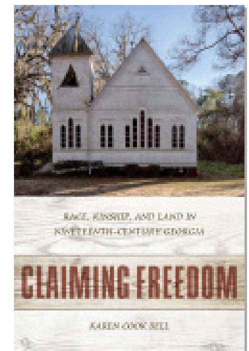
PROJECT MUSE®

2. War and Freedom



Published by

Bell, Karen Cook.
Claiming Freedom: Race, Kinship, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Georgia.
University of South Carolina Press, 2018.
Project MUSE. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/57502.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/57502

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

2

WAR AND FREEDOM

You may make my grave wherever you will
In a lowly vale or a lofty hill
You may make it among earth's humblest graves,
But not in a land where men are slaves

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "Bury Me in a Free Land"

Delia Garlic, a former slave in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana, knew the worst of slavery, including violent punishment and forced separation from family members. In an interview with the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s, she offered an unsparing assessment of her enslavement, saying the "days was hell . . . its bad to belong to folks [that] own you soul an' body."[1] Garlic provided a lucid narrative of her experiences as an enslaved woman. Her language suggests a bound and violently silenced black body where ruthless exploitation was a way of life, and where disorder and human degradation were commonplace.[2] Garlic's narrative captures the imagination precisely because it describes nearly unimaginable horror. The day-to-day experience of 250 years of bondage established interstices of slavery, marginal spaces where enslaved men and women struggled to create an identity that transcended their status as chattel property. Enslaved men and women employed these marginal spaces to their strategic advantage before and during the Civil War. This chapter interrogates how the chaos of the Civil War created a dynamic, layered backstory for self-emancipating men and women who sought to free themselves and their children from bondage in lowcountry Georgia and for the ways in which former slaves pursued economic justice through landownership.

This chapter argues that in lowcountry Georgia, self-emancipating men and women found in their experiences and emancipatory struggles the sources of inspiration for their own intellectual praxis. As political actors, they took actions during the war that were driven by the desire for freedom but were often constrained by

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

wartime policies and physical terror. Freedom not only provided new and "socially liberated modes of being-with-others," but also created new opportunities to redefine community and construct a liberated identity.[3] But what exactly were the meaning and prospects for freedom in wartime lowcountry Georgia? And what were the meaning and prospects for a liberated identity?

MARGINAL SPACES OF FREEDOM

Opportunities for freedom in lowcountry Georgia were influenced by the natural landscape. The waterways, marshlands, and swamps provided transport and refuge from cruel masters, mistresses, and overseers, even if only temporarily. For a few, the waterways brought the city of Savannah within striking distance. Rice and sea island cotton plantations in lowcountry Georgia were positioned near the region's five large rivers: the Savannah, Ogeechee, Altamaha, Satilla, and St. Mary's, which were vital to the growth of rice and served as the focal point for settlement. The rice industry placed men and women in agricultural and nonagricultural occupations such as ricemilling and gristmilling. Additionally men worked as carpenters, brickmasons, and blacksmiths, and they staffed ferryboats, tugboats, drays, and steamboats, which sailed down the coastal rivers to transport rice and cotton to Savannah.[4]

The task labor system enabled many slaves to acquire property as they traded and sold the surplus of their gardens to each other, their masters, itinerant peddlers, and other consumers. Their experience with a market economy represented a hidden transcript of resistance as they negotiated the marginal spaces of freedom.[5] Women's marketing activities provided a measure of economic influence within the slave community. They allowed women to establish an economic link to the markets in Savannah. River and coastal trading vessels provided important access to trade centers, which women used to supplement their standard of living. Furthermore, as consumers and producers, women traders resisted the legal constraints of their mobility.

Women's access to markets also provided avenues for escape on the eve on the Civil War. At the age of eighteen in 1856, Jane, a slave of cotton and rice planter Charles C. Jones of Liberty County, Georgia, freed herself by stealing a boat and crossing the Ogeechee River, weaving around ponds, creeks, and drainage canals to the forests of oak and the cypress swamps, and on to the Savannah road. Wearing "fine-ear and finger-rings," the corpulent, self-confident African American woman traversed the thirty miles from Jones's plantation to the city of Savannah and renamed herself Sarah.[6] Jane had not been in the city more than a month before she was discovered. She had passed herself off as a slave from the Georgia upcountry who was permitted to hire her own time, and she found employment at $6.50 a week doing housework. A favorite house servant, Jane had run away several times before. The Jones's concern regarding her influence over other slaves on the plantation led to her confinement in the Wright slave broker's yard, from which she and

members of her family from the Jones plantation were transported out of the city of Savannah and sold to an owner in Macon, Georgia, for $4,500.[7]

The experiences of Jane and other fugitive slaves underscored the tensions between what the enslaved thought and what they lived in the years preceding the Civil War. The act of running away marked the establishment of a dialectical relationship with the environment in which captive men and women lived. In this context, freedom in lowcountry Georgia emerged from the military realities of the Civil War. President Lincoln's Anaconda Plan, which imposed a naval blockade along the southeastern coastline, led to Union control of coastal territory from Virginia to Florida. The passage of the First Confiscation Act in August 1861 recognized fugitive men, women, and children who reached Union lines as "contraband of war" whose labor could be used to support the war effort.[8] As early as 1862, when Federal ships threatened the Georgia Sea Islands, which comprised the counties of Chatham, Liberty, McIntosh, Camden, and Glynn, enslaved men and women escaped in the midst of what historian Clarence Mohr refers to as refugeeing.[9] Through refugeeing, planters began relocating their slaves farther inland as the Union Navy blockaded the Sea Islands. In 1860 the enslaved population of the Sea Islands was 34,314.[10] By the end of August 1862, the number of persons classified as contraband of war had increased to over 500 on St. Simons Island.[11] Escapes were more numerous in 1862 than at any other period during the war.[12]

GENDER, WAR, AND FREEDOM

In lowcountry Georgia, the chaos of the war created a diegetic, layered backstory for a large segment of enslaved men and women in this region who experienced de facto freedom by escaping in the first two years of the war. These freedom narratives describe men and women with a keen sense of the binary structure of slavery and freedom. Despite what historian Stephanie M. H. Camp refers to as women's spatial illiteracy, women in lowcountry Georgia demonstrated a familiarity with the landscape and waterways and expressed a determined will to use flatboats and "dug-outs" to facilitate escape.[13] Union forces landed on Tybee and Warsaw islands in the final weeks of 1861, and by the end of March 1862 the entire Georgia coast came under Federal control. Gendered strategies of escape brought women into spaces where they reconceptualized the meaning of political leadership. In one poignant escape, a seventy-year-old Georgia woman used the marshlands to conceal her twenty-two children and grandchildren. Securing a flatboat, the emancipating fugitives drifted forty miles down the Savannah River and reached a Union gunboat to claim their freedom.[14] Under the terms of the Second Confiscation Act, of July 17, 1862, which freed slaves coming under Federal control, this grandmother and her children and grandchildren were free and could be used "in any military or naval service" to suppress the rebellion.[15] Such service included serving as cooks and laundresses and providing other forms of labor support.

The Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, broadened the scope of the Second Confiscation Act by sanctioning the enlistment of free African American men in the Union Army. However, the Proclamation had very little immediate impact on freeing slaves in lowcountry Georgia because many had taken advantage of the chaos caused by the war to free themselves prior to 1863. General David Hunter's General Order No. 11, issued on May 9, 1862, had declared freedom to all slaves living in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina.[16] Although President Lincoln rescinded Hunter's proclamation two weeks later, Hunter's order furthered the cause of freedom among enslaved men and women. On the Manigaults family's Hermitage and Gowrie plantations in Chatham County, Georgia, not only were the fields neglected during the war, but Louis Manigault reported frequent escapes of men and women who "piloted boats through the creeks, swamps, rivulets, and marshes" and who assisted the "Yankees in their raids."[17] Dolly, Manigault's washer for eight years, whom he listed as an "invalid," was among those who ran away in April 1863 while living with the Manigault family in Augusta.[18]

General David Hunter expanded on his freedom proclamation by recruiting fugitive slaves for the Union Army. Believing he was authorized to enlist "fugitive slaves" as soldiers in June 1862 by virtue of an order from Brigadier General T. W. Sherman to "employ all loyal persons offering their services in defence of the Union," Hunter aimed to recruit 50,000 black soldiers for the suppression of the Rebellion.[19] From Hunter's perspective, the experiment of arming fugitive slaves had been a "complete and marvellous success." The men were "sober, docile, attentive, and enthusiastic."[20] Hunter's description aimed to counter negative sentiments regarding the ability of black men to fight on par with white Union soldiers. Employing fugitive slaves as soldiers in 1862 was a radical departure from Union contraband policy, which placed black men in servile positions to white officers. Rufus Saxton, who served as the superintendent of contrabands in Beaufort, South Carolina, wrote disparagingly that "all the officers servants are negroes [and] large numbers are also employed in the Navy Department as sailors servants." Saxton supported the recruitment and enlistment of fugitive slaves into the Union Army and Navy as soldiers and sailors and commenced organizing the Second Regiment, composed of black soldiers.[21]

In March 1863, Federal policy mandated the conscription of Sea Island men by Union forces, which obligated these men to fight with the all-black regiments raised in South Carolina and Georgia.[22] During June 1863, military officials inaugurated a special draft for the Third South Carolina Volunteers on Ossabaw Island, Fort Pulaski, in Georgia, and in Fernandina, Florida, on Georgia's southern border.[23] In several instances, black men working on fortifications were impressed by Union Army commanders for enlistment against their will. At Fort Clinch in Florida, Major George Strong of the First South Carolina Volunteers impressed into service Jeff Houston, Peter Williams, Jake Forrester, Sam Major, and John Wanton. The men

were working as military laborers on the fort, and under General Order No. 24 they were exempted from the draft because they were employed working on permanent fortifications. Captain Alfred Sears, army engineer at Fort Clinch, found the "kidnapping" of black men barbarous conduct.[24]

The Third South Carolina Volunteers combined with the newly formed Fourth and Fifth South Carolina Volunteers to form the Twenty-First U.S. Colored Troops (U.S.C.T). The need for soldiers augured changes in recruitment and enlistment. Major General J. G. Foster, commander of the Department of the South, expressed the need for all able-bodied men in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia to bear arms.[25] The Twenty-First U.S.C.T. numbered slightly over three hundred men until December 1864, when its ranks were filled by additional men who had followed General William Sherman to Savannah.[26]

Civic militarism in military camps was based on exclusive discourses that excluded women.[27] For instance, the language of military posters were grounded in the language of black masculinity. The presence of women and children behind Union lines was masked in one such poster, which contained the statement "all Negroes brought inside the lines at this place, will immediately on their arrival here, before any papers are drawn up, enlisting them as soldiers, be reported at the Provost Office in person."[28] Such military recruitment posters embodied the microtechniques of power, such as laws, policies, and organizational norms and practices, to marginalize the presence of black women.[29] Women challenged the invisibility prescribed by military policies by taking individual and collective action as escape transformed them into emancipating "soldiers" of war and freedom.

An example from the Georgia Sea Islands is illustrative. In late December 1863, thirteen fugitives from McIntosh County, Georgia, boarded the U.S.S. *Fernandina* in St. Catherine's Sound. The leader of the group, a twenty-seven-year-old fugitive named Cain, had escaped from William King's plantation. Accompanying Cain was twenty-two-year-old Bella and her six-year-old son, Romeo; twenty-five-year-old Lizzie and her four children (Joseph, Sam, Eve, and Martha, age twelve years, four years, two years, and five months respectively); and thirty-two-year-old Sallie with her four children (Fannie, Joseph, Emma, and Ben, who ranged in age from eleven years to seven months). Early in 1864, Cain left the *Fernandina* to rescue his relatives from the vicinity of Sunbury, Georgia. He returned on January 7, along with ex-slave Sam, bringing forty-five-year-old Grace, her five children (Judy, Elizabeth, Phoebe, Victoria, and James), her son-in-law Charley, and her grandchildren (Arphee, Virginia, Clarissa, and Edward).[30] Free blacks from Darien, Georgia, reached the Union lines together with those who were escaping slavery.[31] Approximately two-thirds of the escapees were women and children, who were mustered into service.[32] Behind Union lines, women served as cooks, nurses, and seamstresses. As the case of Susie King Taylor illustrates, women also served as educators to soldiers of the U.S.C.T. Literate former slaves like Susie King Taylor and her husband,

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

Sergeant Edward King of Darien, Georgia, performed much of the educational work in military camps and established a model of educational leadership, which allowed men to begin or expand their formal education.[33]

Attempts toward liberation in many areas of the lowcountry were characterized by violence. Confederate soldiers met the advance of Union pickets by retaliating against African Americans in the vicinity. In one instance, Confederate soldiers from Fort Chapman in South Carolina burned a plantation home on Hutchinson Island near Savannah and murdered and terrorized over one hundred men, women, and children in the area.[34] These frequent skirmishes between Union and Confederate forces in the lowcountry placed men, women, and children in precarious positions and underscored the virulent nature of warfare. Confederate soldiers, responding to drum beating at night on the north end of Hutchinson Island, opened fired with the expectation that Union soldiers were on the island. Union soldiers had left the island a week earlier, and malevolent Confederate forces killed fifteen men, women, and children.[35]

During the war, diseases also afflicted enslaved men, women, and children. The cycle of life and death continued unabated as enslaved women gave birth and unyielding diseases consumed young and old. At Hermitage and East Hermitage plantations, seven women gave birth during the early years of the war.[36] Manigault, who served as medical assistant to Confederate surgeon Joseph Jones, reported deaths from the following conditions at Gowrie and East Hermitage plantations from 1861 to 1864: dropsy, sunstroke, cancer in the stomach, and dysentery. The most severe afflictions occurred in the years preceding the Civil War when a virulent cholera epidemic swept through Gowrie plantation.[37] On the field and behind Union and Confederate lines, camp fevers, typhus fever, and common fevers were the most prevalent wartime medical conditions. This issue led S. P. Moore, surgeon general of the Confederate States of America, to task Jones with instituting extended treatment of fevers and studying the relationship of climate and soil to disease.[38]

