

Into the Free Market:  
Slaves, Freedmen, and Market Interaction,  
The Continuity of Slavery and Freedom

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The era of emancipation in the United States of America is a highly researched and heavily analyzed topic in American historian. The American Civil War and the enormous loss of life preceding the abolishment of southern slavery occupy an extensive space as a lasting memory within America's national narrative. Small libraries have been written on the abolition movements, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction Era that followed. Many of these works continue to primarily focus on politics, economic factors, and prominent individuals that set in motion the events that led toward emancipation. With such a keen interest in the American nineteenth century social and political developments it seems natural that analytical research would drift toward those who suffered most under the brutal slave system. The experience of slavery and emancipation, its impact on society and the economic and political ramifications only add to a greater understanding of 19<sup>th</sup> century America. The transition in southern society from slavery to a free market economy based on wage labor impacted over four million slaves, so their experience during this transitions is vital in determining their notions of freedom and the themes they held toward freedom and economic market activity. Yet there are a disheartening limited number of works analyzing former slave's economic participation in the free market following freedom. The degree of freedmen economic activity and participation is undoubtedly linked with their experiences as slaves. The types of slave labor in which slaves were employed, their basic ability to accumulate property, and their understanding of money and market demands all fostered their notions and understandings of the free market prior to emancipation while laboring within the "peculiar institution" of the antebellum South.

A major theme in this study takes a comparative approach to the types of market activity both slaves and freedmen engaged in before and after freedom. While broader, international, perspectives to the study of slavery are encouraged in recent years, the intimacy of the marketplace and labor markets on the individual level is still vitally important in understanding notions of economic participation and values. Such recent calls for trans-national and comparative approaches, while important in larger, broader approaches to slavery within the Atlantic world can also be applied within smaller, and more intimate, regional areas such as the American South.<sup>1</sup> Little has been written analyzing slaves notions and understandings of the free market, nor how they utilized these notions to successfully merge into the free market following emancipation. By focusing on "informal" market

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<sup>1</sup> For trans national studies see Steven Hahn, "Class and State in Postemancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (1990) : 75-98; also Davis David Brion, "Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 2 (2000) : 452-466; and Rebecca J. Scott, "Small-Scale Dynamics of Large-Scale Processes," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 2 (2000) : 472-479.

participation during slavery and comparing this activity to Freedmen's involvement after emancipation a better understanding of their notions of freedom materializes.

The term "Freedmen" applies distinctly to those who were slaves and then emancipated or manumitted. It does not necessarily suppose freedmen were emancipated during the American Civil War. Emancipation and manumission happened at various times. The vast majority of American slaves were emancipated after the Civil War, but many other freedmen and women were manumitted before the war. Freedmen who were manumitted before 1865 are equally important in analyzing the economic themes of freedom because they support the argument that notions of free market ideals were present long before the free labor movements surrounding the Civil War. Some slaves bought their freedom and were manumitted before the war. In these cases, Freedmen or "free men of color" were permitted to live freely, and even own slaves themselves. It should also be considered that the term freedmen, unless otherwise stated, refers to individuals of African descent. Their experiences are important as their stories help elucidate the slavery experience and its impact upon the themes of freedom. They can provide insight into the world of slavery and freedom by displaying the ways in which slaves developed and utilized free market notions. Freemen held the unique position of having experienced both the trials of slavery and freedom. As the entire region shifted toward freedom and the free market economy, their status and position in society became important in that it indicated to what extent they were prepared for freedom in the realm of market activity and wage labor. Freedmen are a particularly interesting and under-analyzed segment of the social population, because they hold a unique perspective as men and women who were both enslaved and free. They present a very peculiar situation, they spent neither their whole life as a slave, nor as free people. They have the unique ability to testify to having lived under both systems. Therefore, their stories provide a transparent middle ground between both societies. Freedmen give an exclusive viewpoint to the impact of slavery on the free labor market and, most importantly, on the notions and values that they held toward it. By tracing their experiences, certain themes and notions of freedom can be understood and better applied to the overall structure of slavery and emancipation within free market society. It can also provide examples that suggest the continuity of themes that prepared slaves for free market interaction.

With so much attention devoted to the story of slavery, and the aftermath of emancipation, one would expect the similar attention toward the experience of those who lived as both slave and free person. Perhaps it is time to look at slavery and emancipation from another perspective, not focused principally on the abuses of slavery or on the larger themes of emancipation and freedom, but on its impact through the viewpoint of the freed slave. There are great opportunities in future studies on the impact of emancipation at the market level in the southern United States, especially utilizing freedmen as the focal point of this transition. With varying labor systems employed, multiple responses to freedom seem likely as slaves moved into a competitive realm. As a work system, tasking allotted "free time" opportunities to slaves once tasks were complete. In other regional areas, gang labor

plantations worked groups of men and women from dawn to dusk, yet provided slaves with their own gardens and personal space that they associated with ownership and a private domain. Some masters hired their slaves out, allowing them to keep portions of the wages they earned in the process. Other slaves became actively aware of the power of money through their own experiences of seeing slaves sold at market, or being sold at market value. Each of these experiences, in some capacity, supported notions of market knowledge, monetary understanding, and claims to property and ownership. Furthermore, an increasingly developed “informal” and internal slave economy, in which slaves could acquire extra food and bits of personal property, allowed them, in some instances, to acquire money, and provided numerous slaves with an extensively complete understanding of market interaction. This “informal” slave economy functioned illicitly in the antebellum South and introduced many slaves to the reality of market interaction providing examples to what they may expect during freedom. There has been little study regarding the enormous amount of market activity that was already taking place when emancipation legally encouraged economic participation of millions of freedmen. Such experiences during slavery ultimately paved the way to their understanding of the free market and contributed to their successes and failures once free. These slave economies provided vital market awareness and solidified values that freedmen understood and utilized once free.

On each plantation or within each household there was a variety of skilled and unskilled slaves. Carpenters, house servants, drivers, and laborers are just a sample of duties these men and women performed. Their skills, along with their notions of work, ownership, and freedom were solidified as slaves and ultimately had a strong impact on their response to freedom. Freedmen became wage laborers and held considerable advantage in certain instances in negotiating terms of contracts. The focus of this project is to evaluate and add to the understanding of how Freedmen involved themselves in the market after emancipation. It seeks to follow the experience of the freed person past the contemporary accounts of Reconstruction and provide an overall view of what it was like to live as both a slave and free person. Following the end of slavery, Freedmen were unrestricted, at least legally, in the pursuit of economic participation and ownership. This research looks to evaluate their notions of freedom and the steps taken by gaining a greater understanding of Freedmen’s participation in the marketplace. Their understandings of the free economic and labor markets were undoubtedly influenced by their bonded experience as they encountered a variety of market mechanisms as slaves.

Continuity is a strong theme throughout this thesis. The values and memories of slavery are ultimately the economic framework that emancipated slaves utilized during freedom in their free market participation. Once emancipation occurred, Freedmen did not, and could not, forget their experiences as slaves. They relied upon the values, lessons, and memories experienced as slaves to support their choices in a free society. While emancipation was a tremendous historical event, the Civil War and economic disparity that followed did not help those freed in the slightest. The idea of continuity suggests that freedmen utilized their slavery experiences to form a foundation for their

notions of work, movement, and ownership that accompanied freedom. Very few freedmen became wealthy after emancipation, for the vast majority, life remained peculiarly similar. How they responded is the overall theme.

How did those who toiled under slave labor respond to and involve themselves in the market economy of the southern United States? The overall structure of this thesis is to provide answers to specific questions developed from this central question regarding the freedmen's experience. What were freedmen's notions of the free market, especially labor and property? To answer such a question it is important to analyze their understandings of work, money, and property that such men and women developed as slaves. Since the purpose of this research is to analyze the freedmen's experience it is important to look at notions developed while enslaved, and to compare those with what occurred during freedom. One key question regarding the experience of the freedmen revolves around their market knowledge. What were the freedmen's work notions and market experiences under slavery? How were freedmen's work notions encouraged by the forms of compensation they incurred? Did slaves participate in a market type economy before emancipation? How did freedmen respond to freedom as emancipation allowed them the rights to actively seek employment, acquire property, open savings accounts, and even own a business under the protection of the law? This leads to the scope of this research and the questions that are necessary to analyze such values carried forward from slavery, as they became legal economic participants for the first time.

What was freedmen market activity during Reconstruction and throughout the freedmen's life? Is there similar market activity in comparable regions? What were freedmen most interested in? Was economic participation different following emancipation in areas where slaves worked under the task system versus the gang labor system? These are the central questions that are the focus of this project. This study entails to elucidate the experience of the freed person and analyze the experience of slavery and its impact on emancipation at the free market level for the group of people who lived as both slave and free person. It seeks to suggest that their experiences as slave greatly influenced their notions of freedom.

The theoretical framework will analyze the southern internal slave economy from various aspects and compare it with freedmen participation in the free market. This will help obtain a broader picture of the economic activity and the meaning of freedom for newly emancipated slaves and their legacy. Using evidence of the internal slave economy in multiple locations in the American South it is possible to synthesize, in some respect, notions of the free market that freedmen used to improve their position after emancipation. Slaves in many areas were allowed to own some kind of property in which their masters acknowledged as personal property.<sup>2</sup> This property had significance to the slave

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<sup>2</sup> Philip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983): 399-420; Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 39, no. 4 (oct., 1982): 563-599; for hiring out slave labor and market activity see also Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (1960) :663-678; and

in the sense that it established ownership and autonomy. An analysis of the internal slave economy in areas of different labor systems within the South will indicate that prior to emancipation many enslaved people already had notions of market interaction.

Sources will come from freedmen themselves. Utilizing slave narratives collected during various periods, this research will analyze their experiences based on their descriptions of both slavery and freedom. Slave narratives from sources compiled prior to the Civil War will focus on slaves that were manumitted prior to emancipation through self-purchase. These sources are important because they highlight the specific market knowledge that slaves utilized in order to acquire money to support efforts to purchase their own freedom. Other slave narratives will focus on attempts of slaves to elude re-enslavement as they fled the South to reach freedom and the North. These types of journeys often required extensive market and monetary knowledge as they clandestinely worked to evade capture. Other sources will come from official reports from the Freedman's Bureau, set up to oversee emancipation and ensure the well being of the freedmen. Newspapers, plantation account books, and supportive secondary sources will provide supplemental illustrations to the overall argument. Accounts of both men and women will be key since this purpose of this research is to provide an overall picture of freedmen's reaction to freedom within various regions.

Criticisms on the use of slave narratives such as the Works Project Administration, which make up the bulk of the slave narratives in this research, have been duly noted. Most of such criticisms surround the value and intention of the narratives. The Works Project Narratives, compiled in the 1930s, rely on the memories of elder freedmen, most of who were younger than fifteen while held as slaves. Many of those interviewed were living under the extreme poverty of the 1930s depression, therefore making many look upon their situation under slavery more favorably. As Norman Yetman explains, "they fondly described events and situations that had not been, in reality, so positive as they recalled them."<sup>3</sup> The distance between these memories and slavery have led many to question the authenticity of specific descriptions relayed by individuals of the project. Another point of concern regarding the Works Project slave narratives is that the overwhelming majority of the interviewers were white. This presents the narratives with a particular sense of bias in that the "interviewer's race was a significant factor in eliciting responses from the former slaves" ultimately encouraging freedmen to be less candid in telling the full story by practicing "self-censorship."<sup>4</sup>

Another pitfall of the slave narratives collected in the 1930s is the problematic of how accurately the interviewers wrote down what the informants said. When reading the narratives it is apparent that many of the interviewers recorded the nuances of certain dialects, and at times suggest an

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Douglas R. Egerton, "Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (2006) : 617-639.

<sup>3</sup> Norman R. Yetman, "The Limitations of the Slave Narrative Collection: Problems of Memory" in "An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives," In *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project 1936-1938* (Electronic Resource), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro14.html> (Accessed August 23, 2011).

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

inferiority in language and education on the part of the former slave. Since there is no accurate way to relate and translate these narratives without ruining the integrity of the sources available, much of the narratives remain unaltered and the recorded dialect is unchanged from the records. Effort has been taken to relate the dialect as best as possible from the sources, and only in certain instances have edits been made to clarify the examples in an effort to support the argument. This is not to portray a sense of inferiority on the part of the ex-slave, but to keep the accuracy of the sources intact and to provide the best representation of the conveyance of the former slave as relayed to the interviewer.

When analyzing any interview or narrative it is vital to understand the contextual situation between the narrator and the interviewer. Authors, such as Katherine Borland, take careful consideration in their analysis and provide frameworks regarding the multiple perspectives that may be present. The perspective of the subject may be, and often is, different from that of the author.<sup>5</sup> Careful consideration of the interviewer and interviewee relationship is necessary. Other researchers elaborate on the discursive use of narrative to promote national or political agendas.<sup>6</sup> These aspects require observation when analyzing and contextualizing narratives. The interview itself is a product of the dominant racial discourse. Relying so heavily on memory may deter others from using such a narrative as a primary source, but when looking at notions, experiences, and overall social situations, facts are not as important as the associations and negotiations one conveys through a narrative. Furthermore, such discourse formulates cultural and racial attitudes by placing constructed frameworks in society that should be carefully considered when analyzing any text.<sup>7</sup> Norman Yetman, an expert who has written extensively on the use of the Federal Writer's Project narratives provides the following assessment regarding their use:

if one wishes to understand the nature of the "peculiar institution" from the perspective of the slave, to reconstruct the cultural and social milieu of the slave community, or to analyze the social dynamics of the slave system, then these data are not only relevant; they are essential. That is not to imply that they should be used exclusively or without caution. Yet the hazards of attempting to comprehend slavery without using them far outweigh the limitations of their use.<sup>8</sup>

Concern regarding the intentions of slave narratives written prior to the Civil War, as accordingly, there are questions of authorship as many narratives were dictated to editors or "white writers." Furthermore, many historians have pointed out the complexity of "dissociating" their use prior to

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<sup>5</sup> Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research." in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck et al. (London: Routledge, 1991), 63-75.

<sup>6</sup> For examples see: Marilyn Booth, "The Egyptian Lives of Jeanne d'Arc," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1998), 171-211; Sondra Hale, "Interviewing Sudanese Woman," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck et al. (London: Routledge, 1991), 121-136.

<sup>7</sup> Maaike Meijer, "Countering Textual Violence On the Critique of Representation and the Importance of Teaching Its Method," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 16, no. 4 (1993): 367-378.

<sup>8</sup> Yetman, "Limitations."

emancipation as an “abolitionist propaganda tool.”<sup>9</sup> However, these limitations, as with the narratives from the 1930s do not supersede there use as a valuable resource.

Such criticisms, however, have not stopped historians from utilizing slave narratives as an important and indispensable resources in analyzing and understanding slavery and its impact on freedom. Coupled with a broad array of other sources, the narratives offer an intimate glimpse into the life of a slave and the reality of freedom once manumitted or emancipated. While the majority of the primary sources used will stem from the state of South Carolina, support will also be given to provide evidence that slaves and freedmen in multiple regions were experiencing similar situations. This helps to broaden the overall structure of the argument and provide evidence that notions of freedom were solidifying themselves before in multiple regions long before freedom. Analysis will involve the entire South by describing slave and freedmen experience in a variety of southern regions. Furthermore, the majority of the period analyzed through this research will most heavily focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> century with emphasis on the late antebellum years through the 1880s, roughly a sixty-year period. Though the vast amount of this research falls within this period there are a few examples that expand the research outside this era, leaving room for future analysis and interpretation that can help provide even greater understanding of the long-term effects of slavery and emancipation and market activity of freedmen.

The slave narratives will be supported by official documentation from government agencies like the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandon Lands (Freedmen’s Bureau). Additionally newspaper articles, court records, plantation manuscripts, and banking records will be used to more fully explore the contextual development of freedom and help synthesize the values, notions, and expectations that slaves carried to freedom. Keeping in mind that these sources represented a primarily white viewpoint, it will be possible to show that slaves held very extensive market knowledge prior to freedom and that this knowledge was actively used to engage in the free market after manumission and during the years following the Civil War. This method of synthesis and analytical research helps to provide a greater understanding of the values obtained in multiple regions, suggesting an overall pattern within the larger regional South. .

The Following chapter will discuss the trends of the historical research of slavery and emancipation in America as it pertains to this study. By discussing the interpretations of the era through its evolution, it will encapsulate some of the early interpretation of the era and more recent studies regarding emancipation and slave economies. The chapter will discuss the overlapping historiography of both the slaves’ internal economy and the views of emancipation. It will also suggest that recent studies of emancipation fall short of the larger picture of slavery and its impact in the American South. Many historians’ periodization regarding the impact of emancipation in the American South stops short of fulfilling an accurate study. Historians routinely set emancipation

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks : The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), n. 12 297-298.

within the scope of Reconstruction and therefore neglect the continued transition of the freedmen who experienced both. Their story continues well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and usually becomes muddled in the developing industrialization and immigration histories of early American 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This chapter analyzes various approaches and points out some gaps and recent trends. By placing Freedmen experiences at the center, new voices can be heard and greater understanding of the process of mass emancipation and its legacy can be seen. It will provide examples of both free and enslaved men and women who lived as both. It asks historians to ponder, with greater scrutiny the theme of continuity, suggesting that the best way to understand slavery and emancipation is to recognize that they are not mutually exclusive, but are part of a continuous thread in which freedmen are the fibers.

Chapter three elaborates on the historical context of slavery and places emphasis on the developing impact of slavery and its variation on the American continent, especially in the south. It discusses the types of slave labor systems practiced in slave states, the task system, the gang labor system, and the hiring out of the slave. By understanding these systems a deeper understanding of notions of freedom and identity can more easily be identified. After discussing the systems, it will describe the internal economies that flourished within each, and the position of slaves within it. Along with identifying the various methods of slave labor it will also analyze the participation within the internal slave economies that functioned as a dual economy along side the “pre-capitalist” nature of southern economy as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

In Chapter four the discussion will turn to the more important analysis of how these slaves developed their market notions. It will analyze their pre emancipation associations with the market and how their ideas developed. It will provide analysis of their notions of work, property ownership, and associations with money as a medium for exchange. It will focus mainly on slave narratives from South Carolina coupled with accounts from other regions. Its main argument centers around the overall theme that slaves already had developed understandings of what they wanted from freedom and used their knowledge of work, money, and property as applicable experiences for the free market. The fifth chapter will follow the course of emancipation and reconstruction in the U.S. It will analyze Freedmen work habits, consumption and spending habits, and their understandings of freedom. There will be testimony from narratives, journals, and interviews along with official records and first hand accounts. The bulk, however, will rely on the memories of slave narratives conducted in the 1930s as a way of documenting American history of slavery. This chapter seeks to provide evidence that

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<sup>10</sup> For a description of the “capitalist debate” see Kathleen Mary Hilliard, “Spending in Black and White : Race, Slavery, and Consumer Values in the Antebellum South” (Thesis (Ph D ), University of South Carolina, 2006., 2006), 4-6; for a more in-depth discussion regarding the capitalist development of slave society in the southern U.S. see Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery; Studies in the Economy & Society of the Slave South* (New York,: Pantheon Books, 1965). For a comparison of the “protopeasantry” among slave communities that developed in both the West Indies and the coastal lowlands of the southern United States see Daniel C. Littlefield, “Continuity and Change in Slave Culture: South Carolina and the West Indies,” *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South* XXVI, no. 3 (Fall 1987) 202-216. Littlefield describes compares the research of slave society in the West Indies by Sidney Mintz with that of the southern rice culture in the coastal areas of the southern U.S..

freedmen utilized their value system and their interaction in the free labor and property markets to secure self autonomy and independence in ways that they believed provided security within the abstract market atmosphere.

Using Leon Litwack's approach in *Been in the Storm So Long*, and Rebbecca J. Scott's framework in "Small-Scale Dynamics of Large-Scale Processes," This it will rely on testimony from multiple accounts during slavery from the voices of those who were freed from bondage. The Federal Writers Project is a reservoir of former slave interviews conducted in the 1930s. Along with these sources, new interpretations of other narratives and autobiographies can be combined to understand the Freedmen market notions, values, and habits of freedom and the market.

Research conducted on the internal slave economy provides insight into the economic condition of slaves surrounding emancipation. It utilizes sources from southern account books, Freedman Bureau reports, and newspapers to "trace patterns of consumption, [and] means of purchase" in the South during antebellum years.<sup>11</sup> A synthesis of these frameworks will be attempted and combined with new research and interpretations using frameworks provided by Litwack and Scott. These interpretations provide a more thorough understanding of race and the market process after emancipation. It will help add to the historiography of the social, racial, and market identities during the transition from American bondage to emancipation, Reconstruction, and beyond. Records of savings and spending habits, along with their access to credit and business proprietorship will be the focus of the sixth chapter. It will suggest that while freedmen were never fully exposed to the working interplay of money and economic gain, they eagerly attempted to save, barrow and procure the means to develop further autonomy. Its focus will relegate these interactions within the cities of the urban South since banking investment opportunities and access to larger sums of money were greater in the urban atmosphere. However, it will provide examples of rural slave efforts to acquire credit and employ their new access to the market for means that opened up the possibility of the future.

The final chapter will bring these arguments together and suggest once again that slavery and emancipation should not be analyzed separately. The experiences of freedmen are important in understanding the transition from slave based economies to full fledged open market competition. Freedom for these men and women was a continuation of the experience of slavery, outside of the moment of emancipation there was no watershed moment that gave them the necessary tools to become successful members in free market society. These men and women were required to provide for themselves using the knowledge and tools that they obtained during slavery. Furthermore, this knowledge, as it was passed on to them as slaves, was also impressed upon the first generations of those born free. Slavery's legacy lasted much longer than the experiences of the freedmen generation, and society has yet to fully understand and deal with its consequences.

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<sup>11</sup> Hilliard, "Spending", viii.

