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Black Joining the Ranks of White: Black Slaveowning in 1800s South Carolina

Zachary M. Saddow
Winthrop University, zsaddow@gmail.com

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Zachary Saddow entitled *Black Joining the Ranks of White: Black Slaveowning in 1800s South Carolina*.
We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts in History.

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Joseph Edward Lee, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser

_____
O. Jennifer Dixon-McKnight, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____
Gregory D. Bell, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____
Takita Sumter, Ph. D, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

_____
Jack DeRochi, Ph. D, Dean, Graduate School

BLACK JOINING THE RANKS OF WHITE:
BLACK SLAVEOWNING IN 1800S SOUTH CAROLINA

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Arts and Sciences

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

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By

Zachary Saddow

Abstract

Exploring the lives and impact of the Black slaveholders in Antebellum South Carolina is a highly overlooked subject in a sensitive area. The idea of a Black slaveholder stands contrary to the widely held belief of slavery held by a majority in the United States. This realization is also startling as most slaveholders were White, with those in bondage being Black. These Black slaveholders actively took part in the system of slavery including the buying and selling of slaves, the production of cash crops, and even support for the eventual Confederacy. Although many began their life in chains, Black future slaveowners would achieve their freedom and purchase their slaves for many reasons. These reasons extend from wanting to save their family from the horrors of slavery to using slaves to achieve their financial goals. These Black slaveowners offer a unique look into the system of slavery and an idea of the differing opinions of slavery held by Black society in the 1800s. This subject is essential to look at as it will offer a unique perspective on the traditional view of the slavery system and how that could impact the years following it.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to my two grandfathers, Robert Brown (Gramps) and Mike Saddow (Grandpa Mike), who I know are both looking down on me. I miss them greatly and hope to make them proud of me every day.

I give thanks to God, my father, Tim, and my mother, Lori, for guiding me on this path and nurturing my love of history; without them, I would be nothing. I thank all of my professors at Winthrop for helping hone my skills and assisting me whenever I asked for it.

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Introduction

The story of slavery is more complicated than one might imagine. The slave experience is filled with hardship, from the disease-ridden slave ships to the brutality of the work that filled their daily lives. However, this story is more complex than White slaveowners controlling and humiliating Black slaves. Some free Blacks would attempt to emulate the White ruling class and own slaves. This aspect of slavery is little known or talked about due to the poor records of the time, and a focus on race as a crucial factor in the slavery system. Even among those that have researched this topic, there is contention about the nature of these slaveowners and their position within the slavery system.

The most significant point of contention revolves around how these slaveowners treated their slaves. Beginning this argument was Carter G. Woodson in his book *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830*. In this work, Woodson presents a table that gives the names of the Black slaveowners by county in each state that had them. Along with this data, Woodson also claims that these slaveowners were benevolent to their slaves and often purchased family and friends to ensure their freedom. This position is further supported by individuals such as Ira Berlin, who wrote in *Slaves Without Masters* that the Black slaveowners distanced themselves from the rest of the free Black populace. Despite this distance, Berlin also argues that the Black slaveowners acted generously to their slaves and wanted to save them from enslavement.

On the other side of this argument, some historians argue that the Black slaveowners were cruel to their slaves in a similar manner to their White counterparts. In this argument, those who support it claim that the Black slaveowners used their slaves for profits and treated them as property. Historians such as Larry Koger took this stance in

his book *Black Slaveowners*, arguing that many, if not most Black slaveowners behaved in this manner, being more focused on profits and allying with their White counterparts.

The most unfortunate thing about this topic is that few authors have dedicated works to it. The earliest work on Black slaveowners was Carter G. Woodson's 1924 book, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830*. This work provided little more than the names and locations of the Black masters. This is something that Woodson has been criticized for, as Woodson's work was seen as flawed due to the poor record keeping of the time. In addition to this insufficient data, Woodson only gave the names of the individuals and their slave counts while failing to differentiate between those who owned slaves for profit and those who owned family.

Much of the scholarly research on the topic would happen in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, much of this research focused on the free Black community and not just a focus on the Black slaveowners. Marina Wikramanayake's *A World In Shadow: The Free Black in Antebellum South Carolina*, written in 1973, demonstrates this occurrence. Her research looks at how the Free Blacks in South Carolina acted, organized, and their role in the state. As part of her research, she describes the differences that the Black elite experienced and how they interacted with the White and Black classes.

Ira Berlin's book *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South,* written just one year after Wikramanayake's book, offers a more largescale look at how the free Black population and class existed in the South. This overall look allowed Berlin to provide comparative evidence, showing how the free Black community faced different problems depending on their state. Berlin also discussed how the Black elite would help or avoid the lower Black class whenever it suited them best.

The general look into the free Black community was not the only topic scholars focused their research on. Some scholars instead concentrated on how individual families came into being and why they decided to own slaves. The book by Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South,* looks at the complete history of the Ellison family. This family was the most prominent Black slave-owning family in South Carolina with around 50 slaves at the start of the Civil War. For the research that Johnston and Roark give, they trace the story of the family's founder, William Ellison, and detail his rise to power. The book describes how the family felt about events occurring in South Carolina and their actions to secure their position among the White families around them. This look at a single family gives a suitable generalization of how others in their position may have acted or attempted to act.

One of the most informative works on this topic comes from the work of Larry Koger in his book *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina 1790-1860.* This book argues that the slaveowners in South Carolina were exploitive in nature and wished to join and ally with the White elite of the state. Koger also looks at the numbers and makeup of the Black slave-owning population and the reasons for owning slaves. Koger's work is one of the best complete looks at how Black slaveowners interacted with those around them as he uses countless individuals as examples within just South Carolina for each point he makes.

While many of the Black slaveowners in other states may have owned slaves benevolently, in South Carolina, the Black slaveowners opted to use their slaves in the same way as their White counterparts. Many individuals came from slavery and saw the system as a way to ensure their family's success. In this manner, their relations with the

White class compared to other free Black individuals showcases how close the two classes were. The Black slaveowner's methods further show this closeness in separating themselves from the Black masses and their efforts to stop slave rebellions by supporting the White rule of law. This showcases how Black slaveowners used the system to improve their status, even if their success jeopardized the well-being of those they owned.

Chapter I: Free Bonds

One of the most important aspects of talking about Black slaveholders is looking at slavery as a whole. The aspects of slavery would lead to a wide range of opinions and reactions, even amongst the free Blacks of South Carolina. The benefits of wealth would drive many to join the ranks of slaveholders while others would seek to break free from it entirely. Many of these future slaveowners would begin their lives in chains following a long-standing slave tradition that began with the colony itself. This slave system of South Carolina was unique from the start as it differed in its establishment process from the older Colony of Virginia. From its beginnings in the Indian slave trade to the boom of cotton, the slavery system in South Carolina offered tremendous opportunities and horrors for those within the system. Even when detached from the system by gaining freedom or by working independently, the influence of the slavery system was still felt by all in how free Blacks were treated by the White class. With many Black slaveholders being freed slaves, it is essential to look into the history of slavery in South Carolina, how these slaves worked, earned their freedom, and the relations with Whites once freed. These aspects are important to understanding the basis for how and why this new position in the slavery system was established.

Slavery in South Carolina

Slavery in South Carolina began early as the colonists adopted the plantation system that had seen success in the Virginia colony. In addition to the success of the Virginia colony, many of the Barbadian settlers to the region brought their experiences from the West Indies. These Barbadian ideas included the use of slave labor, which they

used in Carolina to supply Barbados with food and other materials.[1] These slaves would

be imported as part of an extension of the existing African slave trade coming from the

west coast of Africa to the New World through the West Indies. African slaves were

imported to South Carolina from the colony's establishment, but an actual plantation

system would not be created until the early eighteenth century. During the colony's early

years, the plantations were small and often used local Native Americans captured in raids

or sold by other Native Tribes as slaves. These Native slaves created conflict between the

colonists and the Lords Proprietors, who viewed Native enslavement as a moral evil. This

was mainly due to the spreading idea of the "noble savage" that had become popularized

in European society. By contrast, the Lords Proprietors viewed the African Trade as

justifiable due to the belief that the Africans were uncivilized and incapable of being

civilized. This would spark conflict between the Lords Proprietors and the colonists as

the Proprietors pushed for equality of justice for the Natives while pushing for greater

control of African slaves.[2] The idea for slavery based on African slaves was even

included in the creation of the Fundamental Constitution, in which section 110 states,

"every Freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his Negro

Slaves, of what Opinion or Religion soever."[3] Despite this push, the colony was

considered the premier Native Slave trading colony. Trading was so massive that in 1708,

close to one-third of the colony's 4,300 slaves were Natives.[4]

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1. Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 43.
2. *Colonial entry book vol, 20* (1680), in *Records in the British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina: 1663-1684,* indexed by A. S. Sally Jr (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1928) 97-98.
3. *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* (1669) in *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Locke* (London: Mr. Desmaizeaux, 1739) 15.
4. Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 26-27.

The Proprietors struggled to control the trade of Natives into slavery as even other elites attempted to participate in the enslavement of Natives. This would often include the appointed officials of the colony, who would disregard or follow the orders of the Proprietors whenever it suited their needs. This struggle spiraled out of control as the Proprietors and the elites struggled for power over the colony. Many of the removed officials would remain in their posts in defiance of the Proprietors. One of the best examples is Maurice Mathews, who was in the position of surveyor general. He was removed from his post in November 1683 for attacking Natives in unjust wars for the sake of enslaving them, as well as the transportation of Natives outside of the colony. Both of these were against the orders of the Proprietors; however, Mathews continued to serve in his post and undertake raids against the Natives despite the complaints of the Proprietors.

The Native slave trade weakened following the Tuscarora War of 1711-1715. The effects of the war led to a decrease in Natives that could be enslaved, while the Tuscarora's migration to the Northern colonies led many to fear the importation of slaves from South Carolina to the point where several states banned the importation of the Native slaves.[5] The final nail in the coffin for using enslaved Natives came at the end of the Yamasee War in 1717. This war caused further settlement and migrations from the region and threw South Carolina's frontiers into disarray. The destruction of the war and the chaos it caused further weakened the weak hold of the Proprietors on the colony leading to an uprising in 1719 that petitioned King George I to convert the colony into a crown colony. By 1730, the colony had shifted towards a total use of Black slaves with

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5. Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 302.

the cultivation of rice, indigo, and eventually cotton at its center.[6] From this point onward, the slave population would increasingly outnumber the White population in the state. This would spark reactionary measures by South Carolina's government over the fear of the growing population. This new chapter in South Carolina's history would begin the exponential rise in the value of the system of slavery to the colony and then state of South Carolina.

The cultivation of rice in South Carolina came hand-in-hand with the rise and fall of the Native slave trade. While the planters primarily used Black slaves to cultivate the rice, many of the local tribes occupied the tidal estuaries and swamps that were perfect for rice cultivation. The increase in Native enslavement and the migrations from the Yamasee War allowed colonists to move onto these ideal lands and set up plantations. As previously stated, using Black slaves was not new to the colony. Black slaves were used in the low country to construct buildings and produce goods that could be exported to the West Indies. With the growth in rice cultivation came an increase in the desire for Black slaves. The slaves from the Windward Coast area of West Africa were preferred due to their knowledge of rice cultivation. The desire for slaves from this, and other rice-growing regions, was so great that it would account for nearly 40% of all slaves brought to South Carolina.[7]

To further rice production, the colonial government took measures to ensure the quality of rice being produced, including how the rice should be packaged and the length of the rice. These statutes also covered punishments for those found guilty of failing to

6. Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade,* 341.
7. Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 71.

follow these rules.[8] The production of rice became so heavily entwined with the

government that exclusive use patents were offered to those who could invent easier rice

production methods such as in 1788 when the government granted the privilege to

Samuel Knight for his invention. The machine would help beat out rice to remove the

protective covering on the rice grain. The license would last for 14 years, and anyone

found to have made the machine without Samuel Knight's permission would have to pay

fifty pounds to him.[9]

In addition to the production of rice, indigo and cotton became important cash

crops within the state, requiring slave labor. The cultivation of indigo became widespread

as a way to stabilize the English mercantile system during times of war against France

and Spain. To encourage production, the colonial government assigned bounties to

several crops, including indigo.[10]

Indigo was always produced as a secondary crop alongside more profitable ones

due to the expensive nature of producing the crop. Even the colonial government

advocated for its growth alongside other crops, with the members of the colonial House

of assembly determining that indigo should be planted alongside rice. The members'

reasoning was that indigo is harvested in the summer months just before rice, which

would ease the strain of rice cultivation and free up some of the winter months for other

products such as lumber.[11] Due to this growth alongside other crops, indigo was

8. Thomas Cooper, ed., *Statutes of South Carolina, 1716-1752*, (Columbia, SC: A. S. Johnson, 1838,) act 744, section 2, 687- 689.
9. Thomas Cooper, ed., *Statutes of South Carolina, 1786-1814*, (Columbia, SC: A. S. Johnson, 1839), act 1400, 69-70.
10. Thomas Cooper, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, volume 3 (Columbia, SC: A. S. Johnston, 1838), 613–16.
11. J.H. Easterby, ed., *The Colonial Records of South Carolina: The Journal of the House of Assembly, March 28, 1749- March 19, 1750.* (Columbia. SC: State Printing Company, 1962,) 57,99.

seamlessly integrated into the slavery system. The production of indigo would be shattered following the beginning of the Revolutionary War, which ended the connections in trade between the Colonies and Britain.

With plantations growing crops such as rice and indigo, much of the year was left with little for the slaves to do. In a method to ensure profits could be maintained, the planters would often assign daily tasks to the slaves, such as repairing parts of the plantation or collecting wood and other materials, after which some masters would allow the slaves their own free time. With this time, the slaves could grow food or make goods for personal use or sale.[12] With the outbreak of the American Revolution, many of the low-country planters lost control of their slaves during the British occupation. In this period of semi-freedom, the slaves would grow crops and materials for their use alone, such as potatoes and cotton.[13]

The cotton production in South Carolina began early in the colony's history as the crop's cultivation spread beyond the colony's borders. The crop required large numbers of slaves for harvesting and preparation before being brought to market or spun into cloth. Picking the seeds from the cotton was time-consuming and difficult, acting as a bottleneck in the production process. The invention of the cotton gin in 1794 by Eli Whitney allowed for a faster method of removing the seeds from the cotton. Despite cotton being grown in South Carolina for much of its history, cotton was not a major commercial crop until the widespread use of Whitney's invention. It would not be until the 1820s that cotton began to rise in importance. Cotton would quickly become a major

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12. Joyce E. Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760-1815," *The Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 2 (1991): 177.
13. Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760-1815," 181.

crop throughout the South, and by 1860, slaves produced two billion pounds of cotton every year.

Despite this growing reliance on slave labor, the cruelty of the slavery system would never lessen as the masters would take every measure to ensure their slaves' subservience. Whippings in front of the other slaves to ensure they understood their place was a standard method of punishment. This would not always apply to the master's "favorite" slave woman, who, in some cases, would act as his mistress and had a more significant standing with the master than other slaves. In some cases, other slaves would be punished while the "favorite" was not harmed. One such case happened in the former slave John Andrew Jackson's recollection of his time enslaved. In it, he states that his mother was given ninety lashes for fighting with the master's "favorite."[14]

The spread of slavery in South Carolina was not unusual, as many of the initial planters of the colony came from the plantation economies of the West Indies. The diversity of the use of slaves in the Colony came from the diverse crops they would grow. The constant instability within the early Colony, coupled with the resentment and migrations of the local Native American tribes, led to the rise and dissolution of the Native slave trade. The introduction of rice offered the first significant push towards using slaves from Africa as the primary workforce. The cotton boom in the 19th century allowed for the continuation and even expansion of slavery throughout the Southern states. Slavery quickly became crucial in the government's actions and would begin to influence its every action.

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14. John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 15.

