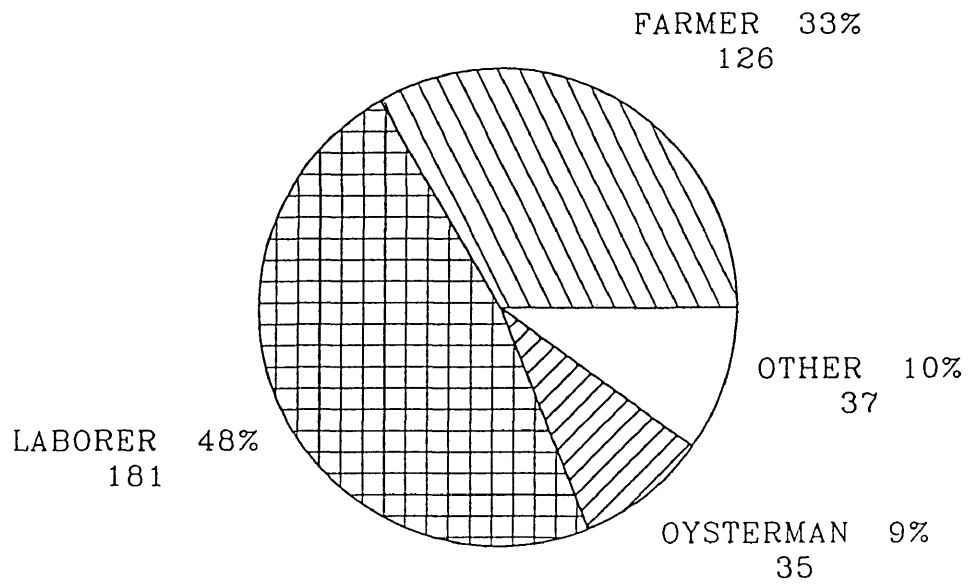
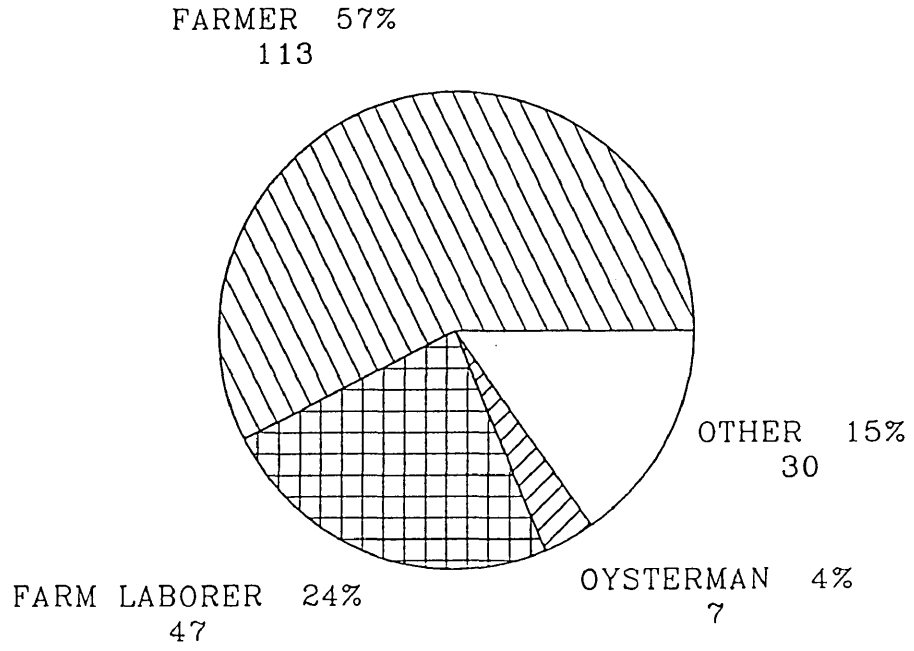


