



## **And Liberty For All: Geechee Culture and the Black Freedom Struggle in Liberty County, Georgia, 1752-1946**

Item Type	dissertation
Authors	Jamison, Felicia
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.7275/10012732.0">10.7275/10012732.0</a>
Download date	2024-12-13 21:55:56
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/17190">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/17190</a>

AND LIBERTY FOR ALL: GEECHEE CULTURE AND THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN  
LIBERTY COUNTY, GEORGIA, 1752-1946

A Dissertation Presented

by

FELICIA L. JAMISON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2017

History



**AND LIBERTY FOR ALL: GEECHEE CULTURE AND THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN  
LIBERTY COUNTY, GEORGIA 1752-1946**

A Dissertation Presented

By

FELICIA JAMISON

Approved as to style and content by:

---

Barbara Krauthamer, Chair

---

Laura Lovett, Member

---

Jeanne Theoharis, Member

---

Rachel Mordecai, Outside Member

---

Brian W. Ogilvie, Chair

## DEDICATION

To all those who came before me. I am because you are.

My grandparents: Amanda and Woodrow Jamison,  
and Nathaniel and Mamie Ophelia Walthour

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been the culmination of four years of research and labor. During that time, many institutions have assisted in funding this project. The Joyce A. Berkman Endowed Fund in Women's History and the Graduate Travel Grant from the History Department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst allowed me to travel to various archives and conduct research. The Summer Dissertation Fellowship from the University of Massachusetts Amherst Graduate School permitted me to conduct research in Liberty County, Georgia. I would also like to thank the institutions that assisted me in locating archival materials used in this dissertation. Namely, Christopher Harter at the Amistad Research Center, Steven Engerrand and the staff at the Georgia Archives, the Georgia Historical Society, and the Liberty County Court House.

My dissertation committee reviewed countless drafts of my dissertation and provided insightful feedback. Thus, I would like to thank Laura Lovett, Rachel Mordecai, and Jeanne Theoharis for their brilliant counsel. I have been fortunate to have Barbara Krauthamer chair my committee. She has been my advisor since I started the doctoral program and my career has greatly benefitted from her guidance, care and mentorship.

I would like to thank professors and colleagues in the History Department and the Afro American Studies Department, namely Joye Bowman, John Bracey, Dee Boyle-Clapp, Tanisha Ford, Jennifer Fronc, David Glassberg, John Higginson, Marla Miller, Karen "Kym" Morrison, Robert Paynter, and Manisha Sinha. Particularly, I would like to thank my sister scholars who have been a necessary resource both inside and outside of the academy: Ximena Abello, Thamyris Almeida, Marwa Amer, Shakti Castro, Castriela Hernandez, Korka Sall, Camesha Scruggs, and Erika Slocumb.

The board of the Dorchester Center has been invaluable to this project. They allowed me access to the records and shared countless stories of their lives. Thus, I would like to thank Bill Austin, Maurice Bacon, Sallie Richardson and Debra Robinson.

And last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for their constant love and support: Polly Moran, Lang Moran, Deshawn Jamison, Cornelius Jamison, Stagnald Walthour, Nolan Golden, Calvin Cephus, and Patrick Daniels.

## ABSTRACT

AND LIBERTY FOR ALL: GEECHEE CULTURE AND THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN

LIBERTY COUNTY, GEORGIA, 1752-1946

MAY 2017

FELICIA JAMISON

B.A., MERCER UNIVERSITY

M.A., MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Barbara Krauthamer

“And Liberty For All” is a case study of an African-American rural community in Georgia. It argues that to understand the manners in which Southern rural black communities fought for civil rights in the Black Freedom Struggle, one must take the *longue dur e* approach to researching and writing their histories. Thus, this dissertation covers the period of slavery until the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s. This case study is representative of other Southern rural communities in that it highlights the nuanced ways in which they survived and persevered while facing racism, racial violence, and disenfranchisement by using grassroots organizing techniques that were specific to the needs of their community. However, it takes an ethno-historical approach in centering the experiences of the local black community who self-identified as Geechee and who trace their ancestry and traditions to enslaved West and Central Africans brought to coastal Georgia in the eighteenth century for their knowledge of rice cultivation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REMEMBERING THE ANCESTORS, 1752-1864.....	27
III. EMANCIPATION AND THE LIMITS OF CITIZENSHIP, 1865 – 1900.....	54
IV. LAND AND COMMUNITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900 – 1940.....	76
V. COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900 – 1940.....	100
VI. A TIME OF TRANSITIONS, 1940 – 1946.....	133
VII. GEECHIE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING IN THE 1946 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES.....	165
VIII. EPILOGUE: REMEMBERING THE ANCESTORS.....	188
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	189



## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Demographic Make-up of Liberty County, Georgia – 1860 – 1910.....	66
2. Churches in Liberty County founded between 1864 and 1901.....	74

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Map of Georgia, 1796.....	33
2. Map of Georgia, 1831.....	38
3. “100” year old woman in Liberty County, Georgia, circa 1890s.....	62
4. Map of Georgia, 1910.....	81
5. Map of Liberty County School District, 1923.....	96
6. Two Girls, Thebes Community, 1930s.....	98
7. Woman using mortar and pestle to beat rice, 1915.....	112
8. Nurse Eerie Thomas with child, Marien Kallquist, 1931.....	117
9. One of the Negro families moved from the Camp Stewart area .....	140
10. Woman who has not yet found a place to move .....	141
11. African Americans building houses in the 1940s.....	160
12. Map of the members of the Dorchester Credit Union, 1953.....	163
13. Mimeograph of a Liberty County Citizens Council Flyer, 1946.....	177
14. African Americans voting in Riceboro, Georgia, 1946.....	182



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As the story goes, in the late nineteenth century an African-American family abruptly packed its belongings and departed town in the middle of the night. The family left on their own accord after hearing an owl hoot three nights in a row. They never returned to the county but instead wrote their relatives to tell of the dubious occurrences that had transpired. Whereas “white persons in Liberty County laughed when they heard the story,” “black persons in the county heard the story soberly and quietly.”<sup>1</sup> The local white-owned newspaper paper, the *Liberty County Herald*, and the widely-read *The Savannah Morning News* reprinted the story to demonstrate the “superstitious” nature of Southern blacks in general and black Liberty Countians in particular. However, by historicizing the silence of the black community in this exchange, it can be deduced that other black community members agreed with the family and believed that the hooting of an owl served as a premonition that evil was afoot. This account is significant for several reasons. First, it shows that black Liberty Countians, who self-identified as Geechee people, believed that nature and the spirit worlds were intricately connected and served as warnings to the living. These shared cultural beliefs were passed on generationally and can be traced back to the traditions of their enslaved eighteenth and nineteenth-century African and African-American ancestors. Second, it highlights the varying degrees of disconnect between the white and black communities, who were physically separated by

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Long Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty: A History of Liberty County, Georgia* (WH Wolfe Associates, 1987), 95.

Jim-Crow segregation and culturally by different systems of traditional beliefs. Third, this account demonstrates that cultural meanings and belief systems often had material consequences for members of the black community in Liberty County.<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation tells the history of the African-descendant community in Liberty County, Georgia from slavery until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s. African Americans have resided in the county since its founding in 1752 and it was the labor of these earliest generations of bondspeople who made the county and plantation owners wealthy. Following emancipation, freedpeople exercised their newly-acquire rights as citizens by registering and voting in local elections, purchasing land and earning income from family farms, and by soliciting help from local black officials to educate their children. The community also used local institutions such as churches, benevolent societies, and fraternal organizations to socialize and provide services to improve their community. These organizing traditions were passed down to kin members, both consanguineous and fictive, and utilized throughout the twentieth century.

Black Liberty Countians are a part of the Gullah-Geechee cultural group, a culture that encompassed the West and Central African cultures of enslaved people with that of Euro-American plantation owners. When scholars discuss Geechee or Gullah culture, they are usually referring to the creole language, folklore, artistry such as basket weaving, and the spirituality of the people. Scholars such as Margaret Washington, Charles Joyner and Michael Gomez have demonstrated the formation and persistence of a distinctly African-

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the beliefs of Geechee people in the 1930s see *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Georgia Writers Project, 1940). For information on the political uses of black culture see Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1977).

rooted local culture among the black communities in coastal Georgia. My dissertation uses these studies to argue that Geechee people used their culture during the twentieth century to participate in the Black Freedom Struggle.

Although culture is an ambiguous term with multiple meanings for this dissertation culture encompasses the “shared, socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior of a group.”<sup>3</sup> This dissertation looks at four components of culture: family and kinship structure, property and landowning practices, community institutions, and spirituality. Each chapter focuses on these core aspects of culture to trace the manners in which succeeding generations passed on agricultural knowledge and strategies integral to material and cultural survival. More importantly, it includes spirituality, as a central part of Geechee culture for two reasons: 1) written and oral records have shown that spirituality was central to Geechee ontology throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries and 2) as shown with the above account, spirituality had material consequences for Geechee people and omitting this aspect of their culture would present a skewed version of their organizing traditions.

Scholars argue that one important component that served to preserve Geechee culture is its relative isolation in the coastal regions or the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina. During slavery, the isolation of the county, compounded by the exigencies of rice culture, afforded bondspeople in Liberty County the conditions in which to preserve their culture. This isolation also benefitted the black community throughout the postbellum period, the Reconstruction era of the late nineteenth

---

<sup>3</sup> Garrick Bailey and James Peoples, *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology* (Wadsworth, 2010), 19.

century, and the early twentieth century. I argue that the isolation of Liberty County along the coast of Georgia in conjunction with the shared cultural traditions served to unite the community and was integral to the complex ways in which they fought for first class citizenship throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

This dissertation also examines the economic, political, and material uses of land by the black community. My research shows that after Reconstruction period, black Liberty Countians purchased land and by the beginning of the twentieth century most of the black community owned land. Records such as land deeds and wills also show that by the early twentieth century black community members had created a system in which parents and grandparents methodically deeded land to their sons, daughters, and grandchildren. This methodical deeding of land effectively created neighborhoods in which consanguineous and other kin members owned large plots of land. If viewed collectively, these all-black enclaves served to create an insular community, one impervious to outsiders, white and black alike. Furthermore, my dissertation argues that owning land also had political implications for the county's black community; because they owned land, black Liberty Countians were able to vote in their own self-interests when participating in electoral.

## **Historiography Review and Interventions**

My dissertation brings together the historiographies of Gullah-Geechee Culture and that of the Black Freedom Struggle. Gullah-Geechee people are usually frozen in a cultural-anthropological realm wherein they are only discussed in relation to their West and Central African origins. Rarely are they viewed as political actors. This dissertation

puts the Gullah-Geechee historiography in conversation with that of the Black Freedom Struggle to understand the ways in which Geechee people in Liberty County, Georgia used their organizing traditions to form community, resist oppression, and fight for their civil rights throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

There are two camps of scholarship that focus on the history of Liberty County, Georgia. The first consists of historical monographs that recount the history of the county from the perspectives of the white community, whether it be that of eighteenth and nineteenth-century plantation owners or that of the white citizens in the twentieth century. One example is the 1972 *The Children of Pride* which documents the correspondences of the family of Charles Colcock Jones throughout the Civil War. The book does a remarkable job of chronicling the experiences of a wealthy plantation family during the war; however, this story is one that reifies the nostalgic view of slavery and normalizes the institution of slavery as part of the Southern antebellum way of life.<sup>4</sup> In particular, histories such as this that focus on plantation owners fail to account for the various ways in which bondspeople resisted the institution of slavery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and fought to end slavery during the Civil War.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Manson Myers, *The Children of Pride: Selected Letters of the Family of the Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones from the Years 1860-1868* (Yale University Press, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> There is a great deal of memoirs written by plantation owners of the county who recount plantation life from the perspectives of slave owners. Some include: Joseph Leconte, *'Ware Sherman: A Journal of Three Months' Persona Experience in the Last Days of the Confederacy* (1937); Mary Sharpe Jones, *Yankees A'coming: One Month's Experience During the Invasion of Liberty County, Georgia, 1864-1865* (1959); and Cornelia Jones Pond, *Recollections of a Southern Daughter: A Memoir by Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County* (1974). It is likely that the prevalence of these memoirs account for the large number of monographs that recount the lives of plantation owners and the minute amount that analyze the lives of enslaved people of the county.



Another such example is *Sweet Land of Liberty* which was written in 1988.

Although a great source detailing the history of Liberty County, Robert Long Groover recycles the nineteenth-century interpretation of plantation owners and that of early missionaries and educators from the American Missionary Association who asserted that enslaved people of the county experienced a lesser form of slavery due to the benevolent treatment of their Christian owners. Long writes “But there is also no doubt but that the slaves in Liberty County were accorded a humane treatment not generally found in other parts of the South.” In one deceptive recount, Groover quotes Ruth Morton, a twentieth-century AMA official who stated that “pure blooded blacks are found in that county to be the rule and not the exception, as in other parts of the South.”<sup>6</sup> By claiming that there were no biracial peoples in the county during the 1940s, the account, and Groover, uses phenotypic perceptions to suggest difference. Additionally, *Sweet Land of Liberty* recycles racists views of black Liberty Countians’ culture as merely superstition. Finally, it fails to include the 1946 Democratic Primary elections, which is the first election in which the black community participated since the 1910s. By failing to discuss the lives of black people in Liberty County in detail, works such as this simultaneously distorts the lived experiences of African American and minimizes the roles they played in the social, economic, and political history of the county.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it invalidates the various ways in which the black citizens

---

<sup>6</sup> Robert Long Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty: A History of Liberty County, Georgia*. (WH Wolfe Associates, 1978), 35.

<sup>7</sup> There are a number of primary sources that also distort the lives of enslaved people in Liberty County. Notably, there are a list of biographies written by plantation owners during the Civil War period. These works include

organized and fought to enact change in the county throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

Within the last twenty years, scholars have recognized the role of black citizens but none have devoted an entire monograph to recounting the lives and experiences of the black community. In the dissertation “The American Missionary Association in Liberty County, Georgia, 1867-1950” Dawn Herd-Clark examines the function of the American Missionary Association in Liberty County from the 1870s to the 1940s. Herd-Clark interviewed several African-American citizens of the county to understand the role of Dorchester Academy in the county. Erskine Clarke’s *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* is a comparative history that traces the experiences of the Colcock family and the enslaved peoples owned by the family. Clarke traces the relationships of enslaved peoples and shows how their lives were shaped by the power dynamics of the Colcock family. In her 2008 dissertation “The Walk, Talk and Act Like New People”: Black Women and the Citizenship Education Program, 1957 – 1970”, Deanne Gillespie documents the educational programs provided by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Georgia, paying particular attention to the program held at the local Dorchester Academy in the early 1960s. These works have created an environment in which this dissertation can be written. Namely, they have interviewed black citizens, conducted archival research, and produced scholarship about the local black community. However, there are questions that they do not address or attempt to answer concerning the specific nature in which the African-American community organized for social, political, and economic equity throughout the history of the county.

This dissertation seeks to fill these historiographic gaps by addressing the following questions: How did bondspeople create community during slavery? What was the environment of Liberty County in the Reconstruction era prior to the arrival of the American Missionary Association? What role did the black community play in forming an environment in which a national organization such as the SCLC could organize and maintain a voting-rights educational program during the height of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s? And what might we uncover if we trace the organizing traditions of one county from slavery until the civil rights movement of the 1940s?

This dissertation seeks to address these questions by positioning the African-American community of Liberty County as political actors in the Black Freedom Struggle. It begins during slavery, when the Geechee culture was developed, and concludes with the 1946 Democratic Primary elections. This timeline is important for a number of reasons. It is essential to begin in slavery because it was the diligence and constant resistance of eighteenth-century bondspeople in the county who maintained community and resisted oppression during slavery. Following emancipation these same peoples purchased lands and established farms, and created local institutions such as churches and benevolent societies to address the needs of their community. Thus, to understand the organizing traditions of African-Americans in Liberty County in the twentieth century it is essential to understand the ways in which their ancestors maintained community and resisted oppression during slavery.

The dissertation concludes in 1946 when black Liberty Countians participated in the Democratic Primary elections. This election was the first time in more than thirty

years that black Liberty Countians participated in electoral politics. Black Southerners had been methodically disenfranchised during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century due to both legal and extralegal means of disenfranchisement. Thus the 1946 elections were significant because it shows that black Southerners voted in the era of Jim Crow. Moreover, this election challenges the assumptions that there was no voting until the 1960s after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act. And in addition to taking a broader approach and beginning the Black Freedom Struggle in slavery, my dissertation also centers the Geechee culture of black Liberty Countians.

My research builds on a long tradition of scholars who have researched African cultural retentions and permutations in rural South Carolina and Georgia. One of the earliest debates about African cultural retention and acculturation in the United States is the Herskovits-Frazier debate of the 1940s in which anthropologist Melville Herskovits argued that African Americans were able to preserve some aspects of their West African culture during slavery and after emancipation. In contrast, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier believed that any African culture retained by enslaved peoples could not possibly have survived the brutality of slavery. In *The Birth of African American Culture* Sidney Mintz and Richard Price entered the debate in 1976 and argued that European interaction with the enslaved populations also influenced African cultural and social continuities in the West Indies. The anthropologists affirmed that New World cultural retentions were not static but in fact were constantly recreated and influenced by both African cultures and Euro American cultures.

Scholars such as Margaret Washington Creel, postulate that the word “Gullah” may refer to either people from Angola, or the Gola, an ethnic group from the area of present day Liberia. Scholars believe that the word “Geechee” could derive from the Kissi people of Sierra Leone, or it could be an abbreviation of the Ogeechee River located in southeastern Georgia.<sup>8</sup> In his book *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, Michael Gomez continues the discussion of cultural retentions and permutations by analyzing various African ethnicities in the colonial and antebellum period United States to trace the eventual creation of an African American culture. The work pays attention to time and place, noting the manners in which particular African ethnicities that were transported to particular places in the United States shaped the culture of that particular region.

Slavery Studies have used quantitative data to approximate the origins of enslaved African brought to the United States during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Michael Gomez notes that during the colonial era, Georgia relied heavily on slaves imported into Charleston, South Carolina. He writes, “of the 7,000 Africans imported into adjacent colonies from Charleston between 1717 and 1775, Georgia received the lion’s share, with 50 percent going to either Savannah or Sunbury.”<sup>9</sup> The majority of the enslaved people imported to South Carolina during the eighteenth century were from Gambia, the Gold Coast, and the Windward Coast of Sierra Leone principally for their knowledge of rice cultivation.<sup>10</sup> Phillip Morgan also

---

<sup>8</sup> Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 102.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 40.

claims that during the 1760s, when slaves were imported directly from Africa, the colony of Georgia received 4 of 5 from the Upper Guinea region of coastal Africa due to their knowledge of rice cultivation.<sup>11</sup>

Morgan contends that although eighteenth-century bondpeople most likely came from West Central Africa, that at least one fifth came from the Gold Coast. Thus, enslaved people in eighteenth-century Georgia were from various ethnic groups and spoke different languages. In their studies, Gomez, Morgan, and Margaret Washington Creel, used quantitative and qualitative methodology to compare the African-American culture developed in the nineteenth century, and the African antecedent of Gullah-Geechee peoples. And as Morgan succinctly notes, “The links between lowcountry Georgia and Africa were many.”<sup>12</sup> These links included a “creole” language, an agricultural tradition of cultivating rice, a family structure that included extended kin members, and a cosmology that embraced spirituality. This dissertation argues that Gullah-Geechee people these cultural traditions endured over many generations and were utilized by their progeny during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to organize and maintain community.

*A Peculiar People* is perhaps the landmark study that methodically constructs the history of Gullahs in South Carolina during the eighteenth century. Margaret Washington Creel argues that the enslaved Gullah people used their religious and secret organizations, based on West African traditions, to maintain community and survive the

---

<sup>11</sup> Philip Morgan, ed., *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee* (The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

atrocities of slavery. Gomez is more hesitant to accept the idea that the secret societies of Poro and Sande of the Upper Guinea region could have been transported from Africa, through the Middle Passage, and to eighteenth-century South Carolina completely intact. Thus the debate on cultural retentions and permutations is still very much relevant and pertinent in our understanding of New World creole societies such as the Geechees in Liberty County. Building upon Creel's work, my study seeks to demonstrate how African Americans in Liberty County use their ontological beliefs, cosmology, religion, and spirituality to survive slavery, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow South, and to organize for change.

Lorenzo Dow Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* is perhaps the most important cultural text that focuses on the language of Gullahs and Geechees in South Carolina and Georgia in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>13</sup> In his 1949 book Turner showed how the language of Gullah people in the lowcountry was similar to that spoken in West Africa and throughout the African diaspora. In the 1940s, Turner's research wrote against scholars who believed that the language spoken by enslaved peoples, and later freedpeople, was either "baby" talk, a basic level of English spoken by planters to their newly-arrived African bondpeople, or a low standard of English learned from Irish indentured servants during the eighteenth century. Turner effectively showed that there were significant similarities that demonstrated that the Gullahs and Geechees spoke a creolized version of West African and Euro American languages and speech

---

<sup>13</sup> Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1949).

patterns. My dissertation builds upon Turner's work to analyze the ways in which black Liberty Countians transmitted cultural information intergenerationally.

*Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kong and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* is another such work that is concerned with the New World creations of Gullah-Geechee peoples. Jason Young analyzes the connections throughout the Black Atlantic, further demonstrating that blacks in the Georgia and South Carolina lowcountry built upon their African cultural traditions and adapted them to their new world surroundings. Like many scholars of Gullah-Geechee Studies, Young focuses on the period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is understandable as there are a great many sources that make the locale of coastal South Carolina and Georgia the ideal place for studying the formation of African American culture. My dissertation considers and analyzes the ways Geechee people in Liberty County, Georgia uses the new world creations of spiritual traditions, syncretic religions, and West African ontology in the twentieth century context of the Black Freedom Struggle.

Another aspect of Geechee culture that can be better explained using an African diasporic framework is the people of Liberty County's spirituality. In *Talking to the Dead* LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant further analyzes Geechee ontology and cosmology of contemporary African American women who communicate with dead ancestors through dreams. In my research, I have discovered that nineteenth and twentieth-century Geechee people in Liberty County did not necessarily recognize their spiritual beliefs in



the scholarly language of hoodoo and voodoo.<sup>14</sup> Like other African diasporic communities, communing with dead ancestors and seeking help from ancestors was simply their way of life. My study seeks to show these practices as traditions passed on from their Geechee ancestors, rather than viewing them as irrationally superstitious. My research historicizes the spirituality of the Geechee people in the twentieth century, connecting it to that of their nineteenth-century ancestors to further contextualize the traditional practice of getting “fixes” and other spiritual acts as simultaneously an African and a New World creation. I also reconcile their spirituality with their strategizing and organizing traditions in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s.

Most studies of Gullah-Geechee communities primarily focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stressing the origins of the cultures in slavery. Those that focus on the twentieth century usually emphasize the continuation of the Gullah Geechee culture by providing examples of the language, foodstuffs, folklore, and material culture of the people. Religion and spirituality are centered in these discussions but scholars rarely position the people as political actors. By not viewing Geechee people as political actors, these studies effectively freeze Geechee people into a cultural realm, one in which they are only relevant when discussing African cultural retentions and survivals in the United States. Also, it freezes Gullah-Geechee people in

---

<sup>14</sup> In *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* Mary Renda historicizes the way the United States’ occupation in Haiti during the early part of the twentieth century created a narrative in which policy makers, scholars and the broader public ascribed the Haitian cultural identity of voodoo and hoodoo onto the physical bodies of African American subjects. Although there are similarities between Geechee culture and Haitian culture, my research shows that Geechee people in the 1940s, as is the case today, define what scholars call syncretic religion and Africanisms as simply Christianity. The act of getting fixes is simply viewed as a tradition passed on generationally.

a temporal moment of the nineteenth century. My dissertation analyzes the lives and actions of Geechee people in Liberty County from slavery until the 1940s, and positions them as political actors throughout the period of the Black Freedom Struggle.

My dissertation benefits from the scholarship of both the Black Freedom Struggle and that of the Long Civil Rights Movement. However, my research will primarily use the analytical framework of the Black Freedom Struggle for two reasons: 1) it encompasses the extensive period in which African Americans in the United States fought for first class citizenship from slavery to the present day, which is ideal for researching and writing about Geechee people whose culture was created during slavery and 2) it allows me to position the Geechee people in my study into a broader African diasporic conversation.

To account for these continuation and differences, many scholars such as Barbara Ransby discuss the struggle for African American rights as the Black Freedom Movement. I will do the same in my research. I seek to center culture in the telling of the narrative and suggest that in addition to the space and social structures of the black church and benevolent societies, rural communities, whose demographics had not dramatically changed during the great migration following either world wars, used aspects of their indigenous Geechee culture to organize and plan strategies in their quest to obtain first class citizenship.

In *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* Charles Payne tells the local story of communities in the Mississippi delta who organized for social, economic, and political change from the 1930s to the 1960s. He centers the voices of ordinary citizens to demonstrate that the modern civil

rights movement consisted of every day black folk using community networks and traditions to evince change. Payne expertly shows the culture of black Mississippians, highlighting the prevalence of kinship networks and the intergenerational work of local people. My dissertation is modeled after this study. However, in addition to showcasing the intergenerational approach to organizing, I also seek to center the spirituality of black Liberty Countians. For Geechee people, as is most likely true for a large number of African Americans, Christianity encompassed issues of morality, religion, organization, and spirituality. Furthermore, for many African and African-descendant peoples such as the Geechees, “there is no clear-cut distinction between religious and secular spheres or perspective of the ordinary life experience.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, by centering spirituality, including that found in religious institutions such as the black church, I seek to analyze the ways that spirituality was integral to black organizing, and to highlight the broader connections of African American organizing traditions to that of the African Diaspora.

*Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* examines the nonviolent direct action tactics practiced by civil rights activists in areas such as Atlanta, Macon, and Savannah. In his study of political organizations in Georgia, Stephen Tuck notes that each locale had its own unique form of organizing. Building upon this approach my dissertation takes the *longue duree* approach to show that black Liberty Countians built upon time-honed generational organizing traditions to organize and vote

---

<sup>15</sup> Ed., Jacob K. Olupona, *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, xvii.

in the 1946 Democratic Primaries. These traditions, which I term Geechee grassroots organizing, encompasses the cultural beliefs that the spiritual world and natural world were innately connected, the prevalence of land ownership and the land deeding traditions that created extensive kinship networks. I argue that the African-American community in Liberty County used these cultural traditions to successfully organize, register, and vote in the 1946 elections.

One such study that historicizes the role of black women in religion and the Black Freedom Struggle is *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion*. The synthesis looks at several denominations, many that have been overlooked by scholars of African American history, such as the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic denominations. By taking such a comprehensive approach to African-American women's religion, Bettye Collier-Thomas displays the manner in which black women were oppressed by black men in local churches, oppressed because of their race in mainstream denominations, and oppressed by white women in church women's organizations. In regard to the sexism experienced in their own churches, Collier-Thomas posits that black women remained in their supportive roles as fundraisers and helpmeets due to their faith in God and their empathizing with black men who were often viewed as less-than and feminine when compared to white masculinity. The author argues that the main goal of black church women, regardless of class or denomination, was the survival of the race. Although the book effectively synthesizes the long history of black women in the church, the book fails to look at women outside of mainstream organized religion. Collier-Thomas briefly mentions Marie Laveau and

voodoo in New Orleans, but omits stories of other African-American syncretic religions. My research provides more insight into the persistence of syncretic religions practiced by African Americans in the twentieth century, such as the ones found in lowcountry Georgia with the Geechee people.

The exclusion of Geechee people from that of the modern civil rights movement narrative also raises questions about the validity of African diasporic culture in the broader United States historiography. In *Exchanging Our Country Marks* Michael Gomez posits throughout the text that the rejection of African-American syncretic religions and traditions were mainly perpetrated by the nineteenth-century black elite who sought first class citizenship in the republic of the United States.<sup>16</sup> But by not writing about the continuity of African culture in African-American communities, do scholars reify this nineteenth century claim that Gullah-Geechee culture is an archaic artifact either best left in the realm of culture or antithetical to the methodical organizing traditions utilized by African Americans in the twentieth century? My research seeks to address these questions by centering culture and tracing the organizing traditions of Geechee people from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

Scholars have shown that African American people's fight for equality did not originate during the Reconstruction era when millions were freed from slavery and recognized as citizens, nor was it confined to their participation in electoral politics. As Steven Hahn contends in *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural*

---

<sup>16</sup> Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 292. As Kevin Gains notes in *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture*, this ideology of racial uplift was used by the nineteenth-century black elite as a liberation theology which ultimately failed to convince the white middle class, and the national government that black people should be treated as first class citizens.

*South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, it has been the historiographic trend to view the history of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow South as separate and distinct narratives. My study models this approach and like Hahn I seek to demonstrate that each of these eras “make up a coherent period in which black political struggles, inside and outside the electoral arena, decisively shaped the South and the nation.”<sup>17</sup>

There have been numerous scholars prior to Hahn that have demonstrated that the black freedom struggle began during slavery. In *Black Reconstruction* (1935) W.E.B. Du Bois established that enslaved people were essentially asserting their claims for freedom by running away from plantations and working as laborers for the Union Army during the Civil war period of the 1860s. As Lawrence Levine established in his seminal 1976 work *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, African Americans throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries utilized folklore for political purposes to resist slavery and Jim Crow discrimination. In *A Nation Under Our Feet*, Steven Hahn argues that in slavery and freedom, African Americans utilized systems of communication to organize and fight for equality. Thus, their quest to organize in an attempt to participate in formal politics was a political act in itself. Robin Kelley’s *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* describes the resistance of working class African Americans throughout the twentieth century. He argues that the acts of protesting segregated buses in

---

<sup>17</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 4.

Birmingham, Alabama in the World War II era, the prevalence of African Americans in the Communist Party, and emergence of Hip Hop in the latter part of the twentieth century were all political acts. My dissertation builds on these scholars and views the quotidian acts of resistance by bondspeople during slavery, the purchase of land throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the persistence of family units and community institutions during the Jim Crow era as political acts enacted by African Americans in Liberty County, Georgia.

These works have served to broaden the definition of politics, which is essential in the African-American experience considering that black people have been systematically relegated to a non-political sphere in regards to electoral politics. Recent historiography in the Black Freedom Struggle has effectively broadened the definition of activists by discussing the ways in which African American peoples of different classes and in different locales have organized to enact social, economic, and political change. John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* showcases the role of black Mississippians in the Black Freedom Struggle. Like many of the historiographical works, Dittmer positions African Americans as viable actors in formal politics, even before they were enfranchised. So why have scholars failed to do the same for Gullah and Geechee peoples? It is imperative that we think of Geechee people in the same manner as we do other African American communities and not divorce their culture from their political actions. My dissertation seeks to accomplish this task.

## Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1: “Remembering the Ancestors” serves as the foundation of this dissertation. I argue that in order to understand the organizing traditions of freedpeople and black Liberty Countians in the twentieth century, it is essential to understand the ways in which the enslaved people formed community during slavery. Thus chapter 1 spans more than a century from the colonial period until emancipation. I analyze the creation of Geechee culture by highlighting the family structure, agricultural practices, and the religious and spiritual traditions among enslaved African Americans in Liberty County. This chapter demonstrates the manners in which community members transferred cultural knowledge generationally, and thus ensured the survival of Geechee beliefs and practices from the nineteenth century into the twentieth.

Chapter 2: Emancipation and the Limits of Citizenship discusses the black community’s quest for citizenship during the Reconstruction Era of the late nineteenth century. It conveys the stories of the black community participating in formal politics, educating themselves and their children, and purchasing land. As early as 1867, freedpeople of the community purchased land and began the established the practice of deeding land to their children, both male and female. Census records also indicate that landownership allowed a large number of black women to “keep house” and work on their own farms rather than working outside the home as domestics or as sharecroppers. I argue that during the Reconstruction period, the community used their Geechee cultural traditions to improve their social, economic, and political



conditions by establishing community institutions, such as churches and benevolent organizations, and participating in electoral politics.

Chapters 3 and 4 span the first four decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 3: Land and Community in the Early Twentieth Century focuses on the multiple uses of land by the black community, as economic, political, and social capital, and as safe space from violence by the white community. My dissertation uses census records, biographies of freedpeople and former plantation owners, the Freedmen's Bureau records, the Southern Claims Commission records, land deed records of the county, and the American Missionary Association records to demonstrate that African Americans in Liberty County, Georgia remained in the South not as exploited sharecroppers but as thriving land owners. Chapter 4: Community Organizing in the Early Twentieth Century focuses on community formation by examining the roles of children, adults, and elders. I argue that this familial structure enabled elders to pass on cultural knowledge to adults and children. This educational system took place in the school system, on family farms, and in community institutions such as churches, in benevolent societies, and Dorchester Academy, which by the early-nineteenth century had become the premiere educational institution in the county for black children.

Chapter 5 focuses on the changes of the black community during the early 1940s. In the six-year period of 1940 to 1946, hundreds of people were introduced into the county. In 1940 the construction of Camp Stewart, a military base that dislocated a number of white and black families in the county, brought in thousands of soldiers to the area, and created a number of jobs for black men, especially those in the turpentine

industry. Additionally, Dorchester Academy, an American-Missionary-Association school founded in the county in 1871, was closed and the Dorchester Cooperative Center (DCC) opened as an educational and organizing space for the black community. A federal credit union and two farmers cooperatives were organized at the DCC and maintained by the black community during the 1940s. The chapter seeks to answer three central questions: How did the introduction of this large number of people affect the insular community that the local black citizens had maintained for several generations? How were these new community members incorporated into the black community? And how did the community members use the new institution of the Dorchester Cooperative Center to organize for social, economic, and political change?

Chapter 6 analyzes the organizing traditions of the community during the Democratic Primaries of 1946. In 1944 and 1946, the Supreme Court ruled that all-white primaries were unconstitutional. This allowed black Georgians to vote in state primaries for the first time since the 1910s. Building upon the material from the previous chapters, chapter 6 argues that black Liberty Countians used grassroots organizing traditions developed during emancipation and honed during the early twentieth century to plan voter registration drives by meeting at the local institutions of churches and the DCC, and by disseminating information using their extended kin networks and social networks of local benevolent societies. Additionally, owning land also had political implications for the county's black community. Because the majority of black men and women worked on their own farms, they were less likely to face the loss of job security

or other forms of coercion by white employers, neighbors or local officials when they exercised their right to vote in the 1940s.

