

Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880

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Who built Thebes of the seven Gates?
In the books stand the names of Kings.
Did they then drag up the rock-slabs?
And Babylon so often destroyed,
Who kept rebuilding it?
In which houses did the builders live
In gold-glittering Lima?
Where did the brick-layers go
The evening the Great Wall of China was finished?

...

Even in legendary Atlantis
Didn't the drowning shout for their slaves
As the ocean engulfed it?

...

So many reports
So many questions.

Bertolt Brecht, 1939

WITHIN the realm of slavery studies there has been a pronounced preoccupation with the external or institutional aspects of the slave system. Despite repeated clarion calls for investigations of life in the slave quarters, little scholarly attention has been directed to the domestic economy of the slaves, their work routines,

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their attitudes toward resource allocation, their attempts to accumulate, and their patterns of consumption.¹ This academic shortsightedness is more easily identified than remedied. Attitudes toward work and patterns of work constitute an area of inquiry that sprawls awkwardly across academic demarcations: the subject is all too easily neglected.² In addition, the genre to which this type of history is most akin, namely, labor history, often suffers from its own myopia: studies that begin by aiming to uncover the experience of workers can all too readily focus instead on management priorities.³ Moreover, what has been said with respect to the English farm laborer applies even more forcefully to the Afro-American slave: "No one has written his signature more plainly across the countryside; but no one has left more scanty records of his achievements."⁴

Mindful of these difficulties and pitfalls, this article accepts the challenge posed by Brecht's questions: it attempts to bring history closer to the central concerns of ordinary people's lives—in this case, the lives of Afro-American slaves in the lowcountry region of South Carolina and Georgia. In this light, perhaps the most distinctive and central feature of lowcountry slave life was the task system. In Lewis Gray's words, "Under the task system the slave was assigned a certain amount of work for the day, and after completing the task he could use his time as he pleased," whereas under the gang system, prevalent in most Anglo-American plantation societies, "slaves were worked in groups under the control of a driver or leader . . . and the laborer was compelled to work the entire day."⁵ While previous commentators have drawn attention to the task system, few have explored how this peculiarity arose and how it structured the world of those who labored under it. In order to shed light on the first matter, I shall open three windows onto different phases in the develop-

¹ Comparative studies of slavery have been especially prone to the institutional or external perspective. Even one of the best studies of slave life—Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974)—devotes only a few pages to the domestic economy of the slaves (pp. 535-540), although slave work routines (pp. 285-324) and aspects of consumption patterns (pp. 550-561) are explored sensitively and at length.

² Anthropologists, for example, have been criticized for neglecting the subject. See the introduction to Sandra Wallman, ed., *Social Anthropology of Work*, Association of Social Anthropologists, Monograph 19 (London, 1979).

³ The labor history that is practiced in *History Workshop* and in the volumes published in the *History Workshop* series are the kind to which this article aspires. Also noteworthy is a recent trend in American labor history that treats the reality of work as the focus, or starting point, of investigation. See David Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s: Toward a History of the American Worker," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 268.

⁴ Alan Everitt, "Farm Labourers," in Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, IV (Cambridge, 1967), 396.

⁵ Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Gloucester, Mass., 1958 [orig. publ. Washington, D.C., 1933]), I, 550-551.

ment of this labor arrangement: its origins in the first half of the eighteenth century, its routinization during the Revolutionary era, and its full flowering by the time of the Civil War. I shall also explore the ramifications of the task system for the slaves by analyzing its most distinctive feature so far as they were concerned: the opportunities it provided for working on their own behalf once the stipulated task had been completed.⁶ I shall argue, then, that a particular mode of labor organization and a particular domestic economy evolved simultaneously in the colonial and antebellum lowcountry.⁷

This argument can best be secured by broadening our horizons to take in not only colonial and early national developments but also those of the antebellum and even postbellum years. On the one hand, such a strategy will show how colonial developments bore directly on nineteenth- and even twentieth-century realities. To take a minor example, the basic task unit still current in the minds of freedmen in the 1930s will be shown to have had a precise colonial origin. On the other hand, the opportunities that the task system presented slaves can be understood only in the light of mid-nineteenth-century experiences. To take a more significant example, the resemblance between the experiences of some lowcountry slaves and of the protopeasants found among the slaves of certain Caribbean plantation societies emerges most clearly from a glance at the behavior of slaves and freedmen in the years surrounding the Civil War.⁸ In other words, to understand the evolution of the task system and its concomitant domestic economy, we shall need a telescope rather than a microscope.

I

If the Negroes are skilful and industrious, they
plant something for themselves after the day's work.

Johann Bolzius, 1751

The earliest, fragmentary descriptions of work practices in the lowcountry rice economy indicate that a prominent characteristic of the task system—a sharp division between the master's "time" and the slave's

⁶ Equally, we could investigate more fully than will be possible here the special role of the black driver, the marketing opportunities, or the occupational structure that a rice tasking system produced.

⁷ The word *particular* is important here because I do not intend to suggest that the independent production of goods and the accumulation of property by slaves was necessarily predicated on a task system. From situations as diverse as a sugar plantation in Jamaica to an iron foundry in the United States, slaves were often able to control the accumulation and disposal of sizable earnings and possessions. Rather, in the lowcountry, a particular conjunction arose that probably led—but this would need much greater space for comparative presentation—to a distinctive internal economy among the slaves.

⁸ In exploring these resemblances, I have found the work of Sidney W. Mintz to be particularly helpful. See "The Origins of Reconstituted Peasantries," in

"time"—was already in place. In the first decade of the eighteenth century the clergy of South Carolina complained that slaves were planting "for themselves as much as will cloath and subsist them and their famil[ies]." During the investigation of a suspected slave conspiracy in mid-century, a lowcountry planter readily acknowledged that one of his slaves had planted rice "in his own time" and could do with it as he wished.⁹ The most acute observer of early work practices, Johann Bolzius, described how slaves, after "their required day's work," were "given as much land as they can handle" on which they planted corn, potatoes, tobacco, peanuts, sugar and water melons, and pumpkins and bottle pumpkins.¹⁰ The opportunity to grow such a wide range of provisions on readily available land owed much to the early establishment and institutionalization of the daily work requirement. By mid-century the basic "task" unit had been set at a quarter of an acre. Moreover, other activities, outside of the rice field, were also tasked: in pounding the rice grain, slaves were "tasked at seven Mortars for one day," and in providing fences lowcountry slaves were expected to split 100 poles of about twelve feet in length (a daily "task" that remained unchanged throughout the slave era, as Table I indicates).¹¹ These tasks were not, of course, easily accomplished, and occasionally planters exacted even higher daily requirements; but, as Bolzius noted, the advantage to the slaves of having a daily goal was that they could, once it was met, "plant something for themselves."¹²

A tried and tested model of labor organization—the gang system practiced on both tobacco and sugar plantations—was available when lowcountry planters discovered their own plantation staple. In fact, many of the first immigrants were from Barbados, where they must have had direct experience of operating gangs of slaves.¹³ Why did they and others decide to adopt a new system? U. B. Phillips claimed that temporary

Caribbean Transformations (Chicago, 1974), 146-156, and "Slavery and the Rise of Peasantries," in Michael Craton, ed., *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies* (Toronto, 1979), 213-242.

⁹ The Instructions of the Clergy of South Carolina given to Mr. Johnston, 1712, A8/429, Society of the Propagation of the Gospel, London; testimony of Thomas Akin and Ammon, Feb. 7, 1749, Council Journal, No. 17, Pt. 1, 160, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

¹⁰ "Johann Martin Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire on Carolina and Georgia," trans. and ed. Klaus G. Loewald *et al.*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XIV (1957), 259.

¹¹ Dr. Alexander Garden to the Royal Society, Apr. 20, 1755, Guard Book 1, 36, Royal Society of Arts, London; "Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire," trans. and ed. Loewald *et al.*, *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XIV (1957), 258.

¹² "Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire," trans. and ed. Loewald *et al.*, *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XIV (1957), 256.

¹³ Richard S. Dunn, "The English Sugar Islands and the Founding of South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, LXXII (1971), 81-93; Richard Waterhouse, "England, the Caribbean, and the Settlement of Carolina," *Journal of American Studies*, IX (1975), 259-281.

absenteeism was responsible: "The necessity of the master's moving away from his estate in the warm months, to escape the malaria, involved the adoption of some system of routine which would work with more or less automatic regularity without his own inspiring or impelling presence." However, while absenteeism may have contributed to the attractiveness of this system, it seems an insufficiently powerful agent to account for its inception. The example of Caribbean sugar production is pertinent here; if the withdrawal of an inspiring master encouraged the development of tasking, why did not sugar planters in the West Indies, where absenteeism began relatively early, adopt the system?¹⁴

The absence of masters may be an unconvincing explanation for the development of a task system, but perhaps the presence of particular slaves can serve in its place. Peter H. Wood and Daniel C. Littlefield have pointed out that some black immigrants to early South Carolina were already familiar with the techniques of rice cultivation.¹⁵ These slaves' expertise, it might be argued, accounts for the evolution of a system that would operate more or less automatically. It has even been suggested, in this regard, that a work pattern of alternating bouts of intense labor and idleness tends to occur wherever men are to some degree in control of their own working lives (need one look any further than authors?).¹⁶ By displaying their own understanding of the basic requirements of rice cultivation, lowcountry slaves might have gained a measure of control over their lives, at least to the extent of determining the length of their working days. While this is an attractive argument, it is not without problems. The coastal regions that seem to have supplied a majority of slaves to early South Carolina were not rice-producing areas; lowcountry whites have left no record of valuing the knowledge of rice planting that some slaves might have displayed; and familiarity with rice planting is hardly the same as familiarity with irrigated rice culture, practiced in South Carolina from early days.¹⁷ Slaves undoubtedly contributed a great deal to the development of South Carolina's rice economy; but, on present evidence, it would be rash to attribute the development of a task system to their prowess, especially when that prowess went largely unrecognized and may not have been significant.

¹⁴ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, "The Slave Labor Problem in the Charleston District," in Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 9. For Caribbean absenteeism see Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 101-103, 161-163.

¹⁵ Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 56-62; Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981), 74-114.

¹⁶ E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, No. 38 (1967), 73.

¹⁷ Of those slaves imported into South Carolina before 1740 and for whom an African coastal region of origin is known, I calculate that 15% were from rice-

A consideration of staple-crop requirements provides the most satisfactory, if not complete, answer to the question of the system's origins. The amount of direct supervision demanded by various crops offers at least one clue to the puzzle. Unlike tobacco, which involved scrupulous care in all phases of the production cycle and was therefore best cultivated by small gangs of closely attended laborers, rice was a hardy plant, requiring a few relatively straightforward operations for its successful cultivation.¹⁸ The great expansion of rice culture in seventeenth-century Lombardy, for instance, was predicated not on a stable, sophisticated, and well-supervised labor force but on a pool of transient labor drawn from far afield.¹⁹ Nor did rice production require the strict regimentation and "semi-industrialised" production techniques that attended the cultivation of sugar and necessitated gang labor.²⁰ However, the Caribbean plantation experience does offer parallels to the lowcountry rice economy: in the British West Indies, crops that required little supervision or regimentation—notably coffee and pimento—were, like rice, grown by a slave labor force organized by tasks rather than into gangs.²¹

producing areas. Unfortunately, we know little or nothing about the regional origins of the earliest slave vessels to South Carolina. The first association between an African region and the cultivation of rice that I have found comes late in the day and may have been no more than a mercantile gambit. In 1758 the merchant firm Austin and Laurens described the origins of the slave ship *Betsey* as the "Windward and Rice Coast" (*South-Carolina Gazette* [Charleston], Aug. 11, 1758). Whites in other areas of North America are on record as valuing the familiarity with rice planting that some Africans displayed (see Henry P. Dart, "The First Cargo of African Slaves for Louisiana, 1718," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XIV [1931], 176-177, as referred to in Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* [Baton Rouge, La., 1963], 14). For the West Africans' widespread unfamiliarity with irrigation see Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 86, and the issue of *Africa*, LI, No. 2 (1981), devoted to "Rice and Yams in West Africa." A fuller discussion of all these matters will be presented in my "Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry" (unpubl. MS).

