“SHE HAS HER COUNTRY MARKS VERY CONSPICUOUS IN THE FACE”: AFRICAN CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN EARLY GEORGIA

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Much of the existing literature on black life during the era of slavery has either given secondary consideration to Georgia or emphasizes the development of the African American community during the antebellum era. Examining the impact of the growth of the slave trade to Georgia and the ways in which North American, Caribbean, and African histories intersected in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, my dissertation demonstrates that Georgia is an ideal area to study the cultural and community development of black Atlantic peoples. Georgia's black society grew and transformed as it faced the harsh realities of labor in a growing agricultural economy and met the challenges of a chaotic American Revolution and the formation of a new nation.

The early history of slavery in Georgia reaches far beyond the boundaries of the American South, this project utilizes an Atlantic perspective in reconstructing African life, community and culture. Plantation records, missionary tracts, medical books, ship records, travel and slave trader journals, court proceedings, and newspapers all from the southern lowcountry, the West Indies, Africa, and Europe are used in examining the structure of Georgia’s enslaved communities. This study finds that West African philosophy and culture transformed to meet new challenges in Georgia and remained a
critical foundation for black society throughout the slavery era.

The dissertation also finds that Africans crossed ethnic and racial barriers in building their communities. Georgia’s frontier presented an atmosphere that was brutally oppressive, yet its fluid boundaries offered unique opportunities for enslaved persons to push for cultural autonomy and freedom. From enslaved Africans’ perspectives, building communities in Georgia meant finding an advantageous position in a multiethnic, multiracial, multilingual society where most could only envision them as slave laborers. As they adjusted to enslavement, the pressures of their condition spawned unexpected allies and enemies as they built intracommunal relationships and formed connections with diverse groups of Indians and Europeans. The transformation of African culture and community in early Georgia reveals a tumultuous path marked by settlement, power struggle, and war that connected West Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the American South.
Coolness, then, is part of character, and character objectifies proper custom. To the degree that we live generously and discreetly, exhibiting grace under pressure, our appearance and our acts gradually assume virtual royal power. As we become noble, fully realizing the spark of creative goodness God endowed us with--the shining ororo bird of thought and aspiration--we find the confidence to cope with all kinds of situations. This is àshe. This is character. This is mytic coolness.

Robert Farris Thompson

Flash of the Spirit African and Afro-American Art & Philosophy
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

BRIDGING GAPS BETWEEN HISTORICAL FIELDS, PERSPECTIVES AND THEMES

Savannah Gazette of the State of Georgia
October 20, 1785

.Absented...from the subscriber...A Negro woman, named Betty, of a yellow complexion, about 30 years old, has her country marks very conspicuous in the face, speaks tolerable English, and understands two or three different African languages; she wore oznabrig clothes, was formerly the property of Mr. Francis Lewis, with whom she lived in the Indian nation.¹

Samuel Beecroft

When thirty year old Betty escaped from Samuel Beecroft’s Georgia plantation, he placed an advertisement in the Gazette of the State of Georgia offering a reward to anyone who could deliver Betty to the Gaoler in Savannah. The advertisement’s detailed description of Betty presented a remarkably diverse cultural background that was common among black Georgians. Born in Africa, Betty wore the scarification marks of her ethnic group and spoke two or three African languages, as well as, what Beecroft described as “tolerable English.” She escaped from the plantation with Castalio and Jerry, both American-born slaves, who were sold to Beecroft by Maryland slaveholders. Betty’s escape reveals the cultural adaptation, transformation, and exchange that took place in

¹Lathan Windley, Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790 vol. 4 Georgia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 134-135.
Georgia, where her diverse African cultural heritage was matched with other African, American, and West Indian cultures. In addition to these developments, Beecroft noted in his advertisement that Betty had “lived in the Indian nation,” providing a glimpse of the complex relationships that developed among Africans and Indians. Towards a clearer understanding of Georgia’s African population in the years preceding the antebellum period, historians must follow Betty’s example and cross boundaries that sometimes separate historical fields, perspectives and themes.

American history’s preoccupation with marking the point when Africans became African-Americans has created a gap in the history of the early period. Scholars accepted limited studies of the peculiar institution and slave labor rather than demanding a more sophisticated understanding of African life and culture. Historians, adopting economic frameworks, sought numbers and statistics, including information regarding the amount of labor blacks completed, slave diets, and mortality rates. The results of this perspective varied. Studies provided the hard core facts necessary for accurate reconstructions of black life in the era, but made slow progress in recovering enslaved blacks from the dehumanization of slavery. Historical writing cast Africans as tools of the colonial and national economies. Thus, historians had trouble discussing early black communities and cultures and made few revelations concerning how Africans interpreted their world, shaped major historical events, and worked towards improving their condition—they were left with no voice. Studies of American history grew without considering African perspectives in shaping broader interpretations of the slavery era, its methodology and theoretical framework. Traditional periodization, watershed events, key figures and
conceptualization of major themes, including liberty and freedom, were rarely challenged. Scholars overwhelmingly accepted black marginalization and left them on the peripheries of historical analyses.

Ulrich B. Philips’ 1918 publication *American Negro Slavery*, provided one of the earliest examinations of the impact of slavery on African American peoples. Raising a great deal of controversy and discussion, Philips described slavery as a benevolent, patriarchal, yet unprofitable institution that ultimately benefitted those it enslaved. Kenneth Stampp offered a destructive challenge to Philips in 1956 with his book, *The Peculiar Institution*. Utilizing a more extensive list of plantation records, Stampp offered numerous examples of abuse and exploitation of the enslaved population. The model for treatment of slaves shifted from beneficiaries to victims of a profitable economic system. One year later, Stanley Elkins carried Stampp’s victimization theory further by comparing plantation life to circumstances in German concentration camps, he concluded that the institution had a devastating impact on the enslaved, forcing *him* into the familiar characterization of Sambo, the shiftless, comical Negro with the best interests of the master at heart, at all times. While these theories offended many scholars, they paradoxically raised new questions about slave life, community and culture.

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Slavery historiography, particularly during 1970's and 1980's, witnessed historians, dually perturbed and enticed by the previous decades of slavery research and influenced by the explosive Civil Rights Movement, quickly moved to undo victimization theories and samboism. This decade was marked by the introduction of studies that emphasized family, religion, cultural retentions and transformations, and race relations. Path-breaking work, which examined American slavery in the context of world history and the social construction of race built a more complex theoretical framework for examining early America. David Brion Davis’ *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* placed American slavery in the context of world history, concluding that the “peculiar” institution was similar to other forms of human bondage and servitude throughout the world.\(^3\) Winthrop Jordan addressed the uneasy development of race relations and racial identity in *White Over Black*. Critically viewing European culture and language backgrounds, he reveals a heritage that symbolically connected blackness with evil,丑陋 and filth while white represented purity, beauty and cleanliness. Thus whites were prepared to de-value African people before the two groups came into contact. This ethnocentrism created white supremacy, black inferiority, and justified African enslavement. Jordan connects racism to the development of American antislavery sentiment. The Revolution marked a turning point in race relations as whites began to question the scope of freedom. A debate on the humanity and nature of the African race ensued and as a result, whites, strongly

\(^3\)David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966). Perhaps Davis’ work would not be considered part of Atlantic history studies, however it is valued here as early encouragement for Americanists to connect slavery, and later the enslaved, to a larger world community.
influenced by Thomas Jefferson, drew a clear and line between the races, adding credence to prior claims of white supremacy—the African race was inferior in mind, body, and soul.4

The notion of white superiority was certainly racist and unjust, but there were some real general differences among the races that all early Americans recognized. Jordan’s work provided students of slavery with a valuable lesson on racism’s origins, but failed to look deeply at the differences in the races that led whites (and probably blacks) towards ethnocentrism. The European background that shaped American culture and cultural interpretations of blackness had been uncovered. How was African culture transferred? Answering this question was critical in giving voice to the enslaved.

Applying an anthropological perspective, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price developed a model for analyzing African culture and its impact on new world encounters and the creation of institutions that supported everyday life. Reflecting on the words of historian C. Vann Woodward, “so far as their culture is concerned, all Americans are part Negro,” the authors contend that cultural borrowing was a two way street.5 Culture and institutions in slave societies overlapped, linking persons slave and free through domestic and familial ties, to larger religious, economic institutions and thus creating and holding together a community. The Mintz-Price thesis presented scholars with a conceptual

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framework for studying African American culture, but offered little analysis or research to test the model. Once historians agreed that the African “old world” had a significant impact on the shaping of new world cultures, the thesis needed to be tested. Historians gave new life to slavery studies with the most in depth examinations of the development of community and culture among enslaved blacks, particularly in the antebellum era. John Blassingame and Charles Joyner marked a distinction between enslaved persons’ world of work and their private lives. In the slave quarters, blacks formed unified communities, heavily influenced by their African heritage. Albert Raboteau and Margaret Washington Creel found that African religious traditions were transformed in a “peculiar slave religion” that emerged in spaces where they were not under the careful watch of planters and overseers. Sterling Stuckey also saw a critical link between Africa and community development, not only in the slavery era, but as blacks shaped their communities in freedom.6

After two decades of research, historians had successfully demonstrated that African Americans in the slave era were crucial to the development of the nation; and participated in most major events, from settlement and exploration to the Civil War era. Important gains were made towards reconstructing the evolution of community and culture among the enslaved and the impact of African heritage on these developments. Historians transformed slavery studies tremendously, but the limitations of their progress were found in a tendency to generalize, creating a dangerously monolithic African American community placed overwhelmingly on large plantations in the antebellum South and dominated by examples of enslaved males. The next placed greater emphasis on specialized studies. How did slavery differ according to region, regime, time period? What is the significance of the African American free population and what are its origins? In this phase of the development of early African American history, scholars sought variation and diversity in the slavery era’s African American communities.  

As historians asked more questions about cultural development in enslaved communities, the evidence they uncovered also suggested a need for closer attention to Africa. Having limited studies to the antebellum period, scholars searched for more information about the first two hundred years of African enslavement in America. The lowcountry presented the ideal setting for examining africanisms, race relations, and the

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early establishment of slavery. Peter Wood’s study of African Americans in colonial South Carolina showed the uneasy relationship of white freedom and black slavery in colonial America, especially in a predominantly black region.⁸ Wood carefully outlined the colony’s uniqueness, found in planters and slaves significant ties with the West Indian colony, Barbados, which had a long history of slavery. Wood made several other outstanding contributions with his study. First, he contended that white slavers held preferences for particular Africans demonstrated by the high percentage of African brought to work on the colony’s rice plantation who originated from rice producing areas in West Africa. Second, *Black Majority* marked the strong influence of African heritage on the development of South Carolinian culture, from the Gullah dialect, to naming practices, religion, and resistance. Wood argued that unlike Virginia, blacks in South Carolina were not spread out over a wide area allowing more cultural retention and ultimately more social and economic independence as well. As Africans began to use their skills to assert their independence, whites became increasingly uneasy and tense, especially considering their minority status.

Wood described black runaways as “a common emblem” of the mounting tensions between whites and blacks; and other acts such as poisoning, arson and projected uprisings were demonstrative of black resistance to white attempts to tighten social control. Black resistance in the colony reached its apex in September of 1739 with the Stono Rebellion. Growing numbers of slaves moved through the colony murdering whites, destroying property all the while shouting “Liberty.” The uprising terrified the

⁸Peter Wood, *Black Majority*
white minority forcing nearly all to take up arms and some to run from their homes to form larger groups for better protection. In contrast to previous descriptions of the rebellion, Wood revealed that the Stono Uprising was not easy defeated and kept whites in a state of fear long after it was suppressed. This event was a turning point not only in black demands for freedom, but in white demands that such liberties be curtailed.

For many years, since the work of Peter Wood, South Carolina stood out as an exceptional case of American slavery with its Caribbean connections, strong Africanisms, and unique landscape of rice plantations. As the body of literature on southern slavery grew, it was dominated by studies of the Chesapeake and South Carolina, areas conquered, settled, and ruled by the British. Historians avoided regions with strong French, Spanish, and American Indian presences. Georgia was among the overlooked. Studies of early Georgia mainly assumed a clear British and German perspective, offering limited discussions of slavery and Indian society.

In Georgia, Betty Wood found a unique colony, similar to South Carolina in crop production and Atlantic and African heritage, yet it was established under laws prohibiting slavery. *Slavery in Colonial Georgia* provided the first detailed examination of black life in the colony before the antebellum period. Wood’s close attention to the debate over legalization of African slavery, the development of the plantation economy, slave law, life,

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and labor created a space in the historiography for Georgia’s unique development. She produced more studies of the region adding gender and religion to a growing body of work. With the road to Georgia paved a bit smoother, more historians ventured into this frontier that seemed the center of black lowcountry resistance, the African past, unusual cultural autonomy, and surprising alliances between Africans and select groups of Indians and Europeans. Paradoxically the fluid social and geographical boundaries surrounded a core of brutal subjugation that pushed Africans into the harshest conditions of enslavement known in North America.

Often analyses of enslaved populations do not challenge traditional periodization, use of historical documents, or theoretical framework. Assuming outdated contributionist models, historians search for exceptional black experiences that fit neatly within the parameters of what historian Nathan Huggins called, “the master narrative of American history.” The experiences of the enslaved black majority are marginalized by placing them in “separate worlds.” Like the slaveholders, historians silence black voices as critical sources in reconstructing the past, thus avoiding direct criticism of long standing ideals of American freedom and liberty. Huggins states that historians view,

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American history from even before the Revolution as an inexorable development of free institutions and the expansion of political liberty to the broadest possible public. Like the framers of the Constitution, they have treated racial slavery and oppression as curious abnormalities--aberrations--historical accidents to be corrected in the progressive and upward reach of the nation’s destiny.\textsuperscript{11}

Historian Nathan Huggins warned Americanists about the limitations of studies of the “slave community” and challenges scholars to move African American life and culture from the margins of historical analysis.\textsuperscript{12} While providing a clearer understanding of enslaved life, “black community” studies ultimately do not give Africans a central role in shaped the broader society. In short, few if any Americans lived in isolation of peoples from other backgrounds, hence America has always been marked by diverse communities. Thus Huggins suggests placing greater emphasis on the interactions and interconnectedness of peoples from varying cultures in shaping the broader American experience. Recent studies of Africans in the early south are creating new histories that emphasize the significance and impact of cross-cultural contact while holding steadfast to the importance of diversity in African American life.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}Nathan Huggins, “Deforming Mirror of Truth,”


There remains an unfortunate problem in Americanists’ interpretation of early black life that Africanists point out without hesitation. Americanists do not spend sufficient time considering Africa in their analyses of early African America. Paul Lovejoy states, “the contributions of anthropologist aside, it is time to add an historical perspective that is rooted in African history to the examination of slavery in the Americas.” Africa receives a quick glance and a brief acknowledgment of the “importance of the African past.” From the American gaze, the “old world” of the enslaved is deemed static while change and innovation are inherently American. Transformations in black culture and community are considered part of Americanization. This conceptual framework frustrates scholars of West African history who have successfully demonstrated that African religion, culture, and ethnicity transformed significantly during the era of the Atlantic slave trade. Long before West Africans reached the Americas, they resisted enslavement, adopted aspects of European culture, learned European languages and religions, and surmounted ethnic differences to shape new communities and identities.

Nonetheless, ethnic diversity should not be understated. People from wide range of cultures covering a region at least the size of the modern day United States, were transported to relatively small areas. The tremendous pressures of enslavement made adaptation of a common language, religion, and culture pragmatic. Historians must also acknowledge the significance of force in African cultural transformations. In North America, more than any other slave society, whites prohibited the use of African

languages and banned their cultural and religious practices, thus rendering European language and religion the only legally and socially accepted cultural practices. These restrictions changed over time and were not always strictly enforced, especially in the colonial era.