## **Quilt Work**

This project is like a quilt. In the African-American tradition, quilts were made from disjointed, discolored scraps of cloths to create an aesthetically appealing and functional object. I have taken this approach in writing this dissertation. I have utilized a number of sources to recover and tell the stories of black people in Liberty County spanning several generations. I conducted research in Liberty County at the local courthouse, libraries, and historical societies. I also traveled to the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University and reviewed the American Missionary Association Records. These records are integral to recounting the history of the local black community as the AMA founded a freedmen school in Liberty County in 1871 and remained in the county until the 1960s. I have also reviewed and compiled data from *The Savannah Tribune* and *The Coastal Courier*, newspapers that reported on the social, economic, religious, and political activities of the black community from the 1880s until the present.

For black Liberty Countians, as is true for many African-descendant peoples in the Americas, oral tradition has been the most important way in which to record and preserve their history. Thus, this dissertation methodically and intentionally uses select sources to better center the voices and experiences of black Liberty Countians during slavery. Although problematic because they convey the stories of African Americans through the gaze of Euro-Americans, sources such as the nineteenth-century annual

reports of the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia provides some context of how bondspeople in the county lived in the antebellum period.

I also use the records of the Southern Claims Commission, in which freedmen testified in order to recoup property confiscated by the Union Army during the Civil War. During their testimonies, African-American men recounted their lives during slavery, expounding on the structures of their family, their agricultural practices, and how they obtained property during slavery. Traces of black voices are also visible in the 1888 work, *Negro Myths from the Georgia Coast*. This book was written by Charles Colcock Jones Jr., the son of a large-scale planter in Liberty County, and recounts the beliefs of freedpeople who had worked on his family's plantations during the antebellum period. Although it erroneously dismisses Geechee culture as "superstition", this book is important because it offers a record of the cultural beliefs of nineteenth-century black Liberty Countians. Furthermore, I contextualize these observations within the current historiography to understand the ontological and cultural traditions of enslaved people and freedpeople of the county.

My work also uses several oral histories that were conducted at the Dorchester Center in the 1990s. I have also interviewed several people from the local community who remember the period of the 1930s and 1940s. Unfortunately, and expectedly, there were many gaps in the various archives that have only allowed me to compile brief glimpses into the lives of enslaved people and African-American citizens of the county. Following the lead of scholars who write African American History, I have used secondary sources to fill in the historiographic gaps to tell a composite story of black life

in Liberty County.<sup>18</sup> It is my hope that by writing their names and telling their stories I too can create an aesthetically appealing tapestry.

### **A Note of Transparency**

This dissertation has its origins in the oral traditions of my community. I was raised in Liberty County and trace my ancestry to enslaved people brought to the county in the eighteenth century. As a youth, the old folk always talked about our ancestors purchasing land in the county following emancipation. Thus, I began this project hoping to write the history of black Liberty Countians and their landowning practices. However, the sources told another story and the time frame changed to encompass the civil rights movement of the 1940s. Most importantly, I set out in this project to tell the stories of the thousands of African-American people who lived, worked, struggled, loved, and died in the county. This dissertation is an attempt to reconcile the oral tradition of black Liberty Countians with my archival training as a historian.

---

<sup>18</sup> Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Acts*. Number 26 (Volume 12, Number 2), June 2008). Ula Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional." *Journal of Women's History*. Volume 20, Number 1, Spring 2008. Eds., Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*. (University of Illinois Press, 2011). Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lived: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

## CHAPTER II

### REMEMBERING THE ANCESTORS, 1752-1864

Robert Anderson was born on a plantation in Liberty County, Georgia in 1819. In many respects his early life is representative of that of the enslaved people of the county. Anderson was raised on a plantation surrounded by maternal family members. His mother and her parents played an active role in his moral and religious development. Due to the culture of the informal economy in which bondspeople were allowed to accumulate property, Anderson's family owned horses and chickens, and grew their own food. Many enslaved families in the county also sold their surplus crops to the enslaved and white populations alike. And although they self-identified as Christians, the world of Robert Anderson and his family included practicing the traditions of their African ancestors, a world in which the spiritual and the religious existed as one.<sup>19</sup>

Geechee culture, the culture created by enslaved African people transported to Georgia in the eighteenth century primarily for their knowledge of rice cultivation, was cemented in the Liberty County landscape and preserved by the community for generations through oral tradition.<sup>20</sup> This chapter pays particular attention to the family

---

<sup>19</sup> Robert Anderson, *The Life of Robert Anderson, The Young Men's Guide, or the Brother in White* (Watkinson Library, Trinity College, and Hargett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Library, 1892), UNC-CH digitizing project "Documenting the American South."

<sup>20</sup> Scholars have traced the ancestry of Gullah-Geechee people to places throughout West Africa and Central Africa. For more information on the origins and formation of Geechee culture see: Margaret Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs*, Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, and, Philip Morgan, ed., *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic Worlds of the Gullah Geechee*.

structure, agricultural practices, language preservation and creolization, and religious and ontological viewpoints of Geechee people of the county. These cultural traditions were passed on to generations of black Liberty Countians throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and influenced the organizing traditions of black Liberty Countians from the era of emancipation and Reconstruction well into the modern Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century.

Scholars of Slavery Studies have demonstrated that enslaved African Americans constantly resisted their status as property by forming family units and establishing kinship bonds with other enslaved people.<sup>21</sup> Enslaved peoples also absconded from labor which could range from simple truancy in which the person hid in the woods for several days or outright escaped to the north or to maroon colonies in the swamps.<sup>22</sup> This chapter serves as the foundation for understanding the ways in which bondspeople formed community and organized politically to ensure their survival, both culturally and materially. Thus, this chapter argues that in order to position black Liberty Countians in the long struggle for human and civil rights, commonly referred to as the Black Freedom Struggle, it is imperative to begin the story by discussing the ways in which bondspeople resisted slavery by forming community, fighting to maintain family units, and maintaining

---

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 – 1925* (Vintage, 1977), Deborah Gray White, *Ar'nt I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), and Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York University Press, 2014).

aspects of their African cultural traditions by incorporating them with that of Euro-Americans.

Commonly in narratives detailing the founding of Liberty County, enslaved people are viewed as either objects owned by plantation owners or are relegated to footnotes of historical studies.<sup>23</sup> However, when the lives and traditions of African Americans are centered in the re-telling of the history of colonial and antebellum Liberty County, Georgia, the perspective shifts from the big house of the plantation to the quarters of the bondspeople. In this particular narrative, plantation owners are not considered as the benevolent distributors of “a human treatment not generally found in other parts of the South” but rather as persons complicit in the systematic enslavement of families and kin members who were subdued in order to maintain a perpetually free labor force.<sup>24</sup> And rather than traditional Protestantism and Methodism, one discovers the world of ancestors, spirits, and customs which is intrinsically both African and American. This chapter will focus on these aspects of the history of Liberty County, Georgia.

## Centering the Ancestors

---

<sup>23</sup> For early-nineteenth century records, see “The Association for the Religious Instruction of Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia” pamphlets housed at the Georgia Historical Society. In the late-nineteenth century A.M.A. pamphlet, Principal Chas. M. Stevens writes “These people [plantation owners] left their impress upon the whole Liberty County, and the ex-slaves and their children bear evidence of a certain kind treatment which these northern colonists gave the colored people under them.” “Dorchester Academy”, A.M.A. Archives No. A1315. The Amistad Research Center. Robert Long Groover’s 1987 *Sweet Land of Liberty*, although a great source that details the history of Liberty County, recycles the same interpretation found in nineteenth century plantation records and that of early missionaries and educators from the American Missionary Association. In reference to A.M.A. sources, Long writes “It is notorious to this day that pure blooded blacks are found in that county to be the rule and not the exception, as in other parts of the South” (35).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Long Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty: A History of Liberty County, Georgia*, (W.H. Wolfe Association, 1987), 35.



The first African Americans were brought to Liberty County in 1752 as bondspeople owned by white colonial settlers. After outgrowing their settlements in both Dorchester, Massachusetts and Dorchester, South Carolina, a group of three hundred and fifty people affiliated with the Congregational Church migrated to the recently established British colony of Georgia.<sup>25</sup> This group set out in May and by June of 1752, the delegates had settled on land in Medway Swamp, a large stretch of land located along the coastal region of Southeastern Georgia. The settlers sent an initial petition to the Council of Georgia to reserve the land for settlement. On 3 July, the delegates “returned from thence to Savanna with their Petition, and got a Grant of 22,400 acres of land, to be reserved for us eighteen months.” The Congregationalists officially settled in the present-day area of Midway, Georgia on August 28, 1754.<sup>26</sup>

*The Published Records of the Midway Church* notes that one of the schooners which transported several migrants from Dorchester, South Carolina also carried “most of their provisions and their Negroes.”<sup>27</sup> Sources estimate that at least fifteen hundred bondspeople were brought to the area during the settlement.<sup>28</sup> Over the next century, the work of bondspeople would make Liberty County one of the most profitable counties in the state. Prior to the Civil War, the county had holdings valued at \$4,736,833.<sup>29</sup> A large source of this revenue was directly related to the county’s large number of enslaved

---

<sup>25</sup> Erskine Clark, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (Yale University, 2005), 6.

<sup>26</sup> *The Published Records of Midway Church, Vol. 1*. Midway Congregational Church, Newman, GA, 1894), 50-51. The Georgia Historical Society. Savannah, Georgia.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. Robert Long Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty: A History of Liberty County, Georgia*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Erskine Clark, *Dwelling Place*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Statistics of the United States in 1860, Including Mortality, Property, &c.* (Washington D.C., 1864), 298.

people. By 1860, bondspeople composed 72% of the population, accounting for 6,083 of the 8,367 people in the county.<sup>30</sup>

Although sources generally treat the presence of slaves as an afterthought, chattel slavery was one of the main reasons that the Dorchester community left their home in South Carolina and settled in the Medway Swamp. The original legislators of the Georgia colony had initially outlawed slavery in 1733. However, by 1750 slavery was legislatively sanctioned and widely practiced in Georgia, especially with the migration of wealthy South Carolina planters.<sup>31</sup> This new settlement in coastal Georgia was ideal for planting rice and sea island cotton because of its possession of numerous rivers and its close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. The enslaved African Americans brought to the area in 1752 served as the labor force that constructed and labored on these coastal plantations.

As Ira Berlin contends in *Many Thousands Gone*, one must consider the time and place being discussed to understand the historical context of slavery and the complexity of power relations between plantation owners and enslaved populations.<sup>32</sup> In the northern states, many enslaved people gained their freedom in the first two decades after the Revolution. Inspired by Revolution ideology, northern lawmakers moved to limit or abolish slavery. By 1804, Pennsylvania (1780), New Hampshire and Massachusetts (1783),

---

<sup>30</sup> *Population of the United States in 1860; compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior, by Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of Census.* Table No. 2 – Population By Color and Condition for Liberty County. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) 73.

<sup>31</sup> *The Published Records of Midway Church*, 51. Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 74-88. Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia*, (The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 51-52. Max E. White, *The Archaeology and History of the Native Georgia Tribes* (University Press of Florida, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), introduction.

Connecticut and Rhode Island (1784), Vermont (1877), New York (1799), and New Jersey (1804) had made efforts to at least gradually emancipate enslaved peoples of their respective states.<sup>33</sup>

Enslaved people in Georgia, by contrast, experienced mainly the expansion of slavery and hardening of regimes of labor and violence. By the 1770s, slavery had become “the most important social and economic institution in the province” and rice had become “Georgia’s most important money crop.”<sup>34</sup> During the same period, Anglo-Americans were purchasing land grants from indigenous communities, which in turn enlarged the size of the territory. These governmental acts concurrently encouraged migrations of white men anxious to profit from the abundance of land, and subjugated and displaced many of the indigenous populations, namely the Cherokee tribes, who had lived in the area for centuries.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006), Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Cornell University Press, 2015), Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Harvard College, 2015), Manisha Sinha, *The Slaves Cause: A History of Abolition* (Yale University Press, 2016), 66-67.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia* (The University of Georgia), 52.

<sup>35</sup> Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 74-88. Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia*, (The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 51-52. Max E. White, *The Archaeology and History of the Native Georgia Tribes* (University Press of Florida, 2002).



Figure 1. Map of Georgia, 1796. By the late eighteenth century, Georgians had settled the coastal region of the state but were surrounded by Native American tribes to the West and to the South. Liberty County is located in the Southeast part of the state. Georgia Archives.

In the 1750s, Georgia planters adopted the tide flow method of rice cultivation that was prevalent in South Carolina. The cost of starting a rice plantation in coastal Georgia in the period was quite expensive, costing as much as 2,746 pounds.<sup>36</sup> However, for the wealthy South Carolina migrants, their investment usually paid off handsomely. Many of the planters in Liberty County inherited their land and human chattel from their South Carolina relatives who had migrated to the county during the eighteenth century.

<sup>36</sup> Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750 – 1860* (The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 27.

Major John Jones had been an aristocrat in South Carolina when he migrated to Liberty County in the early-eighteen century. Jones first established an indigo plantation on the sea islands and later expanded to the inland of Georgia.<sup>37</sup> By the antebellum period his grandson, Charles Colcock Jones, possessed numerous plantations in the county and owned a number of bondspeople.

Rice cultivation was an arduous and laborious task. The year-long season took a great deal of enslaved workers to produce a profitable yield. In January or February of the year, the bondspeople prepared the field for planting, which involved plowing the soil and clearing the land of weeds. In order to properly clear the field, bondspeople worked in knee-high weeds and water. The planting of the rice seeds began in either March or April. During the next several months, the enslaved people regularly irrigated and drained the fields at intervals so that the rice would grow. This work entailed the building and maintenance of wooden gates that permitted certain amounts of water to enter the fields at certain times throughout the season. If the plants received too little water or too much water, the crops would be destroyed. At this stage, the seedlings would have grown several inches in length.

The crop was harvested in either August or September. After using sickles to chop the large stalks of rice, bondspeople would then take them to a barn to be dried. At this stage, the rice could be sold as “rough rice”, meaning it had not been separated from the stalk, and sold at a lower commodity at market. However, most plantations used the

---

<sup>37</sup> Erskine Clark, *Dwelling Place*, 5. Robert Manson Myers, *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War in Six Volumes*. (Popular Library, 1977).

months of November and December for bondspeople to thresh, harrow, and winnow the plant, separating the grains of rice from the stalk, further preparing the rice for market. All stages of planting and the preparation of rice required an extreme amount of skill.<sup>38</sup>

Although rice culture and cultivation was not necessarily a gendered task, recent scholarship has demonstrated that there is a long history of black women being skilled in the knowledge and practice of rice agriculture. In *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation* Judith A. Carney notes that in the 1700s, black women worked diligently in Africa for rice cultivation.<sup>39</sup> There are also several instances in which enslaved women worked the crop during the nineteenth century. Daina Ramey Berry, *Swing The Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe* methodically recounts that enslaved women who worked in the field were skilled took to produce large quantities of rice.<sup>40</sup> These agricultural traditions of cultivating rice would be continued during Reconstruction when freedpeople grew rice for their own consumption.

Scholars have demonstrated that the labor needed to run rice plantations were particularly harsh and deadly for African Americans. The owners of large rice plantations of Coastal Georgia often lived in Savannah, a city thirty miles away, due to the diseases found near the water and the extreme tropical climate during the summer.<sup>41</sup> In *Them*

---

<sup>38</sup> Albert V. House, Jr., "The Management of a Rice Plantation in Georgia, 1834-1861, as Revealed in the Journal of Hugh Fraser Grant," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oct., 1939), pp208-217. Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Lowcountry Georgia*, 46-55. Judith Ann Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 56.

<sup>39</sup> Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Daina Ramey Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (University of Illinois Press, 2007). See Chapter 1: "Skill, Gender, and Productivity in Agricultural Settings", 13-24.

<sup>41</sup> Because the Colcock family owned several plantations in the county, the family would spend the summer months on Catherine's Island, a sea island in the county.

*Dark Days* William Dusiaberre methodically juxtaposes the lived experiences of wealthy white rice planters with that of their bondspeople. Whereas the planters found refuge from the diseases and heat in Charleston, South Carolina or Savannah, Georgia during the summer months, their enslaved populations suffered large scale fatalities, contracting malaria and cholera while harvesting rice and repairing underwater gates and ditches.<sup>42</sup>

Although dangerous and strenuous, the exigencies of rice culture afforded the enslaved people a sense of community and relative cultural autonomy. The task system utilized on lowcountry rice plantations differed greatly from labor patterns found on cotton plantations. Cotton plantations organized labor in a gang system in which enslaved populations worked in gangs from sunup to sundown to complete agricultural work. In the task system, each bondsman and bondswoman was given a task to complete by the end of the day. When he or she completed it, he or she was allowed to work on personal crops, sew clothing for family members, or fish or hunt on the property. The insulated and isolated environment of rice plantations also cultivated a community in which the enslaved population's culture could flourish.<sup>43</sup>

## **The Birth of Geechee Culture**

Although these enslaved people left relatively few records of their experiences, viewing the words of plantation owners and abolitionists may somehow reveal the feelings and experiences of the enslaved population. This is not Genovese's version of the

---

<sup>42</sup> William Dusiaberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Low Country Blacks, 1700-1880," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct, 1982), 563-599. Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia 1750-1860*.

peculiar institution, one in which bondspeople simply acquiesced to the paternalistic system of slavery.<sup>44</sup> Nor is it a story that involves constant rebellions and uprisings, which were prevalent in other locales throughout the Atlantic world. Rather, this is a story in which an enslaved population constantly resisted an oppressive system in both overt and in covert ways, one of which being religious conversion. The Geechee people of Liberty County sought to ensure the survival of their families by making the conscious decisions to both convert to Christianity, the religion of their owners, and to incorporate the traditions of their ancestors, effectively creating the Geechee culture.

---

<sup>44</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972).



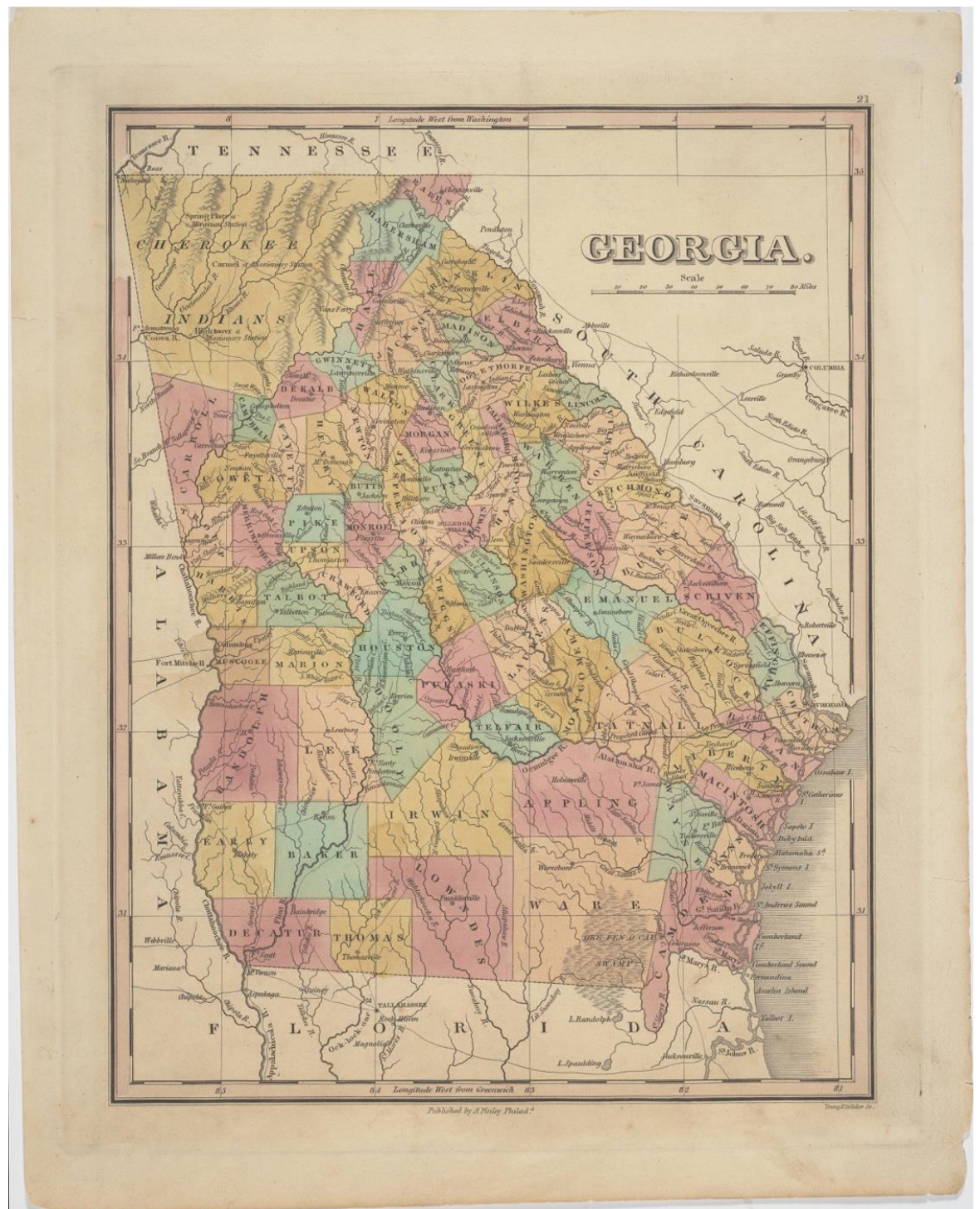


Figure 2. Map of Georgia, 1831. Georgia Archives.

Enslaved Africans in the United States had a long history of resisting slavery. The techniques and strategies ranged from slave rebellions to running away or slowing down production on plantations.<sup>45</sup> Some well-known North-American slave rebellions include the 1739 Stono Rebellion in which Africans in South Carolina who were enslaved organized and killed at least twenty-one white people on their quest to Florida and freedom. In retaliation to the Stono Rebellion southern states temporarily restricted imports of enslaved populations in the 1740s. In 1822, there was the Denmark Vessey Conspiracy in which a freed and literate Vessey attempted to organize a slave rebellion. Although the rebellion never occurred, due to the plans becoming known by whites of Charleston, South Carolina, this conspiracy alerted southern plantation owners that their enslaved populations were not content with their current socio-economic condition. Less than a decade later in 1831, Nat Turner, a literate and deeply religious bondsman, organized a rebellion in Virginia in which approximately sixty white people were killed.<sup>46</sup> Following this direct threat to slavery, southern states began to limit slave mobility and restricted religious instructions to the enslaved population.

---

<sup>45</sup> Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early American* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006). For information on black women and resistance in slavery see: Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton, 1985) and Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). In regards to marronage, see *Slavery Exiles: The Story of the American Maroon* (NYU Press, 2014). In the book Sylviane A. Diouf methodically demonstrates that there existed a large number of maroon communities in the United States from the colonial period to emancipation, contrary to the larger historiographic trend which treated marronage as specific to the Caribbean and South American slave societies.

<sup>46</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (International Publishers, 1987). Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2003), Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

In the spring of 1831 Christian plantation owners in the county created the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia, to religiously convert the enslaved people, not simply for the moral concerns of the enslaved as was the popular rhetoric perpetuated, but rather as a means of social control to limit slave rebellions and to maintain a free source of labor that would ultimately benefit them financially.<sup>47</sup> Scholars such as Stephanie Camp examine the manner in which plantation owners used space to physically confine enslaved bodies by administering laws, customs, and ideals to systematically constrict their movement.<sup>48</sup> Plantation owners in Liberty County taught enslaved black preachers and congregations the bible using catechism but established parameters to assure that the African Americans would not rebel physically or ideologically.

The absentee plantation owners of many of the Liberty County plantations allowed Protestant missionaries to conduct church meetings on their plantations. However, due to the precautions needed to prevent uprisings, certain measures were put in place to police the movements of bondspeople. The association warned that “let no one suppose that religious instruction will do away the necessity of Patrols, and other regulations touching their civil condition.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to daily patrols constantly policing bondspeople, it was customary for owners and overseers to visit their plantations daily

---

<sup>47</sup> Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*. (Savannah: Thomas Purse, 1842), 72.

<sup>48</sup> Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (2004). Camp’s work further details that enslaved women’s bodies were policed more-so than men, as men were able to travel to other plantations and were rented out more frequently than women.

<sup>49</sup> Third Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA, 8. The Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

or at least tri-weekly. According to the association, evening services “have been held exclusively for the Negroes residing on the Plantations visited” and the only ways in which bondspeople from neighboring plantations could attend was by invitation or permission of their owners.<sup>50</sup>

Association rules also dictated that a white minister be present when enslaved people gathered. Enslaved men and women could lead services; however, they could not be taught to read and write. Rather than teaching them to read the bible, the white missionaries used catechism, a technique in which church leaders vocally taught the congregation passages from the bible through recitation, to indoctrinate the enslaved population in the Christian faith.<sup>51</sup> As Janet Cornelius writes, for enslaved peoples, literacy and Christianity often served as a link to freedom. Furthermore, “for enslaved African-Americans, literacy was more than a path to individual freedom – it was a communal act, a political demonstration for the black community.”<sup>52</sup> For the missionary plantation owners of Liberty County, Christianizing their bondspeople was a risk. It could possibly have a positive “moral effect” on them and give them “measured respect and attachment to their owners.”<sup>53</sup> But as the recent uprising of Nat Turner had demonstrated, bondspeople could and often did use Christianity as a defense against the oppressive and inhumane system of chattel slavery.

---

<sup>50</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA. January 1840. (Charleston: Observer Office Press, 1840), 16. The Georgia Historical Society.

<sup>51</sup> Seventh Annual report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA, 5. The Georgia Historical Society.

<sup>52</sup> Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *“When I Can Read My Title Clear”: Literacy, Slavery, and Rebellion in the Antebellum South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Ninth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA, 1844, 12.

The Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County was largely created in response to the early-nineteenth century rebellions of bondspeople in the South. But it is also important to contextualize the association's origins in the larger religious revival of the Second Great Awakening. The early nineteenth century witnessed a religious revival in which the Methodists stormed the South and sought to convert the population, enslaved and free, black and white.<sup>54</sup> During this period, ministers in the county, such as Charles Colcock Jones, sought to educate the enslaved population. Jones, a plantation owner, missionary, and member of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia, had been educated at Princeton Theological Seminary and brought many of the same religious ideology of the period back home to Liberty County.<sup>55</sup> By 1840, the thirty-six-year-old Jones was also designated the "Missionary" of the association.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, viewing his extensive writings on enslaved people in the county is a fitting approach to contextualize the religious ideology of the organization and that of many of the plantation owners in the county.

In his quest to demonstrate the practicality of converting the enslaved population, Jones asserted that the religious education of the enslaved people ultimately benefited plantation owners. According to the reverend and Liberty County native, the enslaved population was improved both religiously and physically through the religious instruction. Jones believed that because the enslaved population had naturally increased by thirty-

---

<sup>54</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (The University of Chicago Press, 1978), Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989), and Barry Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Greenwood Press, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> Erskine Clark, *Dwelling Place*. Robert Manson Myers, *The Children of Pride*.

<sup>56</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA. January 1840, 1.

four and thirty-six percent in the early nineteenth century that the African-born enslaved population had died out and so had the “ignorance and paganism of Africa.” Therefore, the creolized African Americans “were better looking, more intelligent, more civilized, more susceptible of religious impressions.”<sup>57</sup> It was Jones’ belief that bondspeople who had been acculturated into the Protestant faith could better receive the gospel and essentially live spiritually fulfilled lives working for their owners.

Whereas the association used religion to create a more manageable enslaved workforce, contextualizing the actions of bondspeople with the historiography of slavery complicates the simplistic narrative which assumed that by openly converting to Christianity and attending plantation church services, enslaved people conceded to a lifetime of bondage. In its 1840 annual report, the Association provided an example of an enslaved woman who became a church member, married, and died rather suddenly as a testament to their success of morally improving the lives of enslaved people in the county:

The marriages of members of the School have, for the most part, been open and honorable. In this particular there has been decided improvement. Gratifying instances of members of the School dying in Christian hope, have occurred. As an example, that of a young woman, one of the first scholars, may be mentioned. She had always supported an irreproachable character, and married well. In a short season of revival in the congregation in the Winter and Spring of 1836, she became serious; was examined and propounded for admission to the Church. The Communion was put off beyond the regular season, a fortnight. Meanwhile she was taken sick; was not able to be out on the day of Communion, and shortly after died, peacefully in hope of eternal life!<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA. January 1840, 10.

The above passage demonstrates the ideological disconnect of the white religious instructors to their enslaved black church attendees. In regards to her dying peacefully in hopes of eternal life, theologians have determined that black women have often viewed Jesus as a relatable figure because he also suffered greatly. Theologian Jacqueline Grant articulates that whereas Jesus' suffering culminated in the crucifixion, black women's crucifixion "included rapes, husbands being castrated (literally and metaphorically), babies being sold, and other cruel and often murderous treatment."<sup>59</sup> Contextualizing this account historiographically illustrates that it is more probable that the young woman believed death would bring her peace from the hard toil of slavery, rather than the ideological belief that her death exemplified her faith in a white God who had predisposed people of African descent to a lifetime of servitude and a host of other racist and sexist injustices.<sup>60</sup>

During many of the revivals supervised by the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, the bondspeople danced and shouted, all indications of their Geechee culture. The plantation owners viewed the "scenes of loud weeping, swoonings, shoutings, and clapping of hands" as "perversion" and "scenes of disorder."<sup>61</sup> During the Christian conversion process, many of the plantation owners and missionaries attempted to completely strip the enslaved people of their culture and

---

<sup>59</sup> Jacqueline Grant, "Womanist Theology, Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology" in *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009), 76.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the Africanization of Christianity see: Richard Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries* (Yale University Press, 1959), Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African American and the Bible* (Yale University Press, 2006), and Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, GA. January 1840, 18.

beliefs, viewing their creole traditions and language as barbaric and uncivilized. However, as the scene above demonstrates, the Christianity of the enslaved population was heavily influenced by and infused with their and their ancestors' African religious traditions.

In *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Albert Raboteau traces the African "retentions" prevalent in the religious traditions of enslaved people. When discussing traditional religion in West Africa he writes, "the power of the gods and spirits was effectively present in the lives of men, for good or ill, on every level – environmental, individual, social, national, and cosmic."<sup>62</sup> Although Raboteau argues that African continuities are more prevalent in African-American communities who converted to Catholicism, scholars have shown that Gullah-Geechee people in South Carolina and Georgia effectively created a syncretic religion during slavery and maintained their spiritual beliefs throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>63</sup>

As Margaret Washington Creel argues in *A Peculiar People*, enslaved populations used their West African culture of extended kin network and religious secret societies to combat the inhumanity of slavery and to maintain community. Enslaved people often accepted Christianity from their owners; however, it became a syncretic religion, one that combined their West and Central African religions traditions with that of Euro-American Christianity. This unique Gullah-Geechee culture in turn shaped the enslaved population's ontological worldview in which bondspeople had a direct connection with the Christian God and his son Jesus. Creel asserts that "Gullahs displayed an intuitive

---

<sup>62</sup> Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.



knowledge of the moral teachings of Christianity based upon practical experience, the socio-religious influence of African religion, and their own sense of collective survival.”<sup>64</sup>

During slavery, a period that entailed the constant monitoring of enslaved bodies and their movements, Geechee culture was out of necessity encoded and shrouded in secrecy. This world was often isolated from that of plantation owners. Geechee folk, like the Gullahs in South Carolina, possessed a particular cosmology which had been created in the swamps and fields of the Georgia lowcountry. This was the land in which enslaved Africans in neighboring McIntosh County had jumped overboard from a slave ship and flown back to Africa.<sup>65</sup> One in which someone born with a caul over his or her face possessed the ability to convene with the world of the ancestors and other spirits roaming the earth. This spirit world of the enslaved population served both a religious and a practical function: these beliefs and traditions physically and spiritually protected the enslaved population from plantation owners and other dangers, and as we will see during the period following emancipation, they identified and excluded those who were not from the community.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Margaret Washington Creel, *“A Peculiar People”: Slave Religion and Community Culture Among the Gullahs* (1998), 265.

<sup>65</sup> Marquette L. Goodwine, *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture* (Clarity Press, 1998). Jim Morekis, *Moon Charleston & Savannah*, (Avalon Travel Publishing, 2013), 285. There remains an oral tradition in McIntosh County that recounts the story of Ibo slaves who after arriving to St. Simon’s Island, commandeered the ship and walked into the swamps. The memorial site is known as Ebo Landing.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., *Gullah Folktales from the Georgia Coast*, 169-180. William S. Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and their African Heritage* (The University of Georgia Press, 2005).

A major characteristic of the Geechee culture is the tradition of communing with ancestors and other spirits of those who had passed on to the next world.<sup>67</sup> These traditions have their origins in Africa and were practiced throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries in Liberty County and throughout the diaspora. In his 1888 book *Gullah Folktales from the Georgia Coast* Charles Colcock Jones Jr. interviewed several of the formerly enslaved people who had worked on his family's plantations. Despite the Eurocentric interpretation of the writings, these observations allow us a glimpse into the spiritual and ontological world of the enslaved and freed people of Liberty County.

The following passage is an account given by July, a freedman who worked for Charles Colcock Jones during slavery. When asked about the world of spirits July recounted:

Me kin tell you bout heap er people me bin meet an see arter dem done dead an bury. Me shut mose ebry night. Me kin show you some ter-night ef you bin born wid caul. Many time dem people wuh cant see sperit come pon top dem an dunno nuttne bout um. Enty wen you duh walk long de road der night you suttenly feel hot win bresh by you cheek? Enty you sometimes smell dead man finger? Enty you yeddy bush crack der wood wen de win yent der blow? Dem duh sperit, but you no know. Sperit der walk close by you, but you no shum. Me could pint dem out an tell you who dem yiz.<sup>68</sup>

I can tell you about a heap of people I've seen after they've been dead and buried. I see them almost every night. I can show you some tonight had you been born with a caul. Many times those people who can see spirits come upon them and don't know anything about them. Have you ever walked on a road at night and suddenly you feel a hot wind brush by your cheek? Have you ever smelled a dead man before? Have you ever heard a bush crack the wood when the wind blow?

---

<sup>67</sup> For more information on the African origins of communicating with spiritual beings, see LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* (Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>68</sup> Charles Colcock Jones Jr., *Gullah Folktales from the Georgia Coast*, 174-175.