Independent Slaves

The typical image held by the public when discussing slavery is the image of slaves working on the plantation. The situation was far more complex, as slaves were used for practically every aspect of the economy. While many plantations existed in the southern states, slavery also existed in the northern states but primarily in cities. This section of slavery is often overlooked but was instrumental in creating the Black slaveholder class. Even in the plantation-dominated southern states urban slavery was a part of every city. Slaves in urban settings in both the North and south experienced the horrors and challenges of slavery differently than their more rural counterparts. Urban slavery, close to a cosmopolitan free populace, led to the largest percentage of Freedmen in South Carolina and would be one of the essential pathways towards Black slave-ownership.

In the cities, slaves worked as a mix of laborers and house slaves. As part of their tasks, these urban slaves took care of all functions in the home of their master, including cleaning, cooking, and caring for the master's children. In addition to this, slaves were expected to work outside of the house, such as tending to any garden that was owned or going to town or the country as part of errands the master required for the day.[15] One of the most interesting aspects of this relationship was the view held by White citizens of the work slaves did. Even many of the poorest of White citizens viewed the work of the slaves as beneath them, with J.D.B. De Bow stating in his 1852 book, *The Industrial Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States, Vol. 1,* that:

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15. Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1967), 28-29.

The poor white man will endure the evils of pinching poverty, rather than engage in servile labor under the existing state of things, even were employment offered him, which is not general. The white female is not wanted at service, and if she were, she would, however humble in the scale of society, consider such service as a degree of degradation to which she could not condescend; and she has, therefore, no resource, but to suffer the pangs of want and wretchedness.[16]

Despite the idea of the White citizens viewing the work that Black slaves did as beneath them, they could not escape the working Blacks in the city. While in the city, Black slaves were utilized in every aspect of the economy. Slaves were used for everything from construction to buying from the market. Richard C. Wade describes in his book, *Slavery in the Cities*, an article from the *New Orleans Bee* in 1835, which states:

"Almost the whole of the purchasing and selling of edible articles for domestic consumption [is] transacted by colored persons" … "Our Butchers are negros; our fishmongers negros, our vendors of vegetables, fruits, and flowers are all negros," … "the only purchasers the frequent the market are negros; and generally slaves."[17]

This wide variety of tasks that urban slaves were given was not different from their rural counterparts, but unlike the rural slaves, the urban slaves were more often subject to a system of exchange known as the "hiring-out system." As part of this system, masters would sell the work of their slaves to other Whites for varying lengths of time. This system's main idea was to reallocate labor where needed and keep the slaves busy when work was light at their master's home. This practice was utilized in different forms in cities and the rural areas. In rural areas, slaves were often hired out to other plantations

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16. J.D.B. De Bow, *The Industrial Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States,* vol. 1, (New Orleans: The Office of De Bow's review, 1852-53), 241.
17. *New Orleans Bee*, October 13, 1835: 2, quoted in Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 29.

and local shops. In the cities, slaves could be hired out to work in factories or as house servants, often for a single year. This method did not fully encompass the needs of the urban labor requirement, and this was primarily due to the much shorter nature of some jobs, such as road work and construction. To account for this, the cities in South Carolina and the southern states developed work badges that owners could buy from the municipality for their slaves.[18]

These badges permitted the assigned slave to work daily or even hourly positions so long as the master could reach a deal with the hiring party. Due to the loose nature of this system, the local governments which offered the badges developed methods to ensure the behavior of the slaves as well as the quality of the slave that was being hired. To confirm that the behavior of the slave was good, the local governments set restrictions on where the transfer of the slave could be performed as well as how long the slave could work each day. Some cities even limited the wage level that a slave could be hired out to, limiting the jobs that slaves could work. These restrictions were implemented to certify that slaves would be less likely to escape while they were away from their master. Another limitation put in place was an expensive fee for each badge. This was done to ensure that the slaves were not poor workers or old. Sometimes, this fee could reach as high as $10 for a good slave. According to a quote in Richard C. Wade's book *Slavery in the Cities*, from the *Charleston Courier*, in 1849, the revenue from this fee totaled nearly $14,000 in Charleston alone.[19]

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18. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 38-39.
19. *Charleston Courier*, August 31, 1849, quoted in Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities,* 41.

This method of control extended not just to Black slaves but anyone involved with the hire-on system. Any White who attempted to hire slaves illegally would be fined twice the price of the badge plus costs for each day the slave worked for them. Slaves could be punished for working without having a badge or even requesting more pay than was legally allowed. These offenses were punished by whipping and a fine, depending on the circumstances. The masters of the slaves could also receive punishment for breaking the law. If a White person counterfeited a work badge, they would be forced to forfeit it and be charged $50 for each offense.[20]

By the end of the Antebellum period, the effects of slavery in cities had altered to the point where the restrictions on slaves could no longer adequately control their actions. In his book, *South and North: Or, Impressions Received During a Trip to Cuba and the South*, John S.C. Abbott remarks that slavery in the city was unsustainable. The reasoning he gives for this is the cosmopolitan nature of the major cities in the south. The nature of the cities changed the slaves as they gained ideas of human rights from interacting with the free people with whom they would work. Abbot explicitly points out the slaves noticing that their free counterparts receive pay and have the freedom to come and go as they please.[21] These realizations were in stark contrast to their own circumstances of servitude. Despite this, many slaves would find the city to their liking and, on occasions, would run away if they were sold to a plantation by their masters. This love for the city comes from the greater freedom they had as slaves were able to interact with the free

20. *Digest of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston from the Year 1783 to July 1818: To which are Annexed, Extracts from the Acts of the Legislature which Relate to the City of Charleston* (Charleston: Archibald E. Miller, 1818), 187-189.
21. John S.C. Abbott, *South and North: Or, Impressions Received During a Trip to Cuba and the South* (New York: Abbey & Abbot, 1860), 112-113.

population somewhat openly when not under their master's gaze. This was helped by the increase in free Black people in the cities. These freedmen were a growing population in the cities as in 1820, Charleston had a population of free Blacks of 1,475, but by 1860, that population had risen to over three thousand.[22]

Slavery in the cities offered a unique experience from its plantation counterparts. The domestic nature of the urban slave roles allowed for different opportunities and struggles, such as running shops and factory work. The "hire-on" system provided more freedom for the slaves when they were away from their masters. This system also allowed for the cultivation of specific skills and greater understanding of their position and those around them. This influence allowed for a minor breakdown in the system of slavery in the cities and led to a more significant portion of free Blacks than in rural areas. These independent slaves would become the major pool from which the free Black community would grow its ranks, as shown in the next section.

Pathways to Freedom

As the 19th century progressed, several changes began within the US, particularly in the southern states. One of the most significant changes was the growth of the free Black community. Several factors led to the growth of the free Black population, including runaways from the South, the growth of the US, and most importantly, the end of slavery in the northern states. This accounts for much of the growth of free Blacks in the US but does not within the southern states. As stated previously, the number of free Blacks within the city of Charleston nearly doubled over the course of the Antebellum

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22. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 248.

period from 1832-1860. The cause for the increase in free Blacks primarily comes from the manumissions by slaveowners. The reasons for these manumissions ranged from familial ties and wills to the slave outright buying their freedom and even through outstanding deeds. Many of these former slaves freed in these ways would become slaveowners themselves.

Slavery as a system depended on numbers to maintain its position of importance. Following the end of the international slave trade in 1808, the number of slaves could no longer be grown through importation. This raises the question of why slaves would be freed by their masters under any circumstance. Despite this need to maintain the population of slaves, manumissions were relatively common. One of the biggest reasons for private manumission was the age of the slave. Often times slave owners would grant freedom to slaves deemed too old to work or poorly behaved. This seems to have been familiar enough that the state legislature passed an act in 1800 in response which outlawed private emancipation and detailed how the new methods of emancipation should be undertaken:

> Whenever any person or persons shall intend to emancipate or set free his, her or their slave or slaves, he, she or they shall signify such intention to some justice of the quorum, who is hereby authorized and required thereupon to summon to meet, at a convenient time in place, five indifferent freeholders living in the neighborhood of the person or persons so intending to emancipate or set free his, her or their said slave or slaves… and shall answer to them, upon oath, all such questions as they shall ask concerning the character of said slave or slaves, and his, her or their ability to gain a livelihood in an honest way.[23]

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23. David J. McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: A. S. Johnston), 7:442-443.

This 1800 act aimed to control and end the manumission of old or infirm slaves. Despite this, there were still many ways a slave could be freed by their master. One of the most significant ways for a slave to be freed came from close, often familial, ties between the slave and their owner. This fact was pointed out in John Duncan's article, "Slave Emancipation in Colonial South Carolina," in which he states that one-third of recorded colonial manumissions were Mulatto children. In contrast, three-fourths of the adult manumissions were women.[24] Through his research, he concludes that the extra-marital relations between masters and their female slaves led to many masters granting freedom to their mistresses and children as a form of service. This is directly shown with the emancipation of Rebecca Thorne and her son by their master John S. Thorne in 1811. Once freed, Rebecca remained with her former owner as his common-law wife, and they would have six children together. Rebecca would even inherit John's estate following his death.[25]

In the postrevolutionary period, many slaves were freed by their masters due to the ideas that the American Revolutionary brought. Some, like Sarah Chapman, would free their slaves and provide them with plots of land to sustain themselves. Larry Kroger attributes this in his book, *Black Slaveowners*, as guilt felt by the owners during this period.[26] Despite this, the revolutionary fervor did not last, as many slaves were forced to buy their freedom from their masters. This method was not typical for the manumission

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24. John D. Duncan, "Slave Emancipation in Colonial South Carolina," *American Chronicle, A Magazine of History*, I (1972): 66, Quoted in Larry Koger, *Black Slaveowners* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1985), 32.
25. Record of Wills vol. 36 1818-1826, Charleston County, (The Department of Archives & History, Columbia South Carolina), 1034.
26. Larry Koger, *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1985), 33-34.

of slaves in rural areas but was still rather significant within the cities. This method of manumission was made possible through the "hiring-out system," as in many cases, the slaves hired would be paid a small sum for their work. This was particularly true with slaves who acted as artisans. These slaves received skills that they could use to earn money for their masters and themselves. This was the case with William "April" Ellison. His master hired out Ellison to apprentice at a gin maker in 1802. Ellison would apprentice with the gin maker for 14 years, and through his apprenticeship, Ellison was able to save up money and purchase his freedom in 1816.[27]

In some special cases, slaves would be freed by their masters for loyal and dedicated service. This manumission type was far rarer than the methods of familial manumission or buying one's freedom but still held its place in how slaves could be freed. The most common form of manumission was through the master granting freedom within their will. Probably the most famous instance of this happening is George Washington freeing his slave William Lee stating in his will,

> …And to my Mulatto man William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom; or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment) to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so: In either case however, I allow him an annuity of thirty dollars during his natural life…& this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.[28]

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27. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 11-15.
28. George Washington, *The Last Will and Testament of George Washington and Schedule of his Property, to which is appended the Last Will and Testament of Martha Washington*, Fourth Edition, edited by Dr. John C. Fitzpatrick (Mount Vernon, Virginia: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1972), 4.

Freedom as repayment for service and loyalty during the Revolutionary War was common. Despite the outlaw on slaves bearing arms, the nature of the war allowed the lines on what slaves could do in the army to be blurred. Slaves took on different roles, from servicing the officers to performing in pseudo-military roles. Both actions took place in South Carolina alone, and both were rewarded with freedom. In the case of the servicing role, Mose Irvine was hired out to be the personal servant of General Francis Marion. During the war, Mose was captured by the British but escaped and returned to his master who freed him after the war as a reward for his loyalty.[29] Even in military roles, slaves could be rewarded for their actions, as the slave Antigua was tasked to procure information from behind the British lines. For completing this task and other dangerous tasks during the war, Antigua was awarded his freedom by the state assembly along with his wife and children.[30] These exceptional services and acts allowed a rare but desired way for a slave to be freed.

These pathways towards freedom were unfortunately not permanent. The act of 1800 declared that manumissions must be done before a court of magistrates, severely limiting the chances of a slave to be freed. This act required the slaves to be thoroughly questioned and examined on their character to ensure that they were capable of supporting themselves and were of upstanding character. Following this act, the free Black community's growth rate shrank by almost half.[31] Even this restriction did not last long, as in 1820, the state assembly once again placed a limit on the manumission of slaves. This new act declared that private manumissions were now illegal and that all

29. John Livingston Bradley, "Slave Manumissions in South Carolina, 1820-1860" (M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1964), 56.
30. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 33.
31. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 34.

future ones would have to be decreed by the assembly.[32] This new law almost entirely ended manumissions in the state. In 1822, the assembly accepted only six of the twenty-two requests. This was primarily due to the opinions of the legislators, who believed that the number of free Blacks was already too high in the state.[33] This was even more devastating to the free Blacks who purchased their family, as the process for approval was already difficult for White owners. The committee entirely rejected free Black slaveowners that submitted petitions with none of the petitions sent by Black slaveowners being accepted.[34]

The ability to free one's slaves opened many opportunities for slaves to become free legally in the state. Many were able to take advantage of this and were rewarded with their freedom. The struggles of those who were attempting to become free represents their desire to escape the slavery that they were a part of but without the desire to leave the area in which they lived totally. The reasons for their freedom are varied and showcase the complex relationship between master and slave. With the rise of the Black community came backlash from the state government as many viewed the free Black community as a threat to their power. To preserve their power, the legislature took steps to limit the ability of slaveowners to free slaves. This affected everyone involved in the system and outside it in one form or another and demonstrated the state government's desire to preserve the subservience of Blacks. As will be viewed in the next section, this feeling was not always the opinion of those who lived around and among them.

Relations of Free Blacks and Average Whites

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32. McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 7:459.
33. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 53.
34. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 57.

Once they had achieved their freedom, newly freed Blacks entered a new form of oppression. The world of freedom for Blacks offered more life options than their enslaved counterparts. For one, free Blacks had more powers under the legal system, including the right to marriage and the ability to freely earn money and own property. Despite these added benefits, free Blacks struggled with their new position and had to contend with the feelings and whims of the free White populace and government. The experiences of free Blacks and their relationship with the White populace and government were often a necessary and vital aspect of becoming a slaveowner.

The position of free Blacks in southern society was often tenuous and dangerous for those who occupied it. On the one hand, free Blacks were allowed more freedom than slaves were. On the other hand, free Blacks did not have the same security that slaves had and were often viewed with suspicion. One of the most significant advantages that free Blacks held was the ability to marry and own property. This was particularly important as it offered some relief from the pressures of the White community by giving them a private area away from the eyes of Whites.[35] Even after gaining or buying their freedom, free Blacks were still subject to the opinions and feelings of their White counterparts. This in-between of both the benefits of freedom but inferiority to the White populace was summed up by U.S. Attorney General Hugh S. Legaré, who stated that Blacks were neither citizens nor aliens, but they enjoy the rights of denizens universally.[36] This sense of confusion in regard to their position was even greater for those of mixed blood. These

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35. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 249.
36. Benjamin F. Wall, eds., *Official Opinions of the Attorneys General of the United States; Advising the President and Heads of Departments in relation to Their Official Duties* (Washington: Robert Farnham, 1852), 4:147-48.

