

**SAVING THE SOUTH: AGRICULTURAL REFORM IN THE SOUTHERN  
UNITED STATES, 1819-1861**

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation re-assesses how the popular national agricultural reform movement operated in the southern states and how it interacted with the economy of slavery and short-staple cotton. The central question that my dissertation explores is how the agricultural reform movement was used and interpreted by reformers and other planters, including how it changed the daily lives of slaves on cotton plantations. Drawing on print sources from the agricultural press, plantation journals and work logs, and slave narratives, this study explores how planter elites used agricultural reform to articulate their goals for and anxieties about the future of their plantation society, as well as the unexpected legacy of reform on the plantation. By moving away from previous scholarship's singular focus on agricultural literature and societies, this dissertation shows how the ideas of agricultural reform filtered out to planters across the cotton South. Only by considering all three elements of agricultural reform—the public world of reformers, agricultural labor on cotton plantations, and the work of slaves on those same plantations—is it possible to offer a full picture of agricultural reform in the South. This study shows the reach of agricultural reform by combining studies of the print and social worlds of reformers, the account books and non-literary print that popularized reform in the Southwest, cotton work, and plantation case studies. This dissertation traces the intellectual history of southern elites to fundamental changes in the lives of planters, overseers, and slaves in the cotton South.

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## Introduction

“I understand all about the growth of cotton, from the time of preparing the land to receive the seed, till the wool is jinned and packed. I am a good judge of its quality, too, and know what is the best kind of jin for various sorts. I do not say this for the sake of boasting. My knowledge has not come naturally to me. I have acquired it in a very hard school, and I want to turn it to account.”

John Brown, edited by Louis Alexis Chamerovzow, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave in New England*. London: W.M. Watts, 1855, 208.

John Brown was a slave on a Georgia cotton plantation when he acquired his knowledge of cotton agriculture. Like countless other slaves across the American South, Brown needed to know the most intimate details of how planters wanted to grow cotton—his life depended upon it. Planters across the cotton South took interest in the details of plantation agriculture and tried to extract as much cotton as they could from their land and slaves. For many of these men, this meant engaging with the popular agricultural reform movement that published manuals on cotton planting, journals offering advice on the details of running a plantation, and blank record forms to guide cotton planters through the business of planting, cultivating, harvesting, and selling the white fiber. When their masters took an interest in agricultural reform, slaves often paid the price. Agricultural reform in the cotton South emphasized efficiency, eliminating slack periods in the labor cycle, closely monitoring slave labor, and adopting new varieties of the cotton plant that produced more and larger bolls for slaves to pick.

My dissertation, “Saving the South: Agricultural Reform in the Southern United States, 1819-1861” examines how the popular national agricultural reform movement was translated to the southern states and how it interacted with the economy of slavery and short-staple cotton. The dissertation is a study of cotton plantations, agricultural reform, and slave labor in South Carolina and Mississippi. Between 1820 and 1861, the cotton economy

of the plantation South exploded, expanding the reach of slavery and staple production. At the same time, the United States was undergoing a dramatic reshaping of its national economy in the face of industrialization and changing approaches to labor management. Cotton planters in the South selectively appropriated elements of rational production and agricultural reform in an attempt both to follow trends in the national and transnational knowledge networks with which they engaged and extract as much as possible from land and slave labor. These reformers saw re-making plantation agriculture as the only way to secure the future of a slave South.

The central question that my dissertation explores is how the agricultural reform movement was used and interpreted by reformers and other planters, including how it changed the daily lives of slaves on cotton plantations. Drawing on print sources from the agricultural press and manuscript correspondence and plantation journals and work logs, I explore the ways that planter elites used agricultural reform to articulate their goals for and anxieties about the future of their plantation society, as well as the unexpected legacy of reform on the plantation. Focusing on both elites' agendas and slave labor, I was able to see how the intellectual history of southern elites can be directly traced to fundamental changes in the lives of planters, overseers, and slaves. Southern agricultural reform was an adaptive, reactive movement that shifted its form to follow the course of plantation slavery in the United States. Unlike the national agricultural reform movement, southern reform was not defined by a specific set of agricultural practices, but rather served the interests of planter-reformers who were determined to ensure a prosperous future for slave-based plantation agriculture. These men differed from reformers in other parts of the nation, in that they possessed the social authority that other reformers aspired to. The major goal of southern agricultural reform was to keep slavery and plantation agriculture profitable and competitive

with other modes of production. This produced a movement focused on finding inefficiencies in agricultural production, rather than a movement determined to manage soil fertility sustainably. Agricultural reform in the American South was interested in political economy as much as agronomy.

The project differs from most previous work on agricultural reform and change in the American South in that it does not assume that this movement “failed” in the South. Scholars, and indeed some contemporary historical actors, mistook the intentional limiting of agricultural reform to planters and select experts as failure. Southern agricultural reform was never meant to extend beyond this small constituency, an intention that had the practical effect of precluding a sweeping popular movement, such as that of the Northeast. Southern elites saw plantation agriculture as synonymous with southern society and economy, making any truly democratic attempt to reform it inherently dangerous. Planters made agricultural reform about much more than agriculture; reform was a safe place to discuss potentially destabilizing issues like education for the lower classes, skilled and managerial work for slaves, and the precarious economic and political place of southern states nationally. In political forums, questioning the class and labor foundations of plantation society was unthinkable, given the desperate need for stability in a slave society. I argue that the increasing presence of print on the plantation brought this agricultural reform movement into the daily lives of slaves across the South.

This dissertation breaks from extant definitions of agricultural reform by locating the core of the movement in a desire to increase the profits of plantation agriculture and to further the plantation political economy, rather than in a set of reforms centered on soil fertility and specific agricultural practices. The literature on southern agricultural reform has imported two assumptions from the standard story of agricultural reform: that agricultural

reform was about specific agrarian practices, usually centered on soil, and that it was designed to have popular appeal to all white landowning agricultural producers. I argue that these terms do not apply to the South and they have masked the genuine goals of southern agricultural improvement in the South—a political economic project to make plantation slavery consistent with a changing American economy, protecting the planter class and its vision of southern society. Agricultural reform influenced Mississippi cotton planters who did not marl their fields just as it did a Virginia planter who assiduously followed Edmund Ruffin's principles.<sup>1</sup> The movement was defined by its commitment to constant adaptation, innovation, and experimentation in all forms towards its ultimate goal of financial success, regardless of the human cost that slaves paid.

### **Agricultural Improvement in the Eighteenth-Century South**

George Washington was at the forefront of an early generation of southern American agricultural improvers. While Washington only traveled once outside of the colonies that would form the United States, his visit to the West Indian island of Barbados represents an important connection for agricultural reform in the American South. In 1751, when Washington's brother, Lawrence, was suffering from tuberculosis, the two siblings sailed to the tiny colony in the hopes that the warm weather would help Lawrence's recovery. During their four-month stay, George spent much of his time (when not recovering from smallpox) riding around Barbados' plantation landscape. At the time, planters in Barbados were beginning to embrace the Enlightenment idea of improvement, as

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<sup>1</sup> Marl is a mud or stone rich in lime or calcium carbonate. It was commonly found in coastal areas of the southern states and planters would have their slaves dig it up and load it onto carts or boats for transport to the field, where it would be deposited, spread, and sometimes plowed into the soil. Much like lime, marl raises the pH of soils, making them less acidic, and provides calcium to crops. It was the central plank of Edmund Ruffin's platform for southern agricultural reform.

it applied to their plantations. Some of these planters and their agents began to use plantation record books and work logs to keep track of how and where their slaves were working. The books served to monitor their white managers and provide an account of plantation labor so that planters could quantify the work that slaves were doing.

Additionally, since all of the viable plantation land on Barbados had been cultivated, Barbadian plantations were worked much more intensively than Virginian ones, not just in terms of the density of cultivated acres but also in terms of the measures used to restore fertility to the land. The plantations were heavily and regularly manured, plant refuse was plowed back into the ground, and managers closely monitored the soil.

When Washington returned to Virginia, he brought back with him a still-ill brother, immunity to smallpox (smallpox immunity), and new ideas about plantation management. A decade later, in the 1760s, Virginia planters held Washington's Mount Vernon plantation up as a paragon of improved cultivation. The future president used watches and clocks to study and monitor the work of his slaves, divided his slave workforce into more flexible "squads" which he carefully deployed around his plantation, and kept detailed work logs to track work and production.<sup>2</sup>

These practices anticipated the adoption of new business practices in much of the South by many decades, but they do point to an important, and often overlooked, connection between the South and the Caribbean. While the print culture of southern reform draws very little on Caribbean works, the plantation records and accounts that would sweep the South in the 1840s and 1850s were direct descendants of Caribbean recordkeeping practices. On many of the English sugar islands, absentee plantation owners were the rule and plantation enterprises often involved massive capital investments that owners wanted to

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<sup>2</sup> Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

track as closely as possible. As a result, they hired local attorneys to watch over their plantations. These agents often took responsibility for a number of plantations and delegated the daily management to white overseers. Beneath the attorneys and overseers was a complex web of white and slave management, all of which plantation owners wanted to monitor. The solution, for many, was to have their agents assemble annual books gathering together the daily records of the overseers and other managers. These annual books would then be shipped back to Britain for the owner and his accountants to examine and comment on. As Washington's case illustrates, southern planters slowly became aware of these bookkeeping practices and adapted them to their own needs.

Washington was not just an early experimenter with industrial discipline, clock work, and plantation accounting, he was also in the first wave of gentlemen Virginia planters to switch from tobacco, long the staple of the Virginia economy, to wheat and other grains. Grains became a viable crop for planters as tobacco prices declined and prices for the leaf declined. In making this shift, Washington and other northern Virginia planters of the 1770s and 1780s triggered a series of changes in agricultural practice. Tobacco had been cultivated intensively on the same fields year after year, depleting the soil and establishing an agricultural calendar with clear periods of more and less intense work for slaves. The grains, however, involved a different system of cultivation, one that drew on the works of early Virginia agricultural writers like John Binns and John Taylor of Caroline, advocating methods of shifting cultivation, where fields that had been planted in grain one year would be rested the next year, planted only in clover.<sup>3</sup> Grain also required new implements and methods of harvesting and processing. These changes drew in artisans and inventors and made machinery and improved tools a central element of agricultural improvement.

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<sup>3</sup> John Binns, *A Treatise on Practical Farming* (John A. Binns, 1803); John Taylor, *Arator: Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical & Political, in Sixty-One Numbers* (J.M. Carter, 1814).

Influential writers like Taylor also emphasized the importance of keeping the slave workforce fully occupied, both for efficiency and safety—idle slaves were thought to be a risk to revolt.

### **Improvement in the Early Republic**

In the decades after the American Revolution, southern agricultural improvement was most celebrated in Virginia. Nationally, learned elites established agricultural societies in Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston, and other American cities. These societies modeled themselves after scientific societies that participated in Atlantic networks of knowledge. Much like members of scientific societies in early America, the men in these improvement societies wanted to establish their credibility and authority as much as they were interested in changing the practice of agriculture. Contrary to its own rhetoric, agricultural improvement was very much an intellectual movement, not a practical one. In 1817, some of the most prominent agricultural improvers (and Virginians) gathered together to form the Albemarle Agricultural Society. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and a number of prominent politicians lent weight to the organization and John Skinner, who two years later would publish the first major national agricultural journal, the *American Farmer*, gave intellectual authority to the society. In the next few years, several significant societies were organized, including the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society in northern Virginia and the Roanoke Agricultural Society in southern Virginia, where tobacco still ruled the fields.<sup>4</sup> These societies were dominated by wealthy planters who were interested in improving the agriculture of the state through soil management, better implements, and crop selection. The vast majority of the agricultural reformers of this period were men who could afford to take significant

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<sup>4</sup> Charles W. Turner, "Virginia Agricultural Reform, 1815-1860" *Agricultural History* 26 (July 1952), 81.



financial risks and invest considerable capital into uncertain new agricultural projects. While many scholars have argued that southern agriculture was doomed by the refusal of southern farmers and planters to heed the advice of reformers, sticking to established practice was a much safer financial strategy. Thomas Jefferson, a wealthy man and ambitious reformer, died with his plantations heavily mortgaged. Through the first decade or two of the nineteenth-century, agricultural reform in the South was the preserve of the established planter elite.

The other wealthy and influential group of planters in this period was the rice and Sea Island cotton planters of the Carolina and (to a lesser extent) Georgia Lowcountry. These men had different agricultural problems than the Virginia planters who started the renowned agricultural societies. For the South Carolina planter gentry, the major issues were less the declining fertility of the Lowcountry, which still produced large crops, than the tension between an established rice and Sea Island cotton economy and the emerging short-staple cotton economy. Rice and Sea Island, or long-staple, cotton were grown almost exclusively in the tidal Lowcountry. When short-staple cotton emerged, planters had already spent over a century forcing their slave workforces to transform swampland into an irrigated landscape tenuously maintained by an extensive network of ditches and dikes. The crops required large amounts of work to cultivate and harvest, so plantations held large numbers of slaves relative to those elsewhere in the country, and the region's population showed a clear slave majority. Despite this intense cultivation, annual crop yields remained large and planters were thus more concerned with the political economy of the region, competition from other crops, and horticulture than they were with crop rotation, improved implements, or soil management. In this region, planters founded a state agricultural society and a few smaller societies, but no major journal emerged until 1828, and the agricultural addresses of

prominent reformers revolved around tariffs and agricultural education—topics that did not center on soil.

### **1819 and the National Rise of Agricultural Reform**

Scholars begin the story of agricultural reform in the United States, and certainly in the South, after this generation of gentleman improvers gave way to a more coherent, widespread, print-based reform movement. The Panic of 1819 ended the post-war prosperity and catalyzed a re-evaluation of agricultural practices. Credit was more difficult to secure, cotton prices dropped from 32 cents a pound to 13.5 cents a pound between 1818 and 1821, and confidence in the value of improved agricultural acres fell. Many farmers, planters, and their free and slave work forces migrated west, while others focused on improving agriculture at home.<sup>5</sup>

The publication of the Baltimore-based *American Farmer* in 1819 is often taken as the key turning point in the move towards a new agriculture. Other scholars point to the explosion of agricultural societies or the growing popularity of agricultural fairs. Regardless of the specific reasons, when historians speak of “agricultural reform,” they are talking about the period after 1819. Scholarship on the period before 1819 focuses on rhetoric, scientific experimentation and collecting, and ideas of modernity.<sup>6</sup> Scholars have seen the differences between reform in the northern and southern states as less significant in this early stage of agricultural reform than they would be by 1840.<sup>7</sup> The important issue for reformers was ensuring the survival and improvement of agriculture as the dominant force in the American

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Hill and Wang, 2002), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Gentlemen Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Philip Mills Herrington, “The Exceptional Plantation: Slavery Agricultural Reform, and the Creation of an American Landscape” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2012).

economy. Reformers sought to unify with other agriculturists against the encroaching manufacturing sector, not to further divide potential allies. As a result, slavery was often left out of agricultural discourse. Early southern agricultural periodicals are remarkably devoid of articles referencing slavery, much less articles speaking about slave management or the problems that slave labor could cause for agriculture, in comparison to publications from the 1840s and 1850s.

After 1819, the standard view of agricultural reform in the American South shows a world of Seaboard planters who, having adopted a short-term view of land fertility as a result of their embrace of slave labor, were desperately trying to restore their worn lands in order to stem massive outmigration and reclaim their regional preeminence. Planters understood that cheap, easily available land and expensive slave labor combined to make careful management of soil fertility a poor economic strategy. As a result, planters employed environmentally wasteful practices to cultivate the southern staples of rice, tobacco, and cotton. Planters rarely practiced crop rotation, fertilization, or other soil conservation techniques, leading to worn, gullied, and exhausted fields. These depleted soils could not sustain the massive profits of the early decades of cultivation and later generations looked south and west for new lands to exploit. This trend intensified as short-staple cotton became a viable crop across the South. In this narrative, the short-term view of southern planters produced a ruined plantation landscape in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia.<sup>8</sup> Agricultural reform was an abject failure, with planters ignoring the sage advice of regional agricultural authorities such as Edmund Ruffin, Noah Cloud, James Henry Hammond, and Martin Philips. The ability of planters to move their operations southwest disincentivized them from engaging with agricultural reform and the desperate desire to buy more slaves

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<sup>8</sup> Joan E. Cashin, "Landscape and Memory in Antebellum Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 4 (Oct. 1994), 477-500.

prevented them from investing capital in plantation improvements. The planter obsession with planting lucrative and increasingly large cotton crops is also blamed for a lack of interest in crop diversification, plantation and regional self-sufficiency, and other reform initiatives. Any labor and land that could be diverted to these reform objectives would be better used to plant, cultivate, and harvest more and more cotton.

Agricultural reform in the northern states, on the other hand, was a sweeping success. Agricultural fairs could draw a hundred thousand visitors, agricultural journals prospered and circulated widely, agricultural societies could be found in most agricultural counties, and farmers made significant changes to their agricultural practice in response to the reform movement. In fact, there is such scholarly consensus on the topic that we know very little about the details of reform. Only recently has there been significant work on the movement that has gone beyond laying out the basic claims of agricultural reformers and acknowledging that these men largely achieved their aims, while providing a rural version of a national trend of reform movements—temperance and antislavery among the more popular examples. We now know that agricultural reform had a distinctly regional character within the northern states, with agricultural reformers in the northeast in particular pushing an agenda that would advance their regional political economy. Agricultural reform had clear political tie-ins, despite the avowedly non-partisan tenor of its print culture. It also had close connections to the growing American government—the annual reports on agriculture produced by the Commissioner of Patents and, later, the Department of Agriculture were the most widely circulated government publications of the time, with 2.2 million copies of the reports produced between 1851 and 1860.<sup>9</sup> These reports were also popular in the South;

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<sup>9</sup> Ariel Ron, “Developing the Country: ‘Scientific Agriculture’ and the Roots of the Republican Party,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2012), 42. Ron notes that the 1859 print run of 326,000 copies

one South Carolina planter worried that his sweet potato crop fell far short of the government estimate, hoping that there was a “mistake in the patent office report” that provided the optimistic figure.<sup>10</sup>

The southern story is very different. The one long-lived agricultural journal with a large readership was not founded until 1843. The journals that did exist frequently bemoaned the lack of interest in agricultural reform compared to the northern states or European countries. Of the 105 agricultural journals commonly listed for the United States before the Civil War, 21 were published in the South (25 if you include Maryland and DC).<sup>11</sup> Agricultural societies were much less numerous, with 197 agricultural societies in the southern states and 690 in the northern states as of 1858, and the agricultural fairs they held were much smaller affairs.<sup>12</sup> Planters very rarely shifted their plantation practice to align with the reform agenda of the South’s most prominent agricultural reformer, Edmund Ruffin, and his devotion to calcareous manures (marl and other low-pH soil fertilizers). Scholars have long focused on the supposed failure of southern agricultural reform, asking why southern reformers failed where reformers throughout the rest of the nation succeeded so spectacularly. Were slaves unable to grasp the more complicated agricultural techniques of improved agriculture? Were planters content to profit from high world cotton prices that made any form of cotton culture lucrative? Was the relative smallness of the southern print marketplace a barrier to agricultural publication? Did the South lack the professional middle-class that drove reform movements elsewhere?

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was about the same as the first year sales of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. These reports were so widespread that it is possible to buy original copies online for only a few dollars.

<sup>10</sup> John Milne to Thomas Affleck, Thomas Affleck Papers, W: 112, Box 8, Folder 1, Louisiana State University.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Lowther Demaree, *The American Agricultural Press, 1819-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 237-244.

<sup>12</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Patents, Agriculture* (1859), 91. These numbers are significantly lower than the real count, as for a number of southern states I have found more societies than the report lists, but there is no reason to doubt the rough ratio of southern to northern societies.

One simple explanation for the low subscription rolls of southern agricultural serials, low membership in agricultural societies, and modest agricultural fairs is often ignored—very few people were invited to participate. Southern agricultural reformers sought a very specific constituency that excluded slaves, small farmers, and, to a large extent, urban professionals. Southern agricultural reform was by planters, for planters, and about plantations. Some overseers were ushered in as a result of their connections to planters and plantations, but, in general, southern reform was very exclusive.<sup>13</sup> Reform in the South was not about southern agriculture, it was about southern plantation agriculture. The planters who wrote in to and subscribed to southern agricultural publications were, on average, much wealthier than their northern counterparts. They owned large numbers of slaves, often thousands of acres of plantation lands, and were mostly interested in discussing their agricultural interests with other planters and established agricultural authorities.

### **Bounding Agricultural Reform**

The agricultural improvement, or agricultural reform, movement in the antebellum South was a diffuse set of elite writers, planters, scientists, agricultural societies, fairs, and print communities that produced, disseminated, and consumed information about rationalizing agriculture and its place in the political economy of the South. A flood of print swept across the South in the mid-nineteenth century, which included a great deal of work on agriculture. While the individuals, groups, and communities involved in this movement disagreed on even the most fundamental aspects of their reform agenda, beyond a desire to rationalize agriculture, they all saw themselves as part of a reform movement. Agricultural

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, many non-planters were involved, but most of these men were external experts whose contributions would be translated for the southern planter audience. For example, Thaddeus Harris, a prominent entomologist and Harvard professor, was involved in efforts to deal with the cotton moth, but most of his work was sent to Thomas Affleck who compiled it and published it in southern journals.

reform was often cast as one manifestation of a larger national, or regional, battle for “Commercial Agricultural and Moral Reform.” Much like other reform movements throughout the nation, agricultural reform in the South was composed largely of economically secure individuals, from merchants and shopkeepers to large farmers and planters, though it was even more the preserve of the wealthy in the South.

Throughout the dissertation, a distinction is made between agricultural improvement and agricultural reform. Agriculture improvement refers to the elite experimentation of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries that centered on Atlantic networks, correspondence, European scholarship, and the tobacco, rice, and long-staple cotton economies. Agricultural reform refers to the post-1819 print-based movement that relied on the cotton economy, reached from Virginia to Texas, became intensely regional, and emphasized rational production, efficiency, and slave agriculture’s ability to flourish in a modern, industrial economy. I make this distinction for clarity’s sake; the historical actors in the dissertation did not make this distinction so clearly, although improvement and reform were not always interchangeable and did have different timelines.

Improvement was a widespread and widely defined concept in early America. While it was a legacy of the Enlightenment, the dedication to reason that characterized improvement in the United States took on specific meanings within its broader definition. At its most basic it meant to “turn something to good account, to make use of its potential.” This extended to improving oneself through reading as much as it did improving the nation and economy through the “internal improvement” of a canal. Internal improvements, such as canals and railroads, have received the most attention from historians, but in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, improvement was applied consistently to agriculture. Improvement was not, however, simply making efficient use of resources. It had

a moral dimension as well as a tangible sense, in that there was a duty to seek improvement. It was an inclusive idea that encompassed the secular and religious, rural and urban.<sup>14</sup>

Reform was much more closely identified with manufacturing and industrial economies than it was with the legacy of the Enlightenment. In the nineteenth-century United States, reform movements were widespread and sweeping. Most were located primarily among the urban middle-class in northern cities, particularly the temperance, anti-slavery, and women's suffrage movements.<sup>15</sup> Agricultural reform, especially in the South, has often been ignored in the voluminous scholarship on reform in antebellum America, but it shares a similar foundation in the common desire to re-make society along more efficient and morally sound principles (though many northern reformers would disagree with what southern agricultural reformers thought to be moral).

The vast majority of scholarship on agricultural reform in the American South has used the agricultural press as a measure of the movement's success, but also as the main entry point into the issues that concerned reformers and, just as importantly, into who was in control of the movement. The most common model has been the exceptional, committed journal editor who tirelessly worked to convince reluctant planters to write for his journal and subscribe to it. This has characterized work from Albert Demaree's scholarship in the

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 244-245. Recently, Fredrik Albritton Jonsson has argued that the idea of improvement coming out of the Scottish Enlightenment has been misunderstood as unitary, but actually included a variety of strategies to convert nature into capital, not all of which were compatible. He distinguishes between those who advocated for a market-driven version of improvement where the market would dictate the pace of technological innovation and a model of improvement that argued that the natural order was too complex to be left to the market and that particular expertise was necessary to maintain order. In this formulation, most planters fell on the market side of improvement, while most reformers leaned the opposite direction. Jonsson, "Rival Ecologies of Global Commerce: Adam Smith and the Natural Historians," *American Historical Review* 115, 5 (December, 2010), 1344-1345.

<sup>15</sup> Agricultural reform in the early- and mid-nineteenth-century has interesting ties to populism in the late nineteenth-century. Both movements came from rural areas and pursued alternate visions for a modern nation in the face of anxiety over the changing economy. See Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).



1940s and 1950s to the most recent work.<sup>16</sup> Journals were often much more of a collaborative effort than this approach acknowledges.<sup>17</sup>

Recent work is starting to complement the print world of agricultural reform with the other interactions individuals had with the reform movement, from fairs to personal experimentation and encounters with the products of the reform movement, not just journals, but plantation record books, the agricultural practices of neighbors, public speeches, and new ways of seeing land. Ben Cohen's work has been particularly important in demanding that readers engage with the scientific aspect of the intellectual world of agricultural reform in the many ways that nineteenth-century Americans did.<sup>18</sup> I try to follow this example and look at how planters, overseers, and slaves experienced agricultural reform at the plantation level. Like Cohen, I integrate the print world of agricultural reform with its practical implications for individuals who were not core members of this world.

### **Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century America**

Agricultural reform relied on print to provide a “cheap and efficient means for the diffusion of useful knowledge” regarding agriculture, through almanacs, periodicals, and record books.<sup>19</sup> Scholars have been able to access so much of the internal working of the movement because of its voluminous print record. Southern print networks were more limited than those elsewhere in the nation, but they effectively served the planters involved

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<sup>16</sup> Albert Demaree, *American Agricultural Press*; Donald Marti, “Agricultural Journalism.”; Theodore Rosengarten, “The *Southern Agriculturist* in an Age of Reform.”; some recent work emphasizes a broader constituency but still places most credit in the hands of editors, such as Philip Mills Herrington, “Agricultural Reform.” Nearly all of the enormous body of scholarship focusing on Edmund Ruffin takes this approach, as well.

<sup>17</sup> Tamara Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*; Jamene Brenton Stewart, “Informing the South: On the Culture of Print in Antebellum Augusta, Georgia 1828-1860” (Ph.D. Dissertation., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin R. Cohen, *Notes from the Ground: Science, Soil, and Society in the American Countryside* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> *Southron* (Jackson, Mississippi), July 27, 1842.

in agricultural reform. While the limited circulation of southern agricultural periodicals is a major piece of the argument that agricultural reform failed in the South, the men targeted by reformers had access to journals.

Literacy rates in the United States were strikingly varied by region before 1840. Literacy rates in the South lagged behind the national rates by decades. Libraries and adult access to print were introduced to a lesser extent in the South.<sup>20</sup> In 1804, less than four percent of books published in the United States were published in the South, a figure that drops to barely one percent of all books if Baltimore, whose publishing industry did not cater to the South, is excluded from the region.<sup>21</sup> John L. Brooke argues that periodicals in the South were a “vehicle for mobilizing elites rather than the people at large,” unlike elsewhere in the country. He suggests that, through the 1830s, the gentry would selectively disseminate information to the common folk.<sup>22</sup> This fits with a picture of agricultural reform as planter-centric.

By the 1830s and 1840s, when print was flooding into the South, a model that favored elite leadership was already in place. Print succeeded in democratizing debate among planters and professionals, but the vast majority of society was still precluded from participating. Agricultural improvement changed drastically after 1830, in the South. Print was more readily accessible, the cotton boom had dramatically increased the number of planters in the region, even if wealth remained just as concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest and a larger proportion of Americans had leisure time to spend on societal causes;

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<sup>20</sup> Mary Kelley, “Educating the Citizenry,” 269-270 in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2, An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> James N. Greene, “The Rise of Book Publishing,” 94 in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2, An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press).

<sup>22</sup> John L. Brooke, “Print and Politics,” 182 in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2, An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press).

it was simply easier, by the 1830s, to “cater to scattered groups of like-minded Americans, and to support oneself while doing it.”<sup>23</sup>

Between 1800 and 1830, print played an increasingly important role in the way that agriculture was practiced on cotton plantations. Planters' growing integration of print and plantation can be seen in plantation diaries and records from the first two decades of the nineteenth-century, with records of slave labor and crop harvests interleaved with almanacs and newspaper articles. This suggests that planters were beginning to use printed sources like almanacs to structure their record-keeping. A small group of elite planters began to transform older patterns of innovation into what would become known as scientific or improving agriculture. Overseers at some relatively small plantations (fewer than 20 hands) began, at the insistence of their employers, to keep written records.<sup>24</sup> These records also became increasingly linked to almanacs, one of the few common printed books on plantations.<sup>25</sup> In addition, some planters began to use records to monitor slaves and as a tool of control. With detailed records of slave work came the ability to track and calculate sickness and absenteeism.<sup>26</sup> Planters sought to use these printed materials to order their slaves and plantations, much like industrialists attempted to standardize work in factories.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 6.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, “Rockingham Plantation Journal”, *Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations From the Revolution Through the Civil War*, Series F, Part 2 (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986), microfilm.

<sup>25</sup> Planters such as John Stapleton, who owned and managed a Sea Island cotton plantation in Beaufort District, interleaved their agricultural and labor records with almanacs, tying their plantation rhythms to calendar dates and times rather than to agricultural rhythms. John Stapleton Papers, 1813-1816, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aston Coffin kept careful daily records of the work performed by the slaves on his plantation and used these records to calculate how many days each of his slaves missed due to sickness. Thomas Aston Coffin Plantation Book, 1800-1813, South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>27</sup> John Bezis-Selfa, *Forging America: Ironworkers, Adventurers, and the Industrious Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 98-99; 191-192.

## Short-Staple Cotton and the Southwest

As agricultural reform was overtaking agricultural improvement, short-staple cotton was coming to dominate southern economy, society, and culture. In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase added over 800,000 square miles of land to the United States, much of it in areas that could support cotton culture. After the War of 1812, the Treaty of Ghent secured this territory from European incursions and a series of wars, military actions, diseases, and leveraged treaties removed the Native American population from land that white Americans wanted. Rising market prices for short-staple cotton and advances in ginning and processing technology, combined with relatively cheap, fertile land, encouraged mass migration of white farmers, planters, and would-be planters to this new land.<sup>28</sup> These developments, combined with the forced migrations of hundreds of thousands of slaves through the domestic slave trade and the transportation of plantation workforces to form the cotton belt. Planters and slaves migrated from a range of eastern Seaboard states and brought with them varied attitudes toward agriculture and work.<sup>29</sup> Planters constantly sought new ways to extract labor from their enslaved workers, increased crop yields from their fields, and ways to order and predict the yields from both.

Agricultural reform had a mutually reinforcing relationship with the southern cotton plantation economy. Once we take adaptation and the pursuit of profit as the defining characteristics of agricultural reform, rather than soil fertility, its connections to the booming

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<sup>28</sup> Angela Lakwete shows that there was no single development in the cotton gin, from Eli Whitney or anyone else, that made short-staple cotton profitable, but rather a series of technological changes pushed by a wide array of slave and free mechanics, agricultural workers, and planters. Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). Adam Rothman outlines how the pricing of land in the Southwest encouraged much of the land to end up in the hands of slaveowners and wealthy individuals. Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Deep South* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Steven F. Miller, "Plantation Labor Organization and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier: The Alabama-Mississippi Black Belt, 1815-1840," in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds. *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1993), 155-169.

cotton economy of the mid-nineteenth century make more sense.<sup>30</sup> Both cotton planting and agricultural reform were primarily interested in extracting as much as possible from slaves and land, as efficiently as possible. The soil fertility gospel of Edmund Ruffin and his Upper South peers was intellectually respected, but largely ignored in practice, in the Southwest.<sup>31</sup> Cotton planters in the Lower Mississippi Valley were interested in the lessons that agricultural reform held for them in terms of planting, cultivating, and harvesting cotton, getting the best cotton varieties of cotton to plant, tracking the annual local and regional variation in the cotton crop, navigating cotton markets, choosing complementary crops to plant, and managing slaves and their work. Planters took whatever measures suited their immediate economic interests from agricultural reform. In the Lower Mississippi Valley, reform-minded planters tapped into agricultural reform differently than their peers in the Seaboard states. Instead of relying on agricultural periodicals, though there were occasional (sometimes, even successful) attempts to establish journals, planters turned to newspapers and printed plantation record books. The most popular of these, Mississippi reformer Thomas Affleck's *Plantation Record and Account Book* circulated widely throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley and even made its way, in lesser quantities, as far as the Carolinas and Virginia. The popularity of Affleck's books suggests an appetite for agricultural guidance that could direct management and was rooted in cotton cultivation more than in soil chemistry.

Agricultural reformers popularized more careful and systematic record keeping and even, at times, management on cotton plantations, frequently stressing the ways that these practices would appeal to the cotton factors that connected planters to trans-national

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<sup>30</sup> Adaptation and profit were also major goals for reformers interested in soil fertility, but the southern reformers that I am looking at began with larger regional economic and social goals when addressing these problems. Many reformers elsewhere started with soil and agricultural practice, and so came to very different conclusions.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I use Southwest to refer to the lands opened up after the Louisiana Purchase that would form the Deep South. Generally speaking, this means Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

markets and networks of credit. This movement not only co-existed with, but thrived alongside, the rapacious capitalist ethos that characterized the rapid colonization of land and bodies in the Southwest. Many agricultural reformers whole-heartedly embraced the business practices and industrial ethos that was emerging throughout the nation. For planters in the Southwest, embracing agricultural reform became synonymous with an interest in these new practices, with a belief that plantation slavery and agriculture would thrive as the economy changed. The barrier to success was not slavery, cotton, or agriculture, but simply a refusal, on the part of some planters, to evolve with changing circumstances and manage their plantations and slaves more efficiently.

### **Setting**

My selection of South Carolina and Mississippi as my areas of study has helped highlight the impact of agricultural reform on regions with intensive plantation cultivation and huge slave populations. Both states were dominated by two staples raised for international markets, great concentrations of planter wealth through enormous plantation enterprises, and relatively narrowly defined social elites. South Carolina had long-standing planter elites, some of whom could trace their plantation wealth back to seventeenth-century Barbados, while Mississippi planters tended to have acquired their fortunes well into the nineteenth-century. Despite these pronounced differences, both economies had been transformed by cotton, with rice in Carolina and sugar in Mississippi losing ground to the new crop. Even in South Carolina, the majority of cotton planters were not from families with long histories of plantership. In both states, elites exhibited profound insecurity about their collective reputation at a national and international level. As slaveowners and agricultural producers, planter elites worried about maintaining their place as moneyed

intellectuals in American and European spheres. This phenomenon is most clear in Carolina, where elites had long participated in Atlantic exchanges of knowledge, but can also be seen among the newly minted scions of Mississippi. Historians have shown that planters frequently looked to classical works in the Western canon, as well as scripture, to place their slaveholding in a respected intellectual tradition.<sup>32</sup> Beyond this, however, planters found themselves enmeshed in the world of industry, rational production, and progress that historians have often made them observers to. By selecting one long-settled seaboard region with a history of Atlantic engagement and one interior, relatively newly-settled region with emerging elite and knowledge networks, I am able to show how plantership unified southern intellectuals, as well as how historical context shaped the priorities of these elites.

I use South Carolina as an example of how agricultural reform developed into a coherent movement on the eastern Seaboard. A clear set of agricultural societies and print communities laid out a wide array of goals for transforming agriculture and the political economy of the state. The structure of reform in South Carolina mirrored the state's political and economic geography and shifted correspondingly throughout the antebellum period. Examining agricultural reform in South Carolina lays out the intellectual foundations of the movement and the strategies that reformers commonly used to realize their goals.

As the dissertation shifts its focus to Mississippi and Louisiana, it likewise begins to look at how agricultural reform was translated to a region without many of the things that facilitated the South Carolina reform movement—an established print culture and an entrenched and intellectually curious elite plugged into wide networks of science and knowledge. In the Lower Mississippi Valley, I show how the dominance of the short-staple

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<sup>32</sup>Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2005; Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2003.

cotton plantation economy interacted with the reform movement, highlighting reform's focus on adaptation and experiment. In this setting, while some agricultural journals existed, they were treated more as patronage projects than as serials meant to survive through a subscription base and advertising revenue. Print still mattered deeply to planters in the Southwest, but, instead of periodicals and books, these men began to purchase plantation record books, or make up their own. At the height of the antebellum cotton boom, planters had begun to imitate the methods of the merchant clerks that had become emblematic of the changing national economy, with its focus on record keeping and accounting.<sup>33</sup>

## **Methods and Sources**

The dissertation is based on archival research in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Mississippi, as well as work with print sources in archives in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. I began by focusing on materials produced on cotton plantations, particularly plantation journals, inventories, account books, and work logs. These sources provided the details of plantation practice. I found, however, that many of the most interesting developments on plantations traced to responses to attempts to improve agriculture. This led to the second stage of my research, focusing on the agricultural press and the public aspect of reform, from agricultural societies to speeches. As it became clear that agricultural reform was entangled in larger issues of regional political economy, transnational knowledge networks, and sectional politics, I traced outward again, connecting improvement to debates in southern newspapers, political activity, and intellectual networks that could help me understand the broader context and implications of reform.

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2006), 563-603, "Producing Capitalism," and *Accounting for Capitalism: The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).



My archival work evolved in tandem with my research interests. I set out to focus primarily on local, plantation-level sources that revealed the details of the working lives of slaves, but my work gradually expanded to incorporate growing interests in print culture and the translation of elite debates to practical implications. My interest in print culture emerged from attempts to understand how planters engaged with reform and what communities resulted from this engagement. I was struck not only by the similarity to existing social networks—one that suggested that the circulation of journals mirrored society rather than creating new networks—but also the ways that the agriculture served as an idiom for discussing larger issues for the southern society and economy.<sup>34</sup> As I inquired further, I began to see how public reform of agriculture served as a safe space to make radical suggestions for the reform of southern society that could be seen as destabilizing in a political forum.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The project engages with several bodies of literature that have examined the place of agricultural reform in the South and the nation from distinct perspectives. Historians of slavery and the South have looked at the ways in which agricultural reform was taken up by planters and how it changed crop yields. Such scholars have also examined, to a limited extent, how agricultural reform influenced the daily lives of slaves.<sup>35</sup> Historians of science have used agricultural reform as a lens through which they can see Americans' engagement with nature.<sup>36</sup> Historians of print culture have paid passing attention to the agricultural press, specifically, as among the few groups of publications to persist in the early nineteenth-

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<sup>34</sup> Faust, "Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture."

<sup>35</sup> John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Cohen, *Notes from the Ground*.

century South.<sup>37</sup> Environmental historians have included some parts of agricultural reform, particularly the practice of experimentation on rice and sea island cotton plantations in the Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry, in their analyses of how plantation agriculture shaped the southern landscape. These historians have often categorized agricultural improvement as simply an extension of long-standing attempts on the part of planters to simplify and control the environment.<sup>38</sup> Intellectual historians have focused on agricultural reform as a practice closely tied to planters' modern anxieties and as a way to express anxieties about change and progress.<sup>39</sup> Some historians have looked at agricultural improvement as a sincere attempt to reform southern economy and society. These scholars have often framed agricultural reform as a movement that failed to meet its stated goals and focused on why it failed, rather than the changes it wrought, intentionally or not.<sup>40</sup> While this study engages with all of the literatures, I also seek to push beyond these categories and show how histories of agricultural reform engage with the history of slavery and slave labor, the daily lives of slaves, and connections to the changing national economy. I put the scholarship on agricultural reform in dialogue with recent work on the political economy of slavery in the cotton South.<sup>41</sup>

The articles and dissertations underway and completed in the past couple of years are producing a body of work that has the potential to be the most significant shift in the history

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<sup>37</sup> Theodore Rosengarten, "The Southern Agriculturist in an Age of Reform" in Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, ed. *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 279-294.

<sup>38</sup> Mart A. Stewart, *"What Nature Suffers to Groe": Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Drew Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press), 1985; Joyce Chaplin, *Anxious Pursuit*.

<sup>40</sup> William Mathew, *Edmund Ruffin and the Crisis of Slavery in the Old South: The Failure of Agricultural Reform*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988) and George Steffen, "In Search of the Good Overseer: The Failure of the Agricultural Reform Movement in Lowcountry South Carolina, 1821-1834," *Journal of Southern History* 63 (1997): 753-802. Some work, such as that of S. Max Edelson has combined many of these approaches in his study of planters in the colonial period, *Plantation Society in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2006, but few have integrated these approaches for the national period.

<sup>41</sup> The political economy of slavery has enjoyed new currency under the guise of the history of capitalism in recent years. This work is interested in how credit, commodity markets, and the abstracting technologies of capitalism shaped slavery and cotton plantations in the Southwest.

of agricultural reform yet. Several young scholars are making broad connections between agricultural reform and regionalism, sectional politics, the rise of major business practices, and environmental critiques of the plantation South that informed free soil ideology. Their work draws on a wide variety of other literatures, from scholarship on the rise of capitalism in America to architectural history, to make clear the broad impact that agricultural reform had on nineteenth-century America. Collectively, I hope this work will solidify agricultural reform's place within the larger, well-established history of nineteenth-century reform (more on that later), as well as dismiss the long-standing historical consensus on the failure of agricultural reform in the southern states and the simple division between North and South that, for many scholars, still defines agricultural reform.

Ariel Ron's dissertation, "Developing the Country," establishes, for the first time, the true scale of agricultural reform in the nineteenth-century Northeast, its deep connections to the United States government, profoundly regional character, and its importance in understanding the coming of the Civil War. Ron demonstrates that the agricultural reform movement directly led to the agricultural lobby in the United States and successfully made agricultural science a major government concern. In fact, the annual report on agriculture issued by the Commissioner of Patents (and, later, the United States Department of Agriculture) was the biggest single government publication, year after year, and was in great demand across the northern states. Perhaps most significantly, he shows that agricultural reform explains why farmers in the northeast would support the Republican Party in the decade before the Civil War, despite its association with manufacturers.<sup>42</sup>

Another recent dissertation, Philip Mills Herrington's "The Exceptional Plantation: Slavery, Agricultural Reform, and the Creation of an American Landscape" offers a different

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<sup>42</sup> Ariel Ron, "Developing the Country."

view of the role that agricultural reform played in the increasing sectional tension leading up to the Civil War.<sup>43</sup> While Ron focuses on the political role that the reform movement played in the northeast, Herrington argues for a much earlier influence. He suggests that agricultural reform's ideal agricultural aesthetic of small, orderly farms, with carefully maintained fields, stone fences, well-made outbuildings, and fenced livestock placed the plantation, which fit none of these criteria, outside of the mainstream of American agriculture, that the plantation was made exceptional by agricultural reform<sup>44</sup>. He suggests that this division between mainstream farming and exceptional plantations led Americans to think of the North and South as antagonistic competitors. The agricultural roots of sectional tension, he argues, are reflected in the free soil versus slave soil terms used in antebellum politics. Herrington sidesteps debates over the failure of southern agricultural reform; he is not interested in how reform changed practice, but in the associated rhetoric. He assumes that agricultural reform was popular in the South, perhaps influenced by his choice of Georgia, home to the most popular (and only long-lived) southern agricultural periodical, the *Southern Cultivator*, as his one case study. His study of the sectional rhetoric in the North and South adds a rare comparative perspective to the literature on agricultural reform and addresses previous scholarship which had largely focused on identifying whether or not agricultural reformers were for or against secession and why.

Caitlin Rosenthal's dissertation, "From Memory to Mastery: Accounting for Control in America, 1750-1880," is about accounting and business practices, as the title suggests, more than it is about agricultural reform.<sup>45</sup> The first two chapters of her dissertation, however, deal at length with the idea of scientific management in the South. She looks at

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<sup>43</sup> Philip Mills Herrington, "The Exceptional Plantation" and "Agricultural and Architectural Reform."

<sup>44</sup> Herrington calls this the "environmental critique" of slave agriculture and is taking up John Majewski's analysis of northern criticisms of shifting cultivation. Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Rosenthal, "From Memory to Mastery."

Mississippi agricultural reformer Thomas Affleck (who plays a prominent role in this dissertation) and the account books that he publishes for use on plantations (also a major topic in this dissertation). She places these popular books in a national narrative that challenges the idea that American accounting practices developed in northern business. She carefully analyzes Affleck's blank account books, highlighting the innovations they show and arguing that they popularized many features in the South before the North.<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal does not, with one or two exceptions, look at account books after they have been used, however. My archival research suggests that the accounting methods that Rosenthal argues "thrived on slave plantations" were, in fact, rarely used by planters, who preferred to use other features of the books and often treated the accounting forms as scratch paper.<sup>47</sup> Eli Capell, a Mississippi planter, is the individual whose records Rosenthal examined and used as her case study and he carefully kept the accounts that Affleck's book contained. Capell was highly unusual in this regard, however, as less than ten percent of the plantation books that I have been able to examine show evidence of similar diligence. Capell was an admirer of Affleck's who wrote to the reformer and invited him to visit him on his plantation—few men were as devoted to Affleck's accounting gospel as Capell.

The broad, business history approach that Rosenthal takes provides important insights into a field that too often relies on agricultural periodicals as defining reform. Her approach suggests a promising new avenue for research, one that this dissertation also practices, at times—the study of non-literary print. Record books, blank forms, and advertisements made up a huge and understudied part of the agricultural press and of the print that planters engaged with for agriculture. These materials are often studied by

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<sup>46</sup> For an earlier piece arguing for plantations as a source of accounting methods, see Marcel van der Linden, "Re-constructing the Origins of Modern Labor Management" *Labor History* 51, 4 (2010), 509-522.

<sup>47</sup> Rosenthal, "From Memory to Mastery," 83.

historians of business, management, and capitalism, but have received less attention from scholars of agricultural reform. Where they are used, it is most frequently as a vessel for information that planters or overseers recorded in it, rather than as a text of its own.

In addition to work specifically on agricultural reform, this dissertation engages with several other sets of scholarship. In particular, it addresses work on print culture, reform movements in antebellum America, and the recent explosion of work on the connections between cotton, plantation slavery, and American capitalism.

### *The Development of Scholarship on Agricultural Reform*

Avery Craven's *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (1925) shaped scholarship on the history of agriculture and agricultural reform more profoundly than any other work. Craven argued that tobacco plantation agriculture had ruined the soils of the Upper South and cotton and sugar were in the process of doing the same in the Lower South. Agricultural reformers attempted to restore the soils of the Upper South and conserve the soils of the Lower South, while maintaining profits. Craven claims an incomplete victory for southern reformers, suggesting that they made more progress than any other region and that southern reformers were the most talented.<sup>48</sup> Some historians have argued that it marked a "turning point for Southern economic and political history," an assertion that underscores how central agricultural reform was to all aspects of southern society.<sup>49</sup> The institution of slavery led planters to value labor more than land, ignore soil fertility, and the wealth that slaves built up for planters allowed them to ignore the backwardness of their practices until it was too late. Of course recent scholarship has

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<sup>48</sup> Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1925).

<sup>49</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon, 1961) 145n1.

proven that, on the eve of the Civil War, the plantation economy was prospering, planters were forcing slaves to work longer and harder than ever before on a wide variety of agricultural and non-agricultural ventures, and more and more rich agricultural land was opening up for cultivation in Texas and beyond.

Albert Lowther Demaree wrote the first major book on the agricultural press in 1940.<sup>50</sup> His work, along with Craven's, shaped early perceptions of agricultural reform. Like Craven, Demaree credited American reformers with attempting to revolutionize a backwards agriculture and of succeeding in the North. Unlike Craven, he does not argue for the failure of reform in the South, in fact he concerns himself very little with changing agricultural practice, focusing fully on the internal dynamics of the press. He positioned skeptical, superstitious, conservative farmers in opposition to educated, enlightened agricultural reformers. Demaree's work marks the beginnings of the equation of the agricultural press with agricultural reform. He felt that "Americans of the pre-farm journal period relied largely on English contributions" to knowledge.<sup>51</sup> In a related development, Demaree located the "birthdate" of reform on April 2, 1819, when the *American Farmer* was first published, another lasting interpretation.

Eugene Genovese inspired a generation of historians to examine what he calls the "limits of agricultural reform," that is to say, the particular reasons why agricultural reform could not succeed in the American South. Genovese positioned his work as a corrective to the long-standing assumption that the agricultural reform in the South was progressing steadily until the rupture of the Civil War dramatically restricted Southern agriculture. Instead, he argued, reform in the South had always been limited and doomed to failure as a result of three fatal flaws. First, agricultural reform was widespread only in Virginia. Second,

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<sup>50</sup> Demaree, *American Agricultural Press*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

slave-based agriculture could only sustain very limited reform, a thesis that William Mathew expanded upon decades later.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the agricultural movement itself was dysfunctional and contradictory to the point of becoming self-defeating.<sup>53</sup> Genovese focuses on the most prominent reformers as noble figures thwarted by a recalcitrant and uninterested group of planters who are unwilling or unable to take a long-term view of their economic situation. He emphasizes the comparatively low circulation of reform periodicals in the South, without acknowledging the correspondingly narrower target audience (planters were the core of agricultural reform in much of the South, whereas in other areas a wide cross-section of agricultural producers and professionals were involved).

In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars approached agricultural reform in the South as an intellectual cause connected to scientific societies and northern reform. This literature emphasized an early period dominated by elites that lasted until 1819, followed by a series of periods characterized by the type and popularity of journals that reformers published and read.<sup>54</sup> In 1988, William Mathew resurrected Genovese's thesis that southern agricultural reform was doomed to failure by the region's reliance on slavery and lack of interest in print outside of Virginia. Mathew goes one step beyond Genovese and suggests that Edmund Ruffin can stand in for southern agricultural reform more generally, a position that has had a

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<sup>52</sup> Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, 124-125; Mathew, *Edmund Ruffin*, 1988. It should be noted that Genovese focuses on the labor shortage that selling slaves in the Upper South created and how this limited reform.

<sup>53</sup> Genovese. *Political Economy of Slavery*.

<sup>54</sup> Donald Marti, "The Purposes of Agricultural Education: Ideas and Projects in New York State, 1819-1865," *Agricultural History* 45, no 4 (October 1971): 271-283. *To Improve the Soil and the Mind: Agricultural Societies, Journals, and Schools in the Northeastern States, 1791-1865* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Published for the Agricultural History Society and the Department of Communication Arts, New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University by University Microfilms International, 1979); "Agricultural Journalism and the Diffusion of Knowledge: The First Half Century in America," *Agricultural History* 54 (1980): 28-37. Margaret W. Rossiter also made important contributions that emphasized the role of agricultural chemistry and, in particular, German chemist Justus Liebig, in nineteenth-century agricultural reform. Rossiter, *The Emergence of Agricultural Science: Justus Liebig and the Americans, 1840-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) and "The Organization of Agricultural Improvement in the United States, 1785-1865." In Alexandra Oleson, ed. *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early American Republic: American Scientific and Learned Societies from Colonial Times to the Civil War*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.



long shelf-life.<sup>55</sup> In the past decade, scholars have taken a different approach to studying agricultural reform, placing a new emphasis on connections to environmental history, agrarianism, and connections between agriculture and new ways of interacting with science.<sup>56</sup> These works have been rooted more in environmental history and the history of science than in economic, social, or southern history. As such, they have raised interesting new questions about the ways that environment limited and shaped agricultural reform and how reform was connected to new, popular ideas about science in nineteenth-century America, but have often overlooked the pragmatic concerns of reformers that are hidden in their idealistic rhetoric.

### *Agricultural Reform as Symbol*

Some of the most valuable and overlooked scholarship on agricultural reform takes the movement as an expression of much larger concerns. Agricultural reform, in this work, becomes a place to work out societal concerns. This work began to emerge after the publication of Tamara Thornton's *Cultivating Gentlemen*, which presents a compelling example of the advantages of looking beyond the material value of agricultural change and the associated discourses. Thornton suggests that the Boston merchant elite that dominated agricultural reform in early national New England embraced the movement as a way of participating in and demonstrating their membership in the agricultural or productive class

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<sup>55</sup> Mathew, *Edmund Ruffin*, 212, ix-x. For examples of Ruffin overshadowing reform more generally, see, for example Avery O. Craven, *Edmund Ruffin, Southerner: A Study in Secession* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1932); Aaron Ihde, "Edmund Ruffin, Soil Chemist of the Old South," *Journal of Chemical Education* 29 (1952): 407-414; Betty L. Mitchell, *Edmund Ruffin: A Biography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); David Allmendinger, *Ruffin: Family and Reform in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*; Cohen, *Notes from the Ground*; Stephen M. Spratt, "When the Soil Was Everything: Unearthing the Agricultural Roots of American Environmental Writing" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2011); Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in American Literature, 1580-1864* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Majewski. *Modernizing a Slave Economy* is an exception to this trend and approaches reform from an economic history angle, focusing on the lack of state support for the movement.

of society, in the prevailing Jeffersonian model of a nation based on agriculture. The merchants wielded significant economic power, but found themselves painted as leeches on the American economy, as unproductive middlemen. By founding agricultural societies, purchasing country estates, and participating in the print world of improvement, these men were able to assume the mantle of agriculturists, the foundation of early America.

Thornton's approach points to versions of agricultural reform that, for all their bluster, are not about transforming the daily practice of a major sector of the American economy, but rather, exist because agriculture was the central part of early American life. Agriculture was an all-encompassing industry in the nineteenth century United States. It formed the basis for the political economy of the South and the daily life of most of the region's inhabitants, both slave and free. As a result of this omnipresence, agriculture was a constant source of discussion, debate, and subject of great study. The flood of print that swept across the South in the early nineteenth century included a great deal of work on agriculture that has often been ignored by intellectual historians.<sup>57</sup>

The real source of this line of thinking about agricultural reform, however, can be found much earlier than Thornton's book, in Drew Faust's neglected 1979 article on agricultural addresses in South Carolina. Faust's brilliant piece examines these annual speeches, which were widely published in state papers, and concludes that agricultural reform filled a cultural role as much as an economic and productive role in southern society. Faust argues that reformers in South Carolina used agricultural societies, addresses, and

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life in the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) which is an excellent treatment of intellectuals in the antebellum South. O'Brien details the reading habits and intellectual interests of the Charleston elite, but spends very little time on agricultural works. See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) See Drew Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986) for an example of a work that does include agriculture among southern intellectual interests.

publications as a setting where agriculture became the primary “verbal and ritual symbol” through which the state of society generally could be discussed.<sup>58</sup> While historians occasionally cite Faust’s article, they have not engaged with it extensively, nor used it to provide a model for new work. If her argument is taken seriously, then scholarship on agricultural reform needs to treat agriculture like nineteenth-century Americans did, as the foundation for the economy, society, and culture of the South. Agricultural reform is not just about agriculture, it is also about the economic future of a region, it is about how and when people work, it is about the basic structure of society. I take this idea up in tracing the structure of agricultural reform in South Carolina. When agricultural reform is viewed through a wide lens, the myriad external influences come into focus. Reading the agricultural press and surviving manuscripts of reformers, many scholars have concluded that reform in South Carolina was dominated by a small number of editors and prominent planters. The agricultural societies struggled, the state legislature provided little support, and the few agricultural journals that formed were unable to support themselves. In short, apathy doomed agricultural reform in the state.<sup>59</sup> Put into the broader political and economic context of the state’s history, it becomes clear that the leadership of agricultural reform was a sort of proxy for the leadership of the state. When the established rice and Sea Island lowcountry planter elite dominated the state, the major journal was published in Charleston and featured work primarily from lowcountry contributors. As the short-staple cotton boom gradually placed more and more influence in the hands of upcountry planters, a journal published in upcountry Columbia took over.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Drew Faust, “The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Antebellum South Carolina” *Journal of Southern History* 45 (Nov. 1979), 541-544.