Those are the spirits but you don't know. The spirits walk close by you but you don't see them. I can point them out and tell you who they are.<sup>69</sup>

This passage is particularly useful because it demonstrates the beliefs of Geechee people of the county and it also serves as an example of their creole speech pattern. Although plantation owners, abolitionists, and early-twentieth century scholars believed that the Geechee language was a "slave" language that denoted ignorance and inferiority, scholars have methodologically and empirically demonstrated that the Geechee language is a creolized version of the Euro-American language and West and Central African languages spoken by enslaved people brought to the Lowcountry in the eighteenth century. Lorenzo Dow Turner's pioneering work details the connection of the Gullah-Geechee language to that of several languages spoken in West Africa. He notes the similar words, phonetics, and several other cultural similarities such as naming practices.<sup>70</sup> Thus in order to understand the organizing traditions of the Geechee people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is essential to view the language, the ontological beliefs, and religion as a creole New World creation that has been constantly re-created based on their adaptation to the changing geography, world events, and lived experiences of people who lived in and migrated to the county.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> This passage was translated by the writer.

<sup>70</sup> Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (University of South Carolina Press, 1949). David B. Frank, "Gullah Grammar Sketch" paper presented on September 25, 2015 at the Centennial Conference of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Atlanta, Georgia. Both works use empirical data and comparative studies to support the view of the Gullah-Geechee language as a creole language. Other works that connect African Americans to the African Diaspora include Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* and Joseph E. Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture*.

<sup>71</sup> Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). My working definition of the African Diaspora is similar to that of Michael Gomez's in that it accounts for both the movement of people, ideas, and cultural traditions of African descendent people from the continent and throughout the Atlantic world. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kong and the*

The above passage also highlights the ubiquity of spirituality in Geechee culture. According to theologian Peter J. Paris, for many African and African-descendant people, spirituality is “the animating and integrative power that constitutes the principal frame of meaning for individual and collective experiences.”<sup>72</sup> This definition of spirituality is essential to understanding the linkage between the caul of which July speaks and access to the spirit world. The Geechee people believe that a person born with a caul, a thin layer of skin covering his or her face, is more intimately connected to the spirit world of the dead. People such as July served both a spiritual and practical function in Geechee communities – they assured other community members that the ancestors were omnipresent beings who watched over the living, ensuring that people maintained a moral and ethical lifestyle, and they were physical embodiments and conduits of culture and traditions. The basic belief that the spirit world and that of the living were innately connected was one such belief that unified the Geechee people of the county during slavery and emancipation.<sup>73</sup>

---

*Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* is another such work that is concerned with the new world creations of Gullah-Geechee peoples. Jason Young analyzes the connections throughout the Black Atlantic, further demonstrating that blacks in the Georgia and South Carolina lowcountry built upon their African cultural traditions and adapted them to their new world surroundings.

<sup>72</sup> Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Purpose*. (Fortress Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>73</sup> There is extensive literature that talks about the “caul” as a root to the spirit world of ancestors in the African American experience. See Tina McElroy Ansa, *Baby of the Family*, (Harcourt, Inc., 1991) and *The Hand I Fan With* (Anchor Books, 1996); Thomas A. Green, *African American Folktales*, (Greenwood Publish Group, 2009), 141. Lawrence Levine’s *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom* is also a great resource for understanding the interconnectedness of religion, spirituality, and resistance of African-American communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## The Structure of Family

As Brenda Stevenson notes in *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*, due to the exigencies of slavery, most enslaved people did not live in nuclear households, rather there were a variety that included nuclear households, single-parent households, and abroad marriages.<sup>74</sup> However, for the enslaved people in Liberty County the extended kin network was the most common form of family structure. Like Robert Anderson's upbringing, many of the bondspeople in Liberty County lived on plantations with their maternal family members. Although allowed to marry, it was common for husbands and wives to live on separate plantations, with the children residing in the same household as their mother. Old Jupiter, a driver for John Jones, worked on Liberty Plantation while his wife, Silvey, worked as a cook on another of the Jones' plantations. Through prolonged negotiations with John Jones, Old Jupiter was able to have Silvey moved to Liberty Plantation so that the couple could live together. By 1803, Old Jupiter and Silvey lived on the plantation with their sons Jupiter and Hamlet, and their grandsons Little Jupiter, Augustus, and Prince.<sup>75</sup> The structure of extended kin networks, those that included the quotidian interaction of several generations of family members, continued throughout slavery and Reconstruction.<sup>76</sup>

It is very likely that Old Jupiter and Silvey were allowed to live and raise their families on the same plantation because they were owned by the same plantation owner.

---

<sup>74</sup> Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*, (Oxford University Press, 1996), 208.

<sup>75</sup> Erskine Clark, *Dwelling Place*, 3-17.

<sup>76</sup> For more information on the structure of enslaved families see: Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford University Press, 2014),

<sup>76</sup> *Population of the United States in 1860*, 73.

Many enslaved couples were forced to raise their families in different houses in various parts of the county. Prince Stevens and his wife Drucilla lived on separate plantations and belonged to different owners. Prince lived on the plantation of Dr. Henry Way and Drucilla and their four children lived on the neighboring plantation of Joseph Bacon, which was located about five miles away. Prince often visited his family on weekends and some evenings. The couple would not be able to cohabitate and jointly raise their family until the latter part of the Civil War when African Americans in the county were freed.<sup>77</sup>

The family structure of freed people was somewhat different than that of enslaved people in the county. By 1860 most African Americans in the county remained enslaved. The 1860 census lists the enslaved population at 6,083 and lists no free blacks.<sup>78</sup> Yet there had been a small number of free blacks in the county as early as 1840. For that year, there were 35 free people and 7,246 enslaved African Americans.<sup>79</sup> By 1852 only fifteen people were registered as free, and all of them were women and their children.<sup>80</sup> Bellah, a sixty-year-old woman was listed as living on the plantation of G.W. Walthour, a local plantation owner; Eliza, a twenty-four-year-old women, was listed as living in Riceboro with her three children; and Susan, a thirty year old woman, lived in Dorchester with her three children. The following year, the women were once again listed on the registry in addition to a twenty-three-year-old man named William Anderson. Another significant

---

<sup>77</sup> Testimony of Brister Fleming and Hanson Bacon, July 1871. U.S. Southern Claims Commission Allowed Claims, 1871-1880 for Prince Stevens. Ancestry.com.

<sup>78</sup> *Population of the United States in 1860*, 73.

<sup>79</sup> Sixth Annual Report for the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia. January 1841, 22 and 23. Georgia Historical Society.

<sup>80</sup> "Enrollment of Free Persons of Color, 1852," *Liberty County State of Georgia Court of Land Plats and Freed Persons, 1852-1884*. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

change for the year was that Eliza was now listed as having four children, including an infant child. It is possible that Eliza's husband lived on a nearby plantation and perhaps she remained in the county for that reason.<sup>81</sup> Robert Anderson notes that when he visited his family as a free man, the plantation owner often allowed him to freely interact with his mother.<sup>82</sup> So perhaps it was not uncommon for freedpeople and enslaved people of the county to associate, marry, and raise families together.

In 1854, in addition to the other freedpeople, fifty-four-year-old Abraham Harmen also lived in the county.<sup>83</sup> The disproportionate number of free women and their children to free men in the registry of free people prompts several questions for scholars. Why were these people freed in a county in which the majority were enslaved? Did they remain in the county, and in the case of Bellah, on the same plantation, to stay close to family members? Who were the fathers of Eliza's and Susan's children? Many of these inquiries may never be answered. But as Amrita Chakrabarti Myers notes in her analysis of freedwomen in antebellum Charleston, South Carolina, free women had to make numerous compromises and alliances in order to gain their freedom, maintain their free status, and accumulate property within a society that devalued them based on their race and sex.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the fact that only a small amount of women were able to secure their freedom in a county in which the majority of African Americans remained enslaved

---

<sup>81</sup> "Enrollment of Free Persons of Color, 1853," *Liberty County State of Georgia Court of Land Plats and Freed Persons, 1852-1884*. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Anderson, *The Life of Rev. Robert Anderson*, 39.

<sup>83</sup> "Enrollment of Free Persons of Color, 1854," *Liberty County State of Georgia Court of Land Plats and Freed Persons, 1852-1884*. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>84</sup> Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

simultaneously demonstrates the ingenuity of the people who managed to gain their freedom and emphasizes the insurmountable obstacles which kept thousands enslaved. And the fact that freedpeople remained in the county in which the majority of African Americans were enslaved suggests that both freedpeople and bondspeople sought to maintain familial bonds.

## **Conclusion**

Although most African Americans in the county were not manumitted, just as in other locales, Geechee people took various opportunities to escape from bondage. Many enslaved people took the conflict and confusion of wars to run away, such as during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and during the Civil War.<sup>85</sup> However, the vast majority of bondspeople who remained on plantations during slavery and during the Civil War often remained due to their bonds to the land, family, and other kin members. For thousands of bondspeople in Liberty County, freedom would only come with the conflict of war.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Ed. Philip Morgan, *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee* (The University of Georgia Press, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*.



## CHAPTER III

### EMANCIPATION AND THE LIMITS OF CITIZENSHIP, 1865-1900

Emancipation came to the Sea Islands of South Carolina in 1861 with the Port Royal experiment, mere months after the Civil War commenced.<sup>87</sup> And although President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 which technically freed enslaved people in states of rebellion, freedom did not reach African Americans in Liberty County until 1864. In December of that year, General Tecumseh Sherman, leader of the Union troops for the Southern campaign, ordered the destruction of coastal Georgia on his historic March to the Sea. And while the Union troops destroyed the property of white plantation owners and confiscated the property of bondspeople, their arrival signaled liberty for African Americans of the county.<sup>88</sup>

On January 12, 1865, black religious leaders of Savannah, Georgia convened with Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton and Major-General Sherman to discuss the meaning of freedom. The spokesman for the group of twenty freedmen noted that freedpeople wanted to “reap the fruit” of their own labor and to have land in which to earn a living.<sup>89</sup> The outcome was the short-lived Field Order No. 15 which sought to settle black families on lands confiscated by the Union army. Although only a small number of freed people in the nation benefitted from the order and received the promised forty acres and a mule,

---

<sup>87</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (The University of Georgia Press, 1964).

<sup>88</sup> Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolina Campaigns* (Louisiana State University press, 1985), 54-60.

<sup>89</sup> “Minutes of an Interview between the Colored Ministers and Church Officers at Savannah with the Secretary of War and Major-Gen Sherman, Savannah, Georgia, Jan 12, 1865,” in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, 331-338.

this meeting reveals that following emancipation African Americans had a clear view of citizenship. In addition to owning land and providing for their families, men wished to participate in electoral democracy. In turn, African-American women sought autonomy for themselves, which at times was in opposition to both their employers and their husbands.<sup>90</sup> Black Liberty Countians had similar aims.

This chapter analyzes the various manners in which African Americans in Liberty County, Georgia pursued first class citizenship during the postbellum period. It follows the transfer of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next by looking at the continuation of family units, the purchasing of farms and agricultural, participation in electoral politics, and the community establishing cultural institutions such as churches and benevolent societies, and soliciting educational opportunities for their children. As in most black communities during Reconstruction, there was no precise strategy for achieving first class citizenship. African Americans in Liberty County used different approaches at different times to live as they pleased.

### **Land, Family, and the Establishment of Geechee Land Deeding Practices**

Leon Litwack writes, “What emancipation introduced into the lives of many black people was not only the element of choice but a leap of confidence in the ability to effect changes in their own lives without referring to whites.”<sup>91</sup> For the local black community, freedom meant reconnecting with and spending time with family members and earning

---

<sup>90</sup> Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1997), Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), and Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

<sup>91</sup> Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (Vintage Books, 1979), 228.

their own land. In many cases, the local white community in the county were reluctant to accept the freedpeople's definition of freedom. Whereas many large-scale planters left the area and sold off parcels of land to freedpeople, some land owners remained in the county and attempted to hire African Americans to work their land.

One labor dispute between white land owners and freedpeople occurred in 1966. During the Reconstruction period the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, or the Freedmen's Bureau, often negotiated contracts between black workers and white landowners. One account is demonstrable of the conflict and tension between the various races and classes of the county. In February of 1866, a conflict emerged between black workers, a landowner, and his neighbor. Raymond Harris, a white landowner, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau agent in Liberty County that his neighbor, Elliot Quarterman, frequently shot at and burned the houses of the African-American laborers who lived and worked on Harris' land. Understanding the importance of maintaining good relationships with black workers, Harris lamented that "the negroes will not work as long as they are harassed in this manner."

In addition to showing the conflict inherent in a new system of labor, this account also demonstrates the small amount of power and jurisdiction that the Bureau possessed. James W. McConnell, agent of the Liberty County Bureau, had previously sent Quarterman a summons concerning Harris' complaint but had failed to enforce it. The letter also noted that Quarterman's father, Thomas W. Quarterman, had been charged

by freedmen for failing to compensate them for labor performed in 1865.<sup>92</sup> Hence for many freedpeople, finding employment and forming contracts with white landowners was an uncertain and precarious endeavor.<sup>93</sup>

The new labor system was equally frustrating for blacks and whites alike. Many plantations that had thrived in the antebellum period suffered economically when freedpeople became citizens who could negotiate the amount their wage and the number of hours they would work. The LeConte family who owned Woodmanston, a large plantation in Liberty County renowned for its botanical gardens, had fled the state during the period of the Civil War. In February of 1868, Mr. Jones, a man hired to oversee the lands of Woodmanston, reported to John LeConte, scientist, professor and patriarch of the LeConte family, “not to expect much from farming operations in this county” as “the niggers are lazy and steal all they can put their hands on.”<sup>94</sup> Members of the LeConte family had relocated to South Carolina during the Civil War and struggled to negotiate and secure workers for their plantation from afar.

Like other former plantation-based economies in the South, in the postbellum period white planters in Liberty County attempted to establish the economically exploitative system of sharecropping. In 1866, Mary Jones, the widow of Charles Colcock

---

<sup>92</sup> “Letter from Raymond B Harris Feb 27, 1866. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. MS 5915

<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Coleman, *A History of Georgia*, 226. For more on contract negotiations in the Reconstruction Era see: Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>94</sup> “Letter to John LeConte, February 22, 1898.” Folder A-Z Unlisted Miscellaneous. MS 22 C5. Box 1. The Bancroft Library. The University of California Berkeley. Joseph LeConte, *Ware Sherman: A Journal of Three Months’ Personal Experience in the Last Days of the Confederacy* (Louisiana State University Press, 1937, 1999).

Jones and owner of three plantations in Liberty County, and her son, Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., issued standard sharecropping contracts to freedpeople who had previously worked for them.<sup>95</sup> But as sociologist Peggy Hargis contends, sharecropping proved to be an ineffective system as the majority of white landowners had vacated their properties in 1864 and it was both time consuming and economically ineffective to manage workers from afar. In an effort to make some profit from their land, in 1872 the Jones family began selling off parcels of land to selected freedmen in the county.<sup>96</sup>

In 1867, Charles Colcock Jones Jr. and his mother, Mary Jones, allowed Stepney West, a former driver on their Arcadia Plantation, to lease land on the plantation. The Jones family constructed a labor contract with West and thirty other freedpeople, which stated that the workers would live and work on the land and in exchange they would provide the Jones family a third of their crop.<sup>97</sup> After several years of receiving low yields from sharecroppers and from unsuccessfully trying to sell Arcadia to buyers in the county, in 1872 the family divided the two-thousand-acre estate into small plots and began to sell them to freedmen. Stepney West became the first freedman to purchase land from Arcadia. Over a period of three years, West paid \$270 for a ninety-acre lot.<sup>98</sup> And as they resided out of state, the Jones family often requested guidance from Stepney West when selling to freedmen with whom they were not acquainted.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Peggy G. Hargis, "For the Love of Place: Paternalism and Patronage in the Georgia Lowcountry, 1865-1898" *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Nov., 2004), 834.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 838-839.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 834.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 840.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 834-836.

In addition to gradually purchasing land from former plantation owners, there were other methods in which freedmen purchased land. For many freedpeople, their claims to property and the collateral with which to purchase land in the Reconstruction period had its origins in the informal economy system prevalent during slavery. The informal economy was a culture in which plantation owners allowed bondpeople to sell their excess crops and goods to whites and blacks alike. These economic systems benefitted both the enslaved and plantation owners as it provided the bondperson the opportunity to earn money and goods for his or her family, and it alleviated the need of the owner to provide food and clothing for enslaved people. According to Prince Stevens, “I worked for my master by task and when completed all us did for ourselves. We were allowed all the land we could cultivate in such time as we could make for ourselves and my master would allow me to work one of his horses til I got one for myself.”<sup>100</sup>

The genealogy of the Stevens family accurately demonstrates the manners in which freedpeople who had accumulated property during slavery purchased land during the Reconstruction era. Prince Stevens was born in 1834 on the plantation of Dr. Henry Way. During his time in slavery, Stevens was able to accumulate property including a buggy, 2 cows, and 24 chickens. Drucilla Stevens, born in 1840, also accumulated property while enslaved. When making the claim to the Southern Claims Commission on July 7, 1871, Prince and his witnesses had to distinguish between Drucilla’s property and those of his that were kept at her house. During slavery, Prince also cultivated his own

---

<sup>100</sup> U.S. Southern Claims Commission Allowed Claims, 1871-1880 for Prince Stevens. This testimony is marked as number 43. Ancestry.com

rice and grew his own potatoes after completing his tasks on the plantation.<sup>101</sup> For that year, Stevens valued all of his goods at \$318 but was only awarded \$164 from the commission.<sup>102</sup>

Less than half a decade following emancipation, the Stevens family had accumulated a great deal of wealth. In 1870, the family owned a twelve-acre farm valued at \$100.<sup>103</sup> The family raised both livestock and grew various vegetables on the farm. They had a milch cow to produce milk and cheese, and 3 hogs. That year the family produced 30 bushels of corn, 1 bale of cotton, 5 bushels of sweet potatoes, 5 gallons of molasses, and 474 pounds of rice.<sup>104</sup> It took a number of people to successfully run a farm that produced such a large harvest and diverse crops. On the 1870 census, 35-year-old Prince was listed as the owner, and 30-year-old Drucilla and the couple's 12-year-old daughter, Ellen, were listed as farm laborers. The other five children were listed either as "domestic servant" or "at home", which could mean that they either worked inside the home or helped with smaller jobs on the farm.<sup>105</sup>

In 1880, several years after receiving payment from the Southern Claims Commission, the Stevens family had accumulated a great deal more wealth. The family now owned 111 acres of tilled land and 175 acres of unimproved woodland. They possessed 3 horses, 7 oxen, 11 milch cows and 19 other cattle, 21 hogs, and 25 chickens.

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. And for more information on the property holding rights of enslaved people in Liberty County, Georgia see Dylan Penningroth's *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>102</sup> "No. 20.696 43.402. Claim of Prince Stevens of Liberty Co. Georgia, Summary Report", U.S. Southern Claims Commission Allowed Claims, 1871 for Prince Stevens. Ancestry.com

<sup>103</sup> U.S. Census, Liberty County, November 1870.

<sup>104</sup> "Schedules 3. – Productions of Agriculture in 18<sup>th</sup> in the County of Liberty in the, 1870." Ancestry.com

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Census, Liberty County, November 1870.

On the farm, the family produced 175 pounds of butter and had hatched 75 dozen eggs. They had planted 152 acres of rice and had harvested 320 bushels, and they had planted 15 acres of corn and harvested 280 bushels. They also had planted sugar cane and made 40 gallons of molasses. The family was able to hire African-American laborers for 30 weeks out of the year, but it is probable that these laborers were Prince and Drucilla's children or other kin in the county.<sup>106</sup> When Prince Stevens died in 1908, the family had accumulated a vast estate which included 495 acres of land and was valued at \$1,400.<sup>107</sup>

As indicative of the Stevens family, the management of a large farm and the accumulation of land was a family endeavor. The Williams was another such family that purchased land and established a farm in the Reconstruction period. By 1870, forty-year-old Sambo and thirty-year-old Judy Williams owned a twenty-acre farm valued at \$100.<sup>108</sup> Two of their four children who were over the age of ten, helped the family produce 150 bushels of Indian corn and 500 pounds of rice for the year.<sup>109</sup> In February of 1880, Williams acquired twelve acres of land by "Warranty Deed from American Life Insurance."<sup>110</sup> In addition to this increase of acreage, over the ten year period of 1870 to 1880, the family had steadily grown their estate to 280 acres. With the help of two of their older sons, ages twenty years old and fifteen years old, the family raised cattle, chicken, and hogs. The Williams also produced 2,700 pounds of rice, 200 bushels of corn,

---

<sup>106</sup> "Schedule 2. Productions of Agriculture in Liberty County, Georgia, June 1880" Ancestry.com

<sup>107</sup> The Will of Prince Stevens, February 2, 1909. Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Ancestry.com.

<sup>108</sup> U.S. Census for 1870. Liberty County, Georgia. Ancestry.com

<sup>109</sup> U.S. Agricultural Census for 1870. Ancestry.com.

<sup>110</sup> Land Deed Book 256, 279. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.



2 bales of cotton, 100 gallons of sugar cane, and about 20 bushels of sweet potatoes.<sup>111</sup>

It is likely that this large scale agricultural production was sold and bartered to family members and to the larger black community of the county. As early as 1875, there existed local markets in which people could purchase and sell locally produced goods such as those grown on black-owned farms. However, there is no certainty that African Americans of Liberty County could advertise in the *Hinesville Gazette*, which was the local white newspaper.<sup>112</sup>



Figure 3. "100" year old woman in Liberty County, Georgia, circa 1890s. The Amistad Research Center.

Black women of the county who benefitted from land ownership worked in their own homes. In the 1870 census, less than a decade after emancipation, many women

---

<sup>111</sup> U.S. Census of 1880. U.S. Special Agricultural Census of 1880. Ancestry.com

<sup>112</sup> "Report of Darien Timbr (sic) Market. Savannah Market." *Hinesville Gazette*. Vol. V. Hinesville, Georgia. Monday, June 14, 1875. No. 12. Microfilm. Liberty County Public Library. Hinesville, Georgia. Also, there is no listing of black Liberty Countians advertising in *The Savannah Tribune*, the regional black newspaper, in the late nineteenth century.

were listed as “keeping house.” For African-American women in Liberty County, this classification generally encompassed doing house work, taking care of children, laundering clothes, and working on the family farm. In 1870, twenty-nine-year old Jane Alexander was listed as keeping house. Meanwhile, her husband, thirty-three-year-old Simon, worked on the farm. The couple had two young children who stayed at home with Jane.<sup>113</sup> Twenty-two-year-old Elsy Anderson was listed as keeping house while her twenty-five-year-old husband July was listed as a farmer.<sup>114</sup> The young couple had managed to purchase eight acres of land by 1870.<sup>115</sup> Thirty-seven-year-old Pleasant Anderson kept house while her forty-two-year-old husband Jack worked the farm. Unlike the previous couples, the Andersons were fortunate to have a teenaged son, thirteen-year old Jack Jr., to assist them on the family farm.<sup>116</sup>

It is also important to note that some women who worked in the house were sometimes listed as “farm laborer” which was the case for Drucilla Stevens in 1870.<sup>117</sup> Despite the various listings of black women on the 1870 census, it was the case that if the family owned land, the wife and women of the family most likely did some aspect of work for her own family. This type of labor was quite different from the majority of black women in the nation who worked as domestics for white families. As historian Tera Hunter has shown, black women sought to control their own labor rather than risk the

---

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Census of 1870, 20. Ancestry.com.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>115</sup> Special Agricultural Census of 1870.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 3.

sexual violence that too often accompanied working as a cook, laundress, maid and nanny in white homes.<sup>118</sup>

Records also indicate that black Liberty Countians who were married continued to differentiate between their properties after emancipation. In 1870, sixty-year-old Isaac and sixty-year-old Jennie Scott owned twelve acres of land.<sup>119</sup> In the Georgia Tax Digests of 1793-1892, both husband and wife owned property.<sup>120</sup> In the first listing, Isaac registered his wife's property under the heading "Isaac Scott for Wife" in which he records that her horses, mules, cattle and livestock were valued at \$72, and that her plantation and mechanical tools were valued at \$5.<sup>121</sup> In the couple's next entry in the digest, Isaac valued his property at \$5 and Jennie listed hers as \$41.<sup>122</sup> In the succeeding citations, Jennie's property was listed at \$311 and at \$12, and Isaac as \$21.<sup>123</sup> And as the principal purpose of these tax digests was to ensure that both white and black male citizens paid poll taxes to be eligible to vote, why would a black woman register her goods on the tax digest? What does this claiming of property tell us about the goals and wishes of freedwomen in the county? And how does Jennie Scott's case complicate the U.S. census' categorization of freedwomen as "keeping house"?

---

<sup>118</sup> Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

<sup>119</sup> Special Agricultural Census for 1870. U.S. Census for 1870. Ancestry.com

<sup>120</sup> The information is compiled from the "Georgia, Property Tax Digests, 1793-1892 and 1878-1885" on Ancestry.com. The Georgia Tax Digest does not list the year for which the tax is being paid, nor does it contain page numbers. However, the number of the reels are listed, i.e. reel "92 of 702". It seems as if the pages of the book were scanned in chronological order.

<sup>121</sup> "Georgia, Property Tax Digests, 1793-1892, 15<sup>th</sup> District." Scanned page 92 of 702. Ancestry.com

<sup>122</sup> "Georgia, Property Tax Digests, 1878-1885, 15<sup>th</sup> District." Scanned page 188 of 702. Ancestry.com

<sup>123</sup> "Georgia, Property Tax Digests, 1793-1892, 15<sup>th</sup> District." Scanned pages 415, 540, and 693 of 702. Ancestry.com

The lack of sources obfuscates the complex processes in which freedpeople purchased land and made claims to their property during the Reconstruction period. However, many assumptions can be made from the large number of people who purchased land in Liberty County. Owning land in the county mere years following emancipation was contingent on a number of factors including the existence of established kinship networks and the prevalence of the informal economy network. It also appears that the large number of black people in the county capitalized on the exigencies of war which were exacerbated by the pillaging and destruction of plantations in the county by the Union Army. Finally, as noted with the Colcock family and the freedpeople who purchased land carved out of former plantations, African Americans took advantage of the former kinship connections between plantation owners and enslaved peoples.

### **Voting and Participation in Electoral Politics**

In addition to establishing claims to land, during Reconstruction black men in the county took steps to vote in local and national elections. The Fifteenth Amendment, which granted black men the right to vote, was ratified on February 3, 1870. However, African-American men in the county took the loyalty oath and registered to vote in 1867 and maintained the ballot until the 1910s. They could do so because of the large number of African Americans who resided in the county, accounting for 72% in 1860 and 65% in 1910 (see Table 1).

<b>Year</b>	<b>1860</b>	<b>1870</b>	<b>1880</b>	<b>1890</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>1910</b>
<b>White</b>	2,284	2,428	3,581	4,207	4,479	4,569
<b>Black</b>	6,083	5,260	7,061	8,675	8,614	8,355
<b>Other</b>	0	0	7	5	0	0
<b>Total</b>	8,367	7,688	10,649	12,887	13,093	12,924

Table 1. Demographic Make-up of Liberty County, Georgia – 1860 – 1910. Information compiled from the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Census of the United States.

Black citizens also had access to black legislators such as Tunis G. Campbell.

Senator Campbell hailed from Middlebrook, New Jersey. He had worked in Port Royal, South Carolina during the Civil War and had been appointed as Board of Registration in Georgia in 1867.<sup>124</sup> Campbell was also a state senator representing Liberty, McIntosh, and Tattnall counties. While working as vice president of the Republican Party, Campbell assisted in registering black men. According to Campbell, in 1867 in Liberty County more African Americans had registered to vote than white men. In his testimony to Congress in 1871 Campbell asserted that “in Liberty County there were about six hundred colored voters, and perhaps there were two hundred white voters registered.”<sup>125</sup> Consistent with the 1867 voter registration docket book of Liberty County, at least 303 white men

---

<sup>124</sup> Edmund L. Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia: A Splendid Failure* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Russell Duncan, *Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen* (The University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>125</sup> “Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Forty-Second Congress, 1871-72”, Congressional Series of United States Public Documents, Volume 1490, 855.

registered and 825 black men registered to vote.<sup>126</sup> Similar to the action of filing claims to the Southern Claims Commission, a commission established for the sole purpose of white loyalists to recoup losses due to the looting of the Union during the Civil War, black men were signaling that they were ready to vote and participate in first class citizenship.<sup>127</sup>

As Elsa Barkley Brown asserts when discussing freedpeople in Reconstruction-era Virginia, voting was a family affair that included men and women.<sup>128</sup> One of the principal reasons that black men in Liberty County were able to pay poll taxes on their farms was due to the family effort of raising animals, planting crops, and the upkeep of the farms. As substantiated by the narratives of the Stevens, Williams, and the majority of landowning black families in Liberty County, men, women, children and other kin in the community worked to make their farms profitable. These profits allowed the black community to vote and pay poll taxes until the systematic disenfranchisement of more than two thousand black men in 1898.<sup>129</sup>

During the late nineteenth century, the black citizens of Liberty County methodically purchased land, educated their children, and participated in electoral politics. However, the progressive period of Reconstruction was coming to an end. This

---

<sup>126</sup> Returns of Qualified Voters and Reconstruction Oath Books, 1867-1869. Ancestry.Com.

<sup>127</sup> Frank Wysor Klingber, *Southern Claims Commission* (University of California Press, 1955), Gary B. Mills, *Southern Loyalists in the Civil War: The Southern Claims Commission* (Clearfield Company, Inc., 1994), Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South*, Susanna Michelle Lee, *Claiming the Union: Citizenship in the Post-Civil War South* (North Carolina State University, 2014).

<sup>128</sup> Elsa Barkley Brown. "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880," in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

<sup>129</sup> Disqualified Voter List, June 27, 1898." Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

was evident at both the state and local levels. In Georgia, there had been an increase in political racist ideology with the Bourbon Democrats of the 1870s and 1880s who advocated white supremacy and the safeguarding of Confederate ideals.<sup>130</sup> In 1887 the Georgia state legislature passed the cumulative poll tax that effectively disenfranchised the majority of black voters. The law specified that prior to voting, citizens had to pay all back taxes owed to the state.<sup>131</sup> And between 1898 and 1900, the state legislature had adopted and created the all-white Democratic Primaries that excluded black men from voting in state elections.<sup>132</sup>

The municipality of Liberty County also took measures to disenfranchise black citizens. In June of 1898 Liberty County issued a “Disqualified Voter List” list which systematically disenfranchised 2,958 men, the great majority of them being landowning black men.<sup>133</sup> In addition, tactics such as grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and poll taxes were systematically utilized by Democratic governments throughout the South to prohibit black men from voting in elections.<sup>134</sup> By the 1910s, the majority of African-American men had been purged from the local voting registry.

## **Community Organizing in Local Institutions**

During Reconstruction black families sent their children to schools to receive a formal education. For black people during Reconstruction, literacy was not only political

---

<sup>130</sup> Kenneth Coleman, *A History of Georgia*, 222-223, Buddy Sullivan, *Georgia: A State History* (The Georgia Historical Society, 2003), 122-123.

<sup>131</sup> John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, 94.

<sup>132</sup> John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, 95.

<sup>133</sup> “Disqualified Voter List, June 27, 1898” Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia. I am currently using Ancestry.com to determine the demographic data of those listed. From the number who I have identified, the majority are land owning African-American men.

<sup>134</sup> Coleman, *A History of Georgia*, 279.

but also empowering for blacks. In *Schooling the Freed People*, Ronald Butchart acknowledges the power inherent in education for newly freed African Americans. When recounting the demand from blacks for education following emancipation, he writes that “they had spent more than two centuries observing the powerful with formal learning, as well as the poor largely without it, and knew that the codes of power that lay in literacy were essential to a people who were to continue to live among whites, both the powerful and the powerless.”<sup>135</sup> Many black communities actively sought education during the 1860s and were successful in establishing freedmen schools.

Following emancipation, the black citizens of Liberty County, Georgia urged their black congressman, William Golding, to find them a teacher so that they and their children could receive an education. Golding served a brief stint in the Georgia House of Representatives in 1868 before being expelled later that same year. He was once again reinstated following the militarization of Georgia in 1870.<sup>136</sup> Golding had originally received funds from the Freedmen’s Bureau to support the homestead school in which his wife taught classes. In addition, Golding wrote several letters to the American Missionary Association, an abolitionist and benevolent organization, in order to receive funds for a permanent school building and for qualified teachers. By 1871 the AMA had taken over complete financial and educational control of the school. The freedmen school

---

<sup>135</sup> Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>136</sup> Kenneth Coleman and Charles S. Gruff. *Dictionary of Georgia Biography* (University of Georgia Press, 1983), 350. Herd-Clark further details the work of Golding in donating land and soliciting money from various organizations to educate African Americans in Liberty County.



was later named Dorchester Academy, in honor of the eighteenth-century settlers of Liberty County.<sup>137</sup>

Liberty County serves as a unique case study when discussing freedpeople and their quest for education. For one, African Americans owned land in the county which they would use to maintain their autonomy. This insulated sphere of black culture would flourish into a burgeoning political community. According to an early principal at Dorchester Academy “days may be spent at the above without seeing the face of a native white person.”<sup>138</sup> There was interaction between black and white citizens during the late nineteenth century, such as business with land, work, and politics, however there seems to have been little social interaction between the two groups. And as the demographic had not changed in the last four decades of the twentieth century, with more than sixty percent of the county being black, thirty-five to forty percent white, and less than one percent other, the concept of black and white would remain the demographic norm for the county throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Although freedpeople organized and established means to formally educate their children, Geechee parents and extended kin members continued to educate the youth of the community by teaching them cultural traditions. This passing on of traditions can be seen by viewing the agricultural production of the black Liberty County community.