Mulattos were forced into an even more precarious position due to the failure of the law to properly determine at what point someone was Black, White, or Mulatto. This confusion was even written into the law as section 8 of the *Negro Law of South Carolina* states, "no specific rule, as to the quantity of negro blood which will compel a Jury to find one to be a mulatto, has ever been adopted." This opinion was left up to individual cases and was often decided by a jury who could decide by how they looked or the content of their blood.[37]

The method of blood was not the only method that was given to determine a person's status with mixed blood. Justice William Harper concluded in 1835 that, "the condition… is not to be determined solely by… visible mixture… but by reputation… and it may be… proper, that a man of worth… should have the rank of a White man, while a vagabond of the same degree of blood should be confined to the inferior caste."[38] This opinion was shared by the other justices and was used several times throughout the 1800s. One such example was carried out in 1843 when Elias Williams Garden was awarded the privileges of a White citizen by the city of Charleston. This was granted to Garden after his good character and respect for the law were backed up by the White citizens of Charleston.[39]

The position of a Mulatto earning the privileges of Whites was not a total conversion of position, however, as the individuals who earned this would still be counted as Mulatto in census records. This status still gave many benefits to those who

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37. John Belton O'Neal, *The Negro Law of South Carolina* (Columbia: John G. Bowman, 1848), 6.
38 Marina Wikramanayake, *A World in Shadow: The Free Black in Antebellum South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 14.
39. *Elias Williams Garden: Certificate of His Being Entitled to the Privilege of a Free White Citizen* (1843), in *Miscellaneous Records,* vol. 6A, 1843-1847 (1858), 88.

earned it as these benefits included an increase in freedoms as well as an end to the state

capitation tax that free Blacks had to pay. This tax was levied against able-bodied free

Black adults and was set at a fixed amount for each Tax Act.[40] As a free Black, they were

already entitled to benefits that slaves did not receive, such as the right to own property

and marry, but they were also permitted to serve in the militia in secondary roles. Those

who were able to earn the title as a White person were given further freedoms such as the

right to full measures of justice and even the ability to hold seats in the legislature.[41]

The upstanding nature of a free Black was often the deciding characteristic of

how they were treated by the White community when their skin shade was too dark to

pass as White. This was not a new occurrence as this seems to have been the attitude of

the White class during the Colonial period. This feeling only truly extended to those who

knew of the individual in question and their character. Those who did not know the

Mulatto's character were often quick to demean them on the basis of skin color. One of

the best examples of this comes from Gideon Gibson Jr. Gibson was the son of a Mulatto

planter who immigrated to South Carolina from Virginia in 1731. Throughout his life,

Gibson was able to earn the rights of a White man due to his character and leadership role

in the Regulator movement in 1765. Gideon was highly respected by most people who

knew of him but not everyone accepted his status as a White man. This was most evident

when a state legislator attacked Gideon's character and demanded that his status as a

White man be revoked. Gideon's character was good enough that people willingly came

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40. O'Neal, *The Negro Law of South Carolina*, 14.
41. Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, eds., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, vol. 2, *Cases From the Courts of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee,* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1929), 269.

to his defense, including Charleston political leader and future Founding Father Henry Laurens.[42]

This respect for the lawful free Black community was seen in every southern state as those with good character were able to earn the respect of their White counterparts, however this was still not the majority opinion of the time. Many saw the free Black populace as a burden on society with many citing laziness and crime as qualifying reasons for their anger. This belief was summed up by the *New Orleans Bee* which stated, "the absolute idleness, the thriftlessness, the laziness, the dishonesty, the drunkenness, the proneness to vagrancy, and the vice of the negro when free from all the restraints of servitude."[43] Many people viewed free Blacks with suspicion and would often harass them as a result. This harassment stems from several reasons such as, by law, all Blacks were slaves until they could prove otherwise. This was even set before the creation of the state with the Act of 1740 declaring the ruling.[44] Even those who were still enslaved but lived away from their masters suffered from the distrust of the free Black community. Those who worked off of their master's property could be harassed and accused of crimes even as small as saying the wrong name of whom they were owned by.[45] In 1822, the state legislature passed a law that tied free Blacks to the White community. This new law required all free Blacks to be placed under the guardianship of an upstanding White

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42. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 12-13.
43. *New Orleans Bee* (April 16, 1858), quoted in Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1967), 251.
44. O'Neal, *The Negro Law of South Carolina*, 5.
45. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54.

person. This was to ensure that the actions and behaviors of the free Black were watched over by the White community.[46]

This mix of both trust and suspicion towards the free Black community showcases the complex relationship of the day. The majority of free Blacks were disliked by most Whites simply for their skin color and all that it entailed. If the free Black could adequately show their own morality and respect for the law, then they would be seen favorably by those around them even to the point of becoming White themselves. This respect often propelled free Blacks to higher positions and allowed them to live their lives on a more equal footing with their White counterparts. This respect and the positive view from their counterparts was the final step to becoming a slaveowner as a Black person.

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46. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 98.

Chapter 2: Money and Family

Beyond the ability to earn their freedom, the most unique feature of the Black slaveowning class is the reasons they joined the system to begin with. While the idea that there were Black slaveowners is surprising to many non-history focused individuals, the reasons for their ownership are no less surprising. Despite the struggles they may have experienced during their time in slavery all of these individuals would decide to reenter the system as the masters. There are several reasons for this choice which can be compacted into three main reasons: for profit, by inheritance, and to save their family. Each of these reasons gives insight into how these individuals used the slavery system for their own benefit. Even with these insights and a feel of how these Black slaveowners used the slavery system to their advantage, new challenges would arise. Keeping their family free once they bought them was a particularly difficult challenge. These different reasons show just how divided the free Black community was on the slavery system. With slaves being owned by free Blacks in every County in the state and nearly every profession, discovering these reasons gives a new perspective to the narrative of slavery which has been little explored.

Slavery on the Basis of Profit

Black slaveowning is already a strange occurrence, but it becomes even more so when looking into the reasons for Black people to own slaves. By far the most surprising reason for free Blacks to own slaves was due to their own economic advancement. The idea of free Blacks owning slaves seems to stand in contrast with the conclusion one would normally come to when hearing of Black slaveownership. Many free Blacks would own their family to free them from their White owners, however a large number of free Mulattos would purchase slaves for purely economic gain. These Black slaveowners offer a unique perspective on slavery that the free Black community had in South Carolina. With many of these same future slaveowners coming from slavery themselves, it is a wonder why they chose to take part in the system. The reasons for joining the slavery system for profit, their decision to continue or expand their holdings, and how they treated their slaves offer a unique view into the slavery system and how it impacted their lives and South Carolina.

Once they had earned their freedom, newly freed Blacks struggled to make a living. Those who were trained in a trade or artisan skill had more opportunities to earn a living than those with no unique skill set. Those with skills were often still able to find business after becoming free, becoming productive members of their community. This was due to a constant need for artisan work required by planters and others in the area. These artisans still struggled to advance monetarily with several problems facing them. Many newly freed Blacks had little to their name, the statute of 1800 required that all freed slaves must be able to properly support themselves so as to not become a burden on the state. Despite this and their training, free Blacks would struggle with competition from Whites as well as hired-out slaves. Once freed, many slaves would begin their own

businesses if the money was available. These would be started in either the person's home or at a separate location that was either paid for or rented by the free Black individual or a benefactor. Most of this would take place in larger cities where the free Black population was higher, and more business could be conducted. One such example was Sally Seymore, a free Black woman in Charleston who was freed by her master, Thomas Martin in 1795. Following her manumission, Sally used her skills as a baker to open a shop in Charleston.[47] Despite most free Blacks moving to the cities to work, some remained in the rural areas for their businesses. In one such case, William Ellison operated as a mechanic servicing cotton gins at local plantations from his home in Stateburg. Ellison would continue to do this until purchasing a shop of his own and begin manufacturing his own cotton gins in 1822.[48]

For many future Black slaveowners, the advancement and need of their businesses was the primary driver for purchasing slaves. Free Black artisans and planters were forced to compete with Whites in their line of work. This often led to an inability to make a profit, forcing many Blacks into poverty and possibly back into slavery. To combat this, newly freed Blacks would often move to other towns and set up shops there. This would help with competition such as when William Ellison earned his freedom, he moved from his hometown of Winnsboro, SC, to Stateburg, some 40 miles away. This move was done to escape his background of slavery and avoid direct competition with his former mentor William McCreight.[49]

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47. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 38.
48. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 25.
49. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 16.

Artisans were not the only group of free Blacks that would eventually own slaves. While it was far easier for artisans to begin their businesses and acquire slaves, many Black planters of every size were able to afford slaves and use them to increase the output of their farms. In many ways, the acquisition of slaves by these Black planters mirrored their White counterparts. Much like their White counterparts, the poor Black planters acted as subsistence farmers with help only from what immediate family they had. Farmers, such as Jesse Hamilton of Chester County, relied only on their spouse and adult children for help on their farms. These subsistence farmers made up the majority of free Black farmers. A sizable portion of Black farmers were able to grow enough crops to purchase some hired help or slaves. Wade Sanders was a Black farmer from Newberry County who owned a small farm with his wife and children. In 1849, Sanders and his family were able to pull in a crop of cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes totaling $537. Following this successful year, Sanders was able to use the extra money to purchase seven slaves to help on the farm. By 1859, the Sanders' farm was producing nearly 50% more crops due to the impact of the slaves purchased.[50] In much the same way that White plantations were operated, the large cotton-growing plantations owned by Black planters grew a mix of food and cotton. In addition to the similarities to the crops grown, the rich Black planters had the ability to purchase cotton gins to speed up their production. On the plantation of William Ellison, the 330-acre property operated 5 gins by 1860.[51]

Following the purchase of slaves, many Black slaveowners would continue to purchase more slaves in an effort to expand their profitability. As with their White

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50. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Schedule I,* Newberry District, South Carolina, 275. *Schedule II,* 297. *Schedule IV,* 43-44.
51. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 132; Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 80.

counterparts, purchasing more slaves increased both their prestige and their profits. In the

case of Anthony Weston, he used his wife's status as a free woman of color to help him

purchase slaves for his millwright business. As a slave who was "freed" after 1820 by his

master, Anthony was not legally free but operated as a nominally free slave. In the ten

years between 1835 and 45, the Westons would purchase over 20 slaves to expand their

millwright business. In the 40 years that Anthony Weston had been freed, his purchase of

slaves had increased his property value to over $48,000 by 1860.[52] Even those with no

connections to farming or artisan skills were able to use slaves to their benefit. Richard

Edward DeReef and his brother Joseph of Charleston were real estate and lumber mill

owners. Throughout their lives, the DeReefs were able to steadily expand these

businesses and purchased a number of slaves, both domestic and manual. Richard DeReef

alone would own up to 40 slaves by the start of the Civil War to help with his business.[53]

Even with the knowledge of Black people owning slaves for profit, a new

question comes to mind: how did these Black slaveowners treat their slaves and was it

any different than their White counterparts? The general view of slavery is one of

oppression and extreme cruelty from the masters that the slaves served. This knowledge

comes from the experiences of the slaves who survived and those who escaped. Slavery

on the plantations was harsh for the slaves, everything from food to shelter was

inadequate. Even beyond that, masters would instill the belief in White supremacy into

their slaves.[54] In addition to the living conditions and mental treatment of the slaves,

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52. Thomas Y. Simons, *List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1860* (Charleston, SC: Evans & Cogswell, 1861), 332.

53. "Colored Slave Owners: One Family of Mixed Blood in Charleston Owned Forty Negro Servants," *New York Times*, May 26, 1907, 6.

54. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Live in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 158-161.

physical punishment was common. This punishment was done for a multitude of reasons including slow working or attempting to escape. A slave named John Andrew Jackson recounts being beaten by his master for being too weak to operate a plow as a youth.[55]

The topic of the treatment of slaves by Black slaveowners is contentious among historians. Despite the amount of evidence on both sides, there is almost no way to determine which side has more merit. On one side sits the scholarship of Carter G. Woodson who makes the claim of benevolence. Woodson argues that the vast majority of Black slaveowners purchased family or those they wanted to free from slavery.[56] On the opposing side, scholars such as R. Halliburton Jr. and Larry Koger support an idea that a large portion of the Black masters were exploitative. Scholars such as these accuse Woodson of creating a myth through his generalization of data. Woodson's use of the flawed data from the 1830 census and his state-by-state representation led to his critics pointing out Woodson's failure to properly analyze the data while still believing that his data allows others to come to their own conclusion.[57]

As Black familial slaveowners will be looked at in a separate section, an example will be provided only showing the side of the exploitative Black master. In this way, William Ellison is again in the spotlight for his ownership and treatment of his slaves. Ellison, even amongst his White peers, was seen as a particularly cruel master. Due to his constant effort and drive towards wealth and prestige, Ellison was a tight-fisted man who

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55. John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (1862), in *I Belong to South Carolina: South Carolina Slave Narratives,* ed. Susanna Ashton (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 101.
56. Carter Godwin Woodson, Introduction to *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830: Together with Absentee Ownership of Slaves in the United States in 1830* (Washington D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1924), V-VI.
57. David L. Lightner and Alexander M. Ragan, "Were African American Slaveholders Benevolent or Exploitative? A Quantitative Approach," *The Journal of Southern History* 71, No. 3 (2005): 545,547.

ensured his family's ability to maintain their standing. As part of this, Ellison paid keen attention to the opinions of others and took steps to ensure that he had a good reputation. One of Ellison's biggest fears was being associated as Black. To change this, it is said that Ellison made efforts to prove that he was not soft on slaves due to his skin color. In much the same way as White planters, Ellison had no qualms about separating the family of his slaves as he routinely sold off his female slaves. This seems to have been due to his belief that the female slaves had little value in either his shop or plantation.[58] One striking difference on Black plantations such as Ellison's were the slaves themselves. On plantations throughout the south, the slaves would have a general sprinkling of mixed-race slaves. On the Ellison plantation and many other Black owned plantations, the slaves would be almost entirely Black. This was primarily done to disassociate the masters from their slaves by the basis of skin color.[59]

Slavery for profit is an interesting stance for Free Blacks to have taken, especially when acknowledging their own past as slaves. Free Blacks would purchase and expand their slaveholdings as their desires to gain material wealth expanded. These same Blacks attempted to emulate their White counterparts as a way to ensure their acceptance in the community. From real estate to farming, there were free Blacks who used slaves to improve their situations, often using the same methods and reasonings as their White counterparts.

Slavery From Inheritance

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58. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 135-136.
59. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 134.

Owning slaves for profit or family was not the only option, however, as there exists a gray zone between the two sides which is slavery from inheritance. Slavery from inheritance is an interesting aspect of Black slaveowning as it does not entirely fall under either argument discussed in the previous section. Those who inherited slaves had the option of freeing their slaves or using them for profit. This is a unique position that others who owned slaves could not easily do. Those who owned family sought only to free them while those who wished to earn a profit from their slaves rarely freed them outside of wills. Black slaveowners who gained slaves through inheritance are important when looking at Black slaveowning due to how they gained their slaves, what they decided to do with their slaves, and how they interacted with the free Black and White communities.