FIGURE 8  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS,  
NELSON DISTRICT 1910





small advancement in social mobility. The release of the African-Americans from slavery put them into direct competition with the poorer whites for the opportunity of employment as shareworkers and for any opportunity to acquire land (Dunning 1972). That land acquisition was a goal of the African-Americans can be established by noting that three African-Americans purchased land between 1865 and 1870 to join Thomas Banks as recorded landowners within the project area. In 1867, John Banks, possibly related to Thomas Banks, purchased two tracts of land from Thomas Tinsley, the white owner of the large Lansdowne estate. These tracts totaled 11 acres (York County Deed Book 17:73). In 1869, Thomas James purchased five acres of the Indian Fields farm from John R. Coupland for fifty dollars in cash (York County Deed Book 17:273). Also in 1869, John Morris purchased ten acres from John Coupland for one hundred dollars (York County Deed Book 17:224). All three men are believed to have been free before the beginning of the war since they are listed in the 1861 Land Book. The establishment of these individual farms--although founded by people free before the war--may have further encouraged other freedmen to attempt to buy land. These small islands, however, were surrounded by white farmers and it is doubtful the white landowners allowed the new African-American landowners any true economic success. Most likely, the African-American land owners were regarded in the same way as a poor white who was able to buy land, since socially they occupied the same status or position after the war.

The end of the 1860s found some things changed and some

things the same. White power and authority continued over the African-American population, although now that population was free by law. The whites still controlled the vast majority of the land within the project area, except for four small parcels that added up to slightly more than 26 acres. The foundations were set for the continuation of the plantation economy with whites controlling the land and the labor force. Yet the labor force in the next few decades began to enter the ranks of landowners. The reasons for this will be analyzed below.

CHAPTER IV  
YORK COUNTY 1870-1919

The forty years following the reestablishment of white power and authority over the African-Americans of the project area included a large increase in African-American land ownership, while white ownership in the project area remained relatively stable. The increase in property ownership among African-Americans occurred at a time when the African-American population of the county was decreasing and the white population was increasing. The white power structure continued its control over the African-American population through economics and landownership, and this may have contributed to the population decrease. These are the decisive years for the hypothesis of this thesis, that African-Americans attained land ownership but none of the equality with whites they sought due to the social relations of the two groups.

The York County population in 1870 had swelled to over 7,000 people, mainly due to the influx of so many African-Americans during the war. The census of that year recorded approximately 2,600 whites and 4,800 African-Americans in the county (1870 United States Census). In the Bruton and Nelson Districts, which contained the project area, there were approximately 700 whites and close to 3,500 African-Americans, meaning the north part of the county contained 70

percent of the African-American population. By 1880, the African-American population in the county had started a decline that would continue until the end of this study's time period (see Figure 1). The African-American population in 1880 decreased to around 5,500. This decrease is particularly noticeable in the Nelson District, which lost almost 500 African-Americans between 1870 and 1880. The Bruton District showed a slight increase in African-American population in 1880, while the white population in each district held steady (see Figure 2). Overall, the white population in the county increased slightly (1880 Census). The census returns for 1890, 1900, and 1910 reflect the same pattern of countywide increase in the white population and a decrease in the African-American population. The returns from the two districts show that the north part of the county continued to contain a relatively stable white population while the African-American population decreased in every census (1890 United States Census, 1900 United States Census, 1910 United States Census). By 1910, whites outnumbered African-Americans in the county for the first time during this study's time period.

The African-American population decline within the project area, and the county as a whole, from 1870 to 1910 indicates that the African-American population was possibly not as controlled by the plantation economy as thought. The mobility to leave the county suggests a weakening over time of the plantation economy. Indeed, Mandle suggests that the decline in paternalism during the period not only allowed for greater movement of the African-American population

economically and socially but was an impetus for the development of the segregation laws of the 1890s that replaced the outdated and weakening paternalistic culture (Mandle 1972). Mandle suggests the segregation laws of the 1890s filled an ideological void within the dominant white power structure in dealing with African-Americans. With the introduction of the segregation, or Jim Crow, laws, the whites no longer had to rely on paternalism to control the African-Americans. The law did that for them (Mandle 1972).