The story of Emancipation in America not lacking a historiography, yet in American history its interpretation is often focused more closely with the history of Reconstruction. In the late nineteenth century, William Dunning fashioned a “dominant southern” view on emancipation and Reconstruction that “deliberately looked backward to slavery.”<sup>12</sup> W.E.B. Du bois challenged much of Dunning’s view, but it was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that Revisionist writers, amid the social upheaval of the civil rights movement, focused much of their attention on the former slave and their experience. Monumental studies such as those of Eugene Genovese, Sidney Mintz, and Ira Berlin provided evidence of how slaves in various regions negotiated daily life.<sup>13</sup> Calls for “comparative approaches” and “global” views continue to push for the study toward broader perspectives.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, the internal slave economy of the southern United States has drawn attention. Larger studies on the complexity of the Atlantic system will undoubtedly enhance the knowledge of chattel slavery. However, it is equally important to focus on smaller regional patterns that functioned as legal units that controlled slaves in various ways. The market patterns of slave and freedmen are vital to understanding slaves traversed the moment when their activity moved from illicit slave activity to free market participant. By looking at the freedmen experience, a greater understanding of their market views and market experiences shed light on the impact of emancipation and the free market, suggesting that themes of freedom, especially as related to the market, were solidifying in the mind of the slave long before emancipation.

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<sup>12</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois et al., *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1998) 179-180; for other interpretations of the Dunning School see Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982) : 82-100.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene D. Genovese et al., *Roll, Jordan, Roll : The World the Slaves Made*, [1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1974); Ira Berlin et al., *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Ira Berlin et al., *Cultivation and Culture : Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series in Black Studies. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); for larger comparative approaches see David Brion, "Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives," , 452-466..

<sup>14</sup> David Brion, "Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives," 452.

## Chapter Two

### Slavery, Emancipation, and Reconstruction Reconsidered

Too often the story of emancipation in the United States is told through the lens of the political and racial turmoil and neglects to seriously analyze the continuity of market interaction at the social levels of society.<sup>1</sup> More often than not emancipation is discussed at the political levels and within legal contexts, or focuses primarily on prominent individuals and their writings; such as elected officials, activists, or intellectuals. The discussion usually revolves around the epic Reconstruction era that discusses emancipation and racial experiences within the framework of the political re-union of the United States following the civil war. Early researchers continually focused their attention on the era surrounding emancipation noticeably toward the study of slavery. As John Hope Franklin, President of the American Historical Association noted in 1980, “One may wonder why...slavery has attracted so much interest and why, in all of the recent and current discussions of racial equality, Reconstruction has attracted so little.”<sup>2</sup> Eugene Genovese, Ulrich Phillips, Lewis Gray, and John Blassingame among a small library of others all elaborated on the “peculiar institution” that controlled the lives of millions of men and women in the nineteenth century. Their studies opened the way for more detailed research in the labor systems and provided an uncanny glimpse into the lives of slaves. Eventually however, the slave society was swept away, and a new era of emancipation established former slaves as free men in a free market society, based on the idea of free labor and open competition within the market.

Analysis of emancipation, spurred by the reunion of the American states, has largely been intertwined with the history of American Reconstruction. The era of American Reconstruction offers a unique opportunity to study the raw and tumultuous years following emancipation in the United States, but can also provide too narrow a window in which to view the full scope and experience of those who were freed. Between 1861 and 1880 the southern United States experience a complete structural shift in social and economic conditions before white “redeemers” instituted segregation and

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of the political and racial studies see C. Vann Woodward et al., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction : Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984); George M. Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race : Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality*, 1st ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Harold Hyman, *A More Perfect Union: The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the Constitution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); Michael Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution: Essays on Politics and the Constitution in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: Fordham University Press); Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Richard L. Hume and Jerry B. Gough, *Blacks, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags: The Constitutional Conventions of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Ted Tunnell, *Crucible for Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> John Hope Franklin, “Mirrors for America: A Century of Reconstruction History,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Feb., 1980), 11.

Jim Crow laws that would restrain freedmen's full participation in American society for nearly another 4century. It is in these few years that the former slaves experience is usually analyzed, rarely taking into account notions of the free market learned in slavery. Nor does such an analysis follow the complete journey of former slaves to its completion, sometimes well into the twentieth century. For these reasons it is important to understand both slavery and freedom from the viewpoint of the freedmen. Their experience provides important understandings that help bridge the gaps in the historiography of slavery and emancipation into the free market.

To further grasp the idea of continuity it is important to follow emancipation from its beginnings in slavery, in the scope of their economic perceptions and their notions of work, market activity, and possessions. Studies of slaves life and early understandings of an internal relationship between work and property accumulation Early indications of an internal economy were slightly noticed when Ulrich Phillips discussed his findings in his 1918 work *American Negro Slavery*. Phillips describe the work habits of the slave in varying degrees, on one hand he claimed their "repugnance toward overwork," and on the other he portrayed the accolades of Peyton, "the most excellent field hand, always at his post." He suggested that slaves "must be impelled as little as possible by fear, and as much as might be by...the prospect of reward." Phillips described slaves affinity for "dress" and suggested that while the cotton belonged to the master, in some areas the "produce belonged to the slaves for their sustenance and the sale of any surplus." These were just a few of the examples that passed through the pages of Phillip's work as he described the very essence of slavery in the Antebellum South. Slaves on certain plantations were encouraged to "earn money for themselves," instances which Phillips described as "exceptional," yet provide brief glimpses into themes of freedom and market knowledge years before emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis Gray also remarked on the slave labor systems in his analysis of southern agriculture. He noted the uniqueness of low country task systems in South Carolina and Georgia and the ability of slaves to acquire cash from the sale of produce, livestock, and hiring their labor out. From this cash he notes their willingness to take it to market to buy liquor, clothing, luxury items and even purchase their own freedom.<sup>4</sup> Eugene Genovese briefly discusses slave notions of labor and work ethic in his monumental study *Roll Jordan Roll, The World the Slaves Made*, and comes close to presenting such notions in the context of Reconstruction. He elaborates on the private "gardens" that slaves cultivated for sustenance and "even a little cotton or tobacco for sale." Descriptions of masters offering incentives such as money and clothes suggest slave notions of compensation, money, and luxuries. Genovese comes closest to suggesting that slaves notions of work and "individualism" was "manifested most attractively during and after Reconstruction in an attempt to transform themselves

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<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery : A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, 1st paperback ed. (Baton Rouge,: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 291-296.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Cecil Gray et al., *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (New York,: P. Smith, 1941), 465, 564-565.

into peasant proprietor.” But he stops short of actually analyzing their experiences as freedmen within the free market.<sup>5</sup>

Other authors also establish the slave situation and provide details to market knowledge. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman suggest that slaves had a stake in the economics of cotton plantations through the incentives, *de facto ownership* of possessions and property. These incentives were part of their masters determination to instill, as they argued, a “Protestant work ethic.”<sup>6</sup> Their work, *Time on the Cross*, was criticized harshly by those who saw such “incentives” and rewards as “long term customary rights gained through agency,” however they nevertheless displayed the powerful knowledge growing within slave communities regarding market activity.<sup>7</sup>

Recently studies have exploded regarding the internal slave economy and the agency in which slave utilized market interaction, monetary gains, and property ownership to obtain independence and autonomy within the slave regime. Philip Morgan, Lawrence McDonnell, and Dylan Penningroth have all contributed to the understanding of slaves’ acquisition of property and establishment of power and resistance through market interaction. According to McDonnell, “when slaves bought, sold and bartered, produced, accumulated, and consumed property they claimed as their own, central questions of power, community and humanity arose.” His research on the market activities in up-state South Carolina suggest that slave participation in the market undermined the entire existence of slavery, since the market treated “all parties as equals.”<sup>8</sup> Morgan and Penningroth provide detailed research on property claims made by freedmen during the Reconstruction era seeking compensation for lost property form the Southern Claims Commission. Their research provides clear indications that slaves possessed and exerted property claims over a wide range of possessions form produce, livestock, and wagons. Furthermore, their claims suggest that they attributed monetary value toward such goods, enough to seek compensation from the federal government. Their claims present a unique view of slave notions of ownership and market value and participation because the property they eagerly sought compensation for belong to them as slaves, further convoluting the notions of property, since they were property themselves.<sup>9</sup> These works elucidate on the activities of slaves and their agency within an internal slave economy that function within the regular southern economy. Their works however stop short of associating such notions with slaves’ entrance into the free market following

<sup>5</sup> Eugene D. Genovese et al., *Roll, Jordan, Roll : The World the Slaves Made*, [1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 535, 322-323.

<sup>6</sup> Robert William Fogel et al., *Time on the Cross : The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, [1st ed., 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974), 144-157.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Mary Hilliard, “Spending in Black and White : Race, Slavery, and Consumer Values in the Antebellum South” (Thesis (Ph D.), University of South Carolina, 2006., 2006), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence T. McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community” in Winfred B. Moore et al., *Developing Dixie : Modernization in a Traditional Society*, Contributions in American History, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 31-44.

<sup>9</sup> Philip D. Morgan, “The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983) 399-420; Philip D. Morgan, “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 39, no. 4 (oct., 1982) 563-599; Dylan Penningroth, “Slavery, Freedom, and Social Claims to Property among African Americans in Liberty County, Georgia, 1850-1880,” *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (1997) 405-435.

emancipation. Most emancipation research, while strongly contingent with slavery usually begins at the moment of emancipation, and ends with the death of Reconstruction around 1877. They rarely stress the continuity theme of slaves' internal economy and their transition as freedmen into the emancipation era. A thorough analysis of Reconstruction historiography elaborates more clearly on the lack of continuity analysis between slavery and emancipation regarding market activity.

Reconstruction historiography incorporates emancipation and has been analyzed from multiple angles. It has been the subject of race relations, economic analysis, political frameworks, education, and the subject of constitutional study. What Eric Foner calls "America's Unfinished Revolution," Reconstruction was the attempt to reunite the states after the destruction of secession and war ripped the nation apart.<sup>10</sup> The reasons for its labeling it as an "unfinished" revolution stem from the social impact that its conclusion had on the former slave class. Interpretations of this tumultuous time have evolved over many years and have been interpreted and reinterpreted beginning in the 1890s just over a decade after its conclusion. The earliest scholarly and historically relevant discussions regarding emancipation and Reconstruction date to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and have become recognized as the Traditionalist "Dunning" School. Dunning's interpretations blamed Reconstruction's failure on the emancipated slaves and the "Radicals" in American politics who fastened emancipation upon the South and allowed uneducated, unprepared slaves access to politics and freedom that they were not prepared to handle. This traditional view continued to be the accepted understanding until many of its assumptions and findings were challenged by Revisionist authors in the 1950s and 1960s. Revisionism fostered in a new understanding of the emancipation and highlighted many of the struggles faced by emancipated slaves as the politics and social climate of reconstructing the divided states hindered their ability to truly gain the promises of freedom.

Early views toward emancipation and Reconstruction argued that following the Civil War the South accepted military defeat and was ready to rejoin the Union. Their efforts to do so were thwarted by radicals in the Republican Congress who wanted to promote the ascendancy of their party to national prominence. Congress eventually opposed any moderate reforms attempted by President Andrew Johnson, instead enfranchising the unprepared and ignorant freedmen. This radical imposition of federal rule was then presided over by southern Union loyalists (scalawags) and northern "carpetbaggers" who despised the rebellious South. After enduring Congressional Reconstruction, the South was eventually redeemed and "home rule" restored. The Traditional interpretation focused exclusively on the failures of such a transition and fostered much its racist assumption without seriously examining the slave populations situation nor seeking to find the positives of the emerging freedmen class. The only discussion regarding the newly emancipated class was the suggested incompetency of the freedmen who were given freedom and rights that they did not deserve.

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1988).

Furthermore, agency held by freedmen was completely absent, suggesting that emancipation and Reconstructions failure was a reactionary, rather than a proactive pursuit by them.<sup>11</sup>

Progressive scholars of the 1920s and 1930s, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, looked at the emerging economic and political ramifications of Reconstruction. Du Bois along with a few other authors such John R. Lynch and Alruthus A. Taylor challenged many of the commonly held assumptions of the Reconstruction era and argued “the general position that blacks during Reconstruction were not the ignorant dupes of unprincipled white men.”<sup>12</sup> These men highlighted the achievements of emancipation and suggested that the war was fought to end slavery. Du Bois placed the black experience at the center of his work. His “monumental study” *Black Reconstruction in America, 1865-1880* departed from the Dunning school by not only placing the freedman and former slave at the center of the Civil War and Reconstruction policy, but elucidated the impact to which labor and economics played in the struggle to reconstruct the South during the war and in the postwar years. Du Bois, unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, was convinced that the Civil War was fought to end slavery, not because of widespread abolitionist sentiment, but as a struggle between capital and labor, with slavery the central theme. Dubois saw the Civil War, not in terms of fashioning an end to slave labor, but an attempt to place free labor as the new precedent, something the South was adamantly opposed. The labor question was discussed from the overall economic and political viewpoints as a national struggle rather than interpreting it at the grass roots social or individual level. Du Bois also suggested that ending slavery was not the goal of the North, it had very little intention of emancipating the slaves, only to stop the spread of slave labor into the expanding west. Explaining through the words of Frederick Douglass, Du Bois wrote “that the Civil War was begun in the interest of slavery on both sides. The South was fighting to take slavery out of the Union, the North to keep it in.”<sup>13</sup>

Du Bois, as one of the earliest and strongest critics of the traditional view, seriously criticized the lack of agency that persisted, that slaves played an active role in turning the war into an abolitionist war. Du Bois provided the freedmen with agency in the Reconstruction saga, not an incompetent passive traveler, but an active agent in the outcome of the war and an intricate part in the war’s aftermath. He showed the “enormous power” held by the slaves and the inability to avoid the consequences the “freedom for the slave was the logical result of a crazy attempt to wage war in the midst of four million black slaves...while trying to ignore [their] interests.”<sup>14</sup>

In the end, according to Du Bois, the economic issues of labor and industrial capitalism interfered with the progress of Reconstruction and allowed for the redemption of the south. The struggle to control the newly freed labor force, fueled by southern racial animosity, led to a

<sup>11</sup> For a greater understanding of the Dunning school of interpretation or a general overview of the traditional viewpoint see Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990) xi-xii; Francis G. Couveres et al, ed., *Interpretations of American History, Patterns and Perspectives Through Reconstruction*, vol. 1, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009), 347-349; Franklin, “Mirrors,” 1-14.

<sup>12</sup> Franklin, “Mirrors,” 5.

<sup>13</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 121.

“determined effort” to reduce black labor as nearly as possible to the condition of unlimited exploitation.”<sup>15</sup> *Black Reconstruction in America* foreshadowed many of the conclusions of “modern scholarship” and challenged the “traditional” interpretation of the Dunning school setting the precedent for a complete revision of Reconstruction.<sup>16</sup> Du Bois’ understanding of the freedmen’s mentality paved the way for future scholars to challenge the traditional viewpoints and place the freedmen at the center of the Reconstruction saga.

Many of the most lasting impressions of emancipation stem from Revisionist and Post-revisionist schools of Reconstruction. Revisionism solidified itself in the 1960s and elevated the Radical Republicans of Congress to the role of hero during the Reconstruction era by highlighting their impressive attempts to secure equality, liberty, and black suffrage in the postwar era. Revisionist scholars presented emancipation and Reconstruction as a “time of real progress” presided over by radicals who were unable to finish their job because of white racist “redeemers” in the south.<sup>17</sup> Revisionists brought race to the forefront amid the racial upheaval of the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. New studies on freedmen participation in state and federal government along with larger cultural studies of race relations and society entered the discussion for the first time. Revisionists argued that southern white resistance to establishing racial equality and suffrage was Reconstructions real tragedy.<sup>18</sup> They stressed the grandness of Radical Republican attempts to support racial equality through the passing of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and for their support of the Freedman’s Bureau and public education.<sup>19</sup> Building from Du Bois, Revisionists discussed race through politics, focusing attention on the struggles of freedmen. Studies of African American societies flourished. Joel Williamson and Willie Lee Rose contributed social studies of emancipation in South Carolina elucidating on freemen’s attempt to acquire property, seek wages, and look for political agency in the aftermath of freedom.<sup>20</sup>

Revisionists John Hope Franklin and Kenneth Stampp openly challenged the traditional Dunning interpretation with their own research and analysis. They did not see the Radical Republican Congress as the “unscrupulous” corrupt government insistent on establishing “negro rule” and “military despotism” upon the South.<sup>21</sup> They portrayed Radicals in Congress as proponents of equal protection, civil rights and universal male suffrage. Franklin, in his work *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (1961) demonstrated the power struggle between President Andrew Johnson and Congress

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 670

<sup>16</sup> Foner, *A Short History*, xii.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Foner, “Reconstruction Revisited,” *Reviews in American History* 87, no. 4 (1982): 83; see also Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 63.

<sup>18</sup> Foner, “Reconstruction Revisited,” 83.

<sup>19</sup> Esteemed works of the *revisionism* include, John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction*.

<sup>20</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: The Bobbs-Merril Company, Inc, 1964); see also Williamson, *After Slavery*.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction*, (New York: Knopf, 1965), vii.

over Reconstruction policy and the re-admittance of southern states to the Union. Kenneth Stampp went a step further, attacking the authors of the traditional view, singling out the scholarship of the Dunning school in an effort to revise the understanding of emancipation. Drawing similar conclusions to Franklin, he argued that the writings of the “Dunningites” were based on “sordid motives” and “human depravity.” What is most interesting in the traditional “legend” of Reconstruction, claimed Stampp, was the “notion that the white people of the south were treated with unprecedented brutality.” In fact, Stampp posits that the occupation, the treatment of prisoners of war, the quick pardoning of ex-Confederates, and the almost non existence of any indictments, trials or convictions for treason indicated how Reconstruction was arguably one of the most peaceful treatments of any rebellious nature against a government in history.<sup>22</sup> All told, the South foiled the idealistic and compassionate policies of the Radicals in Congress. The real tragedy of reconstruction was that it fell short of its ultimate goals, which would take another one hundred years to finish what radicals in congress started in 1865. The wave of revisionism quickly destroyed almost every assumption of the traditional viewpoint.

The 1970s witnessed Revisionists views elaborated upon in light of new political research by authors interpreting the post Civil War years through different political and social lenses. Post-revisionists focused on elaborating and elucidating the political aspects of emancipation and Reconstruction through a perceived shift of political alliances toward the center. This shift had its movements, not only in the Republican Party, but also within the Democratic Party as it too struggled to solidify its dominance in the south during the early years of Reconstruction. Many authors completely neglected the emancipation status of the freedmen and focused exclusively upon the politics of emancipation. “Continuity between the Old and New South” was the theme, but not in light of the status of the freed slave. William Gillette focused on national politics in an effort to explain the “retreat” from Reconstruction and the abandonment of the freedmen in his study *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*. He argued that a “postwar political and constitutional settlement” remained a constant theme within Republican controlled Congress “to lodge national political power permanently in the North within the national Republican Party and to republicanize the South.”<sup>23</sup> Harold Hyman’s *A More Perfect Union* suggests that Reconstruction policy was supported by the “most conservative men in the senate,” a definite change from revisionist writings which stressed the “radical” methods of Reconstruction. Published in 1973, *A More Perfect Union* stresses the continuity of Constitutional understanding in postwar politics suggesting politicians sought a “return to prewar arrangements” between the states and federal government.<sup>24</sup> Theme of continuity between pre-war

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<sup>22</sup> Stampp, *Era of Reconstruction*, 6, 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction: 1869-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), x, xii.

<sup>24</sup> Harold Hyman, *A More Perfect Union: The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the Constitution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 298-299

and postwar relations were the topic, only from the political and constitutional standpoint, with freedmen and emancipation only background topics.

The idea that “continuums dominated” the landscape during Reconstruction vastly contradicts Revisionist notions of radical change.<sup>25</sup> Revisionist authors stressed the radical nature of emancipation and Reconstruction attempts within postwar political movements. These so-called Radicals set out to “remake” southern society by removing political power from the planter class and placing it within the hands of freedmen.<sup>26</sup> The real “impact” of the Civil War and Reconstruction, according to Hyman, lay in the use of the constitution to put an end to slavery and to validate the illegality of secession while ultimately maintaining as much state control of power as possible. While almost completely ignoring the freedmen, Hyman strays, away from southern politics and focuses primarily on northern efforts to use constitutional politics in maintaining state and local control over many issues. He describes the building of a Republican “partnership” with the judiciary to enforce the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. This in turn, explains reasons to Reconstruction’s failure as Republicans grew weary of fighting for black equality due to an inability to enforce federal laws eventually leading to the mindset that Reconstruction was a “black promise not worth fighting for.”<sup>27</sup> Michael Les Benedict, a student of Hyman’s, argues Republicans framed the most “limited Reconstruction they could,” hoping to “alter southern politics and federal law in such a way as to minimize the need for continued federal action to protect rights.” No matter how “radical” black equality and suffrage appeared socially, in the eyes of the Constitution it was quite “conservative.”<sup>28</sup> Hyman and Benedict’s research, though set in the era of emancipation focus exclusively on political Reconstruction centered on northern political disputes and Republican dilemmas of protecting the civil rights of the freedmen while still limiting the role of the national government. These constant restraints and continued struggles to maintain states’ rights and conserve constitutional federalism led to the eventual failure of Reconstruction’s lofty goals. Neither Hyman nor Benedict concern their works with the plight of the freedmen, nor are they particularly focused on Southern politics. This is not to say that the freedmen experience is absent in Postrevisionist Reconstruction works.

Multiple studies stress continuity between the Old South and post war society. George C Rable’s South experiences continuity in a completely different way. *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* showcases how violence and terror were a normal part of southern society before the war. As “heirs to a long tradition of violence,” some white southerners readily employed these tactics as a means to an end. “Nowhere,” according to Rable,

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 299.

<sup>26</sup> Couveres et al, *Interpretations*, 354.

<sup>27</sup> Hyman, *Perfect Union*, 414.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution: Essays on Politics and the Constitution in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: Fordham University Press), xii.

