

**AMY L. YOUNG**

Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
University of Southern Mississippi  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5074

**MICHAEL TUMA**

Brian F. Smith and Associates  
Poway, CA 92064

**CLIFF JENKINS**

Mississippi Department of Transportation  
Environmental Division  
Jackson, MS 39215-1850

## The Role of Hunting to Cope with Risk at Saragossa Plantation, Natchez, Mississippi

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Saragossa Plantation is located in Natchez, Mississippi. It was established in 1823 by one of the wealthiest cotton planters in the Old South, Stephen Duncan. Between 1823 and 1865, Saragossa was home to numerous enslaved African Americans who faced dangers of abuse at the hands of their overseer, sundered and reconstituted families, disease, overwork, and lack of autonomy. Hunting by members of the slave community is suggested as one of the more effective mechanisms for coping with meager rations, but it also functioned to reinforce male gender identity and to incorporate strangers into the quarter community. Overall, hunting strengthened slave family and community bonds and made these social institutions better able to cope with violence, lack of autonomy, and other risks faced by slaves. [*slavery, hunting, risk management*]

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**T**he investigation of the African diaspora is a major focus within historical archaeology (Orser 1998; Singleton 1999). Recent studies informed not only by traditional archaeological methods but also by ethnohistoric and ethnographic data are adding significantly to our body of knowledge about the African experience in the New World (e.g., Heath and Bennett 2000; Pulsipher 1990, 1991, 1993; Tuma 1999a, 1999b; Young 1998). An anthropological approach that allows us to put specific—and in the case of historical archaeology, material—aspects of past life within a cultural context is revealing a great deal of continuity with West and Central African antecedents (Orser 1998; Singleton 1995, 1999). The combination of ethnohistoric, ethnographic, and archaeological data also allows us to perceive the complexity of the relationships that enslaved Africans had with each other, their enslavers, and other members of society. As African diaspora research is conducted not only in the American South but across the globe, scholars are learning more about the commonality of cultures derived from Africa, as well as the extraordinary diversity within and between these communities, past and present (Mullins 1999; Orser 1998; Singleton 1995, 1999).

The case study presented here focuses on a single antebellum cotton plantation and its modern descendant community in Mississippi. We present results of research focusing on hunting behavior in the antebellum community as well as in the descendant community and how that behavior was far more than subsistence behavior. Hunting, then and now, is also a complex social mechanism for coping with risk. Both the antebellum plantation and the rural descendant community are known as Saragossa and located just outside of the town of Natchez (Figure 1). The cotton plantation was established around 1823 and was quite lucrative until the Civil War. In size, wealth of the owners, and number of slaves, Saragossa seems fairly typical of other cotton plantations across Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, particularly in the region known as the Natchez District, where many cotton plantations flourished. Saragossa Plantation is now abandoned, but two antebellum structures remained standing until recently. Some of the descendants of the enslaved African Americans of Saragossa live in a small, rural community down the hill from the archaeological site. In many ways, therefore, Saragossa is fertile ground for acquiring archaeological, oral historical, architectural, and ethnographic data for a better understanding of slavery, the lives of enslaved

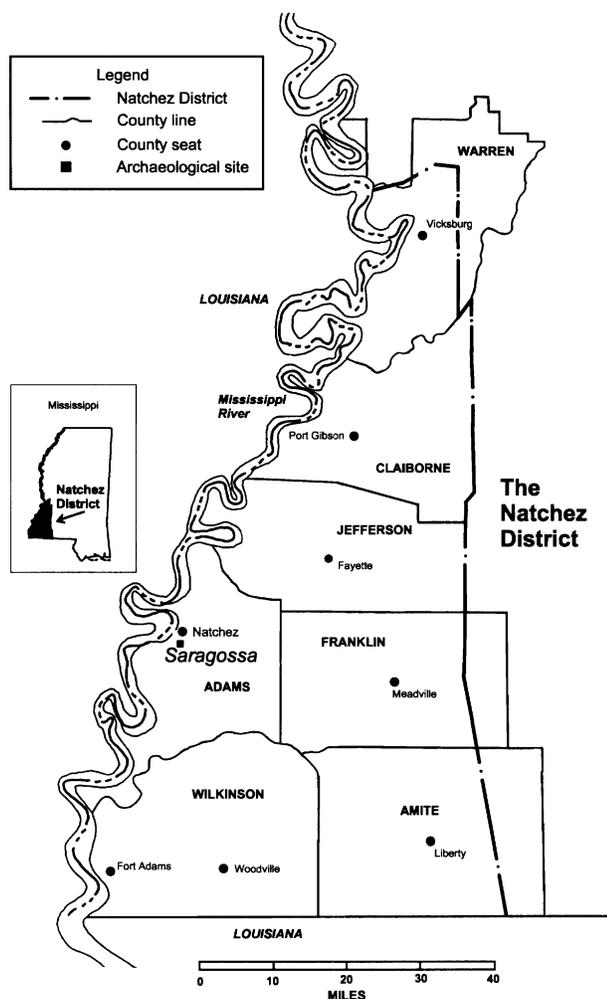


Figure 1. Saragossa Plantation in the Natchez District of Mississippi.

peoples, and the relationships we all have with the antebellum past. We began research at Saragossa in 1997 with the goal of reconstructing aspects of slave life there and understanding more fully the context of slavery in Mississippi, the quintessential cotton plantation state. Few records exist to give us direct information about Saragossa's slaves and slaves on other similar plantations, making archaeological and ethnographic research particularly critical.

### Risk and Risk Management

In 1800, just as the cotton gin was introduced in Mississippi, there were 3,489 enslaved African Americans in the state. By 1820, about the time Saragossa was established, there were 32,814 African American slaves in Mississippi. Near the close of the antebellum era in 1860, the slave population had ballooned to 436,631 (Bancroft 1931:12; Moore 1988:118). By contrast, in the Upland South state of Kentucky where there were few large plantations, the slave population in 1820 was 126,732 and in 1860 was 236,167

(Lucas 1992:xv). While some growth in the slave population in Mississippi can be accounted for by natural increase, most resulted from the forced migration of slaves from the Upland South and other areas within the United States.

African Americans were torn from their families and homes in Virginia, Kentucky, and other states where the plantation economy was in decline and the slave population was increasing through births. Many were sold "down the river" to Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana where the plantation economy was expanding. Many slaves from the Upland South were sold on the auction block at the second largest slave market in the late antebellum era: the infamous Forks of the Road slave market in Natchez, just a few miles from Saragossa. Enslaved African Americans in the Upland South had to cope with the risks to themselves, family members, or other loved ones of being sold "down the river," which severed family and community ties (Young 1997). In Mississippi, enslaved African Americans had to find ways to create new and viable communities with a collection of strangers and constantly assimilate new members into their recently established families and communities. Only by acting collectively and creating solidarity in the slave quarters could they hope to cope with the risks of the "peculiar institution."