¹⁸ In 1830 one Cuban planter, with little historical sense, could even argue that the culture of the tobacco plant "properly belongs to a white population, for there are few plants requiring more attention and tender treatment than this does" (Joseph M. Hernandez, "On the Cultivation of the Cuba Tobacco Plant," *Southern Agriculturalist*, III [1830], 463).

¹⁹ Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity: The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 121-122.

²⁰ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 189-200. The connection between sugar cultivation and gang labor was not absolutely axiomatic, at least in the postemancipation era. See Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838-1865: An Economic History* (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 44-45; Jerome Handler, "Some Aspects of Work Organization on Sugar Plantations in Barbados," *Ethnology*, IV (1965), 16-38; and James McNeill and Chimman Lal, *Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam in British Parliamentary Papers*, 1915, Cd. 7744, 7745 (I am indebted to Stanley Engerman for the last reference).

²¹ B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (Cambridge, 1976), 23-24, 220. A Jamaican bookkeeper reported that the only work on

In addition to the degree of direct supervision required by a crop, the facility with which the laborers' output could be measured also shaped different forms of labor organization. For example, the productivity of a single coffee and pimento worker could be measured accurately and cheaply, particularly in the harvesting cycle. It was easy to weigh an individual's baskets of coffee or pimento berries, and tasking may have first developed in this stage of the respective crop cycles before being extended to other operations. Conversely, the much larger volumes involved in the cane harvest would have proved far less easy and much more expensive to measure on an individual "task" basis; not surprisingly, gang labor was employed at this and other stages of the sugar cycle.²² In the case of rice, it was less the harvesting and more the cultivation of the crop that lent itself to inexpensive and efficient measurement. As Phillips pointed out, drainage ditches, which were necessary in lowcountry rice cultivation, provided convenient units by which the performance of tasks could be measured.²³ The ubiquity and long-standing history of the quarter-acre task suggest that the planting and weeding stages of the rice cycle provided the initial rationale for the task system; once tasking became firmly established, it was extended to a whole host of plantation operations.

Thus various staple-crop requirements seem to have served as the most important catalysts for the development of particular modes of labor organization. Undoubtedly other imperatives contributed to the attractiveness of one or the other labor arrangement: absenteeism and the ease with which slaves took to rice cultivation may well have encouraged a more widespread and rapid diffusion of the task system in the lowcountry than might otherwise have been the case. Moreover, once a task system had been tried, tested, and not found wanting, it could be extended to crops that were produced elsewhere by means of gang labor. In other words, once tasking became a way of life, means were found to circumvent the otherwise powerful dictates of the various staple crops.²⁴

Whatever the origins of the task system, its consequences soon became apparent. Indeed, the way in which slaves chose to spend their own "time" created unease among ruling South Carolinians. One of the earliest laws relating to slaves, enacted in 1686, prohibited the exchange of goods between slaves or between slaves and freemen without their masters' consent. A decade later, slaves were expressly forbidden from felling and carrying away timber on lands other than their masters'. In 1714 the

a coffee plantation *not* carried out by tasks was the drying of the berries, because "this required constant attention" (*ibid.*, 23).

²² Barry Higman suggested this to me in a personal communication.

²³ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor As Determined by the Plantation Regime* (Baton Rouge, La., 1966 [orig. publ. New York, 1918]), 247.

²⁴ See the relevant discussions, below, of how the task system was extended to the cultivation of cotton and even sugar in the late 18th- and early 19th-century lowcountry.

TABLE I
TASKING REQUIREMENTS, C.1750 TO C.1860

<i>Representative Tasks</i>	1750s ¹	1770s ²	1820s ³	1830s ⁴	1840s ⁵	1850s-1860s ⁶
<i>Rice</i>						
Turning up land	$\frac{1}{4}a$		$\frac{1}{4}a$	$\frac{1}{4}a$	$\frac{1}{4}\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{4}a$
Trenching/Covering	$\frac{1}{2}a$		$\frac{3}{4}a$	$\frac{3}{4}a$	$\frac{3}{4}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$
First Hoeing	$\frac{1}{4}a$		$\frac{1}{4}\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{4}\frac{1}{2}a$
Second Hoeing				$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$	
Third Hoeing	$\frac{1}{2}a$			$\frac{3}{4}a$	20c	$\frac{3}{4}a$
Reaping					$\frac{3}{4}a$	$\frac{3}{4}a$
Threshing			600s	600s	600s	600s
Pounding	7m					
Ditching			600sf	700sf	500sf	600sf
<i>Cotton</i>						
Listing			$\frac{1}{4}a$	$\frac{1}{4}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{4}\frac{1}{2}a$
Bedding			$\frac{1}{4}a$	$\frac{1}{4}a$	$\frac{3}{8}a$	$\frac{1}{4}\frac{1}{2}a$
Hoeing			$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$	$\frac{1}{2}a$
Picking			90-100lbs	70-100lbs		
Assorting			30-50lbs	60lbs		
Ginning			20-30lbs	30lbs		
Moting			30-50lbs	30lbs		20-30lbs

General

Splitting rails
Squaring timber

100	100	100	100	100-125
100'	100'	100'	100'	100'

a = acre

s = sheaves

m = mortars

c = compasses

sf = square feet

¹ "Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire," trans. and ed. Loewald *et al.*, *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XIV (1957), 258; Garden to the Royal Society, Apr. 20, 1755, Guard Book I, 36.

² John Gerar William De Brahm, *Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America*, ed. Louis De Vorsej, Jr. (Columbia, S.C., 1971), 94.

³ "Estimate of the Daily Labour of Negroes," *American Farmer*, V (1823-1824), 319-320; [Edwin C. Holland], *A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated against . . . Slavery . . .* (New York, 1969 [orig. publ. Charleston, S.C., 1822]), 53; Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828*, III (London, 1829), 219-223.

⁴ "A Memorandum of Tasks," *Southern Agriculturalist*, VII (1834), 297-299; W. H. Capers, "On the Culture of Sea-Island Cotton," *ibid.*, VIII (1835), 402-411.

⁵ Edmund Ruffin, *Report of the Commencement and Progress of the Agricultural Survey of South-Carolina for 1843* (Columbia, S.C., 1843), 118; J. A. Turner, *The Cotton Planter's Manual* (New York, 1865), 285.

⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States . . .* (New York, 1968 [orig. publ. 1856]), 434-435; Francis S. Holmes, *Southern Farmer and Market Gardener* (Charleston, S.C., 1852), 234-236; Weehaw Plantation Book, 1855-1861, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston; "Tasks for Negroes," *Southern Cultivator*, XVIII (1860), 247; Col. A. J. Willard to W. H. Smith, Nov. 13, 1865 (A7011); testimony of Harry McMillan, 1863 (K78) (see below, n. 81 for explanation of these notations); J. A. Turner, *The Cotton Planter's Manual*, 133-135. See also George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Conn., 1972), II, Pt. ii, 302, III, Pt. iii, 92, Pt. iv, 117.

legislature enacted its stiffest prohibition; slaves were no longer to "plant for themselves any corn, peas or rice."²⁵ While this stark ban appears definitive, later legislation suggests its ineffectiveness. In 1734, for example, an act for the better regulation of patrols allowed patrollers to confiscate "all fowls and other provisions" found in the possession of "stragling negroes." That slaves produced provisions independently is further implied in a 1738 act for the licensing of hawkers and pedlars, which aimed to stamp out the illicit traffic in rice and provisions between slaves and itinerant traders. By 1751 the legislators bowed to the inevitable. By outlawing the sale of slaves' rice and corn to anybody other than their masters, they were implicitly recognizing the right of slaves to cultivate such crops.²⁶ The law of 1714 had thus died a natural death.

From the evidence of plantation account books and estate records, the act of 1751 simply brought the law closer into line with social practice. In 1728 Abraham, a Ball family slave, was paid £1 10s. for providing his master with eighteen fowls, while a female slave received £8 for supplying hogs. In 1736 twenty-two Ball family slaves were paid more than £50 for supplying varying amounts of rice to their master.²⁷ The extent of this trade in provisions was occasionally impressive; over the course of two years, the slaves belonging to James Hartley's estate were paid £124 for supplying 290 bushels of their corn.²⁸ Henry Ravenel not only purchased his slaves' provision goods, consisting of corn, fowls, hogs, and catfish, but also their canoes, baskets, and myrtle wax.²⁹

Masters undoubtedly benefited from these exchanges while displaying their benevolence, but we should not assume that there was no bargaining, however unequal, between the parties. Henry Laurens, for example, advised one of his newly appointed overseers to "purchase of your own Negroes all [the provisions] that you know Lawfully belongs to themselves at the lowest price that they will sell it for."³⁰ If a master refused to give slaves a fair price for their produce, they could take it elsewhere. One of the most persistent complaints of lowcountry planters and legislators concerned illicit trading across plantation boundaries.³¹ A slave who

²⁵ Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 1836-1841), II, 22-23, VII, 11, 368.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 398, 489, VII, 423.

²⁷ Ball Family Account Book, 174, 32, and unpaginated memorandum, Jan. 21, 1736, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

²⁸ Administration of James Hartley's estate, Aug. 1758-July 1760, Inventory Book V, 160-175, S.C. Archs., Columbia.

²⁹ Henry Ravenel's Day Book, particularly for the years 1763-1767, S.C. Hist. Soc., Charleston.

³⁰ George C. Rogers *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, V (Columbia, S.C., 1976), 41.

³¹ Apart from the acts already mentioned, see Cooper and McCord, eds., *Statutes*, VII, 407-409, 434-435. See also Charlestown Grand Jury Presentments, *S.C. Gaz.*, Nov. 5, 1737.

produced rice "in his own time" also traveled more than fifteen miles up the Cooper River to sell a barrel of his crop to his brother, who resided on another plantation.³² A white boatman, implicated in a slave conspiracy, openly acknowledged that he had exchanged his hog for a slave's deer skin.³³ The records of one lowcountry estate even register payments to a neighboring planter's slaves for their seed rice.³⁴ In other words, once slaves were allowed to produce provisions, they would always find ways to market them, be it to passing traders, neighboring whites, or fellow slaves.

Lowcountry slaves took the opportunity to raise a wide array of agricultural products, many of which reflected their African background. In the third decade of the eighteenth century Mark Catesby observed two African varieties of corn in the lowcountry but only among the "Plantations of *Negroes*." When William Bartram visited the lowcountry in the 1770s he noticed that the tania or tannier (a tuberous root found in the West Indies and tropical Africa) was "much cultivated and esteemed for food, particularly by the Negroes."³⁵ Bernard Romans claimed that slaves had introduced the groundnut into South Carolina; by the early nineteenth century, according to David Ramsay's informants on Edisto Island, groundnuts were "planted in small patches chiefly by the negroes, for market."³⁶ Romans also attributed the introduction of the "sesamen or oily grain" to lowcountry slaves; they used it, he maintained, "as a food either raw, toasted or boiled in their soups and are very fond of it, they call it *Benni*." Over one-and-a-half centuries later, a black sea islander was to be found planting what he called "bene." He used it in the same ways that his ancestors had done. Most significant, when asked where he acquired the seed, he said "his parents always had it and he was told 'Dey brung it fum Africa'."³⁷ Apparently peppers were also the preserve of slaves. Knowing that his slave old Tom "plants a good deal of pepper," Elias Ball

³² Testimony of Thomas Akin and Ammon, Feb. 7, 1749, Council Journal, No. 17, Pt. 1, 160.

³³ Testimony of Lawrence Kelly, Jan. 30, 1749, *ibid.*, 85.

³⁴ Administration of David Caw's estate, Oct. 20, 1761, Inventory Book V, 12-19.

³⁵ Mark Catesby, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands . . .*, II (London, 1743), xviii; Francis Harper, ed., *The Travels of William Bartram* (New Haven, Conn., 1958), 297.

