ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: REQUIEM FOR RECONSTRUCTION: THE SOUTH CAROLINA LOWCOUNTRY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE AND CITIZENSHIP, 1880-1980

Robert David Bland, Doctor of Philosophy, 2017

Dissertation directed by: Associate Professor Leslie S. Rowland
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"Requiem for Reconstruction" examines depictions of post-Civil War African American life in the South Carolina Lowcountry and their deployment in the public sphere to represent Reconstruction's promise and perils. As a period when the United States took its first meaningful steps to challenge white supremacy and construct a color-blind democracy, Reconstruction was first tested and then most thoroughly sustained in the predominantly black counties of the South Carolina Lowcountry. In the century that followed Reconstruction's collapse, both those Americans committed to racial egalitarianism and those who supported white supremacy regularly returned to the Lowcountry's post-Civil War past to articulate competing notions of racial progress. "Requiem for Reconstruction" argues that the Lowcountry's visibility led to a countermemory of Reconstruction that diverged from the narratives of professional historians and provided the foundation for a vision of black citizenship that informed

twentieth-century debates over black landownership, cultural appropriation, and civil rights.

In exploring how non-historians interpreted and utilized the past, "Requiem for Reconstruction" intervenes in the fields of American memory and African American cultural history. Showing that freedpeople's Reconstruction-era experiences of landownership and political participation shaped the vocabulary of racial egalitarianism for more than a century, "Requiem for Reconstruction" focuses on a constellation of events, intellectuals, and organizations through which memory of Reconstruction was produced and sustained. By examining the afterlives of nineteenth-century battles over land, labor, African American culture, and black political power, "Requiem for Reconstruction" demonstrates that the Lowcountry's past remained a touchstone in the struggle against white supremacy in the United States.

REQUIEM FOR RECONSTRUCTION:
THE SOUTH CAROLINA LOWCOUNTRY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE AND CITIZENSHIP, 1880-1980

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To the memory of my grandfathers and grandmothers

Robert Edward Bland (1921-1997)

David Leon Henderson (1925-2009)

Ruth Elizabeth Bumbry Bland (1924-2016)

Mabel Black Henderson (1926-2017)

Acknowledgments

While a great deal of academic work is done in isolation, it is impossible to survive the long journey to the PhD without a strong and supportive community. I am blessed to acknowledge and thank the many friends, family members, mentors, and institutions that contributed to the completion of this dissertation.

At the University of Maryland, members of the History Department faculty took an interest in my intellectual pursuits, even when they were quixotic and half formed. David Freund was a constant at the early stages of my graduate career and offered sage counsel over coffee at Peet's in Silver Spring on a number of occasions. Elsa Barkley Brown encouraged me to think more broadly about the African American past, and her guidance as a teacher and a model of scholarly generosity has been invaluable to my academic growth. Ira Berlin offered valuable advice, and the opportunity to work with him in an array of different capacities illuminated the dedication, discipline, and joy that make the academic pursuit of history a vocation that affects more than oneself. My adviser Leslie Rowland has been helpful in more ways than I can count. Always generous with her time and energy—at times to my own perceived misfortune on a late Friday afternoon—Leslie has offered a careful eye, spot-on book recommendations, and a commitment to mentoring to which I cannot do justice in the space of these acknowledgments.

My undergraduate mentors at Williams College instilled a deep respect for the craft of history. Gretchen Long, Kenda Mutongi, Tess Chakkalakal, Christian Thorne, David L. Smith, Carmen Whalen, and Shanti Singham all pushed me to be a clearer thinker, a sharper writer, and a better scholar. While it was one of the most difficult

things I had done up to that point, the process of developing and completing a thesis project during my senior year gave me a great deal of perspective on what a large academic project entails.

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship has been an essential and inextricable part of my journey to the doctorate. From the time when Molly Magavern first notified me that I had been accepted into the program as a sophomore at Williams to the seminars I attended this year on preparing for the academic job market, the Mellon Mays Foundation and its corollaries in the Social Science Research Council and Woodrow Wilson Foundation's Office of Graduate Initiatives have been critical sources of funding for the entirety of my graduate career. More important, Mellon has fostered a community of scholars of color at the undergraduate, graduate, and professoriate levels. The fellowship, mentoring, and sense of belonging that I received from the "Mellon Mafia" have been a godsend, and I would have not have survived the long and lonely road to the PhD without that world.

Financial support from the History Department at the University of Maryland was critical at several stages. Fellowships during my first and fourth years gave me time to develop my research interests without the added responsibility of teaching. A 2013 travel grant allowed me to attend the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and present an early chapter of my dissertation to a larger academic audience. A dissertation fellowship during my final semester gave me the valuable gift of uninterrupted time to write.

The Institute for Responsible Citizenship and the W. E. B. Du Bois Scholars Institute have also been invaluable parts of my intellectual community. Bill Keyes and

William B. Allen have given me more than I can possibly thank them for. The opportunity to return to the program as an instructor has been rewarding in more ways than I can count. The community of alums in the program includes Jarvis McInnis, who offered me a position to teach and serve as a Resident Adviser at the Du Bois Institute over the course of two summers. The instructors at the Du Bois Institute were not only models of academic citizenship but great friends with whom I shared some of the most memorable intellectual conversations of my graduate studies. To Jarvis, Julius, Anisah, Adom, Cliff, and Jess, thank you. I'm rooting for you.

I have trekked across much of the American southeast to complete archival research for this project. While I have an aching suspicion that there is still a document out there that would make all the difference, the gap is not the fault of the many archivists who helped me comb through digital databases, card catalogues, and other research guides that I would certainly have been unable to decipher on my own. To the staffs at the Hampton University Archives, Library of Congress, National Archives II, Rockefeller Archive Center, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, South Caroliniana Library, Southern Historical Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and Amistad Research Center, I extend thanks for their help.

I have had the opportunity to present my work at several academic conferences where I received valuable feedback on papers that ultimately became part of the dissertation. I would like to thank all who read those early versions of my work, especially Ashley Finigan, Elizabeth Todd-Breiland, Jocelyn Imani, K. T. Ewing, Keisha Blain, Nan Woodruff, and William Sturkey.

I would not have made it this far without the support of my family. Allison, you were my first intellectual ally. Although I am two years older, you were always two steps ahead of me in understanding how the world works. One day I will stop stealing books from you. Libby, your unceasing courage and dogged determination to follow the beat of your own drum inspire all of us. I can't wait to see what you do in the future. William and Samuel, you are up next. I will never stop being amazed at how smart both of you guys are. Dad, you have always been my biggest advocate, and I deeply appreciate the sacrifices you and Joyce have made for me. I have come this far in large part because you blazed the path. Mom, I will never stop saying thank you for all you have done and for never letting me settle for being less than the best version of myself. You will always be my intellectual hero.

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandparents, Robert Bland, Ruth Elizabeth Bumbry Bland, Mabel Black Henderson, and David Henderson. They grew up in the Jim Crow South where educational opportunity was deliberately treated as an afterthought. Despite the roadblocks placed in their own paths, they fought to ensure that their children would have the opportunity to chase the dreams deferred. Although none of them is here to see me receive my doctorate, I would like to believe that I am carrying on the tradition and giving voice to their aspirations.

Contents

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List of Abbreviations

ARC	Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA
LC	Library of Congress, Washington, DC
NA II	National Archives II, College Park, MD
NUSC	Northwestern University Special Collections, Evanston, IL
SCL	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
SCDAH	South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC
SHC	Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Introduction

More than any other region of the South, the South Carolina Lowcountry came to embody both the promise and the perils of Reconstruction. As a period when the United States took its first meaningful steps to challenge white supremacy and build a biracial democracy, Reconstruction was first tested and then most thoroughly sustained in the predominantly black counties of the South Carolina Lowcountry. In the century that followed Reconstruction's collapse, both those Americans committed to racial egalitarianism and those who supported white supremacy regularly returned to the Lowcountry's post-Civil War past to articulate competing notions of racial progress. "Requiem for Reconstruction" argues that the hypervisibility of the South Carolina Lowcountry not only led to a countermemory of Reconstruction that diverged from the narratives of professional historians, but also provided the foundation for a vision of black citizenship that would inform twentieth-century debates over land and labor, cultural appropriation, and the struggle for political and civil rights.

The Lowcountry's hypervisibility was rooted in three narratives that were repeatedly deployed to explain the meaning of Reconstruction. The first was a vision of the Lowcountry as a laboratory for free labor, most fully embodied in the Port Royal Experiment. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, northerners became involved in an intense debate over the nature of free labor, leading many to reevaluate their stance on its essential requirements. Second, the Lowcountry appeared in national narratives about African American culture and racial uplift. With a large black demographic majority that had lived largely isolated from whites during slavery, the Sea Islands were seen as a site of racial backwardness by many in the North. As a place where missionaries established

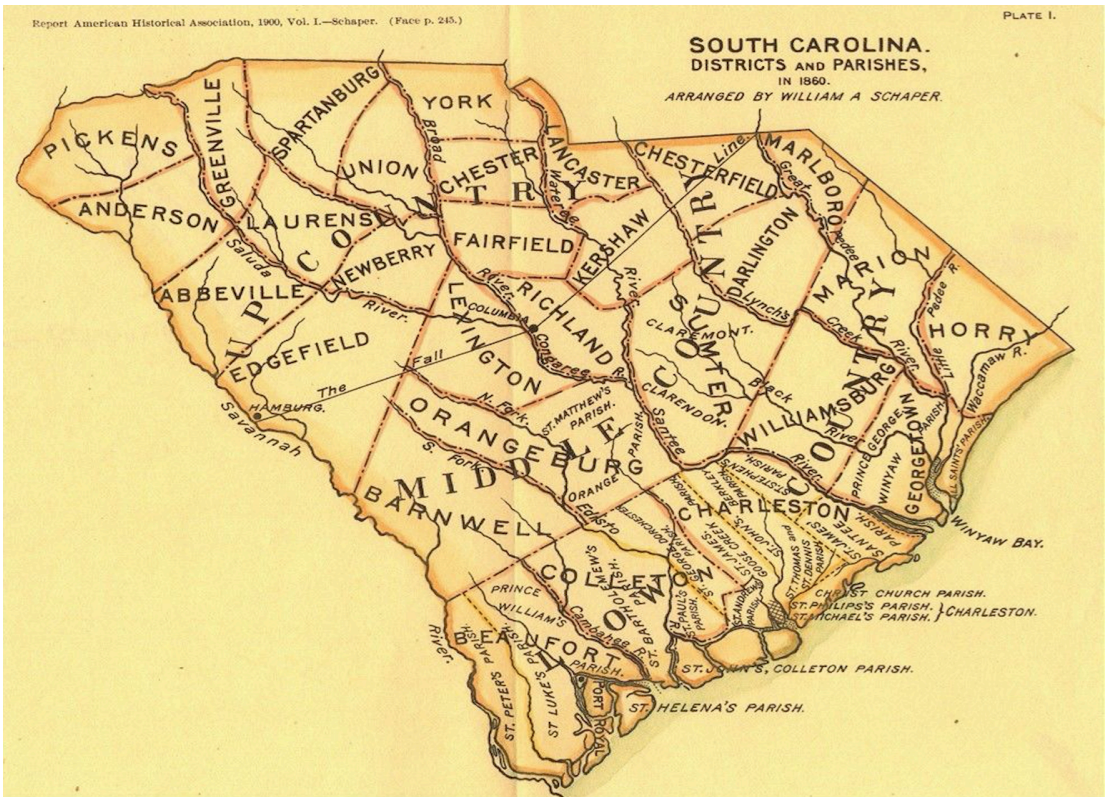

Figure 0.1. William A. Schaper, "South Carolina. Districts and Parishes, in 1860," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1900*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 245.

schools and churches, as well as a setting where the folkways of black Sea Islanders were archived and documented, the Lowcountry served as a touchstone when postbellum Americans debated the place of African American culture in national culture. Third, the Lowcountry, particularly Beaufort County, was remembered as a site of black political power. There black northerners and black Lowcountry residents joined together in a self-governing community that came to embody both the hopes of African Americans across the nation and the menace of "negro domination" for whites who saw black enfranchisement as a grave mistake.

Figure 0.2. Edwin Hergesheimer, "1860 Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population of the Southern States of the United States" (Washington, DC: Henry S. Graham, 1861), Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, https://lccn.loc.gov/99447026 (accessed July 1, 2016).

Figure 0.3. Detail of Figure 0.2. Numbers indicate the percentage of the population that was black.

The Port Royal Experiment and the Postbellum Political Economy

The Lowcountry was at the vanguard of defining the South's post-slavery social and economic order. Following Union occupation of the islands surrounding Port Royal Sound in November 1861, a band of idealistic northerners, sometimes called "Gideonites" because of their missionary zeal, set out to establish an outpost of freedom in the South Carolina Sea Islands. Influenced by a free labor ideology that saw wage work as an intermediate step toward becoming an independent producer and a responsible citizen, the northern reformers sought to demonstrate that slavery could readily be replaced by free labor, making the Union-occupied Sea Islands a model that the rest of the South would ultimately follow. Demonstrating black southerners' capacity to labor without coercion would, they believed, strike a mortal blow against slavery.[1]

In March 1862, the steamer *Atlantic* brought fifty-three northern missionaries, teachers, and plantation superintendents to the South Carolina Sea Islands. They intended to revive local cotton production, establish schools, and transform a slave society into a community grounded in free labor values. The Port Royal Experiment, as the three-year "rehearsal for Reconstruction" came to be known, exposed fault lines in what was assumed to be a cohesive philosophy. On one side were the missionaries who saw reorganization of the Sea Islands' long-staple cotton production in accordance with the tenets of free labor as primarily a moral mission. Led by Edward L. Pierce, a Harvard-trained attorney from Boston, this faction believed its central purpose was to offer a clear alternative to slavery. By early 1863, some of the Gideonites, led by plantation

[1] On Northern free labor ideology, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

superintendent Edward Philbrick, had begun to challenge Pierce's "ill-directed benevolence." Emphasizing the importance of wage labor and market production, Philbrick and several others purchased or leased plantations in 1863. They were soon joined by northern entrepreneurs more committed to profits than philanthropy. Whereas Philbrick and his allies believed that wages and the invisible hand of the market would remake slaves into free laborers, Pierce and other of the Gideonites feared that unrestrained capitalism would exploit black Sea Islanders and replace slavery with a new form of dependence.[2]

The debates over what sort of world would emerge from the ruins of slavery were further complicated by the question of black landownership. Seeing that advocates of the free-market approach wanted not only to implement wage labor but also to sell Sea-Island land at prices that only northern investors could afford, black Sea Islanders and their Gideonite allies feared that their opportunity to attain landed independence would be lost. "The prospect now is, that all the lands on these sea islands will be bought up by speculators," warned General Rufus Saxton, the military governor at Port Royal, in late

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[2] On the arrival of the initial Gideonite missionaries in March 1862, see Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), chap. 2. On the Port Royal Experiment, see Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom, a Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 1, vol. 3, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 148-50, 154; Kevin Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment: A Case Study in Development* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014); James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 159-72; Akiko Ochiai, "The Port Royal Experiment Revisited: Northern Visions of Reconstruction and the Land Question," *New England Quarterly* 74 (Spring 2001): 94-117; Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), chaps. 1-2; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*; Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996), chap. 3. On tensions within the free-labor ideology, see Eric Foner, "Reconstruction and the Crisis of Free Labor," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 97-127.

1862, "and in that event, these helpless people may be placed more or less at the mercy of men devoid of principle." In order to avoid jeopardizing the long-term prospects of black people on the Sea Islands, Saxton argued that they should be given "a right to that soil."[3]

While African Americans across the South pursued a vision of freedom that prioritized access to land, those on the Sea Islands came the closest to actualizing a postbellum society rooted in landed independence. Wartime tax sales placed some land in the hands of former slaves, but a far larger land redistribution was enacted on January 16, 1865, by General William Tecumseh Sherman. His Special Field Order 15 reserved for settlement exclusively by ex-slaves some 400,000 acres of land along the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida that had been abandoned by its Confederate owners. Land in the Sherman reserve was to be divided into parcels of "not more than 40 acres" and issued to heads of families, who would receive "possessory title."[4] Issued in the wake of the March to the Sea, the order was designed to provide for the black refugees who had followed Sherman's army. Although the possessory titles were later reversed by President Andrew Johnson, the experience of independent cultivation of land under government auspices set black Sea Islanders apart from most of their counterparts

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[3] Brig. Genl. R. Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, December 7, 1862, in *Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: Lower South*, ed. Berlin et al., 220-21.

[4] On ex-slaves' acquisition of land at Port Royal during the war, see Berlin et al., eds., *Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: Lower South*, chap. 1; Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen's Community* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), chap. 7; Claude F. Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedman's Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), chap. 1; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, chap. 10; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, chap. 3. For Sherman's order, see Special Field Orders, No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, 16 Jan. 1865, in *Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: Lower South*, ed. Berlin et al., 338-40.

elsewhere in the South.[5]

Freedpeople's struggles over land and labor continued in the aftermath of the Civil War, shaping the political and economic terrain of Reconstruction. With their antebellum landholdings restored by President Johnson, white planters across the South sought to impose a labor regime that recaptured the essence of slavery. The battle between white landowners and landless black workers was a defining feature of the postbellum political economy, and the best outcome most black laborers could hope for was a détente in the form of sharecropping.[6] In the Lowcountry, however, enfranchisement and Republican political mobilization led to universal male suffrage, the election of black men to state and local office, abrogation of the discriminatory laws of Presidential Reconstruction, and the enactment of such measures as a laborer's lien, free public schools, poor relief for the indigent, disabled, and elderly, infrastructure and public

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[5] On the land question at the close of the Civil War, see Steven Hahn, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, John C. Rodrigue, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 3, vol. 1, *Land and Labor, 1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 392-493. On ex-slaves' continued search for landed independence, see René Hayden, Anthony E. Kaye, Kate Masur, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, Leslie S. Rowland, and Stephen A. West, eds., *Freedom, a Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 3, vol. 2, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), chap. 9.

[6] On the postwar struggle over land and labor, see Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), chaps. 6-7; Hahn et al., eds., *Land and Labor, 1865*; Hayden et al., eds., *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*; Susan O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), chaps. 4-5; Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), chap. 6; John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), chaps. 6-7. On the emergence of sharecropping, see Gerald D. Jaynes, *Branches without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chaps. 12-15; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, chap. 4; Harold D. Woodman, "Post-Civil War Southern Agriculture and the Law," *Agricultural History* 53 (January 1979): 319-37.

works projects, and a commission that purchased land for resale to former slaves on easy terms.[7]

While the Lowcountry was a beacon of democratic promise to many, a growing number of white northerners saw the enactments of the South Carolina state legislature as forms of "class legislation" that resembled the efforts of political machines in Northern cities to address the concerns of immigrants and workers. Liberal Republicans such as Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, and E. L. Godkin, founder of the *Nation*, used the pages of their publications to attack what they saw as corruption infiltrating postbellum society from below.[8]

Tension within the Republican Party over the proper direction of the South's postbellum political economy boiled over in the aftermath of an exposé written by James S. Pike for the *New York Tribune* in 1872. A journalist from Maine who had professed support for abolition before the Civil War, Pike had come to despise the South's Reconstruction state governments. In the South Carolina state legislature he saw a "great mass of ignorance and barbarism . . . , guided by unprincipled adventurers from other states, who make use of these freedmen as their agents for the most nefarious acts which were ever committed under the shelter of republican forms of government." In his dismal

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[7] On the role black officeholders played in shaping the political terrain of postbellum South Carolina, see Thomas Holt, *Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), chaps. 5-8; Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), chaps. 12-13; Stephen R. Wise and Lawrence S. Rowland, *Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption*, *1861*-1893, vol. 2 of *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 153-60.

[8] On the Liberal Republicans, see Michael Les Benedict, "Reform Republicans and the Retreat from Reconstruction," in *The Facts of Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin*, ed. Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*: *Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), chap. 3.

portrait of Reconstruction, Pike presented black officeholders as evidence that the state's political order was out of alignment.[9] In fact, the African American men elected to state and local office during Reconstruction did embody a radical change. Finally in possession of the franchise, the voting-age men in South Carolina's black majority had transformed the state into a representative democracy. Pike's account enraptured northern audiences, and Horace Greeley commissioned him to write several more articles in 1873. At the end of the year, Pike expanded them into a book entitled *The Prostrate State: South Carolina under Negro Government*. It depicted "a society turned bottom-side up" in which the rights of the state's white taxpayers were being trampled.[10] This reversal of opinion by a self-proclaimed former abolitionist soon became a well-worn line of criticism in the northern press.

Pike did not have the last word. During the summer of 1876, strikes erupted among rice workers along the Combahee River. Dissatisfied with being paid in scrip instead of cash, squads of black strikers marched from plantation to plantation enlisting other workers to join their ranks. Those who refused were often subjected to what historian Steven Hahn has called the "rough justice that customarily befell those regarded as political traitors." White planters in the Lowcountry demanded that the strikers be brought to heel, but they opposed intervention by local units of the state militia because they were composed almost entirely of black men. Daniel Chamberlain, the state's Republican governor, sought a nonviolent resolution of the ongoing labor conflict. He

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[9] Pike quoted in Robert F. Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850-1882* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1957), 187-88.

[10] James S. Pike, *The Prostrate State*: *South Carolina under Negro Government* (New York: D. Appleton Co., 1873); Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 16.

called on Robert Smalls, the U.S. congressman for South Carolina's Fifth Congressional District and the Lowcountry's most prominent black political leader, to serve as an intermediary between the state and the black workers. Smalls convinced the striking rice workers to stand down and asked their leaders, who all had outstanding arrest warrants, to enter his custody so that they could be taken to the local authorities. Finding that the local planter-friendly trial justice was not in his office, Smalls marched the men to the town of Beaufort, on Port Royal Island, where they were met by a supportive crowd that called for the charges to be dropped. The next day, a black judge did precisely that, allowing the men to go free.[11]

Pike's book and the Combahee strike served as capstones for rival pillars of public memory of Reconstruction in the Lowcountry. A growing number of northern elites rejected any version of Reconstruction that required continued federal intervention. Siding with taxpayers' conventions organized by propertied white southerners, the more conservative free-labor intellectuals claimed that Republican-controlled statehouses and black-controlled local governments were accruing unsustainable levels of debt and enacting legislation that burdened southern landowners. This view was contested by former slaves and their political allies, who believed that the goal of Reconstruction was the empowerment of freedpeople to pursue their own vision of independence.[12]

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[11] Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 347-49. On the Combahee strike, see also Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), chap. 3; Brian Kelly, "Black Laborers, the Republican Party, and the Crisis of Reconstruction in Lowcountry South Carolina," *Journal of International Social History* 51 (December 2006): 375-414.

[12] Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, chap. 3.

The Sea Islands and the Northern Civilizing Mission

Free-labor advocates were not the only white northerners who saw the Lowcountry as a site for testing ex-slaves' ability to succeed in freedom. The "Gideonite" teachers and clergyman who descended upon the Sea Islands in 1862 also viewed the Lowcountry as a showcase that would demonstrate former slaves' fitness for full citizenship. The Yankee missionaries sought to "civilize" the Sea Islands' black residents in preparation for the responsibilities of citizenship. While imagined as benevolent, the civilizing mission required prescriptive judgments about black cultural practices deemed backward or primitive. The missionaries made such assessments when they encountered the Gullah speech, music, religion, and folk traditions of the Sea Islanders. Although most of them responded to the islanders' culture with variations of paternalism and condescension, some developed an appreciation for the music and language of the Lowcountry and began to archive the region's folkways so that national audiences could learn about the cultural world unique to the Sea Islands.[13]

The civilizing mission was informed by both Christian idealism and a conviction that slavery had deeply damaged black people. The Rev. Mansfield French of the American Missionary Society framed the Port Royal Experiment as a project of racial uplift. "Ours is, indeed, a new, untried mission, the final results of which may decide the fate of the poor slaves, and through them, of the nation," he proclaimed. "Order must be established, industry, tidiness in personal habits, as well as in their dark and miserable

[13] On the Port Royal Experiment as a civilizing mission, see Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, chap. 2.

cabins."[14] French, like Edward Pierce, saw the Port Royal Experiment as a pathway to moral improvement for a group of people whose sensibilities had been degraded by the stultifying effects of slavery.

The African retentions in the Sea Islanders' culture shocked the northern missionaries. Enslaved people in the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands, more than in any other part of the South, had retained African folkways. They spoke Gullah, a dialect impenetrable to outsiders unfamiliar with its vocabulary and syntax.[15] "A stranger, upon first hearing these people talk, especially if there is a group of them in animated conversation, can hardly understand them better than if they spoke a foreign language," reported one missionary.[16] Laura Towne, a founder of one of the Sea Islands' first schools for freedpeople, struggled to decipher her students' speech. "They evidently did not understand me," she lamented. "And I could not understand them."[17] Charlotte Forten, a black teacher from the North, was told by a white southerner that "the field hands of those islands were too low to learn anything" and "it was a waste of time to educate or civilize them." Forten herself believed that the impact of the missionaries' uplift would be especially pronounced because the Sea Islanders were "among the most

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[14] Mansfield French quoted in Austa French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; or the Port Royal Mission* (New York: Winchell M. French, 1862), 27.

[15] On Gullah language and culture, see Patricia Jones-Jackson, *When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Michael Montgomery, ed., *The Crucible of Carolina: Essays in the Development of Gullah Language and Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Philip Morgan, ed., *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[16] Unnamed missionary quoted in William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (A. Simpson and Co., 1867), xxiv.

[17] Laura M. Towne Diary, October 3, 1862, Penn School Papers, SHC.

degraded negroes of the South."[18]

Black Sea Islanders embraced many aspects of the civilizing mission. Like African Americans across the South, they rushed to enroll their children in schools. Robert Smalls argued that educational opportunities bolstered black Sea Islanders' determination to "never to be made slaves again." Charlotte Forten described the ex-slaves as more enthusiastic about learning than students in New England. "[C]oming to school is a constant delight and recreation to them," she declared.[19]

Military service also gave black Sea Islanders an opportunity to dispel myths of black inferiority and prove themselves worthy of citizenship. The 1st South Carolina Infantry, the first Union regiment made up of former slaves, drew a great deal of attention in the North. Under the command of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a white abolitionist from Massachusetts, the 1st South Carolina demonstrated that African Americans could serve the Union with honor and dignity.[20] Indeed, one of the most compelling images of the black military experience included Higginson's regiment. On January 1, 1863, the

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[18] Charlotte Forten, "Life on the Sea Islands," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1864): 690.

[19] Smalls quoted in Okon Edet Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service: Robert Smalls, 1839-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 35; Forten quoted in Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower* (Chicago: Johnson Co., Press, 1962), 212. On African Americans' pursuit of education during and immediately after the Civil War, see James A. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), chap. 1; Herbert Gutman, "Schools for Freedom: The Post-Emancipation Origins of Afro-American Education," in *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: Pantheon, 1987), 260-97; Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chaps. 4-6.

[20] On the black military experience during the Civil War, see Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom, a Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 2, *The Black Military Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War*: *How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 1953), chaps. 9-11.

day the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, it was on the Sea Islands that one of the most visible celebrations occurred. General Saxton organized a New Year's Day event on Port Royal Island for the region's black soldiers, white missionaries, and formerly enslaved people. The proclamation was read by William H. Brisbane, a Sea Island planter who had emancipated his slaves before the war and now served as a U.S. tax commissioner. After Brisbane finished, the black members of the audience spontaneously began to sing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," an act that moved many in the audience to tears. Repeated and retold in national periodicals, as well as in Higginson's book, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, the 1863 Emancipation Day celebration was irrefutable evidence to northern readers that black Sea Islanders had embraced the wartime civilizing project.[21]

An unanticipated consequence of the northern missionaries' presence in the Sea Islands was their introduction of the islanders' distinctive folkways to the rest of the nation. The spirituals, in particular, appealed many of the northerners who spent time in the Lowcountry during the war. Both Charlotte Forten and Thomas Wentworth Higginson described their encounter with the spirituals in separate articles for the *Atlantic Monthly*. Lucy McKim Garrison, a teacher who was also part of the Port Royal Experiment, systematically archived and analyzed the spirituals she heard on the Sea Islands. In an 1862 article published in *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Garrison offered scholarly analysis of two songs, "Poor Rosy" and "Roll, Jordan, Roll." The first effort of

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[21] For descriptions of the 1863 Emancipation Day celebration, see Charlotte Forten, entry for January 1, 1863, in *The Journal of Charlotte Forten,* ed. Ray Billington (New York: Dryden Press, 1953), 43; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co., 1870), 39-41; Harriet Ware to unnamed recipient, January 1, 1863, in *Letters from Port Royal, 1862-1868*, ed. Elizabeth Ware Pearson (Boston: W. B. Clarke, 1906), 131-32.

its kind in the United States, Garrison's work represented an important step in democratizing American music. In 1867, she collaborated with William Frances Allen and Charles Pickard Ware to publish *Slave Songs of the United States*. While they acknowledged that black plantation songs had been a staple of American popular culture for more than thirty years, in large part because of their use in minstrel shows, they explained that "no systematic effort has hitherto been made to collect and preserve their melodies."[22]

In transcribing the spirituals for northern audiences, Garrison and her collaborators had to grapple with the politics of cultural hierarchy. "The chief part of the negro music is *civilized* in its character," they argued. While black secular songs represented "negro minstrelsy," the spirituals reflected African Americans' desire to assimilate European musical traditions.[23] Many northern critics viewed Allen, Ware, and Garrison's compilation as valuable, but in praising the book, they often imposed a narrative of black cultural inferiority. "The value of songs . . . depends on the genius of the people, and ranges from the poems of Homer to the babble of our Southern fieldhands," remarked one northern reviewer. He saw *Slave Songs of the United States* as part of an important wave of studies that had enabled scholars "to affix an approximate date to the fragments of ancient music, and to say of music which reaches us from uncivilized tribes whether it is a natural outgrowth or a corruption of something which

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[22] Forten, "Life on the Sea Islands"; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Negro Spirituals," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1867), 685-94; Lucy McKim Garrison, "Songs of the Port Royal Contrabands," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 21 (Fall 1862): 240-60; Allen et al., *Slave Songs of the United States*, i.

[23] Ibid., v (emphasis in the original).

has reached them from the world of civilization."[24]

Others claimed that African American culture was at best unserious and at worst a danger to American culture. "[*Slave Songs of the United States*] is hardly worthwhile," charged one critic who saw the book as an effort "to perpetuate this trash, vulgarity and profanity by putting it into print."[25] Another reviewer described the songs as "snatches of scripture" mixed up with "negro nonsense verses" and "doggerel."[26] Whereas some scholars supported studying the spirituals because they believed that black American music served as a primitivist counterpoint to highbrow American culture, many critics opposed incorporating black spirituals into the American musical tradition out of a fear that democratizing the culture would make it harder for audiences to distinguish between elite and non-elite traditions.[27]

The debate that began in the Sea Islands during the Civil War had a profound effect on how the nation would later view African American cultural productions. The northern missionaries who joined the Port Royal Experiment to establish schools and churches also propagated paternalistic ideas about black culture. While black Sea

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[24] "Slave Songs of the United States," *The Round Table: A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, Literature, Society and Art* 160 (February 15, 1868): 104.

[25] Unnamed reviewer quoted in Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Negro Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 339. On the efforts to archive African American music after the Civil War, see Samuel Charters, *Songs of Sorrow: Lucy McKim Garrison and Slave Songs of the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, chaps. 13-17; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), chap. 1.

[26] "Slave Songs of the United States," *The Athenaeum*, no. 2129 (August 15, 1868): 218.

[27] On the struggle to establish a cultural hierarchy in the postbellum United States, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Islanders embraced some aspects of the civilizing mission, especially education, they had little influence upon how their culture was described and disseminated in the North. Nevertheless, wartime Reconstruction began a national conversation regarding whether and how African American culture belonged in the late nineteenth-century public sphere.

Beaufort County and Black Reconstruction

Although black Americans at times supported the white northern vision of racial uplift that initially took shape at Port Royal, they were most consumed with the Lowcountry as an exemplar of black self-governance. Owing to the presence of black elected and appointed officials in local offices, state government, and the U.S. Congress, the interests of Lowcountry black communities were reflected in government to a greater degree than anywhere else in the postbellum South. While black political strength in the Lowcountry made it a target for accusations of "negro domination," the region was also used by both local black officials and African Americans across the nation to defend the ideals that underpinned Reconstruction.

The Sea Islanders' experience in self-governance began during the war. In 1862, in response to a growing population of escaped slaves and refugees from the mainland who were living in and near the Union headquarters on Hilton Head Island, General Ormsby M. Mitchel established a town for several hundred "contrabands." Named Mitchelville in his honor, the all-black town had neatly arranged streets, its own elected officials, schools, a church, and laws regarding community behavior, sanitation, and taxation. By 1865, its population had grown to 1,500, most of whom made a living as wage laborers for the Union army. Northerners who encountered Mitchelville praised the

settlement as a model of black self-governance.[28]

Following the war, a number of African Americans from the North came to the Lowcountry to help launch self-governance. Major Martin Delany, a black physician and abolitionist from Pittsburgh, saw the rise of independent black communities in the Sea Islands as a pivotal moment in the nation's history. In July 1865, Delany, who was one of the handful of black men commissioned as officers in the Union army, delivered a speech before a crowd of 500 freedpeople on St. Helena Island. Convinced that the intentions of white northerners ran counter to those of the region's freedpeople, Delany discouraged black Sea Islanders from putting too much faith in the Port Royal Experiment. "Believe not in these Schoolteachers, Emissaries Ministers and agents, because they never tell you the truth," he told his audience, "and I particularly warn you against those Cotton Agents, who come honey mouthed unto you, their only intent being to make profit by your inexperience." Delany emphasized that emancipation had been the freedpeople's own doing, not the gift of northern reformers. "[W]e would not have become free," he declared, "had we not armed ourselves and fought out our independence." Challenging the vision of both the free-labor ideologues and the northern missionaries, Delany argued that self-determination was the best path forward for the Lowcountry's freedpeople.[29]

Other African Americans from the North also saw the South Carolina Lowcountry as a place where a black political vision could be fulfilled. William J. Whipper, who was

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[28] On Mitchelville, see Abram Mercheson to Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster, 12 August 1864, in *Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: Lower South*, ed. Berlin et al., 314-16; Michael B. Trinkley, *The Lifestyle of Freemen at Mitchelville, Hilton Head Island: Evidence of a Changing Pattern of Afro-American Archaeological Visibility* (Columbia, SC: Chicora Foundation, 1987).

[29] 1st Lieut Edward M. Stoeber to Brev Maj S. M. Taylor, 24 July 1865, in *Land and Labor, 1865*, ed. Hahn et al., 254-59. For another account of Delany's speech, see Memorandum by 2d Lieut. Alexander Whyte Jr., 23 July 1865, in *Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 739-41.

born free in Philadelphia and served in the 31st U.S. Colored Infantry, came to South Carolina after the war, married into one of the Lowcountry's most prominent free black families, was elected to the 1868 South Carolina constitutional convention, and then served as a trial lawyer and representative of Beaufort County in the state legislature. Richard Howell Gleaves, who was also born free in Philadelphia, moved to Beaufort in 1866, went into business, founded a black fraternal order, and in 1874 was elected lieutenant governor of South Carolina. Richard Harvey Cain, who was raised in Ohio and educated at Wilberforce, moved to Charleston in 1865, where he served as superintendent of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Lowcountry. He was elected to the South Carolina state senate in 1868 and served two terms in the U.S. Congress during the 1870s.[30]

Several freedpeople from the Lowcountry also became political leaders. Hastings Gantt, who had been a slave in the town of Beaufort, represented Beaufort County in the South Carolina state legislature.[31] Prince Rivers, born into slavery in Beaufort County, escaped bondage during the war and rose to the rank of sergeant in the 1st South Carolina Infantry. "No anti-slavery novel has described a man of such marked ability," Thomas Wentworth Higginson remarked of Rivers in the pages of *The Liberator*. "He makes Toussaint perfectly intelligible. . . . [I]f there should ever be a black monarchy in South Carolina, he will be its king." After the war, Rivers became a state legislator and trial

[30] Holt, *Black over White*, 70-75.

[31] Ibid., 48-52.

judge in Edgefield County.[32] Renty Franklin Greaves, born into slavery on the mainland portion of Beaufort County, escaped to Mitchelville in 1863 and enlisted in the 3rd South Carolina Infantry. Able to read and write, Greaves worked as a clerk for a soldier in Mitchelville. During Reconstruction, he was a teacher before being elected to two county offices, coroner and county commissioner. He later held federal appointments as assistant lighthouse keeper and pension agent.[33]

The most prominent figure in Lowcountry black politics was Robert Smalls. Born into slavery in 1839, Smalls had commandeered the *Planter*, a Confederate steamer, into the arms of the Union navy in 1862. With his family in tow, he navigated the vessel through a series of Confederate checkpoints, each of which required knowledge of specific signals. Upon delivering the *Planter* to the Union, Smalls not only gained freedom for himself and his family, but also became immortalized as a hero. After the war, Smalls took part in South Carolina's 1868 constitutional convention, served in both houses of the state legislature, and ultimately was elected to the U.S. Congress.[34]

During Reconstruction, the Lowcountry's black political power was most visible in Beaufort County, where African Americans served in a variety of offices, including sheriff, clerk of court, coroner, probate judge, treasurer, county commissioner, intendant,

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[32] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "An Officer on the Colored Soldiers," *Liberator*, February 24, 1865. On the offices held by Rivers, see Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 67-70.

[33] Giselle White-Perry, "In Freedom's Shadow: The Reconstruction Legacy of Renty Frankin Greaves of Beaufort County, South Carolina," *Prologue* 42 (Fall 2010), accessed October 28, 2016 https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/fall/greaves.html.

[34] On Smalls, see Holt, *Black over White*, 35, 47-50, 56, 77, 79; Edward A. Miller, *Gullah Statesmen: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839-1915* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service*.

city constable, and public school trustee. In 1867, Robert Smalls and Richard H. Gleaves, along with thirty-six other black leaders and three whites, formed the Beaufort Republican Club, which was the first Republican Party organization in the state. In Beaufort County, the party was not the exclusive domain of elite blacks, nor was it restricted to male voters. Mass meetings were at the heart of local black politics, and both men and women played crucial roles.[35]

Black South Carolinians elsewhere in the state saw Beaufort County as an oasis of black power, and many of them moved there to escape upcountry violence, practice their political rights to the fullest, and acquire land. Between 1860 and 1880, the black share of the county's population rose from 83 percent to 92 percent (see Table 0.1). Meanwhile,

Table 0.1. Black Population of Beaufort County, South Carolina, 1860-1900

Year	Black Population	Percentage of Total
1860	33,339	83.2
1870	29,050	84.5
1880	27,732	91.9
1890	31, 421	92
1900	32,137	90.5

Source: U.S. population censuses, 1860-1900, Historical Census Browser, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, University of Virginia, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu.
Between 1870 and 1880, considerable black in-migration was partially offset by the 1878 creation of Hampton County, which was carved out of Beaufort.

[35] Rowland and Wise, *Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption*, 477.

by 1890, more than 70 percent of the county's owner-operated farms were held by African Americans and 13,075 black families owned farms.[36]

For hostile white southerners, the Lowcountry epitomized "negro domination." "Our country is in a bad condition," one white Democrat protested in 1868. "Negroes have everything in their own hands, and do as they please. The Legislature is radical out and out. All or nearly all of our County officers are Negroes. The consequence is that lands and every other kind of property is [*sic*] taxed so high that they declined twenty five percent in value since last fall. Every little negro in the county is now going to school and the public pays for it."[37] In 1876, when William J. Whipper was nominated for a judgeship in the Charleston circuit, the *News and Courier*, the Lowcountry's most widely read newspaper, ran a banner headline declaring "Civilization in Peril." The journal of record for the region's white elite, the *News and Courier* warned that Whipper, who had been instrumental in the creation of the 1868 constitution, was too radical to serve on the court. For the state's white elites, Whipper's nomination represented a step toward the creation of "an African dominion" or, worse, "a new Liberia" on the South Carolina coast.[38]

The northern press played a key role in disseminating narratives of "negro domination." James Pike's articles in the *New York Tribune* painted a dismal portrait of black politicians and exaggerated the extent to which African Americans dominated the

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[36] Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) 162-63.

[37] Unnamed Democrat quoted in Rowland and Wise, *Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption*, 155.

[38] Charleston *News and Courier*, December 24, 1875, quoted in Holt, *Black over White*, 95.

state legislature. The famed political cartoonist Thomas Nast also presented a negative image of South Carolina's black politicians. The cover of the March 14, 1874, issue of *Harper's Weekly* featured Nast's cartoon, "Colored Rule in a Reconstructed State." (See Figure 0.4.) It portrayed two crudely caricatured black legislators engaged in a shouting

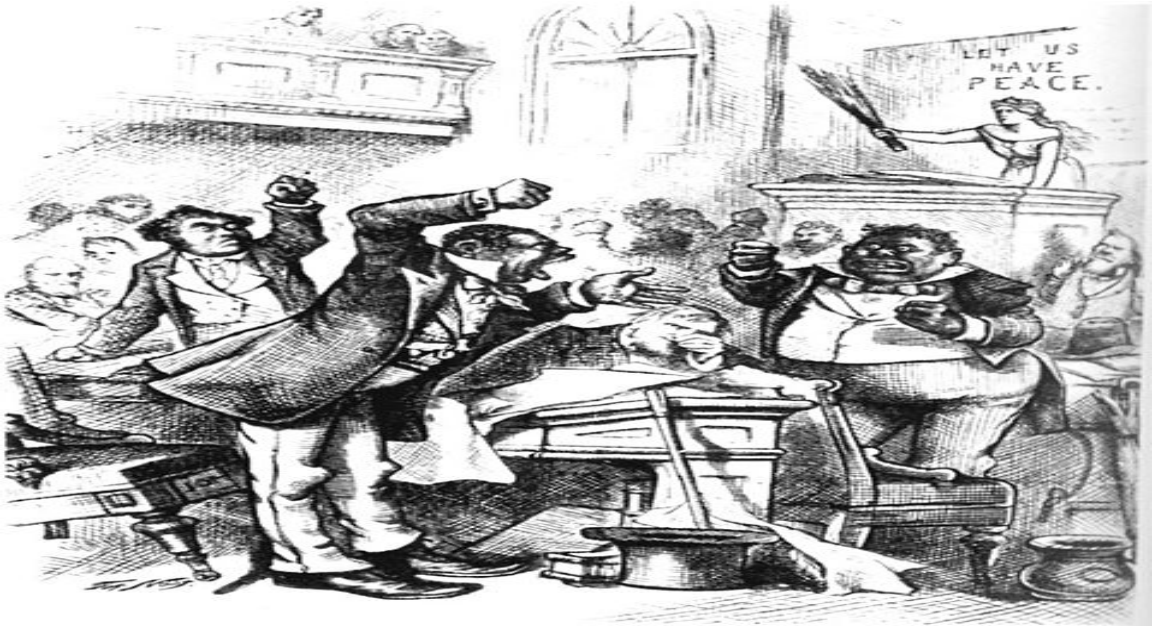

Figure 0.4. Thomas Nast, "Colored Rule in a Reconstructed State," *Harper's Weekly* 18 (March 14, 1874).

match, with a frustrated white legislator caught in the middle. In the background, Columbia attempts to preside over the assembly; behind her, a sign reads "LET US HAVE PEACE" (President U.S. Grant's campaign slogan). "You are Aping the lowest Whites," she admonishes the black politicians. "If you disgrace your Race in this way you had better take Back Seats."[39]

Whether imagined as a place of black progress or of "negro domination," the South Carolina Lowcountry became a hypervisible symbol in debates about the promise and the perils of black political participation. For a number of elite black northerners, the

[39] Thomas Nast, "Colored Rule in a Reconstructed State, " *Harper's Weekly* 18 (March 14, 1874).

Reconstruction-era Lowcountry served as an ideal place to take part in the fight for black progress. For African Americans native to the Lowcountry, the rise of black power meant not only an opportunity for political participation but also a chance to acquire land and escape racial violence. Memory of Reconstruction-era black politics in the Lowcountry, together with memory of black landownership and the northern civilizing mission, guided how future generations of black Americans would deploy the past to make claims for full citizenship, economic justice, and racial equality.

Requiem for Reconstruction

"Requiem for Reconstruction" considers the place of the Lowcountry in the memory of Reconstruction in the United States. Exploring its role through the afterlives of the free labor ideology, the northern civilizing mission, and black political power, "Requiem for Reconstruction" argues that the South Carolina Lowcountry came to embody the hopes and fears that Reconstruction fostered in both white and African American imagination. To do so, it follows the strands of memory that connected the Civil War and Reconstruction to ongoing struggles over black citizenship in the United States. As black southerners endeavored to preserve the economic and political gains they had made during Reconstruction, they had to wrestle with Reconstruction's image in national memory. As an epicenter of Reconstruction-era Republican activity, the Lowcountry repeatedly reentered academic, political, and popular discussions of Reconstruction, especially as they pertained to battles over race, place, and efforts to integrate black southerners into the body politic.

As the moment when the nation first attempted to construct a biracial democracy,

the Reconstruction era was a fiercely contested site of memory. Debates about the meaning of Reconstruction appeared in late nineteenth-century arguments over gerrymandering, in animated discussions of the role of government in assisting the dispossessed and the indigent, and in pitched battles over disfranchisement. They were also prominent in the opening decades of the twentieth century as black schools with Reconstruction-era roots became sites for evaluating of black progress. Debates about the meaning of Reconstruction persisted into the interwar period as Americans across the nation found in the Lowcountry a wellspring of romantic primitivism and mined the region for folklore, black caricatures, and narratives that captured a golden era before the Civil War. So too did the shadow of Reconstruction hover over debates about the limits of the Civil Rights Movement, especially as they pertained to rural poverty in the post-World War II South.

"Requiem for Reconstruction" thus intervenes in the historiographies of American memory and black political thought. The turn toward explorations of memory and race has highlighted the numerous ways that white supremacy has been constitutive to collective narratives of the American experience, often erasing stories of violence and oppression from museums, textbooks, and other public representations of the past. Historians of the American South in particular have illuminated the mythic power of narratives supporting North-South reconciliation and have explored how intellectuals, artists, and institutions of public history told the story of Reconstruction in the century that followed the Civil War.[40]

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[40] For important contributions to the historiography of race and memory, see Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

As one of the most visible illustrations of Reconstruction's promise, Beaufort County boasted a number of institutions and leaders that actively publicized the vanguard role of Lowcountry blacks in pursuing political power and landownership. The outsized place of Beaufort County in the northern imagination as a result of the Port Royal Experiment, Sherman's special field order, and black officeholding meant that both racial egalitarians and white supremacists were forced to grapple with the idea of Reconstruction through reports of what was happening in Beaufort. "Requiem for Reconstruction" argues that events, ideas, and institutions forged in the South Carolina Lowcountry during Reconstruction were important sites for producing and sustaining the afterlives of the free labor ideology, the northern civilizing mission, and black economic and political power.

In taking seriously the fears and hopes of and about black Americans in the Lowcountry, "Requiem for Reconstruction" also engages the robust literature on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century black political culture. The works that have most defined recent scholarship shift attention away from formal politics and struggles over the official levers of power and instead explore the worlds of rhetoric, rumor, and local people. Finding burgeoning political ideology in labor strikes, schoolhouses, churches, and sites of leisure and pleasure, scholars of black politics have identified a wider array of spaces in which black Americans reimagined and redefined gender, citizenship, and

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University Press, 1991); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

notions of "racial destiny."[41] "Requiem for Reconstruction" builds on work that has explored the "infrapolitics" of black American life while also cautioning against losing sight of the role of state power.

The Lowcountry was not, of course, the only place where the legacy of Reconstruction continued to shape local and regional identity. The story of Wilmington, North Carolina, that state's last stronghold of black political power, was remembered and retold by the African American novelist Charles Chesnutt in his 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition*. George Washington Cable, a white native of New Orleans, reflected on the legacy of Reconstruction in late nineteenth-century works of fiction and nonfiction. In 1913, John R. Lynch, a black native of Mississippi who had served in the U.S. Congress during Reconstruction, published *The Facts of Reconstruction* to highlight the laudable accomplishments of Reconstruction in Mississippi and contest the Dunning School narrative.[42] Increasingly, historians have asked scholars of Reconstruction to look beyond

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[41] On the political strategies deployed by African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Deborah Beckel, *Radical Reform: Interracial Politics in Post-Emancipation North Carolina* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Gregory P. Downs, *Declarations of Dependence: The Long Reconstruction of Popular Politics in the South, 1861-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore*, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*; Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jarod Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Mary G. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[42] Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1901); George Washington Cable, *The Silent South* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), *The Negro Question* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), *John March, Southerner* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), and *Gideon's Band: A Tale of Mississippi* (New York:

the South and consider its legacy in the North and the West as well.[43] While a broad synthesis of the place of Reconstruction in American memory remains to be written, "Requiem for Reconstruction" maintains that both opponents and defenders of Reconstruction regularly used South Carolina, and particularly the South Carolina Lowcountry, as a synecdoche for the changes wrought by the Civil War.

"Requiem for Reconstruction" explores the afterlives of free labor, the northern civilizing mission, and black political power during five moments that revived discussion of the meaning of Reconstruction. Chapter 1, "'Some Sort of Negro Paradise': Beaufort County and the Spatial Politics of Post-Reconstruction Black Citizenship, 1877-1895," examines representations of the South Carolina Lowcountry in the initial post-Reconstruction debates about the legacy of Reconstruction. It argues that white Democrats' efforts to gerrymander black political power into a single congressional district not only changed the terrain of black politics within South Carolina, but also created a hypervisible symbol of post-Reconstruction black politics. One of the last places where black voters and black politicians still had access to the levers of political power, the "Black Seventh" became a Rorschach test for how Americans understood the successes and failures of Reconstruction.

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914); John R. Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction* (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1913).

[43] The historiography on Reconstruction has undergone an explosion of new studies that have expanded the field beyond questions of race, citizenship, and the South. For recent examples, see Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Laura F. Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights* (New York: Cambridge University of Press, 2015); Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Edlie L. Wong, *Racial Reconstruction: Black Inclusion, Chinese Exclusion, and the Fictions of Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

Chapter 2, "The Eye of the Storm: Race, Relief, and Memory in the Aftermath of the 1893 Sea Island Hurricane," surveys local, state, and national responses to the 1893 hurricane that struck the Lowcountry, especially black-majority Beaufort County. In the aftermath of the storm, which killed more than 1,000 people, negative narratives of Reconstruction and new ideas of scientific charity discouraged relief organizations from helping the predominantly black victims in a manner that might mirror the region's most famous attempt to assist African Americans, the Reconstruction-era Freedmen's Bureau. The American Red Cross, led by Clara Barton, who had worked as an army nurse in the Lowcountry during the Civil War, faced intense criticism from white southerners for alleged violations of the New South's racial order. South Carolina governor Benjamin Tillman, who had been an active participant in the violent overthrow of Reconstruction in the state, led the attack on the Red Cross relief effort. In the aftermath of the 1893 storm, Tillman and his allies reanimated fears of "negro domination" in order to challenge the legitimacy of the Red Cross. In response, supporters of Reconstruction also entered a discourse about race and disaster relief that called upon memory of the Port Royal Experiment. Their intervention portrayed Beaufort County as one of Reconstruction's lodestars and made the case that it remained an important site in the fight for racial progress.

Chapter 3, "'Help Me to Be a Farmer and I Will Not Be a Problem': St. Helena Island, Industrial Education, and the Legacy of the Port Royal Experiment, 1900-1930," highlights the role of the Lowcountry's black industrial schools in redefining the memory of Reconstruction. Emphasizing the Penn School on St. Helena Island, the chapter demonstrates that memory of the Port Royal Experiment remained in the consciousness

of industrial-school promoters during the early twentieth century. While these educators and their philanthropist allies wanted to eliminate elements of the Penn School that they saw as outdated, especially its academic curriculum, they could not erase the living memory of Reconstruction held by members of the local community. The chapter shows that despite the best efforts of leaders of the industrial-school movement to stifle countermemories of Reconstruction, Penn School teachers and students, as well as residents of St. Helena Island, could never fully escape the school's more radical past.

Chapter 4, "Golden-Hazed Gullah Stories: The Black Lowcountry in American Art and Letters, 1920-1940," analyzes the interwar wave of scholarship, fiction, and theatrical productions that focused on black culture in the South Carolina Lowcountry. While both northern and southern writers had collected black folklore from the Lowcountry since the late nineteenth century, national interest reached a zenith in the 1920s and 1930s. The chapter argues that while the literary works of white writers like DuBose Heyward, Julia Peterkin, and Ambrose Gonzales offered romantic portrayals of Lowcountry black rural life to a national audience eager for anti-modern narratives, black writers and intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois, Sterling Brown, and Lorenzo Dow Turner made the case for a more complicated portrait of black life that retained the rural vision of the Lowcountry but also challenged white supremacy. Their counternarratives, often featured in the black press or supported by black institutions of higher learning, played a critical role in defining the relationship between black folklore and southern identity. In so doing, they offered interpretations of Gullah culture that were less interested in enforcing cultural hierarchy and more engaged in democratizing American art and letters.

Chapter 5, "Forgetting Forty Acres and a Mule: Black Land Loss and the Memory of Reconstruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era, 1945-1980," explores the appearance of land redistribution myths in post-Civil Rights black politics. The idea that freedpeople were promised "forty acres and a mule" after slavery, a narrative rooted in provisions of the law creating the Freedmen's Bureau and in the military measures that settled black refugees on land in the Lowcountry, assumed an outsized place in twentieth-century black memory. The failure of the federal government to make land redistribution widespread and permanent during Reconstruction provided the foundation for a black countermemory that emphasized the centrality of economic justice in the black freedom struggle. This historical critique became increasingly salient during the 1960s as land loss among black farmers became a major story in the national press. While black farmers in the rural South had faced daunting obstacles for most of the century, increased land loss among black residents of the South Carolina Sea Islands during the 1960s and 1970s galvanized black activists because of the region's history as a bastion of black landownership. The fight against black land loss repeatedly invoked the slogan "forty acres and a mule" to draw parallels between post-Civil War battles for economic independence and debates over black progress in the post-Civil Rights era. The movement against black land loss ultimately created a new set of grassroots organizations, including Black Land Services, the Emergency Land Fund, and the National Association of Landowners, that aided black farmers in their fight to preserve their livelihood and helped bring the social and cultural history of the Lowcountry back into the national spotlight.

A note on terminology

Throughout the dissertation, "Lowcountry" refers to the region of South Carolina that lies between the coast and the fall line and stretches from Georgetown County to the Georgia border. At various points in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the region was referred to as "the black district," "the black seventh," or "the black border." Beaufort County, the center of black political and economic power in the Lowcountry, is at times used as a synecdoche for the social and political environment that Reconstruction created in the Lowcountry as a whole.

"Sea Islands" refers to the barrier islands along the coast of the Lowcountry. While mostly used in reference to the islands that lie within Beaufort County, the largest of which are Port Royal, St. Helena, and Hilton Head, the South Carolina Sea Islands also include those within the boundaries of Charleston and Colleton counties, the largest of which are James, Johns, and Edisto.

Chapter 1

"Some Sort of Negro Paradise": Beaufort County and the Spatial Politics of Post-Reconstruction Black Citizenship, 1877-1895

In 1877, following the violent election that presaged the collapse of Reconstruction, a grassroots movement emerged in the South Carolina countryside. Fearing that the new Democratic-controlled state government would abandon any pretense of protecting the gains of Reconstruction, black South Carolinians explored the idea of leaving the United States. Richard H. Cain, a former congressman from Charleston, called for a million black people to emigrate to Liberia. "At no time within the last six years," he observed, "has there been such a deep feeling manifested among the colored people to leave this country for Africa as now." This message resonated with many black sharecroppers and laborers who were struggling in the postbellum economy. "For ten years we have tried to make money and have not been able to do so," lamented one agricultural worker from the upcountry county of Edgefield. "We are poorer now than when we began, we have less, in fact we have nothing. We have not lived extravagantly, we have exercised all the economy we knew how to use and we are going further down hill every day. There is no help for us here, there's no use in trying to get along under the old conditions any longer, and so we have just determined to go somewhere else and take a new start."[1]

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[1] Richard H. Cain, "On Liberia," *Africa and America* 62 (April 1877): 16; "Edgefield Exodus," Charleston *News and Courier*, January 2, 1882. Michele Mitchell connects post-Reconstruction "Liberia fever" with anxiety about "racial destiny." "For those longing to go to Liberia," she writes, "emigration was a means of resolving a deep-seated question about where African Americans could best work out their own destiny." See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 20. On the implications of emigration in late nineteenth-century black life, see Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004);

"Liberia fever" brought many former slaves from upcountry South Carolina to the Lowcountry counties of Charleston and Beaufort, from whose ports they would embark for West Africa. In Savannah, Georgia, immediately south of Beaufort County, African Americans marked Liberian Independence Day with the same ceremony accorded holidays that recognized the destruction of slavery and the black soldiers who had defended the Union and fought for freedom. The 1879 celebration, which was described as "[t]he largest demonstration ever made by colored folks in this section," attracted nearly 500 hundred visitors from as far away as Charleston, Beaufort, Macon, and Atlanta.[2]

While the Liberian exodus represented a grassroots challenge of white supremacy by some black South Carolinians, taking up residence in the Lowcountry was a viable alternative for many others. Black inhabitants of the South Carolina Lowcountry took little stock in the "Liberian humbug," one journalist reported. Meanwhile, refugees from elsewhere in the state fled to Beaufort County in particular because they saw it as an oasis from anti-black violence. In 1879 alone, at least 1,500 black South Carolinians from the neighboring counties of Barnwell, Hampton, and Colleton migrated to Beaufort County.[3] According to Beaufort's Robert Smalls, an ex-slave who had served in both the South Carolina state legislature and the U.S. Congress, the county offered freedom from white

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Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 317-30.