Due to the complex relationship between masters and some of their female slaves, the presence of Mulatto offspring as slaves was a common sight. As was stated in a previous section, many White masters would free their mistresses and children. In addition to simply freeing the slave relatives, some slave masters would provide or buy slaves for the newly freed relatives to help them prosper. One such case was George Galphin, a merchant from Silver Bluff. Galphin used his will to ensure that his children were emancipated and provided a portion of his estate. In addition to the monetary value of the estate, Galphin set aside money for the purchase of four slaves from the next ship to come to Charleston for his mulatto daughter Rachel.[60]

Like Galphin, many White masters who provided slaves to those they freed recognized them as their legitimate heirs. This view was particularly important in the

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60. Willie Pauline Young, eds., *Abstracts of Old Ninety-Six and Abbeville District Wills and Bonds* (Abbeville, S.C.: Greenville Printing Company, 1950), 128-129.

plantation systems of South Carolina as it would immediately elevate the Mulatto to parts of the elite class. In many cases even before their passing, White fathers would elevate their Mulatto children above the slaves and make them the legitimate heirs. A White planter, named Michael Fowler, had children who were all Mulatto by a woman named Sibb. In their youth, these children were raised around slavery but were propped up as masters and mistresses of the house by their father. When Michael Fowler died in 1810, his estate, including all of his slaves, was divided among all his children.[61]

It was not always just the children who were able to inherit slaves. Often times the slaves would be inherited by the wife of the deceased. This was not a rare phenomenon either as according to research done by Larry Koger, the majority of Black women who owned slaves received them through inheritance from relatives or their spouse.[62] This was so widespread in fact that Koger found the majority of Black slaveowning in urban areas were women.[63]

Upon receiving their inheritance, the new masters would decide how they should use their new slaves. By and large, the majority of those who earned their slaves from inheritance continued to use their slaves for profit. For both those who grew up as slaves and those who lived in their parents' homes, the use of slaves allowed them to live a quality life. This was especially true with the planter class of the free Black population. The Collins family of St. Thomas & St. Dennis Parish stemmed from White planter Robert Collins. Robert's children were all Mulatto and received the entirety of his rice

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61. Record of Wills vol. 31 1807-1818, Charleston County, (The Department of Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina) 62-63.
62. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 24.
63. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 23.

plantation upon his death. The children of Robert ran the plantation together and using slaves, became the top of colored rice planters. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Collins family expanded and continued their slaveowning. The second son of Robert, Elias, greatly expanded his slaveholdings by combining his own slaves with his wife's, so that by his 20th anniversary he had increased his slaves to 34. At the time of his death, his estate was split between his two legal heirs. Margaret Mitchell was Elias' only child born in matrimony and so she was awarded the majority of his estate. By the time of her mother's death, Margaret owned 37 slaves between the two estates.[64]

One of the interesting aspects of those who gained their slaves through inheritance is that many of these owners would often sell their slaves before or after they died. This began increasing in frequency in the 1840s as the result of falling profits and increasing anti-slavery sentiments within the Black community. Prior to this, many Black slaveowners would transfer their slaves to their family upon their death. When the husband of Sarah Conner died, she sold all of his slaves instead of using them for more profits. This shows a sign of slavery being a means to an end and not something they agreed with. The selling of all of their slaves during, or at the end of their life, showcases the desire to establish a stable foundation for their family. It also suggests that if these individuals had a secure financial base to begin with, then they might not have partaken in the slavery system from the start. There were some who even refused to participate in the slavery system when receiving their inheritance. The Mulatto children of Henry Glencamp, from St. Stephen's Parish, had their father's 18 slaves divided between them.

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64. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 119-121.

Of the five heirs of the estate, only two of them continued to use slaves while the rest

sold them off or hired them out.[65]

As with every part of the free Black society, those who received their slaves

through inheritance were subject to the opinions of the White community. In much the

way that their method of obtaining slaves was a gray zone, so too was their relationship

with the free Black and White communities. On one hand, those who used their slaves for

money and saw them as a permanent investment attempted to ally with the ruling White

class or the Mulatto elite. This can be most plainly seen with the children of Michael

Fowler. Once those children received their inheritance, they began siding with the White

upper class. Using their slaves for personal gain, none of the slaves owned by Michael's

children were freed, with some of the children owning slaves up until the time of

emancipation.[66] Those who immediately sold off their slaves opted to group with

wherever their social class put them and refused to use slaves to change that. Those who

were wealthy continued to interact with the wealthy Black class, but would probably not

interact with upper-class Whites like slave-owning Blacks could.

Free Blacks who were able to gain slaves through their relationship with existing

slaveowners is an interesting aspect of Black slaveowning that is often overlooked. This

is primarily due to historians focusing on the reasons for continuing to own slaves as

opposed to how they received them. The number of women who gained slaves through

this method, and their use of the slaves they received, shows that the idea of slavery for

personal gain was not a single-sex idea and both would use it as justification for their

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65. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 138.
66. *Eighth Census of the United States*, *Schedule I*, Charleston City, South Carolina, 403.

actions. Despite not receiving their slaves by their own initiative, many of these new slaveowners continued to use their slaves as opposed to freeing them or simply hiring them out to allow them to live as nominally free slaves. Even as a more abolitionist attitude began to spread among these owners, they usually refused to free their slaves until the time of their death highlighting their desire to improve their lives first and foremost.

<div align="center">Kinship Slavery</div>

Even after earning or gaining their freedom, slavery often retained its hold on those who escaped. This was primarily due to members of the former slave's family remaining in captivity. Gaining the freedom of their family and friends became the primary goal for those who were now free. This was not always a guaranteed outcome as everything depended on the whims of the White master who owned their family. Even after buying their family, many struggled as they now acted as the legal owner of their own family. This method of slave-owning is one of the more understandable methods that existed as it was done to ensure their own family's freedom. The methods of gaining the freedom of their family, as well as the efforts made to ensure their freedom, even when freedom was unable to be achieved legally, showcases the difficulties of free Blacks to separate themselves from the system of slavery.

Owning of family as a path to freedom was a common practice. Even after a slave earned their freedom, they would often struggle to ensure that others could join them. This aspect of freedom for Blacks is one that began in the early days of slavery and continued until its end. In every form and method imaginable, the effort to free family was undertaken by free Blacks. In many cases, however, the only way to gain the

freedom of family was through buying them outright. In the same way that freedom could be earned before 1820, money was the pivotal factor in gaining freedom. Many of the beginning years of freedom for an individual was spent working to earn the money necessary to purchase family. Adding to this struggle was the fact that often, only one member of a family would be free. This added to the difficulty of freeing family as what little money earned then had to be split between savings for the purchase as well as for the individual to live on. Such was the struggle of one Peter Elwig of Charleston. Peter was the slave of James Richardson before earning his freedom sometime in the early years of the 19th century. For more than ten years afterwards, Peter used his skills as a carpenter to earn money to free his wife and three sons who remained enslaved by Richardson. By 1819, Peter had only been able to secure the freedom of his wife, who he manumitted on August 14, 1819.[67] Peter's children remained in captivity until 1823 when Peter and his wife were able to purchase them. The purchasing of his wife in 1819 ensured that she could be legally freed by Peter and any other children they had would also be free. Peter's children on the other hand, were unable to be freed and thus became the legal property of their father. This creates a strange situation for the family as well as new problems. For one, Peter's sons were still slaves and could be punished like one if they were suspected of committing any crimes. This would be a fear of all those who were purchased by family after the Act of 1820 ended the ability to personally free slaves.

In some cases, slaves who were hired out were able to form relationships with free Blacks who then helped them gain their freedom. A slave of James Hunter, from

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67. *Miscellaneous Records vol. 6E* 1847-1853 (Secretary of State), 596.

Laurens County S.C., named Dick was able to work and earn his own money through an agreement with his master. Unfortunately for Dick, his master died before Dick could fully pay for his freedom and Dick was sold as part of the estate to a man named Nugent. During his time enslaved by Nugent, Dick married a free Black woman who in turn bought Dick from his master on an installment plan. Dick's struggles did not end there as Nugent died just after the Civil War began. Even after paying several hundred dollars for the purchase, Nugent's family refused to accept the agreement and once again enslaved Dick. Dick's wife was forced to again purchase him with the help of a White man by the name of Clark Templeton. Dick and his family repaid Templeton the money he gave to help them. This was probably done out of gratitude however, as even after the Civil War ended, Dick continued to pay off the debt even though he did not need to.[68]

Both examples above showcase a spouse buying a spouse. In the case of Peter Elwig, this was even done while their children remained enslaved. The purchasing of one's spouse first was often the best and most logical thing to do. This was especially true before 1820 as it was still likely they could be freed. There were several benefits to freeing the spouse first including extra income for the family. Free women offered the majority of the benefits thanks to the laws of South Carolina as the status of enslavement followed the mother to the children. This means that if a woman was freed, all future children would be considered free as opposed to slaves of the former master. It was primarily due to this reason that many chose to free their spouse before their children.[69]

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68. Calvin D. Wilson, "Negros Who Owned Slaves," *Popular Science Monthly* 81 (November 1912): 487-488.
69. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 48.

Even if the free Black individual was unable to achieve their goal of buying their children, many would attempt to establish trusts to purchase them. This involved using a White trustee to purchase the slave in the name of the free Black. This was often a dangerous move as it relied entirely on the inclinations of the trustee to carry out the trust. In one case Peter Parlar added a stipulation in his will that requested his house and lot be sold with the proceeds used to purchase his daughter Hannah from her owner. Soon after his death in 1833, the executors of his will began the process to free his daughter fulfilling his final wish. Some, like John Porte, were not so lucky. When Porte died in 1834, he had two children who were still enslaved. To gain their freedom, Porte stipulated in his will that all of his possessions would be given to his two friends, John Francis and John Lee, to be sold with the proceeds from the sale used to free Porte's children. After nine years' time, the trust had still not been fulfilled and the owner of Porte's children took the trustees to court in order to fulfill the will.[70]

Such occurrences were fairly commonplace as Whites would take advantage of gullible or powerless free Blacks and use the money or the slaves purchased for their own gain rather than follow the stipulations of the trust. In some cases, the White benefactor would use the money to purchase the enslaved family and then turn and use the bill of sale to claim full ownership. A similar occurrence happened with Lamb Stevens of St. James & Goose Creek Parish. Stevens was a Black planter who owned his granddaughter and her child. Stevens hired them out to a man named Christian Alfs. His granddaughter was accused of stealing and as a way to guarantee her safety, Stevens was convinced by Alfs to sign a false bill of sale for both girls. This agreement was made with the belief

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70. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 49.

that once the trial was over, Stevens' granddaughter and her child would be returned to him and the fake bill destroyed. Alfs betrayed Stevens however and used the bill to claim total ownership of the girls. Stevens was forced to take Alfs to court to win back his family.[71]

As was stated in a previous section, the reasons for ownership of slaves by Blacks is split between kinship and monetary gains. The position of kinship as a reason for ownership goes as far back as Carter G. Woodson and his book on Black slaveowners in 1830. This viewpoint is an important one as it shows the efforts of those wanting to free their family from the struggles of slavery. This viewpoint is shared by many historians such as Ira Berlin who states in his book *Slaves Without Masters*, "most free Negro slaveholders were truly benevolent despots, owning only their families and friends to prevent their enslavement or forcible deportation."[72] This idea is one that could extend even further as many free Blacks who owned their family refused to report them when the census was collected. Both those who owned slaves as family and those who owned them for profit took part in not announcing their slaves to the census. One such example was Peter Desverneys, who will be talked about in more detail in the next chapter. Desverneys did not report his slave, Laviana Cole Sanders, despite her having been owned by him for over ten years at the point when the census was taken.[73]

The ability to purchase family gave hope to many free Blacks that someday they could ensure their family's escape from slavery. Unfortunately for these same Blacks, the

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71. Master of Equity, Bills of Complaint 1851, Record Number 75 (Charleston County).
72. Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 273.
73. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 19.

road to freedom for their family was often difficult and filled with obstacles ranging from money to distrustful Whites. Many of those who attempted to free their children were never able to achieve their goals, but even after death used legal methods to allow their family some form of freedom. When cheated by those who pretended to help, many were able to use the law to achieve their goal. After purchasing their family, many free Blacks were now faced with the question of what to do with them. This question grew more important as the state government took measures that restricted the ability to free slaves legally.

Struggles With Owning Family

Even after successfully purchasing their family, those who were bought still remained slaves by law, creating a strange situation for those involved. On one hand their family could not be exploited by unfair masters, but on the other hand, could be harshly punished should they be accused of anything. Managing how to keep their family safe as well as how to ensure they had as much freedom as possible was the main struggle for families in this situation. This balancing act was made more complicated with the changing laws of the state. The position of these nominal slaves and the struggles to ensure their freedom offer a unique look into what owning family was to the people involved.

In many situations, the bond of family was not disrupted by the slavery system, and those who were enslaved were allowed to live as free persons in the same way as their relatives. These de-facto free slaves are difficult to find in records due to how they acted and labeled themselves. As a show of their desire to be free, many of these de-facto free Blacks claimed themselves to be free in all situations. Many of those who were

actually enslaved by family, claimed to be free and paid the free Black capitation tax. In

addition to paying the capitation tax, many de-facto free Blacks would report themselves

as free to the tax collectors and census workers. As an example, Peter Elwig's son Joseph

was purchased by his father in 1823. When Joseph came of age, his father passed on his

skills as a carpenter and by the time Joseph was 26, he had opened his own carpenter

shop and married a free Black woman named Rebecca. Joseph and his wife paid the

capitation tax and were viewed by those around him as a free man even as late as 1864.[74]

The ability to act as a free person was not without its risks. Depending on the time

that the person began to act as a free person, different laws decided the status of the

individual. Prior to the Act of 1800, simple proof of the agreement between the master

and slave ending was enough to ensure the freedom of the slave. As the 19th century

progressed, new changes and limitations in the law ensured that fewer and fewer slaves

could act freely. Following the Act of 1800, which began the limitations on

manumissions, de-facto free Blacks still had the ability to act freely and gain their

freedom. This was due to a stipulation that stated, if an enslaved Black person was

without an owner and acting as a freeman for at least 20 years then it was assumed that

all steps to gain freedom legally were done. The Act of 1820 transferring the right of

emancipation to the state greatly hindered and threatened those who were de-facto free.

With the Act of 1820, any slave who was without a master was still considered a slave

regardless of how long they acted free.[75]

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74. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 69-70.
75. O'Neall, *The Negro Law of South Carolina*, 10-11.

With this change, free Blacks who owned family now had to worry about their family being punished for acting as a free Black. De-facto free Blacks could always be punished for acting free, but after 1820 they could no longer claim freedom based on how long they had been without a master. In addition to the risk of being re-enslaved for acting as free, de-facto Blacks were now considered property and could be seized if their owner died while owing debts. This was a major fear for many free Blacks who now faced the possibility of all of their hard work to free their family being undone. To avoid this problem, free Blacks were often forced to sell their owned family to ensure their safety. In much the same way as freeing their family, free Blacks would form trusts with friends or family to guarantee that their family would remain free. James Hopton Marsh was forced to employ this method. Marsh was able to buy his mother from Robert Howard in 1821, however only two years later, Marsh was struggling with debts and to guarantee his mother's freedom, Marsh established a trust with Robert Howard. As part of the trust, Howard was not able to control Marsh's mother in any way and in return, Abigail Hopton, Marsh's mother, was to pay Howard a fee of $1 every year.[76]

This even extended to those who used slaves for profit. William Ellison, a wealthy planter and cotton gin maker from Stateburg was able to free his family before the Act of 1820. Ellison freed his wife and daughter Eliza Ann but not his daughter Maria, who was by another woman. Ellison would eventually buy Maria in 1830 but was unable to free her. To ensure her freedom, and possibly remove any connection to slavery in his family, Ellison established a trust with Col. William McCreight, his old Mentor. As part of the trust, McCreight was not allowed to restrict Maria in any way or use her for

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76. *Miscellaneous Records of the Secretary of State's Office*, Book ZZZZ, 1823-25, 258-259.

any work during or after Ellison's life. Also, in the case of Ellison's death, McCreight was to secure her emancipation. Despite ensuring her de-facto freedom, Ellison took measures to distance himself from her. At the time of his death in 1861, Ellison's will divided his land and property among his three sons and daughter but not Maria. Maria was given only $466.55 as a part of the will which does not seem to have been delivered in person and was instead mailed to her.[77] This was not uncharacteristic for Ellison as his entire rise to wealth revolved around his reputation in the White community and an enslaved daughter may have jeopardized that.

The state took measures to end the practice of trusts in 1841. The Act of 1841 removed the ability to establish trusts which granted freedom to a slave. This Act declared all trusts, both on death and through nominal sales, to be null and void.[78] This Act was further upheld by the courts in cases such as W.W. Belcher vs. Hugh McKelvey where the court ruled that any gift of slaves suspected of violating the Act of 1841 was void and the slaves could be seized upon discovery.[79] Despite the restrictions of the law, many continued to form secret trusts and act as free people while enslaved.