As the early years of the war brought coastal regions under Union control, the coasts of Virginia and Louisiana also served as havens for emancipating men and women. On March 13, 1862, Congress passed legislation prohibiting the employment of Union soldiers to return fugitive slaves to former masters. The Second Confiscation Act contained a provision referred to as the Militia Act, which freed the mothers, wives, and children of freed men whose labor and service were used to suppress the rebellion.[39] The act declared "forever free" the mothers, wives, and children of black men who had belonged to disloyal masters and then rendered service to the United States, but only if the family members were also owned by disloyal masters—a qualification that excluded the families of most border-state black soldiers.[40] The federal government did not resolve this exclusion until March 3, 1865, when Congress, by joint resolution, provided for the freedom of the wives

and children of all men serving in, or subsequently mustered into, army or navy service.[41]

The Militia Act provided the official imprimatur for soldiers to claim freedom for their wives and children during the war. African American soldiers of the reorganized, Union-supported First Louisiana Native Guards seized horses, carts, and mules in St. Bernard Parish for the purpose of transporting men, women, and children from the surrounding plantations to the city of New Orleans. In one instance, five soldiers demanded the freedom of their wives from loyal planter Mr. E. Villerie in August 1863.[42] Similar demands for freedom occurred in other areas of the South, particularly in the border states of the Union. In Kentucky, Mary Wilson, the wife of Lewis Wilson, of the United States Colored Infantry, claimed her freedom under the Militia Act from master William Adams by leaving his plantation and setting up residence in the city of Lexington. Adams reclaimed Mary with the assistance of the city constable, "tied her in a Slaughter house, . . . and inflicted upon her naked body a severe beating and bruising.[43] Through these instances of on-the-ground relations, the political struggles of husbands and wives demonstrate the myriad challenges they faced in claiming freedom during the war.

From 1862 to 1865, the issue of wage labor emerged as the focus of military officials in the transition from slavery in wartime Louisiana. During the era of slavery, enslaved women in southern Louisiana labored on plantations, worked as domestics and market women, nurtured their children, loved their husbands, and endured episodes of physical and mental terror. The enslaved female population of southern Louisiana, which comprised twenty-three parishes in 1860, consisted of 43,898 women between the ages of fifteen and sixty.[44] During the Civil War, as Union forces occupied much of the region, women expected and demanded fair payment for their labor. Their expectations were often at odds with those of military officials and their former masters and mistresses.

The case of Dinah is illustrative of the conditions women faced in Union-controlled New Orleans. Dinah and her three children were denied fair compensation for a day's work performed for Mr. Elin in New Orleans. According to Dinah's complaint, "Mr. Elin told her he would pay her what was right. He gave her three [children] ten cents each and refused to pay more."[45] Dinah received one dollar for her labor.[46] A sample of twenty-two registers and payrolls of freed people employed on plantations in Terre Bonne Parish from November 1863 to February 1864 indicate that the agency hired 139 women, 111 men, and 72 children to work on plantations.[47] As during their enslavement, government officials valued women's field labor above the domestic work women performed for their families.[48] In her seminal study of black women's labor, Jacqueline Jones has demonstrated that newly emancipated women did not have the luxury of choosing between different kinds of work. Women with children found that "economic necessity bred its own kind of slavery."[49]

In her study of Virginia, Mary J. Farmer argues that the Freedmen's Bureau believed that supporting "black women was more acceptable than supporting black men. Black men had to find employment or face persecution as vagrants."[50] But the court records from Louisiana's Bureau of Free Labor indicate that vagrancy charges were levied against a significant number of women, as well as men. Women filed complaints for nonpayment of wages and resisted vagrancy charges, which military officials implemented to control newly freed people without regard to gender. Women such as Elizabeth White, Henrietta Henderson, Caroline Starks, Charlotte Ann Hall, and Amelie Candole, who filed complaints in New Orleans for nonpayment of wages, are representative of the ways in which women actively pursued their own objectives for fair compensation and economic justice.[51] In comparison, emancipated women in the Sea Islands of lowcountry Georgia often labored behind the lines of the Union Army and Navy without recompense as contraband of war. Freedom brought its own kind of reward in January 1863 as women who were skilled market women received remuneration for goods supplied to the Union Navy.[52]

The arrival of General Sherman's army in Georgia provided an additional opportunity for men and women to claim their freedom. The capture of Atlanta in September 1864, following Confederate general John Bell Hood's evacuation, led Sherman to propose to General Grant a destructive march across Georgia to force Confederate capitulation.[53] As Sherman marched through central Georgia in November 1864, 19,000 men, women, and children left the plantations to follow his army.[54] Before the capture of Atlanta, Sherman had received some indication of what he might expect in the execution of his plan to cut and burn a path up to sixty miles wide through central and southern Georgia to Savannah. Wherever he encountered African Americans, a considerable following of men, women, and children joined in what they considered a march for freedom.[55] Sherman's Special Field Order No. 120, issued on November 9, 1864, endorsed the use, in the march through central Georgia, of "able bodied Negroes" who would constitute a "pioneer battalion" to repair and reinforce roads as they followed the advance guard.[56]

General Sherman divided his army into two wings: the right wing, commanded by Major General Oliver Otis Howard, and the left wing, commanded by Major General H. W. Slocum. According to Slocum, "At least 14,000 of these people joined the two columns at different points on the march, but many of them were too old and infirm, and others too young, to endure the fatigues of the march, and therefore were left in the rear. More than one-half of the above number, however, reached the coast with us. Many of the able-bodied men were transferred to the officers of the Quartermaster and subsistence departments, and others were employed in the two corps as teamsters, cooks and servants."[57] While Slocum's description masks the presence of women and children, the metalanguage of his description suggests that not only men, but also women and children, were among the young and the "too old and infirm."

The large number of men, women, and children following the Union Army led to drastic measures at river and creek crossings to reduce the number of refugees. One Union officer illustrated these measures by writing:

> "When the lower and less fruitful lands were reached, the embarrassment and military annoyance increased. This was more particularly felt in the left wing, which was then the only one exposed to the attacks of the enemy. Losing patience at the failure of all orders and exhortations to these poor people to stay home, Gen. Davis (now commanding the Fourteenth Corps), ordered the pontoon bridge at Ebenezer Creek to be taken up before the refugees who were following that corps had crossed, so as to leave them on the further bank of the unavoidable stream and thus dis-embarrass the marching troops. . . . Those who could not swim as well as those who could swim, were drowned. The loss of life was still great enough to prove that . . . it was literally preferable to die freeman rather than to live slaves."[58]

Sherman defended the actions of General Davis as "militarily necessary," thus reconciling emancipating men and women's moral quest for freedom with his desire to reach the sea. Northern newspapers reported that hundreds of refugees drowned or were reenslaved.[59]

General Slocum's left wing was under constant harassment from Confederate forces led by General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry corps. The Confederate general believed this harassment led Union forces to abandon African Americans at Ebenezer Creek.[60] It was impossible to determine the number of African Americans who followed the army. Some joined for brief intervals, became discouraged, and returned to their homes. Many found it difficult to associate freedom with the harsh measures applied by General Sherman's troops on their way to the sea. Frequently the inherent racism of many Union soldiers gave a grim view of what the future promised. When they encountered such treatment, African Americans soldiers of war and freedom turned away from the jubilant march and awaited an uncertain future.[61]