“was violence more acceptable as a normal part of life than in the southern states.”<sup>29</sup> His study focuses on race, and provides a vivid portrayal of what slaves and freedmen experienced but almost exclusively from a political perspective or showcase the violence of reconstruction. Yet Rable spends the majority of his work focusing on southern white efforts to overthrow Reconstruction governments through means of “counterrevolutionary” and “paramilitary” violence, and systematic resistance to the education of freedmen. Southern society developed notions of race as a method of control in which the “paternalistic” relationship between slave-owner and former slave was more important to post emancipation society than northern education. “In southern theory,” Rable explains, “education for blacks was both unnecessary and dangerous.” Among other ventures, the Ku Klux Klan systematically destroyed schoolhouses and harassed schoolteachers in efforts to maintain control over society. Again the themes of continuity revolved around the attempts of whites to keep the slave class uneducated, not in the notions and ability of slaves to assert their values and growing understanding of freedom.

Barbara J. Fields contends that Democratic Party efforts to fasten racial ideology with “its slogans of white supremacy” should be taken carefully. Not only is racial ideology a historical construct but it varied between southern white social classes.<sup>30</sup> Fields ultimately contends that the “tragic flaw” of southern or American history is that slavery, its dispersal, and its destruction were “central events” where racial ideologies were forged by the experiences of social realities and the formation of industrial and capitalist social classes. She contends that southern historians should be aware that racial ideology became the “medium through which Americans confronted questions of sovereignty based on their relationship to slavery, and that this ideology has had lasting consequences.” Race as a concept emerged from “the acts and decisions of men and women in a society now past,” and historians should be careful in interpretations of race, as it meant different things to various groups.<sup>31</sup> This “neo-Marxian” analysis contends that one cannot understand race relations without acknowledging the formation of social classes arising from industrial capitalism in nineteenth-century southern society.<sup>32</sup> The transition to free market capitalism based on the free labor argument for freedom inherently shifted the focus of emancipation toward the analysis of freedmen’s market concepts.

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<sup>29</sup> George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 191.

<sup>30</sup> Woodward et al., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction : Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* ,157-58; for further information on the ideology of race and its relationship to slavery see George M. Fredrickson, “Masters and Mudsills: The Role of Race in the Planter Ideology of South Carolina” in *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1988). This volume consists of a collection of essays written by Fredrickson which discuss race and social relations in the South.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. , 167-69.

<sup>32</sup> Fredrickson, *Arrogance*, 3.

Emancipation ultimately rested in the willingness of slaves to resort to wage labor.<sup>33</sup> The end of slavery coincided with the rise of free market labor economics. According to Thomas Holt, “freedom to compete did not imply equality.” It did however assume that freedmen held the same “innate nature and potential desires” as whites. In order to implement this transformation to a market economy required the education of former slaves in how to “internalize the discipline and materialist psychology required in a free, but not equal society.” The planter class resisted the free labor system based on their racist assumptions that “blacks would not work without physical compulsion.”<sup>34</sup> Freedmen were reluctant to accept the new economic order as their perception of freedom differed greatly from those of their emancipators which helped to charge the “racial backlash” of longstanding racist ideas and the “willingness to express them” in the late nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> To understand how emancipated slaves accepted freedom historians began to look more closely at social issues and freedmen participation in free labor and market economics.

One of the most noteworthy and early attempts to suggest continuity in freedmen’s reactions to freedom based on notions developed in slavery was published in 1979 by Leon F. Litwack. Litwack looks at freedmen and their proclivities obtained during slavery. *Been in the Storm so Long* analyzes and interprets the issues of post emancipation from a black centric point of view. Litwack’s study utilizes sources from former slaves, black church archives, Freedmen’s Bureau records, and slave owner manuscripts to describe how freedmen understood and dealt with freedom. Litwack argues that black labor issues within southern society re-established a caste system that politically disenfranchised blacks to prewar conditions. The education of former slaves played an intricate part in making “productive free laborers of them” and “[imparting] middle-class values” as well.<sup>36</sup> Litwack depicts the racist ideology that followed the northern teachers and missionaries to the South with hopes of providing the “prerequisites of civilization” and the “esteemed virtues” of nineteenth-century American industry; those being: frugality, honesty, sobriety, marital fidelity, self reliance, self control, godliness, and love of country.<sup>37</sup> The study is a monumental achievement and comes the closest to providing an overarching view of freedmen after emancipation. Litwack’s study suggests that slaves held developed notions of labor, property ownership, and market knowledge that greatly impacted their views of freedom which did not necessarily coincide with what free labor and former owners wanted. Litwack’s monumental study provides a powerful framework for analyzing the individual and social relationships that slaves while bondsmen and correlates them with their experiences in freedom. He elucidates on this by establishing that freedmen organized themselves to “discuss their condition

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Holt, “An Empire over Mind: Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South,” in *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 284-285.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 294-298.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>36</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1979), 480.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

and to frame a response" in every ex-Confederate state.<sup>38</sup> This racial insight indicates that rather than being a passive onlooker to Reconstruction, freedmen were active in their understanding of the liberties granted to them and that an organized response was necessary to solidify their place in the new economic and political world. Attributes they brought with them from slavery.

Ted Tunnell, in his work *Crucible of Reconstruction*, suggests that prior to the war black elites and "free Negroes" distanced themselves from slaves. Afterwards, however, they realized that their "future is undoubtedly bound up with that of the Negro race."<sup>39</sup> Heather Cox Richardson scoured Northern newspapers and periodicals to obtain a better understanding of how the average northerner learned about the southern situation. She elucidates on the labor issues in early postwar years where "Northern Republicans believed that freedmen were going to be good workers in a traditional Republican vision of American society."<sup>40</sup> These same northern republicans soon turned against the enfranchised freedmen when worries arose of a social welfare state dominated by "southern African-American radicalism" who hoped to "confiscate the wealth of others rather than work."<sup>41</sup> Northern newspapers showed the apprehension of whites who believed that southern blacks were attempting to increase the power of government to "be given what others had earned."<sup>42</sup> In the view of Richardson, these media interpretations led to the evolution of class conflicts in relation to race and labor that ultimately brought northern whites together in an effort to preserve their traditional American belief in working one's way out of poverty. Her work helps add to the northern perception of emancipation, as with many emancipation histories, it focuses on the overarching framework of Reconstruction and less on the experience of the freedmen.

In 1988, Eric Foner published his synthetic and comprehensive survey on Reconstruction. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* which attempts to incorporate all the previous works into a comprehensive understanding that portrays the "black experience" and traces the way in which southern society was "remodeled" after the war. Foner focuses on race relations and the meaning of freedom, the expanding authority of the national government, and how economic structures in class and labor impacted Reconstruction.<sup>43</sup> His work synthesizes the aspects of reconstruction while incorporating them into a comprehensive understanding of the period.

Foner draws heavily on the Progressive economic frameworks and Revisionist social frameworks intertwining all aspects of Reconstruction into a powerful model and distinctively complete review of the subject. Not only does he provide agency for the slave and freedmen, but he elaborates on their early attempts to gain liberty and enfranchisement. According to Foner, retreat

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<sup>38</sup> Litwack, *Storm*, 501.

<sup>39</sup> Ted Tunnell, *Crucible for Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 41.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>43</sup> Foner, *A Short History*, xv-xvi.

from reconstruction in the mid 1870s was economically motivated, and was ultimately accepted by an exhausted national Congress unable to enforce new citizenship laws. The end of Reconstruction and the social and disenfranchisement of the freedmen population coupled with loss of political power and fundamental rights enjoyed under Radical Congressional oversight coincided with the election of 1876. Southern Redeemers, “secessionist Democrats” and a slew of southern loyalists shared a “commitment to dismantling the Reconstruction state, reducing the political power of blacks, and reshaping the South’s legal system in the interest of labor control and racial subordination.”<sup>44</sup> Foner, a top American southern historian and slavery analyst, has published other works ultimately concerned with understanding the meaning of freedom and posits that the social dynamic and political forces were not accepting to what freedmen really wanted. He argues that slave and freedmen notions of land ownership and individual autonomous farms were ultimately what freedmen wanted. With no land distribution and a push to implement free labor ideals on the freedmen, they (the freedmen) were forced to return in mass numbers to plantation work for wages or sharecropping. As an observer stated, “the emancipated slave owns nothing, because nothing but freedom has been given to them.”<sup>45</sup>

The notion of the active freedmen, which first surfaced in the writing of Du Bois, has flourished within Revisionist and Postrevisionist circles. A trend in the last few decades has developed in southern history to understand how the newly freed slave understood his rights and place in society. Still many studies of African American history revolve around the age of emancipation and continue to focus on the slavery side. “Does this pattern suggest that historians have thought that the key to understanding the place of Afro-Americans in American life is to be found in the slave experience and not in the struggles for adjustment in the early years of freedom?” asks John Hope Franklin.<sup>46</sup> Social and cultural studies depicting the emergence of freedom are still lagging. Perhaps by utilizing similar methods and frameworks developed to study slave society and slave economies historians can develop a greater understanding of market interaction in the early years of post-emancipation where records are scarce. There have been a number of insightful studies using slave society records such as narratives, autobiographies, along with court, local, and national records. Rebecca J. Scott suggests analyzing narratives and slave recollections as a way to provide agency toward those with little voice. Philip D Morgan and Lawrence T McDonnell show the variety of economic activity within slave society and suggest that slaves understood the freedom and power of market exchange.<sup>47</sup> These frameworks along with those utilized by the likes of Du Bois, Litwack, and

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<sup>44</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction : America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 1st Perennial Classics ed., New American Nation Series. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), 587-588.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom : Emancipation and Its Legacy*, Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 55.

<sup>46</sup> Franklin, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Rebecca J. Scott, “Small-Scale Dynamics of Large-Scale Processes,” *American Historical Review* vol. 105 No.2 (April, 2000), 472-479; Philip D. Morgan, “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of the Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Seriesm* Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct., 1982), 563-599; Lawrence T. McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave

others who have looked at society just after emancipation suggest that new evaluations and interpretations of Reconstruction are available for those who choose to undertake such an endeavor.

More cultural and social studies of the emergence of freedmen from bondage are needed to provide an accurate portrayal of life from slavery to freedom. Many assert, like those of the Revisionist era, that great social changes occurred and others maintain that continuity between old and new south was very prevalent. These enduring questions leave much to be uncovered regarding American Reconstruction and how emancipation affected millions. There is no better place to start then at the point of exchange. Participation of slaves and freedmen in the market just after emancipation can elucidate on the state of the freedmen and to what extent there was participation. Their experience of the market interaction and notions of property ownership, the value of money, and compensation for work during slavery had ramification during freedom. By utilizing account books, narratives, Freedmen Bureau records, and the archives of multiple collections, a new interpretation, and understanding of economic activity may reveal itself. The experiences of the Freedmen themselves are vital in interpreting the history of emancipation.

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Community," in *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society*, ed. Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 31-44.

## Chapter Three

### The Southern Contexts of Slavery

The development of the slave system in the New World greatly impacted the economic development of the modern era. Millions of men and women were forcefully made to migrate across the Atlantic Ocean and settled into a life of bondage and servitude. Within different areas of the Caribbean and Americas varying systems of slave labor developed that greatly impacted slave life and customs. Within these numerous slave cultures, varying forms of slave economies placed slaves and slave owners dependent upon one another. Within the southern United States, prior to the Civil War, masters and planters utilized multiple methods to maintain economic prosperity and keep control of their slave property. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to provide the backdrop of social and institutional situations that slaves within the Antebellum Southern United States found themselves in as it relates to free market activity, property ownership, monetary knowledge, and wages working. There is evidence that many African American slaves were already familiar with and understood many concepts of freedom as associated with free market exchange and free labor. There is evidence that suggests that within the various slave labor systems employed throughout the American South, slaves were aware of and understood many free market notions such as wage working for labor, market exchange, the significance and value of both money and property. Kathleen Hilliard, Phillip Morgan, Lawrence MacDonald, Daniel Littlefield, and others have provided wonderful insight into the resourcefulness and ingenuity of slaves' efforts to work, acquire money and property, and a general understanding of free market ideals and interactions. Within the culture that these slaves lived, there were also efforts, however successful or unsuccessful, by southern society and slaveholders to restrict but also encourage market activity. There is ample evidence that suggests that some slave owners explicitly utilized these "internal slave economies" to satisfy their slaves' wants and desires by paying them in cash or allowing them access to market interaction. Research into the internal economies of slaves also implies that slaves in different areas developed similar understandings to the free labor ideas of work, money, and property. By describing the various work cultures employed in the Antebellum South before the Civil War a clearer understanding of how slaves negotiated their dual economic situation helps provide a picture of the notions and values they held as they emerged from slavery into the free market.

As the market system developed in the southern United States, both slaveholding whites, as well as poor yeomanry whites were affected in multiple ways. The marketplace, along with market interaction and a developing southern middle class, blurred the economic lines between slave labor and wage labor. Urban development and the emergence of a small but increasing consumer and service culture provided new understandings of market relationships at the social levels. This middle class, developing between the planter class and the yeoman, looked to redefine the slave South by

encouraging the development of wage labor all the while trying to maintain balance within the southern slave culture.<sup>1</sup> These developments seriously undermined arguments for slave labor and ultimately provided some slaves avenues to obtain impressive amounts of money, and even purchase their own freedom as they managed to secure positions within wage society. The same situations also apply to white yeoman who found themselves more fully aware of their developing class position as subsistence agriculturalists at odds with the market developments of wage labor in the South. The knowledge of money, coupled with payment for services increasingly fostered the ideas of free market economics, and white yeomen farmers also reacted by hiring themselves out for services labor or migrating to urban areas in search of labor work themselves. Even white yeomanry utilized wage labor when needed. This also solidified the labor market in rural areas. As Aaron Ford remembered how his owner hired him out to “poor white neighbors,” indicating that forms of labor for hire was already solidifying itself among the rural yeomen population.<sup>2</sup> Outside of these developments, the variety of slave labor systems also helped to instill market notions within slave communities.

As a precursor to emancipation, it is important to understand the habits, values, and work experiences that antebellum slaves carried into freedom. Many slavery advocates promoted the racist opinion that those enslaved were inherently lazy and if given freedom would resort to idleness and unproductive if not made to work. Such notions seem paradoxical given the reality that it was notably slave-owners who were idle, earning their profit by the employment of slave labor while indulging in excesses.<sup>3</sup> “Slavery provided the foundation on which the South rose and grew.”<sup>4</sup> There is no greater example of this than in the development of Sea Island plantation systems in the low country of South Carolina. The hard work and reclamation of land from the vast tidal swamps was tasked to African slaves, whose work in this endeavor did not pass unnoticed. The production and work ethic of the slaves to clear and tame the land was described by the nineteenth century United States Judge Henry Smith. “The only labour at the disposal of the settlers who accomplished the feat was of the most unskilled character, African savages fresh from the Guinea coast. It was an achievement no less skilful than that of the ancient Egyptians.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a research revolving around the development of the southern middle class and its positioning within the antebellum South see Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Narrative of Aaron Ford in Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 2 a Folk History of the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, ed. Federal Writers' Project. (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format page 31, (Electronic Resource), <http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/969>, (Accessed August 24, 2011). <http://lowcountryafricana.net>.

<sup>3</sup> For post-emancipation examples of “idleness” views see, LaWanda C. Fenlason Cox et al., *Reconstruction, the Negro, and the New South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973)32-33. For perception on the “leisure” and “pleasure” of the southern aristocratic class see Alexis de Tocqueville et al., *Democracy in America : And Two Essays on America*, Penguin Classics. (London: Penguin, 2003)398-408.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery; Studies in the Economy & Society of the Slave South* (New York,: Pantheon Books, 1965)13.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine Thomas Smythe et al., *The Carolina Low-Country* (New York,: The Macmillan company, 1931)103.

These lands would form the foundation of cotton, indigo, and rice production that led to South Carolina's "crème de la crème" of southern society preceding the American Civil War.<sup>6</sup> African slaves were critical for colonial and antebellum development. Their labor and ingenuity helped establish the work culture and plantation system that became the essence of southern society during its formative years. Furthermore they were instrumental in the plantation process and labor systems that ultimately controlled their destiny. The evolution of the plantation system suggests the resourcefulness and creativity of slaves as they endeavored to make the most of their situation. As the system of slavery spread across the developing United States, it changed and modified its existence as well. Throughout the region, as new crops were introduced and as the slave population increased new methods of employment developed to control and profit from the ample supply of slave labor.

Three very distinct types of labor systems developed and were employed throughout the South. Tasking, gang labor, and the hiring out of slaves were all extensively employed during the antebellum period. These three systems provide the framework for which this study basis its research and conclusions. Understanding the ways in which they affected the labor supply and to what extent slaves understood free market concepts are further elaborated upon in subsequent chapters. But in order to analyze the impact of each system a better understanding of how they function is important. Each system supplied slaves with a variety of market and free labor interaction and helped foster, long before emancipation, notions and themes freedom. Notions of economic independence and market activity provided some slaves with the necessary tools to move into the free market economy with greater success than others. Each type of labor systems allowed for a varying degree of independence and market knowledge and interaction slaves. Recent evidence has elucidated the market interaction provided to slaves by the task system surrounding the low country region and Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia. The Sea Island region provided a unique "task" labor system which differed greatly from that of the much more common "gang" labor system employed throughout the cotton belt and consumed much of a slaves day and time. Analysis has shown that tasking provided the slave with notions between the differences of a slaves "free" time and his "owners" time, which was necessary for him to finish his "tasked" job. During his "free" time, a slave was permitted to do as he wished within legal limits and often removed him from any further calling from his master. The "task system" of labor employed in the southern low country and Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia "built the rice plantation system, which buttressed the economy of the entire region," and much of the work was "directed entirely by Negro drivers."<sup>7</sup> As a "central feature of the low country," the slave employed by the task system was "assigned a certain amount of work for the day, and after completing the task he could use his time as he please."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Possession of Beaufort," *New York Daily Tribune*, November 15, 1861, 4.

<sup>7</sup> June Sheralyn Manning Thomas, "Blacks on the South Carolina Sea Islands: Planning for Tourist and Land Development" (Thesis, University of Michigan., 1977), 29-30.

<sup>8</sup>As quoted in Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 39, no. 4 (oct., 1982) 564; see also Lewis Cecil

Although the task system was not exclusive to the low country of South Carolina, situations arose within its implementation that distinguished it from similar systems utilized within the West Indies. Unlike task systems in the West Indies, South Carolina planters and owners “accepted greater responsibility” in providing sustenance for their slaves. This ultimately allowed more “free time” for those who chose to make use of it when tasks were completed.<sup>9</sup> While the adoption of the task system over the “tried and tested” gang labor model is debatable, the ramifications of such a system are obvious.<sup>10</sup> Once a slave had completed his assigned task, he was free to plant his own food. From the crop yield, the most entrepreneurial of the slaves could take the harvested surplus to market. As the eighteenth century observer Johann Martin Bolzius noted, “they [slaves] are given as much land as they can handle. On it they plant for themselves corn, potatoes, tobacco, peanuts, water and sugar melons, pumpkins, bottle pumpkins,” and “if the Negroes are skillful and industrious, they plant something for themselves after the day's work and buy trifles with the proceeds.”<sup>11</sup> By evaluating the internal productivity of the task labor system on slave time management it may be possible to understand what values and notions freedmen brought into the free market. Bolzuis, describing the daily tasks of the slave, suggests that some were productive enough to establish supplemental means of existence. Following their daily tasks, slaves could return to their own plots of land and do as the pleased.

Frederick Law Olmsted, a northern traveler in the south, captures the reality of the task system and its impact on slave values and notions of work in his observations. “In the woods I saw a negro by a fire, while it was still light, shaving shingles very industriously...No doubt he was working by task, and of his own accord at night, that he might have more daylight for his own purposes.”<sup>12</sup> Olmsted’s depiction of the industriousness of the slaves bound within the task system provides examples of the value they realized in their work and reflects the capabilities they possessed in acquiring goods and property. Olmsted describes how slaves attended to other, more personal, things, once a task was complete. Mothers, who left their babies on one low country plantation, returned to receive them

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Gray et al., *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958)I, 550-551.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel C. Littlefield, “Continuity and Change in Slave Culture: South Carolina and the West Indies,” *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South* XXVI, no. 3 (Fall 1987) 203.

<sup>10</sup> For discussion on the various interpretations of the adoption of the task system see Morgan, “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880,” 566-569; for discussion on planter absenteeism see Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, “The Slave Labor Problem in the Charleston District,” in Elinor Miller et al., eds., *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana,: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 9; for particular slave expertise and familiarity see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, [1st ed. (New York,: Knopf; [distributed by Random House], 1974)56-62; and Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981)74-114.

<sup>11</sup> For information on the southern observer Johann Martin Bolzius see Klaus G. Loewald et al., “Johann Martin Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire on Carolina and Georgia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1957) 218-222; Johann Martin Bolzius, “Reliable Answer to Some Submitted Questions Concerning the Land Carolina,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1957) 259, 256.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy, Our Slave States.* (New York,: Dix & Edwards;, 1856)20.

“when they have finished their tasks – generally in the middle of the afternoon.”<sup>13</sup> By all indications, once a task was complete, the slave was sometimes free to do with what they wanted. The tasking “inculcated” a sense of “responsibility” that was evident in the internal and industrious informal economy created a “quasi-proprietorial attitude.”<sup>14</sup> These values are evident in their productivity within this system as they acquired a variety of personal property as a possible form of resistance to themselves being property.

Some slaves possessed skilled crafts that enabled them to be more industriousness while in bondage. Some “cut fir trees into ships' masts, and into building lumber,”<sup>15</sup> Certain skills provided the slaves with higher value than others. According to Bolzius, “If the Negroes know a craft, they are worth more by as much as their craft earns, eg., a couple of sawyers are worth £4 to £6 more than a mere field Negro; a cooper costs £50 to £70, A carpenter £70 to £107.”<sup>16</sup> Skilled slaves in the city, such as those with brick making knowledge, were extremely valuable, especially when “a gentleman who has his own Negroes can have the bricks made himself under supervision of a white brickmaker, and thereby build more cheaply than with wood.”<sup>17</sup>

Many factors led to the development of certain skilled laborers among slaves. The greater mobility of whites, the greater expense of their labor and the uncertainty of their work quality “necessitated the training and use of skilled slaves,” eventually leading to a degree of “leverage” to those slaves who had obtained expertise.” According to Daniel Littlefield, such slaves who possessed certain skills were less “expendable” and therefore were able to “exert more control over their own destiny.” These skilled slaves obtained greater freedom, and along with their plantation counterparts, were able to accumulate money and goods that they could possibly take to market. The accumulation of certain property for market exchange was noticeable within the ranks of the white population. And slaves with skills in urban areas often dealt with money and wages as they utilized their skills to make money for their masters. Skilled laborers had varying degrees of freedom. Henry Laurens, when sending a slave carpenter to work out of state asserted that he “could return if he “did not like the conditions there.” In urban areas, slaves with talents and skills faired particularly well in collecting a “significant sum of money” while providing for themselves. Some “frequently hired themselves out without their master's knowledge while others were able to traverse from job to job and acquire wages from whites desiring to purchase their labor. As a “monitoring system,” Ordinances imposed to control the mobility of such skilled and hired out labor, yet these legalities were rarely acknowledged.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>14</sup> Philip D. Morgan, “The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983) 401.