This project embraces Huggins’ and Lovejoy’s critiques of slavery studies and aims to bridge the two by situating Georgia in a broader Atlantic context. It seeks a clearer understanding of the process of enslavement for those who arrived in Georgia and the impact their African past had on shaping life in Georgia and continued connections with the broader world community. Years of research reveal that the greatest struggle in slavery studies is reconstructing black voices and understanding the intricacies of the system from their perspectives. Historians have had a difficult time writing about slavery and African Americans. The paradox of slavery and freedom that Edmund Morgan saw in Virginia plagues early Americanists work. Historians have not seen Africans as critical players in shaping American society because their experiences, their voices call for reinterpretation. In response to the challenges African’s experiences present to early American history scholars have created a separate world for the enslaved, thus leaving the master narrative unchallenged.

Did Africans in Georgia live in a separate world? The scholarship is not completely off the mark. Enslaved communities did have their secrets, yet they were an integral part of larger society. Oppression denied rights and representation, but was not

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successful in locking Africans out of the larger society. This was particularly true in the case of early Georgia, where the enslaved community played an integral role, although not always formally recognized, in economic, political, social and cultural spheres. Likewise, the larger society influenced actions blacks took in shaping their private lives and communities.

Considering the evolution of the enslaved community in Georgia, there many be too wide a gap in community and cultural studies of early black society and those that seek greater inclusion of those blacks in reconstructing the larger American society. The former too segregated from the larger society, and the latter limiting influence to those who fit neatly a conceptual framework which historically excluded the majority of blacks. The challenge in closing this gap mirrors the struggles of the subjects themselves. For Africans in Georgia, the consummate problem they faced was overcoming their value as objects of the slave market that turned one into, “a person with a price”\footnote{This phrase is borrowed from Walter Johnson’s discussion of “making slaves” for the domestic slave market. See his book, \textit{Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).} and demonstrating their value as “more than slaves.”

Africans who were transported to Georgia constituted a diverse group of blacks with varying experiences in the enslavement process. They met colonial enslavement with a mixture of resistance and strained adjustment and walked a faulty path between autonomy and subjugation. The West African experience taught them that even the smallest measure of freedom, or basic survival could not be achieved without the support of a communal network. On the slaving coast, they also learned that these networks
needed decreased emphasis on shared ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. As racial identity formed, distinguishing Europeans and Africans, those captured discovered the limitations of protection from their brethren based on “Africanness” or “blackness.” Although that relation developed overtime in the Americas, slavery’s survivors recalled these early lessons from their African past. Thus in Georgia, community formation was complex and provided room for a variety of allies and enemies. Communal bonds were flexible and accommodated shifting alliances. Georgia’s colonial establishment and growth through the early national period was marked by its ever-changing agricultural labor force.

Historians discovered that the colony’s early antislavery foundations met tremendous opposition from planters, merchants, and others hoping to reap the economic rewards which traditionally accompanied institutionalized slavery. The founding Trustees’ vision of Georgia as a haven for the European poor who would migrate as indentured servants, was crushed by the more power dedication to slavery, as well as continued resistance from struggling white laborers who found the colonial plan oppressive. Slavery supporters’ victory legalized preferred African labor and reshaped Georgia in the image of its slave holding neighbor, South Carolina.

For Africans, the 1750 legalization of slavery was a formality. New slavery laws certainly had an impact on their lives, but they had lived in enslavement for years and many had never known freedom. The major impact the first years of Georgia’s legalization had on black life was that it introduced a new phase of dispersal, and separation. Likewise, Georgia’s frontier offered North American slavery’s harshest labor and living conditions. Africans were forced to clear grounds, fell trees and complete other labor intensive tasks.
associated with establishing new plantations and farms. Thus in Georgia, Africans continued life under slavery in its most challenging form.

After the opening of Georgia’s African trade, the colony’s enslaved had little time for community building. They resisted when they could and formed bonds across race, ethnicity, and plantation as they socialized and shared informal economic networks with limited groups of Indians and whites. As their numbers grew in what was still primarily a frontier region, their potential power caused continual distress among white Georgians, particularly the planter elite whose livelihood depended on their oppression. Many fears of the colony’s early antislavery factions were realized for enslaved population was not easily subdued nor shaped into loyal slaves.

Given more time, they might have increased their power, but the outbreak of the American Revolution, just ten years after the first concentrated African imports, put a halt to black Georgians’ emerging power struggle and created a sphere of chaos that had multifaceted impacts on their lives. Reminiscent of Africa, the black communities found themselves the prized human booty of war, a position that could end familial and communal connections. Ironically, they also grasped, in white vulnerability, opportunities to set a black wartime agenda that promised freedom to its victors.

The Revolutionary era’s rhetoric of liberty offered limited respect for black freedom. Some whites increased their criticism of slavery and the African slave trade, but the overwhelming agenda of the early national period sought more intense oppression for the southern black population, particularly in the lowcountry. National rededication to black enslavement and an expansion of the institution in the southern region, redefined
“the African” in important ways. Foremost the opening of the domestic trade challenged previous categorizations of the black community. Prior to its close, the African slave trade was justified as traders, slaveholders and other pro-slavery factions claimed they were saving lives; rescuing the African from savagery, superstition, and certain death. After 1808, legally, there were no “new negroes,” for the slave market. How American born and acculturated blacks became part of a transforming trade landscape that looked more like West Africa than ever before is the focus of chapter five.

Black Georgians had a chance to push a freedom agenda when the colony was first established. They held several key advantages based on their familiarity with the institution of slavery, access to freedom in Spanish Florida, the relatively small size of the planter class, and the frontier offered unsettled areas to hid and establish maroon communities. Their disadvantages were the rapid introduction of experienced overseers and planters after the legalization of slavery, followed by new imports weak from the middle passage. The communities’ inability to maintain reliable alliances with Indians and nonslaveholding whites was shaped by the fragile line the enslaved walked between their roles as valuable partners in informal economic and socio-cultural trade and valuable commodities on the slave market. When combined with brutal labor requirements, the disadvantages blacks faced were too powerful for long term victories in gaining autonomy for the majority. Efforts towards securing liberties within and outside of enslavement continued with varying levels of intensity and success during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
The African past was critical for Georgia’s enslaved population. Scholars understate the oppression they experienced in Africa, as part of the process of enslavement, as well as the ways in which centuries of slave trading transformed African societies. Their lives were more complicated than a clear move from freedom to slavery. By the second half of the eighteenth century, if Africans were free, most who were transported to Georgia had experienced a lifetime of threats and challenges to that freedom. African life was overwhelmed with avoiding capture from African and European slave traders. African born Georgians lost their freedom in Africa, where generations sought measures of adaptation, acculturation, and community- culture building during the era of the slave trade. Once landed in Georgia, “new” Africans began restructuring their lives with similar tools used in their homelands.

During the era of slavery, Africans had few if any rights recognized by white society. Whites discussed the enslaved population often, however they did not value black voices while building lowcountry society. Thus, the historical record of early America is one dominated by whites. Black bodies, how strong and healthy they were what labor could be extracted from them; and the potential for resistance attracted whites’ attention. The struggle for scholars of the early black diaspora is related to the fact that understanding these aspects of black life moves enslaved communities from the marginalization—to subjects, rather than objects, of American history.

This study finds the theoretical framework of Afro-diasporic studies useful in interpreting wide-ranging historical evidence. Archival research for this project includes plantation records, missionary records, medical books, ship records, travel journals, slave
trader journals, court proceedings, newspapers all from the lowcountry, the West Indies, Africa, and Europe. These sources are ideal because while blacks lived in very restricted boundaries when they arrive in Georgia, the experiences many brought to Georgia stretched across the Atlantic. The concept that peoples of African descent created societies with similar “cultural, religious, and ideological” foundations guides the use of historical documents in the study.\(^\text{17}\) Furthermore, the evidence used here demonstrates that black Georgians participated in national and transoceanic migration patterns by way of slave trading, forced and voluntary relocation, missionary work, and travel that fueled a steady flow of cultural exchange with black Atlantic communities.

\(^{17}\)Faculty members at Howard University have been at the forefront of black diaspora studies, offering courses in this field as early as 1922. For a detailed discussion of these themes see, The Black Diaspora Committee of Howard University, *The African Diaspora Africans and Their Descendants in the Wider World to 1800*, Needham Heights, MA: Ginn Press, 1987).
CHAPTER 2

AFRICANS IN PRESHAVERY GEORGIA

South-Carolina Gazette
(Whitmarsh), April 7 to April 14, 1733
Run away from Charleston, the seventh instant at night, three negro sawyers, belonging to Mrs. Catherine Bettison, named Primus, Venture, and Syphax. They were well clothed in welch cottons of a yellow color, and carried their blankets & cloths along with them; the said negroes being hired by Mr. Chardon for the service of Georgia.\(^{18}\)

Primus, Venture, and Syphax were among several hundred enslaved black South Carolinians who labored in Georgia before the legalization slavery. Black South Carolinians were at the center of shaping race relations, the slavery debate, and in building African American culture and community in Georgia from establishment in 1732 to 1765, when merchants began importing slaves directly from Africa. Although Georgia opened its borders as a colony committed to the prohibition of slavery, blacks were a critical part of Georgia’s earliest communities and arrived in the colony in three major groups. First, slavery prohibition did not require total exclusion of slaves from the early workforce. Settlers were permitted access to slave labor loaned to them from South Carolinian benefactors. Second, blacks who had escaped slavery in South Carolina and sought

\(^{18}\)Lathan Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790 Vol. 3 South Carolina* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 5.
freedom in Spanish Florida passed through Georgia, raising white fears and fueling interracial tensions.19 Third, blacks labored clandestinely on the Georgia lands owned by South Carolinian planters who began various illegal enterprises in the colony, which led to several debates regarding a limited expansion of slavery.

Mounting planter frustrations with white servants and growing desire for experienced slave they could force into the harsh labor, transformed planters’ labor preferences. Georgia’s early slaveholders considered black South Carolinians the best laborers for establishing the colony’s agricultural foundations, thus creating a demand for persons they deemed “old negroes” or blacks who had lived as slaves for some time, spoke some English, and knew the work expected of them. As Black South Carolinians moved into Georgia, their home colony entered a new phase of cultural development as increased numbers of African born laborers arrived following the expansion of rice agriculture.20 As South Carolina’s enslaved population was becoming dominated by “new negroes,” or enslaved person born in West Africa who had spent less than a year in the Americas. Georgia’s smaller black population was more experienced and acculturated to

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20Peter Wood notes that from the 1690’s to 1720, a greater proportion of South Carolina’s black population was American born than in previous years. This group “in some ways dominated the evolution of that particular social and geographic frontier” and minimized social barriers as they worked in close contact with Indians and whites and formed social bonds. See Peter Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 95-117. After this period, the rise of rice agriculture fueled increased imports from the African trade.
slave life. Many of the South Carolinian runaways reported in *The Georgia Gazette* were fluent in English. A description of one man, “York, Carolina born, and speaks very proper English,” printed after legalization of slavery represents a typical description of escapees in the preslavery years. See *The Georgia Gazette*, June 2, 1763. Betty Wood finds that a greater proportion of Georgia blacks were born in Carolina from 1732 to 1766 than in the generation “that preceded them or than any which followed until the time of the American Revolution.” The first generation spoke “a more standard English” than those who followed having come from English speaking slave societies, primarily Barbados; as well as sharing closer working space with English speakers. See Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia 1730-1775* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 95; and Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 168-191.

The colonial charter of Georgia envisioned providing land and opportunity for the European poor and settling a frontier for South Carolina. To make servant attractive, the initial price of a slave equaled the amount for the passage, tools, and provisions for a servant for a year. Trustees feared that introducing black labor would make whites “less disposed” to labor themselves. As an “asylum to receive the distressed,” the colony’s founders believed that prohibition of slavery guaranteed employment for poor whites. “Slaves starved the poor laborer” by performing the tasks of carpentry and bricklaying, among other work that could be offered to laboring classes of whites. Georgia’s first settlers criticized slaveholding colonies for their dependence on slavery, pointing out the of dangers black resistance. They did, however, recognize the benefits slaveholders

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21Many of the South Carolinian runaways reported in *The Georgia Gazette* were fluent in English. A description of one man, “York, Carolina born, and speaks very proper English,” printed after legalization of slavery represents a typical description of escapees in the preslavery years. See *The Georgia Gazette*, June 2, 1763. Betty Wood finds that a greater proportion of Georgia blacks were born in Carolina from 1732 to 1766 than in the generation “that preceded them or than any which followed until the time of the American Revolution.” The first generation spoke “a more standard English” than those who followed having come from English speaking slave societies, primarily Barbados; as well as sharing closer working space with English speakers. See Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia 1730-1775* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 95; and Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 168-191.


23Francis Moore, *A Voyage to Georgia, Begun in the Year 1735* (London: Printed for Jacob Robinson, 1744), 27.
enjoyed from enslaved African labor. Johann Martin Bolzius noted that South Carolina had an advantage over Georgia in two major ways. First, landowners possessed more land per head in the colony; and second, “each owner of land may keep as many Negroes or black slaves as he is able to.” Despite the profitability of slavery, Georgians protected their colony from the problems they believed accompanied dependence on enslaved African labor. Avoiding the “great inconveniences in the said colony of Georgia” suffered by “colonies and plantations with black slaves or negroes” who had “obstructed the increase of English and Christian Inhabitants” and exposed the colonies “to the insurrections tumults & rebellions of such slaves and negroes;” the Trustees declared on April 3, 1735 that the colony would prohibit the use of black slave labor.

In the early years of settlement, as white colonists struggled building Georgia’s foundations, they welcomed assistance from black slaves loaned to them primarily from South Carolinian benefactors. Peter Gordon, who arrived with the first transport of settlers to Georgia, noted that “a number of negroe sawyers” were “hired from Carolina” to assist the settlers in building their homes. Bolzius remarked that in Georgia, “each family would make a start with only two or at the most 4 Negroes, i.e., 2 or 4 men, and as many women, they would establish themselves gradually quite satisfactorily.”

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24Johann Martin Bolzius, Reliable Answer to Some Submitted Questions Concerning the Land Carolina In Which Answer, However, Regard Is Also Paid at the Same Time to the Condition of the Colony of Georgia in Klaus Loewald, Beverly Starika, and Paul S. Taylor, translated and edited, “Johann Martin Bolzius Answers A Questionnaire on Carolina and Georgia,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., vol. 14 no.2 (April 1957), 227.


Stephens arranged for a group of passengers “on a journey to Georgia” to be “attended by a couple of trusty Negroes, who were to help them to what was needful, and narrowly watch them at the same time.”

During the prohibition years 202 enslaved men, 147 enslaved women and an undetermined number of their children lived and labored in Georgia.

Black South Carolinians who labored in preslavery Georgia cleared fields, planted crops, assisted in building homes, and completed other household tasks. The enslaved population was small and most performed a range of tasks in small groups for single families or small communities. This early black community had adapted to the lowcountry climate before migrating to Georgia; some were skilled laborers; and most were skilled agriculturists. White Georgians, who were not well acclimated to lowcountry life, valued their abilities. Blacks’ familiarity with slavery’s social and economic structure was an advantage for those planning escape or resistance. Fears of incorporating a rebellious enslaved population, despite the advantages of their labor, were realized when several black carpenters brought a valued supply of honey to the Salzburger settlement and a month later attempted to destroy the settlement by setting the treasured

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Pastors Bolzius and Israel Christian Gronau remarked, “so malicious are the Negroes that, late at night after the Salzburger had gone to sleep, they stuck some burning light-wood into the tree.” One settler lamented, “fortunately our dear God made someone get up and see the fire. If this had not been done, great misfortune could have befallen us, for the shelter if the Salzburger could have easily caught on fire in which case few things would have been saved.”