The Civil War devastated much of the state of Georgia. Sherman's campaign aimed at destroying the physical, economic, and cultural landscapes of the region. Widespread destruction of physical structures, including hundreds of miles of railroads, and an economic depression, inherent in the ravages of war, left men, women, and children destitute and in need of food, clothing, and medical care.[62] Sherman's army arrived outside the city limits of Savannah on December 12, 1864, after traversing through forty-two counties in the state. On January 16, 1865, Sherman issued General Field Order No. 15, which reserved the Sea Islands and abandoned inland rice fields for former slaves. Sherman and other Union officers were under investigation by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton for acts of cruelty against African American refugees. The general issued Field Order No. 15 after meeting

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

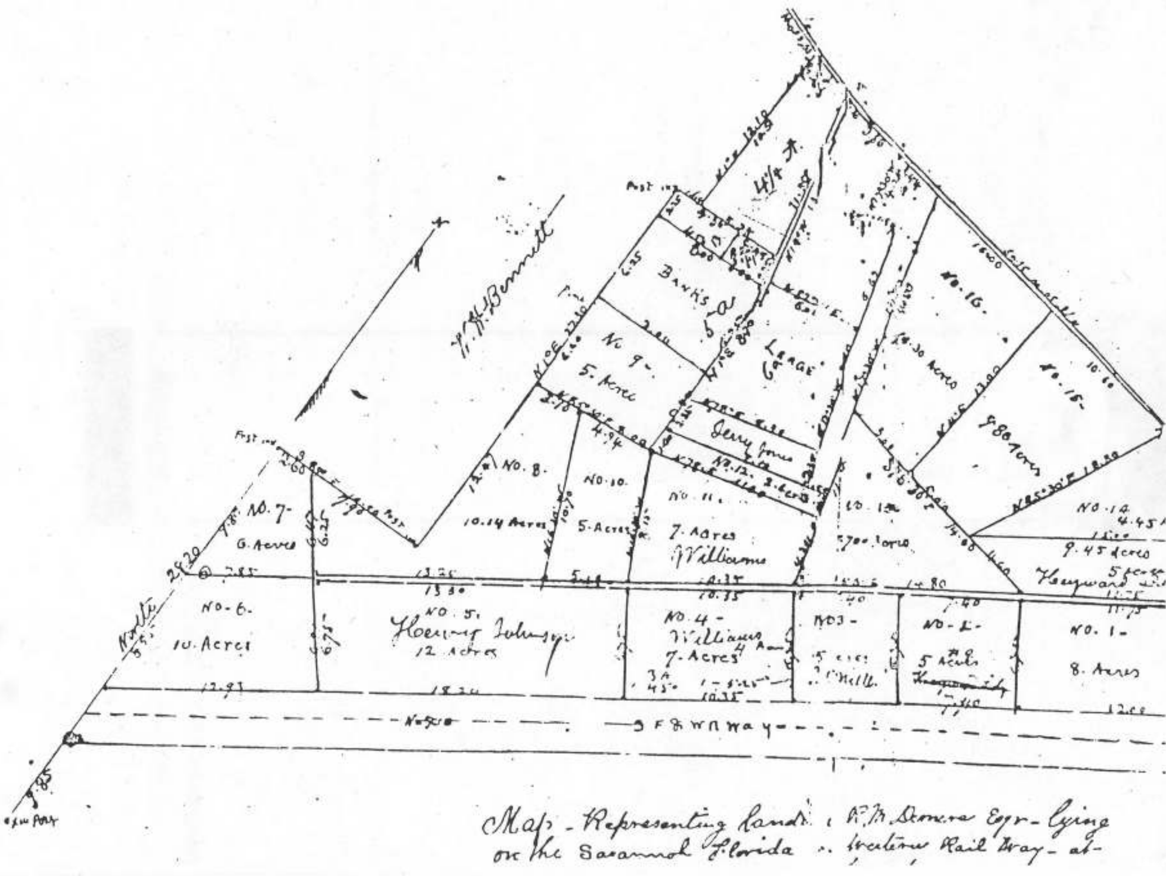
with African American religious leaders in Savannah. It represented Sherman's effort to recast himself while simultaneously jettisoning the newly emancipated from the lines of the Union Army. Men and women who were heads of households received from five to forty acres of "abandoned land" under Sherman's order.[63] President Andrew Johnson later reversed Field Order No. 15, but former slaves in Georgia and other parts of the South continued to believe that the federal government would provide forty acres of land as compensation for enslavement.[64]

Sherman's march represented the end of emancipation and the beginning of African American freedom. Although the city of Savannah was physically intact, it was desolate in spirit and desperately poor. Thousands of African American refugees, including a significant number of women, wandered aimlessly, in need of food, shelter, and clothing. Sherman sought help from General Rufus Saxton in Beaufort, who was already overwhelmed by 15,000 refugees.[65] Saxton reported, "Every cabin and house on the islands is filled to overflowing."[66] He suggested that soldiers from a black regiment protect the islands of St. Simons in Georgia and Edisto in South Carolina, which would also serve as refuge for the homeless. Sherman accepted the suggestion as meritorious, especially for women and children; he believed that most, if not all, able-bodied men could be put to work by the quartermaster corps.

LESS THAN FORTY ACRES

The subjugation of the lowcountry by Union forces during the winter of 1864 provided the impetus for the region's metamorphosis into "abandoned" land settlements for emancipated individuals. Federal officials classified plantations as abandoned if the owner was voluntarily absent and engaged in aiding or encouraging the rebellion. Rufus Saxton, who later became supervisor of Freedman's Bureau affairs in Georgia, advised freed men and women, in a meeting held at Second Baptist Church in Savannah, to locate abandoned lands where they could work and support themselves.[67] Freed men and women who had followed Sherman's trek into Savannah undoubtedly joined with those who returned to plantation lands and carved out family plots. These plots of land represented shared places of intersecting relations, culture, and language that reinforced preexisting kinship and community networks.[68]

Landownership was problematic from the beginning and necessitated a demarcation in land titles. Sherman's land policy did not confer permanent title. Instead, Captain A. P. Ketchum, adjutant general of the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia, issued possessory titles that placed the recipients in a state of economic purgatory by granting them ownership of the crops they produced but not ownership of the soil. Permanent title to the abandoned lands hinged on presidential confirmation, a condition that Sherman outlined in Special Order No.16.[69] The assassination of President Lincoln in April 1865 made permanent land titles untenable. Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, pursued a lenient Reconstruction policy that would



This 1883 map shows the subdivision of land on the Ogeechee Neck. During the 1870s and 1880s African Americans on the Ogeechee Neck purchased between four to ten acres of land near Miller's station and at Wild Horn plantation, providing the foundation for the town of Burroughs. Subdivision of Land, William Miller's Plantation, 1883. Records of the Chatham County Superior Court, Savannah, Georgia.