<sup>59</sup> Theodore Rosengarten, “The *Southern Agriculturist* in an Age of Reform,” in Michael O’Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds., *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986): 279-294.

<sup>60</sup> John Majewski emphasizes state support as a defining factor. Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy*.

### *The Other Reform Movement*

Seeing agricultural reform as a political as well as an economic project allows me to establish its place in a wider literature on reform movements in the antebellum United States. Much scholarship on the history of reform in the antebellum United States has focused on secular and evangelical reformers who sought to improve society, in order to create a better, morally sound nation. Reformers had laudable goals imperfectly realized. Historians present the “moralists and modernizers” of antebellum America as individuals who “stuck thorns in the side of indifference and dared to dream of a better world,” even if their motivations were self-serving and conservative at times.<sup>61</sup> Widely varied visions for what that “better world” would look like complicate this positive characterization. If William Garrison could see a nation without slavery, then James Henry Hammond could see a nation dominated by plantation slavery. Some reformers looked to spread Christianity, found utopian communities, or temper drinking, but others looked to reform extant institutions and adapt them to the modern world. For many slaveholders in the American South, the reform of plantation agriculture was the only viable option for creating and maintaining the world that they wanted to inhabit.

Historians have left agricultural reform outside of the literature on reform movements generally, but considering agricultural reform as well would considerably broaden understanding of reform in America. Agricultural reform responded to many of the same changes that birthed other reform movements—urbanization, industrialization, migration, and an increasingly impersonal world.<sup>62</sup> Agricultural reform in the South was not the urban, middle-class movement that most others were, but it shared many similar

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<sup>61</sup> Steven Mintz, *Moralizers and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xii.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (1978); Drew Faust, “Rhetoric and Ritual.”

impulses, from a desire for education and an idea of progress, to creating its own reform literature and articulating a vision of a transformed society. In their attempts to protect what they saw as eroding traditional values by embracing major change, southern agriculturists were very much reformers in the national sense. Placing southern agricultural reform within the larger reform narrative makes clear how varied American visions for an improved future were.

### *The Second Slavery*

In the past decade, scholars of slavery in the United States have increasingly turned to transnational comparative approaches to explain the extension of slavery to newly opened land in the Southwest and the fundamental changes that this extension, as well as the explosion of the cotton economy, wrought. Dale Tomich coined the term “second slavery” to describe a phenomenon he observed in his own research in Cuba and in others’ work on the American South and Brazil. He saw a series of fundamental changes in slavery in these areas in the very late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, with planters forcing slaves to move to new regions, away from areas important to the Atlantic economy, where the slaves would cultivate new crops for world markets in previously unseen quantities. This was made possible by the adoption of new technologies and techniques borrowed from industrial production coupled with planters’ ability to force slaves to work longer and harder than free workers at tasks free workers would not undertake. Additionally the expanding industrial economies of Europe and the United States provided massive appetites for sugar, coffee, and cotton, as well as ever-growing markets for the finished products. As a result, planters

in the South, Brazil, and Cuba realized huge profits and regional economic dominance that gave them real political influence over the policy of regional governance.<sup>63</sup>

While scholars interested in a second slavery approach recognize the American South as a prime example of this model, very few people working on the American South have actively engaged with this work. In a thoughtful essay, Anthony Kaye suggests that this may be because it is at odds with standard chronological divisions within American history; it is a particularly awkward fit with an “antebellum” period which anticipates the Civil War and begins decades after the United States is formed, instead fitting much more easily with a time period that stretches from the 1790s through the 1860s. Kaye also worries that, despite the absence of explicit declarations of southern exceptionalism in recent scholarship, that the second slavery’s emphasis on the American South as *a* modern, capitalist slave society, rather than *the* most modern, capitalist slave society, is a sometimes unwelcome challenge to this exceptionalism, which he calls a “constitutive element” of writing on antebellum slavery.<sup>64</sup>

This dissertation, chronologically, loosely fits the antebellum timeframe, covering the period from 1819 to 1870. This is a product of the availability of source material, however. Prior to 1819, there was very little printed material relating to agricultural improvement or reform, particularly of the serial variety. There is even less material from South Carolina and Mississippi, my geographical subjects, for this period. In future work, I am interested in expanding this project to stretch back as far as the 1770s and bring in the early stages of agricultural improvement that were based on correspondence, and personal and Atlantic networks. This addition would require extensive archival work in Virginia that was not

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<sup>63</sup> Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham, Md., 2004) and Anthony E. Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and Atlantic World,” *Journal of Southern History* 75 (August 2009), 627-650.

<sup>64</sup> Kaye, “Second Slavery,” 650.

feasible for the dissertation. It would also require looking at a new crop, likely wheat and grains in northern Virginia, and a corresponding set of plantation records.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the literature on the second slavery still has much to offer. The comparative approach of much of the literature brings in a wide variety of approaches to definitions of modernity and capitalism, as well as a number of ways that they manifest in slave societies. In Kaye's piece on second slavery and the South, he points out that southern historians have often spent a great deal of time talking about how modern and capitalist the South was without explaining exactly what specifically was capitalist and modern.<sup>65</sup> He emphasizes new forms of cultural change and creolization, technological and biological innovation which broke down bottlenecks in crop production, and, most importantly, the mobility of slave labor. He identifies two approaches to modernity as characterizing scholarship by historians of the south: one that emphasizes innovation and progress, despite slavery, and sometimes takes an admiring tone, and another, stemming from Paul Gilroy's work, that argues that slavery, as an "extreme form of domination," is, by definition, modern. He suggests that second slavery acknowledges the innovation of the first approach within the framework of the second. Slavery in the American South was compatible with innovation, but this should not be taken as a contradiction or as a moral positive.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 629. It should be noted that since the publication of Kaye's article some scholarship has taken up these specifics. Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens, Ga., 2012) and Edward E. Baptist, "Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, Collateralized and Securitized Human Beings, and the Panic of 1837" in Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 69-92.

<sup>66</sup> Kaye, "Second Slavery," 630-635.

The account books and plantation journals that play such a central role in the agricultural reform movement have clear roots in the merchant clerks that populated the cities of the northeast. Michael Zakim argues that clerks had become a “fixture of American conversation after 1830, a common trope for talking about the capitalist transformation of life in the republic.”<sup>67</sup> Planters were well aware of the role that accountancy and record keeping played in the changing national economy. Seeing that their factors were part of this world of calculation, many planters were willing to embrace a more systematic form of plantation records and accounts. Affleck’s own background was as a clerk, both at the Bank of Scotland as a young man, then as a merchant clerk when he first migrated to the United States from Scotland in 1832. He later became a merchant in his own right in New York and Pittsburgh. The diary that Thomas Affleck kept looked much like the diaries of other young men working as clerks in American cities. Thomas Augst has shown that these diaries ordered the clerk’s lives and character through rational and temporal management principles from their workdays, making the lives recorded within them “living ledgers.”<sup>68</sup> The clerks made sense of problems in their lives by recording and categorizing them in these notebooks. This was reflected in the emphasis on strict self-government in the nineteenth-century, a virtue that encouraged order. The young, usually single, men who became clerks saw the vocation as an apprenticeship of sorts, a professionalization process that came with clear rules and responsibilities. Brian Schoen shows that, even though many of these men

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Zakim, “Producing Capitalism: The Clerk at Work,” in Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 223.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Augst, *A Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 11-12.



ended up setting up small merchant firms, this training process of clerkship made them workers with repetitive tasks that they would often perform for years on end.<sup>69</sup>

### *Cotton and Capitalism*

The intersection of slavery and capitalism in the nineteenth-century United States is a major topic of research and scholarship currently. Conferences, edited collections, books, and articles have all appeared in the past few years.<sup>70</sup> On some points, scholars seem to agree: capitalism was compatible with slavery, slavery was a major driving force behind the development of the capitalist American economy in the nineteenth-century, connections between the plantation South and other regions were significant and are important for study, and more work needs to be done in all of these areas. A particular area of focus has been the Lower Mississippi Valley, where vast sugar and cotton plantations dominated Louisiana and Mississippi. The banks of the Mississippi in this area connected the most intensely capitalized and industrialized agricultural acres in the country to New Orleans and the rest of the world. This is the second slavery, where plantations had as much in common with the sugar plantations of Cuba and Brazil as they did with the tobacco plantations of Virginia.

The way that the abstracting forces of capitalism acted on slaves has been the major research question for much of this work. Edward Baptist and Joshua Rothman have both demonstrated how the tangled financial dealings of planters purchasing plantations and human beings with risky credit could have disastrous consequences for the enslaved, tearing

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<sup>69</sup> Brian Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> For example, the conference *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Development* at Harvard and Brown, April 7-9, 2011 focused entirely on this intersection. See also Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Belknap: 2013), as well as forthcoming work from Edward Baptist and Seth Rockman.

apart families and perpetuating the cotton economy that extracted so much from slaves. This work draws on current preoccupations with the risky and uncertain world of credit networks that are too complicated for most of us to understand. One of Baptist's pieces makes a direct comparison between the credit issues underlying the Panic of 1837 and the recent financial crisis.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the current interest in and worry about global capitalism and its unforeseeable consequences surely explain much of the scholarly currency of these issues. Speaking to the current popular relevance of the study of capitalism, university courses are appearing and the *New York Times* even provided (questionable) coverage of the trend.<sup>72</sup>

The growing consensus that cotton slavery and capitalism were not just compatible but complementary helps explain the form that agricultural reform took in the Southwest. Experts, journals, and record books focused less on soil fertility, new crops, horticulture, and developments abroad and more on measurable directions for cultivating cotton, the amount of ginned cotton per acre given seed varieties could produce, how much cotton a slave could be forced to pick, and how best to record and account for a plantation business. Agricultural reform became less of a forum for discussing a wide variety of issues and more a way of maximizing and making efficient production in a specific sector. Planters increasingly turned to record keeping, calculation, and quantifiable methods for cultivating cotton.

The most recent work on cotton, slavery, and capitalism seeks to show how far the forces of capitalism, credit networks, and world markets went in abstracting human beings. Some work has suggested that these invisible forces, along with avaricious planters, were able to transform slaves from troublesome workers to units of labor and production in

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<sup>71</sup> Baptist, "Toxic Debt."

<sup>72</sup>"In History Departments, It's Up With Capitalism," April 6, 2013  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/education/in-history-departments-its-up-with-capitalism.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/education/in-history-departments-its-up-with-capitalism.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), accessed April 7, 2013.

American culture.<sup>73</sup> Slaves constantly challenged this reductive thinking at the local level, but in the long term an increasingly capitalist, global economy was making it easier and easier for planters to see slaves as hands, as nothing more than productive units. While the prevalence of calculation and record-keeping suggests that there is something to this view, southern whites' constant fear of slave violence speaks to the deep awareness that slaves were, perhaps, more human than many planters would like. This scholarship has the potential to further highlight the contradictions inherent to slavery, much like legal history has shown how difficult the 'double character' of slaves in the law could be to deal with.<sup>74</sup> Attempts to rationalize slave life provided a constant reminder of the humanity of slaves, even as they sought to minimize it.

## Chapter Summaries

### *Chapter One: Light Fingers and Heavy Hearts: Cotton Work and the Whip*

This chapter re-assesses how planters worked slaves on cotton plantations. By focusing on the daily details of work gleaned from plantation records and slave narratives, I argue that it is impossible to talk about a system of cotton cultivation, picking, and processing. The incredible variation from plantation to plantation, much less region to region, makes emphasizing the range of possibilities important. Recent work has shed considerable light on long-term shifts in picking efficiency, but has largely relied on aggregate data, which has obscured what was actually represented in the original cotton picking records. I suggest that combining a wide range of slave narratives with a detailed

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<sup>73</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*

<sup>74</sup> Jenny Bourne Wahl, *The Bondsman's Burden: An Economic Analysis of the Common Law of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Thomas Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Michael Grossberg and Christopher Tomlins, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Law in America: Volume II, The Long Nineteenth-Century, 1789-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

examination of plantation records can provide a more complete picture of the many ways that slaves picked cotton. The chapter introduces the practices of slave agriculture on cotton plantations that are the subject of much of the agricultural reform movement discussed in later chapters.

*Chapter Two: The Structure of Agricultural Reform in South Carolina, 1828-1861*

Using a study of the *Southern Agriculturist*, the first major agricultural serial in the Lower South, and the *Farmer and Planter*, the second major journal in South Carolina, this chapter examines how the agricultural press helped create and maintain communities of agricultural reform. It explores the landscape of reform in the first decades of an established agricultural press, looking at where reform was centered and which actors drove its course. It then traces the shifting goals of reformers and how their frustrated attempts at improvement had a lasting impact on the region. I tie the gradual migration of reform from Charleston and lowcountry elites to Columbia and short-staple cotton planters to economic and political shifts in the state. This chapter links southern agricultural improvement to larger knowledge networks across the nation and in Europe, arguing that planters saw agricultural reform as a way to establish themselves intellectually in a modern world, even as they saw themselves stigmatized by plantation slavery. Finally, I argue that the infrastructure of reform from the press to agricultural societies and speeches became a forum for planters to articulate their anxieties about southern society and visions for the future.

*Chapter Three: The Life of Thomas Affleck's Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book*

This chapter uses a study of the production, dissemination, and use of a printed blank record book for plantations to examine how the ideas and agendas of the discursive

spaces of agricultural reform were translated into plantation practice. The plantation books created by Thomas Affleck show the different ways that agricultural reform operated in the Southwest, with practical non-literary improvement texts finding their way onto plantations in ever-increasing numbers, even as agricultural journals often struggled to find an audience. Hundreds of thousands of slaves were held on plantations managed with the aid of the Affleck book. Planters and overseers selected the elements of the book that they found most useful, carefully recording illness and absence from work, cotton picked, and other details that provided an additional level of surveillance for slaves. The book was also designed to discipline overseers, making record-keeping easier and rendering the actions of the overseer more visible to the planter. By analyzing over eighty copies of these books that were used by planters, I am able to track how improvers' visions of reform were received by planters and overseers.

#### *Chapter Four: Practicing Reform: The Metcalfe Family Plantation Enterprise, 1847-1863*

This chapter looks at the plantation practice of agricultural reform on a set of plantations that used Thomas Affleck's published plantation account books and some rationalizing labor principles. The records of the extensive Metcalfe plantation enterprise spans two generations and nearly a dozen plantations scattered across a section of the Mississippi Delta, from 1850 through the Civil War. The Metcalfes and their overseers and plantation management continued to keep their plantation records in the Affleck books well after slavery was abolished and the cotton South and the planter elite was crumbling. This chapter ties together the themes of the preceding chapters by offering a rare glimpse of exactly how print reform was translated to plantation practice. The depth and detail of the records also allows a nuanced description of how attempts at "reform-minded" plantation

agriculture actually unfolded in the daily lives of slaves. A comparison with a set of plantations in South Carolina shows how reform principles and practice were transferred and transformed from the Seaboard (in this case, South Carolina) to the Southwest (Mississippi).

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship on agricultural reform has focused on agricultural literature societies, and fairs. Most work on southern reform has limited itself to Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia, suggesting that reform did not establish a foothold in the Southwest. Most scholarship has accepted a variety of the “failure model” advanced by Eugene Genovese and reinforced by William Mathew, Steven Stoll, and George Steffen in recent decades. Recently, environmental history and history of science have introduced new perspectives on the context and meaning of agricultural reform, while still maintaining the geographical limits and focus on agricultural literature and public life. This scholarship ignores or minimizes non-literary print, such as record and account books, and provides an unnecessarily rigid definition of reform that has prevented scholars from exploring the influence of agricultural reform outside of a community of reformers.

This dissertation argues that agricultural reform did not fail in the southern slaves states. In fact, agricultural reform in the South carefully limited its potential audience to planters and associated professionals and had considerable influence within this audience. In addition, agricultural reform in Mississippi and the Southwest had significant pull in the form of didactic record books, improved varieties of cotton, and novel business practices. To fully understand the scope and significance of agricultural reform on plantations run by men who did not self-identify as planters, this study examines the work of cotton alongside planters’ ideas of agricultural labor. In taking up bits and pieces of the ideologies of agricultural

reformers, planters both demonstrated their interest in extracting as much as possible from their land and their slaves in an effort to compete in the changing national economy and changed the lives of their slaves in subtle but important ways.

## Chapter One : **Light Fingers and Heavy Hearts: Cotton Work and the Whip**

“Heavy were the hearts of the mother and her children, as they traversed the long cotton rows that day; but their fingers must needs be light. The overseer's whip takes no note of aching hearts. The baskets must be filled.”

Kate E. R. Pickard, *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed. Recollections of Peter Still and His Wife "Vina," after Forty Years of Slavery*. Syracuse: William T. Hamilton, 1856.

Henry Watson was born in Virginia, but sold as a young child to the cotton belt, to the plantation of a Mr. McNeill near Vicksburg. Initially tasked to work in his master's house, Watson knew that life in the cotton fields was full of violence, since “from morning till night could the whip be heard, accompanied with the cries and groans of the sufferers.” He knew that every slave had a quota that specified the number of pounds of cotton that the slave had to pick and any shortfall resulted in as “many lashes being applied to the poor slave's back as he was so unlucky as to fall short in the number of pounds of cotton which he was to have picked.” When Watson was forced from his work in the house to the cotton fields, he could not keep pace, as he was not an experienced picker. The overseer told Watson that his soft life of domestic work had “got the devil in [him]” and that he would give him a “hundred lashes, and that d--d quick.”<sup>1</sup>

Louis Hughes' master jumped into a competition to get the first bale of cotton to the Memphis exchange, hoping to win bragging rights and the bottle of champagne given to the victor. “Boss” was often “so excited and nervous during the season that he scarcely ate.” The master sought to extract even more labor at peak times (and when he was competing with a rival planter) by providing small incentives to the winners of daily picking “contests.” Hughes describes slaves on the plantation working hard for the sweet inducement of a “tin

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<sup>1</sup> Watson, 19-20. Due to the number of slave narratives that I will be citing, I have placed the full citations in Appendix A and will cite as “Author, Page Number” in the footnotes.



cup of sugar.” Hughes labored on a cotton plantation between 1844 and 1865. The plantation was in northern Mississippi, about 100 miles southeast of Memphis. The overseer forced Hughes, at the age of 14, to pick at least 250 pounds of cotton each day. Any adult slave who failed to pick this minimum amount was whipped at the end of the day.<sup>2</sup>

In December of 1849, Henry Clay Bruce arrived at the Greene plantation in northern Mississippi, near Holly Springs. The day after his arrival, Bruce, along with the other slaves old enough to work among the three hundred or so slaves on the plantation, woke up an hour before sunrise, then ate breakfast and trudged to the cotton fields to be ready for work as soon as there was light. Bruce does not mention having specific quotas of cotton to pick, rather he and his fellow slaves were “driven by the overseer who carried a long whip called a blacksnake” until dark, when the women returned to the quarters. Bruce and the other men went to the gin house and the overseer directed them to turn out cotton bales until nine o’clock or later.<sup>3</sup>

The lives of Watson, Hughes, and Bruce provide examples of the myriad ways that planters and overseers sought to extract labor from their enslaved workers on cotton plantations in the 1840s and 1850s. In this period cotton production was growing at an unprecedented rate, by any measure—cotton planters were forcing their slaves to pick four times as much per slave in 1862 as they had at the beginning of the century.<sup>4</sup> Biological innovation and planters forcing their slaves to work harder, longer, and more efficiently explain this explosion in cotton production. Production quotas, systems of routinization, and enforced rates of work made the gains possible. None of these strategies would have been

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<sup>2</sup> Hughes, 32

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, 61.

<sup>4</sup> Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, “Biological Innovation and Productivity Growth in the Antebellum Cotton Economy” *Journal of Economic History* 68, 4 (December 2008): 1123-1171.

effective if it were not for the constant threat (and use) of physical violence in the form of whipping. Most accounts of work on cotton plantations by former slaves center on whipping. As in the examples above, almost every other element varies, but the presence and threat of public whipping with great frequency is almost omnipresent. Any study of slavery and the forced work of cotton plantations would do well to keep constantly in mind Frederick Douglass' summary of slavery: "The whip is all in all."<sup>5</sup> Planters made slaves on cotton plantations feel this truth deeply.

Millions of slaves like Henry Clay Bruce, Louis Hughes, and Henry Watson worked under the whip on cotton fields across the American South. Between 1820 and 1860 planters and overseers responded to rising cotton prices by refining their system of cotton planting and cultivation, changing fertilization and rotation strategies, using "improved" varieties of cotton seed, and attempting to extract more and more labor from the slaves held on their plantations.<sup>6</sup> As slaves were "driven" by the whip, the cotton fields of the Old Southwest became emblematic of the evils of slavery in the United States. Abolitionists focused their

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage, and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Planters certainly tried to extract more and more labor from their slaves. It is unclear how successful they were, for planters had been driving their slaves to work throughout the history of slavery in the United States. Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode argue that the explosion in cotton productivity in this period can be attributed to biological innovation—the development of new varieties of cotton that produced more and larger bolls that were easier to pick. Edward Baptist argues that planters were successful in forcing their slaves to work longer, harder, and more productively. Both factors certainly contributed to the explosion in cotton productivity to some degree. For the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to agree that planters were trying to extract more and more labor from their slaves and succeeded to some degree. Exactly how successful they were at a regional and national level and whether biological innovation or the "pushing system" is the major explanatory factor for the increase in productivity is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Olmstead and Rhode, "Biological Innovation"; Edward E. Baptist, "Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, Collateralized and Securitized Human Beings, and the Panic of 1837" in Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 69-92 and "The Slave Labor Camps of Antebellum Florida and the Pushing System," in Robert Cassanello, Melanie Shell-Weiss, eds. *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008). Baptist will explore these ideas more fully in his forthcoming book *The Half Has Never Been Told: The Migration That Made African America, the United States, and the World* (New York: Basic Books, forthcoming).

public campaigns on the cotton fields, slaves feared being sent to them, and many planters struggled to reconcile their public faces to the realities of the fields. The death rates for slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations were horrific, but it was cotton that dominated the Southern landscape, economy, and society. Slaves did not just worry about being sold “down the river” away from family and home, they specifically feared being sent to “pick cotton.”<sup>7</sup>

The cotton crop covered millions of acres across the slave South, demanded the attention of hundreds of thousands of planters who drove millions of slaves to produce billions of pounds (and dollars’ worth) of cotton. The millions of slaves held on cotton plantations found their lives circumscribed by both the agricultural cycle of cotton and the markets and networks that the crop was entangled in. Slaves worked from dawn until dusk plowing, planting, hoeing, scraping, thinning, topping, and picking cotton; they also were worked differently and punished differently as cotton became more central to Atlantic economies and the British Industrial Revolution. Recent scholarship has illuminated just how connected cotton was to the British Industrial Revolution and, from there, to the major economic and industrial shifts of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Britain was incapable of producing even a small fraction of the natural fibers needed to feed its textiles mills. In order to sustain the production of the new factories, Britain needed what Kenneth Pomeranz has called “ghost acres”—land, labor, and natural resources located outside of the British Isles

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<sup>7</sup> Watkins, 32

<sup>8</sup> Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War” *American Historical Review* 109 (2005), 1405-1438; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000); Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chapter 8.

dedicated to producing the raw material of industry.<sup>9</sup> The cotton South provided these aptly termed “ghost acres.”

Cotton’s reign in the South was predicated on planters speeding slave labor up using management techniques from industrial and agricultural movements in Britain, America, and elsewhere and adding punishment, often in the form of whipping. Historians call the strategies that planters developed by the 1840s to get more and more work out of their slaves the “pushing system.” It is misleading, however, to refer to these strategies as having enough common organization to be called a system. Planters adopted management techniques from all arenas and relied primarily on the whip to give them effect. In their published writings, most improving planters suggested that well run plantations did not need to rely on whipping. One South Carolina planter did not mention whipping in his twenty pages of description on how to run a plantation except to make clear that a driver “should never be flogged except by the master.” Despite dedicating six pages to the details of distributing allowances to slaves, whipping, the primary way that planters demonstrated their authority, was addressed only in the negative.<sup>10</sup> Some commentators were less circumspect, suggesting that slaves should be “flogged as little as possible,” but with the important caveat that flogging must occur “always when necessary.” The reality of plantation “discipline” can be seen in the same planter’s demands that his overseers never to resort to “unusual punishment,” at least not “without the Employer’s approbation.”<sup>11</sup> Even in the semi-private pages of their plantation rules and journals, planters and overseers adopted this language of

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<sup>9</sup> Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Spann Hammond Papers, “Views on Agriculture,” South Caroliniana Library (SCL).

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Flinn Papers, 1813-1840, “Plantation Rules,” SCL.

measured punishment. Their plantation practice told a very different story.<sup>12</sup> Escaped and freed slaves uniformly stressed the centrality of whipping to slavery on cotton plantations.

Scholars have given very little attention to cotton production, compared to the other major plantation crops in the South. Only in the past few years have major works focused on the details of cotton slavery.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the ways that the actual process of working and picking cotton has influenced the rest of plantation life has been underexplored. Scholars have accepted a relatively static model for cotton cultivation that worked with minor regional variations. One major split, between the Southwest and older more established plantation regions is generally acknowledged, but it is often seen as reasonable to talk about the way cotton was made in one or the other area, how slaves worked in those places, and how it influenced their working and non-working lives, and shaped slave culture.<sup>14</sup> By emphasizing the differences in how cotton was worked, as well as the varied ways that planters and overseers found to draw labor from their slaves, I show that existing models for cotton culture were not practical in many areas.

I also look to bring together the often separated sources from plantation papers, the agricultural press, and slave narratives. Agricultural journals and other planter-authored publications provide a useful window to the proscriptive literature and standard practices surrounding cotton cultivation and picking. Plantation journals, accounts, and work logs

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Four for one of the rare examples of an overseer systematically recording punishment.

<sup>13</sup> See Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 2013) and an upcoming project from Edward Baptist. By contrast, there have been many studies of sugar, rice, and tobacco plantations. See, for example, Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); William Dusenberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2000); Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> For a divide between the new Southwest and older regions, see James D. Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

reveal how planters and overseers sought to implement their programs of cultivation and picking on a daily and seasonal basis. Slave narratives provide rare, but revealing, glimpses of how the forced laborers saw planters' supposedly neat and rational management in practice.

Scholarship has largely focused on cotton picking and seasonal rhythms on cotton plantations, for good reason. Cotton picking was the time of the year when planters pushed their slaves the hardest, using whatever means were available, from rewards to violence. The rhythms of cotton cultivation were a major factor in defining different labor regimes for slaves. It is, however, important to focus on the details of cotton cultivation throughout the year. Recent work has argued for the importance of biological innovation on cotton plantations, reflected both in planting and picking. Knowing how slaves were forced to work in the cotton fields helps illuminate how planters tried to make their slaves work and how slaves negotiated, as well as relating to arguments over aggregate cotton picking data. To understand how slaves worked, it is important to supplement work on aggregate cotton picking with an examination of the daily work on a cotton plantation. By looking at what individual slaves were doing on a daily basis, it is possible to see more clearly how planters and overseers sought to manage their slaves and extract more work from them. As valuable as knowing the average number of pounds of cotton picked by a slave in a day is, it is just as valuable to see how that data was collected, for what purpose, what each data point (a number of pounds of cotton recorded as being picked by one slave in one day) actually means. The answers to these questions speak to both the details of the lived experience of millions of slaves and to the production of the nation's largest export.

This chapter uses the cotton cycle as a structure to explore how slaves worked and how planters sought to force them to work on cotton plantations in the American South. I

lay out the basic structure of the many ways that cotton was planted, cultivated, picked, and processed on these plantations. At each stage, I look at planters' and overseers' attempts to push labor and grow a bigger crop, and, in turn, how slaves responded and viewed the cotton system. I pay particular attention to what has been called the "pushing system," a variant of gang labor particular to cotton plantations, and to the process of picking cotton. The cotton picking season highlights the ways planters integrated existing practices of cotton cultivation with new agricultural and labor management strategies to force more work out of slaves. Planters were most motivated to extract work from slaves at this time of the year. The amount and quality of cotton picked during the season would go a long way towards determining the financial success or failure of the plantation as an investment. A valuable cotton crop had to produce both a large number of bales (per acre and per slave working) and clean cotton that could be sold for a high price. If a planter was unable to get cotton picked quickly enough the cotton could lose value rapidly. Once bolls began to open, the cotton fiber was no longer protected from the elements and could easily become dirty and damaged due to wind, dirt, and rain. This was a serious risk that spurred planters to drive their slaves to work harder and harder, by almost any means necessary. British farm managers and industrialists and factory owners in both Britain and the United States had to manage, incentivize, and cajole workers to produce more through efficiency in system, financial motivation or threats, and lack of job security. Planters used a variety of management techniques, but put teeth in all of them with the constant threat of the whip.

### **The Cotton Cycle**

Agricultural writers in the cotton South agreed on a general cycle of cotton cultivation. There was significant disagreement on many aspects of cultivation, but there was

consensus on the basic stages. The preparation of the cotton field through plowing was a central aspect for each planter, followed by creating a bed in the soil and running a furrow along it with a plow. The cotton seed would then be deposited in this furrow and covered with earth. There was then a brief pause until the cotton started to leaf, when it would be cultivated regularly, with a small plow and hoes in order to keep it clear of grass and weeds, as well as keep the soil stirred, loose, and covering the base of the cotton plant. This plowing and hoeing regime would be continued until picking time, when nearly all of a plantation's slaves would be sent into the fields to pick cotton as fast as the planter could make them, through inducement, coercion, and violence. The picked cotton would then be dried, ginned, and pressed into bales for the world cotton market.

This very basic structure can be broken up into five general stages: preparing the ground, planting, cultivation, picking, and processing. Each section of cotton culture involved different labor demands in terms of the type and difficulty of work, the weather it would be performed in, and even the length of the laboring day. Scholars have rightly emphasized cotton picking as central to slave life on cotton plantations, but other parts of cotton culture significantly shaped slave life as well.<sup>15</sup> Picking often occupied four or five months, roughly from late August to December. While there was some chronological overlap, the stages were relatively distinct and involved very different skills and labor demands and were completed during widely varied seasons. Each stage was central to slave life on cotton plantations for periods ranging from a week or two to several months.

Reformers demanded planters cultivate fewer acres and dedicate more labor to those acres over a longer period of time. The need for more time and effort to be spent preparing

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of the amount of labor dedicated to preparation, planting, and cultivation, relative to picking and processing.



land for cotton was a major emphasis in almost all reformers' writings on a system for cotton. This focus on preparation, along with many other "innovations" of improved systems of cotton planting, increased the amount of labor that planters demanded from their enslaved workers outside of cotton picking. Planters often advocated additional work before and during planting because many tasks were easier to perform before cotton was planted, when much time would need to be devoted to that crop, reducing the spare labor available.<sup>16</sup> Improvement-minded planters were constantly searching for ways to spread work from peak periods of labor demand to periods when labor was relatively plentiful. The additional work of breaking up ground, running additional furrows, and creating beds for cotton was much harder work than what would normally be done in March and April on a cotton plantation, creating new burdens for slaves.

In the following description of the stages of labor and work on a cotton plantation, I draw on three different sets of sources: printed agricultural advice literature, plantation records, and narratives of former slaves. These three groups of sources all have distinct biases and speak to different, but overlapping, parts of the labor and work of cotton slavery.<sup>17</sup> Historians most commonly use printed agricultural literature when describing how planters viewed cotton production. It is the simplest way to access the agricultural and labor management strategies employed by planters. It also has an oft-ignored bias. Most of this literature was produced by agricultural reformers and was not meant to describe cotton

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<sup>16</sup> James Henry Hammond, "Report of the Committee of the Barnwell Agricultural Society, on the Culture of Cotton" in J.A. Turner, *The Cotton Planter's Manual: Being a Compilation of Facts from the Best Authorities on the Culture of Cotton; Its Natural History, Chemical Analysis, Trade and Consumption and Embracing a History of Cotton and the Cotton Gin* (New York: C.M. Saxton & Co., 1857; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 24.

<sup>17</sup> I use the separate terms labor and work to distinguish between when planters assign slaves to certain activities (labor) and the details of what slaves do (work). This chapter addresses both aspects of the cotton cycle, discussing the labor of cotton slavery by describing how planters deployed their slaves and when planters decided to begin certain agricultural activities and work when I describe how slaves carried out these activities. Labor relates slaves' activities to production, where work describes the activities. Labor is not meant to connote the planter's perspective and work the slaves'; both elements were understood, though not experienced, by planters and slaves.

agriculture, but rather to argue for a specific, ideal version of cotton agriculture that reformers felt needed to be implemented. Sometimes, the reformer-author would describe labor on his own plantation, other times he would describe a more abstract, Platonic version of cotton agriculture. Even when reformers claimed to be describing the situation “as it was,” usually as a contrast to their own proposed system, the description came from a clear position and usually produced a caricature of what the reformer saw as the most harmful aspects of typical cotton culture, a ridiculing of the “opinions and rules which are generally received.”<sup>18</sup> I attempt to use these sources carefully and corroborate them with evidence from the other two groups of sources.

The second of these groups, plantation records, have a milder version of the reform-bias of the printed literature. Surviving plantation records are more likely to have been produced by planters who were attentive to record-keeping, something highly valued by agricultural reformers. Some records are kept in books produced by agricultural reformers, with a didactic agenda.<sup>19</sup> These sources can be used with more confidence, however, as they both describe the actual labor allocation on plantations, rather than an ideal, and are not produced entirely by reformers, as the printed literature is. Plantations were big business and, as such, required written records. Many surviving cotton plantation records were produced by planters who were no more interested in agricultural reform than the average cotton planter.<sup>20</sup> I draw most of my conclusions about how planters chose to cultivate cotton from

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<sup>18</sup> “The Proper Quantity of Seed to an Acre,” *American Cotton Planter* (Montgomery, Al.), December, 1855.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Three for a thorough discussion of the most popular of these printed record books, Mississippi agricultural reformer Thomas Affleck’s *Plantation Record and Account Book*.

<sup>20</sup> I try to avoid a stark distinction between “planter” and “reformer,” since I see agricultural reform as a widespread movement, with blurred edges. Most cotton planters were exposed to agricultural reform in some manner, from reading an agricultural journal to talking to a neighbor who had been to an agricultural fair. Agricultural reform permeated southern society.

my research in these plantation records. Where I quote printed agricultural literature, it reflects patterns that I have seen in plantation journals and work logs.

The final major set of sources, narratives of former slaves, speaks much more clearly to the work of cultivating and picking cotton than planter and overseer sources do. While white managers were very aware of the details of cotton work—they were on constant lookout for any work slow-downs—slaves spent most of their waking hours working for their owners. Planters and overseers had reason to record the labor activities on a cotton plantation, so that they could track the course of the cotton crop and the productivity of land and laborers. Slaves chose to recount the details of work when they told their life stories. Solomon Northup provides the most celebrated account of picking cotton, but dozens of slaves detailed their time picking cotton bolls from their sharp casings. The dozens of slave narratives that discuss cotton work pale when compared to the millions of slaves forced to trudge up and down rows of cotton plants across the South. Even more than plantation sources, they represent a miniscule sample and are exceptional in their very existence. Far more material about slavery exists from interviews conducted with former slaves in the 1930s, but that material is shaped by the questions asked and many other limitations; there are no descriptions of cotton work in these sources as full as those in the slave narratives.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Norman R. Yetman, "Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 181-210.

### *Preparation and Planting*

In January, when most planters begin their journals, slaves in Mississippi were usually still drying, ginning, and pressing the previous year's cotton crop into bales for distant markets. In South Carolina and the southern Seaboard, cotton picking could last well into February.<sup>22</sup> On many plantations, finishing the previous year's crop dovetailed with preparing the land for the next year's crop. In January or February, slaves would thrash and cut down the cotton stalks from the previous year's crop to get the fields ready for plowing. Thrashing down cotton stalks was often done by slaves that planters delegated to lighter work, as it was not as physically demanding as other work in January and February (plowing fields for corn, planting potatoes, chopping wood, clearing land to be turned into fields). After slaves thrashed down the cotton stalks, the field would be flat enough to run plows through without any obstruction. After thrashing the stalks down, slaves would cut the stalks into smaller pieces, so that they could be plowed into the ground to provide vegetable matter for soil fertility. Some planters had their slaves skip cutting the stalks, others had their slaves burn stalks instead of thrashing them down. Reform-minded planters were most likely to emphasize soil fertility and both thrash and cut stalks. Smaller planters interested in saving slave labor to hire out or employ elsewhere might burn stalks.

Preparing the ground was a major emphasis in almost all reform writings on a system for improving cotton crops. While some improvers advocated deep plowing over every possible scrap of land and other emphasized shallow plowing, nearly all agreed that the "best and most important part" of a cotton crop was the "judicious and proper preparation of the

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<sup>22</sup> For the remainder of this overview of cotton culture, I will use dates typical of cotton agriculture in Mississippi and the Southwest and provide a comparison to the southern Seaboard in parentheses or footnotes.

soil for planting.”<sup>23</sup> Planters saw preparing the ground for planting as central to improved agriculture, as this was the stage that not only supposedly determined how fertile the land would be for the season’s crop, but also how the fertility of the land would be maintained. Serious preparation usually began in February (late-March in the Seaboard states). Planters sent slaves into the fields with plow teams to break up the land at this time; loose, stirred soil was necessary for cotton. Some planters had slaves plow as deeply as possible, thinking that it would more fully stir the earth and bring up the nutrients of the soil. Other planters avoided deep plowing, thinking that it unnecessarily exposed soil to the sun, sapping its valuable fertility. Regardless of the depth of plowing, slaves would be sent into the field to break up the land with plows, then to lay out the rows that were so central to cotton culture.

Cotton was usually planted in long beds to give the cotton plant slight elevation for drainage. The cotton rows were usually between 400 and 500 feet long on large plantations, but length necessarily varied by location. The rows were formed by running a deep furrow with a plow, usually supplemented by a smaller furrow on either side. Some planters liked to have the slaves plow manure into the beds as they were being made. The bed would then be flattened with a scraper plow, which was essentially a thirty inch board attached to a plow that leveled the top of the bed. These rows would be laid out between 4 and 6 feet apart, depending on how large the planter, overseer, or driver expected the cotton plant to get at maturity. The goal was to have the branches of plants in adjacent rows slightly interlock when they reached their maximum diameter. This allowed enough space for plows to run between the rows until the very end of cultivation. After using the scraper plow, the cotton

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<sup>23</sup> Col. James M. Chambers, “Essay on the Treatment and Cultivation of Cotton” in J.A. Turner, *The Cotton Planter’s Manual: Being a Compilation of Facts from the Best Authorities on the Culture of Cotton; Its Natural History, Chemical Analysis, Trade and Consumption and Embracing a History of Cotton and the Cotton Gin* (New York: C.M. Saxton & Co., 1857; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 13.

field would be laid out with straight, evenly spaced beds, about 30 inches wide, and 4 to 6 feet apart, composed of loose, recently plowed soil. Planters drove their slaves to finish this process at least a few days before planting to give the beds time to receive rain and settle, providing the best base for the cotton seed.

In March, planters would send almost all their slaves into the prepared cotton fields to plant seed.<sup>24</sup> The selection of cotton seed was an important step for most planters, as was its preparation. The selection of seed is discussed elsewhere, but by the 1850s planters on good cotton land generally preferred Petit Gulf seed, or improved Mississippi varieties, such as Sugar Loaf. These varieties produce “cluster” bolls, making it easier to pick large quantities.<sup>25</sup> A “cluster” boll variety means that instead of having a single boll of cotton on each branch of the cotton plant, there would be several bolls on the same nodule. This made the cotton quicker to pick, as the cotton was packed together, rather than scattered across the plant. Having invested time and, usually, money in cotton seed, planters had a variety of ways to prepare it for planting, but most involved soaking the seed in some solution of manure or salt in water. It was then dried with ash or lime and fertilized by being rolled in lime.

To plant the seed in the beds a small seed furrow, also known as a drill, would be run with a small plow, ideally a very straight and narrow furrow of less than two inches in width and less than one inch deep. Following the plow, often steps behind, but sometimes a few days later, a slave would drop seeds into the furrow by hand and cover the seeds with dirt by foot. The spacing between seeds would be specified by the planter depending on how far apart the stands (groups of plants) of cotton were to be. Sometimes seeds would be dropped

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<sup>24</sup> Planting might happen as late as April on the Seaboard.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, *Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 112.

mechanically, but most planters struggled to find an automatic drill that met their expectations for regular and adjustable spacing. There were widely varied opinions on how exactly the seeds should be scattered, but the basic process was similar on most plantations. After sowing the seed, slaves would run harrowing plows to throw soil more fully over the drill. The harrows had teeth which pulled dirt into the drill and a flat rear section which smoothed the dirt. After the seed was covered, scraper plows and slaves with hoes would go down each side of the seed bed, spreading dirt over any grass or weeds that appeared.

The types of seed and cotton plants used on plantations have been a subject of great debate recently. Paul Rhode and Alan Olmstead argue that the “achievements of southern cotton breeders rivaled anything accomplished by northern wheat breeders in the nineteenth century.” They extend their argument to suggest that it was this innovation that explains the increasing “efficiency” of slave labor and cotton picking. Rhode and Olmstead want to place these southern cotton breeders near the center of the history of the Industrial Revolution, arguing that their innovation was a necessary condition for sustaining the changes of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>26</sup> Cotton breeders were usually nurserymen, planters, and agricultural reformers who produced and marketed new types of cotton seed. In order to sell a new variety of cotton seed, a cotton breeder needed to show that it could produce a desirable cotton plant, usually determined by the number of pounds of cotton that could be picked in an acre planted with the seed. Thus cotton breeders tended to be planters interested in experiment that then isolated their most successful varieties of cotton by picking seeds out of the most desirable cotton plants by hand and replanting the selected seeds the next year. After a few years of this process, these cotton breeders would then name and market the seeds as a new variety of cotton.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 100.

In the colonial period, southern cotton planters generally grew black seed Sea Island cotton in the Georgia and Carolina Lowcountry or Georgia Green Seed cotton in upland areas that could not sustain Sea Island cotton, which required the high temperature, humidity, and rainfall of coastal regions to thrive. In 1806, William Dunbar, a prominent Mississippi planter, acquired cotton seeds from Mexico and began experiments on his Natchez plantations. By 1820, hybrid Mexican-Green Seed cotton varieties had spread throughout the South, though it was not in wide use until late in the decade. Most planters, by the 1830s, embraced the new hybrid varieties of Mexican green seed cotton that had been bred by local planters and seed producers for specific regions of the South. This cotton had bolls that were easier to pick than previous black seed varieties of the cotton plant, because they were larger and more easily detachable, requiring less dexterity to pick, and clustered together on the plant, rather than spread across it. In addition, these varieties resisted disease better and produced more cotton per acre as they had more and larger bolls.

Thomas Walter Peyre, a South Carolina cotton planter, was one of the thousands of people who experimented with different types of cotton seed. Peyre was among those interested in detailed empirical comparisons between different strains of cotton. To his great frustration, however, the cotton plantation was not an ideal laboratory. Peyre sought to compare green seed and black seed by planting them in separate fields, cultivating them similarly, and making detailed comparisons of their yields, both before and after ginning. In 1836, Peyre planted some Sea Island cotton, as well as two different varieties of upland green seed cotton—Petit Gulf and Alvarado in four fields on his lowcountry plantation, near Charleston. The eight and a half acre field planted in Sea Island cotton produced 546 pounds of cotton per acre before it was processed and 172 pounds of cleaned cotton per acre. The



89 acres planted in green seed cotton yielded 164 pounds of cotton before cleaning and only 51 pounds per acre after ginning.

**TABLE 1.1: COTTON PRODUCTION AT SPRING GROVE PLANTATION BY SEED TYPE, 1836<sup>27</sup>**

Acres in Field	Seed Type(s) Planted	Weight after Picking	Weight after Processing
8.5	Black seed (Sea Island)	4642	1413
33	Alvarado <sup>28</sup>	8229	
40	Petit Gulf	4575	
16	Petit Gulf and Alvarado mixed	1837	4545 (all Alvarado and Petit Gulf)
97.5	Total	19283	6008

The experiment did not turn out as Peyre had hoped, however, despite the clear yield advantage of the Sea Island cotton. While acknowledging that the “Green seed made only about the third of a crop,” Peyre realized that his experiment had been foiled by the interventions of both the environment and the slaves working the fields, as well as his own inexperience with the variety of cotton. He complained that his labor force was reduced when two full “hands” ran away at a key point in May and a “hand + ¾” were sick at a similar time. Peyre’s attempts to reduce the slaves to a number representing the work he could extract from them did little to keep the slaves in the field. While he could turn slaves into numbers on the page, he had no such luck ordering his workers on the plantation; his plantation consistently failed to deliver the amount of cotton that he expected. Peyre extracted a great deal of labor from his slaves, but was unable to fit them neatly into his calculations. Both slaves and the environment were erratic variables in his neat equations and

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Walter Peyre Plantation Journal, 114-115 in Kenneth Stampp, ed., *Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution Through the Civil War: Series B, Selections from the South Carolina Historical Society* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1985), Reel 5.

<sup>28</sup> A variety of green seed cotton introduced by 1825.

Peyre was constantly frustrated with the ways that they foiled his expected outcomes. He was unwilling to give up on the disappointing green seed cotton, as he blamed the reduced haul on illness and laziness among his slaves, as well as flooding of his land.<sup>29</sup>

In 1848, about 100 miles northeast of Peyre's Spring Grove plantation, James Henry Hammond was conducting similar experiments on his Silver Bluff plantation. Hammond tracked ten different fields of cotton, ranging from 2 to 250 acres, planted in a wide variety of different seeds. Hammond has been held up as an example of an early convert to Petit Gulf cotton and improved cotton cultivation methods, but he can be more accurately described as a constant experimenter who saw himself as part of a vanguard of improving planters.<sup>30</sup> Fifteen years after his declaration that he would only plant Petit Gulf cotton, Hammond was planting Pern, Sugar Loaf, Vick, and Silk strains of cotton on experimental fields and carefully recording the average production per acre.<sup>31</sup> Hammond doubted his figures and ability much less than Peyre did and treated his results with little anxiety. His constant experimentation was common among reform-minded planters; their experimentation was made possible by having greater wealth than most planters and was not a realistic strategy for most planters.

The understanding that cotton plantations were inherently risky operations, not just because of fluctuating world commodity prices, but also because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of nature and enslaved workers made innovation costly for many planters. Peyre was far from the only planter who was disappointed after instituting a program of agricultural reform. While green seed cotton was a major factor in the explosion of cotton

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<sup>29</sup> Peyre Plantation Journal, 115 in Stampp, *Records*, Series B, Reel 5.

<sup>30</sup> Rhode and Olmstead, *Creating Abundance*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Hammond Papers in Kenneth Stampp, ed., *Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution Through the Civil War: Series A, Selections from the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1985), Part 1, Reel 2.

production, each new variety of cotton carried major risks for early adopters. Reliable figures for yields of new strains of cotton were difficult to come by, so planters were forced to rely on anecdotal evidence from friends and the word of seed salesmen pushing their own products. The newest cottons attracted planters with promises of incredible production, but demanded a hefty price as well, with some varieties costing up to four hundred times as much as standard seed and common branded strains costing double what ordinary seed did.<sup>32</sup> These prices were compounded by the need to purchase new seed every few years to keep producing desirable cotton plants.

By the 1830s, choosing what type of cotton seed to plant was considered a standard part of being a cotton planter. This extended well beyond the cotton-dominated Southwest and into mixed crop plantation areas like Virginia. In 1850, George Skipwith, a slave driver on a Fluvanna County plantation, wrote to his master that he could not ascertain “which of the new kind of cotton is the best yet but it is all well bolled.” Skipwith apologized for not knowing yet “what calculation to make” about the new variety of cotton seed.<sup>33</sup> In the 1840s and 1850s, reputedly productive cotton seed variants were sold at very high prices and even caused speculation panics occasionally.<sup>34</sup>

As producing cotton seed for market became profitable for many planters and seed men, planters took greater interest in preserving the integrity of their seed strains. Their slaves, as usual, paid the price for planters’ new concerns. One of the most celebrated seed breeders was Dr. Rush Nutt, a planter operating a seed business on his plantation north of Natchez. Nutt introduced the popular Petit Gulf variety of Mexican-Green Seed, a long-

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<sup>32</sup> Rhode and Olmstead, *Creating Abundance*, 113

<sup>33</sup> George Skipwith to John Cocke, August 11, 1850, John Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Rhode and Olmstead, *Creating Abundance*, 110-114.

limbed cotton that rapidly spread throughout the Mississippi Valley, due to its rapid growth in fertile soil and the large number of bolls that each plant produced. Nutt's son, Haller Nutt, continued his father's work on their plantation empire. Haller grew the family fortune, becoming one of the wealthiest planters and largest slaveholders in the nation. Nutt appears in scholarship on the biological changes in southern cotton as an important innovator, but he appears very differently elsewhere; former slave Isaac Throgmorton remembered Nutt rather differently in an 1863 interview, describing him as "very cruel, indeed." Throgmorton recalled Nutt demanding that his slaves pick cotton perfectly clean, and had his overseer drive the slaves brutally, to the point that many of them ran away. In order to get keep cotton seeds free from cross-contamination, planters had their slaves pick cotton from plants with the most desirable plants and ginned this cotton in a carefully cleaned gin. The seeds that resulted from this ginning would then be used to help produce new varieties. When the slaves were caught Nutt had them whipped so badly that "they had to grease them-- their clothes stuck to them so."<sup>35</sup> In his search to get clean cotton to gin Nutt worked his slaves brutally and tortured those who resisted.

New and different varieties of cotton allowed planters to choose plants that were adapted to the soil and climate in their local area. Additionally, many varieties were easier to pick than were cottons of the 1820s and earlier. Cotton strains varied widely in the particular characteristics that influenced ease of picking—height of the plant, size and position of the cotton bolls, how difficult it was to separate the fiber in the boll from the surrounding material, and how much lint was in the boll compared to seed. Each of these characteristics mattered to planters since optimizing them for picking could increase the efficiency of picking and planters could extract more picked cotton per "hand." The biological

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<sup>35</sup> Isaac Throgmorton, "AFC Interview," from Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 432-436.

explanation is not, however, sufficient to explain the entire explosion in cotton production in the fifty years before the Civil War. To fully understand this fundamental change in cotton production, we must look to how slaves were working and how planters were driving them. These aspects will be explored later in the chapter.

**TABLE 1.2: PROPERTIES OF SHORT-STAPLE COTTON VARIETIES**

Variety	Petit Gulf	Cluster	Semicluster
Staple Length	Medium	Short	Short
Boll Size	Medium to Large	Small to Medium	Medium to Large
Maturity	Late	Early	Largely Early
Appearance	Tall, Spreading	Clustered bolls	Upright, semi-clustered bolls
Limbs	Long	Few	Few
Joints	Long	Short	Short
Origin	Petit Gulf	Sugar Loaf (1842)	Boyd Prolific (1847)
Picking	Variable	Difficult, trashy	Difficult, trashy

After Rhode and Olmstead, *Creating Abundance*, Table 4.2, 117-118

The characteristics of different cotton plants were well-known to both planters and slaves. Planters depended on acquiring the varieties that would produce plentiful and easy to pick bolls. Slaves knew that expectations for the amount of cotton that they would have to pick would depend on the variety of cotton. The easier the variety was thought to be to pick, the more cotton they would have to pick. Staple length mattered largely to the planters, who could get more money for cotton with longer fibers, though no upcountry cotton (about 1 inch long fibers) could be sold at the prices that the long-stapled (1.5-2.5 inch fibers) Sea Island cotton could fetch. The other properties of cotton, however, were of great importance to slaves. Cotton labeled as trashy was difficult to pick because the cotton bolls easily became full of broken leaves, burrs, and other “trash.” Pickers had to be careful to get as little trash as possible with the boll, or they would face whipping or other punishment. Trashy cotton had to be cleaned and ginned more than other cotton, a process that reduced

the amount of clean cotton, as some cotton fibers are damaged or removed in each ginning. Early maturing bolls were most desirable for planters since bolls that opened earlier could be picked earlier. Any picking that could be done early reduced the labor demands of the busy picking season. Large bolls were easier to pick quickly, as the time consuming aspect of picking was grabbing, separating, and placing the bolls in the cotton bag. Weight did little to reduce picking speed. Of course, for slaves larger bolls meant picking more cotton, all of which they would have to carry not only up and down the rows as they picked it before depositing it in the baskets at the end of rows, but sometimes from the baskets to the gin house.

### *Cultivating Cotton*

April through July was usually a period of relatively light work. The cotton was planted and in the ground, but not ready to pick. After planting was finished, slaves would work away from the cotton crop, that is they would work in fields of others crops or on non-crop related tasks, until the cotton plants started to leaf. Planters had widely varied opinions on how frequently cotton should be worked. Some, like Hammond, would send almost all of their slaves to hoe and plow the cotton crop every day from planting to picking.<sup>36</sup> Most planters took the emergence of the third, fourth, or fifth leaves as the point when cultivation would begin. The slaves assigned to plow teams would plow on either side of each row so that the plow would cover all of the small grass and weeds with earth and pile some at the base of the cotton stalks. They would be followed by slaves with hoes who would break up the larger clumps of grass and weeds that survived the plowing. The slaves assigned to hoe would also be responsible for removing weaker cotton plants to ensure good

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<sup>36</sup> Hammond Papers, Stampp, *Records* May, June, 1850.

spacing, a process known as thinning.<sup>37</sup> Alternatively, some planters preferred to send the slaves with hoes out first to scrape off all of the weeds and grass near the cotton and then use the plow to cover the bed over again with fresh earth. Whichever approach was used, this process, known as “working over” was repeated several times from the leafing of the cotton to the opening of the cotton bolls. Each row of cotton would be worked over every 7-20 days usually or between three and five times on most plantations, depending on the planter’s approach and on how quickly weeds and grass grew. In weather with a lot of sun and rain, the cotton would have to be worked more often.