Such disruptions were linked the disruption familial and other communal relationships black South Carolinians faced after migration. Planters who acted as benefactors to white Georgians, forced blacks to migrate to the colony with little regard for their community connections. In Georgia, these small groups expressed their discontent with such arrangements. A South Carolina planter withdrew the four best laborers from the Salzburger settlement blacks had attempted to destroy by fire. The remaining slaves warned “that they [would] run away at the first opportunity because four of them [had] been taken away.” The actions that the enslaved in Georgia took to improve their lives, even in small degrees, were central in shaping race relations and the white debate regarding the legalization of slavery in the colony. Blacks at the Salzburger settlement were displeased with the separation of their community and their threat caused

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13The Salzburger immigrants were among Georgia’s first settlers. In 1731, Salzburg’s leader, Archbishop Anton Leopold exiled citizens of his country who had not given up Protestant beliefs to conform to Catholicism. The Salzburgers who settled in Georgia originated from a small group of exiles who remained in the Protestant cities of southern Germany. See George Fenwick Jones, The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 177-1783 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press 1992), 13-21. For more detailed information on the Salzburgers and other German immigrants to Georgia also see Jones’ The Salzburger Saga: Religious Exiles and Other Germans Along the Savannah (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985).

14Ibid., 91-92 & 95.
Salzburgers to re-consider their relationships with this small group of blacks in light of their connections to the large enslaved population of South Carolina. Pastor Gronau proclaimed, “it is such trials as these, sent by God, which are to urge us to greater seriousness of purpose with our Christian religion.” He added concerns regarding the incorporation of a black enslaved population in the colony concluding,

it is a great convenience to have many slaves to do the work; but this convenience is coupled with great danger, for the blacks, who are said to number thirty thousand in Carolina alone, are not faithful to the Christians and are very malicious.\textsuperscript{15}

Although many white Georgians used limited, South Carolinian slave labor, the colony’s black population included a number of runaways from the neighboring colony. Particularly during the time of the Stono Rebellion, settlers were in continual conflict with black escapees passing through the colony and heading for Spanish Florida. Due to the proximity of this territory to British lands, officials found that escape “might easily be accomplished, since a single Negro could run away thither without companions, and would only have a River or two to swim over.\textsuperscript{16} Runaways from South Carolina generally escaped by water, past Frederica to St. Augustine.

Spanish policy in Florida granted freedom to Africans who made successful escapes. The transformation in black social status was real and, at times, strikingly different from the relationships they had with whites in Georgia and Carolina. In December of 1738, Captain Davis found “no less than nineteen negros,” who escaped

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 57.

\textsuperscript{16}See “An Account Showing the Progress of the Colony of Georgia in America from its First Establishment,” in Candler, \textit{The Colonial Records of Georgia}, 3:376.
from his Carolina plantation, living in St. Augustine. They knew that their new freedom was protected by the King of Spain; and when Davis approached them demanding their return to slavery, “they laughed at him.”

Black freedom in the territory was also protected by the Governor who rejected Davis’ application for the return of the nineteen blacks he considered “his property.” Lowcountry planters’ familiarity with this type of situation had increased by the late 1730's. William Stephens spoke for many white Georgians when he warned,

> the Negroes in Carolina can make their escape to Spaniards, notwithstanding the great obstructions they are to meet from this province [Georgia] lying in their way. If the use of such [slaves] were permitted to this colony; what could be expected, but they would march off when they pleased?

As black escapees journeyed towards Florida, they disrupted white settlements in Georgia. In 1740, residents at the Salzburger settlement learned that “a Negro or Moor from Carolina took away some victuals several times and also lopped off melons and pumpkins in the field, carrying them off and spoiling them.” A week later this man, armed with a hunting knife, “making it more dangerous to catch him,” continued to “slip into people’s cottages during the night to do harm.” This runaway, was not the only unwelcome visitor in the settlement. On September 10, two black men and one woman entered some of the homes during prayer meeting and threatened the Indians living with

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18Ibid.
the whites, “saying they would cut off their heads if they did not do as they wished. On account of that the Indians moved away apparently from fear.”

The presence of black South Carolinian runaways, who had reportedly “cut the throats of 34 white men” during the Stono Rebellion, caused great fear among white Georgians. Slavery supporters tried to convince them that it would not be easy for blacks in their colony to escape because they would be “generally confined to their master’s plantation, and unacquainted with the woods: and that they never go but when led by other Negroes who know the roads and passes.” Such comments did not calm fears among white Georgians who maintained that escapees hid in maroonage in the woods and were “secretly looked after by the other Negroes and occupy [occupied] themselves with theft.” The Trustees anticipated potential rebellion and conflicts from South Carolinian blacks noting that “the admitting of negroes in Georgia would naturally facilitate the desertion of the Carolina Negroes.”

William Stephens noted that black escapes through Georgia “a Frontier of such a nature” were unavoidable and runaways, would soon find means, by untrodden paths through a wilderness of thick woods, to flee to Augustine; more especially they will not only obtain their promised freedom, but also have Arms put into their hands, and become a part

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22 “An Account Showing the Progress,” 378.
Scottish settlers living closest to Spanish territory also believed the introduction of slavery jeopardized Georgia’s safety. Furthermore, black efforts to obtain freedom under Spanish rule could bring danger to their communities which they believed would face “barbarous domestics, provoked perhaps by harsh usage, or grown desperate through misery and oppression.”

Black resistance, particularly in South Carolina, offered justification for concerns of domestic uprisings which antislavers feared “on fair opportunity” could bring grave consequences to whites. Blacks who sought freedom gathered the necessary information and materials when opportunities arose. Those who worked in white households and attended “their tables and heard their conversations,” turned “their own various arts, plots, and assassinations.” Circumstances changed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, however during the early period blacks had greater access to firearms and other weapons. Whites feared this gave the enslaved population “a double advantage for mischief.”

Overall, antislavery factions maintained that race relations in American slave societies demonstrated that slavery was accompanied by tremendous cruelty, ill usage, and oppression that shaped “a passionate and revengeful disposition” among the enslaved.


The Stono Rebellion was a dangerous example of black retribution. The movement’s suppression offered little comfort to white antislavers who emphasized the success the Africans had in covering their tracks to freedom at Stono and speculated about other hidden freedom movements. They killed, poisoned, and disrupted white life with methods that went undetected, or were discovered only after plans were in motion. More often, rebellions were suppressed, runaways captured, and “crimes” punished, however white Georgians were overwhelmed with all the possibilities, real and imagined, of successful black resistance that had “also frequently happened, whey they passed undiscovered.”

South Carolinians who ignored Georgia’s slave labor restrictions exacerbated these concerns as they brought their slaves to the lands they purchased once the colony was established. Planters saw in this open frontier region, prime land for new plantations and farms. Three white South Carolinians, who traveled to Georgia with four enslaved blacks, noted the fertility of the region describing “very rich ground” and “choice good planting-ground.” Black South Carolinians labored in Georgia, especially near Augusta, where planters could clandestinely move their slaves across the border. William Stephens found that these settlers traded with Indians and cultivated their lands by “sliding two or


27 “An Account Showing the Progress,” 405.
three Negroes now and then at a pinch into their plantations, where during their skulking a while they are not presently to be discovered.”

Such illegal operations not only ignored Georgia laws, but jeopardized the colony’s relations with local Indian populations. South Carolinians settled plantations on Indian lands that were protected by treaties. In February of 1736, a group of Uchee Indians complained that, contrary to the terms of the treaties they signed with the colony, whites had “carried over Cattle and Negroes, and have planted on the Georgia side of the River.” Georgia officials recognized the great number of problems that these ventures caused and the danger they brought to the security of the colony, as they threatened Indian alliances and brought blacks closer to Spanish freedom. They discussed ways to moderately expand slavery and enough to satisfy proslavery planters’ desire for black labor.

Georgians debated whether or not a more widespread but “moderate allowance” of blacks in the colony would be harmful to their overall mission. South Carolina stood has their primary model of the consequences of such an allowance and the limitations that should accompany it. They discussed that perhaps “4 negroes to a family of 4 whites”

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28William Stephens claimed that there were “at least 100 Negroes made use of by the inhabitants of Augusta,” see “Journal of William Stephens”, in Candler, Colonial Records of Georgia suppl., 4:272. See quote in “Diary of the Earl of Egmont,” 590, “Mr.----Mackay had without leave on his own head settled on—Wilmington Island and employed negroes. N.B. Smart care must be taken of this, for many are disposed to follow his example.” Some South Carolina planters brought slaves to remote plantations along the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers. “In other cases slaves were rented from South Carolinians, and the planter could thus disclaim ownership if caught.” See Douglas Wilms, “The Development of Rice Culture in 18th Century Georgia,” Southeastern Geographer 12 (Nov., 1972):45--57.

29Francis Moore, A Voyage to Georgia, 35.
might be manageable, but even slavery supporters were acknowledged that “Carolina had too many negroes and the laws against their number were not, neither could be kept to.” The Earl of Egmont concluded that it would also “be the case in Georgia, if negroes were allowed there under limitations.” Blacks’ actions in the Stono Rebellion were again at the center of the debate as Georgians demanded an adequate response to their concerns that “negroes might cut the throats or our people, and run to the Spaniards.” They challenged South Carolinian claims that blacks who were “used well never run” by recalling that those “who were thought so faithful by their Carolina masters, as to be trusted to be masters of petiaguas, and overseers of others have run,” to which they received no reply from white South Carolina planters.30

White Georgians briefly debated whether or not the colony’s slavery prohibition should prevent free blacks from laboring on rice plantations. They again turned to South Carolina for examples and concluded that not only would that colony’s stream of runaways make it impossible to distinguish the free from the enslaved in Georgia, but those blacks with skills who might migrate to the colony could “hire themselves to the inhabitants at lower wages than the white servants.”31 Pastor Bolzius proclaimed to the Reverend George Whitefield, “I hear the Negroes in Carolina learn all sorts of trade, which takes away the bread of a poor white trades’ man likewise.”32 A situation that

31Ibid.,315.
would undermine the colony’s primary mission--building an agricultural economy on white servant labor.

Prior to the legalization of slavery in Georgia, the majority of the colony’s hard labor was expected to be performed by white indentured servants. These workers labored on rice plantations, planted corn and other crops, and managed cattle and other livestock. Servants’ living conditions were harsh. In addition to difficult labor, they suffered disease, abuse, and even murder from the planter class. Indentured servant resistance was common and masters were rarely able to manage this population to a degree that promoted agricultural prosperity.

Less than a decade after the establishment of the colony, the numbers of servants who refused to perform their assigned tasks, were unable to labor regularly due to illness, or had escaped their masters plantations had risen to such a degree that even some colonial officials were not able to extract profitable labor on their lands. William Stephens, Secretary to the Trustees of Georgia, lamented,

my thoughts and time were both sufficiently perplexed, how to rule my own disorderly servants, who partly through sickness, and partly through stubbornness, when well, began to give more trouble than my son and I could readily dispense with.33

Complaints of runaway servants increased and they, like other free and discouraged Georgians, found refuge in neighboring South Carolina communities.34


34In 1742, Kenneth Baillie told the Earl of Egmont that “the white Men are not able to work some hours in the Summer, and by frequent sickness are so great an expense to the inhabitants, that their labour will not quit cost,” quoted in “Diary of the Earl of Egmont.605-606. Many white Georgians whose agricultural ventures were not successful in the colony, moved to
Stephens noted that servant escapes had “of late become too common a practice, through the countenance they met with in Carolina.” He found the arms of the South Carolinians “were always open to those who left Georgia” and that “runaway servants too often find it such an asylum, as their Masters cannot easily recover them from.”35 Those who pursued white runaways, could not expect much assistance if the servants had been able to cross the Georgia boundary into South Carolina. Pursuers of three runaways reported that once they found the servants in Charleston they were “apprehensive of being mobbed, and having those prisoners rescued.” When they presented Carolina magistrates with a letter, written by a Georgia official, which asked for assistance, it was “thrown aside with contempt, saying Mr. Causton [author of the letter and servants’ master] had nothing to do in Carolina.”36

A key reason proslavery Georgians pushed for the introduction of the institution was their dissatisfaction with the labor output of white servants. Planters could not force enough labor from white servants for successful agricultural yields. Disease, resistance, and a lack of appropriate agricultural skills limited the profitability of servant labor. Georgia masters, unable to control this labor pool, explained their ineffectiveness with

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[35] See Diary of the Earl of Egmont, Monday November 17, 1735. “A letter was read from Mr. Samuel Eveleigh that he had quitted his purpose of settling in Georgia, and was returned to Carolina, because we allow not the use of negro slaves.” William Stephens, Journal of the Proceedings, 171-2.
harsh critiques of indentured servants, rather than owning the brutality they imposed.

Peter Gordon offered the following analysis,

in proportion to the number of negroes and white servants all over the West Indies and even South Carolina the white servants generally turn out the worst. Nor can it be reasonably expected to be otherwise, because the common run of white servants that transport themselves to our colonies abroad by the help of out agents for that purpose are generally the very scum and refuse of mankind, trained up in all sorts of vice, often loaded with bad distempers and who leave their native country upon no other motive but to avoid the worse fate of being hanged in it.37

Even Pastor Bolzius, who vehemently opposed slavery and stood firm in his belief that whites alone could develop the colony remarked, “it is a great tribulation for us that our servants are such poor workers.” He further described the latest immigrants as having “a history of causing trouble in Germany, too, and of being sly and lazy.”38 Thus the elite of Georgia held the white servant population accountable for agricultural ruin and assumed little or no responsibility for the severity of servant life and labor.

In truth, the failing system of indentured servitude dealt a severe blow to the Trustees’ mission. The poor they claimed to help, arrived in Georgia and were forced into circumstances they found so intolerable that even the colonial officials could not avoid acknowledging the poor condition of servant life. One settler describing German servant


38 Fenwick and Wilson, Detailed Reports, 14:143-144.
life stated that upon coming to Georgia they, “find themselves abundantly more enslaved, and make good the proverb, out of the frying pan into the fire.” Stephens, a servant master himself, admitted he “could not but doubt some of those poor people might verify that proverb.” The more colonists and runways deserted the colony, they more difficult it became build a lowcountry plantation society on white labor. Georgians hoped to use white labor would power an agricultural economy based on silk and wine production, but these and other agricultural pursuits in the colony failed miserably. The growing problem in Georgia’s path, its failing agricultural economy and the elites’ inability to secure enough labor from their servants, transformed the region from a promising colony to one headed for decline.

Settlers marveled at the success of neighboring South Carolina and were quick to note that the colony’s advantage was based on the very thing that was prohibited in Georgia, enslaved African labor. Rice planters interested in moving to Georgia described the labor of cultivation as so severe that in other colonies “many hundred of Negroes (not withstanding all the care of their masters) yearly lose their lives by that necessary work,” thus they found that it was, “simply impossible to manufacture the rice by white men.”