³⁶ Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida . . .*, I (New York, 1775), 131; Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina*, II (Charleston, S.C., 1808), 289. The groundnut is a South American cultivated plant which was disseminated so widely and rapidly within Africa that some have postulated an African origin. This is not the case, but Africans apparently introduced the plant into North America (A. Krapovickas, "The Origin, Variability and Spread of the Groundnut," in Peter J. Ucko and G. W. Dimbleby, eds., *The Domestication and Exploitation of Plants and Animals* [London, 1969], 427-441).

³⁷ Romans, *History of East and West Florida*, I, 130; Orrin Sage Wightman and Margaret Davis Cate, *Early Days of Coastal Georgia* (St. Simons Island, Ga., 1955), 163.

desired him to send "sum Read pepper pounded and corked up in a pint Bottle." In 1742, when Eliza Lucas sent her friend some of the same product, she referred to it, in revealing fashion, as "negroe pepper."³⁸ The only tobacco grown in early eighteenth-century South Carolina belonged to the slaves.³⁹ Janet Schaw was so impressed by the way in which Carolina slaves used their "little piece[s] of land" to grow vegetables, "rear hogs and poultry, sow calabashes, etc." that she thought they cultivated them "much better than their Master[s]." Furthermore, she believed that "the Negroes are the only people that seem to pay any attention to the various uses that the wild vegetables may be put to."⁴⁰

The cultivation and subsequent exchange of provisions allowed some slaves to claim more substantial items of property. In 1714 the South Carolina legislature denied the slaves' claim to "any stock of hogs, cattle or horses." This directive apparently fell on deaf ears, for in 1722 it became lawful to seize any hogs, boats, or canoes belonging to slaves. Moreover, this later act referred to the "great inconveniences [that] do arise from negroes and other slaves keeping and breeding of horses"; not only were these horses (and cattle) to be seized, but the proceeds of their sale were to be put to the support of the parish poor. The irony of slave property sustaining white paupers was presumably lost on South Carolina legislators but perhaps not on the slaves. Once again, legislative intentions seem to have been thwarted, for in 1740 more complaints were to be heard about those "several owners of slaves [who] have permitted them to keep canoes, and to breed and raise horses, neat cattle and hogs, and to traffic and barter in several parts of this Province, for the particular and peculiar benefit of such slaves."⁴¹ The most dramatic example of property ownership by a lowcountry slave in the first half of the eighteenth century involved not horses or canoes, but men. According to a deed of manumission, a slave named Sampson "by his Industry and the Assistance of Friends" had purchased and "procured in his owne Right and property and for his owne Use" another Negro slave named Tom. Sampson then

³⁸ Elias Ball to Elias Ball, Feb. 26, 1786, Ball Family Papers, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Elise Pinckney, ed., *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 28.

³⁹ "Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire," trans. and ed. Loewald *et al.*, *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XIV (1957), 236; John Glen to the Board of Trade, Mar. 1753, C.O. 5/374, 147, Public Record Office; Bernhard A. Uhlendorf, trans. and ed., *The Siege of Charleston: With an Account of the Province of South Carolina . . .* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1938), 353. The cultivation of tobacco spread rapidly through West Africa during the 17th century, so that 18th-century black immigrants to South Carolina might well have been familiar with the crop. See, for example, Jack R. Harlan *et al.*, eds., *Origins of African Plant Domestication* (The Hague, 1976), 296, 302, and Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, Wis., 1975), 230.

⁴⁰ Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews, eds., *Journal of a Lady of Quality . . .* (New Haven, Conn., 1923), 176-177.

⁴¹ Cooper and McCord, eds., *Statutes*, VII, 368, 382, 409.

exchanged his slave Tom for "fifty years of his [that is, Sampson's] Life time and Servitude (to come)."⁴² If the task system had created the opportunities for Sampson's "Industry" to manifest itself in this way, it truly was a potent force.

II

Once a slave has completed his task, his master feels no right to call on him.

Daniel Turner, 1806

By the late eighteenth century the task system had taken deep root in the lowcountry. Tasks were set for almost all operations—from clearing new ground (one-eighth of an acre) to the weekly task of a pair of sawyers (600 feet of pine or 780 feet of cypress).⁴³ However, the basic unit, a quarter-acre, was still the yardstick for virtually all rice-planting operations.⁴⁴ In recognition of this reality, one Georgia absentee in 1786 sent a chain "for running out the Tasks" to his plantation manager. "It is 105 feet long," he noted, "and will save a great deal of time in Laying out the field, and do it with more exactness." Henry Ferguson, an East Floridian who had spent seventeen years in South Carolina and Georgia, was able to specify precisely how much land his slaves had cleared "from the Tasks which he set to his Negroes having measured the Ground frequently for that purpose." He added that "a Task was a quarter of an Acre to weed p. day."⁴⁵ Even opponents of the task system testify to its pervasiveness. William Butler, a keen observer of rice culture, argued in 1786 that slaves "should always be Kept in Gangs or parcels and not scattered over a field in Tasks as is too generally done, for while in gangs they are more immediately under the Superintendants Eyes, [and] of course may be much better and more immediately inspected."⁴⁶

⁴² Mr. Isaac Bodett's Release to a Negro for Fifty Years, Nov. 13, 1728, Records of the Secretary of the Province, Book H, 42-43, S.C. Archs., Columbia.

⁴³ John Gerar William De Brahm, *Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America*, ed. Louis De Vorse, Jr. (Columbia, S.C., 1971), 94.

⁴⁴ William Butler, "Observations on the Culture of Rice," 1786, S.C. Hist. Soc., Charleston. One plantation journal recorded completed daily tasks and acres planted: the quarter-acre task was uniformly applied throughout the planting season. See *Plantation Journal*, 1773, Wragg Papers, S.C. Hist. Soc.

⁴⁵ J. Channing to Edward Telfair, Aug. 10, 1786, Telfair Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; Wilbur H. Siebert, ed., *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785*, II (DeLand, Fla., 1929), 67.

⁴⁶ Butler, "Observations," 1786. There was a parallel debate in England at this time between the advocates of regularly employed wage-labor and the advocates of "taken-work." One of those who censured the recourse to taken-work made a similar point to that of Butler: people only agreed to tasking, this critic alleged, in order "to save themselves the trouble of watching their workmen" (Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline," *Past and Present*, No. 38 [1967], 78-79).

The extension of the task system to the cultivation of sea island cotton confirms the failure of Butler's advice. Since both the long- and short-staple varieties of cotton required close attention, especially in the tedious hoeing and thinning phases of their cultivation, they were ideal candidates for gang labor. Most upcountry South Carolina planters adopted this arrangement from the first, and sea island planters were encouraged to do the same: one lowcountry planter from Georgia advised his South Carolina colleagues that "there is no possibility of tasking Negroes" in cotton culture. However, his peers proved him wrong. By the early nineteenth century the tasking requirements of all sea island cotton operations were well established. They remained substantially unchanged throughout the nineteenth century (see Table I).⁴⁷

Perhaps the profits being generated under the existing task system discouraged lowcountry planters from adopting gang labor, for they were not likely to restructure an arrangement that was so patently successful. In 1751 James Glen reported that South Carolina planters expected a slave to pay for himself within four to five years. Dr. Alexander Garden calculated that in 1756 planters made between £15 to £30 sterling for every slave they employed in the field, which he noted was "indeed a great deal." At that rate, a slave would pay for himself in two to three years. In 1772 a visitor to South Carolina noted that indigo planters made from £35 to £45 sterling for every able Negro; in this case, a newly purchased slave paid for himself in less than two years.⁴⁸ The rate of return of a 200-acre rice plantation, employing forty slaves in the late colonial period, was estimated to be 25 percent, more than double the opportunity cost of capital.⁴⁹ And although the Revolutionary war was enormously disruptive of the lowcountry economy, the 1790s were boom years for planters, as they replaced one highly profitable secondary staple (indigo) with another (sea island cotton). So profitable was this second staple that planters on

⁴⁷ Letter to printers, *City Gazette* (Charleston), Mar. 14, 1796. The readiness with which sea island planters extended the task system to sea island cotton planting suggests prior familiarity which, in turn, suggests that indigo planting had been subject to tasking. No direct evidence of this connection is available, so far as I am aware. Few upland cotton plantations employed a thoroughgoing task system. One that did—the Silver Bluff plantation belonging to Christopher Fitzsimmons, subsequently owned by James Henry Hammond—was run as an absentee property and was more than likely populated by slaves already inured to tasking when resident on Fitzsimmons's tidewater plantation (Drew Gilpin Faust, personal communication).

⁴⁸ James Glen to the Board of Trade, July 15, 1751, C.O. 5/373, 155-157, P.R.O.; Garden to the Royal Society, May 1, 1757, Guard Book III, 86; G. Moulton to [?], Dec. 20, 1772, Add. MSS 22677, 70, British Library.

⁴⁹ John Gerar William De Brahm, *History of the Province of Georgia . . .* (Wormsloe, Ga., 1849), 51; Ralph Gray and Betty Wood, "The Transition from Indentured to Involuntary Servitude in Colonial Georgia," *Explorations in Economic History*, XIII (1976), 361-364.

Edisto Island in 1808 averaged a return of between \$170 and \$260 for every field hand.⁵⁰

Crucial to the continuing profitability of rice plantations was the wholesale transfer of production from inland to tidal swamps, a process that was well underway by the late eighteenth century. John Drayton, writing at the turn of the century, identified some of the advantages of this shift in location: "River swamp plantations, from the command of water, which at high tides can be introduced over the fields, have an undoubted preference to inland plantations; as the crop is more certain, and the work of the negroes less toilsome." Surely it was a tidewater rice plantation that a Virginian witnessed in 1780 when he observed that "after the ground is once well cleared little cultivation does the ground [need] being soft by continual moisture."⁵¹ In short, the development of tidewater rice culture reduced the heavy hoeing formerly required of slaves in the summer months. As might be expected, the daily task unit expanded, and squares of 150 feet (approximately a half of an acre) appeared in tidewater rice fields.⁵² The other side of this coin was the increase in heavy labor required of slaves in the winter months, for tidewater cultivation demanded an elaborate system of banks, dams, canals, and ditches. By the turn of the century, no doubt, lowcountry laborers were as familiar with the daily ditching requirement (about 600 to 700 square feet or ten compasses) as they had ever been with the quarter-acre task.⁵³

Although the precise definition of daily tasks had advantages from the slaves' point of view, the potential conflict that stereotyped tasks and their careless assignment could engender should not be underestimated. Indeed, the evidence of conflict should alert us to a battle that undoubtedly was being waged but that rarely surfaces in the historical record; namely, the constant warring between taskmaster and laborer over what constituted a fair day's work. After one such altercation between a black driver and a group of slaves, the latter took their case to their master in Charleston.

⁵⁰ Ramsay, *History of South Carolina*, II, 278-280. High rates of profit continued to characterize the large rice plantations (see Dale Evans Swan, *The Structure and Profitability of the Antebellum Rice Industry*, 1859 [New York, 1975]).

⁵¹ John Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina as Respects Her Natural and Civil Concerns* (Spartanburg, S.C., 1972 [orig. publ. Charleston, S.C., 1802]), 116; James Parker's Journal of the Charlestown Expedition, Feb. 5, 1780, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I 13/2, Liverpool City Libraries, Liverpool, England.

⁵² Timothy Ford speaks of half-acre tasks (Joseph W. Barnwell, ed., "Diary of Timothy Ford, 1785-1786," *S.C. Hist. Mag.*, XIII [1912], 182). However, the first specific reference that I have so far found to the 150-square-foot task is in Edmund Ruffin, *Report of the Commencement and Progress of the Agricultural Survey of South-Carolina for 1843* (Columbia, S.C., 1843), 104.

⁵³ See Table I. Time and space do not permit an investigation of the effect of developments in machinery on slave work routines. However, to give but one example, the pounding task of the early 18th century was, by the end of the century, redundant. Agricultural manuals in the 19th century do not set daily tasks for pounding.