While the African-American population as a whole was decreasing during this time, the number of African-American landowners was increasing. Between 1870 and 1880, the York County Deed Books recorded 23 land exchanges between whites and African-Americans within the project area (York County Deed Books 17-42). These 26 landowners controlled 300 acres, or approximately 3 percent of the land. Yet the acquisition of this land probably was not the result of hard work by the African-Americans but rather the result of a white paternalism and patronage based on the social relations between the two groups. The paternalism of the period was "...based on a clear and unchallenged recognition from both sides of an insurmountable social inequality" (Myrdal 1944:459). By accepting this paternalism, which was based in the power of the whites, the African-Americans were able to make some short-term gains, but the social standing of the whites was never challenged, only justified. Raper, in another study dealing with this subject, states that the acceptance of the paternalism was necessary for a southern African-American to gain land, because his acceptance of this

world view improved his chances for being accepted by the dominant community. White acceptance of an African-American meant that the African-American knew "his place" in society and did not try to openly challenge the power of the white community (Raper 1936:122). Raper argues that African-American land ownership hinged on whether the whites felt like selling land to the African-Americans, based on the acceptability of the African-American to the white community (Raper 1936). This act of patronage, of rewarding socially acceptable behavior with land, allowed the whites to control the rate of growth of the African-American landowners as a group, and control their economic growth. Although it is impossible to be certain if this type of paternalism and patronage was occurring in the project area, it does appear to be a likely scenario. The previous chapter established that the project area generally followed the type of white-controlled system that developed in the rest of the south following the war; therefore, it is logical to assume that the area would proceed along a similar path to the rest of the South as the years passed. No evidence exists to specifically deny that paternalism and patronage were not in use in the project area, but Shifflett's study of Louisa County, Virginia, shows that this type of system did exist in parts of Virginia (Shifflett 1982).

If the existence of African-American land ownership was directly related to the degree with which the free African-Americans accepted white control, then it becomes clear that the African-Americans achieved little true social mobility. The ownership of land, however, had to affect in some way the

economic status of the African-Americans and how they related to the whites. The 1880 Agricultural Census, for the first time, allowed for a direct economic comparison between the two groups. While the Bruton District returns from this census were not available, the Nelson District records do contain some interesting figures. Through the use of cross-referencing names of landholders with the names on the Agricultural Census, a total of 16 of the African-American landowners were found, suggesting that the other ten were located in the Bruton District (York County Deed Book 17-42; 1880 Agricultural Census). The Agricultural Census recorded a total of 177 acres owned by the 16 African-Americans, but only 125 acres recorded as actually under till. These 16 owners produced goods valued at \$1021, which averaged out to a production value of \$63.81 per farm (1880 Agricultural Census)(Table 1). The figures also indicate that the African-Americans had 71% of their land under till. Through the same cross-referencing, a total of 10 white landowners in the project area were found, out of a possible 35. The 10 white owners controlled 499 acres of land, but only had 40%, or 199 acres, under till. The 10 farmers produced \$1970 worth of goods, for an average production value of \$197 per farm (1880 Agricultural Census).

These figures indicate that whites not only owned more land than African-Americans, which is not a major surprise, but that whites were getting better production out of their land than the African-Americans. Whites were producing close to \$10 worth of goods per acre as opposed to slightly over \$8 for the African-Americans. Quality of the land may have

TABLE 1  
1880 AGRICULTURAL CENSUS DATA, WHITE AND  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN LANDOWNERS IN PROJECT AREA