We hope to make two points about understanding slave society in the American South. First, strong family and community loyalty were absolutely critical in managing the numerous risks they faced (Aschenbrenner 1973; Weber 1978; Young 1997). Both in the Upland South where people were threatened with being sold away and in the Deep South where collections of virtual strangers could end up at a single plantation, there was a crucial need for a fluid but strong and reliable social system to create and maintain families and communities. The slave family and slave quarter community were the basic social institutions that could cope with risks inherent in the slave system. Our second point is that utilizing a risk management theoretical perspective allows us to analyze those fluid social relations that operated within the slave communities. In recent years, slave society has been analyzed within a theoretical framework based on power (e.g., Epperson 1999; McKee 1992, 1999) and the centrality of resistance in everyday life (e.g., Hall 1992; Singleton 1995:128–129; Thomas 1998). Such studies have provided many important insights into slave lifeways and have shifted our perceptions from slaves as victims to slaves who actively resisted the cruelties of the system. This theoretical perspective focuses attention on the relationship between enslaved and enslaver. However, because not every action of African Americans in bondage was a form of resistance, a broader framework can lead to a more comprehensive understanding. Of particular importance, especially regarding questions of ethnogenesis, is a

better understanding of the social relations among enslaved African Americans.

The economic theory of risk management is a perspective that allows us to examine social relationships within the slave community as well as forms of resistance to the multitude of threats from the institution of slavery and behaviors associated with other poor, disenfranchised, rural families and communities. In fact, resistance can be viewed as a strategy for reducing risk, making risk management the larger, encompassing framework. Furthermore, this same theoretical perspective can be applied to the postbellum era, as well as to ethnographic data from West and Central African societies from which American slaves derived, thereby widening this perspective to include all of the African diaspora.

Risk management theory, most often seen in ecological and economic anthropology, is based on the idea that all humans face the chance or risk that they might incur a loss (Cashdan 1985). Therefore all humans, collectively or individually, develop strategies for avoiding that loss or minimizing the cost should it occur (Cashdan 1985; Wiessner 1982a, 1982b). Wearing safety belts in automobiles is such a risk-reducing strategy, done in order to ensure, as far as possible, with minimal cost, that life and well-being are maintained. Similarly, modern insurance policies are a form of risk management should loss of property, catastrophic illness, or loss of life occur. In this case, small, predictable losses (payments of premium) are substituted for large, potentially devastating ones. Wiessner (1982a) outlines four basic strategies for coping with risk: (1) preventing or minimizing loss by controlling the resource that may be at risk, (2) transferring loss to another party (such as stealing), (3) storing surplus in case of future shortfalls, and (4) pooling or sharing risk and spreading out the risk among many individuals. Young's (1997) study of risk management strategies at Locust Grove, an Upland South slave quarter community in Kentucky, suggests that all four methods of reducing risk were utilized. Particularly acute risks perceived by enslaved African Americans in the Upland South included beatings and being sold "down the river." Objects found in each of the three slave house excavations were probably used as charms to ward off misfortune and to control, protect, and prevent danger (Wiessner's [1982a] first strategy). The relatively high frequency of suckling pigs in the faunal assemblage at Locust Grove hints that stealing may have taken place to minimize food shortfalls (Wiessner's [1982a] transfer strategy). Foodstuffs and other goods were stored in root cellars beneath each of the cabin floors at Locust Grove so people could gain control over scarce resources (Wiessner's [1982b] storage strategy). Finally, sharing and giving gifts (Wiessner's [1982b] pooling strategy) of materials like ceramics and other mass-produced items served to strengthen ties between individual slave households. The gift of a teacup or saucer may have symbolized the reciprocal obligations

between slave families (Young 1997). Of course, the actions of giving gifts, stealing suckling pigs, storing food and other valuables in root cellars, and using charms can also be interpreted in other ways. Certainly stealing suckling pigs was often a way to strike back at the planter and therefore a form of resistance. The use of charms signifies alternative, presumably African, belief systems.

### **The Importance of the Slave Family and Quarter Community**

Many scholars have recognized the centrality of family and community in African American life, both during slavery times and after freedom (Aschenbrenner 1973; Blassingame 1979; Ford et al. 1993; Foster 1983; Gutman 1976; Hill 1971; Martin and Martin 1985; Stack 1974; Sudarkasa 1980, 1981; Webber 1978; Zollar 1985). Many scholars trace the roots of the African American family directly to West Africa (e.g., Foster 1983; Sudarkasa 1980, 1981). Others have effectively argued that the extended family is the primary institution for coping with discrimination and economic deprivation (e.g., Ford et al. 1993; Hill 1971; Stack 1974).

Ford et al. describe extended African American families as social institutions serving "as adaptive strategies against alienation, powerlessness, and isolation by providing additional support to members" (1993:75). They see the roots of the extended family as based partially on fictive kin going back at least to slavery times when nuclear families were constantly in danger of disruption due to sale. Extended families, rather than nuclear families, are better able to help with household tasks, child care needs, money, emotional support, socialization, and companionship. Extended families are especially important in transitional and crisis situations. At any given time, resources for a particular individual might be low, but a large extended family increases the possibility that someone might have the means to help a family member in times of crisis (Ford et al. 1993:78). Families and small, tightly knit communities that function as extended families work together to mitigate risk (Stack 1974).

During slavery times, the slave quarter community served as the extended family (Gutman 1976; Webber 1978). Webber (1978) primarily utilizes fugitive slave accounts and narratives of former slaves recorded in the twentieth century to reconstruct what life was like in the slave quarter community. Webber (1978:63) indicates that members of the slave quarter viewed themselves as a family and that shared codes of behavior dictated that one must never betray a fellow slave; one's first duty was to one's community. Stealing from other slaves, physical abuse of another slave, and especially assisting in the capture or sale of other slaves were considered especially reprehensible (Webber 1978:63-65).

Of course, betrayals occurred, and skin color or residence at a particular plantation did not automatically translate into being a trusted member of the community (Webber 1978:64–65). Those who grew up in a particular community were more likely to be trusted than newcomers were. Nevertheless, all trusted members were required to display their loyalty by placing the welfare of the community ahead of their own interests. A particular slave's position in the white-imposed plantation hierarchy (artisan, house servant, driver) was not considered as important as how an individual protected and provided for others in the slave quarter community.

