Legacies of American Slavery: Status Attainment among Southern Blacks after Emancipation*

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Abstract

This study examines the legacy of American slavery at the individual, intragenerational level by analyzing life-history data from roughly 1,400 ex-slaves and free blacks covering the antebellum and postbellum periods. We test a model of durable inequality that considers the potentially vicious circle created by status persistence across institutional regimes. Our findings suggest that the antebellum regime evidenced partial institutional reproduction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, owing to the fact that the antebellum distinction of free blacks and slaves had durable status effects long after emancipation, but over time, black status attainment became largely decoupled from the internal *hierarchy of slavery. Mediating effects, for example, the Freedmen Bureau's educational interventions and the black diaspora, also served to curtail the reproduction of antebellum status. Implications are pursued with respect to both institutional theory and stratification research.*

In December 1865, the American states ratified the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, formally emancipating over 4 million blacks in former slaveholding states (see Schwartz 1970:25-96 for a legislative history).[1] The deinstitutionalization of slavery and its effects have been studied by a number of intellectuals since the late nineteenth century, ranging from DuBois's (1935)

* *This research was supported by a Junior Faculty Development Award from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We would like to thank Judith Blau, Peter Coclanis, William Darity, and attendees at the 2002 Southern Sociological Society meetings for helpful feedback. Special thanks also go to Paul Escott for providing his data set based on a subset of the WPA interviews.* *Direct all correspondence to Martin Ruef, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-5015. E-mail: ruef_martin@gsb.stanford.edu.*

Editors' Note: This article was evaluated and accepted before Judith Blau became coeditor of the journal.

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inquiry into the political potential for greater race and class equality in southern reconstruction to the large-scale quantitative analyses conducted under the impetus of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (Greene & Woodson 1930; Wesley 1927; Woodson 1918; see also Woodson 1922). Despite this early flurry of scholarship, however, more recent efforts in social history have often focused on the institution of slavery itself rather than its legacy (Dunaway 2003; Fogel 1989; see also Stinchcombe 1995), while examinations of slavery's consequences have emphasized aggregate, macrolevel effects (e.g., Ransom & Sutch 2001). Lacking longitudinal analysis at the micro level, the legacy of American slavery remains poorly understood for individual blacks emancipated from this "peculiar institution" (Stampp 1956).

Sociological neglect of the topic is surprising, since instances of profound institutional change, such as emancipation, offer an unusual opportunity for students of stratification to examine the persistence of structured inequality across institutional regimes. After such change, the typically strong persistence of status — both intergenerational and intragenerational — may give way to rapid upward or downward mobility. At the same time, formal deinstitutionalization may be accompanied by remarkable stability in underlying material conditions, norms, and governance structures channeling mobility processes. This institutional stability was reflected in the postbellum South by the employment of ex-slaves on the plantations of former masters, in oppressive sharecropping arrangements, and in other forms of agricultural peonage.

Aside from questions of social mobility, institutional scholars find legacies of formally dismantled institutions to be of interest in their own right. Such legacies hinge on the reproduction of material and cultural conditions from outdated institutions (Scott 2001), owing not only to the persistence of socioeconomic status across institutional arrangements but also to the resulting ambiguity of identity change for persons embedded within them. Particularly for individuals located in the lowest ranks of socioeconomic status, such as ex-slaves, the subjective sense that new institutional arrangements are merely "old wine in new bottles" is likely to inhibit productive collective action and reinforce a pernicious cycle of status persistence. Oppositional tactics employed by southern whites during Reconstruction and its aftermath — including white terrorism, the passage of black codes, and the construction of segregation — served as institutional supports to this cycle.

In this article, we examine the extent to which slavery continued to influence the social status of southern blacks after emancipation. Our specific emphasis is intragenerational, considering a sample of 1,471 blacks who were born before the end of the Civil War, their status within the plantation system of chattel slavery, and subsequent effects of that system on individual socioeconomic attainment. To trace these outcomes, we employ life histories from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writer's Project, based

on interviews conducted with ex-slaves and free blacks during the late 1920s and 1930s. These interviews place our focus at the "intersection," as C. Wright Mills (1959) termed it, of history and biography. Applying quantitative analyses to the life histories, we derive both specific implications for the legacy of American slavery and more general inferences with respect to theories of status persistence and institutional change.

Institutional Legacies and Durable Inequality

An institutional legacy refers to the reproduction of material-resource and cultural conditions from a social institution despite the fact that the institution has been formally dismantled (e.g., the ongoing effects of American slavery after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment). A simple version of such reproduction occurs at the intragenerational level when individuals continue to bear the burden of outdated institutions because socioeconomic status within present institutional arrangements is positively correlated with status under former institutions. The resulting status inequalities are especially durable if they do not necessarily rely on the subjective beliefs of the individuals involved but are embodied in the organizational forms that channel their mobility processes (Tilly 1998).

A concrete example of such institutional reproduction can be found in the crop lien and sharecropping systems that emerged during southern Reconstruction. Prior to emancipation, the majority of the South's 4 million slaves were employed as unskilled workers on cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice plantations. Estimates from probate and plantation records place the percentage of slaves employed in this lowest tier of plantation labor at nearly 70% (see Olson 1992). After emancipation, many of these ex-slaves drifted back to unskilled farm work by virtue of necessity but, lacking resources of their own, relied on credit from merchants to acquire tools, seeds, livestock, and the like (Foner 1989; Greene & Woodson 1930). Those without land were forced into sharecropping tenancy. These arrangements were generally secured by a lien against the crops of the ex-slaves, where the conditions of the lien allowed landlords and merchants considerable authority in dictating the type of crop grown, its quantity, and the method of agricultural production.

Emancipation meant a tremendous increase in the degree to which freedmen and freedwomen controlled their private lives, but, at least for the majority employed in sharecropping arrangements, there was not always a commensurate increase in economic autonomy. The reasons were twofold. First, the debt load imposed by unscrupulous merchants often forced ex-slaves into material penury that placed them in a tier of socioeconomic status similar to that which they had experienced as field hands (Mandle 1992). Even those who

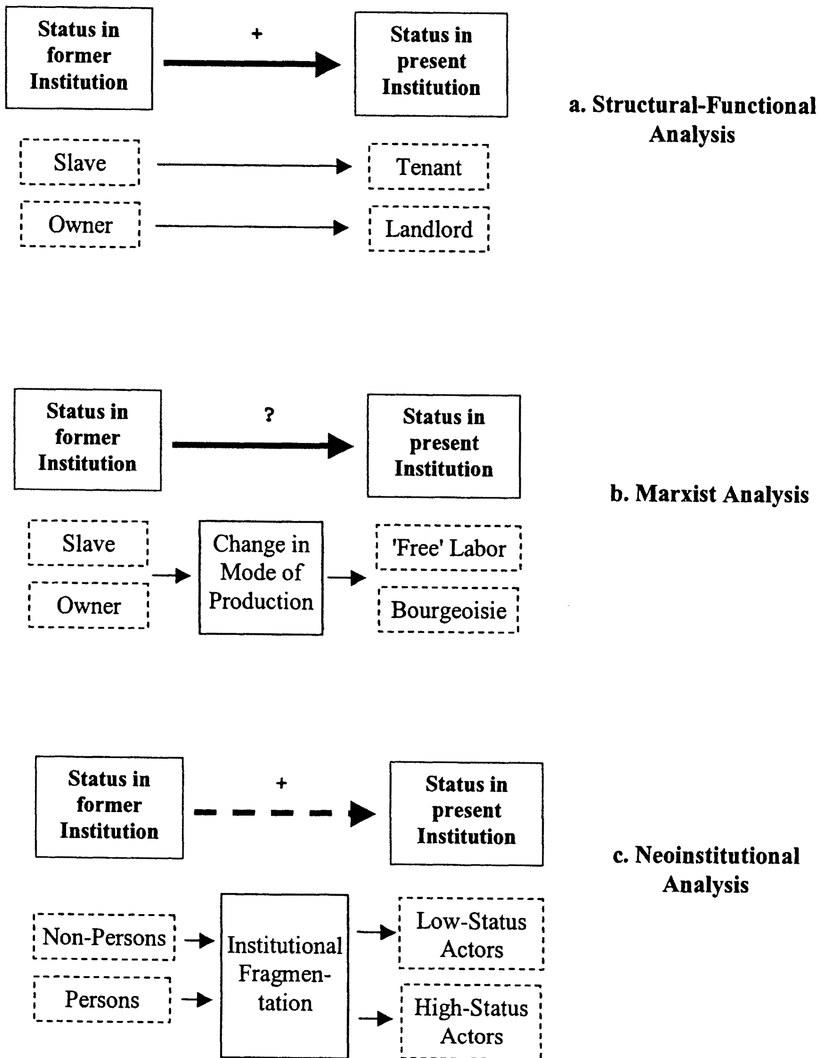
were fortunate or talented enough to escape low-status occupations usually spent a period as unskilled laborers accumulating cultural or economic capital. Second, the authority exercised by merchants and landlords — and effective serfdom of many ex-slaves — meant that the cultural distinction between chattel slavery and "free" wage labor was likely to seem ambiguous to some. Clearly the frequency of physical coercion was reduced under freedom, but even this crucial improvement in the lives of ex-slaves was far from universal (Cohen 1976; Daniel 1979).[2] In these respects, sharecropping and lien arrangements could be seen as reproducing material and cultural conditions from the antebellum plantation system. Other examples of practices descendent from slavery institutions included the enforcement of black codes by police and the harassment of blacks by white patrols and vigilante groups convened to regulate African American behavior.[3] In light of these persistent structures, we ask: To what extent did the basic cycle of status persistence remain after emancipation?