In late July and early August, cotton would be topped on some plantations. That is, if slaves were available, planters would often send them to trim the tops of cotton plants, in order to get the bolls to grow more densely in areas accessible to slaves picking cotton. Planters who practiced and advocated topping believed that it greatly increased yields. Topped cotton would produce more bolls instead of extending its branches vertically. This would result in more bolls to pick and these bolls would be more easily reached by pickers, as they would be at a relatively similar level. While many planters agreed that topping, while often beneficial, was not necessary, some planters looked for a clearer answer. Thomas Peyre recorded an experiment with topping cotton. In October and November of 1847, the planter recorded how many acres of cotton he had topped (881) compared to not topped (788) and tried to correct for other variations in the condition of the fields.<sup>38</sup> This record was noted among his “Experiments in Cotton, Corn, and Peas.” This was the final process before the intense cotton picking season arrived. While slaves spent most of their time in the cotton fields working on things other than picking, the weeks or months picking cotton were undoubtedly the most physically, mentally, and psychologically demanding of the year and as

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<sup>37</sup> Thinning was also done by hand sometimes.

<sup>38</sup> Peyre, *Plantation Journal* 303.

such have been the focus of the majority of scholarship on labor and agriculture on cotton plantations.

Cotton picking was the choke point that determined how much cotton a planter could produce and it was the most physically demanding time of year for most slaves. It was, however, still only a relatively short period of the year, and made up a minority of the work slaves did both on the plantation and on the cotton crop specifically. In fact, at James Henry Hammond's Silver Bluff Plantation, it made up only a quarter of the work on cotton and less than fifteen percent of the total workdays on the plantation.<sup>39</sup> What is particularly striking about the distribution of cotton labor at Silver Bluff is that the majority of workdays were spent cultivating cotton, not planting, picking, or processing it. While cotton picking determined the upper limit for how much cotton could be profitably cultivated, slaves spent more of their working lives holding hoes than cotton sacks. This raises the question of how we are to compare workdays to the intensity of work. Planters and slaves both speak most strongly about cotton picking, despite spending the majority of the year dealing with the cultivation of the crop.

**TABLE 1.3: COTTON LABOR AT SILVER BLUFF, 1850**

Type of Labor	Percentage of Workdays	Workdays Logged
Cotton Picking	25%	2374
Gins & Press	3%	293
Plowing	17%	1603
Hoeing	45%	4336
Planting	10%	962
All Cotton Work	100%	9568

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter Four for more detail on Hammond's plantations and a comparison to cotton culture on Mississippi plantations.



*Cotton Picking: Negotiating the Chokepoint*

Planters and overseers demanded the most work out of slaves during picking time, both in terms of hours and intensity. Recent work on how cotton was actually picked has largely derived from a few descriptions of cotton picking in a limited selection of cotton plantation records and, most significantly, slave narratives and the testimony of former slaves.<sup>40</sup> The narratives of Solomon Northup and Charles Ball have shaped recent characterizations of picking and a quota system. These sources have led to a relatively undifferentiated picture of cotton picking.<sup>41</sup>

The standard view of cotton picking on southern plantations has shifted significantly over the past fifty years, as much as a result of general re-evaluations of slavery in the South as of new, specific work. In 1974, Eugene Genovese argued that cotton picking was not necessarily a difficult time for slaves, as there were often cotton-picking parties and “less whipping and hard driving.” He acknowledges that plantations with such conditions were often balanced out by the opposite conditions on other plantations, but shies away from cotton picking season as a specifically harsh time of the year.<sup>42</sup> Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman argued, in their controversial book *Time on the Cross*, that cotton picking was driven mainly by contests featuring small prizes. Fogel and Engerman do offer that “daily weigh-ins” could be used as punishment when positive incentives did not work. Slaves who “did not respond to the positive incentive had to face the abuse, verbal or physical, of the

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<sup>40</sup> See particularly Baptist. Olmstead and Rhode are a major exception to this trend and have done work with an enormous number of plantation records.

<sup>41</sup> For use of Northup see Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: A Plantation Society in the Texas borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 107-113 and Caitlin Rosenthal, *From Slavery to Scientific Management: Accounting for Control in Antebellum America* (Ph.D. Thesis: Harvard, 2012); for Ball, see Steven F. Miller, “Plantation Labor Organization and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier: The Alabama-Mississippi Black Belt, 1815-1840” in Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, ed., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 164-165, Rosenthal, *From Slavery to Scientific Management*.

<sup>42</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books 1974), 321-322.

driver,” but this was not the primary motivation in their model.<sup>43</sup> Ira Berlin emphasized the more demanding work that slaves faced on cotton plantations in the Old Southwest, arguing that it was planters’ “desire to maximize production” that overrode all else. Without detailing the specifics of any new system for cotton, Berlin argued that the “new demands of cotton pressed hard on all slaves,” and describes a loose quota system.<sup>44</sup>

The current scholarship on cotton picking is split between those arguing for biological innovation as the primary cause for increased productivity and those who place increased quantity and efficiency of labor per slave as the main cause.<sup>45</sup> Despite a few key differences, both sides agree on a basic structure for how cotton was picked. Planters and overseers forced as many slaves as possible into the cotton fields and set them to picking as fast as they could “drive” them to. Picking cotton was difficult work requiring attention to detail, dexterity, and stoop labor. Plantation overseers closely monitored the slaves’ work directly, whipping slaves who fell behind, and indirectly by weighing cotton at the end of each day and whipping those who did not pick enough cotton. Scholars disagree on how “enough cotton” was determined. Paul Rhode and Alan Olmstead, who emphasize biological innovation, simply refer to “picking standards,” as the guideline, while providing examples of specific quotas, arbitrary standards of “light picking,” or “low output.”<sup>46</sup> Ed Baptist, who emphasizes an increase in work per slave, draws on narratives of former slave to argue that planters and overseers established numerical quotas for the number of pounds each slave had to pick that moved steadily upward as each individual slave’s picking ability increased. The major reason that these two groups of scholars differ seems to emerge largely

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 206.

<sup>44</sup> Ira Berlin. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 178-179.

<sup>45</sup> See note 5 for a summary of the scholarship on this topic.

<sup>46</sup> Rhode and Olmstead, “Biological Innovation,” 1143.

from the sources that they draw on. Rhode and Olmstead rely almost entirely on sources from planters and overseers, while Baptist cites the testimony of former slaves. Solomon Northup provides one of the most detailed slave portraits of cotton work and picking on a plantation. Northup's narrative provides one account of how slaves were forced to pick cotton that is reflected in general terms in many narratives. A few key specifics are far from universal, particularly how the "quota" system for picking worked, so comparing Northup's narrative to the many other accounts of former slaves is instructive.

Northup describes how a slave new to cotton picking would be sent into the field for the first time to pick and "whipped up smartly," to make sure he was working as quickly as possible. The overseer would then weigh the cotton that the slave had picked to ascertain his "capability in cotton picking." This would become the slave's quota, the number of pounds that he was required to pick every single day, without fail. Any shortage would result in a whipping proportionate to the amount that his basket was light. The ordinary weight on Northup's labor camp in Louisiana in the 1840s was two hundred pounds. Any slave who picked less than that would be whipped. Some slaves, however, were required to bring in much more if the overseer found them capable of doing so. Overseers and planters forced slaves to pick more and more cotton by increasing their personal quota if they brought in more cotton any day than their minimum. This created an environment of terror where a slave's trudge to the gin house would be full of fear, "whether he has too little or too much," knowing that a whipping or an increase in quota would result.<sup>47</sup>

Planters typically planted the most cotton that they thought their slave workforce could possibly pick, because planting and cultivating cotton could be done with fewer slaves than picking. As a result, the amount of cotton that slaves could or would pick was the

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<sup>47</sup> Northup, 167.

limiting factor on the planter's crop and income. Swift picking was necessary to prevent opened bolls from getting wet or dirty and losing value. This was a particularly difficult task as there was usually not sufficient labor available to pick all of the cotton that had been planted before the bolls spoiled. This great inducement for increased picking pushed many planters to look to extract work from their slaves in more brutal ways than at other times of the year. One slave recalled his master setting "a tree on fire for us to see how to pick cotton."<sup>48</sup> Stories of whipping go hand in hand with stories of cotton picking.

Historians have been too willing to generalize about cotton culture from a single or very few sources. From Northup's description, Sean Kelley has generalized a particular system of cotton picking.<sup>49</sup> This system is very unlikely to have been widely applied as described, as it is at odds with not only most surviving plantation records, but many slave narratives as well. Records of cotton picked are generally silent on the violence involved, or at least speak in code words, like "driven harder," but there is reason to think that they are reasonably accurate in terms of measuring the pounds of cotton picked each day. Cotton picking records were generally recorded daily, transferred from a slate at the gin house, to a record book, then totaled weekly. Planters used these records to keep track of cotton production, evaluate the cotton picking by day, week, or individual, and to track raw cotton picked against cleaned, ginned, and sorted cotton to be baled. In essence, cotton books or records were important business records that planters were invested in seeing kept accurately.

The first indication that systems specifically like that on Northup's labor camp were not found across the plantation South is the near total absence of any records of individual quotas in cotton books. This alone should be enough to call into question the prevalence of

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<sup>48</sup> Octavia Rodgers, 62.

<sup>49</sup> Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 107-113.

a quota system. The records that I have seen in my research show no evidence of quotas being recorded, even when incredible details in most other areas were recorded, down to the number of horses used to pull each carriage taken off the plantation.<sup>50</sup> It is possible, though unlikely, that detailed individual quotas were kept either in the overseer's head, in less permanent books, or on the gin house slate. Their absence in plantation record books alone is not enough to prove that the system that Northup observed was atypical.

The vast numbers of records of cotton picking that exist allow the Northup system to be tested against actual records. If picking was regulated as Northup described, picking totals should be clustered around specific numbers for individual slaves (reflecting individual quotas), with a baseline that few slaves regularly fell below (the minimum task on the plantation, 200 pounds in Northup's case). Instead, I found patterns that seemed to directly contradict the widespread use of a quota system like Northup describes. Some slaves consistently picked more than other slaves when working in the same fields on the same days, but the major determining factor in cotton picking seemed to be what field the manager assigned a slave to pick in and how many times that field had been picked over before. Perhaps quotas were set each day and customized to reflect how much cotton an overseer could reasonably expect a slave to pick? This might be similar to the logic of "hands," where individual slaves had their own ratings for work ability and expectations varied accordingly. This is certainly possible, but there do not seem to be any records confirming it, where there are many such records for "hands." Perhaps, then, the "hand" rating itself determined cotton picking quotas? They do not seem to match up to actual results of cotton picking, though, so this seems unlikely.

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<sup>50</sup> Peyre Plantation Journal, 26. See bibliography for the plantation records consulted.

One way to test the quota system is to examine plantation records of cotton picking. Overseers and planters, by the logic of the quota system, had every reason to keep careful and accurate records of how much cotton each slave picked each day. Planters demanded that overseers keep these records precisely and accurately. While overseers did not find keeping these additional records to be the “pleasing task” that one record book claimed, surviving books show that the records were kept more completely than any other type of plantation record.<sup>51</sup> The records from one Mississippi plantation—the McGehee family’s Western View—show how difficult quota systems can be to reconcile with cotton picking records.<sup>52</sup> Sixteen slaves picked cotton at Western View in 1859 and the overseer, A.J. Vance, recorded eleven weeks of picking in the Affleck plantation record book.<sup>53</sup> The picking began on August 15, over two months after the “first cotton bloom” on June 10, and on December 17 the slaves had “finished picking cotton.” Cotton was picked over several times on cotton plantations, as more and more bolls opened. The first or second picking was usually the largest, when the most bolls were open, with successive pickings of late-opening bolls yielding fewer pounds per slave per day. Throughout the season cotton picking per hand did not increase, as one might expect with a rising quota system, where a slave’s individual quota increased every time he or she exceeded the existing quota. It fluctuated depending on the particular situation of each slave each day. The two most productive pickers on the plantation were a man named Robin and a woman named Anna. Robin’s totals dropped from 342 pounds on the first picking on August 16 at Bluff Hill field to 50 pounds picked in

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Affleck, *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book* (New Orleans: B.M. Norman, 1858), 3.

<sup>52</sup> McGehee Family Papers, Z 0899.00 F, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Affleck was a Mississippi agricultural reformer who published a widely distributed book of blank forms for plantation records keeping and accounting in the 1840s and 1850s. The *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book* likely sold about 10,000 copies in its many editions, making it by far the best-selling book of its type. The book provided many different record-keeping forms, including “Form C,” which was designed for recording cotton picking by slaves. See Fig. 1 for an example of these forms.

the same Bluff Hill field, more than three months and at least two pickings later on November 21.

By late October, picking totals had shrunk across the board with less cotton on the plants to pick. For much of the season, picking totals depended more on the particular field than on the date. For example, Anna picked 90 pounds of cotton on Corn Ridge on September 5 and 280 pounds of cotton on Sign Board Hill on September 6. This difference made a numerical quota system virtually impossible, unless it was reset every day or it operated alongside a hand system, where each slave would have to pick a percentage of what the best hand did. Such calculations would have required written records but there is no evidence that they were made.

The more plausible of these explanations, that hands all had a quota that varied depending on the state of the cotton field that they were picking in, is also difficult to reconcile with the Western View records. Again using Robin and Anna as examples, their daily totals of cotton picked do not follow the exact same patterns. As the most productive cotton pickers among the slaves at Western View, Vance, the overseer, would surely have demanded similar production from the two, especially if there was a uniform quota that changed daily. Even when picking in the same fields on the same days, Robin and Anna's daily cotton picking totals were only similar in that they both picked more cotton in fields that were full of cotton plants that had not been picked recently and less in fields that had been picked over recently. During the week of April 29, on some days Robin's totals were within ten pounds of Anna's, on other days they were separated by nearly fifty pounds, with the totals of both slaves shifting significantly from day to day. Even looking at the other slaves picking cotton those days, no pattern emerges. Some slaves picked as little as 89 pounds in a full day in the fields, others picked as much as 315 pounds. No individual slaves'

picking totals consistently clustered around an identifiable figure that might suggest a quota imposed for work in that field. The picking totals of all of the slaves, taken together, suggest that any quota system imposed at Western View would either have had to be so low as to have had no pushing influence for more than the slowest one or two pickers, or else it would have resulted in the overseer ordering every slave to be whipped multiple times a week.

This is not to say that quota systems did not exist—slave narratives prove that they did exist and were used on many plantations—but rather that they existed alongside many other systems for extracting labor from slaves and they took many different forms. There are many cotton picking records like those of Western View, each of which reveals a different pattern of cotton picking results. Our understanding of how slaves worked needs to reflect this diversity.

Another major problem with using daily cotton picking totals as unproblematic data points is that they do not represent the simple number of pounds picked by a slave in a full day of work, as many records suggest at first glance. When the overseer or planter wrote down a number beside a slave's name for a particular day, it can be reasonably accurately taken as a representation of how many pounds of cotton the manager thought the slave had picked that day. It cannot, however, be reliably used to measure how much that slave produced per day, as the figures often represented partial days of work. Slaves were often shifted between work assignments in the middle of the day. Some particularly assiduous managers recorded this shift in their daily plantation journal and a very few even occasionally recorded it in a work log or cotton record. For example, a Mississippi overseer recorded slaves "doing the same as yesterday until 10 o'clock" when they went to see the planter's



daughter off.<sup>54</sup> Most likely, however, the majority of planters who shifted slaves to or from the cotton fields in the middle of a day did not record it. In some cases this can be seen in a discrepancy between the number of “hands” listed as working cotton and the number listed as having a picking total. More often, surely, the records simply do not tell the reader when this happened. It is clear that work assignments changed frequently during the day. To assume that every time a number is recorded in cotton picking logs it represents how much that slave could or did pick in a full day is unrealistic. If anything, slaves were probably picking more cotton per work day than historians have argued, as partial days of production are often counted as full days.

### **Slave Testimony and Cotton Work**

*Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup’s narrative of his life in slavery, has cast a long shadow on recent scholarship on cotton picking. Sean Kelley, for example, uses Northup’s narrative (of his time enslaved in Louisiana) as the only slave testimony for his examination of cotton cultivation and picking in Texas’ Lower Brazos region. Kelley accepts Northup’s model for cotton picking based on a specific quota system with the explanation that “Solomon Northup explained the calculus that was no doubt familiar to Brazos slaves as well.”<sup>55</sup> While slaves in Texas were surely familiar with planters’ attempts to take as much of their labor as they could, there is no evidence that Northup’s specific model was in operation in the Brazos.

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<sup>54</sup> Metcalfe Family Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 8, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, November 15, 1862. See also Hammond, February 1852 and “Airlie” Plantation Record Book, January 6, 1862, both in Stamp, *Records*, Series A, Part 1, Reel 14 and Series G, Part 1, Reel 11, among many others.

<sup>55</sup> Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: A Plantation Society in the Texas borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 110 and 110, n 42

Edward Baptist describes the cotton picking season in Florida using the narrative of former slave Amos Dresser, among other sources. Baptist relies heavily on Dresser's testimony and an interview from the WPA collection to argue for a version of the picking system described by Solomon Northup. Baptist relays former slave Margrett Nickerson's testimony that tasks continually increased each day that a slave surpassed her minimum quota.<sup>56</sup> Baptist has provided compelling evidence that scholars need to look beyond biological explanations to understand the explosion of cotton production per enslaved worker from 1820 to 1860. This system suggests one way in which more and more labor might have been extracted from slaves. The Northup system, coercive as it would have been, could not have been widely used if planters sought to get as much labor as possible from the slaves that they held. Not only did the incredible variation at all levels from plantation to plantation make any one system unlikely, but a numerical quota that slowly moved upwards that a slave would be held to, day after day, would not have been practical on cotton plantations in the 1840s and 1850s.

Solomon Northup and Margrett Nickerson were not the only slaves to detail how slaves picked cotton on southern plantations. While there are similar descriptions to those of Solomon Northup, most notably Henry Watson who recalled "each individual having a stated number of pounds of cotton to pick, the deficit of which was made up by as many lashes being applied to the poor slave's back as he was so unlucky as to fall short in the number of pounds of cotton which he was to have picked," most former slaves' descriptions differed in important ways. Decades earlier, in South Carolina, Charles Ball saw differentiated quotas for differently-rated "hands" (but not for each slave), payment for cotton picked above the quota, and whippings for slaves who fell short of their quotas.

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<sup>56</sup> Baptist, "The Slave Labor Camps," 49-50.

William Wells Brown tells of a planter who told a slave that he set a quota of 150 pounds for men and 140 pounds for women and gave “five stripes for each pound that is found wanting.” Henry Clay Bruce remembered being introduced to cotton picking in Mississippi in 1849 and emphasized being constantly “driven by the overseer who carried a long whip called a blacksnake,” though he does not describe the cotton weighing ritual. William Walker also recounted being driven in lines by an overseer who whipped any who fell behind, rather than during the weighing ritual. Louis Hughes, in his detailed description of cotton culture and labor in Mississippi, describes his master often being “so excited and nervous during the season he scarcely ate.” The standard task on the plantation was 250 pounds or more, but mentions that planters frequently drove their slaves to get more than the quota. William Webb remembered cotton quotas being assigned by the acre, on his Mississippi plantation, lamenting, “and, if he failed in his task, woe be to him.” On a South Carolina plantation, an overseer so young that former slave John Andrew Jackson described him as a “youth” set an impossibly high quota and gave each slave “twenty-five to fifty lashes each; so that during the cotton- picking season, the place was filled with screams of agony every evening.” Peter Still and Charles Thompson both tell of life as slave drivers, in charge of weighing cotton and reporting totals nightly to the overseer. Thompson remembers bearing the responsibility for reporting cotton picking totals that, when short of the task, resulted in slaves being “unmercifully whipped.” In his nine years as a “field-superintendent,” Thompson was constantly worried about reporting a cotton weight wrong, since if he made a “misstatement of the weight of any one hand's cotton, that hand would know it.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Watson, 19-20; Ball, *50 Years*, 147-148; William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home*, 115; Henry Clay Bruce, 61; William Walker, 16-17; Louis Hughes, 31-32 ; William Webb, 10; John Andrew Jackson, 12; Still, 155; Thompson, 37-38.

The varied testimony of former slaves, along with evidence from plantation cotton picking records, shows that there was a wide range of variations of the quota or picking system. The fact that this variety of regimes can be found in the narratives of ex-slaves shows what a variety must have existed on plantations across the South, given how few narratives exist relative to the millions of slaves who picked cotton. What these systems shared was a goal of extracting as much labor from slaves as possible during the cotton picking season, with little to no regard for the welfare of slaves. Most importantly, these variants all rely on one common variable—each one relied upon the threat and reality of physical and psychological violence, represented most directly and brutally by the whip.

Much like most other aspects of cotton work on plantations, it is important to keep in mind that, even within relatively specific chronological and geographic boundaries, the details of cotton picking could be quite different. By emphasizing single models of how slaves worked and lived on cotton plantations in the Old Southwest in the 1840s and 1850s, scholars have flattened and simplified the experience of slaves. To get a better sense of how slaves spent their working lives, it is important to recognize the variety present even in working cotton.

Scenes like those that Charles Ball, Solomon Northup and many others described certainly took place at gin houses across the slave South; they show up frequently in all types of sources. The assigning of a specific unvaried quota to each slave was likely not part of most such scenes. Instead, overseers likely had a good understanding of roughly how good each slave was at picking cotton (both from observation and records of cotton picking) and, after weighing and recording the cotton total for a slave, would judge whether or not the amount was sufficient, given where the slave had been picking. If the overseer felt it was not, the slave would likely be subjected to physical violence, just as if a specific pound quota had

not been met. This scene fits much more with Northup's statement that a "slave never approaches the gin-house with his basket of cotton but with fear."<sup>58</sup> Rather than a clear quota, knowable at the beginning of the day to each slave, this scene would instead have subjected slaves even more fully to the capriciousness of masters and overseers, as they would never know whether or not their picking was "sufficient" until the warden informed them of his decision. This uncertainty characterized the fear that slaves felt; William Anderson remembers his master frequently storming into the fields to "whip, cut, slash, curse, swear, beat and knock down several, for the smallest offence, or nothing at all."<sup>59</sup>

Slaves were forced to increase their daily cotton picking totals in many ways, but the actual process of picking cotton from the plant was relatively consistent. A slave would walk down a long row of cotton, carrying a bag. The slave would then pick the bolls off the cotton plant and place them in the bag, taking care not to pull off leaves or other debris with the boll. This had to be done carefully, so as not to break branches and damage the plant or get cut by the cotton plant. The fastest pickers were able to pick bolls with both hands simultaneously. When the cotton plant was stripped of open bolls, it was time to move on to the next plant. This would be repeated, as fast as possible, over and over until the end of the row, where the slave would usually deposit the contents of the bag in a basket and continue to the next row.

The details of how a quota system imposed on slaves on cotton plantations provide an important window into how cotton plantations were regulated. This dissertation has, at times, emphasized how planters were attracted to ideas of rationality, accounting, and modern, industrial production and how their engagement with these ideas was turned to

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<sup>58</sup> Northup, 167

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, 19.

finding new ways to extract labor, and performances of obedience from their slaves. It is important to recognize that planters received these ideas in an environment of physical violence and coercion, that accounting for sick days took on a completely different valence when the range of discipline included whipping and sale away from family instead of docking pay and loss of employment.

The difference between the Northup-based quota system and a system without a fixed numerical quota comes down to predictability, the type of terror inflicted upon slaves, and the design behind the system. A slave such as Solomon Northup would have picked cotton with a specific target in mind all day, trying to make sure he made his quota without exceeding it by too much. He would have known how many pounds that he had to pick and would have struggled both to pick enough cotton and to properly estimate how much he had picked, with the twin threats of physical violence and a raised quota waiting at the gin house. In the scene I have argued for, slaves would be sent into the fields without an exact quota in mind, knowing only that they had to pick “enough” cotton to meet the overseer or planter’s expectation. A slave would likely have known how they compared to other slaves in picking productivity, but that would be the only guideline in judging how much cotton had to be picked.<sup>60</sup> In the Northup quota system, meeting the quota provided no guarantees of safety. The guidelines for punishment were terribly unpredictable and left slaves subject to the capriciousness of white managers. Not only would slaves have worked all day not knowing if they could or would meet the arbitrary standard that would be applied at the gin house, but there was no way they could accurately predict what that standard would be. Overseers and planters could manipulate their punishments in order to push slaves to pick more and more cotton.

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Ball, *50 Years*, 148

Scholars have long recognized the symbolic importance of elements of plantation slavery, from public whippings, to overseers handing out rations weekly, and planters personally distributing clothing allowances yearly, but the gin house has not been a major focus for historians. It is, however, a central symbol in slave narratives and judgment and punishment at the gin house is a recurring scene throughout these accounts. Descriptions of light cotton baskets, trials, and whippings in the gin house yard, or in front of the gin house became a canonical episode in the slave narrative genre.<sup>61</sup>

By critically reading slave narratives as both eyewitness accounts and works in a literary genre, it is possible to draw out not just specific evidence about the realities of slavery, but also more general patterns of what elements of slavery were remembered most strongly by former slaves and which could be used most effectively by the anti-slavery cause. For all the horrors throughout the institution of slavery in the United States, it is clear that particular aspects of the institution made stronger impressions on the white public. In most cases, the potential audience for these particularly resonant aspects was potential anti-slavery advocates or sympathizers, but certain aspects of slavery became so socially unacceptable that the audience for the ideas, if not the actual texts, expanded to include slaveholders who sought personal distance from them.<sup>62</sup>

The slave narratives that do exist in this genre are a minute representation of the millions of slaves who lived and worked on cotton plantations across the American South. Slaves did not live within the genre conventions of the narrative and there are surely also

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<sup>61</sup> This scene was also familiar to white residents of the cotton South. A New Orleans paper even advertised a painting showing the cotton weighing ritual as a “familiar scene to many of our readers.” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 21, 1854.

<sup>62</sup> Amy Dru Stanley shows how breaking up slave families through the domestic slave trade became publicly distasteful even for many slaveholders. Stanley, “Slave Breeding and Free Love: An Antebellum Argument over Slavery, Capitalism, and Personhood,” in Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 119-144.

very different experiences on the plantation that could not exist in the slave narrative form. We do not have their views, nor do we have any real way of getting at them. The testimony in slave narratives is among the best we have from formerly enslaved Americans who lived on cotton plantations, but it is important to recognize how drastically the testimony has been modified, even by the standards of historical sources.

The scenes most closely associated with cotton plantations specifically are those that surround the gin house and scenes of whipping. The gin house scenes show a major emphasis on expressing the inhumanity of slavery, but specifically that masters and overseers on cotton plantations imposed such horrific conditions due in part to a constant drive to make a bigger and bigger crop. The narratives support evidence from plantation sources that suggest a lack of system across the various cotton-producing regions, but do suggest that the whip was a constant presence on cotton plantations. These narratives give a picture of slaves living in a constant state of terror, in fear of an overseer's evaluation of their daily cotton picking. This picture is translated for the audience into a fear of record keeping, calculation, and industrial work patterns.

Proslavery zealots viciously attacked the credibility of many narratives, forcing slave narrators and amanuenses to adopt conventions to ensure that the works were above reproach. One particularly famous example of this was the narrative of James Williams, who seems to have inserted pseudonyms for names and places.<sup>63</sup> Planters attacked his narrative's veracity and his publisher decided to retract it. The genre of slave narrative relied on an episodic structure, where the narrative is simply a sequence of events presented without comment, in order to serve as a reliable witness to the horrors of slavery. Unlike most

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<sup>63</sup> Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," in Henry Louis Gates and Charles T. Davis, *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 78-97.



autobiography, scholars have argued, slave narratives could not deal in what is often called the “configuration dimension,” that is the author could not impose a vision on the episodes that have been presented in order to make a larger point, and still maintain the authority of an accurate eyewitness. A slave narrative had to be free of any appearance of emplotment, fictionalization, or creativity, which could be construed as anything other than a completely faithful rendering of facts.<sup>64</sup> Even Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, American Slave*, an exceptional slave narrative in almost every way, has difficulty moving past this constraint on his authorship, only shifting from eyewitness to advocate in his narrative when he leaves slavery and the South.<sup>65</sup> Some scenes in these narratives started to resemble each other. This is not to suggest that such scenes did not happen, but rather that the exact terminology used to describe particular incidents drew on tropes from previous narratives.

Historians have had trouble dealing with slave narratives as literary sources as well as eyewitness accounts. While many historians have been very responsible in confirming details of narratives and deciding how trustworthy they are as eyewitness accounts, they have also left significant interpretive gaps. Literary scholars have shown the generic tendencies of slave narratives, in ways that open up new possibilities for reading these sources effectively. By acknowledging that these narratives are written within a particular literary genre, it becomes possible to pull out particular themes, tropes, and styles of the genre that influence how the

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<sup>64</sup> James Olney, “I Was Born?: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature” *Callaloo* 20 (Winter, 1984), 47-48. Olney’s emphasis on the suppression of the configurational aspect, drawn from Paul Ricoeur, is perhaps at odds with Ricoeur’s own suggestion that even narratives presented as eyewitness accounts are highly configured. See Olney, 47, n1. Olney’s suggestion that an eyewitness perspective heavily reliant on an episodic structure formed a narrow genre with significant conventions for slave narratives, however, remains useful. William L. Andrews argues that the success of slave narratives depended on how well “artfulness hid art” on the part of the narrator. Andrews, *The First Century of African American Autobiography*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 4-6.

<sup>65</sup> Jeannine Delombard, “Eye-Witness to Cruelty?: Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*” *American Literature* 73, 2 (2001): 246.

account is told.<sup>66</sup> The common genre elements used by slave narratives do not diminish their value, but rather provide a different entry point for gleaning valuable information about both slavery on cotton plantations and the largely northern audience for the narratives.

The difficulties inherent in using slave narratives and interviews have been well explored, but so has their value.<sup>67</sup> No other sources can provide a real window into how slaves experienced the peculiar institution. Former slave James Curry underlined this in the *Liberator* when he addressed the attitude of Massachusetts residents towards the work of slavery, saying “when I hear people here say they work as hard as the slaves, I can tell them from experience, they know nothing about it.” And how could they know slavery as Curry did? As valuable as documents generated by abolitionists, planters, and travelers are for studying slavery, some aspects can only be seen in the words of those who lived through it.

#### *The “Gin House Scene”*

When slaves wrote their narratives, one particular plantation space stood out—the gin house. Many slave narratives give a version of slaves presenting their baskets of cotton to the overseer or other manager at the gin house at the end of each day of picking. On some plantations, cotton baskets were also weighed throughout the day or were weighed in the field before being loaded onto a wagon for transport to the gin house, but, in slave narratives, the gin house is by far the most common trope about weighing cotton. The gin

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Frances Foster Smith, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), Andrews, *First Century*. Dwight McBride argues that slave narratives had to be told in the “language that will have political efficacy,” one that was familiar and known through other narratives. McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> See C. Vann Woodward, “History from Slave Sources” and “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems,” both in Henry Louis Gates and Charles T. Davis, *The Slave’s Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 48-58, 78-97; Smith, *Witnessing Slavery*; Lindon Barrett, “African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority” *American Literary History* 7, 3 (Autumn, 1995), 415-442.

house was an important symbol of authority and violence on cotton plantations across the South. After picking cotton all day, slaves would carry their bags and baskets to the gin house to be weighed by the planter, overseer, or slave driver. This manager would record the weight of each basket, usually on a slate, and dismiss the slaves who had picked enough cotton.<sup>68</sup> Those who had not picked to their task, or expectations, would be whipped, often also at the gin house.

These scenes seem designed to draw out several key elements for the reader. First, the narratives underscore the common thread of the dehumanizing element of slavery, as slaves are forced to make a show of surrendering their humanity while masters and overseers lose theirs in their despotic authority. Power relations are taken to the extreme. Second, there is an emphasis on the rationalizing tendencies of the cotton quota system, where each slave is reduced to a number. Echoing northern fears related to industrialization and manufacturing, the scene shows how calculation determines the fate of a slave, blind to their humanity, with a cold, ruthless focus on production.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the scene shows a slave being whipped as a result of a shortfall. The failure to pick enough cotton to satisfy the quota is shown to be out of the hands of the slave; the victim is usually new to cotton picking, not dexterous enough to complete the task, or fell short while providing aid to another. The other variant of this element is the narrator being whipped, usually upon their initial arrival on the plantation. The slave narrator is not usually positioned as someone constantly unable to pick their quota, however, establishing themselves as a competent witness.

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<sup>68</sup> What “enough” cotton meant is dealt with at length elsewhere in the chapter.

<sup>69</sup> For the place of anxiety over calculation, accounting, and industry in northern states, see Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For southern states, see Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). For calculation in the nineteenth century, more generally, see Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

The gin house scene, along with a slave's initial arrival on a plantation, is a common place for a particular emphasis on the dehumanizing element of the institution of slavery. In recounting a particular incident during cotton picking, William Walker described his master not as a person, but as a "fiend in human form."<sup>70</sup> Walker's description centered on a particular individual, but many descriptions were generalized to masters and overseers, or even to the influence of the cotton crop itself. While most narratives discuss slavery and those involved in its perpetuation as the antagonists, Levi Branham, who was only a child in slavery, remembers another culprit, saying that, when he was a boy, children used to call cotton "negro devil" and pull it up whenever they saw it coming up in a field.<sup>71</sup> This identification of the crop with a particularly awful form of slavery reflects the demands that cotton picking placed on slaves.

Solomon Northup, careful chronicler of the horrors of slavery and of cruel masters and overseers, did not even mention the overseer in describing his trips to have his cotton weighed. The overseer had so fully become part of the gin house routine that Northup simply says that the "cotton is weighed" and that "after weighing, follow whippings." Nothing had to be stated; the overseer was the gin house. While the plantation was the purview of the master, with the Big House often dominating the plantation landscape and symbols of his authority scattered across that landscape, the gin house was the center of the overseer's power. For many former slaves, the gin house was the purview of the overseer, not the master, and came to represent capricious, often arbitrary, punishment and the uncertainty surrounding cotton picking tasks. It was there that overseers held trials, often daily, of slaves who had run afoul of him in some way. These trials were brief and summary

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<sup>70</sup> Walker, 16

<sup>71</sup> Levi Branham, 54

enough for Charles Ball to remark that a “Turk or Russian would find the tribunals of his country far outdone.”<sup>72</sup>

Narrative after narrative emphasizes how calculation and record keeping linked cotton picking and punishment. Israel Campbell described his overseer carefully keeping a slate with each slave’s name on it and putting “each draft of cotton down” as the slaves brought it to the gin house. Each pound that a slave was short of their individual assigned task would result in a lash from the overseer’s whip. Charles Thompson describes keeping the weight of each basket three times a day for a hundred slaves as part of his duties as a “boss,” assigned by the overseer, Wilson. Thompson then had to “report [the weights] to Wilson each night.” Again, the punishment for falling short of stated targets was a brutal whipping. The writer of Peter Still’s narrative, Kate Pickard, describes his duties in very similar terms, with Still “obliged each night to weigh the cotton, and to report to the overseer the number of pounds which each of the hands had picked.”<sup>73</sup> Thompson and Still were both working on cotton plantations in Mississippi, but decades apart, yet the descriptions are similar, both falling within the known bounds of emphasizing the rational, calculating aspect of slavery. This connection between the inhuman institution of slavery and the rising tide of industrial and manufacturing production in the northern states may have been emphasized to play into widespread fears of new ways of managing people.

Perhaps the most common trope in describing the gin house scene is the example of the narrator witnessing a slave punished inhumanly by an overseer or master, usually shortly after the narrator’s arrival on the plantation. This element functions to impress upon the new arrival and, by extension, the reader how the calculation and rational management was

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<sup>72</sup> Ball, *Narrative*, 14

<sup>73</sup> Campbell, 33-34; Thompson, 37-38; Still, 155;

modified by the capriciousness of plantation managers. These managers' ideas about drawing more and more labor out of slaves by tying punishment to cotton weights were often no match for their anger and frustration, often inflamed by alcohol. In general, a slave is punished for not reaching a quota set impossibly high, for a trivial offense, or for no discernible reason.

When John Andrew Jackson arrived in South Carolina, he met a slave called Old Prince who was unable to keep up with the work. Constantly falling short of the quota, Old Prince "was continually beaten." Jackson describes one occasion when Old Prince received such a beating, with both the whip and a paddle that "in a few days the skin all peeled off his lacerated body."<sup>74</sup> This image of a slave constantly unable to reach an extreme quota is the most common iteration of the element of initial punishment, but there are other versions as well.

Charles Ball recounts having a brief conversation with another slave, Lydia, shortly after he arrived at a South Carolina plantation. When the overseer blew a horn to indicate roll call at the end of the day, Lydia told him that they would be in trouble if they did not make it to roll call and the two of them ran to the horn. Ball arrived just in time to answer when his name was called, but Lydia, holding a child, was a moment late. Despite Ball's pleas, the overseer ordered her into the gin yard, onto the ground, and whipped her with ten lashes. Ball goes further and describes three more slaves being whipped that day in the gin yard.<sup>75</sup>

William Walker's narrative provides a particularly vivid example of an overseer cruelly torturing a slave for no reason related to work, emphasizing the degree to which

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<sup>74</sup> Jackson, 22-23

<sup>75</sup> Ball, 124-125

slaves were at the mercy of plantation managers. Shortly after Walker arrived at his Mississippi plantation, he met a slave named Nancy, who, at twenty, was the “swiftest cotton picker on the place.” Nancy had recently given birth to a child and had not recovered her strength enough to pick at her fastest. “Nancy was a few feet in the lead” of the other cotton pickers, trying to reach the end of the row to nurse her child, when Dick Fallon, the plantation owner, arrived in the field. Hearing the cry of the child, Fallon leapt off his horse in a drunken rage and cursing the child’s cries, struck the infant on Nancy’s back, killing it with a single lash of the “lightning descent” of his whip.<sup>76</sup>

While cotton picking records provided planters and overseers clear evidence of how much each enslaved worker was bringing to the gin house on a daily and weekly basis, in comparison to the rest of the workforce, the records do not support the common suggestion that there was a quota system in picking. While there were very likely daily quotas for slaves, the level of detail in cotton picking records in the Affleck books did not include a single example of a quota being recorded. The records are largely silent on punishment, but they are not silent on acts that would usually lead to punishment, like running away. It is unlikely that, if there were fixed quotas for slaves that increased over time, they would never once be recorded. Additionally the Affleck logs, along with other cotton picking records, show that suggestions that the quota system worked as Charles Ball described, by increasing every couple of months as a slave gained proficiency was not feasible. It was not possible to have a quota of pounds of cotton picked per day that would be fixed over a season, or even week, of cotton picking.<sup>77</sup> The amount of cotton that could be picked by one slave, no matter how

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<sup>76</sup> Walker, 17-18.

<sup>77</sup> This system is discussed in Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography: Bond and Free*. Miller provides a good summary in Steven F. Miller, “Plantation Labor Organization.” See also Baptist, “Slave Labor Camps.” This is connected to debates over what caused the explosion in cotton productivity in the American South from 1820 to 1860, which Baptist is also working on.

skilled, was too dependent on variables that changed daily. What field were the slaves picking in? How many times had that field been picked over? What part of the season was it?

When Solomon Northup declared that a “slave never approaches the gin-house with his basket of cotton but with fear,” he was referring to the daily weighing of cotton picked, but he could have been speaking in much more general terms.<sup>78</sup> The gin house retained its role as a place of judgment throughout the year. Whippings and other torture were often meted out in the gin house yard and, on many plantations, overseers handed down their judgment for how slaves were to be punished for infractions at the gin house.<sup>79</sup> Northup references the “fear of punishment with which [slaves] approach the gin-house” as common throughout slave life on cotton plantations.<sup>80</sup> Charles Ball, at the time enslaved on a South Carolina cotton plantation, describes three slaves being singled out at an end-of-day roll call in front of the gin house and being “put upon their trial,” with the overseer ordering each of the three to be whipped in front of his house.<sup>81</sup> John Andrew Jackson remembered “each night there were two hours' whipping at the ‘ginning house’” on the South Carolina cotton plantation where he was held.<sup>82</sup> When a young man in a planter family saw that a slave named Isaac was behind the set pace of cotton picking, the “tyrant was going to give him fifty lashes again one evening, on the scaffold where they weigh the cotton, about ten feet high.” The specter of the gin house and whipping terrified Isaac to the point that he “jumped down in the dark on a snaggy stump and ruined his feet.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Northup, 167

<sup>79</sup> This should not be taken to suggest that the gin house was a designated spot for whipping slaves. Whippings were usually administered immediately and wherever was convenient. As a site of the discovery of many infractions, the gin house also saw many whippings.

<sup>80</sup> Northup, 170. Northup titles a section “Fear of Approaching the Gin-House” and references the fear of the gin house four times. Northup, 167, 168, 170, 171

<sup>81</sup> Ball, *50 Years*, 124.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, 23.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.



## Conclusion

Scholars have recently focused on how slaves in the Old Southwest were forced to work differently—harder, longer, more—than slaves in the longer settled coastal regions. For decades questions of where and when slaves worked by gang or task, how cotton and other crops changed work, and whether slavery on the cotton frontier fostered significantly more brutal conditions than elsewhere have been of great interest to historians.<sup>84</sup> Recently, there have been attempts to push the responses to the questions to be more specific, to describe how slaves actually worked on a daily basis. The difficulty with this, however, is that it is almost impossible to describe how slaves planted, cultivated, and harvested cotton if the area of focus is much larger than a single plantation. The admirable efforts by historians to provide a fuller picture of how slaves worked cotton have suffered from a tendency to generalize models of work from a small set of sources.

Cotton and the whip were inextricably linked for planters and slaves. Slaves were not only afraid of being torn from family and surviving an unhealthy disease environment when they were threatened with sale to the Old Southwest. They were also afraid of having to work on cotton plantations. Reading slave narratives, slaves describe their fear of being sold to the Old Southwest and the expanding cotton and sugar plantation region in various terms. Today being sold “down the river” has the most resonance, but at the time being sold to “pick cotton” or sold to the “cotton fields” are phrasings that appeared consistently. James Watkins remembered that, when he was a slave in Maryland in the 1820s and 1830s, his uncle was “sent to Georgia to pick cotton, for running away.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>See, for example, Philip Morgan, “Task and Gang Systems: The Organization of Labor on New World Plantations” in Stephen Innes, *Work and Labor in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 189-220; Berlin and Morgan, ed., *Cultivation and Culture*.

<sup>85</sup>See, for example, Watkins, 32

Former slaves describing their experience on cotton plantations uniformly describe scenes of whipping. Alongside whipping was often the term “drive.” Louis Hughes was one of the few former slaves to talk about masters “pushing” them in his narrative, the more common term seems to have been “driving.” Henry Watson positions slaves being “driven forth to labor from daylight to dark” beside slaves being “whipped to death” as the polar opposite of the Northern image of slavery in its “mildest form” where slaves live in a “comfortable manner.”<sup>86</sup>

The cotton bolls picked by slaves, full of seeds and, sometimes, blood, became a commodity for world markets in the gin house. The sorted white fibers needed only to be pressed and bagged to be sent off to New Orleans or some other port before they were shipped to England to drive the industrial economy. That this transformation occurred in the same place where slaves lined up to have their daily work weighed or to be whipped for perceived laziness, minor errors in work, or the whims of their owners and staff, was not lost on some slaves. That the product of agricultural labor was converted into a commodity in the same place that slaves were whipped was appropriate, given that it was the whip that forced labor out of the slaves. Planters and overseers across the South wielded the whip to enforce different labor regimes, plantation rules, and some to beat their slaves, but for nearly all of them it was the representation of the absolute power that they sought.

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<sup>86</sup> Watson, 20

## Chapter Two : **The Structure of Agricultural Reform in South Carolina, 1828-1861**

In the early nineteenth century, the plantation world of South Carolina dominated the state's economy and society. Agriculture was an all-encompassing industry in the nineteenth-century United States, especially in the South. It employed the majority of the population and dominated the economy. Plantation agriculture involved large capital investment, engagement with regional and international markets, and extensive credit networks. It formed the basis for the political economy of the region and the image of the slave states within the nation. As a result of this omnipresence, agriculture was a constant source of discussion and debate.

The centrality of plantation agriculture to South Carolina society, especially among elites, was reflected in the structure of Carolinian intellectual life. Agricultural societies, library societies, and political offices had similar membership rolls. Scholars have failed to dedicate sufficient attention to the place of agriculture in Charleston's intellectual world.<sup>1</sup> The agricultural reform, or improvement, movement was initially led by elites looking to bring the plantation agriculture that was the basis for their prosperity and status into the intellectual world that they aspired to enter. As New England merchants were striving, by entering agriculture, to reconcile their profession with a republican ideology that left little space for middle-men who were not seen as productive, planters in South Carolina were trying to prove to the world that their agricultural pursuits could be the basis for an

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<sup>1</sup> Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds., *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986) includes a piece on agriculture and Drew Faust consistently deals with the topic *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), "The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Antebellum South Carolina" *Journal of Southern History* 45 (Nov. 1979), *Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Slave South, 1840-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

intellectual life.<sup>2</sup> Even after Drew Faust showed that agricultural reform provided a space for southerners to articulate their anxieties about society and work through their personal worldviews, historians have focused on literary figures, politicians, and theologians as the core of intellectual life in South Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

The planters, merchants, intellectuals, and professionals (labels that often applied concurrently to the same actors) who formed the core of the agricultural reform movement in South Carolina were a mixture of an established, wealthy elite and men on the make. During the publication run of the region's first major, relatively long-lived agricultural journal, the *Southern Agriculturist* (1828-1846), the movement was led by the lowcountry elite—established rice and cotton planters who owned valuable plantations near the coast.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that short-staple cotton was emerging as the major market and economic force in the state, wealthy rice and Sea Island Cotton planters, like Whitmarsh Seabrook, William Elliot, and William Allston, retained leadership of agricultural societies, gave agricultural addresses, and published widely in agricultural journals. The leadership of the agricultural movement mirrored that of South Carolinian society—something that should come as no surprise if agricultural reform is taken as a forum for working out larger local and regional issues. Agricultural reform did not always reflect the state of agriculture in the state as much as it did the intellectual climate of South Carolina. As much as the *Southern Agriculturist's* articles reflected shifts in staple crop prices and crop conditions, such as weather and pests, they also responded to shifts in politics and society. It is possible to trace

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<sup>2</sup> Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> There were two agricultural journals published as the *Southern Agriculturist* in antebellum South Carolina. I refer to the journal published in Charleston from 1828-1846 simply as the *Southern Agriculturist*, while the other journal, published in Laurensville in 1853 will be referred to as the *Southern Agriculturist* (1853).

shifting attitudes towards England and Englishness through the pages of the *Southern Agriculturist*, just as it is possible to pinpoint collapses of the cotton market.

By the 1840s, the *Southern Agriculturist* increasingly represented a group of reformers who no longer reflected the center of agricultural reform in South Carolina. As political and economic power shifted upcountry to Columbia, another center of reform emerged with its own journals and agricultural societies. The upcountry movement even managed to get state support, which had earlier been so hard to come by that noted reformer James Henry Hammond derailed state-sponsored agricultural reform initiatives during his term as Governor. The Columbia-based *Farmer and Planter* eventually took over as the major agricultural journal in the state, beginning in 1850; the journal had only a very small constituency in the Lowcountry. From 1818 onward, two groups representing themselves as an agricultural society of South Carolina competed for regional and national legitimacy and recognition, one founded in 1785 in Charleston and another in 1818 in Columbia. The agricultural reform movement in South Carolina became a center for the struggle between lowcountry elites and upcountry cotton planters for power in the state.

The *Southern Agriculturist* illustrates the course of agricultural reform from the 1820s to the 1840s, as it was shifting towards creating larger communities through print, rather than reflecting the existing social hierarchy. The shifting goals of various improvers emerge clearly in the pages of the journal. Reform no longer sought simply to bring system and a georgic ethic to southern agriculture; instead, it looked to create a systematic and regionally specific brand of agriculture, based upon generally English ideas about agriculture and husbandry. This view was articulated and disseminated by a loosely defined group of agricultural improvers centered on the *Southern Agriculturist* and local agricultural societies. These men initially drew their leadership and influence from the lowcountry elite. This was a

period where the aims of reformers began to encompass ideas about agricultural improvement presenting a viable way for the plantation South to maintain its political influence through economic strength, which had been waning in this period, in their eyes. Agricultural reform centered on a newly modern plantation economy based on an ideal of the improved plantation, a self-sufficient unit that would grow the optimal amount of cotton, based on fluctuating market prices, engage in systematic cultivation on regionally specific crops, and efficiently employ its large enslaved workforce. The emphasis of improvers in this period was efficient use of labor and land, through a variety of means; soil chemistry was one of many options for improving a plantation. These major themes continued in later journals in the state, particularly the *Farmer and Planter*, though significant differences emerged as reform shifted upcountry.

### **Early Agricultural Reform in South Carolina**

Agricultural literature before the publication of South Carolina's first agricultural journal in 1828 was centered on correspondence, books, and journals from abroad circulated among wealthy planters.<sup>5</sup> Between 1800 and 1828, print played an increasingly important role in the way that agriculture was practiced on cotton plantations. Planters' growing integration of print and plantation can be seen in plantation diaries and records from the first two decades of the nineteenth-century, with records of slave labor and crop harvests interleaved with almanacs and newspaper articles. Planters sought to use these printed materials to order their slaves and plantations, much like industrialists attempted to standardize work in factories. Print was a central tool in spreading the systematization of agriculture that swept

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

the reform movement in the antebellum period.<sup>6</sup> Agricultural journals played a central role in linking agricultural improvers through a print community. In 1819, John Skinner published the Baltimore-based *American Farmer*, the country's first national agricultural journal; in 1828, J.D. Legaré published South Carolina's first major journal, the *Southern Agriculturist*, in Charleston.<sup>7</sup> The publication of these journals, along with the founding of large numbers of agricultural societies in the same ten year span, marked a drastic change from the situation before 1819, where agricultural knowledge was largely diffused through personal interactions, Atlantic correspondence networks, and local newspapers, making it very much the precinct of the elite.

South Carolina improvers' goals also shifted between 1800 and 1828, with a desire for profit the one invariable concern. At the outset of the century, agricultural improvers tied profit-driven agricultural improvement to a larger project of investigating the natural world. By the end of the period, however, improvers saw their work tied to a larger societal project: professionalizing plantership, legitimizing agriculture as a demarcated field of inquiry worthy of study at the highest level, and increasing the fortunes of South Carolina, through agricultural means.<sup>8</sup> In 1800, agricultural experimentation was still part of a culture of "natural curiosity, pursued by gentlemen planters, botanists, and collectors alike."<sup>9</sup> Over the course of this thirty-year period, the position of agricultural experimentation changed and planters increasingly viewed experiment instrumentally and performatively. While

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<sup>6</sup> John Bezis-Selfa, *Forging America: Ironworkers, Adventurers, and the Industrious Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 98-99; 191-192. Steven G. Collins, "System, Organization, and Agricultural Reform in the Antebellum South, 1840-1860" *Agricultural History* 75 (Winter 2001), 1-27.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Lowther Demaree, *American Agricultural Press: 1819-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 13-15.

<sup>8</sup> For this story on a national level, see Margaret Rossiter, "The Organization of Agricultural Improvement in the United States, 1785-1865" in Alexandra Oleson and Sanborn C. Brown, eds. *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the early American Republic: American Scientific and Learned Societies from Colonial Times to the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 279-299.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Scott Parish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Chapter 3: "Atlantic Correspondence Networks and the Curious Male Colonial."

philosophical leanings and elite scientific networks undergirded experiment at the turn of the century, by 1828, planters placed less emphasis on natural inquiry and instead redirected their energies towards the spread of agricultural improvement and the professionalization of plantership. Once an agricultural community of print began to coalesce in the late 1810s, the societal goals of the agricultural improvers became even more ambitious and far-reaching. By the 1820s, improving planters were no longer satisfied to engage in a larger transnational elite culture, but instead were intent on transforming the domestic economy of South Carolina.

Literacy rates in the United States remained strikingly varied by region before 1840. Literacy rates in the South lagged behind the national rates by decades. Libraries and adult access to print were introduced to a lesser extent in the South.<sup>10</sup> In 1804, less than four percent of books published in the United States were published in the South, a figure that drops to barely one percent of all books if Baltimore, whose publishing industry did not cater to the South, is excluded from the region.<sup>11</sup> John L. Brooke argues that periodicals in the South were a “vehicle for mobilizing elites rather than the people at large,” unlike elsewhere in the country. He suggests that, through the 1830s, the gentry would selectively disseminate information to the common folk.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1830s and 1840s, when print was flooding into the South, a model that favored elite leadership was already in place. Print succeeded in democratizing debate among planters and professionals, but the vast majority of society was still precluded from participating. Agricultural improvement changed drastically after 1830, in the South. Print

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Kelley, “Educating the Citizenry,” in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2, An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 269-270.

<sup>11</sup> James N. Greene, “The Rise of Book Publishing,” in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2*, 94.

<sup>12</sup> John L. Brooke, “Print and Politics,” in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2*, 182.



was more readily accessible, the cotton boom had dramatically increased the number of planters in the region, even if wealth remained just as concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest and a larger proportion of Americans had leisure time to spend on societal causes; it was simply easier, by the 1830s, to “cater to scattered groups of like-minded Americans, and to support oneself while doing it.”<sup>13</sup>

The growing importance of print for agriculture in South Carolina did not create a sharp break from existing practice of innovation among elites. There is an established literature contesting the modernity of planters and agriculturists, but for my purposes, it is their interest in improvement specifically that is at issue.<sup>14</sup> Scholars have demonstrated that rice planters in the colonial period practiced an innovative, experimental, and adaptive form of agriculture that involved “growing new crops on new lands with whatever obscure or foreign methods proved effective.”<sup>15</sup> Until 1800 or later, this agricultural knowledge was spread largely through personal networks, with newspapers printing occasional articles on planting. Elite planters often had significant libraries of agricultural tracts, largely English in origin, and this information occasionally made its way into South Carolinian newspapers.<sup>16</sup>

Improvement, much like rice planting, was largely the precinct of the wealthy elite, with their

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 6.