[2] "Honoring Liberian Independence," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5 (Summer 1879): 115-16.

[3] Journalist quoted in Charleston *News and Courier*, May 3, 1879. For the migration figure, see *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia* 4 (1879), 813, cited in George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 74.

violence. “I hardly think it probable that any prisoner [in Beaufort County] will ever be taken from jail by a mob and lynched, let his color or offense be what it may," he declared. William H. Heard, a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, agreed that black people had no need to leave the Lowcountry. “Beaufort is the home of the colored man of the South,” he reported. “Young men of money and push could come to this county and do well and enjoy all their rights. Moral, energetic young men are invited into this county to assist in making a name for the race.”[4]

The South Carolina Lowcountry offers a valuable vantage point from which to interrogate the hopes and fears of black Americans following the demise of Reconstruction. Searching for ways to preserve the economic and political gains they had made since the war, as well as the safety of their bodies and their communities, black southerners pursued a myriad of new strategies during the late nineteenth century. They emigrated from the South to rural communities and all-black towns in the trans-Mississippi West.[5] They looked toward Africa both as a destination for emigration and as a grounding for black identity.[6] They created a vibrant counterpublic sphere, establishing newspapers, schools, churches, fraternal orders, mutual-benefit societies, and financial institutions that enabled black communities to flourish in an environment of narrowing

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[4] “Liberian Exodus,” Charleston *News and Courier*, January 22, 1878; Robert Smalls quoted in Charleston *News and Courier*, February 2, 1890; W. H. Heard, “A Trip to Beaufort,” *Christian Recorder*, December 15, 1887.

[5] Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Melissa Stuckey, “All Men Up’: Race, Rights, and Power in the All-Black Town of Boley, Oklahoma, 1903-1939” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009).

[6] Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, chap. 1.

political prospects and escalating anti-black violence.[7] In pursuing these strategies, black Americans had to wrestle with and reexamine the role of the Republican Party in their lives. Frederick Douglass had once claimed that "the Republican Party is the ship and all else is the sea," but the party's abandonment of Reconstruction and its refusal to embrace racial equality led many African Americans to recalibrate their relationship to the party.[8] As one of the most visible centers of Reconstruction-era Republican activity, Beaufort County became the focus for black Americans who sought to defend black political participation in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Debates about African Americans and post-Reconstruction politics were inextricable from a larger anxiety about how predominantly black neighborhoods, counties, and regions fit into an increasingly civilizationist vision of national culture. In

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[7] The creation of postbellum black communities has been one of the richest and most closely-studied areas of African American life and culture. See, for example, Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7 (Fall 1994): 107-46; Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1-30; Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, chaps. 4-6; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), chaps. 4-6; Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), chap 3.

[8] On African Americans and the Republican Party in the late nineteenth century, see Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000); Stanley P. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1873-1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier Press, 1965); Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), chaps. 5-6; Richard B. Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America: From McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973); Eric S. Yellin, *Racism in the Nation's Service: Government Workers and the Color Line in Woodrow Wilson's America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), chaps. 1-3.

response to criticism of corruption in Gilded Age politics, black leaders became acutely aware that the stigma associated with Reconstruction could be used to malign black voters and black politicians as incompatible with good citizenship and good government. This chapter shows how black Americans engaged, resisted, and at times manipulated this anxiety about the legacy of Reconstruction during the final decades of the nineteenth century. It does so by examining representations of the South Carolina Lowcountry in the nation's burgeoning literary magazines, responses to these portrayals in the black press, the personal battle between two of Beaufort County's most prominent black politicians over the legacy of Reconstruction and the future of the Republican Party, and, finally, the 1895 South Carolina constitutional convention where black delegates from the Lowcountry made a valiant last stand for black voting rights.

As African Americans confronted a shrinking terrain on which to advance their politics, anxieties about proper citizenship produced a new set of leaders who challenged white supremacy in the public sphere. In the black press, literary circles, and self-published broadsides, they sought to defend the Lowcountry, and especially the Republican Party in the Lowcountry, as sites of black achievement and praiseworthy historical memory. While the Lowcountry ceased to be viable political space for Republican politics after the 1895 constitution effectively disfranchised the state's black population, the battles over representations of the Lowcountry during the 1880s and 1890s offer a glimpse into how both black southerners and black northerners imagined a world in which the promise of Reconstruction had been realized. By examining this transitional period between Reconstruction and Jim Crow, a more complicated understanding emerges of how race and memory shaped notions of black progress in the

late nineteenth century, as do new narratives of how black Americans brought these notions to bear on the national Republican Party.[9]

Space, Power, and Racial Gerrymandering

On December 13, 1877, a bill was introduced into the South Carolina House of Representatives to make the portion of Beaufort County west of the Savannah and Charleston Railroad into a new "judicial and election county" called "Palmetto County." The territory of the proposed county had been an antebellum stronghold of both white yeomen and large planters and was less densely black than the coastal section of Beaufort County. Predicting that the new county would weaken the Republican Party's strength in the Lowcountry and give the Democratic Party a footing in the region, Democrats across the state supported the measure. The plan for a new county, which had circulated since the early 1870s, picked up steam after the 1876 election of Wade Hampton, the Confederate hero whose gubernatorial victory represented the state's long-awaited "redemption" from Republican rule. "What better name than Hampton!" exclaimed an editorial in a Beaufort County Democratic paper that wanted the new county to memorialize the governor. "A name dearer to Carolina than ever were the Colletons, the

[9] Scholars have explored how subaltern populations have used competing conceptualizations of space to challenge the hegemony of their oppressors. On space and resistance, see Stephanie M. P. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 12-33; Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 6-8, 12-13, 170-71, 333-34; Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chap. 4; Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80 (Summer 1993): 75-112; David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Boston: South End Press, 2007); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

Berkeleys or the Ashleys of our provincial history."[10] More than a symbolic victory for the Democrats, the creation of Hampton County significantly shrank the jurisdiction of Beaufort County's Republican Party, created a Lowcountry county with a significant white minority (34 percent), and set in motion a process that would ultimately allow its white residents political domination.[11] (See Figures 1.1. and 1.2.)

Approved by both houses of the South Carolina General Assembly in February 1878, the law that created Hampton County paralleled a larger effort by white Democrats to stamp out alleged corruption in the Lowcountry. After black Republican Robert Smalls defeated white Democrat George Tillman in the 1878 election for South Carolina's Fifth Congressional District, Democrats brought a bribery charge against Smalls. Claiming that he had been paid by a printing company in exchange for a political favor, Tillman and the Democrats had Smalls's victory invalidated. Smalls challenged the bribery allegation before a congressional committee and also accused the Democrats of having committed electoral fraud and of encouraging polling place irregularities.[12]

Although the committee eventually found that South Carolina's Democratic Party had violated federal election law and declared Smalls the victor, Tillman had already served most of the congressional term. Nevertheless, the specter of federal intervention served as a check on Democrats' extralegal attempts to obstruct black voting, especially

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[10] *Beaufort Tribune and Port Royal Commercial*, October 25, 1877.

[11] On the antebellum history of Beaufort County's white yeomen, especially how they came to support the Democratic Party, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[12] *Contested Election, G. D. Tillman vs. Robert Smalls, Fifth Congressional District of South Carolina: Brief for Contestant* (Washington, DC: Gibson Bros., 1878).

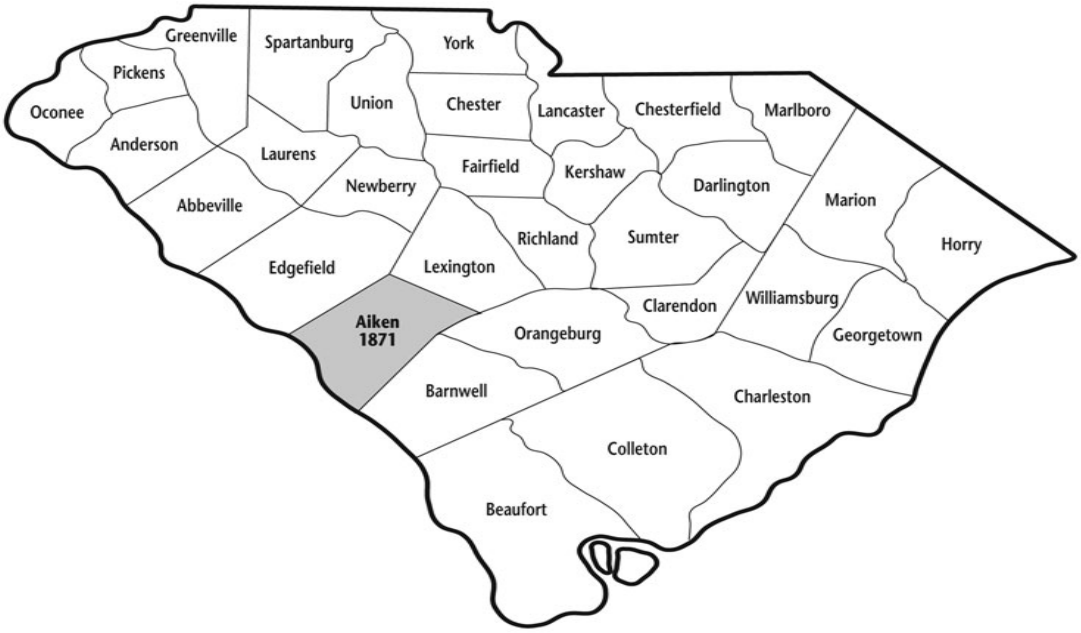

Figure 1.1. South Carolina Counties, 1871-1877 (shaded county created between the two years)
Source: SCDAH, http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/ guide/CountyRecords/1871.htm (accessed July 1, 2016)

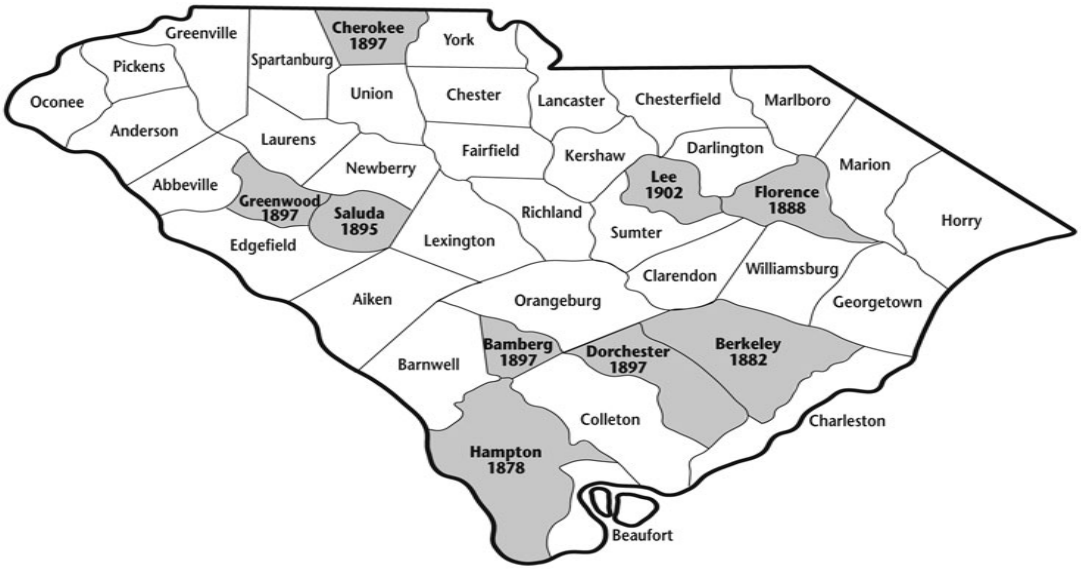

Figure 1.2. South Carolina Counties, 1878-1907 (shaded counties created between the two years)
Source: SCDAH, http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/guide/ CountyRecords/1878.htm (accessed July 1, 2016)

when the Republican Party controlled the presidency or Congress. In addition to federal oversight from above, challenges were directed toward South Carolina Democrats from below. In 1880, the state's resurgent Democratic Party faced a third-party challenge in the form of the Greenback Party. Formed to oppose monopolies and the gold standard, the Greenback Party threatened to unite the state's poor whites and poor blacks against the large landowners who controlled the Democratic Party.[13]

In the face of these challenges, South Carolina's Democratic Party instituted a series of measures designed to disfranchise African American voters without violating the Fifteenth Amendment. A voter registration and election law enacted in 1882 became the cornerstone of this effort. It required all citizens of the state of South Carolina to register to vote by the end of 1882. Those who missed the initial registration deadline were given a single one-day window per month until the July preceding a November election; after that, new voters would be prohibited from voting in that year's election. While ostensibly color-blind, the law's stringent registration provisions were designed to have a disproportionate impact on the state's black wage workers and sharecroppers because it required them to re-register every time they moved (even if the move was on the same farm). Another provision, which became known as the "eight-box law," required voters to deposit a properly marked ballot in a separate box for each of eight

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[13] On the Greenback Party in the South, see Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 1-77; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 214-48; Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), chap. 2; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Manhood* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 110-55; Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 41-53; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, *1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 81-85.

electoral races at the local, state, and federal levels. By requiring voters to recognize each box's label, the law effectively established a literacy test; ballots placed in the wrong box were invalid. While the law managed to disfranchise large swaths of illiterate voters across racial lines, it had a disproportionate impact on black voters.[14]

Convinced that the new election law did not go far enough, Democratic legislators used the redistricting that followed the 1880 federal census as an opportunity to radically transform the state's political landscape. The census results, which determined that South Carolina's population growth entitled the state to two additional representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, encouraged Democrats to realign the congressional districts in a way that would guarantee Democratic domination. At a special session of the state legislature that convened on June 7, 1882, state senator J. F. Izlar of Orangeburg introduced a bill dividing the state into seven congressional districts. Samuel Dibble, a Democratic congressman from South Carolina, was the plan's architect. Hoping to insure Democratic control in six of the seven new districts, Dibble drew the boundaries so as to concentrate a full 25 percent of the state's black population into a single district, the new Seventh Congressional District, thereby diluting black voting strength in the other six districts.[15]

Dibble's districts were textbook examples of racial gerrymandering. The Seventh District not only encompassed the state's most heavily African American coastal

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[14] On the 1882 election law, see Arthur Lewis Gelston, "Radical versus Straight-Out in Post-Reconstruction Beaufort County," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 75 (October 1974): 232-34. See also Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 50-51, 286-87; Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 68-78.

[15] William J. Cooper, Jr., *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 130.

counties, but also snaked several hundred miles inland to incorporate concentrations of black population within six other counties. (See Figure 1.3.) A written description of its composition revealed the bizarre convoluted of the new district:

> Counties.—Beaufort, Georgetown, Sumter, and Berkley (excepting the towns of Mount Pleasant and Summerville, and so much of the parish of Saint James, Goose Creek, as lies between the western track of the South Carolina Railway and the Ashley River below the County of Colleton;) the lower township of Richland County; the townships of Collins, Adams' Run, Glover, Fraser, Lowndes, and Blake, in the County of Colleton; the townships of Amelia Goodby's, Lions, Pine Grove, Poplar, Providence, and Vance's, in the County of Orangeburg; the townships of Anderson, Hope, Indian, King's (excepting the town of Kingstree,) Laws, Mingo, Penn, Ridge, Sutton's, and Turkey, in the County of Williamsburg, and that portion of Charleston County composed of James Island, Folly Island, Morris Island, and the island lying between them, the lower harbor of Charleston Harbor, and the ocean coast line from and below the high-water mark.[16]

Unconstrained by any calculus other than racial concentration, the proposed Seventh District presented a fantastic cartographic spectacle. Not surprisingly, the new congressional district map placed Hampton County outside the Seventh District, thereby ensuring that its voters would have a Democratic congressman. Thus, in reserving the Seventh District for "the ex-convicts and scalawags," white elites in South Carolina used the power of cartography to reduce black political power with less resort to white fraud and violence.[17]

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[16] South Carolina *Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina being the Extra Session, Commencing Tuesday*, June 27, 1882 (Columbia, SC: James Woodrow, 1882), 1169-70.

[17] In discussing the role of maps in nation-building, Benedict Anderson observes that the "vectoral convergence" of print capitalism with the new conception of spatial reality presented by colonial maps created new ways of imagining national communities. With the new map-drawn boundaries, boundaries that were created and enforced by the administrative power of the empire, colonial subjects were forced to respond to a new ontological invention—the nation. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), chap. 10. I argue that the spatial realignments that Anderson describes in Southeast Asia paralleled the realignments occurring in late nineteenth-century South Carolina and other parts of the South.

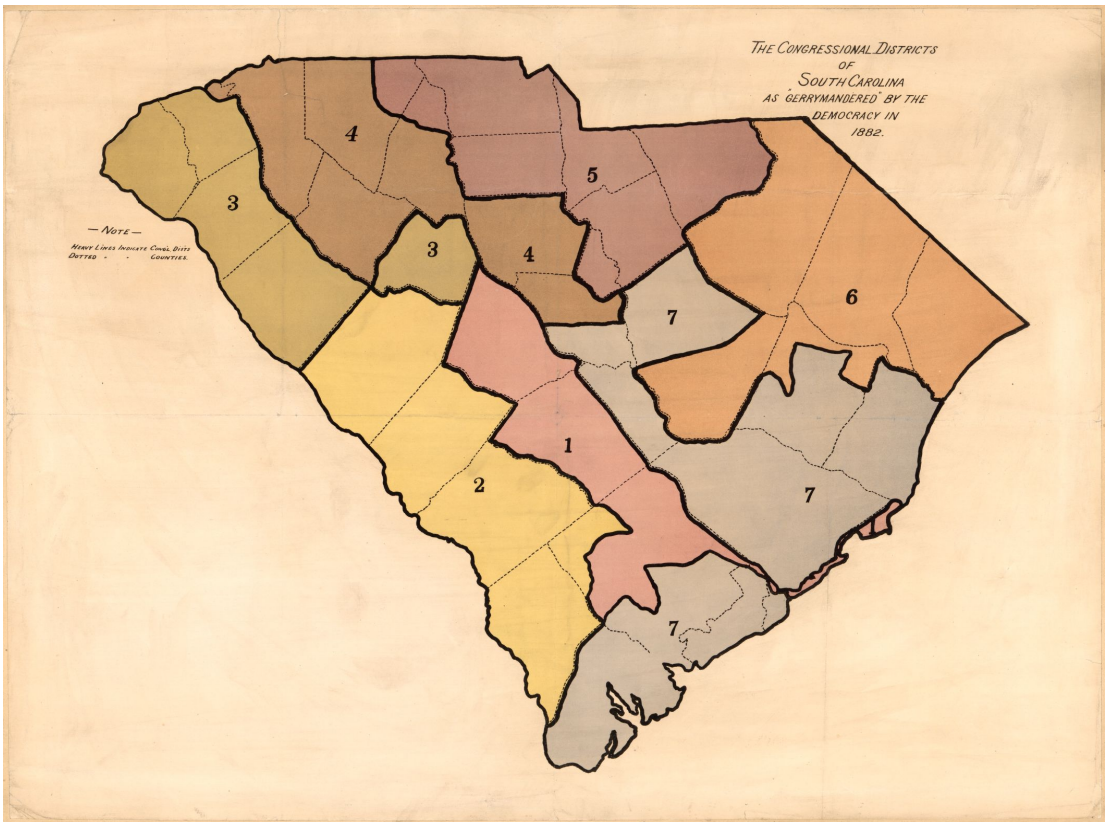

Figure 1.3. "The Congressional Districts of South Carolina as 'Gerrymandered' by the Democracy in 1882"
Source: Geography and Map Division, LC, https://www.loc.gov/item/2015588077/ (accessed July 1, 2016)

Lowcountry Republicans criticized the proposed gerrymander and highlighted the detrimental effect it would have on black political power. Speaking for the Republicans, state senator Thomas E. Miller of Beaufort claimed that the redistricting proposal was a blatant effort to exterminate Republicanism in the state. Critics castigated Dibble's plan for packing 25 percent of black South Carolinians into a single district; with a total population of 187,535, the new Seventh District would be the most populous congressional district in the state, with between 20,000 and 69,000 more people than each of the other districts. Miller offered an alternative plan that would have allowed for four

Democratic districts and three Republican ones, rather than the six-to-one division of the proposed gerrymander. That call went unheeded, and by July 5, 1882, the gerrymandered map of the state had been approved by both houses.[18]

South Carolina's Democrats celebrated their victory. "If the full white and colored Democratic vote be cast for Congressman," boasted Francis Dawson, editor of the Charleston *News and Courier*, "only the Seventh district would go Republican."[19] Outside observers, however, gasped at the monstrosity the Democrats had created. "The district is shaped like a bat with outstretched wings," remarked the Chicago *Daily Tribune*. "It is backed like a camel, and from one point of view is very like a weasel." An 1889 report in *The Forum*, a magazine published in New York, suggested that in South Carolina "the gerrymanderer could display his art in its highest development."[20]

South Carolina was neither the first nor the only southern state to be redistricted along racial lines following the end of Reconstruction. North Carolina's Second Congressional District was designed such that for the duration of its existence, 1871 to 1903, it was known as the "Black Second." In Mississippi, Democrats crowded a majority of the state's black population into a "shoestring district" that snaked along the Mississippi river to incorporate the state's predominantly African American counties into a single congressional district. One of many strategies southern Democrats used to reduce

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[18] Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 103; Charleston *News and Courier*, June 28, 1882. The populations of the seven districts were as follows: First, 118,803; Second, 136,748; Third, 131,569; Fourth, 167,230; Fifth, 121,808; Sixth, 132,383; Seventh, 187,535. See "The South Carolina Gerrymander," Chicago *Daily Tribune,* July 19, 1882.

[19] "Carolina's New District," Charleston *News and Courier*, July 4, 1882.

[20] "The South Carolina Gerrymander," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1882; Walter C. Hamm, "The Art of Gerrymandering," *Forum* 9 (March 1889): 538.

the political power of black voters, racial gerrymandering allowed states with majority-black populations to limit black congressional representation without disfranchising black voters and thus without running afoul of the Fifteenth Amendment or federal voting laws. In this respect, the tactical genius of South Carolina's redistricting scheme was its appearance of legality. Indeed, in allowing for black domination of one of the state's congressional districts, racial gerrymandering could even be portrayed as magnanimous.[21]

The goal of such spatial manipulation was to reduce the impact of the black vote. As one white Lowcountry leader explained, "it was . . . determined that the negroes should be massed in what is termed the 'black district' and that this region of darkness should be given over to the republicans." Despite its patina of noninterference with black suffrage, many observers recognized that gerrymandering violated the spirit, if not the letter, of federal law. "The whole apportionment might properly be rejected if the point should be raised on the ground that the districts are not composed of 'compact and contiguous territory,' nor are they 'nearly equal in population,' as the law requires," observed one reporter. While neither Congress nor the courts challenged South Carolina's 1882 redistricting law, it continued to be a source of controversy in national debates about black voting rights.[22]

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[21] On North Carolina's "Black Second," see Eric Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 3-4, 141. On Mississippi's "shoestring district," see Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 39-40.

[22] White Lowcountry leader quoted in "Carolina's New District," Charleston *News and Courier*, July 4, 1882; "The South Carolina Gerrymander," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1882. On racial gerrymandering in the post-Reconstruction South, see Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 37-38; Bernard Grofman, *Political Gerrymandering and the Courts* (New York: Algora Publishing, 1990), chap. 8; Kent Redding, *Making Race, Making Power: North Carolina's Road*

The "Black District" in the Post-Reconstruction Public Sphere

Controversy over South Carolina's Seventh Congressional District was not limited to voting rights. More than any other racially gerrymandered district in the South, the South Carolina Seventh served as a lens through which the national media explored questions of black politics, black progress, and the legacy of Reconstruction. Sometimes used precisely to mean the congressional district as a whole and sometimes more informally as though interchangeable with Beaufort County alone, the "black district" became a widespread trope in late nineteenth-century writing on race and politics. Portrayed as an exotic and anti-modern space by travel writers and literary magazines, the "black district" required Americans to interrogate the recent past and consider the meaning of emancipation and Reconstruction.

The reconfiguration of the political landscape in the South Carolina Lowcountry coincided with a fierce contest over the meaning of black racial identity in national culture. The destruction of slavery and adoption of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments opened a space for supporters of Reconstruction to portray black southerners as equal to whites before the law and deserving of full political rights. In the 1870s, however, as reports increasingly emphasized the shortcomings of the South's Reconstruction governments, many white northerners not only abandoned the premise of black equality, but also began to argue that black citizenship had been based on a romantic ideal of black Americans rather than their true nature. The intellectuals who made this case supported the demise of Reconstruction and would later be at the forefront

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to Disfranchisement (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), chap. 3; Kenny J. Whitby, *The Color of Representation: Congressional Behavior and Black Interests* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 114-20.

of scientific racism.[23] But despite this rightward turn in racial ideology during the 1870s and 1880s, many white and black Americans continued to reject the premise that black Americans were ill-suited for the responsibilities of citizenship. These anti-racist writers and intellectuals frequently turned to predominantly black regions of the South—most often Beaufort County—to highlight what they saw as black progress. In so doing, they crafted a counternarrative about the legacy of Reconstruction and about African Americans in the post-Reconstruction South.

The first installment of this debate began during Reconstruction through the accounts of northern journalists. James S. Pike, a former free-soil Republican from Maine, achieved particular notoriety following the publication in December 1873 of *The Prostrate State: South Carolina under Negro Government*. Based on stories published in the *New York Tribune* during an 1872 tour of the state, Pike's book painted a monstrous picture of graft, incompetence, and moral decay in the South Carolina state government. Emphasizing the rising state debt and a handful of high-profile instances of graft, Pike argued that Reconstruction was a failure. He blamed the debacle squarely on the misguided policy of granting black men the franchise. Relying on testimony from members of the white planter class, Pike's narrative painted a particularly negative picture of black people in the Lowcountry. "The colored population upon the sea-coast and upon the rivers, is just as slightly removed from the animal creation as it is conceivable for a man to be," claimed one of Pike's sources. Another interviewee argued that the African retentions and Gullah speech of black residents of the Sea Islands were

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[23] Robert F. Durden, *James Shepherd Pike*: *Republicanism and the American Negro*, *1850-1882* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1957), 201-19; Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and the Politics of the Post-Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 104-20.

so pronounced and so different from the folkways of black people in other parts of the country that it would be impossible for a black person from elsewhere to communicate with a black resident of the Lowcountry. Pike concluded that owing to the ignorance of black South Carolinians—particularly those in the Lowcountry—unscrupulous carpetbaggers and demagogues could manipulate black voters "just as a man would drive or lead a flock of sheep."[24]

Edward King, another northern journalist, published an account of conditions in South Carolina in his 1875 book, *The Great South*. Like Pike, King highlighted the lamentations of the white taxpayer movement and endorsed its grievances against the Republican-led legislature. "In a decade and a-half one of the most remarkable revolutions ever recorded in history has occurred," King wrote. "A wealthy and highly prosperous community has been reduced to beggary; its vassals have become its lords, and dispose of the present and pledge the future resources of the State." Alongside a defense of honest government against Republican corruption, King painted a portrait of the postbellum South as backward and unprogressive. The geography of race was a crucial aspect of King's narrative strategy, and no place in the South more dramatically demonstrated the region's distance from capitalist ideals and Anglo-Saxon civilization than Beaufort County. There, King wrote, "The blacks have formed communities by themselves. . . . They monopolize everything." Far from being model agrarian citizens who embraced the tenets of free-labor ideology, the Lowcountry's black residents were mired in economic inefficiency. "[T]hey are in possession of a great deal which they cannot use," he protested. "They seem, especially on Port Royal Island, contented with a

[24] James S. Pike, *The Prostrate State: South Carolina under Negro Government* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873); quotations on 263-65.

small tract of land on which to raise cotton, and over which their hogs may wander." While some Sea Island farmers were industrious, "the masses, are satisfied with getting a living." To King, the most disappointing feature of Sea-Island life was the lack of progress the once-promising community had made since the Civil War.

> They know little about markets, surplus crops, and the accumulation of riches, and care less. They love hunting and fishing; they revel in the idleness which they never knew until after the war. But they are cumberers of the soil; their ignorance impedes, their obstinacy throttles. They are tools in the hands of the corrupt. They lack moral sense, as might have been expected, after a few generations of slavery.

Far from exemplifying the virtues of independence, industry, and self-improvement, black residents of the Sea Islands had sunk into a morass of subsistence farming and economic and cultural backwardness.[25]

The impact of such narratives on northern opinions of South Carolina's Reconstruction-era government cannot be overstated. Several scholars have cited the importance of *The Prostrate State* in undermining northern support of Reconstruction. Because of Pike's self-proclaimed abolitionist bonafides, peers in the northern press freighted his account with considerable intellectual and moral weight. His portrayal of Reconstruction was embraced by such prominent spokesmen as E. L. Godkin of *The Nation* and Thomas Nast, political cartoonist for *Harper's Weekly*. As such northern intellectuals increasingly rejected the basic premise of black political participation, national support for continued federal intervention in the South collapsed. This turn away from Reconstruction was accompanied by a new discourse of national reunion that saw

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[25] Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys in Louisiana, Texas, the Indian Territory, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Co., 1875), 427-29.

white elites from the North and the South reconcile lingering regional enmity by uniting in a common language of white Anglo-Saxon manhood.[26]

An important but understudied strand of this assault on Reconstruction was a redefinition of the place of black citizens in the nation at large. As *The Prostrate State* and *The Great South* demonstrated, northern writers were not interested only in exposing southern political corruption, which mirrored the corruption prevalent in northern cities.[27] They also wanted to illuminate the fault lines that divided the nation, especially race, which they saw as the most impenetrable barrier. By focusing on the black Lowcountry as the most extreme of racial frontiers, northern writers like Pike and King helped construct the scaffolding for postbellum national identity by defining firm boundaries between the wholesome spaces inhabited by middle-class white Americans and the deviant spaces that were the domains of non-white people.[28]

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[26] On the northern retreat from Reconstruction and the role that northern writers like Pike and King played in redefining white northerners' views on race, see Benedict, "Reform Republicans and the Retreat from Reconstruction," 53-78; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), chap. 7; K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 97-134; Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, 101-12; Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South*, *1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), chap. 3.

[27] On journalism that exposed political corruption in northern cities, see James J. Connolly, "The Public Good and the Problem of Pluralism in Lincoln Steffens's Civic Imagination," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4 (Summer 2005): 124-47; Albert B. Paine, *Thomas Nast, His Period and His Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Pyne Press, 1974); Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, 80-85; Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003); Stanley K. Schultz, "The Morality of Politics: The Muckrakers' Vision of Democracy," *Journal of American History* 52 (Winter 1965): 527-47.

[28] Travel accounts like those of Pike and King had a clear pedagogical purpose in a nation fraught by the destruction of slavery, westward expansion, military and cultural campaigns against Native Americans, new waves of immigration, the rise of large cities, and the first stages of overseas imperialism. On the cultural imperialism of travel writing more broadly, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). For studies of how

In the decade following Reconstruction, travel writing about Beaufort County and the Lowcountry as a whole continued to convey fears and fantasies about black pathology and the nation's racial frontiers. This anxiety was most fully articulated in the work of Frank Wilkeson, a veteran of the Army of the Potomac who had served under General Ulysses S. Grant in the 1864 Overland Campaign. During the 1880s, Wilkeson travelled the country as a journalist for the New York *Sun*, the New York *Times,* and *Harper's Weekly*. His writing emphasized the unwieldy nature of the American democratic project, especially as one ventured beyond the clearly marked lines of Anglo-American civilization. His account of the South portrayed the region as a whole and African Americans in particular as lacking in the innate qualities required to prevent the onset of corruption.

In 1882 and 1883, Wilkeson published a series of articles about a trip through the South Carolina Lowcountry. During his time in the "black county" of Beaufort he endeavored to paint a fuller portrait of the famed Sea Islands. "Everybody knows in a general way about the Sea Islands of South Carolina," Wilkeson wrote. This knowledge was limited, however, to the region's unique topography of swamps, marshes, and plantations, as well as the fact that the former planter elite had been brought low by the Civil War and displaced by the formerly enslaved black majority. Wilkeson's account offered a dismal image of black life in the Lowcountry. To begin with, he accused the region's black residents of deficient moral standards. In shops on the Sea Islands, he claimed, "the clerks cannot take their eyes off their darkey customers without some small article disappearing." The men all aspired to be preachers or members of the legislature

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northern writers reimagined the South, see Prince, *Stories of the South*; Silber, *Romance of Reunion*.

and were receiving an education that made them unfit for field work. All the women with "negro blood in their veins" were prostitutes.[29]

Depictions of a lack of postbellum progress coincided with a pernicious narrative of the Lowcountry as a decadent space where former slaves eschewed labor discipline. James Stuart, a former Lowcountry planter who had moved to Wisconsin, returned to his native state in 1885 to document what was happening in the post-Reconstruction Lowcountry. Arriving in the town of Beaufort on a Saturday night, Stuart conveyed an exaggerated picture of the Lowcountry's black working class on holiday. "The hands at the phosphate works are paid off and come into town from many miles around," he reported. "Some bring their pay to their families who live here, many to spend it on a spree." In the carnivalesque scenes of Stuart's narrative, Beaufort overflowed with "black bucolics" from the countryside who, according to one black observer, "swarm around all night talkin' an drinkin' an crowdin', till dere ain't no place for a quiet man." While embellishing exotic elements of the town to emphasize its distance from the nation's white middle-class center, Stuart also identified a number of hotels that would offer potential visitors a version of the Lowcountry that more closely reflected the romantic Old South fantasy.[30]

Frank Wilkeson echoed Stuart's description of the town of Beaufort as a place where race, space, and power all seemed to be in flux. "I wanted to see Beaufort," Wilkeson wrote, "where some three thousand colored people live, and whither hundreds come to trade, on a national holiday." Arriving just before Thanksgiving, he expected to

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[29] Frank Wilkeson, "The Sea Island Negroes: An Interesting Study by an Intelligent Observer," New York *Sun*, January 8, 1883.

[30] James R. Stuart, "En Silhouette," Madison *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 29, 1885.

encounter a bacchanalian scene in which the Lowcountry's black men, eager to spend the "good wages" earned from phosphate mining, would be celebrating the holiday and would "surely go on a terrific drunk." Instead of finding a chaotic scene, however, he encountered "[m]any colored men and women, all dressed in their best."[31] Like Stuart's account, Wilkeson's depiction of Beaufort reflected larger fears and fantasies about the changing spatial dynamics of the New South. As more and more black southerners moved from the countryside to towns and cities where they inhabited the same public spaces as white southerners, consumed the same goods, and were equal under the law, the social norms that had previously governed racial etiquette were shattered and the roles that blacks and whites played in the public sphere had to be renegotiated. In Beaufort, the most populous town in the Lowcountry's black political stronghold, outsiders saw a pronounced version of this change.[32]

A belief that the destruction of slavery had led to a declension in black morality and industry was widespread among the nation's leading white intellectuals. After an 1886 visit to South Carolina, Alexander McClure of Philadelphia described Beaufort County as overrun with "semi-barbarous hordes."[33] In a lecture entitled "Our Blighted Sea Islands," Charles C. Pinckney of Charleston declared that "whenever they (the

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[31] Wilkeson, "Sea Island Negroes."

[32] On black migration to towns and cities after Reconstruction, see Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, chap. 3; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, chap. 3; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 436-85. For discussions of postbellum black consumption and its relationship to notions of work discipline, see Jonathan M. Bryant, *How Curious a Land: Conflict and Change in Greene County, Georgia, 1850-1885* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chap. 10; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 7; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, chap. 2; Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882* (Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 12.

[33] "The Sea Island Negroes," Hartford (CT) *Daily Courant*, August 19, 1886.

negroes) dominate by numbers and political preponderance, most of them have retrograded towards the worse phases of African life." He questioned whether "the boon of liberty" had been a blessing or a curse for the freedpeople of the Sea Islands.[34]

In order to appeal to the nation's elite press, some public figures employed a less virulently racist version of the civilizationist critique of Reconstruction. In *The Forum*, South Carolina's former governor Wade Hampton, now a U.S. senator, offered a reinterpretation of Reconstruction and the Democratic "redemption" in which he had played a central role. Although he argued that white South Carolinians had been "redeemed from a domination more debasing, more disgraceful, than any which has ever obtained on this continent," Hampton claimed that he did not regard black Americans as inherently inferior to whites. Borrowing from the language of the Liberal Republicans, Hampton explained that he had rejected "negro supremacy" because of its foundation in universal suffrage, which he considered "a great crime against humanity, civilization, and Christianity." "The best class of the negroes," he suggested, could be entrusted with the privilege of the ballot, which would in turn be an incentive for other blacks to "qualify themselves for the duties and the responsibilities of citizenship."[35]

Increasingly, the view that political participation was a privilege that should belong only to those who could exercise it responsibly became the dominant perspective. In his account of Reconstruction in South Carolina and Mississippi, the historian Frederic Bancroft concluded in 1885 that "the optimists" (i.e., abolitionists and other supporters of Reconstruction) did not fully consider "the actual intellectual and moral status of the

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[34] Pinckney lecture quoted in Niels Christensen, "The Sea Islands and Negro Supremacy," n.d., Christensen Family Papers, SCL.

[35] Wade Hampton, "What Negro Supremacy Means," *Forum* 5 (1888): 383-85.

blacks" when they launched their crusade for biracial democracy. "Civilization is neither made nor lost in a day," Bancroft argued. "And there is still some difference in political science between intelligence and ignorance."[36] Although Bancroft, like Wilkeson, disparaged the extralegal tactics of southern Democrats, his argument rested on the unstated premise that blacks would attain intelligence and civilization only in time, and only by emulating Anglo-Saxon culture.[37]

Although a considerable number of post-Reconstruction writers either demonized or exoticized the black Lowcountry beyond recognition, an equally vocal group represented the region in a positive light. In part because of its particular place in abolitionist memory, a significant segment of northern writers and intellectuals heralded Beaufort County as a model black community. In 1881, Charles Cowley, a Union army veteran and prominent abolitionist from Boston, delivered a Decoration Day speech entitled "The Romance of History in the Black County" in which he highlighted the progress made in Beaufort County since the end of the war. Cowley disputed the idea that black southerners were "relapsing into savagery" without the civilizing hand of the white master. "Generally the condition of the people has been much improved," Cowley

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[36] Frederic Bancroft, *A Sketch of the Negro in Politics in South Carolina and Mississippi* (New York: J. F. Pearson, 1885), 87.

[37] This anti-democratic worldview was not limited to white-black relations. Liberal Republican critiques of democracy extended to non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants and the nation's American Indian population. The more paternalist version of this philosophy was embodied in industrial schools like the Carlisle Indian Institute, Hampton Institute, and Tuskegee Institute that sought to inculcate in non-whites values that would allow them gradually to develop the skills to become citizens. On civilizationism in the late nineteenth century, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David Sehat, "The Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington," *Journal of Southern History* 73 (Summer 2007): 323-62.

maintained. "The slave-owners formerly boasted that the negroes were 'the best peasantry in the world'; and in the years that have passed since emancipation, the negroes have done much to prove themselves so." In another speech that same year, Cowley honored Robert Smalls on the twentieth anniversary of his heroic capture of *The Planter*. "There is no Southern Problem or Negro Problem," Cowley declared; "it has been solved. The colored people of 'the Black County' and of the entire South are cultivating the soil for the owners of the soil; they are educating their children, caring for their families, improving themselves and working out their destinies."[38]

Thomas Wentworth Higginson, another prominent Boston abolitionist, also used his public stature to publicize black progress in Beaufort County. In his 1870 book, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, Higginson had described his time as colonel of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, the first black Union regiment composed entirely of former slaves; his account not only highlighted the bravery and the humanity of the men in his regiment, but also captured some of the Gullah folkways particular to the Lowcountry. In 1878, Higginson returned to Beaufort County to see how the men of his regiment had fared since the end of the war. "Nothing in actual life can come so near the experience of Rip Van Winkle, as to revisit war scenes after a dozen years of peace," Higginson reported. The changes he identified touched every facet of life. "Not another county or township in the state could show such a record for freedom from crime and pauperism," he wrote. The phosphate industry had brought higher wages and "northern energy." The chief of police in Beaufort, a black man, emphasized that the county's black residents required little public assistance, despite the in-migration of more than 2,000 people from the upper

[38] Charles Cowley, *The Romance of History in the Black County and the Romance of War in the Career of General Smalls, "The Hero of the Planter"* (Lowell, MA: self-published, 1882), 5-6.

parts of the state. Most important for Higginson was the evidence of gendered virtue. Discussing marriage with one of his former soldiers, Higginson was shocked to learn that the man had married Venus, a woman featured in his 1870 book who had a reputation "so very questionable in her earlier incarnations that the name was not encouraging." Now, however, Venus was "a most virtuous wife and a very efficient teacher of sewing in Miss Botume's school." This gendered story of racial progress contested attacks by Wilkeson and others that accused the black women of the Sea Islands of "all being prostitutes." At the same time, however, it reinforced the civilizationist rhetoric that was becoming the dominant framework for claims that most black Americans were unfit for political citizenship. [39]

Although the Republican Party of the 1880s was becoming less aligned with the views of racial egalitarians like Higginson, the emancipationist memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction played an important role for those who continued to fight for black equality. In an unpublished essay titled "The Sea Islands and Negro Supremacy," Niels Christensen, a Union army veteran who served as caretaker of the National Cemetery in Beaufort, rebuffed claims by Charles C. Pinckney and Wade Hampton that black South Carolinians in general, and residents of the Lowcountry in particular, represented the failure of Reconstruction. Using data from the 1880 federal census, Christensen demonstrated that the assessed value of real estate and personal property of the county's

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[39] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co., 1870); Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Some War Scenes Revisited," *Atlantic Monthly* 42 (July 1878): 1-9. Although Higginson saw clear signs of economic, social, and political progress in the Lowcountry, his optimism was chastened by an understanding that federal intervention was no longer politically viable. Anticipating that legal and extralegal disfranchisement were real possibilities, Higginson suggested that when and where the vote came under attack, blacks should "leave those counties or States which ill use them for others which treat them better."

black residents had increased during Reconstruction and that black residents of the Lowcountry had made tremendous progress. "There are no retrograde moments or steps backward in the march of progress and civilization," Christensen argued. Charging critics like Pinckney with being "doctrinaires" and "pessimists," Christensen claimed that "no other 'blight' hovers over our fair Sea Islands."[40]

Higginson, Cowley, and Christensen represented a rapidly declining wing of the Republican Party. Reconstruction had been a toxic issue for national Republicans ever since the publication of Pike's *The Prostrate State*, and following the "compromise" of 1876, southern Republicans had become an endangered political species. Within this decaying Republican orbit, however, the Lowcountry still held significant cultural meaning. During an 1880 whistle-stop tour of the Southeast, former president Ulysses S. Grant addressed a crowd of more than 5,000 in Beaufort. "It has afforded me great pleasure to pay a visit to the town of Beaufort," he told his listeners. "It is a place that has occupied a conspicuous place in the history of our country for the past twenty years, and it is to be hoped that it is a place where the best of the newly enfranchised race are to be developed. I hope that they will become worthy and capable citizens." Grant received a twenty-one-gun salute, and many black members of the crowd fell to their knees and wept at the sight of the Civil War hero and Reconstruction president.[41] Although Grant's reputation had been tarnished by widely-reported scandals, South Carolina's Republican Party correctly gauged the symbolic power that the former president would have in

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[40] Christensen, "The Sea Islands and Negro Supremacy," Christensen Family Papers, SCL.

[41] Grant quoted in "The Negro's Paradise: At Beaufort," New Orleans *Weekly Louisianan*, January 10, 1880; "Grant at Beaufort," New York *Times*, January 10, 1880.

Beaufort County and, as importantly, the value of keeping the story of black progress in the public eye.

If stories about Beaufort County were important to how the nation's racial egalitarians understood Reconstruction and black progress, they also had transnational import. When Sir George Campbell, a Scottish Liberal Party politician and former Lieutenant-Governor of Great Britain's colony in Bengal, toured the American South in 1878 to study postbellum race relations, he took special interest in the South Carolina Lowcountry. In his 1879 book, *White and Black: The Outcome of a Visit to the United States*, Campbell confessed that "when I went to South Carolina I thought there at least I must find great social disturbances; and in South Carolina I went to the County of Beaufort, the blackest part of the State in point of population, and that in which black rule has been most complete and has lasted longest." "It has the reputation of being a sort of black paradise," Campbell continued, "and per contra, I rather expected a sort of white hell. There I thought I should see a rough Liberia, where blacks ruled roughshod over the whites." The world of "negro domination" and white misery that Campbell expected to find in the Lowcountry no doubt derived from the accounts of northern writers like James Pike and Edward King. Campbell, however, reported that he had found "exactly the contrary," a place where the black majority and the white minority lived in harmony. Nonetheless, Campbell's determination to see Beaufort County for himself suggests that it not only stood at the center of American debates about Reconstruction, but also shaped how British colonial administrators conceptualized their own racial regimes.[42]

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[42] George Campbell, *White and Black: The Outcome of a Visit to the United States* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1879), 176.

Beaufort County, the Black Press, and Race Progress

Throughout the 1880s, the black press across the nation took regular note of the gains that freedpeople in Beaufort County had made since emancipation. The rise of landowning farmers in the county was a major point of pride. "Colored men who, ten years ago worked as field hands for fifty cents a day, now own their lands and earn a comfortable support from them," reported the *People's Advocate*, a black newspaper in Washington, D.C., in 1880.[43] A later article in the same paper highlighted the fact that six years after the collapse of Reconstruction, Beaufort still boasted many African American officeholders, including members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, a state senator, a clerk of county court, a school commissioner, two out of three county commissioners, a town clerk, a treasurer, a marshal, a deputy collector of customs, an inspector of customs, and a postmaster. "[W]e are, indeed, worthy of the name 'Africa' that is, as far as holding offices are concerned," a Beaufort resident proudly informed black readers in the nation's capital.[44]

Several black newspapers in the South Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry became important participants in the black public sphere during the 1880s and used their prominence to trumpet the achievements of the region's black residents. The *Sea Island News*, which was published in the town of Beaufort between 1874 and 1891, was highly regarded by other black newspapers. "Its editorial is always pitched upon a high key," declared the New York *Globe*. "It reasons always from an anti-Bourbon standpoint, and

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[43] "The Sea Islands: The Progress of the Population," Washington, DC, *People's Advocate*, August 21, 1880.

[44] "A Negro Paradise," Washington, DC, *People's Advocate*, August 11, 1883.

is an uncompromising advocate of the rights of the people."[45] Among its most lauded contributions was an annual report on the condition of black residents of the Sea Islands that was reprinted by several black newspapers in the North. "[A]round Beaufort, where the colored people do most of their trade, the farmers are mostly small farmers and control 15 or 20 acre farms upon which they have pretty generally erected neat, comfortable and efficient residences," the *Sea Island News* observed in 1883. The paper also took an interest in political developments elsewhere that had implications for residents of the Lowcountry. When the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Ohio made a concerted effort to court black voters, the *Sea Island News* warned black Ohioans that any break with the Republicans could have a negative impact on the lives of black South Carolinians. "Democratic victory under any circumstances is a discouragement to Republicans in the South," the paper cautioned, "particularly to the colored people who despair ever receiving their rights through the agency of Bourbon Democrats, whose hands the colored people will greatly strengthen if they decide to cast their votes with the Democracy of Ohio."[46]

The Savannah *Tribune* also chronicled developments in Beaufort County. The most widely circulated black newspaper in Georgia, the *Tribune* reported on Beaufort County in part because Savannah was the nearest major city, but also because many of its black residents divided their time between the two locales. The *Tribune* played a major role in shaping civil rights activism in Savannah, and the editors used its pages to herald major events in Beaufort County like Emancipation Day and Decoration Day and to alert

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[45] "The Old Man of the South," New York *Globe*, January 26, 1884.

[46] *Sea Island News* article, n.d. quoted in New York *Globe*, September 8, 1883; *Sea Island News*, n.d., quoted in *Cleveland Gazette*, August 1, 1885.

readers when national figures planned to visit the Lowcountry. By trumpeting the progress being made in Beaufort County, the *Tribune* gave local readers a sense that their region was a major anchor in the nation's black public sphere.[47]

The New South, which became Beaufort's weekly newspaper after the death of the editor of the *Sea Island News*, was also in regular conversation with northern black newspapers. Edited by Samuel J. Bampfield, Robert Smalls's son-in-law, *The New South* articulated an accommodationist vision of postbellum black progress. On May 23, 1890, the paper's first issue led with the headline "The Negro Must Help Himself." *The New South* agreed with the national black consensus that the demise of Reconstruction had effectively dismantled the political gains African Americans had made since the end of the Civil War. "[I]t is a fact too well known to [the black man], that he is denied the actual enjoyment of many rights under the Constitution and laws that are accorded to others," Bampfield wrote. "Indeed, under the laws of certain sections of the country he is almost anything but a free man—a pariah in his own country." Bampfield challenged, however, the idea that federal intervention was the answer. "[W]hatever else may have conspired to produce such a condition of things, every intelligent, self-respecting negro knows and freely admits, that the main cause is an unfortunate moral, material, and intellectual condition, —a legacy of more than two hundred and fifty years of slavery." Bampfield believed that black southerners should pursue a strategy of racial uplift that deemphasized political and intellectual goals and instead focused on economic

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[47] Blair L. M. Kelley observes that "[t]he *Tribune*'s most important function was its defense of the quality of African American life in the South." Its editor, John H. Deveaux, and his predecessor, Solomon Johnson, used the pages of the *Tribune* "to sound alarms against the erosion of black citizenship" by reporting lynchings, informing readers of efforts to disfranchise black Georgians, and contesting the expansion of segregation laws. See Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 166-69.

improvement. "Until that condition is *materially* changed, no proper recognition of the race can reasonably be expected," he declared.[48]

Stories of black protest in the Lowcountry also appeared in the African American press. In 1886, when the Boston Star Concert Company gave a two-night performance in the town of Beaufort, it prohibited black attendees on the opening night and on the second made African Americans wait outside until whites purchased tickets first. In response, "the higher and refined class of colored people" refused to patronize the production, and as a result of the boycott, the second night was "almost a total failure." Initially reported by the Augusta, Georgia, *Chronicle*, the story was reprinted by the New York *Freeman*, which applauded the resistance. "'[T]he higher and refined class of colored society' is learning how to resent the fine-spun nonsense of Southern white purists," the *Freeman* asserted. [49]

Envisioning the Lowcountry as essential to the story of post-Reconstruction black progress, northern black newspapers leapt to defend the region's people when they were publicly attacked. Following the publication of Frank Wilkeson's inflammatory articles, a number of black journalists challenged his assertions. T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*, responded to Wilkeson's claim that "redemption," the violent overthrow of South Carolina's Reconstruction government, had been justified. Democratic "redemption" of South Carolina, Fortune proclaimed, especially the "barbarous

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[48] Beaufort, SC, *The New South*, May 23, 1890, quoted in Irvine Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, MA: Willey and Co., 1891), 207. On Bampfield and *The New South*, see Andrew Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free: Robert Smalls of South Carolina and His Families* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 190-94.

[49] Augusta, GA, *Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in New York *Freeman,* May 22, 1886; "Where the Line Is Drawn," New *York Freeman*, May 22, 1886.

butcheries of Hamburg and Ellenton," were "as ruthless as any in the annals of Bulgaria, and far more reprehensible in the eyes of the laws of God and the laws of man than any enacted in the halls of legislation at Columbia."[50]

The *Washington Bee* also attacked Wilkeson's characterization of black life in the Lowcountry. His slander of black womanhood particularly incensed the *Bee*. "This wholesale libel hurled against thousands of a race ought not stand unanswered or unrefuted," the editors insisted. The *Bee* called upon its readers, Washington's burgeoning black elite, to defend their brothers and sisters in the Lowcountry:

> Cannot a leading spirit of some one of the many choice negro societies with which this city is infested: The "Monday and Tuesday Night Library," the "Chatangua Circle," the "Mind Reading Society," the "Artist, Science, and Astronomical Association," the "Ex-Lotus Club," the "Mount Nebo Grand Tabernacle of Ancient United Order of Brothers and Sisters," "Sons and Daughters of Moses of the United States of America" and the World-at-Large be voted competent to answer this scurrilous article, and thus repel as far as possible such unchristian attacks upon a harmless and unfortunate people? Here's a chance for the literary man or woman of this race to immortalize himself or herself. Who'll take up the gauge?[51]

By naming the bevy of literary societies that had been organized in postbellum black Washington, the *Bee*, like T. Thomas Fortune, challenged elite white racism on elite terms.

The South Carolina Lowcountry was also drawn into the growing black public sphere by numerous links between Washington's black elite and Beaufort County's political leadership. South Carolina's Reconstruction-era politicians Richard Cain, Francis Cardozo, and Renty Greaves all moved to the nation's capital after

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[50] T. Thomas Fortune, "The Colored People of the South," *New York Age*, March 16, 1883, quoted in *New York Globe*, March 17, 1883.

[51] "Practical Literary Effort Wanting," *Washington Bee*, January 13, 1883.

Reconstruction and became major figures in black Washington's social scene.[52] Whitefield McKinlay, a powerful real estate broker who had been born in Charleston and educated at the University of South Carolina during Reconstruction, was among the most prominent members of Washington's late nineteenth-century black elite. Heavily involved in the national Republican Party, McKinlay remained keenly interested in Lowcountry politics and funded a number of candidates in South Carolina's Seventh Congressional District.[53]

Among the most conspicuous individuals with ties to both Washington's black elite and the South Carolina Lowcountry was Frances Rollin Whipper. Born in 1844, Frances Rollin was the eldest daughter of one of Charleston's most prominent free black families. Educated in Philadelphia, she returned to South Carolina in 1865 and taught on the Sea Islands. There she met the famed black abolitionist, writer, physician, and Union army major Martin R. Delany, who at the time was stationed in the Sea Islands as a Freedmen's Bureau agent. Under the pseudonym "Frank A. Rollin," she wrote a biography of Delany that appeared in 1868. That same year she married William J. Whipper, a black abolitionist from Pennsylvania who had served as a lieutenant in the Union army and established a law practice in Beaufort County following the Civil War. A formidable political couple, they cofounded and coedited a widely-read Republican newspaper, the *Beaufort Times*, that continued to the end of Reconstruction.[54]

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[52] Thomas Holt, *Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 214-24.

[53] See "Whitefield McKinlay," *Journal of Negro History* 27 (Spring 1942): 129-30.

[54] Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1868). On Frances Rollin Whipper, see Willard B. Gatewood, "'The Remarkable Misses Rollin': Black Women in the Reconstruction South," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92 (Summer

After Reconstruction, William Whipper remained in Beaufort County, where he practiced law and served as a probate judge, while Frances Whipper moved to Washington, D.C., with their three children. In the nation's capital, Frances Whipper played an active role in the city's professional and social life. She continued to write and publish books while also working as a clerk in the General Land Office. In 1885, however, she was removed from that position by the incoming Democratic presidential administration; in response, the black press leapt to her defense. Challenging the accusation that she was "an offensive partisan" who should not draw an annual salary of $900 because her husband was an elected official in Beaufort County, the *Washington Bee* not only argued that Frances Whipper was "industrious, capable, and efficient," but also pointed to an extract from a Democratic newspaper that showed a married white woman working in the same division of the General Land Office who had not been removed from her post. In her unsuccessful campaign for reinstatement, Frances Whipper had the support of prominent elements of Washington's black elite, including the *Bee*, the capital's African American newspaper of record, which repeatedly defended her honor. "It must be remembered that Mrs. Whipper is a colored lady and the unwritten law says that a Negro shall not have the same rights that are accorded to white people," the *Bee* protested.[55] Whitefield McKinlay provided financial assistance to Frances Whipper while she was unemployed, and in 1889 her friend Frederick Douglass, then the District of

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1991): 172-88; Carole Ione, *Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), chaps. 11, 19; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Rollin Sisters," in *Black Women in America*, ed. Darlene Clark Hines, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 990-91.

[55] *Washington Bee*, July 4, 1885; "The Case of Mrs. Whipper," *Washington Bee*, December 12, 1885.