---

<sup>137</sup> Dawn Herd-Clark, “Dorchester Academy: The American Missionary Association in Liberty County, Georgia, 1867-1950” (PhD. Diss., University of Florida, 1999). The American Missionary Association: History of Church and School at McIntosh, GA” ca. 1890s. No. A1429. A.M.A. Archives. The Amistad Research Center. Tulane University. New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>138</sup> “Dorchester Academy, Liberty County, and the Ancient Midway Church” pamphlet. A.M.A. Archives No. A1316. American Missionary Association archives addenda, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Fathers and mothers worked the farm to afford the tuition to send their children to school. And it was common for the younger children to simultaneously attend school and work on the family farm. For example, landownership afforded the Stevens family the opportunity to send their youngest children to school. As the Stevens family grew a great deal of corn, rice, and sweet potatoes, which are all labor-intensive crops, the family needed the older children to stay home and work on the farm. The cultivation of rice illustrates the Geechee people's connections to their African ancestors and the continuation of traditions to the following generations. By the postbellum period this practice of rice cultivation had been passed down for generations within the local black community. On the family farm men, women, and children learned to cultivate crops, measure and sell the products at fair prices to local stores and other kin in the community, and maintain and accumulate property.<sup>139</sup>

Another way freedpeople exercised their freedom was by attending churches of their choosing. During slavery, many of the plantation owners either held church services on their plantations or allowed the bondspeople to attend services at Midway Congregational Church. Many of the bondspeople sat in the gallery of the church, an area in the balconies that segregated whites from blacks, a seating assignment that further reiterated the socio-economic divide between free and enslaved. In the Reconstruction period, African Americans in the county took the liberty to join other denominations and churches. Some of the black community continued associating with the Congregational

---

<sup>139</sup> Prince Steven's testimony before the Commission of Claims, July, 17, 1873. U.S. Claims Commission. Ancestry.com. Georgia Returns of Qualified Voters and Reconstruction Oath Books, 1867-1869. Ancestry.com

Church but the vast majority organized their own churches led by black ministers who were not under the supervision of white denominations.

In 1874, more than a hundred African Americans organized to form a Congregational church in the county.<sup>140</sup> The Midway Congregational Church had been burnt down by Union soldiers during the Civil War. By 1876, the number of congregants had doubled to two hundred and six members.<sup>141</sup> That same year, the building of the church costing \$2,000 had begun construction and was completed in 1882.<sup>142</sup> Reverend Floyd Snelson, an African-American minister who worked for the American Missionary Association and who became the first principle of Dorchester Academy, lamented that getting people to join the church was a laborious task in which he and his wife traveled “from house to house” to recruit members.<sup>143</sup> The 1870 census shows that there were 5,260 African Americans in the county.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the small number of congregants at the Congregational Church is still disproportionately minute in regards to the larger black community.

---

<sup>140</sup> “The American Missionary Association, 56 Reade Street, New York, History of Church and School at McIntosh, GA” pamphlet at the Amistad Research Center. (dated ca. 1890’s). A.M.A. Archives No. A1429. Information can also be found in XXVIII Annual Report of the A.M.A. Oct. 28-29, 1874.

<sup>141</sup> “The American Missionary Association, 56 Reade Street, New York, History of Church and School at McIntosh, GA” pamphlet at the Amistad Research Center. (dated ca. 1890’s). A.M.A. Archives No. A1429. Information originally located in the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> A.M.A. Annual Reports.

<sup>142</sup> “The American Missionary Association: History of Church and School at McIntosh, GA” ca. 1890s. No. A1429. A.M.A. Archives. American Missionary Association archives addenda, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>144</sup> Ninth Census – Volume I. The Statistics of the Population of the United States Embracing The Tables of Race, Nationality, Sex, Selected Ages, and Occupations...From the Original Returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870) under the Directions of the Secretary of the Interior, by Francis A. Walker, Superintendent of Census. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872, 21.

Creating their own churches also had political implications. As Leon Litwack notes, "With emancipation, however, those restraints could no longer be enforced, and black-controlled churches and preachers not responsible to the master would become principal influences in the lives of the freedmen."<sup>145</sup> Between 1864 and 1885 black Liberty Countians founded at least eight churches in the county. The first church founded in the county was the First African Baptist Church (1864) which was located in Riceboro.<sup>146</sup> The Riceboro Presbyterian Church was founded two years later.<sup>147</sup> Midway Temple Presbyterian church was founded in 1868.<sup>148</sup> The Zion Baptist Association, founded in 1865, was an association that comprised several Baptist churches in the county, and possibly in other counties.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (Vintage Books, 1979), 469.

<sup>146</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 21, 1945 noted that the church was celebrating their 81<sup>st</sup> anniversary.

<sup>147</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. September 6, 1945. In 1945 the church celebrated its 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<sup>148</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. July 19, 1945. The issue noted that the church was celebrating its 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<sup>149</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, July 19, 1945. The 1945 issue states that the women's auxiliary of the Zion Baptist Association read the report of the auxiliary and the association.

Church	Year Founded
First African Baptist Church	1864
Riceboro Presbyterian Church	1866
Midway Temple Presbyterian	1868
Midway Congregational Church	1874
Beach Hill Baptist Church	1877
Ebenezer Presbyterian Church	1885
Macedonia Baptist Church	1887
Riceboro Baptist Church	1901

Table 2. Churches in Liberty County founded between 1864 and 1901. Information compiled from The Savannah Tribune.

The dates of these churches coincide with emancipation. As scholars have shown, the black church had multiple functions for freedpeople. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya notes that following emancipation the black church was one of the few “totally controlled and independent institutions.”<sup>150</sup> During the Reconstruction period, African Americans used churches for religious, social and educational purposes. In Liberty County, the AMA attempted to convert freedpeople to the Congregationalist denomination. However, in the tradition of demonstrating their freedom, African Americans left the Midway Congregational Church and founded their own churches. The community would continue to use the cultural institutions of churches in the early

---

<sup>150</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University Press, 1990), 15.

twentieth century to raise funds for local causes, to practice traditional spiritual beliefs, and to socialize with other community members.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the expansion of de jure and de facto Jim Crow system in the South and the eventual disenfranchisement of black men, the black community of Liberty County continued to build community and exercise aspects of citizenship in spaces outside of the polls. African Americans in the county organized in the spaces of their local churches, homes, and at Dorchester Academy. Black community members continued to purchase land and maintain ownership due to the extensive kinship networks formed during slavery and maintained through grassroots initiatives of collective community uplift. By the early twentieth century these long-standing relationships of kinship and the large-scale possession of land created an insular environment in which men, women, and children lived life relatively free of physical violence prevalent in other Southern locals. The community structure created by black Liberty Countians also enabled them to organize, strategize, and participate in electoral politics in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **LAND AND COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900-1940**

By the beginning of the twentieth century the practice of accumulating property through one's lifetime and deeding land to his or her offspring had become a time-honed tradition for the black community of Liberty County. During Reconstruction, African Americans in the county methodically purchased land and strategized to maintain and ensure that ownership remained within the local black community. These strategies, which included deeding land to their progeny and marrying other community members who owned land, effectively created several all-black enclaves which afforded the community some security in the racist environment of the Jim-Crow South. And although the black community did not enjoy the rights of the first-class citizenship that were readily available to whites, the prevalence of black land ownership in the county afforded them some privileges not afforded to other southern African Americans. These intergenerational landowning practices were developed during slavery and methodically utilized throughout the twentieth century as a survival mechanism to resist the physical and psychic degradation integral in the emerging Jim Crow system.

This chapter offers an overview of landownership in the county. First, it analyzes the social, economic, and political environment in Georgia during the early twentieth century that cumulated with the majority of African Americans working as sharecroppers. The prevalence of sharecropping in the first decades of the twentieth century, coupled with the legislative and social dimensions of Jim Crow segregation, further served to

create an environment in which African Americans in the state were relegated to second-class citizenship, a sharp contrast to their experiences during the progressive period of Reconstruction.

This chapter traces the deeding practices of several African-American families in Liberty County to better examine the particular conditions that fostered a community in which most of the black citizenry owned land. For generations, black land ownership in the county had been a mechanism for economic democracy, a buffer for racism, and a way to pass on an inheritance to progeny. By the twentieth century many families had owned land in the county for generations. If viewed collectively, these clusters of large farms created several all-black enclaves and neighborhoods in the county. I argue, that these neighborhoods, composed of hundreds of black landowning families with established kinship ties, created an environment that offered some reprieve or buffer from the racist and dangerous violence experienced in other locales in Georgia.

And as it is important to understand the ways the community maintained ownership of the land, this section will pay attention to the deeding practices developed by the black landowners in the early-twentieth century and the effects it had on the community structure. Many fathers, mothers, and other kin members deeded land to both their male and female progeny. These egalitarian land deeding practices established a community in which black women and men worked together, in public and in private places, to better their community.

## **Race and Landownership in the Jim Crow South**



During the early twentieth century, African-American communities migrated from the South in large numbers in search of better economic opportunities and to escape the racial violence and social inequity prevalent in Southern states. This Great Migration, specifically those during World War I, relocated large populations of African Americans to urban cities in the North, Midwest, and West. These wartime industrial booms encouraged African Americans to leave their homes in search of employment opportunities not available in the South. Cities like Chicago offered employment in the meatpacking industries and Detroit offered opportunities in the auto industry with companies like General Motors.<sup>151</sup> The black population in urban enclaves such as New York, Chicago, and Detroit grew exponentially between 1910 and 1920; New York grew from 91,709 to 152,467, Chicago from 44,103 to 109,458, and Detroit from 5,741 to 40,838.<sup>152</sup>

Scholars have also shown that the migration of African Americans was not confined to the North and Midwest; black citizens from the deep south states of Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi migrated to southern states like Texas and to Midwestern states like Nevada in search of first class citizenship.<sup>153</sup> Following the Civil War, African Americans in rural Georgia also migrated to urban cities such as Atlanta.<sup>154</sup> Although

---

<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Anne Martin, *Detroit and the Great Migration, 1916-1929*. (The University of Michigan, 1993), 4-6. Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 12-13.

<sup>152</sup> James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>153</sup> Bernadette Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941* (Texas A&M University Press, 2013). Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Beacon Press, 2005),

<sup>154</sup> Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 44-45.

these black migrants discovered better economic opportunities, they also experienced inequality and inequity in employment, voting, education, and housing.<sup>155</sup>

African Americans in southern locales fared no better. Southern states such as Georgia saw little industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By 1900, black workers in the state were limited to several fields such as the textile industry, the emerging railroad system, agriculture, domestic service, and in lumber and turpentine production.<sup>156</sup> For the first decades of the twentieth century the chief industry of Georgia remained agriculture with the major export being cotton.<sup>157</sup> In Georgia, the vast majority of African Americans who worked in agriculture worked as part owners of farms or as sharecroppers.

Sharecropping was an economically exploitative system in which laborers worked the land of a farmer and in turn paid him a share of their crops at the end of harvest season. This labor system grew out of contractual labor compromises between plantation owners and freedpeople following the end of slavery. Ideally, the sharecropper would work the land, earn a good yield, pay a portion of the crop to the landowner, and have sufficient crop to support his or her family and make a profit.<sup>158</sup> Unfortunately, sharecropping rarely worked this way. Prior to planting the crops, the sharecropper usually depended on the landowner or a merchant for supplies, seeds, and fertilizer. After harvesting the crop, giving a large portion of it to the landowner to pay for rent, and

---

<sup>155</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (First Vintage Books, 2010). Jeanne F. Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, and Matthew Countryman, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Movements Outside the South, 1940-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>156</sup> Buddy Sullivan, *Georgia: A State History*, 129.

<sup>157</sup> Willard Range, *A Century of Georgia Agriculture* (University of Georgia Press, 1954), 169-170.

<sup>158</sup> Edward Royce, *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping* (Temple University Press, 1993), 181-192.

repaying the landowner or merchant for supplies, the sharecropper typically ended the harvest season in debt.<sup>159</sup>

This debt peonage system was widely practiced in Georgia. In 1900, African Americans in the state of Georgia operated 82,826 farms. Only 9,547, or 11.5%, were full owners of the farms. A small percentage of black farmers, approximately 2.1%, were part owners of farms, meaning that they operated land they owned and land they rented from others. Most farms were maintained by cash tenants and sharecroppers: 41.9%, were maintained by cash tenants, those who paid cash rent for the farms, and the remaining 44% of farms in Georgia were operated by sharecroppers.<sup>160</sup>

Some scholars refer to the economic system of sharecropping as another form of slavery as it consisted of a perpetual system in which the sharecropper was indebted to the land owner. In *Slavery By Another Name*, Douglas A. Blackmon rightly notes that sharecropping was connected to other forms of racial inequity such as the prevalence of chain gang labor of African Americans and the disenfranchisement of black men.<sup>161</sup> Thus, sharecropping can be considered as one manner in which African Americans were economically subordinated during the early twentieth century.

Despite the economic exploitation of African Americans in the state of Georgia, there were some populaces of the state who purchased land and maintained ownership

---

<sup>159</sup> Buddy Sullivan, *Georgia: A State History* (Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 133.

<sup>160</sup> "Table 2. – Farms, June 1, 1900, of White and Colored farmers, and of Specified Area, Principal Source of Income, and Value of Products of 1899 Not Fed to Live Stock, Classified by Tenure by States and Territories – Continued." *Census Reports, Volume V. Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900. Agriculture Part I, Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products*. (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 6-7.) By 1900, out of 81,603 owners of farms, only 9,547 were African Americans.

<sup>161</sup> Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in American From the Civil War to World War II* (Doubleday, 2008).

throughout the early-twentieth century; one of those areas being coastal Georgia. One factor that may have influenced this large-scale ownership of land can be found in the rice culture practiced on coastal plantations in the antebellum period. During slavery, the coastal counties of Liberty, McIntosh, and Glynn were composed of sizable rice plantations that depended on a large population of bondspeople. In tandem with the exigencies of rice culture was that of the informal economy in which enslaved people were allowed to own property.

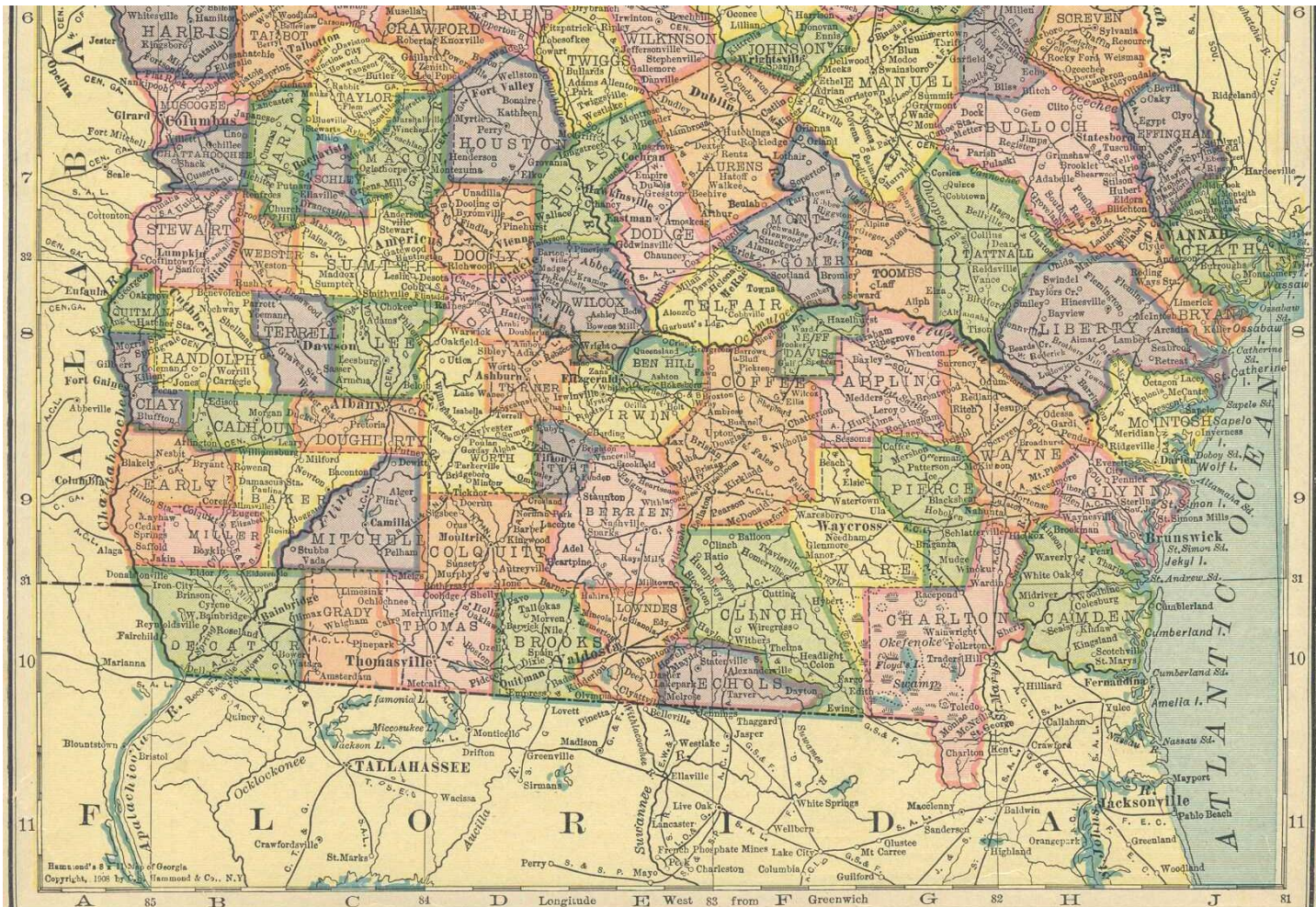


Figure 4. Map of Georgia, 1910. Liberty, McIntosh, and Glynn counties are in the southeast region of the state. Hammond International Atlas, 1910. Georgia Digital Map Library.

In the Reconstruction era freedpeople capitalized on these geographic features and used their savings and kinship connections to purchase land in their respective counties. By 1900, each of these counties had black majorities; in Liberty County there were 4,479 whites and 8,614 blacks, in McIntosh there were 1,456 whites and 5,081 blacks, and in Glynn there were 5,200 whites and 9,104 blacks.<sup>162</sup> The large populations of African Americans, the owning of property during slavery and in freedom, and their agricultural knowledge of rice and other crops proved essential in purchasing land during Reconstruction and maintaining ownership in the early twentieth century.

### **Geechee Landowning Practices and Traditions in Liberty County**

African Americans in Liberty County had established land owning practices during emancipation and Reconstruction. During the twentieth century, the descendants of the community continued purchasing property and deeding the land to their offspring, further strengthening kinship ties. Land deeding served the dual purpose of maintaining family and kinship relations and keeping outsiders from entering the community. By the early twentieth century, many families continued the practice of deeding parcels of their land to their children and grandchildren, simultaneously insuring that their progeny had wealth and that the land would remain within the black community.

By 1900, African Americans owned 72.2% of the farms in Liberty County. Out of 1,710 farms, whites maintained 572 farms and blacks 1,138 farms. Of those 1,138, 793 were full owners, meaning that African-American farmers fully owned 46% of the farms

---

<sup>162</sup> "Table 19. – White, Negro, and Indian Population By Counties, 1880 to 1900", 533-534. U.S. Census Population, Part I. (Washington, 1901), 533-534.



in the county. Although this is somewhat proportional to the county, as African Americans made up 66% of the population that year, the number of African-American farm owners was substantially higher than the state average.<sup>163</sup> In 1900, only 4% of black farmers in the state of Georgia fully owned their farms.<sup>164</sup> The number of black sharecroppers were also disproportionate to the state average. In Liberty County, of the 1,710 farms, African-American sharecroppers only accounted for 4% of this farming classification compared to the state average of 16%.<sup>165</sup> By 1934, African Americans in Liberty County operated 834 farms. 560 of those farms, or 67%, were operated by full owners, accounting for 23,000 acres of land.<sup>166</sup> These figures show that African Americans in Liberty County had strategically maintained ownership of land throughout the early twentieth century.

Scholarship that focus on the history of Georgia demonstrate that this large-scale land ownership was not the norm for southern African Americans. In her study of Southwestern Georgia, Susan O'Donovan uses the concept of the "socio-ecological order" to explain the ways in which the landscape of the region shaped its social order. African Americans in this portion of the state had a history vastly different than those in the southeast. Southwestern Georgia was not settled by white citizens until the early nineteenth century. In a quest to rapidly clear lands to plant cotton, plantation owners

---

<sup>163</sup> "Table 19. – White, Negro, and Indian Population, by Counties: 1880 – 1900 – Continued." U.S. Census Office. Twelfth Census, 1900. Reports 1. Population 1. Part 1 (Washington, 1901), 578.

<sup>164</sup> In 1900, 9,547 of 224,691 farms operated in the state of Georgia were fully owned by African Americans. "Table 3. – Farms, June 1, 1900, of White and Colored Farmers, and of Specified Area, Classified By Principal Source of Income, By States and Territories – Continued." Census Reports, Volume V. Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900. Agriculture Part I, Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products (Washington: United States Census Office 1902), 21.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Robert Long Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 91.

often disrupted families, preferring to purchase young men and women rather than entire families.<sup>167</sup> Although enslaved African Americans in Southwestern Georgia organized in churches during slavery to form community, they lacked established kinship networks prevalent in other regions of the state. Following emancipation, freedpeople in that region failed to receive much assistance from the federal government. Thus, “they were left deeply reliant on those who had once owned them, not only for wage-paying jobs but for the cabins they lived in [and] the food they ate.”<sup>168</sup> These factors made it nearly impossible for freedpeople to purchase land in Southwestern Georgia during Reconstruction or in the early twentieth century.

This large-scale land ownership by African Americans also seems abnormal for other Southern locales. In the 1939 cultural study of a rural community in Mississippi, Hortense Powdermaker indicates that land ownership and status in the black community was inextricably linked to one’s ancestor’s work as a house servant during slavery or one’s multiracial heritage.<sup>169</sup> For African Americans in coastal Georgia, land ownership was a result of intergenerational work of land accumulation and land deeding practices that had its origins in slavery.

In Liberty County, as well as in other coastal counties such as Glynn and McIntosh, African Americans purchased property and maintained ownership throughout the Jim Crow era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>170</sup> It is highly probable that

---

<sup>167</sup> Susan Eva O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 20-26.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>169</sup> Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (The Viking Press, 1939).

<sup>170</sup> In *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, John Dittmer notes that in 1910, McIntosh County, a county thirty-eight miles south of Liberty County, 87% of black farmers owned their farms, 25.

several factors accounted for this large-scale black land ownership in coastal Georgia such as the prevalence of the informal economy system practiced during slavery, the physical destruction of plantations in these areas and the subsequent loss of property of white land owners during the Civil War period, and the role of Reconstruction-era political systems such as the Freedmen's Bureau, military occupation by the federal government, and the presence of sympathetic Republican officials. African Americans in the coastal regions of Georgia, particularly those of Liberty County, took advantage of these opportunities and created strategies to purchase and maintain ownership of land.

A prominent example of black Liberty Countians purchasing property during Reconstruction and maintaining ownership can be seen with the Morrison family. William and Patsey Morrison were land owning farmers in Liberty County. It is likely that both William and Patsey learned the agricultural practices of growing and selling crops as bondspeople during slavery. By 1870, thirty-one-year-old William and twenty-one-year-old Patsey worked as farmers, although Patsey was listed as "keeping house" on the census.<sup>171</sup> By 1880, the Morrison household consisted of Patsey and William, their six children, and Patsey's sixty-year-old mother, Sarah Cassels. In addition to teaching their children the family business, the couple also sent their oldest children to school.<sup>172</sup> It is

---

<sup>171</sup> The categorization of "keeping house" usually entailed working on one's farm, cleaning house, and caring for one's children. It also signified that many black women in the county did not work outside their homes. In Chapter 2: Emancipation and the Limits of Citizenship, I provide numerous examples of how land ownership allowed black women to "keep house" and work to uplift their families and their community during the Reconstruction period of the 1860s and 1870s.

<sup>172</sup> U. S. Census 1870 and U.S. Census 1880. Ancestry.com.



likely that Sarah also did some work on the farm, assisted with chores in the house, and helped raise her grandchildren.<sup>173</sup>

During their marriage, Patsey and William Morrison accumulated approximately one hundred acres of land. After William Morrison died in 1899, he deeded ten acres of land to his new wife, Corrine, and left the vast majority of his estate to his children. His will specified that each of his twelve children receive eighty-five acres to “be equally divided between the above named children after Jurnia Morrison arrives to the age of maturity.”<sup>174</sup> As Jurnia, the youngest child, was only two years old at the time of his death, William Morrison ensured that all of his children owned property, had the means to be financially secure, and held stake in the local black community.

Because the youngest Morrison children ranged in age from sixteen to three years old, an older sibling, U.H. Morrison, took over the care of the children and became the steward of their property. In 1900, twenty-eight-year old U.H. Morrison and his newly-wed wife, twenty-three-year-old Mary, had no children.<sup>175</sup> It is likely that Morrison took over the care of his siblings because he was married, owned land, and had several profitable occupations. Like his father William, U. H. Morrison worked as a farmer and was the pastor of the Zion Baptist Church.<sup>176</sup> He also worked as a federal mail carrier for several years prior to the state-wide dismissal of black federal employees that occurred

---

<sup>173</sup> U.S. census for 1880, 15<sup>th</sup> District, Liberty County. Ancestry.com.

<sup>174</sup> “Last Will and Testament of William A. Morrison”, July 3, 1899. Ancestry.com

<sup>175</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Liberty County. 1359 G.M. District. Ancestry.com

<sup>176</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 12, 1920. Vol. XXXV. Number 17. Several of the newspaper articles note that U.H. Morrison had been pastor of the church for more than twenty years.

in the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>177</sup> This familial relation and job security qualified Morrison to be the steward of his siblings and their property.

U.H. and Mary Morrison also housed two of the adult Morrison sisters. Rosa, twenty-two, and Louisa, twenty, both worked as teachers in the county. And although their father had deeded them land, the women still lived with U.H. and Mary.<sup>178</sup> The living situation of Rosa and Louisa Morrison raises several questions: Was this living arrangement orchestrated by the young women? Perhaps they chose to live with their older brother because they did not have sufficient capital to build houses on their land. Or was it a local practice that only allowed widowed women to live alone, even if the woman owned property?

Nonetheless, the common practice of deeding land to both sexes is significant and indicative of the egalitarian land-deeding practices of Geechee people. The biographies of Rhina Mallard and Katherine Frasier exemplify the interconnectedness of kinship, land, and gender equity of the black community. Rhina Mallard was born in slavery in 1857 on one of the many rice plantations in Liberty County, Georgia. By 1900 she was widowed and owned land in the county.<sup>179</sup> Mallard valued family. She raised at least five children and several of her grandchildren, including Mary LeConte. Mallard could neither read or write but recognized the importance of formal education. She enrolled LeConte and another of her granddaughters into kindergarten at the Presbyterian church in

---

<sup>177</sup> "Post Master Appointment" of Ulysses H. Morrison, for Dec. 23, 1911, page 533. Ancestry.com.

<sup>178</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Liberty County. 1359 G.M. District. Ancestry.com.

<sup>179</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States – 1900. Ancestry.com.

Riceboro<sup>180</sup> and later paid for them to attend Dorchester Academy.<sup>181</sup> In addition to assuring that her progeny received a good education, Mallard also deeded her granddaughter property.

In 1936, Rhina Mallard sold Mary LeConte three acres of land for the sum of one dollar. At the time of the deeding, LeConte was a twenty-six-year-old, unmarried, teacher in the county. This deeding of land to her granddaughter is part of a larger tradition of African diasporic women understanding the power and benefits of land ownership, and purposefully assuring that their female progeny had access to that same power.<sup>182</sup> The three acres, which were adjacent to Mallard's property, further strengthened kinship bonds within the family and the larger community.

Landowning practices for women can also be seen with Katherine Frasier. Frasier was born in the county in 1872.<sup>183</sup> She was married by the age of seventeen<sup>184</sup> and by the age of thirty-eight had birthed nine children. Like most women in the county, Frasier worked at home, raising children, working the farm, and doing laundry for her family.<sup>185</sup> By 1930, Katherine Frasier was a fifty-six-year-old widow, who owned property, and was also raising a grandchild.<sup>186</sup> As was community custom, Frasier sold her children a portion of her property. Rather than put the deed in her daughter, Wilhelmina Walthour's name,

---

<sup>180</sup> "Mary Baggs to Turn 100," *Coastal Courier*, July 19, 2010.

<sup>181</sup> Dawn Herd-Clark interviewing Dorothy Brenson and Mary Baggs, December 1994. Compact discs housed at the Dorchester Academy Museum. Midway, Georgia.

<sup>182</sup> Warranty Deed from Rhina Mallard to Mary LeConte, 16 July 1936. Deed Record Liberty County, Book AAC. pp. 570. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>183</sup> Census of 1880 for Liberty County, Georgia. Ancestry.com. Accessed June 15, 2015.

<sup>184</sup> Georgia, Marriage Records From Select Counties, 1828-1978. Ancestry.com. Accessed June 15, 2015.

<sup>185</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population. Ancestry.com.

<sup>186</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Ancestry.com.

in January 1928 Frasier sold her son in law, William McKinley Walthour, twenty acres of land for five dollars. Although she did not deed the land directly to her daughter, the property was adjacent to her own thus enabling Frasier to spend time with her daughter, and to pass generational knowledge to her grandchildren.<sup>187</sup> It is also important to note that Katherine Frasier deeded the land to her son-in-law following the death of her husband, further demonstrating the power that black women who owned land possessed in the county.

For another pertinent example of gender equity in the community we must revisit the genealogy of the Stevens family. Based on the informal economy system prevalent in the coastal regions of Georgia, Prince and Drucilla Stevens had purchased property during slavery. By 1908 the Stevens family had accumulated 495 acres of land valued at \$1400.<sup>188</sup> In 1909, a year after Prince Stevens' death, his family petitioned the Court of Ordinary of Liberty County to appoint a family member as steward over the family's vast estate. Rather than list his widow, seventy-nine-year-old Drucilla Stevens, or any of his sons as steward, the family selected Mary Stevens, one of Prince and Drucilla's younger daughters, as temporary administrator of the estate. Born after emancipation in 1875, Mary Stevens had been educated in the county. By 1909, she was thirty-four-years old, educated, and unmarried with no children. In 1910, prior to overseeing her family's

---

<sup>187</sup> Warranty Deed from Katherine Frasier to William M. Walthour, 9 January, 1928. Deed Record Liberty County, Book AAC pp. 571. Liberty Count Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>188</sup> The Will of Prince Stevens, dated February 2, 1909. Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Ancestry.com.

estate, Mary and her mother Drucilla lived with her younger brother Charlie Stevens and his family.<sup>189</sup>

Mary Stevens' appointment as temporary administrator of her family's estate was not atypical for the county. By the early twentieth century, black women in the county owned land. In many cases, husbands died and left their land and property to their widows. In other cases, such as that of Mallard and Frasier, mothers deeded property to their daughters and granddaughters. By the mid-twentieth century it was common for both men and women to own property.<sup>190</sup> In Mary Stevens' case, her formal education in school and extensive knowledge of farm administration assured family members that she would properly manage the property and keep the assets within the family.

The black community of Liberty County was insular and at times, people did not record their land claims or the deeding of property through the local court system. This is most likely because kinfolk who lived in the community knew the history of family members and neighbors and recognized their claims to property. This process of land recognition can be seen with the Williams Family. Although Sumpter Williams died in 1917, a deed for his property was not filed in the court of Liberty County until 1982. The affiant, Mack H. Jones, was a neighbor of the Williams family. In the affidavit, Jones recounted the entire genealogy of the Williams family. According to Jones, Sumpter received the land by Warranty Deed from his father Sam Bo Williams. However, the deed

---

<sup>189</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population (Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census). Ancestry.com

<sup>190</sup> Warranty Deed from Katherine Frasier to William M. Walthour, 9 January, 1928. Deed Record Liberty County, Book AAC pp. 571. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia. In 1928, Frasier sold her son-in-law Walthour 25 acres for the sum of \$5. Warranty Deed from Rhina Mallard to Mary LeConte, 16 July 1936. Deed Record Liberty County, Book AAC. pp. 570. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

was never recorded and was subsequently lost in a fire in 1915.<sup>191</sup> Jones then recounted the names of all the children and grandchildren of Sumpter Williams who held claim to the property. And as Mack H. Jones was only three years old in 1915, it is likely that he learned about the family deeding practices of the Williams family from other family and community members of the county.

Another case of community members testifying to determine the status of a land claim is that of Mike Hicks. Born in 1857, Hicks worked as a farmer for much of his life. In 1880, Hicks owned twelve acres of land.<sup>192</sup> His mother, forty-seven-year-old Hetty, assisted with work on the farm.<sup>193</sup> Hicks died in 1925 owning approximately thirty acres of land. Although he had no will at the time of his death his daughter and sole heir, Carie Hicks Simmons, inherited the property.<sup>194</sup> According to the affidavit of Lucinda Stevens given at the deed hearing in 1975, “there was no administration upon his estate and none was necessary.”<sup>195</sup> It appears that for more than fifty years, community members recognized and respected the property of Mike Hicks and did not attempt to steal his land.

These cases demonstrate that the black community often relied on community and kinship relations to determine the rights of landowners. As Dylan Penningroth notes in *The Claims of Kinfolk*, this practice of property recognition originated during the antebellum period. And as many of the affidavits were recorded in the late twentieth

---

<sup>191</sup> Affidavit Mack H. Jones. Land Deed Book 256 page 278. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>192</sup> U.S. Census, 1880, Production of Agriculture in Liberty County, Georgia. Ancestry.com

<sup>193</sup> 1880 U.S. Census. Liberty County, 15<sup>th</sup> District. Ancestry.com.

<sup>194</sup> Born in 1879, Carie Hick Simmons had no children. After she died, her husband Duncan Simmons maintained ownership of the land. Duncan married Lucinda Simmons, and after he died she became owner of the land.

<sup>195</sup> Affidavit of Lucinda Stevens, heir to the property of Mike Hicks. June 23, 1975. Deed Book 135, page 291. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

century, it is evident that members of the black community continued this informal manner of recognizing and respecting the claims of land in the county. These cases also demonstrate that by the twentieth century, African Americans in Liberty County had strategically created a community that was insular and protected from outsiders who sought to purchase land or violently harm community members.

### **The Various Uses of Land in the Black Community**

Focusing solely on the use of land as economic capital obfuscates the significance of land ownership for early-twentieth century African-American communities. Scholars have routinely discussed land ownership in purely economic terms. In his study of *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, John Dittmer notes that several of the coastal counties in Georgia, which were uniformly majority-black, had a high proportion of African Americans who accumulated property during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In his analysis, Dittmer raises the relevant points that in comparison to white populations in those counties, African Americans owned proportionately smaller plots of land.<sup>196</sup> This smaller acreage is important because it highlights the fact that even in locales in which they were the majority, there remained obstacles that prohibited African Americans from purchasing land in large quantities. One could also argue that these smaller amounts of acreage owned by black citizens was a result of families deeding land to all their offspring, which is evidenced by the landowning traditions in Liberty County.