<sup>14</sup> By 1815, Peter D. McClelland argues, America’s first true agricultural revolution was underway. McClelland claims that the period from 1815-1830 stands out from other periods of agricultural change in America as the first time a “search for a ‘better way’ signaled a new spirit of inquiry” that included new technological possibilities. He contrasts this commitment to innovation with the significant agricultural changes, such as crop rotation, that were popularized between 1783 and 1815, which he sees as motivated by changing factor prices. The shifts between 1815 and 1830, he sees as making the “march to modernization...virtually assured.” Peter D. McClelland, *Sowing Modernity: America’s First Agricultural Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 9-10. Joyce Chaplin has argued that agricultural innovation was well-established by 1815, using evidence from large rice and cotton planters to show that planters had a modern worldview and worried about the instability of the future, planning carefully to avoid uncertainty. She is interested in a period where agricultural knowledge was passed through personal networks, with well-connected South Carolinian planters often trading pieces of the exotic natural world for agricultural information from other areas. Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 272-273.

<sup>15</sup> S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 75-76.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, “Charleston. Thursday, March 13,” *Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), March 13, 1800, 1; Agricola, “First Principles of Agriculture,” *Camden Gazette*, November 1, 1817, 1.

close ties to European intellectual networks. At that time, there was not the prospective audience to sustain a regular agricultural journal or a large network of agricultural societies, nor the professional imperatives to create them.

Planters shifted their goals and mode of communication between 1815 and 1820; before 1820, the archival traces of agricultural reform consists largely of newspaper accounts and private plantation papers, whereas the material after 1820 is made up of addresses to agricultural societies and agricultural journals. In the period between 1800 and 1815, a small group of elite planters began to transform older patterns of innovation into what would become known as scientific or improving agriculture. Overseers at some relatively small plantations (fewer than 20 hands) began, at the insistence of their employers, to keep written records.<sup>17</sup> These records also became increasingly linked to almanacs, one of the few common printed books on plantations. Planters such as John Stapleton, who owned and managed a Sea Island cotton plantation in Beaufort District, interleaved their agricultural and labor records with almanacs, tying their plantation rhythms to calendar dates and times rather than to agricultural rhythms.<sup>18</sup> In addition, some planters began to use records to monitor slaves and as a tool of control. With detailed records of slave work came the ability to track and calculate sickness and absenteeism, as Thomas Aston Coffin's records demonstrate. Coffin kept careful daily records of the work performed by the slaves on his plantation and used these records to calculate how many days each of his slaves missed due to sickness.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, "Rockingham Plantation Journal", *Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations From the Revolution Through the Civil War*, Series F, Part 2 (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986), microfilm.

<sup>18</sup> John Stapleton Papers, 1813-1816, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aston Coffin Plantation Book, 1800-1813, in Stampp, ed., *Records*.

## The Scope of Reform

The public reform of agriculture served as a safe space for planters to make radical suggestions for the reform of southern society that could be seen as destabilizing in a political forum. Historians have long taken agricultural reform in the antebellum South to be a necessary response to soil exhaustion caused by the destructive and wasteful practices of plantation monoculture. To accept this premise ignores the essential role of Enlightenment rationality, emerging economies of industrial capitalism, and planters' desires to constantly increase production and profits. Drew Faust argues that in the context of a society where agriculture was the "foundation of both social and moral order," agriculture giving way to commerce and manufacturing in the nineteenth-century was a crisis for Americans and, in particular, South Carolinians. She goes on to suggest that in agricultural addresses, South Carolinians used "agricultural terminology as a vehicle through which to formulate deep-rooted cultural anxieties." Agriculture became the "primary verbal and ritual symbol" through which the state of society in general could be discussed.<sup>20</sup> I would extend her argument to encompass the agricultural reform movement more generally. Agricultural reformers spent a great deal of time discussing not only the best time to pick cotton or the proper mode of fertilization for fields, but also the economic future of the state and programs of education for the lower classes. The leadership, membership, and agenda of the agricultural reform movement in South Carolina reflected the existing social order and changed in response to the shifting societal concerns and anxieties of the state's elite.

No issue was too far afield from agriculture to be included in the reform movement, except for party politics. Many of the issues dividing parties, even the details of economic

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<sup>20</sup> Drew Faust, "The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Antebellum South Carolina" *Journal of Southern History* 45 (Nov. 1979), 541-544. Faust's article is frequently cited in the literature on reform, but rarely is her argument that agricultural reform was the major forum for wealthy southerners to discuss social, economic, and political issues made central to scholarship.

and military policy, could be debated in the pages of the journals, as long as it was couched in agricultural terminology and no parties were mentioned. Anything else was fair game. While southern agricultural reform differed in important ways from northern reform movements, even temperance could be part of a branch of agricultural reform. From 1839-1841 a serial called the *South-Carolina Temperance Advocate* was published in Columbia. In 1841, the journal changed its title to the *South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agriculture and General Literature*, the name it stuck with for the remaining thirteen years of its existence. In 1860, J.A. Turner, a Georgia printer who would go on to publish the *Countryman* (with the help of a young Joel Chandler Harris), a popular southern Civil War newspaper, published a strange journal, the *Plantation*. This work was meant to combine literary and practical writings and rival publications like the *Atlantic*. Lasting only one year and published on Turner's Eatonton, Georgia plantation, the serial brought together, often in the same pieces, poetry and practical advice on cotton planting.<sup>21</sup> Literature, temperance, and politics all mingled comfortably within the confines of agricultural improvement.

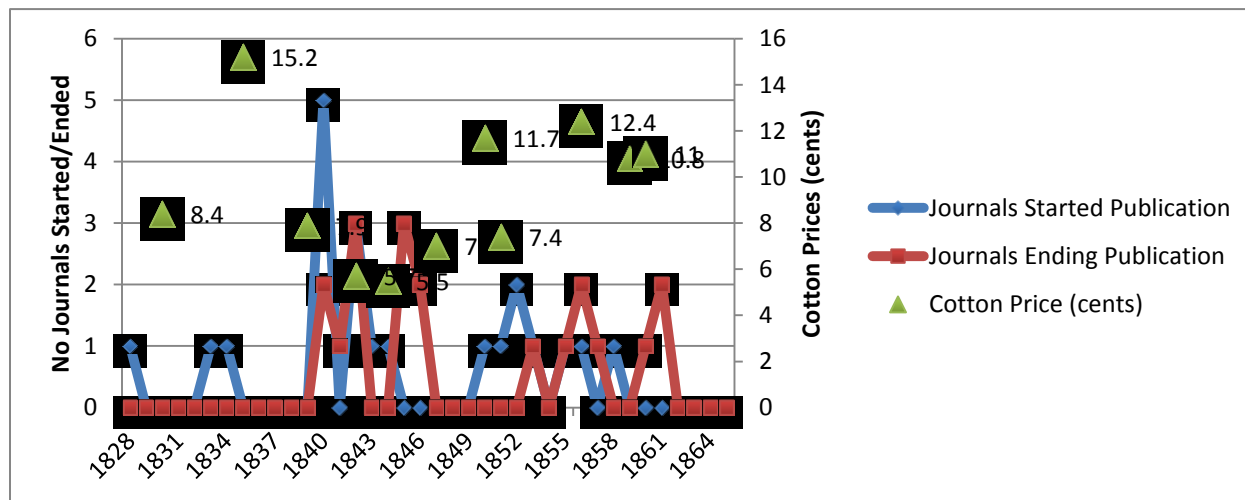
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<sup>21</sup> J.A. Turner, "Cotton on the Plantation," *The Plantation: A General Southern Quarterly of Literature, Politics & General Miscellany* 1 (Eatonton, Ga., 1860), 131-148.

## Agricultural Journals

Historians generally view agricultural reform in the cotton South as a response to fluctuations in the world cotton market and the American economy.<sup>22</sup> While certainly a factor, it is difficult to reduce reform to a pragmatic response to a changing economic situation, given how wide its net was in South Carolina. While difficult times certainly caused planters to consider how to improve their plantation enterprises, mapping agricultural reform onto moments of panic surrounding cotton prices is not supported by the facts. Arguing that journals were published in the aftermath of crashes in the cotton market means very little if the aftermath lasts for a decade, as was the case with the *Southern Agriculturist*, first published nine years after the 1819 crash. Speaking more broadly, such a theory would suggest that the publication of southern agricultural journals would cluster around the low cotton prices of 1819 and 1837, with few journals started in periods of relatively high prices.

**Figure 2.1: Journals Published and Cotton Prices Per Pound**



Source: Demaree, *The American Agricultural Press* and Bruchey, *Cotton and the Growth of the American Economy* in Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Lanham, Md.: Dee, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge, La.: LSU Press, 1988); Theodore Rosengarten, "The *Southern Agriculturist* in an Age of Reform" in Moltke-Hansen and O'Brien, *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, 279-294.

As the chart shows, there is no clear clustering. A small outbreak of five journals in 1840 could be tied to the Panic of 1837, but it could also simply have been influenced by the reform movements growing in popularity throughout the nation in the 1830s and 40s. In support of the latter interpretation, five more journals appeared by 1844. It is significant to note that nearly half of the agricultural serials in the antebellum South appeared between 1840 and 1844, but this should not be attributed to cotton prices, given another outbreak of journals in the early 1850s, when cotton prices were strong.

*The Southern Agriculturist, 1828-1846*

The *Southern Agriculturist* was established in the wake of a major depression in world cotton prices in 1819. The South Carolina State Agricultural Society reacted to this difficult time by pushing for the broadening of agricultural reform and saw a journal as a necessary part of this expansion. The Society quickly realized, as so many reformers would, that an agricultural journal was not a financially viable venture.<sup>23</sup> John D. Legaré, a member of the Society, decided to start a journal on his own and in 1828, the *Southern Agriculturist* was the result of his efforts. Legaré and the journal were products of the Charleston intellectual world, emphasizing the accumulation of knowledge, progress, and a vision for society. The journal printed a wide array of material, from articles submitted by local subscribers, to pieces copied from British journals. The journal emphasized connections with transnational networks of agriculture and science, while attempting to present ways that foreign knowledge could be made applicable to the southern context. This approach reflected the cosmopolitan intellectual and social world of the lowcountry planter gentry.

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<sup>23</sup> Rosengarten, "*Southern Agriculturist*," 279-280.

In the first years of the serial's publication, Legaré published article after article on various crops that could provide alternatives to cotton.<sup>24</sup> The standard line on the *Agriculturist* has been that it reflected Legaré's desire to see a diversified plantation economy that focused on quality products, whether cotton or other cash crops, rather than a large quantity of cotton. The journal then shifted emphasis in 1834, when Legaré gave up control of the journal to open a spa in Virginia.<sup>25</sup> With Legaré's 1841 return, the publication then returned to its roots and looked to improve the soil, having shifted somewhat away from diversification. This argument, advanced by Theodore Rosengarten, often has Legaré standing in for the *Southern Agriculturist*, barely discussing the period of his absence and not distinguishing between Legaré's stances and those expressed in the serial.<sup>26</sup> It was Legaré who "steered clear of the slavery controversy" and Legaré who seemingly controlled every aspect of the journal when he was editing it.<sup>27</sup> Rosengarten carefully identifies Legaré as pushing an agenda of crop diversification by printing a series of articles offering alternatives to cotton, but then casually extends this model of editorial dominance to the entire journal. He acknowledges the contributions of other writers, but always clearly within the basic confines of Legaré's agenda. A model of collective authorship, where Legaré's agenda is supplemented by the varying contributions of prominent planters is more appropriate. Legaré did not write a large portion of the major pieces in the journal, but more importantly, he was well below most of the contributors in his social and economic station. He could not set the agenda for the William Elliotts and Whitemarsh Seabrooks of the plantation world.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 281-285.

<sup>25</sup> Legaré had also given up control of the journal for a period in 1829 when he fell ill, with James Gregorie taking over. *Southern Agriculturist* February, 1829. Spas and springs were popular destinations among planters at the time. See Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001) and Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Rosengarten, "Southern Agriculturist."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 287.

In 1828, the establishment of a regional journal, in the form of the *Southern Agriculturist* legitimized Southern agriculture, with its particular climate, staples, and dedication to slave labor, as an intellectual pursuit and altered the way in which improving planters constructed and disseminated their agricultural ideals. Before 1828, planters and early agricultural societies rarely had dedicated agricultural publications from South Carolina in their library, getting the vast majority of their local material from correspondents to local newspapers, along with epistolary and personal communications within their social networks. The agricultural discourse facilitated by the *Southern Agriculturist* provided a forum for more systematically adapting scientific agricultural concepts drawn from foreign works and the *American Farmer* to the "products and climates" of South Carolina.<sup>28</sup> The journal was aligned with the lowcountry agricultural society, the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, rather than the Columbia-based State society, reprinting a number of responses to questionnaires on agricultural practices issued by William Washington of the Charleston society.<sup>29</sup>

During its run, the *Southern Agriculturist* served as a sort of "paper of record" for agriculturists in the Lowcountry. In April of 1843, Julius DuBose followed Gibbes and established an agricultural serial in Columbia. *The Planter*, a weekly, lasted only a few issues before it went under. The *Southern Agriculturist* had little local competition. Most major agricultural writers in the Lowcountry published extensively in the *Southern Agriculturist*, South Carolina agricultural societies sought to have their proceedings published in its pages, and agricultural materials from other regions, both within and outside of the United States, were reprinted in the paper's "Correspondence" section. The journal was divided into three

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<sup>28</sup> Elias Horry, *An Address Delivered in Charleston, Before the Agricultural Society of South-Carolina, at its Anniversary Meeting, on Tuesday, the 19th August, 1828* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1828), 18.

<sup>29</sup> See the *Southern Agriculturist* issues of April, May, June, July, October, November, 1828.



parts: Part I, "Original Correspondence," which was material intended primarily for publication in the *Southern Agriculturist* and overwhelmingly from South Carolina; Part II, "Selections," pieces taken from other journals or publications, almost always from outside of South Carolina, usually outside of the South, and often foreign; Part III, "Miscellaneous Agricultural Items," small paragraphs divided between sections for "Foreign" and "Domestic" pieces. The articles in the "Correspondence" section were very often focused on adapting techniques to the Southern context, as seen by titles such as "An Essay on the Culture of the Grape Vine; suited for the United States and more particularly for the Southern states."<sup>30</sup> Those of the "Selections" section, however, tended to introduce general techniques and concepts, reprinted directly from European publications, such as "On the Management of Dairies in Devonshire, England".

With the arrival of a regional serial devoted to agriculture, the aims of some agricultural improvers began to shift. The formation of agricultural societies was well underway and the annual addresses to the societies became "state of agricultural reform" speeches. The printed pamphlets that traditionally were produced following the addresses are invaluable in glimpsing the goals of agricultural reformers. While the immediate goals of these planters had shifted from founding an agricultural paper to promoting agricultural education, through new schools and colleges, or the establishment of professorships at extant institutions, their larger aims remained relatively consistent. The "enlightened" planters remained obsessed with three major goals: legitimizing their profession, converting

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<sup>30</sup> N. Herbemont "An Essay on the Culture of the Grape Vine; suited for the United States and more particularly for the Southern states," *Southern Agriculturist* 1, no. 6 (June, 1828), 241-243.

the supposedly ignorant practitioners of agriculture who derided "book farming," and furthering the economic interests of South Carolina through agricultural improvement.<sup>31</sup>

By the time of the *Southern Agriculturist's* initial publication, the adaptation of foreign and northern agricultural innovations and technologies to South Carolina was the dominant approach to material originating in South Carolina. The climate and staple crops (cotton and rice) of the state and its dependence on slave labor meant that it was not practical to adopt techniques wholesale from the English agricultural literature. Studying the South as a part of larger discursive communities, rather than in isolation from the rest of the country, allows for a clearer picture of the social and intellectual networks of improvers in South Carolina. These networks extended beyond slaveowners, Southerners, and Americans to include improvers and agriculturists from across the country and in Europe. Even on a national level, the influence of foreign writers was overwhelming. When "Cincinnatus" listed the founding figures of rational agriculture, he included only one American, George Washington, among Rozier and Chaptal from France and Millar, Young, and Sinclair from Britain.<sup>32</sup> Southern planters' participation in agricultural discourses on a national and transnational level contradicts the image of isolated plantation agriculture. The acceptance of slavery in the South did not prevent South Carolinians from entering intellectual discussions of agriculture through cultures of print. The synthetic nature of the early volumes of the *Southern Agriculturist* suggests that, at least into the 1830s, South Carolinians were still struggling to assert their place in larger discourses on agriculture and science. While Americans often argued that the *American Farmer* was "not surpassed by any work of the

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<sup>31</sup> J. Brenton Stewart uses a study of the Georgia-based *Southern Cultivator* to argue that agricultural journals in the South were important for creating and cementing agricultural information networks, not just for producing "advice." Stewart, "Informing the South: On the Culture of Print in Antebellum August, Georgia, 1828-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012), 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> Cincinnatus, "A Planter or a Farmer, No. 3," *American Farmer* 2, No. 10 (June 2, 1820), 76.

kind, at present, published in Europe,” such assertions were rarely made on behalf of material originating in South Carolina.<sup>33</sup> The persistent intellectual anglophilia of the early national period manifested itself throughout the agricultural literature, with Arthur Young, Sir John Sinclair, and other British agriculturists (along with a smattering of French agriculturists and German chemists) held up as the ideal to which American works should strive for, with only John Taylor's work considered as an American comparable.<sup>34</sup>

Reformers felt that to legitimize plantership and improve the status of their profession, they needed to validate it academically. They wanted to show that it was not “exclusively the scholar’s duty to indite [sic] for public instruction,” but also the planter’s. Unlike in the United States, they argued, “in all countries in which agriculture is in a high state of improvement, it is studied scientifically, as well as practically.” The two major steps called for, throughout the country, as in South Carolina, were the establishment of agricultural schools and the founding of professorships of agriculture at existing institutions. In the pages of the *American Farmer*, James Monroe and the Albemarle Agricultural Society called for the establishment of a professorship of agriculture at the University of Virginia while numerous writers echoed the call in the *Southern Agriculturist*, schools, funded by state legislatures were likewise seen as integral to an agricultural education.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Horry, *Address*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) Tamarkin argues for a deep American association between intellectualism and Englishness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing that “performances of style and manner” of Englishness were commonplace at 19<sup>th</sup> century American universities, even extending to a slight, affected English accent which became common among elite college graduates. (Chapter Four, “The Anglophile Academy”)

Many of the most commonly found agricultural techniques in the *American Farmer* were prominently featured in early issues of John Sinclair’s Edinburgh-based *Farmer’s Magazine*.

<sup>35</sup> A Well-Wisher to Agriculture, “On the necessity of Agricultural Education, being bestowed upon those intended for Superintendents of plantations, and the benefit which would arise from proper encouragement being held out to respectable youths, to encourage as such”, Part 2, *Southern Agriculturist* 2, no. 2 (February, 1829), 49-50; Whitemarsh Seabrook, “Extract from an Address Delivered before the United Agricultural Society of South-Carolina, in the Hall of the House of Representatives, on the 1st of December, 1828,” *Southern Agriculturist* 2, no.3 (March, 1829), 112; “Agricultural Education,” *American Farmer*, 4, no. 35 (Nov. 30, 1822), 273-274.

The criticism that agricultural improvers received stemmed not always from ignorance, as the improvers claimed, but from attempts to minimize risk. The improvers' attempts to convert farmers and planters to their way of practicing agriculture and management were part of an industrial-era desire for ever-increasing efficiency, that did not always take into account the inherent risks of agriculture, such as weather, pests, and staple markets. Improvers saw their efforts as attempts to enlighten the ignorant, while those employing different agricultural techniques, resented the attempts of "book farmers" to impose untested and risky new techniques on them. The innovation and experimentation at the core of the improvers' ethos made for risky business. Many of the methods advocated by practitioners of scientific agriculture, such as the use of soil chemistry, dedicating more labor to improving plantation infrastructure, and conducting experiments with new crops with valuable labor, required large capital inputs and took up a lot of limited slave labor, with no guarantee of increased returns. Improvers' attempts to win converts among "practical planters" form an early chapter in the long story of American elite or governmental attempts to shift the economic and agricultural strategies of farmers towards newer, riskier approaches.<sup>36</sup> The self-described reformers wanted to make their own contribution to agricultural knowledge and enter into the discourses that they had been observing; agricultural reform had to extend to the small farmers and planters who stuck to entrenched, traditional views of agriculture, centered on experiential education, as well as encompassing the holdouts among large planters.

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<sup>36</sup> John R. Stilgoe, "Plugging Past Reform: Small-Scale Farming Innovation and Big-Scale Farming Research" in Ronald G. Walters, ed., *Scientific Authority & Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 119-147. Stilgoe shows how farmers resistant to new agricultural research and innovation, known as "pluggers," became the target of government experts who were determined to convert them to risky, new approaches to agriculture. The "pluggers" saw progressive farmers "sometimes as model but often as destroyers of economic equilibrium." Eventually, major agricultural manufacturers suggested that book-learned farmers look to pluggers for ways to economize in hard times. (122-123)

Reformers' societal ambitions extended beyond professionalization and converting their neighbors: improvement was to serve the interests of South Carolina on the regional, national, and international levels, by increasing efficiency and production. South Carolinian planters thought that they could turn their state into an economic and political power. Plantership and agricultural improvement was presented as vital to the success, and even survival of South Carolina. William J. Alston delivered an address before the "Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River" in 1830, arguing it is the "efforts of our scientific and practical agriculturists, that we are to look for the development of our State."<sup>37</sup> Likewise, James Cuthbert asked the South Carolina Agricultural Society "How many families, who have gone *far into the wilderness, and from good markets for produce*, would still be settled in South-Carolina?", tying the future prospects and out-migration issues of South Carolina to agricultural improvement.<sup>38</sup> These claims were typical; agricultural improvement was presented as the only way for South Carolina to avoid becoming marginalized on the national level. Threats to Southern agriculture, in the form of tariffs against agriculture, were seen as potential "seeds of disunion" for the southern states, unless it was possible to "disenthral [their] Agriculture from the ruinous impositions of the general government."<sup>39</sup>

By 1828, the *Southern Agriculturist*, local agricultural societies, and the rise of cotton as a dominant staple had broadened the debate over improved agriculture. What had been experimentation among wealthy planters interested in Enlightenment ideas and rational experimentation became an issue relevant to most planters in South Carolina. While most planters did not subscribe to agricultural journals or experiment heavily by 1828, they would

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<sup>37</sup> William J. Alston, "An Address delivered before the "Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River," Fairfield District, (S.C.) on its first Anniversary, in July, 1829," *Southern Agriculturist* 3, no. 3 (March 1830), 119-120.

<sup>38</sup> J.G., "Observations by the Editor" on J. Joor, "On Level, or Horizontal Ploughing," *Southern Agriculturist* 3, no. 10 (October, 1830): 442.

<sup>39</sup> "On our Southern Agricultural Concerns," Part 1, *Southern Agriculturist* 1, no. 9 (September, 1828):405; "On our Southern Agricultural Concerns," Part 2, *Southern Agriculturist* 1, no. 10 (October, 1828):452.

have been somewhat aware of the debates surrounding improvement and scientific agriculture.<sup>40</sup> Many risk-averse planters chose to continue agricultural practices rooted in the wisdom of experience. For the minority of planters who did take the significant economic risks associated with experimenting with new ideas, it was their slaves who felt most keenly the increasing demands on their labor, as well as the intensified regimentation and monotony of the industrial ethic that accompanied the drive towards an idealized goal of improved agriculture.

The content published by the *Southern Agriculturist* shifted significantly over its publication run. While the shifts in agenda over the first few years of the serial's run have already been addressed, the geographical origins or foci of the articles provide a view of how the journal shifted during its time as the major agricultural publication of the state and region. Over this period, the developments in southern society can be seen on the pages of the *Southern Agriculturist*.

The *Southern Agriculturist* initially drew its contributions from a geographically broad range of sources and covered a similarly varied set of topics. In terms of the geographical focus of articles in the journal, Legaré printed pieces describing both the United States and other areas of interest. The influence of England, Scotland, France, and Germany on agricultural improvement in the United States is reflected in their prominence relative to other non-American regions and countries. While nearly three quarters of the pieces published in the serial focused on the United States, only about a third of the American pieces were specific to southern agriculture, one of the editor's major stated goals.

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<sup>40</sup> Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Knowledge in Early America, 1700-1765* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Chapter Six, "Information and Insularity: The Experiences of Yankee Farmers, 1711-1830", 132-159.

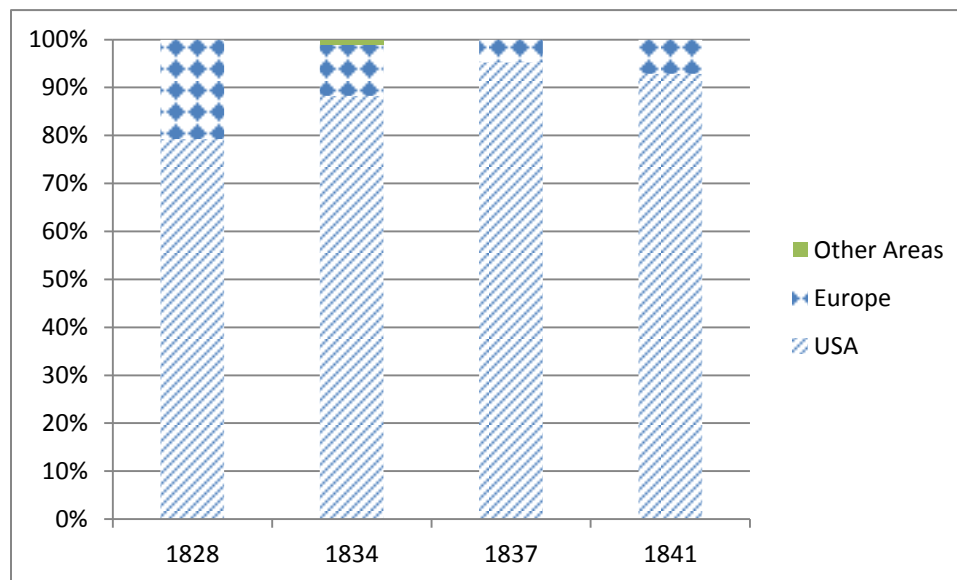
**Table 2.1: Geographic Focus of Articles Published in the *Southern Agriculturist*, 1828**

Geographic Focus	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total Articles
<b>United States</b>	176	73.6
South	56	23.4
Other	120	50.2
<b>Europe</b>	52	21.8
England	17	7.1
France	9	3.8
Germany	4	1.7
Scotland	3	1.3
Switzerland	3	1.3
Italy	2	0.8
Portugal	2	0.8
Prussia	2	0.8
Russia	2	0.8
Denmark	1	0.4
Europe (General)	1	0.4
Ireland	1	0.4
Wales	1	0.4
Sweden	1	0.4
<b>Africa (Total)</b>	4	1.7
Senegal	2	0.8
Africa (General)	1	0.4
Mauritius	1	0.4
China	1	0.4
Ceylon	1	0.4
Chile	1	0.4
India	1	0.4
Jamaica	1	0.4
Mexico	1	0.4
New Zealand	1	0.4
Trinidad	1	0.4
<b>Total</b>	239	100

In the *Southern Agriculturist's* first year of publication, it relied relatively heavily on writing from Europe, both as the intellectual foundation of local contributions and in terms of actual articles printed. Keeping in mind that European journals were more expensive to purchase and more difficult to arrange reciprocal exchanges with, this is particularly significant. Legaré desperately wanted to use the journal to promote agricultural writing in South Carolina and the southern states, bemoaning the fact that “although there have been

Agricultural writers in abundance, unfortunately none have arisen among us.”<sup>41</sup> He argued that a single article located “in our own immediate neighbourhood” will do more than all that can be “read of in foreign works.”<sup>42</sup> Despite this stated commitment, over a quarter of the journal’s articles in 1828 came from overseas and less than a quarter came from the South, even fewer from South Carolina.

**Figure 2.2: Origin of Articles in the *Southern Agriculturist*, 1828-1841**



The geographical areas covered by articles in the *Southern Agriculturist* also shifted over time, along a similar pattern to the origin of the writing. After early prominence, articles on primarily European and other non-American topics were slowly phased out of the journal. While 27% of the journal’s articles discussed non-American topics in 1828, by 1841, it was barely over 10% of the content. The tariff of 1828 and the accompanying sectional tension may have contributed to the particularly low percentage of articles from non-southern American papers (less than 25%), especially considering the predominance of writing about southern self-sufficiency in the journal that year. Attributing too much to

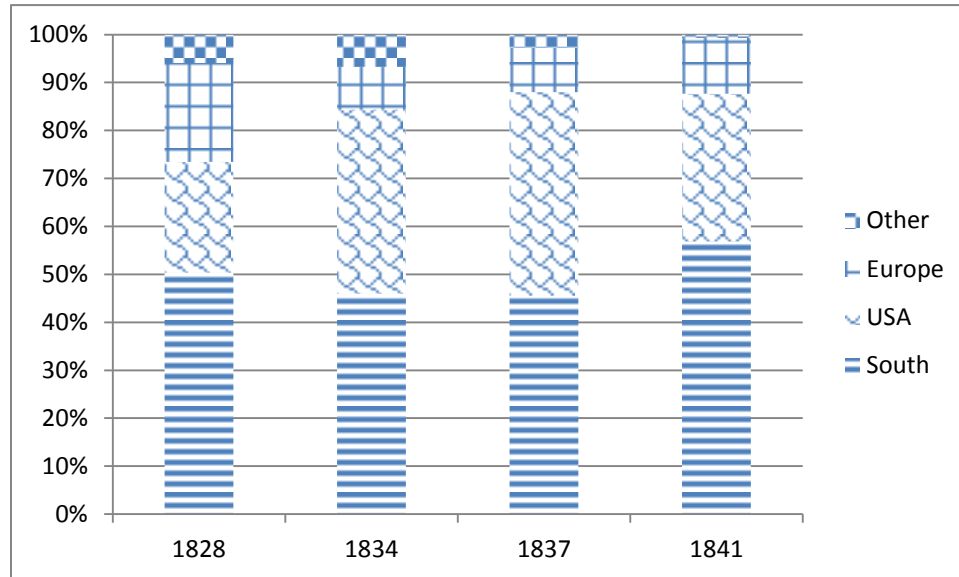
<sup>41</sup> *Southern Agriculturist* 1 (1828), 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



political events can be tricky, however, and it is also possible that there were fewer American pieces because there were fewer agricultural journals in the rest of the country at that time and there was still a strong European influence on the paper and Carolinian reform in general.

**Figure 2.3: Focus of Articles in the *Southern Agriculturist*, 1828-1841**



The period between 1828 and 1846 in South Carolina marked a transition for the membership of agricultural reform. Scholars have showed that membership in agricultural societies in the colonial and early national period was not centered on planters and farmers, but on members who did not work in agriculture.<sup>43</sup> The vast majority of contributions to the *Southern Agriculturist* in this period suggest that nearly all authors were farmers, planters, or, occasionally, authors or publishers focused on agriculture. In addition, an examination of the record books of several agricultural societies shows that this perception holds true for agricultural societies as well. Agricultural reform might have been looking to professionalize, but professionals did not dominate agricultural reform. This portrait of membership in

<sup>43</sup> Lawrence Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution: The Intellectual Origins of Early American Industry*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 123.

agricultural reform is certainly influenced by the Carolinian context, as many lawyers, merchants, and professionals also had plantation enterprises, unlike regions where there was a firmer line drawn between the professions and agriculture. That being said, South Carolina and the slave South were not alone in using agricultural reform and improvement as a tool for elite expression.<sup>44</sup> Sally McMurry has challenged scholarship that posits professional leadership of agricultural reform movements in the northern states, arguing that educated, relatively well-off farmers were the main subscribers to agricultural journals in the antebellum period.<sup>45</sup>

The *Southern Agriculturist* represented the agenda of the lowcountry aristocracy. In 1828, its first year of publication, the journal printed original articles by 29 authors who can be identified in the census and other corroborating documents.<sup>46</sup> These men (and they were all men) constituted a clear generation of southern agricultural reform.<sup>47</sup> While they argued about a great many issues, they led a cohort dominated by wealthy rice and Sea Island cotton planters who were very involved in both agricultural organizations and politics. With only two exceptions these improvers writing in a supposedly regional journal were from the South Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry.

Every one of the *Southern Agriculturist's* contributors in 1828 was born between 1758 and 1798.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority died before the Civil War; of the 29 contributors, only two are known to have lived to see the end of the war.<sup>49</sup> This post-revolutionary generation had built their plantation empires in the relative stability following the Revolutionary War, some expanding significant existing family holdings, but most entered the realm of the truly

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<sup>44</sup> Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*, esp. 57-80.

<sup>45</sup> Sally McMurry, "Who Read the Agricultural Journals? Evidence from Chenango county, New York, 1819-1865" *Agricultural History* 63 (Autumn 1989), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Many more original prices were printed under pseudonyms or were not traceable in any reliable documents.

<sup>47</sup> There was one woman, a Mrs. Russell, who wrote one article, but she could not be reliably identified.

<sup>48</sup> Again, this applies to those who could be found in the census with reliable birth information.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Henry Starr died in 1866 at the age of 69 and Samuel Henry Dickson died in 1872, at the age of 74.

wealthy during their own lifetime.<sup>50</sup> Even so, as the economic and often social elites in the United States' wealthiest region, these were men accustomed to power and leadership. The pages of the *Agriculturist* were filled with ambitious plans for re-making the southern economy, especially the seemingly troubled upcountry.

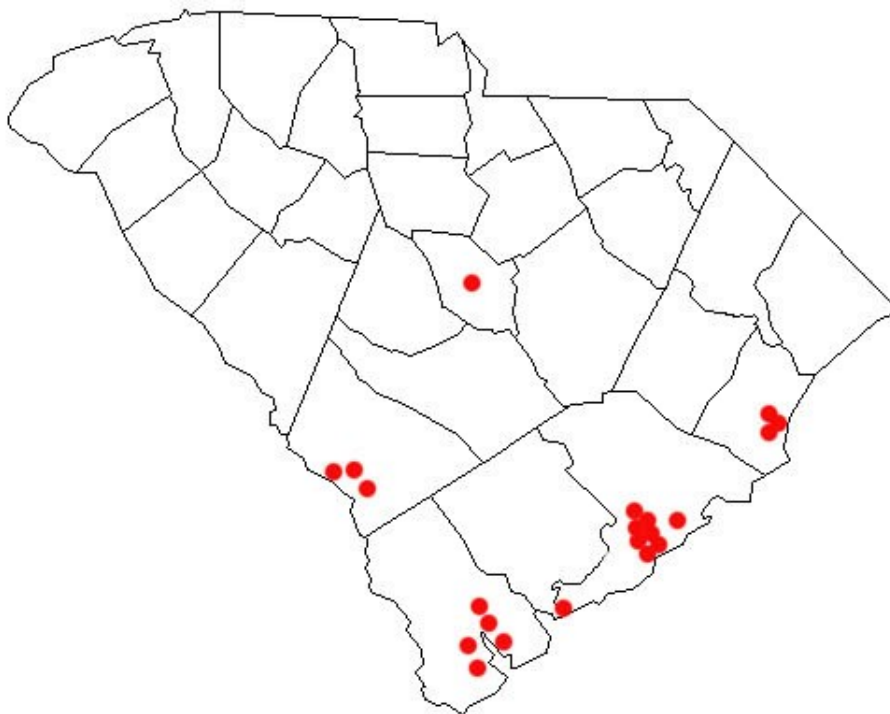
These men, aged between 40 and 70 when the journal began publication, were actively running their plantation empires and wrote to the journal as planters, not agricultural scientists. Samuel Dickson, a doctor and professor of medicine, William Prince, a horticulturist, and Roswell King, an overseer were the only authors who did not own at least one plantation or major business interests in Charleston. Even among that group, Prince was an outsider from New York whose expertise was solicited, and King's authority was built on his and his father's work for Pierce Butler, one of the wealthiest men in the state.

This was a group firmly centered not only on the Lowcountry plantation economy, but on Charleston in particular. The planters owned rice and cotton plantations from Florida to Georgetown County, but their lives were rooted in Charleston. Most owned at least one home in the city and were in close proximity to each other much of the year. Not only did they live in Charleston and work in the Lowcountry, they were very much of the Lowcountry, with only the New Yorker, William Prince, and one Floridian, George Clarke, born outside of South Carolina and Georgia.

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<sup>50</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Figure 2.4: Contributors to the *Southern Agriculturist*, 1828



In 1828, short-staple cotton, which could be grown outside of the Lowcountry, was already a major commodity and one that greatly interested the community of the *Southern Agriculturist*. Despite this interest, the *Southern Agriculturist's* gentleman planters had little personal experience with upcountry cotton. Abram Blanding was the only writer who had a plantation farther from the coast than Barnwell District, barely 50 miles from the coast. Blanding's lone Richland District plantation, near Columbia stood in stark contrast to the stranglehold that Columbia and the upcountry districts had over agricultural reform by the 1840s.

*The South Carolina Agriculturist, 1856*

In 1855, the State Agricultural society of South Carolina funded the publication of a new agricultural journal, *The South Carolina Agriculturist: a Journal of Agriculture, Horticulture, Mechanics, Rural Taste and Industrial Improvement*. There had been no major agricultural journal in the state since the *Southern Agriculturist* folded in 1846. Adam G. Summer was appointed editor and the journal began publication in May of 1856. The serial was unable to secure enough of a subscription base to continue, however, and the final number was published in December of the same year.

The *South Carolina Agriculturist*, unlike previous journals, was published by the State Agricultural Society, which had received \$5000 from the state legislature.<sup>51</sup> Up to this point, the agricultural press had been largely based on a patronage model whereby the founders and editors of journals hoped for enough advertisers and subscribers to sustain the publications financially, but couched the benefits of publication in terms of service to the state and consistently failed to make the journals financially viable. Despite the new support, the *South Carolina Agriculturist* fared no better in terms of its print run, though it may have had a run of reasonable size, as more copies of the serial survive than of either the *Southern Agriculturist* (1853) or the much longer tenured *Farmer and Planter* (1850-1861). The publication had a subsidized first issue that did not result in subscriptions for a second year, despite assertions that supporters would “push the ‘South Carolina Agriculturist’ into every nook and corner in the country.”<sup>52</sup>

The title of the publication neatly summed up the seemingly conflicting goals of agricultural improvement in South Carolina. As with many agricultural journals, the title was

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<sup>51</sup> On state support for agricultural reform in the South, see John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), Chapter Two, “Agricultural Reform and State Activism,” 53-80.

<sup>52</sup> *South Carolina Agriculturist*, November 21 1856.

regionally specific and suggested that it was a journal writing for an audience defined by a profession. This reflected planters' desire to be seen as experts in a defined field, part of a movement towards system. The subtitle includes the various elements that any agricultural improver in South Carolina should be interested in. It is relevant that these constituent elements extend well beyond the practical aspect of improved agriculture, covered by only one of the four terms, "agriculture." The second term, "horticulture," in this context referred to growing plants other than major crops and had been part of agricultural reform in the South for decades. The gentlemanly experimentation of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century had involved significant experimentation with a wide variety of plants and the *Southern Agriculturist* had quickly developed a section on horticulture and gardens, as would later journals.

The final terms in the subtitle, "Mechanics," "Rural Taste," and "Industrial Improvement" provide a clear glimpse of how agricultural planters sought to define themselves in the 1850s. *Mechanics* and *Industrial Improvement* demonstrated reformers consistent commitment to modernizing southern agriculture and utilizing the most efficient systems and implements for maximizing agricultural production. *Rural Taste* provides a firm reminder that all of this industrial production must come in an agricultural context. Most reformers wanted to modernize the plantation economy, not re-make it as an industrial economy. Factory production, such as cotton mills, was to be encouraged, but only as a complementary activity to profit fully from agricultural production, which was to remain at the center of the political economy of South Carolina.

*The Farmer and Planter, 1850-1861*

From 1850 to 1861, the major agricultural journal in South Carolina was the *Farmer and Planter*, published in Columbia by Major George Seaborn, a planter in Pendleton, about 40 miles from the Georgia border. Seaborn's *Farmer and Planter* had grand ambitions, hoping to gain a following from South Carolina to Texas, but by 1858, even the wealthy Seaborn was looking to offload the struggling paper. Seaborn had significant assets to back the publication, but in a recurring theme in southern agricultural reform, the paper was a constant drain on his resources, never able to support itself. In 1858, Robert Stokes bought the *Farmer and Planter*, a failing South Carolina agricultural serial, and re-launched it as a journal focused on South Carolina and bringing together the upcountry and lowcountry planters. Stokes installed William Summer as the editor of the reborn paper.

Summer and Stokes made over the mission of the paper. While Seaborn had courted subscribers as far away as Texas, the agents for the new *Farmer and Planter* were all in South Carolina, with a goal of having an agent in every town in the state. While they never reached that goal, the pair managed to place dozens and dozens of agents throughout South Carolina. They positioned the paper as a valuable resource for the state, printing a testimony from a subscriber identified as "LAURENS" that suggested that state pride should draw subscribers to the "only Agricultural journal in the state."<sup>53</sup> The journal was to promote improved agriculture in South Carolina, and help chart a new course for the state as an agricultural economy. They, too, soon became preoccupied with subscribership, both for financial reasons and as a measure of the success of spreading reform in the state. By the end of the first year under new stewardship, a plea for new subscribers appeared on the back cover of the December issue of the *Farmer and Planter*. The urgent need for a subscriber base

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<sup>53</sup> Laurens, "Preparation and Culture of Land," *Farmer and Planter* (Columbia, S.C.), January, 1859. LCP

of 4000 to continue publication beyond a second year was already a downward adjustment from a goal of 5000 subscribers within a year stated in October of the same year.<sup>54</sup>

The *Farmer and Planter*, more than the *Southern Agriculturist*, emphasized the practical elements of its approach to broadening agricultural knowledge. Articles frequently directly addressed the impracticability of book learning without practical experience. The articles in its pages also had a much greater awareness of differences in wealth, and geography, within the planter class. Some subscribers worried about such divides, hoping the journal would “induc[e] a more intimate acquaintance between low-country and up-country planters.”<sup>55</sup> One stated goal of the journal was to unite the state. In this sense, the legacy of the *Farmer and Planter* was decidedly mixed. As far as the journal succeeded in getting subscribers, they seem to have been in the upcountry that was neglected by the *Southern Agriculturist* and that had seen incredible increases in population (both slave and free), acres under cultivation, and wealth.

The agents for the journal were printed in a number of issues. While there are no known copies of subscriber lists, the profile of agents gives some insight into the reach of the journal. As with mapping the contributors to the *Southern Agriculturist*, a proxy for subscribers must be used for the *Farmer and Planter*, in this case a list of agents, which is even more problematic, given that some of the agents took that role without a major commitment to the journal, though fortunately for this study, not many. Substituting for subscribers is necessary when dealing with agricultural periodicals. Very few subscription lists survive and they are heavily used when found.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Farmer and Planter* (Columbia, S.C.), October, December, 1859.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, January, 1859.

<sup>56</sup> McMurry, “Who Read the Agricultural Journals?” and Jeremy Fisher, “Improving the Soul and Mind: The Geography of the *Cultivator*” (Ph.D. Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 2008) both look to draw significant conclusions about agricultural reform and subscribers to journals based on a list of subscribers to the *Cultivator* (Albany, NY) of one agent in Chanango County, NY. The number of subscribers involved peaks at 33 in 1846,



In antebellum America subscriber debt was commonplace. The problem was particularly pronounced for serial publications, which required repeated payments and often had to send out portions of the publication before receiving payment, and for rural consumers, who were harder to track down for payment. If “Americans across the board were habitually derelict in paying their literary debts,” agricultural reformers were about the worst possible subscription base—rural people subscribing to serial publications.<sup>57</sup> This made agents all the more necessary, as it was not possible for the editor or publisher to personally demand payment; agents across the state had to dun (visit to collect payment from) delinquent subscribers on the publishers behalf. It is not clear if the *Farmer and Planter* sent its agents out to dun tardy subscribers, but at the very least, it needed agents convenient to the towns and post offices where subscribers would receive their papers. Unlike many publications, however, most agents for the journal were not simply convenient functionaries (postmasters, printers, publishers) but planters and reformers themselves who were committed to helping the journal succeed. Some agents, like General George Kinard of Newberry District or John Marshall, a state senator and jurist from Abbeville District, owned large plantations and hundreds of slaves, while more owned a smaller cotton plantation, with 10-30 slaves. The majority of the agents were born in South Carolina and those who were born elsewhere had largely lived in the state for decades. The agents for the *Farmer and Planter* were younger than the writers in the *Southern Agriculturist*, with most forty years old or younger, though there were notable exceptions.<sup>58</sup> The agents did have one thing

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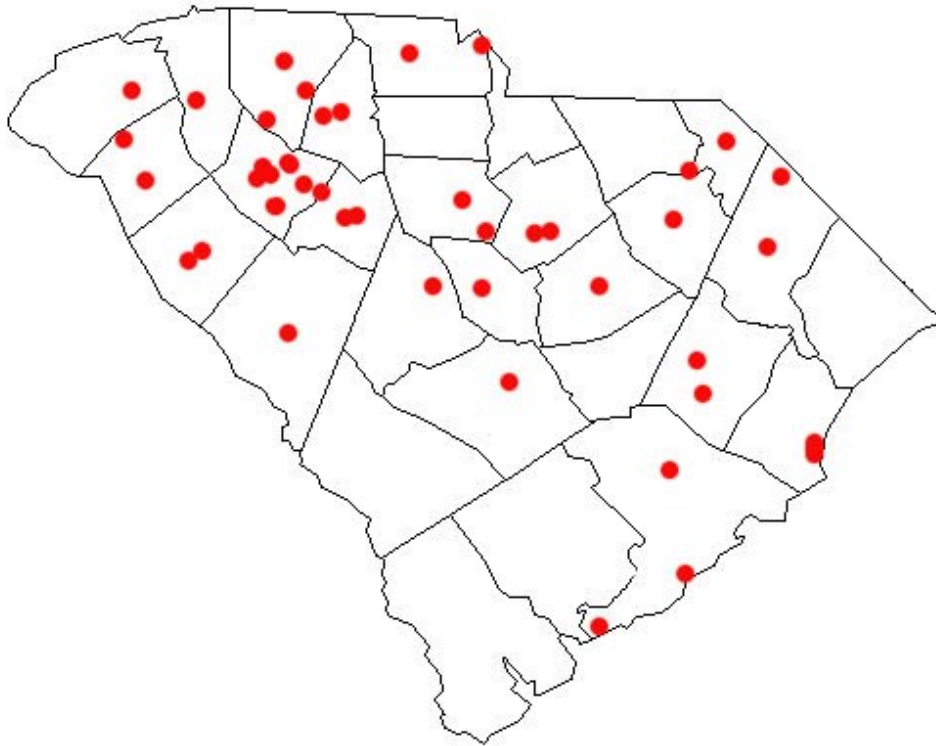
when the journal had well over 10 000 subscribers. John Kvach writes an entire chapter on the subscribers to *DeBow's Review*. Kvach, “The First New South: J.D.B. DeBow's Promotion of a Modern Economy in the Old South” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2008), 62-86.

<sup>57</sup> Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 143-144.

<sup>58</sup> This group of agents is drawn from the *Farmer and Planter* (Columba, S.C.) 1, August 1859. I cross-referenced the names of the agents with the US Federal Census from 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, and 1860, as well as the agricultural schedules from 1850.

in common with the writers in the *Southern Agriculturist* in that they were primarily farmers and planters, not professionals. Other than the scattered postmasters and printers in the group, there are very few merchants, lawyers, or doctors who did not also run a plantation, again contradicting the standard portrayal of agricultural reform as the precinct of modernizing professionals.<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 2.5: Agents for the *Farmer and Planter*, August, 1859**



The journal had very limited success courting the established planter gentry of the Lowcountry or their networks. In fact, comparing the map of agents for the *Farmer and Planter* with the map of contributors to the *Southern Agriculturist*, there is almost no overlap

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<sup>59</sup> Demaree, *American Agricultural Press*, 341-343. Donald Marti, "Agricultural Journalism and the Diffusion of Knowledge: The First Half-Century in America" *Agricultural History* 54 (1980), 36-38; McMurry, "Who Read the Agricultural Journals?," 2-3.

between the constituencies of the two journals. The two serials clearly reflected the particular climate of reform in which they were published. Agricultural journals were seen in the antebellum period and are still seen by historians as not only constituent elements of reform, but also as the primary tool for uniting disparate reformers into a community. The two journals undoubtedly helped build communities in print, but they seem to have reflected an existing social order to a much greater degree. This should come as no surprise, given the degree to which southern reform was a socially rooted movement, with social and economic, rather than agricultural, networks. The reach of each publication was relatively similar to the range of existing agricultural societies at the time and to the homes of the individuals most in control of the state, socially, economically, and politically.

### **Agricultural Societies**

So far, I have continued the practice of recent scholarship in locating agricultural societies, along with journals, as the key centers of agricultural reform.<sup>60</sup> While there is undoubtedly some truth to this, agricultural societies represent a somewhat different vein of reform than journals do. The serials deviated from specific methods of improved agriculture to discuss the future of the region as a continued agricultural power, including the place of industry in a future South. Their focus remained, however, on the ideas surrounding agriculture and the political economy of the region. In agricultural societies, however, it is reasonable to suggest that this was often not the case. Large state agricultural societies' like the State Agricultural Society of South Carolina had a bureaucratic bent and the distance that members had to travel to meetings discouraged all but the most committed reformers from

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<sup>60</sup> Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*; Marti, "Agricultural Journalism and the Diffusion of Knowledge"; McMurry, "Who Read the Agricultural Journals?" This emphasis on agricultural journals and societies makes some sense for South Carolina and the southern Seaboard, but, in Chapter Three, I argue that a new model for reform emerged in the southwestern cotton states.

attending. Local societies, however, often consisted of meetings of like-minded, but also socially networked planters and agriculturists who enjoyed each other's company. The meetings provided an opportunity to socialize and catch up with friends.

The establishment of the *American Farmer* in 1819 was a major turning point for agricultural improvement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the first nationally distributed agricultural journal, it played a formative role in the creation of national and regional agricultural literatures and networks. The journal repeatedly called for the formation of agricultural societies, suggesting that if “our legislatures will only dismiss their mistaken prejudices, and second the efforts of these societies...” real progress could be made.<sup>61</sup> In South Carolina, a state agricultural society was formed in 1818, although one had previously been formed in 1785, and its formation reported in the first volume of the *American Farmer*.<sup>62</sup> Many local societies did spring up in South Carolina in the years following the formation of the state society, playing a key role in disseminating agricultural knowledge.

The Agricultural Society of South Carolina was founded in 1785, as the South-Carolina Society for Promoting and Improving Agricultural, and Other Rural Concerns, by planters in the Charleston District.<sup>63</sup> In 1795, it was officially incorporated as the Agricultural Society of South Carolina. This society lasted until 1860, though it increasingly came to define itself as a society for Charleston and the Lowcountry, despite retaining the name suggesting a statewide reach. The society had an increasingly adversarial relationship to upcountry and statewide attempts to organize agricultural reform around Columbia. A

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<sup>61</sup> “Agricultural Societies,” *American Farmer* 1, no. 47 (February 18, 1820): 375.

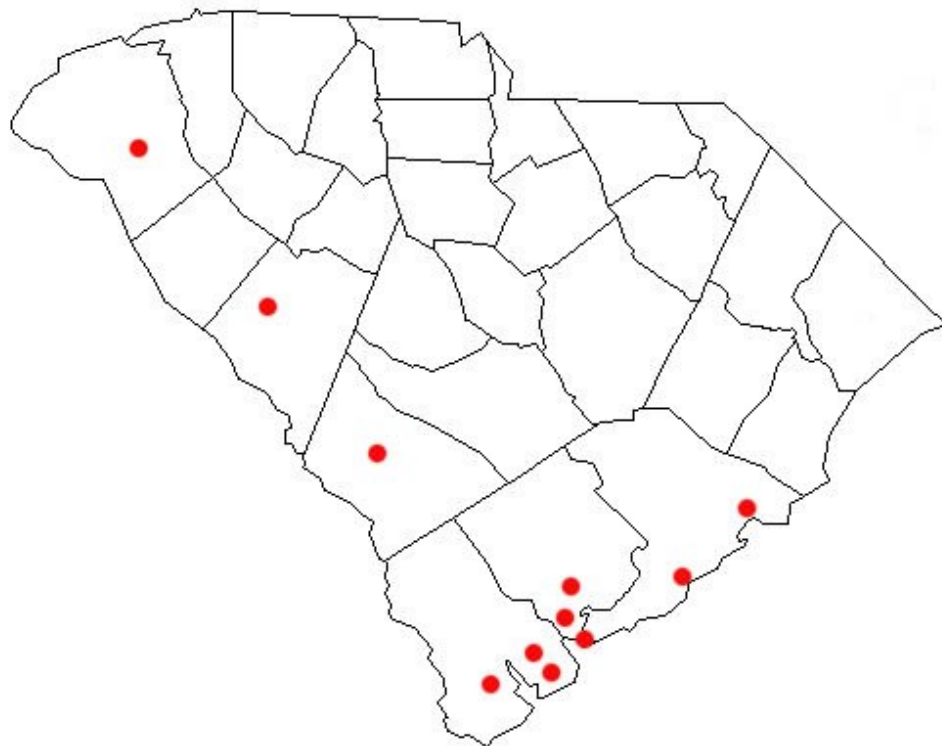
<sup>62</sup> “Constitution of the South Carolina Agricultural Society,” *American Farmer* 1, no. 28 (October 8, 1819): 217; Chaplin, *Anxious Pursuit*, 140.

<sup>63</sup> Note that there are two agricultural societies in South Carolina that should not be confused. The Agricultural Society of South-Carolina was founded in Charleston in 1785 and the State Agricultural Society of South Carolina was founded in Columbia in 1818.

second society, founded in 1818, made similar claims to speak for agricultural reform in South Carolina, but represented the interests of cotton planters in the upcountry.

In 1823, there were eleven agricultural societies in South Carolina—a state society and ten local societies. These local societies were clustered in the Lowcountry around Charleston and Georgetown and along the Savannah River, bordering Georgia. With the exception of the Barnwell, Pendleton, and Edgefield Societies, they were in areas that had been dominated by large plantations and slave majorities for decades. The planters that owned these large plantations traveled in the same Charleston social circles and had numerous familial and business ties. Many were frequent correspondents who shared agricultural information.