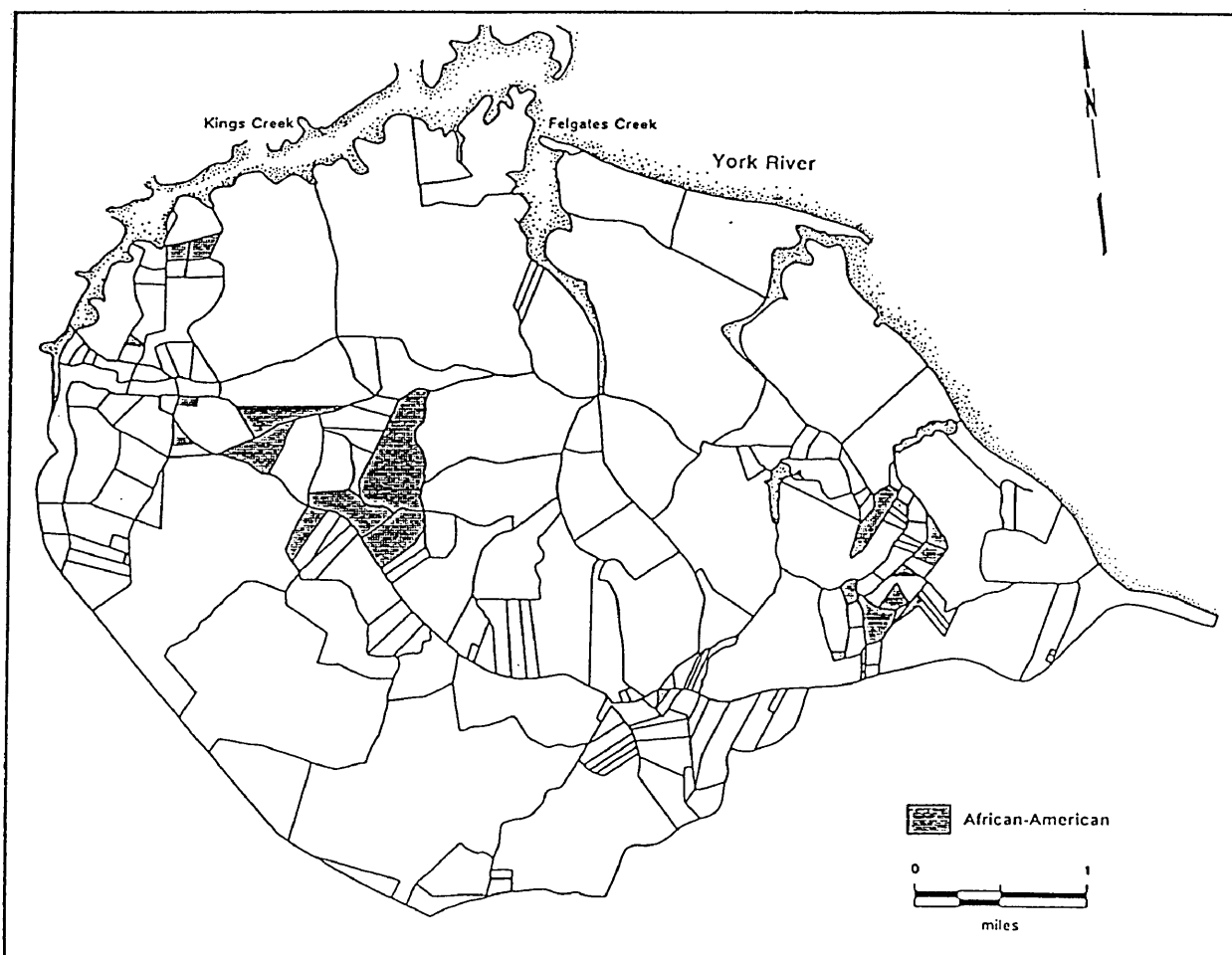
	AFRICAN- AMERICANS	WHITES
Owners	16	10
Acres Owned	177	499
Acres Farmed	125	199
Value of Goods Produced	\$1021	\$1970
Average Production Value	\$63.81	\$197



produced this division. The land within the project area was, and is today, divided between two types of soil. One type is a fine, sandy loam known as Slagle, which is usually found in upland terraces, has moderate drainage, and is suited to fodder crops or pasturage. Slagle soil also requires amendments, such as lime or fertilizer, and responds best to a regime of crop rotation and an intermixing of grass and legume crops. The other soil is an acidic loam called Craven-Uchee, which is typically found on sloping ground, is poorly drained, and is generally unsuited to cultivation (Navy Soil Survey 1982). Basically, the best land was the flattest land. A comparison of the locations of the white and African-American owned farms and a topographic map of the project area showed that the whites controlled the flat or gently rolling land, while the African-American landowners were located along the heavily sloped edges of numerous creeks within the project area (Figure 9). Since the white population controlled which land the African-Americans could buy, the location of African-American-owned property indicates the whites were confining the African-American landowners to the least desirable, least productive land, thereby economically confining them.