When he asked them "why they could not do their Tasks as well as the rest," they answered that "their Tasks were harder." The master was sympathetic, knowing that "there is sometimes a great difference in Tasks, and Paul told me he remembered that Jimmy had a bad Task that Day. I was sorry to see poor Caesar amongst them for I knew him to be an honest, inoffensive fellow and tho't if any will do without severity, he will. I inquired his fault, & Paul told me . . . he had been 2 days in a Task."⁵⁴ Hoeing was at issue in this dispute; on another plantation, threshing became a source of conflict. Three slaves belonging to George Austin—Liverpool, Moosa, and Dutay—"ran off early in December, for being a little chastis'd on Account of not finishing the Task of Thrashing in due time."⁵⁵ By the early nineteenth century, a *modus vivendi* had apparently been reached on most lowcountry plantations. One South Carolina planter reckoned that the "daily task does not vary according to the arbitrary will and caprice of their owners, and although [it] is not fixed by law, it is so well settled by long usage, that upon every plantation it is the *same*. Should any owner increase the work beyond what is customary, he subjects himself to the reproach of his neighbors, and to such discontent amongst his slaves as to make them of but little use to him."⁵⁶ The task system's requirements were hammered out just as much in conflicts with the work force as in the supposedly inevitable march of technological progress.

However onerous tasking could become for some slaves, the system at least had the virtue of allowing the slave a certain latitude to apportion his own day, to work intensively in his task and then have the balance of his time. With the institutionalization of the task system, the slave's "time" became sacrosanct. The right not to be called on once the task had been

⁵⁴ Richard Hutson to Mr. Croll, Aug. 22, 1767, Charles Woodward Hutson Papers, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁵⁵ Josiah Smith to George Austin, Jan. 31, 1774, Josiah Smith Letterbook, Univ. N.C., Chapel Hill.

⁵⁶ [Edwin C. Holland], *A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated against . . . Slavery . . .* (New York, 1969 [orig. publ. Charleston, S.C., 1822]), 53. In the antebellum era, the role of the laborers continued to be significant in the evolution of the task system. For a particularly good example of the difficulty in modifying a long-established task (in this case, threshing), see James M. Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867* (Savannah, Ga., 1978), 8-9. Frederick Law Olmsted also noted that "in all ordinary work custom has settled the extent of the task, and it is difficult to increase it." If these customs were systematically ignored, Olmsted continued, the planter simply increased the likelihood of "a general stampede to the 'swamp'" (*A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* [New York, 1968 (orig. publ. 1856)], 435-436). James Henry Hammond waged what appears to have been an unsuccessful battle with his laborers when he tried to impose gang labor in place of the task system much preferred by his slaves (Drew Gilpin Faust, "Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Ante-bellum Plantation," *Journal of Social History*, XIV [1980], 86).

completed was duly acknowledged by lowcountry masters.⁵⁷ One of the advantages of such a right is neatly illustrated in an incident that befell a Methodist circuit rider, Joseph Pilmore. On March 18, 1773—a Thursday—he arrived at the banks of the Santee River in the Georgetown district of South Carolina. After waiting in vain for the appearance of the regular ferry, he was met by a few Negroes. Presumably they told him that they “had finished their task,” for that is how he explained their availability in his journal. He then hired their “time” so that he could be ferried across the river. The actual time was about three o’clock in the afternoon.⁵⁸ Slaves could not only complete their work by mid-afternoon; they might then earn money on their own account.

In the same year that Pilmore visited the Georgetown district, another observer of lowcountry society, “Scotus Americanus,” testified more fully to the advantages that a fully institutionalized task system presented to slaves:

Their work is performed by a daily task, allotted by their master or overseer, which they have generally done by one or two o’clock in the afternoon, and have the rest of the day for themselves, which they spend in working in their own private fields, consisting of 5 or 6 acres of ground, allowed them by their masters, for planting of rice, corn, potatoes, tobacco, &c. for their own use and profit, of which the industrious among them make a great deal. In some plantations, they have also the liberty to raise hogs and poultry, which, with the former articles, they are to dispose of to none but their masters (this is done to prevent bad consequences) for which, in exchange, when they do not chuse money, their masters give Osnaburgs, negro cloths, caps, hats, handkerchiefs, pipes, and knives. They do not plant in their fields for subsistence, but for amusement, pleasure, and profit, their masters giving them clothes, and sufficient provisions from their granaries.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Daniel Turner to his parents, Aug. 13, 1806, Daniel Turner Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm). Equally sacrosanct, at least to some slaves, was the product of their “time.” Thus, in 1781 a set of plantation slaves attempted to kill their overseer because he tried to appropriate the corn that they were apparently planning to market (*South-Carolina and American General Gazette* [Charleston], Jan. 20, 1781).

⁵⁸ Frederick E. Maser and Howard T. Maag, eds., *The Journal of Joseph Pilmore, Methodist Itinerant: For the Years August 1, 1769 to January 2, 1774* (Philadelphia, 1969), 188.

⁵⁹ [“Scotus Americanus”], *Information Concerning the Province of North Carolina, Addressed to Emigrants from the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1773), in William K. Boyd, “Some North Carolina Tracts of the Eighteenth Century,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, III (1926), 616. This account almost certainly refers to the Cape Fear region of North Carolina. For slightly less-detailed accounts see François Alexandre Frédéric, duc de La Rochefoucauld-

As we shall see, planting for “amusement, pleasure, and profit” continued to be a prerogative of lowcountry slaves.

Pilmore and Scotus Americanus alert us to the ways in which lowcountry slaves continued to acquire money. It should hardly surprise us, then, that lowcountry bondmen still aspired to the ownership of more substantial items of property. In spite of the acts of 1714, 1722, and 1740, slaves remained singularly reluctant to relinquish their claims to horses. In 1772 the Charleston District Grand Jury was still objecting to “Negroes being allowed to keep horses . . . contrary to Law.”⁶⁰ In a transaction that bore a remarkable similarity to the one effected by Sampson a half-century earlier, a slave named Will showed even less regard for the law by exchanging his horses for his freedom. A witness to the exchange heard Will’s master, Lewis Dutarque, say to

old fellow Will that he had been a faithful servant to him and if he had a mind to purchase his freedom he should obtain the same by paying him three hundred pounds old currency and says he Will you have two Horses which will nearly pay me. I will allow you hundred pounds old currency for a Roan Gelding and forty five currency for your Gray for which the fellow Will readily consented to the proposals and Mr. Dutarque took possession of the Horses and the fellow Will was to pay the Balance as soon as he could make it up. Mr. Dutarque also borrowed of the fellow Will a small Black mare which he lost and he said she was worth six Guineas and would allow him that price for her.⁶¹

One begins to wonder how many horses Will possessed. Horse trading may even have been possible within the slave community, if a notice placed in a South Carolina newspaper in 1793 is any indication: “On Sunday last was apprehended by the patrol in St. George’s parish, a certain negro man who calls himself *Titus* and his son about 10 year who is called *Tom*; he was trading with the negroes in that neighbourhood, and he had in his possession 2 horses . . . one poultry cart, and several articles of merchandise, consisting of stripes, linens, and handkerchiefs.”⁶² Given these examples, one lowcountry master was perhaps right to be sanguine about an unsuccessful hunt that he had launched for a group of seven

Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America . . .*, I (London, 1799), 599; Drayton, *View of South Carolina*, 145; and Edmund Botsford, *Sambo & Tony, a Dialogue in Three Parts* (Georgetown, S.C., 1808), 8, 13, 34.

⁶⁰ Charlestown District Grand Jury Presentments, *S.C. Gaz.*, Jan. 25, 1772.

⁶¹ Declaration of John Blake, Apr. 25, 1788, Miscellaneous Record Book VV, 473, S.C. Archs., Columbia.

⁶² *State Gazette of South-Carolina* (Charleston), Oct. 26, 1793.

absentees. He was "convinced these runaways would not go far, being connected at home, and having too much property to leave."⁶³

III

Q. You think that they have a love for property?

A. Yes, Sir; Very strong; they delight in accumulating.

Testimony of Rufus Saxton, 1863

By the middle of the nineteenth century the task system dominated agricultural life in the lowcountry. Indeed, the term so pervaded the region's agricultural terminology that its varied meanings have to be disentangled. For example, a lowcountry planter might say that he had planted "seven tasks (within one task of two acres, as a planter well knows)." At this time, a slave was expected to be able to sow two acres of rice a day; this is presumably what this planter had in mind when referring to the single task of two acres. And yet, the early eighteenth-century definition of a task as measuring one-quarter of an acre was still very much current. It was possible, therefore, to speak of seven units, measuring one-quarter of an acre each, within a larger unit measuring two acres.⁶⁴ Similarly, a planter might say that he had penned "thirty head of cattle on a task for one week" (the "task" here refers to one-quarter of an acre); or he might mention setting a "task" of three rice barrels a day for his cooper.⁶⁵ In other words, in common usage the term "task" not only referred to a unit of labor (a fixed or specified quantity of labor exacted from a person is the dictionary definition) but also to a unit of land measurement (almost invariably one-quarter of an acre or 105 square feet).

Slaves were completely conversant with this terminology, as the recollections of ex-slaves attest. Testifying before Southern Claims Commissioners in 1873, Peter Way knew precisely what constituted a "task" as a unit of land measurement. "Five poles make a task," he noted authoritatively, "and there is twenty-one feet in a pole."⁶⁶ Using the term in this

⁶³ William Read to Jacob Read, Mar. 22, 1800, Read Family Papers, S.C. Hist. Soc., Charleston. For another description of property owning by lowcountry slaves in the early 19th century, see Sidney Walter Martin, ed., "A New Englander's Impressions of Georgia in 1817-1818: Extracts from the Diary of Ebenezer Kellogg," *Journal of Southern History*, XII (1946), 259-260.

⁶⁴ A Georgian, "Account of the Culture and Produce of the Bearded Rice," *South. Agric.*, III (1830), 292. For the evidence that about two acres was the sowing "task," see "A Memorandum of Tasks," *ibid.*, VII (1834), 297, and Ruffin, *Report*, 118.

⁶⁵ A Plain Farmer, "On the Culture of Sweet Potatoes," *South. Agric.*, V (1832), 120; for the cooper's task see the sources cited in the footnotes to Table I.

⁶⁶ Testimony of Peter Way, claim of William Roberts, July 4, 1873, Liberty County, Georgia, Case Files, Southern Claims Commission, Records of the 3d Auditor, Record Group 217, Records of the U.S. General Accounting Office,

sense, former slaves might say that “Mr. Mallard’s house was about four or five tasks from Mr. Busby’s house” (about 420 or 525 feet distant), or that Sherman’s troops were “about three tasks off in the woods. I could see [them] from [my] house” (about 315 feet away).⁶⁷ When Mason Crum interviewed an old Negro woman (a former slave) in the 1930s, she told him that she owned her land “and that she had in the tract t’ree acres and a tass’,” by which she meant three-and-a-quarter acres.⁶⁸ When freedmen referred to the crops that they had produced for themselves in “slavery times,” they used the units acres and “tasks” interchangeably (tasks here again refer to quarter-acre plots).⁶⁹ At the same time, ex-slaves used the term “task” to connote a unit of labor. A freedman, referring to the terms of the contract that he had signed with his employer, spoke of giving “five tasks, that is, I work five tasks for him and plant everything he has a mind to have it planted in for all the land myself and wife can cultivate.”⁷⁰ The dual meaning of the term is nowhere better illustrated than in the words of one former slave, interviewed in the 1930s, who in one and the same breath recalled “de slave [having] but two taks ob land to cultivate for se’f” (by which he meant half an acre) and “in daytime [having] to do his task” (by which he meant a quantity of labor depending on the operation at hand).⁷¹

Tasking was so much a way of life in the antebellum lowcountry that virtually all crops and a whole host of plantation operations were subject to its dictates. The cultivation of corn was discussed in terms of the number of hills in a “task-row” and the number of “beds” in a task.⁷² Sea

National Archives. Hereafter, only the name and date—county and state will be added whenever a claim originates from an area other than Liberty Co., Ga.—will be given, followed by the abbreviation, SCC.

⁶⁷ Testimony of Philip Campbell, claim of Windsor Stevens, July 12, 1873, SCC; claimant’s deposition, claim of Diana Cummings, June 17, 1873, Chatham County, Ga.; see also testimony of Henry LeCount, claim of Marlborough Jones, July 30, 1873.