**Figure 2.6: Agricultural Societies in South Carolina, 1823**



In 1839, no state agricultural society had been consistently active for decades, with the Charleston based Agricultural Society of South Carolina largely focused on the Lowcountry. There was a brief revival of the old society in 1818, under the leadership of General W.R. Davie, but it collapsed after a few short years. Whitemarsh Seabrook, a major figure in South Carolina agricultural reform in the 1820s, as well as prominent politicians, founded another state-wide society, the United Agricultural Society in December of 1826. Founded as a result of the various local societies coming together, the new society was established in Columbia and failed to draw the attendance of members of some of the lowcountry societies, despite Seabrook's leadership. The society did not last through the brief term of its second president, Thomas Pinckney, who assumed the position in 1828. In 1839, however, an active society was led by Patrick Noble and Whitemarsh Seabrook (again) amongst others, but founded by the State Legislature. The Legislature also provided the Society with funds for agricultural premiums, or prizes.

The State Agricultural Society of South Carolina lasted only until 1845, but it began a number of initiatives to spur reform in the state. These initiatives were helped by regular funding from the state legislature. The society initially failed in one of its major objectives, however, when no agricultural journal was produced by the society. In 1840, this was somewhat remedied when Robert Gibbes, the secretary and treasurer of the Society, founded a short-lived serial on his own, the *Carolina Planter* (1840). This journal was published in Columbia, where the state society had been re-established and the seat of the state legislature. Columbia was a central location that pulled the center of reform away from its traditional home in Charleston and the Lowcountry. By 1840, the production of short-staple cotton had moved upcountry and was dramatically more valuable, in total, than the Lowcountry products of rice and long-staple Sea Island cotton.

The State Agricultural Society of 1839-1845 marked the formalization of the shift of power and of the center of reform from Charleston and the Lowcountry to Columbia and the upcountry short-staple cotton lands. While the society was centered in Columbia, the lowcountry planters still held significant sway. The first President of the society was Patrick Noble, the sitting Governor of South Carolina. Noble had spent over a decade representing upcountry Abbeville in the state House of Representatives and Senate and had partnered with John C. Calhoun in law practice in Abbeville. Upon Noble's death, only a year after the establishment of the Society, Whitmarsh Seabrook took the office. Seabrook represented the previous era of reform in South Carolina. Seabrook grew Sea Island cotton on his lowcountry plantation on Edisto Island, Gun Bluff. He was one of the most prominent figures in South Carolina reform in the 1820s, founding and presiding over agricultural societies, delivering addresses, and publishing his work in pamphlets. He was a frequent correspondent to the *Southern Agriculturist*, based in Charleston, and represented Charleston District in the state legislature.

In the 1850s, the State Agricultural Society was revived yet again. With nearly a decade elapsed since a state society was active, a call was put out for an agricultural convention in Columbia, which would serve as the headquarters of any new organization. Adam Summer praised the "central position of Columbia, with railroads radiating in all directions" as an excellent choice, though the fact that it was only 30 miles from his plantation and business, Pomaria Nurseries, surely did not escape his notice either. The new society named three officers in its first years, Andrew Pickens Calhoun as President and Adam Summer as Secretary and Treasurer, followed in that capacity two years later by

Robert Gage.<sup>64</sup> All three men were from upcountry South Carolina; Calhoun was from Anderson District, Summer from Newberry District, and Gage from Union District, all of which were north of Columbia. The society was active and held annual fairs until its abandonment with the start of the Civil War, awarding state-sponsored premiums for everything from cotton to book binding and exhibits featuring products manufactured in South Carolina, ranging from watches to opium.<sup>65</sup>

The *Southern Agriculturist* published a list of agricultural societies in South Carolina, compiled by Whitemarsh Seabrook, the President of the State Agricultural Society of South Carolina and a future governor of the state.<sup>66</sup> Seabrook detailed the names, locations, and presidents of seventeen societies in the state, from his own state-wide society to parish level societies, such as the St. John's, Colleton, Agricultural Society, based on Edisto Island. Taken together, these societies formed a network of reform-minded South Carolinian elites, with leadership remaining the preserve of the wealthy; the network now spanned almost the entire state and the upcountry societies were more numerous than their lowcountry counterparts. This list, while incomplete, includes the major agricultural societies in the state. There were many societies omitted; they were the small or short-lived, often local rather than district level, societies. These were the societies like the Black Creek Farmer's Club, characterized by infrequent meetings, small memberships and budgets, and short lifespans.

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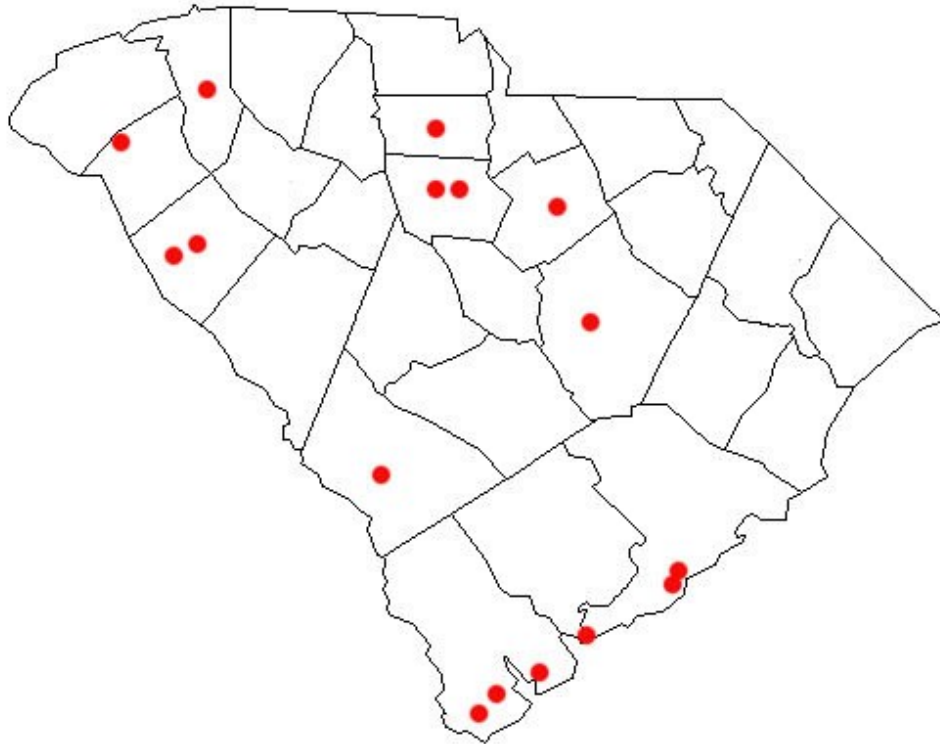
<sup>64</sup> South Carolina State Agricultural and Mechanical Society, *History of the State Agricultural Society of South Carolina from 1839 to 1845: Inclusive, of the State Agricultural Society of South Carolina from 1855 to 1861, Inclusive, of the State Agricultural and Mechanical Society of South Carolina from 1869 to 1916, Inclusive* (Columbia, S.C.: R.L. Bryan Company, 1916), 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> *Southern Agriculturist*, July, 1841.



**Figure 2.7: Agricultural Societies in South Carolina, 1841**



In many ways, we can think of most agricultural societies (perhaps excepting the large state and national societies) as social clubs of like-minded men loosely organized around agriculture. This interpretation is well-supported when reading between the lines of the minutes of agricultural societies and has been recognized by earlier scholars, writers who knew personally some of the members of these antebellum societies. For example, Cornelius Irvine Walker, who was born in 1842, wrote a history of the Agricultural Society of South Carolina in 1919 (the Charleston society).<sup>67</sup> In his history, Walker carefully stated that “much prominence has always been given to social features, which have given enjoyment and added

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<sup>67</sup> C. Irvine Walker, *History of the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, founded Aug. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1785 at Charles Town, S.C.* (Charleston, SC, 1919). Walker was also an honorary member of the Society himself and very close to its workings and interests.

attraction to the Society” and that the “Society essayed several picnics, of compliment or for sociability and pleasure.” More tellingly perhaps, in describing the antebellum Society, Walker admits that at their meetings “the discussion of dinner was as important as that of agriculture.” He also references a Charleston *Courier* article that noted the presence, at dinner, of a “bottle of wine of 1797, and another believed to be older.”<sup>68</sup>

The records of the Black Creek Farmer’s Club lend some support to the idea of agricultural societies as social clubs. The agricultural society was extremely small, with 7 members at its founding meeting in February of 1860 and 19 at the end of the year, though, other than the annual meeting, attendance was between 4 and 9 for each meeting. The Club met semi-regularly at the plantations of members on a rotating basis. The meetings were frequently cancelled and the time between meetings gradually increased. The minutes of the Society also decreased in length over time. Meetings seem to have consisted of the members trickling in to the plantation well after the appointed hour (resulting in a number of complaints about “waiting an undue length of time for the arrival of others”), leading to an abbreviated tour of the fields and buildings.<sup>69</sup> Reports from the various committees (on Hogs, to Experiment on Cotton with Peruvian Guano, Compost Manures, Horticulture, etc...) were filed late or not at all, with a few exceptions. The one type of report that was regularly filed in the minutes was the report of the plantation where the society had met the previous meeting. These reports tended to mix complimentary openings with passive aggressive criticisms of the state of culture and backhanded compliments: “The ditches seemed to have received considerable attention recently, but from the size of the trees cut on the banks we suppose they have not hitherto systematically attended to.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> I have not been able to locate this article myself. *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>69</sup> June 21, 1860, “Black Creek Agricultural Society Minutes,” 1860-1861, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 23, 1860.

The majority of meetings seem to have consisted mostly of socialization, though the references are somewhat oblique. For example, on March 1, 1860, after a brief tour, the “club then repaired to the house, concluded to postpone discussion until after dinner” and when the time came for the discussion it “continued for some time & was interesting to all.”<sup>71</sup> Occasionally more direct references to why discussion might have been so interesting to all were dropped into the minutes, as when J.L. Coker noted that the club “adjourned for the discussion of some very excellent cider which had received the attention of members at intervals throughout the day.”<sup>72</sup> Less than two months later, the members indulged “in a draft of cider equal to New Ark” at eleven in the morning, before proceeding to the examination of the plantation.<sup>73</sup> Coker even cloaked the revelry in the politics of the time when he noted that later that same day, members repaired to a table “bountifully supplied with the substantials of life, to which we did ample justice” and then “indulged in domestic wines, cider & Apples all of which were fine and a proof that we may be an independent people.”<sup>74</sup> The members did have a topic of discussion each meeting and a number of agricultural reports were submitted over the course of the year covered in the minutes, but the club was certainly as important socially as it was agriculturally.

The Black Creek Agricultural Society was essentially the successor to the Darlington County Agricultural Society, with many of the same members. Brief minutes survive for the Darlington Society from 1846 to 1855. The Darlington Society drew members from a somewhat larger area and is more representative of county, district, or parish level societies, while the Black Creek Farmer’s Club reflects local societies. The Darlington group met at a

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., March 1, 1860.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Sep. 13, 1860.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Nov. 8, 1860.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Nov. 8, 1860.

central location in Mineral Springs and sought to build a house for the Society.<sup>75</sup> Many more reports were read, committees formed and agricultural business recorded in the minutes. Even so, one of the longest entries on a committee in the ten year span of the minutes concerns the “Committee on Reorganization of Committees” and its responsibility for dinners. Until 1847, a Mr. H.H. Rugg had been paid to provide dinner for the members after each meeting, but the members hoped for a higher standard and insisted that the committee “be charged with the further duty of attending in person to their preparation.”<sup>76</sup> This resolution was then annulled, after debate, some months later, and a caterer again installed.<sup>77</sup> In 1854, the Society decided to shorten meetings so that they could “close proceedings hereafter before dinner,” which would, of course, still be provided.<sup>78</sup>

Local and district level agricultural societies in South Carolina differed markedly from reform societies elsewhere. The tone was far from serious, religion played virtually no role, and membership was wealthy and rural (though many also owned homes in cities). In keeping with agricultural reform’s role as a forum for elite, white South Carolinian men to discuss society and economy generally, agriculture was present but not the only topic of discussion in agricultural societies. Membership mirrored social and economic ties. This ensured shared interests and meant that there were virtually no doctrinal splits within societies. While there was a divide between lowcountry and upcountry planters, that largely played out between, not within, societies.

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<sup>75</sup> “Darlington County Agricultural Society, Minutes, 1846-1884,” Aug 12, 1856, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1847.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1848.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1854.

## **The Overlapping Networks of Reform: The Summer Brothers and Nurseries**

In 1840, brothers William and Adam Summer established Pomaria Nurseries in Newberry District, South Carolina, which became one of the largest nurseries in the South. The Summers' nursery quickly rose to prominence in horticultural circles, becoming one of the largest sellers of fruit trees in the Lower South. The two figured prominently in the major structures of reform in South Carolina from 1840-1861, with Adam serving as Secretary and Treasurer for the South Carolina Agricultural Society of 1855-1861. Additionally, the two were involved with most of the agricultural publications of the time; Adam was the editor of the *Southern Agriculturist* (1853) and the Columbia-based *South Carolina Agriculturist* (1856) and William edited the second iteration of the *Farmer and Planter* (1859-1861). The *Farmer and Planter* also became a major vehicle for promoting Pomaria Nurseries, with prominent advertisements in each issue and a catalogue sent out annually to subscribers. The Summers', like many other southern nurserymen, such as Thomas Affleck of Southern Nurseries in Mississippi and Texas and Dennis Redmond of Fruitland Nurseries in Georgia, were very involved in the larger agricultural reform movement in the South between 1840 and the start of the Civil War. William was the major operator of the nursery, while Adam raised ornamental plants on his nearby plantation, while also managing a law practice.<sup>79</sup> Living in the Columbia area, the brothers were well positioned to join the South Carolina reform movement when its leadership shifted from the lowcountry rice and Sea Island cotton barons toward the capital and the agricultural writers, state politicians, and cotton planters of the upcountry.

In 1853, the Summers started a new agricultural journal in South Carolina. Even to their close friends, this seemed like a terrible idea. People saw Adam as well-meaning, but

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<sup>79</sup> James Kibler, "On Reclaiming a Southern Antebellum Garden Heritage: An Introduction to Pomaria Nurseries, 1840-1879." *Magnolia: Bulletin of the Southern Garden History Society* 10 (Fall 1993), 3-4.

foolish, impulsive, and somewhat less than competent. Agricultural journals in most southern states were not good business, even for those not known for their profligate ways. The serials rarely attracted enough subscribers to sustain themselves and the journals that did get off the ground almost never lasted more than a few years. William had experience with agricultural journals, having edited a department in the major South Carolina agricultural journal, so was familiar with the economics of such ventures. Despite all of these reasons not to start a journal, the brothers resisted outside advice and began to publish the *Southern Agriculturist*.<sup>80</sup> Adam may not have been careful with his finances, but William had carefully built a nursery business with great success. Why, then, would the Summer brothers enter such a risky business? If we assume that they knew what they were doing, there are at least two possible reasons. Either the brothers were so committed to agricultural reform that they were willing to risk losing money, or they saw a financial benefit that might outweigh the probable losses that the journal itself would sustain. The Summer brothers and other nurserymen across the South found the agricultural reform movement to be a particularly useful avenue for promoting and expanding their nurseries; many other nurserymen entered agricultural reform circles and started, edited, or contributed to agricultural journals. The wealthy planter-reformers who expressed an interest in the practice and appearance of planting were a ready market for nurseries and controlling a journal provided an effective way to not only advertise and distribute catalogues, but to establish themselves as the most expert nurserymen in a region. I argue that nurserymen made horticulture and related disciplines central to southern agricultural reform in order to expand their own businesses. These men were uniquely motivated to sustain losses in publishing and editing journals and

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<sup>80</sup> This was a different publication than the Charleston-based *Southern Agriculturist* of 1828-1846, which was largely edited by John Legaré.

so gained outsized influence in the agricultural reform movement and pushed horticulture to the core of the literature.

It is no coincidence that the most prominent editors of agricultural journals were nurserymen and cotton seed breeders. From the Summers to Thomas Affleck, and Noah Cloud, the men who ran many of the most prominent agricultural journals in the South had much to gain from convincing wealthy planters to thumb through their publications.<sup>81</sup> Nearly all of the journals regularly included a full catalogue of the proprietor's nursery or cotton business, which was often longer than the journal itself. Why wouldn't these nurserymen simply advertise in agricultural journals that already existed, rather than undertaking the expensive and rarely profitable enterprise of starting a journal of their own? Often, there simply was no widely circulated journal in the region that their business targeted and advertising in journals that covered many states could be prohibitively expensive and wasteful. Additionally, a journal could increase local interest in improved varieties of fruit and ornamental plants and provide instruction on how to tend them. Other times, there was a journal that already served a subscriber base that the nurserymen wished to target. Even in these cases, however, nurserymen often preferred to start a journal of their own, both to make sure their catalogue was the one displayed prominently and to establish themselves as agricultural and horticultural authorities who could be trusted to produce and provide the best plants.

Take the example of the Summers and Pomaria Nurseries. The brothers could easily have advertised in the *Farmer and Planter*, the major agricultural journal in South Carolina starting in 1850. For a state agricultural journal, the *Farmer and Planter* had a substantial reach with over fifty agents in counties across the state and boasted over a thousand subscribers by

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas Affleck's career is covered in Chapter Three. Noah Cloud edited the *American Cotton Planter*, in Alabama.

1859. This number may not seem enormous, but consider that there were probably fewer than six thousand planters in South Carolina during the serial's run. For a time that is exactly what the Summers did. Later, William would serve as editor of the horticultural department of a second version *Farmer and Planter*, published after the failure of the original paper as well as the Summers' *Southern Agriculturist*, which raised his profile within the South Carolina reform community.

When the Summer brothers decided, against the advice of many friends and fellow reformers, to start a new journal, the *Southern Agriculturist*, based in Laurensville, about 70 miles northwest of Columbia; the final number was published in July of 1854. Many prominent reformers saw the founding of a second major agricultural journal in South Carolina, when the first did not have a secure future, as a betrayal of the reform cause. This new journal exposed one of the major fault lines in the agricultural reform movement. Many reformers believed that agricultural reform should be primarily for the greater good (limited to white planters, of course) and should be subsidized through society dues, journal subscriptions, and plantation experiments. These men viewed agricultural reform as a long term solution for safeguarding the continued profitability of a slave-based agricultural economy. While these men still hoped to profit from their reform ventures, reform was not primarily a money-making venture in their minds. Even close friends of the Summers', like planter and agricultural authority Robert Gage, worried that the journal "must go down" because it had been "as much as the Farmer & Planter could do to beg a support & with two one would surely starve."<sup>82</sup>

The new *Southern Agriculturist* was thus seen as an attack on the reform establishment in South Carolina and struggled to draw subscribers away from the *Farmer and Planter*. In fact,

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas Affleck Papers, W:112 Box 8, Folder 7, R.J. Gage to Thomas Affleck, June 19, 1854.



their skeptical friend and ally, Robert Gage, knew the “opposition [the paper] would meet from the Farmer & Planter & its friends.”<sup>83</sup> The Summers themselves seemed much more interested in having a journal that could focus on promoting their nursery than they did on confronting other reformers. When the *Southern Agriculturist* failed, despite state backing, the Summers began looking for new opportunities. In 1856, Adam edited the Columbia-based *South Carolina Agriculturist* which quickly ceased publication. Undeterred by their past failures and the eagerness of the current owner to sell, the Summers decided to buy out their competition and, along with another investor, acquired the *Farmer and Planter* in 1859, which William began editing.

The Summers’ eagerness to promote their nursery also extended to aspects of agricultural reform beyond publishing. Adam’s willingness to edit a journal and serve as Secretary and Treasurer of the South Carolina Agricultural Society provided the two with significant influence over agricultural reform. The Society decided to hold an agricultural convention and Adam Summer praised the “central position of Columbia, with railroads radiating in all directions” as an excellent choice, though the fact that it was only 30 miles from his plantation and business, Pomaria Nurseries, surely did not escape his notice either.<sup>84</sup>

Recently, scholars have argued that commercial and plantation orchards and nurseries had real currency with southern agricultural reformers, as they represented self-sufficiency, economic diversification, and enlightened farming.<sup>85</sup> I suggest another explanation—that orchards and nurseries featured prominently in agricultural reform because nurserymen found it economically expedient to become centrally involved in

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas Affleck Papers, W:120 Box 31, Folder 6, R.J. Gage to Thomas Affleck, Feb. 21, 1857.

<sup>84</sup> South Carolina State Agricultural and Mechanical Society, *History of the State Agricultural Society of South Carolina from 1839 to 1845*, 61.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Mills Herrington, “Agricultural and Architectural Reform in the Antebellum South: Fruitland at Augusta, Georgia” *Journal of Southern History* 78 (Nov. 2012): 855-886.

agricultural reform and other reformers found them to be useful hubs for reform, with their large business and correspondence networks. While there was certainly an element of mutual reinforcement, people interested in agriculture were also often interested in orchards, and there is compelling evidence to suggest that nurserymen played a key role in placing pomology and horticulture near the center of agricultural reform. Agricultural journals whose editors owned nurseries and orchards featured horticulture and pomology prominently, sometimes dedicating a third of their original material to the subject, while journals that were not owned or edited by nurserymen gave far less attention to the topic, both in terms of articles published (which could, perhaps, be attributed to lack of expertise) and its importance in their discussions of southern agricultural reform in general.

In many ways, horticulture, as advanced by the Summers fit a vision of agricultural reform centered on cotton incredibly well. Horticulture provided a new subject area that was strongly connected to the trans-Atlantic knowledge networks that southern reformers embraced, while avoiding the nasty subject of slavery. Reformers tried to avoid too much discussion of the details of slavery. This was not limited to obviously taboo topics such as whipping and torturing slaves but included limiting any detailed discussion of slave labor or living conditions. Horticulture was the perfect foil to other plantation discussion because it emphasized the aspects of agriculture that reformers sought to highlight in cotton production, namely, biological innovation, pest control, scientific discussion of plants, preparation of land, and a vision of the region that was expressed through agriculture and horticulture. In cotton fields, reformers saw an economic future for the South; in orchards and ornamental gardens, reformers saw a cultural and social future for the South's ruling elite. The Summer brothers catered to these visions, emphasizing the role that their European gardeners played in running the nursery and printing articles that emphasized the

many ways in which South Carolina was uniquely suited to grow a sophisticated array of ornamental plants and fruit trees.

Like most other nurserymen, the Summer brothers saw horticulture and pomology as a complement to cotton, not an alternate possible future for a South with a diversified economy less reliant on slavery. In fact, the Summers, much like fellow nurseryman and reformer Thomas Affleck of Mississippi, were strong advocates for the preeminence of cotton in the South. In South Carolina, competing schools of agricultural reformers struggled to influence the journals and agricultural societies of the state. William and Adam Summer firmly allied themselves with a group of planter-reformers centered in the Carolina upcountry, around the state capital of Columbia. These men saw a future for the state and region centered on massive cotton production, in contrast to the Charleston elite who had dominated the reform movement through the 1830s, who often advocated for a more diverse selection of crops and limiting cotton production.

Even for nurserymen like the Summers, cotton plantations did not exist outside of the modern world—they were compatible with progress, improvement, and new economic structures. Looking at the role that nurserymen and horticulture played in the agricultural reform movement helps us see just how many different agendas were involved in the movement and just how central the cotton plantation was. Even in pushing to make horticulture and pomology part of agricultural reform, most nurserymen saw these elements as complementary to cotton production. The flourishing of horticulture in South, in their minds, would simply serve to show how compatible the cotton plantation was with scientific progress and cultured living.

## Conclusion

Agricultural reform in antebellum South Carolina was inconstant and uneven at the state level, but for most of the antebellum period, reformers were not looking for state level societies to form the basis for reform. Privately funded societies and journals still focused on thinking through new directions for the plantation economy as much as on improving the daily practice of agriculture. This chapter's focus on who was involved with the various institutions of reform, rather than on what each society or journal accomplished relative to their own goals shows how agricultural reform was centered on the larger social and economic interests of large groups. Reform reflected and participated in the struggle between Charleston and the Lowcountry and Columbia and the upcountry for control within South Carolina. As early as the 1810s, with the formation of a Columbia-based state-wide agricultural society the divisions were clear. By the 1820s, the Charleston society was already at odds with the Columbia societies and this was reflected in the pages of the *Southern Agriculturist*. By the 1840s, state-wide political and economic shifts were well underway and agricultural reform took a similar shape.

This chapter has rejected the “failure” model of reform and presented an alternative way of looking at agricultural reform. Reform was not a coherent movement with an agenda and a clear set of reforms. It was a loosely-knit group of people who floated in and out of the institutions and shared a commitment to progress and efficiency. The lofty goals that many institutions trumpeted were almost never met, but the various aspects of agricultural reform left a lasting, though not necessarily positive, legacy for plantation agriculture and slavery across the South. The following chapters will trace how one instrument of reform, a printed plantation record book, recorded the lives of hundreds of thousands of slaves and

represents the evolution of reform in the Southwest; and how reform was interpreted and practiced on a plantation empire in Mississippi before and during the Civil War.

### Chapter Three : Reform in Practice: Thomas Affleck's *Plantation Record and Account Book*

The story of agricultural reform in the American South has been told as a narrative of grand ambitions brought to failure by greed, cotton, and the institution of slavery. On its face, the story of Thomas Affleck confirms this declension narrative. The Scottish-born Affleck came to Mississippi in 1842 with dreams of establishing himself as an agricultural authority and model planter. By 1847, the plantation that he had acquired through his wife, a wealthy widow, and a second one that he had purchased himself, were both forcibly sold and Affleck could barely hold off his creditors with his income as a nurseryman. The record books and almanacs that he published did nothing to improve his financial situation and by 1859 he had gone to Texas both literally and figuratively. Looking past Affleck's personal struggles, the record books that he published can be seen as one of the most widespread and historically valuable elements of the agricultural reform movement. Affleck's record books were used on thousands of cotton and sugar plantations across the American South and caused one reformer to exclaim that "the name of Affleck has become household."<sup>1</sup> Following the life and career of Thomas Affleck and the creation, publication, distribution, and use of his *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book* suggests a new model for agricultural reform in the Southwest. In this region of cotton plantations and new wealth, planters did not support the agricultural reform movement of their peers in Virginia, South Carolina, and the southern Seaboard. Instead of an agricultural reform movement consisting of agricultural journals, societies, and fairs, planters in Mississippi and other Southwestern states looked more to non-literary print, especially printed record books and almanacs, to connect to

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<sup>1</sup> J. Jones to Thomas Affleck, September 12, 1851. *Thomas Affleck Papers*, Louisiana State University Special Collections, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. All following references to Affleck's personal papers are from this collection, unless otherwise noted.

agricultural reform. This model suggests a broader base of planters engaged with reform, but with less public commitment. The reform of the Southwest was centered on the private sphere more than the public, with planters looking to modernize their plantation practice and adapt to the changing national and world economies through new accounting and business practices. Affleck's record books were an easy way for planters to consider the options offered by these novel business practices.

The *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Books* are valuable historical sources, as they not only provide examples of how reform was intended to be practiced, in their instructions and form, but also of how it was actually practiced, in the form of the records actually kept in the logs. By tracing where and how the record books were used, I will show how improving planters sought to implement the reform agenda that the Affleck books were created to disseminate. Planters' use of the Affleck book provides a window into how they reacted to agricultural reform in practice.<sup>2</sup> By purchasing and using the book, they were self-selected as having some interest in agricultural reform, but how they used specific sections of the book reveals their particular priorities. Planters largely rejected the accounting measures proposed in the Affleck books, while embracing the new record keeping forms. The logs were used to keep a journal, track cotton picking and yields, keep a record of plantation implements, livestock, and slaves, to monitor overseers and managers, and to surveil the labor of enslaved workers. The scale and scope of the Affleck logs' scope means that they were one of the major ways in which planters encountered agricultural reform. It also means that they hold an incredible amount of information about the working lives of thousands of slaves.

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses on how planters engaged with the Affleck book. For a detailed example of the operation of a plantation that used the Affleck books, see Chapter Four.

This chapter serves as a bridge between the first chapter of the dissertation, which discusses the print culture and content of agricultural reform in the South and the final chapter which discusses the practice of reform at the plantation level and the impact of reform on slaves on these plantations. It functions to show how attempts to translate reform to this plantation level were selectively appropriated by individual planters as they saw fit. Affleck was not successful in forcing a wholly new management regime on cotton plantations, but his attempts to do so had profound consequences for planters and their enslaved workforces.

Too often the combination of existing scholarship on other reform movements in the antebellum United States and a singular focus on *DeBow's Review* in the South has created the impression that agricultural reform in the American South was a movement that was driven by a great number of professionals and city-dwellers, along with planters.<sup>3</sup> If we look beyond *DeBow's Review*, which, while an agricultural journal, was many more things and had a very particular agenda and vision for the southern states, a very different picture emerges. Agricultural journals from Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi instead have an authorship and subscription base that is formed mostly of large planters, supplemented with a few agricultural experts with professional or academic credentials (i.e. botanists).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of agricultural reform in the American South. See Steven Mintz, *Moralizers and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) for a synthesis of this literature. See John Franklin Kvach, *The First New South: J.D.B. DeBow's Promotion of a Modern Economy in the Old South* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2008) for a detailed breakdown of the readership of DeBow's Review.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of the *Southern Agriculturist* and the *Farmer and Planter* of South Carolina.



## Thomas Affleck, Aspiring Agriculturist

Thomas Affleck was born in Dumfries, Scotland in 1812, less than one hundred and twenty kilometers south of Edinburgh, in the Scottish Lowlands. While working as a clerk in the Dumfries branch of the Bank of Scotland, a teenage Affleck pored over agricultural tomes, declaring "a farmer I must and will be." He was a regular presence at livestock and agricultural fairs; agriculture was a science to be studied, as well as practiced.<sup>5</sup> Affleck kept regular charts on weather as a young man in Scotland, a common practice of the time; this style of recording would later have a great influence on agricultural records in the American South.<sup>6</sup> The weather diaries kept in Britain functioned in very similar ways to the record books that Affleck and others sold in the South.

The image shows a handwritten weather diary page for October 1752. The page is titled "October 1752" and contains a table of daily weather observations. The columns are: Day, Month, Weather, Direction, Baromet, Rain, Wind, and Time. The entries are as follows:

Day	Month	Weather	Direction	Baromet	Rain	Wind	Time
1	58	58	W	51	52	30	180.2
2	58	58	W	51	52	30	230.2
3	58	58	W	51	52	30	230.2
4	58	58	W	52	53	30	130.1
5	58	58	W	52	53	30	120.1
6	58	58	W	52	52	29	120.1
7	58	58	W	50	52	29	120.1
8	58	58	W	53	52	29	82.9
9	58	58	W	51	52	29	82.9
10	58	58	W	53	52	29	62.9
11	58	58	W	53	53	29	53.6
12	58	58	W	54	52	29	70
13	58	58	W	49	50	30	130.1
14	58	58	W	49	51	29	130.1
15	58	58	W	46	48	30	130.1
16	58	58	W	46	46	30	130.1
17	58	58	W	48	50	30	130.1
18	58	58	W	48	50	30	130.1
19	58	58	W	50	48	30	130.1
20	58	58	W	50	51	30	2
21	58	58	W	49	50		7
22	58	58	W	46	48		7
23	58	58	W	44	44		7
24	58	58	W	45	48		8
25	58	58	W	46	52		7
26	58	58	W	48	50		7
27	58	58	W	50	52		7
28	58	58	W	49	50		3
29	58	58	W	48	44		7
30	58	58	W	48	48		7
31	58	58	W	46	47	30.3	7

**Figure 3.1: John Murray, Weather Observations**

Source: Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment*, 85.

The plantation diarists of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had a lot in common with weather diarists of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in England and Scotland, with their

<sup>5</sup> Diary, September 20, 1831.

<sup>6</sup> Diary, September 20, 1831.

meticulous, routine record keeping and commitment to the accumulation of knowledge. Jan Golinski argued that the diarists' goal was to accumulate observations and that "the prospect of limitless progress in the growth of knowledge was itself a feature of the new view of history that saw it as structured by a homogenous scale of time." Planters' linking of almanacs and the Gregorian calendar with recordkeeping was an acknowledgment of new views of time, structured by the civic calendar rather than by agricultural rhythms.<sup>7</sup>

Affleck briefly enrolled at the University of Edinburgh to study medicine. While he was forced to leave school for financial reasons, Affleck's brief stay in Edinburgh and experiences with the library were surely formative. At the time, the University of Edinburgh was a major center for calculation and boasted a vast library with many texts on improvement. Access to the library of the University of Edinburgh was prized by medical students, as only matriculating students had access to its significant collections. The large library was so short of medical books that they had to introduce a fee to support their acquisition, but an avid reader of agricultural works, such as Affleck, would have had his choice of works on improvement from the vast collection of non-medical texts.<sup>8</sup>

This access, coupled with the Scottish intellectual and societal emphasis on the idea of improvement would have ensured that Affleck became very familiar with agricultural improvement. He would, for example, likely have read the work of Sir John Sinclair, a Scottish agriculturist and founder of the *Farmer's Magazine*, an early Edinburgh agricultural journal. The *Farmer's Magazine* was widely circulated throughout the Atlantic World, but was particularly associated with Scottish improvement and would have been of particular interest to Affleck. Sinclair, in accordance with improving views of the time, advocated

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<sup>7</sup> Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Rosner, *Medical Education in the Age of Improvement: Edinburgh Students and Apprentices, 1760-1826* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 44-45.

experimentation, scientific approaches, and diligent record-keeping in all facets of agriculture and engagement with the natural world.

Affleck learned basic cost accounting from his work at the Bank of Scotland. A voracious reader, Affleck spent his year at the Bank of Scotland studying guidebooks to the United States, as well as other countries; deciding that America was his best option, he left Scotland in 1832.<sup>9</sup> He was determined to be a landed farmer in order to implement his agricultural scheme, and his economic situation made that nearly impossible in Scotland. The Scottish Enlightenment produced many of the accounting techniques that would come to characterize the massive sugar plantations of the Caribbean. The records of these plantations provided the basis for the accounts that Affleck would later produce and sell. The work of Scottish accountant John Mair was particularly important for plantation bookkeeping and characteristic of the accounting theory that Affleck learned with the Bank of Scotland.<sup>10</sup>

When Affleck arrived in the United States, he established himself in Pittsburgh, working at a counting house, learning the accounting and business methods of American merchants. The double-entry accounting employed in these houses would provide the foundation for Affleck's systematic approach to plantation accounts. Affleck's merchant career in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio was representative of the growing links between the accounting practices of merchants and the desire for rationality present in the industrial leanings of southern agricultural reformers. Affleck's eventual application of northern business practices to southern plantations had its roots in his time as clerk and merchant. Affleck's work as a clerk did more than just provide him with the skills to create plantation accounts. The diary that Thomas Affleck kept looked much like the diaries of

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<sup>9</sup>Affleck Diary, December 4, 1831, January 10, 1832.

<sup>10</sup>Michael J. Mephram, "The Scottish Enlightenment and the Development of Accounting" *Accounting Historian's Journal* 15, 2 (1988), 151-176

other young men working as clerks in American cities. These diaries ordered the clerk's lives and character through rational and temporal management principles from their workdays, making the lives recorded within them "living ledgers."<sup>11</sup> The clerks made sense of problems in their lives by recording and categorizing them in these notebooks. This was reflected in the emphasis on strict self-government in the nineteenth-century, a virtue that encouraged order. Affleck made sure that he devoted all of his energy to his "own exertions" at his duties.<sup>12</sup> Affleck would eventually attempt to reduce entire plantations to "living ledgers" by creating a complex system of accounts to both record and shape the events of the plantation.<sup>13</sup> In 1855, Affleck reflected that his plantation record books had been shaped by his experience "having been trained in Scotland, to the strictest business habits."<sup>14</sup>

Affleck's work in these merchant houses, as well as his training in Scotland, taught him the usefulness of double-entry and cost accounting as something more than a tool to calculate profit and loss. Keeping precise accounts allowed for an "effect of accuracy," where quantification served to indicate the objectivity of the record keeper. In addition, careful accounting was essential to establishing creditworthiness, something that was essential to plantation business.<sup>15</sup> The close connection between merchant accounting and plantation record-keeping was accepted in the South, with agricultural journal praising plantation books being kept in the "same manner as the entry of a Merchant's clerk in his Day-Book."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Augst, *A Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Affleck to John Leeds Kerr, June 4, 1833 in "Affleck Papers"

<sup>13</sup> This desire is related to many planters', and particularly agricultural reformers', desire to impose order on their lives and surroundings. For many examples of the destructive aspects of these impulses, see Drew Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Affleck to James Henry Hammond, January 3, 1855.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Augst, *A Clerk's Tale*, 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Southern Cultivator* (Augusta, Ga.), 13 (1855), 75-76.

## Agricultural Reform in Mississippi

In 1840, after years spent as a clerk and struggling merchant, Affleck was offered the chance to edit a Cincinnati agricultural journal, the *Western Farmer and Gardener*, which he quickly accepted, determined to use his position to “nourish a taste for the improvement of the common stock” and otherwise encourage improvement.<sup>17</sup> Affleck headed the journal for only one full year, in 1841, but he became familiar with the challenges of serial publication and soliciting articles for publication.<sup>18</sup> In 1841, Affleck came to Mississippi from Ohio, having spent time in New York and Pennsylvania. He traveled down the Mississippi River aboard a steamboat, hauling a herd of pure-bred livestock along with him. He intended to show the prize animals throughout Mississippi and Louisiana to encourage subscriptions to his publication, the *Western Farmer and Gardener*. The agricultural reform movement in the northern states was made up of agricultural journals, societies, and fairs. These events and institutions enjoyed widespread support and were able to not only enact significant changes in agricultural practice, but also to effectively exert pressure on lawmakers and become one of the first lobby groups.<sup>19</sup> In Ohio, Affleck’s experience editing the *Western Farmer and Gardener* placed him firmly within this model of agricultural reform. When he arrived in Mississippi, he intended to use his agricultural authority to engage with similar institutions. After his warm welcome in Washington, Mississippi, Affleck began to consider relocating to the state, where he felt things were “altogether different” and much friendlier to experimental agriculture.<sup>20</sup> He had not expected “so much of a spirit of improvement

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<sup>17</sup> *Western Farmer and Gardener* 3 (1842), 80.

<sup>18</sup> For an explanation of the many difficulties facing editors of serials in the antebellum South, see Leon Jackson, “Making Friends at the *Southern Literary Messenger*,” in Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, eds., *A History of the Book in America, Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 416-421.

<sup>19</sup> Ariel Ron, “Developing the Country: ‘Scientific Agriculture’ and the Roots of the Republican Party” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> *Western Farmer and Gardener*, 3 (1842), 78-85.

excited” in Mississippi and was drawn to it.<sup>21</sup> While in Mississippi, the Scottish reformer enjoyed the society of the wealthy, educated planter families of the area and was pleased to see the bustling agricultural fair and to hear the lofty intellectual talk of agriculture from his hosts.

Affleck was greatly encouraged by his reception in Washington and Adams County, but even more so by meeting Anna Dunbar Smith, a widow from a prominent Mississippi family who owned a plantation in Adams County. Feeling the pressure of mounting debts in Ohio, Affleck was eager to remove to Mississippi where he saw the prospect of a promising life professionally and financially. Despite Anna’s desire to wed Affleck, Smith’s family was opposed to her “marrying a stranger,” worrying that Affleck was only interested in her wealth.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, however, her relatives acceded to the marriage, after Affleck agreed to relinquish any claim to Anna’s property should she die.<sup>23</sup> Affleck entered the planter class through marriage, as so many cotton planters did in the mid-nineteenth century when plantations were often given as dowries.<sup>24</sup> His status as a planter allowed him to put into practice some of the strategies that he had long advocated. Affleck had succeeded in becoming the agriculturist he had been so sure he would be while working as a clerk back in Dumfries.

Affleck’s affairs were settled for marriage, but he did not leave Mississippi to move his household from Ohio until February, 1842, as he was occupied selling stock, participating in agricultural societies, and giving addresses. Affleck gave an invited talk at the

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<sup>21</sup> “A Trip to the South,” *Western Farmer and Gardener* 3, no. 4 (1842), 79.

<sup>22</sup> Anna M. Smith to Thomas Affleck, March 3, 1842.

<sup>23</sup> Affleck to Anna M. Smith, March 30, 1842.

<sup>24</sup> William Kaufman Scarbrough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Many of the most prominent planters in the South had married into their plantations, including James Henry Hammond, the son of a school teacher, who became a prominent agricultural improver, Governor of South Carolina, and United States Senator after marrying into the aristocratic Hampton family of South Carolina.

Mississippi State Agricultural Society in the capital city, Jackson, but spent the majority of his time in the Natchez region, where his fiancé resided, along with Jefferson College, home of a recently founded agricultural society.<sup>25</sup> The most prominent agricultural society in Mississippi was this “Agricultural, Horticultural and Botanical Society of Jefferson College,” or the Jefferson College Agricultural Society. Affleck’s initial foray into Mississippi and the plantation world included an invited talk at the Society, where he was elected a corresponding member. This honor was one of the first professional accolades that Affleck had received, prompting him to marvel at the “estimation in which [the Society] holds the result of our labors in the noble cause of agricultural improvement.”<sup>26</sup> The Jefferson College Agricultural Society was the first Mississippi agricultural society, outside of the floundering state society. There was even a short-lived discussion of establishing an agricultural journal for the state of Mississippi. Members of the society worried about its economic prospects and instead chose to “earnestly recommend” that members instead subscribe to Affleck’s *Western Farmer and Gardener*.<sup>27</sup>

From these early impressions of agricultural reform in Mississippi, Affleck, ever the optimist, was sure that he would quickly establish a thriving plantation empire based on his agricultural theories. His reputation would grow as he rose within the agricultural societies and wrote for agricultural journals. In a few short years, agriculture in Mississippi would be elevated to rival that of the northern states. The reality of the situation initially did little to dissuade Affleck. The *Southern Agriculturist* was the first successful southern agricultural periodical; no significant paper existed in Mississippi at the time of Affleck’s visit in 1841. As a reformer and an editor, Affleck was deeply committed to agricultural publications and

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1938), 204-5.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Affleck to Charles Foster, December 2, 1841.

<sup>27</sup> *Southern*, (Jackson, Mississippi) January 27, 1842.

began to view their absence as a major failing of agricultural reform in the state, even as he recognized that they generally lost large sums of money that he was in no position to hazard. The *Southern Planter*, a journal closely linked to the Jefferson College Agricultural Society, was one of Mississippi's first agricultural journals and like most early journals in the Southwest, it did not last long. In fact, only four significant agricultural journals were published in Mississippi between 1839 and 1850: the *Mississippi Farmer* (Raymond, 1839-1840), the *Southwestern Farmer* (Raymond, 1842-1845), the *Planter* (Holmesville, 1845), and the *Southern Planter* (Natchez, 1842).<sup>28</sup> The *Southern Planter* was published in Jefferson County during Affleck's initial visit, though it soon relocated to Natchez. Its first issue appeared in January of 1842, but it barely lasted the year. The *Southern Planter* realized the ambitions that Affleck had for a regional agricultural journal in terms of content, but failed to attract sufficient patronage to survive.<sup>29</sup> Affleck realized, with no small amount of frustration, that sustaining agricultural journals in Mississippi was very difficult. Speaking both to his own expertise and the situation in Mississippi, Affleck felt certain that he had the "largest Agric. &c library in the South or West."<sup>30</sup>

Agricultural reform in Mississippi was centered more on printed record books and functional print than on the agricultural journals and publications of the Seaboard states, but journals were published and some planters supported them enthusiastically. Improving planters' determined efforts to demonstrate their progress unfolded at agricultural societies, public events, and political speeches. A look at the *Southern Planter* reveals how the presence of print, even in the form of a short-lived journal, helped foster an agricultural community,

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<sup>28</sup> John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi* (Revised Edition, Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2010; first edition, 1958), 75.

<sup>29</sup> The journal had articles of comparable quality to other contemporary southern agricultural journals, but did not have the subscription base that papers in the Seaboard had.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Affleck to A. Hart, May 10, 1851.



by bringing together the wealthiest planters of the state to rally “public spirit and wealth enough” to sustain the serial.<sup>31</sup> The journal failed to garner sufficient support from advertising or subscriptions to sustain itself, but it did draw together planters who supported similar journals over the next few years and actively engaged in agricultural experimentation. Samuel Bailey, the editor of the *Southern Planter*, rallied support for his publication by linking the purchase of individual subscriptions to the success of agricultural reform in Mississippi. He based the journal’s business model on earlier southern agricultural journals, like the *Southern Agriculturist* and the *Southern Cultivator*, relying on subscriptions and advertisements to create revenue. However, unlike their counterparts at other serials, Bailey and his colleagues at the *Southern Agriculturist* and *Southern Cultivator* argued that private subscriptions, by supporting their journals, would also have a wider public benefit. While it was individuals who purchased private subscriptions, Bailey argued that the existence of the journal would support the cause of improved agriculture in Mississippi and the Southwest. In order to sustain “an enterprise equally concerning the welfare of all,” it was necessary for certain individuals to “bear their quota.”<sup>32</sup>

Subscriptions to these journals were a public signal of support, on the part of self-styled progressives, for the cause of agricultural improvement. Lists of paid subscribers were published frequently. Annual subscriptions were also given out as premiums and prizes at agricultural fairs, tying successful efforts at improved agriculture to the periodicals.<sup>33</sup> Bailey took planters to task, harping on the “*propriety* of their taxing themselves now for its support.”<sup>34</sup> William Summer, editor of the *Southern Agriculturist*, wrote a letter to nurseryman George Fike just before the publication of the journal began stating that despite “subscribers

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<sup>31</sup> *Southern Planter* I, no.1 (1842), 2

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Webb Williams, *The Mississippi Career of Thomas Affleck* (Ph.D. Thesis, Tulane University, 1954), 32.

<sup>34</sup> *Southern Planter* I, no.1 (1842), 2.

from all parts of the state,” agriculturists were like prophets in that they have “no honor in [their] home country,” invoking language of evangelical service to the greater good.<sup>35</sup>

Prominent individuals appeared throughout the subscription lists and rolls of agricultural societies, prompting Charles Sydnor to call a list of reformers a veritable “bluebook” of the Natchez gentry.<sup>36</sup> The *Planter’s* list resembled an accounting of the wealthiest planters in Natchez and the surrounding area because agricultural improvement was so closely linked to other intellectual pursuits.<sup>37</sup> For example, the Jefferson College Agricultural Society was formed when the ambitiously-titled Mississippi Philosophical and Historical Society decided to shift its mission.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately for Bailey, the patronage model tended to limit subscriptions to the very wealthy Natchez planters who could afford the five dollar subscription fee. The model was intended to encourage contributions above the standard rate, in the form of multiple subscriptions, to compensate for its small list of paid subscribers. The extra copies would then be distributed by the patron to neighbors or to stock the libraries of agricultural societies.<sup>39</sup> This strategy was unsuccessful—only three subscribers contributed significantly more than the standard fee.<sup>40</sup> In the opening page of each issue, Bailey appealed to his delinquent subscribers to pay their debts, citing the unmatched contributions of his “curious patrons” as motivating factor.<sup>41</sup> Unpaid subscription fees were common throughout the United States in the first half of the nineteenth-century, with subscribers billed after their subscriptions started. Serials relied on

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<sup>35</sup> Wm. Summer to George A. Fike, January 18, 1851, George A. Fike Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1938), 152.

<sup>37</sup> While the vast majority of subscribers were from Adams and Wilkinson Counties, there were a number of subscribers from West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.

<sup>38</sup> Sydnor, *Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region*, 152.

<sup>39</sup> For an example of the periodical collecting habits of local agricultural societies see the records of the Black Creek Agricultural Society in the “Benjamin Britton Record Book.” (South Caroliniana Library)

<sup>40</sup> All three were contributors from the first issue, with Joseph Dunbar of Jefferson County giving \$50 and William Bisland and Stephen Duncan, both of Adams County, giving \$25 each. *Southern Planter*, I, no. 1, 1842, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Southern Planter*, I, no. 4, 1842, 1.

the sense of a participation in a community of print that was predicated upon a level of familiarity and trust to attract subscribers. This relationship, however, made it difficult to convince delinquent subscribers to pay their debts, as pursuing legal action or even aggressive requests for payment, could easily sour the relationship.<sup>42</sup> Editors, such as Bailey, pleaded (often truthfully) deficiency in funds not just for the journal, but to sustain themselves. By the final issue of the *Southern Planter's* brief existence, Bailey complained that he had “labored under serious disadvantages, partly from [his] own insufficiency and partly from a lack of adequate support.”<sup>43</sup>

Even though the *Southern Planter's* list of paid subscribers grew dramatically over the course of its publication, its final tally of 262 paid subscribers was a far cry from the support enjoyed by successful agricultural journals, whose circulation was several times that of the *Planter*. The *Southern Planter* addressed itself to “Planters of Louisiana Mississippi, and Alabama,” but tellingly failed to receive a single paid subscription from Alabama, though it did manage one from Kentucky.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 163-167.

<sup>43</sup> “Our Harangue,” *Southern Planter* 1, no. 9-12 (1842), 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Southern Planter*, 1, no. 1 (1842), 1.

**Table 3.1: Paid Subscriptions to the *Southern Planter*, 1842**

Issue	Month	Number of States Represented Among Subscribers	Number of Counties/Parishes Represented Among Subscribers	Number of Paid Subscribers
1	January	2	5	51
2	February	2	6	58
3	March	3	8	88
4	April	3	18	183
5-6*	May-June	3	19	210
7-8*	July-August	3	21	241
9-12*	September-October	3	22	262

\*Indicates that multiple issues were published simultaneously as the journal began to encounter serious financial difficulty.

The price was reduced from five dollars per annum to three dollars per annum after the third issue in March, in the face of many delinquent accounts.

Of the 105 agricultural journals commonly listed for the United States before the Civil War, 21 were published in the South (25 if you include Maryland and DC).<sup>45</sup> While subscription figures for the majority of these journals are not known, the figures that do exist largely support the pattern established by the *Southern Planter* of small circulations in number, but with wealthy planters making up the majority of the subscribers, even if most cases are somewhat less extreme.

### **Thomas Affleck and a New Model of Agricultural Reform**

In 1842, Affleck finalized his move from Cincinnati to Washington, Mississippi, where he assumed control of his wife's plantation enterprise and immediately began applying his reform principles to plantation practice. He diversified plantation production, planting a number of crops, not just cotton. Agricultural societies across the South, and even the U.S. Patent Office (which served as a proto-Department of Agriculture at the time) requested

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<sup>45</sup> Albert Lowther Demaree, *The American Agricultural Press, 1819-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 237-244.

samples of the varieties of oats and peas that he had his slaves cultivate.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, in 1846, Affleck's plantation enterprise was failing. The cotton worm infestation of 1846, combined with the heavy debt burdens of the plantations put him in a disastrous financial predicament. Affleck was forced to borrow on a future cotton crop in order to avoid the immediate seizure of his wife's land. This desperate maneuver saved the plantations, briefly, but committed him, like so many other planters, to planting almost exclusively cotton.

Thomas Affleck was in a privileged position financially, due to his wife's plantation and slave holdings, but even so, his attempts at improved agriculture were hamstrung by his lack of capital. Agricultural reform was an expensive proposition that required substantial capital investment and a willingness to assume significant risk, investing in less-proven crops and technologies. Many of the methods advocated by practitioners of scientific agriculture, such as the use of soil chemistry, dedicating more labor to improving plantation infrastructure, and conducting experiments with new crops with valuable labor, required large capital inputs and took up a lot of limited slave labor, with no guarantee of increased returns. Affleck was a planter with significant, if debt-encumbered, holdings, but within five years of assuming control of his wife's Magnolia plantation, he abandoned his ideology of reform in an attempt to avoid financial ruin. By 1847, he had been forced to sell both of his wife's plantations, Magnolia and the recently acquired Rosehill.<sup>47</sup> Affleck was an example of the ways in which many reform agendas were viable only for the wealthiest southerners, a

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<sup>46</sup> Dr. Gale to Thomas Affleck, January 2, 1849; J. Jones to Thomas Affleck, September 12, 1851.

<sup>47</sup> Magnolia plantation had been left to Anna Dunbar Smith by her former husband upon his death and Rosehill had been purchased in partnership with a Charles Lancaster and his share acquired by Affleck in 1842, resulting in substantial debt on Affleck's part. See Robert Webb Williams, *The Mississippi Career of Thomas Affleck* (Ph.D. Thesis, Tulane University, 1954), 43-44.

reality that many reformers dismissed as ignorant cries from the uneducated who were “denying the existence of elementary principles of agriculture.”<sup>48</sup>

In the face of the financial ruin resulting from his risky system of improved agriculture, Affleck became an even more vociferous advocate of agricultural reform. Affleck’s forced shift from planter to writer, editor, and authority resulted in his most lasting contribution to the cotton plantation economy and agricultural reform—the publication of a printed plantation record book that ended up selling thousands of copies. The *Plantation Record and Account Book* was not his best-selling work, however, as he also published an almanac which sold as many as eight thousand copies a year. His publications rarely made a sufficient profit to support his family and his plantation enterprise had failed, but Affleck remained undeterred in his ongoing quest to monetize his agricultural knowledge and connections.<sup>49</sup> As an agricultural authority, Affleck was not alone in feeling due some compensation. While most agricultural improvers framed their contributions and work in terms of public service, they still smarted from the lack of recognition, financial and otherwise that they felt they were owed. Affleck was rich in the “symbolic capital” of agriculture, but struggled to monetize that capital.<sup>50</sup>

As the fortunes of Affleck’s plantation enterprise were fading, he was gaining more and more recognition as an authority on the agriculture of the Southwest. By the late 1840s, he had successfully established himself as an expert on the agriculture of the Southwest, becoming so “well-known as a scientific agriculturist” that editors actively solicited his

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<sup>48</sup> "On the necessity of Agricultural Education, being bestowed upon those intended for Superintendants of plantations, and the benefit which would arise from proper encouragement being held out to respectable youths, to encourage as such; by a Well-Wisher to Agriculture" *Southern Agriculturist* 2, no. 1 (January, 1829), pg. 2

<sup>49</sup> Affleck got the vast majority of his income from the late 1840s on from his large nursery business.

<sup>50</sup> See James Moore, “Green Gold: The Riches of Baron Ferdinand von Mueller” *Historical Records of Australian Science* 11, 3 (June, 1997): 317-388 for another example of a “scientific savant” struggling to monetize the “symbolic capital” or “green gold” of scientific expertise.

work.<sup>51</sup> While he had sold off the family's productive plantation holdings by 1847, that was the first year that his most well-known publication, *The Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book* was published.<sup>52</sup> Affleck's name was already known from the *Western Farmer and Gardener* and his successful almanacs, but the *Record Book* would be his most widely circulated work, going through 8 editions and being sold in every southern state.<sup>53</sup> By 1850, he was the agricultural editor of the New Orleans *Times Picayune*, and had published his *Southern Agricultural Almanac*, and the *Record Book*.