The landowners located within the project area represent a fairly accurate cross-section of their respectable groups throughout the entire Nelson District. The 1880 Agricultural Census recorded a total of 168 African-Americans who either owned land, were renting land, or were sharecroppers. These African-Americans owned a total of 2039 acres and farmed 75 percent, or 1523, of those acres. The farms averaged about 12

FIGURE 9  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE LAND OWNERSHIP  
IN THE PROJECT AREA, 1880



acres in size and produced an average of \$58 worth of goods a year (1880 Agricultural Census). The census recorded a total of 56 white landowners in the district who held 4348 acres, of which they farmed 46 percent, or 1991 acres. The average farm size for the whites was 77 acres, and the farms produced an average of \$209 worth of goods per year (1880 Agricultural Census) (Table 2). The overall figures for the Nelson District and the figures based on the landowners within the project area show a strong similarity. This indicates that the landowners within the project area were a representative cross-section of their group. The only major difference in the figures is the discrepancy between the amount of land owned by whites in and outside the project area. Statistics indicate that whites in the project area owned, on the average, approximately one-third less land than their contemporaries. This may indicate a slight difference within the white community. The great similarity of the figures for African-Americans, however, indicates that the economic structure that had developed with the project area was present within a large part of York County. This suggests that the same social constraints that limited the African-Americans in the project area were also in force outside the project area.

African-American land ownership continued to increase from 1880 to 1910 within the project area, possibly representing the decline of paternalism and the loosening of the plantation economy. Land ownership increased, but whatever economic advancement it brought to the African-Americans must be questioned. A review of the York County

TABLE 2  
1880 AGRICULTURAL CENSUS DATA, WHITE AND  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN LANDOWNERS IN THE NELSON DISTRICT

	AFRICAN- AMERICANS	WHITES
Owners	168	56
Acres Owned	2039	4348
Acres Farmed	1523	1991
Value of Goods Produced	\$9744	\$11704
Average Production Value	\$58	\$209

deed books and land tax books revealed a total of 59 African-American landowners within the project area in 1888 (York County Deed Book 17-41; 1888 York County Land Book). These 59 people owned a total of 888 acres of property, a substantial jump from 1880; however, because of increased ownership, average farm size had only risen to 15 acres per farm, only a slight increase from 1880. The total assessed value of the African-American farms in 1888 was \$7,684, or an average of \$130 per farm, which was a decline from the average value of \$153 reported in 1880 (Table 3) (1888 York County Land Book; 1880 Agricultural Census). Land, while used for farming and subsistence, is usually purchased as an investment that will appreciate in value over time. In eight years, the African-Americans were accumulating more land but receiving a net drop in their investment.

This pattern of increasing land ownership and decreasing or relatively steady assessed land values for African-Americans continued into the early part of this century in the project area. In 1919, the last year property was assessed to particular owners, there were a total of 210 African-American landowners in the project area. These people owned a total of 2443 acres, or approximately one-quarter of the land in the study area. The large increase within the ownership group, however, was tempered by a decrease in average size of the farms to 11 acres from 15 acres in 1888 (1888 York County Land Book). Total land value had increased almost four-fold to \$30,295, but the average land value assessment per farm was \$144 (Table 4) (1919 York County Land Book). The average value per farm was basically stagnant for

TABLE 3  
 1888 YORK COUNTY LAND BOOK DATA, WHITE AND  
 AFRICAN-AMERICAN LANDOWNERS IN THE PROJECT AREA

	AFRICAN- AMERICANS	WHITES
Owners	59	36
Acres Owned	888	7538
Average Farm Size, Acres	15	209
Total Assessed Land Value	\$7684	\$56234
Average Land Value	\$130	\$1562

TABLE 4  
1919 YORK COUNTY LAND BOOK DATA, WHITE AND  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN LANDOWNERS IN THE PROJECT AREA

	AFRICAN- AMERICANS	WHITES
Owners	210	34
Acres Owned	2443	6989
Average Farm Size, Acres	11	205
Total Assessed Land Value	\$30295	\$64050
Average Land Value	\$144	\$1884

a period of 33 years. This suggests the continued selling of poor-quality land to the African-Americans, poor in soil or location or both. Another explanation could be a continued bias against the African-Americans by the county government. Records revealing the names of people who served in the local government during that 33-year period unfortunately do not exist today. A logical guess, however, would be that a group of landed whites were in control of the county government. In his study of Louisa County, Shifflett showed that a group of male white landowners controlled the political offices within the county from 1870 into the early part of this century (Shifflett 1982). While there is no evidence to support this in York County, the continued low value assessed to African-American lands over the 33-year period could represent a conscious effort on the part of the whites in the county and the project area to keep the African-Americans economically depressed. Mandle (1978) suggested that this form of political and economic power control was the replacement for the paternalistic system.