allow the original owners to return and claim rights of ownership. Johnson's Amnesty Act of May 29, 1865, offered a pardon and the restoration of all rights, including right to abandoned property, to Southerners who swore an oath of allegiance to the Union. Additionally each former Confederate state had to ratify the 13th Amendment. Under Johnson's plan, all of the former Confederate states were readmitted, including Mississippi, which refused to ratify the 13th Amendment, and South Carolina, which refused to repudiate its Confederate war debt.[70]

Despite the defeat of the Confederacy, planters hoped to reestablish what historian Allan Kulikoff termed "domestic patriarchy" by exerting control over their land and former slaves. John Cheves, the owner of the 2,014-acre Grove Point plantation, applied for restoration to his land in July 1865. Cheves had not only abandoned his plantation but had also engaged in building torpedoes for Fort McAllister and had employed his slaves in maintaining the fort. By the time of his return, twenty-five families had received possessory titles to 245 acres of land (see Table 3).[71] Planters began returning to plantation districts during the flooding and draining of rice fields in the summer of 1865. The Ogeechee plantations, like those on Skidaway Island, had been spared the wartime destruction that had occurred on several Savannah River plantations. Union officials had controlled and operated several of the plantations in the district. They established their headquarters in the plantation house at Wild Horn during the attack on nearby Fort McAllister, and also maintained a signaling station at the rice mill on Grove Point plantation.[72]

On Grove Hill plantation, owned by William and Robert Habersham, fifty families received title to 641 acres (see Tables 4–5). Grove Hill consisted of 1,100 acres, of which 200 acres were highland. Jacob Shellman, Charles Brown, and Billy Williams, land recipients at Grove Hill and Grove Point, became petitioners in the articles of incorporation for the town of Burroughs in 1898.[73] On nearby New Hope and Shaftesbury plantations, owned by William H. Gibbons, the land was also subdivided. Nineteen families received possessory title to 213 acres at Shaftesbury.[74] Both Grove Point and Grove Hill plantations were located on the Ogeechee Neck, an area that also contained the Wild Horn and Vallambrosia plantations. Former slaves on Wild Horn and Vallambrosia did not receive possessory titles but rented the land from the Freedmen's Bureau, paying one-quarter of their crop as rent.[75]

TABLE 3. Families Who Received Land Titles in 1865, Grove Point Plantation, John R. Cheves

SETTLER	NUMBER OF ACRES	NUMBER IN FAMILY
Pat Taylor	20	3
Thomas Glover	15	6
Dinah Glover	15	3
Francis Singleton	15	4

SETTLER	NUMBER OF ACRES	NUMBER IN FAMILY
Peter Singleton	30	7
Rosana Edwards	10	3
Ned Richardson	30	9
Toby Taylor	5	2
Richard Lachison	15	5
Amy Wilkins	5	1
Billy Williams	5	1
Susie Wright	5	3
Catsey Cheves	5	5
Sambo Greene	10	3
Nebison Barnard	10	2
Lucian Footman	15	3
Titus Neal	10	2
Collins Larrie	15	6
Lucy Barnard	15	5
George Sella	20	4
Richard Bennett	10	6
London Lowman	10	3
David Rollabid	10	4
Major Young	15	2
Anderson Grant	20	3

SOURCE: Register of Land Titles Issued, Savannah, RG 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

TABLE 4. Families Who Received Land Titles in 1865, Grove Hill Plantation, William Habersham

SETTLER	NUMBER OF ACRES	NUMBER IN FAMILY
John Cuthbert	30	4
Lucy Wilson	10	4
Peter McKnight	25	4
Samuel Howard	20	4
Davis Williams	20	3
Wally Large	10	3
Jermiah Jones	40	6
Aliok Campbell	25	4
Daniel Morton	25	9
Scott Butler	30	4
Hannah Butler	5	3

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

Table 4 continued

SETTLER	NUMBER OF ACRES	NUMBER IN FAMILY
Pompey Jackson	4	1
Dandy McNeal	10	5
Tina Jones	5	5
Titus Quarterman	5	5
Sambo Mack	5	5
March Marshall	10	5
Mary Bush	30	3
S. Davenport	10	3
Charles Brown	5	7
Collin Williams	5	2
Jacob Shellman	10	3
Ben Telfair	10	6
Joseph Waltower	6	3

SOURCE: Register of Land Titles Issued, Savannah, RG 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

TABLE 5. Families Who Also Received Land Titles in 1865, Grove Hill Plantation, William Habersham

SETTLER	NUMBER OF ACRES	NUMBER IN FAMILY
Polly Burroughs	11	2
Jane Jones	6	3
Dick Jones	10	4
William Joiner	25	6
Caesar Malone	15	3
Billy Williams	10	3
Henry Emory	5	6
January Hamilton	10	2
Abraham Jacob	10	5
Jane Hargrage	10	3
John Broker	10	5
Caesar Mallard	10	3
Sandy Flowers	30	4
Augustus Johnson	10	5
Peter Sweet	10	2
Sleigh Dunham	10	3
George Agner	10	5
Toby Roberts	10	5

SETTLER	NUMBER OF ACRES	NUMBER IN FAMILY
William Coleman	15	2
Susannah Grovllon	10	2
Hannah Davis	12	4
Gabriel Roberts	5	4
John Campbell	5	3
May Anderson	10	7
Joe Monroe	12	6
Adam Habersham	5	3

SOURCE: Register of Land Titles Issued, Savannah, RG 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Note: Tables 4 and 5 are similar in nature but based on two separate documents in the records.

Bureau enumerations for the islands south of Sapelo Island reveal the fluid conditions within which both agents and settlers negotiated. Both time and distance remained intrinsic weaknesses in the land grant process. In August 1865, the Reverend William F. Eaton, whose jurisdiction included the islands from Sapelo south, found it difficult to survey the land claims of the freed men and women within his jurisdiction due to the distance between the Sea Islands and Savannah. Eaton's figures, according to historian Paul Cimbala, may not accurately reflect the actual settlement of the islands.[76] Nonetheless, Eaton reported 352 African Americans residing on Sapelo, 606 on St. Simons, and 60 on Cumberland. Farther north, on St. Catherine's and Ossabaw islands, the reports of the Reverend Tunis G. Campbell revealed a similar discrepancy. In December, Campbell reported 369 freedmen claiming four thousand acres of improved and unimproved land on St. Catherine's; on Ossabaw there were 78 freedmen claiming two thousand acres of land.[77]

African Americans on Skidaway Island and Butler's Island adopted similar strategies. Under the leadership of Ulysses Houston, who served as pastor of the Third African Baptist Church in Savannah, African Americans on Skidaway Island carved out plots of land on eight plantations and received possessory title to a total of 2,875 acres under Sherman's order.[78] They elected Garrison Frazier as governor, and also elected a sheriff and three inspectors. Frazier and Houston were among twenty African American religious leaders who met with Sherman to advocate for the establishment of oppositional communities. The formation of oppositional communities occurred through nationalist ideology and processes, when a shared ideology and a sense of common destiny converged to challenge both the promise and the failure of federal land policy. Concomitantly, on Butler's Island, fifty-six African American families occupied land that they claimed under Sherman's field order. In many instances, the abandoned lands they claimed had not been registered

with Bureau agents. On both Skidaway and Butler's, African Americans turned inward to reestablish community and kinship ties on land where their enslavement harbored transcendent memories of oppression. These communities did not represent an escape from reality, but they were rational attempts by African Americans to manipulate the hostile environment in which they lived. Maintaining their occupancy of land where their forced labor had produced millions of pounds of rice underscored the belief in both a natural and specific right to the land.[79]