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40Clarence L. Ver Steeg, ed., A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia by Patrick Talifer and Others With Comments by The Earl of Egmont, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1960), 103 &139. Wealthy rice planters notions of white laborers inability to produce a successful crop generally reflected Samuel Eveleigh’s statement that, “the hear of the climate will not permit white men to labour as the negroes do, especially in raising rice, nor can they endure the wet season when rice is to be gathered in,” quoted in Diary of the Earl of Egmont, 605-606.
While a few stood firm in their opposition to slavery, others believed that if Georgia was to thrive and develop at all, the peculiar institution was crucial.41

In 1741, Georgia landholders published their view of the rise and decline of the colony in *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia*. They argued a case for greater land ownership, a change in governmental organization, and the introduction of African slavery by shaming the Trustees into acknowledging the colonists’ economic struggles. The landholders argued that while other “colonies flourished with early trade and affluence,” James Oglethorpe’s restrictions and prohibitions never permitted him “to propose such transitory advantages” to Georgia.42 Criticizing the Trustees’ prohibitions regarding trade in slaves and its effect on their prosperity the authors wrote,

> The valuable virtue of humility is secured to us, by your care to prevent our procuring, or so much as seeing any *Negroes* (the only human Creature proper to improve our soil) lest our simplicity might mistake the poor *Africans* for greater slaves than ourselves.43

The Trustees responded that the that such campaigns were fueled by entrepreneurs whose main interests were in increasing their wealth by opening another market for the lucrative slave trade. With their wealth, officials warned that slaveholders would push out smaller farmers and poorer whites and Georgia would then become, “the precarious

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41“An Account Showing the Progress,” 3:425. “It is very well known that Carolina can raise everything that this colony can; and they having their labour so much cheaper, will always ruin our market, unless we are in some measure on a footing with them,” see full petition of Savannah planters, December 9, 1738 in Candler *The Colonial Records of Georgia*, 3:424-425.

42Clarence L. Ver Steeg, ed., *A True and Historical Narrative*, 4.

43Ibid.
property of a few” established by a few “greedy and ambitious negro merchants who sought,

to become the sole owners of the province, by introducing their baneful commodity, which, it is well known, by sad experience, has brought our neighbor colonies to the brink of ruin, by driving out their white inhabitants, who were their glory and strength, to make room for blacks, who are now become the terror of their unadvised masters.44
Salzburger immigrants refuted the idea that white settlers and servants could not successfully build the colony without black labor. On March 13, 1739 they sent a petition to the Trustees and on the issue of introducing a black enslaved population into Georgia they professed,

We humbly beseech the honourable Trustees not to allow it, that any negro might be brought to our place, or in our neighborhood, knowing by experience, that house and gardens will be robbed always by them, and white people are in danger of life because of them, besides other great inconveniences.”45

Less than eleven years after their antislavery petition, a number of Salzburgers changed their stance on the slavery issue. Pastor Bolzius described the motivation behind the shift. Some settlers believed “that `since their own physical strength is declining and their servants are of almost no help, they are entitled to use Negroes.” Georgia’s President of the Upper House, James Habersham, continually encouraged the Salzburgers to adopt African slavery and Pastor Bolzius recalled him warning, “otherwise, he did not

44“An Account Showing the Progress,” 432.

45 For petition in its complete form see Candler, Colonial Records,13:430. During their struggle to maintain Georgia’s slavery prohibition, Salzburgers, as well as others who opposed slavery, challenged the idea that whites were not suited to labor in the lowcountry climate. Bolzius noted that in some parts of Germany when it was too hot, whites altered their labor patterns. Addressing the issue of whites’ inability to work, he stated, “every honest labourer amongst us will testify the contrary.” See Donnan, Documents Illustrative, 607.
see how our poor people would be able to exist very long.” Attitudes towards slavery shifted as antislavers found justification in reports that blacks were “eternal slaves in their own land and that they lived under great tyranny and difficult circumstances and were legally bought and sold.”  In 1749, Christian Leimberger expressed regret for coming to the colony where he had to “live among thieving and cunning Negro heathens” and feared the introduction of blacks would cost the community “the well-being of their children, whose salvation is more important than all physical advantages.” Just one year later, with no servant assistance in his fields, Leimberger explained that his German laborer had to be freed and claimed that he and his wife “were worn out from work and sickly.” He professed that he could not find a white female servant and was “forced by necessity” to buy a black female slave because he was “badly pressed since he had three children.” The Pastor was surprised by Leimberger’s shift, “in the past,” he wrote, “if anyone in our community spoke against using Negroes, then it was this man himself.” Like Leimberger, other Georgians reconsidered their antislavery positions for economic reasons and decided that acquiring enslaved blacks was well worth the risks and inconveniences that would accompany the drastic change in colonial policy. Richard Lawley reported to the Earl of Egmont in February of 1741, “every one is sensible of the want of negroes, and

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46 Fenwick and Wilson, *Detailed Reports*, 3:12, 55 & 95.
47 Ibid., 3:44.
48 Ibid., 3:93.
49 Ibid.
Frederica, though at first they were by the importunity of Lieut. Horton against having them, yet they afterwards gave him a petition to have negroes.  

After eighteen years of economic failures and an almost equal number of years of petitioning, the Trustees reconsidered the prohibition and passed an act in 1750 that legalized African slavery.  Planters hoped that Georgia’s enslaved population would be free of all difficulties they experienced using indentured servitude. Assuming that blacks could be shaped into loyal, hard-working servants, they concluded that this source of labor would be more productive. The authors of A True and Historical Narrative captured the thoughts of many involved in the proslavery movement when they argued that Africans were “the only human creatures proper” to improve Georgia’s agricultural economy. The profits procured by plantation owners in other slave societies affirmed this notion. Peter Gordon marveled at the success of the West Indian sugar islands and South Carolina. Attributing their wealth to African “labor” and “industry,” he concluded, “that it is morally impossible that the people of Georgia can ever get forward in their settlements or even be a degree above common slaves, without the help and assistance of Negros.”

Gordon argued that blacks could more easily adapt to the colony’s extreme heat and were

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51Douglas Wilms finds that the colony experienced “a rapid and striking development resulting from the expansion of slavery and the liberal land policies of the royal government.” Each head of the family could receive 100 acres as a headright grant and 50 additional acres for each family member and each of his slaves up to a total of 1,000 acres. The Trustees had granted 45,330 acres of land. By 1767, the royal government had granted 550,000 acres. See “The Development of Rice Culture,” 48.

52Coulter, Peter Gordon, 59.
more profitable that white servants. Aside from the fact that black slaves were thought to be “unacquainted with the vices that are but too common among white servants,” and physically apt to survive in Georgia’s hot climate, Gordon and his counterparts believed that the other major difference between white and black servants was that blacks were a better investment. Not only were they enslaved for a lifetime, they could also support themselves and their families.

Negroes having a small pott of land allotted to them, which is the common method, do by their industry and their spare hours not only raise provisions sufficient for their own subsistence, but many of them raise poultry and other little things, which by selling at market often enables them to buy great part of their own clothing so that the expense the master is at in supporting his Negroes is but very small.

This method of allotting plots of land to the enslaved was generally practiced in colonies that utilized the task system of labor. Through tasking, owner’s gave blacks specific daily or seasonal chores; once completed, any extra time was often used to supplement food and clothing rations and for personal economic pursuits.

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53 As documented in Virginia and South Carolina studies, white settlers in Georgia suffered greatly from the climate, which produced malaria and other diseases. Proslavery supporters believed that African and Georgian climates were similar, thus making African labor more advantageous. For a thorough discussion on susceptibility to disease. See Wood, *Black Majority*, 61-91.

54 Coulter, *Peter Gordon*, 57.

55 Ibid., 58. See Kenneth Baille’s remarks to the Earl of Egmont, that “Negroes, who being allowed land and Sunday to work for themselves are no charge to speak of to their masters, and sell the little produces they raise for money,” in “Diary of the Earl of Egmont,” 242. Philip Morgan finds that “lowcountry slaves depended less on planter rations than their Chesapeake counterparts.” For a discussion of slave diets see his work, *Slave Counterpoint*, 134-135.

56 Philip Morgan finds that lowcountry plantation owners chose the task system over the gang labor system used in tobacco and sugar cultivation. “Perhaps the profits being generated under the existing task system discouraged lowcountry planters from adopting gang labor.” See “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700-1880,” *William*
Considering the problems that colonist experienced with indentured servitude in the prohibition years, some believed that the best laborers would be unfamiliar with slavery and should be procured directly from Africa. Gordon described such slaves as being of “sound constitution and uncorrupted morals” who “you may train up in what manner you think will best answer your purpose.” More established American colonies were engaged in a lucrative African trade. Although these colonies served as models for Georgia, planters in the infant colony believed “new Negroes,” or those imported directly from Africa, were not be best suited for labor in the early stages of agricultural development.

Pastor Bolzius recognized that for blacks, eternal slavery as “an unbearable yoke, and very harsh treatment as regards food and work exasperated them greatly.” For this reason, slaves imported directly from Africa had to be treated carefully, for they “frequently took their own lives out of desperation, with the hope of resurrection in their homeland, and of rejoining their people.” This possibility of suicide led to cheaper prices for “new negroes,” for many believed that American born slaves were “much more intelligent in this and in other respects. They are [were] also much more useful and faithful, but for that very reason also much more expensive.” Bolzius noted that in Carolina there was “a large difference between those Negroes who were born in Carolina

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58 Fenwick and Wilson, *Detailed Reports*, 14:233.

59 Ibid., 104.
or have at least lived there several years and those who have just been brought over from Africa.” The former “seasoned” blacks could cost from £8-12 more than the latter.”

One Georgia planter’s newspaper advertisement mirrored the labor expectations of many. He sought “a likely sensible Negro boy, this country born.” Those establishing new settlements preferred seasoned laborers in all areas of plantation work. The aforementioned planter also solicited an experienced overseer. Seasoned overseers and planters were also critical to the success of a new plantation. Experts warned that no profits could be expected in the first year, “especially if the undertaker is not a professed planter, and has not a very faithful and industrious well experienced overseer.”

In the 1760's, Georgia’s slave market emphasized buying and selling black men, women, and children considered valuable because of their skills and familiarity with plantation work, whether they were from North American or West Indian colonies. Planters filled *The Georgia Gazette* with advertisements seeking and selling “a good negro sawyer,” and “a good house wench, who can sew wash and iron well and know how to manage a house.” On the slave market, merchants described valuable laborers as “handy,” “well acquainted,” “extraordinary good,” all marking their experience with slave labor.

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60Loewald, Straika, and Taylor, trans. and ed., “Johann Martin Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire,” 233 & 256. James Habersham stated few “old inhabitants can at present purchase Negroes, and those that can must get them from Carolina,” in Candler, *Colonial Records of Georgia*, 26:156.


62See advertisements in *The Georgia Gazette* June 30, 1763; November 3, 1763; January 19, 1764; February 14, 1765; April 4, 1765; May 2, 1765; and May 30, 1765.
Georgia’s need for experienced black laborers strengthened particularly as the number of inexperienced planters purchasing land for new rice plantations increased. Seasoned planters advised their cohorts of the expenses required for such an endeavor. The accepted method for settlement expected forty Africans on each plantation to plant 140 acres of rice, harvest and prepare 350 barrels for sale, and produce provisions on seventy additional acres of land. Slaveholders expected profits on lands that Africans cleared and fenced during the preslavery years. In cases where this work was not complete; profits could not be turned until the second or third year. African life was overwhelmed by tremendous pressures to develop successful agricultural enterprises for new white immigrants. Their circumstances were so brutal and plagued by sickness and poor health that planters’ calculations of necessary articles and expenses included medicine and doctors fees for the enslaved population, as well as an annual loss for “deaths of Negroes.”

As the slave trade expanded, some slaveholders, mostly in Carolina paid high prices for African-born slaves. On August 24, 1750, a ship carrying three-hundred slaves docked in Charleston and young adult men “fresh from Africa” were sold for £40, twice the usual amount. Bolzius concluded that only the rich could afford to risk so much money on “unproven and still inexperienced” slaves. During the early years of the slave trade to Georgia, many colonists “who were practically minded were of the opinion that

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63 Debrahm, 51.
one should rather buy slaves who were already familiar with the country and the kind of work expected of them.”

The Trustees of the colony urged Georgians not to,

buy one [slave] newly brought from Africa, but rather one that was born in Carolina or at least has learned the English language and how to work, because nothing can be accomplished with the new ones without the encouragement and example of the old Negroes.

Eighteenth century Georgia, unlike South Carolina and West Indian colonies, did not have an established enslaved community to teach “new Negroes” a new language, the skills needed for labor, or to integrate African imports into a life of American enslavement.

While other colonies shifted preferences in favor of direct African imports labor, Georgia continued importing “old negroes,” or blacks who were American born or had at least lived in the colonies for several years. Pre-existing relations and trade links with South Carolina and the West Indies to provide channels for purchasing slaves and no imports entered Savannah and Sunbury directly from Africa prior to 1765.

Approximately 2,600 slaves entered Georgia between 1755 to 1766 with at least 1,200 of this number originating in South Carolina, 270 in Jamaica, and 360 in St. Christopher’s. Understandably, the numbers of slaves originating in South Carolina are

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64Ibid, 121.

65Fenwick and Wilson, 4:18. James Habersham stated, “it cannot be expected, if our real state is considered, that any Negroes from Africa will soon be imported here,” in Candler, Colonial Records, 26:156.

66For 1, 326 of the total imports see Donnan, 4:612-615. Darold Wax estimates that from 1750 to 1764 close to 1, 238 slaves were imported to Georgia via South Carolina. See his article, “New Negroes Are Always in Demand,” 200. Betty Wood finds that after slavery was introduced, the black population rose sharply from 3,000 to 18,000 whites and from under 500 blacks to 16,000 by 1771. See Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 606.
very low in slave ship records because a number of blacks migrated to Georgia with their owners once the colony legalized slavery. John Debrahm remarked,

many rich Carolina planters came with all their families and negroes to settle in Georgia in 1752; the spirit of emigration out of South Carolina into Georgia became so universal that year, that this and the following year near one thousand negroes was [were] brought in Georgia, where in 1751 were scarce above three dozen.67

Scholarly evidence shows that some early settlers of South Carolina migrated from Bermuda, the Bahamas, the Leewards, Jamaica, and above all Barbados. Richard Dunn further suggests that “the first forced black migrants to the English islands were chiefly inhabitants of the Windward, and Gold Coasts and the Slave coasts of West Africa.”68 By April of 1763, Georgians reported that near one thousand families from northern colonies arrived to settle lands south of the Altamaha river within a year; and near four hundred more were expected.69

This, however, does not mean that there were no African born slaves in Georgia prior to 1766. Occasionally Africans, recent arrivals from the middle passage, were sold


68For a discussion of West Indian slave origins and migration to South Carolina, see Richard Dunn, Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972); Daniel C. Littlefield, Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade to Colonial South Carolina (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); and Wood, Black Majority.

69The Georgia Gazette, April 28, 1763.
to Georgia via the South Carolina and West Indian markets. Alexander Fyffe and Company sold enslaved laborers described as “new” to Georgia planters in the early 1760’s. Slave merchants Thomas Llyod, Francis Blake, Read and Mossman, Andrew Darling, and vendue masters William Ewen and Robert Bolton, all took advantage of opportunities to sell small numbers of middle passage survivors from these markets. Avoiding the expense of financing slaving voyages from the African coast, Georgia merchants established trade relationships with English firms that would allow them to “vend slaves for a fee.” Historian Darold Wax discovered that while this “relieved them of the huge capital outlays required by the slave trade,” they still had to deal with burdens at the local level. Such difficulties were easily overcome for “Savannah dealers enjoyed the luxury of a high-demand market,” where the Trustees complained slaveholders were, “stark Mad after Negroes.”