In addition to its use as means of income and subsistence, for the black community land signified a safe space. When used collectively, land ownership afforded entire

---

<sup>196</sup> John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era 1900-1920* (University of Illinois Press, 1977), 25.

communities security from the racial violence prevalent in the Jim Crow South. These strategies of twentieth-century black Liberty Countians creating all-black enclaves in the community can be termed strategic insularity. For example, by deeding an eighty-five-acre tract of land to all twelve of his children, William Morrison ensured that all his children, and their families, remained in close proximity to each other. This land deeding tradition practiced by the larger community also served to create all-black enclaves throughout the county. This process of strategic insularity effectively created spaces that served to insulate the community and keep out outsiders who may have wished physical harm on community members.

To appreciate the level of security that land ownership afforded the community, one must look at the manners in which children in the county traveled to school. During the early twentieth century, the majority of children walked up to ten miles to school each day.<sup>197</sup> At times, parents who owned automobiles drove their children to school. And in 1942, the Liberty County Board of Education partnered with the American Missionary Association to purchase one school bus for the black children of the county.<sup>198</sup> However, for the large majority of black children in the early twentieth century, it was customary to walk many miles to and from school each day.

By 1935, the county operated twenty-seven public schools to educate African-American children. Most of these were one-teacher schools and were often substandard in comparison to the white schools of the county. Per the 1951 "School Survey Summary

---

<sup>197</sup> Chad M. Stevens, "Dorchester Academy" A.M.A. Archives No. A 1315. ARC., 5.

<sup>198</sup> Letter from Fred L. Brownlee to H.A. Bacon, October 2, 1942. Fred Brownlee was the General Secretary of the American Missionary Association and H.A. Bacon was the Superintendent of Schools of Liberty County. Georgia Archives. Morrow, Georgia.



Report”, these schools were strategically located throughout the various black communities of the county.<sup>199</sup> Dorchester Academy, the private school operated by the American Missionary Association and founded in the county in 1871, was considered the most elite school in the area for black children.<sup>200</sup>

Although Dorchester Academy had residence halls to house boys and girls who stayed on campus, most students could barely afford the tuition and had to walk to school. Alice Walthour Frasier, who attended the school during the 1910s, walked to school each day.<sup>201</sup> Mildred Butler attended the school in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Although she stayed in the dorms during the twelfth grade, Butler attended a one-teacher school until she “had the opportunity to go to Dorchester.” She recounts that on her first day at Dorchester she had to walk up to six miles.<sup>202</sup> Teachers and administrators of Dorchester Academy also marveled at the distances to which children would travel to pursue an education.

An early-twentieth-century pamphlet published by the American Missionary Association noted that children walked up to nineteen miles a day and at times “their path through the cypress swamps is often ankle deep in water.” The pamphlet also noted that black children “must start before light in the morning and cannot reach home until

---

<sup>199</sup> “School Survey Summary Report (Negro Schools) of Liberty County.” Sponsored by the Liberty County Civic League. May 1951. The Amistad Research Center.

<sup>200</sup> Dorchester Academy was a freedmen school organized in 1870 in Liberty County. By 1871, the American Missionary Association had taken over complete financial and educational control of the school. By the twentieth century, the school was the premiere institution for black children in the county.

<sup>201</sup> Interview of Alice Walthour Frasier by Dawn Her-Clark on December 3, 1994. Compact disc housed at the Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

<sup>202</sup> Mildred Butler interviewed by Candida Hayes on July 23, 1999. Compact disc housed at the Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

long after dark.”<sup>203</sup> So why were these children, some as young as five or six years old, allowed to walk to school unattended?

One could argue that parents and kin members understood the importance of a formal education and thus allowed their children to travel without adult supervision to obtain it. It could also be argued that adults understood that it was safe to travel throughout the county because of the large networks of kin members who lived in the community.

To better understand the prevalence of children traveling unattended throughout the community, one must examine Dorchester Academy and the community in which it is located. Dorchester Academy was located in District 15, a district positioned in the center of Liberty County. By 1940, 2,216 people lived in the district, comprising approximately forty percent of the black community.<sup>204</sup> The other 3,302 community members were dispersed throughout the other seven districts of the county. Therefore, on their walk to school, African-American children were often surrounded by kin members, church members and other black community members. In 1940, only 316 white people lived in the district, and it is most likely that they were well acquainted with the black population of the county.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> “Dorchester Academy,” American Missionary Association pamphlet, circa 1924. The Amistad Research Center.

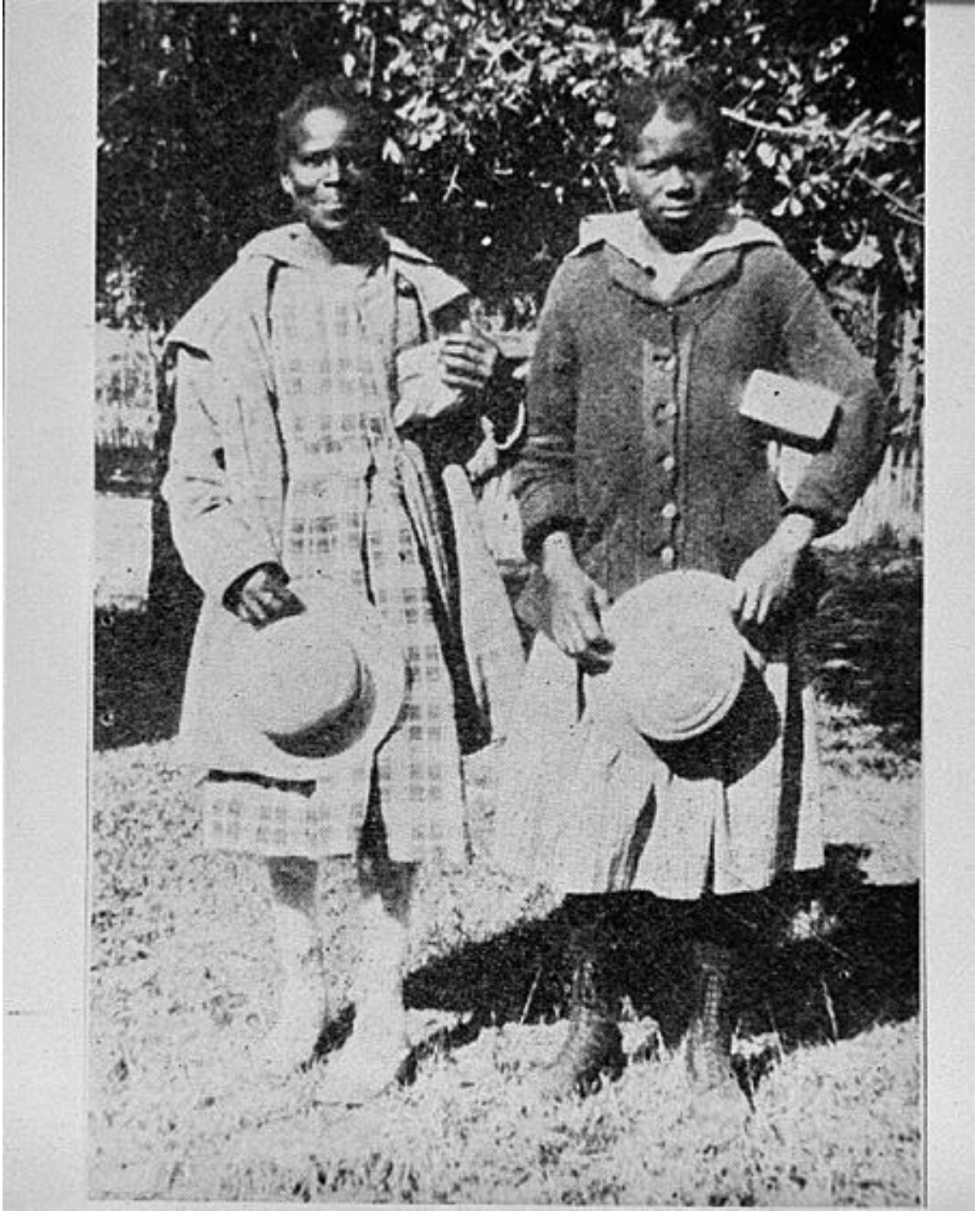
<sup>204</sup> By 1900 Liberty County had 15 military districts organized by tax, political, etc. Records indicate that . However, these military districts were artificial boundaries. For the historic origins of the Georgia Militia and the subsequent districting, see “Georgia Military District” by Alex M. Hitz, *Georgia Bar Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (February, 1956). Many of the districts were further divided into separate neighborhoods.

<sup>205</sup> “Table 28. – Race and Age, By Sex, With Rural-Farm Population, For Minor Civil Divisions, By Counties: 1940”. *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Characteristics of the Population.*, 338. In 1940, African Americans comprised most the population. Out of a population of 8,595, there were 5,518 African Americans in the county, accounting for 64% of the population.



Figure 5. Map of Liberty County School District, 1923. Dorchester Academy was located in the northern part of Military District 15 near the neighborhood of McIntosh. Throughout the early twentieth century black children from various towns and neighborhoods in the county walked miles to attend the school. Georgia Archives.

The methodical land purchases of African Americans throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had created several all black enclaves, such as the many neighborhoods in District 15. These rural neighborhoods comprised of numerous farms owned and operated by African Americans, were filled with families, kin groups, and community members who congregated at churches, attended school together, and belonged to the same fraternal organizations. By the early twentieth century, these neighborhoods afforded children, the most vulnerable segment of the society, the opportunity to attend schools safely.



*Figure 6.* Two Girls, Thebes Community, 1930s. African-American children routinely walked more than 10 miles a day to attend school at Dorchester Academy or another of the twenty-seven public schools in the county. The Thebes community is located between the cities of McIntosh and Riceboro in Liberty County. Georgia Archives.



## Conclusion

During the twentieth century, the African-American community in Liberty County maintained land owning practices established by their ancestors. The processes of strategic insularity, deeding land to both daughters and sons, and respecting the property of consanguineous kin and community members had created an insular community in which land owning was ubiquitous in the black community. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the black community used existing kinship networks to create local benevolent societies, raise funds to educate their youth, and establish a local barter system. Evidence shows that by the 1940s the black community established practices, such as pooling resources, to keep white people from purchasing land in several sections of the county that had been predominantly black for decades.

These land-owning practices proved useful in the decade to come, especially during the 1946 Democratic Primaries when black Georgians could participate in formal politics for the first time in more than thirty years. During the election, black Liberty Countians used land ownership as a buffer to organize and vote as they pleased. Because most black men and women worked on their own farms, they were less likely to face the loss of job security or other forms of coercion by white employers, neighbors or local officials when they exercised their right to vote. For early-twentieth-century black Liberty Countians, land ownership afforded them a range of economic, social, and political opportunities not readily available to African Americans in the Jim-Crow South

## **CHAPTER V**

### **COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900-1940**

Alice Walthour Frasier was born in Liberty County in 1903. Like many families in the county, her parents were landowning farmers. But although they possessed property, the family could not afford to send all of their children to Dorchester Academy, which by the early twentieth century had become the leading institution of education in the county for black children. Whereas her siblings attended public schools located in churches and other smaller buildings throughout the county, during the 1910s the teenaged Frasier secured money to attend Dorchester Academy by caring for her sister's children's. In exchange her brother-in-law paid the tuition for the school which cost forty cents a month. Attending school, however, did not excuse her from working on the family farm. Alice Walthour Frasier often spent the early morning completing farm and house chores, and afterward she walked up to three to four miles to school. She reminisced, "We didn't have no money to pay for boarding so of course we had to walk. We got up early in the morning and do what the devil our mother and father had us do. And then we get ready and start walking." In this manner, Frasier received both a formal education in school and a traditional Geechee education in which family members taught her agricultural practices and the traditions of the local black community.<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Interview of Alice Walthour Frasier by Dawn Her-Clark on December 3, 1994. Compact disc housed at the Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

Frasier's story exemplifies that of the structure of many black families of the county. The children either attended Dorchester Academy, the AMA freedmen school founded in the county in 1871, or another public school in the county, and in their spare time, assisted with work in the home and on the family farm. The majority of adults either worked on farm land that they had either inherited from kin members or purchased from other black people in the county, or they worked in a small number of jobs in the community, such as on the rail road, in the turpentine industry, as teachers, or as reverends. And older members of the community, or elders, continued working their farms.

The chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the roles of children, adults, and elders in the community. This structure of kinship helped establish and maintain community functions. Children were formally educated in school and then educated by community members who taught them cultural traditions such as learning proper farming techniques on the family farm, and how to organize using the local institutions of the church, fraternal organizations, and benevolent societies. It is also likely that adults and elders used oral tradition to preserve the local history and to transfer their spiritual beliefs.

This chapter also analyzes the ways in which the community enacted change in their community using the local institutions created during Reconstruction. It then examines the ways in which the community organized and socialized in spaces outside of the home. Understanding these various aspects of the community is essential to



comprehending the way black Liberty Countians maintained and preserved their community while living in the early twentieth-century Jim Crow South.

## **The Structure of Kinship**

“The extended family of consanguineous relationships rather than the nuclear family of a single conjugal relationship prevails.”<sup>207</sup> In this quotation William Politzer was referring to the family structures of twentieth-century Gullahs who resided in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. However, this description is also representative of the Geechees in twentieth-century Liberty County, Georgia. The structure of extended kin networks had been the norm for black Liberty Countians since the colonial period. The continual contact between various generations of family members and other kin served to educate children and train adults on their roles in the community.<sup>208</sup>

At the top of the socio-economic ladder of the black community were the elders, or older members. Elders were respected in the community due to their advanced age and their wealth of knowledge. Like William Morrison, Rhina Mallard, and Katherine Frasier, most elders owned land and deeded land to their children and grandchildren, further cementing their place in the community as people with socio-economic power. Elders in African-descendant societies also played important spiritual roles in the community. They were often regarded “as partially liminal, symbolically poised between

---

<sup>207</sup> William S. Politzer, *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* (The University of Georgia Press, 1999), 130.

<sup>208</sup> In Chapter 7: Slave Family Structure. Brenda E. Stevenson also traces the prevalence of extended kin networks in African Americans to their experiences in slavery. Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black & White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

this world and eternity.” Hence, as Charles Joyner rightly notes, these beliefs of respecting had its origins in West African societies.<sup>209</sup> For these socio-economic and spiritual reasons, elders were revered in the black community of Liberty County.

Many of the people in the community married at a young age. Young people such as Alice Frasier Walthour married at age seventeen. Thus, the category of adults as used in this chapter refers to people of childbearing-age. Adults could be married or unmarried, and at times lived with relatives. And children were younger people who lived with parents or other family members. These generational divides were not fixed. For children, elders could be their parents, teachers, or any older person who lived in the community. In this case, age was not necessarily a determinant for social status, but a mechanism to teach children the structure of the larger black society. Nevertheless, grouping community members into these three broad categories assists in understanding the manners in which the various segments of the community passed on knowledge and traditions to the next generation.

Children in the community were to be educated, both by teachers at formal institutions and by adult and elder community members. Most children attended school whether full time or part time. For example, Mary Baggs and Dorothy Brenson, both raised by their grandmother Rhina Mallard, attended school at the Riceboro church prior to attending Dorchester Academy.<sup>210</sup> Alice Walthour Frasier attended Dorchester

---

<sup>209</sup> Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (University of Illinois Press, 1984), 64.

<sup>210</sup> Dawn Herd-Clark interviewing Dorothy Brenson and Mary Baggs. December 3, 1994. Dorchester Academy Museum. Midway, Georgia.

Academy while her siblings attended public schools in the 1910s. Frasier attended until the tenth grade and stopped attending after she married her husband in 1921.<sup>211</sup>

African American communities throughout the nation continued to educate their children in the early twentieth century. As Heather Andrea Williams accurately affirms, “African American parents saw education as a commodity, making direct links between schooling and upward mobility.”<sup>212</sup> In schools, children learned how to read and write, and were educated in subjects such as mathematics, history, and science. Thus, for African-American children in Liberty County, a formal education supplemented the knowledge provided by the community. Although a challenge to pay tuition for school or lose the labor of their children on the family farms, parents and other kin members sacrificed to send their children to school.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the state of Georgia took steps to create a public-school system. In 1877, the new state constitution provided segregated public schools for both white and black children.<sup>213</sup> In 1911 the state board of education required certifications of public school teachers, and by 1919, the state levied taxes on residents to support public school education. In 1937 the Georgia legislature set a minimum attendance of seven months for students who attended public schools.<sup>214</sup> Although these legislative endeavors increased the quality of education of children in

---

<sup>211</sup> Interview of Alice Walthour Frasier by Dawn Her-Clark on December 3, 1994. Compact disc housed at the Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

<sup>212</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 140.

<sup>213</sup> Buddy Sullivan, *The Making of America Series*, 136-137.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

Georgia, most of these expenditures were not evenly distributed between white schools and black schools.

Like black schools throughout the state, those in Liberty County were often substandard in comparison to white schools. The twenty-seven public schools in Liberty County were usually one-teacher school and were housed in substandard buildings. The black public schools in the county were able to provide adequate education to black children because they received aid from charitable organizations such as the Slater Fund in the 1920s and the Rosenwald Fund<sup>215</sup> in the 1930s.<sup>216</sup> This inequity comes as no surprise as the Liberty County Board of Education was comprised of only white citizens.<sup>217</sup> As noted by historian Buddy Sullivan, “with state and local boards controlled exclusively by whites, funding appropriations for black education were held to a minimum, particularly in the first four decades of the twentieth century.”<sup>218</sup>

For these reasons, parents wished to send their children to Dorchester Academy. The school offered an education from elementary to high school and taught a wide variety of courses. Dorchester Academy could also boast about their stellar teaching staff.

---

<sup>215</sup> The John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen was established in 1882 to provide resources to freedpeople in the United States. The Rosenwald Fund was established in 1917 and was largely used to improve the educational opportunities of African Americans. By the early twentieth century both funds assisted in providing adequate education for African-American children, especially in the South where black schools received less funding at both the state level and the local level in comparison to white schools. For more information on the funds see: Eds., Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie, *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald, The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>216</sup> “Education-Central Accounting, Negro Education Disbursement Ledgers, 1942-1944,” Vol 1 989 and Vol 997. Georgia Archives. Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>217</sup> In *Sweet Land of Liberty*, Groover notes that although many improvements were given to white public schools in the county during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, “little upgrading and consolidation” took place for the black schools, 83.

<sup>218</sup> Sullivan, *Georgia: A State History*, 153.

Because the American Missionary Academy had founded some of the preeminent institutions of higher learning such as Hampton College, Atlanta University, Fisk University, Talladega College, and Tougaloo University, Dorchester Academy had a large pool of applicants from which to choose.<sup>219</sup> Teachers came from all over the country to teach at Dorchester Academy and the African-American children of Liberty County benefitted from this AMA connection.

Black children in Liberty County worked several jobs to obtain an education from Dorchester Academy. As noted with Frazier, the tuition was expensive for many of the farming families could not afford the tuition. Whereas Frazier paid tuition by babysitting her nieces and nephews, many of the students worked in some capacity at the school. Mildred Butler boarded on campus and worked in the cafeteria to pay for tuition. She attended the school beginning in the seventh grade and graduated in 1932.<sup>220</sup> Her roommate, Mary Baggs, and her cousin Dorothy Brenson, paid their tuition by cleaning the class rooms.<sup>221</sup> The work that students conducted on campus was gendered; the girls either worked in the cafeteria and the boys worked on the local farm.

Because the community was land rich and money poor, the majority of children could not afford tuition. In the 1930s, Elizabeth B. Moore, the first African-American female principal at Dorchester Academy, officially introduced the barter system at the school. The school began accepting produce and goods such as “rice, potatoes, corn, peas, fruits, chickens, ducks, guineas, turkeys, hogs, cows, vegetables, syrups, eggs,

---

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>220</sup> Candida Haynes interviewing Mildred Butler. The Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

<sup>221</sup> Dawn Herd-Clark interviewing Dorothy Brenson and Mary Baggs in December 1994. The Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

peanuts, pecans, milk, butter”, all of which were produced and grown on local farms. This transition to a barter system saw an increase in enrollment “from 162 in 1931-1932 to 236 for 1932-33.”<sup>222</sup>

Providing education for the children, especially at Dorchester Academy where students had to pay tuition, was as much a family effort as a community effort. Alice Walthour Frasier observed that people who did not have children who attended the school would often donate some goods. “They would give something. Then some time they would donate wood, we used to have wood heaters.”<sup>223</sup> Community members, whether consanguineous or fictive kin, understood that the education of the local children was a community project. These children were the next generation of teachers, farmers, reverends, and community members, thus it benefitted the entire community to formally educate the children.

The children of Liberty County received education in the school room and in the larger community. For the Geechee people in the community, the structure of extended family served to educate the younger members of the community on matters of agriculture, religion, spiritual traditions, and organizing traditions. As will be seen later in the chapter, during the early twentieth century children attended church services, social events held by benevolent societies, and programs provided by Dorchester Academy. Children were present at many of the gatherings that were organized by adults and elders so that they could observe and learn the local traditions of the black community.

---

<sup>222</sup> J.R. Jenkins, “Barter Balances A Budget” *The American Missionary* LXXXII (July 6, 1933), 743. The Amistad Research Center.

<sup>223</sup> Interview of Alice Walthour Frasier by Dawn Herd-Clark, December 3, 1994. The Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

Adults, or people who did not attend school but rather worked full time, most likely worked as farmers. Throughout the early twentieth century farming remained the primary occupation for African Americans in the county. In 1900, out of 1,710 farms, African Americans maintained 1,138. And although 793 or 69% of the farms were operated by full owners, not all people in the black community worked on farms full time.

224

Examining the voting register for 1900 somewhat elucidates the limited employment options afforded to black men in the community. The list states the occupations, race, and age of more than four hundred citizens. Of the 145 black registrants listed for the year, the vast majority were farmers. Fifty-seven percent were farmers, thirteen percent worked in the turpentine industry, and fourteen percent were general laborers. The remainder of the occupations included teachers, ministers, and rail road workers.<sup>225</sup>

It is likely that skilled jobs such as black smiths, harness makers, coopers, and stillers were trades learned during slavery and passed down from fathers to their sons.<sup>226</sup> For example, on the 1900 voter registry R.D. Kilhoun was listed as harness maker. Born in 1838, Kilhoun could have learned the trade during slavery on a plantation.<sup>227</sup> Similarly,

---

<sup>224</sup> Table 10. – Farms, June 1, 1900, Classified By Acreage, Tenure and Color of Farmer, With Averages and Percentages, By Counties – Continued. Census Reports, Volume V. Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900. Agriculture Part I, Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products. Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 70-71.

<sup>225</sup> “1900 Voter List.” Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>226</sup> Kenneth Coleman, *A History of Georgia*, 214-218, Georgia M. Frederickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 30-31.

<sup>227</sup> “Voter Lists, 24<sup>th</sup> G.M. District, October 23, 1900”, page 2. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

on the 1900 voting list fifty-four-year-old Robert Way was registered as an engineer.<sup>228</sup>

This career allowed Robert and his wife, Ann enough financial stability to send two of their seven children, ten-year-old daughter Lula and seven-year-old son Luther, to school.<sup>229</sup>

In addition to learn trades during slavery, it is likely that black men also acquired these skills by other means. In 1900 thirty-five-year-old Jacob C. Kemp worked as black smith. However, he came from a local farming family. In 1870, five-year-old Jacob, lived with his parents Jessie and Harriet Kemp. Jessie was a farmer and Harriet was listed as keeping house.<sup>230</sup> It is possible that Jacob was trained in both farming techniques and in smithing, thus supplementing income from the family farm. In 1900, Jacob and his wife, Anna, had six children who most likely labored on the farm. The couple owned their own house and had sufficient income to send their three oldest children to school.<sup>231</sup>

As for the jobs of constable and mail carrier, scholars such as Eric Foner has shown that many of these patronage appointments were occupied by black men as a part of the experiment of racial equality demonstrative of the Reconstruction era.<sup>232</sup> For example, in 1900 Isaac Morell was listed as a mail carrier for Liberty County.<sup>233</sup> Born in 1840, Morell held several jobs in the county before landing the government job. In November of 1870 the twenty-eight-year-old worked as a domestic servant.<sup>234</sup> Earlier that year, Isaac had

---

<sup>228</sup> "Voter Lists, 24<sup>th</sup> G.M. District, October 23, 1900", pg. 3. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>229</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States for 1900. Ancestry.com.

<sup>230</sup> 1870 Census, for the 24<sup>th</sup> Militia District. Ancestry.com.

<sup>231</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States for 1900. Ancestry.com.

<sup>232</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 450.

<sup>233</sup> "Voter Lists, 1458<sup>th</sup> G.M. District, October 23, 1900", pg. 2. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>234</sup> U.S. Census for 1870. Ancestry.com.



married twenty-eight-year-old Teneh Jones.<sup>235</sup> Within ten years, the couple had four children. In 1880, Isaac was listed as a laborer and Teneh as a cook. It is unclear whether Teneh worked as a cook for her own home or for a private family.<sup>236</sup> By 1890, the family owned six acres of land.<sup>237</sup> And by 1891, Isaac worked for the Civil Service as a mail carrier for which he earned \$180.00.<sup>238</sup>

U.H. Morrison also served as a mail carrier for a number of years in the early twentieth century. Morrison was a landowner, who also worked as a full-time reverend of the Zion Baptist church. In 1911 he was listed as working as a mail carrier, but in subsequent census of the early 1900s, he is only listed as a reverend. Although he worked many occupations, it is most likely that Morrison, like other black men in the state, was fired due to the systematic dismissal of black men from federal jobs in the post Reconstruction era. For example, in February 1920, *The Savannah Tribune* printed an article stating that “the appointment of Negroes as clerks was discontinued and for the past ten or twelve years there have been no colored men in this branch of the local post office service.”<sup>239</sup> This timeline is very similar to the dismissal of black federal workers in Liberty County.

Like U.H. Morrison, most black men who were listed in other trades also maintained a farm, either for the subsistence of their family or to bring in additional revenue. Although thirty-eight-year-old Daniel Andrews was listed as a barber in the 1900

---

<sup>235</sup> Marriage Registry for Liberty County, Georgia. Ancestry.com.

<sup>236</sup> U.S. Census for 1880. Ancestry.com.

<sup>237</sup> Real estate and poll tax registry for 1890. Ancestry.com.

<sup>238</sup> Mail-Messenger Service, 1891., pg 352.

<sup>239</sup> “Colored Men Again Appointed Post Office Clerks” *The Savannah Tribune*. February 7, 1920.

voting list,<sup>240</sup> on the census for that year he listed his occupation as a “tie cross cutter”, a position in the turpentine industry. Daniel and his wife, twenty-eight-year-old Rachel, owned their house but had no children living with them.<sup>241</sup> By 1920, Daniel was listed as a farm laborer on a general farm, most likely his own, and Rachel was not listed as having an occupation, which most likely means that she cared for both the farm and the house. And it is likely that men worked a number of occupations in addition to farming because of the large number of family members who worked to make the farms successful. The Andrews family was no exception. In 1920, the couple had a house full of relatives. Their twenty-five-year-old daughter, Eliza Oaden, and her two children lived in the home. In addition, their two nephews lived in the home and most likely assisted in farm labor.<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> “Voting Lists, 1458<sup>th</sup> G.M. District, October 23, 1900”, pg. 1. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>241</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Ancestry.com.

<sup>242</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 – Population. Ancestry.com.



*Figure 7.* Woman using mortar and pestle to beat rice, 1915. Dorchester, Georgia. Although the U.S. census lists the women as “keeping house” black women played essential roles in planting and cultivating rice crops. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century black families continued the tradition of growing rice for subsistence. Vanishing Georgia Photographic Collection. Georgia Archives.

The majority of black women continued to work in their homes and on their farms. And as noted in the previous chapter, the title of “keeping house” included tasks and responsibilities such as laundering, agricultural work, cooking and cleaning, and raising children. African-American women who kept house also continued the tradition of rice cultivation. However, by the early twentieth century, black citizens primarily grew rice for family consumption.

Women also held many jobs and responsibilities outside of their homes. During the early twentieth black women who had been educated at Dorchester Academy furthered their education by attending college. Two examples are that of Mary LeConte Baggs and Lillie Walthour Gillard. Mary LeConte Baggs was born in 1910 in the community of Tressa Hill in Riceboro, Georgia, a city in which 40% of the black community resided in the county.<sup>243</sup> After graduating from Dorchester Academy Baggs worked as a teacher in the county, and during the 1930s she attended the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth in Savannah where she received her B.A.<sup>244</sup> By 1940, Baggs was the principal of the Pine Hill School, a public elementary school located in the Pine Hill community of Liberty County.<sup>245</sup> Lillie Walthour Gillard was also from the county. Gillard was born on January 8, 1927 in McIntosh, Georgia to William McKinley and Wilhelmina Walthour.<sup>246</sup> She also attended Dorchester Academy until its closing in 1940, when she attended Liberty County Training School, the first public high school for African Americans

---

<sup>243</sup> U.S. Census for 1920, Military District 15.

<sup>244</sup> “Mary Baggs to Turn 100,” *Coastal Courier*, July 19, 2010.

<sup>245</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, May 1, 1940.

<sup>246</sup> Obituary of Lillie Walthour Gillard. Sallie Walthour Richardson private collection in Midway, Georgia.

in the county.<sup>247</sup> After graduating in 1944, Gillard attending Fort Valley State in the 1940s.<sup>248</sup> Both Baggs and Gillard returned to Liberty County to educate the black youth of the community.

Geechee women also passed on their knowledge of birthing, herbal remedies, and other traditional practices to their children. This is evidenced through the biography of Florence West Born in the county in 1883, West attended the old Sandy Run School which she remembered as a “cabin on the side of the road.” West later attended Dorchester Academy, and married her husband Wilford West in 1907.<sup>249</sup> Like many families in the black community, the West family cared for several generations of family members. In 1930, forty-three-year-old Florence and forty-five-year-old Wilfred were farmers, raising four children and a grandchild.<sup>250</sup> The importance of extended kin networks is important for several reasons. In Florence West’s case, it is important because this was one way to pass on traditional medical remedies to several generations.

Florence West served a number of years as a midwife, delivering many babies in the county and all twelve of her grandchildren. West also “made an assortment of home-brewed herb medicines to be given to the sick.” Some of the medicines included “mint tea, for babies, and he-bound tea, made from the bushes which grew on the side of the road, for the mothers.”<sup>251</sup> West was most likely educated on herbal medicine from her

---

<sup>247</sup> John Carleston interviewing Lille Walthour Gillard, 1996. Compact disc housed at Dorchester Academy Museum. Midway, Georgia.

<sup>248</sup> “Liberty County Training High School Diploma,” May 26, 1944. Sallie Richardson private collection. Midway, Georgia.

<sup>249</sup> U.S. Census for 1910. Ancestry.com.

<sup>250</sup> U.S. Census for 1930. Ancestry.com.

<sup>251</sup> “Almost 100, She Likes World,” *The Coastal Courier*, Wednesday, December 15, 1982, page 9 A. The Dorchester Museum. Midway, Georgia.

mother, grandmother, or other black women in the community.<sup>252</sup> And as the Charity Hospital, the nearest hospital that would treat black patients was located in Savannah, a city thirty miles away, midwifery, and most likely the use of plants and herbs for a variety of medicinal and spiritual reasons, was an essential profession to the local black community.<sup>253</sup>

County records indicate that during the early 1910s and 1920s black citizens created revenue by manufacturing and selling whiskey. Most likely, the black community had been producing moonshine for a number of years. As early as 1918, the grand jury of the county recommended that the sheriff “be more diligent in looking after the illicit distilling and the sales of intoxicants of all kinds.”<sup>254</sup> However, in 1920, after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment and the commencement of Prohibition, Liberty County officials increasingly policed those who made and distributed alcoholic beverages.<sup>255</sup>

In February of 1921 thirty-four-year-old Queen Baker was sentenced to a minimum of two years and a maximum of three years for illegally manufacturing liquor.<sup>256</sup> Born in 1887, Baker was the eldest of six children. Her father, Washington Baker, worked in the county as a day laborer. Her mother Liza worked at home. Although the Bakers

---

<sup>252</sup> Wonda L. Fontenot, *Secret Doctos: Ethnomedicine of African Americans* (Greenwood Publishing Groups, 1994) and Herbert C. Covey, *African American Slave Medicine: Herbal and Non-Herbal Treatments* (Lexington Books, 2007).

<sup>253</sup> Throughout the early twentieth century, black Liberty Countians traveled to Savannah and were treated at the Charity Hospital. *The Savannah Tribune*. May 9, 1940. For information on the history of the Charity Hospital of Savannah, Georgia see: Ed., William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans: A Social Study made by Atlanta University, under the patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund. Publications, No. 14* (The Atlanta University Press, 1909), 89.

<sup>254</sup> Minutes No. 14: Liberty Superior Court, September 1918 Term, page 8. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Minutes No. 14: Liberty Superior Court, February 1921 Term, 135. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

did not own their home, they succeeded in sending their four oldest children to one of the schools in Liberty County.<sup>257</sup> Although little is known about Queen Baker's life in 1921, the fact that she manufactured whiskey, and most likely sold it to the broader community, demonstrates the various ways in which black people, especially black women, earned additional income. It also shows that there existed alternative employment opportunities other than those established by the counties or those traditionally held by black people in the community.<sup>258</sup>

Women in the county also worked as domestic servants. By 1940, 82.1% of the black women in the county "kept house" and did not work outside of their homes and farms.<sup>259</sup> Out of the 1,831 black women who were considered working-age, only 109, or 5%, worked as domestic servants. During the Depression Era, black women who worked as laundresses for white people in the county often laundered their clothes three times a week. According to a local historian, "They were generally paid 50 cents to wash, starch, and iron a family laundry that might consist of 50 or more pieces."<sup>260</sup> African-American female domestic servants also worked as care givers, or nurses, for children, as seen in the case of Eerie Thomas.

---

<sup>257</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States for 1900. Ancestry.com.

<sup>258</sup> For more readings discussing the informal economy and other means in which black women earned income in the early twentieth century see: Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001) and LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Number Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy* (University of Illinois Press, 2016)

<sup>259</sup> "Table 23. - Persons 14 Years Old and Over by Employment Status Class of Worker, Major Occupation Group, Industry Group, and Sex By Counties: 1940, Liberty County." *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population: Volume II. Characteristics of the Population*, 269. Out of 1,831 black women, 1,505 or 82.1% was not in the labor force. The 1940 census listed working-age persons as 14 years and older.

<sup>260</sup> Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 97.



*Figure 8.* Nurse Eerie Thomas with child, Marien Kallquist, 1931. Flemington, Georgia. Black *women* in the county worked as domestic servants, in clerical positions, and as farm laborers. Vanishing Georgia Photographic Collection. Georgia Archives.