Despite being able to save their family from slavery, many free Blacks were now forced to overcome the struggles with retaining that same freedom. The changes in the law often hindered the ability of nominal slaves more than it restricted the ability to free slaves. The acts of 1820 and 1841 took direct measures to ensure that nominal slaves would not be allowed to continue. They did this by declaring that freedom could only be

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77. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 101-106.
78. O'Neall, *The Negro Law of South Carolina*, 11-12.
79. J.S.G. Richardson, eds., *Reports of Cases in Equity Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals and the Court of Errors of South Carolina* (Columbia: Johnston, 1858), 10: 465.

granted by the state and then again by ending the ability to establish trusts to keep a slave free. Despite these growing restrictions, free Blacks continued to take steps to ensure the ability of their enslaved family to act freely. From establishing trusts in their will to selling family to trusted friends, the continuing freedom of their family was one of the most important goals in their lives.

Chapter 3: Blood and Chains Over Skin

Even with the differences for why they owned slaves, these Black slaveowners did have a place in the system. For both those who owned slaves for profits and those who owned their family, their ownership helped maintain the slavery system. In the case of those who owned slaves for profits, they often chose to fully side with the White ruling class to solidify their own position. These individuals often took steps to associate with the White elite, viewing themselves as an extension of this class. In doing so, the Black slaveowners were able to carve out a place for themselves within the ruling class. With this position, many of the Black slaveowners used their mixed blood and lighter complexion to begin separating themselves from the rest of free Black society. In the same way that Whites would form social clubs during the Jim Crow era, these Mulatto elite would form social clubs like the Brown Fellowship Society to separate from other free Blacks. These social clubs would offer services to its members while refusing to allow entry to those who were seen as too dark skinned. With these social clubs and their relationships to the White elite, the Black slaveowners acted as a secondary line of defense for the slavery system even to the point of betraying those who attempted to end it.

Relations Between Black Slaveholders and the White Community

Those who owned slaves were not totally free from their skin color. Though many almost certainly would have wished to be, the skin color of Black slaveowners remained a separation from White owners. Those who owned slaves for economic gain were often the most likely to attempt to join with the White community. Even for these individuals, however, there were still barriers between the races, which rarely broke. The relationships that formed between Black slaveowners and the White community often defined and formed the actions of the Black slaveowners. Both friendly and hostile actions resulted from this relationship for a number of reasons. The relationship between Black slaveowners and the White community was never set in stone, however both the positive and negative aspects of the relationship created a stark difference between the official stance of the state and the feelings of the people.

As with the typical free Black, the relationship between Black slaveowners and the White community was based on the actions of the Black person. Those who had a good reputation were treated kindly while those who had a bad reputation were treated harshly. For Black slaveowners, this was more extreme. Those who owned slaves not only had to ensure the quality of their morals but also their treatment of the slaves they owned. Those who treated their slaves too kindly could be stigmatized as sympathetic. This could be especially dangerous for those who wished to merge with and associate with the White planter elite. To rectify this, many would attempt to mimic the White versions of slavery. This included the mimicking of the cruelty associated with the White plantation system, forcing their slaves to work long hours year round.[80] On the other

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80. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 107.

hand, Black slaveowners could not treat their slaves too harshly. The years leading up to the Civil War had changed the nature of master-slave relationship. From the initial ownership and property relationship that defined the slave system, a belief of paternalism had begun to take hold. This was a rather vague term that could extend from providing basic care to making sure families remained together.[81] This fine line could lead to many punishments for the Black slaveowner who did not follow this including mobs or having their property confiscated.

Punishment was not a guarantee however, as the primary factor was still their personal morality. To make this an easier process, many free Blacks who owned slaves took to assimilating into the culture of the White planter class. For those who were able to assimilate, they enjoyed the benefits of trust from the White community. This trust would even go so far as White people publicly supporting the continuing ownership of slaves by Black people. One such case of this comes from the *Charleston Courier* which stated that a Black person owning slaves gave them a stake in the institution and therefore it is their interest to uphold the system.[82] This respectability and trust often came with hard work, and a good balancing effort.

The good name and wealth of an individual was able to keep their freedom and the freedom of their family. On the other side, having too much wealth could cause jealousy among their White neighbors. One example of such was William Ellison, for whom this balance was critical for his life. Ellison used his businesses to steadily increase his wealth, preserving his freedom. As a difference from White elites, Ellison, despite

81. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 134.
82. *Charleston Courier*, December 8, 1835.

being incredibly wealthy, refused to splurge or decorate himself as a grand person. Ellison made efforts to paint his family as wealthy and respectable but refused to seem as though he was wealthier or better than his White counterparts. This restraint was deliberate and presented some manner of subjugation despite his wealth being greater than 90 percent of the population of Sumpter.[83] This even extended to how Ellison labeled himself. Despite owning a very successful and large plantation, Ellison labeled himself as his original trade of gin maker. This was a common practice among the Black elite as it showed that the person was wealthy but only in the service of Whites. Had Ellison labeled himself as a planter, he may have caused others to see him as breaking from his role.[84]

For some Black slaveowners, the acceptance they received from the community gave them their greatest reward. In some cases, wealthy Blacks were offered the chance to join White churches in the lower pews. For some churches, having Black people in the building was nothing new as many allowed free Blacks and some slaves to sit in the upper sections. For some special Black slaveowners, after proving their character, their family would be allowed to sit in the pews on the bottom floor with the White members. Black slaveowners such as William Ellison were allowed to sit in the back of the church but on the same level as the wealthy Whites. For many this was one of the goals upon achieving wealth from their slaves.[85]

Despite these efforts to display an upstanding nature, many of Black slaveowners were subject to abuse from the White community. As with the normal free Black

83. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 128.
84. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 123.
85. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 143.

population, the White person having knowledge of the Black individual was needed. Without this knowledge, simple misunderstandings and perceived slights could lead to the Black person being attacked and, in some cases, kidnapped and sold into slavery. Black slaveowners were generally free from suffering this fate due to their standing, and in some cases, their wealth.

In business, the free Black had to take extra measures to succeed as often, the business of the free Black was not the only one of its kind in the area. In some cases, shops owned by other Blacks or even Whites would be present in the same area. In order to compete and even receive business, Black owners and planters would have to be more accommodating than their White counterparts. This accommodation came in many forms, including selling their goods at a lower price than market value or even being forced to sell items on credit. Selling on credit was especially punishing for free Blacks as they often found it difficult to collect when the time came. Even with his upstanding status, William Ellison struggled to collect from those he did business with. In a letter to his oldest son Henry, William Ellison describes the attempt of his grandson John W. Buckner to collect the debts owed to him. In it, Ellison states that John was unable to collect from anyone and received excuses that ranged from not having the money due to poor crops to not being able to find people to certify the payments.[86] This struggle to receive payment sometimes went even further, as in order to receive the payments, taking the person to court was necessary. This took time and energy that many did not have as struggles with going to court did not guarantee they would receive the money owed to them.

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86. William Ellison to Henry Ellison, March 26,1857, Ellison Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

Despite all of the struggles of Black slaveowners, the feelings of the White community were often the most important aspect that needed to be addressed. Black slaveowners took various steps to improve the opinions of the White people around them. Despite these attempts, many Black slaveowners suffered due to the feelings of Whites. Luckily for most Black slaveowners, many of their White peers would accept them in most situations and even go so far as to defend their name in rare cases. Some of these Blacks could even gain the privilege to fully join the White churches. Despite this push to join in with the White community, many Black slaveowners used their heritage as a Mulatto to create their own distinct class which they could use to retain their power.

Brown Elite and the Brown Fellowship Society

As discussed previously, the vast majority of Black slaveowners were Mulattos. Many of these Mulattos would form the apex of free Black society in South Carolina. These Mulatto elites distanced themselves from the Black masses both in monetary forms but also racially. These wealthy Mulattos used their power and money to create a brand-new class across the south that was similar to, but distinct from, both Black and White communities. This new community used its wealth and power as a way to guarantee its own survival through its members, relationships, and the societies they formed.

Mulattos were nothing new in the state as there were often products of the relationships between masters and their slaves. These relationships could be forced or consensual with some female slaves being chosen specifically for their worth as "company." This relationship led to many Mulattos to come about with some earning or receiving their freedom from their masters in their lifetime. This use of slaves for sexual relationships was common within the White community but was fairly absent from those

who were Mulatto slaveowners. In some rare cases, such as Elias Collins, a Mulatto planter from Georgetown County, the use of his slaves for sexual exploitation was a normal occurrence. Collins would use his power as a master to sexually exploit his slaves, having two children; Jonathan and Elizabeth, with his mistress.[87]

For many of these owners, however, the blackness of one's skin had a direct connection to slavery, and many felt it would be a dilution of their blood to have children with a Black slave. Mixed owners such as William Ellison refused to purchase any slave with visible mixed blood, opting instead to use those with darker skin for their business. William Ellison for example, was never reported to own a slave that could be labeled as a Mulatto. According to the census taken in 1850 and 1860, none of Ellison's 50-60 slaves were listed as Mulatto.[88]

Even within the free Black community, Mulatto elites took measures to distance themselves. As was stated earlier, many of those who sought profits closely mimicked the White elites. This included many of the White superiority ideas held by the White community. For those who were Mulattos, the ability to pass as White was a gift from the heavens. Many of these light-skinned Mulattos would openly express a physical superiority to Blacks following the same words of the White class. When the Liberian colonization effort was in full swing, many of the wealthy Mulattos expressed disdain for the idea of living in Africa. Some, such as William Kellogg, a Mulatto planter from North Carolina, even wrote to the American Colonization Society requesting a separate location

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87. Master of Equity, Bills of Complaint 1847, Record Number 52 (Charleston County), "Wills of Elias Collins."
88. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 136.

for Mulattos due to their closer relationship to the White community.[89] Using skin color and wealth, the Mulatto elite ensured the remainder of the Black community stayed at arms distance, often spending on extravagant items to further the distance.[90]

As part of this attempt to distance themselves away from darker skinned Blacks, many of these Mulatto owners began intertwining their families. All interactions between the families of the Mulatto elite were done with consideration for the families' statuses. Marriage in particular held great importance for these elite families. For the marriages to be arranged, special criteria had to be met. The cultural status, economic position, and presence of free, mixed- blood were all factors that had to be met for marriage. With these requirements, many of the elite Black families would become intertwined. The Holman and Collins families were both rice planters and would marry together several times in the first half of the nineteenth century.[91] The marriages between important families allowed not just for retaining the power held but for expanding it. The mixing of families ensured that new profits could be made using the opposing family for support. People such as William Ellison used the families his children married into as new clients and the spouses as new employees for his businesses. This consideration of family status extended to every important aspect of the person's life. Sponsors of baptisms and executors of wills all had to meet a strict standard of familial prestige.[92]

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89. William Kellogg to William McLain, 6 October 1852, Letters Received, American Colonization Society Papers, Library of Congress.
90. Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 279.
91. Loren Schweninger, "Prosperous Blacks in the South, 1790-1880," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (1990): 37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2162953.
92. Wikramanayake, *A World in Shadow*, 81.

An additional aspect of the Mulatto relationship was the creation of private Mulatto societies. The creation of these societies provided a location where the elite could interact with other elites as well as jointly provide services that would normally be difficult to obtain. The greatest among these was the Brown Fellowship Society, a private Mulatto society in Charleston. Founded in 1790 by several prominent mulattos in the city, the society was initially created to provide a burial ground for the members and their families.[93] These societies were able to provide a valuable service for Blacks especially when city officials targeted Black churches. In addition to the initial reasons for the society's creation, many of these societies would go on to create additional help programs for its members. The Brown Fellowship Society and Humane Brotherhood Society, both had programs that focused on the welfare and education of the children, widows, and orphans of their members.[94]

These societies were not open to all however as certain limits were placed on the number of those wishing to enter. The Brown Fellowship Society was especially strict in its standards. The society allowed a maximum of 50 members at its inception but would later expand far beyond that. To become a member, a person had to be over 21, was required to be free, and had to be recommended by at least two members.[95] An additional, often unspoken rule was the requirement of skin color. In many of the Mulatto led societies, membership was only given to those who were lighter skinned while those who were darker skinned or were completely of African heritage were shunned. In response to this, many free Blacks would form their own societies which accepted Black members of

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93. *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society* (Charleston, SC: J. B. Nixon, 1844), 14.
94. Wikramanayake, *A World in Shadow*, 81.
95. *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society*, 4,19.

all skin tones. The Humane Brotherhood was formed with this in mind and provided

many of the same services for its members as the Fellowship society including a

graveyard and sick pay. The difference was that the Brotherhood was cheaper to become

a member and was more open to the plight of the Black population.[96] These two

organizations allowed a way for the Black and Mulatto communities to help those in need

in a way that normally would not be available to Black people.

Despite the struggles with pleasing the White class, many Mulattos elite decided

to assimilate with the White culture. These same Mulattos began taking the language of

dominance used by the White class to retain their own sense of superiority The status and

wealth of an individual, as well as their skin color, was used as the basis for all deals

made by the Mulatto elite. The intricate web of marriages and social agreements ensured

that the wealth and power remained in the hands of a few families. The societies created

by these same individuals focused on upholding their image of superiority to the Black

populace by providing advantages to its members such as education and burial locations.

This Mulatto class carved out a distinct cultural position by utilizing the rhetoric of White

dominance with the subservience associated with the Black population to form an almost

sidekick second class populace which helped uphold the ruling system of slavery.

Peter Desverneys and the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy

Not all of those in the free Black community were as accepting of slavery as the

White community and Black elite. The harsh realities of slave life heavily influenced and

sometimes radicalized those who experienced it both slave and free. Slave rebellions

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96. Robert L. Harris Jr, "Charleston's Free Afro-American Elite: The Brown Fellowship Society and the Humane Brotherhood," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82, no. 4 (October 1981): 297-298.

were not a new occurrence by the 1800s. Several large-scale revolts had taken place over the colonial period including the Chesapeake rebellion of 1730 in Virginia and the New York slave revolt of 1712. These large-scale slave revolts were a constant fear of the White community who believed that if one were to succeed, then all of the European settlements could fall. South Carolina was no different in this regard; it had its own share of slave rebellions, most notably the Stono rebellion in 1739. The Denmark Vesey conspiracy, though not carried out, showcases the fear of slave uprisings that was felt by the southern elite. The conspiracy impacted not just the slaves and White elites, but its effects spread to the free Black community and Mulatto elite. How the conspiracy was undertaken and its betrayal by Peter Desverneys were a critical moment for the Black slaveowners which would have impacted their position in the state.

Denmark Vesey and his planned uprising was not a blip in time but rather a buildup of pressure against both the free and enslaved Black communities. These pressures led to festering unrest just under the surface of the state. Many would flee or migrate from the state due to both the struggling economy, as well as the problematic race relations. Such an uprising, like Vesey's was planned to be, was a constant fear of the White citizens of the state who were far outnumbered by their slaves. It was in this position that Vesey was able to amass such a large rebellion.

Though not born in the US, Vesey would spend much of his childhood within the state. Enslaved at an early age, Vesey would spend over 20 years of his life in bonds under different masters. Known to others as Telemaque, Vesey's birth location is not fully known but his first known location was at St. Thomas Island where he and almost 400 others were shipped to Saint-Domingue to be sold. While on the ship, the crew and

its captain, Joseph Vesey, found the young boy to be appealing and began using him as a pet for the length of the voyage. Upon arriving at the colony, Telemaque was sold with the other slaves but was soon returned to the ship upon its next arrival in the colony due to epileptic fits. Telemaque would remain the slave of Joseph Vesey for the next 20 years, eventually settling in Charleston. [97]

Despite being considered a valued slave, Telemaque was not blind to the pains of slavery or the success of revolution. The Haitian revolution and its effects were felt even among the slaves of Charleston. Following the success of the revolution, many slaves attempted to kill their masters and escape to freedom. One such attempt was made by a slave of Mary Clodner and Joseph Vesey named Molly. Molly attempted to rob her masters and set fire to the house to cover up the theft.[98] This attempt not only gave Telemaque his first showcase of rebellion but also his first showing of punishment. Molly was soon captured after the fire and was hanged for the crime. A newspaper of the time declared that the crime had been committed due to Molly being promised to flee to New York with a slave named Renaud.[99] Telemaque would not remain a slave for long after this. Only three years later, at the end of 1799, Telemaque won a lottery and was able to purchase his own freedom for $600.