The risk of institutional reproduction is present as long as status inequalities under one institutional arrangement translate into inequalities under another arrangement. This pattern contributes to equilibrium in a system of stratification, despite superficial transformation. Employing structural-functional, Marxist, and neoinstitutional theories, three canonical accounts might be advanced to predict durable inequality — or lack thereof — across institutional regimes (see Figure 1).

In Charles Tilly's (1998) structural-functional explanation, robust categorical distinctions among actors are essential in sustaining status inequality. Insofar as new organizational forms, such as sharecropping arrangements, match old status categories (e.g., slaves and owners) with their own categories of inequality (tenant farmers and landlords), patterns of inequality are likely to be maintained. Thus, accounts by historians often assume that there were constraints on status change after emancipation, noting that postbellum "racism in slightly new forms performed the same function for the social system that slavery had once served, and racial oppression was essential to the ends of the system — little had changed for the black man, either practically or theoretically" (Escott 1979:164). Similarly, sociological arguments reflect on gradations within the slave hierarchy (Stinchcombe 1995; Tilly 1998) and the tendency of elites to grant privileges in freedom along the same distinctions.[4]

Marxist scholars tend to agree that institutional reproduction rests on robust categorical distinctions, but they draw attention to shifts in the means of production that may serve to disrupt these categories across institutional regimes (Wright 1997). In this regard, there were fundamental differences in the postbellum situation of the free black laborer, who "owns" him- or herself, and the antebellum slave (Litwack 1979). In particular, two crucial dimensions distinguish the self-ownership of free wage laborers from the legal status of

FIGURE 1: Some Canonical Analyses of Institutional Transformation of Social Status



productive time in pursuits other than work.[5] Geographic mobility allowed many freed slaves to sever ties with former owners and abandon inhospitable areas and conditions in the former slaveholding states. Substantial interstate mobility, culminating in the Great Migration of the early twentieth century, attested to the popularity of this exit strategy for many southern blacks (Gottlieb 1991). Another fundamental difference between the two institutional regimes was the possibility for free black laborers to invest labor time in alternative pursuits, such as education. Despite the opportunity costs and difficulty of obtaining education, it was widely embraced by former slaves and their children.[6] From a Marxist perspective, the gradational status of blacks within the antebellum regime may not be as important to their postbellum occupational attainment as their relationship to the new means of production, mediated via work locale and educational investment (Figure 1b).

Informed by cultural explanations of individualism and agency (Meyer 1994; Meyer & Jepperson 2000), neoinstitutionalist concerns with the transition to freedom are driven by the difficulties inherent in the construction of a new class of "persons" or "actors." In this regard, freed blacks were not simply adjusting to a new legal status or means of production but were engaged in a more fundamental process of identity reconstruction, navigating tensions between formal equality and functional inequality (Meyer 1994). The mediating role of identity change implies less stability in status persistence than structural-functional accounts might suggest. Thus, scholarship on chattel slavery as an institution (Stampp 1956; Winsell 1971) suggests that many of its status distinctions did not generalize to the more universal standards of free wage capitalism. Blacks' rejection of plantation paternalism and its pattern of personal allegiances contributed to this decoupling in the postbellum period.[7] Among other civil liberties, freedmen and freedwomen saw in emancipation the opportunity to point out the hypocrisy of a system of paternalism founded on both Christian ethical codes and harsh physical coercion (Genovese 1974).

If processes of identity reconstruction contributed to broader institutional fragmentation, it is also unclear that relationships to the new means of production were as telling as Marxist explanations might propose. To some extent, old and new institutional arrangements existed side by side in the postbellum South, leading to mixed expectations for the free labor force engendered by emancipation. Given such uncertainty, geographic mobility and control over work locale often brought only limited material benefits to blacks — at least within the former slaveholding states. The paradox of symbolic benefit in the absence of material gain could also be seen in the sharecropping system that evolved in the postbellum period. Sharecropping was a victory for ex-slaves, when viewed as a refusal of supervised labor systems that mirrored the overseer system.[8] However, sharecropping often transferred wealth systematically from blacks to planters — or, as ex-slave Felix Haywood explained, "freedom could make folks proud, but it didn't make 'em rich" (Litwack 1979:449). In the neoinstitutional

explanation, this material uncertainty is reflected in a loose mapping between postbellum status attainment and legal status in the antebellum period (see Figure 1c).

Historical Background

To provide a snapshot of the complexity of slavery's institutional legacy — and potential disruptions to that legacy — we review a number of historical factors impinging on the cycle of status persistence, beginning with the status hierarchy of blacks in the ante- and postbellum South, opportunities for education and migration, and the process of identity reconstruction faced by blacks moving from slavery to freedom. In subsequent sections of the article, historical factors impinging on status persistence are mapped to variables coded from interviews with ex-slaves and free blacks who lived in states and territories with substantial slaveholdings prior to the end of the Civil War.[9]

Status Hierarchy under Slavery

Status persistence between institutional regimes assumes, first and foremost, that there was significant status differentiation under former institutional arrangements. Early historiographic accounts often assumed, erroneously, that the occupational structure on southern plantations was relatively undifferentiated, with most slaves falling into either a large class of unskilled field laborers or a smaller class of household servants. Starting with Wesley (1927), economic historians began to discover the large number of skilled black artisans and semiskilled slaves supporting the plantation system (see also Moore & Williams 1942). Modern accounts stress not only that occupational differentiation among slaves on midsized and large plantations was important from a functional standpoint but that the southern planters actively supported such differentiation in order to control their slave populations (Fogel 1989; Johnson 1986).

At the top of the status hierarchy were the black overseers, or "drivers," chosen for their loyalty to the planters, managerial talents, long plantation tenure, and "imposing physical presence" (Miller 1979). The drivers enjoyed considerable autonomy in running the day-to-day operations of the plantation, leading to debate among antebellum planters whether black or white overseers should be employed in this capacity. Evidence from probate records suggests that the use of black overseers increased until the 1830s but then declined until the Civil War, possibly due to the Nat Turner uprising (1831) and planter fear of slave insurrection.

Joining the drivers in the "elite" slave occupations were skilled black artisans — blacksmiths, masons, mechanics, carpenters, and the like — who

generally enjoyed better living conditions, better vocational education, and greater autonomy than other slaves. In urban areas, slave artisans were often hired out by their masters, leading to competition with white artisans and occasional antagonism from the general populace (Greene & Woodson 1930). Probate records suggest that around 13% of male slaves were employed in the capacity of skilled craftsmen; the number of female slaves so employed was negligible.

Between common field laborers and the elite slave occupations of artisans and overseers, there existed a differentiated status hierarchy of domestic servants (e.g., waiters, butlers, cooks, barbers), semiskilled workers (teamsters, coach drivers, gardeners, clothmakers), and unskilled nonagricultural workers (launderers, porters). These strata comprised roughly 13% of adult male slaves and 29% of adult female slaves on midsized and large plantations (Olson 1992). Placement within these middle ranks, perhaps to a greater extent than in the elite slave occupations, was subject to ascriptive decisions by masters based on the skin complexions, interpersonal relationships, and personalities of the slaves.[10] Under slavery, status ranks above field hand status were perpetuated by marriage patterns. Skilled manual workers, overseers, and to a lesser extent semiskilled workers usually married domestic servants or other high-status slaves (Johnson 1986; Schwalm 1997). After emancipation, the institutional peculiarity of some of these ascriptive decisions could render status persistence in the middle range vulnerable to disruption.