Ideally, the feeling of family and kinship could be very strong in quarter communities. Webber indicates that quarter members addressed each other with kinship terms and behaved toward one another as if they were kin (Gutman 1976:217; Webber 1978:66). The slave narratives contain numerous examples of individuals "feeling obligated to share their food, to protect runaways, and to generally care for, succor, and protect each other with a familial warmth" (Webber 1978:66–67). Creating strong families and solidarity in the slave quarters was especially difficult on plantations where the hierarchy imposed by the planter class (for example, dividing slaves into field hands, domestic slaves, and artisans and treating them differently) acted to divide the community. In other words, strong nuclear and extended families in the slave quarters did not occur naturally but were actively created and maintained by the members of the community. Creating strong extended families must have been difficult as enslaved African Americans were sold away from or purchased and brought into the community. Perhaps the greatest of all risks to enslaved African Americans were the constant threats to the solidarity of family and community, as individuals were more vulnerable to the wrath of overseers and owners expressed as beatings or sales of slaves, food shortfalls, overwork, and many other dangers inherent in the system of American slavery.

### Family and Community Pressures at Saragossa

Saragossa Plantation resembles many other cotton plantations in the Natchez District in terms of its acreage, the arrangement of the buildings, its slave housing, and the number of slaves who lived and labored there. Like many plantations, it changed hands several times between its establishment and the Civil War. When the plantation was sold, the slaves occasionally stayed on the plantation and were sold along with the acreage and improvements. More likely, however, slave communities and families were disrupted by sale or transfer of property. Slave communities could thus potentially be in a state of constant upheaval. These forces, together with divisive factors forced on slave communities from slave owners and Southern society, made stable family and community life difficult.

Saragossa was established in the early 1820s by Dr. Stephen Duncan (Adams County Deed Book 1823:206), who owned several plantations in the area (Sansing et al. 1992). Duncan sold Saragossa to William St. John Elliott in 1835 (Adams County Deed Book 1835:490). In 1849 Elliott sold Saragossa to William G. Conner (Adams County Deed Book 1849:71), who sold it back to Elliott in 1852 (Adams County Deed Book 1852a:177). That same year, Elliott sold Saragossa to Winfield Gibson (Adams County Deed Book 1852b:332), who in 1855 sold it to Caroline Williams (Adams County Deed Book 1855a:312). Williams then transferred Saragossa to her daughter Anna (Mrs. Walton Smith) (Adams County Deed Book 1855b:440). Saragossa remained in the Smith family for the remainder of the antebellum period and, indeed, into the 1970s. Each sale of the plantation must have had tremendous impact on the slave communities there.

Deeds, census records, and tax rolls for Adams County, Mississippi, document the constantly shifting slave population at Saragossa between the 1820s and the 1860s. In 1827, tax records show that there were 71 slaves living at Saragossa when Duncan owned the property. Elliott, however, had 46 slaves in 1836 and 69 three years later. By 1841, Elliott removed ten Saragossa slaves to his suburban estate (Adams County Tax Lists 1818–61). When Elliott sold Saragossa to Conner in 1849, he also included in the deed 23 slaves named and grouped by nuclear family (Adams County Deed Book 1849:71).<sup>1</sup> When Conner sold Saragossa back to Elliott in 1852, he sold 18 of the named slaves back, so they remained at Saragossa.<sup>2</sup> The remaining five may have died or left the property with Conner. Tax and census records of the Smith family show that the slave population that arrived in 1855 remained relatively stable until the Civil War and hovered in the low to mid-twenties (e.g., U.S. Bureau of Census 1860).

As can be seen, the slave population was not very stable at Saragossa. With the exception of transactions between William Conner and William St. John Elliott, presumably every time the plantation was sold there was a shifting of the labor force. Furthermore, especially in the case of Stephen Duncan and William St. John Elliott, constant purchases of slaves meant that new slaves were added to the workforce at Saragossa. This pattern appears to be typical for the area.

The Natchez District is famous for its numerous cotton plantations. Census and tax list data for Adams County, Mississippi, show that it was not uncommon for planters to own 50 or more slaves, and some very wealthy planters owned several plantations. Many, like Duncan, Elliott, and others, were absentee planters residing in the suburbs of the town of Natchez who employed overseers on their plantations. Furthermore, Saragossa does not seem unusual in how slaves were added to the quarter communities and in how many times it was sold between 1820 and the

Civil War, thus repeatedly disrupting family and community life. A great deal of fluctuation in slave population occurred through the years on numerous plantations like Saragossa. The shifting, and in many cases growing, slave holdings must have had tremendous effects on the individual slave communities and families in Adams County, and Saragossa appears to have been fairly typical.

The impact of this constant change in slave population through purchases must have been tremendous in individual plantation communities. Every plantation in the region must have experienced this kind of disruption at least once during the antebellum period. The social mechanisms developed by African American communities for incorporating new members into the fold must have been crucial for collective action, solidarity, and therefore survival.

### Archaeological and Architectural Study of Saragossa Plantation

An 1849 deed map of Saragossa (Figure 2) shows an overseer's house on the north end of two rows of slave houses (Adams County Deed Book 1849:71). An architectural study of the big house shows that it was originally a two-room, two-story brick structure with end chimneys. As such, it served as the home of the overseer and his family. In 1855, when the Smith family acquired the property, the overseer's house was enlarged to accommodate them. Architectural and archaeological data show that the slave houses were two-room, wooden-frame structures resting on brick piers with central brick chimneys. Each slave

house had a gallery (porch) across the front. Presumably, a single enslaved family dwelt in each room (for a total of 16 families at Saragossa) (Young 1998, 1999).

Archaeological and ethnographic investigations were begun at Saragossa in 1997 and continued in 1998 and 1999 as part of the University of Southern Mississippi Summer Field School. The archaeological testing consisted of 42 1 × 1 meter units placed in the area where the slave quarters stood (Figure 3). Shovel testing in the common yard between the rows of slave houses was also conducted. Ethnographic investigations included participant-observation over the course of several weeks in the summer and continued on weekends into the fall and winter months during which both male and female ethnographers made observations and participated in tasks and other activities in the community.