⁶⁸ Mason Crum, *Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Durham, N.C., 1940), 51; for a similar use of the term, but by a son of former slave parents, see Wightman and Cate, *Early Days of Coastal Georgia*, 81.

⁶⁹ For example, see the claim depositions of James Anderson, William Cassell, Prince Cumings, Hamlet Delegal, and Thomas Irving of Liberty Co., Ga., SCC.

⁷⁰ Claimant’s deposition, claim of Marlborough Jones, July 30, 1873, SCC; see also claimant’s deposition, claim of Somerset Stewart, July 30, 1873.

⁷¹ George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, III (Westport, Conn., 1972), Pt. iii, 200-201. A black Edisto Islander, born in 1897, interviewed in 1970, was also conversant with the dual meaning of the term “task” (Nick Lindsay, trans., *An Oral History of Edisto Island: The Life and Times of Bubberson Brown* [Goshen, Ind., 1977], 27, 46-47, 50, 53).

⁷² “Memoranda of a Crop of Corn Grown in St. Andrew’s Parish,” *South. Agric.*, III (1830), 77; “Account of the Mode of Culture Pursued in Cultivating Corn and Peas,” *ibid.*, IV (1831), 236. An intensive application of tasking to operations that ranged from the construction of post and rail fences to the digging of groundnuts

island cotton had its own task-acre as distinct from the task-acre utilized in tidewater rice culture.⁷³ Even when lowcountry planters experimented with sugar cultivation in the 1820s and 1830s, they attempted to retain the notion of a task: a hundred plants, according to one authority, were to be put in a task-row and two hands could then both plant and cut a task a day.⁷⁴ On Hopeton plantation, where sugar was grown on a large scale, task work was "resorted to whenever the nature of the work admits of it; and working in gangs as is practiced in the West Indies and the upper country, is avoided. The advantages of this system are encouragement to the labourers, by equalizing the work of each agreeably to strength, and the avoidance of watchful superintendance and incessant driving."⁷⁵ Whether this attempt to adapt sugar cultivation to the task system contributed to the failure of lowcountry sugar production is difficult to say; but it is possible that sugar, unlike cotton, just could not be successfully grown without gang labor.

Tasking was ubiquitous in another sense: those slaves not able to benefit from the system's opportunities had to be compensated in other ways. The proposition that drivers, as a group, suffered discrimination is barely credible, but in the lowcountry, at least, such was the case. As one ex-slave recalled, "I suppose the Foreman had advantages in some respects and in others not, for he had no task-work and had no time of his own, while the other slaves had the Evenings to themselves." The son of a Georgia planter remembered that his father's driver was "obliged to oversee all day," whereas the field hands "were allowed to work in any way they chose for themselves after the tasks were done."⁷⁶ By way of compensation, lowcountry drivers were entitled to receive a certain amount of help in tending their own crops. Thomas Mallard's driver "had the privilege of having hands to work one acre of corn and one acre of rice" on his behalf; the driver on Raymond Cay's plantation had Cay's field hands plant one

can be found in the Plantation Journal of Thomas W. Peyre, 1834-1851, esp. 259, 332, 365, S.C. Hist. Soc., Charleston. (I am grateful to Gene Waddell, Director of the Society, for bringing this to my attention.)

⁷³ Even Lewis Gray and U. B. Phillips, the two standard authorities on the task system, are confused on this issue. The task-acre in tidewater rice cultivation ideally took the form of a field 300' x 150', divided into two half-acre "tasks" of 150' square. The task-acre on inland rice and sea island cotton plantations was ideally a square of 210', divided into four quarter-acre squares, each side 105' in length. See R.F.W. Allston, "Sea-Coast Crops of the South," *De Bow's Review*, XVI (1854), 596, 609; cf. Phillips, *Negro Slavery*, 247, 259, and Gray, *History of Agriculture*, I, 553.

⁷⁴ Jacob Wood, "Account of the Process of Cultivating, Harvesting and Manufacturing the Sugar Cane," *South. Agric.*, III (1830), 226.

⁷⁵ The Editor, "Account of an Agricultural Excursion Made into the South of Georgia in the Winter of 1832," *ibid.*, VI (1833), 576.

⁷⁶ Testimony of William Winn, claim of David Stevens, July 17, 1873, SCC; testimony of James Frazer, claim of John Bacon, July 7, 1873.

acre of corn and three to five “tasks” in rice on his account.⁷⁷ One ex-slave recalled that “drivers had the privilege of planting two or three acres of rice and some corn and having it worked by the slaves”; and, in order to dispel any misimpressions, he emphasized that “these hands worked for [the drivers] in the White people’s time.”⁷⁸ Other occupational groups received different forms of compensation. A former slave plowman recalled that he “didn’t work by the task but at the end of the year [his master] gave [him] 6 bushels of corn” by way of redress. A former slave carpenter recollected that “when [he] worked carpentering [his] master allowed [him] every other saturday and when [he] worked farming [his master] gave him tasks.”⁷⁹ In this man’s mind, apparently, these “privileges” were about equal.

The central role of the task system in lowcountry life can best be gauged by investigating its fate immediately after emancipation. Throughout the postwar cotton South freedmen firmly rejected most of the elements of their old system of labor: from the first, gang labor was anathema.⁸⁰ At the same time, however, freedmen in the lowcountry were tenaciously striving to retain—and even extend—the fundamentals of their former system. A Freedmen’s Bureau official, resident in lowcountry Georgia in 1867, identified a basic response of the former slaves to their new work environment when he observed that they “usually stipulate to work by the task.”⁸¹ Lowcountry freedmen even demonstrated their attachment to the task system when they rejected one element of their former slave past by refusing to do the ditching and draining so necessary in rice and sea island cotton cultivation.⁸² This work was arduous and disagreeable, of course, and since ditching was more amenable to gang labor than any other operation in lowcountry agriculture, blacks appropriately sought to avoid it at all costs. But in an 1865 petition a group of planters from Georgetown district touched on an even more compelling reason for the freedmen’s refusal to perform this familiar task. They pointed out that “it is a work which, as it does not pertain to the present crop, the negroes are

⁷⁷ Claimant’s deposition, claim of Joseph Bacon, Aug. 12, 1873, SCC; testimony of Peter Way, claim of Silvia Baker, Aug. 9, 1873.

⁷⁸ Testimony of Tony Law, claim of Linda Roberts, July 19, 1873, SCC. See also D. E. Huger Smith, *A Charlestonian’s Recollections, 1846-1913* (Charleston, S.C., 1950), 29.

⁷⁹ Claimant’s deposition, claim of John Crawford, Mar. 3, 1874, SCC; claimant’s deposition, claim of Frank James, Mar. 14, 1874.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1980), 410.

⁸¹ Lt. Douglas G. Risley to Col. C. C. Sibley, June 2, 1867 (A123), Freedman and Southern Society, files of documents in the Natl. Archs., University of Maryland, College Park. (Hereafter reference to documents read at the Society will be given in parentheses.) But cf. Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 410.

⁸² Bvt. Maj. Gen. Charles Devens to Bvt. Lt. Col. W.L.M. Burger, AAG, Oct. 29, 1865, and Nov. 13, 1865 (C1361, Pt. 1, C4160, Pt. 1); Brig. Gen. W. T. Bennett to Bvt. Lt. Col. W.L.M. Burger, AAG, Oct. 11, 1865 (C1361, Pt. 1).

unwilling to perform." The recipient of this petition, Colonel Willard, was a sympathetic and sensitive observer, and his elaboration of this rationale penetrates to the heart of the issue. The freedmen's real fear, he explained, was that having prepared the ditches for the forthcoming crop, the planters would "insist on having them by the month." This arrangement would be absolutely unacceptable, because the freedmen had "been accustomed to working by the task, which has always given them leisure to cultivate land for themselves, tend their stock, and amuse themselves." If they gave way on this issue, he continued, "their privileges will go and their condition will be less to their taste than it was when they were slaves."⁸³

Precisely to avoid such a condition was the overriding imperative governing the actions of lowcountry freedmen. Once this is understood, the multifarious and fluid labor arrangements that characterized the postwar lowcountry become comprehensible. In 1865 and 1866 two basic forms of labor contract (with many individual variations) were employed in the lowlands of South Carolina and Georgia. Either the freedmen worked for a share of the crop (anywhere from one-half to three-quarters, a higher share than found elsewhere in the South), with the freedmen's share being divided among them on the basis of tasks performed, or they hired themselves for the year, with payment being made on the basis of the numbers of tasks completed (usually fifty cents a task, although payment was by no means always made in cash).⁸⁴ Whatever the mode of reimbursement, the task was central to most early contracts.

In 1866 a third labor arrangement arose that soon became general throughout the lowcountry. Known as the "two-day" or, less frequently, "three-day" system, it simply extended the concept of task labor, for it drew an even more rigid demarcation between the planters' "time" and the laborers' "time." The Freedmen's Bureau agent for eastern Liberty County, Georgia, observed as early as February 1867 that there were in his district no freedmen working by the month and only a few for wages. Some were working for a share of the crop, but most were employed by the "two-day" system, working a third of the time on the employers' crop

⁸³ Ben Allston *et al.*, to Col. Willard, Oct. 30, 1865 (C1602, Pt. 2); Lt. Col. A. J. Willard to Capt. G. W. Hooker, AAG, Nov. 7, 1865 (C1614, Pt. 2).

⁸⁴ This information was derived from Lt. Col. A. J. Willard to Capt. G. W. Hooker, AAG, Nov. 7, 1865, and Dec. 6, 1865 (C1614, Pt. 2, C1503, Pt. 1); case #104, James Geddes v. William B. Seabrook, Feb. 11, 1867 (C1534, Pt. 1); contract between William H. Gibbons and 120 Freedmen, Chatham Co., Ga., Mar. 1, 1866 (A5798); Maj. Gen. James B. Steedman and Bvt. Brig. Gen. J. S. Fullerton to E. M. Stanton, June 4, 1866 (A5829); Capt. Henry C. Brandt to Lt. Col. A. W. Smith, Jan. 12, 1867 (A5395). See also John David Smith, "More than Slaves, Less than Freedmen: The 'Share Wages' Labor System During Reconstruction," *Civil War History*, XXVI (1980), 256-266, for the example of a contract, *not* the analysis that accompanies it. A detailed analysis of the labor contracts in operation in these years would undoubtedly enrich, and perhaps modify, this section.

and receiving land to work on their own account for the remainder of the time.⁸⁵ The agricultural census of 1880 reported that the "two-day" system was ubiquitous on the South Carolina sea islands. For ten months of the year, slaves worked two days in each week for their employers and received in return a house, fuel, and six acres of land for their own use, free of rent. Proprietors were said to dislike the system because their employees only cultivated about two acres in the owners' "time." However, the report continued, "the laborers themselves prefer this system, having four days out of the week for themselves." As a result, "they are more independent and can make any day they choose a holiday."⁸⁶

The reasons for the slaves' (and the freedmen's) attachment to the task system should be readily apparent, but the subject is worth a moment's extra consideration because we are in the privileged and rare position of being able to listen to the participants themselves. The most obvious advantage of the task system was the flexibility it permitted slaves in determining the length of the working day. Working from sunup to sundown was the pervasive reality for most antebellum slaves; but ex-slaves from the lowcountry recall a different reality. Richard Cummings, a former field hand, recalled that "a good active industrious man would finish his task sometimes at 12, sometimes at 1 and 2 o'clock and the rest of the time was his own to use as he pleased." Scipio King, another former field hand, reckoned, as he put it, that "I could save for myself sometimes a whole day if I could do 2 tasks in a day then I had the next day to myself. Some kind of work I could do 3 tasks in a day."⁸⁷ Exhausting as task labor undoubtedly was, its prime virtue was that it was not unremitting.