Columbia Recorder of Deeds, helped her secure employment as his clerk.[56]

Robert Smalls, the congressman from South Carolina's Seventh District, also defended Frances Whipper. Her record was "equal to the best in the Interior Department," he insisted. More than just another episode in the ruthless late nineteenth-century battle over the federal spoils, Frances Whipper's dismissal was part of a concerted attack on the Lowcountry. "I can see nearly every colored person who has been appointed from the State of South Carolina removed from official positions for no other than partisan reasons," Smalls declared, ". . . and every one of them belonging to the Seventh Congressional District, which was set apart by the State of South Carolina and known as the Black District."[57]

Robert Smalls, William J. Whipper, and the Battle over Reconstruction's Legacy

Despite his wartime heroics, public service, and continued advocacy for his Lowcountry constituents, Smalls became a controversial figure in the years that followed Reconstruction. While his folksy charm endeared him to the generation of Sea Islanders who had experienced the destruction of slavery, Smalls's unrefined manner, especially his Gullah patois, embarrassed younger members of Beaufort County's Republican Party. In an effort to separate themselves from the freighted legacy of the "Gullah statesman," upstart black politicians began to depict Smalls as a homespun demagogue. In 1882, a faction of the county's Republican Party that called itself the Young Men's Reform Republican Club challenged Smalls's entrenched leadership. Julius I. Washington, a

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[56] Gatewood, "'The Remarkable Misses Rollin,'"180-84.

[57] "A Letter from Congressman Smalls," *Washington Bee*, February 11, 1886.

lawyer, explained that he and his allies opposed Smalls because they were "tired of being represented by ignorant and illiterate men." Thomas J. Reynolds, another member of the reform faction, claimed that Smalls was "totally unfit, morally or intellectually to represent the colored race" and ought to be replaced by a younger, educated man. "Now even the speaker's peculiar patois lends no charm to the listener," observed one reporter of an 1882 Republican rally.[58]

The northern black press also took aim at Smalls. In an article repudiating a claim that Smalls's 1886 election loss was the result of division between light-skinned and dark-skinned members of Beaufort County's black community, the New York *Freeman* argued that his political troubles were instead traceable to tensions based in class and education. "General Smalls is in no sense an educated man," the *Freeman* observed, " . . . and like most men of limited education his views on men and measures are as narrow as it is possible to make them." Although Smalls's brand of populism was effective in the Lowcountry, the *Freeman*, a black newspaper based in New York City, claimed that he had become a "political autocrat" who used his power to crush his rivals. The *Freeman*'s attack reflected a growing discomfort with the Reconstruction hero in the new political landscape. "As a speaker outside of the Beaufort district he has always been a failure of simply monumental in proportions," the paper maintained. In one particularly ignoble incident at a meeting in Philadelphia, Smalls had delivered a "tirade" that demonstrated "neither logic, coherence, or the rules ordinarily observed on such occasions." His "rude plantation eloquence fell as flat as an echo," the *Freeman* reported. After the 1886 election in which Smalls lost his congressional seat, the Charlotte, North Carolina, *Star of*

[58] Beaufort (SC) *Palmetto Post*, August 24 and 25, 1882.

Zion, official newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, editorialized as follows: "We fear that the defeat of Mr. Smalls was due in part to the belief that he entertained that no colored man was entitled to represent that District but himself, when there are many men there abler and equally as competent to fill the position."[59]

Questions of political strategy increasingly divided Beaufort County's Republicans. As the party's ability to compete in statewide elections waned in the 1880s, several of the county's black politicians began to enter into "fusion" arrangements with local Democrats. Fusionism was a power-sharing strategy in which local Republicans and Democrats coordinated the offices for which each party would offer candidates and agreed not to challenge each other in the general election. Sometimes referred to as "the Georgetown plan" in South Carolina, fusionism was most successful in Georgetown, Colleton, and Berkeley counties, where both the Republican Party and the moderate wing of the Democratic Party were strong enough to field candidates but saw that it was in their joint interest to unite against the virulently white-supremacist wing of the Democratic Party. Fusionism was not as effective in Beaufort County, where Republicans enjoyed sufficient demographic and infrastructural strength to outvote both white Lowcountry elites and the insurgents who were demanding straight-out white supremacy.[60]

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[59] "War of the Tints," New York *Freeman*, November 20, 1886; *Star of Zion*, November 25, 1886, quoted in New York *Freeman*, November 27, 1886.

[60] On fusionism in post-Reconstruction southern politics, see Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 113-49; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 214-48; Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*; Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman*, 110-55; Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 33-63; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 79-104. Gelston, "Radical versus Straight-Out in Post-Reconstruction Beaufort County," also emphasizes the internal tensions within Beaufort County's Republican Party but sees the battle over fusionism as simply

Many outside observers heralded fusion as a responsible shift away from the misguided Radical Republicanism of the 1870s. Indeed, it was often regarded as a pragmatic solution to Reconstruction's excesses. "During the past few years, as the uselessness of continuing the Republican organization in local politics has become more and more apparent there has been an increasing tendency toward 'fusion,'" maintained historian Frederic Bancroft in 1886. "This has generally been brought about by the most intelligent of the blacks and the most liberal of the Democrats—in both cases by those who are not politicians, but who only want good government." Narciso Gonzales, a white Lowcountry native who edited South Carolina's most widely-read newspaper, *The State*, applauded fusionism as an alternative to the extralegal violence used by white paramilitary forces in the Upcountry. "With the ten years' success of 'the Georgetown plan' before us we cannot admit that 'the Edgefield plan' was the only way out of the wilderness," he wrote in 1886. Gonzales's reference to "the Edgefield plan," the 1876 massacre of black militia members by a white mob in the Upcountry county of Edgefield, demonstrated that the specter of Reconstruction still haunted the state's politics.[61]

For some black political leaders in Beaufort County, any sort of compromise with Democrats amounted to an erasure of their hard-fought monument to the promise of Reconstruction. Leading the charge against fusion was William J. Whipper. In a self-published broadside, Whipper charged Smalls with selling his birthright for a mess of pottage. Once "the idol of the Republicans of this county," Smalls was now accused of

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a struggle over local political power and not as a debate among African Americans over the meaning of Reconstruction.

[61] Bancroft, *Sketch of the Negro in Politics*, 81; Gonzales quoted in Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman*, 203.

"going into the very arms of the blood stained Democracy that he has so long, so often and so roundly denounced . . . a party [that] but a few years ago penned him and a number of his friends in a house in Gillisonville and riddled it with bullets. . . . the party who for numberless years enslaved his race, and whose galling fetters he has felt on his own person." The Gillisonville incident was a November 1878 assault by an armed group of white Wade Hampton supporters during a political rally in Gillisonville, in the interior of Beaufort County. Robert Smalls owed his life to the mass arrival of black men who, upon hearing that their hero was in mortal danger, stormed from coast to fight off the white attackers. Whipper attributed the loyalty Smalls inspired to the work he had done to transform Beaufort County into an oasis of black political and economic power. [62]

Whipper himself had also played a major role in Reconstruction. A member of the 1868 constitution convention that established South Carolina's first public school system, protected the civil rights of all of the state's citizens, and gave all male citizens age twenty-one and older the right to vote, Whipper had even moved to strike the word "male" from the suffrage clause. "In universal suffrage," he had predicted, "the time will come when every man *and woman* in this country will have the right to vote." Whipper predicted, however, that despite being at the vanguard of expanding political rights in the nation, the delegates would not "show themselves so liberal and progressive [as] to act favorably upon this subject at this present time," and his motion was indeed rejected.[63]

His public contributions notwithstanding, Whipper's personal life brought

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[62] W. J. Whipper, *Fusionists and Fusionism: Robert Smalls' Arraignment by the New York World and Other Matters* (Beaufort, SC: Sea Island News Press, 1889), YA Pamphlet Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, LC. On the Gillisonville attack, see Laura Towne, entry for November 6, 1878, in *Letters and Diary of M. Laura Towne*, ed., Holland, 285-88.

[63] Whipper quoted in Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 65 (emphasis added).

negative attention to the Lowcountry. A souse, a gambler, and a spendthrift, Whipper was rumored to have lost $30,000 in a single hand of poker. A northern journalist hoping for an authentic tour of the "black district" was told to seek out Whipper as a guide. When the journalist asked for a description, his informant responded, "the best card-player in South Carolina." Whipper's reputation was most famously placed on trial in 1875 following his nomination to the South Carolina Circuit Court. The Republican-controlled legislature approved the nomination, but Republican Governor Daniel Chamberlain refused to sign the commission. In a telegram to the New England Society of Charleston, Chamberlain defended his refusal on the grounds that placing a figure like Whipper on the bench not only endangered the future of Reconstruction in South Carolina, but also threatened the principles of Anglo-Saxon virtue that were cornerstones of the Republican Party. "The civilization of the Puritan and the Cavalier, of the Roundhead and the Huguenot, is in peril," Chamberlain claimed. A native of Massachusetts, the governor had internalized the criticisms made by Pike, King, and Nast, and believed that South Carolina's Republican Party had to fight perceptions of immorality at every turn.[64]

Robert Smalls repeatedly used Whipper as a symbol of Reconstruction's excesses. "Those men of the lowest degree of character, the carpetbagger and the rum element," Smalls observed of the legislators who had tried to make Whipper a judge, "were of a convention that nominated adulterers, drunkards, and gamblers to office."[65] While working on a history of South Carolina and Mississippi during Reconstruction, Frederic

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[64] "The Sea Island Negroes," Hartford *Daily Courant*, August 19, 1886; Chamberlain quoted in Charleston *News and Courier*, December 23, 1875. On the battle within South Carolina's Republican Party over appointing Whipper to the bench, see Holt, *Black over White*, 185-95.

[65] "General Smalls and the President. He Denounces the Charges against Him," *Washington Bee*, April 27, 1889.

Bancroft interviewed Smalls about the major figures in Beaufort County politics. In the interview, Smalls spoke openly about Whipper's affair with a mistress. "He left his wife and lived with another woman while his wife worked in Washington," Smalls told Bancroft. "She was good to him. He doesn't appreciate her."[66] Smalls had earlier defended Frances Whipper in the black press, and he had probably helped secure her clerkship in the General Land Office. His antagonism toward her husband was thus deeply rooted in his own legacy of representing the Lowcountry on the national stage.

In representing Whipper as both culturally and morally outside the norms of Beaufort County's black community, Smalls deployed the anxiety over Reconstruction's legacy to his own ends. "Southern Colored people had been imposed upon for too long by a class of corrupt Northerners," he declared. Hoping to juxtapose their deep roots in the region against Whipper's outsider status, Smalls and his allies called their faction of the county Republican Party "The People's Ticket" and argued that northerners like Whipper were "a disgrace to Beaufort and an injury to Republicanism." This viewpoint was shared by some in the black press. After Whipper was arrested in 1887 for failing to pay a debt, the *Washington Bee* described him as "the cap stone on the monument of carpet bag iniquity . . . which caused the whole structure to fall."[67]

The battle between Whipper and Smalls reached its nadir in 1888. William Elliott, a Democrat from one of the Lowcountry's most prominent planter families, had defeated Smalls for the Seventh District's congressional seat in 1886. With considerable evidence

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[66] Smalls interview by Bancroft quoted in Ione, *Pride of Family*, 185.

[67] *Washington Bee*, March 2, 1889; "Smalls and the President. He Denounces the Charges against Him," *Washington Bee*, April 27, 1889; "Whipper Behind the Bars," *Washington Bee*, May 28, 1887.

that both voter irregularity and outright fraud had been committed, Smalls was awaiting a congressional ruling on the election and could not run for the Fifty-first Congress. He therefore campaigned for the party at the national level and supported the fusion ticket in Beaufort County. This strategy helped two of Smalls's closest associates win the offices of sheriff and county commissioner. Meanwhile, Whipper, who was running for reelection as county probate judge as a regular Republican, lost to a white Democrat named Tom Tailbird. When Whipper refused to relinquish the county court records to Tailbird, he was once again jailed.[68]

Writing from a "Murderer's Cell" in the Beaufort County jail, Whipper claimed that fusion was an unpardonable sin that not only weakened the local Republican Party but also betrayed the idealism the county had once embodied. The blame rested squarely on Robert Smalls. "Even the 'Black Congressional District' under his leadership was lost," Whipper contended. Unable to recognize that his own star had fallen and that it was time to allow new lights to represent the local Republican Party, Smalls had let his pride destroy what Reconstruction had built. "He then asked or rather demanded the best office in the County of Beaufort, and because it was refused him joined hands with the Democrats, and under the guise of Fusionism, attempts to destroy the last vestige of Republicanism in the State," Whipper charged. Narrow self-interest, not high principle, guided Smalls's motives. Whipper went further, arguing that the gains of Reconstruction were placed in jeopardy with every fusionist compromise:

> Fellow Citizens: Of the few survivors of the forty-one members of the original Beaufort Republican Club of 1867, I have the honor to be one. . . . I here pledge anew to the Republican Party. . . . Though Democratic and Fusion clouds have

[68] "Race Gleanings," Indianapolis *Freeman*, February 9, 1889; "Why He Refused," Washington *Bee*, February 16, 1889.

> gathered round us like a pall—the darkness is immense, yet the great principles of Republicanism constitute the "silver lining" that announces the approach of day, and the darkest clouds must roll away before its steady march.[69]

More than a simple political rivalry, the vitriolic relationship between Robert Smalls and William Whipper illuminated two competing visions for Beaufort County in the decade following the collapse of Reconstruction. In fusionism Smalls saw a strategy that not only preserved his own political career but also gave black politicians powerful local allies in the fight against white supremacists who were determined to dismantle every last vestige of "negro domination." Whipper rejected the fusionist strategy, believing that autonomous black rule had to be viewed as a principle, and African American control over the local levers of power must therefore not be sacrificed at any cost. With the white-supremacist wing of the Democratic Party outflanking the traditional Lowcountry elite and seizing control of the party during the 1890s, the debate between Smalls and Whipper became far more than a local struggle. The question at hand was whether the Republican Party had any future in South Carolina at all.

The Lodge Bill and the 1895 State Constitution

Although the South Carolina Lowcountry remained an outpost of southern Republicanism during the 1880s, black residents of Beaufort County felt a palpable shift in the state's political atmosphere in the early 1890s. Benjamin R. Tillman, the Democratic governor elected in 1890, was an unreconstructed white supremacist who had earned the nickname "pitchfork" after threatening to prod President Grover Cleveland

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[69] "Why He Refused," *Washington Bee*, February 16, 1889; Whipper, *Fusionists and Fusionism*, 28.

with the farm tool.[70] On the floor of the U.S. Senate, Tillman would later boast about his participation in the violent overthrow of Reconstruction. "We stuffed the ballot boxes. We shot Negroes. We are not ashamed of it," he declared.[71] As governor, he consistently used the specter of Reconstruction to unite the state's white population under the umbrella of the Democratic Party. Although the number of registered black voters had dropped precipitously since the 1882 election law (from 92,000 to roughly 15,000), Tillman continued to invoke the threat of "negro domination." The largely disfranchised black electorate was, he charged, "a frozen snake" that could be reanimated by the unscrupulous white fusionists. To avoid that possibility, Tillman and his allies argued that the disfranchising measures imposed in 1882 were not enough. A new state constitution was needed to fully and permanently remove black voters from state politics.[72]

Tillman's race-baiting strategy took particular aim at Beaufort County and the rest of the Lowcountry. Tillman derisively denounced Beaufort County as "a niggerdom" and viewed the Republican stronghold as one of the chief roadblocks to redeeming the state for white supremacy. The success of fusionism in the Lowcountry not only kept black Republicans in office, but also bolstered local white elites who opposed Tillman and his coalition of Upcountry yeoman farmers and poor whites. Whereas Lowcountry elites remained willing to allow black South Carolinians small pockets of control in the state's

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[70] Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman*, 151.

[71] Tillman quoted in Rembert W. Patrick, *Reconstruction of the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 300.

[72] Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman*, 202-5.

most heavily black regions, Tillmanites increasingly called for a "straightout" campaign to eliminate the Republican Party in South Carolina.[73]

In order to destroy the last traces of Republican opposition in the Lowcountry, Tillman advocated a constitutional convention where the state's Democrats could overturn the provisions of the 1868 constitution that had enfranchised black men. Although a referendum for calling a constitution convention failed in 1890, black politicians in Beaufort County realized that their remaining political rights were in existential danger. In response to the white-supremacist movement set in motion by Tillman's election, Robert Smalls used his remaining political capital to bring national attention to both past and ongoing attacks on black men's access to the ballot. "Thousands of voters," he reported, "after travelling fifty and often one hundred miles to the county-seat, the only place for registration, have to return home after a fruitless search for the register on the days that the law requires him to be present, and as these journeys cannot be made often, the voters are disfranchised and the votes are lost."[74] His solution for the widespread voting irregularities and systemic fraud was enactment of the Federal Election Bill. Also known as the Lodge Bill for its sponsor, Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and as the Force Bill by its detractors, the bill proposed to authorize the federal government to monitor elections in any district whose citizens petitioned for federal election supervisors in advance of congressional elections.[75]

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[73] On Tillman's "straightout" strategy and the road to the 1895 state constitution, see ibid., 198-219.

[74] Smalls, "Election Methods in the South," *North American Review* 151 (November 1890): 598.

[75] On the Lodge Bill, see Vanessa Holloway, *In Search of Federal Enforcement: The Moral Authority of the Fifteenth Amendment and the Integrity of the Black Ballot, 1870-1965* (Lanham,

In his appeal to enact the Lodge Bill, Smalls deployed memory of the military service of black men during the Civil War to challenge white supremacy. Opponents of the bill "forget that the Negroes of the country gave 186,000 men who fought in two hundred and fifty-two battles for the perpetuity of this great nation," he wrote. "We do not intend to go anywhere, but will remain right here and help make this the most powerful of all governments." Responding to the threat of disfranchisement, Smalls attempted to unite the remaining defenders of biracial democracy by invoking the nation's obligation to its black defenders.[76]

Not all of Beaufort County's black citizens were convinced that federal intervention in behalf of black voting rights was the best strategy. William J. Whipper argued that economic self-determination, especially the pursuit of landownership, should take precedence over efforts to achieve political equality. "With all due respect to Sumner, Thad Stevens, and those other leaders of the majority, I must say it was a mistake to confer suffrage as soon upon the freedmen," he told a northern journalist. "They were undoubtedly actuated by the best of motives, but our people were not ready for the franchise."[77] Whipper's local political rival Samuel J. Bampfield echoed this rejection of formal politics. Responding to controversy over the Blair Education Bill, which would have appropriated $77 million for public schools in the South on the basis of illiteracy rates, Bampfield argued that black residents of the Lowcountry were making

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MD: University Press of America, 2015), 4-25; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 86-88.

[76] Smalls, "Election Methods in the South," 600.

[77] "Negro Suffrage: A Representative Colored Man Thinks It Was Prematurely Bestowed," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1886.

progress without federal intervention. "There are more than 10,000 tax payers in Beaufort County, S.C., and fully two-thirds of them are colored persons. We are coming, Father Abraham, Blair bill or no Blair bill. We are coming anyhow."[78]

For Whipper and Bampfield, the fight for political rights appeared to offer only pyrrhic victories. Whipper in particular saw widespread landownership, facilitated by the government, as the missed opportunity of Reconstruction. Highlighting the gains freedpeople had made on the Sea Islands since the Civil War, Whipper argued that the federal government should have offered a homestead program to formerly enslaved people. "They came out of slavery with their attachment for locality and the desire for land-ownership fully developed," he maintained. "They were ready to become property-holders. They were not ready for the ballot. If the United States Government had withheld suffrage and thrown open large tracts of this southern country to settlement by the freedmen we should have been far better off today than we are."[79]

Bampfield's newspaper, the *New South*, argued that in the narrowing political terrain of the 1890s, black South Carolinians were best served by abandoning the state Republican Party and focusing on local issues. "Such a state [Republican] ticket," the paper warned, "would engender race friction, in which the Afro-American would get smashed. . . . Safety and success for the negroes of South Carolina lie in conciliation and not in antagonism in their dealing with the whites on State issues." The *New South*'s position, which echoed the pragmatism espoused by the fusionists, was rejected by influential segments of the northern black press. T. Thomas Fortune's *New York Age*

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[78] Beaufort *New South*, n.d., quoted in *Cleveland Gazette*, June 7, 1890.

[79] Whipper quoted in "Negro Suffrage: A Representative Colored Man Thinks It Was Prematurely Bestowed," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1886.

lamented that so many southern African Americans were refusing to fight the rising tide of white supremacy. "We submit that if the *New South* reflects the sentiments of the race in South Carolina, there is nothing to do about the existing condition but grin and bear it," bemoaned the *Age*. "But, candidly, is the policy of the *New South* the safest and manliest one? We hesitate to decide." Recognizing what was at stake if the Lowcountry no longer embodied the promise of Reconstruction, the *Age* was understandably pessimistic about the *New South*'s strategy.[80]

With the 1890 defeat of the Federal Elections Bill and Mississippi's adoption that same year of a new constitution that circumvented the voting expansions enshrined in the state's Reconstruction-era constitution, South Carolina Democrats finally saw an opening to push forward black disfranchisement. In 1894, the citizens of South Carolina voted to call a constitutional convention. Benjamin Tillman, who was elected to the U.S. Senate that same year, was chosen to preside over the convention. Held the following fall, the 1895 constitutional convention was entirely white except for six black delegates from the Lowcountry, who were the only Republicans. Five of the six were from Beaufort County: Thomas E. Miller, James Wigg, Julius I. Washington, William J. Whipper, and Robert Smalls.[81]

The constitution that emerged from the 1895 convention placed three new restrictions on voting: a literacy test, payment of a poll tax, and a property-holding

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[80] Beaufort *New South*, September 15, 1890, quoted in *New York Age*, September 20, 1890; "Seven Reasons," *New York Age*, September 20, 1890. The most notable example of the rightward turn in black politics was Booker T. Washington, who, like Whipper and Bampfield, suggested that African Americans in the New South would be best served by retreating from politics and focusing their energy on improving their economic standing.

[81] Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 78-82. The sixth black delegate represented Georgetown County.

requirement of at least $300. In addition, the new constitution prohibited individuals who had been convicted of bigamy, burglary, arson, or robbery from voting. Although the voting provisions did not mention race or previous condition of servitude, which would have violated the Fifteenth Amendment, it was clear that they were designed to have a disproportionate impact on the state's black voters. Ironically, Tillman's coalition of poor whites and yeoman farmers also faced widespread disfranchisement under the new constitution. To mollify that constituency, an "understanding" clause was added; it gave registration officials (presumably white) leeway to admit illiterate men who could understand or explain a provision of the constitution. In practice, of course, only illiterate whites would benefit.[82]

Recognizing that democracy was at stake, the black delegates attempted to preserve the political legacy of Reconstruction by showing that black citizenship rights had been a boon to society at large. James Wigg asked members of the convention to "examine the archives of the State from 1868 to 1895 and produce if you can a single vote cast by a Negro against the fullest development of your educational institutions." Highlighting the danger the proposed provisions would pose to poor and illiterate whites, Thomas Miller, a black delegate from Beaufort County who had recently served in the U.S. Congress, pointedly asked, "[D]o you wonder now, gentlemen, that the white vote in

[82] On the 1895 constitutional convention, see Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman*, 198-242; Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, chap. 5. On the South-wide turn toward new constitutional provisions that disfranchised black voters without citing race, see Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 273-306; Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, chap. 5; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chaps. 3-5.

Mississippi fell from over 100,000 to less than 38,000 at the last election?"[83]

More pessimistically, the black delegates declared themselves willing to accept suffrage restrictions as long as they were equitably administered. "What do you want? Good government?" Miller asked. "Stand forth. Conservative or Reformer, make equal rights before the law your battle cry, and I will lead to the ballot box to your support an hundred and thirty thousand of the black sons of South Carolina." Robert Smalls suggested that he would endorse a race-blind literacy test or a property requirement if the convention was serious about building a foundation for good government in the state. "You charge that the Negro is too ignorant to be entrusted with suffrage," he proclaimed. "I answer that you have not, nor dare you make a purely educational test of the right to vote. You say that he is a figurehead and an encumbrance to the State, that he pays little or no taxes. I answer that you have not and you dare not make a purely property test of the right to vote."[84]

Although the voting provisions of the 1895 constitution did not mention race and therefore would not violate the Fifteenth Amendment, their purpose was clear to all of the delegates, both black and white. One southern reporter observed that the tactical gambit by the Beaufort delegates to support literacy and property qualifications drew attention to the nefarious intentions that underlay the good-government rhetoric of Tillman and his supporters. "The way Miller, Smalls, Wigg, and Whipper, the negro delegates from Beaufort have been bullyragging the constitutional convention for the last few days on the suffrage question is too ludicrous for anything," the reporter maintained. "These

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[83] Mary J. Miller, ed., *Suffrage Speeches by Negroes in the Constitutional Convention* (n.p., n.d.), 5-6.

[84] Ibid., 6-7; Columbia *State*, October 26, 1895.

negroes have decidedly the best of the situation, and so far have had altogether the best argument. We never expected to see the day that four negroes from Beaufort would stand up in a body like the one now sitting in Columbia and ask for an educational and property qualification of the suffrage and have the request denied."[85]

While the conservatism of the Beaufort delegation no doubt reflected a growing pessimism about the possibility of genuine biracial democracy, the coalition of former political enemies effectively exposed the hypocrisy of the Democratic delegates' paeans to "good government." Mary J. Miller, the daughter of Thomas Miller, published the speeches of the six black delegates as a record of the stand they had taken in defense of black citizenship. "The nation never knew until this convention convened that South Carolina wanted a legalized, fraudulent election machinery," declared her introduction. "[T]he six Republicans of that body, by their acts and speeches, taught the nation the true object of the majority of the late convention."[86] The Sumter, South Carolina, *Watchman and Southron*, a Democratic paper, was moved by the Beaufort delegation's call for straightforward literacy and property qualifications and suggested that "all talk about the rule of the intelligent and superior race" was "buncombe." A black church congregation in Philadelphia praised Robert Smalls for the "dignity, courage, and singular ability" with which he had honored "the negro race and American patriotism" at the convention.[87] Another newspaper commended Smalls for his heroic last stand. "Mr. Smalls was a potent factor in this convention and the ringing speeches made by him were masterpieces

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[85] Sumter (SC) *Watchman and Southron*, November 2, 1895.

[86] Miller, ed., *Suffrage Speeches*, 2-3.

[87] *Watchmen and Southron* and Philadelphia church both quoted in ibid., 7-8.

of impregnable logic, consecutive reasoning, biting sarcasm and fiery invective. . . . His arguments were unanswerable, and the keenness of his wit, the cleverness of his arraignment, and the persistence with which he routed his opponents from one subterfuge to another astounded the convention, and showed its members that the negro's capacity for intelligence, courage and manhood was not inferior to the bluest blood in the old Palmetto State."[88]

Ratified on December 4, 1895, the new state constitution disfranchised the state's remaining black voters, gave Democrats control of the Seventh Congressional District, and ended the election of black officeholders in Beaufort County until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, the valiant defense of black citizenship by the Beaufort County delegation lingered in the memory of black South Carolinians well into the twentieth century. In 1944, J. Mason Brewer, a black folklorist at South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College, travelled across the state to collect stories, jokes, songs, and other folklore from members of the state's black working class. Murray Holliday, a day laborer in Orangeburg, South Carolina, shared with Brewer a highly stylized version of a confrontation between Benjamin Tillman and "a negro congressman," presumably at the 1895 constitutional convention. In Holliday's account, an angry Tillman shouted, "Why, you dirty black rascal, I'll swallow you alive." Undaunted, the unnamed congressman replied, "If you do, you'll have more brains in your belly than you've got in your head."[89]

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[88] Unidentified clipping, [October 1895], in Miscellaneous Newspaper Clippings, October 1895, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

[89] J. Mason Brewer, *Humorous Folktales of the South Carolina Negro* (Orangeburg: South Carolina Negro Folklore Guild, 1945), 7.

Conclusion

The 1882 redistricting that gerrymandered many black South Carolinians into a single congressional district began the process of black disfranchisement. It also created a hypervisible space that played an outsized role in post-Reconstruction debates about black life. A synecdoche for both the fears and hopes associated with black political power, the "black district" was deployed by travel writers, intellectuals, and politicians to advance competing narratives of postbellum black progress or regression. The debate over the legacy of Reconstruction in the Lowcountry played out in the nation's elite literary magazines, in the black public sphere, in the political rivalry between two of the region's most prominent black politicians, and in the debate over black disfranchisement. As white southerners attacked Reconstruction and white northerners abandoned its enforcement, black leaders were forced to reimagine the terrain on which freedom could be pursued in the United States.

Despite efforts to make the "black district" a vision of progress or an image of declension, narratives of black uplift and "negro domination" elided more than they illuminated. Far from offering readymade evidence for either its champions or its detractors, the Lowcountry was a site of struggle that reflected competing ideas among both black and white Americans. Above all, the "black district" continued to reflect the complex afterlife of Reconstruction.

Chapter 2

The Eye of the Storm: Race, Relief, and Memory in the Aftermath of the 1893 Sea Island Hurricane

On May 28, 1894, black South Carolinians from across the state descended upon the town of Beaufort for Decoration Day. First observed in 1865, Decoration Day honored the Civil War soldiers who had given their lives to preserve the Union, destroy slavery, and move the country toward its founding ideals.[1] Because of its particular history of wartime Reconstruction, Beaufort produced some of the nation's most elaborate Decoration Day observances, and 1894 was no exception. Five National Guard companies and five Grand Army of the Republic posts came from as far as Columbia, Charleston, and Augusta, Georgia, to participate. Each National Guard company was accompanied by its own marching band, and the entire procession was led by former congressman Robert Smalls on a two-mile parade through the town to the Beaufort National Cemetery. Outside observers marveled at the spectacle of the almost entirely black pageant, noting that white participants were like "plums in a sailor's pudding . . . few and far between."[2]

The 1894 observance was particularly memorable because just nine months earlier, the South Carolina Lowcountry had been devastated by a catastrophic hurricane that killed more than a thousand people, caused more than $1 million in property damage,

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[1] The first Decoration Day, which took place in the spring of 1865, was organized by former slaves to recognize Union soldiers who had died in a makeshift prison in Charleston, South Carolina. See David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 64-70. The holiday would later become Memorial Day.

[2] "Decoration Day," Red Cross memo, [June 1894], Red Cross Papers, box LF3, folder 1, Record Group 200, NA II.

and left tens of thousands on the brink of starvation. Reeling from the total loss of their fall harvest, the people of the Lowcountry had survived the horrifying calamity through the assistance of the American Red Cross. Now, with the winter subsiding and new crops at last beginning to grow, the spring offered glimpses of hope. Throughout the 1894 Decoration Day events, speakers cheered representatives of the Red Cross who were in attendance. After marshaling the parade into the national cemetery, Robert Smalls called attention to Clara Barton, the organization's founder and president, who was in the audience. "When Miss Barton and the Red Cross arrived," he recalled, "the buzzard promised to be the fattest animal on the land; now the song birds feed on the growing crops and all were happy." Smalls cited Barton's earlier history in the Lowcountry as well. Several Union veterans in the parade had met her following the 1863 attack on Fort Wagner, when she was serving as an army nurse.[3]

Richard J. Hinton, the day's keynote speaker, forcefully illuminated the connection between the 1893 hurricane and the place of the South Carolina Sea Islands in American memory. An abolitionist who had moved to the Kansas Territory at the height of the "Bleeding Kansas" conflict, Hinton had later served as a captain in the 2nd Kansas Colored Infantry. To the people gathered at Beaufort, he made the following remarks:

> I am here today with a double interest, not only because I remember the brave men who marched under the flag of the Union and the associations of the day, but because I am glad to be here and see your faces,—the men and women, boys and girls,—the people, who were rescued from the storm and have been placed upon their feet again by the aid of the Red Cross organization and the almoner of the national benevolence extended to you. A great English writer once said that there was no romance, fame or poetry in a Democracy. I look in your faces and wonder what land in the world can show so much romance, fancy or poetry as this land. We see this here, and now after a great war,—a war born of great wrong. You were fighting under a great flag, you have lived through that period without malice and you have no revenge to gratify; you

[3] Ibid. On Barton's wartime service in the Lowcountry, see Clara Barton, *A Story of the Red Cross: Glimpses of Field Work* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1928), 79-80.

> are as men who did their whole duty bravely, and now remember the glory of those days, while soberly and industriously looking forward to a better condition.[4]

Hinton recognized the world-historical significance of the black troops who had fought for freedom in the Union army. He also recognized the continued importance of Beaufort County as a place that represented the romance of emancipation and the untapped potential within the American democratic project. For Hinton and the many other participants in the 1894 Decoration Day ceremonies, the work of the Red Cross in preserving the people of Beaufort County represented the nation living up to its founding ideals.

The Decoration Day observance of 1894 provides a valuable glimpse into a then-ongoing debate about the place of Beaufort County in national memory. The catastrophic storm of August 27, 1893, which devastated the South Carolina Sea Islands, was one of the most deadly hurricanes of the nineteenth century. Despite the enormous loss of life and property it inflicted, the national response was uneven and disjointed. As news of the hurricane's destructiveness emerged in the regional and national press, local leaders called upon the state of South Carolina, the federal government, and the public at large to help the suffering Sea Islanders in their time of desperate need. While Governor Benjamin Tillman initially rejected the assistance of the Red Cross, he eventually asked the organization to oversee the relief effort. As a non-governmental and avowedly apolitical entity, the Red Cross was imagined as an impartial conduit that could scientifically distribute relief to the victims of the storm.

What followed was a politically fraught effort that exposed some of the late nineteenth century's most explosive fissures of race, class, and regional memory. Leaders

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[4] "Decoration Day," Red Cross Papers, NA II.

of the local relief effort, the Red Cross, and the South Carolina state government, represented by Robert Smalls, Clara Barton, and Benjamin Tillman, respectively, held different and often competing ideas of what disaster and disaster relief meant in the aftermath of emancipation and Reconstruction. The clash of race and memory within debates about the 1893 storm and the subsequent relief effort demonstrated the shifting place of Beaufort County in national discussions about black southerners in the decades following emancipation. As Americans, white and black, northern and southern, discussed the appropriate role of the state, the limits of philanthropy, and the boundaries of the national community, they regularly returned to the Civil War story of the Sea Islands and what it meant in the nation's trajectory following the end of Reconstruction.[5]

Disaster Relief and the Rise of the Red Cross

Before the Civil War, most Americans experienced death through local bonds of kinship and community. While war and natural disaster occasionally caused massive

[5] The secondary literature on the 1893 Sea Island Storm is small and largely disconnected from histories of southern black life, nineteenth-century state formation, and changing notions of charity and poor relief. Walter J. Fraser, Jr., discusses the storm in the context of other hurricanes that struck the South Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry during the late nineteenth century, but his account is primarily concerned with meteorological details. See Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Lowcountry Hurricanes: Three Centuries of Storms at Sea and Ashore* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 164-84. Some scholars of U.S. state formation have explored the connection between late nineteenth-century disaster policy and new ideas of social security and state responsibility; in some of these accounts, the 1893 storm is mentioned briefly to discuss the tensions the federal government faced as its premodern disaster and relief policies were critiqued during the confluence of natural and economic disasters that occurred that year. See, for example, Gareth Davies, "The Emergence of a National Politics of Disaster, 1865-1900," *Journal of Policy History* 26 (Fall 2014): 305-26, especially 315 and 317; Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 268-71. In addition, a few amateur historians have written accounts of the storm. Their narratives focus on the Red Cross leadership and elite white southerners; the Sea Islands' black residents are largely portrayed as passive victims. See Bill and Fran Marscher, *The Great Sea Island Storm of 1893* (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 2004); Craig Mett, *The Great Sea Islands Hurricane and Tidal Wave: A Storm of Politics and Charity during the Jim Crow Era* (Columbia, SC.: Catmoon Media, 2012).

casualties, the absence of a nationwide communication infrastructure, mass media, or a pervasive national culture prevented the creation of national mourning traditions or collective notions of suffering. With the Civil War, Americans experienced death at a scale and scope that confounded preexisting conceptions of death and dying. The enormous number of fatalities, as well as the need to mobilize men for military service, eventually forced the burgeoning state to establish national memorials, cemeteries, holidays, and bureaucracies. Americans had to struggle to reconcile premodern sacral notions of death with more modern and secular understandings of dying in service of the state.[6]

Ideological shifts in the postbellum world also forced Americans to wrestle with the relationship between death, suffering, and citizenship. The Civil War established a connection between the soldier's sacrifice and national citizenship that became the touchstone for how future generations of Americans would make claims upon the state. What was less clear, however, was how modern notions of death would apply to other aspects of American life. As more Americans worked for large companies, travelled on railroads owned by faceless corporations, and lived in urban settings surrounded by strangers, perceptions of death and danger were transformed.[7]

One of the central fronts in this discursive struggle over the meaning of death was

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[6] Notions of death and suffering underwent a critical reevaluation in the years following the Civil War. As Drew Gilpin Faust has argued, the Civil War forced the nation to both reinterpret cultural ideas of death and sacrifice and reevaluate the state's responsibility to its citizens who died in combat and to their families. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). See also Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 36-42; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*: *The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), chap 3.

[7] Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 15-25.

the way citizens and the state responded to natural disasters. Whereas natural disasters had once been viewed through a Christian cosmology in which a providential God intervened in the natural world, scientific advances had made the causes of natural disasters more clear, and that knowledge was now more accessible to ordinary Americans. Whereas the response to and relief of natural disasters were once the domain of local government and private—often religious—charitable organizations, a more robust and active nation-state now had the capacity to provide dollars and other resources to the victims.[8]

Most importantly, the rise of a new national communications network and its role in shaping postbellum American identity played a critical part in aligning a robust nationalism with ongoing debates about race, reconciliation, and humanitarianism. Disaster, like war, could be seen as a crucible that tested the character of the modern citizen and the modern state. During the late nineteenth century, when good government seemed to be under attack by corruption and self-interest and racialized and gendered notions of virtue were being eroded, natural disasters gave a growing—and increasingly self-conscious—white middle class a heuristic through which to understand national citizenship. In the aftermath of disaster, white middle-class Americans followed

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[8] The late nineteenth century saw a seismic shift in the way Americans conceptualized poor relief. Whereas charity was once tied to gendered ideas of moral uplift delivered through private organizations, the postbellum era saw the rise of more impersonal forms of welfare that used the tools of social science and gradually moved under the auspices of the state. On charitable giving and poor relief, see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), chaps. 9-12; Judith Geisberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The United States Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), introduction, chaps. 1-2; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), chap. 2; Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), chaps. 5-6.

readymade scripts with two clear responses. In accordance with one script, they could see the victims as fellow citizens who had momentarily been placed in a position of vulnerability and disharmony. In this case, non-affected citizens recognized the disaster victims as part of a national web of mutuality and believed that by restoring harmony they preserved the ideal of American magnanimity. The second script helped explain disasters that happened to people not understood as fellow citizens. The condition of these non-citizens, who could be inhabitants of another nation or a non-white racial minority within the boundaries of the United States, garnered sympathy rather than empathy. Such disaster victims were imagined to be vulnerable precisely because they lacked the social and cultural qualities that white Americans regarded as inextricable aspects of national citizenship.[9]

The most important vehicle for this new understanding of natural disaster was the American Red Cross. A private organization established in 1881 by Clara Barton, a former Civil War nurse, it was sanctioned by the United States government as part of an international confederation of Red Cross societies. While initially designed to respond to the horrors of war by aiding soldiers and civilians in combat zones, the American Red Cross came to focus primarily on aiding Americans affected by natural disasters. The

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[9] Cultural attitudes toward natural disasters played a critical role in how individuals, private organizations, and the state responded in times of calamity. On the state and natural disaster, see Dauber, *The Sympathetic State*; Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jacob Remes, "City of Comrades: Urban Disasters and the Formation of the North American Progressive State" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2010); Kevin Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of the Modern American State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Hurricane of San Ciriaco: Disaster, Politics, and Society in Puerto Rico, 1899-1901," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72 (Fall 1992): 303-34; Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Susan Millar Williams and Stephen G. Hoffius, *Upheaval in Charleston: Earthquake and Murder on the Eve of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

forest fires, floods, and earthquakes to which the Red Cross responded in the 1880s fell into the first category of responses to natural disaster. These disasters, which were all widely covered by the national media and secured sizable congressional appropriations, demonstrated how Americans used disaster relief to seek order in an increasingly chaotic world.[10] The 1893 Sea Island Storm, by contrast, reflected the second response to natural disaster. Unable to understand or connect with the residents of the Sea Islands because of the purportedly immutable barrier that governed white and black racial difference, the national public did not respond with the same enthusiasm that had followed previous disasters of similar magnitude. As a result, the Sea Islanders received smaller private donations, experienced greater neglect from the federal government, and were framed as subjects in need of civilizing rather than citizens who, through no fault of their own, had temporarily fallen out of their rightful place within the body of the republic.[11]

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[10] Marian Moser Jones, *The Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), chap. 3.

[11] The alleged failure of Reconstruction and of black self-government in particular had led to a profoundly anti-democratic shift in the language of American citizenship. Coinciding with a massive influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, the forced assimilation of the Plains Indians through the 1887 Dawes Act, and the expansion of American imperial power in the Caribbean and the Pacific, the project of American self-governance was increasingly framed as a triumph of Anglo-Saxon cultural dominance. The more virulent side of this discourse shifted toward scientific racism and eugenics; progressive reformers, however, also embraced notions of the Anglo-Saxon civilizing influence and pursued paternalistic policies in schools, settlement houses, and poor relief. On the connection between progressive reform and paternalistic civilizing ideology in the late nineteenth century, see Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 259-62; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), chap. 6; Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World,* ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 79-90; David Sehat, "The Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington," *Journal of Southern History* 73 (Summer 2007): 323-62; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions*

The Night of the Storm

On Sunday, August 27, 1893, residents of the Sea Islands began to suspect that the heavy rain they had been experiencing since Friday was more than an ordinary summer storm. Essie Roberts, a black resident of St. Helena Island, remembered the early morning downpour as so forceful that people could not go to church. By evening, the wind had reached 125 miles per hour. Susan Hazel Rice, a white woman from one of Beaufort's most prominent planter families, described gale-force winds and tidal waves that required the men of her house to nail all of the doors shut.[12]

By midnight, the storm had reached the height of its destructive force. Water rose to five feet deep in some places, the wind was causing serious damage to houses, and giant trees were being uprooted.[13] According to Admiral Lester Beardslee, a white northerner who was stationed at the Port Royal naval base, "the houses came down like card houses. . . . Some collapsed and crushed their inmates on the spot." Rosetta Archer, a black resident of Port Royal Island who was a child at the time, feared that the rising tide would carry away her family's house.[14]

While Archer's family managed to make it through the storm without suffering

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of Citizenship in U.S. History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), chap. 11; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), chap. 10.

[12] Roberts cited in Clyde Kiser, *Sea Island to the City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 99; "The Storm's Destruction," Charleston *News and Courier*, August 29, 1893; Susan Hazel Rice Diary, August 27, 1893, Beaufort District Collection, Beaufort County Library, Beaufort, SC.

[13] "Sea Islands Overwhelmed: Steadily the List of Cyclone Victims Grows," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 3, 1893.

[14] Beardslee quoted in Clara Barton, *The Red Cross in Peace and War* (Washington, DC: American Historical Press, 1898), 200; Archer cited in Rachel Mather, *The Storm Swept Coast of South Carolina* (Woonsocket, RI: C. E. Cook, 1894), 32.

any casualties, most families on the islands were not as fortunate. The Reverend Bacchus Green, a minister from Port Royal Island, had preached on Hilton Head Island on Sunday and was stranded there the night of the storm. He returned home to discover that his wife and five children had all been killed. Several families had to make heartbreaking decisions as the floodwaters tore their homes apart. One father, seeing that the wind and tide would sweep away his house, carried his two children to bed and told them to be good, say their prayers, and go to sleep. He then wrapped his sick wife in a blanket and carried her out, wading through the waist-high waves and hearing the crash as his house toppled. "It was a hard thing to choose," he told one of his neighbors with tears in his eyes. Susan Rice's brother, Dr. Gowan Hazel, was one of three white residents of Beaufort who perished in the storm. Dr. Hazel, a former Confederate general, left his home to rescue two black neighbors who had been caught in a riptide. The raging waters carried all three to a watery grave, and their bodies were not discovered until Tuesday morning.[15]

By Monday, the winds had begun to weaken, but the floodwaters remained. "In all that distance I did not see a dry spot," reported G. W. Wilkins, a white cotton merchant on St. Helena Island. "There was water everywhere and the desolation was complete. In one place I saw the roof of a house in a tree-top." One of the more disturbing features of the post-storm landscape was the omnipresence of dead bodies. "We saw dead cats and dogs, and dead horses and hogs all along the shore," Rosetta Archer recalled, "and some dead men and women and children. We saw one dead woman

[15] Bacchus Green and unnamed father in Mather, *Storm Swept Coast*, 16-18; Susan Hazel Rice Diary, August 30, 1893.

Figure 2.1. Savannah, Georgia, following the 1893 Sea Island Storm
Source: *Trend Chaser* website, http://www.trend-chaser.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/sea-islands.jpg (accessed July 20, 2015)

holding onto a timber of her house by her teeth." The task of identifying and burying the dead was overwhelming. Many bodies went unidentified and were simply placed in mass graves. On Kean's Neck, a plantation on Port Royal Island, thirty-seven people were buried in one trench. This practice, which was repeated in several places on the islands, helped speed the work but made it difficult for the county coroner to make an accurate accounting of the storm's casualties. [16]

Discovering the Aftermath

In the days immediately following the hurricane, the extent of the destruction on the Sea Islands was unknown to the outside world. The telegraph lines that connected the area to the mainland had been destroyed by the storm, and railroads remained under water. It was not until September 1 that the enormity of the storm became clear to the

[16] Wilkins and Archer quoted in Mather, *Storm Swept Coast*, 18; "Brave Negro Life-Savers," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 19, 1893; "Seeing is Believing," Charleston *News and Courier,* September 1, 1893; "The Storm on the Coast," New York *Times*, September 3, 1893.

state and national media. Charleston's *News and Courier* confessed that the horror could not be captured in words alone. In an article titled "Seeing is Believing," a reporter observed that the Lowcountry landscape was dotted with "shapeless and unmarked graves" that emitted "a deathly and sickening smell." According to Columbia's *The State*, the largest paper in South Carolina, at least 600 lives had been lost and more than 7,000 people left destitute.[17]

By September 2, a New York *Times* correspondent had surveyed the destruction. Attempting to capture the mystique of the Lowcountry, he reminded his readers that before the Civil War, the town of Beaufort had been a resort for the state's aristocratic families. Once a symbol of the immense wealth of the planter class, it was now one of the most visible embodiments of the transformation wrought by Reconstruction. "Beaufort is crowded with negroes," the correspondent observed. "In fact the entire country back of Port Royal and in and around Beaufort swarms with them." But the "black district" was remarkable not only for its demographic composition, he emphasized. It was also a place where black landownership was widespread, and its black residents were "the most industrious and progressive of any in this region."[18]

The national media's struggle to capture Beaufort's racial composition—and its historical roots—had a pronounced effect on how some of the initial reports of suffering and loss were sensationalized. "It Is Terrible: Sea Islands Are Strewn with Dead Bodies," read one headline. "NEGROES DROWNED BY SCORES" proclaimed another. The

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[17] "Seeing is Believing," Charleston *News and Courier,* September 1, 1893; "600 Lives Lost," Columbia *State*, September 1, 1893.

[18] "The Sweep of the Mighty Wind," New York *Times*, September 2, 1893; "The Storm on the Coast," New York *Times*, September 3, 1893.

New York Herald surmised that the storm had "probably made shuttlecocks of their dwellings." Another story compared the scattered bodies to "all the pretty birds of the air." While recognizing the horror of the storm, these accounts highlighted the macabre spectacle of its aftermath. The visibility of Beaufort County as a non-white space encouraged the national media to depict the Sea Islands as a place outside mainstream American experience.[19]

While black residents of the Lowcountry suffered the greatest losses in the storm, white elites played a critical role in narrating its aftermath. The region's rice plantations, whose productivity had declined following the destruction of slavery, appeared to have received a mortal blow. Planters, factors, and commission merchants were demoralized by the standing pools of saltwater left in the rice fields. "The water stood five or six feet above some of the banks, observed H. E. Bissell, owner of Bonnie Hall plantation. "If the water does not get off the crop in the next two or three days the rice will fall off and begin to sprout." While Lowcountry rice required regular flooding, the fields were carefully monitored and manipulated by an elaborate man-made system of dikes and canals that used fresh water, not the saltwater deposited by the storm. If left on the fields, saltwater would destroy the crops. Henry White, a black laborer on an Ashepoo River plantation, believed it would be impossible to save the year's rice crops and reported that his part of Beaufort County was still so flooded that one could move from plantation to plantation only by boat.[20] As several scholars have demonstrated, the 1893 storm

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[19] "It Is Terrible: Sea Islands Strewn with Dead Bodies," *New York Herald*, September 3, 1893; "NEGROES DROWNED BY SCORES," *New York Tribune,* September 1, 1893; "Seeing Is Believing" Charleston *News and Courier,* September 1, 1893;

[20] "Rough on Rice Planters," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 1, 1893.

decimated the Lowcountry's already fading rice industry. By the second decade of the twentieth century, none of the region's major rice plantations remained in operation.[21]

Another prominent economic enterprise damaged by the 1893 storm was the phosphate mines that dotted the waterways of the South Carolina coast. These mines began to appear in the 1870s following the discovery of calcified phosphate deposits in the Coosaw River. Offering cash wages that often doubled or tripled what planters paid day laborers for agricultural work, the burgeoning industry attracted a significant number of young black men who sought to supplement family farm production and bring cash into their households.[22] "Few can really appreciate what the cessation of this gigantic industry means," warned one Lowcountry writer. "Plants aggregating millions of dollars in value are liable to lie idle, men apt to be thrown out of business, merchants deprived of a considerable source of their revenue, and the State cut out of a good slice of debt paying income." Taken together, the phosphate companies paid the state an average of $600 in royalties per day, and it was estimated that in the eight months before the storm their payments had amounted to a total of $17,000. These financial benefits notwithstanding,

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[21] Once the foundation for immense wealth among the planter class, the Lowcountry rice plantations entered a prolonged period of decline following the destruction of slavery. A series of late nineteenth-century hurricanes sounded the death knell of rice production in South Carolina. On the rise and fall of rice production in South Carolina, see Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); James H. Tuten, *Lowcountry Time and Tide: The Fall of the South Carolina Rice Kingdom* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010). For a first-hand account by a former rice planter, see Duncan Clinch Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).

[22] Kiser, *Sea Island to City*, 99. On the phosphate industry, see Shepherd W. McKinley, *Stinking Stones and Rocks of Gold: Phosphate, Fertilizer, and Industrialization in Postbellum South Carolina* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).

Governor Tillman remained a fierce opponent of the industry because most of its capital came from outside South Carolina. To Tillman, the industry was an "octopus-armed" threat that gave northern monied interests undue influence in the state.[23]

Tillman's opposition to the phosphate mines also reflected his deep antagonism to the economic and political power the Lowcountry had long exercised within the state. This animosity affected his response to initial accounts of the storm's destruction. Unwilling to accept reports by the Charleston *News and Courier*, a conservative newspaper that had been hostile to his revanchist wing of the Democratic Party, or the Columbia *State*, which was edited by the brothers Narciso and Ambrose Gonzales, who came from the Lowcountry elite, Tillman sent J. W. Babcock, the superintendent of South Carolina's asylum system and a Tillman appointee, to Beaufort to inspect the storm's damage. Babcock, however, confirmed the accounts in the two newspapers. "Previous reports have not been exaggerated," he informed Tillman, providing vivid details of the casualties in and around the Sea Islands. On a single plantation on Ladies Island, "21 out of the 31 original buildings have been entirely swept away and those remaining are badly damaged. . . . Fifty-one lives have been lost. Of these four babies have not been recovered. Forty-four have been buried in one graveyard."[24]

Leading citizens of Beaufort County banded together to raise national awareness and spur donations. The Sea Island Relief Committee, like the leadership of the county's

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[23] "Out of the Depths," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 3, 1893; George Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 125-28; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 186.

[24] J. W. Babcock to Benjamin Tillman, September 4, 1893, Benjamin R. Tillman Papers, SCDAH; Babcock's report quoted in "A Miracle of Charity," Charleston *News and Courier,* September 4, 1893.

local politics during the 1890s, included both black and white men. Among their number were George Holmes, the white mayor of the town of Beaufort, Niels Christensen, a Danish immigrant and Union Army veteran who had served as superintendent of the Union cemetery in Beaufort, and black former congressman Robert Smalls, then the federal collector of customs at the port of Beaufort. Eight subcommittees oversaw the distribution of relief, each in a different part of the county. Among the committee's central concerns was careful allocation of the resources it received from donors. This anxiety was emphasized in section 10 of the committee's operating rules: "Sub-committees will at all times bear in mind that the distribution of supplies is intended for such as are suffering by reason of the late storm and are now in destitute circumstances and are intended for no others." Recognizing that its use of donations would be closely scrutinized, the Sea Island Relief Committee sought to limit assistance to the truly destitute. Unlike policies the Red Cross would later impose, however, the committee did not require labor in exchange for aid and did not cloak its mission in ham-fisted morality lessons. [25]

In addition to administering local relief, the Sea Island Relief Committee served as a vehicle for Sea Islanders to articulate their own story of the storm. The committee placed the storm's destruction in a longer history and described its human costs in an empathetic tone. In a September 1 appeal to "the American People," the committee announced its own estimates of the storm's destruction: more than 800 lives lost, 2,000 people left homeless, at least 6,000 entirely dependent on charity. "[T]he destruction was thorough and complete," with "not a grain of corn or a pod of cotton left in the fields

[25] Rules for the Government of the Sea Island Relief Committee, n.d., Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

washed by the raging sea." The tragedy, horrible in and of itself, was made more ruinous by its decimation of the hard-worn freedom dreams that the county's black residents had built into the landscape. The committee made the connection between Beaufort County and postbellum black progress explicit:

> Plantations which but a few days ago were dotted with neat cottages and outbuildings, the result of many years of hard toil, and occupied by happy and contented families, are now devastated fields with not an indication of their former habitation, except it be the dead bodies of the families of the owners, left there by the receding waves as a grim memorial of its thorough work of devastation and desolation.

Imploring the nation to remember that the fate of Beaufort County was inextricable from the meaning of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Sea Island Relief Committee couched its call for donations in explicitly racial terms. "The distress exists all over the Sea Islands among the colored population," the committee explained, "and has assumed proportions, as a result of the great disaster, beyond the efforts and abilities of local aid to alleviate." The Sea Island Relief Committee hoped that a national audience would recall the Reconstruction-era promise of Beaufort County.[26]

Even after he understood the extent of the destruction inflicted by the storm, Governor Tillman was opposed to soliciting outside aid for its victims. "The people have the fish of the sea there to prevent them from starving," he maintained. "I hope, too that someone will make them go to work at once and plant turnips on the islands. I do not want any abuse of charity."[27] When Clara Barton wrote to him proposing that the Red Cross take charge of the relief effort, Tillman argued that charity would be detrimental to

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[26] "Appeal of the Sea Island Relief Committee," September 1, 1893, Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

[27] Benjamin R. Tillman to J. W. Babcock, September 14, 1893, Benjamin R. Tillman Papers, SCDAH.

the islands' black residents. "My idea is to distribute the needed provisions only to the heads of families and not give aid to able-bodied men," Tillman declared. "I can promise the good people who have given to the [Sea Island Relief Committee] that not a dollar of the money will be wasted." Relief should be used only "to help them help themselves," Tillman insisted, a sentiment that aligned with both antebellum notions of white manhood and postbellum ideas of scientific charity.[28]

Privately, Tillman expressed his opposition to charity for the black Sea Islanders in overtly racist terms. "They cannot be treated as we would treat white people," he told a friend. His white correspondents in the Lowcountry echoed the sentiment. "Every precaution has been taken to prevent the abuse of charity," confided an ally in Georgetown County.[29] Tillman demonized charity and suggested that it would "demoralize" black workers. Such views were rooted in perceptions of Reconstruction. Arguing that slavery had provided labor and moral discipline that was superior to that of wage labor, many white southerners believed that the Freedmen's Bureau and northern aid societies had dissuaded freedpeople from embracing industry and frugality. As a result, Beaufort County, according to Tillman, had become "a niggerdom" where white-supremacist predictions of racial regression were being fulfilled. In particular, the attainment of landownership by so many of the county's black families challenged the subservient role southern elites expected African Americans to continue to occupy in the

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[28] Tillman quoted in Fraser, *Lowcountry Hurricanes*, 177-78.

[29] Benjamin Tillman to Russell, September 12, 1893, and A. Baron Holmes to Tillman, September 9, 1893, both in Benjamin R. Tillman Papers, SCDAH.

postbellum racial order.[30] Tillman, who represented the right wing of the state's Democratic Party, extended this criticism by warning both his constituents and national observers that direct charity to the Sea Island storm sufferers would perpetuate the postbellum moral decline of Beaufort County's black inhabitants.[31]

While Tillman and his wing of South Carolina's Democratic Party openly embraced white supremacy, other members of the state's white elite also expressed hostility toward the black storm victims. Some observers claimed to have witnessed widespread black immorality in the aftermath of the storm. "The thieving spirit in the negro's breast will oftentimes assert itself even in the midst of disaster and distress," declared Judge John White of Beaufort.[32] Harry Hammond, the son of former South Carolina governor James Henry Hammond, argued that black residents of the Lowcountry had made little, if any, progress since the Civil War. In a letter to *The State*, Hammond suggested that the Farmers' Alliance and other agricultural societies take steps to move the islands' black farmers away from the coast to the inland plantations of the Lowcountry, where they could assist in harvesting cotton, corn, and peas. Comparing black farmers on the Sea Islands to peasant populations in France and Italy, Hammond argued that "the peasant proprietory [*sic*] of the Sea Islands had reached the end of their career."