From the standpoint of a status attainment model, two other statuses within the slavery regime complicate this hierarchy. One is the substantial number of free blacks in the antebellum South, comprising over 5% of the black population in 1860. Aside from their autonomy and high prestige vis-à-vis slaves, detailed occupational records from southern urban centers indicate impressive occupational attainment among free blacks. A census of free blacks from Charleston revealed a number of proprietors (storekeepers, tavernkeepers, milliners) and a large number of skilled artisans (Wesley 1927); notably, few free blacks went into domestic service compared to urban slaves.

The other complication for a model of status attainment involves slaves who were children at the time of emancipation. Because of the early age at which slaves were put to work — some at around age three or four and roughly half by age seven (Fogel 1989) — age itself is not an adequate proxy of childhood under this regime. Rather, our definition of childhood includes those young slaves who had no occupation assigned to them before emancipation and thus never experienced the working conditions of slavery directly. While accounts of planters themselves suggest that there were benefits to early entry into the slave labor force, in terms of skill formation (see Roughley 1823), the costs of lost childhood and socialization within an antiquated agricultural gang system are not to be ignored. By avoiding this pattern of socialization within the institution of slavery, some children endured

its legacy to a lesser extent than their peers who had already spent time working as unskilled agricultural laborers or domestic servants.

Status Attainment after Slavery

After a brief period of celebration, freedmen and freedwomen faced lives characterized by extremely hard work. The Union army encouraged southern blacks to return to their occupations under slavery as a practical solution to the need for economic relief and to fear among white elites that the southern economy was unviable without black labor (Cohen 1991). For agricultural laborers, returning to preemancipation jobs was probably not good advice. Many sharecroppers and tenant farmers existed in abject poverty, often living meal to meal. Yet opportunities for blacks to enter higher-status occupations were few in the Reconstruction era, even in the North. Institutions and cultural norms designed to separate the races limited African American status mobility in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Williamson (1965) describes a common reaction to segregationist institutions among blacks who stayed in South Carolina: "Negroes generally searched for perfection within their half of a dyarchical society" (301).[11]

Whites limited African Americans' access to high-status work outside the black community. Southern white elites hired according to informally defined limits of what constituted "black jobs" — typically agricultural labor, semiskilled industrial labor, or domestic service work (Spero & Harris 1931). For the African Americans who continued to work in agriculture, productivity was severely constrained by the relative lack of tools, especially for sharecroppers who often relied on planter loans (Ferleger 1993; Wiener 1979).

Structures constraining black status mobility were not universally successful. The black community included preachers, skilled craft workers, teachers, and a small number of other professionals. Fifty years after emancipation, obstacles to status mobility were somewhat counterbalanced by increased demand for industrial labor during World War I. Still, a large portion of jobs blacks gained during the war were lost in peace, and prospects for occupational mobility among African Americans did not dramatically improve again until World War II.

Education before and after Emancipation

The threat posed by education to status persistence among blacks was widely recognized by planters in the antebellum South. In response to an increase in abolitionist activity in the 1830s, laws against the education of enslaved blacks were strengthened in the slaveholding states. In some areas, it was a criminal offense to teach *any* black, enslaved or free, to read or write. George Albright, a former slave and nineteenth-century politician, explains: "It was only by trickery that I learned to read and write — if any slave learned to read and

write, he was to be punished with 500 lashes on the naked back, and to have the thumb cut off above the second joint" (Rawick 1972-79, 6.1:8-19). Official prohibitions against educating blacks and widespread planter hostility toward learning among slaves limited literacy to a very small fraction of the southern black population by the time of emancipation (DuBois 1935).

Northern attempts to develop an educational infrastructure in the South began before the Civil War was over. The Union army trained teachers, confiscated rebel homes as schools, and sought to instruct ex-slaves in "the rudiments of civilization and Christianity" (General William Sherman, as quoted in Blassingame 1965). While some of these efforts may have been driven by moral concern, it must also be remembered that the Union's use of ex-slaves as soldiers was severely limited by illiteracy and that federal officials saw education as a means of control as well as enlightenment. Handbooks distributed by the Freedmen's Bureau were designed to help the recently emancipated by instilling strong work ethics and ideologies of disciplined docility in their readers (Hartman 1997).

After the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau undertook a more systematic approach to institutional intervention, which was matched, with various degrees of effort, by the development of public systems of primary education among Reconstruction governments. Even at its height, this system of public education reached only approximately 10% of black children (DuBois 1935) and suffered considerable setbacks with the restoration of southern elites in the 1870s. Government efforts were dwarfed in many areas, moreover, by the grassroots formation of schools by freed African Americans, many of whom worked as builders and teachers without pay (Anderson 1988; Gutman 1987). Maria Jackson's story reveals that, for southern black families, obtaining education was a struggle wrought with pragmatic compromise: "[My brothers and sisters] learned right well in school. Us other children had to help Daddy in the field" (Rawick 1972-79, 1:267-74). Nevertheless, public education could be counted as one of the successes of Reconstruction; by the 1890s, black literacy nationwide had risen to nearly 40% (Greene & Woodson 1930).

The impact of education on black status attainment after emancipation has not been studied systematically at the individual level, although well-publicized debates raged in the late nineteenth century concerning the most effective forms of education. Booker T. Washington (1901) famously advocated a system of practical, industrial education, claiming that "the opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera house" (206-26). Fearing that Washington's approach would lead to abject proleterianization, DuBois ([1903] 1965) countered with proposals for college education, emphasizing the "talented tenth" among blacks. Even today, these debates are unlikely to be settled with the data at hand. What

can be hypothesized, however, is that education — of *any* sort — served to substantially disrupt the legacy of the antebellum regime.

Migration

The geographic mobility of blacks following emancipation served as a second disruption to the reproduction of the antebellum regime. In his pathbreaking analysis, Woodson (1918) traced three waves of southern black migration after emancipation: one resulting from the immediate disruption of the plantation economy during the Civil War,[12] a second, westward movement upon the restoration of reactionary white governments during the late 1870s, and a third, "great migration" to the North, peaking during World War I when wartime industries were understaffed and foreign immigration was reduced to a trickle. Many southern elites actively tried to stop migration using persuasion, accommodation, and legalized detention (Cohen 1991). At least as late as 1916, cases exist wherein black agricultural workers were forcefully prevented from seeking better prospects through migration (Cohen 1976).

DuBois ([1903] 1965) recognized benefits of migration for developing a pan–African American identity (see also Blau & Brown 2001). The aims of migrants themselves — and of migrant aid societies in the North and West who assisted them — were far more concrete. John Mathews described to WPA interviewers why he relocated repeatedly across the cotton belt: "when [the] end of the year come there was nothing to pay the [farm] hands. I got work at a saw mill and made enough for us to live on. When the bulldozers tell me to move, I move" (Rawick 1972-79, 9:1450-60). Still facing profound discrimination in the postbellum South, other blacks saw migration as a form of collective action, the only way to "elevate [themselves] to a higher plane of true citizenship" (U.S. Senate 1880: vol. 7, p. 281; DuBois 1907). Meanwhile, some black leaders, such as Frederick Douglass (1879), considered migration an abdication of rights and a failure to leverage the sheer number of blacks in the South to economic and political advantage.

As emphasized by modern students of collective action, individual advantage and collective disadvantage may exist side by side. At the individual level, interstate migration after emancipation may have severed economic dependencies on local white elites, and blacks migrating outside the bounds of the former Confederacy may have encountered less discrimination.[13] At the same time, other scholars — following Douglass's warnings — have suggested that this exit strategy crippled more fundamental civil rights reform in the South for decades to come.

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

For many years, the emphasis of economic historians on material conditions among emancipated blacks slighted the parallel process of cultural reconstruction — how ex-slaves came to terms with their change in identity from slave to freedman or freedwoman. As emphasized by our theory of institutional reproduction, this dynamic may be intimately tied to underlying status persistence. A slave who had languished as a field laborer in the plantation economy and was driven into peonage after emancipation may have questioned the meaning and value of identity change. In many cases, though, the cycle of cultural reproduction was broken insofar as ex-slaves' valuations of their identities became decoupled from the material conditions of life, instead emphasizing more abstract principles of freedom (Litwack 1979).