By the time of his death, Telemaque, now known as Denmark Vesey, would own several thousand dollars' worth of property due to his work as a carpenter. Due to his respectable attitude and work, Vesey was seen as a leader of the free Black community

97. Douglas Egerton and Robert Paquette, eds., *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2021), 2.
98. Douglas Egerton and Robert Paquette, eds., *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 5.
99. *Charleston City Gazette & Daily Advertiser* (September 7, 1796), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 8-9.

around him. As a result, Vesey was chosen to become one of the central figures of the new African Church of Charleston. This church became the focal point of Vesey's planned rebellion.[100] The African Church of Charleston was formed in 1818 and declared itself to be under the African Methodist Episcopal Church which was founded in Philadelphia two years prior. The split from the White Methodist church began after Morris Brown and Henry Drayton, two free Black people from Charleston, travelled to Philadelphia and became ordained in the AME Church. This act was in response to the White ministers attempting to assert authority over the Black congregants. [101]

This separation was not the end to the struggles for Vesey or the congregation. The separation from the White religious community drew attention and ire from others. The free Black community often struggled to find locations to serve as a burial ground. This struggle was no different as the new congregation's petition to the state government for a burial ground was rejected. The persecution extended past the need for a burial ground as both the state and city governments issued orders against the church. As one indirect example, the city issued an ordinance stating that people of color were forbidden from making clamorous noise including singing anywhere in the city.[102] The city went even further to the point of arresting 140 free Blacks and slaves including several members of the Black clergy.[103]

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100. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 38.
101. Douglas Egerton and Robert Paquette, eds., *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 18.
102. "Charleston City Ordinance," (June 11, 1818), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 27.
103. *Charleston Southern Patriot and Commercial Advisor* (June 8, 1818), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 26.

This struggle against the church was not the only reason Vesey's resentment would begin to grow as the situation for both free Blacks and slaves began to worsen in his eyes. The city continued to place restrictions on how free Blacks could operate including banning the ability to gamble or play cards.[104] For the slaves, the situation was worse as, despite it being illegal for a White to kill a slave, the punishment was usually only a fine and often times the perpetrator went unpunished.[105] It was this combined situation of crackdown on the church and the daily struggles of Blacks around the country which led Denmark Vesey to formulate his plan.

Vesey's plot was never a guaranteed success. Due to the complicated aspect of Charleston and the race relations in the city, Vesey was forced to find recruits from both within and outside the city. The close nature of the populace to each other meant the recruiters had to be incredibly careful with who they associated with. Many of the slaves in the city, while not happy to be enslaved, often accepted their position as subservient and acted as such. This was something that particularly upset Vesey as he is reported to have chastised slaves who bowed to White people.[106] This was not the case for everyone however many more still desired to be free. This was especially true for those in the rural areas around Charleston. These rural slaves were fully aware of the cruelty of slavery and Vesey and his lieutenants were easily able to recruit them. By the time of the arrests, it

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104. "Charleston City Ordinance," (August 16, 1819), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 48.
105. *New England Galaxy & Masonic Magazine* (March 3, 1820), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 50.
106. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 161-162.

was claimed that Vesey had recruited over 4,000 rural slaves who would march on the city when the time came.[107]

Vesey often used his literary and oratory skills to convince those around him of his plan. Vesey's use of the Bible was especially impactful as he routinely used the books of Joshua and Zechariah for his message. Vesey would compare their struggles to those of the Israelites escaping their enslavement at the hands of Pharaoh. For those who had only recently arrived in the state or still clung to the old mysticism, Vesey and his lieutenants used the belief in sorcery and charms to offer protection to those who signed up. Vesey used his knowledge of current events to convince those he tried to recruit that Congress had already freed the slaves but that the masters in South Carolina had refused to obey the law.[108]

For their main goal, the group planned to strike at the city arsenal, seizing all of the available weapons and killing all those they encountered. As part of this attack, the group would then set fire to the city as they went. This would signal those in the rural areas to enter the city and secure it. This bold, if not simple, plan would use hundreds or even thousands of people showcasing the reach and charisma of Vesey's message. The last step of the plan is not fully known. What little information on the end goal of the plan was gained through the torture and interrogation from the trial and is probably not to be completely trusted. From what was gained however, the plan after taking the city was probably to then sail to Haiti using the ships in the harbor.[109]

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107. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 161.
108. Lionel Kennedy and Thomas Parker, "A Narrative of the Conspiracy and Intended Insurrection" (October, 1822), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 74-76.
109. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 39.

Several aspects of Vesey are interesting in comparison to the other free Blacks around him. For one, Vesey was not a poor man, Vesey's value of property was in the thousands of dollars. This wealth as well as his Mulatto heritage would put Vesey among the elite of the city. The main question is: why he did not ally himself with those in his social class? Vesey's situation was not that different from those that have been discussed as he was enslaved at an early age while also being a Mulatto. In addition to being enslaved, Vesey was a talented craftsman and was able to amass a large amount of wealth. While others in Vesey's position used their wealth to gain more influence and interact with the White community, Vesey chose to instead side with the Black masses.

This is most clearly showcased when comparing Vesey to William Ellison. The same year that Vesey was planning his uprising, Ellison was purchasing his shop. Despite both being Mulattos who were trained in a skill and enslaved, Ellison would go on to become a largescale slaveowner while Vesey chose to see slaves as people instead of property. This was seen as a strange position by those who knew him. Even the judge who sentenced him found it strange that someone as well off as Vesey would decide to rebel.[110] The difference between Vesey and Black slaveowners made them a target for the uprising as well. In Vesey's mind, the close relationship between the Black and White elite made all those who owned slaves, for profit or family, a threat to the uprising. Those who owned slaves and their close ties to the White community meant that even those who did not support the White class could still not side with a direct uprising due to the threat that such an action could bring to them and their family.[111]

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110. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 39-40.
111. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 164.

Even among the slave community, the idea of rebellion was not always popular. Many viewed the idea to be foolish due to the belief that even if it was started, the Whites would be able to suppress it. Others, both free and enslaved, wanted to focus on their own lives and not get wrapped up in the mess that an uprising would cause. This belief and uncertainty were the undoing of the entire plan. Peter Desverneys was a mulatto slave of Colonel John Cordes Prioleau at the time the uprising was being planned. Desverneys was reported as a loyal slave to his master and when he was approached by one of Vesey's recruiters, William Paul, Desverneys refused to join him. Desverneys would attempt to inform his master of the plot, but Prioleau was not in town at the time. When Prioleau returned, Desverneys informed him of the plot. With this knowledge, Prioleau reported it to the authorities which would eventually lead to the arrest of the first member of the plot. The authorities would go on further, with the help of another slave named George Wilson, to unravel and end the plot. For their loyalty, both Desverneys and Wilson were awarded their freedom by the state. In addition to their freedom, both were awarded a fund of $50 a year. William Penceel, a free Black man who convinced Desverneys to report the uprising, was awarded $1,000 and exemption of the Capitation tax.

Desverneys would go on to become a well-respected member of his community. He would not be separated by the Black community; the elite especially welcomed him into their ranks. Desverneys was even able to marry Sarah Cole, the daughter of Sally Seymore, the famous baker of Charleston who was mentioned earlier. This familial connection extended even to his sister-in-law who was Eliza Lee, the proprietor of the Eliza Seymore Lee house. These connections would lead Desverneys to purchase slaves

of his own. By 1840, he owned six slaves including a couple whose son he sold. Desverneys would go on to write in his will both of his wish to have his slaves sold for a good price as well as mentioning his discovery of the Vesey plot.[112] Even among the White community Desverneys was held in high regard. In 1857 Desverneys was able to petition the state government to increase his yearly payment from the government to $150 yearly.[113]

Denmark Vesey and his plot show how disunified the Black community was. The constant pressures from Whites on the Black community led to a spread of unrest that could be easily used by someone like Vesey who was charismatic and determined about his goals. The aspect of religion was a particularly sensitive subject when the White community pushed it. Despite these same pressures being applied to them, many of the free Black community, especially the slaveowners, refused to take part in any uprising for fear of what may happen to them. Even those already enslaved were hesitant to join and even betrayed their fellow slaves to save themselves. People such as William Ellison and Peter Desverneys served as an opposing side to Vesey due to their wish to increase their own situations rather than sacrificing themselves to possibly help others escape freedom.

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112. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 176-178.
113. "Petition of Peter Desverney (1857), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 639-640.

Chapter 4: War for White by Black

Despite the friendliness between Black and White slaveowners, the Antebellum period created difficulties for the free Black community. The fear caused by the Denmark Vesey conspiracy eroded the freedoms experienced by the free Blacks. Growing restrictions on the community rarely affected Black slaveowners due to their position, but the greater threat of the Civil War began to unravel the Black slaveowning class. With the coming Civil War, the Black elite was forced to come to terms with how secession would impact their lives. Many attempted to flee the state to ensure their safety. Others stayed, even professing their loyalty to the state and the Confederacy. Many of these same slaveowners would prove their loyalty through their actions. These individuals produced goods for the war effort and even purchased bonds with a similar level of enthusiasm as their White counterparts. It was with this enthusiasm that the Black slaveowners walked to their demise.

Growing Restrictions on the Free Black Community

The years following the Denmark Vesey plot were a period of great change for both the US and the free Black elite. The position of free Blacks in the state became increasingly tenuous as Whites made efforts to remove free Blacks from society, proposing bills that would return them to slavery by force. For free Blacks in the state,

especially the Black elite, the success of these bills would destroy their existing lives and revert them to slavery. Despite these attempts, many of those in the elite, both White and Black, took measures to guarantee the status of the Free Black community would not be fully destroyed.

The lives of Blacks in the state, free or enslaved, was never easy. The constant supervision of the White class hindered the ability of Black people to live their lives. As shown previously, these conditions and the ability for Black people to act independently relied entirely on the White leaders' perceptions. This reliance and complex nature it caused divided the state between those who wanted to limit free Blacks and those who wanted to maintain the status quo. Restrictions such as the capitation tax and racist tones always existed, however, following the Vesey plot, many within the state began pushing for stricter rules. Shortly after the end of the trial, the city placed a ban on the ownership of boats for Black people if they did not first obtain a license to do so.[114]

Similar limiting actions were taken to hinder where free Blacks could travel with the passing of an act in 1822. This act declared that any Black person who leaves the state would not be allowed entry again. This act was a reaction to an idea that the Vesey plot was so large only because of the membership of Blacks from outside of South Carolina.[115] In addition to this act, the government also passed a law requiring all free Blacks to acquire a White guardian. This law tied a Black person to a respectable White who would ensure their good behavior. Even Blacks who would enter the ports as part of a ship's crew were subject to restrictions. The state enacted the Negro Seaman Act at the

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114. "Negro Ordinance" (1822), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 466.
115. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 188.

end of 1822. Which required free Blacks serving on ships to be imprisoned for the

duration of their time in port. In addition to this, the expenses of the imprisonment were

to be paid by the captain of the ship. This act caused widespread outrage from both the

merchants of Charleston and the government of Great Britain who considered the

imprisonment of their citizens to be a violation of the Law of Nations.[116] The merchants

viewed it as a detriment to the commerce of the state, serving only to drive ships away.[117]

What is most surprising however, is that after these initial restrictions, the state

withheld from imposing more restrictions. While other southern states spent the 1830s

and 40s thoroughly restricting the status of their free Black communities, South Carolina

introduced only a single new act in that same span of time. By comparison, both Virginia

and Maryland enacted restrictions on the ability to trade and movement of free Blacks

with Virginia going so far as to outright ban the ability for free Blacks to own slaves.

Within South Carolina however, the state would only enact a single restriction which was

on the ability for free Blacks to maintain schools.[118]

In the 1850s however, this began to change, as the push by the White populace to

enslave or banish all of the free Blacks became too difficult to ignore. In 1850 the

governor of the state at the time, Whitemarsh Seabrook, stated that all free Blacks who

did not own slaves or real estate should be banished from the state. As the decade went

on, similar calls were made by members of the press and legislature. What made these

different from the usual calls to limit the rights of the free Blacks was that all of these

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116. Philip M. Hamer, "Great Britain, the United States, and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1822-1848," *The Journal of Southern History* 1, no. 1 (1935): 1-4.
117. "Charleston Merchants Protest the Negro Seaman Act" (1830), in *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Douglas Egerton, 657-661.
118. Wikramanayake, *A World in Shadow*, 165-168.

new petitions demanded the expulsion or total enslavement of all free Blacks in the state. All of this push stemmed from the panic that spread after John Brown's famous raid at Harpers Ferry. These movements spread fear among the free Black community leading to some, such as James D. Johnston, a Black slaveowner and tailor, to leave the state and immigrate to other areas such as Canada and Liberia.[119]

Despite this widescale push to end the free Black community, many came to their defense. Many people were completely content with the situation for one reason or another and, in some cases, the thought of punishing innocent Blacks due to the "guilty" ones seemed hypocritical. For others, the fear of losing the money these free Blacks possessed would hurt the state more than help.[120] One unique reasoning for many Whites to oppose this push was the partnership they had with the Black elite. The work undertaken by the elite to improve the opinions of Whites led to a surprisingly large number of supporters from all corners of the state. Even some newspapers spoke out against the proposed bills stating that they were harsh and unnecessary. This sympathy even extended to those in the legislature as many of the legislators were friends and business partners with Black slaveowners and thus would not allow the destruction of those who were beneficial to them. This attitude and belief that the Black slaveowners would support the institution of slavery is most plainly shown with both bills that were presented to enslave or banish were never voted on and shot down in committee.[121] The panic of the whole ordeal was not shared by everyone as many Black slaveowners believed nothing would be done to harm their position. This feeling is clearly shown in a

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119. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 188.
120. Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 375-376.
121. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 188- 189.

letter from James M. Johnston, son of James D. Johnston, to Henry Ellison, son of

William Ellison. In this letter, Johnston expresses his happiness about the defeat of the

bill and suggests that Henry read the response from one of the opponents of the bill, Col.

Memmingers. In addition to this, Johnston states that he never thought that the bill would

pass from the beginning.[122]

Despite the many attempts to destroy the free Black community, the state was

able to ensure that only limited actions were taken. Following the Vesey plot, a few acts

were put in place to limit the actions of the Black community. Even this push did not last

long and much of the Antebellum period was peaceful for the Black community in South

Carolina. When the slavery question could not be ignored, many in the White population

attempted to end the status of free Blacks through political means. However, the good

standing of the Black elite as well as others in the Black community ensured that

powerful Whites came to the defense of the Black community. As a result, these attempts

to suppress the Black community were defeated. The real threat, however, was not

coming from the efforts to enslave the free Blacks but instead, was coming from the

secessionist movement and the coming of the Civil War.

Slavery During the War

The beginning of the Civil War in 1861 set Black slaveowners on a course

towards destruction. Despite the start of the war, slavery was still able to continue in a

semi-normal manner. The war shifted the slave masters' focus and the result of their

work, but the goal of profits remained the driving force. The impact of the war's

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122. James D. Johnston to Henry Ellison, 23 December 1859, in *No Chariot Let Down*, ed. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 41.

beginning did not stop the slave system in South Carolina, slavery would gradually change with the course of the war. The war's impact on slavery dragged the slaveowners, Black and White, down towards their destruction.