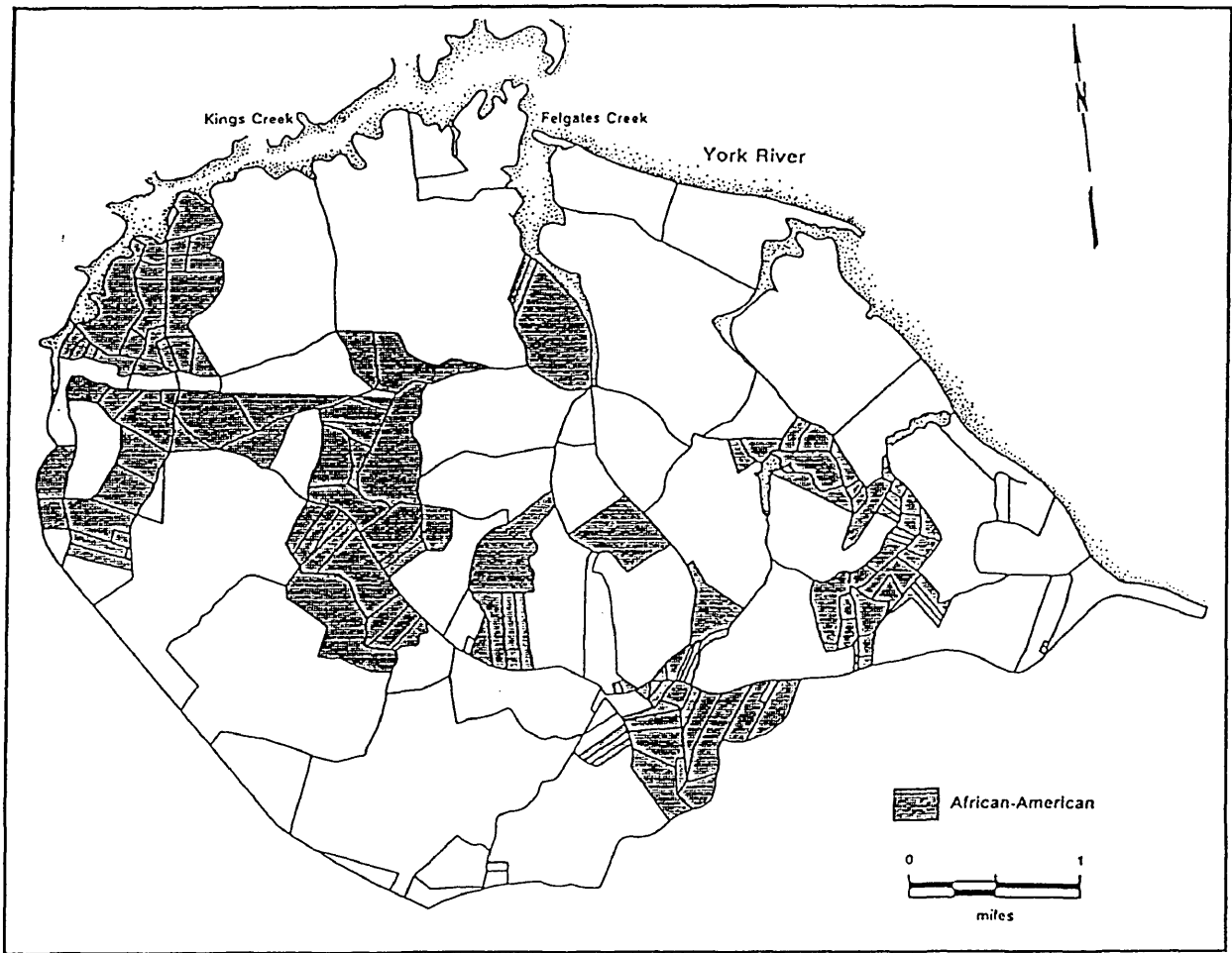
The economic stagnation of African-Americans in the project area between 1888 and 1919 can also be seen by comparing the land value figures with those of the whites. In 1888 there were a total of 36 white landowners in the project area (York County Deed Book 17-41). These 36 whites owned a total of 7538 acres, or about 209 acres on average, valued at \$56,234, or \$1562 per farm (see Table 3) (1888 York County Land Book). By 1919 the number of white landowners had dropped to 34 and they owned a total of 6989 acres worth \$64,050 (1919 York County Land Book). White-owned land had