Identity reconstruction among ex-slaves occurred in a climate of stigmatization, as southern whites questioned their social and economic usefulness. Freedom was an attribute still considered unnatural for southern blacks, leading to a discrepancy between what Goffman (1963) has referred to as idealized and actual social identity. Strategies for managing this discrepancy took on a number of forms among ex-slaves. Some engaged in wholesale rejection of the planter regime, its status hierarchy, and violence. Lydia Jefferson, a former house slave from Louisiana, felt like she came out of "a black hole into [the] sunlight" after emancipation, stating that the "treatment what some of [the] slaves got dat I's see with my own eyes was awful" (Rawick 1972-79, 6.5:1939-42). Jefferson expressed this view even though her own existence on the plantation had been one of relative privilege, at least compared to field hands. Other ex-slaves expressed the ambiguity inherent in weighing ante- and postbellum identities. Talking to a WPA interviewer, Andy McAdams noted, "well son, I'se expected lots different from freedom than what we got. . . . news came one day that we were free and that [same] day they opened the gate and set the dogs after us — just like you would a bunch of wild cattle that you were going to turn loose in a large pasture to graze or rustle for their living" (Rawick 1972-79, 7.6: 2455). McAdams recognized that his personal suffering might be accompanied by collective benefits for southern blacks as a whole: "us old slaves has had a hard time of it but it has been worth all our hardships cause, look at the Negro people today. . . . our people progressed along to where they don't have to suffer the hardships we did trying to learn what our white people wanted us to do" (p. 2456).[14]

Since individual stories of status persistence or change differ considerably, we constructed quantitative measures of ante- and postbellum status from autobiographical narratives. Analysis of these measures provides a summary description of status shifts after emancipation and can be used to assess the relative validity of competing views on status persistence across institutional regimes.

Data, Measures, and Method

Data

We tracked changes in the social status of southern blacks using interviews from the WPA Federal Writer's Project. Following pilot projects conducted at Fiske University, Southern University, and Prairie View College in the late 1920s (see Cade 1935; Egypt, Masuoka & Johnson 1945), the Federal Writer's Project sought to develop a more comprehensive autobiographical portrait of ex-slaves. Between 1936 and 1940, this effort led to the collection of life histories from over 3,000 former slaves and free blacks in 25 states as well as a large number of secondary materials, such as bills of sale from the antebellum South and obituaries of ex-slaves (Yetman 1984).

The data used in this article include 1,590 interviews in the WPA archives that elicited information from southern blacks on their socioeconomic attainment during the postbellum period as well as their status under slavery (see Escott 1979; Jacobs 1981; Rawick 1972-79). To be included in further analysis, respondents had to be born before or during the Civil War and reside in a slaveholding state (or territory) before emancipation. After removing cases that failed to meet these criteria, 1,471 remaining interviews were coded for identifying information, age, gender, family background, education, migration, and occupational attainment of each respondent. Concerns about sample representativeness and the advanced age of some respondents were addressed, as noted below.

Representativeness

In many respects, the WPA interviews provide a unique data set for tracking black status mobility in the nineteenth century. Before 1870, U.S. census records did not identify most southern blacks by name or occupation; slave schedules simply enumerated characteristics such as number and age of slaves owned by particular masters. Other potential sources of data on status mobility — such as conscript records for the Union army — do report former occupations but are obviously conditioned on particular status outcomes for ex-slaves. Consequently, despite the shortcomings noted below, the WPA archives include the most representative data available on intragenerational black mobility between the antebellum and postbellum regimes.

Although the aim of the Federal Writer's Project was to generate representative life histories of former slaves, little systematic sampling was conducted (Yetman 1984). As a result, the archives contain narratives from roughly 2% of the ex-slaves still living in the 1930s but features considerable variation in the number of interviews collected from state to state. To account for geographic bias in the sample, we weighted all cases by state of origin to

correspond to the slave and free black populations at the end of the antebellum era (see Appendix).

Issues of representativeness also arise from the advanced age of respondents and the possibility of different mortality rates among respondents from different status backgrounds under slavery. Demographers have identified two primary correlates of mortality for slaves: slave occupation (e.g., domestic versus field hand) and plantation ecology (type of crop grown) (Fogel 1989). Controlling for crop type, slaves engaged in domestic and skilled manual labor have been found to have mortality rates less than half that of field hands of the same age. To account for this source of differential mortality, we applied a second set of weights based on the mix of slave occupations in the late antebellum South (using Olson's [1992] sample of plantation records). We found that unskilled agricultural workers in our data set tended to be undersampled, whereas domestics were oversampled (see also Escott 1979). The other characteristic affecting slave mortality — plantation ecology — is highly correlated with state of origin and accommodated by the existing sample corrections for geographic bias.

Respondent Age

The advanced age of respondents in the WPA archives has been noted as a shortcoming in using these materials. The median age of respondents in our subsample is 83, leading to questions concerning accuracy of recall. WPA interviewers often undertook prior research to establish basic biographical details on respondents (such as age, family background, and the like). To improve reliability, many WPA interviewers were also instructed to visit respondents on at least two occasions, the second visit to "gather all the worthwhile recollections that the first talk has aroused" (Alsberg 1937). These multiple interviews reveal problems of recall related primarily to complex chronological sequences (e.g., order of masters under the antebellum regime) rather than to the more basic socioeconomic variables employed in our analyses. Moreover, interviews tended to be conducted around major life-cycle markers (e.g., emancipation, marriage), an approach that tends to improve the performance of long-term memory (Escott 1979; Hurwicz et al. 1992).

With respect to interview questions about antebellum status, an issue also arises concerning the amount of time that has passed since slavery. In particular, those sampled blacks who were very young at the time of emancipation — one-third of our sample was younger than nine in 1865 — may view the slave regime through the eyes of childhood (Blassingame 1975; Woodward 1974). To account for such effects, we control for age in our models and also run separate models for respondents who were preteens during emancipation.

Status Attainment Measures

Our rankings of status attainment aim to capture institutional particularities of the antebellum and postbellum periods while also permitting comparability with contemporary rankings of occupational prestige. Using the class schema of Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) as a guide, detailed occupational descriptions of respondents were mapped onto seven status distinctions under the antebellum regime and nine status distinctions under the postbellum regime (see Table 1).[15] Examining the postbellum rankings, two departures from contemporary status hierarchies can be noted. First, low-skill nonmanual occupations (class VIII) are considered to be of relatively high status. As in today's developing countries (see Ganzeboom, de Graaf & Treiman 1992), clerical and other lower-end, nonmanual occupations in the late nineteenth century had not yet been deskilled by technology. Thus, white-collar workers enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and developed unique skills that were difficult to replace. Second, there is considerable differentiation in the ranking of agricultural occupations, particularly between independent farm proprietors (class V), sharecroppers and rental farmers (placed in class III), and common farm laborers (class I). This differentiation reflects the autonomy offered by farm ownership during the postbellum era (Foner 1989; Schultz 1998), as opposed to the exploitive character of sharecropping and the similarity of supervised agricultural labor to fieldwork under the slave regime.[16]

Considering postbellum occupational attainment and the longevity of respondents, an obvious question is whether the number of elite occupational statuses in the sample (especially professionals and officials) is representative of the black population as a whole. Because of the time period covered (1865-1930s), no strict basis of comparison is available. However, analyses of census records around the middle of the period provide indications of whether substantial bias exists in the sample. In 1890, when the U.S. Bureau of the Census first distinguished between white and black laborers, the top ranks of socioeconomic status — professionals and officials — comprised merely 1.1% of the black working population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1890). The percentage in our weighted sample is actually slightly lower (1.0%), with no significant departure from the population parameter under random sampling. Consequently, it does not appear that sample selection — in its more extreme forms — occurs on the dependent variable.

TABLE 1: Occupational Status Attainment of Sampled Blacks, during and after Slavery

Status	Pre-1865 Unweighted (Percent)	Pre-1865 Weighted[a] (Percent)
Slave		
I. Unskilled agricultural	22.8	36.7
II. Unskilled manual/domestic	10.9	7.4
III. Semiskilled agricultural	2.3	1.7
IV. Semiskilled manual	2.8	3.6
V. Skilled domestic	22.9	6.7
VI. Skilled manual (artisan)/driver	1.6	6.6
Free or child of slaves		
VII. Free black	2.1	5.4
Child of slaves (no occupation)	34.6	31.9
(N = 1,400[b])		

Independent and Control Measures

Education

While a small proportion of our weighted sample (.9%) had formal education under the antebellum regime, far more received schooling during the postbellum period — including primary education (39.3%), vocational school training (.8%), and college education (4.2%). During both periods, some respondents began formal education but had to stop prematurely because of personal or social circumstances (8.1%). This was especially true in the antebellum regime, where masters might vacillate in their opinions of educating slaves or the seasonal demands of plantation labor could limit schooling to certain times of the year. Finally, many respondents received informal education (outside a school environment) from literate blacks or whites who had no teaching credentials (19.4%).