> No peasant proprietory ever had a fairer showing; in a genial climate to which they were thoroughly adapted; with abundant supplies of fish and fruit for food;

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[30] For Tillman's characterization of Beaufort County, see Charleston *World*, May 12, 1890, quoted in Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 153.

[31] Kantrowitz, *Benjamin Tillman*, 223.

[32] "Flaws in the Negro's Character," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 3, 1893.

> on fertile soil, their lands almost a free gift to them; aided by government largess and magnificent charities from other sources, the building of a new railroad, the founding of a town, and the development of the extensive phosphate works opening fresh sources of renumerative [*sic*] employment for them; protected from any unfriendly outside influence; for a third of a century, they have been free to establish themselves in permanency. The result? One thousand perish in a catastrophe that destroys only three of their white neighbors! What promise is there that any outside help can enable them to build up their waste places.[33]

For Hammond, the black Sea Islanders' inability to withstand the 1893 hurricane was an indictment of their chimerical pursuit of self-government and economic independence.

Not all white South Carolinians shared this view. Ellen Murray, the assistant principal of the Penn School on St. Helena Island, emphasized in a letter to Governor Tillman that her black neighbors were moral, hard-working citizens. Most importantly, she wrote, "a strong temperance feeling prevail[s] among them." In an effort to define himself as a moral crusader, Tillman had embraced the state's temperance movement and made the creation of a state-run system of alcohol dispensaries the flagship issue of his second term. By showing that the black residents of St. Helena already abstained from the demon drink, Murray hoped to convince the state government to open its coffers. "Private benevolence is wholly inadequate to the task of feeding thousands till July," Murray pleaded. If the relationship between the citizen and his government rested on a foundation of republican virtue, Murray claimed that black Sea Islanders were good citizens and therefore deserved a government that would support them in their time of need.[34]

This defense of black progress was echoed by some of Beaufort County's most prominent citizens. On September 1, Robert Smalls, the renowned Reconstruction-era

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[33] "A Striking Idea: Maj. Harry Hammond Proposes Negro Migration from the Coast," Columbia *State*, September 11, 1893.

[34] Ellen Murray to Benjamin R. Tillman, September 14, 1893, Benjamin R. Tillman Papers, SCDAH.

black politician, issued an appeal to the people of South Carolina in the hope that "the friends of humanity" would come to the aid of his compatriots in the Sea Islands. "These sea islands are the homes chiefly of negroes, who by thrift and industry, have made themselves homes, with none to molest or make them afraid," Smalls contended. Estimating that 400 to 500 lives had been lost within a twenty-mile radius of the town of Beaufort, Smalls feared that almost thirty years of progress had been swept away by the storm.[35] William Elliott, a white Democrat from one of the Lowcountry's most prestigious planter families, also pointed to the Sea Islanders' landowning status. "The situation here is peculiar," he told a *News and Courier* reporter. "The negroes almost universally own their homes, and of course, do not hire labor." While Smalls and Elliott had been fierce political rivals throughout the 1880s, they both understood the unique position of Beaufort County's black residents and hoped that South Carolinians could see the importance of rebuilding their community.[36]

This appeal to the legacy of Reconstruction antagonized the state's white population. A letter to the *News and Courier* written by an "*old resident*" of Beaufort County complained that the region's white population felt forgotten in the campaign for relief. While claiming that the supplies coming in were almost exclusively for black people, he lamented that "[m]any of the white residents of this section are stripped of all." "[T]heirs for over thirty years has been a weary way," he contended, "culminating at last in utter ruin. The remnant saved out of confiscation and the war (they having for years been exiles from homes of affluence) by economy is now gone." The

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[35] "600 Lives Lost," Columbia *State*, September 1, 1893.

[36] "Seeing Is Believing," Charleston *News and Courier,* September 1, 1893.

counterhistory of the "old resident" described the plight of both the region's white yeomen, who had lost many of the social benefits of white supremacy following the destruction of slavery, and its former planter class, which had found its property and social capital greatly reduced following the Civil War. While the writer recognized that black people made up an overwhelming majority of the sufferers and understood the desperate straits of his black neighbors, he asked that the white population also be remembered in the relief efforts.[37]

The Black Lowcountry Response

Although most descriptions of the 1893 Sea Island hurricane appeared in white-owned newspapers, the black press also played a critical role in shaping the narrative of the storm. In addition to reporting details of the calamity and encouraging support for its victims, the black press had to consider questions of respectability and racial representation. The *Savannah Tribune* made its readers aware of the plight of the Sea Islanders and invited members of the Sea Island Relief Committee to come to Savannah to solicit donations from the city's black community. Such interest was not surprising, given that a significant number of Savannah's black residents came from Beaufort County, and many of them continued to travel back and forth between the two areas. Indeed, the *Tribune* had long printed a weekly update called "Back Home News" about events in Beaufort County. In soliciting donations, the *Tribune*'s editors invoked racial solidarity as a motivating force. "It is well-known that nearly all of the sufferers on the island are our people," the *Tribune* observed in its account of the death and destruction on

[37] "Do Not Forget Our Own People," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 9, 1893.

St. Helena, "and this being the fact should especially spur the colored citizens to contribute liberally towards them."[38]

Beaufort County's own black newspaper, *The New South*, also invoked race consciousness, but in a way that reinforced a conservative politics of respectability. Its editor, Samuel J. Bampfield, a son-in-law of Robert Smalls, was part of a new generation of black leaders who viewed post-Reconstruction black progress as rooted in industry and morality. In an article titled "There is Everything in Right Methods," *The New South* expressed strong support for the self-help philosophy articulated by both Governor Tillman and the Red Cross. "The idea of self help is to be as much encouraged among those who are aided by these committees as possible," the paper declared. It discouraged black residents of the Sea Islands from accepting assistance and lauded the Red Cross for requiring the able-bodied to work in return for aid. "[E]very true woman or man would much prefer to obtain these rations in this way than to expose his manhood to the danger of being lowered by a total dependence upon charity," *The New South* insisted.[39]

These ideals, which were deeply gendered, allowed a growing elite within the black community to make claims to social equality. Both black men and black women were invested in policing these social norms, and even in the midst of the storm's devastation, Beaufort County's black elite called on its victims to demonstrate respectability. Another story in *The New South* called attention to a man on St. Helena Island who, despite being strong and healthy and having $200 in the bank, had applied to

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[38] "The Island Sufferers," *Savannah Tribune*, November 25, 1893. For examples of "Back Home News," see *Savannah Tribune*, June 24, 1893, July 15, 1893, August 19, 1893, September 9, 1893.

[39] "There is Everything Right in the Methods," Beaufort (SC) *New South*, October 5, 1893.

the Red Cross for assistance. "Rations are being given out," the man claimed, "and as I have lost my crop along with the rest, I should receive equally along with the others." *The New South* responded with the following admonition to its readers:

> Let us not forget that the eyes of the world are upon us, and that our acts are more keenly scrutinized and our shortcomings more severely condemned than those of the more favored race. We should be on our good behavior in an unusually great degree when it is known that the lights are turned on us, in full blaze, and our every movement subject to the severest and harshest criticism. Let us not lose that manhood we have struggled so hard to acquire that has so long been the pride and boast of the people of this section.[40]

The idea that Beaufort County's black residents were under national scrutiny represented more than paranoia or a parochial sense of self-importance. *The New South*'s politics of respectability were connected to memory of the vicious assaults against the black Lowcountry in the 1870s by northern writers like James Pike and Edward King, not to mention the state's white-supremacist "Redeemers." Framing post-Reconstruction gains and losses as struggles over manhood, *The New South* reflected an awareness among the county's black elite that through military service, political participation, property acquisition, and education, they had built a highly visible "city on a hill."[41]

Another setting in which black residents of the Lowcountry meditated on the

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[40] "Let Us Not Sacrifice Our Birthright for a Mess of Pottage," Beaufort (SC) *New South*, October 19, 1893.

[41] The writings of Pike and King are discussed above, in Chapter 1. On the politics of respectability, see Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

impact of the storm was in the region's churches. In addition to being spaces where people were made aware of the suffering on the Sea Islands and donations were collected, the churches wrestled with the religious meaning of the storm's destruction. "These recent sad events involuntarily direct our minds to the teaching of God's holy word, and impress us with the voice of the text and similar lessons from the prophets in showing forth man's utter dependence upon the tender mercies of God," pronounced the Reverend George F. Miller of Charleston's Cavalry Pentecostal Faith Church. The pastor of Centenary M. E. Church, also in Charleston, emphasized God's power and man's helplessness in his sermon, after which he collected $58 from his congregation to help meet the needs of the storm's victims.[42]

Christianity was a critical component of the cosmology of the region's black people. Just seven years earlier, black residents of Charleston had turned to the Bible to understand the devastation resulting from the 1886 earthquake. That event had drawn many of them to millennialist interpretations about the end of times, and similar understandings appeared in 1893. "The wind and the waves roared all the time like heavy thunder so that people thought the Judgment Day had come," observed Emily Mobley of the Kean's Neck plantation on the mainland of Beaufort County. "Some said it was Gabriel's trumpet blowing." Another woman, having lost all of her possessions in the storm, pleaded, "But oh, good Lord de next time you make a visit among us just come in your glorified person!" Unlike the responses of the black press, the examples of black religious thought, though frustratingly limited in number, offer glimpses into the

[42] "A Glorious Sabbath Day," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 4, 1893.

worldview of non-elite portions of the Lowcountry's black population.[43]

The 1893 Depression and the Failure of the Federal Government

On October 2, Governor Tillman finally conceded that outside aid was needed and asked the American Red Cross to oversee the relief efforts. The Red Cross discharged the Sea Island Relief Committee from its responsibilities, then devoted the next month to surveying the storm-swept landscape and evaluating the committee's work. While the Red Cross officials commended the efforts of local leaders to provide for the storm victims, they found the committee's methods sorely lacking. "The manner of distribution previous to November 2 [when the Red Cross began to issue aid], though performed by willing workers, was not, could not be, that systemic distribution which comes only after years of experience," asserted one Red Cross worker. In order to inventory preexisting donations, Red Cross officials closed the warehouses used by the Sea Island Relief Committee. Storm victims who had come to Beaufort expecting to receive rations were told to disperse so that the town "could be rid of the demoralizing influence of idle people." With the doors now closed, Barton's associates canvassed the entire county to develop a census of those who had been affected by the storm and account for the material assets of each household.[44]

On November 2, relief operations resumed under the banner of the Red Cross. With only $30,000 in cash to accompany in-kind donations, the organization's limited

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[43] Mobley and the other unnamed storm victim both quoted in Mather, *Storm Swept Coast*, 61. On the response of black Charlestonians to the 1886 earthquake, see Williams and Hoffius, *Upheaval in Charleston*, chap. 3.

[44] Red Cross worker quoted in Barton, *Red Cross in Peace and War*, 223; "Sea Island Relief inventory book," [October 1893], Red Cross Papers, box LF2, RG 200, NA II.

resources intensified its already-stringent philosophy of relief. Although rations were issued to households in need, the weekly allotment for a family of seven was only one peck of hominy and one pound of pork. All except the elderly and the infirm were expected to work in exchange for aid. Men were given shovels and spades with which to clear public roads, dig ditches, and rebuild houses. Women were organized into sewing societies that repaired donated articles of clothing and turned "ticking into mattress covers" and "homespun into garments." The Red Cross emphasized that its mission was to stamp out dependence. "They must not eat the bread of idleness," proclaimed Barton of the storm victims. "We must not leave a race of beggars, but teach them the manliness of support, and methods of self-dependence." Fearing that memory of the Reconstruction-era Freedmen's Bureau, which had become associated with a decadent vision of federal largesse, still lingered in Beaufort County, the Red Cross volunteers appeared to operate from the premise that it was better to be too stringent than too generous.[45]

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[45] Barton, *Red Cross in Peace and War*, 223, 225. The Freedmen's Bureau was established in 1865 to help formerly enslaved people in the transition from slavery to freedom. In addition to providing rations and health care, assisting in the establishment of schools, helping freedpeople find lost family members, and assisting them in their quest for justice in local and bureau courts, the Freedmen's Bureau was a critical intermediary that monitored free-labor relationships between formerly enslaved people and former slaveowners. In 1872, Congress shut down the bureau, and in the following decades its place in national memory became increasingly negative as federal involvement in the South on the behalf of black people was portrayed as having encouraged dependence. On the Freedmen's Bureau, see Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds., *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999); Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Chad Alan Goldberg. *Citizens and Paupers: Relief, Rights, and Race, from the Freedmen's Bureau to Workfare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 2; Steven Hahn, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, John C. Rodrigue, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, ser. 3, vol. 1, *Land and Labor, 1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); René Hayden, Anthony E. Kaye, Kate Masur, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, Leslie S. Rowland, and Stephen A West, eds., *Freedom:*

Figure 2.2. Red Cross workers sorting seed potatoes that had been donated to victims of the 1893 Sea Island Storm
Source: Clara Barton, *Red Cross in Peace and War* (Washington, DC: American Historical Press, 1899), 200.

The parsimony of the Red Cross was both philosophical and pragmatic. Although reports of the Sea Island storm appeared in all of the nation's major papers and appeals for relief were made by both South Carolina politicians and the Red Cross, the federal government and the American people at large responded with less support than they had after previous disasters. Following the 1889 Johnstown Flood in Pennsylvania, which killed 2,200 people and left close to 40,000 in need of food and shelter, the Red Cross had received $39,000 in cash and more than $200,000 in supplies. Counting all private donations, the organizations that collected funds for the Johnstown victims accumulated over $3 million. In comparison, the Red Cross received far less in both cash donations and supplies for the more than 30,000 people who were left destitute by the Sea Island

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A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, ser. 3, vol. 2, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

storm.[46]

Recognizing the limits of private donations, Clara Barton and the Red Cross appealed to both the state and federal governments for assistance. Although Barton memorialized the South Carolina General Assembly about the dire circumstances facing the Sea Islands and the need for "the guardians of the common weal" to act on behalf of the storm victims, the legislature adjourned for its Christmas vacation without appropriating any funds.[47] In October, Barton travelled to Washington, D.C., to ask Congress to help the people of the Sea Islands. "The ground is wet and sour," she reported. "The people are living on this damp ground in tents, under sheds and tree limbs . . . . Malaria in acute form is there; typhoid, typhus, and pneumonia will, in the near future, be epidemic." Barton asked the legislators to appropriate $50,000 in aid. George Washington Murray, the black congressman who represented South Carolina's "black district," had introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives on September 11 to authorize relief funds for the Sea Islands, but it was ignored.[48] Barton's resolution was introduced by Massachusetts senator George Hoar, who was one of her neighbors, and co-sponsored by South Carolina senator Matthew C. Butler. "Every hour lost," Hoar

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[46] Marian Moser Jones compares the Red Cross response to the 1889 Jonestown Flood to that following the 1893 Sea Island Storm and concludes that anti-black racism on the part of the federal government, Governor Benjamin Tillman, and the American people was a major reason for the funding disparity. See Marian Moser Jones, "Race, Class, and Gender Disparities in Clara Barton's Late Nineteenth-Century Disaster Relief," *Environment and History* 17 (Spring 2011): 107-31.

[47] Barton, *Red Cross in War and Peace*, 201.

[48] Murray's resolution cited in Columbia (SC) *State*, September 8, 1893.

argued, "will result probably in some human being perishing."[49]

When an appropriation was considered in the Senate, it was soundly rejected.[50] During the debate, William Alfred Peffer, a Populist senator from Kansas, asked that its scope be enlarged to include the entire country and the appropriation be made large enough to help all unemployed men in the United States.[51] Peffer's proposal alluded to the economic depression that had begun in 1893, the worst the country had ever experienced. In response to the economic collapse, calls came from labor and populist groups for the federal government to assist hard-hit farmers and unemployed workers. Although this grassroots push contributed to the rise of the Populist Party, it had an adverse effect on requests for disaster relief and discouraged Congress from acting on behalf of the Sea Island storm victims. As Barton told a friend who had encouraged her to appeal to the governors of states across the nation for additional aid, "It would be political suicide for any chief magistrate at this moment in the existing state of things, to ask for assistance for any people outside of his own. None would dare to do it where the poor of their community are crying for help."[52] While Barton held that economic scarcity and not racial bias had led to state and federal inaction, representations of the relief effort in the media, as well as later accusations of anti-white bias, suggest that racism at least

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[49] Senator Hoar, speaking on Sea Island Relief resolution, 53rd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 25 (November 2, 1893): 3076-77.

[50] Jones, "Race, Class, and Gender Disparities in Clara Barton's Late Nineteenth-Century Disaster Relief," 120-21.

[51] Senator Peffer, speaking on Sea Island Relief resolution, 53rd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 25 (November 2, 1893): 3077.

[52] Clara Barton to A. M. H. Christensen, December 14, 1893, Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

partially explained the disparity between the Sea Island relief effort and previous disaster campaigns.

The Relief Effort in the National Media

Beaufort County's prominence in national memory meant that high-profile Republicans were willing to use their national platforms to bring attention to the Sea Islanders' plight. Within a week of the storm, the aging black abolitionist Frederick Douglass published a letter "on behalf of the sufferers" in the *Brooklyn Eagle*. "I am moved to make this appeal for immediate help," Douglass implored. "These people need money, food, and clothing, and all who can do so are urged most earnestly to respond at once to this call for help." He encouraged readers to send their donations to Robert Smalls. "Into no greater hands could they be placed with greater certainty of being promptly and faithfully distributed," he declared.[53] Douglass's swift response and his reference to Smalls suggest that Smalls and Douglass had remained in contact in the years following Reconstruction and that they understood each other to be fellow travelers in the diminishing band of black leaders still willing to make full-throated arguments for black political rights. Smalls had written to Douglass just days earlier to apologize for missing the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, "my time being taken up looking after the storm sufferers and fixing up my places and making them habitable."[54]

The *Brooklyn Eagle* was not the only northern periodical that encouraged liberal-minded citizens to contribute to the relief effort. The Springfield, Massachusetts,

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[53] "Letter from Frederick Douglass," *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 9, 1893, clipping in Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

[54] Robert Smalls to Frederick Douglass, September 7, 1893, Frederick Douglass Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

Republican, another long-time advocate of the rights of black southerners, asked its readers to remember Reconstruction as they assisted the victims of the storm. After describing the catastrophic damage, the *Republican* argued that "anyone who has ever visited that locality knows the present situation is perfectly intelligible and the stories of the great need and suffering of the whites and negroes are easily accepted." The idea that the Lowcountry was already well-known to northerners was a recurring element in calls for contributions.[55]

Joseph S. Elkington, a representative of the Philadelphia Freedmen's Relief Society, offered an extended portrait of Beaufort County in a series of letters and articles for the *Friends' Intelligencer and Journal*, the nation's most widely-read Quaker periodical. Elkington was in Beaufort to distribute food and clothing that had been donated to the Philadelphia society for the storm's victims. In addition to relaying information about the condition of the black victims, Elkington tried to describe the entire constellation of relief work in the Sea Islands. He also reported on how the Sea Islanders had progressed in the years since the end of slavery.[56]

After visiting with Clara Barton, Elkington lamented the limitations of the Red Cross operation. In particular, he regarded the rations provided by the Red Cross as insufficient for the region's larger families. During the first days of the Red Cross's relief work, he reported, black Sea Islanders believed that the supplies came from federal appropriations and therefore understood them to be an extension of their rights as

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[55] "The Sea Islands," *Springfield Republican,* September 15, 1893, clipping in Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

[56] Joseph S. Elkington, *Selections from the Diary and Correspondence of Joseph S. Elkington, 1830-1905* (Philadelphia: Press of the Leeds and Biddle Co., 1913), 300-303.

citizens. When Elkington asked why the Red Cross did not appeal to Congress for funds, he was told that while the organization had in fact requested $50,000, Red Cross workers feared that free rations would "pauperize and demoralize" the storm victims. Elkington speculated that southern Democrats had pressed their representatives in Congress to withhold financial aid because "there were too many 'niggers' and it would be well to let them die."[57]

During his visit, Elkington communed with almost all of the white northerners in Beaufort County. Rachel Mather, a Baptist missionary from Massachusetts who had founded a school for girls in 1868, hosted Elkington at her home on St. Helena Island. He also met members of the county's black elite, including Robert Smalls, whom he described as "one of the most remarkable colored men of the South," and Samuel J. Bampfield, editor of *The New South*. These men, along with several of the county's black clergymen, arranged for Elkington and the Philadelphia Freedmen's Relief Association to hold a community meeting in Beaufort. At the meeting, a number of black Sea Islanders gave detailed accounts of the storm's destruction of life and property, but many others were reluctant to relive the horror. "Oh! I can't tell you how it was, you couldn't understand it," one man told Elkington. "I believe you," Elkington responded. "I believe you that it was awful."[58]

While not all white northerners were willing to challenge racism on the part of South Carolina's state leaders or within the Red Cross, others mobilized memory of Beaufort County during the 1860s to raise awareness of the black Sea Islanders' plight.

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[57] Ibid., 304.

[58] Ibid., 305.

William Channing Gannett, a Unitarian missionary who had spent three years on Port Royal Island during the Civil War, appealed for storm relief by emphasizing the progress ex-slaves and their children had made in the region since emancipation. "Now, after a generation of freedom, the land is mostly owned by blacks in little farms of ten to forty acres," Gannett wrote. "The great majority live in their own houses, scattered over these farms, instead of in the huddled negro quarters of the old plantation. On St. Helena Island alone, I believe, four to five hundred sewing machines click, and here and there a small parlor organ may be heard." The image of the Sea Islanders embracing middle-class aspirations would have resonated with the generation of white northerners who remembered the Port Royal Experiment and the possibility of the region's becoming a model black community in the postbellum South. Gannett also reported that Beaufort County experienced fewer capital crimes than any other part of the state and that its residents paid more annual taxes than every other county but Charleston.[59]

The idea that the Sea Islands had become a model community appeared in other religious publications as well. In the *Friends' Intelligencer*, a correspondent named Edward Poor argued that the storm "should awaken special interest in those of our people who have followed the efforts of the colored race to elevate and improve their condition." Like Gannett, Poor described the farmers of the Sea Islands as frugal, temperate, honest, and law-abiding. During a visit to St. Helena Island in February, 1893, Poor had observed a prosperous and independent black majority living harmoniously with the white minority, thereby giving the lie to the specter of black domination propagated by Lost Cause writers. In contrast to northern conservatives and white southerners who regarded Reconstruction as an era of corruption and declension, the northern religious press saw

[59] Letter of William Channing Gannett, n.d., in *Unity*, November 16, 1893, 163-64.

numerous signs of black progress. At the core of such reflections on the 1893 storm was a fear that the world the formerly enslaved people had struggled to build in postbellum Beaufort County had been lost. "In one short week these people, whose possessions represent the toilsome effort of twenty-five years, find their houses swept away, their crops destroyed, their lands devastated, and in many cases their breadwinners killed," wrote Poor.[60]

The missionary writers were careful not to romanticize what they saw. Gannett acknowledged that Beaufort County was "no paradise"; lax morality, inconsistent work habits, and "the devil of drink" continued to plague the islands. Elkington described the soil of the Sea Islands as being of poor quality and thought that the people would be better off on the mainland. On the whole, however, these writers found on the Sea Islands a self-reliant, industrious, and prosperous community.[61] The legacy of wartime Reconstruction lingered in the memory of white northerners, and the storm caused them to reemphasize the place of the Sea Islands in the national conversation about racial progress.

While white northerners like Elkington and Gannett offered coverage of the Sea Islands that emphasized the longstanding connections between Beaufort County and the North's involvement in emancipation and Reconstruction, other writers highlighted the place of the Sea Islands in the New South. Joel Chandler Harris, author of the popular Uncle Remus stories, was asked to write two articles for *Scribner's Monthly* on the storm and its aftermath. The first of these articles, "The Devastation," sought to capture both

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[60] Edward E. Poor, "The People of the Sea Islands," *Friends' Intelligencer*, September 23, 1893.

[61] Letter of William Channing Gannett, n.d., in *Unity*, March 1894, 164; Elkington, *Diary and Correspondence*, 306.

the horror of the storm's destruction and what Harris regarded as the anti-modern charm of black life on the Sea Islands. Emphasizing his own ethnographic authority, Harris argued that the nation had not received the full story of the storm because "the islands themselves have not spoken, and they will not speak." "Gentle, patient, smiling, and

Figure 2.3. "In Spite of Trouble"
Source: "The Sea Island Hurricanes: The Relief," *Scribner's Monthly* 15 (March 1894): 279.

good-humored, the Negroes have no complaints to make," he continued. "They discuss the storm among themselves, but not in a way to impart much information to a white listener." The purported opaqueness of Lowcountry black life allowed Harris to demonstrate his expertise in Gullah folkways. According to one review of the series, "No one other than the author of 'Uncle Remus' could have given here and there the verdical touches of negro dialect and temperament which go to make up a complete picture of the isolated, hapless community."[62]

[62] Joel Chandler Harris, "The Sea Island Storm: The Devastation," *Scribner's Monthly* 15 (February 1894): 231-35; "Leading Articles of the Month: To the Rescue of the Sea Islanders," *Review of Reviews* 9 (March 1894): 257.

Harris's second article, "The Relief," focused on the work of the Red Cross. Harris agreed with the stringent allocation of assistance and saw Barton's organization as an efficient and modern purveyor of humanitarian aid because it made clear to the Sea Islanders that in order to obtain help they must help themselves. Harris emphasized

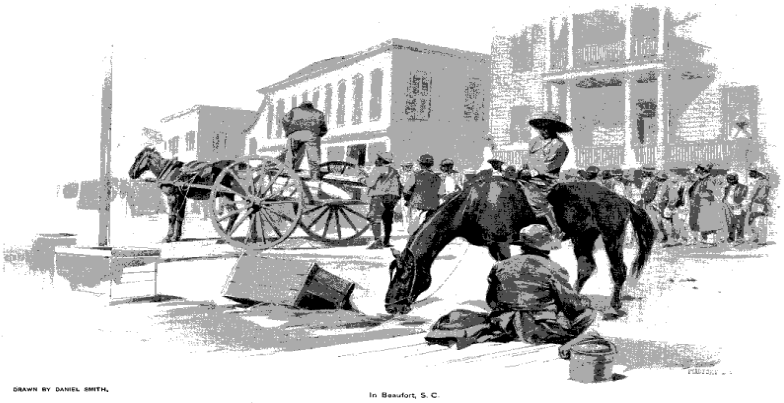

Figure 2.4. "In Beaufort, S.C."
Source: "The Sea Island Hurricanes: The Relief," *Scribner's Monthly* 15 (March 1894): 284.

conflict between the approach taken by the Red Cross and the expectations of the Sea Islands' black residents. "Some of the older ones, remembering the days when the Freedmen's Bureau was in operation, came to the conclusion that the government had charge of the relief funds," he claimed. In one instance, Harris witnessed an elderly black man objecting to the paltry amount of food being issued. "Mockin' bud been eat mo' dun dat!" the man protested. "The man remembered the days when the Government poured out its bounty through the Freedmen's Bureau," Harris surmised. Like Joseph Elkington, Harris witnessed the spread of a grassroots rumor about government intervention, but Harris took it one step further by suggesting a link between the Red Cross relief effort and memories of the Freedmen's Bureau held by the generation of Sea Islanders who had

lived through Reconstruction.[63]

The contributions of Joseph S. Elkington, William Channing Gannett, and Joel Chandler Harris were all written in the style of the postbellum travelogue, and, to differing degrees, all assumed that the people and the landscape of the Sea Islands would be seen as foreign by a middle-class audience. Their essays served as pieces of investigative journalism or calls for donations, but they were also part of a larger effort to codify racial and regional differences in national culture. While all of these writers were considered progressive on questions of race and all produced accounts that reflected both white and black memory of the postbellum past, they also reflected the limits of narratives rooted in the abolitionist memory of the Sea Islands. While some writers still emphasized black progress and the promise of emancipation, many now highlighted the backwardness of the Sea Islands' black residents and portrayed them as out of step with the rest of the nation.[64]

The Democrats' Assault on the Red Cross

Black residents of the Sea Islands and elite writers in the national media were not alone in drawing connections between the work of the Red Cross and Reconstruction. As

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[63] Harris, "The Sea Island Storm: The Relief," *Scribner's Monthly* (March 1894): 277.

[64] Writers of local-color literature marketed "otherness" in the same way that travel writing on the Middle East, Asia, and Africa emphasized the "orientalist" aspects of non-white and non-western cultures, thereby offering more "authentic" alternatives to the Anglo-Saxon, middle-class mainstream of the United States. On local color and southern travel literature, see *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture,* Volume 9: *Literature*, ed. M. Thomas Inge (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), s.vv. "Regionalism and Local Color," "Travel Writing." On the broader implications of orientalist discourses in travel writing, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

the Red Cross established control over disaster relief on the South Carolina coast, the state's white Democrats began to compare it to the earlier northern intervention. These comparisons became increasingly hostile and increasingly racialized as relief work extended into the winter. By the spring of 1894, claims that the Red Cross was discriminating against poor whites were appearing in the state's major newspapers. These charges echoed the rallying cries against "Black Reconstruction" and "Negro Domination" made by the state's Democratic Party during the 1870s. The Red Cross's leadership understood the historical parallel being deployed by Governor Tillman and his followers and charged that allegations of anti-white bias were political tactics designed to bring white yeomen into the still-divided Democratic Party. The fight between the Red Cross and the Tillman wing of the Democratic Party not only recapitulated earlier struggles in the state over the fate of Reconstruction, but also foreshadowed the upcoming battle over black political rights in the 1895 state constitutional convention.

Even as the enormity of the 1893 storm was becoming clear to the state and national media, white South Carolinians discouraged local relief organizations from providing aid to its black victims. An article in the Charleston *News and Courier* argued that "the distribution of free rations to the negroes on the islands will demoralize them and promote idleness on their part to their own detriment and that of the white farmers." The writer feared that the issue of rations would interfere with the Lowcountry's already-precarious market in black labor power and require white farmers to offer higher wages. Citing a rumor that black workers had already begun to strike for higher pay, he called upon longstanding objections that landownership and access to political power discouraged black residents of the Lowcountry from working for white employers.

Governor Tillman also opposed outside intervention. In response to a telegram imploring him to seek federal aid, the governor insisted that "[t]he necessity for national aid to sufferers does not yet exist." "I do not think it will," he added. "Contributions are very liberal and I think we can get along without it."[65] In the minds of his white constituents, Tillman's critique of federal intervention would have drawn a clear parallel to the memory of Reconstruction.

While Tillman later backtracked and asked the Red Cross to spearhead the relief effort, many white South Carolinians did not welcome the national organization. White farmers in the Lowcountry assumed that the Red Cross was operating in bad faith and favoring black victims over white. In November, rumors of discriminatory practices began to emerge. Thomas Martin of Bluffton, which was on the mainland of Beaufort County, wrote a letter to the Charleston *News and Courier* describing what he saw as systemic bias against whites and favoritism toward blacks. According to Martin, the Red Cross was giving aid to black Bluffton residents who collected veterans' pensions from the U.S. government, "drove double buggies," and owned property worth more than $1,000. For Martin, this was not only a failure of oversight, but also evidence of overt discrimination against white South Carolinians at the hands of northerners. "Remember this peninsula has more white farmers and people than colored," Martin declared. His assumption that the Red Cross was playing favorites was supported by what he regarded as partisan bias in the composition of the Bluffton relief committee. Its members included Pompey Riley, a black Republican pension agent, John Lindsey, a black pensioner and political leader, London Simmons, also a black pension recipient and Republican leader,

[65] "No Need of Federal Aid," Charleston *News and Courier*, September 11, 1893.

and Moes Bruin, whom Martin described as a "creme de la creme hog thief."[66]

Eugene Gregorie, a white planter from the Pocotaligo section of Beaufort County, asked William Elliott, a prominent white Democrat from Beaufort, to seek an audience with Clara Barton to discuss the "common evil" the Red Cross was inflicting upon the county's white planters. Gregorie and his fellow planters believed that "indiscriminate issue of rations to the lazy negroes of this section" was hurting their ability to recruit black workers during the pivotal spring planting season. Gregorie had reportedly witnessed men claiming false dependents in order to secure rations and remain outside the agricultural labor market.[67] The accusation that the Red Cross was upsetting a previously harmonious balance between labor and capital echoed a charge repeatedly made against Reconstruction-era governments.

For the region's poorer whites, black Union veterans who were affiliated with the local Republican Party almost certainly represented the worst elements of the recent past. Beaufort County's white yeomen had sided with the slaveholding elite during the Civil War and saw themselves as playing a constitutive role in the patriarchal world of the region's planters. They had fought for the Confederacy precisely because they feared that the end of slavery would undermine their social and economic standing as propertied heads of household in a society founded on the supremacy of propertied white men.[68]

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[66] Thomas Martin to editors of Charleston *News and Courier*, November 17, 1893, clipping in Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

[67] Eugene Gregorie to William Elliott, March 29, 1894, Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

[68] On the identity and politics of propertied white men in the South Carolina Lowcountry, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), chap 7.

Martin claimed that the Bluffton Relief Committee hurt not only poor whites but also black residents of Bluffton who were not part of the local Republican machine. For Martin, the clearest example of this destructive postbellum partisanship was when the Bluffton Relief Committee "refused rations to an old blind negro who doesn't vote." One of the most powerful indictments of Reconstruction had been the charge of corruption and the decline of good government in favor of patronage. By linking the Red Cross to this charge, Martin aligned his attack not only with a longstanding critique of Reconstruction, but also with northerners' concerns about urban political machines and their corruption of democracy. Condemning the Red Cross as "an inflammatory failure," Martin concluded that "if wealthy politicians, republican pension drawers, carpenters, &c. are rationed and helped, and our poor white farmers have to suffer, I say God help such charity, we don't want any such here."[69]

As leaders of an organization that prided itself in being nonpartisan, Red Cross officials took these accusations seriously. J. C. Hemphill, editor of the *News and Courier*, asked John MacDonald of the Red Cross to respond to Martin's criticisms. After emphasizing that "the Red Cross cares not one iota whether a man is republican or democrat . . . Methodist or atheist, black or white," MacDonald described the nonstop hostility that white residents of Bluffton had directed toward the organization. When MacDonald first arrived at the town's wharf to survey the storm's damage, for example, he had overheard local white men murmur, "That boat has brought the men belonging to that Cross concern which proposes to feed all these worthless niggers." MacDonald defended the probity of the black relief committee. As a pension agent, Pompey Riley

[69] Thomas Martin to editors of Charleston *News and Courier*, November 17, 1893, clipping in Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

was able to identity other agents in the county and ensure that the Red Cross did not distribute aid to those already receiving pensions from the U.S. government. John Lindsey, who had lost his house and livestock in the storm, not only worked for the Red Cross's relief committee, but also used his own resources to help care for individuals who were worse off than himself. In addition to defending the relief effort, the Red Cross cited evidence of local whites hampering the organization's outreach. "We have held a meeting and I bet no more rations will be issued in Bluffton," a white storekeeper had told Pompey Riley. Another storekeeper had told London Simmonds, "You are a Red Cross man, they are leading the people to hell all the time." MacDonald hypothesized that the white storekeepers in Bluffton were assailing the reputation of the Red Cross because they wanted to force the storm sufferers to purchase from them on credit.[70]

Rachel Mather witnessed the precarious place of white farmers who, on the one hand, desperately wanted to hold onto some semblance of their antebellum social standing but, on the other, found themselves in the same perilous economic position as the county's smallholding black farmers. "I done hear in Colleton County that you give the niggers lots of old things; they need them bad enough too, but I suppose you hans't any objections to helping us too if we got a white skin," declared one white farmer. Another "respectable looking farmer" told Mather, "I never begged before, [and] I wouldn't now only I can't see my children starve." In better times, Mather argued, these white farmers "would die rather than solicit help of a so-called 'nigger teacher'." The enormity of the storm's destruction pierced the racial divide and exposed the common plight of poor whites and blacks. "These desperate crackers and long suffering negroes

[70] John MacDonald to J. C. Hemphill, December 3, 1893, Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

will combine" Mather warned, "and there will follow fearful scenes of violence and rapine—tragedies that will shake the proud old Palmetto State to her foundation, and involve the nation in another bloody contest."[71] Her prophecy of biracial uprising not only alluded to the Civil War, but also spoke to the fear among the nation's white elite that the labor conflicts and populist uprisings of the 1890s evinced an irreconcilable conflict between capital and labor.

Sensing that the future of white supremacy was at stake, South Carolina's political leaders continued to wield the cudgel of racism to bring poor whites the Democratic Party and keep them there. During the spring of 1894, new reports of discrimination against poor whites began to emerge in the state's Democratic papers. The Columbia *Daily Register* published an article titled "Cursing the Red Cross! Bitter feeling against It in Beaufort County." The article, which was written by an unnamed "special correspondent" and cited only one named source (Thomas Martin), savaged the work of the Red Cross and claimed that the organization was in league with Beaufort's black Republican machine. "Bob Smalls," who was identified as a key agent of the conspiracy, had "risen largely in the estimation of the negroes of Beaufort in the last few months." Pointing to his recent failed congressional bid, the unnamed correspondent argued that the aid issued by the Red Cross would give the politically moribund Robert Smalls enough support to return to Congress.[72]

Rather than respond to the *Daily Register*, Red Cross officials sought to bring national attention to the unfair attacks. John MacDonald believed that the charges were

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[71] Mather, *Storm Swept Coast*, 50-53.

[72] "Cursing the Red Cross! Bitter Feeling against It in Beaufort County," Columbia (SC) *Daily Register*, May 25, 1894.

politically inspired and could be traced directly to Governor Tillman. Tillman, who was still reeling from the backlash against his ill-fated campaign to bring all liquor sales under the control of state-run dispensaries, was now a candidate for the U.S. Senate. According to MacDonald, Tillman hoped to secure the position by casting himself as defender of the state's yeoman farmers and poor whites. Although the coalition that had twice elected him governor could not directly put him in the U.S. Senate (at the time, senators were chosen by state legislatures), Tillman politicized the Red Cross relief effort in order to mobilize his base against legislative candidates who opposed his selection. The *Daily Register*'s writer, MacDonald charged, was a partisan "tool" by the name of Heyward, who lived in Columbia. Although he claimed to have scoured the entirety of Bluffton township, Heyward returned to Columbia after only twelve hours, then penned the article charging the Red Cross with "every crime in the calendar." MacDonald denounced Tillman's scheme, which played politics with the relief effort, as "diabolical and fiendish." Speaking for Clara Barton and the entire Red Cross, MacDonald told P. V. DeGrew of the United Press that they "would be exceedingly glad" to have these facts brought out in the northern papers, many of which were reprinting extracts from the *Daily Register* story and spreading rumors that the Red Cross was allowing white people in Beaufort County to starve.[73]

By the time MacDonald wrote to DeGrew, the Red Cross was preparing to leave Beaufort County and wanted to highlight the success of its relief effort. "We have been occupying the field for eight months, and have done greater and better work than was ever done on a relief field," MacDonald claimed. Although the Red Cross had fed tens of

[73] John MacDonald to P. V. DeGrew, June 3, 1894, Clara Barton Papers, Manuscript Division, LC.

thousands of people, salvaged hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, and put 35,000 people in "a better condition than they have ever been before," the charges of racial bias threatened to destroy the organization's hard-earned reputation for nonpartisan service. "This unscrupulous demagogue, this blatherskite, this Tillman," MacDonald spewed, "is doing all that he can to belittle our work and pose before the community as the only man who has saved this country."[74]

Remembering the Storm

While the 1893 Sea Island Storm eventually receded from national memory, it remained a critical component in the nation's understanding of the relationship between the Lowcountry and black progress since the Civil War. Accounts of the hurricane by the Red Cross, white northerners, white southerners, and black Sea Islanders articulated different aspects of the complicated social memory of the Lowcountry's postbellum experience. While these stories did not offer a single narrative of the storm's implications, read together, they underlined the centrality of the Lowcountry in the nation's understanding of the past and future of African Americans.

For Clara Barton, the work of the Red Cross following the 1893 storm became a central part of how she told the organization's story. In her first book, *The Red Cross in Peace and War*, which was published in 1898, Barton documented each of the organization's major relief missions. The relief effort following the Sea Island Storm served as a shining example of the group's heroism and altruism. "It is probable that there are few instances on record," Barton wrote, "where a movement toward relief of such magnitude, commenced under circumstances so new, so unexpected, so unprepared and

[74] Ibid.

so adverse, was ever carried on for such a length of time and closed with results so entirely satisfactory to both those served and those serving."[75]

In framing the Red Cross response to the storm as a national achievement in philanthropy, Barton and her volunteers invoked the fraught history of Reconstruction to argue that the Red Cross had doubled as a school for citizenship. Barton's description of the sewing circles that conscripted local women to mend tattered donations into wearable garments, for example, expressed a fear that politics might infiltrate the Red Cross's nonpartisan work. It was necessary "[t]o get the women interested and into the work and the men out of it," Barton explained, because "the committeemen were fast gaining in importance and influence among the other men by reason of patronage, a kind of 'political pull,' one might say." So, too, had it been essential to dissociate the Red Cross from governmental assistance. Local committeemen had to be carefully told that the supplies were not provided by the government, because many of them remembered "the old 'Freedmen Bureau' days."[76]

Reflecting on the work of the Red Cross in the Sea Islands, Barton argued that the organization had not only saved the islanders from starvation, but had also given them the tools of thrift, industry, and self-reliance that would "help to fit them for the citizenship which, wisely or unwisely, we had endowed them with." Barton's uncertainty about the legacy of Reconstruction reflected a widespread unease among white northerners about the wisdom of black enfranchisement. In the years between the Sea Island Storm and the publication of Barton's book, South Carolina amended its state constitution to add

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[75] Barton, *Red Cross in Peace and War*, 197-210 (quotation on 197).

[76] Ibid. (quotations on 259 and 233).

literacy and property ownership to its requirements for voters, measures that gave effectively disfranchised black South Carolinians without violating the Fifteenth Amendment. Barton's book failed to describe either the resurgence of white supremacy in South Carolina politics or the Red Cross's prolonged battle with Benjamin Tillman during the relief effort; instead, her conservative stance on citizenship paralleled the tone that both black and white accommodationists adopted during the Jim Crow era.[77]

In contrast to Barton's account, the narratives crafted by white northerners who had established schools in Beaufort County during Reconstruction emphasized racial progress and the devastating impact of the hurricane. The Penn School, which had been founded by Laura Towne in 1862, documented the storm's effects in its 1898 report. Prior to the storm, the school's leaders had regularly highlighted the progress that the people of St. Helena Island were making with the school's help. According to Towne, belief in superstition and the supernatural was on the decline, and the island's self-supporting farmers "were no disgrace to any race or nation." The 1898 report, which was the first in five years, emphasized that the storm had erased the islanders' achievements. "The people, prosperous and happy on Sunday morning, stood on Monday, beside their dead, bewildered, homeless, without food, without a change of clothing, with absolutely nothing." The storm had made ruin of thirty years of work, leaving the region materially impoverished and spiritually traumatized. Expressing anger toward the federal and state governments for failing to appropriate funds to assist the storm's victims, the report described the continued suffering of the men, women, and children of St. Helena. Hunger was one of the most serious problems. In the months following the storm, students

[77] On the disfranchisement measures adopted by the 1895 constitutional convention, see above, Chapter 1.

regularly fainted in the classroom from hunger, Towne recalled, and several men died in their fields from exhaustion. While the people were working hard to regain their previous standard of living, the storm's damage, together with the low price of cotton and continued drought, had left them mired in destitution. As late as 1898, Laura Towne and the Penn School were still making appeals to donors for food, clothing, and financial support for children and widows on the island.[78]

Rachel Mather's 1894 book, *The Storm Swept Coast*, also reflected fear that the progress made by the people of Beaufort County was at risk of being lost forever. A critic of the Red Cross relief operation, Mather challenged the self-congratulatory rhetoric and paternalism of Barton's reflections. She emphasized the experiences of the Sea Islanders and generally told the story of the storm and its aftermath through their voices. Meditating on the progress of the county's freedpeople since emancipation, Mather remembered a moment in 1868, a quarter century earlier, that mirrored the humanitarian crisis following the 1893 hurricane. That year, a severe June drought had decimated the crops and left the freedpeople on the brink of famine. Searching for help, Mather had travelled to Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. Beecher was one of the nation's most prominent abolitionists, and his church was known as "a friend of the freedman." Mather had testified before a Sunday service, and, after hearing her impassioned plea, Beecher had implored the congregation to take up an offering for the starving people of the Sea Islands.[79]

Reflecting on the desperate circumstances of 1868, Mather rejoiced that the black

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[78] "Penn School Annual Report, 1898," Penn School Papers, SHC.

[79] Mather, *Storm Swept Coast*, 66-68.

Lowcountry had subsequently become a model rural community. "That hungry wail had long since ceased from these ever green shores," she wrote, "and we heard instead the busy clatter of phosphate mills, whistling engines and rushing cars—listened to the jubilant songs of a stalwart yeomanry as they converted the wilderness into a fruitful field—heard the joyous peals of Sabbath bells inviting well dressed worshipers into neat churches—heard too the merry school bell and saw hundreds of happy children trooping into cheerful school-rooms." Then this idyllic scene was shattered by the storm of 1893, and "twenty-five years of peace and prosperity have since rolled into eternity." The fields, schoolhouses, and churches built by the freedpeople, monuments to their "patient endeavor and worthy achievement," had been demolished, and hunger and deprivation once again gripped the region. While many were willing to call the Sea Island Storm a natural disaster or an act of God, Mather placed the resulting damage at the feet of the nation. "When we reflect how readily the country has appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars in war for the destruction of human life, and how unwilling it is to appropriate even a few thousands for the saving of life," she bemoaned, "we can but deplore human governments and pray for His speedy reign." [80]

While Mather and Towne saw Beaufort County's postbellum transformation as an optimistic period of growth that was reversed by the hurricane, many white southerners saw the 1893 Sea Island Storm as an occasion to mourn the demise of the slaveholding South. Elisabeth Carpenter Satterthwait, a native of New York, had moved to Beaufort County after the Civil War and married a white southerner. In 1898, she published a novel, *Son of the Carolinas: A Story of the Hurricane upon the Sea Islands*, which used

[80] Ibid., 64-65.

the 1893 storm as a critical turning point.[81]

The story of a Quaker woman from the North who moves to the Sea Islands and falls in love with the scion of a prominent Lowcountry family, *Son of the Carolinas* reflected several of the most prominent tropes of the burgeoning "Lost Cause" genre. Emphasizing sectional reconciliation and the romantic grandeur of the antebellum South, the novel consistently uses its African American characters to ventriloquize white nostalgia for slavery. Aunt Jeddy, a mammy figure who remains loyal to her owner's family following the Civil War, repeats timeworn judgments about the failures of postbellum black life, doing so in a heavy Gullah patois that gives the white-supremacist refrains a patina of authenticity. When asked about the black community after slavery, Aunt Jeddy replies as follows:

> "Too many ob der niggers 'roun' heyr loose da hair when de big gun shoot, an' go off rambling' like dat's dataway still, an' ad's chillun is getting sussed dan da is, every yeah; da donna' want to wuck, ad's no 'count 'tall; but ad's er gittin' tercificates ted teach aid fa' buff, an' den am de berry kin' dat won't wuck 'tall in service; say da ain't twine ted tote of' no buckra."

At other points in the novel, Aunt Jeddy challenges the wisdom of emancipation and rejects the notion of equality. Claiming that "de Lawd" had made whites, blacks, and Native Americans different, Aunt Jeddy criticizes white northerners who want blacks to embrace Victorian values but would never suggest that northern whites emulate the folkways of black southerners. Satterthwait viewed this contradiction as a fundamental failure in liberal racial ideology and maintained that black southerners possessed an unconscious, essential wisdom that had been preserved in slavery but was in danger of

[81] Elisabeth Satterthwait, *Son of the Carolinas*: *A Story of the Hurricane upon the Sea Islands* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemeus, 1898).

being destroyed by Reconstruction.[82]

According to Satterthwait's third-person narrator, the aftermath of the 1893 hurricane revealed widespread black immorality. "That thieving propensity which exists in the African and makes him rob the helpless traveler upon his own soil, still lies dormant in his nature and asserts itself when the white man or those of his own color are at his mercy," the narrator asserts. The only exceptions were the "good old negroes" who had stood by their employers. According to Satterthwait's narrator, the younger generation of blacks in Beaufort County, those who had come of age during Reconstruction, had to be convinced by their elders "to do as the white folks did, and go to work to clean up the town before an epidemic of fever set in." Whereas Laura Towne and Rachel Mather viewed the 1893 hurricane as an event that halted the progress of Reconstruction, Satterthwait's novel imagined the storm as a lens into the disorder and decay brought on by Reconstruction. In its happy ending of a marriage between the northern heroine and a southern man, *Son of the Carolinas* portrayed a storm-born New South that, after weathering the trials and tribulations of Reconstruction, would ultimately reconcile the regional differences between northern and southern whites and return black southerners to a subservient status.[83]

For many black Sea Islanders, the 1893 storm represented the end of Beaufort County as a place where the dreams of Reconstruction could still be pursued. In his 1930 study of St. Helena Island, Clyde Kiser, a graduate student at the University of North

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[82] Ibid. (quotation on 43-44). On North-South reunion literature, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), chap 2.

[83] Satterthwait, *Son of the Carolinas*; quotation on 245.

Carolina, interviewed dozens of men and women who had left the island. While those who had migrated North during the 1910s and 1920s cited employment opportunities, rural drudgery, and the spread of the boll weevil as the reasons for their departure, many of those who had left during the first decade of the twentieth century named the 1893 hurricane. "The storm left the Island desolate so far as crops were concerned," recalled Essie Roberts, a native of St. Helena. Roberts's husband suffered a traumatic head injury during the storm and was no longer able to provide for his family. Needing to find work, Roberts left St. Helena for Beaufort in 1893 and worked for the Red Cross in the immediate aftermath of the storm. When Kiser interviewed her, Roberts had moved to Savannah. Viola Ware, another migrant from St. Helena, echoed the regret expressed by Laura Towne and Rachel Mather. "The situation on the Island that caused me to leave more than anything else was the 1893 storm," she told Kiser. "We had been growing corn and cotton. Then here come 'long the storm. It blow down the little out-buildings, killed our turkeys and destroyed the crops. Water spread out all over our place. We had worked hard many years takin' care of the soil. Water just washed it all away." Ware's father fell ill after the storm, and at the age of ten she dropped out of school and went to work on a mainland plantation to help support her family. She eventually left the Lowcountry altogether, abandoning the Reconstruction-era dream that Beaufort County once represented.[84]

The 1893 Sea Island storm and the underfunded relief effort hastened the slow decline of a community that had once embodied the promise of emancipation and Reconstruction. Heralded as a lodestar for postbellum black progress, Beaufort County

[84] Kiser, *Sea Island to City*, 99-102.

foundered under neglect by the federal government and racism on the part of state officials. The Red Cross, which imagined itself an exemplar of disinterested scientific charity, could not escape the Lowcountry's racially entrenched past and, instead of modeling color-blind philanthropy, helped further embed notions of racial difference in the national discourse. Although some former abolitionists and northern writers tried to embrace the Lowcountry's Reconstruction-era legacy, rejecting both the anti-black narratives of Benjamin Tillman and the ostensibly disinterested approach of the Red Cross, their pleas for empathy, if not social justice, fell on deaf ears. As a result of the storm, the underfunded relief effort, and the relentless hostility of the state's Democrats, the once-thriving black community of Beaufort County, a place that had stood as a proud living monument to Reconstruction, now occupied a liminal space in the American imagination. The disaster that struck the Sea Islands was as much man-made as it was natural, and it exposed the particular vulnerabilities that black residents of the Lowcountry faced at the end of the nineteenth century.[85]

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[85] The recent turn toward questions of environment and landscape in African American life and culture has encouraged many scholars to explore how black Americans have responded to natural disaster. This wave of scholarship, much of which has been inspired by questions that emerged in response to the failures of local, state, and federal governments during and immediately after hurricane Katrina, tries to place earlier disasters in conversation with historical transformations in racial ideology, public policy, built environments, and labor. For examples, see Richard M. Mizelle, *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Lawrence N. Powell, "What Does American History Tell Us about Katrina and Vice Versa?," *Journal of American History* 94 (Winter 2007): 863-76; Clarence Taylor, "Hurricane Katrina and the Myth of the Post-Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Urban History* 35 (Summer 2009), 640-55; Joe William Trotter and Johanna Fernandez, "Hurricane Katrina: Urban History from the Eye of the Storm," *Journal of Urban History* 35 (Summer 2009): 607-13; Lynnell L. Thomas, "'Roots Run Deep Here': The Construction of Black New Orleans in Post-Katrina Tourism Narratives," *American Quarterly* 61 (Fall 2009): 749-68; Clyde Woods, "Katrina's World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source," *American Quarterly* 61 (Fall 2009): 427-53.

Chapter 3

"Help Me to Be a Farmer and I Will Not Be a Problem": St. Helena Island, Industrial Education, and the Legacy of the Port Royal Experiment, 1900-1930

Laura Matilda Towne bore witnessed one of the most radical transformations in American history. As participants in the Port Royal Experiment, Towne and her fellow "Gideonites" were at the vanguard of the destruction of slavery. Like other northern missionaries, Towne believed that freedom required the capacity for self-improvement and that the schoolhouse was central to the development of that capacity. In 1862, she founded the Penn School on St. Helena Island to help prepare the first generation of ex-slaves for the post-emancipation world. Unlike most of her peers, however, Towne remained in the Lowcountry after the Civil War; indeed, she continued to teach at the Penn School until her death in 1901.

In 1912, believing that the story of the Penn School would have particular resonance on the eve of the semi-centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, Rupert Holland, the son of one of Towne's close friends, published Towne's diary and personal letters. In his introduction to *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina*, *1862-1884*, Holland suggested that they "should be read as the story of a pioneer."[1] Himself a writer of historical fiction that traded in adventure stories of European pirates, British explorers, and early American colonists, Holland attempted to place Towne's work among the freedpeople of St. Helena in the same narrative framework.

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[1] Laura M. Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M Towne, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884*, ed. Rupert S. Holland (Boston: Riverside Press, 1912), ix-xviii (quotation on xiv).

While Holland had no trouble explaining Towne's educational outreach or racial uplift through this lens, her support for Reconstruction left him baffled. "The era of the 'carpetbagger'," Holland maintained, was a period of trouble, unrest, and "the machinations of greedy politicians." While that judgment reflected the consensus of most white northerners, including the professional historians of the time, it did not square with Towne's characterization of Reconstruction in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Rather than "scenes of unrest," Towne's letters and diary entries from the 1870s painted a picture of political fraud on the part of Beaufort County's Democrats and anti-black violence by Red-Shirt paramilitary groups that "redeemed" the state from Republican rule. Far from repudiating Reconstruction, Towne criticized both the racism of white southerners and the cowardice of northern Republicans who abandoned their black allies. While recognizing the "indignation and resentment" in Towne's Reconstruction-era letters, Holland made no attempt to side with her. At the same time, he decided not to censor Towne's writings because doing so would "erase the feelings of a stirring era" and thus "erase the human nature out of it."[2]

The book quickly became a lightning rod for criticism. On August 11, 1913, *The State*, South Carolina's newspaper of record, published a scathing review. Towne's writings displayed "absolute distrust in and contempt for the entire white population of the old Regime," wrote the paper's book critic. Far from an honest accounting of the violence deployed by the Red Shirts during Reconstruction and by the slaveowning class during the antebellum era, the book was interested only in slandering prominent Lowcountry families like the Elliotts, Fripps, Rhetts, and Burnwells by portraying them as "southern Caligulas." *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne* was biased and out of step

[2] Ibid., 5-6.

with mainstream opinion, the reviewer argued. Laura Towne was "a fanatical abolitionist," and the Penn School had become a cog in the machine of radical Republicanism. This perception of Reconstruction, which had been embraced by most white Americans by the beginning of the twentieth century, imagined Beaufort County as a haven for northern carpetbaggers and "educated negro rogues." The review concluded with a call for southerners to reject all such revisions of Reconstruction's memory: "So long as books like *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne* are published, so long must South Carolinians protest that the old Southern civilization was not 'half barbarian.'"[3]

Controversy over the legacy of Reconstruction made the Penn School and St. Helena Island contested sites. Following Towne's death in 1901, the Penn School began to depart from its previous emphasis on academic subjects and instead to embrace the tenets of "industrial education." The movement to implement industrial education in black schools, that is, to emphasize vocational skills like farming, carpentry, masonry, and the domestic arts, was more than a debate about curriculum and pedagogy. The architects of the industrial-school campaign, especially Booker T. Washington and Hollis B. Frissell, the presidents of Tuskegee and Hampton institutes, respectively, sought to erase Reconstruction from black memory. Hoping to gain the support of northern philanthropists and New South boosters, Washington, Frissell, and their allies explicitly repudiated Reconstruction. In his 1901 biography, *Up from Slavery*, Washington argued

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[3] Y.S., "Life-Time on St. Helena," Columbia (SC) *State*, August 11, 1913. On the "Lost Cause," the revanchist movement to redefine the legacy of the Confederacy in popular culture, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), chap. 8; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chaps. 7-9; K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), chap. 6.

that "the Reconstruction policy, so far as it related to my race, was in large measure, on a false foundation." He framed the industrial-school movement as an effort to counter the dangerous political ideologies fostered by Reconstruction. Keenly aware that white southerners saw any form of black education as a Trojan horse for black political empowerment, Washington argued that once vocational training rather than classical education became the focus, the schoolhouse would no longer serve as a counterpublic space. Tuskegee Institute, the industrial school he founded in Alabama in 1881, was thus more than an institution designed to help black students gain vocational skills. It signaled to both southern whites and northern philanthropists that it would bend the trajectory of black political life such that black southerners would not repeat "the mistakes of the Reconstruction period."[4]

The determination of industrial-education boosters to overturn the educational legacy of Reconstruction made the Penn School an ideal site for rural outreach. At the dawn of the twentieth century the Penn School, an institution that had been in the vanguard of black education following the Civil War, offered a new generation of idealistic black teachers an opportunity to reshape the educational terrain. Under the

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[4] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1901), 80. Although scholars have demonstrated that Washington secretly supported individuals and groups that were trying to defeat segregation and lynching, he also wielded his considerable influence to silence criticism of his accommodationist strategy of black uplift. See Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1956-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), and *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 6-10; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), chap. 3; Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), chap. 7; David Sehat, "The Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington," *Journal of Southern History* 73 (Summer 2007): 323-62; Raymond Smock, *Booker T. Washington: Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2009).

stewardship of the Hampton Institute, the industrial school in Hampton, Virginia, that Frissell headed, the transformation of the Penn School occurred on two fronts. First, new teachers, administrators, and board members were installed. Then the school's new leadership radically revised the classroom curriculum and dramatically expanded outreach activities on St. Helena by adding programs in agriculture, home economics, and public health.