The crisis in Charleston brought about great fear in the free Black community; many would flee the state in the time between South Carolina's secession and the battle at Fort Sumter. As the tensions in Charleston began to boil, many free Blacks successfully immigrated to places such as Haiti and the northern states. These individuals would sell all of their possessions and board ships to take them away from the city.[123] Many left the state due to the uncertainty of the war's impact on their status. The previous decade of attempts to enslave free Blacks did not present a comforting outlook for what the next years might bring. For those who remained in the state, they attempted to maintain their normal lives. For the slaveowners, this meant continuing the process of buying and selling slaves.

The newest aspect of slavery was the inclusion of the Confederate government. The new wartime economy required not just products but also the labor of slaves to build a variety of infrastructure for the war. The government used the existing hire-out system to acquire slaves. The changing needs caused many of the skilled slaves to have less work. As one of the cornerstones of slavery involved ensuring that slaves remained busy, this idleness led many to fear a mass escape or uprising. In response, the Confederate government seized and hired slaves to help support the war. These slaves were used to build infrastructure such as railways and roads. Slaves were also used to build fortifications and serve high ranking officers of the army. Even prior the battle of Fort

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123. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 290-291.

Sumter, slaves were used to build up the fortifications in the city.[124] These slaves and the work that they did increased the manpower of the army. This work would normally have been carried out by the White and Free Black population.

This use of slavery became more prevalent as problems began to show for the Confederacy. Slaves such as the Ellison's, who were machinists, were especially valuable. When the war began, many factories and local shops entered agreements to create a wide array of goods for the war effort. Owners of skilled slaves often hired out their slaves to these shops which provided a good income to the master while keeping their slaves busy. This was especially important for cotton gin makers such as the Ellisons as the production of cotton would continuously fall throughout the war.[125]

With the change in skilled slave work, the agricultural aspect of slavery also changed with the war. Prior to the war's outbreak, the major agricultural product of most slaveowners was cotton or rice. With the war's beginning, many of the slaveowners wanted to use the world's reliance on their cotton to gain the major European powers' help and possible entrance into the war. This plan caused many problems for the large plantation owners who now refused to sell their stores of cotton. Even those who chose not to follow this suffered, as the strengthening Union blockade prohibited any of the cotton to be exported. To make up for this loss, many plantation owners would begin planting foodstuffs to help support the war effort. Rather than cotton, the most important agricultural product became corn. This switch to growing food as well as the tightening

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124. David Detzer, *Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt inc., 2001) 309.
125. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 301-302.

blockade drained the availability of funds, resulting in the decline in available goods and money seen in the later years of the war.[126]

As the war progressed, and the fortunes of the Confederate army worsened, so too did the fortunes of the slave masters. The Black slave masters were always treated worse than their White counterparts. The government was able to seize their property if they did not provide enough for the war effort. As the war worsened, and entered into its final years, the Confederate army began raiding its own citizens. This involved seizing valuable property and anything else of use. This extended to the seizing of food and most importantly, livestock. Free Blacks and Black slaveowners were especially vulnerable. People such as Sarah Boag, a Black slaveowner in Charleston County, would see almost all of their livestock stolen over the course of the war. This theft only increased the food shortages that plagued the Confederacy by the end of the war.[127]

The problems with food were not the only struggle with slavery during the war. As the war worsened, many of the slaves learned of the deteriorating situation and began to fight more intensely for their freedom. Even early in the war, fear of revolts was heightened. This fear was so extensive that many free Blacks would be closely monitored by the state governments to ensure that no uprising could be undertaken.[128] As the Union armies advanced closer, the owners began losing all control over their slaves and in many cases, the slaves had already seized their freedom, with the arrival of the Union armies only making it official.[129]

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126. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 190.
127. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 191.
128. John F. Marszalek, ed., *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866* (Baton Rouge, 1997), 202.
129. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 311.

The breakdown of the slavery system was a slow but guaranteed process as the war progressed. The use of slaves to take over industrial work was hindered by the failure of industrialization in the south. On the agricultural scene, the sudden end of the cotton trade caused many problems for the planters rich and poor. The loss of cotton sales coupled with the need to switch to food production reduced the ability of the plantations to effectively make money or produce goods. As the problems on the battlefield grew worse, so did the situation at home. The lack of food led to starvation and attacks from soldiers while the advancing Union armies encouraged more and more slaves to refuse to obey. This total breakdown guaranteed all who were involved in the system suffered until the end of the war and beyond.

<div align="center">Support for the War by the Community</div>

The start of the Civil War formed a new challenge for the free Black community. The secession crisis and the start of the war could have destroyed the Black elite before the death of slavery became a reality. This dangerous situation forced the free Black community to choose a side. For some that meant leaving the state prior to the start of the war. For those who did not leave, they were forced to support the Confederacy. Many in the community did not view the Confederacy with worry and instead willingly opted to side with the new government. These individuals chose their lots for a variety of reasons from wanting safety to supporting slavery. This represents a unique and little talked about aspect of the Civil War due to the methods that the Black community supported the war.

From the onset of the war, the free Black population was in a dangerous position. Many in the White community, especially those in the news and positions of power, questioned the loyalty of the Black population. For these Whites, the free Black

population represented an internal avenue for the Union to destroy their way of life. It was this feeling that encouraged the attempt to pass bills to enslave the Black community in the year before the War's beginning.[130] The defeat of these bills and the support for the Black community previously described brought peace for the Black elite. Even with many viewing the Black population with suspicion, the Black elite had earned the trust of many of the White leaders. White leaders such as Christopher Gustavious Memminger, a politician and lawyer from Charleston County, expressed confidence in the support that the Black community would give.

This belief was affirmed by many of the free Black elite on the eve of the war. On January 10, 1861, a group of 23 Black elite from Charleston signed two memorials, one to Governor Pickens and the other to Columbia Mayor J. H. Boatwright. The message sent to Boatwright was signed by members of the Black elite such as Jacob Weston and Richard Holloway. The memorial to the Governor was signed by the DeReef brothers and Anthony Weston.[131] Within these memorials, the Black elite professed their loyalty and support to the state and the cause. In the message they state, "we are by birth citizens of South Carolina… In our veins flows the blood of the White race."[132]

Even those who held little social standing opted to volunteer their service to ensure the safety of their position. For these free Blacks who held no real connection to slavery and simply wished to survive, the war would be a difficult and uncomfortable time. For these Blacks, their support often came unwillingly and only to guarantee their

130. *Charleston Courier,* December 16, 1859.
131. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 293.
132. Memorial to J. H. Boatwright, January 10, 1861; Memorial to His Excellency Gov. Francis W. Pickens, January 10, 1861, Francis Wilkins Pickens Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

safety. Throughout the war, both slaves and free Blacks would volunteer to help construct

defensive structures in Charleston stating their reasons were, "to escape the lash of the

owner, and avoid being suspected of disloyalty."[133] As the war progressed, the situation

for these free Blacks worsened. While many were still offering their support for the war

effort, the news from the battlefield discouraged further actions to support the failing

government. This did not go unnoticed by many in the White community as an editorial

from the *Tri-Weakly Watchman* states:

> The free Negros of this state- What is their number, and why are they not pressed into
> service? The conscription forces White men into the army, and the law requires the
> planter to send his slaves to the coast; why then should the free Negro, the most idle and
> unprofitable member of the body politic, be excused from all service?... In Sumter
> District alone there are over thirty, liable for road duty, who are abundantly able to make
> the dirt and timber fly – why are they not pressed into service?[134]

For those who had wealth and standing, the war was much kinder. For them, the

experience of the war mimicked the White slaveowners. Many of these slaveowners

followed their White counterparts in switching from cotton to food production. Those

who owned stores oftentimes converted them from their main purpose into general stores

to help with the issues of supply the Confederacy faced. For those who operated

plantations, such as the Ellison brothers, the food they produced was sold to the

government for half the market price. In addition to the food produced, plantation owners

would often sell animals such as cattle and horses to the army and their neighbors when

requested.

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133. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 295.
134. *Tri- Weekly Watchman*, July 6, 1863.

The one aspect separating the Black slaveowners from their White counterparts was the lack of family serving in the military. The Confederacy held a strict policy of not allowing Blacks, free or enslaved, to be enlisted or volunteer into the military. This did not stop members of the Black elite from attempting to sign on. The sons of William Ellison, Henry and William III, attempted to join the army but were rejected.[135] Other states would eventually allow free Blacks to enlist in the military as part of state militias, but South Carolina never made a similar decision. Regardless, these Black troops only served in labor battalions. This was followed throughout the entire war with one exception. The grandson of William Ellison, John Buckner, was able to successfully enlist as a private in the 1st South Carolina Artillery. Not only was Buckner able to enlist but he was able to see some action as according to his military record, he was wounded on July 12, 1863, at Fort Wagner the day after the end of 1st Wagner. Buckner would continue to serve until 1864.[136] These privileges seem to have come from a mix of need for troops and the Ellison family's perfect reputation. Even if they could not join normally, many of the Black elite served in the defense of Charleston. Many of the Black denizens of Charleston formed a fire company which acted as the only fire company in the city during the Union bombardment. One of the members of the fire company and a member of the Brown Fellowship Society, James Holloway, stated proudly that the members of the Society saved Charleston from the fires from the Union bombardment.[137]

The reasons behind the support given by the Black community mimicked those of the White community. Those who had little involvement with slavery gave their support

135. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 190.
136. Confederate Military Records, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.
137. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 306-307.

hesitantly. The support they gave was done to protect themselves and their family rather than genuine loyalty. The Black elite and those who owned slaves for profit showed a greater sense of loyalty due to the close nature between them and their White counterparts. The support from the Black elite showcases how interconnected they were with the White elite. The relatively low numbers of Black elite who left prior to the war demonstrates their loyalty to the system that they were apart of even to the bitter end.

Chapter 5: After the Fall

With the end of the Confederacy came the end of the Black slaveowners. In every way, these former slaveowners suffered in the same way as their White counterparts. They lost most of their money, their farms and businesses were ruined, and they no longer had their slaves. For the Black slaveowners, they lost an even more important aspect of their pre-war identity, their Free status. Prior to the war, those who were free held a higher standing in the state. This was primarily due to the methods of manumission that were possible prior to the war. The methods for manumission may have been different but they all shared the requirement of the slave being of high moral character. This requirement gave the free Blacks a slightly positive reputation in the eyes of many important Whites. With the end of the war came the end of that status. This loss of status plunged the Black slaveowners into the masses and deprived them of the benefits previously enjoyed by their status. With this loss, plus the loss of their money and slaves, the Black slaveowners suffered the most from the end of the war. The Reconstruction era offered even more challenges to the Black former slaveowners. Regaining their lost wealth was a struggle many Black former slaveowners could not overcome and so faded into the Black masses. Those who did, could not hold onto their regained possessions for long as the end of Reconstruction and the rise of the Redeemers further eroded the position of the Black former slaveowners. This change post- Civil War is an essential point when researching Black slaveowners as the knowledge of what happened to them explains some of the struggles the African American community experienced during the Jim Crow era.

Damage to the Slaveholders

The end of the Civil War had a disastrous impact on almost the entirety of the south. The length of the war and the brutality with which it was fought devastated the south in every aspect. The population had been severely reduced from battles and disease with a large portion of the south's military age men dying in the conflict. Even those who did not fight in the war suffered the material and economic destruction that occurred in the last year of the war from both the Union and Confederate armies. The slaveowners and wealthy elites of South Carolina shared in the devastation as Sherman's army raided the plantations along their path. The death of slavery and the destruction of the war was not unique to the White population as many of the Black denizens suffered alongside them. This includes the damages suffered by the slaveowners of the state. The destruction experienced by the Black slaveowners was often greater than their White counterparts due to the suffering during the war and the racial tension that followed. The beginning of Reconstruction did little to alleviate the problems that the end of the war caused for these Black former slaveowners.

The ending years of the Civil War led to a rapidly decreasing quality of life for those in the south. The loss of territory and the tightening Union blockade led to shortages of everything from sugar to medicine. These shortages made it nearly impossible to make largescale profits during the war. No planter was able to make profits similar to their pre-war standards and, as the war worsened, so too did what little profits they were able to make.[138] The end of the war did not alleviate these shortages. By the end, the shortages and devastation had caused even the wealthy plantation owners to

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138. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 303.

reach a breaking point. The years following the war did not solve the problems with supply, especially with regards to food production. Crop failures persisted for several years afterwards. Robert Michael Collins, a Black rice planter in Georgetown County, experienced this struggle. Following the war and the end of slavery, Collin's rice crop failed every year between 1865 and 1869.[139] This extended to the other former slaveowners in the state as the Freedmen's Bureau noted that most of the rice crops had failed in the previous two seasons and that the planters were on the verge of being unable to pay their workers.[140]

The failure to produce food contributed to the Black slaveowners' inability to regain their lost wealth. When the Confederacy was formed, the government began printing their own currency backed only by credit. When the Confederacy fell, these same bonds and currency became completely worthless. Those who converted their money into this new currency now lost a substantial portion of their pre-war value. Some of the Black slaveowners invested heavily in the Confederate dollar to show their loyalty. The Ellison brothers invested nearly $10,000 into Confederate investments and lost it all in the end.[141] This loss of funds at the end of the war severely hindered the ability of the Black slaveowners to rebuild after the war's conclusion. As part of their attempt to survive, more than reclaim their wealth, former slaveowners were often forced to sell their property. This helped keep them afloat but also greatly hindered their ability to retain their position. The greatest possession these former slaveowners held was their land. Those who owned plantations suffered the most from this as the massive tracts of

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139. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 193.
140. Wesley Markwood to Major E.L. Dean, 14 March 1867, *Letters Sent to Georgetown, South Carolina 1867-1868,* Freemen Bureau, Record Group 105 (National Archives, Washington D.C.).
141. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 305.

land they once cultivated were gradually sold off. Of the 900 acres of land the Ellisons

were cultivating at the start of the war, only 112 acres were still being cultivated by

1870.[142] This rapid drop in cultivated land stemmed from the lack of funds available, the

need to purchase new seed, and the loss of their slaves significantly damaging

slaveowners after the war's conclusion.

By far the greatest loss to the Black slaveowners was their slave property. With

the realization that the end was near, many of these slaveowners attempted to sell their

slaves, ensuring they still received money from the loss. This was not always possible

however, as many others refused to purchase slaves in the final months of the war. When

the war ended, these slaves were now completely free and the slaveowners were not

compensated. Following the end of slavery, these new African Americans were no longer

forced to work on the plantations or businesses as they used to. Many would remain due

to economic reasons, but the majority left to find family or pursue their own economic

interests away from the painful memories of slavery. With the loss of slaves, the former

masters began to break down though many of these Black former slave masters would

still attempt to regain their former standing.

The end of the Civil War was as punishing to the Black former slaveowners as it

was for the Whites. In both cases, the late war shortages and crop failures were only

exacerbated following the war. These wartime struggles worsened as many of the former

Black slaveowners now faced destitution. With the loss of much of their wealth and

workforce, these former slaveowners were forced to adapt to a new way of life or lose all

they worked for. The severe losses the Black elite took during the war would make

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142. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 316.

regaining their wealth an exceedingly difficult process. With no funds, the loss of slaves, and shrinking land size, the Black slaveowners now faced an uphill climb they had not experienced since they first gained their freedom.

<div align="center">Attempts to Regain Their Wealth</div>

Despite the significant damage the Black slaveowners encountered, many were not content to lose their elevated position. Much like their White counterparts, the Black former slaveowners made efforts to retain their pre-war status. These Black former slaveowners would utilize the same tactics as their White counterparts to retain their former elite status. Even those who could not, would attempt to utilize the new system to rise to the upper ranks of the African American elite. This struggle to regain their past position of power through the efforts of the planters, merchants, and those who adopted the new system give a different view of Reconstruction from the normal lens of rich Whites or former slaves.