Migration

Patterns of migration reflect respondents' degree of embeddedness in communities that formerly supported slavery, as well as ongoing economic dependencies on white elites in those areas. We code characteristics of migration for two time periods, analyzing geographic mobility — both voluntary and coerced — during the antebellum regime and period of emancipation (through the mid-1860s) and during the postemancipation regime (after the mid-1860s). Three types of migration are considered:

TABLE 1: Occupational Status Attainment of Sampled Blacks, during and after Slavery (Continued)

Status	Post-1865[c] Unweighted (Percent)	Weighted (Percent)	Threshold (μ)[d]
I. Unskilled agricultural	12.1	12.0	.000
II. Unskilled manual/domestic	18.5	16.9	1.141
III. Semiskilled agricultural	29.5	29.4	1.991
IV. Semiskilled manual/skilled domestic	21.1	19.0	2.564
V. Proprietor farmer	3.1	3.3	2.701
VI. Skilled manual/supervisor of unskilled or semiskilled workers	7.8	9.4	3.184
VII. Supervisor of skilled manual workers/ small proprietor	1.2	1.5	3.290
VIII. Low-grade professional/nonmanual worker	6.0	7.5	4.446
IX. Official/high-grade professional/ proprietor	.7	1.0	n/a
(N = 1,392[e])			

[a] Weights are based on the geographic distribution (1860 census) and occupational distribution (Olson 1992 sample) of southern blacks.

[b] Seventy-one cases contain incomplete data on status within the antebellum regime (coded as missing).

[c] Percentages are based on a pooled sample of all jobs held by respondents (2,298 job positions).

[d] Figures are upper-threshold estimates for an ordered Probit model of highest occupational attainment; see Table 6 (model 4) and equation 2.

[e] Eight additional cases contain incomplete data on status within the postbellum regime (coded as missing).

interstate migration; migration outside the bounds of the (former) Confederate states, including movement into slaveholding border states maintaining neutrality during the Civil War; and an interaction effect for the migration of blacks who had been free prior to 1865 into non-Confederate states. The latter variable is used to explore the contention by some early scholars (e.g., Douglass 1879) that the lack of a "critical mass" of free blacks in states outside the South might have complicated status attainment and resource mobilization efforts; migration could thus have imposed a relative liability for those blacks who did not carry the onus of a former slave status.

Control Variables

Analyses include controls for the age and gender of respondents. Exploratory plots suggest that socioeconomic attainment can be characterized as a linear function of age, possibly capturing unobserved human capital effects. The control for gender reflects differences in nineteenth-century mobility patterns, since women were usually favored for domestic work and barred from manufacturing jobs and other types of strenuous nonagricultural work (Schwalm 1997; Williamson 1984). Childbearing and family responsibilities also impeded status mobility among emancipated black women.

Missing Data

For education, a conditional mean imputation procedure was used to replace missing values and ensure that a maximum number of cases could be retained (Little 1992). Using OLS regression, conditional means are calculated as

$$X_i^* = E(X_i | X_1, \ldots, X_p) \quad (1)$$

where X_i represents the missing values. Weights are assigned to cases with imputed education values in order to compensate for increased residual variance (Little 1992). Cases with missing values on any of the other variables were removed by listwise deletion. This reduced the total number of cases to 1,392. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 2.

Statistical Methodology

For purposes of analysis, the postbellum status attainment of respondents was assessed for their initial occupation after emancipation and for their highest-prestige occupation thereafter. Since these dependent variables are measured on a ranked scale, multivariate methods for ordinal variables were applied. We estimated Zavoina and McElvey's (1975) ordered Probit model based on the following specification, stated in terms of continuous latent measures of the dependent variables (Y^*):

$$Y^* = X\beta + \varepsilon \text{ with } Y = \begin{cases} 0 \text{ if } Y^* \leq \mu_0 \\ 1 \text{ if } \mu_0 < Y^* \leq \mu_1 \ldots \\ J \text{ if } Y^* > \mu_{J-1} \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

where Y is the observed counterpart to Y^* and the μ's are free threshold parameters that distinguish ordered values. Maximum-likelihood estimates were derived using Greene's (1996) LIMDEP software, with the constraint that the first threshold parameter (μ_0) equal zero.

TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Control Variables Used in the Analysis: Weighted Sample

Variable	Proportion/Mean	S.D.
Demographics		
Gender (1 = male)	.71	—
Age (in 1865)	13.72	9.08
Migration		
Interstate migration (through mid-1860s)	.20	—
Interstate migration (after mid-1860s)	.49	
Migration outside Confederacy (all periods)	.18	—
Education		
Formal education (pre-1865)	.01	—
Formal education (post-1865)	.43	
Abbreviated education (all periods)	.08	—
Informal education (all periods)	.19	—
(N = 1,392 after listwise deletion)		

Note: Weights are based on the occupational and geographic distribution of southern blacks (1860).

Results

Table 3 provides a descriptive cross-tabulation of antebellum status and highest achieved postbellum status among the sampled respondents. The diagonal of the mobility table suggests considerable status persistence among emancipated blacks, with each antebellum status generally being linked to disproportionate odds of representation within a comparable postbellum status (assuming a model of statistical independence).[17] By the same token, upward mobility into the ranks of professional and nonmanual workers tends to be relatively rare for blacks formerly employed as slave field hands, domestics, or semiskilled laborers, while downward mobility into the ranks of unskilled and semiskilled wage laborers is typically avoided by former slave artisans and by blacks who were free in the antebellum South. All of this suggests some empirical support for a structural model of status persistence across institutional regimes.

Preliminary conclusions in this regard must be tempered by a number of caveats. First, the destination states considered in the mobility table combine occupations held immediately after the Civil War (often under former masters) with later occupational outcomes. This tends to conflate short-term status stability

TABLE 3: Status Mobility of Sampled Blacks between Antebellum and Postbellum Regimes

Antebellum Status	Weighted Number	Postbellum Status (Highest Achieved)								
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Slave										
I	509	17[a]	49	197	101	29	52	20[a]	43	1[b]
II	104	1[b]	18[a]	38	18	5	6[b]	2	16	0[b]
III	22	2	0[b]	10[a]	4	3[a]	2	0	1[b]	0
IV	50	0[b]	7	5[b]	27[a]	2	5	0[b]	4	0
V	93	1[b]	13	15[b]	34[a]	3[b]	16	3[a]	7[b]	1
VI	92	0[b]	0[b]	1[b]	19	6	44[a]	0[b]	19[a]	3[a]
Free or child of slaves										
VII	78	0[b]	8	10[b]	10[b]	0[b]	21[a]	0[b]	21[a]	8[a]
Child of slaves (no occupation)	445	11	67	148	111	19	33[b]	3[b]	47	6
(N = 1,392[c])										

Note: For an explanation of occupational status rankings, see Table 1. Notations related to counts are limited to cells with an expected count of at least one observation.

[a] Observed count exceeds expected count by a ratio of at least 1.4:1.

[b] Expected count exceeds observed count by a ratio of at least 1.4:1.

[c] Row totals need not sum to number of cases because of rounding associated with case weights.

with what may be long-term fragmentation of status structures. Second, the pattern is complicated by the appearance of new classes during the postbellum period, such as independent farmers and a black petty bourgeoisie. For instance, low-level supervisors and proprietors (class VII) are drawn disproportionately from entrepreneurial blacks who were once unskilled field workers. Third, the simple cross-tabulation does not address other factors affecting mobility patterns during the postbellum period, including education, migration, and gender.