Affleck discovered that planters in the Southwest were interested in a different model of agricultural reform. Journals had difficulty attracting subscribers, agricultural societies struggled to retain members, and fairs never reached the attendance levels and broad interest that they found in northern states, or even the Seaboard southern states, like South Carolina. Instead, planters took to non-literary forms of print, like Affleck's record books, almanacs, and the more current agricultural news that they could find in newspapers, which tracked the arrival of new varieties of cotton seed. His plantation record books sold more copies annually than all but the most popular southern agricultural journals and certainly more than any journal in Mississippi. Historians have long focused on agricultural journals as markers of agricultural reform in the nineteenth-century, but many Mississippi planters looked to other forms of print for agricultural guidance.

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<sup>51</sup> J.D.B. DeBow to Thomas Affleck, April 10, 1846.

<sup>52</sup> Ingleside, Anna Dunbar and Thomas Affleck's plantation, was likely purchased by James Wistar Metcalfe of the prominent Adams County Metcalfe family, who was living there by 1860, though it may have been owned by Affleck's stepson in the interim.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Affleck to B.M. Norman, October 16, 1852, "Affleck Papers"

## Plantation Record Books

The origins of printed plantation record books like Thomas Affleck's can be traced at least as far back as the Scottish Enlightenment. Arthur Young, along with other Scottish and English agriculturists working and writing at the end of the eighteenth century, played a major role in taking such record-keeping practices and popularizing them beyond the plantation. They also made significant contributions to integrating such practices with industrial time management. Arthur Young's 1770 work, *Farmer's Guide in Hiring and Stocking Farms*, was the first work to advocate for detailed labor management and record-keeping in conjunction with clock time. By 1792, Young looked for standardized tasks and bells to regulate breaks according to clock time. His industrial discipline centered on berating employees with public assemblies to shame slack workers. The limit of punishment in his world was discharge from the farm.<sup>54</sup>

The sugar colonies of the West Indies produced detailed work logs and plantation record books. The complex network of management and absentee ownership on the sugar islands encouraged detailed records that could represent the plantation investments to their European owners. The books served to show the European slaveholders not only how profitable their businesses were, but exactly how the attorneys, overseers, and "bookkeepers" that they had hired were managing their investments. In the 1670s, detailed plantation logs were kept in the British West Indies; by 1745, these managers were beginning to keep records of daily slave labor on the sugar plantations.<sup>55</sup> Books instructing planters on plantation accounting date to at least 1741, with the practice likely commonly taught well

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<sup>54</sup> Lorena Walsh, Personal Correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2013), 56-68.



before that.<sup>56</sup> In the North American colonies, George Washington adopted similar plantation record-keeping and accounting practices on his Mount Vernon plantation, no doubt influenced by his time in Barbados. By the mid to late-eighteenth century, work logs and complex plantation accounts were common on large West Indian sugar plantations and Chesapeake tobacco plantations.<sup>57</sup>

One of the earliest printed plantation account books in the United States was the *Farmer's Accountant and Instructions for Overseers*, published by Pleasant Suit in Richmond in 1828. Suit's work laid out, in great detail, the principles of agricultural accounting for managers. Texts like Suit's were doubtless the basis for many of the detailed accounts kept by planters and overseers in blank notebooks.<sup>58</sup> Dedicated accounting and record-keeping textbooks sat alongside books of blank forms and instructions for those planters who were interested in learning how to keep their own accounts without the aid of published forms. Printers in southern cities also made blank forms for recording slave labor for their clients, just as they would stationary. In South Carolina, for example, A.E. Miller, a Charleston printer produced work logs purchased by a number of South Carolina planters, including James Henry Hammond and Andrew Flinn. Additionally, many planters made their own work logs of varying complexity, from the basic records kept by William Dunbar which made only slight departures from a journal, to the detailed books created by Thomas Walter

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<sup>56</sup>Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 58; William Weston, *Complete Merchant's Clerk* (London: Charles Rivington, 1754); Clement Caines, *Letters on the Cultivation of Otabeite Cane* (Robinson, 1801).

<sup>57</sup> Justin Roberts, "Sunup to Sundown: Plantation Management and Slave Work Routines in the British Atlantic, 1750-1810" (Ph.D. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2008); Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> Pleasant Suit, *The Farmer's Accountant and Instructions for Overseers* (Richmond, Va., 1828), Library company of Philadelphia; for an example of a plantation account made in a blank book see "William Sims Reynolds Journal," South Caroliana Library.

Peyre which often dedicated dozens of pages of detailed charts to a single month.<sup>59</sup> The detailed records of men like Peyre and the more journal-like descriptions of planters like Dunbar were difficult to repeat on a larger scale, when overseers rather than planters would be completing the plantation journals. Printed record books were produced and purchased to help planters discipline the record-keeping behavior of their hired managers. Thomas Affleck hoped that not only would his record books help planters monitor their overseers, but that it would make a “vast improvement” in the overseers, improving their handwriting and inducing “business habits.” He optimistically opined that it helped overseers “while away an hour of the evening.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book* in Print**

In a letter to South Carolina politician and agricultural reformer James Henry Hammond, Affleck describes how he came to produce the *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book*. As a student of the Scottish Enlightenment, Affleck was “astonished beyond measure” to see the lack of formal accounting and business practices on cotton plantations when he arrived in Mississippi. Overseers were recording the weight of cotton picked each day and the weights of the bales shipped to New Orleans, but no more details were committed to paper. Affleck surveyed his neighbors and, finding a few who kept tidy plantation record books, he found some elements that would be useful to include in books on his own plantation. He felt that the existing books lacked any sort of system, or uniformity, something that would hamper the ability of planters to learn from each other. In response,

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<sup>59</sup> *Life, letters and papers of William Dunbar of Elgin, Moraysbire, Scotland, and Natchez, Mississippi: pioneer scientist of the southern United States; compiled and prepared from the original documents for the National society of colonial dames in America* (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi State Historical Society, 1930); Thomas Walter Peyre Plantation Journal, 1812-1851, Stampp, *Records*.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Affleck to James Henry Hammond, January 3, 1855.

Affleck drew up two books of his own, one for the overseer on each of his plantations. As part of his employment contract with the overseers, Affleck required that they keep the books “correctly” and provide them to him at the end of the year for examination. Affleck, perhaps euphemistically, admits that he had to provide a “little assistance + encouragement,” but that the books were kept as he wished.<sup>61</sup>

B.M. Norman, a New Orleans publisher and friend of Affleck, was so impressed with the record books in use on the plantations that he persuaded the reformer to publish a revised version of the record books that Affleck used on his own plantation. Affleck had created his own record books as a check on overseers, whose agricultural ability he distrusted. The last pages of content in the *Record Book* are dedicated to training, monitoring, and working with overseers. He includes a sample form for an “Overseer’s Weekly Report,” which he feels should be completed in addition to the *Record Book* entries, as well as an essay spelling out the duties of an overseer. Affleck had been frustrated with his overseers’ inability to keep the records that he desired, complaining that they were “ignorant of everything like accounts & in fact, system of any kind” so he laid out rows and columns labeled with the categories of information that he wanted recorded.<sup>62</sup> Affleck’s record book was the first to be widely published and the first that was much more than a set of blank record forms; he provided instructions on how to complete the book, as well as account sections that sought to impose cost accounting principles onto plantation accounts, which the author felt had been neglected, especially depreciation of property.

Affleck saw in the record books an opportunity to finally capitalize financially on his reputation, while at the same time spreading the gospel of reform. By 1849, he had made an

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Affleck to James Henry Hammond, January 3, 1855.

<sup>62</sup> Affleck to Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Southern Central Agricultural Society of Georgia, May 24, 1851.

agreement with Weld and Company of New Orleans to sell the book, though difficulties with the publisher limited the circulation of the first edition.<sup>63</sup> There are no reliable figures for the circulation of all editions of Affleck's log through its eight editions, but a very rough estimate of about eight or ten thousand copies sold seems reasonable.<sup>64</sup> This rough estimate gives an idea of the importance of the log; the average number of slaves in an Affleck log in my sample was 84. Even the most conservative interpretation of these estimates would suggest the number of work years of slaves represented in the Affleck books was in the hundreds of thousands, as were the number of individual slaves represented over a fifteen year period. Given the guesswork involved in arriving at these numbers, however, it is sufficient to say that the Affleck books were relevant to the lives, working and otherwise, of an enormous number of slaves.

The Affleck book was widely circulated throughout the Lower South, with a particular concentration in the Lower Mississippi Valley, as would be expected, given Affleck's residence and networks in the area. The 62 Affleck books examined for this chapter are distributed across four states and sixteen counties and parishes, though it is certain that the actual circulation of the book was much wider. (Fig. 2) For example, a Georgia planter writing in a Georgia agricultural journal claimed that "if a fellow can keep that 'AFFLECK BOOK' he thinks he ought to have \$700 or \$800 now; we used to get overseers at \$200 or \$300," making it clear that the book was in wide use in Georgia, as well.<sup>65</sup> Affleck's work was also widely copied, contrary to copyright law.<sup>66</sup> Affleck himself

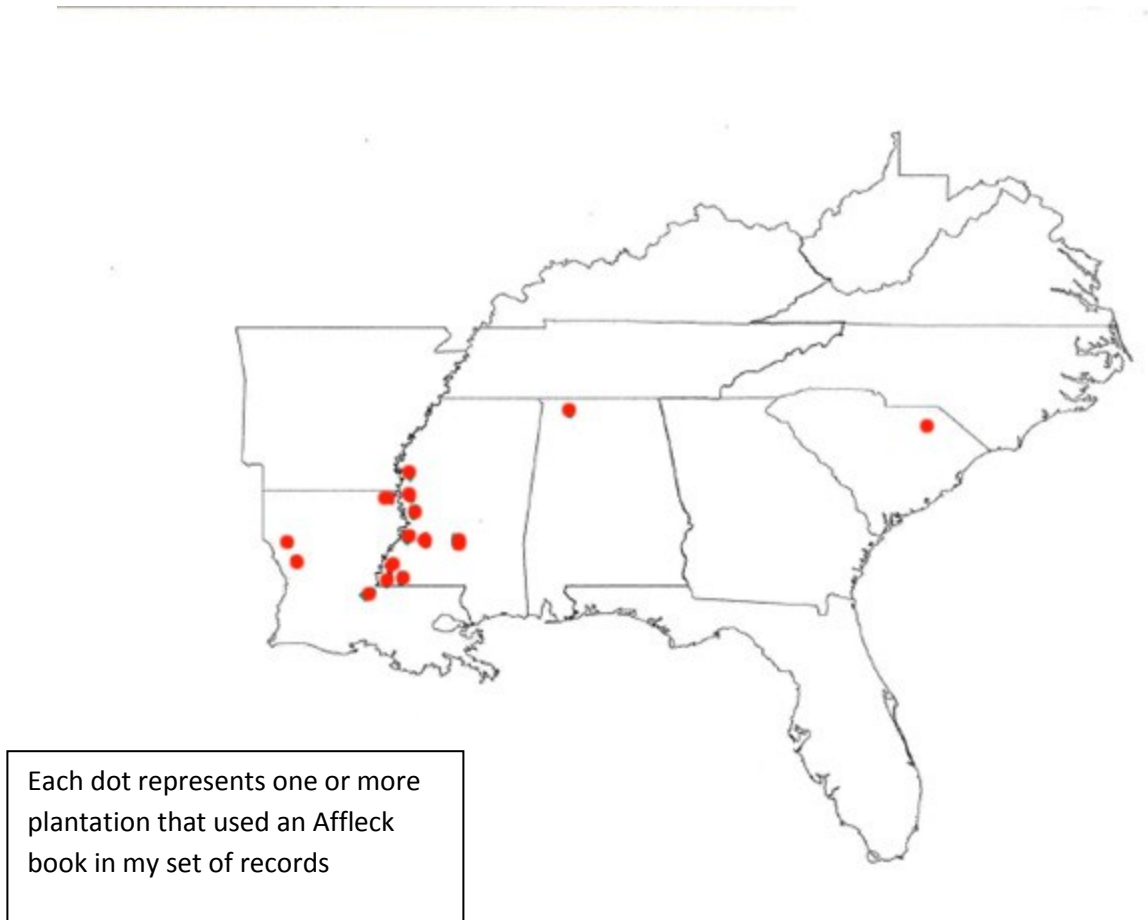
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<sup>63</sup> Affleck to Lumsden and Kendall, June 14, 1850.

<sup>64</sup> A figure of 3000 copies of the eighth edition is repeated in several places, which seems reasonable, given the frequency with which the logs are found among plantation papers. There are also numerous references to significant back orders for each edition, suggesting complete sales. The eighth edition makes up between 35 and 40 percent of the surviving logs in my sample, suggesting a total circulation of between eight and ten thousand. This is a rough estimate, but gives an idea of the order of magnitude of the books circulation.

<sup>65</sup> *Southern Cultivator* 14 (1866), 339.

was aware of at least one instance of a “garbled and pirated copy” of his book being cheaply reproduced, in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>67</sup> There are also other examples of close knockoffs being produced, but Affleck’s book itself was firmly located in a tradition of plantation account books that built on each other.<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 3.2: Locations of Plantations in Affleck Sample**

<sup>66</sup> While frustrating to Affleck, this was not an unusual practice. See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 44-45.

<sup>67</sup> *Southern Rural Almanac*, 1854, “Affleck Papers.” For an example of the Virginia printed record book (published in 1852), see “Plantation and Farm Instruction, Regulation, Record, Inventory, and Account Book, by a Southern Planter.” Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU. Robinson used the book in 1854 on his Willow Point plantation in Red River Parish, Louisiana, where he also used two versions of Affleck’s book, between 1859 and 1861.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Steward Papers, LSU. Affleck complained of a “Mr. Bland” producing a bad imitation of his book in Richmond. Affleck to Hammond, January 3, 1855.

The *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book* illustrates the difference between reform agenda and practical reality. Affleck's work is very didactic, instructing the user on exactly how to keep accounts and record plantation events, but it also seeks to shape plantation practice. He wrote an extensive "Explanation of Records and Accounts" on how to run an improved plantation. This book was written in Adams County, Mississippi, on Ingleside Farm, owned at the time by Affleck and later by James Wistar Metcalfe, whose family would use Affleck's books extensively.

The *Record Book* measured approximately twenty-two by thirty-five centimeters, with a hard cover and relatively thick pages. The book was meant to survive use on a plantation, though entries were to be made "each evening," rather than in the field.<sup>69</sup> After a few pages of advertising, the cover page announced the purpose of the particular version of the work. In addition to going through eight editions, the book was available in multiple formats, for plantations of varying sizes and crops. The cotton books were far more common than those designed for sugar plantations and are the focus of this chapter. They were made for plantations of fewer than 40, 80, 120, or 160 "hands." Following the cover page, Affleck included extensive instructions on how to use the book and manage a plantation.

The bulk of the book was dedicated to the fifteen different types of forms that made up the records and accounts. The 52 form "A"s provided a week's worth of daily entries. These were to be used to record the work that slaves did, weather, and crop notes. Every quarter, a form "B" appeared, that was an inventory of tools and livestock.<sup>70</sup> Form "C" recorded the amount of cotton picked by each slave each day. These forms appeared weekly, beginning at the end of July or start of August. The rest of the forms appeared only once, at

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<sup>69</sup> Affleck Book, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, for 120 or fewer hands, "Explanation of Records and Accounts" this one is from a book kept by B.F. Lurbeville on Dr. James Metcalfe's York Plantation in 1862, MDAH.

<sup>70</sup> In very early editions, form B appeared monthly.

the end of the year and were largely concerned with plantation accounting. Forms “D” and “E” covered clothing and supplies used on the plantation; form “F” recorded births and deaths on the plantation; form “G” was for physicians’ expenses, but was also intended to form “an invaluable record” of illness on the plantation; form “H” recorded the weight of each bale of cotton; form “I” listed slaves, their ages, and values at the beginning and end of the year, with the difference “transferrable to the balance sheet”; and forms “J”, “K”, and “L” were inventories of tools, livestock, and crop. Affleck’s cherished cost accounting principles are most evident in the final three forms. Form “M” recorded plantation income; form “N” recorded expenses; and form “O” was a balance sheet to record the profit or loss of the plantation.

Thomas Affleck wanted his book to lead planters to a system of reformed plantership that would combine the principles of agricultural reform and cost accounting. The instructions and forms of his record books were structured to translate the tenets of agricultural reform into improved plantation practice. The goal of the books was to overhaul how planters managed their crops, labor, and accounts. Ideally, a planter would have his overseer carefully fill out forms A through L and then use that information to fill out forms M and N himself to calculate income and expenses, including appreciation and depreciation of tools, livestock, and slaves. Finally, the planter would use this information to complete form O, a final accounting of the profitability of the plantation. This accounting, which was more in line with advanced business accounts nationwide, would allow the planter to evaluate his investment relative to other options more accurately than ever before.

Print provided improvers like Affleck a “cheap and efficient means for the diffusion of useful knowledge” regarding agriculture, through almanacs, periodicals, and record

books.<sup>71</sup> Several major elements that were common to much writing on agricultural reform can be found in the record books. First, and most obviously, the records demand a careful, regular record keeping and close attention to detail. Agricultural serials across the South were united in calling for careful recordkeeping on plantations. Not only was the practice seen as necessary in order to manage the plantation according to modern business practices, but it was also vital for building a base of agricultural knowledge.<sup>72</sup> Reform writers blamed the long-standing failure to keep good records for the problem of simple substitution of “new ideas for old,” rather than the progress they sought.<sup>73</sup>

Education was another central tenet of most agricultural reformers. Planters who did not keep up with the developments of scientific agriculture were ridiculed in pieces like “A Night with the Man who did not take the Papers” and lauded in pieces like “Value of Scientific Instruction to Planters.”<sup>74</sup> Affleck addresses this directly with his “Duties of an Overseer,” where he constantly chastises overseers for their instinctual actions, demanding that they “THINK before [they] act.”<sup>75</sup> The principle of planning and working with one’s mind in agriculture was important in reform discourse.<sup>76</sup> More importantly, however, one of the main purposes of the books was to limit the damage that an uneducated overseer could do, by systematizing and regularizing plantation management through recordkeeping. An overseer that would be held accountable for lost tools, sick or deceased slaves, rather than being judged solely by the size of the cotton crop was likely to do a better job than one who

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<sup>71</sup> *Southron* (Jackson, Mississippi), July 27, 1842.

<sup>72</sup> “Keep a Plantation Record,” *DeBow’s Review* Vol. 13, no. 2, (August, 1852), 194. The article was also printed in *Farmer and Planter* (Columbia, SC) 10, 1 (January, 1859), 16. “Farm Book,” *Farmer and Planter* 10, 3 (1859), 110-111.

<sup>73</sup> “Keep a Plantation Record,” *DeBow’s Review* Vol. 13, no. 2 (August, 1852), 194.

<sup>74</sup> *Farmer and Planter*, 10, no 1, 7 (1859), 20, 209. See also “Reading and Unreading Farmers,” *Southern Planter*, 10, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Affleck’s “Duties of an Overseer” very clearly bridges the gap between the agricultural press and plantation practice, as it is printed in every edition of the *Record Book*, but also in *DeBow’s Review* 18 (1855), 339-345.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, “Mind is the Farmer’s Might,” *Southern Planter*, 10, 4.



was only concerned with the short-term goal of the largest possible crop, or so went reformers' logic. Affleck emphasized that "the time has passed when the Overseer was valued solely for the number of bales of cotton... he had made."<sup>77</sup> To enforce the primacy of the appreciation and depreciation of plantation assets, Affleck included more forms dedicated to the changing value of land, livestock, implements, and slaves than dedicated to the cotton crop, something that was emphasized in the year end counting.

Focusing on the Affleck log and its production so closely risks suggesting that it was an exceptional creation, but it was much more a product of very standard, agreed upon principles within the print communities of agricultural reform. In fact, without any reference to a particular record book, A.S. Acklen, a Louisiana planter, wrote that in order to manage a plantation properly, a record must be kept, an inventory taken quarterly, daily cotton picking amounts, births, deaths, and physician's visits noted.<sup>78</sup> Affleck drew together the wishful thinking of many reform-minded planters and created a physical object that represented everything that they wanted from their overseers.

### **The Record Book on the Plantation**

The existing scholarship on these record books has stopped with an assessment of how the accounts were intended to function, how they reflected new ideas of accounting and management, along with a brief acknowledgment that while "no plantation followed Affleck's recommendations to the letter," the books are important because they "illustrate the type of information that *could* be compiled on plantations."<sup>79</sup> Two studies have gestured

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<sup>77</sup> "Duties of an Overseer," *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book*

<sup>78</sup> "Rules in the Management of a Southern Estate," *DeBow's Review* 21 (1856), 617-621.

<sup>79</sup> Richard K. Fleischman and Thomas N. Tyson, "Accounting in Service to Racism: Monetizing Slave Property in the Antebellum South," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 15 (2004), 381. J. Heier is also interested primarily in what the books say about "accounting practices and plantation management methods that *could* (my emphasis) have been in widespread use throughout southern cotton districts just prior to the Civil War." Jan Richard

to the incomplete adoption of Affleck's instructions and forms, though, in both cases, the central questions have been what the Affleck books can tell the reader about accounting and the place of plantation accounts in a larger history of accountancy.<sup>80</sup> J. Heier, in particular, goes to great pains to sort out the degree to which Affleck's accounting system is in accordance with current practice, fretting that the "non-recognition of liabilities causes problems with Affleck's methodology because a true picture of the business's net asset value is never shown."<sup>81</sup> As historians of accountancy, these scholars are interested in where Affleck fits into the development of cost accounting and in reconstructing accounts more accurately. This approach provides valuable data on these specific plantations, but provides little insight into how the books were actually used, how they connected reform to plantation practice, and how they changed the lives of the tens of thousands of slaves on the plantations recorded in these books.

By analyzing how frequently each section of the Affleck book was used, whether its intended purpose was altered, and which forms remained in the books, it is possible to arrive at a better understanding of how planters actually used the books to shape their plantation practice. The *Record Books* located for this chapter each used some, but not all, of the forms included in the book. I calculated how often each of the forms was used for its intended purpose. Minor differences in the details of records were still counted as used, but where the purpose of the form was completely transformed and essentially used as blank paper, the usage was discounted.

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Heier, "A Content Comparison of Antebellum Plantation Records and Thomas Affleck's Accounting Principles," *The Accounting Historian's Journal* 15, 2 (1988), 143. Additionally, Heier makes many incorrect statements, claiming many plantations that used Affleck records did not and that his study includes "nearly one hundred percent of the plantation records from Alabama and Mississippi that have survived since the 1850s and 1860s," and giving Affleck credit for introducing many types of plantation accounts, rather than simply compiling them.

<sup>80</sup> Fleischman and Tyson, "Accounting in Service to Racism," 376-299 and Heier, "Content Comparison," 131-150.

<sup>81</sup> Heier, "Content Comparison," 140.

**Table 3.2: Use of Forms in Affleck Book**

Form	Function	Number Filled Out	Percentage of Total <sup>82</sup>
A	Daily Record	55	97
B	Stock Inventory	26	46
C	Cotton Picking	49	86
D	Clothing	35	61
E	Supplies Received	32	56
F	Births and Deaths	45	79
G	Physician's Visits	25	44
H	Cotton Bales	39	68
I	List of Slaves	29	51
J	Inventory of Tools	8	14
K	Inventory of Livestock	5	9
L	Inventory of Crop	1	2
M	Income	4	7
N	Expenses	7	12
O	Final Account	2	4

At the most basic level, the most used forms were likely of the most importance to the planter, particularly given that while most of the forms were kept by overseers, rather than the planters themselves, the planters use the forms to monitor overseers, giving them careful instructions on their completion.<sup>83</sup> This is not to suggest that forms that were filled out less regularly were not of interest, just that they were not integral to the operation of the plantation, from the owner's perspective.

The Affleck books have been treated by most historians as account books. The actual usage of these logs makes clear that they were not used as such, even if that was Affleck's intent. Forms A through I are the most frequently used and J through O the least frequently used. A through I are largely record keeping forms and J through O are largely accounting forms. Contrary to the arguments of accounting historians, in practice the

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<sup>82</sup> For this table, the sample of 62 plantation books has been reduced to 57, due to legibility and access issues with 5 of the books.

<sup>83</sup> For the records used for this calculation, see Appendix B-D. There are 62 Affleck books from 23 different planters and 27 different plantations. I have located several more books that I have not yet been able to see.

Affleck books were record books, not account books. The books may have represented the range of available accounting and management techniques for cotton planters, but these accounting methods were not in demand, even among the wealthy, educated planter elite. The Affleck books were record books for plantation managers. The books stayed with the overseer, manager, or possibly even slave driver charged with the daily management of the plantation.<sup>84</sup>

Planters used the Affleck books most to replicate what they had long been recording in blank plantation journals—the events of each day, the amount of cotton picked, the weight of cotton the plantation produced, and births and deaths of slaves. Contrary to Affleck’s wishes, this data was not often transferred to secondary accounting forms to contribute to a complete plantation account. Caitlin Rosenthal argues that the books were “effective in both ensuring honesty and extracting maximum effort” from slaves and overseers and that the Affleck system of accounting “thrived on slave plantations.”<sup>85</sup> This was not the case. The accounting forms in the Affleck books went almost unused. Rosenthal cites two examples of completed accounting forms in Affleck books (Eli Capell and Eustatia Plantation); a larger sample tells a very different story. Planters made other use of the information. That 97% of the books used the daily record suggests that the most important role of the Affleck books was to provide a daily plantation record, a role that plantation journals had been filling for decades before 1850. No other form was used nearly as much, further emphasizing how central their role as a plantation journal was to planters. If the Affleck books were first a journal, they were also accounts books, blank bound volumes, instructions for overseers, and inventories.

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<sup>84</sup> For a possible example of a slave driver completing, or much more likely, providing the information to complete, an Affleck book, see Joseph Jaynes Plantation Journal.

<sup>85</sup> Caitlin Rosenthal, *From Slavery to Scientific Management: Accounting for Control in Antebellum America* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 2012), 76, 83.

Three of the four most commonly used forms in the Affleck books did what most detailed plantation journals had already done, albeit less formally—record daily events, track cotton picking, and note the births and deaths of slaves on the plantation. These three forms were probably expected and appreciated by planters and are provided by almost all existing cotton plantation record books. Affleck’s book did make some little headway in bringing in a list of cotton bales and their weights (Form H), something that was usually recorded, but in an account book or ledger, rather than in a plantation journal. If Affleck was seeking a complete plantation account, this was probably the closest he came to succeeding. It was an incomplete victory, however, as almost no planters or overseers translated this data to the crop inventory (Form L) or income sheet (Form M).

Affleck’s book came out of a long tradition of plantation record books, as well as the specific context of agricultural reform in the antebellum South, but it also coexisted and competed with many other books, from blank books, to plantation journals, to other printed work logs and record and account books. In one case, the accounting and record keeping methods of the Affleck book have been tested against those in a sample of non-Affleck records. The article found that in a sample of 52 plantation records from Mississippi and Alabama the Affleck procedures were found at a “significant” level, though the study has numerous fundamental flaws.<sup>86</sup> Regardless of the study’s specific findings, it is useful to compare the Affleck books to other blank and less didactic printed books that were available. Planters most commonly used blank and simply printed books on their plantations, generally used the books either to record accounts or daily events.

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<sup>86</sup> Heier, “Content Comparison,” 146. Heier uses only 8 procedures from the Affleck book to test whether they are present elsewhere. He finds the comparison significant at a level of .01, .05, and .10 for all 8 operations. He does not, however recognize that by his standards, the Affleck books themselves would fail his test for completing some of the accounting procedures. The problems with his sources and research are discussed in note 57.

Planters purchased the Affleck books for a reason. Many planters found value in a book that restricted the leeway for overseers and demanded very specific things of their managers.<sup>87</sup> It was easy for a planter to demand that daily entries be made, but the Affleck book ensured that cotton picked would be recorded, stock counted, or at least it could, if the planter demanded it. Planters also recognized that the Affleck books did not have to be used exactly as intended. While Table 3.2 shows which forms were for a purpose similar to what Affleck intended, forms that were not used in that manner also had value. Bound blank books were in demand on plantations and forms that the planters did not value for their intended purpose were converted to alternative use. For example, many planters used accounting and inventory pages that were not needed to extend the life of the book. That is, they would use these pages, conveniently bound in with their plantation records, to add another year's worth of the forms that they did want, particularly the daily records, but sometimes cotton records as well.<sup>88</sup> Just as often, the forms would go completely unused, at the time, but be brought into use at a later date, most commonly in the late 1860s, often to keep accounts with newly freed former slaves.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> James Henry Hammond to Thomas Affleck, January 3, 1855.

<sup>88</sup> For an example of forms used as daily entries, see Frederick Augustus Metcalfe, *Newstead Plantation Book*.

<sup>89</sup> For an example of this usage, see Panther Burn journals.

**DAILY RECORD OF OCCURRENCE, PARTICULARS, & REMARKS TO BE MADE**  
 during the month of \_\_\_\_\_ 18\_\_

NAME	AGE	SEX	RELATION	STATUS	REMARKS
1	Wm. Lamb				
2	Chas. 1st				
3	Wm. 1st				
4	Bill				
5	James				
6	Francis				
7	Edw.				
8	Sam				
9	Richard				
10	Pat				
11	Ann				
12	Robert				
13	Little Charity				
14	America				
15	Duffy				
16	Christina				
17	Sarah				
18	Chas. & Ann				
19	Chas. & Ann				
20	Abeline				
21	Oliver				
22	John				
23	Arthur				
24	Jack				
25	James				
26	John				
27	John				
28	John				
29	John				
30	John				
31	John				
32	John				
33	John				
34	John				
35	John				
36	John				
37	John				
38	John				
39	John				
40	John				

**Figure 3.3: James Harrington Plantation Journal**

The “Daily Record of Passing Events,” Form A, was the most flexible of the forms in its design. Affleck simply stated that it was a place to jot down everything that was “worthy of being recorded.” He offered a series of examples of events that could be included, but these suggestions were not reflected in the form of the pages, which listed the seven days of the week, leaving a blank space after each one for notes. The openness of these forms allows a view of planter’s particular interest. Notations of the weather and major progress on crops (planting, weeding, harvesting) were standard. Some planters and managers chose to record illness, some wrote in the details of work assignments, others

described their own actions during the day, some even recorded punishment of slaves, though generally only in exceptional circumstances.<sup>90</sup>

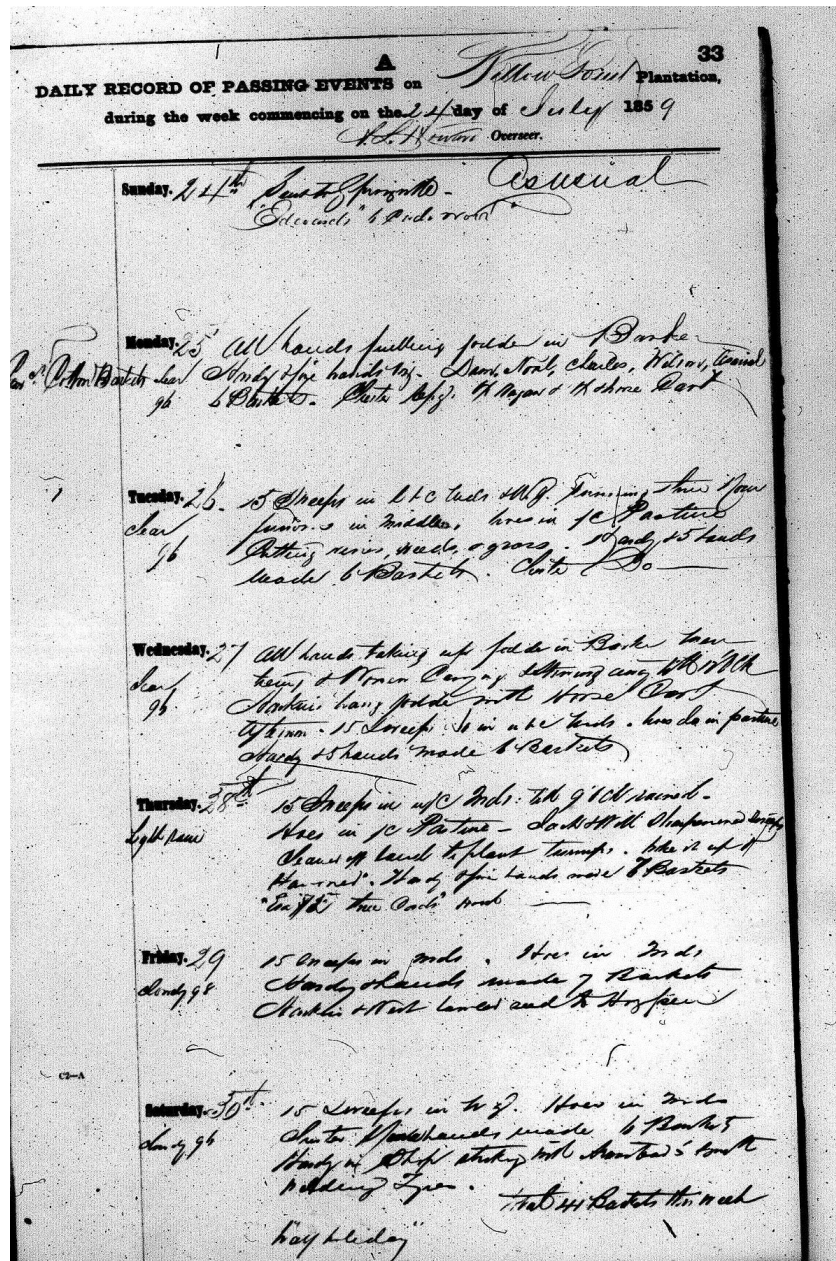


Figure 3.4: Willow Point Plantation Journal

Source: Joseph Toole Robinson Papers

The cotton picking records were among the most used of the Affleck forms, trailing only the daily record of events. (Table 3.2) Reform minded planters sought to manage their

<sup>90</sup> For somewhat frequent records of punishment, see Metcalfe Family Papers, The Grove Journal, 1853-1854.



soil, allocate their labor, and introduce the best cotton seed in order to make their enterprises more efficient, but mostly they sought to extract ever more work from their enslaved workers, using the whip alongside various other forms of coercion. When it was time to pick cotton, nearly every slave on a plantation would be forced into the fields, where they would pick cotton all day, often having to meet a quota. The cotton picked would be weighed at the gin house in the evening. The whip awaited those who had not met their quota. There are many variations on this pattern, but the basic principles remain the same.

Each of the Affleck books contained many pages in which the amount of cotton picked by each slave would be recorded (Form C). Beyond simply keeping track of the amount of cotton picked each day (which was part of the goal), there was a sinister aspect to these records. The spreadsheets that resulted from each week's cotton picking allowed the planter or overseer to easily ascertain which slaves were coming up short on a regular basis in their picking. The Metcalfe plantation records are silent when it comes to punishment, but it is not difficult to guess what the result of coming to the gin house with a light basket week after week would be.

**DAILY RECORD OF COTTON PICKED ON**  
during the week commencing on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 1855

NAME	No.	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Week's Picking
John	1	195	74	94		120	142	
Amos	2	178	135	131		69	56	
B. George	3	176	133	Sick	Dead	43	Sick	
Edmond	4	165	136	128		80	106	
Jesse	5	56	45	76		90	driving cart	
P. George	6	Sick	Sick	Sick		Sick	Sick	
Hampton	7	Sick	65	82		75	78	
Adair	8	185	192	165		114	135	
Rope	9	138	110	101		83	103	
Samuel	10	126	113	110		70	95	
Edward	11	43	Sick	27		55	65	
Albion	12	Killing the Hens						
Wright	13	168	146	120		90	97	
Hannah	14	145	115	103		70	97	
Phoebe	15	160	125	92		50	91	
Samuel	16	190	168	144		105	131	
Caroline	17	130	130	120		86	70	
Levy	18	Sick	Sick	Sick				
Amelia	19	Killing in Sucklet						
Ester	20	113	97	68		55	80	
Harriet	21	72	54	20		30	12	
Sarah Ann	22	61	24			20	11	
Willis	23	41	32	15				
	24	736	793	759		733	747	
	25						Monday	2365
	26						Tuesday	1939
	27						Wednesday	1590
	28	October the 20th	1855	1050	1050	1050	Thursday	1338
	29	October the 22nd	1854	9130	9130	9130	Friday	1412
	30	October the 24th	1853	121450	121450	121450	Saturday	8644
	31	October the 24th	1852	123650	123650	123650		

Figure 3.5: Joseph Jaynes Plantation Journal

The cotton picking records usually recorded more than just cotton picked. In the example above, the overseer at Joseph Jaynes' plantation compared the week's picking to the previous four years' picking. Calculations like this suggest that some planters and overseers went back to the Affleck books to make decisions about future agricultural practice. In many examples of the Affleck books, these forms were also used to record any other work done during the cotton picking season. If a slave was not picking cotton, whatever other work

they were doing would be recorded instead of the number of pounds of cotton picked each day. Not only can we assume that planters were very interested in which slaves were repeatedly absent in order to root out suspected malingerers, but perhaps even to sell slaves that were thought to be chronically ill. In fact, an article in the Louisiana journal *DeBow's Review*, to which many users of the Affleck guide subscribed, asks planters to have a report of repeatedly ill slaves "read out publicly at the end of each month," so that the "sneers of the faithful" slaves would persuade the recalcitrant slaves to reform their ways.<sup>91</sup> It was certainly not the "sneers of the faithful" that would motivate slaves, but other implied threats certainly would. These modern technologies of surveillance had far more power in the cotton fields than they did in the English factory, where dismissal was likely the worst punishment available. The record books got their real power from the implied presence of the whip.

After the daily record of events and cotton picking records, the record of births and deaths on the plantation was the most used form. The fact that almost all planters recorded births and deaths of slaves, whether using the Affleck books or not, is to be expected. Slaves represented a large investment on the part of the planter and births and deaths were major events. The fact that careful records of births and deaths were kept far more frequently than inventories of slaves and their value (79% of the sample compared to 51%) further underscores the recording over accounting preferences of planters and managers. While some planters carefully recorded the names, ages, and values at the beginning and end of the year of each slave on the plantation in form I, many did not. Planters were less interested in appreciation and depreciation than in the more pronounced financial changes represented by the loss of slaves through death and the new infants added to their slaveholdings through

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<sup>91</sup> "Keep a Plantation Record," *DeBow's Review* Vol. 13, no. 2 (August, 1852), 194.

birth. Some have argued that “planters who kept meticulous accounts often advocated for leniency in punishment.”<sup>92</sup> The casual manner in which planters recorded the deaths of their slaves in the same manner as their livestock suggests that this was not the case.

The *Record Books* published by Thomas Affleck offer a window into the practice of reformers’ printed ideals. Even the most ardent reformers, like the Metcalfe family of Adams County whose prominence in the local agricultural reform scene is reflected in their subscriptions to agricultural journals, presence at agricultural fairs, and entry into contests for improved stock and plantations, did not follow Affleck’s system to the letter.<sup>93</sup> Some of this reluctance was surely due to differences in the details of plantation management, but much of it was due to a widespread difference between what they felt should be done on an ideal plantation and what made sense in the particular context of their own practice. The Metcalfe family had the largest, most complicated plantation enterprise among those who kept the Affleck books, spanning thousands of acres and hundreds of slaves in Adams County alone and used an integrated system of management between all of the plantations owned by members of the family.<sup>94</sup> They carefully tracked the activities of their slaves and discussed management affairs at length, but consistently ignored the accounting forms in Affleck’s books. The daily realities of plantation management made the level of calculation and recordkeeping necessary for the Affleck system unrealistic. Even where the same planter and manager keep the Affleck books in consecutive years, different sections are omitted. In fact, on the Metcalfe plantations, managers initially use some of the accounting forms, but after the first year, stop using them entirely.

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<sup>92</sup> Rosenthal, *From Slavery to Scientific Management*, 41.

<sup>93</sup> The Metcalfe family had subscriptions to *DeBow’s Review*, the *Southern Cultivator*, and an unnamed “Agricultural Journal” in their shared library. “The Old Library” in Metcalfe Family *Papers*. Additionally James Metcalfe is on the subscription list of the *Southern Planter* (Natchez, MS), OS/630.5/So8p/v.1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter Four for the Metcalfe Family

The additional information kept in the Affleck books added to the level of monitoring and surveillance of both managers and slaves. Overseers' actions could be tracked more easily beyond just cotton production; how assiduously they kept the book itself was often a test in and of itself, with planters valuing overseers who could carefully keep records over those who could not. Slaves' cotton picking was tracked as closely in Affleck books as anywhere else, sick days were all recorded in one book, and the results could easily be used to separate the best pickers from the worst over long periods, as each slave's weekly total was included, along with the daily total.

## **Conclusion**

Thomas Affleck's *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Books* point toward a next direction for the history of agricultural reform in the American South. Historians have neglected the regional aspect of agricultural reform, beyond a simple division between free and slave states, plantation agriculture and farming. Recent work has suggested that there were major differences between different areas of the northern free states, with particular states and sets of states setting particular agendas for their own benefit.<sup>95</sup> There were major regional splits within the slaveholding states as well; Virginia has occasionally been recognized as having its own agenda because it grew different crops (grain and tobacco) and had different problems (more slaves than were profitably employed) than South Carolina or Mississippi. Historians have rarely distinguished between cotton-growing regions, however, preferring to lump them together, with the caveat that agricultural reform "failed" in Mississippi to a greater degree than it did in South Carolina, because in South Carolina planters were concerned about outmigration and declining fertility, while new land in Mississippi masked the wasteful nature of southern agriculture. Rejecting the "failure" aspect

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<sup>95</sup> Ron, "Developing the Countryside."

of this explanation, I look to move beyond standard measures for the presence of agricultural reform—journals, societies, and fairs—to see how planters in Mississippi actually engaged with agricultural reform.

In this chapter, I have argued that Affleck’s book represents the types of non-literary print that planters interacted with on a regular basis. This indirect contact with the ideologies of agricultural reformers shows the many ways that the agendas of men like Edmund Ruffin, Noah Cloud, and Thomas Affleck could filter out to cotton planters. Affleck presents a coherent vision for a new plantation management in his books; very few planters adopted his vision completely. A few starry-eyed acolytes, like Louisiana planter Eli Capell, tried to emulate Affleck’s system and wrote of the “advancement of Education and agriculture at the South,” but most used sections of Affleck’s book and rejected others.<sup>96</sup> In this way, I argue, agricultural reform in the Southwest was more widespread and influential than historians have argued, but also less narrowly-construed and defined by the expectations of prominent reformers themselves. A huge number of planters interacted with agricultural reform, but relatively few self-identified as “agricultural reformers.” By privileging the latter, historians have underestimated the former.

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<sup>96</sup> Eli J. Capell to Thomas Affleck, November 15, 1846.



large home on Montrose plantation on Second Creek, a couple of miles from Bourbon. Holtree did nothing more than note Mahalia's actions because Mahalia had appealed to the authority of James Metcalfe, Holtree's employer. The planter and his family owned thousands of acres of plantation land in Adams County and managed the plantations as divisions of a larger enterprise, with slaves and supplies moving frequently between the plantations as the white managers deemed necessary. Metcalfe subscribed to many of the ideas of the agricultural reform movement in Mississippi and used Thomas Affleck's printed record books to track his vast holdings. Mahalia was able to use her knowledge of this unusual system of large-scale plantation management to temporarily get away from Holtree and Bourbon plantation. Little else is known of Mahalia's maneuver and it is likely that she was whipped for leaving Bourbon without Holtree's permission, but she was not forced to return immediately and remained working at Montrose for at least two and half months.<sup>2</sup>

Mahalia was likely unique among slaves on the Metcalfe plantations in successfully choosing her residence in such a bold manner and likely paid for her assertiveness. More frequently the layers of management on the Metcalfe plantations resulted in more surveillance of slaves, rather than more leeway to appeal to a higher authority. No other Metcalfe overseer recorded a slave appealing directly to the plantation owner and other escaped slaves did not flee to other Metcalfe plantations, nor did they remain away for months. Instead, the Metcalfe family's engagement with agricultural reform meant that the overseers and planters had records of how much cotton each slave picked each day, often for years at a time. The Metcalfes noted the highest average picking totals each season, as well as slaves who were able to pick more than others. Dr. James and his sons forced slaves

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<sup>2</sup> Mahalia may have returned to Bourbon on July 30, 1860, but Holtree's writing is not legible enough to ascertain whether it was Mahalia or another slave owned by the Metcalfes, Malinda who "came back from Montrose." "Bourbon, 1860," July 30, 1860.



to work planting fields in new strains of cotton for their experiments, to gin cotton from different fields differently, to operate dangerous steam engines and boilers, and to build cisterns and mills to house the engines. For the Metcalfes, agricultural reform was a way to run their vast plantation empire more efficiently, to extract more from their land and slaves, not a way to manage their land sustainably or to ameliorate the conditions of slavery.<sup>3</sup> The Metcalfe family provides an example of the synthesis of agricultural reform and rapacious cotton capitalism that many planters saw as the only way for the South to maintain its regional economic strength within a changing national economy. For many prominent southerners, agriculture and modernization could comfortably co-exist, but only if planters embraced agricultural reform and were willing to improve their plantation practice. The Metcalfes enthusiastically embraced this direction, hoping it would allow them to continue expanding their slave-based agricultural business.

James Metcalfe came from a family of artisans and small planters. His father, John Metcalfe, was born in Virginia and was working as a stone mason in Kentucky when James was born. John was the elder half-brother of future Kentucky governor Thomas “Stonehammer” Metcalfe. The Metcalfe family lineage was evidently important to James, as he named his first two plantations Bourbon, after the county in Kentucky where he grew up, and York, after the county in England that his great-grandfather, John Metcalfe (1680-1751) emigrated from. This Metcalfe family was prominent in Mississippi in the nineteenth-

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the connections between agricultural improvement and the amelioration of slavery in the West Indies, see Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44-56.

century; James' brother, Volney Metcalfe, a physician, also moved to Mississippi and set up a medical practice.<sup>4</sup>

In 1814, James Metcalfe (1790-1867), a twenty-four-year-old doctor, moved to Adams County, Mississippi, from his home state of Kentucky. His wife Sarah Williams Baker Metcalfe moved with him, and the couple had six sons after their move, four of whom were involved in the family business: James Wistar Metcalfe (1819-1865), Henry Laurens Metcalfe (b. 1829), Orrick Metcalfe, and Charles Metcalfe (1837-1865).<sup>5</sup> In the decades following the move, the family acquired a number of plantations in the Second Creek region of Adams County. By 1866, the plantation enterprise included thirteen plantations owned or managed by Dr. Metcalfe, his sons, and their wives, Sarah, Eliza, and Helen.<sup>6</sup> Eleven of the plantations were clustered together on the banks of Second Creek, while James Wistar and his wife, Sarah Jane Semple Young, owned a plantation in Wilkinson County and one in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana.

### **Mississippi and the Cotton Southwest**

When the Metcalfe family moved to the Mississippi Territory, American migrants were just beginning to flock to the area. The Creek War of 1813-1814 seized land in the eastern section of the Mississippi Territory and encouraged white American settlement

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<sup>4</sup> The Barber of Natchez, William Johnson, mentions Volney as a participant in a fight in Natchez. D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 263.

There were two extended Metcalfe families with extensive plantation holdings in Mississippi in the antebellum period. While both had common ancestors in Kentucky, they did not acknowledge the connection. For the purposes of this chapter, I am focusing on the Metcalfes based in Adams County, not those in Washington County. Somewhat confusingly both have extensive surviving plantation papers at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and both used the Thomas Affleck record books. I am grateful to the archivists at the MDAH for leading me through the complicated history of the two families.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix E for a fuller explanation of the background of the Metcalfe family members and the specifics of their plantation and slaveholdings.

<sup>6</sup> To distinguish between the two James Metcalfes that own plantations, I refer to the elder James as "Dr. James" and his son as "James Wistar."

throughout the territory, as Native American military threats dissipated.<sup>7</sup> Settlement reached a fever pitch after the War of 1812, when cotton prices spiked from 12 cents a pound in 1812 to 30 cents a pound in 1815. While prices declined over the next few years, in a postwar depression, the rush to settle the cotton land of Mississippi was well under way.<sup>8</sup> Between 1810 and 1820, the white population of Mississippi more than doubled as new arrivals looked to cash in on former Creek lands and the cotton economy.<sup>9</sup> Many of the wealthiest Mississippi planter families on the eve of the Civil War had moved to the Mississippi Territory before 1815 and secured plentiful, cheap land; the Sargent, Minor, Dunbar, and Nutt surnames were only a few of those already well-established in the area when James Metcalfe arrived in 1814. In 1817, the western section of the Mississippi Territory became the State of Mississippi, with the capital in Natchez from 1817 to 1822, when it moved to Jackson. Even after Natchez lost its status as the state capital, the town remained the economic core of wealth in the state.

In the 1830s, the American economy was booming, as banks enlarged the money supply, the government opened for settlement millions of acres of land to the west for settlement, and high cotton prices drove enormous profits from exports. The cheap land allowed many Americans to rise from obscurity to wealth. The old Southwest profited from this boom as much as any other region. The population of Mississippi more than doubled from 1830 (136,621) to 1840 (375,651).<sup>10</sup> Cotton production in the United States rose from 350 million pounds to 500 million pounds in just four years, from 1831 to 1835, with the

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Usner, "American Indians on the Cotton Frontier: Changing Economic Relations with Citizens and Slaves in the Mississippi Territory" *Journal of American History* 72 (Sept., 1985): 315-317.

<sup>8</sup> John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988): 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/index.html>, accessed October 13, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> This figure includes all people in the census, both free and slave. Historical Census Browser, October 13, 2012.

vast majority of the annual crop produced in the southwestern states. In 1839, that total had risen to 800 million pounds (200 million of which was produced in Mississippi alone).<sup>11</sup> This massive increase in cotton production was fueled by increases in picking efficiency, but also by planters cultivating newly cleared southwestern land with more and more slaves brought from the Seaboard states or purchased at the slave markets in New Orleans and elsewhere throughout the southwest.<sup>12</sup>

Planters needed massive amounts of capital to purchase the land and slaves necessary to produce cotton on plantations. In the 1830s, they found this capital relatively easy to acquire. Between 1829 and 1836, banking in Mississippi grew dramatically; by the end of the period, twenty-eight banks were in operation and over 15 million dollars of loans were out to customers who were mostly cotton planters. Banks saw cotton planters as great investments in Mississippi. The planters experienced bonanza rates of return in the early 1830s and were able to repay their loans with little difficulty. When President Andrew Jackson withdrew federal deposits from the Bank of the United States (which had provided a large portion of its loans to Mississippians), much of the capital was diverted to the Planter's Bank of Mississippi, allowing planters to continue borrowing vast sums to purchase land and slaves.<sup>13</sup> In 1836, when low cotton prices caused massive failures among British firms involved in the cotton trade, the New Orleans cotton market crashed in early 1837. Banks across the United

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<sup>11</sup> Joshua D. Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012): 2-4.

<sup>12</sup>See Chapter One for a discussion of the explosion of cotton production. See also Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); James D. Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*; David Lightner, *Slavery and the Commerce Power: How the Struggle Against the Inter-State Slave Trade Led to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Rothman, *Fever Dreams*, 2-9, especially 2n4 and 4n9. For a study of banking and plantation slavery in Mississippi, see Richard Holcombe Kilbourne, *Slave Agriculture And Financial Markets in Antebellum America: The Bank of the United States in Mississippi 1831-1852* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006).

States collapsed and planters in the Lower Mississippi Valley were unable to meet debts that banks began to call in, given the low cotton prices.<sup>14</sup>

The Panic of 1837 and the subsequent cratering of cotton prices in 1839 are often seen as a turning point for agricultural reform in Mississippi. Some planters were driven to bankruptcy in 1837 by loans that they could not repay. Many others were ruined when their cotton crops brought a fraction of their former value in 1839. In the face of a new financial climate for cotton planters in the depression following the 1839 collapse, the argument goes, planters embraced agricultural reform, with some scholars even arguing that there was an agricultural revolution in Mississippi between 1839 and 1849.<sup>15</sup> The evidence for this sudden embrace of agricultural innovation and reform agendas is spotty, however, as Mississippi developed few of the standard institutions of agricultural reform (a few short-lived journals and agricultural societies). In 1839, several well-known Mississippi reformers formed the Agricultural, Horticultural, and Botanical Society of Jefferson College (Washington, Mississippi), but it disbanded in 1843. There were other organizations in Warren and Hinds County, but overall these structures were not as common as in the Seaboard states. The strongest element of the argument is the development of new types of cotton in the period, but there is no spike in new strains after 1839.

### **The Metcalfe Neighborhood: Adams County and Second Creek**

Adams County, bordering the Mississippi River, had rich agricultural land that drew many wealthy planters to the area. Some of the wealthiest, most renowned planters grew

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Baptist, 'Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, Collateralized and Securitized Human Beings, and the Panic of 1837,' in Michael Zakim and Gary Kornblith, *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 87-89.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, *Cotton Kingdom*, 18-36.

their fortunes in Adams County, on the backs of the slaves that they brought to the region. Stephen Duncan was a nationally-known planter, landowner, banker, investor, and creditor. Like many of the Natchez elite, Duncan combined slaveholding and plantation production with an engagement with the national economy and an understanding of just how compatible slavery and modern industrial and financial production could be.<sup>16</sup> Haller Nutt was a regionally known agricultural improver responsible for new strains of cotton and changes in cotton presses who had accumulated a plantation fortune worth at least two million dollars by the 1850s.<sup>17</sup> William Dunbar was an early settler in the Natchez district and is given credit for inventing the square cotton bale and the screw press for cotton. He planted cotton and indigo and built up a plantation empire that included Forest plantation, in the Metcalfe's neighborhood (owned by one of his relatives, Mary G. Dunbar, when the Metcalfes came to Mississippi).<sup>18</sup> By the time of the Civil War, the district produced almost ten percent of the cotton in the entire South.<sup>19</sup> The incredible concentration of wealth, enslaved workers, and cotton monoculture shaped the world of Adams County, encompassing everything from the environment to the cultural institutions. The region was characterized by huge landholdings, a sizeable slave majority, cosmopolitan intellectual interests, and Whiggish, and later, anti-secession sympathies. More than 11 percent of the wealthiest slaveowners in the nation (those who owned more than 250 slaves) resided in Adams County.<sup>20</sup> The next highest concentration of such slaveholders was in Georgetown

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<sup>16</sup> Martha Jane Brazy, *An American Planter: Stephen Duncan of Antebellum Natchez and New York* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*, 107-108, 120, 122-123.