<sup>15</sup> Bolzius, “Reliable Answer to Some Submitted Questions Concerning the Land Carolina,” 260.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>18</sup> Littlefield, “Continuity and Change in Slave Culture: South Carolina and the West Indies,” 209-211.

Hiring out slaves has also been shown to provide slaves in the upper South and urban areas with considerable independence and market knowledge in regards to earning wages and individual autonomy. As supplemental income for their masters, slaves in urban areas hired out as waiters, servants, or just about any job that their owners desired. Sometimes the period of hire might last over half a year, but usually they urban slaves were leased for days at a time.<sup>19</sup> In the more industrious upper South of Virginia, masters offered their slaves to local factories, providing labor at wages to help spur the industrial expansion in the region. Others sent their slaves to work for friends or even plantations for wages which the owners took mostly of for themselves.<sup>20</sup> The access to paid wages provided slaves with monetary knowledge and the ability to understand market economics, since they could evaluate their work time in connection with their monetary compensation, even if their owners sequestered most of it. Hiring out was also employed in rural areas, and in some instances, slave were aware of whites hiring themselves out trying to earn extra money. “Poor white folks had to hustle ‘round to make a living, so, they hired themselves to slave owners,” recalled Samuel Boulware.<sup>21</sup> Whenever possible, owners and poor whites utilized the hired-out wage labor system to earn money, while the slave earnestly learned for the behavior, undoubtedly acquiring market skills from this slave labor system.

Even gang labor offered unique opportunities for slaves to understand market knowledge essential to the free market. Gang labor was much more intrusive in a slave’s life. It usually consisted of working in the plantation fields from dawn until dusk and consumed much of a slave’s time. Without the free time to cultivate his own crops or provide his own subsistence, these slaves relied more heavily on their master for provisions. Yet this did not stop them from understanding concepts of the free market, spending, or notions of monetary consumption. Upon many of these plantations slaves were allowed to keep private quarters and gardens. Many accumulated fineries and clothing passed down from their owners. Some were acutely aware of the market through the purchasing and selling of slaves, often knowing the exact amount for which they were sold. They learned to value their free time and witnessed first hand the profiteering of their masters through their slave labor. This ultimately led to the understanding that their work meant great monetary rewards for their masters. Such a system instilled notions of work ethic, production, and in certain instances, allowed for the acquisition of property. Many larger plantations also held general stores in which slaves traded and

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas R. Egerton, "Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (2006) : 623

<sup>20</sup> See Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (1960) .

<sup>21</sup> Narrative of Samuel Boulware in Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 1 a Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*,, ed. Federal Writers' Project (Project Gutenburg, 2006), pdf format page 31,(Electronic Resource), [www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976](http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976), (Accessed August 24, 2011) <http://lowcountryafricana.net>.

acquired personal “luxuries” and small amounts of property.<sup>22</sup> The ability of slaves to accumulate certain forms of property suggests a development of market and labor value. These values would eventually follow them into the free market and labor society. Even as the South fastened slavery more fully, slaves, along with masters, continued to develop an internal or “informal” slave economy with personal notions and values of the market as central features.

As early as 1686, laws prohibited the “exchange of goods between slaves or between slaves and freemen without their masters’ consent.” These continued to evolve over the course of the eighteenth century, with limited effect as masters also began to rely on their slave’s production and efficiency. These interactions often resembled bartering transactions where the slave had a degree of negotiation power. Henry Laurens, a southern slave owner, advised one of his overseers to “purchase of your own Negroes all [the provisions] that you know lawfully belongs to themselves at the lowest price that they will sell it for.” In addition, according to Philip Morgan, if a slave did not receive a “fair price” they were able to take their produce “elsewhere”<sup>23</sup>

Many slaves took advantage of the situations presented to them. Aside from the efforts of plantation slaves taking crop surplus to the markets, or skilled slaves hiring out their time, some were able to acquire property. This acquisition of property through market means suggests that many African American slaves had extensive knowledge of the market system and the value of money in terms of a day’s work and pay. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, many slaves found ways to acquire consumer goods as well as managed to control various amounts of their own property, even as they themselves were considered property. The paradox of maintaining some semblance of property rights, even as they themselves were property, suggests the complex notions of slave participation within southern economics. It also suggests that while slavery was being further fashioned upon the South during the antebellum years, slaves themselves found alternative ways to resist and embrace free market ideals, even though they were controlled in the most extreme manner.

The ability of slaves to claim property was of great concern for many southern states. The most obvious reason pertains to the paradox mentioned above, that being, how can property, claim property? If a slave is property, then are not all his possessions also the property of the slave owner? South Carolina enacted numerous laws prohibiting slaves from claiming hogs, cattle, horses, and began, over time, to seize boats or canoes that belonged to slaves. Throughout the eighteenth century, these laws continued to evolve, suggesting that efforts to control such property accumulation went conveniently unrecognized.<sup>24</sup> It may seem difficult to identify what a slave claimed as his property, or what was regarded as such. However, by focusing on documentation of the Southern Claims

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<sup>22</sup> Lawrence T. McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community” in Winfred B. Moore et al., *Developing Dixie : Modernization in a Traditional Society*, Contributions in American History, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 31-44.

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," 571-572.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 574; see also South Carolina, et al., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 10 vols. (Columbia, S.C.: Printed by A. S. Johnston, 1836) VII, 368, 382, 409.

Commission created in the aftermath of the Civil War, a greater picture as to the actual assertion of slave property rights and privileges is revealed.

The Southern Claims Commission began operation in 1871 with the objective to reimburse loyal Americans for the property confiscated or appropriated by the Federal government during the war effort. The idea was to alleviate suffering and property loss to those who filed a petition. The system functioned through the claimants answering a set of questions regarding their loyalty and the property lost. Commissioners would then decide on the compensation based on the claims and their interpretation of the answered questions.<sup>25</sup> There were 22,298 petitions filed, of which 7,092 were allowed. Most striking in regard to property ownership by slaves is the 602 petitions filed and granted to ex-slaves. These claims by ex-slaves provide further evidence that property ownership and free market consumer qualities were not lost during the confinement of bondage and chattel slavery.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most notable and most unique aspect of the reality of slave notions of wages, market interaction, and property was the act of purchasing ones own freedom. Some slaves were able to acquire enough money to facilitate such a purchase. Sometimes a slave would negotiate the terms of such purchases and utilize saved earnings for purchasing not only their freedom but also spouses and family members. These types of transactions are the are the epitome of market interaction and understanding. Such examples highlight the ability of the enslaved to comprehend how the market functions and utilize the knowledge to set goals and standards that could ensure their freedom and undoubtedly supply them with the economic experience to exert autonomy within the paradox of southern society that function in the expanding market revolution.

On the eve of the Civil War, many slaves found themselves in a peculiar situation. Some forced to work in gang labor atmospheres, others within the context of a more liberal tasking system held remarkably developed market knowledge. Slaves in the urban and upper South, who were hired out, found thrifty ways to accumulate bits money that enabled them to access the market in multiple ways.. Each of these systems provided the slave with working knowledge of market activity and property. They were ripe situations for the soon to be freepersons to develop knowledge that would help them in the freedom. How they developed their market and free labor knowledge is essential to better understand their choices following emancipation. A closer look at the development of such notions and values provides a clearer picture to the themes of freedom being solidified during slavery. They elucidates the meanings that slave took with them into freedom. Slave activity in a market context is essential to understanding the continuities that freedmen faced as they traversed into the new territory of freedom.

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<sup>25</sup> For a complete list of all questions asked see “Appendix A” in Frank Wysor Klingberg, *The Southern Claims Commission*, University of California Publications in History, (Berkeley.: University of California Press, 1955)213-219.

<sup>26</sup> Kathleen Mary Hilliard, "Spending in Black and White : Race, Slavery, and Consumer Values in the Antebellum South" (Thesis (Ph D ), University of South Carolina, 2006., 2006), 12-13. Hilliard gives a more thorough discussion on the importance of the Southern Claims Commission in regards to consumerism and slave consumer values.

The system of slavery offered numerous introductions to the market and provided slaves with multiple opportunities to interact at certain market levels. Each of the varying labor systems, in their own unique way, encouraged market knowledge. The context in which slaves negotiated these situations set the stage for their reaction during freedom. By analyzing and creating the context of the slaves' situation a better understanding can be reached as to how these different systems and regional developments worked to provide free market notions and values to a great number of slaves. From the evidence and overall institution of slavery it has become evident that slaves had access to the market which allowed them to develop a strong connection to the themes that free market society expected of freedom. While slavery existed to control the means of production, the internal activity of both slave and slave owner instilled many free market ideals and set the stage for the erosion of the slave system as a whole. How slaves developed their free market notions is equally as important as the context in which they lived, for it is these notions that provided the slave essential knowledge for success or failure once free.

## Chapter Four

### Slave Notions of Work, Money, and Property

It has been suggested that upon freedom, slaves were thrust into a world in which they were ill prepared and uneducated in the responsibilities that freedom entails. These critiques continue to persist to this day and stem from early and uniformed observations of slavery and slave culture. They tend to rely on racist assumptions of inferiority and misinformation that paint slaves as obedient servants who required constant supervision and lacked the capacity to critically comprehend the complexity of freedom and the choices that it provided. This however is not the case. The bonds of slavery are undoubtedly cruel, inhumane, and stripped the human being of the possibility of self-determination and expression. Yet within this grueling and grotesque part of American history there is a side which is rarely discussed nor analyzed. Slavery, in all its controlling forms, is also the story of people, and it is in these stories that historians find the resistance to slavery and the accumulation of knowledge, values, and notions that propelled those enslaved to seek freedom and happiness in various ways. Within the chains of slavery, men and women expressed many forms of autonomy, supporting themes of freedom that solidified themselves long before emancipation and provide a greater understanding to the impact slavery had upon economic choices. Looking at the stories of surrounding the victims of slavery is vital in understanding their reactions and participation within the free market economy that they entered following emancipation. It is in these stories that it is possible to obtain the values and notions that slaves utilized once free. This chapter analyzes such notions in terms of economic independence and the understanding of how slaves acquired and interpreted notions of work, money, and property necessary for them after emancipation as they became essential components in the free market.

Though slaves were property themselves, many were able to acquire property for themselves. Through a variety of ways many slaves successfully managed to obtain personal property, property that they claimed as their own and of which their masters apparently held little to no claim over. Their ability to acquire these pieces of property were determined in multiple ways. Some had access to money; others acquired property through compensation for work. Contrary to the idea of slavery, some slaves were hired out as wageworkers and many slaves were already participating in wage earning and monetary compensation for their work, providing valuable knowledge about the earning potential within such a system. These experiences, among others, offered some slaves complex notions about the value and uses of money. Money acquired, sometimes over thousands of dollars, which they used for the purchase of consumer goods, livestock, and even their own freedom.<sup>1</sup> To those who were able to acquire property and goods, their notions of such market related ideas were

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Mary Hilliard, "Spending in Black and White : Race, Slavery, and Consumer Values in the Antebellum South" (Thesis (Ph D ), University of South Carolina, 2006., 2006).

instrumental in their understanding of freedom and the free market. As slavery slowly died in the United States, slaves were placed in the peculiar position of participating in a market in which they formerly were *legally* excluded from. It is from slavery where they acquired the knowledge that would help or hinder them as they made the transformation from slave to free person.

The Emancipation Proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863 was the beginning to the legal end of slavery in the United States. This presidential edict declaring “all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”<sup>2</sup> This proclamation, issued during the raging American Civil War, eventually established legal freedom for all citizens of the United States. Following the Union victory and the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution slavery officially ended.<sup>3</sup> Although the Thirteenth Amendment of 1865 legally ended slavery within the United States, many slaves were already experiencing certain aspects of it prior to the end of the war in certain areas. However, it was with the official ending of the war that the vast majority of American slaves attained freedom. With this freedom came the realization that the free labor and economic market were now within the grasp of this new class of freedmen. After all, as Leon Litwack observed, Abraham Lincoln’s Proclamation provided freedmen “no real guidelines” on how to “turn a slave into free man.”<sup>4</sup>

The experiences of slavery had undoubtedly ramifications on what it meant to be free for these men and women. They were expected to merge into the free market as laborers, consumers, and productive citizens within the capitalist system that defined the American experience. From bondage, they carried forth notions of work, property, and certain skills that they utilized in an effort to adapt and traverse into the free market. This free market was first and foremost a market based on free labor, whether for wages or other forms of compensation, the freedmen were expected to continue to become productive laborers. In many respects they carried the knowledge obtained during slavery into freedom and transitioned into the free market effectively in many cases.

Many of these slaves, former plantation field hands had different notions of work, different notions for the value of money, and a keen awareness of the value of ownership and property. Slave experiences suggest that rations and shelter superseded the accumulation of money for work compensation. Others experiences helped develop ideas on the impact of money and consumption. Still others held notions of property ownership through their ability to acquire different kinds of personal property. These freedmen returned to work as sharecroppers after freedom, working for

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<sup>2</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *The Emancipation Proclamation*, January 1, 1863

<sup>3</sup> The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America, ended slavery, defined citizenship, and established voting rights for all citizens. These are also known as the Reconstruction Amendments.

<sup>4</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long : The Aftermath of Slavery*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf : distributed by Random House, 1979)227.

portions of the crops they harvested and for humble dwellings within a similar system that they were accustomed. Their expectations remained similar to their experiences in slavery and their notions of the value of their work were already well developed, even though they were unfamiliar with the wage labor system. Many were asked, even persuaded, by their former masters, to remain on plantations and work in exchange for wages. Freedmen testimony is replete with examples of the slave to wage labor that took place on the plantations of rural South Carolina.

In South Carolina, most freedmen were informed of their freedom through their masters. Some of the freedmen refused to stop working for their former masters. In counties of upstate South Carolina, many freed slaves remained, at least in the beginning, on their former masters plantations. Eager to understand the freedom they acquired, freedmen continued their work habits to test the waters of freedom, ready to utilize their knowledge of labor as a power to obtain autonomy. Their notions of work were intimately connected with their survival and ability to provide for their families “You ain’t gwine to believe dat the slaves on our plantation didn’t stop working for old marster, even when they was told they was free,” declared Ezra Adams, former slave in Lancaster County, South Carolina.<sup>5</sup> His experience was not unique. Many freedmen stayed on with their former masters because of their relationship between work and survival. They understood that with freedom came the responsibility to provide for themselves, and many were already aware of the concept of wages for labor. They were ultimately somewhat timid to jump right into the free labor market. On the plantation of Jim Aiken in Fairfield County, South Carolina, slaves were informed of their freedom by their master who “told us we was free, and if we wanted to stay on with him, he would do the best he could for us. Most of us stayed, and after a few months, he paid wages.”<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Downing “stayed on” with his former master while his father remained employed with his for “wages.”<sup>7</sup> These freedmen realized that freedom did not mean that they did not have to work and they were prepared to accept wages for their work. Many plantation owners began to supply the former slaves with wages and encouraged them to work. “Master told us we was free and could go but if we wanted we could stay on with him. We stayed with him for two years and worked for wages,” explained Wallace Davis.<sup>8</sup> Many slaves were already familiar with the concept of working for compensation, most through the provisions of rations. Money was not completely lost to them, and their notions of work attained during slavery encouraged their transition toward responsible free labor workers.

While work and free labor notions were further developed during freedom, many ultimately learned such concepts through market interaction gained during slavery. This labor and market knowledge encouraged slaves to subtly resist the entire institution. Once free, Freedmen continued to

<sup>5</sup> Narrative of Ezra Adams, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 1 a Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*,, ed. Federal Writers' Project (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format page 7, (Electronic Resource) [www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976](http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976) (accessed August 23, 2011), <http://lowcountryafricana.net>. Hereafter cited as NSC: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Narrative of William Ballard, NSC: 1, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Narrative of Laurence Downing , NSC: 1, 128.

<sup>8</sup> Narrative of Wallace Davis, NSC: 1, 118.

assert their independence as free men and women through work and production that they realized were necessary for survival within the free market. Freedmen Ezra Adams described his notions of work, explaining that everyone “has got to work to live, regardless of liberty, love and all them things.” “I knows from experience dat poor folks feels better when they has food in deir frame and dimes to jingle in deir pockets.” Adams further describes the value of a hard days work. “If a poor man wants to enjoy a little freedom, let him go on the farm and work for hisself. It is sho’ worth somethin’ to be boss, and, on de farm you can be boss all you want.”<sup>9</sup> One freedwoman described her notions of working by suggesting that anyone that “liked slavery time better, is lazy and don’t want to do nothing.”<sup>10</sup> Other freedmen regarded the lessons learned as slaves vital to their success. “Dere ain’t no doubt dat many a slave learnt good lessons dat showed them how to work,” suggests former slave Charlie Davis. Although Charlie was only a small boy when emancipated, his notions of work were greatly enforced by his perception and understanding through his own experiences as a former slaves.

Although slavery was forced labor, it provided particular notions of work ethic and examples of varying forms of compensation. Nevertheless, in certain instances it also impaired the ability of men and women to successfully make the transition into freedom. Working for wages was a new phenomenon for many slaves, and some freedmen had difficulty combining freedom with competitive labor requirements expected with their freedom. “When freedom come,” explains William Henry Davis, “some of de colored people didn’ know what freedom was en dey just hang around dey white folks en look to dey Massa for what dey get right on. Wouldn’ get off en make nothin for dey own self.”<sup>11</sup> The notions of work, wages, and freedom were lost on certain men and women who did not associate freedom with working for wages or, rather, did not understand the values of free labor as expected by the market economy. Some slaves had to be encouraged to work for wages. On one plantation, after freedom, a man came “to make a speech to the slaves …and told dem to stay on and work for wages.”<sup>12</sup> This type of encouragement suggests that while many slaves were familiar with work ethic, they were unfamiliar with the idea of working for monetary compensation. This did not mean however that they did not possess significant knowledge on the value of money as it pertains to commodity and supply and demand.

The value of money was increasingly important in making the transition into the free market. No longer were freedmen necessarily going to be provided rations of food and clothing in exchange for their labor. Within the free labor market, they were expected to work, or earn, their monetary compensation, most notably in the form of wage labor. And although research has shown that some slaves earned and accumulated money and significant amounts of property, the vast majority, usually those in rural areas, were inexperienced with notions of earning money as compensation and utilizing it as means of exchange. Money, on the rural plantations of South Carolina, was limited and rarely

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<sup>9</sup> Ezra Adams, NSC: 1, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Narrative of Victoria Adams, NSC: 1., 10.

<sup>11</sup> Narrative of William Henry Davis, NSC: 1, 120.

<sup>12</sup> Narrative of Isabella Dorroh, NSC: 1,127.

made it into the possessions of the slaves. “I see some money, but never own any then,” explained freedman Frank Adamson.<sup>13</sup> “Money?” exclaimed Anne Bell when asked about it, “I never saw no money. What I want wid it anyhow?”<sup>14</sup> For most of the plantation field workers who toiled under the rural gang labor systems, their work went uncompensated. The rations that they received were necessities for living, not as payment for work rendered. This association likely stunted the concept of earning potential as relegated in the arguments of free labor proponents. Gordon Bluford, a freedman from the South Carolina midlands, expressed it the best, “We had a pretty good house to live in [during] slavery time, and some fair things to eat, but never was paid any money.”<sup>15</sup> While some slaves never even saw money it does not mean that they had no association with it as a value of exchange. Their association with money was largely influenced by market activity, usually on a plantation store, or when they traveled into town. But one of the most common associations slaves had with the buying and selling power of money revolved around the experience associated with the buying and selling of slaves.

Many freedmen reflected on the experiences of seeing family or friends sold, or even their own experience as commerce or property. The value of money most likely, for those who never acquired any during slavery, stemmed from values that they understood as their own worth. These experiences shaped their understanding of money and its value, and created an association that prepared them for understanding the monetary system. Even if they were unaware of how much money a slave was worth, slaves were aware that monetary value was associated with the marketing of each individual.

I see em sell plenty colored peoples away in dem days cause dat de way white folks made heap of dey money.” Coase dey ain’ never tell us how much dey sell em for. Just stand em up on a block bout three feet high en a speculator bid em off just like dey was horses. Dem what was bid off didn’ never say nothin neither. Don’ know who bought my brothers, George en Earl. (She cried after this statement). I see em sell some slaves twice fore I was sold en I see de slaves when dey be travelin like hogs to Darlington. Some of dem be women folks lookin like dey gwine to get down dey so heavy.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that slaves, themselves as property, had monetary value based on necessity was impressed upon every slave. They realized the market value of a slave depended on a particular slaves’ skill, age, or physical characteristic. Many slaves were also aware that their value depended upon the supply and demand, or the overall numbers on a given plantation. They were acutely aware that money was the driving force behind their owner’s decision to buy or sell and that certain qualities could attract greater value. “Master had over twenty grown slaves all de time, He bought and sold

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<sup>13</sup> Narrative of Frank Adamson, NSC: 1, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Narrative of Anne Bell, NSC: 1, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Narrative of Gordon Bluford, NSC: 1, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Narrative of Sylvia Cannon, NSC: 1, 74.

them whenever he wanted to,” explained Samuel Boulware.<sup>17</sup> “Some times,” according to Anne Broome, “they git too many and sell them off,” suggesting that “tears didn’t count... as long as de money come a runnin in.”<sup>18</sup> John Boyd, a freedman from Union, South Carolina, was aware that once a man paid \$3500 for a particular slave.<sup>19</sup> Emanuel Elmore recalled that his father was sold four times, once for \$4,000 and the last time for “only” \$1,500.<sup>20</sup> These associations with money had a lasting impact upon their relationship with money and its value within a market economy. It suggests that they were aware of consumer notions that work, supply and demand, and desired qualities all had a monetary value. Furthermore, this value was associated with what a man was willing to pay and worthiness of the slave being acquired. Slaves associated this value with concepts of free market exchange. This worth was further associated with the purchasers need for that particular slave’s labor, associating supply and demand, work value, and monetary exchanges as concepts that slaves understood. Still, in other ways outside of buying and selling, slaves experienced first hand the power of earning wages while still bonded, especially skilled and urban slaves.