decreased by over 500 acres, yet values had risen. The average white farm size had decreased slightly to 205 acres, but the average farm value had increased to \$1884 (see Table 4) (1919 York County Land Book). The white-owned farms were continuing a natural value increase over time, whereas the African-American land was not increasing in value. Land values have a tendency over time to increase unless something catastrophic occurs to the land. The indication that African-Americans were continuing to buy and farm the land suggests that the land was unchanged from its normal state. While African-Americans, as discussed earlier, were sold the less attractive land located along the hilly slopes adjacent to the creeks or in low-lying areas, this does not fully explain the lack of value accumulation. The facts suggest that the white landowners could have been manipulating the assessments of African-American-owned land in order to continue the subordinate economic status of the African-Americans that had existed since the Civil War.

By 1919, African-Americans in the project area formed 86% of the landowners and controlled 25% of the land (Figure 10). The white minority had used economic power and selective land sale to confine the African-Americans to the least attractive land and a lower economic status. The chances of the African-Americans escaping this white-controlled system were slim, but the question of whether they might have threatened economic equality with the whites became a moot point in 1918. The decision of the U.S. Government to buy over 10,000 acres of land in northern York County for a military facility meant that all private landowners had to

FIGURE 10  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE LAND OWNERSHIP  
IN THE PROJECT AREA, 1910



sell their land to the government at a fair price set by the government or face seizure of their land through eminent domain. The African-American landowners in the project area, who had lived under the control of the white landowners for 50 years, were subject to the whim of the white-dominated Federal Government. The government paid a fair price for the land, meaning it paid five times the assessed value of the land recorded in the 1919 Land Book. The assessed amount was multiplied by five because land assessments in York County before 1919 were done at 20% of actual value (Clerk of the Court 1993). Paying the actual assessed value of the land was not an economic benefit to the African-Americans. While the entire population of the project area was forced to relocate in 1919, the African-Americans tended to congregate in three areas, the first two known as Lackey and Grove located just outside the project area, and the third between the project area and Williamsburg. The higher land values in these areas meant that the African-Americans could not buy the same amount of land that they had owned in the project area with the money the government had paid them. In many cases, the African-Americans were only able to purchase between one-quarter to one-third of the amount of land they had owned in the project area (York County Deed Book 40-41). This reducing of African-American land holdings also reduced the amount of land they farmed and probably reduced the income of these families proportionally to the reduction in land. In forcing the African-Americans in the project area off their land, the U.S. Government reduced the economic status of those African-Americans, confining the African-Americans even further into

a low economic status. This further decrease in economic status may have put African-Americans in the area into an economic position similar to their post-Civil War condition and may have given further impetus to the migration of local African-Americans to the urban areas of the North.

The power structure that dominated the lives of African-Americans in the project area from 1870 to 1919 evolved and changed over that period of time. In 1870, the white landowners had reestablished control over the African-American labor force through the use of the tenantry system, which temporarily assured the survival of the plantation economy. The whites rewarded those African-Americans who accepted "their place" in the social order with the chance to buy land through a system of paternalism. As the paternalistic system began to deteriorate, and the number of African-American landholders increased and possibly was seen as a threat, the whites began to legally impose restrictions on African-Americans through what would become known as the Jim Crow laws. African-Americans were economically disadvantaged due to the poor quality of the land that whites sold to them even as the whites kept the best land for their own use. Throughout all of this, the African-Americans in 1919 had established at a minimum a subsistence living before the Federal government bought up all of the land in the project area. The resulting decrease in the amount of land owned by these African-Americans, combined with the trauma of being forced to leave the land many had literally farmed all their lives, erased any economic gain the African-Americans may have made over the previous 50 years and kept them

subordinated economically to the white population.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The term social stratification is the name given to the field that studies inequality in society including unequal distribution of goods and services, rights and obligations, power and prestige. Each of these is an attribute of a position of two groups of a society, not an individual (Littlejohn 1972). In this study, these attributes have been described from the position of two groups in a single society, whites and African-Americans. The hypothesis of this study was that African-Americans attempted to attain a social and economic status equal to the landed whites within the project area but failed in this effort mainly due to the social power structure created by the whites after the Civil War, a power structure created to keep the African-Americans subordinate to the whites. This hypothesis has been proven correct.