Table 4 shows a series of multivariate models predicting the prestige of the first job held by sampled blacks after emancipation. Status under slavery has statistically significant effects on status attainment for all of the specifications. Those blacks who were free in the antebellum South had substantially higher status outcomes in the postbellum period than those who had been slaves. Since the magnitude of the ordered Probit estimate does not lend itself to direct interpretation, we plot the relative probability of different status outcomes, holding all other explanatory variables at their sampling means (see Figure 2). The chart shows that former slaves tend to be overrepresented in unskilled

TABLE 4: Ordered Probit Models Predicting Prestige of Initial Occupation (post-1865) for Blacks Formerly Residing in U.S. Slaveholding States

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept[a]	.135	−.038	−.075	−.099
	(.073)	(.082)	(.084)	(.086)
Demographics				
Gender (1 = male)	.395***	.428***	.402***	.394***
	(.051)	(.051)	(.052)	(.052)
Age (in 1865)	.026***	.023***	.022***	.022***
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)
Status under slavery				
Child of slaves	.358***	.569***	.581***	.594***
	(.068)	(.072)	(.075)	(.075)
Free black	.849***	1.104***	1.121***	1.113***
	(.074)	(.074)	(.079)	(.080)
Slave[b]				
Skilled manual	—	1.058***	1.072***	1.049***
		(.083)	(.088)	(.089)
Skilled domestic	—	.747***	.740***	.738***
		(.175)	(.178)	(.178)
Semiskilled manual/ agricultural	—	.215	.250*	.224
		(.136)	(.136)	(.137)
Unskilled nonagricultural	—	.219*	.236*	.252*
		(.131)	(.130)	(.131)
Community embeddedness				
Migration (out of state)	—	—	.112*	.107*
			(.054)	(.054)
Migration (to non-Confederate state)	—	—	.248***	.253***
			(.052)	(.053)
Free blacks × migration from Confederacy	—	—	.028	.031
			(.186)	(.186)
Education[c]				
Formal education	—	—	—	.087
				(.512)
Informal or abbreviated education	—	—	—	.139*
				(.075)
−2 log likelihood	4929.62	4826.30	4811.83	4810.34
Degrees of freedom	5	9	12	14
(N = 1,392)				

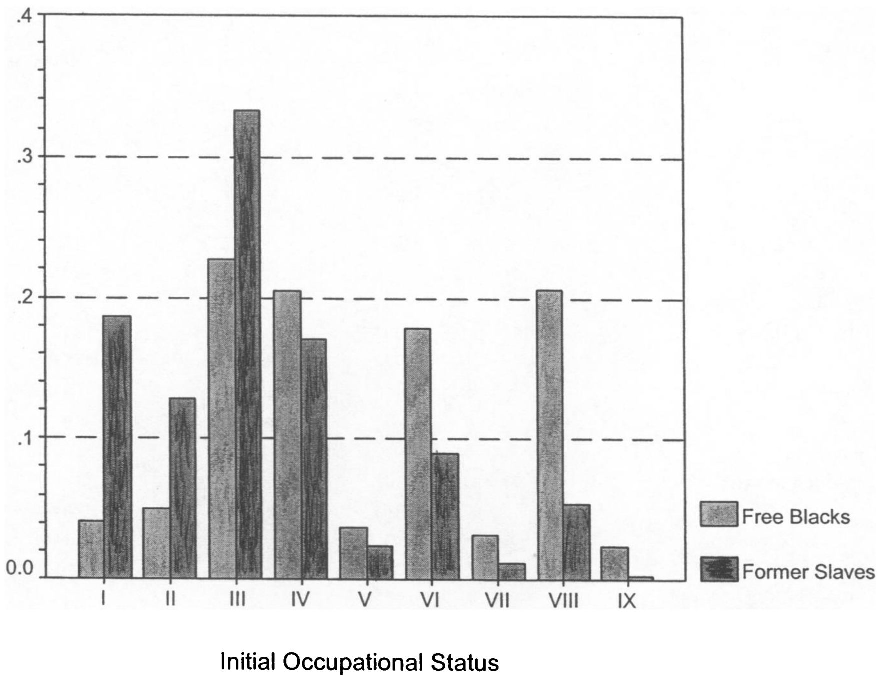
[a] Inclusion of intercept requires that μ_0 be constrained to zero.

[b] Slaves working as field hands (unskilled agricultural workers) are the omitted reference category.

[c] Refers to education received before emancipation; "no education" is the omitted reference category.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$ (one-tailed tests for hypothesized effects; two-tailed tests otherwise)

FIGURE 2: Predicted Probability of Initial Occupational Status (post-1865) for Free Blacks and Former Slaves



Note: Predictions are based on Table 4, model 1. For an explanation of occupational status rankings, see Table 1.

occupations and semiskilled agriculture, while blacks who were free in the antebellum period are overrepresented in all higher-ranking occupations. This finding reflects several advantages on the part of free blacks. They did not face the public identity adjustment that former slaves underwent during emancipation; in other words, free blacks had already established the autonomous self they presented to employers, authorities, and other members of society. Moreover, free blacks were much more likely to have accumulated wealth and belong to communities with relatively powerful social support infrastructures (Horton & Horton 2001).

Children of slaves, who had not yet been assigned an occupation under the slave regime, also enjoyed occupational advantages over slaves who were employed on the plantation or in urban slavery. Children were not exempt from socialization under slavery. They were conditioned to avoid drawing attention to themselves by both whites and parents concerned with their safety (King 1995). But our results suggest that submissive identities presented to planters did not have a strong effect on the children's later status attainment, at least

compared to the effects of enculturation on adults. The childhood effect holds independently of a respondent's chronological age, suggesting that enculturation in slave labor routines per se had adverse consequences that could persist well beyond the antebellum regime. These consequences include lowered expectations for fair labor contracts and submissive work habits (e.g., reluctance to make suggestions or negotiate with powerful others).

Status outcomes immediately after emancipation were also a function of position within the occupational hierarchy of slavery (model 2; likelihood ratio $\chi^2 = 103.32, p < .001$, vs. model 1). Slave artisans and craft workers, in particular, enjoyed high-status outcomes than the majority of slaves employed as field laborers. Since slave artisans were often hired out for wages before 1865, their more favorable status attainment under slavery reflects their relative autonomy and experience with the marketplace as well as their technical abilities (Genovese 1974). Status-persistence effects beyond the antebellum regime were also evident for household servants and those in other slave occupations, reflecting an ordered hierarchy that differentiated the statuses of these occupations from that of unskilled agricultural labor.

Some forms of black migration served to disrupt status-persistence effects (model 3). Interstate migration through the mid-1860s improved status attainment outcomes slightly, while exodus from the former Confederate states offered more promise to former slaves. Both results can be attributed to the damaging role of community embeddedness in reproducing institutional arrangements and their status hierarchies (e.g., ongoing economic dependence on former masters). Notably, there is no significant difference between the effects of emigration on former slaves and on free blacks.

To ensure temporal precedence, we considered the effect of education under the antebellum regime on the first job of respondents after emancipation. As shown in model 4, formal and informal education within the planter regime provided only limited durable benefit in terms of status attainment outcomes (likelihood ratio $\chi^2 = 1.49$, nonsignificant, vs. model 3). This could result from the sporadic nature of such education or the fact that socialization within the older institutional arrangement did not offer the adaptability needed after emancipation. One potential concern with this interpretation of educational efficacy is that some sampled blacks were relatively young during the antebellum regime. Given that the average respondent was less than fourteen years old in 1865, it is reasonable to expect that a substantial proportion of the sample would not yet have reached an age at which schooling might be appropriate. To explore this issue, we split the respondents into two subsamples, one comprising blacks who were ten years old or younger in 1865 ($N = 653$) and one comprising those who were older than ten ($N = 739$). The corresponding models for initial occupational attainment during the postbellum period are shown in Table 5.

The influence of antebellum status and demographic factors is largely consistent across the two subsamples. Under the slave regime, black children were often expected to take on adult work tasks at an early age (Fogel 1989), and so it is unsurprising that status distinctions between young field workers, domestics, and free blacks would mirror those of their adult counterparts.[18] With respect to migration and education, two notable differences are evident between the subsamples. First, interstate migration through the mid-1860s tended to have beneficial status implications for younger WPA respondents but not for older ones. In particular, this finding appears to reflect the stronger embeddedness of adolescent and adult ex-slaves in local communities and social networks. Second, informal and periodic education during the antebellum regime proves effective for those blacks who were ten years old or younger in 1865, but it is not effective for older blacks. For the latter group, it is possible that the benefits of such education — often offered under clandestine circumstances — were counteracted in the late antebellum period by the active hostility of many planters and by efforts at "reeducation."

Examining the highest subsequent occupational attainment of respondents during the postbellum period (Table 6), several important differences from initial occupational attainment can be noted. While the status distinction between free blacks and slaves prior to 1865 continues to have telling effects, status persistence based on the occupational slave hierarchy has weakened considerably. Former slave artisans and craft workers, whose skills appear to generalize across institutional arrangements, have clear status advantages ($p < .001$), but other high-status slave occupations (e.g., household service) offer little durable advantage over common field labor. For domestic and semiskilled workers, the institutional reproduction of the slave regime appeared to be limited by the fact that many of its status distinctions were rooted in particularistic traits (skin tone, deference behavior) that became less salient after emancipation (Stampp 1956).