A second advantage concerned the relationship between the slaves' provisions and the planters' rations. Whatever slaves produced beyond the task was regarded as surplus to, not a substitute for, basic planter allocations of food and clothing. One former slave recalled that his master continued to dispense rations "no matter how much they [the slaves] made of their own . . . [which] they could sell . . . if they chose." July Roberts, another ex-slave, emphasized that "every week we drew our rations no matter what we raised." When one former slave claimed the loss of corn,

⁸⁵ A. M. McIver to Lt. J. M. Hogg (SAC), Feb. 28, 1867 (A5769); see also Lt. W. M. Wallace to Capt. E.W.H. Read, Jan. 8, 1867 (C1619); D. M. Burns to [?], Mar. 17, 1867 (A7188); and Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1965), 135-136.

⁸⁶ Harry Hammond, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of South Carolina," in U.S. Census Office, *Tenth Census, 1880* (Washington, D.C., 1884), VI, Pt. ii, 60-61.

⁸⁷ Testimony of Richard Cummings, claim of Lafayette Delegal, July 11, 1873, SCC; claimant's deposition, claim of Scipio King, July 9, 1873. A number of lowcountry freedmen made similar statements. For the general recollections of ex-slaves see, obviously, George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Conn., 1972), and Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979), 38.

rice, and clothing taken by Federal troops, an attempt was made to deny him his title because these represented rations and "so belonged to the master." The response of this freedman's attorneys no doubt reflected the prevailing attitude of former slaves: "It is obvious to remark that if these things had not been taken from the claimant by the army, he would have had them after 'freedom came' and were to all intents his property."⁸⁸ Not only did slaves plant in their own time for "amusement, pleasure, and profit," they claimed the master's rations as their own to do with as they wished.

In view of these advantages, we might expect the scale and range of property owning by slaves to have assumed significant dimensions by the middle of the nineteenth century. An analysis of the settled claims submitted by former slaves to the Southern Claims Commission for loss of property to Federal troops provides the best test of this hypothesis.⁸⁹ Taking the Liberty County, Georgia, claimants as a sample, former field hands outnumber all other occupational groups. While most were mature adults when their property was taken, 30 percent were under the age of thirty-five. In terms of occupation and age these claimants constitute a relatively broad cross section of the slave population. Moreover, whether field hands or artisans, young or old, virtually all of them had apparently been deprived of a number of hogs, and a substantial majority listed corn, rice, and fowls among their losses. In addition, a surprising number apparently possessed horses and cows, while buggies or wagons, beehives, peanuts, fodder, syrup, butter, sugar, and tea were, if these claims are to be believed, in the hands of at least some slaves. The average cash value (in 1864 dollars) claimed by Liberty County former slaves was \$357.43, with the highest claim totaling \$2,290 and the lowest \$49.⁹⁰

Some claims were spectacular. Paris James, a former slave driver, was described by a neighboring white planter as a "substantial man before the war [and] was more like a free man than any slave."⁹¹ James claimed,

⁸⁸ Testimony of Peter Stevens, claim of Toney Elliott, Aug. 8, 1873, SCC; testimony of July Roberts, claim of Nedger Frazer, Feb. 27, 1874; report of R. B. Avery and testimony of Gilmore and Co., attorneys for claimant, claim of Jacob Dryer, Nov. 1, 1873.

⁸⁹ The settled or allowed claims from ex-slaves for Liberty and Chatham counties, Ga., and Beaufort, Charleston, and Georgetown counties, S.C., were investigated. For a fuller presentation of my findings, see "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Lowcountry," *Jour. So. Hist.* (forthcoming).

⁹⁰ The Liberty Co., Ga., claims are the most numerous and most detailed. They contain few urban claimants and form the ideal sample for the purposes of this study. Eighty-nine former slaves from this county submitted claims that were settled: 50 of the 89 were field hands and 25 of 86 were under the age of 35 when their property was taken. For a fuller discussion of the reliability of these claims and an analysis of the claimed property, see my article cited in n. 89.

⁹¹ Testimony of Raymond Cay, Jr., claim of Paris James, June 2, 1874, SCC. Cay also said that he "looked upon [James] as one of the most thrifty slaves in Liberty County." His claim totaled \$1,218.

among other things, a horse, eight cows, sixteen sheep, twenty-six hogs, and a wagon. Another slave driver, according to one of his black witnesses, lived “just like a white man except his color. His credit was just as good as a white man’s because he had the property to back it.” Although the claims commissioners were skeptical about his alleged loss of twenty cows—they explained, “twenty cows would make a good large dairy for a Northern farmer”—his two white and three black witnesses supported him in his claim.⁹² Other blacks were considered to be “more than usually prosperous,” “pretty well off,” and “hardworking and moneysaving”—unremarkable characterizations, perhaps, but surprising when the individuals were also slaves.⁹³ Alexander Steele, a carpenter by trade and a former house servant of Chatham County, Georgia, submitted a claim for \$2,205 based on the loss of his four horses, mule, silver watch, two cows, wagon, and large quantities of fodder, hay, and corn. He had been able to acquire these possessions by “tradeing” for himself for some thirty years; he had had “much time of [his] own” because his master “always went north” in the summer months. He took “a fancy [to] fine horses,” a whim he was able to indulge when he purchased “a blooded mare,” from which he raised three colts. He was resourceful enough to hide his livestock on Onslow Island when Sherman’s army drew near, but some of the Federal troops secured boats and took off his prize possessions. Three white planters supported Steele in his claim; indeed, one of them recollected making an unsuccessful offer of \$300 for one of Steele’s colts before the war. Lewis Dutarque’s Will, a horse owner of note in the late eighteenth century, had found a worthy successor in Alexander Steele.⁹⁴

The ownership of horses was not, however, confined to a privileged minority of slaves. Among the Liberty County claimants, almost as many ex-field hands as former drivers and skilled slaves claimed horses. This evidence supplies a context for the exchange recorded by Frederick Law Olmsted when he was being shown around the plantation of Richard J. Arnold in Bryan County, Georgia. Olmsted noticed a horse drawing a wagon of “common fieldhand negroes” and asked his host

“[do you] usually let them have horses to go to Church?”

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

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

“Oh yes; William (the House Servant) owns two, and Robert, I believe, has three now;

⁹² Testimony of W. A. Golding, claim of Linda (and Caesar) Roberts, July 19, 1873, SCC. His claim totaled \$1,519.

⁹³ Report of R. B. Avery, claim of Jacob Quarterman, July 5, 1873, SCC; report of R. B. Avery, claim of Prince Stewart, July 29, 1873; report of the Commissioners of Claims, claim of James Stacy, Aug. 15, 1873.

⁹⁴ Claimant’s deposition and testimony of John Fish, claim of Alexander Steele, Aug. 17, 1872, Chatham Co., Ga., SCC.

that was one of them he was riding.”
 “How do they get them?”
 “Oh they buy them.”⁹⁵

Although a few freedmen recalled that former masters had either prohibited horse ownership or confined the practice to drivers, most placed the proportion of horse owners on any single plantation at between 15 and 20 percent.⁹⁶ A former slave of George Washington Walthour estimated that “in all my master’s plantations there were over 30 horses owned by slaves. . . . I think come to count up there were as many as 45 that owned horses—he would let them own any thing they could if they only did his work.”⁹⁷ Nedger Frazer, a former slave of the Reverend C. C. Jones, recalled that on one of his master’s plantations (obviously Arcadia, from Frazer’s description) there were forty working hands, of whom five owned horses; and on another (obviously Montevideo) another ten hands out of fifty owned horses.⁹⁸ This, in turn, supplies a context for an interesting incident that occurred within the Jones’s “family” in 1857. After much soul-searching, Jones sold one of his slave families, headed by Cassius, a field hand. A man of integrity, Jones then forwarded Cassius the balance of his account, which amounted to \$85, a sum that included the proceeds from the sale of Cassius’s horse.⁹⁹ Perhaps one freedman was not exaggerating when he observed in 1873 that “there was more stock property owned by slaves before the war than are owned now by both white and black people together in this county.”¹⁰⁰

The spectacular claims and the widespread ownership of horses naturally catch the eye, but even the most humdrum claim has a story to tell. Each claim contains, for instance, a description of how property was accumulated. The narrative of John Bacon can stand as proxy for many such accounts: “I had a little crop to sell and bought some chickens and then I bought a fine large sow and gave \$10.00 for her. This was about ten years before the war and then I raised hogs and sold them till I bought a horse.

⁹⁵ Charles E. Beveridge *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, II (Baltimore, 1981), 182. Twenty-four field hands, out of a total of 53 slaves, claimed horses.

⁹⁶ Two Liberty Co. freedmen testified to a ban on horse ownership on their plantations; three recalled that only drivers had horses; and fourteen supply the proportions mentioned here.

⁹⁷ Claimant’s deposition, claim of Paris James, June 2, 1874, SCC.

⁹⁸ Claimant’s deposition, claim of Nedger Frazer, Feb. 27, 1874, SCC. This is the same Niger, as he was known as a slave, who objected to being hired out in 1864 because he was unable, as he put it, to “make anything for himself,” and who pretended to have yellow fever so that Sherman’s troops would not deprive him of his property (see Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* [New Haven, Conn., 1972], 1162, 1237).

⁹⁹ Myers, ed., *Children of Pride*, 244, 306.

¹⁰⁰ Testimony of W. A. Golding, claim of Linda (and Caesar) Roberts, July 19, 1873, SCC.

This was about eight years before freedom. This was a breeding mare and from this mare I raised this horse which the Yankees took from me."¹⁰¹ This was not so much primitive as painstaking accumulation; no wonder one freedman referred to his former property as his "laborment."¹⁰² And yet, occasionally, the mode of procurement assumed a slightly more sophisticated cast: some slaves recall purchasing horses by installment;¹⁰³ some hired additional labor to cultivate their crops;¹⁰⁴ two slaves (a mill engineer and a stockminder) went into partnership to raise livestock;¹⁰⁵ and a driver lent out money at interest.¹⁰⁶ Whatever the mode of accumulation, the ultimate source, as identified by virtually all the ex-slaves, was the task system. As Joseph James, a freedman, explained, "They all worked by tasks, and had a plenty of time to work for themselves and in that way all slaves who were industrious could get around them considerable property in a short time."¹⁰⁷

By the middle of the nineteenth century, in sum, it is possible to speak of a significant internal economy operating within a more conventional lowcountry economy. According to the depositions of the freedmen, this internal economy rested on two major planks. The first concerns the degree to which some slaves engaged in stock raising. One white planter, testifying on behalf of a freedman, recalled that "a good many" slaves owned a number of animals; he then checked himself, perhaps realizing the impression that he was creating, and guardedly stated that "what I mean was they were not allowed to go generally into stock raising."¹⁰⁸ And yet some slaves seem to have been doing just that. One ex-slave spoke of raising "horses to sell"; another claimed to have raised fourteen horses over a twenty-five-to-thirty-year period, most of which he had sold;

¹⁰¹ Claimant's deposition, claim of John Bacon, July 7, 1873, SCC.

¹⁰² Report of R. B. Avery, claim of Robert Bryant, Oct. 6, 1877, Beaufort Co., S.C., SCC.

¹⁰³ Claimant's deposition, claim of William Drayton, Feb. 20, 1874, Beaufort Co., S.C., SCC; testimony of Sterling Jones, claim of Sandy Austin, July 21, 1873.

¹⁰⁴ James Miller, for example, recalled that "many times I would get some one to help me, and get along that way, I would pay them whatever they asked according to the time they worked" (report of R. B. Avery, claim of James Miller, July 29, 1873, SCC). See also claimant's deposition, claim of Pompey Bacon, Aug. 7, 1873.

¹⁰⁵ Claimant's deposition, claim of Edward Moddick and Jacob Hicks, Mar. 17, 1873, Chatham Co., Ga., SCC.

¹⁰⁶ Report of J.P.M. Epping, claim of Pompey Smith, n.d., Beaufort Co., S.C., SCC.

¹⁰⁷ Testimony of Joseph James, claim of Linda and Caesar Jones, Aug. 1, 1873, SCC.