Once slavery was legalized in Georgia, the colony’s black population increased rapidly. Three thousand blacks arrived in Georgia from 1752 to 1765 and near one half of this total originated in South Carolina. Enslaved men outnumbered women on near fifty percent of the colony’s plantations, where the average planter owned fifteen slaves. Seventy percent of enslaved blacks lived on estates where there were more than twenty, but not more than fifty slaves. Men, women and children performed the necessary tasks for establishing plantations and cultivating fields, which included clearing fields of trees

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70See company and merchants advertisements in *The Georgia Gazette*, November 17, 1763; January 3, 1765; March 21, 1765; May 16, 1765; May 23, 1765; and July 4, 1765.

71See Wax, “New Negroes.”

and bushes and enclosing the areas with six-foot fences. Each adult laborer was expected to “work 6 to 10 acres and plant Indian corn, beans, pumpkins, rice and potatoes on it.” When blacks were not engaged in some stage of agricultural labor they were used for various kinds of housework, and according to Georgia law, “all Negro men of 16 to 60 years must work on the public roads, to start new ones or to improve them.”

Planter contributed very little to the general “upkeep of the Negroes” which Pastor Bolzius noted was “very sparse.” Their rations included Indian corn, poorer quality rice that was not exported, beans, occasional potatoes; and if they had “benevolent masters or proved themselves loyal, they may receive a little meat a few times a year.” Clothing was minimal as well,

In the winter the negroes must be kept warm, but in summer they go naked, except that the men cover their shame with a cloth rage which hangs from a strap tied around the body. The women have petticoats; the upper body is bare. The children of both sexes go about in summer just as they left the mother’s womb. In winter negro men and women have shoes, none in summer.

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74 Ibid., 236. Blacks were valued most as plantation laborers and before slavery was legalized Georgia officials contended that their duties should be limited to such to curb black occupational and geographic mobility and to prevent labor competition for white skilled workers. Robert Hows remarked, “the negroes should not be allowed to work at anything but producing rice (a labour too hard for white men), and in felling timber,” in Donnan, Documents Illustrative, 4:595.

75 Ibid. Philip Morgan finds that “slaves ate more poorly in the Lowcountry than in the Chesapeake,” in Slave Counterpoint, 143.

76 Loewald Starika and Taylor, “Bolzius Questionnaire,” 236.
Housing for blacks was generally built around the plantation’s or farm’s barn which was typically six hundred feet away from the home of the master. Each family or two persons lived in a cheaply constructed dwelling, “the costs of such a Negro hut are [were] but very minor. One buys only a few nails for them.”

Georgia’s slave laws were rigid and punishment was severe. Although there was a great deal of discussion about slave preferences and which slaves were most loyal, in reality whites expected an “aggressive response from any black transported to Georgia.” In 1755, the Georgia Assembly, dominated by South Carolina migrants, passed Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes which was modeled after South Carolina’s slave code of 1740. The act declared that,

in his majesty’s plantations in America slavery has been introduced and allowed and the people commonly called Negroes, Indians, Mulatos, and Mestizos have been deemed absolute slaves.

Slave laws reflected fears of rebellion and insurrection by the enslaved population. The aforementioned act warned that it was “absolutely necessary to the safety of this province that all due care be taken to restrain the wandering and meetings of negroes and other slaves at all times.” Whites feared that these people would plan and carry out insurrections on Saturday nights, Sundays and other holidays. The assembly further demanded that blacks be restrained from carrying “dangerous weapons or using or keeping of drums horns or other loud instruments which may call together or give sign or

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77 Ibid.

78 Candler, Colonial Records, 18:137.
notice to one another of their wicked designs & purposes.”79 Likewise “all whites regardless of whether they held slaves, were legally bound to assist in the supervision of Georgia’s blacks.”80

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From its inception, the plan for establishing Georgia seemed headed for failure. Supporters imagined the colony a critical part of the British empire. A protective barrier between Spanish Florida and the English colonies, Georgia would prove equally valuable as an agricultural export economy and haven for the poor of Europe, offering them work and hope as indentured servants. Surrounded by slaveocracies, Georgia banned the institution and believed antislavery regulations would protect the colony from the mistakes of its neighbors. In reality, they could not manage white servant labor or lay the foundation of their colony without Africans, thus agricultural pursuits failed repeatedly. In addition to these trials, slaveholders from throughout the Americas did all they could to hasten an end to Georgia’s antislavery years.

Following the Trustees’ unsuccessful project in indentured servitude, slaveholders fought for the legalization of African slavery. In 1750, they descended on Georgia and began establishing plantations with black laborers from American and West Indian colonies who were “seasoned.” These laborers had achieved an uneasy adjustment to slave life after recovering from the illnesses of the African slave trade and escaping death. “Old negroes” had the agricultural expertise Georgia planters sought and were aware of

79Ibid.

80See Wood, Slavery in Colonia Georgia.
the legal and social boundaries of slavery. As James Habersham noted, they believed that “nothing could be accomplished without the help of old negroes.” and they considered such blacks the most loyal and productive slaves. In reality, racial tensions in Georgia were prevalent from 1732 to 1766, and whites feared, expected, and faced resistance from the enslaved who carried a cultural of resistance to the new colony, particularly following South Carolina’s well-trodden paths to Spanish Florida. Soon white Georgians’ descriptions of the formerly ideal “seasoned negroes” shifted and mirrored their negative views of rebellious indentured servants from the preslavery years.

As historian Darold Wax notes, “new Negroes would be in demand” as planters and slave merchants began considering African-born slaves, who were unfamiliar with American slavery, the ideal plantation laborers. They were misguided in their notions about the nature of Africans, whom they thought could be shaped into perfect slaves in their “uncorrupted” state. Centuries of slaving in West Africa produced generations of people who had begun the process of cultural adaptation, identity transformation, and resistance long before Georgia introduced and legalized African slavery. Georgians would also learn that enslaved Africans who had never set foot on an American colony could be equally unwavering in their resistance to slavery and creative in building culture and community with its boundaries. These skills had strong foundations in West Africa, where many were had lived in the chaos created by the Atlantic slave trade, which was at its height when Georgians began to import slaves directly from the region.

81 Wax, “‘New Negroes’”
CHAPTER 3

“FROM CORDAGE TO IRON FETTERS”: GEORGIA’S AFRICAN PAST

If we be ascertained how, as natives they live, we may be brought to conceive what, as emigrants they endure.82
–William Beckford

William Beckford’s Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica gave instructions to planters throughout the Americas regarding how “new negroes may be at first settled and domesticated” or seasoned. For Beckford’s plan to work, masters and overseers had to pay close attention to the tremendous impact that experiences in West African societies, ravaged by warfare, and the middle passage had on blacks’ physical and mental health. His remarks included, a discussion of Africans’ capture, family separation, resistance and submission to slavery, and the process of cultural and communal development in enslaved communities. Although the African past was central to Beckford and his contemporaries’ understanding of how blacks endured slave life in the Americas, fewer historians have given such attention to the West African phase of enslavement and its role in shaping life on American plantations and farms. The goal of this chapter is to consider Beckford’s concern with “how as natives they lived” towards situating Georgia in a broader Atlantic context as the colony developed its African slave trade.83

82William Beckford, Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica Impartially Made for a Local Experience of Nearly Thirteen Years in that Island (London, 1788).

83Ibid.
perspectives and experiences transitions early American analyses of blacks communities from limited studies of new world institutions and laborers to broader examinations of African people, as their histories transformed in new settings.

Most of the secondary literature relating to the African slave trade emphasizes political and economic developments. In particular, the scholarship of the past twenty years, enhanced our understanding of African agency in the South Atlantic system. Traditionally viewed solely as victims of trade, Africans played more varied roles in a system of bargaining, negotiating, and power play that forced compromise among its participants. During near five centuries of exchange, African leaders had a critical part in regulating trade relations that did not always favor European traders and merchants, nor allow their absolute power or authority in delegating the processes involved in capturing and selling human cargo. A valuable contribution of more recent scholarship relating to the African trade is its challenge to static notions of power in African-European relations along the slave trading coast.

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The introduction of Africans as key players in the Atlantic economy demonstrates the need for closer examination of the varying impacts the trade had on African communities. The smallest percentage of Africans, the political and social elites, could earn tremendous wealth and power from slave trading. Other leaders tried to stop, or at least limit, human trafficking in their regions. African traders’ roles were precarious and ranged from lucrative financial opportunities to dangerous risks that often resulted in their own enslavement and transport. The millions of Africans captured in the interior, marched to the sea coast, and/or enslaved abroad represent almost as many stories. With a critical gaze, some generalizations may help reconstruct the lives of those affected by the trade. The current historiography, however, shows that we can no longer speak of a single “African experience.” Many communities faced a variety of opportunities, gains and losses as a result of the European and American demand for black laborers. These circumstances created a chaotic atmosphere along the major slave regions of West Africa.

The Atlantic slavery historiography generally centers the most powerful African and European leaders, merchants, and traders. Until recently, few Africanists considered the rise of the Atlantic system from the viewpoint of the captives. Early Americanists look

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to Africa for broad evidence of African American cultural roots, but give less attention to
Africans’ experiences as a link to their political, economic, and social movements in
American society.

Eighteenth century West Africa was extremely diverse and there is no single
accurate description of life and culture that can be provided. One social condition that did
exist in many societies that became central to European and African trade relations
resulted from a system of trading people for political, economic, or social gain. Slavery
thrived in West African societies, yet differed from the institutions that developed in the
New World. Consideration of Africans’ knowledge of slavery and their participation in
the development of the South Atlantic system is critical in determining what knowledge
captive Africans had of labor oppression and slave trading, and the ways in which this
information guided their actions and shaped culture, community, and resistance.

87For a summary of the debate regarding historical definitions of African slavery and the
development of the African slave trade see Robert O. Collins, James McDonald Burns, and Erik
Kristofer Ching, eds., Problems in African History: The Precolonial Centuries (New York:
Markus Wiener Pub., 1993); Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, eds., Pawnship in Africa: Debt
Bondage in Historical Perspective (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Paul Lovejoy, ed., The
Ideology of Slavery in Africa (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981); Lovejoy, Transformations
in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983);
of African History 30, 3(1989):365-394; Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., Slavery in
Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,
1977); and Claire C. Robertson and Martin Klein, eds., Women and Slavery in Africa (Madison:
University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

88Richard Rathbone states that American and Caribbean historical fields need more
thorough understanding of the African background. He finds that in West Africa potential captives
were aware of European intentions and developed a culture of resistance that included maroonage,
insurrections, political organization in baracoons and slave holding pens, and shaping new cultural
traditions in coastal communities. See “Resistance to Enslavement in West Africa” in Patrick
Manning, ed., An Expanding World Volume 15 Slave Trades 1500-1800: Globalization of
In his important work on Africa and the Atlantic world, John Thornton’s *Africa and Africans* notes that scholars overemphasize barriers created by African diversity, and inaccurately conclude that Africans who were enslaved came from too many different language and ethnic groups to communicate and develop common identity. Africanists and Anthropologists agree that Africans who were enslaved in the Americas came from three major cultural groups: the Upper Guinea, the Lower Guinea, and the Angolan coast. A variety of languages and cultures can be found in each of these regions; however, such diversity does not indicate an inability to communicate. Using the work of Alonso de Sandoval, Thornton notes that by modern classifications there were as many as fifty different languages in the areas of western and central Africa that constitute enslaved Africans’ origins. He adds however that “few scholars would argue that every linguistic or national unit on the West African coast possessed a culture entirely different from its neighbors.”89

African ethnic groups in each area were connected by sophisticated water transportation routes and commercial trade networks. People could communicate with members of diverse ethnic and language groups because their societies were multilingual. Such “people can understand a wider variety of speech than monolingual people.” Pidgin languages or lingua franca were enhanced communication networks. In the Upper Guinea coast the political and commercial lingua franca was *Mandinga*. This ethnic group, and

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others including the Fula and Jolofs, could communicate based on common Islamic
religious beliefs. In parts of the Lower Guinea, where people spoke languages from two
groups of the Kwa family, Akan and Aja, not only was Yoruba the lingua franca, numerous
ethnic groups also worshiped Yoruba deities. The Angola region was even less diverse.
Africans from this region who were enslaved in the Americas lived in a zone where two
languages were spoken, Kikongo and Kinbundu, which were noted to be as similar as
Spanish and Portuguese.  

For decades, Africanists have criticized Americanists’ lack of attention to the
scholarship in their field in studies of new world slavery. In particular, they find that
American slavery studies ignore Africa when examining the ways in which cultures and
communities transformed as they met the chaotic era of the trade. Likewise scholars of
early Africa note that Americanists do not show enough interest in finding connections and
similarities in the African diaspora. North American slavery studies struggle with the
significance of Africa in early history. Several path-breaking works established a strong
case for closer examination of links with Africa. Peter Wood and Daniel C. Littlefield
found that no real understanding of slavery in South Carolina could be achieved without
an analysis of the colony’s African influences. Later, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall
demonstrated that Africa played an essential role in shaping social, cultural, and economic
life in French and Spanish Louisiana. Others in the field have viewed African cultural

90 Thornton, Africa and Africans, 186 & 188-191.

91 Peter Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through
the Stono Rebellion (New York: Norton, 1974); Daniel C. Littlefield, Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity
and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,
heritage as conflict, confusion, and a barrier that new world blacks had to overcome.

Most of the early American scholarship echoes the ideal that,

“the passage from traditional religions to Christianity created a community of faith and provided a body of values and a religious commitment that became in time the principal solvent of ethnic differences and the primary source of cultural identity.”

This study takes a divergent path and considers Africa the very foundation of culture and community building among black Georgians who relied upon their cultural heritage and information gained from their experiences abroad as they adjusted to new world slavery. Scholars of Africa, Europe, and the Americas approach slavery studies from varying perspectives. The burgeoning field of Atlantic World history encourages research from all the aforementioned fields and seeks connections among those who experiences crossed significant physical and cultural boundaries. Historian Paul Lovejoy suggests that, “the methodologies and research results of the past several decades of African history can be used much more effectively in the examination of the conditions of slaves in the Americas.” Incorporating more African history in American studies will also show “more about the history of Africa itself.” Such an Atlantic perspective presents an ideal conceptual framework for this study of Georgia’s enslaved community. The trade


had unique beginning and ending points for the African leader, the European trader, and
the American planter. For the enslaved, particularly those born in West Africa and
transported to the Americas, the trade flowed from one world of oppression to the next,
presenting a continual threat to those who arrived in Georgia. Their experiences challenge
traditional, historical periodization. From the vantage point of the African captive,
experiences that shaped the journey to the lowcountry began long before the legalization
of slavery in 1750. This chapter examines that process of New World enslavement and
provides descriptions of the regions that served as major points of departure for those who
arrived in Georgia. The official dates of Georgia’s African trade, c.1765 to 1807, are
expanded to incorporated life in West Africa (and the West Indies) as a key factor in
shaping life in Georgia.

The evidence presented by Thornton suggests that many African cultural practices
and world views were similar among various ethnic groups. Furthermore, African
participation in cultural, religious and economic exchange (among ethnic groups and with
Europeans) had been well established and predates America’s colonial slave trade. People
shaped communities and identities without incorporating European religions and cultures.
In fact, connections with Europeans often created or intensified ethnic conflict. One
barrier towards understanding the importance of the process of enslavement in Africa and
the impact that it had on shaping the lives of those who were captured and transported is
the lack of historical sources that reflect the thought and feelings of this group. These
barriers need not silence African voices. Evidence of the experiences of capture and
slavery in the African interior and on the coast and during the Middle Passage can be obtained through the available sources. Accounts from Africans, slave traders and merchants, voyage records, court records, newspapers, and planter journals and manuscripts, along with other sources can help recreate West African life and its significance in the lives of those who entered Georgia.  