The end of the Civil War devastated the Black slaveowners, as previously discussed. The loss of slaves and most of their wealth caused a reset for most Black former masters. For many, the end of slavery was the end of that way of life and new lives would have to be crafted. For those who refused to accept this new reality, the thought of losing all they had worked for was too much to bear. Following the same path as their White counterparts, these former slaveowners would attempt to force their former slaves to remain reliant on their new employers.

The planters had a difficult time retaining their former slaves. The urban slaveowners could make the change from owner to employer with little fuss or cost which

was not readily available to the rural slaveowners. The shortages during the Civil War and the brutal nature of rural slavery made the return to planting difficult. The memory of slavery created a particularly difficult challenge to overcome. The brutal memories of the whippings, sexual abuse, and killings the slaves experienced at the hands of their masters and others deeply stigmatized the idea of working with them again.[143] Even as African Americans, many would rather leave the plantations to find their own path in life. For those who remained, new struggles would arise. As the former masters attempted to continue planting, they would often go into debt due to the failure of their crops which would harm the workers who remained.

Robert Michael Collins, an African American rice planter from Georgetown County, attempted to continue planting rice after the war. The struggles from the war and the failures of his crop in the years following made feeding his family and workers nearly impossible.[144] To help alleviate this, in 1868, Collin's asked the Freedmen's Bureau for help. The Bureau gave Collins a month of rations for his family and the workers who remained. This was not a gift and came with a bill for $49.53.[145] This debt did not stop him however as Collins was able to pay it back entirely after a year. In terms of the actual plantation, Collins struggled to regain its former glory. The war and failing crops shrunk his plantation's production to a mere fraction of its pre-war levels. Collins could not pay his workers and instead, they were paid for their services with food, shelter, and clothing. This system was common following the end of slavery and held many similarities to the now defunct system. The trade of labor for food and shelter remained and was held

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143. Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849), 15-18.
144. J.G. Randall and David Herbert Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Lexington: D.C. Health and Company, 1969), 576-577.
145. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 193.

together by a mutual agreement of needs. The plantation owner needed labor to produce

their crops and secure a revenue stream while the workers required a place to live and

food for their families.[146] This would not last forever as much like their White

counterparts, the Black planters who attempted to regain their wealth would switch from

the payment of exchange to a wage-based system by the end of Reconstruction. For

Michael Collins, his workers were paid $1,000 for their work in 1879. As for Collins

himself, he was able to recover the majority of his pre-war wealth at the cost of half his

acreage over the 20 years following the Civil War. This limited how much he could

regain in status but did allow him to come close to his pre-war production.[147]

Unfortunately for the African American planters, Michael Collin's story was the

exception to the norm. The damage from the war was often too great for the Black

slaveowners to overcome. In many cases, the loss of the slaves ended any chance to

regain their lost position. Former masters such as Sarah Boag, a Black rice planter from

St. Thomas & St. Dennis Parish, lost her 10 slaves at the end of the war. Due to this loss,

she could no longer produce her pre-war crop of rice leaving her 312 acres empty. With

the loss of her plantation, Boag was forced to rely on her skills as a midwife to survive.[148]

Even the cotton producers of the state suffered a slow and agonizing decline. The

vast majority of the Black owned cotton plantations would be unable to recover following

the war. This included the largest of the Black cotton producing families, the Ellisons.

During the war, the Ellisons were one of the few planters who made a profit during the

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146. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 3-10.
147. Koger*, Black Slaveowners*, 194-195.
148. Koger*, Black Slaveowners*, 195.

war. Following the defeat of the Confederacy, all of these profits became defunct. With this loss of money, the vast majority of the slaves who were owned by the Ellisons left and only 12 workers were retained as opposed to the nearly 50 slaves they held at the start of the war. The Ellisons attempted to take part in the system of sharecropping with their White counterparts. With sharecropping, the plantation owners agreed to pay extremely low wages for the labor of the African Americans they hired. This was not an ideal situation for most former slaves who did not like the idea of further control on their lives. The Ellisons made the choice to only hire workers through this method. This was the primary reason the Ellisons lost so many of their former slaves. Due to the low number of workers, the Ellisons were unable to cultivate the same amount of land they had previously. Of the 500 acres they cultivated in 1860, only 118 were still being cultivated by 1870.

Even the old gin shop that built the family fortune under William Ellison could not secure their future. While the destruction of cotton gins in the state by Sherman's army would have given them a massive competitive advantage, the end of slavery distinctly damaged the ability of the shop to operate. The end of slavery gave the skilled former slaves the opportunity to use their skills and start their own businesses. Even though William Ellison's grandson, John Buckner, continued to operate the gin shop, the lack of skilled mechanics meant a drop in both quality and quantity of the gins.[149] By 1870, the two sons of William Ellison, who operated the estate, no longer described themselves as planters. Instead marketing themselves as general merchants providing goods for the White planters around them. Despite the decline of their plantation, the

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149. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 316-317.

Ellisons were able to retain most of their standing with those around them even if their name was no longer widely spread. This luck did not last forever though as the family wealth disintegrated upon the deaths of William Ellison's sons, Henry and William Jr. in 1883 and 1904 respectively. Their nephew, John Buckner, moved from Stateburg following a dispute over William Ellison's will. With the deaths and departure of the last remaining members who knew William Ellison, the family no longer had the centralization or strong leadership to continue their businesses, and by 1920 the family held none of its old territory.[150]

Some former masters attempted to use the new world and carve out a new position of power as opposed to retaining their old power. For these individuals, this new form of power came from the access to politics African Americans now had. Literacy gave the former slaveowners an advantageous position over the freed slaves and even most of the pre-war free Blacks. By 1870, around half of the Black politicians in the state were fully literate.[151] Many of Charleston's wealthy African Americans, who retained their wealth after the war, focused on rebuilding their businesses. Only 7 of the Charleston Black elite took the necessary steps to enter politics. A large percentage of these Reconstruction politicians were members of the Brown Fellowship Society. These African American elite were not fully unified in their political standings with prominent members holding offices being in both parties. Men such as Elias Garden and Richard E. DeReef held conservative beliefs and acted as Democrats while others such as Robert

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150. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 331-338.
151. William C. Hine, "Black Politicians in Reconstruction Charleston, South Carolina: A Collective Study," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 (1983): 560.

Howard and William McKinlay sided with the more progressive views of the Republican Party.[152]

Much like those who attempted to regain their lost position, those who attempted to create a new position of African American elite were not able to succeed for long. The vast majority of the African American elite began experiencing economic reversals and only a few decided to serve more than one political term. This seems to have been due to a focus on their economic standing rather than a political standing. Only a few individuals such as William McKinlay decided to remain in politics with McKinlay and his son Whitefield J. both serving in the state legislature in 1868. With the end of Reconstruction in 1877 came the end of the attempts of Black former slaveowners to gain political power. The incoming Jim Crow laws and backlash from the White community made attempting to run for politics difficult.

The end of the war created a power void from the Black elite. As new African Americans, the former slaveowners attempted to pick up the pieces of their destroyed lives and find a new place worthy of their old standing. The struggle to regain their lost wealth was not easy and the majority of those who attempted it failed miserably and faded into obscurity. Those who attempted to gain power through the political scene fared no better. Even though many could have advanced further after the war, the economic problems following the war prevented their advancement. With the end of Reconstruction came the end of the attempts to regain status politically as the state began limiting the rights of the African American population.

Changing Relations Between Former Masters, Former Slaves, and the White Community

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152. Hine, "Black Politicians in Reconstruction Charleston,": 563-564.

With the end of the Civil War came changes to the social structure of southern society. The established class system of the pre-war era was ripped apart with the freeing of the slaves. The end of the war created new classes and old ones were destroyed. The destruction of the free Black community and the creation of the African American community irreversibly changed the relationships between every class. These changing relationships set up many of the conflicts that defined the next hundred years and brought an end to the status of the Black former slaveowners.

Black elites were devastated by the end of the war and the struggles it caused. The war left them broke and struggling to survive, accompanied by the realization of their lost status. With the end of slavery came the end of the free Black class. In the pre-war south, the free Black class enjoyed certain benefits such as limited rights including marriage and limited access to education and politics. While emancipation protections granted following the war gave more rights to all free Blacks in theory, the pre-war distinction held more meaning than the post-war one did. The pre-war free Blacks held some distinction as they were often viewed as more respectable than slaves by the White community. Free Blacks, such as the Ellisons, who prided themselves on their family's reputation, received many favors from their White friends and customers. The favorable experiences Black slaveowners had with the White community allowed them to distance themselves from the rest of the Black community. Following the end of the war, many of the Black former slaveowners attempted to remain on this side. Much like their White counterparts, many of the Black former owners retained their dominance over the freedmen. As was discussed in the pervious section, those who operated plantations

followed their White counterparts with starting the system that would become

sharecropping.[153] For those who were merchants and craftsmen, the change did not affect

their daily business as much. The shops they operated still offered preferential treatment

for their White customers. Those former slaveowners who opened shops used their

connections to supply their White neighbors with plenty of luxury goods which would

normally be unavailable to the freedman around them.[154]

This desire to maintain a close relationship with their White counterparts

extended to politics. In the new political system, many of the newly enfranchised African

Americans opted to join the Republican Party who they saw as responsible for freeing

them. For the Black former slaveowners, this stance was unthinkable. Much like their

White counterparts, many believed that the northern Republicans had destroyed their

livelihood and they refused to join the side of their former slaves. Large former

slaveowners such as the Ellisons, Richard DeReef, and Elias Garden secured their

positions as staunch Democrat supporters with their White friends.[155] This stance was

further strengthened with the policies that the Republican party in South Carolina pushed

for. The plan for land redistribution was especially disliked by these former slaveowners

who refused to give their land to those who they saw as beneath them.[156] The decision to

join the Democrat party stemmed from a combination of past beliefs from slave owning

and a desire to remain on friendly terms with the White class.

153. Roger L. Ranson and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 56-99.
154. Charles S. Aiken, "The Evolution of Cotton Ginning in the Southeastern United States," in *Geographical Review* 63 (April 1973), 210-216.
155. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 326-327.
156. Carol R. Bleser, *The Promised Land: The History of the South Carolina Land Commission* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 27-30.

As was discussed previously, many of these Black former slaveowners refused to accept the new status of the freedmen. The support that many of them gave to slavery both before and during the war had deeply embedded them in the slavery system. After the war's conclusion, the state quickly attempted to control the Black population by instituting the first of the Black Codes. In these codes, the ability of African Americans to begin work in a trade was severely limited due to it being outlawed unless the person obtained a license from the Judge of the District Court. This license would only be given to those who were able to prove themselves as skilled tradesmen and had a good moral character. In addition to this, the person applying would have to pay 100 dollars for storekeepers and 10 dollars for mechanics to the Clerk of the district and pay that sum annually.[157] This benefited the former slaveowners who were already known by the White community for their good morality and had the money to pay for it. In some cases, the Black former slaveowners were able to get the license and fee waived by either the court or the local U.S. army officer due to their good standing. Using their family's good standing, the Ellisons were able to run their gin shop and open a general store following the introduction of these codes.[158]

Much like the fortunes of the Black former slaveowners, the positions would not last forever. Over the course of Reconstruction, the White community grew increasingly hostile to the African Americans in the state. The White community already disliked the Black community with a few exceptions, but the Reconstruction era solidified that hatred. The racial supremacy idea that most White people held in the state was pushed further as

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157. An Act To Establish and Regulate the Domestic Relations Of Persons of Color, and to Amend the Law in Relation to Paupers and Vagrancy (1865), in *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: Republican Printing Company, 1875), 13: 279.
158. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 318.

the Freedmen took part in the voting process. At the end of Reconstruction, the White

community was able to regain almost total power in the state with the Redeemer

movement. This movement spread throughout the south, pushing for the need for the

south to redeem itself from the shame of the loss in the Civil War and Reconstruction

This movement spelled the end of the positive relations between the Black former

slaveowners.

With the rise of the Redeemers came a rise in the number of lynchings of African

Americans. Lynching was not a new concept as there are over 2,000 recorded lynchings

that happened during Reconstruction all across the south.[159] The rise in lynchings was not

the only consequence of the Redeemers as even those who were within the Democrat

party were not safe from being targeted. With the election of Wade Hampton in 1876,

many of the Democrat clubs began purging their African American members and by

1890 the majority had completely removed the presence of African Americans from their

ranks.[160] The few that remained had to prove their loyalty to the party and the state.

The 1890s also changed most of the associations between the African American

elite and the rest of the African American community. This change mainly came from the

deaths of many of the former slave masters. With the deaths of these former masters, the

real change and connections between the two communities would begin. While the

former masters took many measures to separate themselves from the normal African

Americans, their children, even when born prior to the Civil War, did not continue to

hold the same desire to separate themselves from the Black community. Many of these

159. "Over 2,000 Black People Were Lynched From 1865 to 1877, Study Finds," *New York Times,* June 16, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/us/reconstruction-violence-lynchings.html.
160. Michael P. Johnston and James L. Roark, *Black Masters*, 327.

children would use their education to begin helping out the freedmen. People such as Frances Rollins and Thaddeus Sasportas used their ability to read and write to educate the freedmen and provide some political leadership. Sasportas was especially prevalent in this regard as he would be elected to the state legislature of Orangeburgh County. [161] With the shift to the African American community, the children of the former slaveowners began melding their families with the common people ending the majority of the legacy of the Black slaveowners.

With the end of the Civil War came a major change in the social status of the Black slaveowners. Much like their attempts to regain their wealth, the attempts to retain their social standing could not be maintained in the long run. The introduction of the Redeemers and the deaths of many of the former slaveowners, re-aligned the former slave owning families who began to assimilate into the more general African American population. The more years away from Reconstruction, the more this process intensified. With the deaths of the Black former slaveowners came the end of that class and the distinction that came with it. The families of these individuals would forever be included in and associated with the African American community.

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161. Koger, *Black Slaveowners*, 198-199.

Conclusion

The rise and fall of the Black slaveowners represents the first formation of Black elite. These slaveowners set aside the bonds of race that they shared with the slaves and instead chose to side with the White ruling class. Their use of slaves for profit forced these slaveowners to become steeped in the success of the slavery system. Due to being so invested in the slavery system, these individuals helped ensure its survival, even going as far as to help stop slave rebellions such as the Denmark Vesey conspiracy. Even when White citizens attacked Black communities, the Black slaveowners sided with the White elite over members of their race. The relationship between the Black and White slaveowners was based on how morally upright the Black individual was and allowed some Black slaveowners to earn the trust of the White elite.

With the push for these individuals to join with the White elite came efforts to distance themselves from the Black community. In doing so, the Black elite used the same racial jargon that the White class did. Using the lightness of their skin and the wealth they possessed, these Black slaveowners separated themselves from other free Blacks and declared themselves to be superior to others. With the separation from the rest of the Black community and the alliance with the White elites, these Black slaveowners acted as a secondary class which supported and upheld the system of slavery at all costs.

This loyalty to slavery led the Black slaveowners to follow it to their destruction by siding with the Confederacy. Black slaveowners chose to support the Confederacy, going as far as to supply food and other materials to the Confederate army with some even attempting to enlist. With the end of the Civil War came the mortal blow to the

Black slaveowners. Despite the attempts of these former slaveowners to regain their wealth at the end of the war, the amount that they lost was often too great. Despite this loss, many did not accept their new position and would attempt to regain their lost position. This usually came at the cost of their old land. In order to stay afloat, Black former slaveowners sold off their land to ensure they could feed their families. In an attempt to regain their wealth and lost position, these former slaveowners again sided with their old allies, even implementing sharecropping in order to keep their workers tied to the land. With the rise of the Redeemers came the demise of the Black slaveowners. Most of their former allies began to turn against them. Despite how intertwined the Black slaveowners were in the slavery system, their legacy is almost entirely forgotten. The struggles of the Reconstruction and Redeemer eras erased the position that the Black slaveowners once held and forced them into the same group that they had once enslaved.

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