Eleven units were placed along the west row of slave houses, as indicated by the 1849 and 1852 deed map, where a heavy density of artifacts was found on the surface. Unfortunately, the entire west row except immediately adjacent to the standing slave house was plowed yearly as a kitchen garden in the twentieth century, an activity Smith descendants readily confirm. Materials representing items used and owned by slaves, however, were

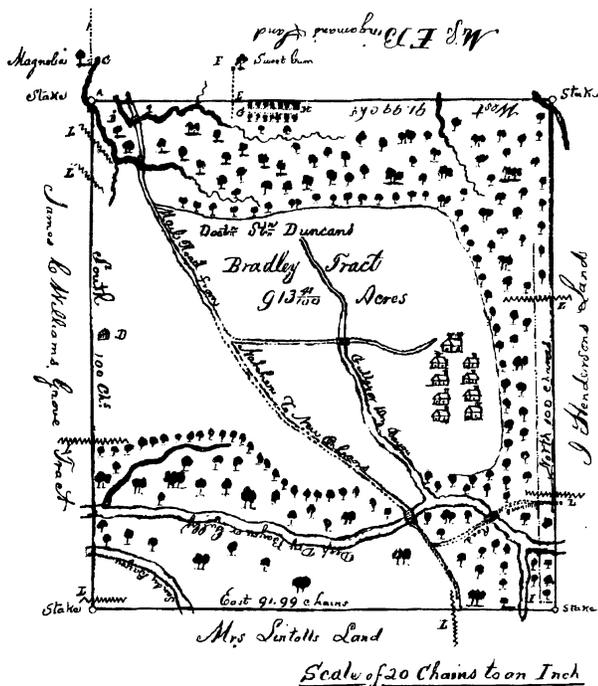


Figure 2. An 1849 deed map of Saragossa.

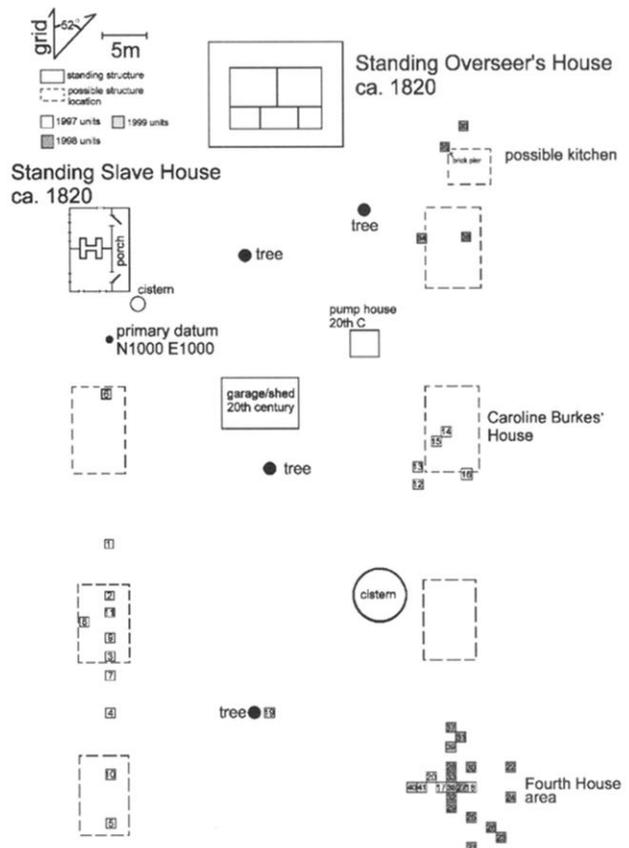


Figure 3. The 1 × 1 meter units at Saragossa Plantation.

collected in the west row units, including ceramics and bottle glass. Preservation of bone, bricks, and iron, however, was generally very poor. No buried features like brick piers, chimney foundations, or pit cellars were discovered in excavations. Further, no clusters of brick fragments were detected that might indicate the remains of piers or chimney foundations. However, since only 11 square meters were used to test the entire area, the possibility of finding such remnants of the slave houses in future work cannot be completely discounted. Also, future work could be conducted in order to collect artifacts that may be clustered where individual houses stood along the west slave house row, even if no features relating to house remains are located.

Excavations along the east row were more promising in terms of artifacts, faunal preservation, and features. In 1997, the second house on the east row was tested. The Smith family descendants recalled that a former slave named Caroline Burkes lived in the house into the 1920s. Burkes, born a slave in 1840, evidently never married and remained on the plantation after freedom. She served as "Mammy" for several generations of Smith children. Some of the older people living in the African American descendant community remember her. Five units were excavated, and the preservation of bone and features was better here than along the west row. Artifacts recovered date from the antebellum period into the twentieth century. The deposits relating to Burkes's occupation are covered with a sheet midden of late-twentieth-century architectural material that originated with the remodeling of the main house in the 1980s. Two significant features were excavated at Burkes's house. First, the robbed-out foundation of the central chimney was discovered. Interestingly, this feature intruded into a prehistoric pit feature filled with Mississippian potsherds and charcoal. The second historic feature is a posthole that appears to represent a support for the gallery that ran along the front of the house.

Testing at the fourth house on the east row showed deeply buried antebellum deposits with well-preserved animal bone. Twenty-one 1 × 1 meter units were placed in the vicinity of this house. As at Burkes's house, the piers and chimney foundation were removed when the house was torn down in the twentieth century. Almost no postbellum artifacts were recovered at the fourth house, however. The Smith family descendants recall that the house was unoccupied in the twentieth century but used to store old furniture. Analysis of the ceramics from this house confirm this usage as the collection consists of decorated and plain whiteware and pearlware that all fit well with an occupation from the 1820s until the Civil War (Allgood 1999).

Several features were excavated at the fourth house, including an early posthole with a partially intact cedar post in a location consistent with a gallery roof support. Beneath the deposits that relate to the slave house is a rectan-

gular burned area that includes brick rubble, burned clay, and a few cut nails. This feature is not oriented with the house but closer to magnetic north-south. Although only a very small portion of this feature was investigated, it appears to represent the brick kiln where handmade bricks were burned and then used to construct the overseer's house and the foundation piers and chimneys of the slave houses.

The area of the detached kitchen was also tested (Ostrom 1999). The remains of a brick pier that likely represents an eastern corner was located in one unit. The ceramics from this area indicate that the kitchen was probably constructed about the time the Smith family purchased the property in 1855, and the remains likely represent only the last planter family rather than the earlier overseer occupants of the big house. However, due to the small sample size, we cannot rule out the possibility that deposits may also be associated with the overseers.

### Faunal Remains at Saragossa

Faunal remains were recovered from the units excavated at the main house kitchen, representing remains of meals of the Smith family and possibly earlier overseers, and from 18 of the 21 units excavated at the fourth house, representing the remains of slave meals (Jenkins 1999; Tuma 1998). The kitchen sample is small, consisting of only 105 specimens, but the sample from the fourth house includes 1,368 bones.