<sup>19</sup> Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society*, 6-7. Wayne defines the Natchez District as five counties in Mississippi (Wilkinson, Adams, Jefferson, Claiborne, and Warren) and three parishes in Louisiana (Concordia, Tensas, and Madison).

<sup>20</sup> Thirty-one of the 272 slaveholders listed as having more than 250 slaves in the 1850 and 1860 censuses lived in Adams County. In Georgetown, 14 planters are listed as owning 250 or more slaves. This data is drawn from

County in the rice district of South Carolina, with less than half as many planters listed as owning 250 slaves. The rich alluvial lands of the Lower Mississippi Valley allowed these Adams County planters to extract massive profits from their land and slaves. Adams County was a world of dazzling wealth and inequity.

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William Scarbrough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003) which compiles data from the manuscript censuses from 1850 and 1860. The figures should be taken only as a rough approximation as census records for the number of slaves an individual owned can be misleading. For example, slaves could be listed under the plantation that they worked on, ownership of which might be attributed to a relative who was not the owner.



**Figure 4.2: Natchez Region, Mississippi, 1860**

Source: Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1993), xx.

The Second Creek conspiracy scare unfolded in this world.<sup>21</sup> In the autumn of 1861, shortly after the beginning of the Civil War, a panic spread through slaveholders in Adams County. Rumors of a slave conspiracy fueled a panicked extra-judicial inquiry that resulted in

<sup>21</sup> For more on the Second Creek Conspiracy see Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek* as well as Jordan, “The Charleston Hurricane of 1822; Or, the Law’s Rampage” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, 1 (Jan., 2002): 176 for a reflection on the book, suggesting that there was “very probably” an actual slave conspiracy in Second Creek.



planters having at least 27 slaves executed. Planters claimed (and tortured, coaxed, and coerced corroborating evidence out of slaves) that there was a plan for slaves to kill a number of planter families in the Second Creek neighborhood, about ten miles south of Natchez—the Metcalfes’ neighborhood. While this possible conspiracy surely shook the Metcalfes deeply, they kept such worries out of their surviving records.<sup>22</sup> The tense world that planters created through their concentration of oppressed slaves on their plantations lent itself to panic as much as to profit. The Metcalfe family’s role in the Second Creek conspiracy is not fully known, but as major players in plantation society, they were deeply involved. The Metcalfes were prime targets in the alleged conspiracy. One of the coerced slave witnesses identified the list of planters and plantations that the slaves targeted, saying they were planning to “kill Mr. and Mrs. Mosby, have young ladies to self, kill Dr Scott, then go to Dr Orricks, then go to Dr Dunbar, then to Mr Young’s, then to Mr Metcalfe.”<sup>23</sup> Both Orrick and Dr. James Metcalfe were targets on this list, and the Mosby, Scott, Dunbar, and Young families were closely connected to the Metcalfes, either as friends or relatives.<sup>24</sup> The Metcalfe family was immersed in the tension enveloping the Second Creek neighborhood.

The Metcalfes owned at least 10 plantations near Second Creek, all south of Natchez, north of the Homochitto River, and east of the Mississippi. All of the Metcalfe plantations in the area were located within a few miles of each other. Dr. James, the patriarch of the family, had settled at the southernmost family plantations and expanded his holdings

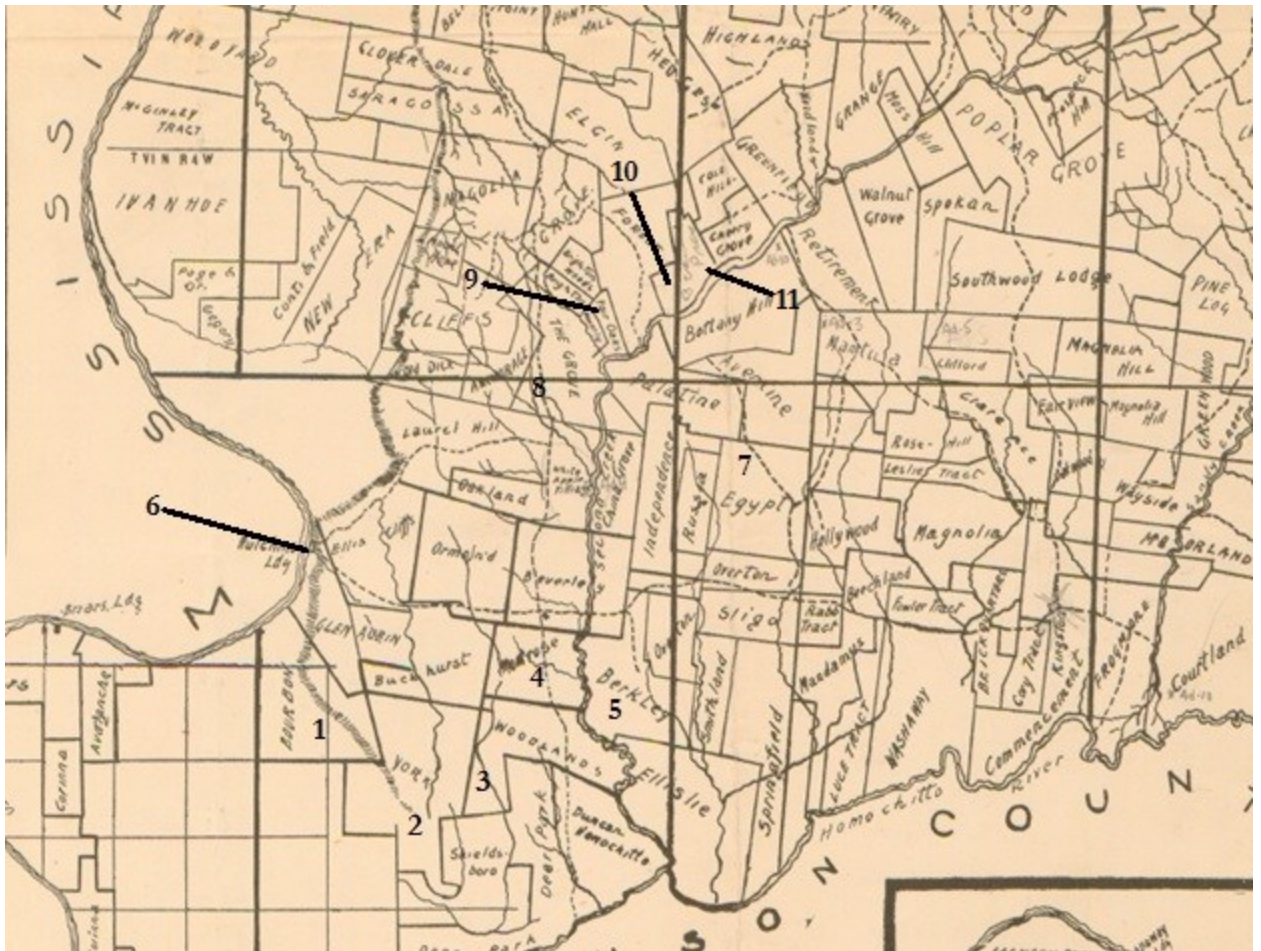
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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Dr. James Metcalfe, Orrick Metcalfe, and James Wister Metcalfe, those members of the family most directly involved in the Second Creek panic do not have any surviving plantation documents from 1861. There are plantation books from Dr. James’ plantations, but none that he kept himself.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Scott testimony cited in Jordan, *Tumult and Silence*, 124.

<sup>24</sup> James Wistar Metcalfe married Sarah Jane Semple Young, of the Young family. The Mosby plantation, Brighton, adjoined both Henry Laurens Metcalfe’s Grove plantation and Orrick Metcalfe’s Fair Oaks and Alfred Mosby was a regular presence at James Wistar Metcalfe’s Ingleside plantation. Dr. Scott was a friend of Orrick Metcalfe’s and the Dunbar family was connected to almost everyone in Adams County. Mary Dunbar’s Forest Plantation, which was the one referenced in the list of targets, divided Fair Oaks and James Wister Metcalfe’s Beaux Pres plantation.

from there. As he acquired plantations for his sons, the enterprise moved north. The elder sons, James Wistar, Henry Laurens, and Orrick, all lived within a mile or two of each other on plantations along Second Creek. The Metcalfe plantations were not only close to each other, they were close to many other prominent planters and agricultural reformers, due to Adams County's preeminence in planter circles. In fact, James Wistar's residence, a small plantation known as Ingleside Farm, had previously been owned by Anna Dunbar and her husband, Thomas Affleck.



**Figure 4.3: Metcalfe Plantations in Adams County, 1860**

Source: "Map of Adams County, Mississippi." C.W. Babbitt, et al. Reprint, Chicago, 1890. MDAH

1	Bourbon	Dr. James
2	York	Dr. James
3	Woodlands	Dr. James
4	Montrose	Dr. James
5	Berkeley	Dr. James
6	Hutchins Landing	Dr. James
7	Egypt	Helen Gillespie/Orrick
8	The Grove	Henry Laurens
9	Fair Oaks	Orrick
10	Ingleside	James Wistar
11	Beaux Pres	James Wistar

The Metcalfe plantations' proximity to each other created a neighborhood of its own within Adams County. Slaves frequently traveled between plantations during the course of their working days and were sometimes abruptly moved from one plantation to another. The Metcalfes and their hired overseers transferred slaves, sometimes entire plantation forces

between Dr. James' plantations.<sup>25</sup> It is not surprising that on the "List of Bourbon Slaves," the specific day is noted (January 26<sup>th</sup>), where most planters would take a census of slaves at the beginning of the year that was expected to remain relatively constant.<sup>26</sup> Any such census on one of Dr. James' plantations would be a snapshot of that day, rather than a list to refer to throughout the year. Slaves on the plantations owned by Dr. James' sons usually remained there for long periods, but frequently were sent to other plantations in large numbers for a few days at a time.

### **The Metcalfe Records**

Despite their size and importance, the well-documented Metcalfe plantations have rarely been discussed at length by historians.<sup>27</sup> The records left behind are largely plantation journals, account books, and work logs, which do not easily yield a narrative, but buried in numbers is the story of hundreds of men, women, and children. Not only can these records help provide a fuller perspective for a historiographically pivotal region, but they also

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The proximity of the plantations to each other made this possible, but the frequency with which it occurred underscores just how connected to each other the Metcalfe plantations were. While the plantations were physically proximate, it was the shared ownership of them that connected the slave populations to each other. This idea of a neighborhood challenges the purely geographical definitions that have been offered, based on research conducted on Adams and surrounding counties. While large plantation enterprises were not the common way that a neighborhood was constructed, this possibility shows the many ways that neighborhoods were constructed and suggests that the spaces of a neighborhood were not always determined solely by physical proximity of residences. See Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places*, 4 for the argument that "in the Natchez District, slaves defined neighborhoods precisely, as adjoining plantations, because this was the domain of all the bonds that constituted their daily routine." This was not the case for the slaves on the Metcalfe plantations, as their daily routine often included bonds that extended to a number of other Metcalfe plantations that were not adjoining.

<sup>26</sup> *Metcalfe Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 4, Bourbon, May 6, 1862.

<sup>27</sup> Jordan, *Tumult and Silence*, 114-115 and Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 91, 96 are the most notable exceptions. Even in those cases, the Metcalfe plantation records are not used extensively. Kaye only uses the earliest volumes of the Metcalfe plantation books (1847-1848) and Jordan is interested in how the Metcalfes related to the larger neighborhood.

provide a rare glimpse into the inner workings of a large set of plantations and the lives of many enslaved workers in the transition from slavery to the upheaval of war.<sup>28</sup>

The Metcalfe plantation records were kept in a variety of different books, but the most common were various editions of Thomas Affleck's popular and widespread *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book*. This book has been discussed at length in previous chapters, as has its author, a celebrated Mississippi agricultural writer and publisher, who served as a hub for a significant network of American agriculturists and agricultural scientists. The Metcalfe plantation records form the largest known surviving collection of Affleck books used on plantations. The depth of the records allows for a fuller picture of how the plantation enterprise operated than is usually possible. The Metcalfes' extensive use of Affleck's books suggests an interest in bringing their business in line with what they would have seen as the modern, rational mode of production that was becoming increasingly common in the northern United States and Europe. Using Affleck's book rather than the more common practice of using a blank book or a journal with only dates printed on it suggests that the Metcalfes valued attempts to reform their plantations and make them more efficient. Dr. James Metcalfe also participated in the agricultural reform movement in the Southwest under the more traditional understanding of print-based reform centered on journals, agricultural societies, and readings in agriculture and chemistry.

Record-keeping is the clearest indication of the Metcalfe family's connection to Mississippi agricultural reform. The bulk of the evidence for the plantation practice of the Metcalfe family is drawn from the record and account books kept by the various family members and managers. Most of the plantation records are made in pre-printed plantation

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<sup>28</sup> For some of the scholarship rooted in Adams County sources, see Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society*; Jordan, *Tumult and Silence*; Kaye, *Joining Places*; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 2013).

account books published by Thomas Affleck of Jefferson County. These books were initially published in New Orleans, though eventually the publication site shifted. The Metcalfes seem to have bought their copies at Bloomfield & Steel, booksellers on Camp Street in New Orleans.<sup>29</sup> They likely purchased the books in quantity, as they used the same edition for several years and on several plantations.<sup>30</sup>

The production, circulation, and use of these record books are discussed at length in the previous chapter, but here it is important to remember that these books were used in many different ways. The books on the Metcalfe plantations were largely used to keep a plantation journal and to keep records of cotton picking and baling. While these were the records kept in the books, they had a purpose beyond keeping a record of work done, weather conditions, and crop harvests. The books were intended as a measure of surveillance of both slaves and overseers. When an overseer keeps the book on one of the Metcalfe plantations, many more fields are filled out than when one of the Metcalfes keeps the plantation record themselves. When the planter keeps the record, fewer fields are filled out and the logs resemble work records less and a journal more.<sup>31</sup>

### **Collective Management on the Metcalfe Plantations**

The plantation records of the Metcalfe family reveal the extent to which their holdings need to be viewed as a collective (on the part of the owners) enterprise. The Metcalfe family enterprise used the Thomas Affleck record books more than any other set of plantations with surviving records. Dr. James Metcalfe's close links to the Mississippi

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<sup>29</sup> Henry Laurens also bought at least one copy of the Affleck book from a drug store in Natchez, Wallace & Elliot.

<sup>30</sup> The surviving record books from Dr. James Metcalfe's plantations are all from the eighth edition of Affleck's book, though they use different sizes of book (those for plantations of less than "40 hands" and those for less than "120 hands" are both used).

<sup>31</sup> The exception here is the 1853 Grove plantation logs. Both the planter, Henry Laurens Metcalfe, and the overseer, Joseph Dooley, kept a log in a copy of an Affleck book simultaneously.

agricultural reform movement showed in how he and his sons managed their plantations. Dr. James not only purchased and required his overseers to use the Affleck books, but he also encouraged significant deviation from common plantation management. The Metcalfe plantations were not owned collectively by the family, but the family managed them and their slave workforces as though they were part of the same enterprise.

Plantations had support roles within the larger plantation enterprise that were balanced with their individual management. Slaves were constantly shifted between plantations to accommodate seasonal labor needs. When cotton opened on one plantation, slave from other plantations would be sent to help pick the crop. Slaves with specialized skills, such as coopers or blacksmiths, would also serve multiple plantations. Many of the plantations performed certain tasks for the entire plantation enterprise. The riverside Bourbon plantation, owned by Dr. James, served as the dock for the Metcalfe plantations, with steamboats loading the Metcalfe cotton and offloading passengers and supplies exclusively at Bourbon. The Metcalfes even had a warehouse built there to store cotton and other supplies until they were ready to ship or were needed elsewhere. Woodlands, at a higher elevation than Bourbon, grew provisions and served as reserve accommodations when the swampy plantations were deemed too malarial, or, during the Civil War, too accessible to Union ships. Montrose plantation served as the seat of the family estate, the residence of Dr. James, and was home to many of the luxuries of the Metcalfe family, such as the thoroughbred horse stables. The sizeable library, however, was at the more centrally-located York plantation. Other plantations had their own roles, from milling lumber or baking bricks to housing smiths' workshops.

**Table 4.1: Roles of Metcalfe Plantations within the Larger Enterprise**

<b>Plantation</b>	<b>Production/Role</b>
Berkeley <sup>32</sup>	Wood
Bourbon	Steamboat Landing/Warehousing of Goods Produces Bricks Lumber and Grist Mills (after 1860) Blacksmiths Mechanics
Montrose	Main House Stables Gardens Orchard Cattle Hospital for Slaves
Woodland	Higher Ground when other Plantations Flood Fodder Extra Slave Quarters
York	Lumber Mill (powered by steam engine) Grist Mill Carpenters
The Grove	Orchard Beef (Cattle)
Fair Oaks	Medical Treatment

The surviving plantation record books allow only a partial understanding of the complementary production of the Metcalfe plantations. The Metcalfes clearly delegated non-cotton production to specific plantations within their larger enterprise. The surviving Affleck books from Bourbon, the Grove, York, and, Berkeley show how those plantations related to other Metcalfe plantations, but less information exists for Fair Oaks, Ingleside, Woodlands, Beaux Pres, and Egypt, which do not have surviving plantation books.<sup>33</sup> The plantation

<sup>32</sup> Berkeley, even in 1861, was not as far along in the process of converting forest to cotton fields as some of the other plantations. It imported many of its supplies from other plantations and from Natchez. *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 3, Volume 1, Berkeley Plantation Book, 1861-1862, MDAH.

<sup>33</sup> When slaves at Bourbon moved to Woodlands for part of the year in 1862, some information on that plantation is available.



books that do survive suggest that the plantations owned by Dr. James (Bourbon, York, Berkeley, Woodlands) and Henry Laurens' Grove plantation were the most connected to other Metcalfe plantations.

The Metcalfe family plantations were closely connected by design, not convenience. To get a sense of just how important the plantation collective was to daily management, it is useful to look at just how many times the managers note interactions between Metcalfe plantations. The plantations could not easily operate individually under this system, instead depending on receiving supplies from other Metcalfe plantations and relying on the larger pool of slave labor owned by the Metcalfes to supplement that of a single plantation when labor needs peaked—when cotton opened unexpectedly quickly or a levee broke, for example. Even when an activity could be carried out on one plantation, it was often shifted to a plantation that might be a better fit. Orrick Metcalfe had a medical practice that he could have run out of his Fair Oaks plantation or his wife's Egypt plantation, but, instead he advertised that his practice was located at his father's higher profile Montrose plantation, which would be easier to find for most potential clients.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Mississippi (Natchez) Free Trader*, June 7, 1853.

**Table 4.2: Other Metcalfe Plantations in the Bourbon Plantation Record, 1860**

Plantation	Metcalfe Owner/Manager	Number of Mentions
Berkeley	Dr. James <sup>35</sup>	1
Montrose	Dr. James	52
The Grove	Henry Laurens	43 <sup>36</sup>
Fair Oaks	Orrick	13 <sup>37</sup>
None (overseer only)	Charles	2 <sup>38</sup>
Total Mentions of Other Metcalfe Plantations		111 <sup>39</sup>

Table 4.2 shows just how closely connected the Metcalfe plantations were on a daily basis. The overseers at Bourbon plantation noted an interaction with another plantation 111 times. These notations were usually made when slaves went to or arrived from another Metcalfe plantation, when supplies were transferred between plantations, or when a Metcalfe family member or white overseer traveled between Bourbon and another plantation. There were surely many more interactions that the overseers at Bourbon did not include in the plantation journal. There is no mention of slaves carrying messages from other plantations, of slaves from other Metcalfe plantations traveling through Bourbon to reach the Mississippi or Natchez, or of slaves on other Metcalfe plantations visiting friends or family at the Bourbon slave quarters. The records that the Bourbon overseers kept in the Affleck book involved agricultural and productive operations, slave labor and health, interactions between whites, and exceptional events—fires, steamboat explosions, or slaves fleeing the plantation. The Metcalfe overseers rarely recorded events involving slaves that they did not deem

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<sup>35</sup> While mentions of Dr. Orrick Metcalfe and Henry Laurens Metcalfe clearly relate to a single plantation, the same is not true of Dr. James Metcalfe who owned Bourbon, as well as three other plantations mentioned in the 1860 Bourbon log, so mentions that refer only to him individually have been omitted. He is mentioned by name twice.

<sup>36</sup> This includes mentions of both Henry Laurens Metcalfe and of his plantation, the Grove.

<sup>37</sup> The mentions of Orrick Metcalfe do not name a specific plantation, but Fair Oaks is clearly the plantation involved.

<sup>38</sup> Mentions of Charles Metcalfe during his time as overseer are not included.

<sup>39</sup> This total does not include the many notations that mention sending teams to haul supplies to or from Bourbon where the destination is clearly another Metcalfe plantation, but no specifics are given.

important to agricultural operations or plantation discipline. The 111 events, meaning an event more than twice a week on average, relating to other plantations were significant for plantation management.

Most of the events connecting Bourbon to other Metcalfe plantations involved Montrose plantation (52 mentions) and the Grove (43 mentions). Montrose, as the residence of Dr. James, received not only plantation supplies (salt, pork, lumber, plows) from the Bourbon warehouse, but also materials for the patriarch's thoroughbred horses and the stables (curry combs) and luxury goods for his household (furniture, flower pots, coffee from Brazil and Java). Most notations referencing Montrose involve slaves hauling goods from Bourbon to Montrose, though in a few instances slaves bring goods from Montrose to Bourbon (garden seed, Irish potatoes). Bourbon's relationship with the Grove was less one-directional. Slaves did haul pork and corn meal from Bourbon to the Grove, but Henry Laurens also sent slaves to work at Bourbon (slaves from the Grove were responsible for over one hundred work-days on Bourbon).

Slaves were shifted between family plantations as the owners and overseers saw fit.<sup>40</sup> Slaves frequently worked on plantations other than the one that they lived on. For example, between May 6 and 18 of 1862, overseer Charles Evans records the slave population of Bourbon plantation moving to Woodland, as well as the work done by these slaves at various family plantations. In one week, Evans records the slaves at Bourbon packing up the

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<sup>40</sup> In 1853, in the Grove plantation book, Henry Laurens Metcalfe noted that a "good many of the people got passes to go to York + Woodland" suggesting a neighborhood within the Metcalfe plantations. It also, however, offers the possibility that the Metcalfe family sought to create borders at the edge of the Metcalfe plantations, granting passes to Metcalfe plantations more easily than to plantations owned by other planters. It is also possible that slaves did not need written passes to travel between Metcalfe plantations by the mid-1850s, just the permission of an overseer or planter, as mentions of passes cease by that time. On Sunday, August 21, 1853, Henry Laurens gave a number of slaves passes to go to Woodland plantation and found that a portion of them on their return were accompanied by several Woodland negroes who robbed my apple orchard. This puts a stop to all visits to from here in future." This policy did not last and within a year slaves seem to be traveling between plantations without passes. *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 1, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH, August 21, 1853.

plantation as the Mississippi River was rising. Dr. James had Evans move the slaves “to the Hills,” which meant Woodland plantation (though some went to Montrose as well), which was not directly on the river bank and also on high enough ground to be safe from almost any level of flooding. The move, begun May 6, was largely completed by May 11, and work in the fields resumed. The next week, some slaves worked at York on May 12, 1862, Woodland on May 13, Montrose on May 14, and Woodland again on May 15. While these three plantations were all owned by Dr. James personally, on May 18 the teams were working at Henry Laurens’ Grove plantation. The lives of the slaves of the Metcalfe plantations were even less stable than those of slaves elsewhere in the cotton South.<sup>41</sup> The slave workforces did not always move together either. Frequently individual slaves would move between plantations as needed. On September 19, 1861, York’s overseer B.L. Lurbeville noted that “Julius, Hershel + Charley went to Bourbon to Pick cotton” and that “Edinboro is going to Montrose to work to morrow.” Almost two years later, on March 2, 1863, “Francis + Phil went to York” from Woodland and the same “Edinboro Maria + George Warrick came to Woodland.”<sup>42</sup>

By 1862, the Civil War had arrived in Natchez and Adams County. The Metcalfe family had a long history of supporting Whig candidates. Dr. James Metcalfe’s uncle, Thomas Metcalfe, had been a Whig governor of Kentucky. In 1862, the *Daily Delta* (New Orleans) published a (heavily editorialized) digest of what different papers were saying about emancipation across the country which prominently featured a quote attributed to Metcalfe, a “distinguished patriot,” arguing that if the Union and slavery could not co-exist, then

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<sup>41</sup> *Metcalfe Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 4, “Plantation Journal (Bourbon and Woodland), 1862-1863,” pg. 22-23. MDAH.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 53; Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 7, “Plantation Journal (York), 1860-1862,” pg. 58. MDAH.

southerners must let “slavery die the death it has brought upon itself.”<sup>43</sup> The quote was not current (Thomas Metcalfe died in 1855), but highlights the strength of the Metcalfes’ pre-war Whig alignment. After Mississippi seceded, however, the Metcalfes began sending slaves to work for the Confederate war effort, building fortifications and working in salt mines. On June 21, the Mississippi had lowered enough for “all Woodland and York hands” to go Bourbon to prepare the plantation for planting. There was to be no cotton planted, however, given the conditions of the Civil War; corn was to be planted instead.<sup>44</sup> The slaves had only gone to Bourbon for the day, their quarters had not been relocated. The Metcalfes and their overseers changed their plantation practice in response to the presence of the Union military, preferring not to house slaves on the river plantation. The following day, June 22, 1862, Evans made a marginal note: “Yankees landed at Bourbon this day.” In his standard entry, the overseer calmly noted “Men went to Bourbon to clean up the quarters + got detained by the Yankees all night. Lost two boys Jeffel and Ransom, with five of our Best mules. Taken of (sic) by the yeankes (sic)...”<sup>45</sup>

On June 29, sixteen enslaved men at Woodland, perhaps emboldened by the arrival of the Union in the region a little over a month earlier, ran away to the swamps of the Metcalfe plantation neighborhood. Evans attributed the cause of the “stampede” to fright, but did not elaborate. Three days later, on July 2, two of the slaves returned, two more on July 4, and eleven more on July 5. Only one slave stayed out a full week and even he returned July 6. On the day the final slave “came in,” Evans “gave out general allowance to the hands,” something usually reserved for the end of the year. It is possible that by running away the slaves had managed to negotiate certain perks. On June 28, the day before the

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<sup>43</sup> *Daily Delta* (New Orleans), October 9, 1862.

<sup>44</sup> *Metcalfe Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 4, “Plantation Journal (Bourbon and Woodland), 1862-1863,” pg. 27 MDAH

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

slaves left, Evans had given “the hands a holiday” (though “holiday” is a generous term for ending the work day at four o’clock), suggesting that there may have been some unrest already.<sup>46</sup> Under normal circumstances, Metcalfe overseers only granted “holidays” at Christmas and, sometimes, when a major chunk of plantation work (like planting cotton) was completed.

Given the entangled nature of life on the Metcalfe plantations, these events are not isolated in the Bourbon/Woodland journal. At nearby York plantation, B.L. Lurbeville makes entries as overseer from January, 1862 through June 16, 1862. From June 17 through June 24 no one makes the daily report. Beginning on June 25, C.B. Wingate makes the entries as the overseer. While we know from the Bourbon/Woodland journal that the Union Army came to the Metcalfes’ area of Second Creek by June 22, there is no way to know for sure if Lurbeville's departure was related, though it does seem likely. Either way, the gap in records leaves no mention of the Union arrival in the York journal. Wingate does, however, also record a June 29 flight of slaves, just as Charles Evans did in the Bourbon/Woodland journal. Where Evans saw a "stampede" of frightened slaves, Wingate recorded that "Several of the People gone to the Woods through a misunderstanding with their master."<sup>47</sup> It is likely that slaves on both plantations arranged to run away together, as, on June 30, Wingate saw “People returning from the Woods,” while Evans has the runaways from Woodland returning in stages between July 2 and 6.<sup>48</sup> This interpretation suggests that the frightened “stampede” that Evans describes was for show, perhaps to give the impression that it was

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 28-31. See also, Wailes Diary, July 2, 1862 in Jordan, *Tumult and Silence*, 245, n14. It is possible that Jordan errs in saying the two tracts are York and Bourbon, as Woodland may be one of the two plantations.

<sup>47</sup> Metcalfe Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 8, “Plantation Journal (York), 1862-1863, 1866,” pg. 27-30. MDAH.

<sup>48</sup> Metcalfe Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1, Volume 4, “Plantation Journal (Bourbon and Woodland), 1862-1863,” pg. 28-31, Volume 8, “Plantation Journal (York), 1862-1863, 1866,” pg. 27-30. MDAH.

not a planned or organized act. The most “frightened” person involved may have been Evans himself.

This same event appears in yet another way in an outside source. Benjamin Wailes, a prominent local agricultural improver and planter, as well as a correspondent and acquaintance of several of the Metcalfes, writes in his diary that “twenty odd negro men” had fled from Metcalfe plantations and were “said to have gone down to the river.”<sup>49</sup> While Evans and Wingate make their observations on June 29, Wailes does not make his entry until July 2, but he is almost certainly describing the same incident, as no other slaves are recorded running away from the Metcalfe plantations in that timeframe.

### **Steam, Agricultural Reform, and Plantation Production**

The Metcalfe family’s approach to managing their cotton plantation empire drew heavily on ideas drawn from the agricultural reform movement. Most obviously, planters and overseers kept careful records in the Affleck plantation books. Additionally, however, the Metcalfes embraced a number of other measures associated with agricultural reform in the Southwest. The Metcalfes incorporated industrial technology into their plantation infrastructure, most often in the form of steam engines that were used to run cotton gins. The family also produced bricks and milled lumber in significant quantities. In order to maintain these operations, the Metcalfes owned a number of slaves that they called mechanics, in addition to a number of blacksmiths and carpenters. The family also tried to create new varieties of cotton from the wide variety of cotton seed that they purchased from

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<sup>49</sup> Wailes also claimed that Dr. James Metcalfe was about to remove the slaves to a place of greater safety. Jordan assumes that this means taking them far away from Adams County, but it may also have meant moving the slaves to Woodland plantation, out of the reach of Union ships, as he had done on previous occasions. Diary, Benjamin Leonard Covington Wailes Collections, Special Collections Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, July 2, 1862 cited in Jordan, *Tumult and Silence*, 245.

across the South. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the Metcalfe family latched onto the idea that plantation agriculture was fully compatible with new ideas of labor management and tried to detach individual slaves from their context as agricultural laborers linked to a single plantation and make them more abstract units of labor. This was by no means a new process, with George Washington having attempted something similar on his Mount Vernon plantation in the eighteenth-century.<sup>50</sup> The intertwined history of slavery and capitalism takes the abstraction of slaves into labor units as one of its central issues. On the Metcalfe plantations, however, the process went well beyond the abstraction and “violence of numbers” that characterizes much of the scholarship on capitalism and slavery and introduces clearly industrial elements of production.<sup>51</sup>

Steamboats were a visible reminder of steam power in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The Metcalfe plantation empire relied on steamboats and on the steam power produced by other boilers and engines on their plantations. To some, steamboats may have represented the “nineteenth-century’s first confrontation with industrialized mayhem,” in the form of accidents and explosions, as one historian has recently put it, but to the Metcalfe family the modernization and progress that they represented was much more important.<sup>52</sup> In 1860, the famed steamboat *Natchez* visited Bourbon plantation at least twenty-three times and was the plantation’s main connection to the world beyond Adams County.<sup>53</sup> On October 8, rumors reached Bourbon that the *Natchez* had burned up. The incident did not receive further comment and nine days later, the steamboat reached Bourbon and took on 253 bales of

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<sup>50</sup> Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*.

<sup>51</sup> Ian Baucomb, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005). It is important to note that the Metcalfes were not the only or the first planters to manage their slaves in this manner, just that it was relatively uncommon when taken to the extreme of the Metcalfe management.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> The *Natchez* set several speed records for steamboat travel on the Mississippi. In 1855, for example, it ran from New Orleans to Natchez in 17 hours and 30 minutes. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1883) cited in Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 104-5.



Metcalf cotton.<sup>54</sup> Had the *Natchez* truly burned, one of the other steamboats competing for lucrative cotton business, like the *Charmer* or *Vicksburg*, which occasionally shipped Metcalfe freight, would have taken its place and linked Second Creek to New Orleans in a similar manner. The terror of industrialized mayhem was felt by the slaves on the Metcalfe plantations much more than by the masters.

The Metcalfe family also engaged in more standard agricultural reform ventures, such as experimenting with different cotton seed. In 1860 alone, the Metcalfes purchased or planted three new varieties of cotton—Brown seed Mexican, Dear seed, and Star seed—as well as isolating and distributing varieties of their own to friends and neighbors.<sup>55</sup> They also tried planting other possible crops for world markets, such as “Chinese sugar cane,” and carefully tracked the results of planting various provision crops (corn, sweet potatoes, turnips, Irish potatoes, peas, etc...). The family constantly sought to improve the machinery on the plantation. Slave mechanics and white experts from Natchez were regularly employed working on new varieties of gins and presses that tended to work intermittently, at best, as well as on installing and repairing the steam engines that the Metcalfes installed on a number of their plantations to run lumber mills, grist mills, and gins. The commitment to steam power was massive for a cotton plantation. Not only did the engines need to be purchased, but existing mills and gins had to be retro-fitted to accommodate steam power, new buildings were needed to provide the water necessary to keep the engines running, and slaves put in long hours felling and cutting trees for the firewood that powered the steam engines.

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<sup>54</sup> “Bourbon 1860,” October 8, October 17.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, March 17, September 9, September 17, March 28, September 19.

## Discipline in the Affleck Books

The Metcalfe overseers were responsible for administering punishment on the plantations for a wide variety of infractions of plantation or societal rules and norms, from malingering to resisting white authority. Throughout the year, overseers reported slaves being sick, largely without comment. Occasionally a manager would note that many slaves were sick, but they rarely noted any suspicion that the slaves were malingering. This pattern changed during cotton picking, as Charles Metcalfe grumbled that “three hands complained of being over hot and some wanted to stop without cause.” Charles kept the slaves in the field. By the end of the day three slaves were too sick to work.<sup>56</sup> A month later, he noted that the slaves were “becoming sickly.”<sup>57</sup> Two weeks later, Charles admitted that there were “some hands complaining.”<sup>58</sup> This apparently was not a serious worry for the young man, though, as he left the plantation that Sunday to go to the lake to hunt, where he “killed 7 Ducks” and “went up as far as Gaillard Lake” which was several miles from Bourbon.<sup>59</sup> Less than a year before planters tried dozens slaves as part of a revolt they thought was about to unfold in the Metcalfe’s Second Creek neighborhood, Charles felt comfortable leaving the plantation regularly on Sundays and occasionally during the week. The presence of white supervisors on adjoining family plantations made Charles’ seemingly negligent oversight possible. By the same token, slaves on the Metcalfe plantations would have had a difficult

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<sup>56</sup> It is impossible to know if these were the same three slaves that had complained of being “over hot” but it seems plausible, as the notations follow each other. At the very least, the conditions that the slaves were complaining about probably contributed to Metcalfe taking the unusual step of pulling slaves out of the field during the work day. Normally slaves were sent to the plantation hospital in the morning or stayed in the fields all day. “Bourbon 1860,” August 31, 1860.

<sup>57</sup> Even rain could not always save the slaves at Bourbon plantation from work in the cotton fields. Rain usually stopped cotton picking on plantations in Mississippi, but the Metcalfes sought to reduce this perceived inefficiency. While large amounts of rain made the cotton too wet to pick, the Metcalfes wanted to send their slaves out in the drizzle and purchased “India Rubber coats for men to pick cotton in”—waterproof rain coats. *Ibid.*, September 12, 26, 1860.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, October 10, 1860.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, October 14, 1860. The lake, now known as Gilliard Lake, is at the extreme south end of the Metcalfe plantation holdings, on the north side of the Homochitto River, the border between Adams County and Wilkinson County.

time finding a lengthy period of time during the day when they could be confident that they were not being watched. Even if the overseer and plantation owner were gone, another white Metcalfe employee could arrive at any time.<sup>60</sup>

Surveillance alone was not sufficient to keep slaves working as long and as hard as planters demanded. Punishment and torture were a regular part of cotton production on Mississippi plantations. The overseers on the Metcalfe plantations were responsible for disciplining slaves, which often meant whipping them.<sup>61</sup> In October of 1852, John E. Holmes, the overseer on another Metcalfe plantation, The Grove, tried to whip General, an enslaved man on the plantation.<sup>62</sup> The *Natchez Courier* claimed that General confessed to killing Holmes in response. After the overseer tried to whip him, General grabbed Holmes and choked him. The two men struggled and General drew his knife and fatally stabbed Holmes in the heart. The paper went on to note that Holmes' arm was entirely black and his eyes were "injected with blood caused by the tightness" of General's grasp.<sup>63</sup> The Adams County Circuit Court found General guilty of murder in November 1853, just over a year after Holmes' death. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* grouped General's conviction in with that of another slave, Frank, that the Adams court convicted of murdering his master,

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<sup>60</sup> For slaves' awareness of sight lines and hidden supervision and surveillance by overseers, see Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 167.

<sup>61</sup> The Metcalfe plantation records reveal very little about whipping, punishment, and torture on the plantations. Beyond references to the fact that some Metcalfe slaves were whipped (a certainty on a Mississippi cotton plantation), the Metcalfe books are incredibly careful to avoid any mention of whippings, even in cases where there can be little doubt that overseers whipped slaves. There are outside mentions of whipping on the Metcalfe plantations. During the trials following the suspected slave conspiracy at Second Creek, testimony from a slave, Orange, suggested that a neighboring planter, Alfred Mosby, regularly whipped at least one slave on James Wistar Metcalfe's Ingleside plantation. This whipping was linked to a "widespread reign of whipping" in the neighborhood, one that surely included the Metcalfe plantations. Winthrop Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*, 116, 116n32. The exceptions to this practice are the early record book for Henry Laurens Metcalfe's Grove plantation. The 1853 record book records the saga of one slave, Mike, who was repeatedly whipped, jailed, and threatened with sale. *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 1, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH. The 1855 record book includes notations for about half of the year listing slaves who were "punished" each day. *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 3, Grove Plantation Book, 1855, MDAH.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Laurens Metcalfe, Dr. James Metcalfe's son, owned Grove plantation and it was managed as part of the larger Metcalfe plantation enterprise.

<sup>63</sup> *Natchez Courier* referenced in New Orleans *Time-Picayune*, November 22, 1854.

William Henry, a month after the Holmes killing.<sup>64</sup> These attacks were noteworthy, if exceptional challenges to the order of plantation society.

In 1853, also at Grove plantation, the new overseer, Joseph Dooley worked closely with the plantation owner, Henry Laurens Metcalfe. This is the first surviving record book for the Grove, so it is hard to know whether Henry Laurens took a more active role in plantation management and slave punishment as a result of Holmes' death, but it is clear that the young man was in the fields with his overseer on most days. Unusually, that year both men kept a copy of Affleck's book; the overseer's contains brief entries outlining the main work done on the plantation each day, while the planter's contains the fuller records typical of the Affleck books kept on Metcalfe plantations.<sup>65</sup> Metcalfe and Dooley got along well, with Henry Laurens wishing the overseer well when he left to become a merchant at the end of the year.<sup>66</sup> Together, they sought to crush any signs of resistance among the slaves. While the two men generally avoided mention of punishment, one case provides a notable exception. One of the men found that Mike, who usually served as the driver for the gang taking on the most difficult work on the plantation, had committed some sort of "misconduct." Instead of cryptically leaving the issue at that, in the written record, as was customary, both Henry Laurens and Joseph Dooley noted additional details. A few days after the "misconduct," on March 18, Henry Laurens records that Mike was "being whipped by Mr. Dooley for disobedience ran away today. Little Milly taking his place as driver."<sup>67</sup> Dooley offered a different story, writing that Orrick Metcalfe, Henry Laurens' brother, whipped the

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<sup>64</sup> New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, November 21, 1854.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Laurens Metcalfe's book is *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 1, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH and Joseph Dooley's is *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 2, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH.

<sup>66</sup> *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 1, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH, December 18, 1853.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, March 14, 18, 1853.

driver who “then run [sic] away.”<sup>68</sup> While whipping a slave was common on the Metcalfe plantations, failing to prevent the slave from fleeing during the torture was not. Perhaps Dooley did not want to be responsible for Mike’s escape, or perhaps Henry Laurens did not want to implicate his brother to the rest of the plantation neighborhood. Either way, Mike refused to allow a white man to whip him, just as General had the previous year. Mike managed to escape rather than kill his attacker, however, and was not executed.

Over the following months, the two white men searched for Mike, enquiring after him and offering a reward (twenty dollars) for his capture. Sometime between March 22 and June 4, Mike was captured and in custody once again.<sup>69</sup> After or during his capture, Mike was likely brutally beaten, as Henry Laurens’ record book mentions that he has recovered “almost well enough to sell.”<sup>70</sup> From June 4 to June 19, Mike was held in “close confinement” and Henry Laurens tried to sell him. One prospective buyer was “quite anxious to purchase but wouldn’t face the music” of Metcalfe’s price of \$800, which was well below the planter’s \$1200 valuation of the slave before the escape.<sup>71</sup> During his imprisonment, Mike was treated more than once by the plantation doctor, Orrick Metcalfe. After his release from confinement on June 19, Mike disappears from the plantation records until July 7, when the former driver is doing the light work of making baskets for several days, Henry Laurens having been unable to sell him. By mid-August, however Mike seems to have recovered both his health and Henry Laurens’ trust well enough to be hauling fodder in a mule cart, tending cotton on the scaffold, and picking cotton. By November, Henry

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<sup>68</sup> *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 2, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH, March 18, 1853.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph Dooley does not record any details about Mike’s escape or the pursuit of him after the initial March 18<sup>th</sup> incident and Henry Laurens Metcalfe’s record book is blank between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup>. It is likely that the capture comes not too long before June 5<sup>th</sup>, as entries in that period regularly mention Mike and his recovery.

<sup>70</sup> *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 1, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH, June 5, 1853.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, June 7, 1853.

Laurens entrusted precious bales of cotton to Mike to haul down to the river for storage at the Bourbon warehouse.<sup>72</sup>

Mahalia ran away from Bourbon and leveraged a tiered management system to stay away; General resisted an overseer and was executed for it; Mike also fought off a whipping and suffered a brutal beating and imprisonment only to find himself back where he had started, working under the same overseer. Adams County and the Metcalfe plantation empire did not mirror the orderliness of the Metcalfe records and accounts. Cotton production depended on the whip as well as on management. The cases of Mahalia, General, and Mike are exceptions in the sense that they forced their way into the neat entries in the Affleck books. Whipping and punishment on the Metcalfe plantations was not an exceptional occurrence, but a part of daily life, hidden away from record books. One overseer at the Grove, departing from this convention, noted the slaves who were punished each day for half a year in 1854. Alexander Moore used the margins of the Affleck book to record those on the “sick list,” as well as the slaves punished each day. In January alone, he noted 46 cases of “punishing” a slave. Extrapolating his records to a full year, there are nearly six times as many instances of Moore punishing a slave, or having a slave punished, as there are slaves at the Grove.<sup>73</sup> He stopped recording “punishment” almost exactly as cotton-picking season began.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps whipping was so common at those times that it was too much to record. Perhaps the punishments could be easily discovered by a trained eye examining the records of cotton picked. Whatever the reason punishment was no longer recorded, it is likely that slaves were whipped more often during cotton-picking, not less.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., August 12, 17, 22, November 28, 1853.

<sup>73</sup> This is based on instances of punishment recorded compared to the number of adult slaves on the plantation. I have not included children because Moore did not record punishing any children, so all figures relating to punishment relate only to adult slaves.

<sup>74</sup> *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 3, Grove Plantation Book, 1854-1855, MDAH.

## **A Year at Bourbon Plantation**

To get a sense of how the Metcalfes' plantation management operated and how their decisions shaped the lives of their slaves, it is useful to look at a year on one of the larger Metcalfe plantations at the height of the cotton economy. In 1860, Dr. James Metcalfe's Bourbon plantation was a linchpin in the family enterprise. As the plantation on the bank of the Mississippi river, it served as the plantation empire's major point of contact with the world beyond Natchez and Adams County. Steamboats running up and down the Mississippi stopped at Bourbon to deliver news, pick up and drop off passengers, to offload food, iron, machinery, and luxury goods such as imported coffee, as well as to pick up the result of hundreds of slaves' labor and the basis of the Metcalfe wealth—cotton bales bound for New Orleans. Slaves at Bourbon worked on a wide variety of assignments handed down by the overseer, W.C. Holtree, to play their role in the Metcalfe enterprise. Dr. James decided that the slaves at Bourbon would be responsible for loading and unloading steamboats at the landing, storing goods at the warehouse near the landing, making bricks, producing firewood for steamboats and the machinery on the plantation, as well as making fencing materials for the rest of the plantations. Other functions, such as running the lumber mill, managing the thoroughbred horses and stables, and producing pork were handled on other plantations.<sup>75</sup> Despite all of these responsibilities, though, Bourbon was primarily concerned with planting, cultivating, harvesting, ginning, and pressing cotton. The lives of the slaves on Bourbon's swampy lands in 1860 reflected this.

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<sup>75</sup> Pork, for example, came mostly from Henry Laurens Metcalfe's plantation, The Grove. The Metcalfes also purchased pork in large quantities.



**Figure 4.4: Former Cotton Field, Bourbon Plantation**

Author's Collection, April 26, 2013. The land is currently part of the St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

On January 1, 1860, overseer W.C. Holtree began recording the goings on of the plantation in a copy of the eighth edition of Thomas Affleck's *Plantation Record and Account Book*, as Dr. James Metcalfe instructed him to. His opening entry, "Did nothing," was not often repeated, even on Sundays like January 1.<sup>76</sup> On Monday, Holtree forced almost all of the slaves into the swamps to get out wood for firewood and making pickets. He sent a few women to spin lines for plows and noted that two slaves were sick and unable to work. Throughout January, Holtree's descriptions of labor and events at Bourbon seem relatively standard for a Mississippi cotton plantation in 1860. Slaves' work was centered on preparing the plantation for the cotton and corn crops of the coming planting season. They plowed land, cleared new fields, removed cotton trash from old ones, fertilized fields, planted

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<sup>76</sup> "Bourbon 1860," January 1, 1860.



potatoes, repaired and made agricultural implements, and processed the previous year's cotton crop. This time of the year did not put stress on the available labor at Bourbon and it largely operated independently of the other Metcalfe plantations. While three slaves were sent from Bourbon to other plantations and three arrived at Bourbon from Metcalfe plantations, the slave population did not turn over dramatically. Small amounts of supplies, like salt, hay, iron, and potatoes, were moved to and from the other plantations and members of the Metcalfe family visited to check in on operations.

This appearance of stability continued to characterize the plantation log through the initial preparation of the land for the cotton crop. Slaves built an arbor and pigeon coop, worked in orchards, performed required labor on a public road, in addition to ginning and pressing the previous year's cotton crop (when the frequently-broken machines happened to be working), and plowed and cleared fields. When planting season began in March, labor demands intensified, as did the stakes of the timing of work. Planting cotton had to be done at just the right time so that cotton would quickly open when conditions were right, and allow slaves to pick it all before the elements damaged it so badly that it lost its value. In this environment, the Metcalfe plantations became increasingly reliant on each other. In January and February, when no cotton was in the ground, only a few slaves moved between plantations and the ox and mule teams on the plantations only hauled supplies off-plantation a couple of times a month. This changed dramatically when cotton was planted. In one week in March, when almost all of the slaves were planting cotton, supplies were hauled to or from Bourbon six out of seven days, with multiple trips made on some days. Bourbon received supplies to make tools (nails, hoes, parts for the cotton press) and shipped out cotton seed, wood, and salt. After planting, the slaves spent the next few months cultivating the cotton crop—scraping soil over the plants, making hills around the plants, breaking up

weeds with hoes—and fitting in other work when Holtree felt slaves could be spared. This work was grueling for slaves but predictable from the overseer’s perspective. Holtree did not ask for more slaves to help with work during this time, nor did he send out slaves to other plantations.

### **Agricultural Labor and the Cotton Cycle**

Agricultural labor on Bourbon plantation was shaped by the culture of cotton. The Metcalfes and their overseers prioritized the production of cotton over producing other crops. They arranged the cultivation and harvest of other crops in ways that would not interfere with not only cotton picking, but also cotton cultivation. The shaded areas on the workflow chart below indicate peak labor requirements—times when the vast majority of the slave workforce was sent to work on a single, often time-sensitive, activity. In only one month where there was a peak requirement for cotton was there a simultaneous non-cotton peak requirement; in March, Holtree, the overseer, sent almost all of the slaves to plant cotton and to plant corn.<sup>77</sup> In this case, both planting operations required a lot of labor per day, but over a relatively short period. Four days were spent planting corn and ten planting cotton. Corn was almost finished by the time Holtree had the slaves plant cotton, but nonetheless, the overseer stopped the corn planting as soon as he decided it was the right time to plant cotton. Cotton was planted one field, or “cut,” at a time with the overseer deciding that fields were ready for planting on different days, depending on weather, preparation of the land, and the location of the field. The Bourbon slaves finished planting corn after the planting the “Cane Ridge” with Indian Cotton (one of many different types of

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<sup>77</sup> On March 5, Holtree noted, “All hands planting corn except a few” and on March 19 he noted, “All hands planting cotton except a few.” *Ibid.*, March 5, March 19, 1860.

cotton seed that the Metcalfes planted) and before they began planting cotton on the “Sandy land.”

Table 4.3: Workflow Chart for Bourbon, 1860

Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Cotton</b>	Threshing stalks	Cutting stalks	Planting	Scraping	plowing	Hoeing	Hoeing	Picking	Picking	Picking	Picking	Picking
<b>Corn</b>	Pressing	Plowing	Plowing	Hoeing	Hilling	Scraping	Scraping	Scraping	Ginning	Ginning	Ginning	Ginning
<b>Irish Potatoes</b>	Planting	Plowing	Planting	Weeding	Weeding	Scraping	Scraping	Scraping	Ginning	Ginning	Picking	Picking
<b>Sweet Potatoes</b>	Planting	Bedding	Hoeing	Hoeing	Watering	Digging	Watering	Digging	Raking	Picking	Picking	Banked
<b>Peas</b>	Threshing		Manuring	Hoeing	Planting	Hoeing		Planting		Hoeing		
<b>Turnips</b>				Threshing								
<b>Turnips</b>				Cleaning ground								
<b>Oats</b>			Sowing			Cutting						
<b>Brick</b>		Hauling					building	Making brick	Making brick			
<b>Mill</b>	Chopping Wood	Sawing	Hauling Wood	Hauling Wood			Brick Yard Repair	Firewood	Sawing	Firewood	Chopping wood	Chopping wood
<b>Improvement</b>	Clearing	Clearing	Ditching	Clearing	Making Gates	Ditching	Making Cistern					

The “Activity” category in the workflow chart is divided into sections for each of the major crops on the plantation, cotton and corn, as well as sections for other provisions crops, non-agricultural production, and plantation improvement.

The Metcalfe plantation managers prioritized cotton over other crops, but found ways to structure the agricultural cycle to work in many provision crops alongside cotton. Recent scholarship suggests that slaves in the Lower Mississippi Valley were starving and that an obsession with planting as many acres in cotton as possible forced planters to import the majority of the food for themselves and their slaves.<sup>78</sup> This was not the case on the Metcalfe plantations. The Metcalfes and their managers did import some foodstuffs, in particular corn and pork, via steamboat, but most of the food consumed by livestock and people on the plantations was grown on the family plantations. The Metcalfe plantation land was incredibly valuable for its potential to grow cotton, but, even in wealthy Adams County, with its intense cultivation, high slave population, and sought-after land, finding land to grow corn and other provision crops in large quantities was not a problem. Not only were the Metcalfes able to harvest fodder for livestock and provision crops for people on plantations like Woodlands, away from the fertile, river banks, but Bourbon plantation, on the Mississippi grew significant quantities of corn each year.

The barrier to growing corn in the Lower Mississippi Valley was not finding arable land, at least in the Metcalfes' case. Carefully managing the available slave labor to ensure that the cotton crop was not affected by the labor requirements of provision crops was the issue. The Metcalfes had little trouble arranging this. As the workflow shows, much of the labor dedicated to cultivating corn was required at times when the labor demands for cotton were relatively low (January through March). A slave could plant and cultivate more acres of cotton than a slave could pick. This meant that outside of the picking season, overseers found slave labor that they could assign to other crops and productive enterprises. Corn was picked near the end of cotton picking season, but on days when all of the cotton fields had

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<sup>78</sup> Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 177-182, 463-464n7.

been picked over and the overseer was waiting for more bolls to open before sending the slaves back down the rows of cotton.

The most striking revelation of the Bourbon workflow chart (Table 4.3) is the nearly complete disappearance, once cotton picking begins, of labor that is not related to a crop cycle. Before cotton picking season arrived, managers sent slaves to clear land, fix fences, ditch, and erect structures every month. After cotton picking season began, the Bourbon overseers limited slave labor to picking cotton and, when labor could be spared, attending to other crops that were ready for harvest. Even chopping wood was only done to fuel the engines that powered gins and presses. For two months during cotton picking, slaves made bricks at the new brickyard; this was in anticipation of new construction in the following year and it was rare for an overseer to send more than two or three slaves to make bricks.

**Table 4.4: Most Common Cotton-Related Work by Month at Bourbon, 1860**

January	Thrashing cotton stalks Plowing Ginning cotton Pressing cotton
February	Plowing Cutting and raking cotton stalks Ginning Pressing
March	Planting cotton Plowing Ginning
April	Scraping cotton (hoes) Scraping cotton (ploughs) Ginning
May	Hilling cotton (ploughs) Hilling cotton (hoes)
June	Hoeing cotton Scraping (ploughs) Plowing cotton
July	Hoeing Picking cotton Building scaffolds for drying cotton Sweeping cotton (ploughs)
August	Picking Scrapers (ploughs) Building and repairing scaffolds
September	Picking Ginning Putting up cotton on scaffolds
October	Picking Ginning
November	Picking Trashing cotton
December	Picking Ginning Pressing

Table 4.4 shows the labor involved in the cotton cycle at Bourbon in 1860. Cotton picking was the labor chokepoint and occupied parts of five months, but involved the majority of the slave workforce for closer to three months. Slaves at Bourbon spent the majority of the cotton cycle preparing the ground and cultivating the crop. At the beginning of the year, they processed the previous year's crop (finishing ginning, pressing, and shipping the cotton) and prepared the fields for a new cotton crop by thrashing down the old cotton stalks, cutting them up, and plowing them back into the soil. The slaves then ran plows through the fields to break up the soil and then to create beds for the cotton seed. In March, the slaves went into the cotton fields to plant the seeds. From April through the beginning of the cotton picking season in August, the Bourbon slaves cultivated the cotton plants. Slaves would scrape the cotton with both hoes and plows, breaking up weeds and (with hoes) carefully chopping out cotton plants that appeared where they were not wanted. Then the slaves would hill the cotton, piling dirt around the base of the plant. At Bourbon, slaves scraped the cotton many times to keep weeds down. When enough cotton bolls were open that the overseer decided it would soon be cotton picking time, slave mechanics and carpenters began building scaffolds to hang the cotton on, so that it could dry out before ginning and pressing. Finally, the slaves picked the cotton and began ginning and pressing the year's crop, a process that would last well into the next year.