The other notable factor affecting upward mobility over the life course, but not necessarily initial occupational attainment, is education. As emphasized by DuBois and Washington, schooling — whether rooted in formal college education, vocational training, or informal apprenticeship — was the institutional intervention that could most benefit southern blacks in the long run (see model 4). To be truly effective, however, such schooling had to be decoupled from the older educational mechanisms of the antebellum South (cf. Table 4, model 4), which were ad hoc at best and often rooted in the patriarchal ideology of the planters. Although blacks faced barriers to professional employment throughout the period of the study, education brought a host of cumulative advantages over the life course, including greatly increased access to academic and vocational knowledge as well as a much lower likelihood of victimization in labor contracts. Surprisingly, both formal and informal education affect status attainment with about the same intensity in model 4. A plausible explanation for this equivalence is that formal education

TABLE 5: Models Predicting Prestige of Initial Occupation (post-1865) for Separate Subsamples of Younger and Older Southern Blacks

	10 Years Old or Younger in 1865	Older Than 10 in 1865
Intercept[a]	–.300	–.163
	(.157)	(.147)
Demographics		
Gender (1 = male)	.488***	.392***
	(.078)	(.075)
Age (in 1865)	.035**	.025***
	(.013)	(.005)
Status under slavery		
Child of slaves	.731***	.571**
	(.114)	(.193)
Free black	1.328***	1.005***
	(.160)	(.121)
Slave[b]		
Skilled manual	—	.868***
		(.096)
Skilled domestic	1.076***	.661**
	(.302)	(.230)
Semiskilled manual/ agricultural	.652	.179
	(.548)	(.170)
Unskilled nonagricultural	.285	.313
	(.197)	(.191)
Community embeddedness		
Migration (out-of-state)	.318**	–.022
	(.104)	(.073)
Migration (to non-Confederate state)	.365***	.176*
	(.097)	(.078)
Free blacks × migration from Confederacy	–.120	.203
	(.218)	(.617)
Education[c]		
Formal education	–.026	.233
	(.476)	(3.819)
Informal or abbreviated education	.446**	.029
	(.151)	(.101)
–2 Log likelihood	2186.92	2558.51
Degrees of freedom	13	14
N	653	739

[a] Inclusion of intercept requires that m_0 be constrained to zero.

[b] Slaves working as field hands (unskilled agricultural workers) are the omitted reference category.

[c] Refers to highest level of education: "no education" is the omitted reference category.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

TABLE 6: Ordered Probit Models Predicting Highest Prestige of Subsequent Occupations (post-1865) for Blacks Formerly Residing in U.S. Slaveholding States

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept[a]	1.341	1.322	1.289	.928
	(.092)	(.100)	(.104)	(.117)
Demographics				
Gender (1 = male)	.465***	.446***	.428***	.398***
	(.055)	(.056)	(.057)	(.057)
Age (in 1865)	.017***	.014***	.013***	.018***
	(.003)	(.003)	(.004)	(.004)
Status under slavery				
Child of slaves	.111*	.182**	.191**	.188**
	(.064)	(.070)	(.070)	(.071)
Free black	.827***	.940***	.986***	.903***
	(.077)	(.080)	(.083)	(.084)
Slave[b]				
Skilled manual	—	.781***	.782***	.648***
		(.085)	(.088)	(.090)
Skilled domestic	—	.161	.155	.164
		(.155)	(.155)	(.154)
Semiskilled manual/ agricultural	—	–.075	–.040	–.005
		(.107)	(.108)	(.102)
Unskilled nonagricultural	—	.153	.166	.180
		(.112)	(.111)	(.115)
Community embeddedness				
Migration (out-of-state)	—	—	.029	.042
			(.047)	(.046)
Migration (to non-Confederate state)	—	—	.173**	.114*
			(.057)	(.057)
Free blacks × migration from Confederacy	—	—	–.195	–.224
			(.559)	(.564)
Education[c]				
Formal education	—	—	—	.473***
				(.086)
Informal or abbreviated education	—	—	—	.502***
				(.087)
–2 Log likelihood	5045.58	4999.02	4992.98	4970.92
Degrees of freedom	5	9	12	14
(N = 1,392)				

[a] Inclusion of intercept requires that μ_0 be constrained to zero.
[b] Slaves working as field hands (unskilled agricultural workers) are the omitted reference category.
[c] Refers to highest level of education; "no education" is the omitted reference category.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$ (one-tailed tests for hypothesized effects; two-tailed tests otherwise)

was of highly variable quality during the period of our study (Anderson 1988). Black public schools ranged from Hampton-model institutions — designed to produce more productive agricultural laborers — to black-run schools that were oriented toward academic achievement but often suffered severe resource shortages.

Discussion

For the last generation of blacks born under American slavery, we have shown that the legacy of this institution evidenced both persistence and disintegration in the decades after emancipation. Status distinctions between free blacks and slaves under the antebellum regime continued to influence occupational attainment in the postbellum era. Slaves who were emancipated after reaching adulthood evidenced socioeconomic scars for years to come in contrast with children who only glimpsed the conditions of the slavery regime. But other features of the slave regime disintegrated over time. Except for those who learned skills in manual trades, occupational status within the system of slavery carried few durable occupational advantages or disadvantages in the late nineteenth century.

Mediating factors, such as migration and education, also served to disrupt institutional reproduction after 1865. Emigration was consistently defamed by southern elites as a move away from home to dangerous territory, outside the "protective" arms of paternalism (Horton & Horton 2001). But former slaves who confronted disenfranchisement and economic exploitation in the South often found new opportunities outside the former Confederacy. At the same time, there was often an absence of benefits for those migrating *within* the Confederacy, particularly for black adults. This could be accounted for by a number of contextual factors. By the early 1880s, blacks encountered antivagrancy laws throughout much of the South. New arrivals to a formerly Confederate town could expect to be jailed or forced into penitentiary labor if they failed to immediately find work (Cohen 1991; Williamson 1984). Moreover, blacks who migrated within the South were often those who were most harshly persecuted; they often had to leave home in a hurry, regardless of employment prospects at their destinations (Gutman 1976; Litwack 1979).

Educational opportunities during Reconstruction helped to substantially offset the forced illiteracy of the slavery regime. The success of such education in opening new economic opportunities for freed blacks was all the more impressive considering that formal schooling in the antebellum period had been largely ineffective. Our analysis thus suggests that substantial barriers to status mobility among blacks were produced by the legacies of slavery, but it does not support the contention that mobility processes were equivalent across the two regimes. Rather, our findings imply that mobility among freedmen and

freedwomen depended on many of the same factors determining mobility in contemporary America. Freedmen and freedwomen needed opportunities for education, the resources to move to areas demanding skilled labor, information about job opportunities they could reasonably trust, a childhood free of hard labor and physical abuse, and, ideally, work experience in skilled crafts.

Conclusion

With respect to our canonical explanations of institutional transformation and social status (see Figure 1), our results suggest qualified support for all three. In the immediate aftermath of the antebellum regime, status structures evidenced recalcitrance and developed consistent mappings between categories of inequality under slavery and freedom. This substantiates an account of durable inequality across these regimes (Tilly 1998). Mediating characteristics — such as labor mobility and investment in human capital — also exercised some influence on initial status attainment among the emerging population of free blacks. Consistent with Marxist accounts, these features of the means of production within free wage capitalism became central influences on the mobility regime over time. Simultaneously, institutional fragmentation contributed to loose coupling of social status across the regimes in the long run. While some details of this process are particular to the deinstitutionalization of slavery, the general pattern is one familiar to neoinstitutional scholars. When regulatory changes lead to formal dismantling of one institutional regime, the beliefs and norms that supported that regime often linger, contributing to conflicting expectations and fragmentation of authority systems (Meyer & Scott 1983). Such patterns of "partial" reproduction were reflected in the Reconstruction and Restoration eras during the latter half of the nineteenth century (DuBois 1935).

Naturally, understanding the *institutional* legacy of the antebellum system, as well as the legacy of American slavery for individual blacks, requires consideration of additional levels of analysis. Organizational and political dynamics, in particular, merit consideration. What cooperative organizations — schools, churches, banks, newspapers, and the like — were created in the black community to break patterns of status persistence (DuBois 1907)? To what extent were these organizations supported by federal interventions during Reconstruction? When were organized oppositional tactics employed by southern white elites to counter these efforts? What specific effects did Ku Klux Klan oppression have on black status attainment in the postbellum period (Hadden 2001)? These questions of institutional reproduction at the macro level require careful attention to the ecology of social movements and organizations that filled the niche vacated by the dismantling of the antebellum regime.

Even at the individual level, our findings must be regarded as preliminary. We have considered *intra*generational patterns of status persistence, although many of the more telling legacies of slavery were played out in the first generation of southern blacks born without the onus of forced plantation labor (see Darity, Dietrich & Guilkey 2001 for one long-term study of intergenerational persistence). Our analyses may also benefit from an enriched conception of black identity during the postbellum era, which has been limited to considerations of status change. Lengthier narratives published by ex-slaves and their kin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries present more nuanced views on slavery, freedom, and race relations (Blassingame 1975).