The value and knowledge of earning a dollar through working, or participating within the market economy, gave some slaves a great advantage when freedom exposed them to the realities of free labor. Certainly, the earning of a few dollars based on work and time spent created a distinct association with money and the resources it could provide, and some slaves received certain amounts of money for their labor. Slaves that were able to acquire bits of money used it to purchase goods at the marketplace, further expressing autonomy and independence. Philip Evan’s master gave him “small coins” that he used to buy a “cap.”<sup>21</sup> Gus Feaster remembers the first money he made as a slave through “gathering blackberries to sell at Goshen Hill to a lady dat made wine.” Not only did Mr. Feaster obtain his own money, his mother, also a slave, traded “cotton” at the same trading post where she acquired a “bonnet” for “ten dollars worth o’ cotton” and bought “five cent worth of peppermint candy.” According to Gus, “money wasn’t nothing in dem times”<sup>22</sup>

There were a great number of slaves who actually worked or were hired out for wages. Skilled slaves possessed a unique power in which they, and their masters used to further their economic gains. This was critical to a slaves understanding of the value of money and work. It shaped their notions of work and instilled upon them the value of money in a positive way, providing the notions and concepts of earning potential and creating a drive to utilize that potential to improve their standing in society and life. Being hired out helped prepare these slaves for the reality of market participation and solidified valuable knowledge they could utilize during the transition to freedom. It

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Boulware, NSC: 1, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Broome, NSC: 1, 44.

<sup>19</sup> John Boyd, NSC: 1, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Narrative of Emanuel Elmore, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 2 a Folk History of the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, ed. Federal Writers' Project. (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format page 6, (Electronic Resource) <http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/969> (accessed August 23, 2011), <http://lowcountryafricana.net>. Hereafter cited as NSC: 2

<sup>21</sup> Phillip Evans, NSC: 2, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Gus Feaster, NSC: 2, 19, 28, 29.

also fostered the understanding of working for money rather than food and clothing rations, thus providing building blocks for work relocation and the ability to negotiate contracts for wages. Most importantly, it emphasized the general understanding of the value of money and its usage within the marketplace.

De first work dat I remember bout doin in slavery time, I hold mules for my boss. Drove wagon for Mr. Rogers. If people wanted any haulin done, he told me to help dem en collect for it. He never wouldn' ax any questions bout what I collected for de haulin. Just let me have dat money. I remember I bought cloth dat cost 12-1/2 cents a yard wid de first money I get. Den I bought a girl 10 cents worth of candy en sent it to her.<sup>23</sup>

This recollection from Aaron Ford indicates his association with money and work. He then used his earnings to purchase certain consumer goods at market value. This type of market activity is proof that themes learned during slavery were valuable notions that translated directly into the free market. Values and notions gave Aaron a great advantage and suggests that notions of freedom were solidifying themselves prior to emancipation.

In the upper South, hiring out of slaves was an alternative way of providing supplemental income for slave owners during slow agricultural periods. It also supplied wageworkers to certain industries or to people who could not afford the rising purchasing price of slaves. Hiring out gave them access to money and supplied them with the opportunity to manage their own time and labor activities. Clement Eaton has shown that slaves were often hired out as both skilled and unskilled laborers, providing them a greater “measure of freedom from customary constraints.” These slaves were given wages and even “consulted” about their preferences. “Thrifty” slaves, he suggests, were inventive enough to keep portions of their wages and spend it for “pleasure.” Slaves were hired at different wages depending on their skills, even rewarded for overtime work. “Some slaves even hired their own time from their owners, paying them a part of their wages, usually two dollars a week.”<sup>24</sup>

In some instances slaves, especially urban and skilled individuals, maintained a great degree of control and autonomy. Although masters often received the bulk of their earnings, “slaves might get about one-third of the cash paid.” On the Nottoway Plantation in Louisiana, “black coopers received cash bonuses for producing barrels beyond specification.” Slaves earned cash in a variety of ways, such as constructing carts, or sawing lumber around various locations for hire.<sup>25</sup> On rural plantations slaves were also able to acquire money and exchange it at the market. George Briggs was able to acquire money for “plattin galluses and making string and other things.” Sallie Paul believed that even though “white folks” didn’t give slaves “no money no time...[slaves] had money in slavery

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<sup>23</sup> Aaron Ford, NSC: 2, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Clement Eaton, “Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (1960) 663-678.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas R. Egerton, “Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (2006) 623-624.

time much as dey does now.”<sup>26</sup> It seemed that across the board slaves were acutely aware of the market, and looked forward to experiencing the bartering and haggling as a way to forget the bonds of slavery for a while and exert autonomy over their lives and choices.

Wages provided slaves with a greater “understanding of cash power.” Douglas Egerton, provides examples of how slaves, by the early nineteenth century were already “attuned to the claims of money and property.” Many masters allowed their slaves to openly “buy or sell wares” in the market.<sup>27</sup> Slaves in certain areas could buy, sell, or trade for luxury commodities such as tobacco, sugar, and coffee. Other slaves sought fineries in exchange for their goods at the market. They enjoyed, just as much as free society, to display their fashionable tastes and revel in their possessions. And since most of their substance was provided by their masters, whatever money they acquired from extra work or from their own garden surplus was often directed at certain luxuries. “They always want finery in exchange or some luxury to eat, as a sufficient quantity of useful food & clothing is provided without buying,” remarked one traveler through the South Carolina low-country.<sup>28</sup> In the rural upper state, slaves exchanged goods upon plantations stores. An enslaved carpenter visiting James Rogers’s general plantation store purchased a “padlock, a half pint of liquor, and some muslin” for “less than a dollar.” Other enslaved men and women also chose to exchange acquired “property” at the “market for other commodities [such as] blankets, sugar, whiskey,” or whatever they liked.<sup>29</sup> These interactions undoubtedly suggest that market interaction was already persistent among slave communities and themes of autonomy were solidified long before emancipation.

One of the most interesting and probably greatest experiences in market activity was the use of market knowledge and monetary gain to purchase their own freedom. The most industrious and inventive slaves used the market to acquire the necessary resources to make such a purchase. The account of Lundsford Lane, a North Carolina slave, provides some of the most compelling evidence that slaves were already taking advantage of the market in powerful ways.

My father gave me a small basket of peaches. I sold them for thirty cents, which was the first money I ever had in my life. Afterwards I won some marbles, and sold them for sixty cents, and some weeks after Mr. Hog from Fayetteville, came to visit my master, and on leaving gave me one dollar. After that Mr. Bennahan from Orange county, gave me a dollar, and a son of my master fifty cents. These sums, and the hope that then entered my mind of purchasing at some future time my freedom, made me long for money; and plans for money-making took the principal possession of my thoughts.

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<sup>26</sup> Lawrence T. McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community” in Winfred B. Moore et al., *Developing Dixie : Modernization in a Traditional Society*, Contributions in American History, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 32, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Egerton, “Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World,” 618, 621.

<sup>28</sup> Hilliard, “Spending”, 51. Hilliard’s chapter “Money and Moralism: Management and the Consumer Process” in “Spending in Black and White : Race, Slavery, and Consumer Values in the Antebellum South” provides a great analysis of slave spending habits and their desire for commodities and luxuries.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence T. McDonnell, “Market Relations,” Moore et al., *Dixie* 31.

Upon understanding the power of money, Lane began to sell tobacco at 15 cents to local men who fancied his flavor and smoking method. Eventually he was able to hide his earning for fear of losing it. He saved as much as possible and “except to procure such small articles of extra comfort as I was prompted to from time to time,” eventually purchased his freedom for \$1000.<sup>30</sup>

Other slaves also worked to make enough money to purchase their freedom. Those who were lucky enough to be hired out found creative ways to save enough money for such amazing purchases. James Maguire, a New Orleans slave, was allowed by his former owner to “hire his own time out for several years at \$20 per month,” enough for James to accumulate \$850 toward the purchase of his own freedom. This was by no means a regularity, nor was it common for a slave to retain such large portions of his earnings, however it was not unique during slavery times for men to be hired out for additional wages. This also applied to women slaves. Betsy Crissman, a slave in Jackson Mississippi, was hired out by her owner, and upon fulfilling the requirement of that contract, “hired out my time from him at \$15 per month.” After working for this arrangement for almost two years she “saved enough to purchase my own freedom...for \$300.” The power of money was very real to many slaves, and it was dramatically associated with the power of purchase and market knowledge, and not necessarily associated directly with the buying and selling of slaves or the purchase of freedom.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, to the experience Lane, Holmes, and Betsy Crissman, in areas of the southern coastal areas where the tasking system was employed, freedmen were accustomed to the value of money, work, and market interaction. Yet their experience differed from those who purchased their freedom, simply by the fact that they actually acquired substantial amounts of personal property as slaves. In the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, slaves accumulated money and property through their own work and ingenuity. Notions of “personal responsibility” were associated with work ethic and the market exchange for property. Such accumulation was vital knowledge that allowed slaves successful maneuvering within the “internal” slave economy that functioned within the “conventional” Southern economy. The peasant like behavior of these slaves prepared them for freedom in a distinctive way.<sup>32</sup> They worked for themselves in timely fashion, managed their time, produced surpluses to consumption, bartered and traded among their masters, and frequented local markets to exchange their goods for other commodities, luxuries, and money.

This unique internal economy offers insight into the notions of property accumulation and work culture that provided many slaves with attributes that prepared them for the reality of emancipation. As early as 1808, David Ramsay reported that on Edisto Island, SC groundnut was

<sup>30</sup> Lunsford Lane et al., *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C. Embracing an Account of His Early Life, the Redemption by Purchase of Himself and Family from Slavery, and His Banishment from the Place of His Birth for the Crime of Wearing a Colored Skin*, Electronic ed. ([Chapel Hill, N.C.]: Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999), 8-10. (Electronic Resources) <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lanelunsford/menu.html> (accessed August 25, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> John W. Blassingame et al., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 296-302, 496.

<sup>32</sup> Philip D. Morgan, “The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983) 401, 419.

“planted in small patches chiefly by the negroes, for market.”<sup>33</sup> Upon his visit to a lowcountry plantation in 1853, Frederick Law Olmsted remarked on the independent nature of the slaves who functioned within the task system of the southern rice and cotton culture. He noted the skill and the unique retention of property owned by the slaves that was fully acknowledged by their masters. One particular slave trained and employed as an “engineer...was allowed to spend his wages for himself,” suggesting autonomy within the slave society. Others on the same plantation were also able to procure for themselves items of personal property through their own means. Olmsted described how a house-servants and a watchman “bought their horses with money.”<sup>34</sup> When he inquired further into the ownership of the horses of which these particular slaves were riding, the following exchange occurred:

“Oh, no; that horse belongs to the old man.”

“Belongs to him! Why, do they own horses?”

“Oh, yes; William (the House servant) owns two, and

Robert, I believe, has three now; that was one of them he was riding.”

“How do they get them?”

“Oh, they buy them.”<sup>35</sup>

That slaves acquired money or credit is further supported by Olmsted’s observation that one servant, after attending church, was witnessed, “slipping a coin into the hands of the boy” who had been tending his horse. Still others on the plantation were able to raise produce during their own time and in some instances take the surplus to market or sell it to their masters.<sup>36</sup> Such valuable knowledge surely helped these men after freedom.

Olmsted noted that the slaves were “at liberty to sell whatever they choose from the products of their own garden, and to make what they can by keeping swine and fowls.” Further stimulating these market interactions was their master, who purchased “poultry and eggs” and frequently acquired other “game” from slaves. Outside of their interaction on the plantation, slaves were capable of clandestinely frequenting “grog-shops.” These shops exchanged or bought goods from slaves and sold them “whisky,” and other liquors. To combat these illegal activities, planters often established plantation stores where slaves could exchange goods and acquire credit. Upon Olmsted’s inquisition as to how much credit slaves could acquire for the exchange of their goods within the plantation store, one owner replied that he, at the present, owed his slaves “about five hundred dollars.”<sup>37</sup> Slaves, in the low country were eager to obtain private property, and after freedom they expected to maintain the

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<sup>33</sup> David Ramsay, Ramsay's History of South Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808 (W.J. Duffie,: W.J. Duffie,), microform., 289.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted et al., *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854, with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York, London,: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1904)

<sup>35</sup> As quoted in Philip D. Morgan, “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 39, no. 4 (oct., 1982) 412.

<sup>36</sup> Olmsted et al., *A Journey* , 56.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 68-73

status and rights to it. Following emancipation, slaves of the low country showed a particularly higher percentage of becoming small landowners and not sharecroppers.<sup>38</sup>

The value of property for many of these slaves was of considerable importance. Many freedmen in particular parts of southern Georgia and South Carolina, in the early years following emancipation, asserted claims of lost property through the Southern Claims Commission. This Commission was set up to allow claims of lost property during the Civil War. Philip Morgan has shown in his research on the claims of freedmen in Liberty County Georgia that a substantial number of slaves owned acknowledged property. In these particular areas of the South, slaves were known to purchase and sell horses and other livestock through "installments." The mere fact that following emancipation many slaves in southern Georgia and South Carolina submitted claims for monetary compensation for lost property suggests that they valued both property and money as significant to their livelihood and freedom. More importantly, they utilized their knowledge of market exchange and property value to seek compensation for the lost property taken from them during the Civil War. One Georgia freedmen submitted a claim for \$2,205 for the loss of livestock, agriculture, and a wagon that he stated he had acquired through trading while still a slave. A substantial amount indeed for a man formerly held as property. His ability to acquire such a significant amount of property prior to emancipation highlights his market knowledge and ability to utilize the market to trade, save, and procure the necessary means to hold and retain such an impressive amount. Analysis of freedmen claims suggests that in certain counties in the lower South slaves were "more than usually prosperous," and "hardworking and moneysaving."<sup>39</sup>

In various locations throughout the American South slaves routinely found ways to acquire property and money that helped them establish certain notions regarding the value of both. They utilized these notions in various ways and interacted in market exchange both openly and clandestinely. Field hands in rural areas developed strong work ethic that they understood as vital to the free market. They understood monetary value based on their own worth as slaves through their experience as property themselves that could be bought and sold. Other slaves encountered market interactions that involved a wide range of decision-making skills and industrious thought. Slaves who worked under the task system devised was to organize their own time and utilize their free time to produce surplus for the market. This surplus allowed them to barter and trade for money and acquire property, suggesting that long before freedom, many themes were already solidified among the slaves. This solidification was a subtle form of resistance that slowly eroded the slave based institution and instilled in many slaves the values, notions, and themes of freedom and the necessary tools to free market success. Hired out slaves encountered wage work and monetary compensation that allowed them to purchase luxuries and devise ways to purchase their own freedom. Even in instances where slaves never had access to money or property, there was always a drive to escape the constraints of

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<sup>38</sup> Morgan, "Ownership," 420.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 412-414.

slavery and an understanding of how the market functioned, be it trading for goods, or speculations based on their own value. Slaves had the notions that their work was making their masters rich, a realization that made them fully aware that it was their value as workers that carried the southern economy. One freedwoman recalled how, in her words, slaves, “cleared de forests, built de railroads, cleaned up de swamps, and nursed de white folks. Now in our old ages, I hopes they lets de old slaves like me see de shine of some of dat money I hears so much talk ‘bout.”<sup>40</sup>

These work and market notions were carried into freedom, and while they were solidified in slavery, they were actively utilized once free. Many freedmen took the lessons acquired as slaves and ventured into the free labor with very little property, and almost no saved money. Yet they were well aware of their importance within the economic realm. Once free, they began to negotiate the terms of their freedom, employment, and values. Many encountered resistance from their former masters and a white class of citizens who defined their superiority on skill color alone. Yet through all the hardships that slavery imposed, freedmen looked for work and eagerly attempted to acquire property and consumer goods in a southern economy that was destroyed by war and pillaged by northern military confiscation. Still many freedmen were successful in their endeavors to participate in the new southern labor system where wages for work and markets were now open to them. It was a time of unprecedented opportunity, though the opportunities would remain limited for years to come.

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<sup>40</sup> Narrative of Anne Broome, NSC: 1, 45.

Chapter Five  
Into the Free Market:  
Labor and Property

How did freedmen merge into the free labor market? The themes learned as slaves are vital to their reactions and acceptance to the available labor markets in which they merged. Since documentation is scarce regarding such “ground level” activity, incorporating slave narratives, official records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, manuscripts from plantation records, and newspaper articles that discuss the transition from slave labor to free labor are vitally important in understanding freedmen’s transition into the free labor market. This chapter will try to incorporate the various methods and movements that many freedmen used to their advantage as they began the enormous task of providing for themselves and becoming successful participants within the new society. By focusing on their notions of work and the types of labor markets that were available, it becomes clear as to what they expected and how they reacted to their new status as wage laborers. Because the transition from slave to free laborer was different in various locations, this chapter will look at the notions of those who lived in areas of the up-state cotton regions and the Sea Islands of the Georgia and South Carolina Low Country. It will show that freedmen attempted to better their financial position by seeking to acquire suitable wages and eagerly attempting to establish property rights and land ownership. Their attempts in the early stages of emancipation suggest that they were well aware of the benefits that the free market provided and wanted to claim a strong and legitimate position within it. They utilized all the available avenues to focus on improving their position and eagerly attempted to supply themselves and their families with the ability to adapt and participate in the market economy. It suggests that themes of freedom that were solidifying themselves prior to emancipation were employed but realistically hindered due to their peculiar position within a racially and bitterly hostile society created by the slave system.

Slave narratives from the Works Project Administration will provide the bulk of material for this chapter. Coupled with various other slave testimony, newspaper, and official records, this chapter will provide a freedmen’s perspective on how they viewed their opportunities and how they experience the transition. The experiences of freedmen are critical in understanding the reality of labor, property and there availability. Freedmen interaction with the prevailing white slave holding society is crucial in understanding the limits and availability of labor and property ownership. Slave narratives provide unique perceptions and perspectives of what they encountered on the ground. Letters and official documents from Union soldiers and officials provide ample evidence of the transition and participation of former bondsmen in the new atmosphere. Freedmen carried forth from slavery notions described in the previous chapter which prepared them in numerous ways for the new free labor society. It has been suggested that the racial and supremacist views of the established slave

ruling class and white society were no more aware of the meaning of free labor than freedmen. Slaves passed into a society where “former slave owners resented the very idea of having to negotiate with freedmen,” this was coupled with northern opinions that Southerners “do not know what free labor is” made the transition even more daunting.<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1861, slaves were already moving into the free labor system. In Port Royal, South Carolina, slaves were under Union occupation, and in an effort to continue crop production, Union leaders considered the notion of a “free labor experiment” and began to set up a system to put former slaves to work. According to those who were on the ground in Port Royal, the soon to be former slaves knew that their futures depended upon their ability to earn a living and continue to work. Officials in charge believed that the experiment of putting these men and women to work would encourage among them, among the “self-support by their own industrie,” and provide them with “order, industry, economy, and self reliance; and [would] elevate them in the scale of humanity, by inspiring them with respect.”<sup>2</sup> What Union officials had in mind was a “free-labor experiment” that would provide these slaves with wages for work, and notions of free labor freedom.

Their was no doubt by those who first attempted to provide wages to these “contraband” slaves in Port Royal that they were already “ready to work.”<sup>3</sup> As one of the leading proponents of such an experiment suggested, “If the experiment of a guided transition to freedom could work on the Sea Islands, where the slaves had lived in such isolation and ignorance” it could be “hopefully attempted” anywhere in the South.” But this perceived “ignorance” of the slave was as misguided as the belief that slaves were not ready for the transition to free labor. Careful analysis of slave narratives, planter contract records, and official Freedmen Bureau Records indicate that not only were many slaves prepared for the transition into the free economy, but also they willing accepted and engaged in the transition, with acquired and sometimes advanced knowledge of what was expected. This chapter seeks to showcase the various transitions that former slaves made in their efforts to merge into the free market through their labor attempts and their success in acquiring jobs and negotiating compensation for their labor. It looks at their attempts to acquire property in the market, and analyzes the extent to which freedmen were prepared for emancipation within a free market society of which they were virtually propertiless and penniless and held no legal rights. Of course this was not entirely the case as slaves held distinct notions of labor, money, and property, even accumulating both money and property while enslaved. The previous chapter laid out the argument that many slaves already held a strong work ethic, were familiar with money and even wage earning experiences, and were well aware of the benefits to obtaining and holding private property. Once free, freedmen and women utilized the

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<sup>1</sup> See remarks of Carl Schurz in “Carl Shurz’s Letters from the South” in Eric Foner, *Reconstruction : America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 1st Perennial Classics ed., New American Nation Series. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), 131-132.

<sup>2</sup> Willie Lee Nichols Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction : The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 29, 49.

notions they acquired in slavery to secure a foothold in the new labor system. Both skilled and unskilled slaves desperately sought employment and were very aware of the economic importance of their role within the free labor system. They recognized the importance of their ability to work within the system to maintain independence and economic viability, even during the most dangerous of times, as white supremacy and racial bigotry hindered their ability to secure upward mobility in most employment arenas in the South.