The new teachers saw themselves as reformers stamping out the vestiges of antebellum black life that had been left unchallenged by Laura Towne and her staff. Hampton Institute produced an avalanche of publicity highlighting the achievements of the restructured Penn School. In the pages of Hampton's monthly magazine, *Southern Workman*, as well as other Progressive-era publications that made extensive use of photography, Hamptonites attempted to erase the Penn School's connection to Reconstruction. As a cadre of philanthropists, teachers, and agricultural reformers redefined the relationship of the Penn School to the residents of St. Helena Island and to the nation, they also trumpeted their accomplishments in Beaufort County as a Progressive-era model of racial harmony that addressed both national problems like the Great Migration and global issues related to African colonization.

The Penn School's Reconstruction Roots

Prior to its early twentieth-century transformation, the Penn School embodied a vision of progress rooted in the free-labor ideology that stood at the center of the Civil War-era Republican Party. Founded in 1862 on St. Helena Island, one of the largest Sea Islands along the coast of Beaufort County, the Penn School emerged as a result of

circumstances brought about by the Union occupation of Port Royal in November, 1861. With the arrival of Union forces, white planters fled to the mainland, leaving the Sea Islands' enslaved black majority in a liminal status, still legally in bondage but no longer under the control of the their former owners. Northern abolitionists immediately grasped the world-historical significance of the Union occupation and began to imagine how the region could be deployed in the assault on slavery. The Port Royal Experiment, as the wartime project came to be known, brought competing factions of northern free-labor advocates to the Sea Islands, all of whom saw an opportunity to make the region a model for what the postbellum South could be.[5]

Whereas some northerners came to Port Royal primarily for political or economic reasons, Laura Towne characterized her work in missionary terms. To her, the Penn School was more than an institution that would train former slaves to become workers in a free-market economy. Steeped in the abolitionist tradition, Towne saw the Penn School as playing a vital role in preparing the people of St. Helena for the challenges of freedom. In describing her own experience as a teacher at the Penn School, Charlotte Forten, a black abolitionist from Philadelphia who lived in the Sea Islands between 1862 and 1864, noted that she taught her students about Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution so as to inspire "courage and ambition, and high purpose." Northern visitors to the school, in addition to observing what the students were learning in their history,

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[5] The literature on wartime Reconstruction on the South Carolina Sea Islands constitutes some of the most important foundational scholarship in the social history of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The best monograph remains Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), and *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), offer rich portraits of the work of abolitionists during and after the Civil War.

grammar, and mathematics classes, also witnessed the singing of abolitionist songs like "John Brown's Body."[6]

For Towne, the Penn School's educational work was inextricably linked to the political struggle that began during Reconstruction. A frequent participant in local Republican meetings, Towne claimed that during Reconstruction the black residents of St. Helena were "awake to their rights" and took their duties as citizens seriously. She often highlighted the contributions of black congressman Robert Smalls. When hundreds of Red Shirts interrupted a Republican meeting in the town of Beaufort by storming through the streets on horseback, slapping women in the face, and "licking the hats" off men, it was Smalls who discouraged the outraged black citizens from responding with violence, even though many of them were armed.[7]

In the late 1870s and 1880s, as black political power waned in both Beaufort County and South Carolina as a whole, Towne refused to blame black corruption for Reconstruction's collapse. Instead, she called into question the extralegal tactics of the state's Democrats and the cowardice of national Republicans. In letters to northern friends, she described the horrors of "redemption," including an assassination attempt on the life of Robert Smalls and election fraud by the "drunks" and "opium addicts" who served as Democratic county commissioners. In 1876, when Rutherford B. Hayes agreed to abandon military occupation of the South in return for the U.S. presidency, Towne was

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[6] Orville Vernon Burton with Wilbur Cross, *Penn Center: A History Preserved* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 13-20; Elizabeth Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South: The Penn School Experiment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 10-15; entry for November 13, 1862, in *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten*, ed. Ray Allen Billington (New York: Dryden Press, 1953), 150.

[7] Entry for November 6, 1878, in *Letters and Diary of Laura Towne*, 285-88.

filled with "raging indignation." "I hope we have not another Buchanan in the President's chair," she wrote to a friend of the school. "[Hayes] is too easy and ready to think well of everybody. He won't believe in rebellion till he sees it again, I suppose." Although many white northerners had embraced white southerners' arguments for returning control of state and local government to the "best men," Towne remained skeptical of the argument that Democratic rule was synonymous with good government. "Nobody seems to remember that the South is only half-civilized and that the Negroes are nearly as well informed and a great deal more loyal than the whites," she wrote.[8]

Although Towne's views on black politics were no longer within the national Republican consensus, many Americans across the late nineteenth-century political spectrum continued to praise the work of the Penn School, as did foreign observers. When Sir George Campbell, a politician in the Scottish Liberal Party, came to Beaufort County in 1878 as part of a journey across the U.S. South to document American race relations, he visited St. Helena Island, where he met Towne at the Penn School. "Sir G. stopped at the school, and made some remarks at the church convention," Towne recorded in her diary. "He questioned me chiefly about the people, and their rate of progress." In writing about his experience, Campbell described the black residents of St. Helena as "very regular and good." "Besides the superior education given by the Northern ladies," he wrote, "state schools are kept up, but for want of funds are not very efficient, and sometimes are scarcely open more than two months in the year; but the people do a good deal for themselves in this way, and are getting on very well." Sarah Orne Jewett, a prominent writer of local-color stories about the postbellum South, visited St. Helena in 1888 with her friend and fellow writer Annie Fields. The two women stayed

[8] Entry for June 1, 1879, in ibid., 294-96.

with Towne for several days and left St. Helena deeply impressed by the impact of the Penn School. "[T]he result of [Towne's] work lay like a map before us," Jewett wrote. "Every step spoke to us of the sacrifice and suffering of humanity and of its endurance in the present time." Later that year, in a short story about a widowed southern woman on a once-glorious St. Helena plantation that now lay in ruins, Jewett mined her first-hand encounters with black progress in the Lowcountry to show how far the *ancien régime* had fallen. Another observer, General Rufus Saxton, who had served as military governor at Port Royal during the Civil War and then as assistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau for South Carolina, was even more attuned to the distance the Lowcountry's black residents had travelled since emancipation. In 1893, he declared that after thirty years of freedom, the people of St. Helena Island did not seem to be the same race they had been as slaves.[9] The sympathetic views of the Penn School espoused by Campbell, Jewett, and Saxton point to a resilient—albeit diminishing—strand of egalitarian thought that was connected to the legacy of Reconstruction. Its adherents continued to see the school as a beacon for the promise of postemancipation black life.

A growing number of white intellectuals, argued, by contrast, that institutions like the Penn School represented a misguided idealism. Carl Kelsey, a rural sociologist trained at the University of Pennsylvania, was unimpressed by black progress on St. Helena. The history of Reconstruction in South Carolina and Mississippi, he believed, demonstrated that the efforts of sympathetic northerners were "a folly of measures."

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[9] Sir George Campbell, *White and Black: The Outcome of a Visit to the United States* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1879), 157; Laura Towne, diary, November 17, 1878, in Penn School Papers, SHC; Sarah Orne Jewett quoted in Paula Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World, Her Work* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002), 193-94; Sarah Orne Jewett, "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation," *Atlantic Monthly* 62 (August 1888): 145-49; Rufus Saxton cited in Rossa Cooley, *School Acres* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1930), 60.

Arguing that the judgments of northern teachers who penned accounts of "dark-skinned Yankees" should be discounted, Kelsey reported that St. Helena's black farmers failed to paint their houses, left their livestock unfenced, and lacked the knowledge required to maximize the land's productive capacity. This failure, he argued, was a result of easy access to credit from a northern merchant and income from Union military pensions that discouraged many farmers from becoming more industrious. Niels Christensen, Jr., a prominent white resident of the town of Beaufort who was the son of a Union army veteran and an abolitionist teacher, echoed Kelsey's sentiment. "Left to himself," Christensen argued, "he [the black farmer] is a proved failure. Great possibilities lie before him which he neither sees nor has the ambition to seek." A proponent of industrial education and critic of Reconstruction, Christensen supported black disfranchisement because he believed that white rule had brought financial stability and good government.[10]

The late nineteenth-century debate over the efficacy of the Penn School was in effect a referendum on black progress in the post-Reconstruction rural South. For white elites who opposed what they saw as naïve racial romanticism, the black landowners of the Sea Islands demonstrated that black southerners lacked the capacity to become successful farmers. This criticism, which was rooted in notions of postbellum black regression, had been leveled against the Lowcountry since the beginning of Reconstruction. It was challenged by observers who saw the Lowcountry in general, and St. Helena Island in particular, as exemplars of black achievement. "A man's social standing on St. Helena is measured by the amount of his land and by his education,"

[10] Carl Kelsey, *The Negro Farmer* (Chicago: Jennings and Pye, 1903), 46-48; Niels Christensen, Jr., "The Negroes of Beaufort County," *Southern Workman* 32 (October 1903): 481-85.

reported one northern outsider, who added that "the aristocrats are those who have been to Penn School through the second or even third generation, and who cultivate the land which their fathers or grandfathers bought from the United States Government."[11]

At the turn of the century, Beaufort County was one of only six counties in the United States where blacks made up 90 percent or more of the total population. A full 70 percent of its black farmers were landowners.[12] Both sympathetic white northerners and African Americans across the nation saw this unique condition as a significant accomplishment by the county's black residents. In describing the community her students had created, Towne reported in 1879 that "[t]he majority of our pupils after graduation settle down as farmers, either inheriting their fathers' farms or buying land of their own." But their landowning status was only the beginning.

> They are now putting up four and six-roomed houses instead of the old time huts. Some of our graduates have become trusted clerks and employees in the Island stores, or the pastors, deacons and spiritual leaders of the churches. Others have passed the County examinations, and all over the County and in the country places between Beaufort and Charleston teachers from the Penn School easily find employment. Ten of the public schools on the island are taught by our graduates.[13]

While Towne certainly had an incentive to embellish the accomplishments of her school's graduates, the fact that so many outsiders also lauded the progress on St. Helena suggests that real gains had been made during the first four decades of the Penn School's existence.

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[11] Henry Wilder Foote, "The Penn School on St. Helena Island," *Southern Workman* 30 (May 1902): 263-70. On postbellum narratives of black regression, see above, Chapter 1.

[12] George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 101-2.

[13] Diary entry of October 13, 1879, in *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne,* 280.

The New Penn School and the Politics of Reconciliation

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the conservative counterrevolution in black education was knocking on the door of the Penn School. While Laura Towne continued to draw support from allies who were once involved in abolition and Reconstruction, the nationwide turn against racial equality severely diminished the coffers of antislavery organizations.[14] Meanwhile, the Penn School continued to depend on financial contributions from the few remaining freedmen's aid societies, including the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the nation's first abolitionist society, and the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association.[15] As the school's financial difficulties mounted, Towne refused to take a salary and used outside donations to pay her teachers and keep the school tuition-free. "Our school exists on charity, and charity that is weary," she fretted. Although the school could have transferred control to the state of South Carolina and become a public school, that choice would have entailed not only a loss of autonomy, but also an unforgivable acquiescence to mounting white supremacist forces. "If turned over to the state, no northern colored person has a chance of being appointed teacher of a state school," Towne wrote in 1884.[16] Moreover, public control might well have placed the school in an even more precarious financial situation, because Democratic-appointed officials would probably have left the Penn School underfunded.

In the 1890s, as Towne's health began to fail, her friends and family sought new benefactors. Then, in 1900, Towne's niece, Helen Carnan Jenks, turned to Hampton

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[14] McPherson, *Abolitionist Legacy*, 35-80; Burton, *Penn Center*, 35.

[15] Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 24-28.

[16] Towne quoted in Burton, *Penn Center*, 35-37.

president Hollis Frissell. Since Frissell headed one of the nation's most prominent institutions of black education, Jenks probably hoped that he could connect the Penn School to the northern philanthropic organizations that were taking an interest in black education. The General Education Board (GEB), for example, which was funded by an endowment from oil baron John D. Rockefeller, had recently made it part of its mission to fund black schools in the South that embraced industrial education. The Penn School, Jenks believed, could be a candidate for GEB support. "I know of no place which presents such excellent opportunities for a certain sort of experiment station work among the Negroes, as does this island," she told Frissell.[17]

Frissell initially expressed skepticism about bringing the Penn School into the Hampton network. It was "far behind the times" in its approach to educating black students, he told Jenks.[18] Several members of the Penn School's board of trustees expressed the same concern. Henry Wilder Foote, a Unitarian minister from Boston, commented on the school's failure to embrace vocational training. "There is not a mechanic worthy [of] the name on the island," he asserted. By developing a robust industrial program, he argued, the school could grow in size and provide well-trained industrial teachers for the region's public schools. The Penn School's would-be reformers also questioned the quality of the academic training it offered. Helen Jenks rued the fact that the students were put through a gauntlet of academic courses, including American

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[17] Helen Carnan Jenks to Hollis Burke Frissell, April 14, 1900, Hollis Burke Frissell Papers, Special Collections, Hampton University, Hampton, VA. The experiment station was a satellite of the late nineteenth-century land-grant college that focused on bringing scientific techniques to farmers. See Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

[18] Frissell to Helen Carnan Jenks, April 18, 1900, quoted in Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 26.

history, literature, and mathematics; she was convinced that they "memorize their lessons instead of actually learning the principles which underlie what they are taught." Changing the curriculum would not be simple. After closely inspecting the school's day-to-day operations, Frissell concluded that Ellen Murray, who had succeeded Laura Towne as principal, had to be replaced. "She has no conception of what the modern industrial school should mean," he maintained.[19]

Following Towne's death in 1901, Frissell and the trustees began to transform both the organizational structure and the mission of the Penn School. First, they had it incorporated under a new name, "Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School."[20] This small but important change signaled that the school would no longer emphasize academic training. Instead, it would now focus on accommodating its students to life in the rural South. The trustees slowly stripped away Ellen Murray's power to make administrative decisions and surrounded her with new Hampton-friendly administrators. Like the other second-generation private industrial schools for black students that emerged at the turn of the century, the reconstituted Penn School and its mission of racial uplift were predicated upon the work of black teachers who had been trained at either Hampton or Tuskegee. This generation of teachers, almost all of whom had been born after the collapse of Reconstruction and had witnessed the meteoric rise of Booker T. Washington, saw themselves as the vanguard of racial progress. Rossa Cooley, a northern white woman who was selected to succeed Ellen Murray as principal of the Penn School,

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[19] Henry Wilder Foote, "The Penn School on St. Helena Island," *Southern Workman* 30 (May 1902): 266; Robert D. Jenks, "Confidential Statement of the Conditions at Penn School," n.d., Penn School Papers, SHC; Jenks and Frissell quoted in Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 30-32, 34.

[20] Penn School Charter, 1902, Penn School Papers, SHC.

argued that once the Hampton graduates had lived in communities like St. Helena long enough, their missionary spirit would "make their schools shine as lights in the black centres of the South." According to Cooley, the Hamptonites would lead to St. Helena's 6,000 black residents "becoming up-lifted." What is more, she wrote, "the Sea Island boys and girls are developing a spirit of struggle and service for their own people."[21]

The Hampton-trained teachers viewed the black residents of St. Helena Island as morally and socially stunted, and therefore in desperate need of their missionary outreach. Helen Lou James, a 1901 graduate of Hampton, believed that forty years after emancipation, the people of St. Helena continued to exist in "ignorance, destitution and depravity." P. W. Dawkins, the first superintendent of the school's new industrial department, refused to send his own children to the Penn School because he thought the teachers who had received their normal training in the nineteenth century were incompetent.[22]

Not surprisingly, James, Dawkins, and the other Hampton-trained teachers often found themselves at odds with, if not outright antagonistic toward, St. Helena's black residents. This tension was rooted in the "civilizing" mission to which black and Native American students were subjected at Hampton. More than teachers, the graduates of Hampton were expected to be missionaries for Hampton's vision of racial uplift. Once indoctrinated, they were to go to non-white communities and not only teach industrial values, but also embody industrial discipline. In the words of Hampton's founder, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, "A teacher does more by virtue of what he is than of what he says;

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[21] Rossa Cooley, "Work among St. Helena Negroes," *Vassar Miscellany* (December 1914): 10.

[22] Helen Lou James, "The Need for the Penn School on St. Helena Island, " *Southern Workman* 37 (February 1908): 90-92; Dawkins's views cited in Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 42, 62.

the most powerful constructive influence is indirect."[23] In this respect, the teachers who arrived on St. Helena in the first decade of the twentieth century were participants in a particular strain of the politics of respectability. A set of public practices that mirrored Victorian notions of decorum, the politics of respectability was used by black elites to enact and enforce their own vision of racial uplift, as well as by members of the black working class to imbue traditionally subservient jobs with dignity and make assertions of self-respect in the face of white supremacy.[24]

In order to reshape the values of both students and older generations on St. Helena, the new Penn School instituted a variety of community-outreach programs. When P. W. Dawkins arrived on the island in 1902, he was charged with holding annual farmers' conferences across Beaufort County. Initially popularized by land-grant colleges during the late nineteenth century, farmers' conferences were a critical part of the community outreach undertaken by black industrial schools. Both Hampton and Tuskegee held annual conferences that attracted national attention. Beyond offering

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[23] Armstrong quoted in James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 47.

[24] The term "the politics of respectability" was coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Since the inception of the concept, historians of African American life, especially African American women's history, have debated whether the strategy, especially when used by members of the black working class, entailed a sort of "false consciousness" imposed from above or a grassroots ideology that arose out of the hopes and fears of working people. On the politics of respectability in early twentieth-century black life, see, in addition to Higginbotham's book, Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), prologue, chaps. 4-5; Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

agricultural training, the farmers' conferences also offered simple, homespun lessons on better living. Some of these lessons were captured in a ten-page pamphlet entitled "St. Helena Farmers' Conference Don't's" that included such injunctions as "Don't go to town to spend a quarter when your time at home is worth a dollar" and "Don't try to eat all you raise but try to raise all you eat."[25]

The Penn School's ventures into community outreach were not limited to farming. In 1902, Rossa Cooley and fifty of the island's older black women began to meet periodically for classes in sewing and cooking. By 1904, Cooley was teaching a community class every Wednesday evening to discuss hygiene and emergency home nursing. York Bailey, a Penn School graduate who subsequently attended Hampton Institute and Howard University Medical School, returned to St. Helena in 1911, married a Penn School teacher who was a Hampton graduate, and for fifty years practiced as the island's only physician. In addition, Hampton-trained women on the Penn School's staff brought a number of public health programs to the island. The island's midwives were gradually replaced by a Hampton-trained nurse who operated out of the Penn School. Domestic-science teachers who doubled as home-extension agents surveyed the homes of islanders and instructed families in modern homemaking, including dietary requirements, childrearing practices, and canning fruits and vegetables.[26]

These incursions into the everyday lives of St. Helena's residents bloated the Penn School's operating budget. By the end of World War I, its expenditures were among the highest of all private schools for black children in the South. While the General

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[25] "St. Helena Don't's," n.d., Port Royal Agricultural School folder, Christensen Family Papers, SCL.

[26] Rossa Cooley, *Homes of the Freed* (New York: New Republic, 1926), 82-87.

Education Board shouldered a majority of the costs of the expensive outreach programs, the school also charged tuition for the first time in its history. While the fee was only $5 per year and students could work on the school farm to pay 80 percent of it, the other dollar was a burden for families who seldom handled money and whose financial transactions were generally filtered through crop loans and store credit.[27]

The Penn School remained committed to these expansive—and expensive—outreach programs because they provided both Hampton and the General Education Board with valuable examples of industrial school success. In 1909, the Penn School was able to expand its outreach efforts even further by becoming a demonstration farm for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Cooperative Extension. The USDA had become involved in demonstration work in the South with the passage of the 1890 Morrill Act but had largely avoided black communities. However, as Hampton and Tuskegee slowly increased their prestige in the eyes of northern white philanthropists, the General Education Board stepped in to help fund the work of black extension agents, but only if they operated out of black institutions and worked exclusively with black farmers. In 1909, Joshua Blanton, a graduate of Hampton who had completed both academic and industrial programs and began working at the Penn School in 1904, was tapped by Frissell to oversee the first USDA farm demonstration for black farmers in Beaufort County. His appointment was greeted with considerable fanfare by the industrial-school movement.[28]

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[27] Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 66-72; Cooley, *School Acres*, 40.

[28] Cooley, *School Acres*, 27-28; Joshua Blanton, "One Man's Life Story," *Southern Workman* 23 (August 1923): 404.

St. Helena's black residents initially opposed Blanton's efforts to reform the island's farming practices. Blanton and his wife Linnie Lumpkins, also a Hampton graduate and Penn School teacher, both commanded tremendous respect within the Penn School and Hampton Institute communities, Blanton was received with suspicion by islanders who were not affiliated with the school. Cloaked in federal authority as an agent of the USDA, he nevertheless faced considerable resistance as he tried to change the hearts and minds of the island's older generation. Still a young man, Blanton was considered "a mere boy" by men who had come of age during the late nineteenth century. When instructed to follow the USDA mandate that each demonstration-farm plot be at least one acre in size, these established farmers expressed "distrust and skepticism." Their resistance forced Blanton to revise the USDA guidelines by beginning demonstration work on the island with half-acre plots. This change eventually paid off, and during his tenure as a USDA farm-extension agent, Blanton saw corn yields on St. Helena increase from sixteen bushels per acre to thirty-five. Writing in 1923, Jackson Davis, a white leader in the movement to build schools for southern black children, framed Blanton's work as a fight against the entrenched ignorance of the island's black elite.[29]

The clergymen on St. Helena Island, as in many other rural black communities, represented a leadership class that had come to prominence during Reconstruction and embraced the sort of classical education that industrial-school advocates saw as out of step with the needs of the New South. Blanton, who through pluck and resilience convinced St. Helena's religious leaders to embrace scientific farming, not only garnered

[29] Seaman Knapp to Rossa Cooley, May 25, 1909, Penn School Papers, SHC; Jackson Davis, "The Negro in Country Life," *Southern Workman* 41 (Spring 1923): 20-22.

a victory for the Penn School that could be advertised in the pages of the *Southern Workman*, but also convinced some Lowcountry ministers to preach the industrial-school gospel. "All made two and three times as much as they had ever raised before, and one, Rev. D. C. Washington, made over fifty bushels on his acre," reported Jackson Davis. "When he got his fifty-bushel button from the United States Department of Agriculture he wore it proudly on his coat, and the following Sunday he preached an impressive sermon on 'Opening the Eyes of the Blind.' He said that he had been farming in blindness for thirty years, but this young man had come and opened his eyes, and now he could not only see how to raise corn, but also a great light and hope had come into his life for all the people on the Island."[30]

While the Penn School was the most notable force in the campaign for black uplift in Beaufort County, the Lowcountry was dotted with institutions designed to provide industrial and agricultural training for black children and black farm families. In 1867, during Reconstruction, Rachel Crane Mather, a white woman from Massachusetts, had established a school for freedpeople in the town of Beaufort; fifteen years later, it was brought under the auspices of the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society and became a boarding school that offered normal and industrial education for black girls. In 1898, Elizabeth Wright, a black graduate of Tuskegee, founded the Voorhees Institute in neighboring Bamberg County; she sought to create a small-scale replica of Booker T. Washington's famous vocational school.[31]

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[30] Davis, "The Negro in Country Life," 20-21.

[31] Thomas Jesse Jones, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Public Education of Colored People in the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), 479-85.

An institution that gained considerable influence in Beaufort County during the first two decades of the twentieth century was the Port Royal Agricultural School. Abbie Holmes Christensen, the school's founder, had longstanding ties to the abolitionist movement. Her parents had moved the family to the Sea Islands during the Civil War to participate in the Port Royal Experiment. After being educated in the North, Abbie Holmes returned to Beaufort, where she married Niels Christensen, a Danish immigrant who had served as an officer in a black regiment during the Civil War. Committed to the ideals of Reconstruction, Abbie Holmes Christensen envisioned her school on Port Royal Island as offering black children an opportunity to succeed in the New South. For her, the path led through industrial education. "This school is not endeavoring to furnish a higher education that would carry individuals away from their homes," a 1905 pamphlet explained, "but to provide enough practical education, and cultivate habits of cleanliness, thrift, and industry, to enable the average child to go back to his home fitted to make a good living off the land." Unlike the leaders of the Penn School, however, Abbie Christensen employed African Americans in leadership positions and invited local black leaders to join the school's board of trustees. The school's first two principals, Edinburgh Mahone and Joseph Shanklin, were both Tuskegee graduates, and three of the four men who served on the school's initial board of trustees were African American.[32]

Abbie Christensen's racial liberalism created a number of high-profile enemies for the Port Royal Agricultural School. Cole Blease, South Carolina's Democratic governor, regularly issued attacks. In one instance, he savaged the school for associating

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[32] Monica Maria Tetzlaff, *Cultivating a New South: Abbie Holmes Christensen and the Politics of Race and Gender* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 165-66, 168; 1905 Port Royal Agricultural School pamphlet, 1905, Christensen Family Papers, SCL.

with Booker T. Washington. "I can hardly believe this," Blease exclaimed. "that white people, would, in South Carolina, give a negro as a reference." Like his ideological predecessor Benjamin Tillman, Blease saw the Lowcountry's comparatively moderate white elites as threats to white supremacy. Abbie Christensen's son, Niels Christensen, Jr., was also a target, and Blease regularly assailed the reputation of his father for having served in a black regiment.[33]

Such attacks, in addition to illuminating the ubiquity of white-supremacist rhetoric in South Carolina politics, demonstrated the limits of what was possible for the Port Royal Agricultural School. Buckling under the pressure of his critics, Niels Christensen, Jr., distanced himself from his mother's idealism. A moderate insofar as he was willing to use the pages of his newspaper, the Beaufort *Gazette*, to oppose lynching, he decried Reconstruction and regularly voiced support for black disfranchisement. "Educate your negroes to be moral, self supporting and intelligent," he warned his mother in 1901. "Then will be the time to discuss the admissibility of allowing them the suffrage, then and surely not till then will the whites perhaps be willing to think of allowing them to vote and hold office." Christensen, who was then a state senator, recognized that his mother's school, despite being entirely conventional by national standards, was freighted with the Lowcountry's legacy of northern-led educational experiments that had fostered black political empowerment.[34] The Port Royal Agricultural School, like the Penn

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[33] Tetzlaff, *Cultivating a New South*, 164.

[34] Niels Christensen, Jr., to Abbie Holmes Christensen, November 11, 1901, Christensen Family Papers, SCL. On the son's opposition to lynching and support for disfranchisement, see Tetzlaff, *Cultivating a New South*, 186-87.

School, inevitably served not only as a modern experiment in agricultural and industrial education, but also as a reminder of the promise and the perils of Reconstruction.

Remembering Emancipation and Forgetting Reconstruction

As the nation prepared to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the events that had brought about the end of slavery were increasingly woven into contemporary debates about black progress. More than any other moment in nineteenth-century black history, emancipation remained in national memory during the first decades of the twentieth century, but as disfranchisement shifted the focus away from the achievement of black political rights and citizenship, commemorations assumed a more conservative tone. By the 1910s, discussions of emancipation were intersecting with academic debates about "the race problem" and African Americans' alleged lack of progress since the end of slavery. Once at the center of African American public culture, the traditions of celebrating emancipation and honoring the soldiers who had given their lives in defense of the Union began to wane.[35]

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[35] Although there is some difference of opinion as to precisely when Decoration Day and Emancipation Day ceremonies began to decrease in size and fade from the black political vocabulary, historians of African American memory and Civil War reconciliation all show that by the second decade of the twentieth century, the two major commemorations of emancipationist memory no longer held the same importance in black public culture. On Emancipation Day, Decoration Day, and other public commemorations of African American memory, see Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History* 21 (March 1995): 295-346; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 64-97; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 62-94; Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Thavolia Glymph, "'Liberty Dearly Bought': The Making of Civil War Memory in Afro-American Communities in the South," in *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, ed. Charles M. Payne and Adam Green (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 111-40; Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), chap. 7.

As the nation's most visible site of emancipationist memory, Beaufort County had become a secular mecca for both black and white Americans seeking to reflect on the meaning of slavery's destruction. At their peak in the 1890s, Beaufort's Decoration Day observances attracted crowds of up to 8,000 people. Because of its prominence in national memory, Beaufort County could consistently attract major speakers from the North who were eager to rhapsodize about the meaning of the Civil War. Although attendance dropped as black political power collapsed in the twentieth century, the county's black residents continued to fight for the memory of emancipation. As late as 1920, both black and white speakers addressed audiences at the national cemetery in Beaufort, but the attendees were fewer in number and the observance was now called Memorial Day. After 1921, the ceremonies were organized by the American Legion and became so depoliticized and saccharine that the few remaining Union veterans shared the stage with members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This arrangement appears to have satisfied no one, and beginning in 1928, the occasion was segregated, with whites celebrating Memorial Day and African Americans from the Sea Islands, Savannah, Charleston, and Augusta continuing to make the pilgrimage to Beaufort to observe Decoration Day well into the 1930s.[36]

The Penn School's fiftieth anniversary in 1912 was a moment when Beaufort County once again became a highly visible site of emancipationist memory; it was also an opportunity to tout a conservative vision of postbellum black progress. The celebration, which took place on St. Helena Island on April 12 and 13, attracted more than 1,000 people, some coming from as far away as Philadelphia, New York, and

[36] Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 83-84.

Boston. Its most public component was a commemoration of emancipation on the Sea Islands. The first day's ceremonies, called "People's Day" in the official program, emphasized the role of the area's black residents in shaping emancipation. The day began with a procession of students and graduates of the Penn School into the school's main courtyard. They were followed by veterans of the 1st South Carolina Infantry, which had been organized at Port Royal in 1862 and was the first Union regiment composed entirely of former slaves. (See Figure 3.1.) Although a thunderstorm threatened to cancel the

Figure 3.1. Veterans of 1st South Carolina Volunteers being honored at Penn School 50th Anniversary Celebration, April 12, 1912
Source: Penn School Papers, SHC

festivities, the captivated crowd heard Beaufort County's Civil War hero and Reconstruction-era congressman Robert Smalls speak about his daring capture of *The Planter*. The high point of the day was a reenactment of the public reading of the Emancipation Proclamation that had taken place on Port Royal Island on January 1, 1863.

As in 1863, members of the crowd rose in unison and sang "My Country 'tis of Thee."[37]

The semi-centennial's second day moved away from celebrating emancipation and instead focused on the changes that the industrial-school movement had brought to St. Helena Island. As part of the day's events, a new building for training boys in carpentry, mechanics, and masonry was opened. Named in honor of Francis R. Cope, a founder of the Philadelphia Freedmen's Relief Association and longtime contributor to the school during the Laura Towne years, the Cope Industrial Building was the first major addition to the Penn School campus. Presented by three Hampton graduates who had become full-time teachers at the Penn School, the building represented a financial and symbolic triumph for the school's new industrial direction. Whereas the Penn School had entered the twentieth century struggling to raise funds, the new building demonstrated that the institution had become a thriving model of southern harmony and racial progress. Samuel Chiles Mitchell, president of the University of South Carolina, made precisely this point in his keynote address:

> I want to tell you how we ought to live together you and I, your children and mine. I have made up my mind. . . . my heart cannot grow on hatred, neither can yours. We have got the greatest educational experiment in the world and I am glad to have a share in it. That is what I like and I mean to see that every child of the million and a half in South Carolina shall have the best chance to develop every faculty that God has given it.

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[37] "Grace House's Unpublished Account of Penn School Fiftieth Anniversary," Penn School Papers, SHC; Grace House, "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Penn School," *Southern Workman* 41 (May 1912): 317-22; "First School for Negroes Celebrates Its Fiftieth Anniversary on St. Helena Island," New York *Times,* April 21, 1912; "Penn School Celebrates Fiftieth Anniversary: Occasion of Joy for All—General Robert Smalls Speaks," Baltimore *Afro American*, May 11, 1912. In describing the performance of black historical memory, particularly parades of soldiers, W. Fitzhugh Brundage argues that "their parades became 'mobile living-history exhibits' that traced the evolution of African Americans from slaves to proud and progressive citizens." See Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 75. On the performance of black southern memory in parades and pageants, see also Blight, *Race and Reunion,* 67-70; Clark, *Defining Moments*, 12-32.

In Mitchell's account, the Penn School represented an educational model that South Carolina could present to the entire nation. Like Niels Christensen, Jr., Mitchell was regularly demonized by Cole Blease and the reactionary wing of the state's Democratic Party for supporting gradual racial progress. The Cope Industrial Building was therefore more than a victory for industrial education. It embodied a vision of reconciliation that necessitated the forgetting of Reconstruction so that white northerners, white southern moderates, and black industrial-school advocates could pursue a racial harmony unburdened by the weight of the past.[38]

Rupert Holland's publication of Laura Towne's diary and letters in 1912 was part of the effort to use the Penn School's fiftieth anniversary to reshape its place in national memory. In addition to removing potentially offensive references to prominent white southerners, Holland accompanied the text with photographs of the school's fiftieth anniversary celebration. The full-page images of well-dressed students were, perhaps not coincidentally, placed among Towne's letters that dealt with Reconstruction. (See Figure 3.2.) Holland also provided photographs of the new industrial arts building. By showcasing its purposes, he was apparently making a strained effort to blur the boundary between the Penn School's current industrial incarnation and its more quixotic origins. Having infiltrated the school's past with anachronistic images from the present, Holland sent complimentary copies of *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne* to the nation's most prestigious intellectual institutions, including Ivy League universities and their coordinate

[38] "The Anniversary Year," April 13, 1912, Penn School Papers, SHC. On the role of white elites in "progressive" reforms of the southern racial order, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*: *Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chap. 5; Kimberly Johnson, *Reforming Jim Crow: Southern Politics and State in the Age before Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), chap. 6.

Figure 3.2. Elementary School Girls Prepare for the Penn School's 50th Anniversary Celebration, April 12, 1912
Source: Penn School Papers, SHC

women's colleges, major black industrial schools, elite literary periodicals, and the leading liberal newspapers of New England, New York, and the mid-Atlantic.[39]

Visual Narratives and the Penn School in the Public Sphere

Holland's placement of twentieth-century photographs in Laura Towne's nineteenth-century diary did more than signal to the nation that an industrial-school curriculum had successfully taken hold on St. Helena Island. It also demonstrated that visual narratives were playing an increasingly critical role in the cultural politics of racial uplift and black progress. Between 1880 and 1920, Hampton Institute disseminated countless images of black teachers, black students, and black schools into the public

[39] Holland, ed., *Letters and Diary of Laura M.* Towne, 300; "List of individuals and institutions that received complimentary copies of *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*," May 1912, Penn School Papers, SHC.

sphere.[40] The Penn School's fiftieth anniversary was preceded by a fundraising pamphlet that cleverly joined the school's importance in memory of the Civil War to the innovations generated by the Hampton takeover. "Founded at a critical moment of the National History by two earnest women," the pamphlet began, "maintained through many years by their devotion and heroic self-sacrifice, brought to a stage of increasing efficiency under its present management free of the handicaps of the degrading influences of any large city, the school approaches its fiftieth anniversary with the hope of still greater usefulness." The six-page pamphlet, which was designed to solicit $50,000 in donations in honor of the school's semi-centennial, emphasized that the countryside offered black Americans the greatest prospects for progress.[41]

A visual narrative of black students finding meaning in rural life was a recurrent theme in the school's promotional literature. A 1909 postcard to potential donors featured a photograph of a male student hoeing a field and the plea "Help Me to be a Farmer and I Will Not Be a Problem" emblazoned in bold red letters. (See Figure 3.3.). In another fundraising postcard, a photograph of two female students washing a window appeared above the caption "Earning School Fees." Yet another used a photograph of Hampton-trained teacher Linnie Lumpkins Blanton delivering instruction to a circle of attentive students reading under a tree draped with Spanish moss; the

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[40] On Hampton's use of photographs, see Ray Saperstein, "Picturing Dunbar's Lyrics," *African American Review* 41 (Summer 2007): 240-42.

[41] "50th Anniversary of the Penn Normal Industrial and Agricultural School," Penn School Papers, SHC.

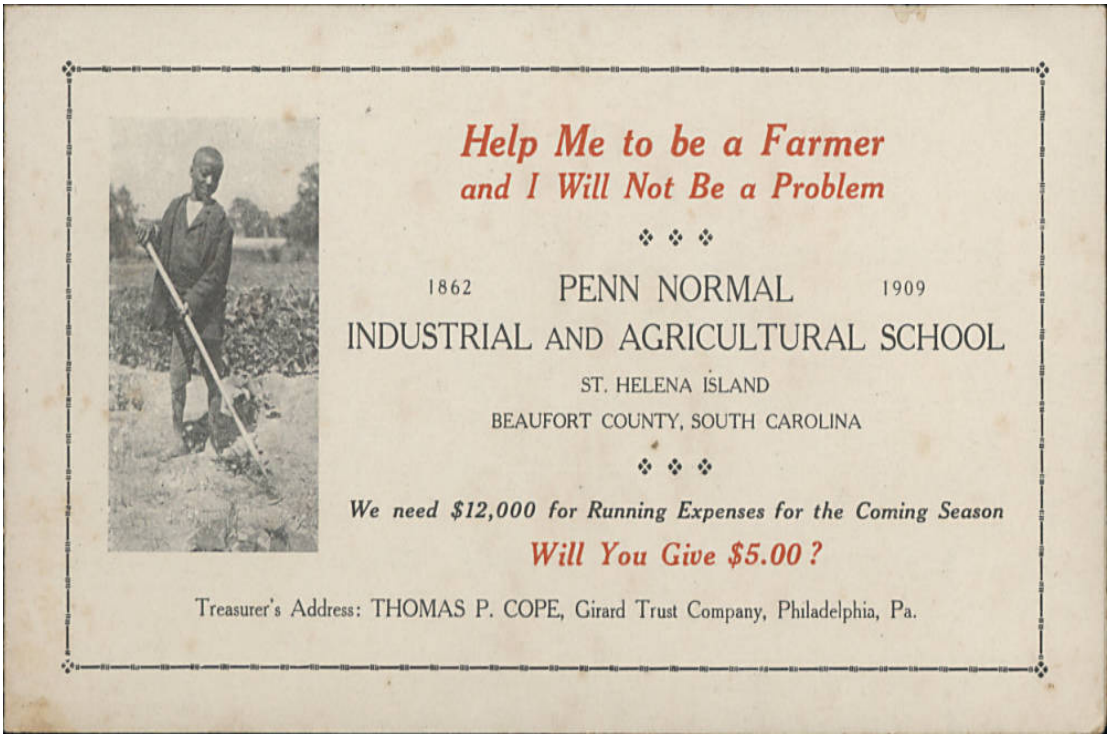

Figure 3.3. Promotional postcard for the Penn School, 1909.
Source: Penn School Papers, SHC.

caption was "Primary Class at Work on a Warm Day."[42] The idea that industrial education was a bulwark against the social maladies of urban life no doubt appealed to elite white northerners who travelled in progressive circles and saw the early twentieth-century urban crisis as a need for order.

With photography becoming an increasingly important tool of progressive reform, Hampton sought to disseminate images of black students and black schools that would resonate with middle-class white audiences. The most popular vehicle for distributing these images was the *Southern Workman*, Hampton's monthly periodical. Established in 1872 as a magazine devoted to "the interests of the undeveloped races," the *Southern Workman* was initially designed to document the folkways of black southerners and

[42] "Help Me to be a Farmer" postcard, 1909, "Earning School Fees" postcard, 1909, and "Primary Class at Work on a Warm Day" postcard, 1909, all in Penn School Papers, SHC.

Native Americans through local-color writing and contributions from the nascent fields of sociology and anthropology. However, as the number of Hampton graduates reached a critical mass and they assumed positions at more and more schools across the South, Hampton's power to dictate the direction of black education increased exponentially. Accordingly, the *Southern Workman* began to publish essays that promoted Hampton's industrial-education platform to the nation. The articles about the Penn School, which were generally written by Hampton-trained teachers, often included carefully curated photographs of students engaged in both academic and vocational lessons. Their inclusion allowed Hampton to reframe the story of the Penn School through the power of the photograph.[43] Inextricably linked to the rise of photographic journalism in magazines like *National Geographic* and *Survey Graphic* and in such best-selling books as *How the Other Half Lives*, the new visual narrative of black education emphasized racial and regional boundaries while also giving progressive reformers new ways of imagining social work.[44]

The visual narratives propagated by Hampton extended beyond the pages of the *Southern Workman*. Leigh Richmond Miner, director of Hampton's Department of Applied Art, used staged images of black southerners to promote the dignity of

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[43] For examples of the *Southern Workman*'s use of photography to create a visual narrative of the Penn School, see J. E. Davis, "A Unique People's School," *Southern Workman* (April 1914): 217-29; J. E. Davis, "Hampton at Penn School," *Southern Workman* (February 1917): 81-89; Francis R. Cope, Jr., "Service to Penn School," *Southern Workman* (November 1917): 603-9.

[44] On the rise of photojournalism and realism, see David Leviatin, "Framing the Poor: The Irresistibility of *How the Other Half Lives*," in *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*, ed. David Leviatin (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 1-50; Emily Oswald, "Imagining Race: Illustrating the Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar," *Book History* 9 (2006): 213-30; Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Susan Schulten, "The Making of the *National Geographic*: Science, Culture, and Expansionism," *American Studies* 41 (Spring 2000): 5-29.

agricultural work and rural life. Miner's work first appeared in Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1901 collection of dialect poems, *Candle-Lightin' Time*. The photographs, which were commissioned by Dunbar's publisher, borrowed from existing tropes of the Old South plantation and emphasized continuities between black life during slavery and in the early twentieth century. Intended to complement the dialect on the page, Miner's photographs provided readers with visceral images that contrasted radically with life in urban America.[45] The fact that Miner was commissioned to provide photographs for three more Dunbar books suggests that his picturesque images of southern black life contributed to their financial success.[46]

In photographs taken during two visits to St. Helena Island, one in 1900 and the other in 1923, Miner gradually began to break from simply updating the Old South plantation trope, instead moving toward a new twentieth-century aesthetic. The St. Helena photographs were taken with cumbersome cameras whose lengthy exposures required their subjects to pose for several minutes. Miner thus captured the men and women of St. Helena in highly staged portraits that nevertheless exhibited considerable "sensitivity and sympathy." "There is no evidence of abjectness or despair in any of his subjects," observes John H. McGrail, a professor of photography who restored many of

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[45] Oswald, "Imagining Race," 215-28; Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Candle-Lightin' Time* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1901).

[46] Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Lil' Gal* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1904), *Howdy, Honey, Howdy* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1905), and *Joggin' Erlong* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1906).

the photographs. “Despite the evident poverty prevalent on the island,” McGrail writes, “the pictures reflect determination and confidence.”[47]

Miner’s photographs, which showed teachers in the classroom, children at play, and men and women at work in the fields, captured a quiet dignity in the black southern experience that had not been present in the visual culture of the late nineteenth century.

Figure 3.4. Leigh Richmond Miner photograph of a Penn School classroom, 1923
Source: Penn School Papers, SHC

Underlying the sympathetic images of rural life was a depiction of the Penn School as a centripetal force holding St. Helena Island together. It appears that Miner created these

[47] John H. McGrail, “An Appreciation,” in *Face of the Island: Leigh Richmond Miner’s Photographs of St. Helena Island,* ed. Edith M. Dabbs (New York: Grossman, 1971), 1-14 (quotation on 7). The glass negatives of Miner’s photographs were discovered in the 1960s and published by Edith M. Dabbs with the help of McGrail. While some of the images were not seen until they appeared in Dabbs’s book, several were used in Penn School promotional materials or in articles by Penn School principal Rossa Cooley. See, for example, Rossa Cooley, “Aunt Jane and Her People: The Real Negroes of the Sea Islands,” *Outlook* 90 (October 1908): 425-32, and “America’s Sea Islands,” *Outlook* 131 (April 1919): 741.

images to "sell" the Penn School and the industrial-school ideal to the nation. A 1916 *Southern Workman* article mentioned that Miner had travelled to several of the most prominent black industrial schools across the South, including Tuskegee, the Penn School, the People's School at Mt. Meigs in Montgomery County, Alabama, and the Calhoun Colored School in Lowndes County, Alabama. During these visits, Miner not only took several standard photographs, but also used a "moving picture" camera to create a film about the black industrial-school movement that would be used to promote the Hampton model of education.[48]

The Great Migration and the 1920s Rural Crisis

The industrial-school movement claimed that its educational program offered a modern template for the rural South that would preserve the dignity of agricultural work, but the collapse of global cotton prices in the 1920s, declining agricultural wages, and the spread of the boll weevil decimated the region's economy. These material conditions, together with the legal and extralegal violence inflicted by the Jim Crow order, led growing numbers of black southerners to vote with their feet against life in the rural South. The Great Migration, which was the largest wave of rural outmigration in the nation's history, made clear the discrepancy between the promise of the New South and

[48] "Hampton Workers," *Southern Workman* 45 (December 1916): 702. For photographs Miner took on St. Helena, see Photograph Album 86, Penn School Papers, SHC. Miner produced several films for Hampton that emphasized the school's positive influence in racial uplift. One of these films, *John Henry's Four Years at Hampton*, received attention in the black press; see, for example, "Moving Picture Story: Achievements of Hampton Student Portrayed in Didactic Manner," Chicago *Broad Ax*, July 26, 1913.

the harsh realities of the world made by white supremacy.[49] Between 1900 and 1930, the black population of Beaufort County dropped from 32,100 to 15,600; St. Helena Island experienced an equally precipitous decline during those years, losing almost 50 percent of its population (from 8,285 to 4,458).[50] In the face of this dramatic decline, some white southerners simply stuck their heads in the sand. "[T]here has been no migration of Negroes to the North this year," claimed the South Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture in 1919. Moreover, "many who had left in previous years returned disillusioned over life in the North and with a greater appreciation for southern living."[51]

The upheaval in the southern countryside forced proponents of industrial education to wrestle with the limits of the Penn School's vision of rural life. The pull of higher wages in the North, coupled with the collapse of the South's rural economy following World War I, placed the school and its advocates of the countryside on the defensive. In response, they offered the Penn School as a counterweight to urban migration and modern consumerism. In "selling" the idea of the Penn School, leaders of the industrial-school movement attempted to merge market-oriented progress with

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[49] On the Great Migration, see Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration*: *A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 1-37; Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Isabella Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010*)*; Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[50] Historical Census Browser, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, University of Virginia, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/ (accessed April 15, 2016).

[51] B. B. Harris, *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industries of the State of South Carolina*, *1919* (Columbia, SC: Gonzales and Bryan State Printers, 1920), 16.

nostalgia for a producerist vision of rural community. These ideas were already irreconcilable by the 1920s, however, and more and more residents of St. Helena abandoned the decaying utopian community. As a result, the Penn School struggled to define its mission amid the rural crisis of the 1920s and 1930s.[52]

Notwithstanding the diminished economic prospects of blacks in the rural South, proponents of industrial education continued to advocate the agrarian approach to racial progress that was embodied in the industrial school. In 1917, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Education collaborated with the Phelps-Stokes Fund to publish *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, which surveyed the nation's black private schools and offered assessments of their health. The study's leader, Thomas Jesse Jones, was a former teacher at Hampton and an advocate of industrial education. After visiting the Penn School in December 1913, Jones described it as "an excellent community school" that exerted a strong influence for the improvement of the lives of the people on St. Helena Island. It was also one of the few institutions in the state that used a school farm to train its students in modern agriculture. Whereas many of the schools surveyed in the report received scathing reviews and were advised to radically change their curricula, if not close their doors, the Penn School was said to deserve "more ample funds" so that it could continue its "important work."[53]

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[52] On the collapse of the South's rural economy in the 1920s and 1930s, see Peter A. Coclanis, *Confronting Southern Poverty in the Great Depression: The Report on Economic Conditions of the South with Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), chaps. 1-2.

[53] Thomas Jesse Jones, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), 662.

Despite the Penn School's favorable reputation, financial shortfalls remained a serious problem. By the third decade of the twentieth century, the school was not only conducting a "year-round school" with activities for students and their families in every season, but also offering a variety of community-outreach programs, including Health and Sanitation, Home Improvement, Recreation, and Religious Life. In an effort to address the struggle of St. Helena's small farmers to survive in the modern agricultural economy, several of the school's leaders established a cooperative society and a credit union, the latter with a start-up grant of $2,000. These programs inflated the school's operating budget, and, despite sizable donations from the General Education Board, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, and a number of individual donors, the school went from a surplus of $4,000 in 1904 to a deficit of more than $14,000 in 1920. This trend alarmed the board of trustees, and debates about the school's sustainability raged during the 1920s. While the trustees agreed that the school's aims were noble, many of them questioned how long the school could survive. "Are the results commensurate to the amount of money and labor being invested?" asked one Hampton-trained teacher in 1926. "There can be no doubt as to the purity of our motives or the highness of our aim; the question is, are we hitting the mark?"[54]

While Rossa Cooley and other leaders of the school privately worried about the institution's future, they continued to describe St. Helena Island as a model rural community. Cooley, who was the school's principal during the 1920s, wrote a number of articles for both *Survey* and *Survey-Graphic* on the work of the Penn School. Paul Kellogg, *Survey*'s editor, had expressed admiration for the Penn School and believed that

[54] Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 162-66; Burton, *Penn Center*, 63-64; "The Aims of Penn School," 1926, Penn School Papers, SHC.

it held the key to interracial cooperation in the Jim Crow South. Cooley subsequently expanded the articles into two books, *Homes of the Freed* (1926) and *School Acres* (1930).[55] They contributed to a wave of reflections on the importance of St. Helena Island in the story of black progress since emancipation. "Carolina Negroes Live As in Utopia," proclaimed a 1928 article in the *Washington Post*. Characterizing the black residents of St. Helena as "happy property owning farmers," the article emphasized that they were deeply religious descendants of slaves who lived apart from modern life and shared a distinctive culture that inspired sociological study. In 1924, McDavid Horton, an editor of the Columbia *State*, published a twenty-page pamphlet that made similar observations and placed the Penn School at the center of St. Helena's unique mode of rural life. In 1923, Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, invited Cooley to present a paper at the group's annual meeting, whose theme that year was promoting racial harmony through research and scholarship. By the 1920s, St. Helena had become one of the nation's most important sites for understanding black history and culture. [56]

While attention to the Penn School during the 1920s was mostly positive, some observers questioned the way in which Cooley and her allies told the story of St. Helena's development. Although Mary White Ovington, a co-founder of the National Association

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[55] Rossa B. Cooley, "The Farm Demonstrator," *Survey* 44 (April 1920): 40-41, "A Mission of Love and Literacy," *Survey* 59 (January 1, 1928): 443-46, and "How We Brought Farms to School," *Survey Graphic* 59 (February 1, 1928): 572-78; Rossa B. Cooley, *Homes of the Freed* (New York: New Republic, 1926), and *School Acres* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1930).

[56] "Carolina Negroes Live As in Utopia: Colony of 5000 on Island, Descendants of Slaves, Highly Prosperous," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1928; McDavid Horton, *St. Helena Island: A Negro Community* (Columbia, SC: The State Printing Co., 1924); Carter G. Woodson to Rossa B. Cooley, October 3, 1923, Penn School Papers, SHC.

for the Advancement of Colored People, wrote a glowing review of Cooley's *Homes of the Freed*, she expressed doubts about the Penn School's mission. Writing in the book-review section of the *Chicago Defender,* one of the nation's leading black newspapers, Ovington offered only reserved praise for the direction in which Cooley and her peers had taken the school. *Homes of the Freed*, Ovington pointed out, skipped over the forty-four years between 1862, when the school was founded, and 1906, when Cooley became its principal. "Reading between the lines," Ovington observed, "one sees that the school had been run down and that the academic training needed to be superseded by industrial." While she was mostly sympathetic to the new mission, Ovington noted that, like other publications by proponents of industrial education, Cooley "seeks to make friends for the work." This desire to provide white audiences with a particular narrative about the progress from slavery to freedom elided "the whole story of the Southern school," Ovington suggested, and failed to address questions about the teachers' interactions with their students or tensions between the school and the local community.[57] Ovington's review points to a significant omission in the progress narrative trumpeted by the industrial-school movement. In their effort to prepare black southerners for the constricted world of the twentieth-century rural South, the boosters of industrial education had to erase the radical history of Reconstruction. As Ovington and other critics demonstrated, the erasure was, however, never complete. The competing interpretations of emancipation and Reconstruction held by white northern liberals, black intellectuals, and the descendants of formerly enslaved people lingered in national memory.

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[57] Mary White Ovington, "The Bookshelf: About Freedmen," *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1927.

In addition to publishing books and articles in the national press, the Penn School's leaders highlighted progress in the domestic lives of black Sea Islanders by entering the Better Homes in America competition. The brainchild of Marie Meloney, editor of the middle-class women's magazine *The Delineator*, Better Homes in America recognized excellent homemaking in communities across the United States. A celebration of both post-World War I consumerism and modern domesticity, the competition attracted Americans of all regions and races during the 1920s and 1930s.[58]

Hoping to connect the idea of the modern home to material improvement on St. Helena Island, the Penn School partnered with the island's residents to enter the first Better Homes competition in 1922. The house that the island submitted, a two-room cabin called the Jessamine Cottage, was constructed by the Penn School's male students and decorated by girls in its domestic program. Unlike entries from more affluent parts of the country, which featured electricity, running water, and the latest appliances, the Jessamine Cottage lacked the amenities associated with a modern home. The house St. Helena presented for the 1924 competition, however, had two stories and was outfitted with a porcelain bathtub. Perhaps feeling pressure from the Better Homes organization to embrace consumerism, the Penn School and the St. Helena community adopted a middle-class standard that contradicted the producerist vision at the center of the school's philosophy. While St. Helena's 1924 entry emphasized that the Better Home on display on the island could be purchased by a family with an annual income of $1,000, the average resident of St. Helena earned only $424 a year during the 1920s.[59]

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[58] Janet Hutchison, "Better Homes and Gullah," *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 102-10.

[59] Ibid. For the income figure, see Thomas J. Woofter, *Black Yeomanry: Life on St. Helena Island* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1930), 25-30.

Despite the disparity between the houses entered into the Better Homes competition and those the island's residents generally owned, and also despite the fact that after 1925 St. Helena was required to participate in a segregated division of the competition, the Penn School's leaders touted the outcome as an accomplishment for the entire island. A pamphlet sent to potential donors about the school's 1924 entry claimed that its receipt of a "special" first prize demonstrated that the Penn School was providing St. Helena Island with not only "the three Rs" but also "better homes, better farms, better men and women."[60] President Calvin Coolidge applauded the school, its students, and the St. Helena community for their success in the competition. He believed that the "sensible" house built by the Penn School students showed that good homes were available to black citizens and demonstrated that middle-class progress was still possible in rural America. Keenly aware of the growing dissatisfaction of many black Americans with rural life in the South, Coolidge called the Penn School's victory "a contribution to building our American ideals."[61]

Leaders of the industrial-school movement expected the Penn School to be more than a national symbol of black progress; they also envisioned it as a contributor to racial uplift in colonial Africa. Between 1923 and 1926 alone, forty-six different missionaries and colonial administrators visited St. Helena Island. Most of them came from colonies within the British Empire, and all embraced the Anglo-Saxon civilizing project that paralleled the goals of industrial education. Thomas Gordon Guggisberg, governor of Great Britain's Gold Coast colony, visited Hampton, Tuskegee, and the Penn School in

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[60] "1924 Better Homes Contest" (pamphlet), n.d., Penn School Papers, SHC.