As a measure of taphonomic pressure, the bones were sorted into three general categories: identifiable fragments, shaft fragments, and scrap. Identifiable fragments are those specimens that could be placed into a bone element or animal size category. Long bone shaft fragments are bone splinters from the main limb bones, and scrap represents small, unidentifiable bone fragments. A substantial amount of fragmentation occurs in the fourth house assemblage, as 48.8 percent is included in the scrap category, followed by 40.5 percent as identifiable fragments, and 10.7 percent as long bone shaft fragments. Although the percentage of scrap bone is relatively high, it is similar to the percentages of nonidentifiable bone reported for other plantation sites (Figure 4). For example, Crader (1990) reports 57.3 percent scrap from building "o" at Monticello and lists ranges of 45.1 to 86.5 percent from other slave contexts.

The identifiable portion of the Saragossa assemblage consists of both domestic and wild species. Domestic animals including pig, cattle, and sheep/goat were recovered from the fourth house (slave) and kitchen (owner/overseer) (Figure 5). Domestic cat and chicken were recovered from the fourth house as well. A significant amount of bone from both areas is of the large and medium mammal categories. These bones, however, consist of axial elements that are difficult to identify at the species level. The large

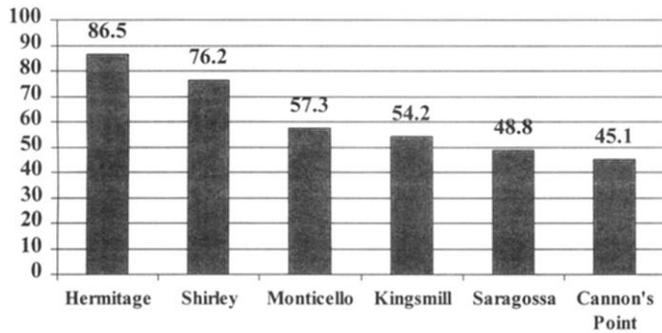


Figure 4. Percentages of bone scrap at selected plantations.

mammal category is likely cattle, while medium mammal is probably pig. The combined pig/medium mammal category dominates both assemblages, making up 74.8 percent of the fourth house (slave) identifiable species and 58.4 percent of species identified from the kitchen (owner/overseer). The cattle/large mammal category is also abundant, constituting 23.9 percent of the fourth house findings and 39.6 percent of the kitchen samples. Comparing the exploitation of cattle and pig between the fourth house and the kitchen shows that their relative contribution to the diet varies. Pig is more abundant at the fourth house, while cattle is slightly better represented at the kitchen, as would be expected for slaves versus owner/overseer (Figure 6).

A number of wild species were identified in the Saragossa assemblages (Figure 7). Interestingly, even though white-tailed deer is commonly the dominant wild species in southeastern archaeological assemblages, only 12 specimens were identified. One such specimen is a deer molar found on the surface of a unit in the kitchen, which could have been deposited there as a result of last year's hunt. The remaining 11 specimens were recovered in three units at the fourth house and are all associated with Saragossa slaves. Box turtle, oyster, and rabbit (including one specimen identified as swamp rabbit) were identified from both the kitchen and the fourth house. Softshell turtle was recovered from the kitchen. Squirrel, opossum, aquatic turtle, gar, bigmouth buffalo, raccoon, Canada or

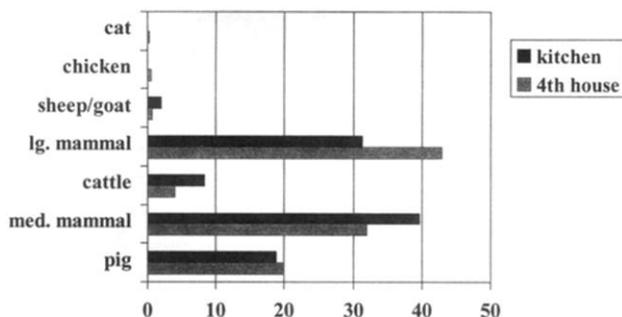


Figure 5. Percentages of domestic species at the fourth house (slave) and kitchen (overseer/owner) at Saragossa.

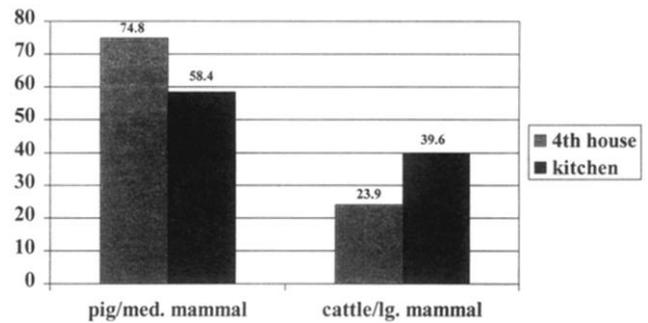


Figure 6. Percentages of pig/medium mammal and cattle/large mammal at the fourth house (slave) and kitchen (overseer/owner) at Saragossa.

blue goose, and other fish were recovered from the fourth house. In fact, the major difference in wild species between the fourth house (slave) and the kitchen (owner/overseer) assemblages is the lack of fish from the kitchen. Catfish is the dominant wild resource from the fourth house, represented by 27 specimens. One specimen was positively identified as blue catfish, and the remaining 26 specimens are either blue or channel catfish. The presence of blue catfish probably reflects the close proximity of the Mississippi River.

The bulk of the diet for the enslaved African Americans at Saragossa, as represented in the faunal assemblage, came from domestic species, most often pig. Beef was not uncommon. Wild species, it seems, provided occasional fare for the slaves. Deer, squirrel, raccoon, rabbit, and various fish are still available in the immediate area today. Many of the smaller game species are attracted to cultivated areas or poultry yards and could have been obtained through opportunistic or garden hunting. The importance of hunting, however, may not be immediately apparent based on the relative frequencies of wild animal bones in the archaeological assemblage.