Some of the first paying jobs allotted to former slaves were sanctioned by the United States military before the ending of the war. In 1862 Abraham Lincoln prescribed the Militia Act which declared that any “African descent” slave who owed “labor or service labor to any person” who “levied war or has borne arms against the United States...shall forever thereafter be free.” Furthermore, The US military actively encouraged the employment of these former slaves declaring “that persons of African descent, who under this law shall be employed, shall receive ten dollars per month and one ration, three dollars of which monthly pay may be in clothing.”<sup>4</sup> These early employment opportunities helped foster notions of free labor and market activity and introduced many freedmen to the steps the Union was willing to take to secure their rights within a free labor society. These early attempts to employ former slaves provided first hand experience to many men and highlighted the conditions that they would encounter while moving into the post emancipation era.

In South Carolina, slaves and freedmen were actively recruited for service in the 103<sup>rd</sup>, 104<sup>th</sup>, and 105<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops regiment. It was not only freedom that attracted recruits to the military, it was the possibility of earning wages and financial enticements that would help lift them from the status of the lowest class of citizens, and ultimately secure their independence in the free market. These freedmen learn valuable lessons through active military employment. Lessons regarding money, pay for service, and an overall broadening of the values of equality and freedom helped further establish freedmen notions of market knowledge learned as slaves. Military employment fostered “self-respect,” treating the freedmen troops “precisely” as other soldiers were treated. It encouraged the understanding of money and contractual obligation. Freedmen adhered to their notions of wage equality and their understanding of work ethics, fostering the refusal of “Negro soldiers” to accept the rate of \$10.00 a month while “whites,” of the same rank, received \$13.00. Such protests were some of the first for “equal pay for equal service.”<sup>5</sup> Military service also provided the benefit of pensions that would help support freedmen in later years when they became elderly or disabled.<sup>6</sup> Not only were slaves ready to work and fight for their freedom, but following the war

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<sup>4</sup> United States. War Dept. et al., *The War of the Rebellion : A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. ([Pasadena, Calif.]: Historical Times, 1985) vol.5, 654-655.

<sup>5</sup> Joel Williamson, *After Slavery : The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (New York: Norton, 1975), 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Narrative of Delacy Wymann, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 2 a Folk History of the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, ed. Federal Writers' Project. (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format page 69, (Electronic Resource) <http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/969> (accessed August 23, 2011), <http://lowcountryafricana.net>. Hereafter cited as NSC: 2.

freedmen utilized the notions, knowledge, and experiences learned in bondage to merge into the free economic markets.

Throughout the entire South, freedmen went to work in ways that best suited their skills. On the plantations, most of the slaves returned to their previous occupations. They signed contracts with plantation owners and former masters. Some worked for wages, others for a percentage of the crop cultivated. Either way, with the destruction and pillage of large areas of the South, coupled with the enormous loss of able-bodied men, a shortage of labor gave freedmen in some areas considerable advantage when it came to employment. The labor shortage that followed the war left some planters in desperate need of laborers, and many turned to their former slaves to fill the shortage.<sup>7</sup> Silas Glenn recalled that after freedom, his former owner offered “wages” to those “who wanted to stay on with him and help make the crop that year.” Silas recalled, “All stayed that year.”<sup>8</sup> Emoline Glasgow remembered that, “when freedom come, all of us stayed with de master until he and his folks moved away.”<sup>9</sup> Many Plantation owners did not want to give up their only labor source and risk loosing the profit from the next harvest, and although they were unfamiliar with paying wages, they offered either wages, or portions of the crop as payment. This gave the freedmen considerable advantage in the early years as the labor question and efforts to restore the southern economy was the number one priority.

Planters, in the early years following the war, from 1865 to 1867, found it difficult to meet the demand for labor, especially during such unpredictable economic times. With competition for free labor at an all time high, freedmen held “considerable bargaining power” and were more apt to restrict, negotiate, and even refuse work under certain conditions. Freedmen refused to sign labor contracts because the possibility of better options. In Alabama, employees were walking away from their duties “without cause of provocation” because “they find no difficulty in getting employment.” These instances encouraged planters to “raise wages, promise additional pay for harvest work, and offer land free of charge for garden plots.” The shortage of labor following the war also established the inability for planters to enforce disciplinary provisions that were stipulated in many contracts because of the reality that freedmen might abandon their work.<sup>10</sup>

Freedman Bureau Records show the magnitude of such negotiations related to the return to work of the freedmen. The Bureau, in a number of places, acted as recorders of contracts established between freedmen and property owners. Between December 1865 and May of 1866, the Bureau recorded nearly 300 contracts in Summerville, South Carolina between landowners and freedmen. The terms ranged from shares of crops, to monthly or yearly wages. Some negotiated terms to have food and shelter furnished. Others required from the contract that all medical expenses be cover. In other areas, freedmen negotiated their own terms for such expenses. In Darlington County, South Carolina, on the cotton plantation of Andrew Carrigan, freedmen contracted separately with Dr. S.H.

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<sup>7</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 138.

<sup>8</sup> Narrative of Silas Glenn, NSC: 2, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Narrative of Emoline Glasgow, NSC: 2, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 138-139.

Pressly to “furnish all necessary medicines and medical attention to the freedmen and their families during the present year,” where they agreed to pay “four dollars” for “each family member of their families.”<sup>11</sup> Freedmen also negotiated their wages. In Summerville some freedmen received up to \$12 per month, others negotiated for portions of the crop harvest. In certain instances, freedmen rented entire tracts of land and paid the owner a monthly payment. J. S. Howell received “\$43 for 40 acres of land & house - for the year.”<sup>12</sup> Contracts between landowners and freedmen varied considerably during the first few years following the war, with considerable advantage held by freedmen. However, over time many of these sharecropping contracts resembled conditions similar to those during slavery. Freed people wanted to control their own labor, especially in an abstract free market that was pushing them toward a different kind of slavery, one that bonded them to the land through wages and contracts. Though their notions of the free market were strong, they were eager to cut out their own identity within the market, one that more or less exploited their labor, rather than utilized it to advance their newly acquired position in freedom.

Familiar with having garden plots of their own provided by their former owners, and familiar with the practices sowing, cultivating and harvesting the southern staple crops, they probably hoped and believed that they may acquire land of their own and provide for themselves. The desire for private land was one of the most highly aspired goals of the freedmen. On the Sea Islands and elsewhere, freedmen eagerly attempted to obtain land. Even before the war ended, thousands of acres of confiscated land was being held by the United States, and the Freedmen’s Bureau was in control of over 850,000 acres. The allusion of acquiring property was not unrealistic to freedmen. Across the South, the Freedmen’s Bureau, an agency set up to provide and manage the welfare of the over four million freed slaves, was actively providing plots of land to freedmen. Some were set up in the form of leases, others utilized to settle freedmen on for work and cultivation. These realizations were eventually thwarted by Presidential pardons and restoration of many lands back to their previous owners. Yet what remained was the willingness and labor force the freedmen that helped instill economic recovery and highlights the work notions and ethic of those who maintained the lands in the first few years after the war.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> William Andrew Carrigan, "Labor Agreement: Dr. S. H. Pressly," in William Andrew Carrigan Papers, 1844-1889. (Columbia South Caroliniana 1844-1889).

<sup>12</sup> Register of Contracts; Summerville, South Carolina Vol. 272 Dec 1865-May 1866, p. 10-11 Roll 103-A PDF p. 261 (National Archives Microform Publication M1910, roll 103) Records of the Field Offices for the State of South Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands 1865-1872, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. <http://lowcountryafricana.net/freedmens-bureau-field-records.asp>. Hereafter Cited as NARA.

<sup>13</sup> For more detailed accounts of freedmen and Union attempts to acquire and provide confiscated land to emancipated slaves see: Rose, *Rehearsal* ; Williamson, *After Slavery : The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* ; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, , 153-170. Rose, Williamson, and Foner give impressive accounts of the determination of the Freedmen’s Bureau, along with freedmen themselves, to utilize confiscated Confederate plantations and land to settle former slaves on. They elucidate on the battles between Republican’s, activists, freedmen, and Bureau officials with President Johnson and provide detailed and primary source documentation of the impact that these battles ultimately had on those involved. Rose and Williamson

In inland areas where plantations were abandoned, many freedmen continued to work and harvest hoping to acquire the abandoned land they were living on and use the crop for subsistence or market profit. These freedmen were not idle, nor did they feel the need to stop working. Many freedmen, instilled with notions of self-reliance and acutely aware of the work needed to sustain them, continued to provide for themselves, sometimes unsupervised. In Colleton County, South Carolina, between 1865 and 1866 there were over 8,500 freedmen living on abandoned lands and farms, most “cultivating” and “planting” and continuing to work as they had prior to freedom. According to the Assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees and Abandoned Lands, D.F. Towles, Colleton County in September of 1865 there were plantations that “have been located upon by freedmen, and are in cultivation.” Almost a year later, the Bureau found, on one particular plantation taken up by Charles Whorley, “eighteen freed persons of color employed on this plantation receiving (2/3) two thirds of the crop.”<sup>14</sup>

That these freedmen continued to plant and cultivate suggests that they assumed that they would be capable of acquiring such property as to become self-supporting, and that they could utilize the crop as they saw fit. Yet their immediate realizations of acquiring land, something that most rural and plantation freedmen desperately wanted became muddled in the politics of the Reconstruction era, especially in the low country of South Carolina, where the task system had established many freedmen with a sense of autonomy and allowed them to acquire substantial amounts of personal property. Here, freedmen preached “the gospel of land ownership.”<sup>15</sup> A Savannah Georgia newspaper reported that freedmen would rather “die...before they would surrender their claims to the land.”<sup>16</sup> However, as reconstruction of the rebel states continued, it became evident that these lands would eventually be returned to their former owners or sold at auction, leaving freedmen either tied to the land as wageworkers and sharecroppers or free to leave and find other means of employment.

Although their ambition for land ownership was strong, freedmen in this area of South Carolina also discovered the power of their bargaining position. According to General Oliver O. Howard, freedmen fully expected to acquire land by means of the Confiscation Act and redistributed through the Freedmen’s Bureau. If this was not the case, then they insisted on renting or purchasing the land for themselves. Many of the abandoned lands had been set aside for freedmen and refugees during the war, and under the orders of President Johnson, were being returned to their previous owners once they swore an oath to the Union. When General Oliver O. Howard informed the freedmen on Edisto Island, South Carolina and explained the matter to an assembly of concerned and “interested” group of freedmen in 1865, he was implored with shouts of “No. no!,” and “why do you

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deal exclusively with South Carolina, while Foner takes a broader approach and analyzes the Freedmen’s Bureau activities over a range of states.

<sup>14</sup> NARA Roll 0103-A page:185-217.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom : Emancipation and Its Legacy*, Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 82.

<sup>16</sup> *Savannah Weekly Republican*, January 26, 1867.

take away our lands?" Freedmen expressed their malcontent proclaiming, "you take them from us who are true, always true to the Government! You give them to our all time enemies! That is not right!"<sup>17</sup> In grief and under a three-man committee appointed by the assembled freedmen responded with the following:

General, we want Homesteads, we were promised Homesteads by the government. If it does not carry out the promise its agents made us, if the government haveing concluded to befriend its late enemies and neglect to observe the principals of common faith between its self and us its allies in the war you said was over, now takes away from them the all right to the soil they stand upon save such as they can get by again working for your late and their all time enemies...we are left in a more unpleasant condition than our former...You will see this is not a condition of really freemen.<sup>18</sup>

The quest for land was deeply rooted in the idea of emancipation and intimately interrelated with labor in the mind of the freedmen. Ezra Adams expressed his opinion toward freedom and property ownership, "freedom ain't nothin', 'less you is got somethin' to live on and a place to call home."<sup>19</sup>

The freedmen, so eager to acquire land, found themselves without property, without government support, and returned to the land that they toiled under their former owners. But they soon discovered that they held greater advantage than before, especially in their efforts to negotiate the terms of their employment. These negotiations were not entirely in vain, as the freedmen were able to set many standards and bargaining agreements that they were not as privileged to under slavery. Planters were eager to reacquire their lands, and though the government would not support the plight of the freedmen to take over their former masters' property, they were willing to mediate between freedmen and planters in settling contract disputes and negotiating work conditions. General Howard "constituted a board of supervisors in which the government, the planters, and the freedmen were equally represented." The supervisory board was to "secure and adjust contracts and settle cases of dispute or controversy." The freedmen required that "on no condition would [they] work for their late owners" as they had under slavery; "but if they could rent lands from them, they would consent to all other arrangements proposed." Some would work for "wages," but as General Howard observed, "the general desire was to rent lands and work them."<sup>20</sup>

These negotiations continued, and by the end, freedmen had carved for themselves a somewhat advantageous outcome. Their powerful position, coupled with their concern for their own well being established general guidelines for employment. A general labor contract was agreed upon which adhered to many free market guidelines and gave the freedmen considerable power to improve

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<sup>17</sup> O. O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army* (The Baker & Taylor Company,: The Baker & Taylor Company,), microform. Vol 2., 238-239

<sup>18</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 160.

<sup>19</sup> Narrative of Ezra, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 1 a Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*,, ed. Federal Writers' Project (Project Gutenberg, 2006), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army*, 2:239.

their position, if not they could leave altogether and seek other employment. These general contracts consisted of:

an obligation in which he [the planter] promised substantially: to leave to the freedmen the existing crop; to let them stay at their present homes so long as the responsible freedmen among them would contract or lease; to take proper steps to make new contracts or leases, with proviso that freedmen who refused would surrender any right to remain on the estate after two months; the owners also engaged to interpose no objections to schools.<sup>21</sup>

Not only did the freedmen in the Sea Island vicinity utilize their knowledge obtained in slavery to enhance their position during freedom, but over time these particular freedmen fared better than other freedmen who returned to sharecropping. They were able to secure employment at “very high rates of wages,” and carve out the roots toward ownership and economic independence.<sup>22</sup>

On Edisto Island, by 1880, freedmen owned 4,000 acres, and raised an estimated “two-thirds” of the cotton produced on the island. Holdings of land ranged between 25-60 acres with the largest freedmen landowner being John Thorne, with roughly 250 acres. They eagerly continued to grow their holdings in both land property and personal property, as they had purchased, in the year preceding 1880, “over 500 horses and mules, 300 carts and 100 buggies.” The freedmen planters, according to Thorne, earned roughly \$500 to \$800 a year, enough to “live comfortably and save money.” The freedmen who made up the bulk of the population did not own land, but were also doing quite well also. Where the most “serious problem which the whites have to deal with is the securing of sufficient labor at any price,” problems in which freedmen showed a “willingness to add to their income by working for daily wages.”<sup>23</sup> Even outside of the low-country, in the midlands and up-state of South Carolina freedmen began to acquire small rented sections of land which they farmed to become independent. “After about 1880,” recalled Frances Andrews, “when things got natural, some of the slaves from this section rented small one-horse farms and made their own money and living. Some would rent small tracts of land on shares, giving the landlord one-half the crop for use of the land.”<sup>24</sup> Freedmen were clearly staking their claim as independent participants in the free market.

Not only did men find the property market available to them, but freedwomen also had the opportunity to acquire property at the market if they could save the necessary funds. Hard working and market conscious former slave women were eager to gain autonomy after freedom, and some, through their own means, obtained tracts of land to live on. During her time as a slave in Tennessee, Betsy Crissman, “rented a good farm and managed as best I could...entirely by my own labor.” After purchasing her freedom with saved earnings in Mississippi, she by 1866, had “bought a lot for \$300

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 239-240.

<sup>22</sup> “The Sea Islands,” *The News and Courier*, April 22, 1880,

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>24</sup> Narrative of Francis Andrews, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 1 a Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, ed. Federal Writers' Project (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format page 12, (Electronic Resource) [www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976](http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976) (accessed August 23, 2011), <http://lowcountryafricana.net>. Hereafter cited as NSC: 1,

and built a small house, making the whole cost \$1000." Betsy was so industrious, that she later "bought another house and lot, and gave \$2,600 for it."<sup>25</sup> In South Carolina, Lucretia Heyward, worked in a "cotton house" for wages following emancipation used her "money" to "buy twenty acre ob land on Parri Islandt [Paris Island]."<sup>26</sup>

In urban areas, property holdings by former slaves also increased. In cities, as freedmen poured in from the countryside, the number of "prosperous urban blacks" in the Upper South, increased from "285 to 978 or 243 percent," a huge increase between 1860 and 1870. In addition to these numbers, many of these property holders were employed in "menial occupations such as waiters, servants, porters, laborers, hack drivers, and laundresses," which "strongly suggest," according to Loren Schweninger, "that some members of the upper-wealth group had been antebellum slaves." Henry Harding, a former slave that became a "hotel owner" was "worth \$35,000 in 1870." Freedmen James Thomas, a St. Louis barber, made a "fortune" in real estate speculation. Following the war, he "owned nearly two entire blocks of downtown St. Louis, rented out forty-eight apartment units, and controlled real estate as far away as Memphis and Nashville. His real estate was valued at \$150,000."<sup>27</sup> These adventurous freedmen are only a few examples of those who openly engaged in the free market, seeking property and wealth.

Although property ownership was available to freedmen if they procured the means to acquire it, the daunting task of building up a savings for the vast majority depended upon working for wages. This coupled with the fact that freedmen emerged from slavery as a penniless and a mostly unskilled class of people made the transition to property owning very difficult. However, many freedmen utilized the free labor market and the shortage of labor that followed the Civil War as a way to survive the devastated economy. In the early years, rural slaves stayed on with their former owners as wageworkers and sharecroppers. But after a number of years some decided to move on. Freedmen were no longer bound to the land and had the opportunity to seek other forms of employment. Many left the countryside looking to better their situation. Planters found considerable difficulty in returning freedmen back to the work that they had toiled at during slavery. After subsequent crop failures in the late 1860s, many planters were unable to furnish the wages they promised, or refused to pay them outright. Others tried to withhold portions of the crops promised to freedmen after the harvest. Complaints to the Freedmen's Bureau describe the situation on the ground as many sharecroppers and wageworkers ask for assistance in settling contract disputes and payment shortages.

The Freedmen's Bureau established a means to seek remedies for contract disputes. Unlike during slavery, when slaves could not seek an means of compensation because the held no rights, Freedmen utilized their established rights in free society to obtain legal recourse against those who did

<sup>25</sup> John W. Blassingame et al., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 469.

<sup>26</sup> Narrative of Lucretia Heyward, NSC:2, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Loren Schweninger, "Prosperous Blacks in the South, 1790-1880," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (1990) 51-52.

not honor their contracts. These ‘registers of complaints’ provide evidence that freedmen understood the implications of the free market and that they knew that the freedom to contract established them with the necessary means to seek compensation and legal action against those who did not meet their contractual commitments. These complaints began almost immediately following freedom once contracts were agreed upon, suggesting that freedmen did not have to acquire the notions of exchange for compensation. In other words, freedmen realized long before freedom that contracts were binding and that they knew, and looked forward to utilizing their legal status to make sure that agreements were binding, and establishing their belief that grievances regulated within market society and that the market was only as stable as the ability to make contracts.

In its early stages, the Freedman’s Bureau acted similarly to a court system in the southern states because their existing legal system did not recognize former slaves as having rights. It was not until these states revised their legal system and constitutions that the Freedmen’s Bureau began to hand cases over to state court systems. In the early years, the Bureau helped negotiate and settle contract disputes, and freedmen utilized the resources and authority of the Freedmen’s Bureau to establish their place in the free market, especially related to contractual agreements. When labor and compensation contracts were not upheld to there terms, freedmen complained to the Bureau, which stepped in to settle the matters and enforce the terms agreed upon. The complaints not only provide insight into their notions of the rights provided in a free market society. Freedman John Brown complained that his employer “had violated his contract with him [by] discharging him from his employ before the end of the year and by rejecting him (Brown) from the home given him at the time of entry into contract.” Other freedmen complained that their employers refused to provide the shares of crop agreed to. Complaints were not only subject to the compensation of men, but women also had the ability to seek recourse for losses. David Williams complained to the Bureau, on behalf of his wife, that a local firm was, “indebted to his wife \$3.00 for services rendered in April last.”<sup>28</sup> These types of complaints and settlements strengthen freedmen’s notions of contractual obligations and faith in due compensation, but as time faded and the Freedman’s Bureau was disbanded in the early 1870s, freedmen found themselves in peculiar situations bargaining for wages and shares of crops within a vehemently racist society. This was particularly the case in rural areas in the South. So in order to find conducive conditions to live under, freedmen, searched for better conditions and travel to new locations in search for work and to see what the free market held for them.

The fact that former owners and planters in rural parts of the country offered wages was not enough to keep some freedmen stagnant in their endeavor to improve their situation, especially since the conditions were too familiar to what they experienced under slavery. On his former plantation, William Ballard recalled that, “after eight months,” of working for wages, “some [freedmen] went to

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<sup>28</sup> NARA, M103: 231-232.

other places to work.”<sup>29</sup> These freedmen found jobs across the region doing different things. Some looked for work on other plantations, while many moved to ever expanding cities to find work. The years following emancipation were alive with freedmen movement as they looked for work and a way to create a new life, suggesting they had considerable insight into the fluctuating labor market situation. Charley Barber described how he stayed on his former master’s plantation until 1876 and then moved “to Winnsboro [to] git a job as a section hand laborer on de railroad.” In the early years following emancipation freedmen enjoyed considerable freedom in their movements about the South. However, as the economic situation slowly deteriorated through a number of economic recessions they became subject to a variety of restriction. After 1877 a variety of segregation laws, violence, racist restrictions, and continued economic stagnation hindered and discouraged the advancement of freedmen within the ranks of society. Vagrancy laws became customary after 1877 that restricted freedmen liberties. These laws allowed for the arrest of “virtually any person without a job.” Such laws also made it illegal to offer employment to those already under contract and seriously hindered freedmen’s economic liberties.<sup>30</sup> Yet even through most of this, freedmen continued to seek work and advance their economic position, their work notions still driving them.

Freedmen moved about the entire South looking for work. Men like Anderson Bates moved over three times in search of work. Bates, from Fairfield County, South Carolina, traveled as far as Hopewell, Virginia in search of work. Throughout his life, he worked for wages, the most \$7.20 a day. By the time he was 87 he was living rent-free on someone else’s property, unable to acquire his own.<sup>31</sup> Many freedmen, though the market was open to them for the purchase of property, never acquired the skills, nor the savings to successfully purchase homesteads for themselves. But they continued to seek work and provide for themselves and their family, using their skills and the work ethic developed during slavery to further their participation in the free labor market. The money they acquired through their various odd jobs went toward those things to which they attached value, or saw as luxuries. Just as any open market, their money was spent on just about anything that they could afford. And as they acquired the means to purchase, they did so as they saw fit.