¹⁰⁸ Testimony of T. Fleming before R. B. Avery, claim of Prince Wilson, Jr., July 28, 1873, Chatham Co., Ga., SCC. The widespread ownership of animals is also indicated in the records of one lowcountry plantation. In 1859 almost 40 slaves, over half the adult males on the plantation, owned at least one cow, cow and calf, steer or heifer. Only about 10 of the 40 held skilled or privileged positions (Weehaw Plantation Book, 1855-1861, 87, S.C. Hist. Soc., Charleston).

and one freedwoman named some of the purchasers, all of whom were slaves, of the nine horses that she had raised.¹⁰⁹ The other major foundation of this internal economy was the amount of crop production by slaves. Jeremiah Everts observed that the slaves in Chatham County, Georgia, had "as much land as they can till for their own use."¹¹⁰ The freedmen's recollections from all over the lowcountry support this statement: a number of ex-slaves reckoned that they had more than ten acres under cultivation, while four or five acres was the norm.¹¹¹ The proprietorial attitude encouraged by this independent production is suggested in one freedman's passing comment that he worked in his "own field."¹¹² Through the raising of stock and the production of provisions (together with the sale of produce from woodworking, basketmaking, hunting, and fishing), slaves were able to attract money into their internal economy. Robert W. Gibbes knew of an individual slave who received \$120 for his year's crop of corn and fodder; Richard Arnold owed his slaves \$500 in 1853 when Olmsted visited him.¹¹³ Thus, while produce and livestock were constantly being bartered by slaves—"swapping" was rife, according to the freedmen—one observer of the mid-nineteenth-century lowcountry was undoubtedly correct when he noted that "in a

¹⁰⁹ Testimony of Fortune James, claim of Charles Warner, Aug. 6, 1873, SCC; claimant's deposition, claim of Prince Wilson, Jr., July 28, 1873, Chatham Co., Ga.; claimant's deposition, claim of Jane Holmes, July 21, 1873.

¹¹⁰ Jeremiah Everts Diary, Apr. 5, 1822, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, as quoted in Thomas F. Armstrong, "From Task Labor to Free Labor: The Transition along Georgia's Rice Coast, 1820-1880," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXIV (1980), 436.

¹¹¹ The Liberty Co. claimants who mention such acreages include Daniel Bryant, William Cassell, Prince Cumings, George Gould, Ned Quarterman, Paris James, and Richard LeCounte. The Chatham Co. claimants include Dennis Smith and Alfred Barnard. The Beaufort Co. claimants include John Morree, Andrew Riley, Pompey Smith, Moses Washington, and Benjamin Platts. When James Miller's brother, Lawrence, a student at Howard University, was asked whether the hundred bushels of rice claimed by his brother was not excessive, he replied, "I should not think so—not in his condition." James's "condition" was only that of a field hand, but he was the "director" of the family, and the family planted five acres (testimony of Lawrence Miller, claim of James Miller, July 29, 1873, SCC).

¹¹² Claimant's deposition, claim of Adam LeCount, Feb. 26, 1874, SCC.

¹¹³ Gibbes, "Southern Slave Life," *De Bow's Review*, XXIV (1858), 324; Olmsted, *Journey*, 443. Fanny Kemble noted that two carpenters on the Butler estate sold a canoe to a neighboring planter for \$60 and that slaves could earn large sums by collecting Spanish moss (Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, ed. John A. Scott [New York, 1961], 62, 364). Unfortunately, there are no estimates of the proportion of money circulating among the slaves. The handling of money certainly gave rise to some discernment: one freedman remembered paying \$60 in "good money" for a horse. He continued, "I call silver money good money, I call confederate money wasps' nests" (claimant's deposition, claim of Simon Middleton, June 2, 1873, Chatham Co., Ga., SCC).

small way a good deal of money circulated among the negroes, both in the country and in the towns."¹¹⁴

The autonomy of this internal economy is further indicated by the development of a highly significant practice. By the middle of the nineteenth century, if not before, slave property was not only being produced and exchanged but also inherited. The father of Joseph Bacon bequeathed him a mare and all his other children \$50 each.¹¹⁵ Samuel Elliott claimed a more substantial legacy, for his father "had 20 head of cattle, about 70 head of hogs—Turkeys Geese Ducks and Chickens a Plenty—he was foreman for his master and had been raising such things for years. When he died the property was divided among his children and we continued to raise things just as he had been raising."¹¹⁶ The role of less immediate kin was also not negligible. Two freedmen recalled receiving property from their grandfathers; another inherited a sow from his cousin; and William Drayton of Beaufort County, South Carolina, noted that when his father died he "left with his oldest brother, my uncle, the means or property he left for his children," and Drayton bought a mule "by the advice of my uncle who had the means belonging to me."¹¹⁷ There were rules governing lines of descent. One female claimant emphasized that she had not inherited any of her first husband's property because she had borne him no children; rather, his son by a former marriage received the property.¹¹⁸ The ability to bequeath wealth and to link patrimony to genealogy serves to indicate the extent to which slaves created a measure of autonomy.

The property rights of slaves were recognized across proprietorial boundaries as well as across generations. Slaves even employed guardians to facilitate the transfer of property from one plantation to another. Thus when Nancy Bacon, belonging to John Baker, inherited cattle from her deceased husband who belonged to Mr. Walthour, she employed her second cousin, Andrew Stacy, a slave on the Walthour plantation, to take charge of the cattle and drive them over to her plantation. According to Stacy, Mr. Walthour "didn't object to my taking them [and] never claimed them."¹¹⁹ The way in which slave couples took advantage of their divided

¹¹⁴ Alice R. Huger Smith, *A Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties* (New York, 1936), 72.

¹¹⁵ Claimant's deposition, claim of Joseph Bacon, Aug. 12, 1873, SCC.

¹¹⁶ Claimant's deposition, claim of Samuel Elliott, July 17, 1873, SCC.

¹¹⁷ Claimant's deposition, claim of York Stevens, Mar. 2, 1874, SCC; claimant's deposition, claim of Edward Brown, Feb. 20, 1874, Beaufort Co., S.C.; claimant's deposition, claim of William Roberts, July 4, 1873; claimant's deposition, claim of William Drayton, Feb. 20, 1874, Beaufort Co., S.C.

¹¹⁸ Claimant's deposition, claim of Jane Holmes, July 21, 1873, SCC. Twenty-three Liberty Co. freedmen referred to inheriting property within the same plantation.

¹¹⁹ Claimant's deposition and testimony of Andrew Stacy, claim of Nancy Bacon, Mar. 14, 1874, SCC; Stacy performed the same service for Clarinda Porter (claimant's deposition, claim of Clarinda Porter, Feb. 18, 1874). Nine Liberty Co. freedmen referred to inheriting property across plantation boundaries.

ownership is suggested by Diana Cummings of Chatham County, Georgia. Her husband's master, she explained, "allowed him to sell but mine didn't," so Diana marketed her crops and stock through her husband and received a part of the proceeds. On her husband's death, she received all his property for, as she put it, her "entitle" (surname) was then the same as her husband's. She had since changed it, through remarriage to Sydney Cummings, but she noted that Cummings had "no interest in [the] property [being claimed]."¹²⁰

By the middle of the nineteenth century the ownership of property by lowcountry slaves had become extensive and had assumed relatively sophisticated dimensions. This, in turn, gives rise to an obvious question. What significance was attached to the practice by the slaves? What was the *mentalité*, the moral economy, of this property-owning group? Certainly some freedmen spoke of "getting ahead" and of "accumulating" under slavery.¹²¹ Jacob Monroe, a freedman, admitted that as a slave under the task system he "could go and come when [he] pleased, work and play after [his] task was done," but he pointedly emphasized that "he chose to work."¹²² Competitiveness was also not alien to the slave quarters. One freedman recalled how the young adults on one plantation "were jealous of one another and tried to see which would get their days work done first."¹²³ William Gilmore referred to the disparities in property ownership that characterized Raymond Cay's slaves; he likened them to the "five wise and five foolish" and disparaged those who "slept and slumbered the time away."¹²⁴ Similar impressions are derived from those Northerners who came into contact with sea island blacks in the early 1860s. B. K. Lee observed that "they are very acquisitive indeed"; Henry Judd described their "passion for ownership of horses or some animal"; and Rufus Saxton was impressed to find that "they regard the rights of property among themselves. If a man has a claim upon a horse or sow he maintains his right and his neighbours recognize it."¹²⁵

Acquisitiveness and respect for property had other overtones, as Rufus Saxton's resonant phrase—"they delight in accumulating"—suggests.¹²⁶ Display and ostentation, while not on any grand scale, of course, seem an accurate characterization of some slaves' behavior. The ownership of horses undoubtedly had practical purposes—one freedman explained that "some of the slaves had families a good ways off and they used their horses

¹²⁰ Claimant's deposition, claim of Diana Cummings, June 17, 1873, Chatham Co., Ga., SCC.

¹²¹ See, for example, claimant's deposition, claim of Silvia Baker, Aug. 9, 1873, SCC; claimant's deposition, claim of Hamlet Delegal, Mar. 7, 1874; and claimant's deposition, claim of William Golding, May 16, 1874.

¹²² Claimant's deposition, claim of Jacob Monroe, July 18, 1873, SCC.

¹²³ Testimony of Joshua Cassell, claim of George Gould, Aug. 11, 1873, SCC.

¹²⁴ Testimony of William Gilmore, claim of York Stevens, Mar. 2, 1874, SCC.

¹²⁵ Testimony of B. K. Lee, 1863 (K72); testimony of Henry G. Judd, 1863 (K74); testimony of Brig. Gen. Rufus Saxton, 1863 (K70).

¹²⁶ Testimony of Saxton, 1863 (K70).

to visit them. The masters said it was for their interest to have us own horses so that we could get back home to work."¹²⁷ But the exhibition of status appears also to have been involved. William Golding's ownership of a horse and saddle was proved because "he was given to riding about on Sundays." Frederick Law Olmsted not only witnessed a head house-servant mount his horse after church service but, in true paternalistic fashion, slip a coin to the boy who had been holding its reins.¹²⁸ Ex-slaves commonly justified their ownership of a horse and wagon by their need to go to church on Sunday. This was not just a practical matter: Leah Wilson could not disguise the sense of status she derived from being able to drive "right along together with our master going to church."¹²⁹ A horse, as Edward Philbrick observed in 1862, was more than a means of transport; it was "a badge of power and caste." Sea island blacks had no respect for people who could not present themselves on a horse. "They will hardly lift their hats to a white man on foot," he noted, and viewed a "walking nigger" with contempt.¹³⁰

Although we find elements of display, of accumulation for its own sake, and of "getting ahead," the *mentalité* of the slaves cannot be reduced to any one of these traits and was indeed much more. We can uncover better the meaning and limits of such behavior by exploring, once again, the slaves' immediate response to freedom. In terms of their attitude toward labor, the freedmen firmly resisted the overtures of northern reformers and proclaimed a resounding attachment to what may be resonantly characterized as a task-orientation. Employers and Freedmen's Bureau officials alike constantly bemoaned the impossibility of persuading the freedmen to "perform more than their allotted tasks."¹³¹ In 1867 Frances Butler Leigh observed freedmen who begged "to be allowed to go back to the old task system" when the agent of the Freedmen's Bureau attempted to have them work by the day. "One man," she reported, "indignantly asked Major D—— what the use of being free was, if he had to work harder than when he was a slave."¹³² Few freedmen would work a full day, a full week, "and very seldom a full month steady," complained one employer.¹³³ One

¹²⁷ Testimony of Lafayette Delegal, claim of Richard Cummings, Feb. 28, 1874, SCC.

¹²⁸ Report of R. B. Avery, claim of William Golding, May 16, 1874, SCC; Olmsted, *Journey*, 428.

¹²⁹ Testimony of Leah Wilson, claim of Prince Wilson, Jr., July 28, 1873, Chatham Co., Ga., SCC. See also the claim depositions of William Gilmore and Hamlet Delegal, and the testimony of Simon Cassell, Henry Stephens, and Fortune James in the claims of Jacob Monroe, Clarinda Porter, and Charles Warner respectively.

¹³⁰ Edward S. Philbrick to Pierce, Mar. 27, 1862 (Q12).