There were many reasons that influenced local black women to work as domestic servants. Alice Walthour Frasier worked as a care giver for her nieces and nephews to pay for tuition at Dorchester Academy. It also seems that black women who were widowed or unmarried worked as domestic servants to pay property taxes or to educate their offspring. For an example we must return to the story of Rhina Mallard. In 1920, fifty-eight-year-old Mallard was a widowed home owner who was raising two of her granddaughters. For that year, her occupation was listed as a servant with a private family.<sup>261</sup> It is likely that households consisting of a married couple or several working-age adults generated enough revenue to pay taxes to maintain ownership of the family property. But as Mallard was widowed, older, and supporting two young granddaughters both under the age of eleven, it is likely that she had to work on her farm and as a domestic servant to earn enough income to support her family and to pay taxes on the land.

Like those classified as adults, elders in the community held many jobs outside of farming. However, the chief indicator of one's status as an elder was the large amount of acreage that he or she had managed to accumulate over his or her life time. By the age of eighty-five, Samuel Monroe had amassed more than 175 acres of land. On his deathbed in 1899, Monroe deeded 25 acres to his wife, Dinah, 25 acres to his eldest daughter, Nannie Clipp, and 150 acres to his daughter, forty-two-year-old Margaret Roberts.<sup>262</sup> In 1907, sixty-five-year-old July Anderson Sr. had accumulated more than

---

<sup>261</sup> U.S. Census for 1920, Military District 15.

<sup>262</sup> "Last Will and Testament of Samuel Monroe", August 7, 1899. Will Book, 150-151. Liberty County Court House. U.S. Census for 1870 and 1880. Ancestry.com

eighty acres of land and made his son, thirty-seven-year-old July Anderson, administrator of his estate.<sup>263</sup> When seventy-four-year-old Prince Stevens died in 1908 he and his family had accumulated 495 acres of land valued at \$1400. The family elected to make thirty-four-year-old Mary Stevens the temporary administrator of the family estate.<sup>264</sup> Additionally, many people, like Rhina Mallard and Katherine Frasier, deeded land to their children and their grandchildren while they were alive. In 1928, fifty-six-year-old Frasier deeded land to her thirty-three-year-old son-in-law and in 1936, seventy-four-year-old Mallard deeded land to her twenty-six-year-old granddaughter.

During the early twentieth century, both elders and adults educated the children in the community. This education took place in the home, on the farms, in the church, and at times, during social events provided by benevolent societies. These intergenerational connections and educational practices were essential to maintaining community in the racist environment of the Jim Crow South.

### **The Exigencies of Jim Crow**

In 1898, the county published a “Disqualified Voting List” containing approximately 2,958 names, the majority of which were landowning black men.<sup>265</sup> This list effectively disenfranchised most black men in the county.<sup>266</sup> However, evidence suggests that in the first decade of the twentieth century there continued to be some

---

<sup>263</sup> U.S. Census for 1900. Georgia Property Tax Digest for the 1359<sup>th</sup> district, 1890. “July Anderson Sr., Administrator Bonds, August 7, 1907.” Liberty, Georgia. Ancestry.com

<sup>264</sup> The Will of Prince Stevens, dated February 2, 1909. Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Ancestry.com.

<sup>265</sup> “Disqualified Voting List”, 1898. Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>266</sup> The Disqualified Voting Lists contains about 2,958 names with no other information. To ascertain the demographics of each person, I am researching his information on Ancestry.com to determine his race, age, occupation, land-owning status, and family members.

representation of black men in local electoral politics until as late as 1908.<sup>267</sup> The persistence of black men registering to vote in local election demonstrates that the black community continued to push for the vote during the early twentieth century despite the emergence of the Jim Crow system. To understand this process of gradual and systematic disenfranchisement of black men in the county, one must take a closer look at the larger trend occurring in state politics.

By the late nineteenth century, the Democratic Party had taken control of state government from Republicans. In 1887 the Georgia state legislature passed the cumulative poll tax that effectively disenfranchised most black voters. The law specified that prior to voting, the person had to pay all back taxes.<sup>268</sup> Between 1898 and 1900, the state legislature had adopted and created the all-white Democratic Primaries that excluded black men from voting in state elections.<sup>269</sup> Finally in 1908, the state legislature instituted the literacy clause, stating that voters needed to be able to read to participate in elections. Cumulatively, these laws effectively disenfranchised black men in Georgia.<sup>270</sup>

This process of discriminating against African-American voters had its origins in the Reconstruction era. There had been an increase in political racist ideology with the Bourbon Democrats of the 1870s and 1880s who advocated white supremacy and the

---

<sup>267</sup> There exist several voting registers in the county from the early twentieth century. Two of the registries are dated 1900 and 1904. The other lists contain no dates. Also, all of the voting lists are incomplete as they do not contain information from all the districts of the county. The 1900 voting lists contains 145 black men and the 1904 lists contained 369 black men. "Voting List of 1900" and "Voting List of 1904." Probate Court. Liberty County Court House. Hinesville, Georgia.

<sup>268</sup> John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, 94.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>270</sup> Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 29 - 30

safeguarding of Confederate ideals.<sup>271</sup> During the 1890s the Populist Party in Georgia attempted to disrupt the political monopoly held by Democrats by uniting African-American and working-class white farmers of the state. However, by the early 1900s, the Democratic Party had reclaimed hold of state politics.<sup>272</sup> And although Democrats had passed several anti-black laws during the late nineteenth century, many historians cite the gubernatorial election of 1906 as the climax of racist rhetoric and the progenitor of racist practices in the Democratic Party.

In 1906 Hoke Smith, the former Secretary of the Interior of the state, ran against Clark Howell, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Both Democratic, the two used racist rhetoric to appeal to white voters. Hoke Smith ran on the promise of disenfranchising the black population of the state and subsequently won the primaries by a wide margin.<sup>273</sup> And as scholars note, it is very probable that the racist rhetoric espoused by both Smith and Howell during the gubernatorial race incited racial violence of electorates, namely the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906. During the course of three days, thousands of white men attacked blacks in Atlanta, killing at least twenty and wounding several hundred more.<sup>274</sup>

The racial violence sparked by the 1906 gubernatorial election was not an anomaly in Georgia or in the South. The most common practice of using violence to subordinate African Americans was through the act of lynching, in which a mob of white people hanged and burned the bodies of black persons. Following the end of Reconstruction in

---

<sup>271</sup> Kenneth Coleman, *A History of Georgia*, 222-223, Buddy Sullivan, *Georgia: A State History*, 122-123.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>273</sup> John Dittmer, *Black Georgie in the Progressive Era*, 97-100.

<sup>274</sup> David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

the 1870s, lynchings became a common occurrence. In the year of 1892, mobs had lynched 71 whites and 155 blacks.<sup>275</sup> The early twentieth century also saw an increase in racial violence in Georgia. In 1915, during the height of World War I, the Ku Klux Klan was reborn in Stone Mountain, Georgia. That year, thirteen African Americans were lynched in the state.<sup>276</sup>

The citizens of Liberty County regularly read about the many lynchings occurring through the nation in *The Savannah Tribune*. There were several lynchings that occurred in Liberty County in the period. In 1920, several white law enforcement officers lynched two black prisoners who were housed in the county jail. Two of the white officers were convicted and served time in prison for the murders.<sup>277</sup> Thus, for black Liberty Countians, as was true for African Americans throughout the nation, the threat of violence was always present.

The disenfranchisement of black men and the rise of racial violence were only two parts of the Jim Crow system; the systemic segregation of the races was another integral part. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Georgia legislators issued laws that solidified the emergence of Jim Crow. In 1891, legislators passed a law requiring railroads to provide separate cars for whites and blacks. Between 1891 and 1908, the state legislature also passed laws segregating chain gangs, convict lease camps, and cemeteries.<sup>278</sup> The 1896 Supreme Court Case *Plessy v. Ferguson* cemented segregation

---

<sup>275</sup> William Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 1993), 7-8.

<sup>276</sup> David L. Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (A Birch Lane Press Book, 1993), 314-316.

<sup>277</sup> Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 81.

<sup>278</sup> Buddy Sullivan, *Georgia: A State History* (Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 149.

on the national level. This separate but equal doctrine encouraged both state and municipal governments to maintain segregated street cars, schools, and churches. African American communities in various cities throughout the state vocally protested these Jim Crow laws. One example being the 1906 Savannah boycott of segregated street cars.<sup>279</sup> Despite these efforts of protest, by 1910 the Jim Crow system was fully entrenched in the state of Georgia.

These legislative changes affected the black community in numerous ways. As seen above, in the early 1900s, black men like U.H. Morrison held federal posts in the postal services. In 1900, in addition to the occupations of farmers, ministers, laborers, and teachers, two men held federal positions, one as a mail carrier and the other as a constable.<sup>280</sup> In 1904, out of 369 jobs held by black men, three were constables and one was a magistrate. Although the voting list is incomplete, these fragments demonstrate that during the early twentieth century black men held important positions in the county. As noted above, this large-scale purge of African-American men from federal and state-funded positions were a part of the state's initiative to disenfranchise black men.

This systematic purge of black federal employees raises several questions. What did it mean for the black Liberty Countians to have black mail carriers? Most likely they were a part of the community and knew the people to whom they delivered mail? Additionally, how beneficial was it to have an African-American magistrate to administer the law? It is probable that he attended local churches or was a member of the same

---

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>280</sup> Voters List for Liberty County Georgia. October 22-24, 1900. Liberty County Court House.

fraternal lodge of other local black citizens. What was lost when these federal and state positions were taken from the local community? How did the loss of these positions affect the social, economic, and political structure of the black community?

### **Community Organizing in the Jim Crow South**

Despite the rise of racist violence in the state, legislated segregation of public facilities, and the eventual disenfranchisement of black men, the black community of Liberty County continued to build community and exercised aspects of their citizenship in spaces outside of the polls. One important space of organizing for twentieth-century African Americans was the church. The church had been used as a central space to organize for change during slavery and emancipation. They were also spaces in which to socialize and maintain relationships with members of the community.

By 1930 the county boasted many black churches of all denominations. The Midway Congregational Church was affiliated with American Missionary Association and was located on the grounds of Dorchester Academy. The pastor of the church was often not from the county; the AMA officials chose the pastor of the church and they usually nominated a black man who lived in nearby Savannah. The Zion Baptist Church was one of several Baptist churches in the county.<sup>281</sup> It appears as if U.H. Morrison was the pastor of the Zion Baptist Church as well as three other Baptists churches in the county, including the F.A.B. Baptist Church in Riceboro, the Anderson Grover Baptist Church, and Beechill Baptist Church in Limerick.<sup>282</sup> Most likely, Morrison was a traveling pastor who provided

---

<sup>281</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 12, 1920.

<sup>282</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 26, 1920.

services in several communities in the county. In addition, the St. Peter's A.M.E. church was located in McIntosh, Georgia. There was also the Midway Presbyterian Church in Midway.<sup>283</sup> It appears as if members from different denominations attended services, programs, and events at other churches, regardless of their denominations.

In addition to attending churches for religious reasons, the black community used the space of churches to socialize. One approach to understand the multiple uses of the black church is by viewing the Emancipation Day celebrations that were routinely held in the churches of the county. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth-century, African Americans in the nation commenced the tradition of celebrating Emancipation Day. For many black communities, January 1 did not only signify a new day of a new year. It also served to remind African Americans about the ideological and political functions of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 that freed enslaved people in the rebellious states. As Mitch Katchun asserts, Emancipation Day Celebrations provided an opportunity for African Americans to publicly debate how they would remember their slave past.<sup>284</sup> It seems as if the speeches and lectures given during the celebration served to commemorate the painful history of their ancestors. However, it also seems that for the black community, the Emancipation Day celebrations came to symbolize the freedom and liberty of that black people currently possessed. By the early twentieth-century, black people in the county annually gathered together and socialized with family and other kinfolk in order to celebrate the manifold meanings of Emancipation Day.

---

<sup>283</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. December 14, 1922.

<sup>284</sup> Mitch Katchun, *Festivals of Freedom: Meaning and Memory in African American Emancipation* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 148.



On January 1, 1921, the black community of Liberty County celebrated Emancipation Day at St. Peter's A.M.E. Church. The services included a welcome by Laura Bell Williams and the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation by Sarah Robertson. Rev. J.W. Holloway preached a sermon.<sup>285</sup> In 1923, the day was celebrated at Midway Presbyterian Church. For that year, church members performed a night of "wake" in which they brought in the new year by staying at the church from the night until after midnight. Prof. S. C. Usher delivered an oration on "The New Negro" and Mrs. Ella Jones of Riceboro serenaded the crowd with a musical selection. The day commenced with a barbeque.<sup>286</sup> In 1933, Emancipation Day was celebrated at both Midway Temple Presbyterian Church and at Dorchester Academy with the assistance of the Midway Congregational Church.<sup>287</sup> These celebrations held at churches were moments in which the black community celebrated life, remembered their ancestors, and enjoyed life.<sup>288</sup>

Emancipation Day was a cultural event celebrated by African Americans throughout the nation. However, it is likely that different communities incorporated the national event with the cultural traditions of their specific communities. For example, the 1923 event included a "wake" which coincided with the funerary tradition in which African-Americans "reconvene(d) the family and its community to rehearse the situations and events of black death."<sup>289</sup> And considering that both were held in the church and

---

<sup>285</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. January 8, 1921.

<sup>286</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. January 4, 1923

<sup>287</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. January 12, 1933.

<sup>288</sup> For more information on the textual and photographic history of the various ways in which freedpeople celebrated emancipation see: Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Temple University Press, 2013).

<sup>289</sup> Karla FC Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Duke University Press, 2003), 165.

possibly occurred overnight, black Liberty Countians created a new custom. This was one such example of black Liberty Countians created new traditions by building on established cultural traditions

By the early twentieth century, Dorchester Academy served as an educational institution for the entire black community of the county. In addition to formally educating local black children, the school also held events to educate local adults on new farming techniques. In March 1920, Dorchester Academy hosted the “first annual conference of the Liberty County Negro Farm Bureau.” The two-day conference brought from specialists from around the state to educate local black farmers on new, innovative farming techniques. The agenda for the event included topics on “health sanitation, livestock diseases, farm crops, education and marketing.”<sup>290</sup>

The second annual session of the Liberty County Negro Farm Bureau was held on February 21, 1921. In addition to the talks on agriculture practices, Miss Juanita Conyers, the home demonstration agent of Chatham County discussed the importance of “beautifying: homes and “serving well-balanced meals.” On the following day, educational film entitled “Fight the Fly” was shown to educate farmers on ways to deal with flies. Some of the day’s lectures and talks were held at a local church.<sup>291</sup> Events such as the Negro Farm Bureau conferences were attended by all segments of the black community, including children, women, and men. Thus,

---

<sup>290</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. March 13, 1920.

<sup>291</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. February 26, 1921.

African Americans throughout the nation also created benevolent organizations and participated in fraternal organizations as a means to support their communities when the nation failed to provide equal financial support for all of their citizens. As early 1921, there existed a chapter of the Knights of Pythias in Liberty County.<sup>292</sup> The Knights of Pythias was originally founded by white men in Washington D.C. in 1864. By 1880, black men had adopted the rituals and created an organization that functioned as a self-help organization connecting African American communities throughout the South. Some of the benefits of being a member was insurance for members.<sup>293</sup>

In 1920, the black community had a chapter of The Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Good Samaritan and Daughters of Samaria of Georgia, an organization similar to the Knights of Pythias that offered “age-old annuities” and built cemeteries for members. The Good Samaritans also connected small communities to members in the state and in the nation.<sup>294</sup> In June of the year, a delegation of the organization traveled to Macon, Georgia to attend the Grand Lodge meeting, enabling them to interact with other black communities in the state.<sup>295</sup> In May of 1921, grand chief of the Samaritans, J. B. Phillips, visited the Zion Baptist Church to talk to church members and the pastor, U.H. Morrison.<sup>296</sup>

---

<sup>292</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. February 19, 1921. In 1921, Jas. L. Grant, District Deputy of Knights of Pythias visited members of the black community, *The Savannah Tribune*. August 19, 1921. In February of, 1922, Grant returned to install officers of Dorchester Lodge 447. *The Savannah Tribune*. February 16, 1922.

<sup>293</sup> Tamara L. Brown, eds., *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision* (University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>295</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 12, 1920.

<sup>296</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. May 7, 1921.

There also was a branch of the Prince Hall Masons in Liberty in the early twentieth century.<sup>297</sup> Prince Hall Masonry traced its origin to 1775. Although initially a middle-class organization that training black men in leadership roles, by the twentieth century, the organization was an institution that forged social bonds between African Americans throughout the nation.<sup>298</sup>

The Court of Calanthe was another fraternal organization that existed in Liberty County during the early twentieth century. Unlike the Knights of Pythias, The Good Samaritans, and the Masons which usually included auxiliary units for women, the Court of Calanthe was an organization for black women.<sup>299</sup> Founded in Texas in 1897, the Court of Calatnthe was the only “fraternal insurance organization” controlled solely by black women.<sup>300</sup> In 1922, the court of Liberty County had their semi-annual election in which they elected officials for their cabinet.<sup>301</sup> The fact that the black women of Liberty County organized and maintained their own institutions, namely one that provided insurance to its members, demonstrates the influential role that women played in the community.

The community also had political organizations in which they discussed issues and planned strategies on methods to participate in electoral politics. In June of 1920, the Colored Women’s Republican Club of Liberty County met. The chairman of the organization, Mrs. M. G. Roberts, and other members discussed the importance of

---

<sup>297</sup> In 1920 the Masons memorialized a brother who had died . *The Savannah Tribune*. October 6, 1920.

<sup>298</sup> William A. Muraskin, *Middle-Class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in American* ( , 27-30.

<sup>299</sup> William W. Griffin, *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930* (The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 30

<sup>300</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud and Merline Pitre, eds. *Black Women in Texas History* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 91-92.

<sup>301</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. March 2, 1922.

encouraging other black women in the county of participating in politics.<sup>302</sup> This issue was pertinent as women's enfranchisement was an important national topic and would become legal with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. And it appears as if the Republican Club for men did not meet for a number of years. In March of 1921, the Republicans held a meeting in which they reorganized their structure. Revered U. H. Morrison was elected county chairman of the organization.<sup>303</sup>

Black women also socialized and organized in their own private spaces. This was largely due to the prevalence of land ownership and the privilege of working in their own homes. As early as 1920, black women gathered to can goods under the auspices of The Canning Club. The club was headed by Mrs. J. U. H. Simms, the wife of a professor at Dorchester Academy, and Mrs. U.H. Morrison, first lady of many of the Baptist churches in the county. Members met regularly to can beans and peas.<sup>304</sup> Although the newspaper account only offers a few words on the meeting, one can deduce that while canning vegetables the women also discussed a number of political matters. As black women served in church organizations, fraternal organizations, and political organizations, it is likely that they also discussed issues affecting their community in these gatherings.

Additionally, black Liberty Countians also created their own self-help organizations. During the Great Depression era, African Americans in Liberty County created the Union Brotherhood Society, a benevolent organization geared to provide burial insurance to the community. Each member donated either ten or twenty-five cents

---

<sup>302</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, June 5, 1920.

<sup>303</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. March 5, 1921.

<sup>304</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 26, 1920.

a month to ensure that when she or members of her family died she would receive a proper burial. The society also provided health benefits to its members. Due to the pervasiveness of racism in the Jim Crow South many early-twentieth century blacks in the South were uninsured. Without the society, most blacks would have simply been buried in a wooden box. However, members received a formal burial steeped in tradition and ritual. "At funerals, the Society members dressed in black and white, wore badges and greeted each other as Brother and Sister."<sup>305</sup>

During his tenure as a soldier in World War I, William McKinley interacted with African American men from around the country. Perhaps he discovered this manner of organization during that brief diasporic moment and brought the ideology of grassroots organization back to his community. Although the Society had no affiliation with any political parties, it was similar to the organizations formed by newly freed people during Reconstruction in the sense that they were used for the betterment of the race and were formed using "many of the basic materials of everyday life: from the ties and obligations of kinship, from the experiences and struggles of labor, from the traditions and skills of leadership, and from the spiritual energies and resources of religion."<sup>306</sup>

In order to better understand the importance of the practical and religious purpose of the Union Brotherhood Society to the blacks of Liberty County and the importance of burials and funerals in the African American tradition, one must review the groundbreaking work of renowned twentieth-century anthropologist Melville Herskovits

---

<sup>305</sup> Meredith R. Devendorf, *Images of America: Liberty County*. (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 24.

<sup>306</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Harvard College, 2003), 166.

on black slave retention of African culture. Herskovits discusses the two driving forces behind providing proper burials and funeral rites.

The positive urge derives from the prestige that accrues to a family that has provided a fine funeral for a dead member; negative considerations arise out of the belief that the resentment of a neglected dead person will rebound on the heads of surviving members of his family when neglect makes of him a spirit of the kind more to be feared than any other – a discontented, restless, vengeful ghost.<sup>307</sup>

The proper burial of a family member was simultaneously a display of class status that demonstrated one could afford a funeral and a sign of respect for the deceased. Thus in establishing the society, the black community of Liberty County served a number of services for the black community: practical in providing an essential service not offered to blacks due to their race, political in providing a service that proved to blacks they could attain the same services as whites, and religious in providing a sense of closure and ceremony to the loved ones who passed on to the next world.

## **Conclusion**

Although blacks in Liberty County had not participated in formal politics since the early twentieth century, they had organized in church, social networks, and at the Dorchester Academy. The Geechee people in Liberty County maintained benevolent organizations and church organizations as political vehicles for identifying and pursuing social and political interests. This experience of organizing meant that black residents of Liberty County were well prepared to push for voting rights and enter formal party politics in the 1940.

---

<sup>307</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941), 198.

## CHAPTER VI

### A TIME OF TRANSITIONS, 1940-1946

On February 16, 1946, more than 1,100 people in Liberty County gathered to honor its black citizens who had fought in World War II. The crowd, which included eight hundred black men, women, and children, lined the street to observe the two-mile parade. A military band from Camp Stewart played music as the white state patrol and local sheriff provided some protection for the large crowd. The sight of eighty black veterans marching from Dorchester Academy to the Midway Congregational Church “evoked expressions of Negro pride which could not be describe in words.”<sup>308</sup> Later that day, more than 500 people packed the church while 100 more waited anxiously outside as black leaders and white officials gave remarks on the remarkable accomplishments of the local black veterans. According to local news correspondent E. J. Shellman, “this was one of the grandest affairs that has ever been given in Liberty County.”<sup>309</sup>

The 1946 Veterans parade was both a cultural event for the black community of Liberty County and a political event that involved the collaboration of both the black and white communities. Several local black organizations, including the Federal Credit Union and the Retreat Farmers Union, and several black churches worked together to raise more than \$200 for the event. In addition to providing protection from the state patrol and local police officers, white county officials also contributed to the event by donating \$50.<sup>310</sup> As observed by Claudius Turner, the director to the newly-formed Dorchester

---

<sup>308</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton. February 18, 1946. ARC.

<sup>309</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. February 21, 1946.

<sup>310</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton. February 18, 1946. ARC.



Cooperative Center, the sheriff was most likely playing politics “for Negroes [were] going to vote in Liberty County in the next Democratic primary election.”<sup>311</sup>

The Veterans Parade was indicative of the many changes that occurred in Liberty County during the early 1940s. The fact that so many parties participated in the actual parade was not an anomaly. Rather, this interracial collaboration reflected the changing demographics of Liberty County. As during the first world war, black men in Liberty County served in the armed forces during World War II. However, the war officially came to Liberty County in 1940 when the federal government purchased thousands of acres in southeastern Georgia to build a military fort. Camp Stewart, which was located about twenty miles from the Dorchester Cooperative Center, changed the economic and demographic nature of the county by introducing thousands of black and white soldiers into the county. However, the military fort also displaced hundreds of black and white families who had lived in the area for generations.

Another drastic change to the community was the creation of the Dorchester Cooperative Center (DCC). Dorchester Academy, which had been an educational institution in the county since 1871, was closed in 1939- 1940 and the DCC was officially opened in 1945. And although Dorchester Academy had provided programming for the community throughout the early twentieth century, the creation of the Dorchester Cooperative Center was the first time since the Reconstruction era in which an organization sought to effectively alter the economic and social lives of black Liberty Countians. However, the DCC was integrated into the black community by local black

---

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

citizens because it housed organizations such as the Federal Credit Union, which provided loans to black citizens who were due-paying members, and the Retreat Farmers Union, which was a cooperative that provided seedling and modern equipment to its members.

This chapter seeks to understand the ways that these changes affected and effected the lives of black Liberty Countians. Camp Stewart displaced thousands of local people from their ancestral land and separated them from family and community members. How did this displacement affect the families who were forced to relocate to another part of the community or to another town? How did these small displacements effect the overall community structure of the black community? The building of the military fort also introduced hundreds of soldiers and their families into the black community. How did these visitors change the established structure of local Geechee community? This chapter seeks to understand the large scale and long term effect that the creation of Camp Stewart had on the local black community of Liberty County.

The creation of the Dorchester Cooperative Center also brought Claudius and Alice Turner to the county. Although Claudius Turner arrived under the auspices of directing the DCC, he also utilized his training as a sociologist to research and record the Geechee culture of the local black community. This chapter uses Turner's sociological studies to demonstrate the ways in which Geechee culture differed from the culture of middle-class African Americans like the Turners. More specifically, this chapter utilizes these studies to better understand the continuation and permutations of Geechee culture in the mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, these studies, and the experience of Turner as an outsider in the community, elucidates the way the Geechee people maintained an insular

community: at times the community acquiesced to the suggestions of Claudius Turner because of his educational background and his connection to the resourceful American Missionary Association; and at other times they disregarded Turner's suggestions and maintained their traditional ways of organizing and meeting the needs of local citizens.

### **Camp Stewart and the Black Community**

In January of 1941, Fred Brownlee, an administrator of the American Missionary Association, inquired about the rumor that the federal government had purchased over half of the county to create a fort for military aviation.<sup>312</sup> Sol. C. Johnson, the editor the *Savannah Tribune*, was the ideal person to ask considering that he readily received information concerning the occurrences of southeastern Georgia. Johnson informed Brownlee that the government would purchase land "no further east than Hinesville, about eight miles from the school." Johnson also wrote that some residents in Hinesville would have to relocate to other areas.<sup>313</sup>

In an effort to ascertain exactly what was occurring near one of the American Missionary Association schools, in March of 1941 Brownlee contacted Dr. Charles Johnson of Fisk University. Johnson was one of the leading black sociologist in the United States who had connections throughout the nation. Brownlee and Johnson were acquainted because of their AMA connection; Brownlee served on the National Board of Missions and Johnson worked at Fisk University, a college founded by the AMA. According to

---

<sup>312</sup> Letter from Fred L. Brownlee to Sol. C. Johnson, January 20, 1941. ARC.

<sup>313</sup> Letter from Sol. C. Johnson to Fred L. Brownlee, Jan. 23, 1941. ARC.

Johnson, the federal government would not force citizens to move by March 1 but would rather “allow a leeway of perhaps ten months.”<sup>314</sup> However, these rumors proved false.

In July of 1940, the federal government purchased more than 300,000 acres of land in five counties in southeastern Georgia, including thousands of acres in Liberty County. The military fort, subsequently named Camp Stewart, served as a training ground for anti-aircraft units during the international conflict of World War II.<sup>315</sup> Throughout the war, units from the National Guard and the army trained at the fort. These units would socialize in various counties. By the beginning of 1941 many citizens of Liberty County realized that the building of the military fort would directly affect the community.

The first 5,000 acres of land were purchased in July of 1940. Subsequently “the reservation would include over 280,000 acres and stretch over five counties.”<sup>316</sup> When the federal government conducted geological research on the area it saw a “large expanse of property” that could be used “for the firing ranges and impact areas that an aircraft artillery training center would need for live fire training.”<sup>317</sup> The coastal land in Liberty County was an ideal location for a military fort. As historian Daniel Kryder notes, northern and coastal cities drew large supply contracts based on its “preexisting economic capacity” evident in the ready availability of factories and workers. By contrast “the relative underdevelopment of the southern economy, combined with abundant and

---

<sup>314</sup> Letter from Fred Brownlee to Sol. C. Johnson, March 6, 1921. ARC.

<sup>315</sup> Meredith R. Devendork, *Liberty County*, 89-92.

<sup>316</sup> Alejandro M. de Quesada, *A History of Georgia Forts: Georgia's Lonely Outposts*. (The History Press, 2011), 108.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

inexpensive land and a warmer climate, led military officials to funnel soldiers rather than contracts into that region.”<sup>318</sup> However, viewing this large-scale purchase of land from an economic, geographic, or militaristic perspective fails to account for the numerous ways the building of the camp effected the lives of people who lived in these counties.

Between 1941 and 1942, thousands of citizens who lived in the western parts of the county were forced to relocate to other places in the county or the state. According to the Office of War Information, many black and white citizens of Liberty County were relocated to Hazelhurst Farms in Hazelhurst, Georgia, a rural community with plenty of land that was located approximately seventy miles west of Hinesville.<sup>319</sup> Although many families readily moved, there were a number of individuals who could not or would not relocate. Ultimately more than 1,500 families, totaling approximately 6,000 people from five different counties, were displaced from their homes in 1941.<sup>320</sup>

In 1941 Jack Delano, a photographer working for the Farm’s Administration, captured the lives of people displaced by the building of Camp Stewart. These photographs serve as one of the few sources that illuminates the impact that the building of the fort had on the lives of individual citizens in the county. Like Doris Ulmann and Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, this chapter uses photography to understand the impact that land displacement on Gullah-Geechee culture.<sup>321</sup> As art historian Lisa Gail Collins notes when analyzing the work of artists engaging with Gullah-Geechee history, “their visual art

---

<sup>318</sup> Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>319</sup> Library of Congress. <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm98084274>

<sup>320</sup> Groover, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 105.

<sup>321</sup> Michelle Lamuniere, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The Gullah Photographs of Doris Ulmann* (University of Oregon, 1994). Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, *Daufuskie Island*. (The University of South Carolina Press, 1982).

suggests that the search for roots can also be a search for routes; that is, that journeys for knowledge of a cultural simultaneously expose the complexity of the past, illuminate the present, and reveal valuable resources for the future.”<sup>322</sup> But what do the two photographs below suggest about the loss of “roots” to Geechee people who were displaced from the land in the early 1940s?

The first photograph shows a young black mother and her three young children sitting on the porch of their new home in Hazelhurst Farms, Georgia. The mother looks disgruntled while the children look pensive. Although there are no records that indicate the names of this family, this photograph raises many questions regarding the manners in which Liberty County citizens were forced to vacate their property in the period of the early 1940s. How many farms and kinship networks were destroyed to build this military fort? Did community members, such as those in these two photographs, have ancestral ties to the land? What did the displacement of these people mean for the larger community. In what ways did this large-scale land purchase disrupt the social, political, and economic system of the local black community?

---

<sup>322</sup> Lisa Gail Collins, *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past* (Rutgers University Press, 2002), 65.



*Figure 9.* One of the Negro families moved from the Camp Stewart area near Hinesville, Georgia to Hazlehurst Farms. April, 1941. Jack Delano, photographer. The Library of Congress.



*Figure 10.* Woman who has not yet found a place to move out of the Hinesville Army camp area working on a quilt in her smokehouse. Near Hinesville, Georgia. April, 1941. Jack Delano, photographer. The Library of Congress.

The second photograph is entitled “Women who has not yet found a place to move out of the Hinesville Army camp working on a quilt in her smokehouse.” One could ask has she not yet found a place or did she refuse to vacate her property? The scene in



the above photograph implies that the woman did not want to move because her home in Liberty County was in fact her home. In the photograph the woman is seated in her smoke house. There is pork curing above her head and in a corner a washing board and other materials rest against the wall, which suggests that she provides her own meat and does her own house work. One can hardly miss that she is diligently working on an elaborate quilt. The intricate design of the quilt suggests that she had been working on the project for several weeks and wished to continue knitting it in her smokehouse. And although the quilting is usually a community project involving several women, it seems as if the woman in the photograph is working on it herself.<sup>323</sup> The caption of the photograph also suggests that she lives alone and has maintained a solitary, peaceful way of life. Thus, her not moving is an indication of how the purchase of the land and building of the fort disrupted individual family life but also that of the local community structure.

As seen in chapter 3, the black community had devoted decades creating an intricate system of land deeding strategies that kept ancestral land within specific family units. The land owned by most black Liberty Countians in the 1940s had been worked by their enslaved ancestors and purchased by forefather and foremothers during Reconstruction. We may never know the countless ways in which the building of Camp Stewart disrupted the lives of black community members. However, these photographs offer a hint at the effect of land displacement of the local black community.

---

<sup>323</sup> For more on quilting in the African-American tradition see Perlie Mae Johnson, "African American Quilts: An Examination of Feminism, Identity, and Empowerment in the Fabric Arts of Kansas City Quilters" a dissertation published in 2008.

The building of Camp Stewart introduced many black soldiers into the community. During the early 1940s, many black soldiers who resided on the base actively socialized with the local black community of Liberty County. As was the social norm for the nation, Camp Stewart was segregated based on race. One example can be viewed with the Easter Services held at the military fort in 1942. An April 3 memorandum states that the fort would hold “Easter Sunrise Service for the entire post.” However, the statement further specified that there would be separate services for Catholic soldiers, Jewish soldiers, Christian Science, and Colored soldiers.<sup>324</sup> It is likely that black soldiers from Camp Stewart attended the black churches in Liberty County due to the limited space available at the services held on the fort.

By 1944, black soldiers from Camp Stewart regularly attended services at the black churches in Liberty County. In February of 1944, Sgt. Calhoun of Camp Stewart “taught the classes and preached at morning services” at First Calvary Baptist Church.<sup>325</sup> On April of 1944, Pvt. Colins of Baltimore, Maryland and Pvt. Wingfield sang and played music at Bethel A.M.E. Church.<sup>326</sup> Quartets from Camp Stewart also sang at Bethel A.M.E. to raise funds for the trustees of the church.<sup>327</sup> Attending churches were just one way the soldiers of Camp Stewart interacted with black Liberty Countians.

African-American soldiers regularly socialized with black Liberty Countians at community events. In February of 1944, the Jolly Pair gave a “wholesome recreation and

---

<sup>324</sup> “Daily Bulletin, Number 89, April 3, 1942.” Headquarters, Antiaircraft Training Center, Camp Stewart, Georgia. Georgia Archives. Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>325</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, March 2, 1944.

<sup>326</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, April 6, 1944.