"Still Unproven and Inexperienced": Categorization and Preferences in Georgia Trading:

As discussed in the previous chapter, as Georgia’s agricultural foundations were planted firmly, the preference for acculturated blacks decreased. Not only had they proved as difficult to manage as white laborers, but the very assets that made them valuable to the white population were the qualities that they used to challenge the boundaries of their oppression. Language and agricultural skills, communal relations, familiarity with the institution of slavery all aided black Georgians as they resisted and adapted to slavery. Thus after over thirty years of clandestine and legalized black slavery, black labor preferences made a strong turn towards Africa. Fifteen years after the legalization of the slave trade, Georgia began to import Africans directly from West

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African slave ports. Georgia’s shift also mirrored the preferences for “new Negroes” that had developed in other American colonies during the early part of the eighteenth century. From Rhode Island to South Carolina, slave traders, merchants, and planters contended that blacks from the West Indies were the worst slave laborers, generally sold by their former masters because of their rebellious nature or failing health.95

Categorization of “good” and “bad” slaves did not solely reflect planter-merchant slave preferences, but was connected to the colonies’ dependence on the African slave trade as a major source of revenue that initiated rapid economic growth in northern, southern, and West Indian societies. Thus slave trade companies and merchants increased the market value of their human merchandise by devaluing laborers available through smaller scale trading. This appealed to Georgia planters because they needed greater numbers of workers. Likewise, tumultuous relations between whites and acculturated blacks demonstrated, they felt, the more familiar a laboring population was with slavery’s terrain, the more advantages they accrued in dismantling its boundaries. All of these issues, together, were central in shaping preferences for slaves. Direct African imports provided the greater number of laborers and provided European nation and their colonies with a greater number of economic activities related to the trade. The development of the African trade in Georgia was accompanied by a surge in economic opportunities, which included the rise of the planter-merchant class, ship building and various employment opportunities for sailors. The colonial American planter-merchant class had real economic

95See Darold D. Wax, “Preferences for Slaves in Colonial America,” Journal of Negro History, Volume 58, Issue 4 (October, 1973), 371-401. For a detailed discussion of these preferences in South Carolina’s African trade see Littlefield, Rice and Slaves.
incentives behind their preferences. The ways in which these preferences impacted race relations in daily life changed over time.96

A clear distinction must be made between white Georgian’s preferences for what they called “new negroes” and slaves who were African-born. During the ten year period addressed in the is chapter, slave imports to Georgia via North American and West Indian trade routes continued.97 Once a person had experienced New World slavery for at least six months, his or her classification changed. Those who survived the “seasoning period,” including disease, language, labor, and cultural adjustments, were no longer considered new. After they had established connections and acceptable communication skills, whites described them as “African born,” often referencing their “country marks.” The term “New Negroe” was reserved for Africans who had only recently disembarked at Georgia ports directly from the West African coast.98 From the existing records, at least thirty


97Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America. At least fifty-six ships from the West Indies and South Carolina carried over 700 enslaved blacks to Georgia from 1766 to 1776. The numbers of slaves on board ranged from as few as two to seventy-three. At least three ships were noted to carry “new Negroes” from West Africa. Captain Robert Anslie arrived in Savannah, August 2, 1769 from St. Kitts. His ship, Mercury, brought “a few” slaves “just imported” from Gambia. The firms Cowper and Telfairs and John Graham and Co. reportedly imported ninety “new Negroes” from the Windward coast and Gambia on the ships Nancy and Fortune July 6 and August 10, 1768, respectively. See Donnan, 625.

98My description of Georgia’s categorization differs from that of Michael A. Gomez who finds that “once the period of seasoning had been completed,” captives were called “new negroes.” See Gomez, Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 168. Georgia records show that captives, both African and American born, were considered “old
three slave ships traveled the middle passage to Georgia from 1766 to 1776 and only two of this number made brief stops in the West Indies.\textsuperscript{99} Georgia slave merchants and planters preferred the direct route from Africa. “New negroes” were increasingly considered “uncorrupted” and best suited to be shaped into obedient servants. They placed particular value on Africans from the Senegambia and Sierra Leone regions (the “Rice coast”), desiring their agricultural expertise for the colony’s rice economy. Once a deterrent, “unproven and inexperienced” Africans began filling the Georgia slave market. Hoping to ease concerns of resistance, merchants marketed Africans as “unacquainted with the vices” of the acculturated enslaved and white indentured communities. Thus the benefit of direct imports was far-reaching. It afforded planters larger, faster purchases and expanded the scope of slave trading which was more lucrative for merchants who enjoyed a larger slave market.

\textsuperscript{99}David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, \textit{The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. This database allows the user to examine, summary, and analyze slave voyage records from a range of published and archival sources. The sources used in this chapter on the Georgia slave trade are as follows, Elizabeth Donnan, \textit{Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade}; \textit{Lloyd’s List} (newspaper); \textit{The Georgia Gazette} (newspaper); documents reprinted in \textit{The Georgia Historical Quarterly}; David Richardson, Kathy Beedham, and M.M. Schofield, \textit{Liverpool Shipping and Trade, 1744-1786}, ESRC Data Archives, University of Essex, 1992; Schofield archive at the University of Hull, including notes of Maurice M. Schofield on Liverpool slave ships between 1774 and 1778 and the Wilberforce Papers; and from the Public Records Office–Britain, documents located in the Admiralty Records, Board of Trade, and Colonial Office; \textit{The Papers of William Davenport and Company, 1745-1797}, The David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, PA; \textit{Brown Family Papers, 1762-1782}, The John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI; \textit{A Rhode Island Slaver: Trade Book of the Sloop Adventure, 1773-1774} (Providence: Shipley Library, 1922).
The difference between “old and new Negroes” had more to do with their familiarity with American slavery than their experience with slave trading and labor oppression. In this respect, Georgians of West African descent were far from “unproven and inexperienced.” They came from societies with varying degrees of servitude, hierarchy, and oppression. Their efforts to avoid capture in Africa had failed and they had begun the process of enslavement long before reaching seaports of Savannah and Sunbury. For example, the Sereer of the Senegambia had faced years of high risks of enslavement. By the eighteenth century, flight from slavery had become a theme of their mythology. Groups of Senegambians who successfully escaped enslavement on the West African coast, formed communities similar to the maroon societies that emerged in the Americas. West African runaways hid in the forests for refuge; and in the Senegal River valley they formed a village called Guereau on the Cape de Masse that fought off Wolof pillagers and slave traders.100

After the introduction of the African trade, categorization of blacks in the enslaved population became more complex. The major categories were “old” or “seasoned” and “new,” the former referred to persons (African and American born) who had been enslaved for at least two years. The latter described laborers who had recently arrived from Africa. Contact with West Africa did result in some assumed knowledge of African ethnicity. Preferences were made for “Gambia” blacks or those from the Senegambia and Sierra Leon regions of West Africa for their supposed knowledge of rice production.

Generally, Africans were described according to assumed broad regional West African origin. African slave traders had little information regarding the internal function of the West African slave trade. Their descriptions of African ethnicity, which were transported to Georgia, were generalized and reflected their limited knowledge of West African geography. Thus slaves from the upper Guinea coast were commonly called “Gambia,” those from the lower Guinea, “Bight” (referring to the Bight of Benin?) or “Ebo,” and those from the Congo region were called “Angola, “ ”Gola,” or “Congo.” Finally there was an even broader term, “Guiney” revealing no real knowledge of an African’s background other than to imply s/he was from the Guinea Coast, which often described the entire slaving coast encompassing all three regions.

White Georgians’ categorization mirrored white Atlantic methods of describing the black populations they encountered in West Africa. In the African context, broad categories were adopted to distinguish blacks. Widely read accounts by William Bosman, Thomas Aubrey and Mungo Park, among others, generally forced Africans into about four major groups. Aubrey found “four sorts” the first “of a chocolate colour,” the second “of a natural black,” the third “are yellow,” and the fourth “a dark russet colour.” His account includes a discussion of the hair textures, physical appearance, and lists common diseases among each group. The group most recognizable to whites, those “of a natural Black color” receive the best rating and are recommended above all others for service in America,

lusty strong, vigorous, cheerful, marry, affable, amorous, kind docile, faithful, and easily diverted from wrath...they have also
The other groups of blacks, less recognizable to American whites, receive poor ratings, “proud, revengeful, dull, lazy, naturally sad, and sluggish” are among the terms for those deemed less valuable as slaves.

Categorization affirms what scholars know from slave voyage records—that enslaved populations in Georgia had diverse ethnic origins and originated from ships that embarked at most of the major slaving ports of West Africa. The key purpose of categorization was in creating an image of “prime slave” for American markets. White merchants, traders, and traveler descriptions served as guidelines for selling and purchasing slave laborers. They generalized characteristics of the “the best slaves” so that most cargoes would appear “prime.” The groups whites developed do suggest some desire for a better understanding of African diversity. Small moves towards learning about African cultures were overwhelmed by marketing. Africans noted as the best laborers received a general description that could accommodate most of the captives merchants and slaveholders encountered. Minimal information relating to religion and other cultural practices can be drawn from these sources alone. Overall white categorization of Africans says more about their efforts to reduce their human cargoes to valuable commodities in the marketplace than provide a picture of black diversity in Georgia and the significance of African ethnicity in the development of culture and community among the enslaved.

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Regardless of the origins of Georgia’s preference for new negroes, the African slave trade ensued after 1765 and West Africans quickly gained a dominant role in Georgian society. During the ten year period from the opening of the African slave trade to the eve of the American Revolution, Georgia’s enslaved black population increased rapidly. More than 6,000 Africans were forced on slave ships destined for Georgia and more than 5,000 of this number survived the middle passage and disembarked at the ports of Savannah and Sunbury. The largest number of these Africans, near 2,000, (32%) were purchased in the Senegambia region of Africa, followed by over 1,000 each from Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast. A slightly larger number of near 1,200 Africans were purchased at unspecified locations in Africa.\textsuperscript{102}

The high percentage of Senegambians reflect Georgia’s adaptation of preferences from the South Carolina trade. Planters and merchants who moved to Georgia, as well as those new to rice agriculture, continued the industry’s specific preference for Africans from Senegambia who they thought were well acquainted with rice production. In addition to the ever-present assumption that “new negroes” were less likely to resist, valuable skills in rice agriculture led whites to classify Africans from the Upper Guinea Coast as “prime slaves.” A closer look at the impact of the eighteenth century slave trade in the region demonstrates that Senegambian Africans had extensive knowledge of and

\textsuperscript{102}Four hundred and twelve Africans were noted to have arrived in Georgia from unspecified regions in Africa. Angola is a possible point of origin for some of the Africans who are counted in this number. Historian Joseph Miller has written a noteworthy work on the Angolan slave trade in the eighteenth century. Georgia records reveal that at fewer than four hundred Africans arrived from this region during the first ten years of the slave trade. For numbers, see David Eltis, et al. \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade}. Also see Joseph Miller, \textit{A Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.)
experience in enslavement prior to their arrival in Georgia. The nature of the Atlantic slave trade had transformed societies the Upper Guinea coast and led to a great expansion of internal slavery that was linked to the Atlantic slave trade; and that the by the time Georgia entered the Atlantic slave trade, slave exports from the Senegambia region had actually declined significantly.

James Searing notes that slavery in Senegambia reached its harshest point in the eighteenth century when it expanded and co-existed with the brutal export trade. Overall, slavery and the slave trade were deeply entrenched in daily life in the Senegambia region. In the eighteenth century, an increasing number of Africans served as military and agricultural slaves in West Africa. During this period, known as the era of ceddo, three major spheres of slavery prevailed in the region. People were enslaved in the military, served as dependent farmers and weavers of cotton cloth, or were sold to Atlantic merchants. In areas where there was profitable trade in export crops such as gum, grains, and cattle, Africans were less likely to participate in slave trading with Europeans and kept laborers for internal markets. Even in this expanding internal system of slavery, Africans held a greater fear of Atlantic enslavement. “The fear of sale to the Atlantic trade served the master’s interests by favoring accommodation to slave status” with in Africa. The majority of the British trade in the region was fueled by slave caravans traveling west from

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103 Africanists note that the era of ceddo devastated the economy and provoked famine on what Searing calls a “frontier of violent enslavement linked to the Atlantic slave trade.” More specifically the Wolof term can be translated as “unbeliever,” “pagan,” or “traditionalist,” and in the nineteenth century, “warrior.” The era of ceddo describes a period of wide-spread use of enslaved forces in the military forces of the region, Searing, *West African Slavery.*
the middle Niger Valley to the Gambia river, a distance of some six hundred miles.\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, large numbers of slaves purchased in markets near the coast, originated from communities further inland.

The British trade also extended further south of the region to Sierra Leone. In 1785, John Matthews published a series of letters in \textit{A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone}, describing the eighteenth century European trade in the region. Providing evidence of what he deemed the “impolicy of the abolition of the slave trade,” Matthews’ book was part of the growing debate over the moral, economic, and social significance of the African slave trade in England. Merchants, traders, planters and other supports of the African trade, justified black enslavement and removal to Americas as a mercenary efforts that saved Africans from the inevitable death they would suffer under the systems of slavery practiced in their homelands. Aside from offering evidence for a pro-slave trade argument in the ensuing debate, Matthews provides observations of the Upper Guinea coast, particularly Sierra Leone that reveal African societies and peoples deeply affected by centuries of slave trading.

Although European traders maintained a presence in this region of West Africa for several centuries, by the latter part of the 1700’s, they generally submitted to African laws and established trade relations after negotiations with leaders of coastal cities and towns. This was the only way European traders could ensure a safe and profitable African venture. Upon arriving on the coast, Matthews negotiated with local African groups and sought permission from African leaders to “erect stores and workman houses” and initiate

\textsuperscript{104}Searing, \textit{West African Slavery}, 27-58.
trade. He acknowledged the dangers and even brutal consequences of straying from local rules and regulations. In Sierra Leone, the former agent of the company he served, was “murdered in a most horrid manner.” Prior to his arrival fourteen years after the incident, “not a white man has [had] dared to put his foot on shore.” Local leaders granted Matthews trading privileges after he convinced the king that by his “own laws, they were bound to protect the stranger from insult and oppression”—all white men being strangers. Matthews, like many traders before him, further submitted to African custom by participating in a ritual. A ceremonial truce was made “by making a hole in the ground, and saying in this grave I bury all past animosities, whoever opens it shall be subject to a palaver.” The people shouted a term of approbation, then Matthews and the king filled the hole thus concluding the ceremony.105

Communities in the eighteenth century Upper Guinea West Africa had experienced intense cultural contact with Arabs and Europeans and formed lasting connections based on trade, religion and socio-political expansion among a variety of African ethnic groups. In this region, the Mandingo were powerful. Their language provided the lingua franca of trade and they spread their religion, Islam, throughout the region. Where they could they expanded their empire through war; and where they could not assert military power, they became central figures by establishing schools and teaching local populations Arabic reading and writing. Like African Muslims throughout the Islamic empire, their service to the communities they joined was wide-ranging. As valuable soldiers, teachers, merchants,

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105 Matthews, A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone, 6. *Palaver* was a wide-spread term used to describe campaigns or attacks against villages used for the purpose of capturing and kidnaping people to sell to the West African and Atlantic slave markets.
and advisors, Matthews noted that he rarely came to an African village that did not seek the advice of a Muslim Mandingo before taking any political, economic, or social move.\footnote{Ibid, 69.}

The Muslim Africans of the Upper Guinea were also well sought after by European traders, for they played a central role in the capture and sale of slaves on the coast. This role was an expansion of the ancient trans-Saharan and the subsequent Arab slave trade conducted centuries prior to the Portuguese arrival in West Africa in the fifteenth century. Thus, slavery as an institution of labor exploitation and slave trading in the region were not unknown to Africans. By the eighteenth century, the scope and nature of the trade had transformed significantly. In the early years of European involvement in the African trade; the majority of the laborers were enslaved from among those ethnic groups living in coastal societies. By the eighteenth century, the growth of the trade had pushed traders’ (black and white) purchases further in to the interior as well.