### The Functions of Hunting at Saragossa Plantation

In addition to the archaeological, architectural, and historical research conducted at Saragossa Plantation, ethnographic fieldwork in the slave descendant community is also under way. The community comprises about 60 individuals, most of whom are related to four sisters who are direct descendants of Saragossa slaves. These women own houses at the end of Saragossa Road (Figure 8) and thus control the majority of the real estate in this community. Men marry into the community, and most come from neighboring rural black communities. Some men trace their ancestry back to slave plantations near Saragossa. The population is quite fluid as folks move into and out of the community. Usually this involves living with relatives in California, Illinois, or Michigan and then moving back

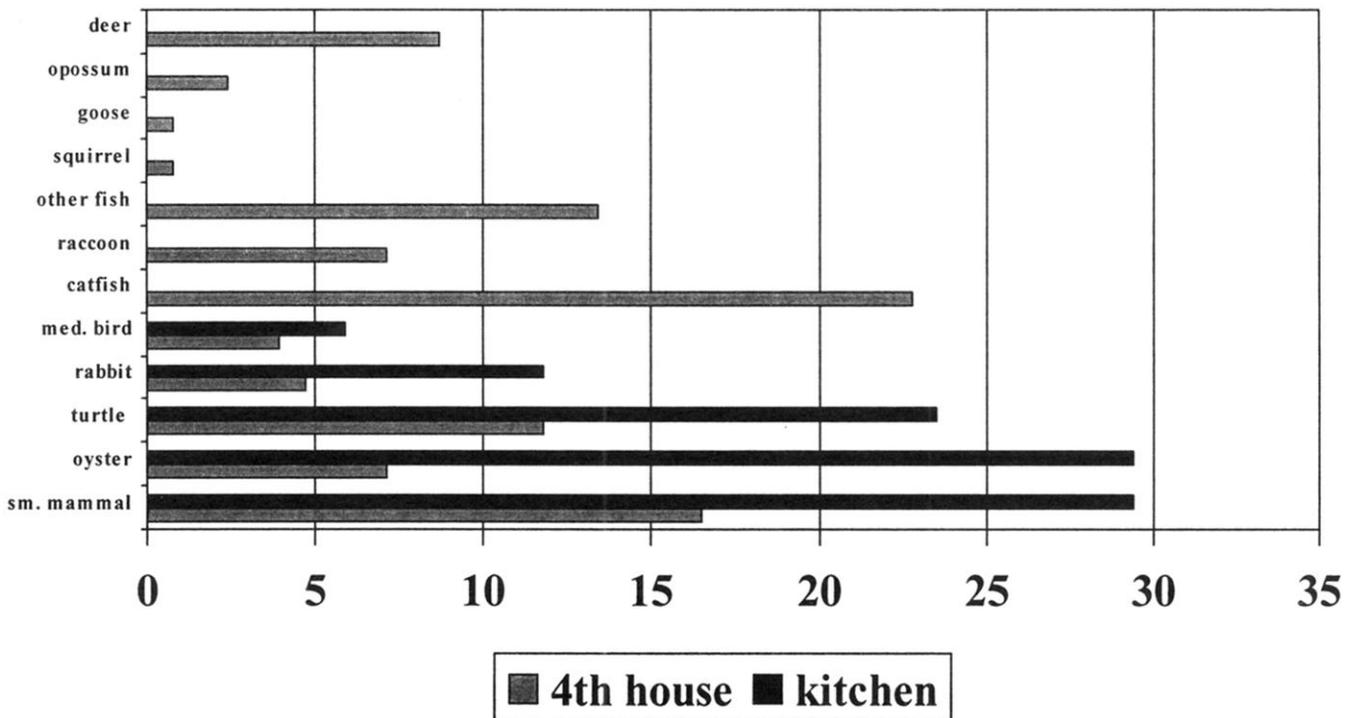


Figure 7. Percentages of wild species at the fourth house (slave) and kitchen (owner/overseer) at Saragossa.

into the community of Saragossa Road. Relatives from outside the Southeast come for visits, and sometimes children who live outside the area spend their summers on Saragossa Road. The residents of the small community suffer constantly from economic hardships. Many adult women work outside the home in fast food restaurants in Natchez. One constant topic of conversation in the community revolves around money (or the lack of it). Child care is shared among the women of the community (Tuma 1999a, 1999b).

Hunting and fishing were just some of the many activities investigated during the course of the ethnographic work. Fieldwork was conducted by male and female ethnographers because of the fairly strict rules in this community about proper gender behavior. Fieldworkers not only observed and interviewed residents, they also participated in the activities they were observing, as far as possible. In the case of hunting, this work was done by a male ethnographer (Tuma 1998, 1999a, 1999b) who “apprenticed” himself to the male hunters in the community. The hunters were quite accustomed to teaching young men how to hunt, and the student/ethnographer was well received.

Hunting in the descendant community, as in the South generally, is traditionally a male-dominated activity with a long history (Marks 1991). Although some of the techniques, especially the technology, of hunting have changed considerably since the antebellum era, we expected that hunting today, as a tradition passed from father to son,

would reflect some of the practices of the past. In other words, the harvest of wild resources in this modern community may inform the research of similar activities of the antebellum slave community.

The residents of this community consider themselves rural or “country” people. Several families raise hogs, chickens, and goats; many have gardens and gather fruit and nuts from trees in the vicinity. Early in the fieldwork, it became obvious that hunting, fishing, and trapping wild resources were important activities among the adult males. One of the first activities men in the community talked about was hunting. Hunting is an exclusively male activity (women are considered “bad luck”), but women and children, as well as men, fish (Tuma 1999b). Most hunters are adults, but youngsters learn to hunt by participation. As for many southerners in general (see Marks 1991), hunting seems to be a rite of passage into manhood in the descendant community. Unemployment in the community is very high; many adult males (over 20 years of age) are unemployed for part of the year and underemployed for much of the rest of the year. As welfare is generally scorned in this community (men are supposed to “bring home dollars”), hunting is viewed as a way for unemployed/underemployed adult males to contribute economically to household and community.

Hunting by men at Saragossa is typically a group activity. Today, deer is the most highly prized game, although they also hunt raccoon, squirrel, feral pig, and opossum. It