The life of freedmen Henry Brown, a freedman from the Charleston area, reads like a resume as he describes his experience through the transition from slave to freedmen. After the war passed, Henry found himself thrust into a social climate that brought free labor ideology into the economic climate. Former slaves were expected to participate with the new ideological structure, and Henry utilized his notions about labor and the market to take advantage of employment opportunities. He elaborates on this experience further in his narrative:

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<sup>29</sup> Narrative of William Ballard, NSC: 1, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction : America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 1st ed., The New American Nation Series. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 593.

<sup>31</sup> Narrative of Anderson Bates, NSC: 1, 21-22.

"After the war when we came back to Charleston I went to work as a chimney-sweep. I was seven years old then. They paid me ten cents a story. If a house had two stories I got twenty cents; if it had three stories I got thirty cents. When I got too big to go up the chimneys I went back to Rose plantation. My father was still overseer or driver. I drove a cart and plowed. Afterwards I worked in the phosphate mines, then came back here to take care of the garden and be caretaker. I planted all these Cherokee roses you see round here, and I had a big lawn of Charleston grass. I aint able to keep it like I used to."

Economic independence appears important to Henry. He indicates the significance of the power to work, make money, and choose his employer. He lists his employment history almost like a resume. His descriptions are quite vivid and give specific details to indicate his feelings and identity with his work. It also shows a sense of power and agency as he is empowered to take control of his income and movement within society. He tells of his first job after the war as a "chimney sweep." In his narrative, he provides details that indicate his perceived strong attachment to the work and provides him with agency by identifying with working for wages. He elaborates on his mobility and indicates his pride in his work and the planting of the gardens on Rose Plantation. His narrative elucidates on the types of employment and the openness of the labor market to those who searched for meaningful work. He elaborates about his "brother Tom [who] was on the police force," and tells of another brother who "drove the police wagon."<sup>32</sup> Henry's narrative shows the extent to which men organized their life and accepted free market relations, especially regarding money, the power of negotiation, and movement.

Benjamin Holmes' success as a freedman also provides evidence that themes of freedom in the free market were corollary to their experiences as slaves. Holmes, "bound as an apprentice," to a "colored tailor" learned the value of money at an early age. As a young boy he was offered a "gold dollar" by his mother as encouragement to learn to write. Upon learning to read he was "hired" to read newspapers to men in store on Sundays. He recalled that "the better the news, the more they paid me." During the Civil War he was sold where he was settled in Chattanooga, Tennessee and "hired" out at a local hotel. His work was so admired that his owner eventually "took me into his own store" where on occasion he "ran the store myself for a day and a half." Following the war, and now free, Holmes agreed to the terms of "thirty dollars a month" to better his financial position where he was presently making "but ten at the time." According to Holmes, "his next experiment was to become a clerk to a colored barber, at sixty dollars a month." Eventually, once the barber died, Mr. Holmes administered his estate, sold the business, and became a teacher for "thirty dollars a month," and eventually settled in as a business owner himself working "at my tailor's trade...making from one to three dollars a day."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Narrative of Henry Brown, NSC: 1, 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> Blassingame et al., *Slave Testimony* y, 618-620.

The examples of both Henry Brown and Benjamin Holmes suggest the numerous opportunities available in the free labor market for freedmen. Though the vast majority of men and women were unskilled and emerged from slavery with almost nothing, they settled into various jobs, mostly menial work as small wage laborers, sharecroppers, house servants, or subsistence farmers. Many wandered the countryside in search of work and better conditions. Slaves in the Carolina and Georgia low country were able to utilize their experiences from slavery to obtain greater land ownership rights. They held considerable property knowledge and ownership and worked under slavery in a task system that provided them with greater autonomy than those in the inland. Many eagerly looked to acquire land that would provide autonomy in their daily lives. In certain areas they were more successful than others, such as on Edisto Island of South Carolina. Freedmen Bureau records, first hand accounts, and Newspapers reports indicate the extent to which former slaves eagerly anticipated property ownership. When it became apparent that land confiscated from former confederates would not be redistributed to them, many returned to the farms that they knew, but with a new perception of what it meant to be free.

The absence of a large labor force provided them with opportunity to negotiate contracts, and earn wages. They now had the opportunity to bargain for their work, something they could not do during slavery but had the notions of what money and work meant. However, the experiences of those in the up-state and inland cotton belt were also aware of the market notions. Their experiences of being sold, and their associations with the power of money provided them with insight as to how markets reacted and to the power that money held in acquiring property, and its value based on supply and demand. All of these themes were utilized once they took their first steps in the free labor market as wage earners with an ability to accept work or refuse it based on their own experiences. They negotiated terms for their contracts, moved about searching for work as they saw fit, and filed complaints when they felt it necessary. These notions were not obtained during the moments of freedom, but solidified while bonded as slaves on the plantations or as servants in aristocratic households. Once freedom arrived they went to work as every other able bodied person, and from their work they acquired compensation, what they did with it and how they used it was just as important.

## Chapter Six

### Choices in the Market:

### Luxuries, Savings, and Loans

In 1876, amid the heated political election between southern Democrat's "red shirt" campaign, and the Republicans hoping to maintain government control, a freedman from Winnsboro, South Carolina, was working on the railroad as a "hand laborer." He had recently moved from his former plantation where he remained after slavery until money, or a change of life, impressed upon him to leave his former master's land and seek employment on the railroad. The railroad was a convenient place to earn a few dollars. "I git paid off de pay train," he recalled. The railroad "company run a special pay train out of Columbia to Charlotte. They stop at every station and pay de hands off de rear end of the train in cash." Charley's story is not unique. The fact that he was a former slave earning cash for labor was part of the transition that followed the Civil War. What is most interesting is what he recollects he did with his first earnings from that job. "Out of de fust money," he remembers, "I buys me a red shirt and dat November I votes."<sup>1</sup>

Charley decided to spend his money on a "red shirt," not for necessity, but as a luxury, a commodity that suggested his political affiliation. The "red shirt" campaign of 1876 was the Democratic push in South Carolina to "redeem" the South Carolina government from "Radical" Republicans, northern "carpetbaggers" who had come south to help during the reconstruction of southern society, and the loyal Unionist "scalawags" who had supported the North during the Civil War. Their objective was to restore "home rule" to the state and re-adjust southern society to as close to pre war conditions as possible. Why Charley was supporting such a campaign is a question in itself, but his decision to purchase the red shirt is the subject of this chapter. Charley's decision suggests a number of important notions that provide evidence of the continuity and market interaction that freedmen carried from slavery.

First, he was working for wages, something that, as discussed earlier, was not a notion that was absent to slaves. He had also been working for his former owner for roughly ten years before he decided to move to Winnsboro to seek new employment. Perhaps he had grown weary of plantation life, or perhaps he was just looking to make more money, or perhaps his former owner encouraged him to leave or died. The notable exchange here is that, once acquired employment, he decided to save a portion of his earning for the specific purpose of buying the shirt, which was undoubtedly a commodity, most notably a degree of pleasure, definitely not a necessity. It may even be called something of a luxury item. What Charley did, saving and spending his money on what he wanted at

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<sup>1</sup> Narrative of Charley Barber, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 1 A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, ed. Federal Writers' Project (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format, 17 (Electronic Resource) [www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976](http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/976) (accessed August 23, 2011), <http://lowcountryafricana.net>. Hereafter cited as NSC: 1.

the market, is the structure and analysis of this chapter. He worked for his earnings, he saved some of his money, and he purchased a product for luxury based on his own wants and desires. These may seem like trivial decisions, but it suggest a much more powerful implication, that freedmen's notions of luxury and spending habits were influenced by their experiences as slaves. This chapter will suggest that freedmen carried notions and values acquired in slavery into the free market and, as consumers, embedded themselves within the market in ways that they understood. The market was open for their participation and they actively engaged as consumers, savers, and investors.

Market activity is a difficult venture to analyze when receipts and documentation for these types of transactions were not as efficient as they are today. Transactions at the market level were usually done in cash, or through the trading and bartering of goods. Most of these transactions were never recorded, so there is very little specific examples of where to look. Some of the most notable sources regarding such activity come from the narratives and contemporary observations from journals, newspapers, and in official war records that discuss market interaction. This chapter looks at the market activity through the discussed participation hidden within slave narratives and first hand accounts and observations from those who toured the South before and after emancipation. It will describe the attitude and experiences of slaves notions of commodities and luxuries that developed during slavery and provide examples of the same activity during freedom.

This chapter also analyzes freedmen notions of saving money. It suggests that slaves were aware of the importance of money and other valuables because they witnessed the importance of such items to their owners. As owners tried to save and maintain their wealth, slaves realized that such things were necessary and important during freedom. The witnessed first hand the things their owners treasured, such as clothing, furniture, gold and silver. It is also evident that slaves saved money and valuables before emancipation, and used these savings to purchase illicit goods at the market. Such example provide a degree of autonomy and resistance to slavery on the part of the slave, while also describing the values and notions they held prior to freedom. It suggests the existence of strong associations regarding market activity, consumerism, and the value saving a few extra dollars for the acquisition of luxuries.

Historians, over the last thirty years, have been actively aware of the internal economy of slaves in the southern United States. In recent years, scholars have suggested that this internal economy helped establish consumerism within the slave population. Kathleen Hilliard, suggests that slaveholders attempted to monitor and instill notions of "moralism" while trying to manage the consumer process. More importantly, Hilliard, along with Dylan Penningroth, Phillip Morgan, and Lawrence McDonnell among others, have all shown that there was, to an extent, a consumer slave society that functioned illicitly yet completely allowed by their owners in the South. Some slaves acquired money through market participation while other slaves were able to keep portions of their wages that they made while being hired out. Needless to say, slaves found ways to save and acquire money or tradable goods which they used to acquire consumer goods at the market. Exactly what

these slaves consumed beyond subsistence indicate to an extent their notions and values that transferred into society with them free people. By the end of the Antebellum period in the South, slaveholders were greatly debating how to satisfy the wants, needs, and luxuries of their slave population. These debates revolved around decisions to allow slaves to acquire money, luxury goods, and other articles of property.<sup>2</sup>

The ability to acquire luxuries necessarily implies that one must have the ability to purchase goods above the means of necessity. In other words, to purchase luxury goods one must have already acquired the ability to provide those products that are required for survival. It also implies the notion that in order to obtain such luxuries a degree of thought and savings must have gone into the decision to acquire such a luxury. Charley Barber had to use his money to buy the red shirt, not because he needed it, but because he wanted it. He decided to save a portion of his earnings and purchase the shirt as an indicator to his political allegiance. These decisions are important when analyzing freedmen activity in the market. It also infers the reality that shops and trading posts were willing and able to sell to freedmen, and actively encouraged such market interaction. So how much, and to what extent, did freedmen save?

Even before emancipation, slaves were in the habit of saving. From the individual garden plots that they were allowed to maintain on the plantation, they saved for market. These were not always clandestine activities; much of it was encouraged by slaveholders. One former slave owner admitted that he “never interfered with [his] people, they bought & sold these things at their own price & spent the money as they pleased.” Such notions gave the slave autonomy to interact at market and use entrepreneurial skills to acquire goods that they wanted. One slave in the Low Country of Georgia remarked that he obtained livestock and wagons through industrious work and saving. “I bought mine sir by taking care of what little I could get,” testified James Quarterman to a Southern Claims Commission agent.<sup>3</sup> Obviously in this section of the South, slaves were more than able to save accumulated goods and money to purchase non necessities and even luxury items.

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<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Mary Hilliard, "Spending in Black and White : Race, Slavery, and Consumer Values in the Antebellum South" (Thesis (Ph D ), University of South Carolina, 2006., 2006), 40-72; for further readings on the slave internal economy and market interaction see Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (1960) ; Douglas R. Egerton, "Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (2006) ; Lawrence T. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community" in Winfred B. Moore et al., *Developing Dixie : Modernization in a Traditional Society*, Contributions in American History, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 31-44; Philip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983) ;Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 39, no. 4 (oct., 1982) ;Dylan Penningroth, "Slavery, Freedom, and Social Claims to Property among African Americans in Liberty County, Georgia, 1850-1880," *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (1997)

<sup>3</sup> Penningroth, "Social Claims," 413; see also testimony of Edward DeLegal in claim of Tony Axon, p. 7, Liberty County, Georgia, Case Files, Southern Claims Commission, Records of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Auditor, Allowed Case Files, Records of the U.S. General Accounting Office; and claim of James Quarterman, p. 1, Liberty County, Georgia, Case Files, Southern Claims Commission, Records of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Auditor, Allowed Case Files, Records of the U.S. General Accounting Office.

The acquisition of luxuries encouraged slaves to make decisions regarding what they needed for necessity and what they wanted to spend or trade their savings to obtain. Kathleen Hilliard points out how slaves could trade and “extra bag of corn” for “calico or tobacco” or buy “‘fine’ clothing.”<sup>4</sup> Activities such as this did not end with emancipation, in fact, since it was legally encouraged, market interactions and notions of luxury spending increased exponentially. Freedmen, now having legal access to the market, could potentially purchase anything they wished. Though their actual purchasing power remained limited for years because of their peasant like status and the mere fact that they emerged from slavery virtually penniless, freedmen were no strangers to saving as a means to acquire luxury goods and commodities. Sylvia Cannon remembers that “people would have found we colored people rich wid de money we made on de extra crop, if de slaves hadn’ never been free. Us had big rolls of money en den when de Yankees come en change de money, dat what made us poor.” Sylvia recalled how she buried extra money in the ground that she saved up from “clear[ing] up new land.” When she decided to dig it back up, she “had over \$1500.00” that she saved.<sup>5</sup>

So what did freedmen purchase once free? What types of luxury spending and savings habits did they express when merging into the free market? In the previous chapter it was discussed that freedmen took a intense interest in acquiring land. In certain instances they were able to acquire tracts of land or even purchase or build homes. Nevertheless, the vast majority were not in a position to make such large investments because of their circumstances. Yet when circumstances were changed by a twist of fate, some freedmen made the most of their situation. One of the easiest ways to showcase the obtained notions of market knowledge, savings and spending can be assessed when analyzing the entrepreneurial spirit of those who were able to use their money wisely to provide for themselves. Benjamin Holmes, discussed in the previous chapter, parlayed his earnings into a successful tailor business and college education. Yet some freedmen, not attuned to wage working spent their earnings on everyday luxuries like clothes, candy, or novelties to impress potential boyfriends and girlfriends.

Slaves often found value in the excess clothes that they acquired. Many slave owners offered slaves extra clothes as luxuries or as reward for overwork. Fine clothes often held high regard among slaves and suggested merits for their work. Slaves would also wear their Sunday bests to church and felt strong attachment toward these articles of property. When Union officers confiscated a Georgian slave Pompey Bacon’s possessions for the war, he “grieved” at the taking of the “nice linen shirts [he] used to go to communion in.” Dylan Penningroth noted that slaves attired their, “common everyday coarse clothes” for weekly work and wore their “finery” that they had purchased or received from their owners on Sundays.<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Russell recalled how “white folks and visitors would give me coppers, 3-cent pieces, and once or twice dimes. He “used them to buy extra clothing for Sundays and rice

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<sup>4</sup> Hilliard, “Spending”, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Narrative of Sylvia Cannon, *NSC*: 1, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Penningroth, “Social Claims,” 420-421.

crackers and candy.”<sup>7</sup> As a young slave girl, Mamie Riley cried when Yankee soldiers wanted to confiscate potatoes by wrapping them in two of “Ma’s good dresses.” She found them “some sacks” to use instead, and they left the dresses and gave her “[e]leven or twelve dollars.”<sup>8</sup> Mary Adams recalled how she had a “heap of pretty clothes” that she acquired from her mistress. These experiences suggest and display the value that slaves placed on these “luxury” items. Wearing such nice clothes on Sundays helped slaves escape the everyday life of work and bondage, instilling value in itself and the ability to forget their position, if just for one day a week.

With so much emphasis on clothes as valuable possessions for slaves it is no wonder that they continued to view such commodities as luxury goods and enjoyed spending their earned money on such articles during freedom. Just as Charley Barber, many freedmen enjoyed the prospect of obtaining fine clothes and showing their earnings by their outward appearance. Following emancipation, whites described freedwomen as “putting on airs” for aspiring to be “ladies,” as they adorned themselves “in fancy garments, and carried parasols.”<sup>9</sup> Dan Smith, in his efforts to impress his future wife, while working in the early 1870s, took his money and bought “a suit of clothes, a new hat, a pair of boots, a new shirt, [and] bottle of Hoyt’s cologne” to impress his future wife before he “ask[ed] her to marry me.” Mr. Smith’s notion that fine clothes and luxury items, like cologne, were enough to satisfy his wants, along with that of his future spouse suggest his desire to spend his earnings on luxuries. Smith, once he made his decision, prudently saved up his earnings, waiting until he sold his “last bale of cotton” in order to have the necessary amount to make such purchase. His example shows his keen interest in saving for such commercial and non-essential goods.<sup>10</sup> Freedmen were eager to enjoy the new conveniences of freedom, and their experience under slavery often fostered their market notions.

Plantation stores offered slaves the opportunity to use cash or credit that they accrued; this provided them with notions of saving their earnings to purchase what they wanted. Frederick Law Olmsted described the plantation store in the low country of South Carolina. Olmsted noted one plantation store he visited prior to emancipation, as being “well supplied with articles they [slaves] most want, which are purchased in large quantities, and sold to them at wholesale prices; thus giving them a great advantage in dealing with him rather than with grog-shops.”<sup>11</sup> These plantation stores also existed in the up-state, as Pick Gladden described the “big store at the end of Mr. W. B. Whitney’s

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Russell, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves Vol. XIV South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, ed. Federal Writers' Project. (Project Gutenberg 2006), pdf format, 23 (Electronic Resource) [www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/970](http://www.werelate.org/dlib/handle/970) (accessed August 23, 2011), <http://lowcountryafrican.net>. Hereafter cited as NSC: 4.

<sup>8</sup> Narrative of Mamie Riley, NSC: 4, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long : The Aftermath of Slavery*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf : distributed by Random House, 1979), 258.

<sup>10</sup> Narrative of Dan Smith, NSC: 4, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom; a Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States. Based Upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author* (New York,: Knopf, 1953), 198.

plantation" near Union, South Carolina. According to him it was a "good store," where those who lived on the plantation "didn't have to go to Newber'y to git no candy and 'Bacco."<sup>12</sup> Just as they had been doing in slavery, freedmen saved for what they wanted and took advantage of the unregulated opportunity now confronting them. Stores routinely offered commodities that catered to new customers who were willing to purchase good above the means of subsistence.

There were ample businesses willing to take advantage of the new freedmen thrift that was taking place as freedmen moved about searching for work. Ben Horry's father would save "rice" because, "rice been money" in that time. He would take the rice down to town to "get provisions like, sugar, coffee, pepper and salt." But one thing that Horry's father traded for was not just provisions, "my father loved [his] liquor," he recalled, and "that take money." Surely the act of saving rice to buy provisions was a necessity, but saving extra to buy liquor was definitely considered a luxury.<sup>13</sup> After freedom, John Franklin's family raised "corn, beans, 'taters and chickens for ourselves and to sell." They would go to Columbia to "sell it and buy coffee and other things that we could not raise at home."<sup>14</sup> Shops opened around the South to profit from the new money being provided as wages to the freedmen. Tailor and barber shops opened in the cities catering to freedmen as they moved about the cities. In Rural areas, entrepreneurial establishments opened looking to take advantage of the expanding economic activity. Northern businessmen also flocked to the South hoping to strike it rich. Their business ventures and establishments provide evidence to the luxuries and tastes of freedmen wishing to spend their money on commodities and luxury items that were not available to them where they lived or worked. Traveler and editor, Whitelaw Reid, journeyed through the South immediately following the conclusion of the war. He described the situation and the profiteering of businesses looking to take full advantage of the open market within the newly emancipated South. While traveling he came across a plantation recently purchased by a Northerner who quickly "established a store to catch the negro trade. Its business was done entirely for cash, and its sales averaged over fifty dollars a day—all made at an average profit of one hundred per cent. Calicoes, cottonades, denims, shoes, hats, brass jewelry, head handkerchiefs, candy, tobacco, sardines, cheese, and whisky were the great staples."<sup>15</sup> Former slaves were earning and saving money, not just in the cities, but they were utilizing their money even on the plantation stores where many continued to work as sharecroppers and wage earners far away from the urban areas. Men traveled around taking advantage of the new market relations surrounding freedom. Isaiah Butler explained, "When de war wuz over, ole man Jones come over frum Georgia and sell t'ings to de colored folks. He'd sell 'em everyt'ing. He took

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<sup>12</sup> Narrative of Pick Gladden, *NSC*: 2, 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Narrative of Ben Horry, *NSC*: 2, 114-117.

<sup>14</sup> Narrative of John Franklin, *NSC*: 2, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Whitelaw Reid, *After the War : A Southern Tour, May 1, 1865 to May 1, 1866* (Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin,; Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin,), microform., 498-499.

all de colored folks' money!"<sup>16</sup> The opportunity to take someone's money ultimately suggests that the person has to have saved some money.

The notions of saving money, silver, or other fineries were nothing new to freedmen. During slavery they were very aware of the value of these articles. Their notions are elucidated upon as they described the scenes during Yankee raids on southern plantations. Slaves learned from their masters and through their own experiences that money, jewels, clothes, and property was worth a hefty price. Slaveholders would try almost anything to save their valuables, and slaves witnessed and even took part in such activities, further instilling notions regarding the value and importance of having such property and money stashes. Watching their owners hide their valuables suggested that there was some advantage to saving and instilled among slaves the idea of wealth accumulation. It also provided slaves an opportunity to decide what kind of items were considered valuable. These notions would follow them as free men and women, and they held strong notions from what they believed was valuable and worth saving. Money was no exception.