Searing’s and Matthew’s descriptions of trade, agricultural production, and manufacturing on the Upper Guinea coast demonstrate why Georgia planters sought Africans from this region, yet reveals that the largest number of those who were enslaved may not have come from these coastal cities, but from ethnic groups further inland where Europeans had limited knowledge of African life. By the eighteenth century, the Atlantic slave trade in the Senegambia and Sierra Leone had become an integral part of everyday life. Accounts of the slave trade from this region primarily examine slave trading and
culture in coastal African communities. As had been the case centuries earlier, Europeans had not gained access to slave trading routes in the interior societies of West Africa.

Historians and eighteenth century contemporaries alike developed reasonably accurate descriptions of the coastal societies of Senegambia and Sierra Leone. Reconstructing the African life in the interior is more challenging. European traders, who left the bulk of written sources relating to the trade, had very limited knowledge of the function of slave trading in the interior and of African culture in the region. On rare occasion towards the end of the century, limited numbers of white traders traveled into parts of the interior to purchase slaves. Joseph Hawkins, who traded slaves for the South Carolinian and West Indian markets, conducted business in the interior with the traders from the Ibo nation.

Following the end of the British Royal African Company’s monopoly of the African trade in the colonies more Americans and “separate traders” participated in slaving voyages. Young white men grasped opportunities for successful commerce they hoped would provide lucrative businesses and the monetary foundations for social respectability. Adventures from varying backgrounds met successes and failures in the Atlantic’s challenging world economic, political, and cultural tensions. Joseph Hawkins both epitomized American men’s attractions to the African trade and stood apart from the majority because of his rare experiences in the interior. Born in New York, Hawkins moved to Vermont at eighteen where he lamented, “at the end of fourteen months I found

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107 For an account of tensions between the Royal African Company and independent traders see, A True State of the Present Difference between the Royal African Company, and the Separate Traders. Written by a True Lover of his Country and Humbly Submitted to the Wise Consideration of Both Houses of Parliament (1710) JCBL.
my hopes of success in business disappointed.” After “hearing it frequently said that a young man of a moderate education and industrious habits, with a good recommendation, would be sure of an eligible and constant employment in the southern states,”108 Hawkins traveled to South Carolina where his “circumstances and prospects on arriving in Charleston by no means equaled [his] wants or expectations.” He searched for new pursuits and finally, “more by the stimulus of necessity” Hawkins accepted an offer on board a “Guinea Trader.” Accounts written by Hawkins and others who worked on slave ships in the lower Guinea and Angola regions are critical toward developing a picture of Africans’ lives before they arrived in Americas. These narratives show that Africans further South were also knowledgeable regarding the slave trade; that these regions were also marked by ethnic diversity, but language and cultural difference that did not always reflect hostility; and that those who were enslaved shared a common experience for three months to a over year before they reached American plantations that shaped a new identities and ignited collective resistance.

Hawkins joined the crew of the ship Charleston and voyaged to the “Isles of Delos” off the coast of West Africa. Captain J. Connelly led the expedition which sought trade with members of the Ibo nation. Planters in the West Indies hailed, the transported slaves of that nation were most esteemed in our West India Islands; they are most industrious, laborious and susceptible to generous


sentiments; their courage and self-denial in misfortunes, in war, and even on the scaffold are unparalleled.\textsuperscript{110}

Connelly chose Hawkins as the crew member best suited for a journey into the interior to establish contact and commence trade. Hurdee, an Ibo who was fluent in English and several African languages, served as Hawkins’ guide into the interior. Their journey to the Ibo nation reveals ethnic diversity and conflict that existed in West Africa, often as a consequence of the slave trade. The Ibo and Gola kings had been at war and the voyage into the interior was marked by a fear of encountering members of the Gola nation. If such a meeting occurred, Hurdee feared he would be killed by this enemy nation and that Hawkins would be held for ransom.

During the twenty two day journey from the coast to the Ibo nation, Hawkins learned some of the language of the people he encountered and became familiar with African hunting techniques and medicinal healing practices. As Matthews had in Sierra Leone, upon arrival at the village of the Ibo king, Hawkins had to immerse himself in the African culture. When the king was pleased with the European trade items he was offered, he recounted his battles with the Gola, his victory, and promised a number of his prisoners to sell in America. The following day one hundred prisoners of the Ibo nation were bound and forced on the long journey to the shore.

\textsuperscript{110}Hawkins, \textit{History of a Voyage}, iii-iv. This praise of the Ibo nation may reflect some of the misconceptions that Europeans had regarding African ethnicity and slave capture. Members of the Ibo nation would have generally sold their enemies into slavery, however selling members of one’s own ethnic group, marked as criminals, did occur. This may reflect some level of European manipulation of African ethnicity to justify the slave trade or increase sales from preferred ethnic groups. See Littlefield, \textit{Rice and Slaves}.  

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The initial capture in the interior was most often made by African traders who were increasing accompanied by Europeans during the eighteenth century. Alexander Falconbridge described “fairs” that took place in the interior, two hundred miles from the coast, where several thousand slaves could be purchased every six weeks. Falconbridge complained of,

“the extreme care taken by the black traders to prevent the Europeans from gaining any intelligence of their modes of proceeding; the great distance inland from whence the negroes are brought; and our ignorance or their language, prevent our obtaining such information on this head as we could wish.”

Africanists, such as Joseph Miller, suggests that many of the African captives in these “fairs” were prisoners of war and others who had been punished with slavery for situations ranging from debt and adultery to more serious crimes. Traders called groups of captives that traveled from the African interior to the coast “coffles” as they would term a group of livestock; and between the time of capture and disembarkation from the coast, it was common for the captives to live among animals as they endured the beginning stages of what would become a life of enslavement.

Africans faced harsh treatment as they headed towards the seacoast. The march to the coast, marked the beginning of the deterioration of health, spread of disease, and death that contributed to the overall catastrophic rate of mortality caused by the Atlantic slave trade. African and European traders alike treated captives with grave brutality. As they traveled through the interior, captives were bound together and driven with whips. Food

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111Ibid, 13.

112See Joseph Miller, A Way of Death.
and water were minimal and insufficient, and clothing was sparse. In this condition, the injured and battered became increasingly susceptible to disease. Paths to the coast were marked with shallow graves of decaying corpses and skeletal remains; growing numbers of dead bodies were haphazardly tossed along shorelines. Joseph Miller notes that a slave merchant of the Angola region reported towards the second half of the century, that one could expect to lose forty percent to flight and death from purchase in the interior to boarding the ships. In fact, 25% of captives died en route to the coast. Both corpses and escapees were testimonies to others of the cruelty they too might endure if captured and sold. Thus by the eighteenth century Africans along the Guiney coast and deep into the interior had much feared the European slave trade and protected their communities from merchants to the best of their abilities. Communication networks established by escapees, maroon communities and other resistance movements spread information about the trade to a wide-range of villages.

Along the Guiney coast, slaving was an inhuman and horrific business, but nonetheless an enterprise with regulations. Even the most vulnerable of Africa had some understanding of hierarchy and servitude that may force them into submission by their superiors. Africans immediately recognized that European enslavement was more oppressive than servitude in their societies and altered familiar trading customs. The expansion of methods for procuring slaves was the most devastating change, and fewer people could expect protection from their leaders. By the high-tide of trade, there was more forcible removal by abduction, kidnaping and social and economic methods as

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113Ibid.
opposed to outright war and its repercussions. Petitioners for the Abolition of the slave trade presented evidence before the House of Commons in 1790 and 1791 that discussed the chaos and injustices of procuring slaves between 1753 and 1790. Evidence presented by slave traders, as well as surgeons in the trade, demonstrated the “common nature of kidnaping.” Slaver trader Capt. Wilson reported, “it is the first principle of the natives, the principle of self-preservation, never to go unarmed, while a slave vessel is on the coast, for fear of being stolen.” Captain Hill recalled, “the natives on the continent opposite to Goree all go armed, for fear of being taken.”

Traders explained that Africans were increasingly sending out “parties in search of slaves.” During these *palavers*, villages and towns were raided and burned and those captured were forced to European slave forts. At the English slave factory at Secundee, near Cape Coast Castle (modern day Ghana), a slave trader recalled that captives were brought in one evening and the next morning people came to the factory, pleading for the release of their children and relatives. He testified, that “some were released, and part sent off to Cape Coast Castle,” and eventually sold to lowcountry merchants. The trader stated that he had, “every reason to believe they had been obtained unfairly as they came at an unseasonable time of the night, and from their parents and friends crying and begging their release.” Generally European traders’ primary interest was in filling their ships and they were not at all concerned with the injustices of the trade. The factory resident at the

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114 Abstract of the Evidence Delivered Before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, in the Year 1790 and 1791; on the Part of the Petitioner for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Edinburgh, 1791), JCBL; Minutes of the Evidence Taken...Before the Committee of the Whole House...to Whom the Bill for Providing Certain Temporary Regulations Respecting the Transportation of the Natives of Africa, in British Ship, to the West Indies, and Elsewhere, was Committed (April, 1789) JCBL.
Secundee fort, Mr. Marsh, declared that “he did not mind how the traders got them, for he had purchased them fairly.” Another trader, Mr. Bowman said, he “never saw any slaves who had been convicted of crimes” among his purchases.115

Traders, both African and European, also took advantage of misfortunes caused by natural disasters, such as famine and drought, that forced people to sell community members, their children and other relatives, and even themselves into slavery. Those who had escaped death or capture in the event of war, were often left without protection and vulnerable to capture. Traders traveled from village to village, searching for the unprotected and the vulnerable, thus expanding their captive population through raiding. African traders who were not associated with a powerful leader or large trade company took costly risks in selling captives. Whether they worked internal markets, coastal forts, or slaving voyages, black traders faced abuse from Europeans. During the era of the Royal Africa Company’s British power trade position, they punished African traders who sold captives to separate traders with a brand in the face. Africans who earned money by taking advantage of opportunities to sell a few captives to Europeans, occasionally found the tables turned when white traders added them to their cargoes.116 In Georgia, John Brown witnessed the precarious position of African traders,

Tony Wilson discovered that Boatswain Smith was the very man who had sold him from his country, within the last two years. He got into a great rage, and fell upon Smith directly, and they both began to fight, butting at one another furiously. We had a great deal of trouble to part them, but we

115Ibid.

116The Trial of Captain Livesley, for Cruelty & Ill-Treatment, to Potter Jackson, An African Negro; on Board the Lord Stanley, a Ship in the African Trade (London, 1806); and A True State of the Present Difference.
succeeded at last, and learnt that they had both been brought direct to Savannah in Georgia, with a great many more. Boatswain Smith had been kidnapped not very long after he had been the means of sending his countryman into slavery.\textsuperscript{117}

The march to the European ships docked on the sea coast marked the transition to American enslavement for those enslaved captives who would survive the journey. In Ibo country, Hawkins’ original group of one hundred Gola prisoners of war increased to near five hundred men, women and children from varying backgrounds. As the trader prepared the African captives for their journey to \textit{The Charleston} slaver, Hawkins remarked that they recognized “the darkness of their situation” and the beginnings of a new phase of enslavement when “a change from cordage to iron fetters, rent their hopes and hearts together: their wailings were torturing beyond what words can express.”\textsuperscript{118} The “iron fetters” particular to American bondage forced Africans to recognize and address a form of captivity that differed from what they had known in their respective nations.

Alexander Falconbridge’s \textit{Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa} details his experiences and observations as a surgeon in the slave trade. The narrative is particularly valuable because of the close attention it pays to the experiences of the captives in the slaving districts on the coast of West Africa and during the journey to the Americas. Falconbridge gives some account of ethnic rivalries and warfare in Africa; however he says more about the connections captives made and the ways in which identity shaped from the experience of bondage on the sea coast. Particularly revealing in

\textsuperscript{117}Boney, F.N. ed., \textit{Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, A Fugitive Slave} (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1972), 164

\textsuperscript{118}Hawkins, \textit{History of a Voyage}, 143.
Falconbridge’s account is the length of time that African captives spend on the coast of Africa, in forts, baracoons, and even onboard the ship, before the journey to the America’s ensued. On the shores of Bonny and New Calabar, crew members were instructed to build “a house” on the ship for the slaves while docked on the coast. “Another purpose for which these temporary houses are erected, is, in order to prevent the purchased negroes from leaping overboard. This, the horrors of their situation frequently impel them to attempt.”119 On Falconbridge’s voyages, slaves were purchased and brought onboard daily for a period of at least three months. An African voyage, from departure to return, could last ten months to the slaving coast and fifteen to eighteen months to the Windward and Gold coasts. Considering that the American South was the furthest point on slave ship missions, Africans who arrived in Georgia from points other than Senegambia and Sierra Leone may have spent over a year in bondage prior to arrival in Savannah or Sunbury ports.

The tension and discomfort that grew from Hawkins’ captives’ new condition in American bondage and the illness that was spreading before his ship disembarked, united the African captives in rebellion on the coast. The uprising was swift and brutal, the Africans forced crew members overboard and Hawkins’ finger was severed from his hand. Those who were bound assisted others by holding the legs of the crew members, and others shouted cheers of encouragement to those who fought. In the end, one African was killed and nine seriously wounded. This experience of interethnic rebellion against American bondage was vastly different from the royal treatment Hawkins had received.

119 Falconbridge, An Account of the Slave Trade, 7.
from the Ibo whose enemies he hoped to enslave. The danger of rebellion, the miserable agony suffered by the captives, and the fear of a probable outbreak of disease overwhelmed Hawkins. In the hours following the Africans’ rebellion, he planned his escape from the slaver. Hawkins was unsuccessful and as he feared, he fell ill during the journey and lost his sight. This event promptly ends Hawkins’ narrative. He spent little time describing the most traumatic events of his travels in West Africa, which occurred on the sea coast and during the middle passage.

Once slave traders completed their purchases and were prepared for the voyage to the Americas, Africans had already suffered high mortality rates and exposure to poor health conditions and debilitating disease. Africans who arrived in Georgia ports from the Upper Guinea had a better chance of surviving the middle passage and generally had lower mortality rates than Africans other regions. The passage from Senegambia and Sierra Leone was the shortest of the trade routes to Georgia and had a less severe impact on the health of the Africans onboard. It is probable that merchants influenced growing preferences for Africans from this region, valuing their survival rate as much as their agricultural skills. Greater numbers of slaves were available in the Lower Guinea and Angola regions, including societies that produced rice. Slave traders risked smaller during the Senegambia’s era of ceddo when slave exports for the American market had declined; or perhaps fabricated Africans’ true origins in their advertisements.