<sup>327</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. April 13, 1944.

entertainment for the residents of this city and soldiers of Camp Stewart.” The club, which served as an antecedent for the federally-funded United Service Organization (USO), had been organized “some time ago” and was held at the home of Mrs. Florence Moody.<sup>328</sup> Other social gatherings included soldiers of the camp dining with various families in the county. In September of 1945, Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel R. Smith invited Cpl. Marion T. Sanders and wife on Friday evening.<sup>329</sup> It is also likely that black soldiers courted local black women. For example, in February 24, 1944, Pvt. W.M. Fletcher was the Sunday evening guest of Miss Grace Frasier.<sup>330</sup> In March 1944, Sgt. Walter Davenport and Sgt. Johnson of the camp were Sunday evening guests of Misses Christeen Hubbard and Rona Mae Lee.<sup>331</sup> These gatherings are significant as they indicate that within the short six-year period of 1940 and 1946, hundreds of African-America soldiers were introduced into and regularly socialized with the local black community.

Camp Stewart affected the lives of black Liberty Countians in a plethora of ways such as displacing some members from their ancestral land and disconnecting them from kin members. It also introduced new potential members to the community. The building of the fort also created employment opportunities for native Liberty Countians. One example occurred in 1941 when officials at the camp worked with the National Youth Administration to help employ the local black youth. The NYA was a New Deal agency

---

<sup>328</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. February 4, 1944.

<sup>329</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. September 13, 1945.

<sup>330</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. February 24, 1955.

<sup>331</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. March 16, 1944.

that provided jobs to American citizens between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five.<sup>332</sup>

By 1941, Dorchester Academy was the site of the local NYA program known as the Dorchester NYA Residential Work Experience Center. The local program was directed by J. R. Jenkins, the former principal of Dorchester Academy. On May 21, the center held a celebration to recognize the accomplishments of the program, which had employed local black youth on the grounds of Camp Stewart.

During 1941, the young adults had been employed at the hospital at Camp Stewart as “mess attendants, pantrymen, and kitchen police.” Young women were given the gendered jobs of “maids and house attendant.” In regards to the success of the program for young women, the newspaper article noted that “several had been placed in permanent positions, one of them in the home of General Wilson, commanding general of Camp Stewart.”<sup>333</sup> These jobs were especially useful in providing alternative training and employment opportunities for the local black citizens of Liberty County.

In addition to attending churches and clubs with the local community, the wives of many black soldiers lived at the Dorchester Cooperative Center. As late as November 1943, military wives rented rooms in the building of the center. In a letter dated November 15, 1943, Claudius Turner lamented the fact that “the income of the building has been cut to nothing...since most of the colored soldiers have been transferred from Camp Stewart” and “there are no soldiers’ wives living in the building.”<sup>334</sup> It is highly

---

<sup>332</sup> Joyce Ross, “Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration: A Case Study of Power Relationships in the Black Cabinet of Franklin D. Roosevelt” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 60. No. 1 (January 1975), 4.

<sup>333</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. May 8, 1941.

<sup>334</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth A. Morton, November 15, 1943. ARC.

probable that the wives of soldiers who lived in the building, and perhaps their extended kin who visited them, regularly socialized with the local black community.

It is likely that by the time Claudius Turner sent the letter in November 1943 lamenting that black families no longer rented rooms at the center, many of the black soldiers at Camp Stewart had been reassigned to other military posts. Reports indicate that there had been racial tension between black and white soldiers at Camp Stewart since 1942 when black soldiers were first transferred to fort. African-American soldiers were segregated into different units and were often passed over for promotions and mistreated.<sup>335</sup> These racial incidents culminated in the June 1943 race riot.

The incident occurred in June of that year when rumors abounded that African-American women had been assaulted by white soldiers.<sup>336</sup> Following the riot at Camp Stewart, the federal government shipped out many of the black troops to actively fight in the war. However, a number of black soldiers remained at the fort who continued to interact with the local black community. Throughout 1945 and 1945, black soldiers attended churches, socialized at people's houses, and attended events at the Liberty County branch of the United Service Organization (USO), an organization that sought to encourage local communities to provide services and entertainment to troops.

Like the race work conducted by Mary McLeod Bethune to ensure that African-American youth received employment opportunities in the National Youth Administration, Hubert T. Delany, the national director of the National Association for the

---

<sup>335</sup> Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II*, 175.

<sup>336</sup> Stephen Tucker, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggles for Racial Equality in Georgia*, 26-27.

Advancement of Colored People, played a significant role in investigating the lack of entertainment on military forts and in neighboring communities for black troops. Whereas activist A. Philip Randolph served as an honorary vice chairman of the USO fundraising campaign, in 1941 Delany served on the board of directors “to assist and advise the USO in the development of services for African-American troops.”<sup>337</sup>

The Hinesville USO was opened in Liberty County in January of 1944. The building was created “for colored troops.” The staff and the board of management reflected the effort of the federal government to help soldiers. The address for the event was made by Col. Wm. V. Ochs, the commander of Camp Stewart. W.J. Nicks, an African American man served as the director of the facility with Mrs. Fressie B Maxwell. Additionally, the board of management was comprised of residents of Liberty County: F.S. Fraser was chairman, Miss Mildred Turner, the Jeanes Supervisor for the count served as Vice Chairman, and Mrs. Carrie Simmons served as a board member.<sup>338</sup>

Despite the circumstances in which black troops left the county, there remained many African-American soldiers at the camp and they continued to socialize with the local black community. For example, in September of 1945, the Dorchester Center sponsored a baseball game between D.A. and Camp Stewart. The soldiers from the camp won by a large margin but many enjoyed the game that was held on Labor Day.<sup>339</sup> The black

---

<sup>337</sup> Nina Mjagkij, “The Negro Service Committee and African-American Soldiers” in *Politics and Progress: American Society and the State Since 1865*, eds. Andrew Edmund Kersten and Kriste Lindenmeyer (Praeger Publishers, 2001), 46.

<sup>338</sup> “New Federal Recreation Building At Hinesville,” *The Savannah Tribune*. January 6, 1944.

<sup>339</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. September 13, 1945.

community fondly remembered their service to the country and this show of respect was shown in the Veteran's Parade which was organized by the local black community in 1946.

### **The Dorchester Cooperative Center**

During the World War II period, the American Missionary Association closed the doors of many of its educational facilities and entered a new phase of community organization. Ruth Morton, the Director of Educational Operations, took the lead in ensuring that the community centers, which were located in several cities throughout the South and in Puerto Rico, succeeded in socializing the black communities and making them economically self-sufficient by incorporating modern farming techniques and teaching them the economic benefits of credit unions and farmer cooperatives.<sup>340</sup> The American Missionary Association's transition from educational facilities for youth to community centers coincided with the state of Georgia's effort to provide quality education to its African-American citizens.

In the early 1940s Robert Cousins, the white director of the Division of Negro Education for Georgia, actively sought to improve the standard of education for black Georgians. Scholars Joe Richardson and Maxine Jones note that this initiative was "aided and partially motivated by blacks' increased willingness – abetted by the NAACP – to go to court to secure better schools."<sup>341</sup> In 1940 Cousins contacted Ruth Morton concerning the state and municipal governments taking financial responsibility for African-American

---

<sup>340</sup> Ruth A. Morton, "Philosophy and Principles of the American Missionary Association Community Centers" *An Address Delivered by Ruth A. Morton, Director of Community Services, at a Conference on "Social Experimentation on the Community Level," July 6, 1949, at Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee Alabama, 4.* Pamphlet housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

<sup>341</sup> Joes M. Richardson and Maxine D. Jones, *Education For Liberation: The American Missionary Association and African-Americans, 1890 to the Civil Rights Movement* (The University of Alabama Press, 2009), 113.

schools. According to Morton, during the meeting Cousins asserted that private institutions such as Dorchester Academy could continue as board schools “after the state provided free public education for all its citizens.”<sup>342</sup> AMA officials agreed with Cousins but felt that the African-American community in Liberty County should have some say in the outcome of Dorchester Academy considering that the school had become an integral institution in the community.

In the Spring of 1940, the administration of the American Missionary Association, namely the General Secretary Fred Brownlee, and Ruth Morton, met with black Liberty Countians to determine the fate of Dorchester Academy. According to Morton, she and Brownlee explained that the state would provide adequate public education for African-American children. The parents of students who attended Dorchester Academy were forced to barter for goods and pay cash for their children’s education. With the improvement of public schools for African-American children, the parents would be able to save these resources.

The response from black Liberty Countians was mixed as some felt that “it was time the state provided schools so that they would not have to pay tuition” while others lamented that their children “would not receive diplomas from Dorchester Academy” as it had become a family tradition to receive an education from the school.<sup>343</sup> Had the parents declined the offer, Morton asserted that the AMA would have continued operating the school. However, by unanimous decision the representatives of the local

---

<sup>342</sup> Letter from Ruth A. Morton to Mrs. Robert Track. November 2, 1940. ARC.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.



black community agreed that the school should be closed and that Liberty County should provide adequate education for all its citizens.<sup>344</sup>

After receiving the consent of the black community, the American Missionary Association met with the white community of Liberty County to ensure that public officials would properly disseminate funds to black public schools. The organization worked with Robert Cousins to accomplish this goal. In March of 1940, Cousins began corresponding with Fred Brownlee about the closing of Dorchester Academy. Cousins planned to meet with H. A. Bacon, the superintendent of schools for the county, to determine the steps to take concerning the education of African-American children in the county. Cousins alerted Brownlee that “it will be necessary for some general understanding to be reached by you, Mr. Bacon and me before we go into a meeting of the Liberty County Board of Education.”<sup>345</sup> Cousins realized that to make drastic improvements to the education of African-American children, he would have to have prolonged discussions with the administration of both Dorchester Academy and the Board of Education. During this process, Cousins would serve as the emissary between the two groups.

Over the next year, the three groups interacted often. Ultimately, the American Missionary Association and the Board of Education decided to divide the costs of the high school building, materials for the schools, and one school bus for the black children.<sup>346</sup> The transition went smoothly. While Liberty County Training School was built, the American Missionary Association taught students in the old facility of Dorchester

---

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Letter from Robert L. Cousins to Fred Brownlee, March 5, 1940. ARC.

<sup>346</sup> Dawn Herd-Clark, “Dorchester Academy: The American Missionary Association in Liberty County, Georgia, 1867-1950”, 200-2009.

Academy. Other buildings on the property was sold and razed. The AMA administrators determined that the lone building, that of the boy's dormitory, would be used as a community center.<sup>347</sup>

One major issue that the American Missionary Association wished to address was the local black community's lack of access to bank loans. Seldom could black Liberty Countians obtain loans from the local white-owned banks due to their racist and discriminatory practices. Thus, the AMA sought to create a cooperative credit union for the African Americans in the county. During the summer of 1937 the AMA sent several members, headed by J.R. Jenkins, to St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia to learn about cooperatives. The AMA had an established relationship with Jenkins: Jenkins had served as the principal of Dorchester Academy from 1933 until 1939 and was the local administrator for the National Youth Administration that was housed on the grounds of the school. The local group returned to Liberty County in 1939 and trained local community members on the tenets of cooperation.<sup>348</sup>

The Dorchester Federal Credit Union was established in 1939 during the Great Depression. In the early 1930s "the county depended for its survival on the sale of farm products and naval stores, and there was virtually no market for them."<sup>349</sup> However, whereas white citizens received loans from local banks, African Americans were often excluded from applying based on their race. Thus, the creation of a credit union supported

---

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 208-210. For more information about the history of African American cooperatives see: Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

<sup>349</sup> Robert Long Groover *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 87.

by the AMA and maintained by the local black community was essential for the survival of the community.

The Dorchester Federal Credit Union provided loans to all dues-paying black citizens of the county including farmers, teachers, and domestic servants. According to an April 1940 editorial titled “Cooperation Comes to Liberty County”, the Dorchester Federal Union was important for several reasons.

The people have been anxiously awaiting some salvation for their many problems and many have testified that if the Credit Union idea had come into this community ten or twenty years ago of the land that people have had to sell and lose on account of delinquent taxes, would have been saved for their children.<sup>350</sup>

Also important was that people from various classes and occupation could receive loans from the credit union. As the editorial stated, membership was not “based on residence” or “composed only of teachers of the community or county” but also included “wood cutters, farmers, turpentine workers, saw-mill laborers, ministers, truck drivers, shop keepers, W.P.A. workers and domestics.”<sup>351</sup> Essentially, the credit union’s mission and aim was to provide a system of money for community members of various occupations, ages, and sexes. By January 1946 the organization had more than 240 members. Also impressive was that within a six-year period the credit union had “assets mounting to more than \$5,600”, had loaned out more than \$23,000, and had provided more than 350 loans to black credit union members in Liberty County.<sup>352</sup>

---

<sup>350</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. April 18, 1940.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>352</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. January 17, 1946.

Other organizations maintained by the Dorchester Cooperative Center was the Dorchester Farmers Cooperative and the Retreat Farmers Cooperative. The Dorchester Farmers Cooperative was incorporated under Georgia law in January 1946. Both farmers cooperative worked closely with the credit union to loan them money. By early 1946 this intimate relationship between the organizations afforded them the capital to purchase a tractor and a tract of land that members of the cooperatives used collectively.<sup>353</sup>

### **The Turners and the Local Black Community**

In 1942, the American Missionary Association officially hired Claudius Turner to become the first director of the Dorchester Cooperative Center. However, the couple had a few months of training to see if the black community would take to the Turners. The AMA officials understood that although the Turners were African-American, the Geechee people of Liberty County would not accept just any representatives to work and live in their community. Following their trial, the Turners were officially hired in 1944.<sup>354</sup>

Claudius Turner arrived to the rural community in the spring of 1944 with his wife Alice and their young child. Claudius hailed from Arkansas and although originally from Georgia, Alice had been raised in Tennessee. The college-educated couple arrived in Liberty County with a preconceived notion of the local black community as rural, individualistic, and superstitious. During the seven-year period in which they worked, lived, and socialized in Liberty County, the Turners came to understand that black Liberty Countians were a part of the Geechee cultural group prevalent in the coastal regions and

---

<sup>353</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. January 17, 1946.

<sup>354</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton, May 18, 1943. ARC.

Sea Islands of Georgia. And although the Turners and black Liberty Countians were from different places, they were united in their experiences as African Americans living in the Jim-Crow South.

The arrival of the Turners in the local community can be viewed as an introduction of new ideas. Although black Liberty Countians had a long history of interacting with teachers and administrators of Dorchester Academy and pastors of the Midway Congregational Church who were hired by the American Missionary Association, the coming of the Turners signaled a fundamental shift: whereas teacher, administrators, and reverends were hired to do a job and often left after a short amount of time, the Turners were hired primarily to interact with the community and to influence their way of life. To accomplish this task, the Turners had to become a part of the local black community.

Born on January 30, 1908, Claudius Turner was raised in Hope City, Arkansas with six siblings. His parents had migrated from North Carolina during the great migration in the midst of World War I. His father Henry worked as a laborer at a mill while his mother Helen, raised the children as a full-time mother.<sup>355</sup> Turner received his Bachelor's of Arts from Knoxville College in 1931. He received his Master's of Arts from Atlanta University in 1940. While working on an assistantship at Fisk University in Tennessee, the AMA hired him to become director of the Dorchester Community Center in 1942.<sup>356</sup>

Alice Hagans Turner was born in Emmanuel County, Georgia in 1912. Her parents, Charles and Anne Hagans, owned a small farm but had to sell when the boll weevil

---

<sup>355</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920.

<sup>356</sup> Transcript for Claudius Turner from Atlanta University circa 1940. ARC

destroyed the family's cotton crop. In the early 1920s the Hagans family relocated to Chattanooga, Tennessee to be with Charles Hagan's brother who had settled in the area several years before.<sup>357</sup> After Charles Hagans died in 1925, Anne Hagans was left to raise five children on her own. During the Great Depression, Mrs. Hagans worked two jobs, one as a seamstress in a department store and she also sold pies throughout the city.<sup>358</sup> Mrs. Hagans was a former teacher who realized the importance of both a formal and a practical education so in addition to sending Alice Turner to school, she also taught her daughter how to sew, a skill that had proven very profitable to Mrs. Hagans during the turbulent 1930s.<sup>359</sup> This pursuit of a dual education is a practice that black women, even educated, passed on as a survival technique to ensure that their daughters possessed the tools to survive in a world in which they were often relegated to the lowest socio-economic status due to their race and sex.

Alice Turner attended a number of premier institutions of higher learning, such as Fisk University, Spelman College, and Tuskegee Institute, but had not yet earned a college degree by 1942.<sup>360</sup> As was the doctrine of African-American middle class respectability politics, in order to be deemed a proper wife and mother, Alice Turner was constantly uprooted from her studies to accompany her husband and her child from university to university. But during those short periods of attending various colleges, Mrs. Turner learned a great deal about social science and domestic science. She also managed to craft an ideology on the proper ways to teach students. In her 1942 application to the

---

<sup>357</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920.

<sup>358</sup> Oral history with Twilla Jenkins by writer in October 2014.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Application for the Board of Missions of the AMA, circa 1942. ARC.

American Missionary Association, Mrs. Turner discussed her pedagogy of “social competence” in which pupils were “guided in developing types of personalities” that would prepare them to be successful citizens, a praxis that she would later use in her work in Liberty County.

Claudius Turner was hired to serve as the director of the Dorchester Cooperative Center. His responsibilities included handling the finances of the center, and educating the black community on cooperative initiatives and on new farming techniques. Turner was more than qualified to conduct this work as he held a degree in economics from Atlanta University and in 1940 he worked in the rural community of Tollette, Arkansas.<sup>361</sup> Claudius Turner also possessed experience as a researcher. While taking classes at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, Turner worked under the guidance of renowned social scientist Dr. Charles Johnson. In 1941 Turner researched the system of primary and secondary education afforded to African-Americans of a Louisiana Parish.<sup>362</sup> Thus, his work with the Geechee people of Liberty County encompassed economic and agricultural initiatives, as well as studying the cultural organizing traditions of the community. Despite their academic training, it would take the Turners several years to comprehend the complexity of the local Geechee culture.

Prior to their arrival in Liberty County, both Claudius and Alice Turner had been made aware of the background of the local blacks and had been forewarned that they were not community oriented. In a 1948 pamphlet entitled “Plymouth Rock in Liberty

---

<sup>361</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Fred Brownlee. September 23, 1940. ARC.

<sup>362</sup> Phillip J. Johnson, “The Limits of Interracial Compromise: Louisiana, 1941.” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (May 2003), 320.

County” Morton asserted that the credit union initiative was put in place in order to combat the “individualistic attitudes of antebellum days.”<sup>363</sup> It seems as if Claudius Turner shared these sentiments.

By 1944 the Union Brotherhood Society, a local benevolent society created by members of the local black community in the 1930s, had more than four hundred and fifty members. However, Turner and the AMA officials believed that the black community did not have a collective mentality. In his discussion of the Union Brotherhood Society, Turner replicated the feelings of AMA officials. He criticized the black community’s “individualism and contempt for knowledge.”<sup>364</sup> In the same letter, Turner noted that the community “seemed to be hypnotized by the desire for money” because they conducted “public work” to pay taxes on their farms without cultivating the farms.<sup>365</sup>

It is likely that the Turners’ experience of working in other rural African-American communities had not prepared them for the particular culture of the Geechee people in Liberty County. Although Alice Turner had been born in Georgia and raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the culture of Geechee people in the coastal region and Sea Islands of Georgia was unique. It is also likely that these cultural traditions were not practiced by African Americans who had migrated to places outside of the South, and thus were perceived as abnormal by visitors to Liberty County. This can be seen in the ways that Claudius Turner initially viewed Geechee culture as superstition.

---

<sup>363</sup> Ruth Morton, “Plymouth Rock in Liberty County: Story of the Dorchester Community Center, McIntosh, Georgia”, 1950. The Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, American Missionary Association Archives Addendum, Series A. Box 74, File 18.

<sup>364</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton. August 31, 1944. ARC.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.



In a 1944 letter, Turner provided Ruth Morton with two examples that articulated his point that black Liberty Countians were irrationally superstitious. Earlier that year, Turner had received a letter that he had been drafted to fight in World War II. Several members of the community urged him to visit a woman in Savannah to get a “fix” so that he would not have to go to war. Once he received the rejection letter he was to return to the woman to get the fix taken off.<sup>366</sup> Whereas Claudius Turner and the AMA officials viewed the Geechee people of Liberty County as irrationally superstitious, my research argues that their culture of believing in that the nature and the spirit world were innately connected. This belief also assisted the local black community in surviving the racist environment of the Jim Crow South by creating an alternate reality in which they were powerful, rational, and equal, if not morally superior, to whites.

Claudius Turner noted that another example of the Geechee culture had occurred three weeks earlier. A local woman, who had killed her sister, attended the funeral and cried hysterically. The president of the Farmer’s Union noticed that when the casket was buried, the dirt “rose up to the level of the ground and then went back into the gravel.” Once the news of this occurrence reached the local community, the people canceled a social dance that was to have taken place on Labor Day.<sup>367</sup> Claudius Turner marveled that the local black community would abruptly cancel a dance that they had organized several months in advance. But as noted in the case of the family who suddenly left town due to

---

<sup>366</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton, August 31, 1944. ARC.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

the hooting of an owl in the late nineteenth century, these shared beliefs were part of the Geechee cultural traditions of the local black community.

Belief that the spirit world was intimately connected to that of the living was an integral aspect of Geechee ontology. During the period, the Works Progress Administration conducted interviews of a number of Geechee people in coastal Georgia in order to better understand the former enslaved populations who continue to practice a traditional, rural lifestyle. Although WPA workers and middle class reformers such as the Turners viewed these beliefs as superstition and as signs of unintelligence, these cultural traditions served to maintain an insular community.<sup>368</sup>

### **Community Organizing in the 1940s**

In the 1940s, the community continued to organize and socialize in the traditional institutions of local churches, benevolent societies, and fraternal organizations. However, in this period they also utilized the services and spaces of the Dorchester Cooperative Center and the United Service Organization building to maintain their traditional cultural practices. This section argues that services of the DCC and the USO were so successful in the county because they enabled the community to pay taxes on land, better educate their children, and provided spaces in which large numbers of peoples could discuss ways in which to improve their lives.

---

<sup>368</sup> *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers; Project, Works Progress Administration, 1940).



*Figure 11.* African Americans building houses in the 1940s. Liberty County, Georgia. The organizations housed at the DCC, including the Federal Credit Union and the two Farmers Cooperatives, provided opportunities for black Liberty Countians to build houses and pay taxes for their land. ARC.

The children of the community continued attending school. As noted above during the late 1930s and early 1940s, the public system of Georgia became better structured and provided more funding to African-American schools. Concurrently, black school teachers in the community continued to work in the segregated-public schools to educate local children. Because the lives of young children were greatly influenced by the curriculum of school, it is relevant to review the history of the black teacher's association of the county.

One of the earliest meetings of the Liberty County Teachers Association was held in January 1932. The organization was comprised of teachers from all fifteen public schools of the county. At this particular meeting, the teachers met with H. A. Bacon, the Superintendent of Education in Liberty County, to ensure that teachers were complying with the state regulations.<sup>369</sup> During the 1940s, these teachers, overwhelmingly comprised of young black women many from the county, created and implemented county-wide programs for black children.

During the early 1940s, the public schools held annual oratorical contests. The annual event was scheduled in late February to coincide with Negro History Week, an event created by historian Carter G. Woodson in 1920.<sup>370</sup> During the event in Liberty County, school children performed works “by Negro authors and songs of Negro origin.” The purpose of the contests was “to familiarize children and adults of the communities with the poets of the race, and to develop an interest in Negro history in general.”<sup>371</sup>

During the years 1945 and 1946 the event was held in the building of the Hinesville USO to accommodate the large number of people who wished to attend. Both community members and soldiers from Camp Stewart attended. It was also an opportunity for students to improve their speaking skills, “to achieve to belong, to make worthy contacts and develop effective personalities.”<sup>372</sup> The Oratorical Contest was simply one of many tools outside of school, church, and the home in which African-American children gained skills to become good citizens.

---

<sup>369</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. January 14, 1932.

<sup>370</sup> C. G. Woodson, “Negro History Week.” *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol 11, No. 2 (Apr., 1926), 238.

<sup>371</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. March 15, 1945.

<sup>372</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. February 28, 1946.

At times, the black community of Liberty County did not organize under the auspices of a designated organization. During the 1940s, black Liberty Countians often organized at the grassroots level by pooling resources to keep white citizens from purchasing land in their community. One example occurred in early 1945 in the community of Freedmen's Grove. According to Claudius Turner, "an acre of ground with an old dilapidated school building was auctioned off by the County Department of Education. The Negroes of that community got a white friend to bid it in for them. They brought it at the high price of \$967.00."<sup>373</sup> That the black citizens would pay almost a thousand dollars to purchase one acre of land demonstrates the extreme measures they took to maintain the insularity of their community. Black Liberty Countians understood the stakes of maintaining all-black neighborhoods: due to the ubiquity of anti-black violence intrinsic in the Jim-Crow South, the best way to maintain safe community was to keep outsiders from purchasing land in their neighborhoods.

---

<sup>373</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Fred L. Brownlee. January 30, 1945. ARC.

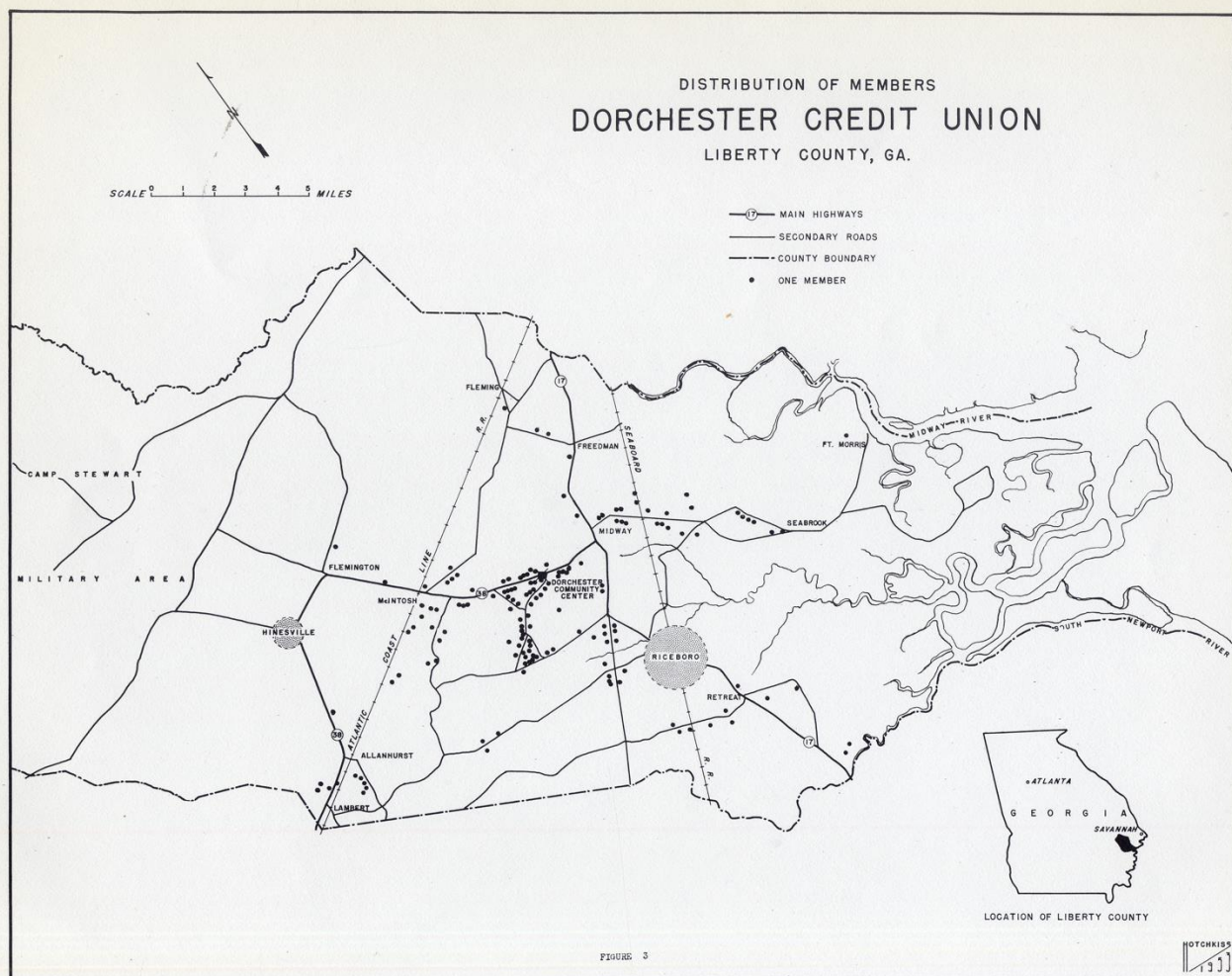


Figure 12. Map of the members of the Dorchester Credit Union, 1953. This map is a part of the "Reconnaissance Survey of Dorchester Community Center" study published in 1953. Although this map is from a later period, it shows the proximity of members to the Dorchester Credit Union. The Dorchester Cooperative Center was located in the center of the black community. Camp Stewart is in the western part of the county. The Amistad Research Center.

## Conclusion

The Veterans Parade was perhaps the highlight of black social, cultural, and political life in 1946. As Claudius Turner rightly noted, the event also signaled a shift in racial interaction between the black and white communities of Liberty County. White

officials such as the sheriff and local business owners recognized that due to recent changes to federal legislation, black citizens would soon have the right to participate in state primary elections.

Black Liberty Countians would utilize the local institutions of the church and the DCC to prepare for the 1946 Democratic Primaries. The Dorchester Credit Union enabled community members to pool resources and served as a vehicle in which to readily mobilize a large number of people. This is evident in the large role it played in planning and administering the grand event of the Veteran's Parade in which hundreds of soldiers and key political figures of the county participated. And finally the Dorchester Cooperative Center served as the central place in which hundreds of citizens in the county met to discuss and strategized for issues facing their respective communities. The black community used the diverse institutions of the local churches and cooperatives housed at the DCC to participate in the 1946 primary elections.

## CHAPTER VII

### GEECHEE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING AND THE 1946 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES

In April of 1946 the black citizens of the county organized the Liberty County Citizens Council (LCCC) “to get Negroes to register in Liberty County.”<sup>374</sup> The LCCC was a political organization created for the sole purpose of preparing the local black community to vote in the 1946 Democratic Primaries. Over the two-month period of April and May, the council educated more than two thousand black people on their rights as citizens. They were also made abreast of the changes in the electoral process that would allow black Georgians to vote in a state election since the 1910s. According to Claudius Turner, the LCCC was organized by an ad hoc committee of the Dorchester Federal Credit Union, which by 1946 had become the premier institution in the county. The administrative board “contact(ed) the leading members in each neighborhood in the county” to provide details about the locations and times of mass meetings.<sup>375</sup> The ad hoc committee members, composed of local African Americans from the county, understood that soliciting members from the various black neighborhoods served several purposes. First, it would be a way to easily disseminate information to the large community, which by 1940 totaled more than 5,500 people.<sup>376</sup> Second, the selected leaders were respectable,

---

<sup>374</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. April 25, 1946.

<sup>375</sup> Claudius Turner, “Overcoming Obstacles to Voting in Liberty County, Spring of 1946.” ARC. This document is a sociological study composed by Claudius Turner during his time in Liberty County. The four-page study provides a detailed analysis of the political organizing of African Americans in Liberty County during the 1946 Democratic Primaries.

<sup>376</sup> Table 21. – Composition of the Population, By Counties: 1940, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 Population: Volume II Characteristics of the Population*, 221.



landowning citizens who could participate in political matters without their livelihood being threatened by white employers. The LCCC would serve as the central organization to educate and register black Liberty County voters for the Democratic Primaries that would be held in May and July of that year.

It has entered the national memory that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was the principal decree that allowed twentieth-century Southern African Americans the opportunity to participate in state and national elections. It is true that the congressional act, in conjunction with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, “circumvent(ed) the problem of policing state practices by simply suspending those requirements which have been used discriminatorily.”<sup>377</sup> However, at least two decades prior, millions of black Southerners organized, registered, and voted in the 1946 Democratic Primaries.

The 1946 primary election was the first time in at least thirty years in which a large number of African Americans participated in state primaries. In Georgia, as in other southern states like Texas and South Carolina, the primaries essentially signified for whom the state would vote. Legislatively, Georgia had maintained white primaries since the first decade of the twentieth century. The exclusion of African-American voters was maintained by the enactment of poll taxes, grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and terrorist acts such as the lynching of black people by white mobs. Thus, by the early 1940s, the majority of black Georgians were effectively disenfranchised.

In order to provide an in-depth analysis of the 1946 Democratic Primaries in Liberty County, Georgia, this chapter uses the Long Civil Rights Movement paradigm to

---

<sup>377</sup> “Voting Rights Act of 1965.” *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 1966, No. 2 (Spring 1966), 468-469.

situate the actions of the local black community into the broader narrative of Civil Rights Movement. Jacqueline Dowd Hall, as well as scholars such as Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodward, have argued that viewing the civil rights movement in this framework reperiodizes the movement to as early as the 1930s, during the Great Depression Era, well into the 1970s of the Black Power Era.<sup>378</sup> This paradigm demonstrates that the work of black Liberty Countians in the previous decades of the early twentieth century, and arguably that of the late nineteenth century, set the groundwork of the organizing traditions used during the 1946 Democratic Primaries.

This chapter introduces the concept of Geechee grassroots organizing. This type of organizing is specific to the indigenous traditions of the Geechee community in Liberty County. It accounts for several of the topics discussed in previous chapters, specifically the prevalence of extended kin networks and the ways in which black Liberty Countians used these networks to readily disseminate information during the registration drive. It also accounts for the manners in which land ownership afforded the community the right to vote in their best interest; as many black citizens generated revenue from their home farms, they were less likely to face the loss of job security or other forms of coercion by white employers, neighbors or local officials.

## **Preparing for Enfranchisement**

---

<sup>378</sup> Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005). Komozi Woodward and Jeanne Theoharis, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South 1940-1980* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

The post-World War II era was a period in which African-Americans actively sought for the right to vote. As Stephen Tuck notes in *Outside Atlanta*, African Americans in communities throughout the state had agitated for change and maintained political and self-help organizations in their respective community throughout the twentieth century. Black Georgians fought for equity in education, employment, and housing. In addition to the daily agitation for change occurring in black communities throughout the state, the 1940s was a pivotal time in which changes were occurring in the nation.<sup>379</sup>

Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had grown in number and maintained branches throughout the nation. The NAACP brought another technique of filing legal cases through their legislative branch, the Legal Defense Fund. Finally, there were a number of pivotal court cases, namely the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* and 1945 *King v. Chapman*, that specifically challenged the impediments of black enfranchisement in the nation in general, and in Georgia in specific. Black Georgians took advantage of the political and social climate and utilized traditional systems of organizing to register and vote in the 1946 Democratic Primaries.