During cotton picking season, everything other than cotton picking became an afterthought. Overseers on the Metcalfe plantations kept much more detailed records of work, not only recording the pounds of cotton picked by each slave each day, but also noting the labor done by slaves who were not picking cotton. Almost eighty percent of the total work-days at York in 1852 were spent picking cotton. Even this high figure does not fully capture how fully cotton picking dominated the working lives of slaves on the Metcalfe



plantations. More than five percent of the total work-days, over a quarter of the non-picking work, were spent on labor related to cotton picking—ginning the picked cotton, overseeing the gin, putting picked cotton up on the scaffold to dry, or hauling cotton. Less than ten percent of work-days during cotton picking season were spent on work not related to the cotton harvest. A few slaves were sent to help with work on other plantations, possibly cotton work, a few slaves like carpenters and blacksmiths continued their specialized work, and a few slaves continued to hoe the cotton so that weeds did not choke the plants.

**Table 4.5: Work During the First Four Weeks of Cotton Picking, York, 1852**

Activities of Slaves	Work-Days	Percentage of Total Work-Days
Cotton Picking	1842	79.3
Ginning	108	4.6
Gin Driver	7	0.3
Hoeing	81	3.5
Scaffold	19	0.8
Mill	16	0.7
Making Fence Rails	8	0.3
Hostler	17	0.7
Sawing Boards	6	0.3
Hauling Cotton	1	0.0
Blacksmith	45	1.9
Carpenter	23	1.0
Away at Bourbon Plantation	37	1.6
Away at Montrose Plantation	1	0.0
Working in the House	2	0.1
Sick	92	4.0
“Pretending” <sup>79</sup>	3	0.1
Illegible/Unable to Determine	15	0.6
Total	2323	100.0

<sup>79</sup> J.B. Austen, the overseer at York, used “pretending” to note when he felt slaves were feigning illness to avoid work in the fields. This notation was also used by Henry Laurens Metcalfe at the Grove who wrote, “Hamilton came in this afternoon complaining of his old friend the gravel. I rather think he is feigning sickness, but intend he shall do nothing till he’s examined by brother Orrick.” *Metcalfe Family Papers*, Series 1, Subseries 2, Volume 1, Grove Plantation Book, 1853, MDAH, June 8, 1853.

## Non-Agricultural Production at Bourbon

When the slaves that the Metcalfes held at Bourbon were not planting or picking cotton, they worked on the semi-industrial ventures that the Metcalfes began to install on their plantations. In 1860 alone, the slaves built a brick yard, a pigeon house, a cotton house, and a lumber mill (and a cistern to supply its boiler). At the beginning of the year, the mill at Bourbon was a general purpose, low-tech operation that involved much manual labor and served to grind corn, split wood, and saw lumber, and needed to be rebuilt.<sup>80</sup> In July, mechanics overhauled the mill, after receiving a boiler by packet a few days earlier. The slaves spent many days working at the brick yard and lumber mill after they built them. Between finishing the brick yard on July 10 and the end of the year, for example, slaves worked at the brickyard on 17 days, with 225 work-days spent burning and processing brick. Despite all of this labor, slaves still hauled tens of thousands of bricks to Bourbon throughout the year, much of it from nearby planters with stores of bricks.

**Table 4.6: Construction Work at Bourbon, 1860**

Project	Days of Work	Work-Days Spent
Brick Yard	17	225 <sup>81</sup>
Lumber Mill	2	8
Cistern	11	39
Pigeon House	21	38 <sup>82</sup>
Cotton House	2	37 <sup>83</sup>
Arbor	5	10
Total	50	357

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<sup>80</sup> There had been another older mill on one of Orrick Metcalfe's plantations, either his Fair Oaks or his wife's Egypt, but it was torn down on January 18, 1860, just a few months before the Bourbon mill was constructed.

<sup>81</sup> When the number of slaves working at the brickyard was not specified, I made an estimate based on the averages of other days where similar work was done. The total is a rough estimate, not a precise figure.

<sup>82</sup> Three of the twenty-one daily totals of work-days were estimated based on averages of other days where similar work was done.

<sup>83</sup> Totals for work on the cotton house are based on my calculations of how many slaves were included in the categories that Charles Metcalfe used to describe the slaves doing the work—"carpenters" and "men."

Over the course of twelve months, the Metcalfe overseers at Bourbon had the slaves build or majorly renovate six structures. The arbor and cotton house were minor projects, but some projects, like the lumber mill-cistern complex, were significant both in terms of the work involved and the expertise needed. Slave and white mechanics rebuilt the old mill at Bourbon, so that a new state-of-the-art steam engine could provide the power. The cistern adjoining the mill was built to provide a constant source of water for the engine. The Metcalfes' commitment to maintaining and increasing the building stock at Bourbon reflects their connections to an agricultural reform movement that emphasized plantation improvement, modernizing production along industrial lines, and attempting to convert surplus slave labor into new types of plantation production to complement cotton culture.

From the beginning of the year through the cotton cultivation season, Holtree pushed the slaves at Bourbon to work hard and long. He tracked their production daily, of anything from the number of fence pickets split or individual bricks made (8 000 on July 21) to the portions of fields planted each day. He even laid out figures for measuring how much corn slaves picked each day.<sup>84</sup> This level of record-keeping and surveillance paled compared to the situation during cotton picking season. On July 24, two months after the first cotton bloomed, Sarah Davis and George led the children and older slaves into the fields to begin picking the early-maturing blooms off of the cotton plants.<sup>85</sup> A week later, on July 31, the rest of the hands began picking cotton. On August 2, Holtree noted that it was "opening fast." At this point, the overseer began tracking the weight of the cotton that each slave picked each day. At the end of the day, Holtree would weigh the cotton near the gin house. This was meant to be his most important and carefully performed duty of the year. On August 3 or 4, however, Holtree was dismissed as overseer and replaced by Robert Morgan,

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<sup>84</sup> "Bourbon 1860," March 2, 1860.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, May 24, 1860; July 24, 1860

who, after keeping the books irregularly was replaced by one of Dr. James Metcalfe's sons, Charles, by September 9.<sup>86</sup> Charles carefully weighed the cotton each night. When he could not weigh the cotton, Charles carefully noted that cotton had not been weighed, even if someone else had weighed it for him.<sup>87</sup> The rare occasions when the daily cotton picking was not weighed were recorded with the same significance as other major events, such as the visit of a relative or the end of cotton planting, with Charles taking great pains to explain the failure to weigh the cotton.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes he even estimated the total cotton picked, suggesting that he "must have picked over 20 000 [pounds] with both forces but set it down as that so as not to over run [sic] the mark."<sup>89</sup>

The careful tracking of cotton picking was the main purpose of the Metcalfe family's system of record-keeping. The Affleck books allowed the Metcalfes to precisely track how much cotton each slave was picking, how much cotton each plantation was producing, and how much work each overseer was extracting from the slaves under his management. Under Charles' management, cotton picking was quantified more than ever before. Not only did Charles fill out the cotton picking forms in the Affleck book carefully, but he reviewed them during and after the cotton picking season. During the year, he noted which slave had picked the highest single daily weight of cotton to date.<sup>90</sup> After picking was finished, he went back

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<sup>86</sup> While Holtree was dismissed in early August, it was not until late October that he and his family made their final exit from the house at Bourbon. *Ibid.*, October 25, 1860.

<sup>87</sup> On October 29, Charles noted that he "got Mr. Austen to weigh my cotton." *Ibid.*, October 29, 1860.

<sup>88</sup> This is another example of a manager's awareness that he was writing for an audience—the plantation owner—when filling out the Affleck books.

<sup>89</sup> The overseers on the Metcalfe plantations recorded cotton picking as though they had done the picking themselves and the slaves were simply the instruments, hence the phrasing of this entry. Even though this entry is only two days after the previous example of Charles not weighing the cotton himself, these were two of only three examples of this occurrence. The other was on November 26 when cargo from a steamboat unexpectedly needed to be unloaded quickly and occupied all of the slaves. "Bourbon 1860," October 31, 1860.

<sup>90</sup> On September 26, Charles recorded that "Highest weight picked this year picked today by Frederick" who had brought in 475 pounds of cotton that Saturday. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, also a Saturday, he noted that William Parker had the "highest weight picked during the year" at 500 pounds, though he qualified this by noting that the cotton was "fully swampy." *Ibid.*, September 26, 1860.

and noted which days had the highest average weight of cotton picked per slave and the highest total.<sup>91</sup>

### **Plantation Practice in South Carolina: A Comparative Case**

James Henry Hammond's Silver Bluff plantation in South Carolina is an interesting point of comparison for the Metcalfe plantations, as Hammond had a lot in common with the Metcalfe family in terms of their plantation practice, but was influenced by the Seaboard South Carolina agricultural reform movement (described in Chapter Two), rather than the Southwestern movement (described in Chapter Three) that the Metcalfes drew on.<sup>92</sup> The similarities and differences between the two plantation enterprises underscore the relationship between the two parts of southern agricultural reform. Hammond was a prominent South Carolina planter and politician whose career included stints as Governor, United States Congressman, and Senator. Illness, scandal, and sectional tension frequently derailed his career and stymied his ambition to enter the White House. Hammond was perhaps most infamous for his role as a proslavery apologist who declared, "Cotton is King."<sup>93</sup> Hammond was a first generation planter, like Dr. James Metcalfe, who became involved in the South Carolina agricultural reform movement, extended this involvement to changing how he ran his plantations, and embraced new methods of recording and accounting for slave labor and plantation production. While Hammond did not use Thomas Affleck's books, he had Charleston printer A.E. Miller make him customized plantation work logs that he required his overseers to keep. Hammond's logs recorded work

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<sup>91</sup> On September 15, another Saturday, he noted that "Cotton averaged 261 pounds- the Best day's work this year." Ibid., September 26, 1860.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Two for more on Hammond and his plantations.

<sup>93</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Appendix, 70, cited in Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1982) 346.

assignments more precisely than the Affleck logs, as they required the overseer to note the number of slaves performing each type of work each day, but this format also forced all work into a set of categories determined by Hammond at the beginning of the year. Much like the Metcalfes, Hammond used his record books to monitor both his overseers and slaves, but also used the books as references to be consulted after the fact to assess how effective his management plans had been over the year.

Hammond owned two plantations in 1849, and would add another two within the next decade. Silver Bluff was located in Barnwell County, South Carolina, twelve miles south of Augusta, Georgia, along the Savannah River, in the northern part of the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Hammond split his Silver Bluff plantation into two new plantations at the beginning of 1849. One was named Cathwood, while the other retained the Silver Bluff moniker. Silver Bluff was a short-staple cotton plantation that also produced corn and a small number of other crops. The soil at Silver Bluff was fertile, but swampy, requiring significant labor to improve. In 1850, the two plantations combined were approximately 10,000 acres in size, with 3,000 acres under cultivation, producing 160 bales of cotton and 11,500 bushels of corn.

Hammond acquired Silver Bluff through his marriage to Catherine Fitzsimmons, a member of the powerful Hampton family.<sup>94</sup> When he assumed ownership of the plantation, the young Hammond decided to correct what he saw as the mismanagement of the plantation in order to improve its profitability. Hammond tried to force slaves to switch from working by task to working longer hours that he specified under the direction of

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<sup>94</sup> Catherine was the daughter of Wade Hampton and the sister of Wade Hampton II, two of the most powerful planters in the southern United States over the previous decades.

himself or an overseer.<sup>95</sup> Like the Metcalfes, Hammond emphasized the value of plantation infrastructure, erecting new buildings, and repairing run-down structures. Unlike the Metcalfes, he kept a tight personal reign on all aspects of plantation management and delegated very little to his sons. He did, however, share the Metcalfe family's interest in pooling slave labor, even if it was much less of a break from existing practice—Hammond's plantations adjoined each other and were often managed less collectively than as units of a single plantation. Even so, Hammond also noted transfers of slaves from one plantation to the other in his work logs and plantation journals.

The intense focus on cotton on both plantations, however, means that the work regime on the two plantations looks most similar during cotton picking. There are clear fixed labor costs associated with cotton. The cotton needs to be picked as quickly as possible, so the vast majority of slaves are sent into the fields to pick. The Metcalfes tracked individual slaves' cotton picking more closely than Hammond, who tended to have his overseers record the total slave workforce's daily cotton picking weights. It is unclear, however, whether Hammond also had the overseer record the individual daily totals in a less permanent location, like a slate or notebook, without requiring it to be then noted in the main plantation work log or journal, as the Metcalfes did. The cotton picking record on the Metcalfe plantations suggests that the planters and overseers may have placed a premium on

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<sup>95</sup> I have avoided calling Hammond's new regime gang labor, as the slaves did not necessarily work in unison and elements retained a task influence. For example, cotton picking productivity was measured based on the weight of cotton picked, but slaves were also required to stay in the fields and work hard for the entire day. Faust, *Hammond* for a thorough treatment of Hammond's attempts to move away from task work. See B.W. Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739-1912*, (Mona: Press University of the West Indies), 1998; Philip D. Morgan, "Task and Gang Systems: The Organization of Labor on New World Plantations," in Stephen Innes, ed., *Work and Labor in Early America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1988: 189-220, "Work and Culture: The Task System and Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880" *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982), 563-599, "Task and Gang Systems," 189-220; Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, "Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in America" in *Cultivation and Culture: The Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press) 1993, 1-49 for a discussion of hybrid intermediaries and alternatives to a binary task/gang division.

cotton picking compared to reform-minded planters in South Carolina. Over eighty percent of the total work-days on York plantation during cotton picking season were dedicated to cotton picking and over ninety percent of the work-days were committed to cultivating, picking, and processing the cotton crop. B.L. Lurbeville, the overseer at York, gave only five percent of the work assignments to activities that weren't directly related to cotton. At Silver Bluff, almost thirteen percent of slave labor was assigned non-cotton work during picking season.



**Table 4.7: Slave Labor During Cotton Picking in South Carolina and Mississippi**

Activity <sup>96</sup>	Silver Bluff (South Carolina), 1850 <sup>97</sup>		York (Mississippi), 1852 <sup>98</sup>	
	Work-Days	Percentage of Total Work	Work-Days	Percentage of Total Work
Cotton Picking	1232	71.2	1842	81.1
Ginning and Pressing	98	5.7	135	5.9
Hoeing	0	0	81	3.6
Ditching	65	3.8	0	0
Clearing	22	1.3	0	0
Fencing	0	0	8	0.4
Mill	0	0	16	0.7
Miscellaneous	129	7.5	93	4.1
Sick	145	8.4	95	4.2
Total	1731	100	2270	100

The differences in approaches between South Carolina and Mississippi agricultural reformers can be seen in a comparison between Hammond and the Metcalfe family, but what is most striking is how similar the labor breakdown on the two plantations looks during cotton picking. Both plantation enterprises emphasized labor management, record-keeping, and quantifying approaches to plantation agriculture and slavery. On both the Metcalfe and Hammond plantations, cotton was king and all other work operated around the labor demands of cotton. Slaves executed the reformers' experiments (planting test plots of new

<sup>96</sup> The categories of work that are used for this table are drawn from James Henry Hammond's work logs. The Metcalfe family's York plantation log provided more precise work information that I placed into the Hammond categories. Several of Hammond's categories (Fodder & Corn, Clearing, Ploughing, Planters) were eliminated for the table as no work was recorded in any of them on either plantation.

<sup>97</sup> This data is taken from James Henry Hammond's work logs for his Silver Bluff plantation in Barnwell County, South Carolina. I have used data from the first four weeks of sustained cotton picking, just as I did for York plantation. At Cowden, this came later in the year (August 16 for York, September 28 for Silver Bluff). At Silver Bluff, Hammond sent his slaves into the fields to pick for a few days earlier, but late-September was the beginning of sustained picking. Kenneth M. Stamp, ed. *Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War* (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1985), microfilm, Series A, Part 1: "The Papers of James Henry Hammond, 1795-1865," Reel 14.

<sup>98</sup> The figures for York differ from those in Table 4.5 because the work-days that were illegible, unidentifiable, or off York plantation were eliminated from the total to make them consistent with the data available from Silver Bluff plantation.

types of cotton or sugar), planted corn and other provision crops (peas, potatoes, pumpkins), cleared new land, repaired buildings, and maintained the plantation infrastructure (cleaned cabins, cleared ditches, fixed fences).

The major difference between the two plantations is that the Metcalfes had slaves picking cotton for 81 percent of the total work-days, while Hammond had his slaves picking cotton for 71% of the work-days. The percentages of work-days spent on other types of work are often near duplicates on the two plantations. Ginning cotton was a fairly fixed labor input in both locations, consuming almost six percent of the total slave work-days. This percentage is fairly constant as both plantations operated a single gin that required a similar number of slaves to operate. Hammond's standard gin was run by 3-4 slaves, while the York steam-powered gin required 4 slaves on most days, and up to 7 when it was not operating smoothly. The slave force at the more complex York gin set-up frequently included a slave designated as the "gin driver," while the Hammond gin did not have dedicated supervision. Slaves on both plantations spent between 3.5 and 4 percent of the work-days on what can be thought of as "optional" upkeep—maintaining crops or plantation infrastructure (hoeing cotton and repairing ditches). The ten point difference in cotton picking work-days on the two plantations is accounted for in the final two significant (over one percent of total work-days) recorded labor activities. Slaves at Silver Bluff were sick about twice as often as slaves at York and spent twice as much time on uncategorized, or miscellaneous work. The difference in work-days spent in the plantation hospital could very well be a reflection of the sample size, but the difference in miscellaneous labor is telling. At Silver Bluff these extra work-days were spent marling fields.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Introduction, note 1 for an explanation of marling.

Hammond put great stock in soil conservation and improvement, while the Metcalfe family dedicated very little labor to soil management, instead shifting slave labor to non-agricultural work in times of excess labor. The Metcalfes had slaves loading and unloading steamboats, running a warehouse, operating steam engines, and hauling a wide variety of goods onto, off of, and between their plantations. Hammond forced his slaves into swamps and rivers to dig out marl, which they would then haul to the fields to spread. A large amount of the work that Hammond and his overseers filed under the “Miscellaneous” category was digging, hauling, and spreading marl on the cotton fields. The slaves in South Carolina spent much more of their time preparing fields and cultivating crops than their counterparts in Mississippi. Away from the bottleneck of cotton-picking, Hammond chose to force the slaves on his plantations to weed, hoe, plow, and fertilize the cotton fields, while the Metcalfes sent their slaves to non-agricultural ventures much more frequently.

## **Conclusion**

The plantation enterprise of Dr. James Metcalfe and his family illustrates the complex relationship between southern plantation agriculture and the changing national economy and how agricultural reform helped plantation owners reconcile the two economies. The Metcalfe family embraced a version of agricultural reform that was both specific to the cotton economy of the Deep South and compatible, in their eyes, with the changing realities of the rapidly expanding American economy. The planters combined long-standing southern agricultural reform interests in improving plantation practices with Thomas Affleck and others’ emerging interest in recording and tracking the labor of the slaves they held in order to create a plantation enterprise that they felt would be able to successfully compete in both the Atlantic cotton economy and the American economy. With

plantations open to new economic and agricultural strategies, people like the Metcalfes felt that plantation agriculture had a strong future as an integral and powerful part of the emerging capitalist economy of the United States.<sup>100</sup>

The Metcalfe family's plantation enterprise was unusual in the degree to which it was managed collectively, but it had much in common with other Lower Mississippi Valley cotton plantations. The banks of the Mississippi River below Natchez were covered with large cotton (and sugar) plantations owned by wealthy men with extensive business and personal networks. These planters were familiar with business practices beyond those of the cotton South. Some, like Stephen Duncan, came from northern states, others came from other countries, and most were interested in extracting as much as they could from their plantation investments. For the owners of large cotton plantations in this region, elements that historians have associated with agricultural reform, like experimenting with varieties of cotton seed or seeking to bring in steam power, were simply attempts to get more out of their land and slaves.

The daily practical consequences of the Metcalfes' attempts to bring their plantation enterprise in line with this economy were felt by the hundreds of slaves on their plantations. There is no indication whatsoever that engagement with agricultural reform and cost accounting was beneficial for slaves, as some have argued. In the Metcalfe case, there is evidence to suggest that slaves were whipped enough that the family was known in the neighborhood for the frequency of whipping and that punishment happened on a daily basis,

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<sup>100</sup> For different perspectives on the connections between capitalism and slavery in the nineteenth-century United States, see Edward Baptist, "Toxic Debt," Joshua Rothman, *Dark Times and Fever Dreams*, Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams* and an upcoming volume on capitalism and slavery, edited by Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman. On plantation business and accounting practices see Marcel van der Linden, "Re-constructing the Origins of Modern Labor Management" *Labor History* 51, 4 (2010): 509-522, and Caitlin Rosenthal, *From Slavery to Scientific Management: Accounting for Control in Antebellum America* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 2012).

but was, with a few exceptions, kept out of the plantation record books. The Metcalfes and their overseers looked back over their record and account books to examine when their slaves were most productive. While it is possible that, in some cases, careful record-keeping distanced slaves slightly from the capriciousness of masters and overseers, it seems clear that the additional surveillance and quantification that the Affleck books brought to the plantation brought more harm than help. In Mississippi, agricultural reform focused on cotton and slaves, not soil, and slaves in Adams County were spared little cruelty by “enlightened” planters like the Metcalfes.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has connected southern agricultural reform to the lived experiences of planters and slaves in the cotton South. From the established, elite culture of journals and agricultural societies in South Carolina to the record-books and quantification of the Lower Mississippi Valley, agricultural reform reflected the regional differences within the South and the particular issues that worried planters. Across the southern states, however, planters interested in agricultural reform were united in their desire to see a southern economy and society rooted in slavery and agriculture prosper and maintain or grow its power and influence within (or, to some, outside) the United States. Agricultural reformers deliberately cast their efforts in rational, progressive terminology, linking it to national movements associated with modernization. Meanwhile, southern agricultural improvement was widely ridiculed, both nationally and within the plantation South, as being at odds with the simple nature of plantation agriculture and slavery.

An article painting slave-based agriculture as a relic of the past doomed to failure by the modern economy appeared in the June 1858 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the publication of the *Atlantic* piece, a satirical response appeared in the pages of many newspapers across the country:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1858, 90-101. The *Atlantic Monthly* was founded as a New England literary journal with abolitionist tendencies in 1857, so this article was a natural fit for the journal's readership. Ellery Sedgwick, *A History of the Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, June 24, *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*; June 24, *Providence (R.I.) Post*; July 15, 1858, *New-York Herald Tribune*; July 21, 1858, *Wisconsin Free Democrat*; July 23, 1858, *Liberator*; July 24, 1858, *Daily Confederation* (Montgomery, Al.); July 24, 1858, *Wisconsin Weekly Free Democrat*; July 25, 1858, *Sunday Delta* (New Orleans, La.).

Now jest grant that what he says about plowin' by steam should turn out true—and cotton could be grow'd in this way I gest want to ask him one question—When it comes to pickin out, whar is his steam engin then? It takes fingers to do this sort of work, and no steam engine will ever be made to strike a lick like them. If we ever du plow by steam, which I won't deny nought be done, we'll turn our niggers into pickers—make more cotton and sell at a less price. He is whot might be called a speculative genius, like a feller who lives not far from here; he thought he'd make an improvement in picking, and then monkeys would be the very article. One monkey could pick as much as a nigger, and one nigger could oversee 10 monkeys. The monkeys was got and the trial maid; the only mistake about it was, instead of one nigger managing 10 monkeys, it took 10 niggers to manage one monkey; so he has to giv up his experimentin and sticks to the old way of gatherin his crop. Some one says that every man is crasy on some subjects. Your man is crasy on steam.

The satire excerpted above ridicules southern defenses of the modern elements of their system of plantation slavery, portraying the slaveowners and slave societies of the South as inescapably and unknowingly backward. This parody of a southerner writing about reform was published in June and July of 1858, throughout the country. The parody looks to do much more than simply ridicule southern resistance to progress, however. Combining mockery of southern backwardness and resistance to change with ridicule of the comic nature of their abortive attempts to modernize their plantations, the parody seeks to show the ways in which attempts at improvement in the South, when executed, are doomed by their links to slavery. By contrast, the piece implies that true industrialization is a path to progress and moral improvement. Whatever the particular reasons that individual newspaper editors and their staffs had for printing the satire, its wide and varied audience shows the currency of debates over progress and improvement as they related to the plantation South and slavery.

Debates like this represented southern agricultural reform and cotton slavery on the national stage, but they only represented one element of agricultural reform, an element that has dominated historical scholarship. My work seeks to re-focus the history of agricultural reform to place the discourses of reform and the social world of reformers alongside actual plantation practices. From this perspective, not only can we see how planters sought to use

agricultural reform as a proxy for the future of a southern agricultural economy rooted in slavery, but also how the ideology of reform shaped the daily lives of planters, overseers, and slaves.

Agricultural reform in the cotton South comprised the world of planter ideology, the world of agricultural labor, and the world of slave work. To date, most work on agricultural reform in the South has focused on planter ideology and the social world of reform. Some work, especially older work from the 1940s and 1950s, focused on agricultural labor and reform, explaining when fields needed to be ploughed, manured, and when crops needed to be harvested. Only recently has historical scholarship begun to recognize that work was as important an element of plantation slavery as labor. In this case, work refers to the activity of slaves in the cotton fields. Labor refers to the productive aspect work of performed by slaves—how work became agricultural production on plantations.<sup>3</sup> The actual details of how slaves chopped weeds, hilled cotton plants, and, most crucially, picked cotton are the basis of cotton plantation slavery. These details were known intimately to slaves, who describe them in great detail in slave narratives. Planters and overseers knew these details well, but rarely described them, apparently taking them as something any reader would know.

Slaves remembered the details vividly. Solomon Northup recalled the skill and ability—the “dexterous fingers and quick motion”—that were necessary to pick cotton to the standard demanded by sharp-eyed planters and overseers. Planters’ interest in the details of their agricultural ventures became abundantly clear when overseers weighed cotton at the

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<sup>3</sup> Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: A Plantation Society in the Texas borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Baptist, Edward E. “The Slave Labor Camps of Antebellum Florida and the Pushing System,” in Robert Cassanello, Melanie Shell-Weiss, eds. *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 31-63; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 2013). See Chapter One for a full discussion of the labor and work on a cotton plantation.



end of each day. Any slave who arrived with a light basket would not only be whipped, but also interrogated and observed. Planters were looking for ways to get the slave to pick more and more cotton. Northup's master, Epps, had his slaves brutally whipped and beaten frequently, but he also employed other tactics to try and get his slaves to pick more cotton:

“Depositing the cotton in the sack, moreover, was a difficulty that demanded the exercise of both hand and eyes. I was compelled to pick it from the ground where it would fall, nearly as often as from the stalk where it had grown. I made havoc also with the branches, loaded with the yet unbroken bolls, the long, cumbersome sack swinging from side to side in a manner not allowable in the cotton field. After a most laborious day I arrived at the gin-house with my load. When the scale determined its weight to be only ninety-five pounds, not half the quantity required of the poorest picker, Epps threatened the severest flogging, but in consideration of my being a "raw hand," concluded to pardon me on that occasion... Practice and whipping were alike unavailing, and Epps, satisfied of it at last, swore I was a disgrace—that I was not fit to associate with a cotton-picking ‘nigger’—that I could not pick enough in a day to pay the trouble of weighing it, and that I should go into the cotton field no more.”

Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 179-180

Cotton connected the South more closely to world markets, networks of credit, and the associated financial infrastructure. The rest of the American economy was increasingly focused on manufacturing and industry, with an emphasis on efficient production and attendant developments in industrial technology, labor management, and accounting. At the same time, land that had been planted in cotton for years began to decline in fertility. In light of these changes, cotton planters looked for new ways to extract more cotton from their acres and more labor from their slaves. For many planters, agricultural reform offered a possible way forward. Reformers promised improved crop yields, sustainable profits, and a secure, stable future for their plantation businesses. Reform drew on scientific vocabulary, quantification, endorsement from European societies, and the social and economic status of its proponents to lend authority to these ambitious claims.

To understand agricultural reform in the cotton South, one needs to understand what it was that planters sought to reform. The first chapter of the dissertation explores the

details of cotton production in the plantation South, specifically how slaves planted, cultivated, harvested, and processed cotton. By beginning with a discussion of the labor and work of cotton, I emphasize that changes in what seeds were planted and in how cotton was worked and picked were just as central to agricultural reform as journals and agricultural addresses of prominent reformers. The ritual of weighing cotton at the end of a day's work was canonical in southern culture and contained strands of most important elements of cotton and reform, from the cotton that slaves picked all day long to the overseer's measuring of that production and its conversion into a figure on a slate, to that figure's transformation into a lasting representation of all that labor in the plantation record book.<sup>4</sup> Previous assessments of how this weighing ritual was leveraged to drive slaves to work harder and longer draw on a limited source base. By drawing on both slave narratives and plantation record books, I suggest that no single method of working slaves could have been widespread across the cotton South. Much like the diffusion of agricultural reform, specific methods of forcing slaves to work were re-interpreted by individual planters.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, I examined the structure of agricultural reform in South Carolina, as an example of Seaboard plantation agricultural reform. Between the late-eighteenth century and the Civil War, agricultural reform in South Carolina was a social movement for a tightly bounded group of wealthy men—planters. Reformers emphasized the importance of education, Enlightenment rationality and science, print networks, and the social value of their cause. For planters in South Carolina, agricultural reform represented progress for their slave society; to other white southerners, it may have looked like another attempt by planters to exert control over society. This chapter suggests

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<sup>4</sup> This scene was so central that slave narratives developed a particular format for discussing it, planters referred to it repeatedly, and a New Orleans paper even advertised a painting of the cotton weighing ritual as a “familiar scene to many of our readers.” New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, February 21, 1854.

that historians need to re-evaluate the boundaries of the history of reform in the antebellum United States to include agricultural reform. The separation between the history of reform and the history of agricultural reform can partly be explained by historians' geographic focus on the northern states for many reform movements, but this alone is not a sufficient explanation, as agricultural reform in the northern states has also been isolated from other reform causes. While scholarship on reform is beginning to acknowledge the importance of rural populations, the urban focus of the history of reform has certainly been a factor in explaining this separation. Just as important, perhaps, is the more general isolation of "agricultural history." There is a significant barrier to entry in much agricultural history. In a time when very few historians have any personal experience with agricultural work, earning even a basic understanding of agricultural life and work is a time-consuming process and has often been left to specialists. Recent scholarship on cotton slavery that emphasizes the details of work suggests that this may be changing.<sup>5</sup> I hope the dissertation raises the question of what agricultural reform can tell us about American reform movements more generally, a question that I would like to explore in future research.

The second half of the dissertation connects the debates of the 1980s (Did agricultural reform succeed? What changes resulted from reform?) with current debates surrounding the discursive worlds of reformers (What social and cultural role did agricultural reform fill for planters? How did they represent their identity through agricultural writing? Did reform fully integrate southern planters into the rational business practices of northern merchants and manufacturers?) by focusing on how agricultural reform was translated from the Seaboard to the Lower Mississippi Valley and from print to plantation practice. The

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<sup>5</sup> See Kelley; *Los Brazos de Dios*; Baptist, "Slave Labor Camps"; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "Biological Innovation and Productivity Growth in the Antebellum Cotton Economy" *Journal of Economic History* 68, 4 (December 2008), 1123-1171.

intellectual and political world of reform discussed in Chapter Two reveals a great deal about the structure of southern society and how planters used agricultural reform as a forum for discussing larger issues. However, it is only possible to see how this world shaped the daily lives of planters, overseers, and slaves by following the ideologies of reform to the plantation level. In Chapter Three, I follow the best-selling plantation record and account book published by Thomas Affleck to the plantations on which it was used. I am able to see what planters valued from the agenda of reform represented in the printed instructions and forms of the book. Planters and overseers largely ignored the complex accounting functions available in the book, which have been the focus of most scholarship on the book, and, instead, diligently completed the record-keeping forms.<sup>6</sup>

The Affleck book provides a cautionary tale against taking agricultural reformers at their word. Affleck and his fellow luminaries in the reform movement were proud of the accounting functions that would bring plantation business practices in line with those across the merchant Atlantic world. Scholars have largely accepted Affleck's claims that planters eagerly filled out the accounts and, as a result, had a better understanding of their financial situation, valued plantation improvement over the size of a cotton crop, and were able to relate to cotton factors and the world of the cotton market more successfully. Examining their use, however, reveals that planters apparently preferred to use the neatly ruled and affordable Affleck books to keep their overseers honest, track the cotton-picking productivity of their slaves, and monitor the annual cotton crop. By focusing so much on the creation of reform ideology and the debates represented in the pages of agricultural

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<sup>6</sup> Williams, Robert Webb. "The Mississippi Career of Thomas Affleck." Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1954. Richard K. Fleischman and Thomas N. Tyson, "Accounting in Service to Racism: Monetizing Slave Property in the Antebellum South," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 15 (2004), 381. Jan Richard Heier, "A Content Comparison of Antebellum Plantation Records and Thomas Affleck's Accounting Principles," *The Accounting Historian's Journal* 15, 2 (1988), 143.

journals, historians have sometimes let themselves forget that didactic and prescriptive literature is rarely received as its producers intend. While historians have been very clear that many planters rejected agricultural reform as “book farming,” much less has been made of how those planters who were interested in agricultural reform interacted with the advice that they received.<sup>7</sup> Historians are used to parsing planters’ language when it comes to how they talk about their slaves. For some reason, we rarely read between the lines when it comes to reformers’ discussion of agriculture.

The intersection of print and practice is where agricultural reform had its greatest influence on southern economy and society. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I show how one set of Mississippi plantations drew on agricultural reform, including the Affleck books, to run their plantation empire in an unusual manner. The Metcalfe family took bits and pieces of various agricultural reform ideologies and combined them in an attempt to create a plantation enterprise that adopted what they saw as the best parts of industrial technology, while still relying primarily on exploiting slave labor to produce enormous crops of cotton. The Metcalfes paid special attention to certain elements of reformed agriculture, using steam engines, experimenting with many varieties of cotton seed, carefully tracking labor allocation, and working towards self-sufficiency among their plantations. They also chose not to adopt key elements of Affleck and other Mississippi reformers’ advice, spending very little time manuring their fields, ignoring most accounting forms in the Affleck books, and producing almost nothing but cotton for the market. I compare the

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<sup>7</sup> Marti, Donald. “Early Agricultural Societies in New York: The Foundations of Improvement.” *New York History* 48 (October 1967): 313-331. William Mathew, *Edmund Ruffin and the Crisis of Slavery in the Old South: The Failure of Agricultural Reform*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Hill and Wang, 2002); For two notable exceptions, see Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Gentlemen Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989) and Drew Faust, “The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Antebellum South Carolina” *Journal of Southern History* 45 (Nov. 1979), 541-568.

Metcalfes' Lower Mississippi Valley plantations to the South Carolina plantations owned by James Henry Hammond to show how the differences between the agricultural reform agendas in the two regions influenced the choices that the planters made about their plantation practice. In both cases, the reformers' actions were shaped but not defined by the arguments of agricultural reformers. Looking at the public and printed production of agricultural reformers gives a significantly different image of reform than their private practice does. The history of agricultural reform is incomplete without both the public and private elements. Going forward, there is much work to be done in understanding how planters received the gospel of reform and forced their own versions onto their enslaved workforces.

I hope this dissertation helps to understand agricultural reform as part of the history of reform in the United States more broadly, as a forum in which planters worked out their anxieties about the future of their region, as well as an attempt to modify the daily agricultural practice of planters and, by extension, their slaves. The increasingly prominent study of capitalism in nineteenth-century America has emphasized the centrality of the cotton economy and slavery in American economic change in this period. The most intense site of this economy, the Lower Mississippi Valley, was overrun by planters interested in some parts of agricultural reform. By the 1840s and 1850s, agricultural reform encompassed a great many things, from agricultural journals, to record books, to experimenting with cotton seed. Most planters with sizeable holdings interacted with some elements of this network on a regular basis. In fact, historians sometimes have trouble distinguishing between the agendas of various groups of agricultural reformers and actual plantation practice in the

Lower Mississippi Valley.<sup>8</sup> If historians, with our preconceived ideas of what defined agricultural reform and a wealth of print sources on reform compared to plantation sources, have difficulty distinguishing between planters and reformers for our own analytical categories, how much muddier must it have been at the time?

In light of the fuzzy borders between agricultural reformers, planters interested in agricultural reform, and cotton planters in general, it is important that we not limit our discussion of agricultural reform to the print worlds inhabited solely by self-identified agricultural reformers. While these arenas are important spaces for parsing the intellectual foundations of reform and mapping its regional differences, we can not forget that the real influence of agricultural reform in the South how it shaped the economic practice of planters and the working lives of slaves across the cotton South in ways that are difficult to trace. Drawing a clear line from an article in the *Southern Agriculturist* to the number of pounds of cotton a slave had to pick each day in a South Carolina cotton field is nearly impossible. Outlining the complex connections between the ideology of agricultural reform and cotton planters and between these planters and the slaves they forced to work in their fields is possible. By broadening the focus of my dissertation to include not just agricultural journals and societies, but also record and account books, the work involved in producing cotton, and a study of how plantations run by reformers actually operated, I have tried to suggest some of the directions that further work on agricultural reform in the South might take.

In my introduction, I suggested that scholarship on agricultural reform in the cotton South has mischaracterized the movement as a failure. I would like to further suggest that

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Johnson, in particular, uses the categories in overlapping ways. While he distinguishes between planters and agricultural reformers, the sources for his claims about what “planters” did are frequently pieces written in an agricultural reform journal (*The American Cotton Planter*) or papers from plantations owned by reformers. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*.

the problems with defining the stakes of agricultural reform extend beyond the problems of defining the desired audience that I outlined in Chapter Two. Agricultural reform was not a tightly bounded movement made up only of elite planters and writers who actively engaged in agricultural experimentation in a scientific manner, sought to make specific changes designed to eliminate the backwardness of southern agriculture, and wrote and published agricultural serials and pamphlets. Instead, this loosely defined group of individuals helped produce and disseminate a vision for the future of the plantation South that emphasized the need for innovation and accommodation to changing economic realities. In this broader sense, a huge number of large cotton planters became involved at the edges of this movement—including individuals who never wrote an agricultural treatise—and the lines between agricultural reformer, shrewd planter, and planter blurred. As mentioned earlier, this has troubled historians who seek to distinguish between these overlapping and loosely defined categories. Historians should have difficulty with these categories. Agriculture dominated American economy, society, labor, and work in the nineteenth century. The urbanizing, industrializing nation was still predominantly agricultural and any movement to reform agriculture had high stakes and a wide scope. Agricultural reform was a popular social movement that wanted to make major changes to the foundation of American life. The individuals, debates, and changes surrounding agricultural reform had far-reaching consequences and I hope that my dissertation suggests that we need to recognize the reach of agricultural reform and the degree to which it was bound up in plantation agriculture in general. This movement is at its most interesting and its most influential at its edges, where planters selectively appropriated various aspects of reform, modified them, and imposed them on the slaves working their fields.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: List of Narratives Discussing Cotton Work

All narratives are from *North American Slave Narratives*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>

Albert, Octavia V. Rogers. *The House of Bondage, or, Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves, Original and Life Like, As They Appeared in Their Old Plantation and City Slave Life; Together with Pen-Pictures of the Peculiar Institution, with Sights and Insights into Their New Relations as Freedmen, Freemen, and Citizens*. New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890.

Alexander, Charles. *Battles and Victories of Allen Allensworth, A. M., Ph. D., Lieutenant-Colonel, Retired, U. S. Army*. Boston: Sherman, French & Company, 1914.

Anderson, William J., *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-four Years a Slave; Sold Eight Times! In Jail Sixty Times!! Whipped Three Hundred Times!!! or The Dark Deeds of American Slavery Revealed. Containing Scriptural Views of the Origin of the Black and of the White Man. Also, a Simple and Easy Plan to Abolish Slavery in the United States. Together with an Account of the Services of Colored Men in the Revolutionary War--Day and Date, and Interesting Facts*. Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857.

Ball, Charles. *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave*. New York: H. Dayton; Indianapolis, Ind.: Asher & Co., 1859.

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## Appendix B: Note on Affleck Books

For this chapter, I have used the records of 62 examples of the *Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book*. These books represent a wide variety of cotton plantations, planters, and slaves. The books represent all of the examples of the Affleck cotton books that I have used so far. There are certainly more examples of the Affleck books in archives that I have not yet located. I have several collections that I believe hold more examples that I will need to look at soon. Even so, with the possible exception of the large Olmstead-Rhode project on cotton picking, my sample has more Affleck books than any other work that I am aware of.<sup>1</sup> There are the standard biases that come with using surviving plantation records. The sample necessarily selects for more prominent planters who were particularly attentive to recordkeeping, as their books were kept and have survived for well over a century. I have done my best to keep this in mind in writing the chapter.

The average wealth of planters in this study, according to the 1860 Federal Census was \$189 622. Over \$70 000 of this was real estate, largely plantation land, and almost \$120 000 of this was personal property, largely slaves. The planters generally owned hundreds of slaves and multiple plantations, with the surviving books representing a very small portion of their plantation practice. The planters were all men, with the exception of one half year, where the book reflects that the plantation was owned by a woman. These men had an average age of 43, with only one planter younger than 30 and one over 53. With the exception of Joseph Toole Robinson, who was listed as a corn merchant, all of them described themselves as either farmers or planters. The majority of the planters were born in

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the books that make up the Olmstead-Rhode sample that have been used in this chapter can be found in Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "Biological Innovation and Productivity Growth in the Antebellum Cotton Economy," *Journal of Economic History* 68 (2008), 1123-1171. Other examples have only been included in more recent, unpublished, papers.

the state in which they had a plantation, though a small number were from outside of the immediate region, largely the Upper South (Virginia and Kentucky); one planter was born in Ohio, another was from Ireland.

### Appendix C: Affleck Sample

Owner	Plantation	County	State	Date
Joseph Jaynes	None listed	Rankin	MS	1854
		Rankin	MS	1855
		Rankin	MS	1857
		Rankin	MS	1858
		Rankin	MS	1860
Dr. James Carson	Airlie	East Carroll Parish	LA	1862
	Canebreak	East Carroll Parish	LA	1856
	Canebreak	East Carroll Parish	LA	1857
	Canebreak	East Carroll Parish	LA	1858
Basil Kiger	Buena Vista	Warren	MS	1860
A. Ledoux, Miltenberger, Hall	A. Ledoux + Co.	Pointe Coupee Parish	LA	1856-1857
J.H. Knight	Pre Aux Cleres	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1852
	Pre Aux Cleres	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1853
Joseph Toole Robinson	Willow Point	Red River Parish	LA	1859
	Willow Point	Red River Parish	LA	1860-1861
Andrew Macrery	Springfield	Adams	MS	1855
Dr. James Metcalfe	Bourbon	Adams	MS	1860-1861
	Bourbon	Adams	MS	1861-1862
	Bourbon/Woodland	Adams	MS	1862-1863
	Woodland/The Grove	Adams	MS	1855, 1866
	York	Adams	MS	1852-1853
	York	Adams	MS	1860-1862
	York	Adams	MS	1862-1863

Dr. James Metcalfe	Berkeley	Adams	MS	1861-1862; 1865
Henry Laurens Metcalfe	The Grove	Adams	MS	1853-1854, 1862
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1853
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1854-1855
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1855-1866
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1857-1858
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1857-1859
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1859-1860
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1860-1861
	The Grove	Adams	MS	1861-1862
Frederick Augustus Metcalfe	Newstead	Washington	MS	1857-1858
	Newstead	Washington	MS	1858-1859, 1862
	Newstead	Washington	MS	1859-1860, 1862
	Newstead	Washington	MS	1860-1861
Horatio Sprague Eustis	Eustatia	Issaquena	MS	1860-1861
William R. Elley	Not listed	Washington	MS	1855-1856
Thomas E. Helm	Canaan	Hinds	MS	1855
Crosswell Family	The Oaks	Darlington	SC	1861-1862
John Willis	Panther Burn	Washington? (currently Sharkey)	MS	1857
	Panther Burn	Washington? (currently Sharkey)	MS	1859-1866
Andrew McGehee	Western View	Wilkinson	MS	1859
Charles Clark	Doro	Bolivar	MS	1853-54
	Doro	Bolivar	MS	1855

	Doro	Bolivar	MS	1858
	Doro	Bolivar	MS	1861-62
Eli Capell	Pleasant Hill	Amite	MS	1860-1861
	Pleasant Hill	Amite	MS	1862
	Pleasant Hill	Amite	MS	
Phanor Prudhomme	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1860
	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1861
	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1862
	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1863-1864
	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1867-1868
	Vienna	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1852
	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1852, 1866-1867
	Bermuda	Natchitoches Parish	LA	1857
James Jackson Family	Forks of Cypress	Limestone	AL	
Nannie Herndon Rice	Meadow Woods	Oktibbeha	MS	
A F Smith	Not listed	Washington	MS	



## Appendix D: Affleck Book References

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Mississippi Department of Archives and History

- Clark (Charles) and Family, *Papers*, Z/0122.000
- Elley (William R.), *Plantation Record Book*, Z/0411.000
- Helm (Thomas E.), *Plantation Record Book*, Z/0859.000
- McGehee, Family *Papers*, (1854-1874), Z/0899.000
- Metcalf Family, *Papers*, Z/1874.000
- Metcalf (Frederick Augustus), *Papers*, Z/1843.000
- Panther Burn Plantation Account Books*, Z/0074.000/S/Box 1

Mississippi State University Library

- Rice (Nannie Herndon) *Papers*

Ohio Historical Society

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South Caroliniana Library

- J.R. Crosswell, *Account Book*, Manuscripts Plb

Western Reserve Historical Society

- A.F.Smith, *Plantation Journal*

### Archives Accessed by Others<sup>2</sup>

University of Alabama, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library

- James Jackson, *Papers*

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection

- Prudhomme Family, *Papers*

### Archives and Collections Accessed via Microfilm Collections<sup>3</sup>

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- Joseph M. Jaynes Plantation Journals (Stamp collection, Series F)

University of Texas, Austin

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<sup>2</sup> I have the basic information on the Affleck books in these collections, but still need to see the books for myself.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth, M. Stamp, ed, *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations from the Civil War from the Revolution through the Civil War*. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985-2000; except, Capell Papers, from Ira Berlin, ed., *Records of Southern Plantations from Emancipation to the Great Migration*. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America.

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Capell Family Papers (Berlin, Series B, Part 4)  
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Phanor Prudhomme Papers, Plantation Records, 1860-1864 (Stampp, Series J, Part  
5)  
Prudhomme Family Papers,  
[http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/p/Prudhomme\\_Family.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/p/Prudhomme_Family.html)

## Appendix E: Owners of the Metcalfe Plantations and Their Plantation Holdings

**Dr. James Metcalfe** (ca. 1790-1867) was born into a wealthy Kentucky family. In 1814, he moved to Adams County in Mississippi with his wife **Sarah Williams Baker Metcalfe** (date-date), of St. Mary's Parish in Louisiana. Despite having worked as a doctor, there is no indication that James practiced medicine in Mississippi, preferring instead to focus on cotton planting. He personally owned at least six cotton plantations in the Second Creek region of Adams County, totaling over 7 000 acres. The 1860 Census lists James as the owner of 315 slaves, an increase of 25 from the 1850 Census, but his own records suggest that a number between 600 and 700 would be more accurate.

James had seven children—six sons and a daughter—all born in Mississippi. His sons, John Thomas, James Wistar, Orrick, Henry Laurens, Charles, and Duncan Ker served as managers for James or were given or purchased plantations of their own, which were added to the family enterprise. The exceptions were John Thomas, who became a New York doctor and Georgia planter (post-war), and Duncan Ker, who seems to have lived in town, in Natchez. His daughter, Amelia, married Dr. Samuel Chopin of New Orleans and eventually moved to Washington, D.C..

Plantations Owned:

Montrose (800 acres)

Bourbon (2,500 acres)

Hutchins Landing (400 acres)

Woodland (1,100 acres)

York (1,100 acres)

Berkeley (1,200 acres)

**James Wistar Metcalfe** (ca. 1819-1865) was born five years after the Metcalfes arrived in Mississippi. The eldest of the four sons, in 1850 James Wistar married **Sarah Jane Semple Young**, of the wealthy Adams County Young family. In addition to his own Ingleside Farm, James took over management of the Beaux Pres, Desert, and Ackland plantation owned by Benjamin F. Young (Sarah's father) and the Young family. Whether James Wistar took full ownership of any of the three plantations is unclear, but Ackland and Desert were not in Adams County, though James Wistar is listed as owning 88 slaves in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, where Ackland plantation was located, in the 1860 census.

Ingleside Farm (80 acres)

Beaux Pres (450 acres)

Desert (in Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi)

Ackland (in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana)

**Dr. Orrick Metcalfe**, the second of Dr. James' sons, was a doctor like his father, but maintained an active practice. He is frequently referred to as a doctor, as often as he was as a planter, perhaps because he served as plantation physician for the Metcalfe slaves. In addition, he owned Fair Oaks plantation, considered small with roughly 80 slaves living and working on its 170 acres. In 1855, he married **Helen C. Gillespie** Like his older brother, Orrick also took over management of a plantation owned by his wife, in this case Egypt plantation, also in the Second Creek region. Orrick may have also owned a plantation called Corinna or Canowa, on the Mississippi River, just south of his father's plantations.<sup>4</sup>

Fair Oaks (170 acres, purchased in 1856)

Egypt Plantation (owned by his wife)

**Henry Laurens Metcalfe** (b. 1829), the third of the Metcalfe sons, followed the standard family plan by marrying into a plantation, The Grove, in 1852 when he wed **Eliza C. Kinsey**. Henry Laurens took over the management of his father's estate in 1867. Henry Laurens and Orrick both survived the Civil War, but Henry Laurens was the brother who moved to the center of the family business after the War.

The Grove (1,050 acres)

**Charles Metcalfe** (ca. 1837-1865), the youngest of the sons involved with the plantation enterprise, did not own a plantation himself, but was heavily involved in the management of the family plantations. While Charles likely managed several plantations, he is only listed as the overseer in one of the family plantation books, for Bourbon in 1860-1862. Charles fought in the Civil War after his stint as manager at Bourbon and was killed in 1865.

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<sup>4</sup> There are no references to Orrick owning Canowa/Corinna in the Metcalfe Papers, but Winthrop Jordan shows that, in 1856, a Road Duty roster indicates that Orrick owned slaves at a "Carina" plantation. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence*, 114n28. There is also a reference to Dr. James Metcalfe, Henry Laurens Metcalfe, and Orrick Metcalfe going "down to Carina" for an evening on December 9, 1860. "Bourbon, 1860." Additionally, the widely circulated map of Mississippi River plantations made by French-born plantation painter Marie Adrien Persac shows a "Canowa" plantation owned by a "D.O. Metcalp" just south of Bourbon plantation, owned by "Jas. Metcalf." *Plantations on the Mississippi River: From Natchez to New Orleans* (New Orleans: B.M. Norman, 1858).

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Part 2, South Carolina and Georgia

Rockingham Plantation Journal

Series G, University of Texas, Austin

Part 1, Barker Texas History Center

Canebreak Plantation Records

Airlie Plantation Records

Part 5, Center for American History, Natchez Trace Collection

Kiger Family Papers

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<sup>1</sup> I have used hardcopy, microfilm, and online versions of these serials. Hardcopies were viewed at the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, Mass.), the Charleston County Public Library, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Louisiana State University Library, the Mississippi Department of Archives (Jackson, Miss.), the South Caroliniana Library (Columbia, S.C.), the University of Pennsylvania Library, and my personal collection.

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these published primary sources were accessed online and through the Johns Hopkins University Library. The majority were accessed in hardcopy at the Chemical Heritage Foundation's Othmer Library (Philadelphia, Pa.), the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the South Caroliniana Library. For slave narratives used, see appendix.



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### PUBLICATIONS

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### PRESENTATIONS

"Pomaria Nurseries and Southern Agricultural Reform: Horticulture and the Cotton Plantation" at the Society of Historians of the Early American Republic Annual Meeting, St. Louis, July, 2013

"Re-Thinking the Quota System: Cotton Picking in the Lower South, 1840-1860" at the Agricultural History Conference, Banff, Canada, June, 2013

"Plantation Business Practice and Cotton Factors: Plantation Accounting in the American South" at the Business History Conference, Columbus, Ohio, March, 2013

"Agricultural Reform in Print and Practice: Slavery and the Metcalfe Plantation Enterprise" at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December, 2012

"Equations in the Field: The Cost of Agricultural Reform for Slaves and Freedmen in

Mississippi, 1850-1870” at the Southern Forum on Agricultural, Rural, and Environmental History, Jackson, Mississippi, April 2012

“Rationalizing Lives: Quantifying Slave Labor in the American South” at the Southern Industrialization Project Meeting, University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Park, Long Beach, MS, June 2011

“Professionalizing Plantership: The *Southern Agriculturist* and Reputation in South Carolina, 1828-1840” at Knowledge Networks: American Periodicals, Print Cultures, and Communities Symposium, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom, May 2011

“Improving the South: Plantation Slavery and American Industrialization” at Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development, Cambridge, Mass. and Providence, Rhode Island, April 2011

“Thomas Affleck’s World: Printing Slave Agriculture in the American South, 1840-1860,” Invited Talk at the Lawrence D. Stokes Seminar, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, February 2011

“Rationalizing Labor: Agricultural and Management Literature in South Carolina, 1800-1830” at the Omohundro Institute Conference, Oxford, Mississippi, June 2010

“‘It Has Been Still Further Simplified’: The Dissemination of Agricultural Knowledge in South Carolina and Mississippi, 1820-1860” at the Library Company of Philadelphia, November, 2009

“Labor Management on a South Carolina Cotton Plantation, 1848-1850” at the American Seminar of the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, April 2007

## **TEACHING**

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*Teaching Assistant* for two sections of “Occidental Civilization: Early Modern Europe” (Professor Richard Kagan), Spring 2008

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Department of History Research Grant, Johns Hopkins University, 2006  
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