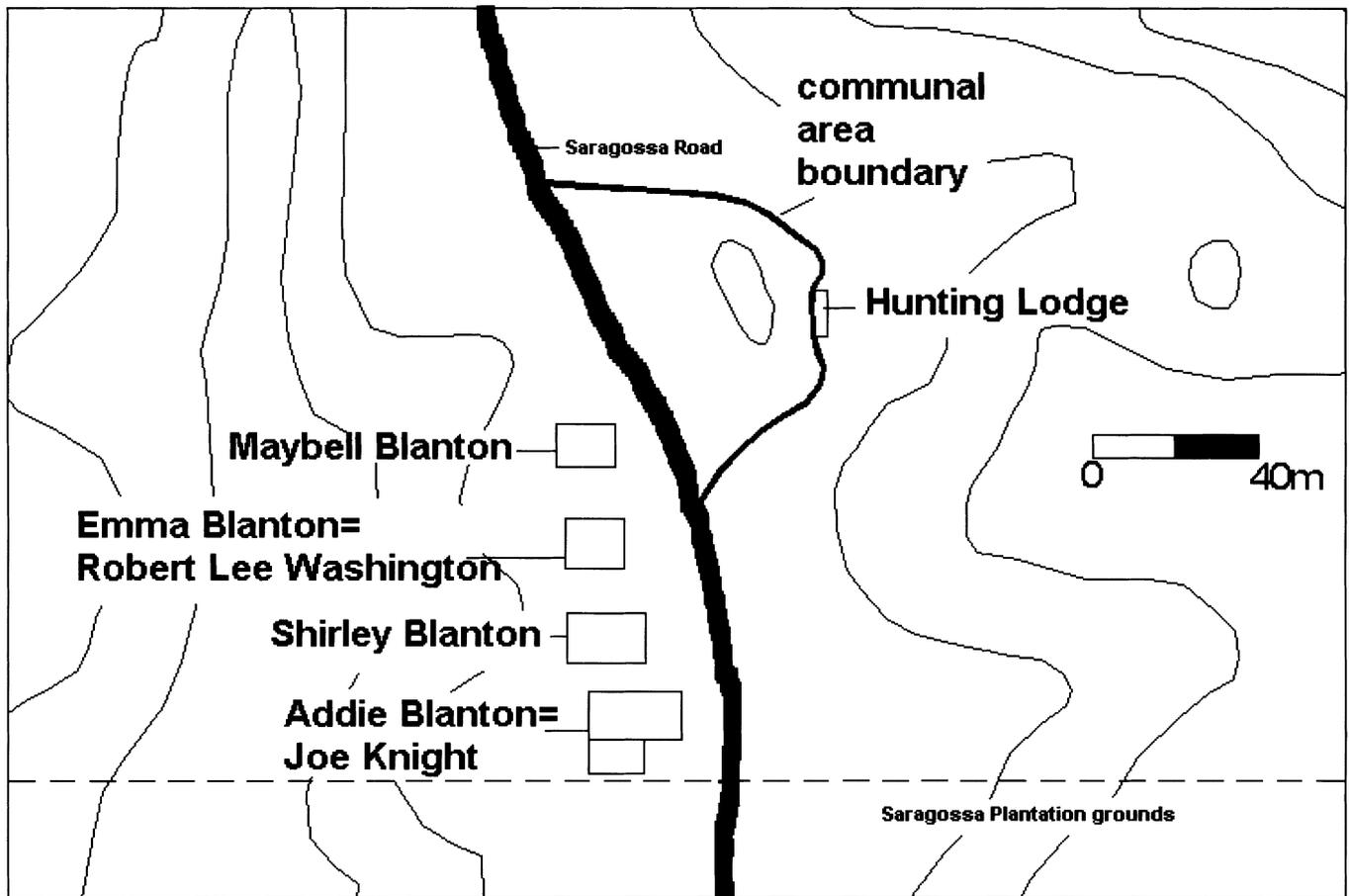


Figure 8. Map of the Saragossa Road descendant community.

appears that deer and other game constitute a relatively significant portion of the protein consumed during the winter months, and fish is the main portion in warm months (Tuma 1999b).

Communal deer drives are a favored method of hunting in the descendant community. Men with shotguns and rifles line up in the woods, spaced several hundred meters apart, and other hunters with dogs drive the deer into the ambush. In this case, dogs are considered absolutely necessary for a successful hunt. Observed deer drives lasted between one and two and a half hours. The goal of the drive is to optimize the return and minimize the time spent in the hunt. In addition to communal deer drives, sometimes deer are hunted using other methods (Tuma 1999b). Communal deer drives are more common and, of course, necessitate cooperation of the men in the community. Hunting by the men in the descendant community is considered not just a sporting but also a subsistence activity.

Deer hunting occurs during the cool months of winter. Little hunting occurs during the summer, but dogs are trained for hunting, and the men discuss the last deer-hunting season and speculate about the upcoming season. Summer is a time of fishing and catching turtles.

Even though there is seasonality in hunting, some wild species are harvested and consumed in the community throughout the year. Wild species that were observed being harvested include deer, raccoon, feral pig, various species of turtle, squirrel, and fish (largemouth bass, white bass, alligator gar, buffalo fish, catfish, and others) (Tuma 1999b).

The game and fish, once acquired, are distributed throughout the descendant community in a number of ways. The first activity after successful hunting or fishing is typically a communal feast. Therefore, when someone—or, in the case of communal drives, the group—is successful, the whole community benefits. Surplus from the hunt or fishing trip is distributed among various freezers in the community. Both the communal feast and the sharing of surplus in various freezers can be seen as pooling strategies for minimizing risk. Obviously storage of surplus is a risk-reducing strategy (Wiessner 1982b).

The animals are brought to the neighborhood and processed. Large animals are butchered behind a shack called the “hunting lodge” located in the communal area of the neighborhood (see Figure 8). The hunting lodge is maintained by most of the men and many younger males in the community. The feast also takes place in the open communal

yard, where men and women share in the cooking of the fish and game. Men clean fish in front of their houses or in the communal area. Women generally do not clean fish. Only men were observed butchering deer and other game. Women are in charge of preparing other foods (sweet potatoes, greens, potato salad, corn on the cob seasoned with hot spices), and folks gather around the cooks and socialize as they wait to eat.

As for many southern hunters, hunting is considered to be very important from a number of perspectives. First, hunting feeds the community, so it must be considered a significant subsistence, and therefore economic, activity. This activity is especially important considering the high rate of underemployment in the Saragossa community.

The second function of hunting is to create and maintain gender identity. As lines demarcating the sexes are blurred in the modern workplace, hunting seems to be an important way of reaffirming masculine identities in this neighborhood: "To engage in hunting is to emulate, to defend, and to advocate what is a tried, proven, and proper way of becoming and being a man" (Marks 1991:6). Ironically, elders in the Saragossa community recall when hunting was not considered so important to gender roles. It may be that the stricter gender roles of earlier times, especially in economic activities, allowed for a more relaxed attitude toward hunting or at least less gender meaning attached to it. It is more likely, however, that men in the early twentieth century were better able to "bring home the bacon" because most were actively engaged in farming, even if they were unable to bring home dollars. Today, unfortunately, bringing home "dollars" or a regular paycheck is far less predictable. Nevertheless, hunting means strong gender identity, and strong gender identity, in turn, means strong family and community ties. Men who do not routinely contribute to the resource pool, unless they are quite elderly, are generally not respected.

The third function of hunting in the Saragossa community is to integrate newcomers (men) into the community. Marks observes that for southerners in general, both black and white, hunting "allows residents the opportunity to assess the stranger's behavior and assign him a known category of persons" (1991:6). Because the men have married into the Saragossa community in recent years, they have learned to live together and cooperate (as kin) through the socializing processes of group hunting and maintaining the hunting lodge. In a community where pooling scarce resources and cooperation are essential for the survival of all, effectively assessing and integrating newcomers are very important activities. This gives newcomers a chance to prove themselves by providing an important economic commodity to the group.