The 1944 Supreme Court ruling *Smith v. Allwright* was pivotal legislation that contested the widespread practice of the Democratic Party functioning as a private organization. In *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* Darlene Clark Hine states that this one legislation offered millions of African Americans in the

---

<sup>379</sup> *Sweet Land of Liberty* is another text that rethinks that civil rights movement outside of the South. In the monograph Thomas Sugrue also broadens the definition of the term civil rights to encompass voting and registration initiatives, and movements to improve education, unemployment, and discriminatory housing. Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (Random House Trade, 2008).

South the opportunity to participate in democracy; for many it was the first time in more than forty years.<sup>380</sup> If *Smith v. Allwright* signified a national shift in anti-racist legislation and an impetus for large-scale black registration, then the 1945 court case *King v. Chapman* assured blacks in Georgia that it was the opportune time to register and vote.

On July 4, 1945 Primus King, a black minister, attempted to vote in the Democratic Primaries in Columbus, Georgia but was escorted out of the court house by a white law officer.<sup>381</sup> King, who was a member of a group of Columbus African-American civil rights activists, immediately met with his white lawyer and filed a law suit. In September 1945, King's attorneys argued in *King v. Chapman et al.* that their client's right to vote under the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Seventeenth Amendments had been violated. On October 12, 1945, a judge ruled in King's favor and awarded him \$5,000.<sup>382</sup> In 1946 the Democratic Committee of the State of Georgia appealed the case to the Federal Circuit Court at New Orleans. Paying close attention to these proceedings, African Americans in Liberty County and throughout the state altered their strategies of first-class citizenship and commenced planning to register and vote in the 1946 Democratic Primaries.

The prevalence of print culture is especially significant in reference to the prompt dissemination of information about the King case to millions of people. As Patrick Washburn asserts, "black newspapers provided the foundation for the civil rights era."<sup>383</sup>

---

<sup>380</sup> Darlene Crank Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (University of Missouri Press, 2003).

<sup>382</sup> Laughlin McDonald, *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

<sup>383</sup> Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voices of Freedom* (Northwestern University Press, 2006), xvii.

This especially true for African Americans in Southern Georgia who regularly read *The Savannah Tribune*. The black-owned newspaper regularly provided its readers with information about national court cases that involved and affected African-American people. On April 4, 1946, thousands of readers learned that the Supreme Court would not review the appeal case to *King v. Chapman*.<sup>384</sup> Realizing that this could be the turning point in voting rights for African Americans, the black citizens of Liberty County raised \$50.00 for the Primus King case.<sup>385</sup> They also began strategizing in the spaces of the Dorchester Cooperative Center (DCC) and the numerous churches in the county.<sup>386</sup>

Although the Geechee people in Liberty County had not participated in formal politics since the early twentieth century, they routinely organized in churches, benevolent societies, locales homes, and at the DCC. This experience of organizing meant that black residents of Liberty County were well prepared to push for voting rights and enter formal party politics in the 1940s, when it seemed like there was an actual opening to do so.<sup>387</sup>

Throughout the 1940s, African-American communities throughout the nation agitated for legislation that provided equitable schools, housing, and access to electoral politics. In the quest for civil rights each community created techniques and used strategies based on the location, demographics, and history of race relations for the respective community. In particular, to the environment of Liberty County in the 1940s,

---

<sup>384</sup> "S. Court Refuses to Hear 'White Primary' Appeal Case." April 4, 1946. *The Savannah Tribune*.

<sup>385</sup> Notice of Primus King Supreme Court Case, February 9, 1946. ARC.

<sup>386</sup> Laughlin McDonald, *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia* and Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980*.

<sup>387</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Harvard College, 2003).

the ubiquity of land ownership afforded the black population some economic autonomy. Two features make Liberty County, Georgia an important case study in understanding the complexity of the black freedom struggle. Black Liberty Countians were the majority in the county, accounting for 64% of the population (total pop 8,595, black 5,518) making their vote particularly important.<sup>388</sup> A large percentage of the black population owned land, accounting for 71% of farms in the county with the average acreage being 39 acres. This degree of land ownership among black Liberty Countians was well above the state average, in which blacks only owned 27% of farms.<sup>389</sup> These factors assisted the Geechee people of Liberty County in effectively registering and voting in the 1946 elections.

### **The Liberty County Citizens Council**

The executive board of the Liberty County Citizens Council (LCCC) was comprised of several influential members in the community. Therefore, to understand the significance of the organization and its role during the registration drive and election, it is important to know the leaders of the organization. Three of the four executive board members were ministers of churches in the county. Reverend W.C. Shipman, the president of the organization, pastored several of the local Baptist churches. Bishop Eddie Jones, the vice president, was pastor of the Riceboro Baptist church. Reverend William Woods, pastored the four Presbyterian churches in the county. And Mrs. Effie Dell Frazier, the youngest member of the executive board, was the assistant secretary.

---

<sup>388</sup> "Table 21. – Composition of the Population, By Counties: 1940" *Sixteenth Census of the United States:1940. Population: Volume II, Characteristics of the Population*, 221.

<sup>389</sup> "County Table I. – Farms, Farm Acreage, and Value By Color of Operator, 1940, 1935, and 1930" pg 508-509, "State Table 12: Number of Farms, Farm Acreage, and Farm Value, By Race of Operator: 1910 to 1940", 496. *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Agriculture, Volume I, First and Second Series, State Reports*.

Reverend W.C. Shipman was the president of the organization. As a minister in the community, Shipman had connections to other churches and congregations in the community and state. As Clarence Taylor notes, “A variety of leadership styles and models as well as ideologies have been evident in the black religious communities. These ideas have blurred secular and sacred, combining church and state, religious beliefs and secular doctrines.”<sup>390</sup> Additionally, black preachers were economically sufficient and owned land. Although not originally from the county, his role as a pastor of several churches in the county and his access to hundreds of local black people suggested that Reverend Shipman could readily disseminate information about the upcoming elections.

The Baptist minister was originally from Bryan County, a county approximately fifteen miles away. Reverend Shipman maintained his residence in Bryan County while pastoring several Baptists churches in Liberty County.<sup>391</sup> By 1946, Reverend Shipman had been a preacher in the county since the early 1940s.<sup>392</sup> In addition to administering church services, the Shipman family was very active in the social life of the community. In May of 1945, Rev. W.C. Shipman was the president of the Boy Scout Troops for the county.<sup>393</sup> Mrs. Florrie Shipman was a member of the Midway Sewing Circle, a social club composed of local black women.<sup>394</sup> The organization regularly held meetings at the Shipman house throughout 1945 year.

---

<sup>390</sup> Clarence Taylor, *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality from Jim Crow to the Twenty-First Century*. (Routledge, 2002), 6.

<sup>391</sup> According to the U.S. Census for 1910, 1920, and 1940, William Shipman lived in Bryan County, Georgia.

<sup>392</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. October 14, 1943.

<sup>393</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. May 24, 1945.

<sup>394</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. September 30, 1945. October 25, 1945. March 21, 1945.

Bishop Eddie Jones was the Vice President of the Liberty County Citizens Council. Prior to being hired as the pastor of the Riceboro Baptist Church in, Jones was a reverend in Savannah. In October of 1945, Jones served as the guest preacher at the Riceboro Baptist Church.<sup>395</sup> It seems as if this trial period was a success because in less than six months Bishop Jones was selected as the pastor of the church.<sup>396</sup> It is probable that Jones was selected on the executive board because like Shipman, he was a reverend with access to a large group of people.

Like Shipman and Jones, Reverend Woods was also from outside the county. Prior to becoming the minister of the Presbyterian churches in Liberty County, Woods was employed at the Coulter Academy in Cheraw, South Carolina, a school affiliated with the Presbyterian church to educate African-American children.<sup>397</sup> Like Bishop Eddie Jones, Reverend Woods had to prove himself to the community before being hired as pastor of the local Presbyterian churches. In July of 1945, Reverend Woods visited all the African-American Presbyterian churches in the county. On this trip, he assisted the current reverend of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church with administering communion to the congregation.<sup>398</sup> In August, he gave remarks and delivered the sermon at the Midway Presbyterian Church. To obtain the position, Reverend Woods sought to connect with black Liberty Countians outside the space of the church. In August 1945, he was the

---

<sup>395</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. October 11, 1945.

<sup>396</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. April 25, 1946.

<sup>397</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. July 26, 1945 and August 2, 1945. Patrick O'Brien. "Lois Irwin, Barber College and Christian Altruism in Alabama, 1926-1927." *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985), Vol. 62, No. 4 (Winter 1984), 333.

<sup>398</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. July 26, 1945.



special guest at the social gathering of the ladies-only Midway Sewing Circle.<sup>399</sup> By October of 1945, the community had invited him to pastor the Presbyterian churches of the county. The local community “wishe(d) him much success in his new field of labor for the master.”<sup>400</sup>

Mrs. Effie Dell Frazier was the assistant secretary of the Liberty County Citizens Council. Unlike the other executive board members, Mrs. Frazier was not a reverend, was originally from the county, and was a young woman. But to understand how a twenty-six-year-old woman could be elected to a board whose sole purpose was to educate and motivate people to register and vote in the 1946 Democratic Primaries, one must look at the genealogy of Effie Dell Frazier’s family, the Hines family.<sup>401</sup>

Pompey Hines, Effie D. Frazier’s grandfather, was born in Liberty County in 1844. He was most likely worked as a bondsperson on one of the many plantations in the county. However, during the Reconstruction period Pompey and his wife Ellen purchased property and ran a farm. By 1880, Pompey and Ellen had accumulated 116 acres of land and had cultivated 16 of those acres.<sup>402</sup> By 1900, fifty-five-year-old Pompey and forty-one-year-old Ellen maintained a large farm with the help of their fifteen children, twelve of whom resided in their home.<sup>403</sup> As was the tradition of black Liberty Countians, when he died in July 1919, the widowed Pompey Hines left “both real and personal property in said State probably worth the sum of ten thousand dollars” to “his next of kin fifteen

---

<sup>399</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. August 2, 1945.

<sup>400</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. October 25, 1945.

<sup>401</sup> In 1930, 9-year-old Effie D Hines lived with her father, James T. Hines, her mother, Ester, and her two older brother. 1930 U. S. Census. Liberty County, Georgia. 1543 GM District. [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com)

<sup>402</sup> Agricultural Census for 1880. 17<sup>th</sup> District. Liberty County, Georgia. [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com).

<sup>403</sup> 1900 U. S. Census. 1543 G.M. District. Liberty County, Georgia. [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com)

children.” The property was to be divided among his nine sons and six daughters. Mrs. Effie Dell Frazier’s father, James T. Hines, was one of the children who inherited a portion of the Hines land.<sup>404</sup>

By 1920, thirty-four-year-old James T. Hines and his wife, twenty-year-old Esther, owned a farm in the 1543<sup>rd</sup> district of the county, the same district in which James was raised.<sup>405</sup> By 1930, land ownership had afforded the Hines the opportunity to send all three of their children to school.<sup>406</sup> Thus by 1946, it was not uncommon for Mrs. Effie Dell Frazier to have been selected as the assistant secretary of the Liberty County Citizens Council: the twenty-six-year-old belonged to one of the oldest land-owning families in the county. Additionally, she had married into another of the local families, the Frazier family.

These brief biographies of the executive board of the LCCC demonstrates that the black citizens of Liberty County deliberately chose reverends with ready access to a large number of congregants or local citizens who had connections to the broader network of native black families. It also appears that each member of the executive board was located in different parts of the community. Reverend Shipman lived near Dorchester Academy, which was located in the center of the county.<sup>407</sup> Bishop Jones lived in Riceboro, a city located in the southeastern part of the county, about ten miles south of

---

<sup>404</sup> “P. B. Hines”, Court of Ordinary, October 7, 1919. Ancestry.com

<sup>405</sup> 1920 U.S. Census. 1543 District. Liberty County, Georgia. Ancestry.com.

<sup>406</sup> 1930 U.S. Census. 1543 District. Liberty County, Georgia. Ancestry.com.

<sup>407</sup> In the weekly updates that community members submitted to The Savannah Tribune, the updates that focus on the activities of Shipman family are located under the community section entitled “Dorchester Academy.” In the May 22, 1945 issue, the news relating to Mrs. Shipman’s brother being wounded while on duty in Italy is listed under the “Dorchester Academy” community. Similar examples can be found in the following issues: June 14, 1945, July 16, 1945, October 25, 1945, March 21 1946; and May 9, 1946.

Dorchester Academy.<sup>408</sup> Reverend Woods lived in the Freedman Grove community, which is located in the northeast portion of the city.<sup>409</sup> Mrs. Effie Dell Frazier lived in Hinesville, a city located in the western part of the county.<sup>410</sup> The geographic location of each executive member made it easy to readily disseminated material throughout the county, to educate their respective communities on their voting rights, and to hold meetings in which to strategize on the proper way to vote in the Democratic Primaries.

In addition to methodically selecting board members from the various communities, the organization also strategized to create a nonthreatening and racially ambiguous name. After its founding, the political organization selected the name of Liberty County Citizens Council in an effort to avoid “names, statements, and action which have the connotation of race.”<sup>411</sup> The LCCC planned to organize any community political activity through the Dorchester Cooperative Center. Over the next three months, the organization would meet in different churches throughout the county to educate members on their rights as citizens and on proper voting procedures.

---

<sup>408</sup> Bishop Jones was hired to be the pastor of Riceboro Baptist Church. News that were submitted to the Savannah Tribune was listed under the “Riceboro” section. *The Savannah Tribune*. June 27, 1946.

<sup>409</sup> When Rev. Woods moved to the community in October 1945, he lived in Freedman Grove with Dr. F. S. Frazier until the parsonage of the church was remodeled. In subsequent postings in *The Savannah Tribune*, Rev. Woods’ social activities are listed in the “Freedman Grove” section. *The Savannah Tribune*. October 25, 1945. November 22, 1945. January 17, 1946.

<sup>410</sup> In *The Savannah Tribune*, every mention of Mrs. Effie Dell Frazier is located under the “Hinesville” section of community events. *The Savannah Tribune*. May 22, 1945, February 7, 1946, March 8, 1946, and July 8, 1946.

<sup>411</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton, April 19, 1946. ARC

[ENC. APRIL 19, 1946]

# THE \$64 QUESTION



BE A GOOD CITIZEN

REGISTER TO VOTE

## Why Register?

Every good citizen puts his or her name on the registration list in order to be able to vote for elected officials who make and enforce the laws by which we are governed. The more citizens who register and vote, the better our government is. By voting we get better roads, schools, hospitals, playgrounds, parks, libraries, and safety of life and property.

## Where Register?

You register at the tax receiver's office in Hinesville.

You don't have to pay poll tax or other taxes to register.

## How Register?

Begin by courteously telling the tax receiver that you wish to register to vote. Keep calm and an even temper. Give no one an excuse for not registering you. You will have to give your name, address, where you were born, your age, how long you have lived in Georgia and Liberty County. You must be able to read and write. You must sign your name on the registration book.

LIBERTY COUNTY CITIZENS COMMITTEE

Figure 13. Mimeograph of a Liberty County Citizens Council flyer, 1946. This announcement was created by the LCCC and distributed throughout the community. Leaders of the LCCC also held community meetings at churches in their neighborhoods and would hold mass meetings at the DCC to educate people on their voting rights. The Amistad Research Center.

After their initial meeting on April 19, the LCCC met again on April 26<sup>412</sup> and on May 24. Announcements for both meetings asked that “all communities in the county had representatives present.”<sup>413</sup> However, political meetings were not only held at Dorchester Cooperative Center. There were additional informational meetings held throughout the county. These meetings were most likely organized by the officers of the LCCC in their respective neighborhoods. For example, on Tuesday, June 4, “the third in a series of mass meetings in the county was held at Zion Baptist Church” in the Crossroads community of the county.<sup>414</sup>

It is likely that the community held numerous meetings throughout the county in order to educate people on the particularities of voting. On 27 June the “Hinesville” community announcement encouraged “all persons 18 years and older” who were not registered to vote to “be on the lookout for announcements of mass meetings in your community” in order to receive information on using the ballot.<sup>415</sup> The LCCC and the larger black community understood the importance of their vote as they outnumbered the white community. By 1940, the black citizens of voting age numbered more than 2,000 whereas white voters only numbered 1,700.<sup>416</sup> Understanding this significance, the LCCC attempted to prepare the black community to vote as a bloc.

In addition to educating people on the proper voting procedures, members of the LCCC and the larger community actively assisted community members in registering to

---

<sup>412</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. April 25, 1946.

<sup>413</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 6, 1946.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>415</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*. June 27, 1946

<sup>416</sup> In 1940, the state of Georgia had lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.

vote. One manner was through carpooling and transporting people to the court house. The court house was located in Hinesville, the county seat of Liberty County. As less than 16% of the black community lived in Hinesville, the community organized a carpooling system in which to transport hundreds of black citizens to the court house to register.<sup>417</sup> Within the three-month registration drive, more than 1,600 members of the African-American community had registered to vote.<sup>418</sup> However, the registration process had not been one without issues.

The question of rather or not black registrants were presented with literacy test or were systematically stricken from the voting list was contested by both the black and the white officials. In his observations on the voting drive Claudius Turner provides ample examples of white officials discriminating against black citizens. According to Turner, the tax collector of the county did not engage in the discriminatory practices. However, the Board of Registrars of Liberty County made African-American applicants take written examinations to determine their qualifications and to intimidate them into not registering.<sup>419</sup> Turner and the local black citizens realized that this was an illegal measure and hired a lawyer from Savannah to file suit on their behalf.

And although the board of registration of Liberty County vehemently denied discriminating against the black community, it is highly probable that they did not provide proper access to voting. This can be viewed with the state-wide investigation conducted

---

<sup>417</sup> 1940 census. In 1940, 910 African Americans lived in military district 17, a district that included Hinesville, Taylor's Creek, and Sunny Glenn.

<sup>418</sup> In his study "Overcoming Obstacles to Voting in Liberty County" Turner notes that more than 1,600 registered to vote. But the Federal Bureau Investigation of 1946 that interviewed officials in the county puts the number of black registrants at 2,053.

<sup>419</sup> Turner, "Overcoming Obstacles to Voting in Liberty County." ARC.

by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in May of that year. During the primaries, many African Americans brought suit to the local government so much so that the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched an official investigation in July of 1946. F.B.I. Investigators traveled to more than forty counties in Georgia and interviewed both white and black citizens to determine if there had been any misconduct in the election. The investigation unequivocally determined that the supporters of Eugene Talmadge sought to bring “about a wholesale purge of Negro voters from the voting list irrespective of their qualifications under Georgia law.”<sup>420</sup>

The FBI investigation sheds some light on the methods used by the board of registration and white officials in Liberty County during the 1946 Democratic Primaries. According to the statements given to special agent Maurice F. Donegan, on May 4, 1946 1,500 sets of challenges and summons forms were mailed to J. Wardlaw Griner, tax collector of Liberty County. These forms were sent from Atlanta “to be used in challenging Negro registrants” and in hopes that “after a few were challenged, the rest would quit.”<sup>421</sup> Griner stated that he refused to accept the forms from the Hinesville post office, but he admitted to having a phone conversation with Eugene Talmadge in regards to challenging black registrants. He had also received two letters from Talmadge on May 4, 1946 including mimeographed instruction sheets on how to use the 1,500 sheets to challenge black voters.<sup>422</sup>

---

<sup>420</sup> “Report of Special Agent Maurice F. Donegan, Jr., for Liberty County”, 8/29/46. Collection No. 5920. Joseph L. Berd Collection of FBI. Georgia Historical Society. Savannah, Georgia.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

The Talmadge administration also sent challenge summons forms to Donald H. Fraser, a city court judge in Hinesville. Fraser stated that he received 2,000 forms in early July 1946 “by railway express from the Commercial Letter Service in Atlanta, Georgia.” Fraser acknowledged that he received the forms after requesting them the Talmadge office as “it was common knowledge that such forms were obtainable from Talmadge headquarters and were being used in other counties.”<sup>423</sup>

Despite this large-scale attempt to prohibit African Americans from voting in Georgia, thousands of people successfully registered for the 1946 Democratic Primaries. In 1946, over 125,000 black Georgians registered to vote. Scholars such as Steven Tucker note that only 20% of eligible African Americans in the state registered;<sup>424</sup> However, more than 73% of eligible black Liberty Countians registered.<sup>425</sup> Whereas urban cities such as Savannah and Atlanta used local NAACP chapters to conduct a voter registration drive, black Liberty Countians created the Liberty County Citizens Council and used local, indigenous institutions such as churches and the Dorchester Cooperative Center which to educate people on their voting rights and to register to vote.

---

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Tucker, *Beyond Atlanta*, 41.

<sup>425</sup> Claudius Turner, “Overcoming Obstacles to Voting in Liberty County, Spring of 1946.” May 17, 1946. ARC. Turner notes that out of 2,200 eligible black voters approximately 1,600 were registered in the summer of 1946.





*Figure 14. African Americans voting in Riceboro, Georgia, 1946. The Amistad Research Center.*

### **Geechee Grassroots Organizing**

Geechee Grassroots Organizing is based on the organizing traditions used by the black community of Liberty County, Georgia in the 1946 Democratic Primaries. These strategies were based on organizing traditions which had been established by the community in the Reconstruction era of the late nineteenth century. Geechee grassroots organizing is based on 4 cultural facets of the community: large-scale landownership by the local black community, the pervasiveness of extended kinship networks, the availability of local institutions in which to organize, and the shared cultural beliefs of the

community. Because most the black citizens owned land they were free to organize and collectively vote in the interest of their community. The majority of the black community owned land, married other people in the community, and regularly socialized with other black people in the county. Kinship networks were maintained in the spaces of churches, in homes, with the interaction of black soldiers at the local USO, and the membership of organizations housed at the Dorchester Cooperative Center, namely the Dorchester Credit Union and the two farmer cooperatives.

Lastly, an integral facet of Geechee Grassroots Organizing is the shared beliefs of the local Geechee community. These cultural traditions, or Geechee grassroots organizing, can best be viewed through the experiences of Claudius Turner, who was a non-native black Liberty Countians who participated in the voter registration drive of 1946. Although Turner was the director of the DCC, many times when organizing for the elections, local black leaders preferred to keep Turner in a subordinate position. Thus, this chapter utilizes the correspondences and sociological studies prepared by Claudius Turner to analyze the manners in which the Geechee community maintained an internal leadership structure while organizing for the 1946 Democratic Primaries.

By 1946, Claudius Turner had lived in and worked with the black community of Liberty Count for three years. However, it seems as if 1946 proved a time in which Turner began to understand the complexity of the Geechee people. In a letter written to Ruth Morton in May of 1946 Tuner began “I have written on many occasions about the individualism of the people and their willingness to go it alone. But I have found later that there is something in their traditions which provide a powerful unifying force.” During

the voter registration drive Turner realized that when the black citizens went to vote, they had time-honed techniques in place in which to pacify white bureaucrats. For example, when the tax collector asked the black registrants for whom they would vote, without any prior coaching they responded “I didn’t come to vote. I come to register.” Another instance was after receiving illegal written qualifications, African Americans were asked which party they liked. They responded, “I like both parties.” Turner marveled, “These people are masters at straddling issues...Out of the 1,100 Negroes who registered there was not a racial incident.”<sup>426</sup>

This nonviolent approach to interacting with the local white community had been formulated and perfected over time. African Americans in Liberty County had lived with the local white community for generations. Their ancestors had been enslaved by many of the ancestors of the local white community. Many of the black men worked in the turpentine industries with white businessmen. Thus, the black community understood how to productively interact with white officials without inciting violence.

Another important example of Geechee grassroots organizing was the importance of maintaining local leadership. As mentioned above, the leaders of the Liberty County Citizens Council solicited assistance from Claudius Turner in meeting with other leaders in the black community, but they did not ask him to occupy a leadership role in the organization. In reaction to several black community members receiving literacy tests and after being stricken from the voting register, the LCCC obtained the services of a lawyer from Savannah in order to file suit for discriminatory practices.

---

<sup>426</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton, May 2, 1946. ARC

On May 1, 1946, fifteen delegates from the LCCC visited Aaron Kravitch, a lawyer in Savannah, and “charged that the board of registers there used illegal methods to strike Negroes’ names from the voting list.” Headed by Reverend W. C. Shipman, the delegation stated that the board of registrars of Liberty County “used the educational qualifications as the sole requirement for registering.” Kravitch contacted the Governor of Georgia, Ellis Arnall, to specify that there were in fact several qualifications for voting that could be used to register, not just one.<sup>427</sup>

During the visit to Kravitch’s office, members of the LCCCC delegation suggested that Claudius Turner not be the one to make the report to the black community about the event. Turner “interpreted the suggestion as a shield over me against attack and also a means of maintaining local leadership.”<sup>428</sup> This “shield” served to protect Turner from any negative effects or feelings that the white community of Liberty County may have about the LCCC soliciting a lawyer and filing suit against the discriminatory practices of the board of registrars of Liberty County.

In the May 2 editorial, Reverend W.C. Shipman was listed as the leader of the group. As Shipman had cultural and social ties with both the black and white communities in the county, it was more likely that he would face little repercussion for the LCCC’s political actions. Turner, on the other hand could face negative consequences from both the white community and the American Missionary Association who hired him to work with the community in an economic role rather than a political role. Whereas Turner

---

<sup>427</sup> “Kravitch Demands Vote Qualification Ruling By State,” May 2, 1946, *Savannah Morning News*.

<sup>428</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Ruth Morton, May 2, 1946. ARC.

attributed their political participation to the Reconstruction Era, it could be argued that their cultural traditions also shaped the manner in which they organized and interacted with the local white community.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the black citizens in the county were successful in registering and voting in the Democratic Primaries in 1946. For the year, 1,784 white voters were registered and 2,053 black voters registered.<sup>429</sup> The black vote proved influential in the election. Voting in bloc, the black community was able to improve their community, such as in the building of roads and new education initiatives.<sup>430</sup>

However, with the vote came a set of new challenges for the black community. Soon after the election, white leaders in the community begin to buy black votes. Claudius Turner notes that there were several instances in which white factions attempted to coerce black citizens to vote for their candidate, namely for Eugene Talmadge. During the organizing for the registration drive, white officials such as Sheriff Sykes had attended numerous church events. At times leaders of the LCCC were visited at their homes.<sup>431</sup> This increased substantially after the election when leaders noted the power of the black vote. By 1948, the black vote had been divided in the county. Stephen Tucker notes that although black Liberty Countians continued to vote throughout the period of the 1940s and 1950s, it was manipulated by local white officials. Nonetheless, the fact that African

---

<sup>429</sup> "Report of Special Agent Maurice F. Donegan, Jr., for Liberty County", August, 29, 1946. Georgia Historical Society., 244.

<sup>430</sup> Claudius Turner, "A Program of Community Development in Liberty County, Georgia," 11. December 30, 1946. ARC.

<sup>431</sup> Letter from Claudius Turner to Fred Brownlee. July 1, 1946. ARC.

Americans in Liberty County continued to vote during the Jim Crow period of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s is a large achievement and demonstrates the perseverance of the people and the strength of their local institutions.<sup>432</sup>

---

<sup>432</sup> Tucker, *Beyond Atlanta*, 82.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **EPILOGUE: REMEMBERING THE ANCESTORS**

This case study of Liberty County, Georgia demonstrates that Southern rural African-Americans built on generational traditions to participate in electoral politics during the civil rights movement of the 1940s. Scholars of the Black Freedom Struggle usually trace the organizing traditions to one or two generations prior, however the case of Liberty County demonstrates that these traditions may have its origins in earlier periods, such as in slavery or in Reconstruction. Finally, this case study illustrates that there is not a homogenous African-American culture and that to understand the traditions of specific communities it is important to look at different facets of their cultures. And in the case of Liberty County, as is most likely true for other rural Southern counties whose demographics had not drastically changed during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is essential to look at spirituality as an integral part of culture.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berry, Daina Ramey. *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia*. University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Belin, Ira. *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States*. Harvard College, 2015.
- Blackmon, Douglas A. *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in American From the Civil War to World War II*. Doubleday, 2008.
- Brattain, Michelle. *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South*. The University of Georgia Press, 2004.
- Brown, Elsa Barkley. "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880," in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.
- Butchart, Ronald E. *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Camp, Stephanie. *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Carney, Judith Ann. *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Clarke, Erskine. *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*. Yale University Press, 2005.
- Coleman, Kenneth, ed. *A History of Georgia*. The University of Georgia Press, 1991.
- Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.
- Collins, Lisa Gail. *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past*. Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Creel, Margaret Washington. *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs*. New York University Press, 1989.



de Quesada, Alejandro M. *A History of Georgia Forts: Georgia's Lonely Outposts*. The History Press, 2011.

Devendorf, Meredith R. *Images of America: Liberty County*. (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009.

Diouf, Sylviane A. *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York University Press, 2014.

Dittmer, John. *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era 1900-1920*. University of Illinois Press, 1977.

Dittmer, John. *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Drago, Edmund L. *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia: A Splendid Failure*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. The Free Press, 1998.

Duitsman Cornelius, Janet. *"When I Can Read My Title Clear": Literacy, Slavery, and Rebellion in the Antebellum South*. University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Dusinberre, William. *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988.

Gellman, David N. *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*. Louisiana State University Press, 2006.

Gillespie, Deanna. *"'They Walk, Talk, and Act Like New People': Black Women and the Citizenship Education Program, 1957-1970."* PhD diss., SUNY-Binghamton, 2011.

Glymph, Thavolia. *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Granger, Mary. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*. Georgia Writers' Project. Savannah Unit, 2007.

Grant, David L. *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia*. A Birch Lane Press Book, 1993.

Grant, Jacqueline. "Womanist Theology, Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology" in *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies*. The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009.

Gray White, Deborah. *Ar'nt I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.

Grossman, James R. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*. The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Gomez, Michael. *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Gomez, Michael. *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Groover, Robert Long. *Sweet Land of Liberty: A History of Liberty County, Georgia*. WH Wolfe Associates, 1987.

Gutman, Herbert. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 – 1925*. Vintage, 1977.

Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

Hall, Jacqueline Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005).

Hargis, Peggy G. "For the Love of Place: Paternalism and Patronage in the Georgia Lowcountry, 1865-1898." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Nov., 2004).

Herd-Clark, Dawn. "The American Missionary Association in Liberty County, Georgia, 1867-1950." PhD diss., Florida State University, 1999.

Herskovitz, Melville. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

House, Jr., Albert V. "The Management of a Rice Plantation in Georgia, 1834-1861, as Revealed in the Journal of Hugh Fraser Grant." *Agricultural History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oct., 1939).

Hunter, Tera. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. Harvard University Press, 1997.

- Johnson, Phillip J. "The Limits of Interracial Compromise: Louisiana, 1941." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (May 2003).
- Joyner, Charles. *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*. University of Illinois Press, 1984.
- Kachun, Mitch. *Festivals of Freedom: Meaning and Memory in African American Emancipation*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.
- Kryder, Daniel. *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Levine, Lawrence. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press, 1990.
- Litwack, Leon. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. Vintage Books, 1979.
- Manigault-Bryant, LeRhonda. *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory Among the Gullah/Geechee Women*. Duke University Press, 2014.
- McDonald, Laughlin. *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Melish, Joanne Pope. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*. Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Mintz, Sidney and Richard Price. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Mjagkij, Nina. "The Negro Service Committee and African-American Soldiers" in *Politics and Progress: American Society and the State Since 1865*, eds. Andrew Edmund Kersten and Kriste Lindenmeyer. Praeger Publishers, 2001.
- Morgan, Philip. "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Low Country Blacks, 1700-1880." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct, 1982).
- Morgan, Philip ed. *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee*. The University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Morris, Aldon D. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. The Free Press, 1984.

Myers, Amrita Chakrabarti. *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Myers, Robert Manson. *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War*. Yale University Press, 1972.

Paris, Peter J. *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Purpose*. Fortress Press, 1995.

Payne, Charles. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. University of California Press, 1995.

Penningroth, Dylan. *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South*. University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Powdermaker, Hortense . *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*. The Viking Press, 1939.

O'Donovan, Susan Eva. *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

Olupona, Jacob Kehinde., ed. *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*. Crossroad, 2000.

Pollitzer, William S. *The Gullah People and their African Heritage*. The University of Georgia Press, 2005.

Raboteau, Albert. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Range, Willard. *A Century of Georgia Agriculture*. University of Georgia Press, 1954.

Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Renda, Mary. *Talking Haiti: Military Occupation & the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Richardson, Joes M. and Maxine D. Jones. *Education For Liberation: The American Missionary Association and African-Americans, 1890 to the Civil Rights Movement*. The University of Alabama Press, 2009.

- Rogers, Georgia A. and R. Frank Saunders, Jr., *Swamp Water and Wiregrass: Historical Sketches of Coastal Georgia*. Mercer University Press, 1984.
- Rose, Willie Lee. *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*. The University of Georgia Press, 1964.
- Royce, Edward. *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping*. Temple University Press, 1993.
- Rucker, Walter C. *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America*. Louisiana State University Press, 2006.
- Schwalm, Leslie. *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina*. University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Sinha, Manisha. *The Slaves Cause: A History of Abolition*. Yale University Press, 2016.
- Smith, Julia Floyd. *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750 – 1860*. The University of Tennessee Press, 1985.
- Stanley, Amy Dru. *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Stevenson, Brenda E. *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*. Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*. Random House Trade, 2008.
- Sullivan, Buddy. *Georgia: A State History*. The Georgia Historical Society, 2003.
- Theoharis, Jeanne F., Komozi Woodard, and Matthew Countryman, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Movements Outside the South, 1940-1950*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Taylor, Clarence. *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality from Jim Crow to the Twenty-First Century*. Routledge, 2002.
- Tuck, Stephen. *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980*. The University of Georgia Press, 2001.
- Turner, Lorenzo Dow. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. University of South Carolina Press, 1949.
- Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Willis, Deborah and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery*. Temple University Press, 2013.

Wolcott, Victoria. *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Wood, Betty. *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Woodson, Carter G. "Negro History Week." *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol 11, No. 2 (Apr., 1926).

Young, Jason. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.