Despite these caveats, our study offers several general insights for students of stratification and social institutions. One is that the tools of stratification research can — and should — be applied to even the most extreme cases in the scale of socioeconomic status. All too often, researchers ignore those individuals located in the bottom rungs of socioeconomic attainment, because they seem difficult to classify in terms of standard occupational scales. However, models of mobility must take these individuals into account, particularly when they constitute a population as formidable as the 4 million African Americans who were emancipated in 1865. Our finding that intragenerational status mobility was limited in the South after the Civil War also has implications for intergenerational mobility. Leaving the South altogether was an easier choice for the first generation born in freedom than for the generation of freedmen and freedwomen, in part because hopes of improving race relations in the South had been destroyed too often during the Jim Crow period (Litwack 1998). The portrayal of freedperson status mobility in this article suggests that the first generation born free witnessed few opportunity structures shaping their parents' careers.[19]

Furthermore, our study shows that mobility models should incorporate legal statuses, such as slave status, since these qualities have long-term effects on occupational attainment. Individuals who were free at the time of emancipation fared much better throughout their lifetime. It remains unclear whether such differences were generated by the improved capacity of free blacks to accumulate resources in the antebellum period, the difficulty encountered by former slaves in constructing a new identity, unobserved variation in skin tone (i.e., color stratification), or the greater likelihood that free blacks had a white or mulatto parent.[20] Revising conventional models of mobility in such cases requires attention to historical detail and opens a dialogue between studies of social stratification and institutions.

Institutional analysis also benefits from such dialogue, since oppressed groups can serve as a crucial impetus to systemic reform, as Marx pointed out long ago. When status persistence displays a qualitative break between institutional regimes, it can lay a foundation for further institutional change. Conversely, status persistence across regimes — accompanied by status-consistent identity

valuation — is indicative of cosmetic institutional change, rather than fundamental reconstruction. In this regard, the issue of institutional persistence is not merely of historical interest, since the efficacy of more recent civil rights movements may be viewed in a similar light. As Tilly (1998) emphasizes, mere attitudinal changes toward discrimination are typically insufficient to alter structured patterns of inequality. Our analysis of postbellum status attainment suggests that investments in human capital (education, moving persons to match work contexts) and fundamental reorganization of workplaces (particularly their categorical distinctions) may generate more effective interventions.

Notes

1. Lincoln's earlier, and more famous, Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 was issued under his war powers and has been questioned from the standpoint of constitutional validity.

2. The distinction was especially ambiguous in those states — Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina — that enacted laws supporting peonage, in which ex-slaves where legally bound to serve a creditor until a debt was paid. Although such laws were unconstitutional from the standpoint of federal authorities, they remained a fact of life for many former slaves in the South.

3. We do not mean to imply that antebellum slave patrols and postbellum white patrollers were identical. Slave patrols were instruments of the law before 1865, whereas night riders and other race terrorists operating after 1865 were criminals. Rather, we suggest that racist terrorist groups and vigilante groups used tactics developed by and drew inspiration from the slave patrols (see Hadden 2001 for a review of this continuity).

4. In using the term *structural-functional,* we do not intend to equate these perspectives on institutional reproduction with the familiar Davis and Moore (1945) theory of inequality. Rather, the accounts are structural-functional insofar as they assume that organizations adopting categorical inequalities from former institutional arrangements continue to be favored in new institutional contexts (Wright 1998).

5. These characteristics can be described more abstractly as control over work locale and control over work time. From a Marxist perspective, a defining element of precapitalist means of production is the absence of one (or both) of these elements among exploited classes. Thus, slaves lack either form of control in the work process, while serfs lack control over work locale (at least, when seen as ideal types). Nominally free wage laborers, by contrast, exercise *some* control on both dimensions.

6. The Freedmen's Bureau, established to ease the transition of blacks after emancipation, reported the development of 740 black schools in the former slave states in 1866, with 90,589 students; by 1870, those numbers had grown to 4,239 schools under the supervision of the bureau, educating some 247,333 students (DuBois 1935).

7. The degree of paternalism's degeneration is a topic of debate. Ochiltree (1998) questions the outright demise of paternalism but agrees with the prevailing conclusion in the literature that paternalism declined dramatically after 1865.

8. Cohen (1991) argues that sharecropping was forced on planters by a freed working class that refused to participate in fieldwork that reminded them of slavery. The sharecropping system was an improvement over slavery in that it gave workers substantially greater freedom over day-to-day work in the field and did not share (at least in theory) slavery's patterns of regulation through physical punishment.

9. Our criterion for identifying states with substantial slaveholding activity is the enumeration of at least 2,000 slaves in the 1860 U.S. census. States meeting this criterion are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, as well as the Indian Territory (Oklahoma). Excluded from analysis are New Jersey (which reported 18 "indentured servants" in the 1860 census), Delaware, Kansas, and Nebraska.

10. Physiological factors, thought by planters to correlate with slaves' physical ability, figured heavily in field labor and skilled labor assignments. An elaborate system of "hand" ratings among planters viewed height, strength, age, and gender as primary considerations (Fogel 1989).

11. There were other reactions, of course, including protest and migration.

12. Migration immediately after emancipation can largely be attributed to attempts to reunify separated families, searches for economic opportunity, and desires to create distance from former owners (Davis 1993; Foner 1989).

13. The effects of migration on status attainment among blacks who had been free within the antebellum regime are more complex. These individuals had more extensive resources and support networks in their southern communities than ex-slaves did and may well have suffered status losses as a result of migration to the North or elsewhere (Woodson 1918).

14. Note that all of these presentations pertain to *social* identity — identity as perceived by strangers — rather than *personal* identity — as perceived by friends and intimates (Goffman 1963). Some ex-slaves may have shown equivocal attitudes toward freedom in public (especially when interacting with whites), while imbuing their new identity with positive valuation in private.

15. Even for postbellum status, the construction of prestige rankings is complicated by several factors. One typical approach to describing occupational desirability — socioeconomic status (SES) scale construction (Blau & Duncan 1967; Wegener 1992) — requires information on education and income that is generally unavailable for the period considered here. Although wages were recorded for industrial workers in turn-of-the-century census records, agricultural and professional earnings cannot be recovered. Educational experience is recorded in the 1900 census, but the corresponding "occupational" classifications in census data are industry-based. Moreover, education and income may be less robust determinants of occupational prestige during Reconstruction and the late postbellum period (Katz 1972) than in modern society.

Despite these differences, correlations between nineteenth-century prestige rankings and twentieth-century SES scales tend to be high (Hauser 1982).

16. Independent farmers still rank below skilled manual laborers along dimensions of income and advancement potential. In 1900, the average black-owned farm earned less than half the annual salary of a single carpenter (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1900). Nonagricultural workers also enjoyed chances for promotion to supervisory status.

17. Note that the comparable postbellum status rank for antebellum class V (skilled domestics) is class IV, not V (which refers to independent farmers).

18. The designation "child of slaves" in the table is formally independent of chronological age (referring to any respondent who had yet to be assigned work duties in the antebellum period) and therefore applies to both subsamples.

19. Note that the influence of pull factors in the North also played a critical role in stimulating migration — the difference in northern and southern opportunity structures created a decisive contrast (Tolnay 1998).

20. The limited evidence available in the WPA archives suggests that one obvious explanation of advantage among free blacks — viewing it as a form of social capital handed down by those who had white ancestry — is not especially viable. In particular, we find no significant association between freedom during the antebellum period and white parentage.

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APPENDIX: Distribution of Sample across Former Slaveholding States and 1860 Census Weights

State	Cases	Case-to-Population Ratio	Case Weight
		Slave Population	
Alabama	102	1:4,265	1.479
Arkansas	131	1:848	.294
Florida	12	1:5,145	1.784
Georgia	159	1:2,907	1.008
Kentucky	42	1:5,369	1.861
Louisiana	73	1:4,544	1.576
Maryland	5	1:17,438	6.046
Missouri	45	1:2,554	.886
Mississippi	196	1:2,228	.772
North Carolina	93	1:3,560	1.234
Oklahoma (Indian Territory)	8	1:313	.109
South Carolina	143	1:2,814	.976
Tennessee	96	1:2,872	.996
Texas	196	1:931	.323
Virginia	69	1:7,114	2.467
		Free Black Population	
All states (pooled)	30	1:7,699	2.577

Note: Figures are reported for sample of blacks with known social status within the antebellum regime.

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