[61] Calvin Coolidge to Rossa Cooley, July 5, 1924, Penn School Papers, SHC.

1927 in preparation for establishing a similar institution in West Africa. Mabel Shaw, a leader of a missionary station in Kawandiva, North Rhodesia, declared that "America for me will always mean St. Helena Island." Meanwhile, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, which increasingly turned its attention to industrial education on the African continent, regularly cited St. Helena Island and the Penn School as models with transnational implications. In a 1928 speech to supporters of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, C. T. Loram, a professor of education at Yale University and an administrator of the Native Affairs Commission in the Union of South Africa, remarked that "[a]t Penn School, South Carolina, I believe I have found the ideal school and the model for African education." Mabel Carney, an instructor at the Teachers College of Columbia University, encouraged her African students to visit the Penn School. "Everywhere I go up the length and breadth of the whole continent [Africa]," she told Grace House, the school's vice principal, "everyone knows of you and Miss Cooley and Penn School." In 1930, the Phelps-Stokes Fund created a scholarship at Teachers College for African students to travel to the Lowcountry and observe the Penn School. The African administrators and students saw the Penn School as "a laboratory experiment of extraordinary interest" and hoped to establish similar schools in their homelands.[62]

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[62] Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 58; "Noted Educator Visits Hampton: Gold Coast Governor to Study Schools in Southland," *Chicago Defender*, October 15, 1927; "Address by Dr. C. T. Loram of the Native Affairs Commission, Union of South Africa, on the occasion of a Dinner given in his honour by the Phelps-Stokes Fund of 101 Park Avenue New York," April 1928, Penn School Papers, SHC. On the relationship between black industrial schools in the United States and the establishment of similar institutions in Africa, see Sehat, "Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington"; Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Contrary to the Penn School narrative that placed black southerners in complete adjustment to rural life, many black residents of Beaufort County were increasingly dissatisfied. In a private letter to the Penn School's board of trustees, Rossa Cooley expressed anxiety about the long-term stability of the utopian community on St. Helena Island. "The crisis is here," she warned in 1923, when a long-awaited bridge connecting the island to the mainland was finally completed. An educational philosophy based on embracing the countryside and rejecting urban life was now threatened by the access developers and businessmen would have to the island. "[T]he whole demonstration in rural Negro education will be crippled if the Negroes must lose their lands on this Island," she predicted.[63]

Rejection of rural life was most pronounced among St. Helena's younger generation. Features that older generations and the advocates of industrial education idealized—landownership, autonomy, religiosity—became forms of drudgery, isolation, and monotony for many of those who lacked a living memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The Penn School's staff continued to frame the Great Migration as destructive to the younger generation and to the moral fabric of the island. When asked to describe the fate of islanders who had left St. Helena, Moses Dudley, a teacher at the Penn School, responded that "one third are still in the North; one third come back damaged; one third come back in their coffins, no good to anybody." While this message may have pleased the school's boosters, who consistently argued that the city was

[63] Rossa Cooley to George Foster Peabody, May 28, 1923, Penn School Papers, SHC.

destructive, it did little to persuade younger residents of the Sea Islands to remain at home.[64]

The most important cause of the exodus was the general decline of the region's economy. "Can't have anything on the Island," explained a young man who had left St. Helena in 1914. "If I can't make enough money to save $10 or $11 a week, I might as well not work. I'd join the street loafers. They manage to sleep and eat. If that's all you can get out of working, why work? But that's just what they do on the Island. Laborers in the oyster factories go to work in the dark and come home in the dark. And for that they get 30 to 40 cents a day."[65] Following the collapse of the region's rice, phosphate, and cotton economies during the first two decades of the twentieth century, young people in Beaufort County were left with the choice of either a life of subsistence production on the land their parents had owned, or striking out for a city where they could earn wages and help support family members still on the Sea Islands by remitting cash.[66]

The attractions of urban pleasures and modern popular culture also played major roles in the younger generation's rejection of the country-life ideal. "Got tired living on Island," one young man explained. "Too lonesome. Go to bed at six o'clock. Everything dead. No dances, no moving picture show, nothing to go to." The pursuit of pleasure had gendered dimensions. In the 1920s, the Penn School's teachers noticed that the island's young women increasingly embraced the beauty and fashion trends found in black newspapers, including straightening and lengthening their hair. Remarked Helen Lou

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[64] Dudley quoted in Cooley, *School Acres*, 129; Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 183-87.

[65] Clyde Vernon Kiser, *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 77.

[66] Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries*, 78.

James, a fierce advocate of rural life and the Hampton model, "If I were a girl in one of those homes, I too would have run away to Savannah."[67]

As memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction faded in the minds of the Lowcountry's younger generation, appeals to landownership, education, and history lost their potency. As more and more people left the region, those who remained increasingly turned away from local institutions like the Penn School and instead looked to new national organizations that called for more vocal advocacy of black rights. Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) established chapters in several Lowcountry counties in the 1920s, including Beaufort. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also established a chapter in Beaufort. While the two organizations had different, and at times competing, approaches to the black freedom struggle, both rejected the accommodationist approach of the industrial-school movement. They looked instead to either federal law or burgeoning notions of pan-African community.[68]

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Penn School became a touchstone in a national debate about black progress in the rural South. In this debate,

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[67] Kiser, *Sea Island to City*, 124-28.

[68] Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Lexington: University of Press of Kentucky, 2006), 63-66; Mary G. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Jarod Roll, "'The Lazarus of American Farmers': The Politics of Black Agrarianism in the Jim Crow South, 1921-1938," in *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction,* ed. Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett (Gainesville: University of Press of Florida, 2012), 42. Although the UNIA and the NAACP emerged to tackle problems directly related to twentieth-century iterations of white supremacy, their intellectual roots can be traced to the world black people attempted to create in the Reconstruction era. On the connection between the early twentieth-century civil rights movement and nineteenth-century black activism, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

advocates of industrial education attempted to erase the school's connections to Reconstruction by establishing extensive programs of agricultural and social outreach that looked to the future instead of the past. Drawing parallels between the Reconstruction-era fight for racial equality and early twentieth-century efforts to create interracial harmony in the South, the school's new leaders cultivated a romantic version of rural life that appealed to potential donors and the northern press. The vision of black education offered by the new Penn School failed, however, to challenge the structural racism that black residents of the Sea Islands had faced since the overthrow of Reconstruction. In response to this failure, a new group of African American intellectuals would emerge to challenge the revisionist narrative of the Penn School as an oasis of racial liberalism; in so doing, they also called into question the industrial-school argument for forgetting Reconstruction and developed a new approach to the Lowcountry's past.

Chapter 4

Golden-Hazed Gullah Stories: The Black Lowcountry in American Art and Letters, 1920-1940

On October 10, 1927, *Porgy: A Play in Four Acts* opened at the Guild Theater in New York City. Adapted from DuBose Heyward's bestselling 1925 novel, *Porgy*, the theatrical version was written by Heyward and his wife Dorothy. Lauded for its sympathetic portrayal of working-class black life in Charleston, the play sought to preserve the book's socio-realism by not using white actors in blackface; instead, it became one of the first Broadway plays to feature an African American cast. The novelty of using black actors, combined with the commercial success of Heyward's book, created lofty expectations.[1]

The production was a great success. "No play has ever caught the true colored nature more than [*Porgy*]," one critic wrote. "[T]he authors DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, not only know the Negro and get his point of view but also have the literary and dramatic sense to transcribe that knowledge into a fascinating book and a majestic play." "'Porgy' is a great play," declared another review. "It carries on the most august traditions of that phase of human activity now distinguished by the name of legitimate drama." A critic in the black press called the play "a splendid thing for the negro" and delighted in the fact that the audience had included more intellectuals than "frivolous flappers."[2]

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[1] On the novel *Porgy* and its subsequent adaptations, see Ellen Noonan, *The Strange Career of Porgy and Bess: Race, Culture, and America's Most Famous Opera* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[2] "'Porgy' Brought to the Hollis: Vivid and Pungent Play of Negro Life in the South Presented by Theatre Guild Daily," Boston *Globe*, April 10, 1928; D. K., "Theater Guild Presents 'Porgy' on

Although Frank Wilson and Evelyn Ellis garnered the lion's share of the praise for their performances as Porgy and Bess, respectively, audiences were also captivated by an actor who played a minor character. "Leigh Whipper, the tall raw-boned veteran of the Negro theatrical field, is 'going over big' in the roles he plays as undertaker and Crabman in 'Porgy'," one critic observed. Another claimed that "[t]he extraordinary virtues of 'Porgy' from the beginning have always been not those of cameo acting but of colorful showmanship in wide full strokes. . . . The huckster, who sings amiably, 'Ahm talking 'bout the food ah sell; Ahm talking 'bout steamed crabs,' wanders in and out of the performance like a figure in music."[3]

In an interview with the *Pittsburgh Courier*, DuBose Heyward described how the Crabman character originated. "One day, Leigh Whipper . . . came to us and introduced himself as a fellow Charlestonian," Heyward explained. "His father had been a judge in South Carolina during the Black Republican Administration following the Civil War. His boyhood had been spent in the old city." The son of William J. Whipper, who had served in a number of local and state government positions during Reconstruction, and Frances Rollin, a noted writer and socialite, Leigh Whipper had divided his early childhood years between Charleston and Beaufort. In the 1880s, he, his mother, and his two sisters moved to Washington, D.C., where he was educated at the M Street School and Howard University.[4] Although Heyward, like most white southerners, expressed hostility toward

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Ford's Stage," *Baltimore Sun*, March 19, 1929; Eva Jessaye, "'Porgy': A Stellar Production," Baltimore *Afro-American*, October 22, 1927.

[3] "Leigh Whipper Scores on Broadway," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 12, 1927; J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play: Back Comes 'Porgy'," New York *Times*, September 21, 1929.

[4] "Whipper Family Biography," box 114, folder 1, Leigh Whipper Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

"the Black Republican Administration," he appreciated the perspective Whipper offered on black life in the Lowcountry. The character of Crabman emerged from Whipper's memories of Charleston, not Heyward's, and in later interviews Heyward acknowledged

Figure 4.1. Leigh Whipper in "Crabman" costume, 1928.
Source: Leigh Whipper Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC

that Whipper not only created Crabman but also counseled Heyward on the entire play, making it a more accurate depiction of black life in the city.[5]

[5] "Leigh Whipper Scores on Broadway," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 12, 1927; DuBose Heyward, *Porgy: A Play in Four Acts* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), xv-xvii.

Both Heyward and Whipper enjoyed success in the entertainment industry. *Porgy* ran for fifty-five weeks on Broadway and then went on to tour the rest of the United States, as well as Paris and London. In 1934, it was adapted into the iconic musical *Porgy and Bess*. Whipper would become the first African American to be a member of the Actor's Equity Association and was a founder of the Negro Actors Guild of America; he also starred in a number of films, including *Of Mice and Men*.[6]

While much has been written about both DuBose Heyward and Leigh Whipper, less has been said about the collaboration that developed from their competing memories of the Lowcountry's past. *Porgy*, which white critics showered with praise in the 1920s, is now understood by historians and literary scholars as a product of sympathetic paternalism. Heyward, the scion of one of Charleston's most prominent planter families, was part of a literary movement that used African American folklore to emphasize the cultural distinctiveness of the Lowcountry. While Charleston's white elites generally eschewed the explicitly anti-black narratives of writers and filmmakers like Thomas Dixon and D. W. Griffin, white Lowcountry writers shared their hostility toward Reconstruction and questioned the purported moral superiority of white northerners on matters of race. By offering a portrait of southern racial harmony at the height of the Great Migration, the Lowcountry's leading white writers offered a narrative that identified the Lowcountry, not Chicago or New York, as a model for the nation.[7]

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[6] Noonan, *Strange Career of Porgy and Bess*, 73-85. On Whipper's acting career, see Carole Ione, *Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 171-76.

[7] A number of scholars have explored the role African American culture played in shaping modernity in the United States during the interwar years of the twentieth century. See, for example, Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chap. 4; W. Fitzhugh

Interwar literature on the Lowcountry failed, however, to take into account the concerns of black intellectuals who both embraced and challenged the new interest in black folklore.[8] While some northern black writers and scholars feared that attention to the folkways of black southerners could undermine race progress, a number of black writers with roots in the South saw potential in embracing Lowcountry dialect and folk traditions.[9] Some black scholars went further still, not only identifying African retentions in Gullah folk culture, but also pointing to the betrayed promise of Reconstruction and the structural barriers that plagued twentieth-century black residents of the Lowcountry as a result of disfranchisement and segregation. Dissatisfied with black writers in the New Negro movement who championed urban life and also with white southern romantics who used black folklore as a thinly-veiled defense of Jim Crow, black writers and scholars in both North and South turned to the Lowcountry in order to challenge

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Brundage, "'Working in the Kingdom of Culture': African Americans and Popular Culture, 1890-1930," in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1-42; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), chap. 6; Lawrence W. Levine, *High Brow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), chap. 3; Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chaps. 1-4; K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), chap. 6; Shirley Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), chaps. 4-5.

[8] Daphne Lamothe*, Inventing the New Negro: Narrative, Culture, and Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), chaps. 1, 4-5; Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and Racial Representation*, chaps. 3-4.

[9] Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, intro.*;* Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, eds., *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1-60; Tammy L. Brown, *City of Islands: Caribbean Intellectuals in New York* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), chap. 2; Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), chap. 4.

narratives of black inferiority and highlight the achievements of rural black people. Folklorist Sterling Brown and linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner, among others, created representations of southern black life that attempted to blend the romance of white southern writers and the rigor of social science.[10]

In the competing projects of white southern writers, white academics, and black scholars, the black Lowcountry became the center of an ongoing debate about Reconstruction's cultural legacy. As the massive northward migration of black southerners exacerbated already-toxic charges of black pathology, the turn toward the rural South in American art and letters was at once nostalgic and sociological. Part of a growing antimodernist movement in American life, literature and scholarship on the Lowcountry reflected many Americans' longing for a simpler past. Despite the desire of white folklorists to freeze Lowcountry black culture at an idyllic antebellum moment, the act of collecting black stories from the Lowcountry was inextricable from the Port Royal Experiment and Reconstruction —a circumstance that black folklorists emphasized. [11]

White sociologists began to explore the Lowcountry partly in order to dispel the romantic understandings of black life being propagated by southern white folklorists. Enamored with the opportunity to study one of the South's few remaining "island communities," that is, rural communities that retained indigenous folk traditions, a number of academics, mostly from the University of North Carolina, traveled to the

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[10] Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*; Margaret Wade-Lewis, *Lorenzo Dow Turner: Father of Gullah Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

[11] On the work of social scientists and folklorists in the Lowcountry, see Mark Ellis, *Race Harmony and Black Progress: Jack Woofter and the Interracial Cooperation Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), chap. 7.

South Carolina Sea Islands during the late 1920s to study the region that had once hosted the Port Royal Experiment. While inspired by the literary accounts of Lowcountry white writers like DuBose Heyward, the scholars hoped that their work, built on the foundation of social science, would provide a more objective portrait of Lowcountry black life. As they did so, they saw the institutions founded during Reconstruction—especially the Penn School—as hopeful models for those striving to build interracial harmony in the twentieth-century South. Black scholars often expressed skepticism about this effort because they believed that its emphasis on harmony, like the previous generation's focus on North-South reconciliation, ignored the structural racism that stood in the way of racial justice. Black scholars therefore turned to the Lowcountry to demonstrate that black southerners remembered Reconstruction differently or, in the case of Lorenzo Dow Turner, to challenge narratives of black cultural inferiority by showing that Gullah represented one of the most powerful forms of African retention in the Western hemisphere.[12]

The Rise of Lowcountry Folklore Studies

The folk culture of African Americans in the South had long fascinated white Americans. In the minstrel shows of the antebellum period, white performers appropriated distorted versions of enslaved people's folk traditions. First appearing in white working-class neighborhoods of New York during the 1820s, the minstrel show became one of the first forms of popular culture with national appeal; by the middle of the nineteenth century, white actors performing in blackface had popularized minstrelsy

[12] On the African American scholars who challenged the work of white academics and writers during the interwar period, see Ellis, *Race Harmony and Black Progress*, 211-15; Noonan, *Strange Career of Porgy and Bess*, 74-77, 121-25.

to such a degree that troupes traveled across the country, performing in both highbrow venues like opera houses and lowbrow settings like taverns and circuses.[13]

The Civil War was a watershed for national interest in African American folklore. The highly educated white northerners who descended upon the South Carolina Lowcountry to participate in the Port Royal Experiment produced a wave of writing about black folkways. Lucy McKim Garrison, who arrived in the Sea Islands in 1862 under the sponsorship of Philadelphia Port Royal Relief Committee, began the first systematic documentation of black spirituals. Working as a teacher, she became fascinated with the folkways of the freedpeople. The 1867 volume that emerged from her time in South Carolina, *Slave Songs of the United States*, which she coauthored with William Francis Allen and Charles Pickard Ware, was the first published collection of African American music in the United States.[14]

The white northerners who journeyed to the South Carolina Sea Islands during the Civil War also played a pivotal role in introducing the black folk traditions of the Lowcountry to a national public. In the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*, for example, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, commander of the 1st South Carolina Infantry, rhapsodized about the spirituals his soldiers sang during their leisure time. The black

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[13] On the history of blackface minstrelsy in the United States, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[14] William Francis Allen, Lucy M. Garrison, and Charles Pickard Ware, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: A. Simpson and Co., 1867). On black spirituals in the United States, see Sterling A. Brown, "Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads and Work Songs," *Phylon* 14 (Winter 1953): 45-61; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClurgh and Co., 1903), chap. 14; Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Negro Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow, 1963), chap. 3; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), chap. 1.

abolitionist Charlotte Forten published an account in the same journal that featured the stories, songs, and games of the African American children she taught while she was a participant in the Port Royal Experiment.[15]

Interest in African American folk culture became even more widespread during the late nineteenth century. Spirituals assumed a prominence in minstrel shows that they had not during the antebellum years. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, a student choral group from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, gained national and international acclaim by performing spirituals for potential donors. In the 1880s, Joel Chandler Harris, a white Georgian, rose to fame with his "Uncle Remus" stories. Narrated by a fictional former slave to a young white boy, the stories centered on the adventures and wisdom of anthropomorphic animals like "br'er rabbit," "br'er fox," and "br'er bear." The stories, which had roots in West African folk tales, had played a critical role in providing black children a moral and cosmological framework for understanding the perils they faced in bondage. Thomas Nelson Page, a white southerner deeply sympathetic to the antebellum South and the Confederacy, employed the dialect of black southerners to create romantic plantation fantasies in his wildly popular 1884 book *Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories*. As several scholars have observed, the works of writers like Harris and Page were central to the ongoing project of North-South reconciliation. They offered "stories of the South" that appealed to white northerners and began the process of stitching together a new national culture.[16]

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[15] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Negro Spirituals," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1867): 685-94; Charlotte Forten, "Life on the Sea Islands," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1864): 67-86.

[16] Prince, *Stories of the South*, 166-206. On the role animal stories played in the cultural life of enslaved people, see Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, chap. 2.

As folklore studies became more formalized in the early twentieth century, the work of the folklorist became a prominent part of efforts to preserve an antimodern American past. The American Folklore Society, which had been founded in 1888, sought to make the increasingly homogenous American middle class aware of pockets of unique cultures in the nation's remaining "island communities." Traveling to isolated rural settings and collecting folklore from black, indigenous, and poor-white communities, folklorists such as Alan Lomax and Elsie Clew Parsons introduced middle-class Americans to the secular songs of the nation's rural and working-class people.[17]

While African Americans had fewer institutional resources with which to collect, preserve, and curate folk traditions, several black scholars did investigate the cultures of unlettered black southerners during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hampton University sponsored a Folklore Club whose members collected, studied, and discussed black folk traditions. As the nation's most prominent black folklore society, it attracted a number of scholars and intellectuals interested in the cultural traditions of black southerners. In 1894, when Anna Julia Cooper, a writer and educator who became the fourth black woman to earn a PhD in the United States, addressed the club, she questioned the need to civilize the "folk" and instead deployed the "folk" as a critique of civilization rather than a barometer by which the "civilized" could measure progress.[18] The African American poet and novelist Paul Laurence Dunbar worked with the Hampton Folklore Society a number of times during the early twentieth century and also collaborated with Hampton photographer Leigh Richmond Miner to produce works that

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[17] Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*, 18-45; Prince, *Stories of the South*, 97-134.

[18] Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*, 89-90.

combined narratives with images of southern black life.[19] The materials collected by Hampton folklorists and published in the *Southern Workman*, Hampton's monthly magazine, represented a broad swath of folklore. It included not only "acceptable" forms such as spirituals, religious lore, and animal tales, but also less reputable superstitions and conjure stories. Rhymes, riddles, folk tales, warning tales, and songs also appeared in the Hampton publication.[20]

In the early twentieth century, the distinction between reputable and less reputable forms of folklore became a key battleground in debates over representations of African Americans in popular culture. In "The Sorrow Songs," the final essay in his seminal *Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois praised the spiritual, which had become the most venerated and respectable expression of African American culture. Spirituals had been used to comic effect in minstrel shows and collected as exotic artifacts by white folklorists. By contrast, Du Bois described them as "the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment." "[T]hey tell of death and suffering," he wrote, "and unvoiced longing toward a truer world."[21]

The Lowcountry was one of the most prominent sites of the folklorists' cultural endeavors. In addition to its having been the first place where black folklore was collected and studied in a sustained way, Gullah, the dialect spoken by the region's black

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[19] Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Lyrics of the Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1896), *Poems of Cabin and Field* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1899), and *Candle-lightin' Time* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1901). On Dunbar's early twentieth-century poetry exploring black folklore, see Ray Saperstein, "Picturing Dunbar's Lyrics," *African American Review* 41 (Summer 2007): 240-42.

[20] Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*, 76.

[21] Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 250-64 (quotation on 262).

residents, had intrigued folklorists since the Civil War. When transcribed on the pages of middle-class magazines, popular books, or academic monographs, it was almost inscrutable to outsiders. The difficulty of deciphering Gullah not only exoticized the Lowcountry and its black residents, it also gave the white folklorists an authority that allowed them to traverse between the world of educated elites and a primitive world that existed on the margins of the increasingly modernized nation.[22]

Representation of African American folklore as a counterbalance to modernity was especially pronounced in interwar Charleston. One of the wealthiest cities in the United States before the Civil War, Charleston lost a great deal of its cultural standing during Reconstruction as members of the region's planter class found themselves impoverished by the loss of their human property and the decline of an economy they had once dominated. Battered by a global collapse in cotton and rice prices, as well as a series of hurricanes that devastated the Lowcountry during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Charleston experienced a prolonged decline until World War I.[23]

Following the war, however, Charleston's boosters came up with a new way to "sell" the city. Emphasizing the colonial and antebellum past, white elites from the former planter class championed Charleston as America's "most historic city." The "golden haze of the past" was designed to attract not only white southerners who yearned

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[22] On the use of folklore to shape modern middle-class culture, see Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," in *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 14; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), introduction and chaps. 3, 6.

[23] On the post-Civil War decline of the Lowcountry's rice economy, see Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of the Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Lowcountry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chap. 4; James H. Tuten, *Lowcountry Time and Tide: The Fall of the South Carolina Rice Kingdom* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

for a nostalgic Old South, but also white northerners who had developed a voracious appetite for moonlight-and-magnolia stories of the South. For both groups, Charleston offered a carefully curated experience of the southern past.[24]

Narratives of racial harmony and authentic black folk life were central to this mythic South. The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals (SPS), an organization of white elites interested in the cultural artifacts of the Lowcountry's black population, collected songs and performed concerts in Charleston. The SPS pledged to preserve black spirituals, "educate the rising generation in their character and rendition," and "relieve the distress of the oldtime negro and his people." Members of the SPS occasionally traveled to northern cities to give performances. While there, the white sons and daughters of Charleston's elite spoke entirely in Gullah, casting into sharp relief the differences of class and race between the performers and the people whose culture was being appropriated.[25]

The "old time negro" imagined in paeans to the Old South was an antimodern invention designed to assuage the anxiety of both northerners and southerners about the Great Migration. With more than 1 million black migrants leaving the South for East Coast cities and Midwestern industrial centers between 1916 and 1930, whites saw black city-dwellers as visible signs of a social upheaval that threatened the stability of the pre-industrial world. Catering to fears of modern change, "Historic Charleston" offered a

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[24] Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 21-52.

[25] Ibid., chap. 4.

retreat into a lost world where everything, including racial hierarchies, remained frozen in the past. [26]

White writers played a critical role in crafting the idea of the Lowcountry as an antimodern oasis. While not every white American could afford to visit Charleston, a growing number of middle-class consumers in the 1920s were attracted to romantic primitivism.[27] The Lowcountry's three most prominent white writers of the 1920s, Ambrose Gonzales, Julia Peterkin, and DuBose Heyward, all achieved literary fame for their fictional accounts of black life in the Lowcountry. All three came from elite families that had lost their plantation wealth following the Civil War. Each of them rejected the region's postbellum changes—especially Reconstruction—and longed for the imagined harmony of the antebellum era. More moderate on questions of race than the upcountry populists who continued to stoke white racial anxiety, the Lowcountry's three most prominent writers, sought a middle ground that preserved white supremacy while also offering an inclusive—albeit hierarchical—vision of the South that valorized African American folk wisdom.

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[26] Ibid., introduction. For the number of black migrants, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), introduction.

[27] Primitivism, the borrowing of cultural forms from non-Western peoples, was widespread in Western art during the interwar period. Primarily associated with painters like Paul Gauguin, Henri Rousseau, and Pablo Picasso, Primitivism also informed the revival in folklore, as well as white middle-class interest in black musical forms like jazz and the blues. On Primitivism in the interwar world of arts and letters, see Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), chap. 3; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism," in *The Expanded Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 312-29.

White Lowcountry Writers and Black Folklore

Ambrose Gonzales was the first interwar white writer to present black Lowcountry folklore as a critique of modern American life. Editor of the Columbia *State*, South Carolina's newspaper of record, Gonzales was born in Barnwell County into a prominent family that owned many slaves. Perhaps not surprisingly, he held a romantic view of the antebellum Lowcountry and saw the relationship between master and slave as a quasi-familial bond rooted in mutual respect and reciprocal obligations and duties.[28]

In the early 1920s, Gonzales collected stories and recollections of his childhood home that he published as *The Black Border*. The titular "black border" came from the racial demography that led some observers to refer to the Lowcountry as the "black district." *The Black Border* was loosely organized around vignettes about particular black residents of the Lowcountry. Narrated by Gonzales, the stories leaned heavily on the Gullah dialect and emphasized that only southerners were capable of capturing the essence of the black Lowcountry. "[N]o northern writer has ever succeeded even indifferently well in putting Negro thought into Negro dialect," Gonzales claimed. "To recent southern writers, therefore, one must turn for intelligent understanding of the Negro character." Paying homage to previous generations of southern white folklore writers like Joel Chandler Harris, John Bennett, and Charles Colcock Jones, Gonzales viewed *The Black Border* as part of a southern literary tradition that valued the traditions of black Lowcountry residents precisely because they signposted the hierarchical

[28] For an illustration of the outlook of descendants of the Lowcountry's planter elite in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Duncan Clinch Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).

boundaries of the southern racial order.[29]

Accompanied by a nearly fifty-page glossary of Gullah vocabulary, *The Black Border* emphasized the primitiveness of Gullah speakers. "In no other tongue, perhaps, can so much be expressed with so little strain on brain or lips or glottis as by the Gullah's laconic use of these grunting jungle-sounds," Gonzales maintained.[30] Although Gonzales presented the dialect of his black characters as opaquely as possible, requiring the reader to depend on the glossary, his message about the region's past was easy to follow. One story set during "the trying days of Reconstruction" demonized black residents of the Lowcountry who had aligned themselves with "the awful circle of the Republican fold" and lionized a "courageous" black man who had sided with the Democrats and was pardoned for attacking a biracial Republican. Another story set in the 1870s followed Prince Mingo, drill master of the Adams Run Militia in Beaufort County, who had once served under Thomas Wentworth Higginson in the 1st South Carolina Infantry. Mocking the black militiamen for their shoddy marching and poor discipline, Gonzales observed that despite such exclamations as "Buckruh de debble!" and "Enty de Freedmun Bruro mek we fuh free!," the men returned to their natural state of docility when a white planter walked by. "And all down the line," Gonzales wrote, "their hands being free, men touched their little monkey caps or tugged at their kinky forelocks and scraped their feet, in token of the kindly respect, in which, spite of freedom and franchise, muskets and uniforms, and the poisonous propaganda of the Freedman's [*sic*] Bureau, they yet held

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[29] Ambrose Gonzales, *The Black Border*: *Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast* (Columbia, SC: The State Co., 1922), 17. Gonzales briefly mentioned the 1898 collection of black folklore by Massachusetts-born Abbie Holmes Christensen, but only to say that it was derivative and paled in comparison to the work of Harris and Jones.

[30] Ibid., 277.

those known throughout the countryside as having been kindly masters to their slaves, and just and liberal employers of the freemen [*sic*]."[31]

White critics from both the North and the South praised *The Black Border*. "Mr. Gonzales is a good story-teller," wrote one southern reviewer who claimed that "the average reader will find this book entirely away from the beaten path—something new—something original in the field of letters." Mary White Ovington of the NAACP struggled to decipher the Gullah passages but thought the book would "be of value as a record, and also as a store-house for those who wish to recite Negro stories."[32]

The Black Border was reviewed several times in *The State*, Gonzales's own paper. Not surprisingly, the assessments by his colleagues were overwhelmingly positive. They saw the book as an important defense of both southern identity and the southern past. "The author has successfully and brilliantly set himself the task of social historian of the least known part of the negro race," remarked one critic. Another condemned the whole body of folklore stories written by northern writers. "We have had a nauseous superfluity of negro dialect stories, written mostly by Northern authors, male and female, who knew nothing of negro dialect but what they had learned from 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and Christy minstrel songs," he complained. Whereas the ham-fisted northern writers had failed to capture the essence of postbellum black life, Gonzales had succeeded because he possessed the insight available only to white people who knew the Lowcountry intimately. "This book could have been written only by a man to the manner born," the

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[31] Ibid., 64-65, 158-65.

[32] H. E. Harman, "'The Black Border': Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast," Atlanta *Constitution*, September 24, 1922; Mary Ovington, "Book Chat: *The Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast*," Baltimore *Afro American*, January 6, 1923.

critic argued, "a native of the region described, one who had been born the son of a pre-war rice planter, nursed by a 'negro mauma', had played in childhood with negro children, had hunted with negroes, had experienced the hardships that followed the Confederate war, and had lived through the horrors of Reconstruction—those worse than war time horrors when a pitying world spoke of South Carolina as 'The Prostrate State.'"[33]

Like the stories of Ambrose Gonzales, Julia Peterkin's fiction also made heavy use of Gullah. Born into a prominent planter family in 1880, Peterkin married into another prominent planter family and, when not writing novels and short stories, spent much of the interwar period managing Lang Syne, a 2,000-acre cotton plantation in Calhoun County, South Carolina. Her 1927 novel, *Black April*, which fictionalized the stories of individuals who lived on her plantation, was widely praised for capturing the interior lives of black characters without comedy or caricature. A lifelong member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Peterkin, like Gonzales, exemplified a highborn *noblesse oblige* that romanticized the paternalistic ties that had purportedly bound slaveholders and enslaved people. She used her fiction to make a case for the humanity of both groups.[34]

Scarlet Sister Mary, which Peterkin published the year after *Black April*, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and garnered almost universal acclaim for its portrait of Lowcountry black life. Based on a black family that lived on her plantation and worked

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[33] George Armstrong Wauchope, "Gonzales' 'The Black Border,'" Columbia (SC) *State*, October 8, 1922; "The Black Border," Columbia (SC) *State*, November 26, 1922.

[34] Julia Peterkin, *Black April* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1927); Elizabeth Robeson, "The Ambiguity of Julia Peterkin," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (Winter 1995): 761-86.

for her, the story followed "Sister Mary," a Gullah woman who eschewed conventional ideas of marriage, family, and education. A vernacular intellectual, Mary taught her daughters to avoid becoming dependent on men and her sons to see education as much broader than the schoolhouse.[35] These themes resonated with northern literary critics,

Figure 4.2. Advertisement for Julia Peterkin's *Scarlet Sister Mary*
Source: *The Crisis,* October 6, 1928

who readily accepted the premise that southern African Americans had access to an earthy wisdom that eluded both middle-class whites and the growing population of black Americans now residing in northern cities. One reviewer, writing for the New York

[35] Julia Peterkin, *Scarlet Sister Mary* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928).

Times, applauded *Scarlet Sister Mary* for its engagement with southern black life at a moment when many black southerners were moving to the South Side of Chicago or New York City's Harlem. "When the negro gets his 'depluma' from school the antique mores disappear," the reviewer lamented. Mary Ovington also expressed concern about the urban shift in black American life and found in Peterkin's prose an antidote to tensions over black pathology. "Had Mary lived in the city I suspect she would have seemed only a loose cheap woman to the reader. But she lived in a part of the South that Mrs. Peterkin describes with such charm that those of us who do not know it will feel defrauded."[36]

The success of *Scarlet Sister Mary* made Peterkin the darling of northern critics, and she became a sought-out authority on southern black life and culture. "I've grown up with them all about me. I've loved many of them," Peterkin explained when asked how she was able to describe black life so vividly. "It is quite impossible for a northerner to understand the feeling I have for many of the Negroes on our plantation, because the roots of the feeling go too far back for casual exhumation and discussion."[37] In a lecture, she spoke about the perils of black progress. "[Black America's] future place will depend entirely on its future accomplishment," she argued. "Whatever the future produces will be produced from inside."[38] Like *Porgy*, *Scarlet Sister Mary* was made into a stage play; unlike *Porgy*, however, the theatrical adaptation of Peterkin's novel was performed by

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[36] John R. Chamberlain, "Julia Peterkin Writes Again of the Gullah Negroes," New York *Times*, October 21, 1928; Mary Ovington, "Book Chat: Scarlet Sister Mary," Norfolk *New Journal and Guide*, November 17, 1928.

[37] Hannah Stein, "A Novelist of the Gullah Negroes: Julia Peterkin Has Lived Close to the Black Folk of Her Stories," Baltimore *Sun,* June 30, 1929.

[38] "Julia Peterkin Speaks Her Mind on Negro Problem," Norfolk *New Journal and Guide*, September 30, 1933.

white actors in blackface.[39]

The Lowcountry writer who achieved greatest fame in the 1920s was DuBose Heyward. A descendent of Thomas Heyward, Jr., a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a relative of Duncan Clinch Heyward, a former governor of South Carolina, DuBose Heyward was born in 1885 into one of the Lowcountry's most illustrious families. Although the Heywards lost most of their wealth following the destruction of slavery and the collapse of the rice industry, they remained prominent members of Charleston's cultural elite. Heyward's mother, Janie Scriven Heyward, published several collections of African American folklore and was a well-respected poet. DuBose Heyward himself experienced minor success as a poet and was cofounder of the Poetry Society of South Carolina.[40]

In 1925, Heyward published *Porgy*, his most famous work. Set in a fictional neighborhood of Charleston called Catfish Row, *Porgy* painted a romantic portrait of the city's black working-class community. While hopelessly trapped by personal failings and pathologies, the story's protagonists, Porgy, a crippled beggar, and Bess, a drug-addicted prostitute, find love and redemption at the margins of society.[41] Despite being marked by poverty and violence, Catfish Row itself is portrayed as a setting for communal bonds that were rooted in the black residents' authentic folkways.

Heyward was forceful in defining certain black characters as outside the collective norms of Catfish Row. Sportin' Life, the dandy from New York who provides

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[39] Fanny Butcher, "The Stage: Scarlet Sister Mary," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, January 27, 1931.

[40] Yuhl, *Golden Haze of Memory*, 116-17.

[41] Noonan, *Strange Career of Porgy and Bess*, 73-85.

Bess with cocaine, embodies the dangers of northern life. Simon Frazier, a jackleg attorney who sells fake divorce certificates, is an offensive sendup of the ambitions of post-emancipation African Americans. Whereas Charleston's black working class is portrayed as pathetic but honorable in its virtues and values, the book's black middle-class characters are villains, and the vibrant black middle class that actually existed in the city is entirely absent.[42]

Porgy reflected the nostalgic reinvention of the Lowcountry by Charleston's boosters during the interwar period. Its first chapter introduces the reader to Charleston via a starry-eyed reflection on the city's "Golden Age":

> Porgy lived in the Golden Age. Not the Golden Age of a remote and legendary past; nor yet the chimerical era treasured by every man past middle life, that never existed except in the heart of youth; but an age when men, not yet old, were boys in an ancient, beautiful city that time had forgotten before it destroyed.[43]

The "Golden Age" imagined by Heyward mirrored the boosters' "golden haze" rhetoric. It was predicated on a theory of history that privileged continuity over change. In *Porgy*, the Lowcountry was the site of a mythic past where neither racial conflict nor class conflict existed, a world where hierarchy and harmony prevailed. Although Charleston experienced one of the most violent race riots of the "Red Summer" of 1919, in fiction the city was a place of racial peace.[44]

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[42] On Charleston's antebellum free black community, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), chap. 4. On Charleston's postbellum black middle class, see I. A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), chaps. 5-6; Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), chaps. 6 and 8.

[43] Heyward, *Porgy*, 11.

[44] On the racial violence of the summer of 1919, see David F. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014);

According to the book's reviewers, Heyward's greatest achievement was capturing the life of Charleston's black working class without resorting to comic stereotypes. Heyward's approach, like that of Peterkin, enamored northern literary critics and made Heyward a sought-after source on questions of race and black culture. "DuBose Heyward, who is known to the poets as a poet and to the rest of the world scarcely at all, has written a novel about the Negroes of Charleston which is a gorgeous piece of work," wrote one reviewer, "a story that is at once funnier than anything that Octavus Roy Cohen ever wrote about Negroes, more fantastic than anyone who has known the southern Negro intimately can possible imagine, and yet a story with swift, bitter power and sharp cruelty and soft pathos." Another review suggested that *Porgy* was "one of the few masterpieces of American literature" and set a standard that would "take the muse of novel writing herself (if there had been a novel writing muse among the famed nine) to equal."[45]

As *Porgy*'s popularity increased, Heyward, like Peterkin, was asked to translate his interest in Lowcountry black life into pronouncements on black life and black culture. For a volume produced by Charleston's Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, Heyward penned an essay on "The Negro in the Low-Country." His most full-throated

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Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011); William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970). On the riot in Charleston, see McWhirter, *Red Summer*, chap. 6.

[45] Mary White Ovington, "Book Chat: *Porgy*," New York *Amsterdam News*, December 2, 1925; "A Romance of Negro Life," New York *Times,* September 27, 1925; Fanny Butcher, "Critic Praises Heyward's New Book as Good, but Places 'Porgy' in Higher Rank," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, February 2, 1929. Octavus Roy Cohen was a white South Carolinian who wrote a humor column for the *Saturday Evening Post* in black dialect. For examples of Cohen's writing, see *Saturday Evening Post*, June 17, 1922, October 4, 1924, April 27, 1929, and December 13, 1930.

statement on the Lowcountry in southern literature and memory, the essay advanced an anti-democratic history of Charleston. After first describing Reconstruction as a "vale of humiliation" when former slaves sat in the halls of the government, Heyward recounted the golden era that had existed in the Lowcountry during the colonial and antebellum periods. In that world, which was by any definition a slave society, Heyward saw a harmony that stemmed from hierarchy and a model that challenged the premises of democracy. "In America, where we hold before every native-born man-child the prospect of becoming the president of the United States," he wrote, "we have forgotten that there can be such a thing as pride of caste among the lowly, that there could exist in a man who had been born a servant and expected to die a servant a self-respect equally as great." Whereas most Americans had forgotten this truth, Heyward suggested that the Lowcountry's white elites were closer to understanding the proper workings of a biracial nation than any other thinkers on race.[46]

Gonzales, Peterkin, and Heyward were far from the only southern writers with antimodern tendencies who attracted the attention of northern literary critics. The mythology surrounding the Lowcountry's "golden age" paralleled the odes to southern life written by the "Southern Fugitives," a cohort of poets and essayists affiliated with Vanderbilt University. Emphasizing their discomfort with commerce, capitalism, and modern life, the Nashvilleans pledged allegiance to the rural virtues they associated with life in the Upcountry South. Eventually publishing *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930, the writers from Vanderbilt, who also became known as the Southern Agrarians, expressed some

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[46] DuBose Heyward, "The Negro in the Low-Country," in *The Carolina Low-Country*, by Augustine T. Smythe, Herbert Ravenel Sass, Alfred Huger, Beatrice Ravenel, Thomas Waring, Archibald Rutledge, Josephine Pinckney, Caroline Pinkney Rutledge, DuBose Heyward, Katherine C. Hutson, and Robert W. Gordon (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 171-87.

hostility toward the vision put forward by the popular Lowcountry writers because they believed the more authentic stories of the South were to be found in the Upcountry.[47]

What united both contingents of white southern writers, however, was a fear that the rural world of the nineteenth-century South was receding as a cultural force in both regional and national life. As the nation became increasingly urban and the family farm gave way to agricultural corporations, antimodern southern writers created a mythic past where the problems of the twentieth century did not exist. In the Lowcountry version of antimodernism, that mythic past was inextricably connected to an imagined racial harmony that had not yet been scarred by Reconstruction-era battles for racial equality.

Black Critics and the Golden Age Narrative

The Lowcountry's prominence in American popular culture coincided with an explosion of black cultural production and literary criticism. The Harlem Renaissance, the cultural movement of the interwar period that saw the Great Migration as a moment of artistic, political, and spiritual rebirth, had a contentious relationship with the folk traditions of the South. The idea that a "New Negro" had emerged in New York's Harlem and other northern cities meant repudiation of the "Old Negro" associated with the rural South.[48]

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[47] On the Southern Agrarians, see Emily Bingham and Thomas Underwood, eds., *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal: Essays after I'll Take My Stand* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) ; Michael O'Brien, "'The South Considers Her Most Peculiar': Charleston and Modern Southern Thought," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 94 (Spring 1993): 119-33.

[48] Gabriel A. Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), introduction.

New Negro intellectuals embraced a black modernity that was city-centered, cosmopolitan, and engaged in the public sphere. Renouncing the long tradition of black Americans being played for comic effect to white audiences, New Negro critics championed art that emphasized black dignity and racial uplift.[49] Students at Hampton Institute, for example, inspired by calls to discard the trappings of the slave past, led a series of campus protests against the school's administrative leadership during the 1920s and refused to perform spirituals for white donors.[50]

The historian, social critic, and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois used the pages of *The Crisis*, the monthly magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to establish a particular aesthetic standard for works of art dealing with the black American experience. When black Americans confronted their past in art, it was often through dysmorphic caricature. "We thought nothing could come out of that past which we wanted to remember; which we wanted to hand down to our children," Du Bois wrote in 1926. For Du Bois, all art was political, and notions of "Beauty" or "Truth" were simply sleights of hand that elided the white supremacy that characterized most of the nation's art. "Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists," he asserted. The answer for Du Bois was not only to create art that offered positive images of black life, but also to hold white artists accountable for works that hindered black progress.[51]

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[49] Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, introduction; Lamothe, *Inventing the New Negro*, chap. 3.

[50] Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation*, 58-60.

[51] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *The Crisis* (October 1926): 293.

Supremely interested in how highbrow cultural production could combat anti-black racism, New Negro intellectuals saw the white Lowcountry writers as important but potentially dangerous allies in their quest for positive representations of black life. In *The Crisis*, Du Bois praised *Porgy* as "a beautiful piece of work." "Seldom before has a white Southern writer done black folk with so much sympathy and subtle understanding," he wrote. Du Bois did believe, however, that *Porgy* focused too exclusively on Charleston's "black underworld" and thereby erased the city's black elite. "Out of Charleston for a hundred years has flowed leadership of the colored folk of America and in Charleston still rest men and women who would be a credit to any modern nation," Du Bois declared. [52]

While some African American writers were ambivalent about black folk traditions, others believed that black Americans had to engage the intellectual productions of unlettered black southerners in order to create a full accounting of the black past. In the theater, a number of black playwrights brought their own renditions of black folk humor to the stage. Leigh Whipper and Porter Granger's 1927 play *We's Risin': A Story of the Simple Life in the Souls of Black Folk* was seen as one way for African Americans to take ownership of their own folk culture and reject the minstrelsy and vaudeville traditions.[53] Another important advocate of black folklore was Zora Neale Hurston, who had grown up in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. She worked with noted anthropologist Franz Boas while she was an undergraduate student at Columbia

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[52] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Porgy," *The Crisis* (March 1926): 240-41.

[53] Leigh Whipper and Porter Granger, *We's Risin': A Story of the Simple Life in the Souls of Black Folk*, 1927, in Leigh Whipper Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

during the 1920s. An opponent of scientific racism and a pioneer in understanding race as a cultural construct, Boaz helped guide Hurston toward the field of anthropology. Conducting extensive fieldwork in the South, Hurston took particular interest in the folk traditions of the region's black working people. In 1931, she collaborated with the black poet Langston Hughes to produce *Mulebone: A Comedy of Negro Life in Three Acts*, a play that depicted the pathos and humor of southern black life. In 1935, she published *Mules and Men*, which offered both an ethnographic study of central Florida's black working class and a cultural archeology of secular folk traditions. Hurston's passion to represent the folk sensibilities of black southerners would also inform her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She would later conduct field work in New Orleans and Haiti, exploring Vodoun rituals and links between folk traditions of the American South and the Caribbean. Hurston was especially concerned about the sanitizing effect that the propagandistic approach advocated by Du Bois would have on black art. [54]

Sterling Brown, a poet and English professor at Howard University who had grown up in Washington, D.C., and received his undergraduate and graduate training in Massachusetts, also dedicated most of his academic career to extolling the cultural achievements of ordinary black southerners. "Dialect, or the speech of the people," Brown observed, "is capable of expressing whatever the people are. And the folk Negro is a great deal more than a buffoon or a plaintive minstrel." While a growing number of northern black intellectuals recognized the artistic and intellectual depth of black folk

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[54] Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, *Mulebone: A Comedy of Negro Life in Three Acts* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), which was written in 1931; Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Philadelphia: Lippincott and Co., 1935), and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1937); Adam Ewing, "Lying up a Nation: Zora Neale Hurston and the Local Uses of Diaspora," *Callaloo* 37 (Spring 2014): 130-47.

traditions and saw them as rich cultural resources, Brown argued that most black writers refused to center their work on the black folk because of "black middle class striving for recognition and respectability."[55]

As the chief literary critic for *Opportunity*, the magazine of the National Urban League, Brown reviewed a number of books by prominent white Lowcountry writers. In a 1927 review of Julia Peterkin's *Black April*, he applauded the literary movement coming out of the Lowcountry for shifting southern literature away from white supremacy and toward richer portraits of black life. "Ambrose Gonzales helped start it," Brown observed. "DuBose Heyward continued it. And now Julia Peterkin shows herself of their ilk; being willing to look upon the coastal Negro as more than a clown; as a human, capable of being a tragic figure, and stirring with his portrait more than ridicule." Brown found it particularly impressive that the black characters in interwar Lowcountry fiction were more than mere plantation fantasy or tools in the uplift propaganda preferred by the New Negro literati. He commended Peterkin for creating characters of "the earthy earth." "The squeamish may object to this story," Brown observed, "seeing only in it a dark tale of blood and superstition and of illegitimate children," but Peterkin's portrayal of black rural life captured "the gleams of humor and loveliness" as well as "the steady glow of humanity" that more propagandistic writers often omitted.[56]

Within a few years, however, Brown's sympathy for Peterkin's essentialist aesthetic evaporated. "[T]he statement that any artist, in one book or in half-a-dozen, knows 'the Negro' is of course a patent absurdity," Brown declared. "'The Negro' does

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[55] Brown quoted in Eugene B. Redmond, *Drum Voices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976), 227-28.

[56] Sterling A. Brown, "The New Secession—A Review," *Opportunity* 5 (May 1927): 147.

not exist; and he never did."[57] He would go further in a 1934 review of *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, a collaboration between Peterkin and the prominent photographer Doris Ulmann. *Roll, Jordan, Roll* harkened back to the day of the plantation, Brown argued. "The types shown are for the most part simplified: loyal, fatalistically resigned Uncles and Aunties, mistrusting civilization," he wrote. "These primitive folk do not build or run machines, they have no books or newspapers . . . radios or moving pictures . . . but they have leisure to develop faculties of mind and heart and to acquire the ancient wisdom of their race."[58] Brown was offended by passages that lamented the loss of innocence of black children as they grew older because they did not address the racist roots of black poverty and limited educational opportunities. Brown considered *Roll, Jordan, Roll* a fatally flawed work that failed to grapple with the structural racism that pervaded the South. He issued a similar critique of the volume of essays published by the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals. "The regretful refrain of all the essays," Brown observed, "is 'There are no Negroes singing in the fields.' The verb is never 'working.'"[59]

For Sterling Brown, studies of black folk culture had to do more than glorify the positive aspects of rural life. They also had to convey the fears and aspirations of black southerners speaking on their own terms. Reflecting upon how the spirituals in particular had become dehistoricized pillars of an Old South mythology, Brown ruefully pronounced it "not so strange that today the whites should have half of the credit for the spirituals." "They do so with justice," he pointed out. "These songs of suffering do owe

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[57] Sterling A. Brown, "Local Color or Interpretation," *Opportunity* 10 (July 1932): 223.

[58] Sterling A. Brown, "Arcadia, South Carolina," *Opportunity* 12 (February 1934): 59.

[59] Sterling A. Brown, "Pride and Pathos," *Opportunity* 9 (December 1931): 64. For the SPS volume, see Smythe et al., *The Carolina Low-Country*.

equally to both slaves and masters: the first produced the song, and the second produced the sufferings."[60]

Scholarly Studies of the Lowcountry

The surge of attention to Lowcountry black folklore inspired a corresponding push for scholarly study of the history and social structure of the black Lowcountry. The social scientists who focused on the Lowcountry during the interwar years, black as well as white, also saw the region as a source of answers to problems of urban migration, racial conflict, and rampant consumerism. The white social scientists engaged in studies of the Lowcountry were generally more liberal on matters of race than the white elites who wrote fiction about the region. Nevertheless, they hesitated to analyze the structural foundations of racial disparities. The black scholars who also studied the Lowcountry challenged those biases and, like the black literary critics of the era, saw the black Lowcountry as a place that reflected both the promise of emancipation and Reconstruction and the perils of the Jim Crow present.

The most prominent institution in interwar studies of Lowcountry black life was the University of North Carolina. Howard Odum, who chaired the university's sociology department and founded the journal *Social Forces*, was a leader in shifting examination of southern life away from paeans to the Old South or backdoor arguments for white supremacy. Born in 1884 near Bethlehem, Georgia, Odum completed a dissertation on African American spirituals at Clark University in Massachusetts in 1909.[61] In the 1920s,

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[60] Brown, "Arcadia, South Carolina."

[61] Howard W. Odum, "Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negro" (PhD diss., Clark University, 1909).

he collaborated with Guy Benton Johnson on two books about black work songs and also published a trilogy of ham-fisted stories about a character named Black Ulysses.[62] Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, he would move away from studies of black folk life to focus on questions of regionalism and social work.[63]

Odum's shift in academic focus corresponded with his and the university's increasing leadership in trying to foster interracial harmony. More than any other predominantly white institution of higher education in the South, the University of North Carolina was a beacon of racial moderation. With the establishment of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in 1918, as well as the sociological journal *Social Forces*, the university attracted a vibrant cohort of talented white scholars who were interested in both cutting-edge social-scientific scholarship and questions of social justice.[64]

One of the first intellectual projects that demonstrated the university's understanding of the relationship between sociology and race relations was a year-long study of life on St. Helena Island in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Already well-known in intellectual circles for its place in Civil War history, St. Helena experienced a renewed

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[62] Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Song: A Study of the Typical Negro Songs in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925), and *Negro Workaday Songs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926); Howard W. Odum, *Rainbow Round My Shoulder: The Blue Trail of Black Ulysses* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928), *Wings on My Feet: Black Ulysses at the Wars* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), and *Cold Blue Moon: Black Ulysses afar Off* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931). On Odom's folklore writing, see Lynn Moss Sanders, *Howard W. Odum's Folklore Odyssey: Transformation to Tolerance through African American Folk Studies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

[63] See, for example, Howard W. Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), *American Regionalism: A Cultural-Historical Approach to National Integration* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1938), and *Race and Rumors of Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).

[64] On the role of the University of North Carolina in interwar southern liberalism, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 201-46.

wave of interest during the interwar period as the Penn School became an exemplar for black education in the South. Its leaders actively cultivated relationships with the South's leading white liberals and positioned the Penn School as a model of interracial cooperation.[65]

The Penn School was therefore of great interest to Howard Odum and his protégé, Thomas Jackson Woofter, Jr. The son of a professor at the University of Georgia, Woofter earned a PhD in sociology at Columbia University in 1918 and then spent nearly a decade as a researcher for organizations that focused on interracial cooperation. Shortly after joining the faculty of the University of North Carolina in 1926, he received grants from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the university's Institute for Research in the Social Sciences to conduct a study of black life on St. Helena Island. Woofter and a team of fellow scholars from the University of North Carolina took up residence on St. Helena for six months and began collecting sociological data about the island's inhabitants. Described in the SSRC grant proposal as one of the nation's most primitive and isolated groups of African Americans, the black residents of St. Helena were intriguing to Woofter because they had acquired and retained smallholdings of land with greater success than any other black community in the South. Woofter and his team saw St. Helena as a model community that African Americans elsewhere in the United States would do well to emulate. [66]

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[65] On the Penn School, see above, Chapter 3. On the school's effort to situate itself as a center of southern liberalism, see Orville Vernon Burton with Wilbur Cross, *Penn Center: A History Preserved* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 70-98.

[66] Mark Ellis, *Race Harmony and Black Progress: Jack Woofter and the Interracial Cooperation Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 211-15.

In a 1928 preliminary report prepared for the Penn School, Woofter's team suggested that the residents of St. Helena faced many of the same problems that plagued African Americans elsewhere in the South, including poverty and inferior public schools. The scholars from the University of North Carolina believed that the island was still benefitting from the institutions and ideas engendered by the Port Royal Experiment, but now struggled economically. "In short," the report concluded, "the achievement on St. Helena has been an orderly community, a healthy community, one which is fairly stable, but in which bread winning is difficult."[67]

Despite their declared commitment to scientific rigor, the University of North Carolina scholars could not entirely escape the "golden haze" that permeated the productions of the interwar fiction writers. While careful to declare that the objective of his research was not "the picturesque," Woofter borrowed from the rose-colored depictions of black Lowcountry life in their novels, stories, and plays. "The land and people of St. Helena Island are the same which lend charm to the work of Julia Peterkin and of DuBose Hayward," he wrote. At the same time, however, Woofter tried to portray the Penn School's outreach and, by extension, his own research as more forward-looking than the fiction and folklore that dominated popular culture. Unlike the characters in *Black April* and *Porgy*, the people of St. Helena, he argued, were at a more advanced stage of civilization and had more advantages than the tragically primitive characters who peopled the narratives of white Lowcountry writers. [68]

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[67] "The Study of St. Helena Island: Preliminary Confidential Report for the Trustees of the Penn School," 1928, box 6, Penn School Papers, SHC.

[68] T. J. Woofter, Jr., *Black Yeomanry: Life on St. Helena Island* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1930), 5.