Sherman's order affected barrier islands that were on the periphery of time and space. For almost a century, African Americans labored on Georgia's six largest offshore islands, producing rice and Sea Island cotton within the confines of an existentialist environment. The marshlands and tidal rivers surrounding Cumberland, Jekyll, St. Simons, Sapelo, St. Catherine's, and Ossabaw islands separated the islands from the mainland, reinforcing their collective identity and consciousness.[80] This ideological landscape also included a host of smaller barrier islands and inland rice districts, such as Skidaway, Butler's, Argyle, and Whitemarsh islands, where Sherman's order altered the spatial parameters of former plantations. In this context, the Sea Islands and the inland rice districts became a nexus for newly freed slaves, many of whom not only maintained ancestral ties to plantation lands, but also believed that they had a natural right to the land. The majority of men and women who returned to coastal Georgia had worked the same land during slavery. They had loved, borne children, and buried their dead on this land, and had developed a spiritual, if not religious attachment to it.[81]

The enduring vitality of African American culture in the lowcountry stemmed from the employment of absentee plantation management, which provided enslaved African Americans with a greater degree of autonomy than existed on cotton and sugar plantations. Consequently African Americans developed an attachment to the land that found reinforcement in consanguineal relationships. The demographic majority held by the slave population in the region was an additional factor that shaped the ideology of African Americans. In 1860 the region had a population of 34,314 slaves and 23,184 whites, most of whom resided in the city of Savannah.[82] This demographic majority shaped the worldview of former slaves in the immediate postwar period as they sought to gain control of land and their labor.

As African Americans gained social and economic spaces in the lowcountry, they also created myriad political networks to promote political advocacy and self-governance. The political channels established to protect and influence communities in the lowcountry included mustered militias and organized governments. African Americans on the Ogeechee Neck established the largest settlement of freed people in the Ogeechee district, receiving title to 886 acres of land.[83] Slavery and emancipation served as the prism for nationalist unity, as evidenced by the election of a committee of three on each plantation to represent the communities. The functional authority of these committees included serving as "cabinets of advisors" to

the Freedmen's Bureau in Savannah. In addition to selecting representatives, freed people also organized the Ogeechee Home Guards, which provided freed men with an important collective political identity. Moses H. Bentley, under the auspices of the Union League, had formed the Ogeechee Home Guards, which at its peak in 1867 mustered in two hundred men. The Union League encouraged progressive political action by counseling African Americans to insist on "setting up for themselves to secure homesteads."[84]

For many African Americans, the barrier islands were important symbols of cultural memory and identity. African and African American knowledge systems had created and maintained the technologies of rice production for decades. In addition to its value as the principal plantation cash crop for lowcountry Georgia, rice was valued as a market item and a dietary staple in the years following emancipation. In areas such as the Ogeechee district and Sapelo Island, obtaining proprietary interest in land suitable for cultivating rice for the market, as well as for home consumption, was a significant expression of their freedom during the first decade following emancipation.[85]

Rice cultivation figured prominently in the lives of slaves and planters during the antebellum period. Constrained by geography, rice plantations clustered at a distance of between five and twenty-five miles from the sea and required the maintenance of an elaborate irrigation system and a threshing mill. They required investments from $50,000 to $500,000 at the outset and required year-round attention. By 1862 the Sea Islands had been abandoned by planters, who considered it vital to protect their valued property by forsaking rice production as Union forces gained control of nearby Tybee Island, and patrolling the defenseless, exposed Sea Islands in Georgia. Prior to the Civil War, enslaved African Americans living within the six counties in the region had annually produced 51,686,141 pounds of rice.[86]

During the process of restoration, planters were forced to adjust to the reality that former slaves possessed keen knowledge about the cycles of rice production and were now in a position, as freed men and women, to manipulate the lowcountry landscape and subvert land restoration to fulfill their economic objectives. Rice plantations functioned as "huge hydraulic machines," which necessitated the construction and maintenance of floodgates, trunks, canals, banks, and ditches. They were massive engineering achievements that slaves had erected and had maintained for nearly a century.[87] In addition to coordinated labor, rice cultivation also required skill. Workers began preparing the soil for cultivation in January and continued until early March. They planted the seeds in straight-line trenches four inches wide and eleven inches apart. After flooding the fields for eight to nine days, workers drained the water, and the fields were allowed to dry for ten days. Referred to as the "sprout flow," this initial flooding resulted in the sprouting of seeds.[88] A second flow, referred to as the "point flow," occurred for eight to ten days. This flooding and draining of fields occurred repeatedly until the final flooding, referred

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

to as the "harvest flow," in September. Gathering rice required the use of sickles; rice workers grasped a handful of rice stalks with the left hand and swung the sickle with the right hand in a rhythmic pattern. After harvesting, they threshed the rice at the threshing mill to remove the seeds. Workers pounded rice used for home consumption with mortars and pestles and winnowed it in reed baskets made in West African fashion.[89]

During the early months of the Freedmen's Bureau's existence, its policies supported the distribution of land to former slaves. Rufus Saxton, as inspector of plantations and settlements and the Freedmen's Bureau assistant commissioner, moved expeditiously to place agents in the Ogeechee district and on St. Catherine's and St. Simons islands to execute the land provisions of General Sherman's field order. Saxton, who directed one of the first emancipation laboratories in the South Carolina Sea Islands, sympathized with the plight of former slaves and articulated policies that reinforced the nationalist ideology of lowcountry African Americans.[90] During his tenure as assistant commissioner, 40,000 freed men and women on abandoned plantations in the lowcountry received possessory titles to plots of land ranging from five to forty acres. However, along the Georgia coast, the number of African American families receiving land in the official register did not conform to the reality of ad hoc settlement and emancipation in the rice and cotton fields. According to the official records, 242 African Americans claimed 1,645 acres, receiving possessory titles from 62 land grants on Ossabaw, St. Catherine's, Sapelo, and St. Simons islands.[91]

By the end of 1865, most of the planters in the district had received a presidential pardon and "informal possession" of their lands. Robert Habersham received a special pardon from President Johnson in September 1865. Although planters had been given possession of their land, the bureau maintained that freed people had control over the crops. By year's end, former slaves had produced a rice crop, which they marketed despite the constraints of the postwar environment. They insisted on selling their rice in Savannah as opposed to selling it directly to agents of the Bureau, who imposed a mill toll and a rice tax.[92] The tide of federal land policy turned quickly at the end of 1865. Major General Oliver Otis Howard, commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, countermanded Sherman's order following Johnson's nullification of the Bureau's enabling land provisions on September 12, 1865. Although planters' lands were returned to them, the Bureau maintained that former slaves had control over the crops they produced and could not be removed until after they marketed their harvest. Although Bureau agent Captain A. P. Ketchum recognized the economic rights of freed men and women, reorganizing the labor supply to provide discipline and control became the Bureau's first priority. In very important ways, the Freedmen's Bureau served as the agent of dispossession because of its role as mediator in the restoration process.[93]