By feeding the community, maintaining gender roles, and integrating strangers into community life, hunting functions in the modern descendant community to reduce

or manage risk. These risks are similar to those of the slave community and include dealing with the risk of strangers in the community who might not have the community's best interest in mind, the risk of food shortfalls, and the risk of community breakdown if males and nuclear families do not cooperate and share. Furthermore, because jobs are scarce for African Americans in this area (especially those who cannot afford a college education), hunting offsets economic shortfalls by keeping the larders stocked. The food is shared throughout the neighborhood in a feast or barbecue that reinforces kinship ties, thus encouraging members of the community to share other economic resources. Hunting, because it is an exclusively male activity, tends to reinforce gender identity and allows men to uphold their roles as breadwinners even when unemployed or underemployed. Also, as strangers are incorporated into the community through their activities of hunting, they become productive, supportive, and trusted members of that community.

## Conclusions

McKee notes that faunal remains from archaeological sites "should generate more than just information on the details of diet; they should provide a bridge to the exploration of the elements of human social organization enveloping diet and nutrition" (1999:218). Faunal data from archaeological and ethnographic contexts at Saragossa have provided critical information about the social organization of the slave community and the modern descendant community. If hunting in the modern descendant community is analogous to hunting in the antebellum slave community at Saragossa, then it is likely that this activity functioned in many similar ways to reduce or manage risk.

First, hunting was a subsistence activity that sometimes yielded shared and stored surplus (risk-reducing strategies). Assuming that slaves at Saragossa worked sunup to sundown six days a week (as may have been typical of cotton plantations) and were forced to rely on relatively meager, or at least monotonous, rations provided by the planter or overseer, then hunting was probably organized to optimize the harvest and minimize the time requirements. Hunting small game with dogs probably resulted in success most of the time. This activity was probably fairly common in slave quarter communities (Campbell 1994). Webber (1978:17, 169) describes clandestine hunting activities taking place under the cover of darkness. This type of harvesting strategy could have also been supplemented by hunting large game at night, as well as daytime communal deer drives in season. The relatively low occurrence of deer in the slave assemblage at Saragossa may indicate that deer-hunting opportunities were more rare in slavery times than in the modern community. This might be understood in terms of the way plantation labor may have been organized (i.e., working sunup to sundown six days a week) but

also in terms of the rarity of guns in the slave community. No evidence other than lead shot was recovered archaeologically; however, the low number of units opened must also be considered. Dogs were likely used as hunting companions in the slave quarter communities. In a similar faunal assemblage recovered from Mount Locust Plantation in the Natchez District, several examples of carnivore (probably dog) gnawing were noted on large elements. However, the relatively low occurrence of deer in the archaeological assemblage might also be accounted for in the modest testing strategy combined with the low success rate of deer hunting in any context.

Many of the species recovered from archaeological contexts at Saragossa were identified as small game (opossum, raccoon, rabbit), but some larger game (deer) was also acquired. Although this is not a direct reflection of the diet, presumably the small game was an important addition to the diet and an opportunity for enslaved males to feed and prove their worth to the slave community. Hunting or trapping small game may have been more opportunistic than organized deer drives observed in the descendant community. But additions of protein from small game probably would have been welcomed into a diet likely dominated by cornmeal and rice.

Additional archaeological research at Saragossa may indicate that game was distributed throughout the slave community as it is in the modern community as well. Hunting, therefore, was a strategy to gain some control over the resource of food, and if the food was distributed throughout the community, it was also a way of pooling resources (a risk-reducing strategy).

Another function of hunting during slavery times at Saragossa may have been to initiate newcomers into the slave community. Such initiations would have been especially important in constantly fluctuating populations. Hunting today is a test to find out how strangers might fit into the economic and social system. Communal hunting reinforces male cooperation that would have been very beneficial in the slave community. Newcomers who successfully participated in hunts were able to reassure the community of their good faith by providing game. Newly proven members of the community could therefore be trusted to protect the entire community and contribute to the resource base.

Finally, hunting as an exclusively male activity probably served to reinforce proper gender behavior. This would have been especially important with the emasculating effects of the system of slavery. If enslaved men were less able to protect their families from harassment or violence from whites, they were able to act as "breadwinners" as hunters. Furthermore, Webber (1978:169) describes slave fathers teaching their sons how to hunt, reinforcing the important role of father in the slave family. Such activities strengthened slave family ties and the entire slave

community, making the community better equipped to deal with the other problems it faced.

Women in the slave community may have fished, like women in the ethnographic community, and this activity may have also served to reinforce their gender identity. However, data from historical sources, such as former slave narratives collected during the Great Depression, provide almost no evidence concerning the role of women and fishing. Hunting and fishing were more than ways of getting food. They were social activities that strengthened family and community loyalty. If all members of a slave quarter community worked together to resist violence and oppression by staging work slowdowns or aiding run-aways, life in the quarter was safer for all. Finding the means to bind members of the community into a web of kinship obligations and rights (pooling resources and spreading out risk) must have been extraordinarily important in the Cotton Belt during slavery times.

## Notes

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1. Slaves listed in this document include Ben Cochran, his wife Frances, and their four children—Angelina, Creacy, Adam, and a little girl not named; Bill Martin, his wife Patsy, and their child; Sam Wheatly and his wife Lucy; George Brent; Old Lucy; Charles McLane, his wife Mary, and their two children—Isaac and Aggy; Jane the Cook; Sonora and her child America; and Helen G. and her children Willis and Anna (Adams County Deed Book 1849:71).

2. Many of the names are the same in this deed of sale: Ben Cochran, Frances, Angeline, Creacy, Adam, Sean, Little Ben, Bill Martin, Patsy, Ann, Louisa, Sonora, America, Sam Wheatly, Lucy, Old Lucy, George Brent, and Old Jane (Adams County Deed Book 1852a:177).

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- 1849 William St. John Elliott to William G. Conner, December 21. Deed Book HH:71. Adams County Court House, Natchez, MS.
- 1852a William Conner to William St. John Elliott, April 26. Deed Book HH:177. Adams County Court House, Natchez, MS.
- 1852b William St. John Elliott to Winfield Gibson and His Wife Elizabeth McCullough, December 29. Deed Book II:332. Adams County Court House, Natchez, MS.
- 1855a Winfield Gibson and Wife to Caroline M. Williams, January 13. Deed Book KK:312. Adams County Court House, Natchez, MS.
- 1855b Caroline M. Williams to Anna Williams Smith, January 13. Deed of Gift for \$1.00. Deed Book KK:440. Adams County Court House, Natchez, MS.
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