Once the research was complete, the team of scholars published four monographs derived from their data. The first, and most widely read, was Woofter's *Black Yeomanry: Life on St. Helena Island*. Published in 1930, *Black Yeomanry* explored the relationship between St. Helena's high rate of black landownership and such indicators of social progress as household income, school funding, out-of-wedlock childbirth, and church attendance. That same year, Guy B. Johnson published *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island*. A sociologist and social anthropologist, Johnson offered a revisionist study of Gullah dialect and folk traditions that challenged the premises of earlier scholars. In addition to offering an extensive catalog of words, stories, and songs, Johnson's book argued that Gullah had an internal logic rooted in the grammar of the English language. In 1932, Clyde Kiser published *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers*. Kiser's project was a comparative study that contrasted conditions on St. Helena with the less forgiving world of northern cities; it argued that the migrants fared worse after leaving the island. Finally, in 1936, Guion Griffis Johnson published *A Social History of the Sea Islands, with Special Reference to St. Helena Island, South Carolina*, which traced the history of the island's black community since the Civil War.[69]

The initial reception of Woofter's book was overwhelmingly positive. His portrait of St. Helena as a poor but stable community still rooted in the communal values of the countryside attracted considerable praise. One northern writer found *Black Yeomanry* a refreshing change from the "Police Gazette romances of Harlem dives" that dominated

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[69] Ibid.; Guy B. Johnson, *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930); Clyde Kiser, *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); Guion Griffis Johnson, *A Social History of the Sea Islands, with Special Reference to St. Helena Island, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930).

works about "[t]he Negro in our midst." Describing Woofter's book as "a sane, sympathetic, revealing and appealing study," he claimed that it "cannot be too earnestly commended to the attention of all intelligent readers" and "should be in the library of every high school and every organization devoted to any form of social welfare work, throughout the country." Addressing potential objections that St. Helena was an atypical black community, another reviewer lauded Woofter for focusing on a community that could offer lessons in racial progress. "[M]any of the constructive forces which have made St. Helena exceptional are those which need most to be described and analyzed," he argued. In a review titled "Gullah Negroes," the New York *Times* characterized *Black Yeomanry* as "a sociological study of the life and people out of which came the Gullah Negroes of Julia Peterkin and DuBose Hayward [*sic*]. But the people on the island of St. Helena have had more advantages and more training of every sort than were assumed in 'Porgy' and 'Black April,' and so the study presents their life at a more advanced stage than does the fiction."[70]

Black intellectuals approached Woofter's book with considerably more skepticism. While some, like reviewer Robert Burns Eleazer of the *Chicago Defender*, commended Woofter for combining "the exactness of the scientific investigator with the warm human interest and imagination of the popular writer," others saw *Black Yeomanry* as a deeply flawed project that reflected the structural racism embedded in the academy. "There is not single word of really illuminating truth. . . ," W. E. B. Du Bois declared. "Woofter's study is little less than a calamity." While Woofter acknowledged the

[70] "Life on St. Helena Island," Hartford *Courant*, September 14, 1930; Paul Green, "On Old St. Helena: Review of *Black Yeomanry*," New York *Herald-Tribune Books*, August 24, 1930; "Gullah Negroes," New York *Times*, November 30, 1930.

existence of widespread poverty on the island and noted that the average St. Helena household had to make do with an income of only $400 a year, Du Bois faulted Woofter and his team for failing to discuss the roots of black inequality. "Their reports are propaganda, pure and simple," he charged, "and attempt to say to the world that whatever is wrong in the South is not due to the race question but to ordinary social difficulties which can be found everywhere."[71]

Also irritating to Du Bois was the ease with which Woofter and his colleagues had obtained $16,000 for their study when he and other black sociologists had little or no access to grant money. "It is a shame that the Boards and Funds which are spending money for investigation in the South should continue to pursue this line of so-called sociological research," he wrote. "Why is it that Negro scholars, like Woodson, Frazier and Ira Reid, men who when they see obvious conclusions, have the common honesty to express them, can seldom get funds for their work?"[72]

Du Bois's skepticism about Woofter's study was shared by other black scholars. In his 1931 review of *Black Yeomanry* in the *Journal of Negro History*, Carter G. Woodson similarly pointed out that racism in academic institutions and private foundations prevented black scholars from securing the research funds available to their white peers. "When we consider that this study was projected on a budget of about thirty thousand dollars and that it was a joint investigation of a staff of research workers we wonder why the results are so meager unless something unusual is to appear in the

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[71] R. B. Eleazer, "The Book Shelf: Origin of the 'Gullah'," *Chicago Defender*, October 18, 1930; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Reviewed Work: *Black Yeomanry*, *Life on St. Helena Island*, By T. J. Woofter, Jr.," *Crisis* (November 1930): 378.

[72] Du Bois, "Reviewed Work: *Black Yeomanry*," 378.

forthcoming volumes," Woodson observed. Woodson was convinced that many of *Black Yeomanry*'s analytical shortcomings stemmed from the absence of black scholars. "In the beginning of this survey," Woodson recalled, "it was urged that Negro investigators be placed on this staff to interpret certain phases of the life of their race which only a Negro can understand, but probably because Negroes cannot break bread with white men they were not required to cooperate." While Woodson regarded Woofter as a generally "enlightened" scholar, he believed that the deficiencies of *Black Yeomanry* meant that "the Negro must treat his own record scientifically."[73]

The criticism of *Black Yeomanry* by Du Bois and Woodson reverberated in the interwar black press and gave rise to a new label for white scholarship too timid to identify racism: "Woofterism." *The Afro American*, a black newspaper published in Baltimore, criticized *Black Yeomanry*'s inability to confront the damage wrought by segregation. "When everywhere throughout the South average colored schools are found to be below average white schools, it is evident there must be some reason for it," the paper maintained. While the *Afro American* considered Woofter progressive on questions of race, his failure to acknowledge the Jim Crow origins of unequal school funding suggested that beneath the veneer of scholarly objectivity lay a defense of segregation. "[D]espite the liberal atmosphere of that university and the program of education in that state, Mr. Woofter enunciates a theory ancient and un-Christian, unscientific and fallacious, impractical if extended and altogether subversive of the best interests of the state and the nation."[74]

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[73] Carter G. Woodson, review of *Black Yeomanry*: *Life on St. Helena Island*, by T. J. Woofter Jr., *Journal of Negro History* 16 (Spring 1931): 95-96.

[74] "Woofterism—a Fallacy," Baltimore *Afro American*, September 27, 1930.

Ira de Augustine Reid, a black sociologist at Atlanta University, echoed the same concerns. "*Black Yeomanry* gave Woofter the chance to argue for better funded black education," he wrote, "but it was typical of his tendency to write for white readers that he failed to put the case for radical change, leaving black readers to draw their own conclusions." Reid believed that because the book was designed for a commercial publisher, not an academic press, it followed in the mold of popular community studies like Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown*, with any hard edges sanded down. Reid regarded Woofter's analysis as more scientific than that of the southern white men "who about two generations ago went North and equipped themselves in modern historiography to write the reconstruction history of the South in order to white-wash their ancestors who overthrew the only democratic government the South had ever had." But he was also keenly aware that, like the Lowcountry fiction of Heyward and Peterkin, rose-colored depictions of a quaint, premodern community ignored the racism that lay behind the golden haze. "The future of these Negroes is not bright," Reid maintained, referring to the residents of St. Helena.

> During the depression most of the white men who acted as bankers to the Negroes have failed. The large truck garden run by a white man is a possible threat to the economy of the Negroes. It is also possible that one of the beaches will be used for [the] building of a summer resort. The introduction of autos, radio, [and] telephones is making for change. Crime is on the rise. A large number of Negroes are emigrating to the mainland and the North. Thus it is probable that the old culture of the community will gradually disintegrate. [75]

The desire to see St. Helena as a community caught between premodern and modern worlds also colored Guy Johnson's analysis in *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island*. Johnson leaned heavily on the idea of an "island community." A concept at the center of

[75] Ira De A. Reid, review of *Black Yeomanry*, by T. J. Woofter, Jr., *Opportunity* (November 1930): 342.

considerable debate among sociologists during the 1930s, island communities were characterized as rural folk societies that had not yet been fully subsumed by modern forces and secular institutions. Johnson argued that St. Helena was an example of such a community. "The Spirit of the Negroes is that of poor but proud peasants," he wrote. During the 1930s, Johnson presented his findings at a number of conferences where scholars were engaged in identifying the nation's remaining island communities.[76]

In connecting St. Helena to other "island communities," Johnson discounted the possibility that Gullah culture had African roots. "Contrary to popular opinion, there is very little native African culture left," he argued. "The folklore shows probably the most traces of an African origin. One finds the animal stories current in other parts of the South and these are similar to those told in Africa. In music and in folkways there are also a few African elements."[77] But they were minimal, Johnson believed, and the grammatical and syntactical underpinnings of Gullah came from English. "In breaking in new Negroes," Johnson explained, "the white man used a sort of 'baby talk.' He simplified tenses, inflections, gender, number, etc., until there was left but a skeleton of literary English."[78]

In his "baby talk" thesis, Johnson took a firm position in an emerging debate over the degree to which African American culture was indebted to an African past. "The Negro's almost complete loss of African language heritages is startling at first glance, but

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[76] Johnson, *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island*; Guy B. Johnson, "The Isolated Negro Community of St. Helena Island, North Carolina," *Bulletin: The Society for Social Research*, January 1937, and "Conference on Cultural Isolation," both in box 5, folder 1085, Guy Benton Johnson Papers, SHC.

[77] Johnson, "The Isolated Negro Community of St. Helena Island, North Carolina."

[78] Johnson, *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island*, 8.

slavery as practiced in the United States made any other outcome impossible," Johnson argued.[79] Melville Herskovits, a white American anthropologist who spent most of his career studying people of African descent in Surinam, was one of the most prominent voices on the other side of the debate. His magnum opus, *The Myth of the African Past*, would not be published until 1941, but Herskovits had already begun to challenge scholars like Johnson, arguing that African cultural patterns were at the center of black culture in the Americas. In a private letter written in 1933, Johnson questioned Herskovits's thesis. "[O]ne of our younger anthropologists, M. J. Herskovits, has been in Surinam," Johnson wrote, "and will probably publish a book in the near future. Herskovits disagrees vigorously with me on my ideas about the relatively small African influence on our Negro dialect and our Negro music." Although Johnson was "willing to take a step or two toward the African [retention thesis]," he was not ready to agree with Herskovits. "He is really more familiar with the Negroes of British Guiana than he is with the Negroes here in our own South," Johnson insisted. "I think he is inclined to underestimate the extent to which our Negroes have assumed white culture."[80]

While Johnson and Herskovits were debating African retentions, Lorenzo Dow Turner, a black English professor who had just left Howard University for Fisk University, had begun his own study of Gullah. While teaching a summer session at South Carolina State College for black teachers, many of whom were from the Lowcountry, he became intrigued by their dialect. Recognizing that the expansion of a formally trained teacher corps would inevitably lead to the standardization of English and

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[79] Ibid., 10.

[80] Guy B. Johnson to J. Graham Cruickshank, May 16, 1933, box 5, folder 1086, Guy Benton Johnson Papers, SHC.

the eventual disappearance of Gullah, Turner applied for a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies to make a permanent record of the dialect. Unlike previous folklorists, however, Turner would not try to capture Gullah through conventional transcription, which he regarded as a hopelessly inadequate method for representing speech. Rather, he proposed to use phonetic symbols and phonographic recordings.[81]

Awarded an ACLS grant in early 1932, Turner spent the summer and fall of that year on Johns, Edisto, Wadmalaw, and St. Helena islands. Carrying a bulky, cumbersome electric recorder that weighed more than thirty pounds and used stainless-steel magnetized wire, Turner traversed the islands in search of interviewees. To allay the suspicions of the islands' residents, who were accustomed to being ridiculed for their cultural and linguistic uniqueness, Turner had to do a great deal to gain their trust. To encourage the full cooperation of his informants, he compensated them with tobacco, small parcels of groceries, or occasionally money. In addition, he sought out local community leaders to serve as intermediaries. Among them was Dr. York W. Bailey, a graduate of the Penn School who had earned a medical degree from Howard University and then returned to St. Helena as a physician.[82]

While the project was initially archival in nature, Turner eventually expanded his 1932 research into a book on African culture in America. "I became interested in African culture several years ago, when I was doing field work on a Negro dialect of coastal

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[81] Margaret Wade-Lewis, *Lorenzo Dow Turner: Father of Gullah Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 58; "L. D. Turner Awarded Grant for Research in World Linguistics," Baltimore *Afro American*, April 2, 1932.

[82] Wade-Lewis, *Lorenzo Dow Turner*, 82-84.

Figure 4.3. Lorenzo Dow Turner conducting an interview in the Lowcountry, 1932
Source: Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, NUSC

South Carolina and Georgia known as Gullah and Geechee," Turner reported in 1953. The work he conducted in the Sea Islands led him to go on to study African languages and spend time in Brazil, Senegal, and other parts of the black Atlantic. "I discovered so many non-English characteristics of this dialect that I decided I needed to study some of the African languages spoken in the areas from which the slaves were brought to the new World," Turner explained. "After that I became interested in studying the effect of the impact of African culture in general upon the cultures of the New World."[83]

[83] Operation New Horizon, January 16, 1953, box 2, folder 6, Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, NUSC.

By the 1940s, Turner was certain that earlier scholars of Lowcountry folklore had completely missed the significance of African cultural survivals. His 1949 book, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, demonstrated that Gullah contained linguistic patterns that could be traced directly to Africa.[84] Turner attributed a great deal of his success in discovering these linguistic connections to the trust he had built with black communities in the Sea Islands. According to Turner, this trust was rooted in part in the willingness of the islands' black residents to speak more openly with him than they would with white scholars. "[T]he Gullah Negro when talking to strangers is likely to use speech that for the most part is English," Turner explained.[85]

Many readers found Turner's argument refreshing. "This book is eloquent evidence of Doctor Turner's development as an authority on English as spoken by Negroes on the Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina," Carter G. Woodson told a correspondent. "In tracing these origins he has shown ripe scholarship in mastering the essentials of the native languages spoken in Africa as well as the influences from these sources on the languages spoken in the Western Hemisphere."[86] Herbert Apetheker, a white historian of African American life and culture, agreed with Turner's critique of the white Lowcountry writers. "The tone of the earlier writers may be judged by this passage from Ambrose E. Gonzales, one of the most 'authoritative' among them," Apetheker suggested: "'Slovenly and a careless of speech, these Gullahs seized upon the

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[84] Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[85] Quoted in Wade-Lewis, *Lorenzo Dow Turner*, 91-94.

[86] Carter Woodson to Ralph Linton, December 28, 1949, box 2, folder 6, Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, NUSC.

peasant English used by some of the early settlers and by the white servants of the wealthier colonists, wrapped their clumsy tongues about it . . .' and so on." Apetheker argued that all too often, academics "of our multi-million-dollar institutions of mis-education" built upon or borrowed from the shaky foundation established by Gonzales and others.[87] While the African retention debate remains unresolved, Turner's findings sounded the death knell for romantic and primitivist accounts of black life in the Lowcountry. No longer would the Lowcountry serve as a repository for the fantasies of Old South apologists or the hopes of interracial-harmony activists; instead, black scholars pushed for a nuanced portrait of the region's past that rejected mythologies devised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[88]

In their place, African American writers and activists developed a counternarrative about the Reconstruction-era Lowcountry that was grounded in black political participation. In interviews conducted with former slaves between 1936 and 1938 by the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), a sharp division emerged in the approaches of black and white interviewers. The white interviewers, most of whom were southerners, were more likely to follow the scripted questions, while black interviewers demonstrated a greater willingness to diverge from the script or ask follow-up questions. As several scholars have noted, the discrepancy in responses was heavily shaped by the public

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[87] Clipping of Herbert Aptheker, "Review of Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect," *Books in Review*, box 2, folder 7, Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, NUSC.

[88] Following Turner's book, studies of Gullah increasingly emphasized African retentions and cultural resistance, and the history and culture of the South Carolina Sea Islands increasingly became sites of interest to the burgeoning fields of African American history and black studies. On the continued interest in the Sea Islands, especially in relationship to the first generation of black studies scholarship, see *Journal of Black Studies* 10 (Summer 1980), a special issue on Sea Island culture.

performances of Jim Crow that led black southerners to modulate their answers to white people.[89]

Some black writers saw the FWP as an opportunity to unearth previously unrecorded social history. Augustus Ladson, a black native of Charleston who taught at South Carolina State College, worked for the FWP in and around the Lowcountry. Whereas many of his white colleagues received either innocuous or opaque answers to the boilerplate questions designed by the FWP, Ladson was often able to get his interviewees to open up about the violence that took place during slavery and about moments when slaves exercised resistance. Like Turner, Ladson understood the rules of southern racial etiquette and believed that, as a black interviewer, he was more likely to obtain unfiltered responses than his white counterparts.[90]

The results of Ladson's interviews suggest that he was invested in a countermemory project that sought to recover the black political history of the Lowcountry. In 1936, he sought out Thomas Ezekiel Miller, an ex-slave who had served as a state senator from Beaufort County during the 1870s, as U.S. congressman from the Lowcountry's "Black Seventh" District between 1888 and 1890, and as a delegate to the 1895 South Carolina constitutional convention, where he opposed the disfranchisement

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[89] On how racial etiquette influenced FWP interviews, see Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 245-47; John Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), introduction; Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); George Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Supplement, ser. 1, vol. 1 (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1977), introduction.

[90] On Ladson, see Damon L. Fordham, *True Stories of Black South Carolina* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008), 37-48; Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 137-40.

amendments. The five-page biography that Ladson entered into the FWP's collection went beyond Miller's political accomplishments. It not only discussed his childhood and family history, but also provided an overview of Reconstruction in South Carolina.[91]

No other member of the entire Federal Writers' Project interviewed a Reconstruction-era officeholder. Miller "has written and ready for the press, a true history of Congressional Reconstruction and the part Negroes played in South Carolina," Ladson reported.[92] Although the interview transcript has disappeared from the historical record, Ladson's summary of his conversation with the Reconstruction leader captured an aspect of Lowcountry memory that had been minimized or erased in popular accounts of the era. Ladson's search for a usable past in the accomplishments of black legislators resembled the efforts of black scholars to redefine the Reconstruction era in both the historical profession and public memory. In effect, it paralleled the work of historian Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, who produced a trilogy on black life during Reconstruction in South Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee, and that of W. E. B. Du Bois, who in 1935 published the most sustained challenge to white-supremacist interpretations of Reconstruction.[93]

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[91] Augustus Ladson, "Biography: Ex-Congressman Thomas Ezekiel Miller," 1936, Federal Writers' Project Papers, SCL.

[92] Ibid. Unfortunately, Miller's account of Reconstruction was never published, and the manuscript has apparently not survived.

[93] Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in South Carolina during The Reconstruction* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1924), *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926), and *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1941); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935).

Conclusion

During the years between the two world wars, new narratives about the Lowcountry emerged in both fiction and social science research. The fiction written by white southerners during this period, while couched in more sympathetic terms than the crude stereotypes that had characterized earlier works, was still inextricably linked to the white-supremacist project of defending the Old South and erasing Reconstruction. Black literary critics agreed that black folklore in the Lowcountry had preserved virtues that African Americans were in danger of losing in the Great Migration, but they challenged the golden-hazed tint in which such writers as Julia Peterkin and DuBose Heyward painted the hierarchical world of the Lowcountry.

The sociological work that white scholars conducted in the Lowcountry during the interwar years examined the Reconstruction-era institutions of St. Helena Island that had helped create a black community where landownership was high and racial harmony seemed to prevail. Black scholars, however, argued that those studies failed to address the white racism that had eroded many of the gains of Reconstruction. In a quest for a countermemory rooted in the Lowcountry, some black intellectuals, most notably Lorenzo Dow Turner, used social science to valorize the folk traditions of the region's Gullah speakers by highlighting the dialect's African roots. Others, like Augustus Ladson, used the Federal Writers' Project to bring the story of Reconstruction into an ostensibly apolitical effort to capture the life histories of former slaves.

In the battles over representations of the Lowcountry in folklore, fiction, and social-scientific research, the memory of Reconstruction was filtered through fears of urban disorder and racial conflict. White fiction writers and scholars looked to different

visions of the Reconstruction-era past: Julia Peterkin and Du Bose Heyward, to an updated version of the moonlight-and-magnolias world of postbellum plantation fiction; Thomas J. Woofter and Guy Johnson, to the northern missionaries who had established institutions rooted in northern values during the Civil War. Both approaches portrayed the region's black inhabitants as passive participants, a deficiency readily identified by black critics. Through the work of literary criticism and their own field research, black intellectuals approached the interwar fascination with the Lowcountry from a different angle and in the process helped preserve a black countermemory of the region's history.

Chapter 5

Forgetting Forty Acres and a Mule: Black Land Loss and the Memory of Reconstruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era, 1965-1980

On the tenth track of his 1965 live album, *Mr. Oscar Brown Jr. Goes to Washington*, jazz vocalist Oscar Brown, Jr., invoked a well-known episode in African American history. "If I'm not mistaken I once read/ During that short spell I spent in school/ Where Every Slave set free was supposed to get/ for slaving, forty acres and a mule." The song, appropriately titled "Forty Acres and a Mule," punctuated each stanza with the Reconstruction-era slogan. "We had a promise that was taken back/ and when we hollered it was 'Hush, be cool!' Well me, I'm being rowdy, hot and black. I want my Forty acres and my mule!"[1] Born in 1926 to college-educated parents in Bronzeville, a black middle-class neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, Brown's "short spell in school" probably meant not only encountering black teachers who were only two generations removed from Reconstruction, but also reading textbooks written for black schoolchildren that sought to dispel white-supremacist propaganda about Reconstruction.[2]

Long a mainstay of family history and folklore, mythology about forty acres and a mule also began to appear in black popular culture during the post-Civil Rights era. On March 12, 1975, the American funk band Parliament released its third album, *Chocolate City*. Addressing the importance of Washington, D.C., and other black-

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[1] Oscar Brown, Jr., "Forty Acres and a Mule," *Mr. Oscar Brown Jr. Goes to Washington*, (LP, Fontana, 1965).

[2] Mary K. Huelsbeck, "The Story of Oscar Brown, Jr.," BlackGrooves.org, December 7, 2007, http://blackgrooves.org/the-story-of-oscar-brown-jr/ (accessed July 30, 2016); Donnie L. Betts, *Music Is My Life, Politics, My Mistress: The Story of Oscar Brown, Jr.* (Film, No Credits Production, Inc., 2007).

majority cities to African Americans, lead singer George Clinton juxtaposed the tangibility of "chocolate city" as "our piece of rock" with the chimerical outcome of past aspirations. "We didn't get our forty acres and a mule," he sang. "But we did get you, CC."[3] More than a throwaway line, Clinton's use of the Reconstruction-era slogan, like Brown's in the 1960s, touched a powerful chord of African American memory. At the same time, it reflected a shift in how black Americans understood the meaning of Reconstruction. During the Civil Rights era, black intellectuals and activists who were inspired by the emergence of black nationalism fashioned new mythologies about the black experience that were rooted in the struggle for biracial democracy during Reconstruction. Often working outside the discipline of academic history, black journalists, politicians, policymakers, artists, and grassroots activists all deployed narratives about Reconstruction to call attention to the lost promise of the post-Civil War years.[4]

Underlying the new accounts of Reconstruction were the changing spatial dimensions of black American life. The now profoundly urban contours of the African American experience left many black leaders wondering about the place of landownership and rural life in black politics. With the rise of "chocolate cities," the growing black middle class began to compare the economic and political gains of the 1970s to advances African Americans had made in the 1870s. In 1972, Vernon Jordan, president of the National Urban League, warned that the "Second

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[3] Parliament, "Chocolate City," *Chocolate City* (LP, 1975, Casablanca).

[4] Scholarship on Reconstruction in post-World War II memory is limited, but see Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), chap. 5.

Reconstruction" would meet the same fate as the first Reconstruction if conservatives successfully rolled back affirmative-action programs and enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[5]

While black America had become increasingly urban during the 1960s and 1970s, some activists warned that emphasis on the promise and perils of northern life drew attention away from ongoing problems in the rural South. Pointing to a precipitous drop in the standard of living of rural black southerners, organizations like the Black Economic Research Center and the Emergency Land Fund argued against a teleological story of black progress. Rather than focus on the rise of post-Civil Rights black officeholders, rural activists used the unfulfilled promise of "forty acres and a mule" to call attention to the rapid decline of black landownership in post-World War II America. Between 1950 and 1970, more than half of the land owned by black farmers had been lost. Centered mostly in the South, the land crisis paralleled the rural declension that had become increasingly visible as the nation grappled with poverty through the regional and local programs instituted by the War on Poverty.[6]

This chapter argues that battles over land loss in the South Carolina Lowcountry reanimated a deep-seated fear that had roots in the region's

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[5] Vernon E. Jordan, "The End of the Second Reconstruction," May 16, 1972, Proceedings of the 63rd National Urban League Annual Conference, reprinted in *Vital Speeches of the Day* 38 (Summer 1972): 552. On the opening of the American workplace to African Americans and women under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, see Nancy Maclean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Work Place* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[6] On the War on Poverty's engagement with the South during the Civil Rights era, see Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), pt. 3; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), chap. 13.

Reconstruction-era past. A touchstone of black progress following the Civil War, the South Carolina Lowcountry became a stand-in for rural black poverty during the mid-twentieth century. As a new generation of scholars reminded the nation that the Lowcountry was once the site of black economic independence and political power, organizations like Black Land Services Incorporated and the Emergency Land Fund worked to bring attention to the plight of black farmers in Beaufort County. By deploying the memory of Reconstruction, civil rights activists across the nation and in the Lowcountry itself drew a parallel between, on the one hand, the collapse of the nation's first attempt to use the state to protect black rights and, on the other, the twentieth-century black freedom struggle. In so doing, they also reclaimed a black political vision rooted in landownership and rural life.[7]

The Strange Career of "Forty Acres and a Mule"

The slogan "forty acres and a mule" was rooted in a Civil War order by General William T. Sherman that offered former slaves an opportunity to settle on forty-acre plots carved from Lowcountry plantations. While the policy was reversed by President Andrew Johnson after the war, the fight for landownership continued,

[7] On Black Land Services, see Orville Vernon Burton with Wilbur Cross, *Penn Center: A History Preserved* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 99-104. Although this chapter is focused on the genealogy of the promise of forty acres and a mule and how it informed thinking about twentieth-century black land loss, it is important to note that it is also at the center of ongoing conversations about reparations for slavery. On reparations movements in the United States, see Martha Biondi, "The Rise of the Reparations Movement," *Radical History Review*, no. 87 (Fall 2003): 5-18; William Darity, Jr., "Forty Acres and a Mule in the 21st Century," *Social Science Quarterly* 89 (September 2008): 656-64; Robin D. G. Kelley, "'A Day of Reckoning': Dreams of Reparations," in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 110-34; Michael T. Martin and Marilyn Yaquinto, eds., *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States: On Reparations for Slavery, Jim Crow, and Their Legacies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pt. 3.

first by Republicans in Congress and officials in the Freedmen's Bureau, and later at the hands of black and white Republicans who kept the aspiration alive in state and local Reconstruction politics. When Reconstruction ended, the idea of forty acres and a mule lived on in the memory of black Americans. Some black southerners remembered the promise fondly, while others concluded that it had been fraudulent from the beginning or saw its reversal as a tragic betrayal of what Reconstruction could have been. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, reflections on the slogan became increasingly militant as the limits of civil rights without economic empowerment became increasingly apparent. A lodestar among the promises of Reconstruction, "forty acres and a mule" developed a mythology over the ensuing century that reflected growing skepticism among African Americans about the prospect that any government-led reform would live up to its promise.

On January 16, 1865, General William Tecumseh Sherman issued Special Field Order 15, which reserved for settlement exclusively by ex-slaves some 400,000 acres of land along the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida that had been abandoned by its Confederate owners. Land in the Sherman reserve was to be divided into parcels of "not more than 40 acres" and issued to heads of families, who would receive "possessory title."[8] Issued in the wake of Sherman's March to the Sea, the order was designed to provide for the black refugees from slavery who had followed Sherman's army. Far from an advocate of racial equality or social justice,

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[8] Special Field Orders, No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, 16 Jan. 1865, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, ed. Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, ser. 1, vol. 3 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 338-40.

Sherman did not intend the order as a foundation for postwar public policy or a model for the postbellum social order.

The call to redistribute land to former slaves did not disappear at the end of the war.[9] The newly established Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) was envisioned, at least initially, as a vehicle to redistribute land once owned by the South's planter class; the law creating the bureau provided that ex-slaves be settled on forty-acre plots. But the amnesty and pardon policies of Andrew Johnson, who assumed the presidency following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, required the land's return to its antebellum owners, thereby stifling the redistribution plans. With the federal government now committed to restoring the property rights of southern planters, the Freedmen's Bureau had to renege on its promise of land reform, and bureau agents instead turned to promoting wage labor. The struggle to dispossess freedpeople to whom land had already been issued was especially severe and drawn out in the Sherman reserve, where some 40,000 freedpeople had settled as early as June 1865. Their dispossession continued into 1867.[10]

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[9] On the land question at the close of the Civil War, see Steven Hahn, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, John C. Rodrigue, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Land and Labor, 1865*, ser. 3, vol. 1 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), chap. 4. On freedpeople's efforts to achieve landed independence during the years immediately following the war, see René Hayden, Anthony E. Kaye, Kate Masur, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, Leslie S. Rowland, and Stephen A West, eds., *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, ser. 3, vol. 2 of *Freedom, a Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), chap. 9.

[10] For the official announcement that bureau-controlled land would be restored to its former owners, see O. O. Howard, Circular No. 15, September 12, 1865, in Hahn et al., eds., *Land and Labor, 1865*, 431-33. On the role of the Freedmen's Bureau in enforcing free labor in the postbellum South, see ibid., chap. 2; Hayden et al., eds., *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, chap. 1; Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slavery to Wage Labor, 1860-1870* (New

Despite the federal government's renunciation of land reform, the idea of "forty acres and mule" gained new life during Congressional Reconstruction. On March 11, 1867, Congressman Thaddeus Stevens introduced a bill that outlined a land redistribution plan.[11] Although it did not pass, the idea of land reform remained alive in the radical wing of the Republican Party and among many grassroots Republicans. During the 1868 elections, white southerners repeatedly accused the Republican Party, particularly local chapters of the Union League, of propagating the rumor that black southerners would receive "forty acres and a mule" if they voted for the Republican ticket. Although white reporters never heard Republican officials make any such *quid pro quo* offer, southern newspapers claimed to have corroboration from former slaves. "Never having attended one of the secret 'league' meetings—at which the Radical leaders were accustomed to make their promises or give their instructions to the negroes—we cannot say that we ever heard the offer of land and mules made," one Georgia paper acknowledged. "But we have heard Negroes say that such promises had been made to them, and that they expect to receive land."[12]

Such accusations were part of an overarching critique of purported corruption at the core of Reconstruction. By suggesting that the newly enfranchised freedmen

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York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 4; Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), chaps. 6-7. On the dispossession of freedpeople in the Sherman reserve, see Hayden et al., eds., *Land and Labor*, 1866-1867, chap. 2.

[11] On Stevens and land redistribution, see Eric Foner, "Thaddeus Stevens, Confiscation, and Reconstruction," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), chap. 7.

[12] "Forty Acres and a Mule," Columbus (GA) *Daily Enquirer*, November 24, 1868.

lacked the republican virtue required to wield the ballot and were being manipulated by morally dubious northern "carpetbaggers," white southerners portrayed the promise of "forty acres and a mule" as a form of corruption. "The promise made by the agents of the Freedman's [*sic*] Bureau after the war, that if the negro would join the Republican Party and help to enslave his old master, the Republican Party would give him forty acres of land and a mule, still holds its place in the memory of the negro," claimed a white Georgian in 1882. He added that adherence to this fantasy made blacks "the dupes" of "designing tricksters" and "northern scoundrels."[13]

After Reconstruction, the mythology surrounding "forty acres and a mule" remained a powerful force in black politics, requiring black leaders to reflect on the meaning of Reconstruction well into the Jim Crow era. In an 1886 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, William J. Whipper, a black probate judge and Republican leader in Beaufort County, South Carolina, argued that landed independence, not suffrage, should have been the central goal of the federal government following the destruction of slavery. "If the United States Government had withheld suffrage and thrown open large tracts of this Southern country to settlement by freedmen we should have been far better off today than we are today," Whipper declared. Himself a planter who supported the rights of landowners, Whipper's counterfactual land policy resembled the sale of direct tax land on the Sea Islands rather than the allotments under Sherman's order that figured so prominently in black memory. " I do not mean that the Government should have given each freedman 'forty acres and a mule' or anything of that sort," Whipper explained. "What I mean is that this experiment, tried

[13] "Forty Acres and a Mule," Macon (GA) *Telegraph*, June 9, 1882.

here [Beaufort County] so successfully, of letting the colored man buy on time ten acres—that was the limit—should have been conducted on a general scale."[14]

During the 1880s, black leaders in other parts of the South also called on their constituents to move beyond antiquated calls for government-assisted land redistribution. On July 10, 1883, the Texas Colored Men's Convention met in Austin to elect delegates to a National Colored Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, as well as to discuss "the moral, intellectual and industrial condition and destiny of the colored race in Texas." Intent upon looking forward rather than back, the Texas convention rejected Reconstruction-era notions of land redistribution. "[T]oo much useful time has been wasted by us in politics with the expectation of getting from someone, no matter who, 'the forty acres and a mule,'" the convention's platform declared. The delegates wanted "little to do with politics, or any other kind of 'ticks.'" Instead, they called upon black Texans to become holders of "unquestioned deeds" and replace "log cabins and clap board shanties" with frame houses.[15] The Texas Colored Men's Convention, like William J. Whipper, saw that the prospect of forty acres and a mule from the federal government had become a lost cause. As a politics of self-help and racial uplift took hold among Gilded Age black leaders, the Reconstruction-era vision that associated the Republican Party with the promise of

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[14] "Negro Suffrage: A Representative Colored Man Thinks It Was Prematurely Bestowed," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1886.

[15] J. Harvey Jones, "The Texas Convention. Its Purposes and Results," New York *Globe*, September 8, 1883.

land was discarded as both impractical and unbecoming of a "manly race."[16]

While black southerners' faith in the Republican Party plummeted following the collapse of Reconstruction, their quest for land continued. As black political power waned in the South and tenancy, sharecropping, and debt peonage became harder and harder to escape, many blacks in the post-Reconstruction South explored the possibility of landed independence in the trans-Mississippi West. Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas all saw significant increases in their black populations during the late 1870s and early 1880s. Leaders of emigrationist movements, who sometimes called themselves "exodusters," used biblical language to recast the search for land in terms that avoided parallels to Reconstruction.[17] Even Robert Smalls, who opposed emigration and continued to defend the Republican Party and Reconstruction, traveled to Arizona to explore the possibility of establishing an all-black colony.[18]

In the 1890s, conservative black leaders continued to portray the desire for forty acres and a mule as an ill-conceived fantasy. At an 1898 conference for black farmers, mechanics, and laborers, William H. Councill, the president of Alabama's Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, saw the robust turnout as a sign that black southerners were progressing beyond the failed ideas of Reconstruction.

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[16] On the relationship between masculinity and post-Reconstruction racial uplift, see Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chap. 2.

[17] Ibid., chap. 1. See also Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

[18] George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 153-56.

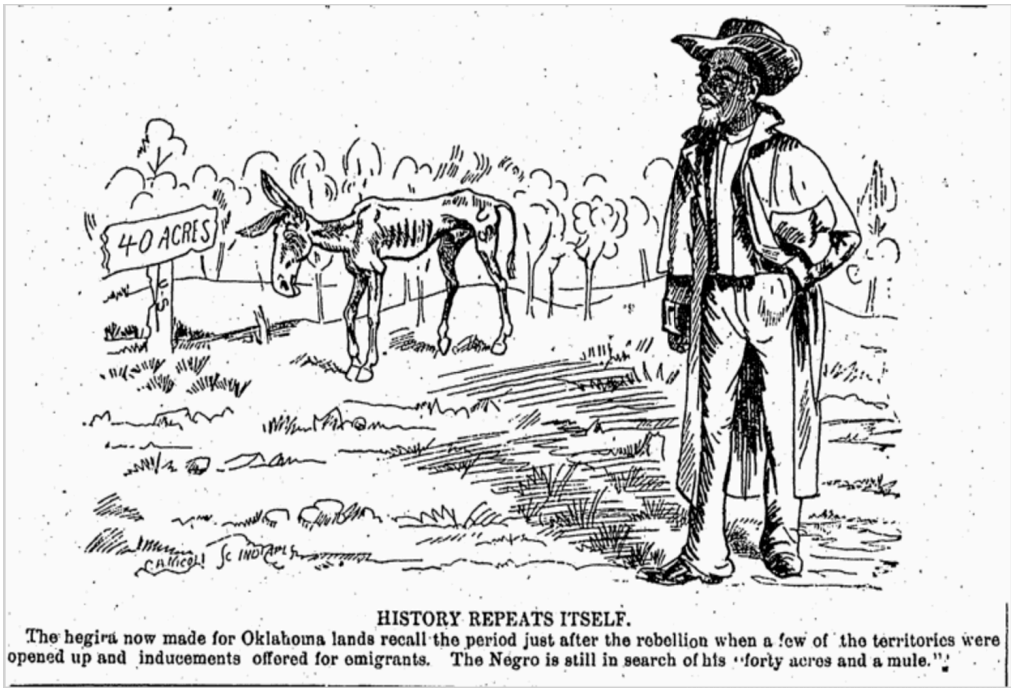

Figure 5.1. Political cartoon, 1890
Source: Indianapolis *Freeman*, March 15, 1890.

"That many of you have come a long distance, at no little trouble and expense, on a purely industrial mission is of great significance to the race and tells us that a new Negro has come into the new South; a Negro no longer allured to idle sleep by 'forty acres and a mule,'" he declared.[19] Although the 1890s saw a campaign for the federal government to enact pensions for former slaves, ideas that smacked of reparations for slavery were largely mocked by the end of the century.[20] In a speech about race

[19] "The Industrial Congress of Agricultural and Mechanical College at Normal," Indianapolis *Freeman*, April 23, 1898.

[20] "Beats Forty Acres and a Mule," Columbia (SC) *State*, August 22, 1891; "Pensions for Ex-Slaves," Columbia (SC) *The State*, April 25, 1896. On the campaign for ex-slave pensions, see Mary Frances Berry, *My Face is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); Miranda Booker-Perry, "No Pensions for Ex-Slaves: How Federal Agencies Suppressed Movement to Aid Freedpeople," *Prologue* 42 (Summer 2010): online, https://www.archives.gov/publications/ prologue/2010/ summer/slave-pension.html.

progress during Tennessee's 1897 Centennial Exposition, Richard Hill, chief of the exposition's Negro Department, told a black crowd, "We must stop looking for any kind of a 'forty acres and a mule.'" The line was greeted with cheers, laughter, and applause.[21]

In the early twentieth century, however, a growing number of writers and intellectuals rejected the notion that the promise of forty acres and a mule had been a pipe dream and instead began to describe the failure to redistribute land as a tragedy. In an essay on the Freedmen's Bureau in his 1903 volume *Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois lamented the missed opportunity of land reform. "[T]he vision of 'forty acres and a mule'—the righteous and reasonable ambition to become a landholder, which the nation had all but categorically promised the freedmen—was destined in most cases to bitter disappointment," he wrote. Du Bois mocked his rival Booker T. Washington and other "men of marvelous hindsight" who derided expectations of government-aided land reform while "preaching the Negro back to the present peonage of the soil." Washington and his acolytes knew, or should have known, that their vision of an independent black peasantry was dashed "on that day when the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau had to go to South Carolina and tell the weeping freedmen, after their years of toil, that their land was not theirs, that there was a mistake—somewhere."[22] Although there is no record of Washington mentioning "forty acres and a mule," his well-known opposition to Reconstruction and support for New South reconciliation suggest that he would have been hostile to

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[21] "Crowned with Success," Chicago *Broad Ax*, July 31, 1897.

[22] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurgh and Co., 1903), chap. 1 (quotation on 8-9).

the idea of confiscating land from southern planters and redistributing it to freedpeople.[23]

In the second decade of the twentieth century, as the Great Migration began to restructure black America, the decline of the smallholding farm in black life imbued the mythology of forty acres and a mule with an even greater sense of opportunity forever lost. In response to an ongoing debate in the black press about the potential dangers of the city, the Indianapolis *Freeman* warned potential migrants that the northern labor market was radically different from that of the South. "We, in the main, are day laborers, porters, waiters and hold other situations of the strict domestic variety," the *Freeman* wrote. "There is but small chance for successful farming. The dream of forty acres and a mule has long since gone." M. A. Majors, a black physician in Chicago, discerned among college-educated African Americans a growing disdain for rural life. "The old Uncle Tom idea of forty acres and a mule is being supplanted by the young men of the race just out of college, and they have their minds turned in the direction of wealth," he maintained. Mary White Ovington, a cofounder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, also remarked upon the new aspirations of black southerners. In a review of James Weldon Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, she suggested that the rise of the "New Negro" foreshadowed "the day . . . when every Negro has not only his

[23] For Washington's opposition to Reconstruction and support for New South reconciliation, see Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1901), chap. 5.

'forty acres and a mule' but his own victrola and his radio set."[24]

The sense of loss was compounded by ongoing violence in the rural South. In 1934, while conducting a study of southern schools built with the assistance of the Rosenwald Fund, Fisk University professor Horace Mann Bond witnessed the lynching of Jerome Wilson, an African American farmer in Washington Parish, Louisiana. In response to the gruesome event, Bond wrote a book-length manuscript titled "Forty Acres and a Mule" that linked the murder of Wilson and his brother Moise to their family's history since emancipation. By acquiring land during Reconstruction, the Wilsons not only avoided sharecropping, but also challenged local white supremacy through their economic independence and political leadership. Although the manuscript was never published, an excerpt appeared in the Urban League's journal, *Opportunity*. Deeply skeptical about black southerners' migration to northern cities, Bond saw the story of the Wilson family as part of an important and underreported aspect of African American history.[25]

Although the vast majority of African Americans who remained in the rural South were sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or wage laborers, the promise of forty acres remained a central part of their collective memory. In the Federal Writers' Project manual for interviewing elderly ex-slaves in the 1930s, one of the suggested

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[24] "The Labor Exodus," Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 30, 1916; Dr. M. A. Majors, "What Young College Men Think," Chicago *Broad Ax*, June 18, 1921; Mary White Ovington, "The Book of American Negro Spirituals," Chicago *Broad Ax*, November 7, 1925.

[25] Horace Mann Bond, "Forty Acres and a Mule," *Opportunity* 13 (May 1935): 140-41; Adam Fairclough, "'Forty Acres and a Mule': Horace Mann Bond and the Lynching of Jerome Wilson," *Journal of American Studies* 31 (Spring 1997): 1-17.

questions asked if interviewees had expected to receive "forty acres and a mule."[26] As a result, a number of them reflected on the longstanding myth. Many remembered it as a broken promise. "[T]he Yankees talked about forty acres and a mule for everybody," remarked Emmeline Trott of Pontotoc, Mississippi, "but I never heard of anyone getting even a string from them."[27] Lizzie Norfleet, who grew up in Coahoma County, Mississippi, also saw "forty acres and a mule" as a promise betrayed. "The report came out after the war that every family was going to get forty acres and a mule to start them out. Ain't never seed nobody what received nothing. All I seed is transferring from plantation to plantation. You wasn't made to stay nowhere so they all moved about."[28] Boston Blackwell of Little Rock, Arkansas, was utterly dismissive. "That old story about forty acres and a mule, it makes me laugh," he declared. "They sure did tell us that, but I never knowed any person which got it. The officers telled us we would all get slave pension. That just exactly what they tell. They sure did tell me I would get a parcel of ground to farm. Nothing ever hatched out of that, neither."[29]

Some interviewees added new details to the standard story. Sam Rawls of

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[26] Henry G. Alsberg to State Directors of Federal Writers' Project, July 30, 1937, in Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, https://www. loc. gov/resource/mesn.001/?sp=30 (accessed March 10, 2016).

[27] Emmeline Trott interview, *Pontotoc* (MS) *Progress*, January 27, 1938.

[28] Lizzie Norfleet, interviewed by Carrie Campbell, n.d., Ex-Slave Narratives Papers, 1936-1940, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digitalarchives/series/436/browse/Coahoma%20County/Norfleet%252C%2520Lizzie (accessed March 10, 2016).

[29] Boston Blackwell interviewed by Beulah Sherwood Hagg, in Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, https://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/query/S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Blackwell,+Boston) (accessed March 10, 2016).

Newberry, South Carolina, claimed to have "heard dat Gen. Grant said de slaves ought to get 40 acres of land and a mule so dey could go to work."[30] Others repeated white southerners' description of the rumor as a ruse perpetrated by conniving northerners. "I heard about the 40 acres of land and a mule the ex-slaves would get after the war," acknowledged Frances Andrew of the South Carolina Lowcountry. "But I didn't pay any attention to it. They never got anything. I think this was put out by the Yankees who didn't care about much 'cept getting money for themselves."[31]

With the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, a more militant version of "forty acres and a mule" entered the public discourse. During the 1960s and 1970s, it became a trope used by black activists to emphasize a long history of duplicity toward black Americans. Pointing to the federal government's failure to uphold its promise to freedpeople, such activists asked black Americans to wake up to the centuries-long saga of racial injustice that continued into the post-Civil Rights era. "AmeriKKKa has promised us 'forty acres and a mule,' and we're yet without food, clothing, and shelter," observed Milwaukee *Star* columnist Wangari Komae in 1970. Chicago *Metro News* writer Angela Wright leveled a similar criticism against President Jimmy Carter as he prepared to run for reelection in 1980: "Carter's promises to the Black community in 1976 are reminiscent of the 'forty acres and a mule' pledge made to freed blacks during the Reconstruction era: vacuous." An apocryphal story from the Washington, D.C., riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. had

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[30] Sam Rawls interviewed by G. L. Summer, in Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Rawls,+Sam) (accessed March 10, 2016).

[31] Frances Andrew interviewed by G. L. Summer, in Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Andrews,+Frances) (accessed March 10, 2016).

a looter emerging from an appliance store with a television and telling a journalist, "This is my 40 acres. I'll be back for my mule." In an editorial taking the Black Power movement to task for a lack of specific goals, civil rights leader Bayard Rustin suggested that the movement look to the Reconstruction-era slogan for guidance. Forty acres and a mule, he pointed out, was "both precise and practical."[32]

In the century since the end of the Civil War, the meaning of "forty acres and a mule" had undergone multiple transformations. In the late nineteenth century, the slogan shifted from a reflection of the optimism of the postemancipation moment to a rhetorical device that dismissed the naïveté of the earlier era's radicalism. By the early twentieth century, it had come to represent the lost promise of black rural life and a missed opportunity; in a time of rural poverty and massive outmigration, the slogan offered a countermythology. As the Civil Rights era came to a close, the phrase underwent yet another redefinition, becoming a rallying cry not only to address other failures of government, but also to build support for a renewed reparations movement.

Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Memory of Reconstruction

The shift in meaning of "forty acres and a mule" in the 1960s and 1970s accompanied a dramatic uptick in attention to Reconstruction. In his 1955 book, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, historian C. Vann Woodward declared that the nation was experiencing a "Second Reconstruction" that was, in some respects, more

[32] Wangari Komaee, "Confrontation," Milwaukee *Star*, January 17, 1970; Angela Wright, "Jimmy Carter: A Turncoat," Chicago *Metro News*, October 4, 1980; apocryphal story cited in Thomas A. Johnson, "Blacks Press Struggle to Retain Farmland," New York *Times*, July 13, 1980; Bayard Rustin, "The Myths of the Black Revolt," *Ebony*, August 1969, 44.

ambitious than the first. "The Second Reconstruction," he wrote, "addressed itself to all the aspects of racial relations that the first one attacked and even some that the First Reconstruction avoided or neglected." Framing the post-World War II fight for racial equality as a continuation of the nineteenth-century struggle, Woodward expressed cautious optimism that the Second Reconstruction would be more successful than the first. By 1974, however, when a third edition appeared, Woodward's hope had been chastened by the urban rebellions of the late 1960s, and a newly added chapter, "The Career Becomes Stranger," reflected his discomfort with the rise of Black Power.[33] In private correspondence he remarked on the federal government's retreat from enforcing civil rights laws, the rise of white backlash, and what he saw as the unserious rhetoric of Black Power. "Looks like the Second Reconstruction is about over, 1954-1966," he wrote to Robert Penn Warren.

> The reaction is on us and strong northern liberals in full retreat and nothing in sight to turn them back. Colored ranks in confusion and or knifing each other. [Bayard] Rustin & [A. Philip] Randolph battling for power, [Floyd] McKissick & [Stokely] Carmichael screaming incoherently, [Martin Luther] King & cohorts all but silenced in the general melee. . . . Congress wiping its hands of the whole cause, LBJ backtracking, backlash lashing, Kluxers kluxing, G. Wallace booming. . . . All the classic '77 signals are up. Well, it had to come some time, and it looks like the twelve-year cycle is par for the course as in'65-'77. Same thing only different.[34]

Other historians debated the efficacy of the "Second Reconstruction" as a label that captured parallels between the post-Civil War period and the Civil Rights

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[33] C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 9-10, and *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1974), chap. 6. On the 1950s origin of the label "Second Reconstruction," see Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 163-70.

[34] C. Vann Woodward to Robert Penn Warren, September 22, 1966, in *The Letters of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. Michael O'Brien (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 248.

Movement. Howard Rabinowitz was skeptical of the comparison. "Unless extreme caution is employed when using the term Second Reconstruction, the effect will be to distort the meaning of the First Reconstruction," he warned. For Rabinowitz, issues at the center of the Civil Rights Movement such as jobs, housing, and economic conditions—not to mention the direct assault on segregation—had no counterpart in the First Reconstruction. James McPherson, in contrast, found the comparison useful. "There is an uncanny similarity between the rhetoric of lapsed liberals of that day and their 'neoconservative' counterparts today," he wrote. Pointing to growing pessimism about federal anti-poverty programs, McPherson argued that the sentiments of the nation's "lapsed liberals" echoed the spirit of statements made by Liberal Republicans in *Harpers Weekly* and *The Nation* in the 1870s.[35]

The "Second Reconstruction" entered the popular lexicon during the 1970s as a way to understand the backlash against the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement. "We have been through a second reconstruction as to the hopes, aspirations, and dreams of black folks of both periods," explained Curtis Wilson, director of the Black Studies Program at Cleveland State University. Wilson maintained that, like the First Reconstruction, the Second Reconstruction had come to an abrupt end because of neglect on the part of the federal government. Parren Mitchell, the first African American congressman elected in the state of Maryland, observed, "I think we are closer to the Reconstruction period more than ever now. Black elected officials have not just been losing, but our rate of losing elections are

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[35] Howard N. Rabinowitz, "More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing the Strange Career of Jim Crow," *Journal of American History* 75 (Winter 1988): 842-56 (quotation on 850); James M. McPherson, "The Dimensions of Change: The First and Second Reconstructions," *Wilson Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1978): 135-44 (quotation on 143).

[*sic*] increasing." Civil rights leader Jesse Jackson considered the Supreme Court's 1978 decision banning racial quotas in *Bakke v. California* "an attempt to stop the second Reconstruction." A writer for the Pittsburgh *Courier* also saw parallels between the post-Civil Rights period and Reconstruction. "Get yourself a good, recent, revisionist text on the Reconstruction period and read it," she advised. "Then look at the newspapers. You can save money on a blowout. The similarity should stand your Afro up very nicely." Vernon Jordan, president of the National Urban League, repeatedly used the phrase "Second Reconstruction" in speeches designed to mobilize members of his organization against the policies of the Nixon administration. In 1974, the theme of the league's 63rd annual conference was "The Unfinished Second Reconstruction," and Jordan, in front of more than 6,000 delegates, called for a full-employment policy of massive private and federal job creation that would assure every citizen capable of working a living wage.[36]

Black periodicals played a critical role in promoting the revisionist narrative of the First Reconstruction. Lerone Bennett, Jr., senior editor of *Ebony*, the nation's most widely-read black magazine, used its pages to reshape memory of Reconstruction. In a series of articles published in the 1960s, Bennett portrayed the Reconstruction years with starry-eyed wonder:

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[36] "Failures of 'Reconstruction Periods' Discussed," Baltimore *Afro American*, February 19, 1972; Ron Suber, "Mitchell Warns of the 'Second Reconstruction'," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, July 16, 1978; Jackson quoted in Joe Nazel, "Race Quotas Fought," Los Angeles *Sentinel*, September 15, 1877; Pamala Haynes, "The Coming of the Second Reconstruction," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, May 4, 1972; "Civil Rights Policy Scored," *Washington Post*, November 22, 1972 ;"Urban League Calls for National Full Employment," Cleveland *Call and Post*, August 11, 1973; Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., "Crucial Court Decision Due," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, May 4, 1974.

> Never before—never since—had there been so much hope. A black mother knew that her boy could become governor. The evidence of things seen, the evidence of things heard fired millions of hearts. Black mothers walked ten, fifteen and twenty miles to put their children in school. They sacrificed and stinted. They bowed down and worshipped the miraculous ABC's from which so many blessings flowed. The sky, or at the very least, the mountain top was the limit.

Another article in the series described South Carolina as "a postbellum paradise for Negroes" and championed the ability of black leaders William J. Whipper, Robert Brown Elliott, Robert Smalls, and Francis L. Cardozo to "formulate and carry through a revolutionary program in the interest of Negroes and poor whites." Bennett characterized Reconstruction as the first moment of "Black Power" in the United States. Characterizing the period between 1867 and 1877 as "a black reconstruction," Bennett argued that "beginning in 1867, the freedmen assumed the instruments of power by organizing political groups and trouping in large numbers to the polls." "Now," he continued, "after a turbulent period of riots and church burning and whippings and demonstrations—a period, in short, remarkably like our own—the harvest was about to begin."[37]

Bennett expanded upon this idea in *Black Power U S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction*, which was published in 1967. Bennett hoped his book, which was clearly indebted to W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, would give wider currency to the work of Du Bois and the other black scholars who had first challenged white-supremacist interpretations of the era. In addition, he believed that his book

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[37] Lerone Bennett, Jr., "Black Power in Dixie: Negro Voters Elected Judges, Representatives, during Reconstruction of the South," *Ebony*, July 1962, 84-90 (quotation on 84), "Black Power, Part III: South Carolina, A Postbellum Paradise for Negroes," *Ebony*, January 1966, 116-20 (quotation on 118), Lerone Bennett Jr., "Black Power, Part II," *Ebony*, November 1965, 28-38 (quotation on 28).

was timely in the current moment. "Reconstruction in all its various facets was a supreme lesson for America, the right reading of which might still mark a turning point in our history," he wrote. Bennett's use of "black power" before the phrase was popularized by Stokely Carmichael demonstrated the long history of the black freedom struggle and offered a clear link between the First and Second Reconstructions. [38]

Perhaps not surprisingly, given that Bennett was a self-trained scholar, his book was poorly received by academic historians. James W. Patton, for example, argued that it was marked by "exaggeration rather than restraint." Although Patton agreed with the general thrust of the book and believed that historians had rightly discarded an earlier generation's white-supremacist interpretation of Reconstruction, he found Bennett's work poorly sourced and polemical in tone. "Few of the revisionists have been so strident in their criticism of the white race or so reckless in their use of facts as is evidenced in Mr. Bennett's work," Patton wrote.[39] Robert F. Durden also criticized Bennett's presentism. "Aphorisms, some of them semimythical, about power, especially black power, abound." Durden observed that Reconstruction appeared to be in vogue during the 1960s, and he understood that new interpretations of the past were important in the ongoing fight for racial equality. "In the American Negro's search for a usable past the Reconstruction era is,

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[38] Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Black Power, U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1967), iv-viii.

[39] James W. Patton, review of *Black Power, U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867-1877*, by Lerone Bennett, Jr., *North Carolina Historical Review* 46 (Spring 1969): 72.

understandably, the most tempting hunting ground," he wrote.[40] The tension between the work of activists like Bennett who prioritized politics over historical craft and historians like Woodward, Patton, and Durden who sometimes drew parallels between past and present but wanted to keep activism out of the discipline highlights how Reconstruction blurred the line between memory and history.[41]

The new, more radical vision of Reconstruction also reached television, the most powerful communications medium of the 1970s, when Howard Fast's novel *Freedom Road* was turned into a four-hour miniseries. The miniseries, which aired on NBC on October 29 and 30, 1979, attracted considerable fanfare, in part because of its casting of Muhammad Ali, the most famous athlete of the 1970s, as the protagonist. Ali's involvement not only ensured that the long-awaited film would finally go into production, but also meant that for the first time on American television, Reconstruction would be portrayed in a positive manner. With the acclaim accorded ABC's 1977 miniseries *Roots* fresh in mind, NBC rushed to offer its own historical series. The network had purchased the rights to *Freedom Road* in 1974, hoping that the recent groundswell of popular interest in African American history, combined with the presence of one of the most popular African American celebrities of the decade, would guarantee that its series would garner similar critical and

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[40] Robert F. Durden, review of *Black Power, U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867-1877*, by Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Journal of Southern History* 34 (Summer 1868): 468.

[41] By the 1980s, a number of scholars were seeking a middle ground between the Woodward and Black Power understandings of the "Second Reconstruction." See, most notably, Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984).

commercial success.[42]

The miniseries was inspired by Howard Fast's 1944 best-selling novel and was given the same title. Once a member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), Fast interpreted the Reconstruction era through the lens of W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*. In a foreword to the 1952 edition of *Freedom Road*, Du Bois commended Fast for taking on the much-maligned but critically important period of American history. "His story is fiction, but his basic historical accuracy is indisputable," Du Bois declared.[43]

Fast's novel had been optioned by Hollywood studios several times during the 1940s and 1950s, but a film adaptation never went into production. Fast himself hoped that the role of Gideon Jackson, the story's protagonist, would be played by the legendary actor and activist Paul Robeson. While a project that featured both a blacklisted white writer and a blacklisted black actor was unlikely during the height of the Red Scare, a movie based on *Freedom Road* also encountered resistance from the white-dominated American film industry. "In those years, you didn't fly in the face of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)," Fast explained. "You simply couldn't make a film with blacks as leading, straightforward characters. I was told they would never let it

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[42] Howard Fast, *Freedom Road* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1944); *Freedom Road* (television miniseries), directed by Jan Kadar, written by Howard Fast, National Broadcasting Company, October 29-30, 1979; "Ali Does His 'Road' along 'Freedom Road'," *Ebony*, October 1979, 102; *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (television miniseries), directed by Martin J. Chomsky, written by Alex Haley, American Broadcasting Company, January 23-30, 1977.