African-Americans in the project area at the end of the Civil War experienced an upward movement in their social status. The freedom achieved by the African-Americans for the first time put them in direct competition with lower-class whites for employment and economic opportunities. Unfortunately, the African-American population was not properly trained or prepared to survive with their new freedom and were open to exploitation by the whites. With the

return of land confiscated during the war and with the encouragement of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, the whites implemented a tenantry system that temporarily preserved the viability of the plantation economy by subordinating the free African-Americans through the use of labor contracts.

Within the project area, there were three African-American landowners by 1870. All three were free before the war, however, and probably obtained the means for land purchase at that time. The African-Americans who were freed during the war continued to be viewed by the white landowners as a relatively cheap source of labor. The signing of African-Americans to tenant contracts assured the whites of a controllable labor force similar to the slavery that existed before the war. The only possibility an African-American had to escape the tenantry system was to fully accept the white world view and economic domination and be fully accepted by the whites as someone who knew his or her place in society. Then, in a paternalistic way, the African-American would be rewarded for his or her "correct" way of thinking by being offered a chance to purchase a piece of land. The whites offered the African-Americans the least attractive land on the hilly slopes of the creeks or in the low-lying and poorly drained areas. In this way, the whites confined the African-Americans to certain parts of the project area. The African-Americans who were allowed to purchase land moved up in the social status of their group, but raised only a subsistence living off of the land.

As the number of landowning African-Americans grew in

the 1870's and 1880's, the whites turned more toward legal means of controlling the African-American population. In the project area, African-American land values may have been kept arbitrarily low so as not to increase the economic standing of the African-American landowners. At a more general level, the need or want of the whites for control over the African-American population culminated in the passage of the Jim Crow laws early in the twentieth century.

The whites were successful in economically restricting the mobility of the African-American population through the use of their power and status. When the U.S. Government took control of the land in the project area in 1919, African-Americans were no closer to economic equality with the whites than they had been at the end of the Civil War. Socially, the African-Americans were at least equal to the lowest class of whites, with whom the African-Americans competed against for employment opportunities.

In modern times, most studies on social stratification involving African-Americans involve racial or ethnic stratification (Noel 1968; Blue 1959) or focus on stratification within African-American society (Jones 1946; Glenn 1963). One particular economic question asked is if whites have gained economically from the subordination of African-Americans. In a brief, but very comprehensive article, Villemez (1978) shows that statistics indicate that whites earn a larger income proportionate to the number of African-Americans in the population. Villemez found that the larger the African-American population being economically subordinated, the larger the percentage of the white



population making over \$15,000 per year (Villemez 1978). This indicates that whites continued to economically subordinate the African-American population and benefit from that subordination in the 1970s.

Politically, African-Americans seem to have made gains in political power at the local, state, and national levels with the passing of civil rights laws, affirmative action, and the creation of political voting districts containing African-American majorities. Yet even these gains must be questioned. The debate has already started as to whether majority African-American political districts have increased African-American power in the state legislature or diluted it by creating more conservative-leaning white majority districts (Lerman 1995). The debate on this point is only beginning and will certainly continue in the near future.

American society has been stratified to some extent from the moment the English landed at Jamestown. This study has examined the stratification between whites and African-Americans in York County after the Civil War in an effort to show how stratification survived the war and how the white population, in its position as the dominant group of the social order, continued to economically subordinate the African-Americans, even into the early decades of this century. This economic inequality still exists today and is still the subject of numerous studies. This study has shown how the white population developed a stratification system at the end of the Civil War based on white power and status to economically and socially subordinate the African-Americans and continue the domination of the white population. The

results of this stratification are present in society today; by understanding the origins of these results it is hoped that a better understanding of society today can be achieved through understanding the society of yesterday.

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