When the "Yankees come," described freedmen Lewis Evans, the first thing they looked for was "money."<sup>17</sup> Slaves witnessed frantic owners trying to hide their belongings from advancing northern armies. Witnessing such events solidified the notions of savings and the importance of holding on to such belongings. "De white folks hadder herry (hurry) en put t'ings in pots en bury em or hide em somewhey when dey hear dat de Yankees wus comin," recalled Louisa Collier.<sup>18</sup> The same experience was told by Dinah Cunningham who witnessed Yankee soldiers rummaging through the house as they, "tore up everything, ripped open de feather beds and cotton mattresses, searchin' for money and jewels."<sup>19</sup> Slaves observed their owners hiding their pots and kettles in "holes" and putting their "silver" in "trees," in an effort to maintain their wealth, suggesting to many slaves that these things were associated with power and prosperity, and worth hiding and saving. Owners even placed some of their "fine furniture and other things" in slaves' quarters in order to elude Yankee confiscation, believing that the army was not interested in slave property.<sup>20</sup>

Saving was essential to realizing freedom in the market-oriented economy, and some freedmen saved as they witnessed as slaves. "We buried our valuables in sacks and holes, then put plants over the hiding places. The Silver was buried over by Cypress Pond; and we saved all buried valuables," recalled Amos Gadsden.<sup>21</sup> Freedmen Sim Greeley recalled, "never in my life did I hear of a bank in slavery times. Everybody buried dere money and sometimes dey forgot where dey put it...Lots of money buried somewhars, and folks died and never remembered whar it was."<sup>22</sup> Testimony from the Southern Claims Commission suggests that slaves in the Georgia low country of

<sup>16</sup> Narrative of Isaiah Butler, *NSC*: 1, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Narrative of Lewis Evans, *NSC*: 2, 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Narrative of Louisa Collier, *NSC*: 1, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Narrative of Dinah Cunningham, *NSC*: 1, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Narrative of Henry Brown, *NSC*: 1, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Narrative of Amos Gadsden, *NSC*: 2, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Narrative of Sim Greeley, *NSC*: 2, 73.

Liberty County were "more than usually prosperous," "pretty well off," and "hardworking and moneysaving."<sup>23</sup> Slaves across the South understood the value of saving property and in many cases used their owners' as examples as to what was important and valuable to retain.

Freedmen understood the value of saving and whenever they desired to purchase or acquire something, they realized that it would be available to them through the market if they had the means and the ability to save for such luxuries. Andy Brice made up his "mind" to "save and buy me a fiddle," which he acquired at Christmas.<sup>24</sup> Nelson Cameron was able to pay for his wedding and pay someone to marry him and his partner "for de forty cents I saved up."<sup>25</sup> Freedmen were accustomed to saving what they could, it was a necessity during slavery, and thriftiness transferred with them to freedom. "Peoples would have found we colored people rich wid de money we made on de extra crop...us had big rolls of money" purports Sylvia Cannon. She, like many others, buried her savings in the ground, hoping to dig it up and use it when the time was right, or when she wanted something that she desired.<sup>26</sup> Freedmen Martha Richardson and her mother, living in Columbia following the war, found a "pot" buried in the ground. She utilized the \$5,700 recovered in the "silver" and "gold pieces" to "buy two lots on Senate Street," and "build" a "two story house" and "cottage" on another. After that "she always had rent comin' in ever since." Stories like Martha's show the industriousness and ingenuity of freedmen and women when they had the ability to acquire necessary funds and comforts. They developed their skills further after slavery and made the most of the market. Martha's mother worked as a hotel cook while a slave in Columbia and from her experiences she was able to parlay her finding into a successful property venture, she even "worked on just de same" after finding the money.<sup>27</sup> After emancipation however, banks and savings companies began to cater to these freedmen and women in an effort to stimulate investment and stimulate economic growth. No other bank signified the freedmen's participation in savings and barrowing than the establishment on the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company.

Following the Civil War, the Congress of the United States chartered the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company at the same time that it established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. The purpose of which was to "encourage habits of thrift among the former slaves."<sup>28</sup> The establishment of the National Freedman's Bank was incorporated quickly after the war due largely to the success of the Freedman's Savings Bank of South Carolina that began operation in Beaufort in 1864. Its main focus, in early years, prior to becoming nationally chartered, was to "induce Negro soldiers to save their pay and bounties." These early deposits from freedmen soldiers, legitimized the bank which amounted early assets of "about \$200,000." The bank quickly merged with

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, "Ownership," 412.

<sup>24</sup> Narrative of Andy Brice, *NSC*: 1, 34

<sup>25</sup> Narrative of Nelson Cameron, *NSC*: 1, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Narrative of Sylvia Cannon, *NSC*: 1, 73.

<sup>27</sup> Narrative of Martha Richardson, *NSC*: 4, 10-12.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction : America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 1st Perennial Classics ed., New American Nation Series. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), 69.

another savings institution in Charleston to become the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company.<sup>29</sup> The bank operated with "phenomenal" success, and deposits increased.<sup>30</sup>

Once established, it set its sites on providing a place for freedmen and freedwomen to accumulate and save their earnings. The vast majority who deposited were from average and medial jobs as both men and women began to open accounts. Records from Charleston show the extent of those willing to open accounts and place their earnings into the bank attempting to save. Laborers, seamstresses, boot blacks, cooks, waiters and farmers were among the host of many others who opened accounts with the company. Parents brought their schoolchildren to open accounts encouraging them to start saving for their future. Some open accounts for \$9, others deposited \$100, all money which apparently was being set aside as savings. Freedmen who opened accounts also brought in their friends, siblings, and other family members, many of which are listed in the remarks of opened accounts, suggesting that freedmen were curious and eager to understand the opportunity and functions of banking.<sup>31</sup> As early as August 1866, over 1900 Freedmen had deposited more than \$300,000 into accounts, and it continued to grow<sup>32</sup>. Freedmen in both the surrounding areas of Beaufort and Charleston entrusted their earnings in these banks, eager to save for the future. The Freedman's Savings and Trust Company was not the only financial institution that freedmen frequented, other banks were establish in Virginia and New Orleans with the specific goal of encouraging freedmen to save money. The early success of the institutions suggests the level of savings, thrift, and earning power of the freedmen. As one freedman stated, when it came to money, "I just rather put my money in de bank, [and] go dere when I want it."<sup>33</sup> Trusting their earnings to a third party was a major leap forward in freedmen notions toward the money economy. By allowing banks to hold their deposits, these freedmen acknowledge the true reality of the market, that money could be saved, earn interest, and even be lent out for the purpose of purchasing and investing. That freedmen utilized such opportunities distanced themselves from slavery and indicates the extent to which they understood and participated in the free market.

Freedmen and women knew the power of money and understood that money was central to the free market. They had strong notions regarding it. While they eagerly wanted and tried to acquire land by saving money, many were not as fortunate and spent their money unwisely or never earned a serious enough amount to amass significant earnings. Still, freedmen understood savings, and debt through their experiences. As Alexander Robertson proudly professed, "[I] paid my debts dollar for

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<sup>29</sup> Joel Williamson, *After Slavery : The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (New York: Norton, 1975), 178.

<sup>30</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois et al., *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 599.

<sup>31</sup> Freedmen's Savings and Trust Record, Charleston, SC, "Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands," ed. National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC: National Archives Microform Publication, Record Group 105, M816, roll 23).

<sup>32</sup> "Freedman's Savings and Trust Company," *The New South*, August 11, 1866, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Narrative of Caleb Craig, NSC: 1, 88.

dollar and owe no man nothin' but good will.”<sup>34</sup> Others nostalgically looked back toward slavery as a time when “money was not worshipped then like it is now.”<sup>35</sup> Though it may have been difficult for freedmen to acquire such money, they realized its value and necessity for both living and comfort. In certain instances, they were in good enough standings to barrow money. Loans often helped them make due until the next harvest, or provided extra income to obtain other luxuries or run businesses.

Some former slave owners gave out small loans in an effort to help trustworthy freedmen.. Former slaveholder and plantation owner, Andrew Carrigan, issued a number of loans to freedmen after the war. He lent \$315 to freedmen Andrew Hines at “2 ½ percent” interest. Another freedmen, Timothy Renty, barrowed \$115 from Mr. Carrigan. Though it is not exactly sure what these men used the money for, they were fully aware of the loan process and interest rates that coincided with loan agreements.<sup>36</sup> Freedmen also sought loans through the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company. Prior to dissolving in 1874 from poor management and intense competition, the Beaufort branch of South Carolina had approved and loaned out over \$126,000 to various individuals and businesses.<sup>37</sup> But with lack of overall wealth, and very little skills to fall back on, obtaining loans and stable income was a difficult transition for freedmen. There is no better signifier to the thrift of freedmen than through their attempts to save money. While all banks were open to the freedmen, the Freedmen’s Bank’s initial success is a strong indicator of the market exchange and interaction exhibited by freedmen. It dealt almost exclusively with freedmen so its records are a testament to freedmen savings and loan activity. Upon its closing in 1874, due to poor management and a lack of overall government support, depositors had invested \$2,993,790.68 in 61,144 accounts. As the bank became insolvent after “money was loaned recklessly” and soon “runs” were started on the bank, eventually leading to its closing where a majority of its depositors lost nearly all their deposits. “Thus” as W.E.B. Dubois described, “the most promising effort to raise the financial status of the best and thriftiest of Negroes went down in the maelstrom of national corruption.” However, its extraordinary early success is remarkable considering the vast majority of clientele had recently emerged from slavery. At its highest point, the total deposits reach roughly \$57,000,000, as staggering number considering most of its depositors had virtually nothing only a few years before.<sup>38</sup>

The market was now completely open, and freedmen took advantage whenever possible to earn, buy, and save. Without their masters watchful eyes, they expanded their economic activity to acquire the goods that they saw fit, both from a necessity standpoint and as consumers of luxury items. They purchased surplus food, spent money on fine clothes and jewelry, and started businesses. They utilized the market to express themselves outwardly in ways that were not allowed while slaves. Their

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<sup>34</sup> Narrative of Alexander Robertson, *NSC*: 4, 15-16.

<sup>35</sup> Narrative of Reuben Rosborough, *NSC*: 4, 21.

<sup>36</sup> William Andrew Carrigan, “Loan Agreements,” in William Andrew Carrigan Papers, 1844-1889 (Columbia South Caroliniana, 1844-1889).

<sup>37</sup> “The Freedman’s Bank at Charleston and Beaufort,” *The News and Courier*, December 30, 1874,

<sup>38</sup> Du Bois et al., *Black Reconstruction in America* , 600.

spending habits and values, being solidified during slavery, were brought with them to freedom and they eagerly participated in the market economy. Across the South the market opened its doors to the influx of new money while freedmen utilized their new independence and autonomy to purchase whatever their hearts desired.

Freedmen opened savings accounts to save. Looking to the future, they brought their children with them and encouraged deposits. They actively sought land, built businesses, and engaged in a variety of market exchanges. These former slaves held strong notions regarding savings and money that was established through their experiences and by their observations of their former owners' behavior. In many areas the market had been open to them during slavery and they were already active participants in a dual market system that was blurring and eroding the lines of slavery and freedom. Plantation stores, grog shops and city markets were all valuable tools utilized by slaves to prepare for freedom. Once free they continued to seek luxuries, save money, and invest in ways that would secure their future. Continuity for the freedmen suggests that notions of freedom were establishing themselves under the very umbrella of slavery. The market infiltrated slavery on multiple levels, helping to slowly prepare and encourage freedom. Slaves actively, and subversively, resist bondage by being actively and openly aware of the market as it prepared them for economic freedom as wage earners, consumers, and investors in the free market.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Freedom and slavery are polar opposites. Over time, the definition of slavery has meant different things, but ultimately the idea and institution of chattel slavery subjected its captives to being labeled as property themselves and forced work. Yet the paradox of the system as it developed in the American South affected the idea of freedom in complex ways. Eric Foner suggests that the meaning of freedom is “anything but unproblematic,” and has “never been a fixed category.” In the United States the very concept and ideas of freedom “have been powerfully affected by the existence and the concept of slavery” to which it was juxtaposed.<sup>1</sup> There is no better example of this than the experience of the freedmen, who labored under the confines of slavery and was then thrust into the expectations of freedom. Their story highlights the complexity and ambiguities of freedom as they emerged into the free market as consumers, wage laborers, and active participants in the market system. Slavery did not completely exclude many slaves from the development of free market ideals, and in many cases it actually provided slave communities with extensive knowledge of free market notions and the expectations of freedom within market society.

“The history of freedom,” a scholar of British history has recently written, “is really the history of contests over its constructions and exclusions.”<sup>2</sup> Millions of men and women who lived as both slave and free person experienced, as bonded individuals, a fostering of important values and notions that set the stage for failures and successes within the developing free market American South. The context of slavery set up multiple ways in which slaves found themselves interacting in market situations and incorporating such experiences as key aspects of freedom. These market interactions instilled autonomy and independence during an era when they were considered property with no legal rights as citizens. The labor systems in which they worked offered insight and experiences that set them up for legal market interactions once free.

Tasking allowed slaves control over their productivity, and associated their free time with that of their work time. In the low Country of South Carolina and Georgia slaves were able to utilize this system to carve out autonomy and blur the lines between master and slave by accumulating money, property, and interacting in the marketplace in almost completely independent ways. Claims from the Southern Claims Commission following the Civil War suggest that, as slaves, they held strong notions about the value of both money and private property. Testimony supports the reality that slaves often held substantial amounts of property where they lived quite comfortably, even hiring other slaves to

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Foner, *Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1994), 2

<sup>2</sup> Ian Christopher Fletcher, “Rethinking the History of Working People: Class, Gender, and Identities in an Age of Industry and Empire,” *Radical History Review*, 56 (Spring 1993): 85-86

finish daily tasks if they had other obligations to attend.<sup>3</sup> This was not exclusive to the lower South as slaves in other regions also accumulated bits of property and money.

In regions of the industrializing upper South, like Virginia, slaves were often hired out to work in factory settings. Others were hired to do work for individuals who either did not or could not afford to own slaves. Either way, these urban slaves interacted extensively in the market economy. They acquired, in some cases, enough money to purchase their own freedom, even saving enough to purchase the freedom of family members or spouses. In certain instances they took entrepreneurial roles, creating small businesses and clandestine markets for whites or other slaves who fancied their products. Lunsford Lane sold tobacco to whites in North Carolina, eventually making enough money to purchase his own freedom for \$1000.<sup>4</sup>

Historians often neglect the history of slavery and emancipation as a continuous event. They typically divide the history of the United States between slavery and freedom at the watershed moment of the Civil War. Scholars focus on the themes of nineteenth century America by dividing the period between pre and post war America while tending to focus on slavery, or exclusively on freedom. Studies that stress the continuity between slave and freedmen experiences lead to a greater understanding of American social history and shed light on the fact that many of the freed slaves were forced to rely on the skills they acquired during slavery to succeed during freedom. It is important not to forget that millions of men and women experienced their first interaction with the market while enslaved. This interaction provided them with a greater understanding of what free society expected of them. It also prepared them for interaction within the free market and free labor society once they obtained freedom.

There were numerous ways that slaves acquired market knowledge in the South. On plantations in the low country rice culture, slaves were allotted tasks that, once they were finished, they could utilize their time to attend other ventures in a multitude of ways. Some decided to use their time to produce crop surplus and take it to the market or sell it to their masters. These slaves were able to acquire property, and even, in certain instances, live more prosperously than some whites.<sup>5</sup> Their experience show that slaves in these areas had impressive notions toward the value of work,

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<sup>3</sup> Philip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983), Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 39, no. 4 (oct., 1982), Dylan Penningroth, "Slavery, Freedom, and Social Claims to Property among African Americans in Liberty County, Georgia, 1850-1880," *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (1997)

<sup>4</sup> For greater analysis of upper South slave hiring see Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (1960), Douglas R. Egerton, "Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (2006), Lunsford Lane et al., *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C. Embracing an Account of His Early Life, the Redemption by Purchase of Himself and Family from Slavery, and His Banishment from the Place of His Birth for the Crime of Wearing a Colored Skin*, Electronic ed. ([Chapel Hill, N.C.]: Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999), (Electronic Resource), [docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lanelunsford/lane.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lanelunsford/lane.html).

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, "Ownership," 399-420; Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," 563-599; Penningroth, "Social Claims," 405-435.

time, and money. Many of these slaves were aware of property value and even submitted claims for compensation of lost property after the Civil War. Once they were free, these slaves showed a higher likelihood of land ownership than other regions, suggesting that their market experience as slaves enabled them to successfully transition into the free market economy. Their success at owning land provides evidence to the value that slave saw in land ownership.

Throughout the entire South many slaves understood the importance of land. Many saw that land was necessary to carve out autonomy. Following the war slaves across the South expected to receive some form of land from the federal government. Freedmen's Bureau records indicate that once free, many slaves remained on abandoned lands and continued to harvest. Some took the surplus to the market. Others, desperately tried to negotiate terms toward land ownership. Throughout South Carolina freedmen eagerly fought for land. Some were able to acquire small patches to work, and in certain areas, they found ways to rent or eventually acquire property. The tenacity to which these freedmen openly and eagerly tried to acquire land is important because it provides insight into what they developed as important in sustaining freedom for themselves. It equally suggests that they understood the value of property and the economic benefit in having such land for themselves. Unfortunately, because of their low economic position, and virtually penniless status, they rarely found ways to acquire it. This does not mean however, that they did not understand its importance in the free market.

Probably the most important impact upon the slaves' life that was necessary once free was the work ethic and the understanding that they could negotiate their labor for wages. Millions of freedmen went to work following emancipation. The experience of many slaves in urban cities or in areas of the upper South provided them with general ideas as to what was expected with wage labor. Even on plantations across the rural South freedmen remained on plantations and negotiated wages from their former owners. Hard work for wages appears to have been something that freedmen expected of freedom. Jerry Hill of Spartanburg, South Carolina described his experience. "After we were told by my master that we were now free and could work wherever we chose, my mother hired me out to a man and I stayed with him two years. It was pretty hard to make a living after we were free, but I worked hard and always got on."<sup>6</sup> Hard work for compensation was something of which freedmen were completely aware. Their existence before freedom taught them that hard work was a requirement, but they also utilized freedom as a way to make such work pay. "No man can say he ever gave me a dollar but what I didn't earn myself," declared Charlotte Foster. "I was taught to work and I taught my chilluns to work."<sup>7</sup>

Records indicate that freedmen were willing to work and understood the value of their labor. This is not surprising considering the fact that many freedmen were acutely aware of the value of

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<sup>6</sup> Narrative of Jerry Hill, Works Project Administration., *Slave Narratives Vol. XIV. South Carolina, Part 2 a Folk History of the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, ed. Federal Writers' Project. (Project Gutenberg, 2006), pdf format, 110, (Electronic Resource).

<sup>7</sup> Narrative of Charlotte Foster, NSC: 2, 33.

themselves or other slaves. Having witness the buying and selling of friends and family members, they surely developed notions that they had monetary power and value. These notions helped to transition into the free labor market, especially when it came to bargaining for wages or compensation. Freedmen Bureau reports highlight the extent to which many freedmen sought compensation. They filed complaints when employers failed to provide agreed upon compensation or wages.<sup>8</sup> Manuscripts from plantations suggest that freedmen were able to not only negotiate wages, but also negotiate terms for benefits such as medical care.<sup>9</sup> All of this stemmed for the knowledge of their own worth that they understood while slaves.

Yet when discussing the free market, the most accurate way of understanding how freedmen understood market workings is by analyzing their participation in the marketplace. Freedmen enter the free market with distinct ideas of luxuries. Slave narratives suggest in various ways the usage of wages and earnings to purchase luxuries at the market. These luxuries were not new to them and many slaves held distinct views of the things they wished to obtain above subsistence. Clothing was a luxury, and some freedmen utilized the market to purchase other luxuries such as instruments, while others bought gifts for spouses and friends. These interactions are key to providing support that freedmen actively engaged in the marketplace, despite their lowly status. Reports around the South discuss the “grog shops” and general stores that popped up following the war. Descriptions show of what freedmen were most likely purchasing with their money and provide evidence that freedmen were active consumers. This does not seem overly novel being that whether a slave or freedmen, they likely held the same wants and desires, that being autonomy and independence to use their skills and ingenuity to support themselves as free people.

Probably the biggest leap that freedmen made in their acceptance of the free market was their ability to save money and invest in their future success. Account records have shown that thousands of freedmen and women opened savings accounts in an effort to save money. These notions of savings were not spontaneous decisions. The quickness to which freedmen engaged in savings accounts following their freedom suggest that many carried notions about the power of money and wealth from their slavery experience. Many realized quickly by observing their masters reaction to their accumulated wealth that power was to be found in money and property. Their experience as slaves solidified the idea of saving, especially with those slaves who saved while enslaved. Others, once free, were willing to entrust their earnings in banks, allowing for third party handling of their earnings. This suggests a deep commitment to the free market and supports the thesis that prior to freedom men and women were aware of how the free market worked.

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<sup>8</sup> "Field Records of the State of South Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands 1865-1872," ed. National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, MD: National Archives Microfilm Publication M1910, roll 103).

<sup>9</sup> William Andrew Carrigan, "Labor Agreement: Dr. S. H. Pressly," in William Andrew Carrigan Papers, 1844-1889. (Columbia South Caroliniana 1844-1889).

Analysis has shown that there was vast continuity between slavery and freedom for slaves and freedmen. They utilized a number of market skills developed during slavery to help during the transition from slavery. Arguments can be made that in certain instances their knowledge overall exceeded that of free white yeoman farmers. This suggests that many slaves were just as prepared as a vast majority of free men and women once they were thrust into the free market. White backlash and the return to a segregated pre war social class system hindered the freedmen's success in the free market. Left to the true nature of the open labor and economic market, freedmen appear to have acquired market knowledge during slavery that prepared them in multiple ways for freedom. However, as the South solidified itself to many pre war social conditions in the late nineteenth century the freedmen were returned to second class citizens with limited government representation and a white supremacist majority that subjugated them to a similar position to slavery that took nearly one hundred more years to finally address. Analysis of has shown that themes of freedom were solidifying themselves prior to emancipation and highlight how people who are regularly described as an unprepared enslaved class ultimately navigated the waters of freedom in the free market.

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