¹³¹ Bvt. Lt. Col. R. F. Smith report in Bvt. Maj. Gen. R. K. Scott to O. O. Howard, July 9, 1866 (C1428, Pt. 1). See also Bvt. Lt. Col. B. F. Smith to O. A. Hart, Apr. 25, 1866 (C1617).

¹³² Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation* (London, 1883), 55.

¹³³ E. T. Wright to Lt. Col. H. B. Clitz, Oct. 6, 1865 (C1361, Pt. 1).

Northerner advocated the confiscation of the freedmen's boats so that instead of continuing in their ways of "precarious living," they might develop "habits of steady industry."¹³⁴ The freedmen were said to work "when they please and do just as much as they please"; they then relied on hunting and fishing "to make up for what they lose in the field."¹³⁵

This clash between the proponents of Northeastern business methods and a laboring population wedded to an alternative work ethic reverberated throughout the postwar lowcountry. The conflict is neatly illustrated in an exchange that occurred in 1865 between Colonel Willard, a man generally sympathetic to the freedmen's plight, and two ex-slaves who were sawmill workers. Willard was approached by the harassed owner of the mill, who was unable to impress his workers with the virtues of "steady" work: they claimed, for example, at least two hours of rest during their work day. From the standpoint of a Northern businessman, Willard's argument to the two representatives of the work force was impeccable: "Laborers at the North," he pointed out, "got less wages, and worked from sunrise to sunset, this season of the year, only having an hour at noon." The freedmen's reply was equally forceful: "We want," they emphasized, "to work just as we have always worked." Willard was left to expostulate that these former slaves "have no just sense of the importance of persistent labor."¹³⁶

The freedmen's attitude toward the accumulation of property, much like their attitude toward work, was decisively shaped by their former experience under the task system. The argument that "the more they cultivate, the more they gain" had, as one Northern army officer discovered, no appeal. In 1868 Frances Butler Leigh made a similar discovery when she found that some freedmen refused wages and rations, preferring to "raise a little corn and sweet potatoes, and with their facilities for catching fish and oysters, and shooting wild game, they have as much to eat as they want, and now are quite satisfied with that."¹³⁷ In short, lowcountry freedmen apparently wished to avoid an unlimited involvement in the market, favoring production for sale only within the familiar context of an assured production for subsistence. This explains, in large measure, why the freedmen would not forego their hunting and fishing activities for a greater concentration on cash crops, why they aspired to the ownership or rental of land, and why they refused to work for wages.¹³⁸ The degree to which subsistence (in this case, hunting) formed the priorities of one freedman is captured in a brief anecdote. A special agent,

¹³⁴ J. G. Foster to [?], Sept. 20, 1864 (C1334, Pt. 1).

¹³⁵ Joseph D. Pope to Maj. Gen. Q. A. Gilmore, June 29, 1865 (C1472).

¹³⁶ Lt. Col. A. J. Willard to W. H. Smith, Nov. 13, 1865 (A7011).

¹³⁷ Smith report in Scott to Howard, July 9, 1866 (C1428, Pt. 1); Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation*, 124.

¹³⁸ I have been influenced by Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 97-127; Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York, 1976 [orig. publ. Indianapolis, Ind., 1964]), 226, 303, 406; and the works by Mintz cited in n. 8.

who toured the lowcountry in 1878 investigating disputed claims, visited the home of Samuel Maxwell, a former slave. He was not impressed with this particular claimant's adaptation to freedom and advised him to participate more fully in the wider society. For a start, he suggested, why not raise hogs rather than dogs? To which Maxwell replied: "A pig won't help us catch coons and rabbits."¹³⁹

The preferences and ambitions of the freedmen reflected, above all, a desire for autonomy not only from the impersonal marketplace but also from individual whites. As one would-be employer found out in 1866, the freedmen who rejected wages and wanted to supply their own seed were expressing a fundamental desire to "be free from personal constraint."¹⁴⁰ They sought, in other words, to build upon a foundation that the task system had laid, consisting of that part of a day, that plot of land, or those few animals that they, as slaves, had been able to call their own. Thus for many, if not most, lowcountry freedmen, the central priorities of subsistence and autonomy shaped whatever propensity for material accumulation and for "getting ahead" they may have had. And what these goals of subsistence and autonomy signally call to mind, of course, are nothing more than the central priorities of peasants throughout the world.¹⁴¹

The freedman's quest for a measure of autonomy from individual whites should not be construed, however, as a desire for total disengagement from whites, particularly in the immediate postemancipation years. The moral universe of lowcountry slaves apparently contained notions of social equity and of reciprocal obligations between blacks and whites that were not jettisoned when freedom came.¹⁴² Henry Ravenel's slaves, for example, voluntarily presented themselves before their master in March 1865 and "said they would be willing to take a certain piece of land which they would cultivate for old Master—that they would not want a driver or overseer, but would work that faithfully for him—and that they would take another piece of land to work for their own use." Another set of plantation blacks dumbfounded their former owner in July 1865 when they told him that they now considered the land as their own; perhaps more striking, however, was their readiness to grant "Master" a portion of the crop as "a free gift from themselves."¹⁴³ When the promise of land dimmed, the freedmen could be expected to assume a more hostile posture. While evidence of such hostility exists, some sensitive observers

¹³⁹ Report of R. B. Avery, claim of Samuel Maxwell, June 8, 1878, SCC.

¹⁴⁰ J. R. Cheves to A. P. Ketchum, Jan. 21, 1866 (A7058).

¹⁴¹ Apart from the standard works on peasants by Wolf, Shanin, and Mintz, I found the general implications of James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn., 1976) particularly helpful.

¹⁴² For antebellum slaves, and on a general level, this is the argument of Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, esp. 133-149.

¹⁴³ Arney Robinson Childs, ed., *The Private Journal of Henry William Ravenel, 1859-1887* (Columbia, S.C., 1947), 216; Capt. H. A. Storey to C. B. Fillebrown, July 9, 1865 (C1468). Ravenel still considered his plantation hands to be slaves in Mar. 1865.

were still aware of a basic and continuing paradox. Thus Joseph Le Conte, writing of Liberty County, Georgia, freedmen in the 1890s, noted their refusal to be tied to whites and their rejection of wage labor based, in his view, on their ability to "live almost without work on fish, crawfish, and oysters." At the same time, however, he referred to "the kindest feelings" existing "among the blacks . . . toward their former masters." While Le Conte may have been guilty of some self-deception, similar observations from his fellow whites suggest the reality of this paradox.¹⁴⁴ Once again, this aspect of the freedmen's world view is strikingly reminiscent of a central feature of peasant life that, according to one authority, is permeated by the moral principle of reciprocity.¹⁴⁵

The significance of the particular conjunction that this article set out to explore—the conjunction between a certain mode of labor organization and a particular domestic economy—can now be assessed. From the short-run perspective of masters, this conjunction had a number of benefits. They could escape their plantations in the summer months, they were supplied with additional provisions, and their slaves were *relatively* content, or so they believed. Oliver Bostick, a Beaufort County planter, explained that he "allowed [his] slaves to own and have their property and have little crops of their own for it Encouraged them to do well and be satisfied at home." Rufus King, another lowcountry master, was satisfied that "no Negro with a well-stocked poultry house, a small crop advancing, a canoe partly finished or a few tubs unsold, all of which he calculates soon to enjoy, will ever run away."¹⁴⁶ From the short-run perspective of the slaves, this conjunction increased their autonomy, allowed them to accumulate (and bequeath) wealth, fed individual initiative, sponsored collective discipline and esteem, and otherwise benefited them economically and socially.¹⁴⁷ In other words, on a much reduced scale, there were lowcountry slaves who resembled the protopeasants found among Caribbean slaves. This similarity was derived from very different origins: in the lowcountry, from a particular mode of labor organization; in the Caribbean, from the need for slaves to grow most of their own food and provision the free population. There was, in short, a much wider "peasant breach in the slave mode of production" in the Caribbean than in the lowcountry.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ William Dallam Armes, ed., *The Autobiography of Joseph Le Conte* (New York, 1903), 234. Long after emancipation, when he had ceased to be a landowner, Daniel Huger Smith still shared in "the same interchange of small gifts of eggs or a chicken or two on the one side and perhaps an article of clothing on the other" that had characterized master-slave relations many years before (*Recollections*, 127).

¹⁴⁵ Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasant*, 157-192.

¹⁴⁶ Testimony of Oliver P. Bostick, claim of Andrew Jackson, Mar. 10, 1874, Beaufort Co., S.C., SCC; Rufus King, Jr., to William Washington, Sept. 13, 1828, in *American Farmer*, X (1828), 346.

¹⁴⁷ See Mintz, "Slavery and the Rise of Peasantries," in Craton, ed., *Roots and Branches*, 241.

¹⁴⁸ The phrase was coined by Tadeusz Lepkowski, referred to by Sidney W. Mintz, "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?" *Review*, II (1978), 94. I would also

Still, the parallel is suggestive, for in the same way that protopeasant adaptations had a comparable short-term significance for masters and slaves in both Caribbean and lowcountry, there were comparable long-term results. Wherever there were significant protopeasant activities among the slaves, there emerged after emancipation a class of people who had acquired the requisite skills that helped them escape, at least in part or temporarily, their dependence on the plantation.¹⁴⁹ In the lowcountry, the course of the war, the capital requirements of its major staple crop, and the development of phosphates production go some way toward explaining the particular shape of its postwar labor history.¹⁵⁰ But surely certain elements of this configuration had deeper roots, roots that without exaggeration can be traced all the way back to the early eighteenth century. The imperatives so dear to generations of lowcountry slaves achieved a measure of realization in the more distinctive features of the region's postwar labor arrangements. By 1880 the percentage of farms sharecropped in the coastal districts of South Carolina and Georgia ranked among the lowest in the South; the proportion of rural black landowners was one of the highest in the South; it is possible to speak of a "black yeomanry" in the late nineteenth-century lowcountry; and by 1880 one observer in coastal Georgia could describe how most of the Negroes in his county had "bought a small tract of land, ten acres or more [on which they made] enough rice . . . to be perfectly independent of the white man."¹⁵¹

suggest that there was a significantly wider peasant breach in the slave mode of production in the lowcountry than elsewhere in North America where "incentives," in the forms of garden plots, opportunities to earn money, etc., were accorded slaves. More comparative work is obviously needed, but evidence from one area of the antebellum South supports my supposition (Roderick A. McDonald, "The Internal Economies of Slaves on Sugar Plantations in Jamaica and Louisiana" [unpubl. paper, Southern Historical Association Meeting, 1981]). In any case, I am reluctant to describe the task system as an incentive system; it was more a way of life.

¹⁴⁹ Mintz, "Slavery and the Rise of Peasantries," in Craton, ed., *Roots and Branches*, esp. 226-233. In the same way that I consider there to have been a wider peasant breach in the slave mode of production in the lowcountry than elsewhere in North America (though it was certainly not absent elsewhere), I also believe—and this is almost a corollary—that the ability to escape the plantation, while not unique to the lowcountry, was more effectively secured here than elsewhere in North America.

¹⁵⁰ As we might expect, lowcountry freedmen, particularly sea islanders, proved an unreliable source of labor for the phosphate mines. Their plots of land took precedence, and their earnings from mining formed only a welcome supplement to the income derived from farming (Tom W. Schick and Don H. Doyle, "Labor, Capital, and Politics in South Carolina: The Low Country Phosphate Industry, 1867-1920" [unpubl. paper], 11).

¹⁵¹ Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1977), 91-93; Williamson, *After Slavery*, 155; W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," *Bulletin of the United States Department of Labor*, VI, 35 (1901), 647-677; T. J. Woofter, *Black Yeomanry*

To paraphrase Sidney Mintz, nothing else during the history of low-country slavery was as important as the task system and its concomitant domestic economy in making possible the freed person's adaptation to freedom without the blessings of the former masters.¹⁵²

(New York, 1930); *Morning News* (Savannah), Jan. 30, 1880, quoted in Armstrong, "From Task Labor to Free Labor," *Ga. Hist. Qtrly.*, LXIV (1980), 443. This last-mentioned article makes a similar argument to the one here.

¹⁵² Mintz, "Plantation Slave," *Review*, II (1978), 95.