THE OGEECHEE TROUBLES

Adverse changes in the contract labor system, which resulted in less autonomy and more direct supervision from new managers, overseers, and their guards, propelled freed men and women to force a distribution of land. In 1867 the owners of Prairie and Southfield plantations decided to rent their lands to Major J. Motte Middleton and Captain J. F. Tucker. Tucker also became part owner of John Cheves's Grove Point plantation. Middleton's expulsion of men who refused to sign labor contracts under his terms immediately engendered hostility and bitterness on the part of black laborers. According to William Burroughs, they also "felt dissatisfied with anyone having possession of the lands because they had the plantation pretty much to themselves."[94]

On Saturday, December 31, 1868, two years after Johnson rescinded General Field Order No. 15, the Ogeechee troubles erupted. The *Savannah Morning News* provided sensationalized accounts of the five-day revolt, which at its core was more than a struggle over land. It was an ideological struggle to test the breadth and the limits of economic democracy.[95] Dissatisfied with the imposition of labor contracts and the transgression of what had become a sacrosanct doctrine on the Ogeechee Neck, the leaders of the revolt, Solomon Farley, Paul Campbell, Jack Cuthbert, and Captain Green, began mobilizing the Ogeechee Home Guards, a military and protective unit. Moses H. Bentley, under the auspices of the Union League, had formed the Ogeechee Home Guards in 1866. The Union League encouraged African Americans to secure homesteads, counseling them to insist on "setting up for themselves."[96] Union League meetings provided black men with an important collective political identity that served to reinforce their ideology. The officers of the Union League's Ogeechee district included Farley as president, Campbell as vice president, Cuthbert as assistant vice president, and Sam Howard as secretary. Union League meetings had been held regularly on Grove Point plantation since 1866. However, in February 1868 Major Middleton disallowed the meetings, effectively eviscerating a viable political organization on the Ogeechee Neck that promoted political and social activism. Middleton's actions forced the men to meet in secret, which ultimately contributed to the escalating hostilities.[97]

The cycle of the "insurrectionary'" events continued on New Year's Day. Deep in the Ogeechee woods, just before sunrise, two hundred members of the Ogeechee Home Guards divided into military companies and armed themselves with muskets and bayonets. The men had putatively secured weapons in Savannah months before the revolt. Plantation managers had also provided muskets to "trustworthy" African Americans on the Ogeechee Neck to drive off the ricebirds.[98] As the men marched toward the plantations, they met George Baxley, one of Middleton's overseers, who had gone to investigate the commotion in the woods. The men lurched toward

Baxley, surrounded him, confiscated his weapons, and struck him with the butt of a musket. Baxley recovered after the men had left, found a canoe at the Ogeechee River, and made his way to Savannah. By dint of threats, the insurgents also forced Middleton to leave the Ogeechee Neck and used their weapons to intimidate and force others who did not support their objectives to flee. The strategic objectives of the men and women did not include murder. Their primary objective was to force the former landowners and their agents to abandon the Ogeechee Neck. The rebels also excoriated obsequious black guards like Fortune Brown and George Bunyan, who were reluctant to join the rebellion. As the insurgents traveled from the Ogeechee plantations to the Atlantic Gulf train station, a strategic rallying point, they proclaimed that "no white man should live between the two Ogeechees."[99]

Despite the pandemonium that engulfed the Ogeechee Neck, the actions of the men and women were purposeful. They established their headquarters at Middleton's house on Southfield plantation, constructed a fortification at Peach Hill, and established a watch on the main roads. In the late evening on New Year's Day, Farley issued the "Ogeechee Manifesto." This manifesto was more than an attempt by a semi-literate freedman to justify his resistance to local authorities; it was an apocalyptic plea for recognition of the economic rights of former slaves, as indicated by the document's last statement "Ogeechee Until Death."[100] Freed people from nearby Bryan and Liberty counties, as well as from Augusta Road on the outskirts of Savannah, had joined what the *Savannah Morning News* proclaimed the Ogeechee insurrection. The paper's supercilious verbiage and stinging condemnations of the participants fed rumors of a mass movement of former slaves to the Ogeechee Neck and contributed to the belief that the men and women had perpetrated mayhem and murder.[101]

The objective of complete autonomy over the region seemed feasible to most freed people and a few of Savannah's black religious leaders, whom the insurgents invited to begin the process of negotiation and settlement. The African Americans in the district constituted an overwhelming majority: in 1870 they numbered 4,201 as opposed to a white population of 411, a decline of two from the 413 in 1860.[102] In other areas of lowcountry Georgia, freed men and woman had already achieved the autonomy that African Americans on the Ogeechee Neck desired. At Belle Ville on St. Catherine's Island, for instance, the Reverend Tunis G. Campbell had established an autonomous community of African Americans and appointed himself governor on the basis of the promise of Sherman's order. After troops removed Campbell, he purchased a 1,250-acre plantation in McIntosh County and established another black settlement.[103]

The possibility that the Ogeechee revolt could succeed and spread entered the minds of white Savannah residents as white families who were reportedly "driven out" boarded the Atlantic Gulf railway or sailed down the Ogeechee Canal for Savannah. The railway's Miller's Station, located near the land of planter William H.

Miller, became an important rallying point. A distance of only two to three miles separated the plantations on the Ogeechee Neck; hence, freed people maintained an interplantation network. Through this network they maintained close associations that strengthened the bonds of family and community. This bond was particularly evident on January 2, when Savannah sheriff James Dooner arrested Solomon Farley at New Hope plantation. As president of the district's Union League, Farley was viewed as the leader of the insurrection. When authorities attempted to transport him to Savannah, hundreds of blacks, in military formation and armed, rallied at Miller's Station. This show of force led to Farley's release, but it also prompted civil authorities to seek federal military assistance.[104]

The tranquil marshlands and tidal rivers that extended across the Ogeechee landscape were manifest symbols of rice production and important symbols of the revolt. During the five days of unrest, the insurgents secured possession of thousands of bushels of rice from Grove Hill, Grove Point, Prairie, and Southfield plantations. The acquisition and disposition of the rice crop became a cogent display of their freedom to exist as independent "rice planters," an appellation rice workers believed reflected the apotheosis of their life and labor.[105]

During the revolt, the insurgents received consul from Aaron A. Bradley, a labor activist. Bradley, who escaped slavery in Georgia during the 1830s, had studied law in Boston and positioned himself to serve as an advocate for African Americans. When slavery ended, he settled in Savannah and became an ardent political agitator for dispossessed freed men and women. Bradley, in fact, had been charged with using seditious and insurrectionary language in 1865, when he led the first campaign in Chatham County to retain the land promised under Sherman's order. The plangent and iconoclastic oratory of Bradley reinforced the Ogeechee resistance campaign and set the stage for the penultimate stage of defiance.[106]