[43] W. E. B. Du Bois, Foreword to *Freedom Road* by Howard Fast, 3rd ed. (New York: Blue Heron Press, 1952), v.

play in the South."[44]

By the 1970s, however, American popular culture had begun to change. The black freedom struggle was assuming a more pronounced cultural dimension, and calls for Black Power led to growing demands that television and film tell stories of the black past. The best-known example of this shift was the television adaptation of Alex Haley's 1976 book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Airing for eight consecutive nights in 1977 on ABC, *Roots* was viewed by 140 million households and received thirty-seven Emmy Award nominations. Two years later, 110 million viewers tuned in to *Roots: The Next Generation.*[45]

In 1973, four years before *Roots* aired, *Freedom Road* was acquired by a new production company, and Howard Fast began work on a script. Hoping to capture the new enthusiasm for black history in popular culture, *Freedom Road* was given a budget of $4 million. When *Roots* achieved critical and commercial success in 1977, NBC executives rushed *Freedom Road* into production and increased its budget to $7.5 million, more than the budget for *Roots*. The increase came in large part because NBC was able to secure Muhammad Ali to play the lead. "Ali was the essence of the deal," recalled Zev Braun, the movie's producer. "NBC wouldn't have made the picture without him."[46]

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[44] Fast quoted in Aljean Harmetz, "*Freedom Road*—The Long Haul to TV," New York *Times*, October 28, 1979.

[45] *Roots: The Next Generations* (television miniseries), directed by John Erman, written by Alex Haley, American Broadcasting Company, February 18-26, 1979. On the cultural and critical impact of *Roots*, see Matthew F. Delmont, *Making Roots: A Nation Captivated* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

[46] Harmetz, "*Freedom Road*—The Long Haul to TV."

Like Fast's novel, the televised version of *Freedom Road* emphasized the democratic promise of Reconstruction. Directed by Czechoslovakian filmmaker Jan Kadar, *Freedom Road* follows the journey of Gideon Jackson as he tries to shape the terrain of black freedom following the destruction of slavery. In showing Jackson's journey from slave to Union soldier and then to participant in South Carolina's 1868 constitutional convention, state legislator, and U.S. senator, *Freedom Road* placed the Popular Front radicalism of W. E. B. Du Bois and Howard Fast in direct conversation with the Third World solidarity espoused by Muhammad Ali. Whereas Fast and

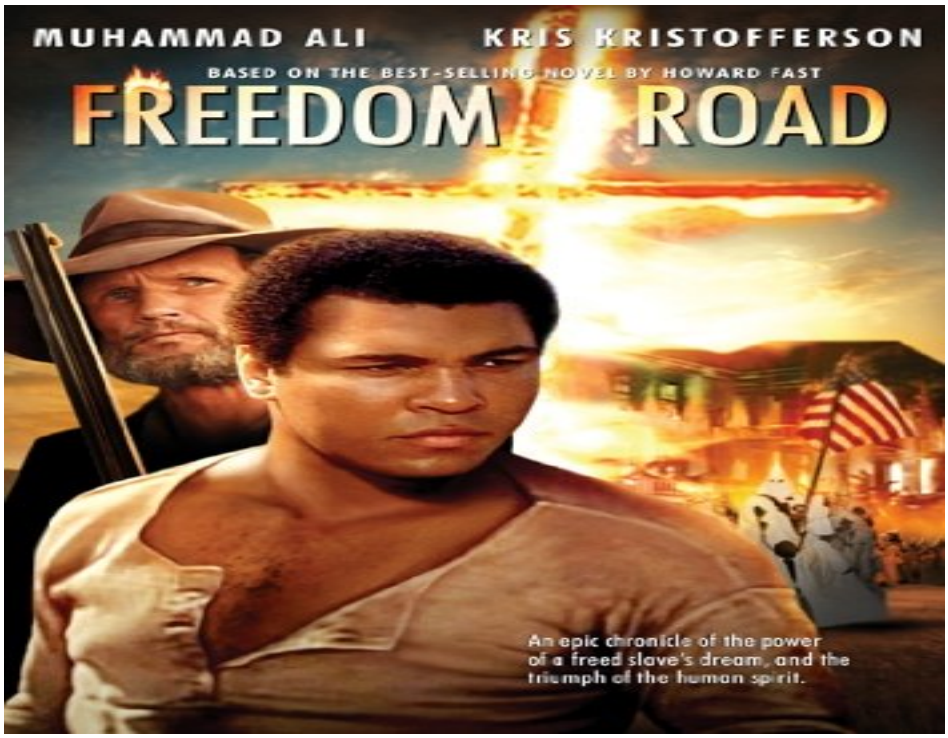

Figure 5.2. Movie poster, 1979
Source: National Broadcasting Company, 1979, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079173/mediaviewer/rm3402603520 (accessed March 10, 2016)

Du Bois viewed Reconstruction as a rare moment when blacks and whites in the postbellum South recognized their shared economic interests and could have built a biracial working-class movement that mirrored the CPUSA's organizing campaigns

in the interwar South, Ali saw Gideon Jackson as an analogue to his own struggle against imperialism and white supremacy during the 1960s. "Gideon Jackson is a mythical character, but he's typical of the time," Ali remarked. "He's not afraid; he stood up against all the structures like I did with the draft board and by becoming a Muslim. And he's got an idea for freedom and justice for all people . . . he's the kind of man I would've been if I was living then."[47]

In the miniseries, Gideon Jackson fights for the rights of both freedpeople and poor whites and leads a biracial effort to obtain land. Emphasizing the possibility of political coalition between white tenant farmers and black sharecroppers, *Freedom Road* offered the most sustained cinematic critique of D. W. Griffin's *Birth of Nation* in American film history. Like Fast's book, Kadar's miniseries inverted the narrative of *Birth of a Nation* by casting the Ku Klux Klan and elite white southerners as villains while portraying black politicians and the freedpeople as heroes. In one scene early in the movie, Gideon Jackson makes the case for land redistribution in the South Carolina General Assembly—to the delight of the freedpeople and poor whites in the gallery.

While Ali's performance in *Freedom Road* received a lukewarm response from television critics, many of them recognized that the story of Reconstruction was incredibly important and would never have been told without the former heavyweight champion's involvement. The television critic for the Lewiston, Maine, *Evening Journal* found Ali's performance lacking but saw the miniseries as making a crucial point. "To the show's credit," he wrote, "there's more than lynchings and cross-

[47] Ali quoted in Dick Russell, "'I Gotta Stay Here All This Time for a Million Dollars'," *TV Guide*, October 27, 1979, 24-27.

burnings; there is the interesting view that Reconstruction was a renaissance for Southern blacks." Although John J. Connor of the New York *Times* described Ali's performance as "stilted, lifeless, [and] unconvincing," he considered criticism that focused on Ali's acting limitations as missing the forest for the trees. "[T]here is something admirable about Muhammad Ali's dedication to this project," Connor observed. "There is no doubt that he is committed to having the story told . . . [and] without his participation, the production may never have been realized at all.[48]

Finishing 33rd and 55th in the Nielsen ratings on the two nights it aired, *Freedom Road* failed to match the commercial success of *Roots*. While a number of films about the experience of black people during slavery have been made since *Roots*, it was almost forty years before another film about Reconstruction appeared.[49] Even during the initial run of *Freedom Road*, telling the story of what the United States could have been inevitably demanded recognition of ongoing struggles to enforce civil rights. The NBC affiliate in Boston refused to air *Freedom Road*, claiming that doing so could exacerbate the violence brought on by court-mandated school busing. *Freedom Road*'s depiction of "unusually graphic incidents of racial violence," especially against black children, unsettled city leaders who may have seen the miniseries as a reminder that the hard-fought gains of the Civil Rights Movement,

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[48] Peter J. Boyer, "Muhammad Ali Stars in 'Freedom Road'," Lewiston (ME) *Journal*, October 29, 1979; John J. Connor, "TV: Ali in Fast's 'Freedom Road'," New York *Times*, October 29, 1979.

[49] For the most recent cinematic depiction of Reconstruction, see *Free State of Jones* (film), directed by Gary Ross, written by Leonard Hartman (Bluegrass Films, 2016).

much like those of Reconstruction, could be erased by extralegal violence.[50]

Freedom Road represented the most visible embodiment of a reconfiguration of Reconstruction in public memory. As the incrementalist phase of the Civil Rights Movement gave way to calls for black power, the cultural wing of the black freedom struggle found the Reconstruction era a rich source for a usable past. The mythologies that had emerged around black landownership and political power, especially in the South Carolina Lowcountry, acquired enormous allegorical power for black Americans who were fighting for political representation and economic justice in the post-Civil Rights era. Although accounts of Reconstruction in black periodicals and on film did not always conform to standards of historical objectivity and were sometimes at odds with academic accounts, they brought the past into conversation with the present and forced scholars, politicians, and public intellectuals to grapple with competing understandings of what Reconstruction meant.

"Forty Acres and a Mule," Black Land Loss, and the Memory of Reconstruction

Renewed interest in Reconstruction in the press and in popular culture coincided with a fierce debate about the disappearing black farmer. "We the black people assembled in Detroit, Michigan, for the National Black Economic Conference are fully aware that we have been forced to come together because racist white America has exploited our resources, our minds, our bodies, our labor," declared civil rights activist James Forman in 1969. The speech Forman delivered, which became known as the Black Manifesto, demanded $500 million in reparations from the

[50] Garden City (KS) *Telegram*, November 8, 1979; "Disparate Groups in Boston Seek to Quell Racial Tension," *New York Times*, October 30, 1979.

nation's white churches and synagogues, institutions Forman considered "part and parcel of the system of capitalism." The Black Manifesto also called for the creation of a "Southern land bank" that would "help our brothers and sisters who have to leave their land because of racist pressures" by enabling them to establish cooperative farms.[51]

Although the reparations demand seemed unrealistic, a number of the black economists in attendance considered a land bank a possible remedy for the growing problem of rural poverty. Robert S. Browne, an economist who worked with a number of black nationalist groups during the 1960s, helped Forman conceptualize the Black Manifesto. In 1970, Browne partnered with Forman, Fannie Lou Hamer, Vincent Harding, Muhammad Kenyatta, and Julian Bond to publish a fundraising advertisement for a southern land bank in the New York *Times*. "Many black young people who hopefully migrated to the harsh, impersonal urban ghettoes only to find despair, disillusionment, and continued poverty are ready to return home if only home were to offer them a minimum of opportunity," the advertisement declared. "The Land Bank will acquire land and poor black people will be helped to move on to it and to own and work it collectively in accordance with modern farming methods."[52]

Although the advertisement failed to raise enough funds to launch a land bank, Browne remained involved in the fight for black landownership. Shortly after the advertisement appeared, he secured a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to

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[51] James Forman, "The Black Manifesto," Black National Economic Conference, May 4, 1969, Detroit, Michigan, *New York Review of Books*, July 10, 1969, 31-33.

[52] "Must All Blacks Flee the South?" New York *Times*, April 26, 1970.

study black land loss.[53] Published in 1973 by his Harlem-based think tank, the Black Economic Research Center, Browne's book, *Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South*, sounded an alarm. Its central finding was that black landownership had peaked in 1910 at 15 million acres. Since that time, it had been in rapid decline, dropping from 12 to 5.5 million acres in the two decades since 1950. "The U.S. is probably more a white man's country now than ever before in

Poison Is Suspected In Death of 30 Cows On a Muslim Farm

ASHVILLE, Ala., March 15 (AP)—Cows continue to die on the farm owned by Black Muslims near here, apparently the victims of poison dumped in their water supply last Tuesday night.

J. E. Davis, manager of the farm, said the cows started dying Wednesday afternoon. By Thursday, he said, the toll was 19 and by Friday 24 had died. Mr. Davis said the count had reached 30 yesterday and at least nine more were sick. There are 263 cows at the farm now, Mr. Davis reported.

Sheriff Joel Woods of St. Clair County said that organs of the dead animals had been shipped to the state toxicologist at Auburn University for analysis. He expects a report tomorrow.

"I definitely suspect poison," Sheriff Woods said. "Who poisoned them and why is what we're trying to find out."

Mr. Davis said he thought the cattle were given cyanide.

MUST ALL BLACKS FLEE THE SOUTH?

MANY BLACKS PREFER THE RURAL SOUTH . . .

Despite the steady stream of millions of rural black folk into the cities of the North and West, there are many millions more who wish to remain in the rural South and to find there a life of satisfaction and dignity. Many black young people who hopefully migrated to the harsh, impersonal urban ghettoes only to find despair, disillusionment, and continued poverty are ready to return home if only home were to offer them a minimum of opportunity.

BUT SOUTHERN RACISTS DRIVE BLACKS TO URBAN NORTH

But the South continues to be inhospitable to black people, and especially to those black people who wish to help themselves to have a better life. Terrorism has always been a way of life in the South, and the intimidation and sabotaging of the Muslim's laborious efforts to develop a modern cattle farm is merely the most recent in an unending series of ugly incidents designed to drive black people off the land and out of the South. It has always been difficult for black people to purchase land in the South, and the amount of land owned by blacks declined by 40% between 1950 and 1964 — as a result of chicanery as well as because of economic hardship — and the trend continued throughout the sixties. If black people continue to permit themselves to be pushed off the land it will be increasingly difficult for them to pursue effectively their arduous struggle for full citizenship, especially in the southern states [which is still where most black people in America live].

BLACKS ARE ORGANIZING TO RESIST FORCED MIGRATION . . .

Concerned black people are determined to resist all attempts to terrorize black people off the land. To this end, we are forming a non profit Land Bank which will be charged with the responsibilities of purchasing, holding, and helping to develop land in the South for the benefit of landless black people. We also propose to assist impoverished black land owners to retain and improve their present holdings. The Land Bank will acquire land and poor black people will be helped to move on to it and to own and work it collectively in accordance with modern farming methods. In some locations we hope to launch suitable industrial projects which can provide employment, income, and a sense of purpose for black youth, and an attractive alternative to the urban ghetto.

BUT VAST AMOUNTS OF MONEY ARE NEEDED

Your generous contribution will help us to resist racist pressures and to demonstrate that black people can function responsibly in the area of economic development. We earnestly solicit your support in this important undertaking.

BLACK ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE, INC.
TASK FORCE ON THE SOUTHERN LAND BANK

Sponsors:

The Hon. Julian Bond — James Forman — Prof. Vincent Harding
Prof. Robert S. Browne — Fannie Lou Hamer — Muhammad Kenyatta

I object to efforts to intimidate and terrorize black people off the land and I wish to support the effort to purchase land for black people.

Enclosed is my check for: _____ $10,000 _____ $1000 _____ $500 _____ $100 _____ $25 _____ $10

Name: _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Make check payable to Black Economic Research Center, Inc.
Mail to: Southern Land Bank P.O. Box No. 3 NYC 10035

"Contributions are tax deductible."

Figure 5.3. Advertisement for Southern Land Bank
Source: New York *Times*, April 26, 1970

history," Browne wrote. The precipitous decline in landownership was particularly worrisome because it was occurring "at the very moment when the southern black

[53] Roy Reed, "Blacks in South Struggle to Keep the Little Land They Have Left," New York *Times*, December 7, 1972.

community is finally within grasping distance of some significant degree of political control over its destiny." Juxtaposing the political promise of the Civil Rights Movement with the continued fragility of black wealth and black economic power, Browne warned of a precarious future for the nation's remaining black landowners. "The dilemma of the black community," he wrote, "is that it finds itself in the midst of a capitalistic society but virtually without capital." [54]

The crisis in black land loss was inextricably connected with a structural transformation in the southern economy following the Great Depression. As the cotton belt was replaced by an urban and suburban Sunbelt economy that emphasized defense, aerospace, high tech, and energy industries, the economic geography of the South began to shift. These post-World War II economic changes led to a new demand for highly-skilled, college-educated workers, resulting in the expansion of a new middle class in such metropolitan areas as Houston, Atlanta, the North Carolina Research Triangle, and Washington, D.C. These and late twentieth-century developments eventually encouraged a sizable reverse migration of African Americans from the North but not before thousands of rural black landowners, sharecroppers, and laborers had been pushed off the land.[55]

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[54] Robert S. Browne, *Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South* (New York: Black Economic Research Center, 1973), 3-7 (quotations on 4 and 6); Robert Browne, "Institution Building for Urban Revitalization," *Review of Black Political Economy* 10 (Fall 1979): 34-43 (quotation on 36).

[55] Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of, Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), chaps. 11-14; Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), chaps. 4-7; Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), chap. 4. On the reverse migration, see Carol B. Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

The uneven distribution of post-World War II economic gains in the South raised a number of red flags for national black leaders. The collapse of black landownership signaled the erasure not only of a site of memory deeply rooted in the promise of Reconstruction, but also of the twentieth-century foundation of black political and economic power. During the 1960s, black landowners were generally the first to register to vote and become active in the struggle for civil rights. Whereas sharecroppers and other agricultural workers could face serious repercussions from white employers for challenging white supremacy, black landowners were insulated from the threat of being fired or evicted. With black landowners having formed the foundation of the black leadership class in the rural South for most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their decline represented the death knell of the promise of rural life at the very moment the Civil Rights Movement was on the verge of destroying the Jim Crow order and redeeming the South in black life. [56]

Recognizing that land represented both economic power and a vital repository of cultural memory, some civil rights organizations proposed to purchase southern land. As early as March 1961, the Rev. Joseph H. Jackson, a prominent Chicago minister who served as president of the National Baptist Convention, thought land important enough to see to it that its members purchased 404 acres as a collective

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[56] Lester M. Salamon, *Black-Owned Land: Profile of a Disappearing Equity Base, Preliminary State-Level Analysis* (Durham, NC: Institute of Policy Science and Public Affairs, Duke University, 1974), chap. 1. On black landownership in the twentieth century, see Evan P. Bennett and Debra A. Reid, eds., *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); Manning Marable, "The Politics of Black Land Tenure, 1877-1915," *Agricultural History* 53 (Winter 1979): 142-52; Leo McGee and Robert Boone, *The Black Rural Landowner—Endangered Species: Social, Political, and Economic Implications* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), chaps. 5-6.

farm for impoverished blacks in Fayette County, Tennessee. Three years later, the Convention, which had the largest black membership of any organization in the U.S., acquired another 100,000 acres, also in Tennessee.[57] By 1970, the Nation of Islam had purchased some 15,000 acres of land in Michigan, Georgia, and Alabama.[58] Responding to a declensionist narrative about life in the urban North and to a strand of black agrarianism that had roots in the industrial-school movement of the early twentieth century, the fight to hold land brought historical memory and economic power into conversation with each other.[59]

Robert Browne was the first social scientist to measure exactly how much acreage black landowners had lost and also the first to understand the importance of making that loss an issue of public policy. In 1972, Browne used a $1 million donation from an anonymous New Yorker to establish the Emergency Land Fund

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[57] Bobby L. Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 278-79.

[58] Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 47-48.

[59] On black agrarianism, see Jarod Roll, "'The Lazarus of American Farmers': The Politics of Black Agrarianism in the Jim Crow South, 1921-1938," in *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule*, ed. Reid and Bennett, 132-62. Although the debate about black land loss in the United States paralleled back-to-the-land and peasant movements in the Third World, a notable difference was that in the global South, indigenous and Marxist movements of peasants often couched their vision of land in anti-capitalist discourses, while African American intellectuals in the land-loss movement envisioned black-owned land as a site of wealth accumulation. On the land issues facing the rural poor in the global South, see Alexander Avina, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); Daniel Nugent, ed., *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); William P. Mitchell, *Voices from the Global Margin: Confronting Poverty and Inventing New Lives in the Andes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

(ELF). Based in Atlanta, Georgia, ELF had field offices in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia. Joseph F. Brooks, president of ELF, argued that "with land, black families can retain the dignity of economic independence and build upon the hard-won victories of the Civil Rights Movement." With commercial interests increasingly "gobbling up" the southern countryside, Brooks saw black landholders as vulnerable to unscrupulous speculators who took advantage of their unfamiliarity with title, mortgage, and heir law. "If you're in Philadelphia struggling in the ghetto, you have no idea how fast land appreciates in your home county, Beaufort, South Carolina," Brooks observed. "You need some money right now. You have a low horizon."[60]

The mainstream press published several accounts of black land loss. The New York *Times* ran a series of articles over the course of the 1970s that highlighted the crisis black landowners were facing. A 1972 article followed the plight of sixty-five-year-old Evelina Jenkins, who was being forced to leave the land she and her family had owned since the Civil War. "Since 1861, getting and losing land has been the pride and despair of people like Evelina Jenkins," the article reported.

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[60] Brooks quoted in Eleanor Clift, "Black Land Loss: 6,000,000 Acres and Fading Fast," *Southern Exposure* 2 (Fall 1974): 108-11. On the crisis black landowners faced during the Civil Rights era, see Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

The New York Times/Bill Barley

Mrs. Evelina Jenkins, with some of her children and grandchildren, in front of the house on her cousin's property where she now lives

Blacks in South Struggle to Keep the Little Land They Have Left

Figure 5.4. Roy Reed, "Blacks in South Struggle to Keep the Little Land They Have Left"
Source: New York *Times*, December 7, 1972

A 1980 article in the *Times* also brought awareness to black land loss through the tropes of Reconstruction-era land acquisition and the promise of "forty acres and a mule." *Southern Exposure*, a periodical devoted to long-form journalism on southern life, devoted its Fall 1974 issue to questions of land and landownership. An article by Eleanor Clift homed in on Browne's study and the work of the Emergency Land Fund, and the Black Economic Research Center also supplied a piece for the special issue. Four years later, the Emergency Land Fund was featured on the NBC evening news on June 9 and the CBS evening news on July 5.[61]

[61] Roy Reed, "Blacks in South Struggle to Keep the Little Land They Have Left," New York *Times*, December 7, 1972; Thomas A. Johnson, "Blacks Press to Retain Farmland," New York *Times*, July 13, 1980; Eleanor Clift, "Black Land Loss: 6,000,000 Acres and Fading Fast," *Southern Exposure* 2 (Fall 1974): 108-11; Black Economic Research Center, "Black Land Loss: The Plight of Black Ownership," *Southern Exposure* 2 (Fall 1974): 112-21; NBC and CBS information in "Black Land Loss," Chicago *Metro News*, July 1, 1978.

The black press also raised the alarm. "Blacks are losing land in the South at such an alarming rate, it has been estimated that we will own an insignificant amount by 1990," warned Lu Palmer of the Chicago *Metro News*. Palmer's fear, like that of many in the black press, was that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the economic gains, were precarious and in danger of being rolled back. In an article that summarized the findings of the Black Economic Research Center's report for a general audience, Anthony Griggs of *Ebony* magazine echoed Robert Browne's fear that the loss of black-owned land was part of a larger story of urban migration, restructuring of the southern economy, and the marginal status of the small farmer in post-World War II American life. "[T]he millions of acres blacks once possessed, like the acreage they still control, has been and continues to be made up of thousands of small black farms of between 40 and 75 acres," Griggs explained. Citing a study showing that more than 80 percent of black farm owners were forty-five years of age or older and close to 60 percent were over fifty-five, Griggs argued that a sharp break was occurring between members of an older generation who were fighting to retain landholdings rooted in Reconstruction and those of a younger generation who were children of the Great Migration and had largely rejected the rural South.[62]

An *Ebony* story that reported on the struggles of the Harris Neck community in the Georgia Lowcountry emphasized the same point. "Forty acres and a mule" had figured prominently in its history. "Since 1865, Blacks had owned the land, the beneficiaries of General William Tecumseh Sherman's Field Order 15," reported

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[62] Lu Palmer, "Blacks Are Losing Land Which Is Power," Chicago *Metro News*, July 29, 1978; Anthony Griggs, "How Blacks Lost 9,000,000 Acres of Land," *Ebony*, October 1974, 96-104 (quotation on 97).

Ebony writer Thad Martin. A successful community of ex-slaves in the late nineteenth century, Harris Neck became a sleepier but still independent black settlement in the early twentieth century. "For all of 76 years the little community of Harris Neck thrived, much too out of the way to be bothered by meddlers or those who would have been angered by its success. It was paradise neither regained nor

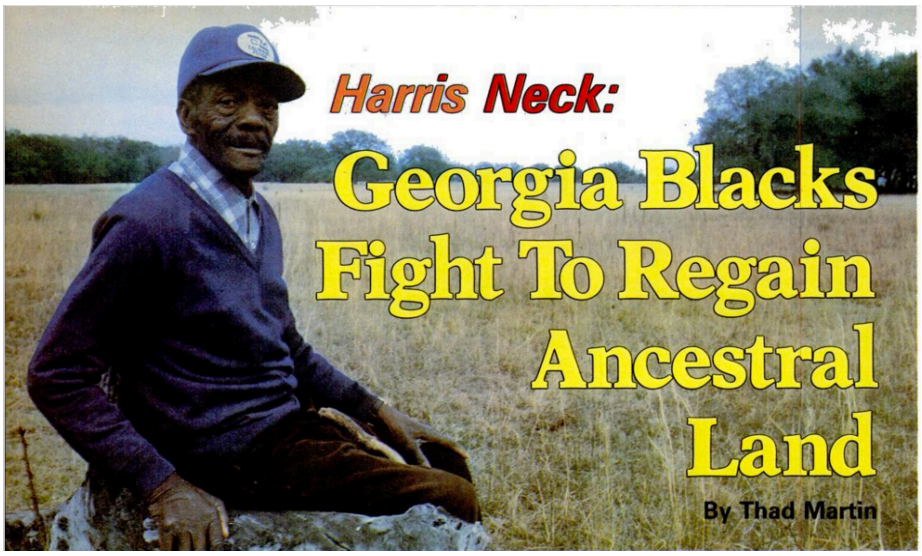

Figure 5.5. "Harris Neck: Georgia Blacks Fight to Regain Ancestral Land"
Source: *Ebony*, June 1983, 36

lost, though, for Blacks, the good life came with scant assurances." In 1942, the federal government sought out the land in Harris Neck to build an airbase. Lacking adequate deeds to the land or legal counsel to advise them, the settlement's black residents had signed away their rights and found themselves in danger of losing their "ancestral homeland." In its account of local people who were waging an ongoing battle to reclaim the land, *Ebony* underscored that theirs was not only a story of social justice, but also one of memory and birthright.[63]

[63] Thad Martin, "Harris Neck: Georgia Blacks Fight to Regain Ancestral Land," *Ebony*, June 1983, 36-40.

Beaufort County, Black Land Loss, and Rural Poverty

No story of black land loss captured national attention more than the 1970s battle between black landowners on the South Carolina Sea Islands and the region's rapidly expanding resort industry. One of the few areas where large numbers of African Americans remained owners of the soil, the Sea Islands had become a central part of the mythic black South crafted by black writers, intellectuals, and politicians over the course of the twentieth century. The Sea Islands assumed an outsized place in African American memory during the twentieth century precisely because the region's residents had managed to hold on to both their land and a distinctive culture; the Sea Islands thus served as a romantic rural counterbalance to the urban centers at the other end of the Great Migration. As the region's mythic status was forced to reckon with the new Sunbelt economy, most particularly in the form of tourism, the romantic ideal was brought into sharp contrast with the realities of rural life in the post-Civil Rights era. In the face of real estate developers who argued that they brought economic growth and jobs to the region, African Americans differed in their defense of black-owned land. While some saw it as a commodity that gave black families economic security, others saw a more nebulous site of memory and culture that should remain beyond reach of the market. Ultimately choosing to embrace elements of both arguments, black land activists viewed the struggle over land in the Lowcountry as not only a battle between rural life and the modern economy, but also a fight to preserve the memory of Reconstruction in one of the few places where it still resonated.

Although the resort industry was largely a post-World War II phenomenon, the islands off the South Carolina and Georgia coast were already popular destinations for northern tourists. Accounts of the region's idyllic landscape by post-Civil War northern travel writers had helped boost tourism. By the early twentieth century, the Sea Islands had become prime locations for northern industrialists seeking to acquire summer homes and hunting preserves. In 1904, for example, shipping magnate William P. Clyde, purchased a thousand-acre plantation on Hilton Head. Coinciding with the renaissance of southern tourism in Charleston, tourism in Beaufort County's Sea Islands gave middle-class northern visitors an opportunity to consume the Old South; for upper-class elites, the islands offered seaside havens where they could mix history and consumer pleasures. [64]

The post-World War II tourism industry radically reconfigured the region's social and cultural contours and gave rise to a new vision of its future. In 1956, completion of the Hilton Head-Bluffton Bridge connected the previously isolated islands to the mainland of Beaufort County, allowing real estate developers to imagine the region as a playground for tourists. Between 1958 and 1964, at least 149 new resort homes were built on Hilton Head Island, and 625 additional lots were sold. Sea Pines Plantation, the first resort community on Hilton Head, won several landscape architecture awards during its first decade of existence, and in 1962, *Sports Illustrated* praised it as "second to none" among American resorts. By the 1970s, the

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[64] Michael N. Danielson, *Profits and Politics in Paradise: The Development of Hilton Head Island* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), introduction.; William P. Clyde to Booker T. Washington, August 8, 1904, Booker T. Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, LC. On tourism in the late nineteenth century, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), chap. 3.

region's boosters were pitching Sea Pines as a place where vacationers could settle more permanently. "Come home to Hilton Head," read one appeal. "It's a great place to visit—but to live here is to love it."[65]

By the 1970s, all of the larger Sea Islands were in the midst of a tourism boom. Planners envisioned the Sea Islands supplanting the warm temperatures, beaches, and golf courses of southern Florida. The Sea-Island resort communities would not, however, be places for those seeking an inexpensive vacation home. "In Sea Pines Plantation, half-acre lots along the golf course go for as high as $40,000," one newspaper reported. "The same size ocean-front sites are worth $60,000, if you can get them." Clearly designed as a resort community for the well-to-do, Hilton Head was billed as "the Western Hemisphere's Riviera."[66]

The real estate boom came at the expense of Hilton Head's black residents. With the smallholdings of black landowners now worth a great deal to developers, real estate corporations and their lawyers took advantage of often-inchoate inheritance patterns. Many black landowners had failed to make wills specifying who should inherit their land. Title often remained in the name of a long-deceased ancestor, with multiple living heirs, siblings, and cousins each holding varying percentage shares in the entire plot. These shares sometimes became so numerous as to make any division of the land impractical. Under such conditions, selling the land and giving each heir a portion of the proceeds consistent with his or her share was the

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[65] Danielson, *Profits and Politics in Paradise*, 48, 100; Huston Horn, "Nothing to Do—But Enjoy Yourself," *Sports Illustrated*, December 17, 1962, 57-64.

[66] Steve Brody, "Hilton Head Island Takes in the Sun, Tourists," Chicago *Tribune*, February 28 1871.

only way to clear the title. Developers took advantage of the situation and began actions to quiet title, which frees the land from the claims of heirs. They often did so by offering to buy out one or two of the heirs of a family's landholding, then going to court to force sale of the entire tract. Since the developer had ready capital, he was generally able to buy the land at the resulting public auction. [67]

Black land loss in Beaufort County paralleled a significant demographic shift. Between 1950 and 1960, the county went from being 57 percent black to 62 percent white. For the first time in three centuries, the area no longer had a black majority. In addition to the black outmigration that had begun during the second decade of the twentieth century, the establishment of a Marine Corps air station brought an influx of white residents. Growth of the white population coincided with a dramatic decrease in markers of economic wellbeing for the black population. In 1960, almost one-third of the county's black families earned less than $1,000 annually. Of black students who enrolled in Beaufort County schools, 81 percent dropped out before graduation, and 46 percent of black adults over the age of twenty-five were illiterate. Per-pupil spending for black students was only 70 percent what white students received.[68] Dr. Donald Gatch, a white primary-care physician based in the town of Bluffton, shocked the nation with an account from his community health clinic, where he saw widespread malnutrition, vitamin-deficiency diseases like scurvy, rickets, and pellagra, and intestinal parasites such as hookworm, roundworm, and whipworm,

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[67] Margaret A. Shannon and Stephen W. Taylor, "Astride the Plantation Gates: Tourism, Racial Politics, and the Development of Hilton Head Island," in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 176-200.

[68] Courtney Siceloff, "Beaufort County—1960," Penn Center Inc. Papers, SHC.

ailments that most Americans associated with the developing world, not the United States.[69]

Decimation of independent landownership on the Sea Islands was one of the most shocking byproducts of the county's socioeconomic decline. As the growing resort industry led to real estate speculation, which caused property taxes to skyrocket, Beaufort County's capital-poor black landowners were forced either to sell their smallholdings or default on their taxes. "The impact [of resort development] upon the largely black family farms has been mixed[,] with resort-type jobs combined with higher property taxes and other factors making it increasingly difficult for these families to retain ownership of their land," Emory Campbell, director of the Penn Center, told the South Carolina Bar Association in 1986.[70] Compounding the problem were questions of title and inheritance that were not specific to the Lowcountry. An Emergency Land Fund study published in 1980 revealed that about 80 percent of African American rural landowners did not have wills.[71] Another study estimated that one-third of black-owned land from North Carolina to Mississippi was heir property; yet another claimed that the total was as high as 40 percent. As the number of family members with claims on the land increased while the parcel either remained the same size or diminished, real estate developers were able to take advantage of ambiguities

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[69] David Nolan, "The Hunger Doctor," *New York Review of Books*, March 11, 1971.

[70] Emory Campbell to South Carolina Bar Association, February 5, 1986, Penn Center Inc. Papers, SHC.

[71] Emergency Land Study Fund, *The Impact of Heir Property on Black Rural Land Tenure in the Southeastern Region of the United States* (Atlanta: Emergency Land Fund, 1980); Jess Gilbert, Spencer D. Wood, and Gwen Sharp, "Who Owns the Land? Agricultural Land Ownership by Race/Ethnicity," *Rural America* 17 (Winter 2002): 56-62.

in ownership as several generations of a family, often spread out in different parts of the country, had to determine whether the land should be sold and, if so, who had the authority to sell it.[72]

To combat black land loss in Beaufort County, the Black Economic Research Center partnered with a number of local activists. Penn Community Services, a non-profit entity that emerged out of the former Penn School, served as the hub of this rural outreach. A nexus of civil rights activism during the 1950s and 1960s, Penn Community Services also organized a local branch of Head Start, developed the Child Development Project, which established daycare centers across Beaufort County, and created the Business Development Project, which helped African Americans in the Lowcountry establish businesses and navigate the loan process. In 1971, Penn Community Services created a new program, Black Land Services. Starting with a $1.5 million grant from the Black Economic Research Center, Black Land Services hired a director and a small staff that conducted research, collected data, and organized conferences for local landowners on the intricacies of heir law and mortgage law.[73] John W. Gadson, Sr., the president of Penn Community Services, explained that "the main job [of Black Land Services] is education—convincing black owners that their chief economic and political power lies in holding their land and not selling it to the first 'smooth talking' real estate agent who offers what seems

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[72] John P. Smith, "Cultural Preservation of the Sea Island Gullah: A Black Social Movement in the Post-Civil Rights Era," *Rural Sociology* 56 (Summer 1991): 294. On the consequences of intestate property in another South Carolina black community, see Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *Promiseland: A Century of Life in a Negro Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), chap. 5.

[73] Black Economic Research Center, *Report on the Black Land Services Project* (New York: Black Economic Research Center, 1971).

to be a large price for it."[74]

For its first conference, Black Land Services prepared a manual entitled "Got Land Problems?" Written by Harold R. Washington, a law professor at North Carolina Central University, the manual included several references to forty acres and a mule. Its inside cover featured a dedication "to Aunt Sophie Daise and all of the freedmen who got the forty acres, but never got the mule." The primary purpose of "Got Land Problems?" was to inform black landowners about the laws of the state of South Carolina as they related to the rights of heirs, partition, recordation, condemnation, tax delinquency sales, quieting title, mortgage foreclosure, and judgment liens. It also connected the current land crisis with the history of black landownership in Beaufort County. Beginning with the Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865, the manual identified the South Carolina Lowcountry as a site where the promise of forty acres and a mule was grounded in both federal policy and local politics. "It was [on] the basis of the Freedmen's Bureau Act that Black folk formed their dream of '40 acres and a mule'," the manual reported. While the dream had been unavailable to most freedpeople, black residents of Beaufort County had managed to accumulate land and develop a society in which smallholding farms were the norm. "There were some of us who got the land, if not the mule," the manual declared.[75]

In addition to holding conferences and publishing advice for farmers, Black Land Services set out to organize black landowners. This initiative, called Project

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[74] Gadson quoted in Roy Reed, "Blacks in South Struggle to Keep the Little Land They Have Left," New York *Times*, December 7, 1972.

[75] Harold R. Washington, *Got Land Problems?* (Frogmore, SC: Black Land Services Inc., 1973), quotations on 1-2.

Black Land, was designed to prevent black landowners from defaulting on delinquent taxes or selling their land at a loss. Using student interns from Howard University to canvass Beaufort County during the summer of 1972, Black Land Services initially received little cooperation from local residents. "The community just refused to give out information concerning their property, in part because the students were not from the community," John Gadson, Jr., told Howard undergraduate Larry Brown. "It was here that we realized that our educational program had not worked effectively. We came back and started a new process, this time some handbills were printed up and passed out at each house. This bill clearly explained Black Land and its objectives." In addition to putting student volunteers to work, Black Land Services constructed a computer database of taxpayers in the four counties it served so that black taxpayers could be identified. Once black landowners who owed back taxes were identified, the staff at Black Land Services attempted to make them aware of the amount they owed. In some cases, the organization itself paid the outstanding taxes; in 1974, Black Land Services expended more than $1,200 to save twenty-three parcels of black-owned land in Beaufort County. Overall, Black Land Services paid $40,000 in back taxes for black landowners during the 1970s.[76]

Black Land Services achieved a number of successes during the 1970s. Project Black Land managed to clear complicated titles to family estates and helped about one hundred families each year avert confiscation of their land for nonpayment of taxes. With the aid of personnel from Project Black Land, other property owners

[76] Washington, *Got Land Problems?*; John W. Gadson to Larry Brown, June 4, 1972, Penn Services Inc. Papers, folder 360, SHC; "Black Land Services," *Penn News* 3 (September 1974), Penn Services Inc. Papers, folder 360, SHC.

were able to obtain full market value for land they sold to developers. Whereas black landowners had previously received around $10,000 per acre, some now netted offers upward of $30,000 per acre. (The speculators in turn sold the land for as much as $100 per square inch.) Most importantly, Black Land Services slowed the rate at which families on the Sea Islands and in the Lowcountry as a whole lost their land.[77]

Ultimately, however, Black Land Services was no match for the booming resort industry or the speculators who saw the Sea Islands as an undervalued investment. Between 1972 and 1980, the number of annual visitors to Hilton Head Island increased from 72,000 to 648,000. The Hilton Head model for a planned resort community was copied in a number of other places in the Sunbelt South, including River Hills Plantation near Charlotte, North Carolina, Amelia Island Plantation in Florida, and Brandermill outside Richmond, Virginia. In the national press, Charles Fraser, a white developer from the Georgia Lowcountry who created Sea Pines Plantation on Hilton Head, was heralded for developing a template for the modern resort community. As landscape architect Edward Pinckney observed in 1984, "People almost take it for granted now but believe me, in the early days of Sea Pines it was not done anywhere else."[78]

By the end of the 1970s, Sea Pines had become an exemplar for other Sunbelt resort communities. Its success not only led resort developers to emulate the golf-and-beach-home pairing elsewhere in the South, but also encouraged its replication in other parts of the Lowcountry. In 1970, the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina sold

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[77] "Black Land Services," *Penn News* 3 (September 1974), Penn Services Inc. Papers, SHC; Burton, *Penn Center*, 260.

[78] Danielson, *Profits and Politics in Paradise*, 31-33, 122 (quotation).

1,100 acres on Seabrook Island in Beaufort County to real estate developers. Four years later, an investment company based in the nation of Kuwait purchased Kiawah Island in Charleston County with the intention of building a golf resort. Meanwhile, on Fripp Island in Beaufort County, developers constructed a resort community that featured luxury condominiums, two golf courses, and the slogan "Fripp Island: Another World, Not Another Resort."[79]

Expansion of the resort economy came as a mixed blessing to the Lowcountry's black residents. On Hilton Head, the resort sector provided a tremendous boost to the local economy, with the number of local businesses increasing from 125 in 1972 to more than 800 in 1980. During the resort boom of the 1970s, secondary and tertiary businesses tripled the number of employees on the island from just over 3,000 to more than 9,000. Even though 50 percent of Beaufort County's black residents were still landowning farmers, most of them had to seek employment outside the household to make ends meet, generally in the seasonal truck farming industry. As the generation born after the Great Depression increasingly fled the Lowcountry in search of better prospects in northern cities and as agricultural work became less and less remunerative in the post-World War II period, the resort economy became a major source of service-sector employment. "It could be argued—and is—that white development brought economic betterment to black chambermaids and to a generation of career caddies," wrote the journalist Paul Good in 1968.[80] A 1980 study found that even in low-wage service positions, blacks were likely to be

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[79] Ibid., 125-32; Page Putnam Miller, *Fripp Island: A History* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2006), 89.

[80] Paul Good, *American Serfs* (New York: Putnam Press, 1968), 130.

found on the lowest rungs. In food and hospitality, for example, blacks made up 41.7 percent of those in food preparation (cooks and dishwashers) but only 17.6 percent of those in food service (waiters and waitresses). Only 6.2 percent of front-desk personnel were black, compared to 61.1 percent of maids. Sam Bolden, former head of the Hilton Head Island branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, claimed that motels would hire a black person, but "promotion is another matter."[81] Such racial divisions contributed to perceptions that the resorts were intended to be sites of Old South nostalgia.

The rise of service-sector employment destabilized traditional spatial allegiances in the Sea Islands. All of the domestics connected with one of the largest resort companies, the Hilton Head Company, came from Ridgeland, a small town about twenty miles away. Other employees come from the town of Beaufort on Port Royal Island and from Parris Island. Of the employees at the large Holiday Inn on Hilton Head, only 50 percent were from the island, and only 20 percent of the housekeepers were local residents. "Hotels organized buses to pick up African Americans who had been driven off the island to the mainland and carry these workers on one and two-hour one-way commutes to scrub toilets for the tourists," reported one hotel worker on Daufuskie Island in 1978. "Young people attracted to the relatively high-paying menial work in the resort industry on the island tended to drop out of school early," she continued. What is more, "the decline in black landownership caused a loss of independence as small, autonomous enterprises such as farms disappeared, leaving behind a dependent black underclass serving the needs

[81] June Manning Thomas, "The Impact of Corporate Tourism on Gullah Blacks: Notes on Issues of Employment," *Phylon* 41 (Spring 1980): 4-6.

of Hilton Head's tourists."[82]

Although hourly wages in the resort industry were relatively high, few blacks on the islands were salaried employees. With forty-hour work weeks available only in the summer and an hourly wage of $2.30 or $2.65, the income of a worker during the offseason could drop to the annual equivalent of between $2,990 and $3,445, which, if he or she were supporting a family of four, was below the poverty line. With no unions among resort employees and few for blacks anywhere in the Lowcountry, black workers were particularly vulnerable to the whims of their employers. Although the new service-sector jobs were more economically viable than seasonal agricultural labor, they cast into sharp relief the transformation of the Sea Islands from a site of economic independence to just another part of the Sunbelt where workers without college degrees found themselves trapped in low-paying, part-time employment.[83]

Conclusion

Although dwindling funds forced Black Land Services to reduce its staff "to the bone" by the late 1970s, efforts to fight black land loss in the Lowcountry did not cease. When Black Land Services closed its doors in the 1980s, the Penn Center continued to aid Beaufort County's black landowners. Partnering with the National Lawyers' Guild, the Center brought second-year law students to St. Helena Island to work as summer interns. In 1986, a prospective intern named Linda Trice applied for the program because she had been inspired by the unique place of the Sea Islands in

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[82] Hotel worker quoted in Shannon and Taylor, "Astride the Plantation Gates," 183.

[83] Thomas, "Impact of Corporate Tourism on Gullah Blacks," 11.

African American history. As an undergraduate student at Howard University, she had been mentored by Sterling Brown, who told her that it was important for northern blacks to go south "to learn the rhythms, songs, poetry and folklore of our people." Having completed an MFA in creative writing and a PhD in Black Studies before entering law school, Trice had a particularly sophisticated understanding of the black experience. She cited Charlotte Forten as one of her heroes, noted her agreement with Melville Herskovits's Africanism thesis, and remarked that she had been moved by Clyde Kiser's *Sea Island to City*. She also mentioned that she was worried about the danger of resort development in and around the Sea Islands. "I saw brochures sent out by developers of such areas as Hilton Head," Trice wrote, "and was appalled at how the only people enjoying the resorts were whites." Blacks appeared only as servants. "One brochure proclaimed that at night the blacks would come and serenade the guests with 'old songs.' It was as if the war had never been fought [,] for here was a resort in essence offering one to return to the days of slavery and experience the 'Romantic' Slave South."[84]

Trice's views reflected a growing interest among African American intellectuals in the cultural history of the Sea Islands during the 1970s and 1980s. J. Herman Blake, a black sociology professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, had visited Daufuskie Island several times since 1967 and found the cultural strength of the Gullah community so irresistible that he purchased a house on the island in order to spend as much time there as possible.[85] Jeanne Mountoussamy-

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[84] Linda Trice to Emory Campbell, March 31, 1986, Penn Services Inc. Papers, SHC.

[85] Alex Haley, "Sea Islanders, Strong-Willed Survivors, Face Their Uncertain Future Together," *Smithsonian* (Fall 1982): 88-90.

Ashe, a photographer and wife of tennis star Arthur Ashe, collaborated with Alex Haley to create a photographic essay of Daufuskie that chronicled both the history and present struggles of the island's black community. Like Hilton Head in the 1960s and 1970s, Daufuskie was becoming a site of real estate speculation, and developers were trying to take advantage of the inchoate system of wills and intestate family ownership.[86]

In 1983, Karen Fields, a black sociologist, published *Lemon Swamp and Other Places*, the memoir of her grandmother, Mamie Garvin Fields. Born in 1888, Mamie Garvin Fields spent most of her life in segregated Charleston as part of the city's robust black middle class. For a time, she taught in an elementary school on Johns Island. Her narrative centered on the many counterpublic spaces black people in the Lowcountry had constructed between the Civil War and the end of segregation. The "Lemon Swamp" in the book's title was a wetland outside her grandfather's farm that had served as a refuge for enslaved people awaiting the rumored arrival of Sherman's army in 1865. Freedpeople also escaped to Lemon Swamp after the war in order to avoid becoming wage laborers for their former masters. Karen Fields described her grandmother's rendition of the Lowcountry's history as "a recollection of what territory remained unsubdued, perhaps unsubduable, by Jim Crow's regime of remembering."[87]

Inspired by the nation's bicentennial, which she saw as an important moment in which to spotlight the nation's African American past, Patricia Guthrie, a black

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[86] Ibid., 91-96.

[87] Mamie Garvin Fields with Karen E. Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 1983); quotation on 4.

social anthropologist, conducted two field visits to St. Helena Island during the 1970s. The resulting study, *Catching Sense: African American Communities on a South Carolina Sea Island*, appeared in 1996. Guthrie found St. Helena teeming with a history that was in danger of being forgotten. She drew her book's title from the Sea Island phrase that referred to the moment in a child's transition to adulthood when a sense of morality and community is developed. "'Catching Sense'," Guthrie observed, "is the glue that holds together the community system—belonging to churches, praise houses, and claiming a plantation as one's home. I believe the phenomenon of catching sense is unique to African Americans. Furthermore, it has its origins in the experience of slavery." Like Trice, Blake, and Fields, Guthrie saw the Sea Islands as a critical site of African American memory and believed it important for black scholars to analyze and preserve that memory during the post-Civil Rights era.[88]

By the 1990s, ideas about the Sea Islands as sites of African American memory were beginning to move from the academy into popular culture, and African American interest in the islands' Gullah culture reached a new zenith. In *Daughters of the Dust*, a 1991 film set on St. Helena Island, black filmmaker Julie Dash told the story of three generations of Gullah woman who struggled to reconcile tensions between the antebellum past and their Great Migration present.[89] Three years later, Ron Daise and Natalie Daise, black natives of St. Helena, created the children's show "Gullah Gullah Island," which ran for four seasons on the cable television network

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[88] Patricia Guthrie, *Catching Sense: African American Communities on a South Carolina Sea Island* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1996); quotation on 13.

[89] *Daughters of the Dust*, directed by Julie Dash (New York: Kino International, 1991).

Nickelodeon. Similar in tone and theme to "Sesame Street," the Emmy Award-winning "Gullah Gullah Island" not only taught children critical thinking and life skills, but also introduced them to the language and culture of the Lowcountry's Gullah.[90] In 1996, the documentary film *The Language You Cry In* traced the linguistic similarities between the Gullah speakers of the Sea Islands and the Mende-speaking people of Sierra Leone.[91]

The renewed interest in Gullah culture also informed public history initiatives. The Penn Center was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974, and in 1999 it opened the York W. Bailey Museum, which was named for the Penn School graduate who served as the only doctor on St. Helena Island for the first of half of the twentieth century. While the Penn Center continued to conduct community outreach during the 1980s and 1990s, it increasingly turned its attention to the preservation of Gullah culture. At the forefront of a burgeoning Gullah tourism industry, Emory Campbell, the director of the Penn Center during the 1980s, organized the nation's first Gullah Festival in 1986 in the town of Beaufort. Initially a small gathering of family and friends, the festival has grown to over 70,000 attendees and brings guests from as far as Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Germany, and Australia.[92] In 2006, Democratic congressman James Clyburn, whose district included the Sea Islands, introduced a bill in the House of Representatives to designate the region between Wilmington,

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[90] Jennifer Mangan, "Gullah-baloo,: Preschoolers and Their Moms Are Crazy for 'Gullah Gullah Island'," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1996; "Polliwog Helps Bring Gullah Culture to Life," Miami *Sun Sentinel* July 7, 1996.

[91] *The Language You Cry In*, directed by Angel Serrano (Los Angeles: California Newsreel, 1996).

[92] Burton, *Penn Center*, 103-4, 124-25.

North Carolina, and Jacksonville, Florida, the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.[93]

Late twentieth-century popular interest in the Lowcountry had its roots in the turmoil over black land loss in the 1970s. The Lowcountry as the home of independent black landowners was in danger of being erased. In response, black scholars and activists defended the Lowcountry as a space that embodied the promise of Reconstruction. Occurring at the same moment that "the First Reconstruction" and "forty acres and a mule" were being invoked by civil rights and black rights activists, the fight against black land loss in the Lowcountry transformed the way African American history intersected with public memory. Making claims based on cultural heritage and history alongside demands for economic empowerment, a new generation of scholars, politicians, and activists framed the fight for landownership as a struggle not only to maintain black economic power, but also to preserve a particular vision of the African American past, both of which were rooted in Reconstruction.

[93] "Bill Will Provide Millions for Gullah Community," National Public Radio, October 17, 2006, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6283153 (accessed August 16, 2016). On the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, see http://www.gullahgeechee corridor.org/ (accessed July 15, 2016).

Epilogue

More than any other region of the United States, the South Carolina Lowcountry came to embody the promise and the perils of Reconstruction. The site of fierce struggles over black political power, storm relief, industrial education, cultural appropriation, and land loss, the Lowcountry became a lens through which Americans filtered their understandings of Reconstruction.

The region's history continues to inform discussions of Reconstruction. In 2000, after reading Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt asked Foner what would be the ideal location for a National Park Service site commemorating Reconstruction. When Foner recommended Beaufort, South Carolina, Babbitt, together with Jane Upshaw, a dean at the University of South Carolina-Beaufort, worked to form the Sea Islands Reconstruction Partnership. The partnership, which consisted of forty local organizations, met regularly to discuss the possibility of a national park in Beaufort County.[1]

In 2003, the U.S. Senate passed a bill sponsored by South Carolina Democrat Fritz Hollings that authorized $350,000 to explore the possibility of a national park dedicated to Reconstruction in Beaufort County. As a result of aggressive lobbying by the Sons of Confederate Veterans, however, the bill died in the House of Representatives. "We felt like it was something that the people of South Carolina really wouldn't want to have because it was such a terrible time in our history," remarked one opponent of the measure. Michael Hill, president of the League of the South, who was also involved in

[1] David Lauderdale, "It's Been a Long March to Tell a Local Story That Helped Reconstruct America," *Beaufort Gazette and Island Packet*, June 12, 2015. Foner's book was published in 1988 by Harper and Row.

the campaign against commemorating Reconstruction, vowed that his organization would block any further efforts. "It's not going to turn out to be anything but another propaganda effort," he maintained. "If the federal government is involved in this and if they're bringing in mainstream historians, this won't be very favorable for the South. Reconstruction will be politicized: North, holy and righteous; South, evil and despicable."[2]

Despite the failure of the 2003 effort, local and national leaders continued to advocate a Reconstruction memorial in Beaufort County. In 2014, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded Brent Morris, a history professor at the University of South Carolina-Beaufort, a $200,000 grant to train high school history teachers to explain the Reconstruction era more effectively. Under the grant, thirty teachers from across the nation came to Beaufort in June 2015 for a three-week institute on "America's Reconstruction: The Untold Story." The institute featured lectures by local and national experts and tours of the region's historic landmarks.[3] Meanwhile, the National Park Service (NPS) announced in May 2015 that it would begin exploring locations for a site dedicated to Reconstruction. Once again, Beaufort County was at the top of the list. Congressman James E. Clyburn, a Democrat who represented South Carolina's 6th District, called the NPS project "long overdue." "I think [Reconstruction's] been intentionally misrepresented," maintained Clyburn, a former high school social studies teacher. In June 2016, he co-sponsored a bill with Republican South Carolina

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[2] Kate Siber, "A Complicated Past," National Parks Conservation Association website, Winter 2016, https://www.npca.org/articles/978-a-complicated-past (accessed July 25, 2016).

[3] Robert Behre, "Beaufort Highlighting Its Reconstruction Role," Charleston *Post and Courier,* August 24, 2014.

Congressman Mark Sanford to make the Penn School the national Reconstruction monument. Billy Keyserling, Beaufort's mayor, has been a consistent advocate of the NPS project and views the possibility of a national Reconstruction memorial as a major coup for the growing Sunbelt city. "If you ask any historian," Keyserling remarked, "they're going to say there's more in Beaufort than anywhere else that is tangible and can be documented." In fighting for the NPS site, Keyserling and other city leaders expressed hope that Beaufort could become a "Reconstruction hub" that would attract commercial developers and tourists.[4]

In June 2015, representatives of the NPS visited several locations in Beaufort County, including the Penn Center, Robert Smalls's home, and the Emancipation Oak where the Emancipation Proclamation was read and celebrated in 1863, as they weighed the possibility of establishing a site to commemorate Reconstruction. Throughout the discussions, Beaufort remained one of the favored locations. "[I]f there's a logical place to center an uplifting story of Reconstruction," one reporter observed, "many say, it's the area around Beaufort."[5]

The creation of an official monument dedicated to Reconstruction finally came to fruition in the waning days of Barack Obama's presidency. On January 12, 2017, President Obama designated three new NPS sites honoring African American history. Under the Antiquities Act of 1906, which allows the president to designate national

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[4] Jennifer Schuessler, "Taking Another Look at the Reconstruction Era," New York *Times,* August 24, 2015; Emma Dumain, "Clyburn, Sanford Push to Make Penn Center a National Monument," Charleston *Post and Courier*, June 2, 2016.

[5] Rebecca Luyre, "Beaufort County's Reconstruction-era Sites Toured by National Park Service," Columbia (SC) *State*, June 4, 2015; Schuessler, "Taking Another Look at the Reconstruction Era."

monuments, Obama established memorials for the Greyhound bus station in Anniston, Alabama, where Freedom Riders were attacked in 1961, the A. G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham, Alabama, which served as the headquarters for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the 1963 Birmingham Campaign, and several sites in Beaufort County, including the Emancipation Oak, the Penn School, and Robert Smalls's home as a memorial to Reconstruction.[6] "I have sought to build a more inclusive National Park System and ensure that our national parks, monuments and public lands are fully reflective of our nation's diverse history and culture," Obama declared.[7] The modern foundation for the long quest for African American civil rights and multi-racial democracy, Reconstruction now has a permanent place on the American landscape. Hopefully, it will also find a lasting place in the nation's collective memory.

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[6] On the Antiquities Act, see Ronald F. Lee, "The Origins of the Antiquities Act," in *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation*, ed. David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 15-34. On the Freedom Riders, see Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). On the Birmingham Campaign, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), chap. 18, and *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), pt. 1; Glenn Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[7] Jennifer Schuessler, "President Obama Designates First National Monument Dedicated to Reconstruction," New York *Times*, January 12, 2017.

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