During the final two days of the revolt, prayer meetings, which had accompanied the violence from the outset, intensified as word of military reinforcement spread. These meetings helped the people to sustain faith in their objectives. They were augmented by drumming, which in the culture of West African society summoned the spirits of their ancestors to appear. Drumming was also an integral part of the "ring shout" that followed prayer meetings and represented a continuing African cultural manifestation among lowcountry African Americans. Shout songs like "Time Drawin' Nigh (I See the Sign)" provided group affirmation that their campaign for land, autonomy, and control could be sustained.[107]

The inexorable sequence of events culminated on January 5 when the Ogeechee men and women received word that U.S. military forces had arrived in Savannah. The arrival of troops exacerbated anxiety and division among the insurgents that intensified as discussion of surrender emerged. Nonetheless, possible surrender did not result in the capitulation of the majority of African Americans on the Ogeechee Neck. In a final attempt to resist authorities, freed men and women led by Solomon

[23.137.249.165] Project MUSE (2024-11-21 18:48 GMT)

Farley, Captain Green, and other Union League officers destroyed the bridge over the Ogeechee River and sabotaged the plantation mansions at Grove Hill, Grove Point, and Southfield. But the flurry of activity did not quell the division within the Ogeechee Home Guards. In anticipation of the army's arrival, fourteen men and one woman surrendered to authorities at the Oglethorpe Barracks in Savannah.[108]

With tensions building, Sheriff Dooner, after meeting with Savannah mayor Edward C. Anderson, requested military assistance from General George G. Meade, military commander of the Georgia district. Meade emphatically refused the request, stating that "only after men and means had been exhausted" could the military act.[109] After forming an ineffective *posse comitatus,* Sheriff Dooner on January 5 surrendered his duties to military officials. As a result of this action, the Sixteenth Infantry Regiment prepared to disembark for the Ogeechee country. Commanded by Major Thomas W. Sweeney, the unit consisted of Companies A and I from Augusta and Companies B and C from Atlanta. The soldiers' duties were to restore the peace and assist civil authorities in arresting the insurgents. During the five days of unrest, Savannah judge Philip M. Russell Jr. issued 150 warrants against the participants, charging them with "insurrection against the State of Georgia, robbery by force, robbery by intimidation, assault with intent to murder and larceny."[110] On January 6 at one o'clock in the afternoon, companies A and I, led by Major Sweeney, arrived on the Ogeechee Neck and gained possession of the plantations. For nine days, the soldiers aided civil authorities in arresting 141 individuals. By January 15, the entire Ogeechee Neck had been abandoned. Those who were not arrested crossed the river to Bryan County in fear of later retribution from civil authorities.[111]

The Ogeechee troubles occurred just at the moment when Radical Republicans in Congress were deciding the state's fate. The Georgia House of Representatives, early in September 1868, had expelled twenty-eight of the thirty-two recently elected black representatives on the grounds that the right to vote did not imply the right to hold office. This affront against the Reconstruction Act of 1867 prompted Republican leaders in Washington to reevaluate the status of Georgia. Thus Georgia remained imperiled during the Ogeechee revolt.[112]

In the pretrial proceedings, which began on Friday, January 15, and lasted for fourteen days, the case of the *State of Georgia v. Captain Green* became a litmus test for determining whether insurrection charges could be sustained. As spectators filled the gallery and lower hall in the Chatham County courthouse, the twenty-five prisoners sat on the south side of the courtroom, "hard looking" and filled with trepidation.[113] While Captain Green awaited his fate, Solomon Farley, who could not be located by authorities, had fled the county. Defense attorneys Henry S. Fitch, a state-appointed counsel; James Johnson, a Savannah attorney who voluntarily provided his services; and A. W. Stone, whose presence was requested by interested parties in Savannah, represented Captain Green and the other accused men and

women, who consistently denied participating in the revolt. Their refusal to confess heightened the atmosphere of the court's proceedings.[114]

In presenting their case, the prosecuting attorneys for the state, Henry R. Jackson and Alfred B. Smith, relied on the testimony of Sheriff Dooner, his deputy Julius Kaufman, Captain Tucker, and Major Middleton. Other persons who were driven out of the Ogeechee country provided collateral testimony. The four witnesses for the defense—Jack Cuthbert, a drillmaster for the Ogeechee Home Guards; Thomas Benedict, an officer in the Union League; and two plantation owners, William Burroughs and William Miller—provided counterfactual testimony that relegated the Ogeechee insurrection to a dispute over labor contracts.[115] Miller, who maintained amiable relations with the African Americans on the Ogeechee Neck, had not lived on his plantation for three months prior to the violence. The sympathetic testimony of both Burroughs and Miller cast a moderate light on the revolt, but did not influence the decision of Judge Russell. On the last day of the proceedings, "black spectators filled the court gallery as white spectators congregated around the main door" to hear Judge Russell commit Captain Green and 116 of the insurgents to trial. Twenty-six African Americans who were not identified by the state's witnesses were released.[116]

The public had already decided the fate of the Ogeechee prisoners, but most believed that Governor Rufus Bullock would issue a pardon. Throughout his term as governor, Bullock had made extensive use of his pardoning powers and had also encouraged Radical Republicans to reimpose military rule in Georgia after the expulsion of the black representatives. Whites in Savannah believed that Bullock and Aaron A. Bradley had prearranged the trouble in the Ogeechee district. Supporters of a pardon also viewed a trial as an unnecessary expense.[117]

Although public outcry over the Ogeechee troubles had dissipated by the start of the trial on May 12, 1869, interest in the fate of the prisoners remained salient in Savannah. The lead prosecuting attorney for the state, C. W. West, secured guilty verdicts against Captain Green, Dandy McNeil, Ned Edwards, Jack Cuthbert, Thomas Benedict, and Nick Bailing for insurrection, robbery by intimidation and assault with intent to murder in connection with the Ogeechee riot. Larceny and assault charges were levied against the other participants, who invariably were found not guilty in the absence of corroborating testimony. Judge William Schley, in a climate of profound disdain, sentenced the six men charged with insurrection to five years of hard labor in Milledgeville. Hard labor in the state prison ended two months later. In July, Governor Bullock issued amnesty proclamations, which absolved the men of all charges.[118]

During the 1870s, the new Republican agenda increasingly catered to northern businesspeople and southern political interests, and this combination resulted in the abandonment of an economic platform for freed men and women. The issuance of enormous grants of land and government bonds for railroad development

in the West and the development of a program capable of capturing white support in the South meant that tangible economic restitution in the form of land was not forthcoming. The failure of the Ogeechee men and women to force a distribution of land led them to devise an alternative strategy to secure a measure of economic independence.[119]

The wartime and postwar experiences of men and women in lowcountry Georgia provide valuable insights into both slavery and the Civil War. Viewed from an antebellum perspective, the escape of many black Georgians underscores the importance of freedom and family ties and simultaneously casts doubt on the depth of black commitment to the paternalistic ethos as they claimed freedom for themselves.[120] During the Civil War, Delia Garlic and many enslaved men and women pursued their freedom in marginal spaces where public and private history unfolded.[121] The myriad challenges they faced during and after the war represented distilled expressions of freedom and a desire for economic justice.