Georgia slave sale advertisements placed stronger emphasis on health and length of the slave voyage for Senegambia Africans than their expertise in rice technology. In fact, merchants knew their clients were aware of the devastating impact of the middle passage
and claimed shorter voyages. Captains of two slavers, the ship *Woodmanstone* and the snow *Granada* falsified information about their voyages. The available records of their journeys to Savannah in 1766 are consistent in all areas, except the recorded length of the middle passage. Captains of both ships purchased slaves in Gambia between June and August and arrived in Savannah in October. The recorded length of the middle passage for the both ships were near ten weeks; however when they placed advertisements in the *Georgia Gazette*, announcing the sale of the Africans, the *Granada* claimed a “short passage of five weeks” and the *Woodmanstone* a seven week journey.\(^\text{120}\)

Disease and harsh treatment brought death to many during the journey from Africa to the Americas. Towards the latter part of the eighteenth century trading companies sought a decrease in middle passage mortality rates to increase the profits of the trade as well as the quality of slave labor. Surgeons familiar with the coastal trade and African life wrote books purchased by “physicians to negroes” as well as planters and overseers with detailed descriptions of disorders, diseases and instructions for treating blacks.\(^\text{121}\)

Surgeon, Dr. Aubrey, who spent time on the African coast, urged his peers and planters to utilize healing practices used by the Africans themselves to cure disease in his book, *The Sea-Surgeon*. He observed that many Africans died because of surgeons’ ignorance stating that the surgeon,

\(^{120}\)See *The Georgia Gazette*, October 22, 1766 and Eltis, et al. *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*.

\(^{121}\)Thomas Aubrey, MD., *The Sea-Surgeon or the Guinea Man Vade Mecum* (London: John Clarke, 1729); Thomas M. Winterbottom, M.D. Physician to the Colony of Sierra Leone, *Medical Directions for the Use of Navigators and Settlers in Hot Climates* (London: 1803).
knows not what they are afflicted with, but supposing it to be a fever, 
bleeds and purges, or vomits them, and so casts them into an incurable 
diarrhoea, and in a very few days they become a feast for some hungry 
shark.\textsuperscript{122}

Aubrey noticed that in African communities when people were sick with the diseases that 
prevailed on the slave ships “they took nothing but cold Water and sucked Oranges.” He 
saw them successfully treat the small-pox in what they called “less than half a Moon” or 
fourteen days and measles in eight. He recommended that allowing Africans to eat their 
usual diet and less violent abuse on the slave ships would decrease mortality.\textsuperscript{123} Aubrey 
noticed that in their homelands, Africans ate “a great deal of palm oil with flesh or fish” and 
that while they ate a “great quantity of pepper” were “not used to any salt provision.” On 
slavers, Africans could not eat citrus fruits, plantain, corn, and yams and were “forced to 
eat too much salt.” Aubrey concluded that the Africans’ poor diet accompanied by the 
abuse of sailors “who beat and kick them,” led to the high mortality rates. He ultimately 
blamed the surgeon “for letting the slaves die, when they are murdered, partly by strokes, 
and partly famished.”\textsuperscript{124}

Efforts to preserve the health of Africans and improve the conditions of the slave 
trade had made progress; and by the time Georgians began importing slaves directly from 
Africa, middle passage mortality rates had declined. While the estimated average death 
toll of slave imports after 1750 was an astonishing ten percent, it had dropped ten percent

\textsuperscript{122}Ibid, 126-128.

\textsuperscript{123}Aubrey, \textit{The Sea-Surgeon}, 108. This was intended for the use of young surgeons as a 
guide demonstrating the methods for curing diseases from abroad, especially on the Coast of 
Guinea, including the best way of “treating Negroes, both in Health and in Sickness.

\textsuperscript{124}Ibid.
from the years prior to 1750 and dropped another five percent when the trade resumed after the American Revolution, mainly due to efforts to standardize the trade emphasizing placing ventilators on slave ships and using looser packing techniques. Studies such as Aubrey’s proved essential towards gaining information about African cultural practices. For Europeans, “knowledge was power” for increased wealth, more than an avenue of cultural exchange. Those who traveled to Africa had varying motivations, but all searched for information that would ultimately benefit America slavery institutions.

*Precedents for the African-European Cultural Power Struggle in America: The Case of Vicar Thomas Thompson:*

The Second Great Awakening is considered North America’s first widely successful movement towards the conversion of enslaved and free black populations to Christianity. Previous efforts certainly existed, but no missions matched the noted success found after the late eighteenth century. The impact in Georgia was significant and the state witnessed the growth of America’s first black Christian church and several well-known religious leaders.\textsuperscript{125} Historians have produced convincing evidence of the complexities of African conversion and the ways in which enslaved communities used Christian themes to interpret their condition, improve their lives, and even spark resistance to enslavement. Nonetheless, scholars rarely consider the role of power and conquest in African conversion. Christian missionaries' successes in Georgia, followed years of failures on the West African coast. A critical discussion of why Christians representing organizations

\textsuperscript{125}For a detailed discussion of George Liele and the spread of Christianity among Africans in Georgia and the West Indies see Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion.*
such as The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) faced so
many failures in West Africa suggests historians take a closer look at conversion as more
than a religious mission. Christian conversion not only challenged African religions and
Islam, it threatened the independence and power of the communities marked for
proselytization.

Vicar Thomas Thompson’s account of two missionary voyages he made to West
Africa in the first half of the eighteenth century demonstrate the difficulties of promoting
Christianity on the coast. Appointed by the SPG, Thompson kept journals of his travels
along the slaving coast. His writings are significant because they describe Christian
missions and conversion attempts among Africans and reveal the challenges and failures
whites faced as cultures cultural worlds clashed. The ways in which missionaries critiqued
their experiences in Africa clarify the approaches to conversion that emerged in Georgia
and other parts of the new world.

Europeans who traveled to West Africa during the era of the African trade
confronted unfamiliar cultures. As missionaries, sailors, merchants, and traders observed
Africans, they learned that there were not only numerous language and ethnic differences,
but that most societies had religious and cultural practices that were intertwined with
everyday life. The extent to which Christians could attempt conversion was determined by
their negotiations with African leaders and his/her negotiations with the masses. Thus
social, political, and economic power shaped the course of conversion in Africa. The
opportunities missionaries grasped were limited by their weak political position, as well as
numerous cultural and language barriers which strained communication with those they hoped would accept their religious teachings.  

The majority of the eighteenth century missionary work in Africa fell into three major categories, preaching to white traders and merchants; baptizing biracial children, and organizing Christian worship in coastal communities that had standing connections with Europeans, particularly enslaved persons laboring in European factories or spaces where whites held the upper hand in shaping social and political relations with Africans. During his stay among the Susu communities, Vicar Thompson baptized “some mulatto children by the desire and request of those traders who had come from thence and were going home [to Europe].” Aside from baptizing little more than three children, the vicar was unable to convince the Susu to sway from their own religious worldview. Describing them as “ a mixed people of pagans and Mundingos, which are a sect of Mahometans,” Thompson found the Mandingo ulama or religious teachers, giving children Islamic lessons written in Arabic “for God’s sake, not for fee or reward.” In addition to these teachings which took place in the streets of the town; several mosques were used for worship in the community.

\[126\text{See Mungo Park, } Travels \text{ in the Interior Districts to Africa: Performed Under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796, 1797 (Philadelphia, 1800)}\]

\[127\text{Thomas Thompson, } An \text{ Account of Two Missionary Voyages by the Appointment of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the one to New Jersey in North America, the other from America to the Coast of Guiney (London, 1758), 30.}\]

\[128\text{Ibid, 30.}\]
Further south, Thompson aimed towards more widespread conversion of the masses. Having only baptized a white child and two biracial children, Thompson approached Cudjo Cabosheer, leader of Cape Coast town, for permission to preach to “the Blacks” of the community. Cabosheer honored his request, but the vicar’s first sermon to a black audience was a disappointment. Few people attended and when he began “to speak upon the Christian religion, some of them made a motion to go away.”\(^{129}\) Thompson’s plans were further obstructed when he informed Cabosheer that his “design was to preach to the natives every Sunday, and on other days in the week.” The leader quickly objected, stating that he would not be able to get the people to a meeting any day but Tuesday, which was not only their day of rest, but a religious day.

Despite his initial failures, Vicar Thompson persisted and convinced the Cape Coast community to build a school-house for his classes. They agreed that construction should follow an annual ceremony which celebrated the harvest of yams. Thompson lamented when the harvest season ended, along with plans for the promised school. Frustrated, the vicar paid for the use of a room for the religious instruction of several children, but met another disappointing failure,

> Children growing weary of what is no longer a novelty, and the parents neglecting to keep them to it, and make them come daily, my hopes were quickly at an end of doing any good this way.

\(^{129}\)Ibid, 36.
After making little progress in Cape Coast town, Thompson shrugged at an invitation to take his mission to Accra lamenting, “my endeavors having already met with so much defeat, I was too doubtful of the success, to embrace that proposal.”

Thompson’s major goal was to have access to “the blacks” of West Africa, or the people he believed were unfamiliar with European culture and religion. This population was most resist to his cause and presented the most difficulties for his mission. After two years traveling the coast, “the first Negro [I] baptized on African ground: was a servant who labored for the Factor at an English slave fort.” Thompson credited his initial successful conversion with the man’s proficiency in the English language. His ability to communicate and understand the Christian’s mission was the key and forced Thompson to admit, “my not being acquainted with the language, I had all along considered as a disadvantage.” After successfully baptizing three of his own African servants, the vicar believed that his early failures were not evidence of his future progress among Africans.

In his writings, Vicar Thompson did not acknowledge the relationship between power and conversion in his missionary activities. His successful conversions and baptisms all occurred in spaces were he had the upper hand in the complex system of power play that developed along the coast among Africans. He had to wonder if these conversions were true or if all the people he encountered would eventually “grow weary” of his propagation. If he had questions concerning his servants, they were answered rather quickly. We can only speculate about these men’s initial attitudes towards Christianity.

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Ibid., 42-45

Ibid., 69.
Whether or not their curiosity was genuine, they chose not to challenge the force of white oppression at the slave factory and did not reject Thompson’s religious teachings. When they felt they were able, the men admonished the Christian doctrines they learned. Thompson claimed he was astonished and remarked that the Factor’s servant was “indeed the best taught of any of his color...and he made the worst use of his instruction.” The Africans approached Thompson with a final statement regarding their the recent conversions. He recalled,

The Christian religion they call white man’s fashion and white men, they say, know best, but black man follow black man’s fashion; as much as to tell me, they would not be put out of their own way.132

Thompson could not explain this change and remarked that the men had been of “very Christian-like behavior.” His collide with African communities and cultures resembled the experiences of other Europeans. Even within the boundaries of a slave trade that was rapidly reaching its peak, Africans held a degree of communal and cultural power that supported the freedom to reject aspects of European society they deemed invaluable. The power they held was not absolute or distributed equally among various members of a given society. Notably, those person defined as valuable commodities had more difficulty defining communal and cultural space between African and European forces that denied them freedom.

Africans, forced into slavery, began what became a long process of defining and re-defining community and culture. The process was marked by repeated losses and gains of power and freedom. The slaving coast was the learning space where notions of

132Ibid., 69.
resistance, acculturation, new ethnicities, and societal reformation and reorganization were
born. West Africa produced African slavery’s first runaways and maroon societies.
Uprising in coastal towns and aboard slave ships previewed violent resistance movements
such as the Stono Rebellion. African-European contact in West Africa created complex
social relations that forced sexual abuse on African women, as well as, a small number of
pragmatic interracial relationships that symbolized political and economic partnership
between nations. The children of these relationships were slavery’s first cultural and
biological blending of African and European races. In West Africa the enslaved created
methods of adaptation and resistance that would serve as the foundations of their actions
in Georgia and other parts of the new world.

The enslaved were not alone as they interpreted their African experiences.
Europeans reflected upon their lives on the slaving coast, where they entered complex
relations of dominance and unavoidable compromise. Planters, merchants, and
missionaries all recognized that communal and cultural power afforded Africans freedom
from whites’ notions of blacks’ social, political, and economic space. This power was
strongest when whites were outnumbered, unfamiliar with the landscape, and unable to
communicate with the communities they met. The key for winning control was
dismantling or suppressing this power, a victory not easily or quickly gained. Europeans
understood the “African challenge” as a struggle to eradicate African culture, language,
and religious beliefs and replace them with a European world view which named the
African inferior. Whites also faced losses and gains as they collided with African societies.
Thomas Thompson’s travels in Africa resulted in a new plan for confronting African culture; closing the gap created by cultural difference; and ultimately winning the upper hand in the seemingly irreconcilable African-European power struggle:

Having considered of the properest method I could take for the instruction of the Blacks, I judged it best not to insist much at first upon points of Christian doctrine, but to strike at their false worship, and endeavor to convince them of their absurd notions, and expose the folly of their idolatrous and superstitious rites; that, if possible, I might disengage their minds from there, for the reception and entertainment of divine truths. In this care then I was to present them with a general view of Christianity, but To lay out chiefly the confutation of the errors, and thence to proceed to establish the other.133

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African enslavement impacted middle passage survivors in several ways that shaped their Georgia experiences. The freedom struggle began in West Africa, as captives learned they were defined as human commodities for traders of varying ethnic and racial backgrounds. Protection offered with membership in particular ethnic groups crumbled under the weight of the trade’s demand for laborers. Cultural values and norms were ignored and abandoned in the slave market, shifting the overall significance of ethnicity in slaving regions. As the lines between enemies and allies thinned, Africans transformed group identity.

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As early as the sixteenth century, West Africa witnessed the emergence of new ethnic and social groups that grew from the slave commerce. Along the Guinea coast,

133Ibid., 37-38.
communities grew from refugees of war, escaped captives and laborers enslaved in coastal cities and towns operated by Africans and Europeans who gained wealth from the trade. The heightened period of “palaver” in the eighteenth century resulted in a blend of captives from the deep interior and those with more daily experience with threats of enslavement and transport. The great distances captives traveled introduced them to a range of fates within the Atlantic system.

Olaudah Equiano passed through various African nations to European masters and traders and recalled a willingness to trade his final fate in the New World with that of “the meanest slave” in Africa. Africans began rethinking their traditional ideals of servitude as well as their own “African” identities. Conflicts and age old rivalries aside, captives expected, or at least hoped that the more powerful Africans would transcend ethnic differences and condemn their sale to Europeans. Equiano remembered his childhood grief as a black trader carried him aboard the slaver and left him.” Similarly, Ottabah Gugbano stated,

But I must own, to the shame of my own countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by some of my own complexion who were the first cause of my exile and slavery; but if there were no buyers there would be no sellers.134

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Captives learned in West Africa that European enslavement disrupted ethnic, communal, and religious bonds in ways uncommon in their homelands’ form servitude. Friends became enemies, people were captured and enslaved in surprise night attacks on their villages, as the eighteenth century trade created tremendous chaos in Africans daily lives. These situations influenced an early caution of blind allegiance to ethnicity. It did not eradicate the significance of cultural similarities and communal bonds shared by members of ethnic communities; rather it provided enslaved Africans tools for broadening communal identity to include greater consideration of how outsiders defined “Africans” and how those notions impacted their lives. Thus common experience grew as important as language, culture, and religion in shaping identity. These ideals shaped community building in Georgia.
CHAPTER 4

“WHEN THE OBIA WATCHES”: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMS IN A NEW WORLD

Run away from the subscriber’s plantation...two new negroe young fellows; one of them of a yellowish complexion, about five feet four inches height, computed eighteen years of age, of the Fallah country, slim made, calls himself Golaga, the name given him here Abel; the other a black fellow, about the same size and make, computed seventeen years of age, of the Suroga country, calls himself Abbrom, the name give him here Bennet.135

Lachlan M’Gillivray

West African captives began shaping their lives as forced laborers before the new world voyage. Resistance, reluctant adaptation, and disease all visited the coastal slave pens and slave ships. As the trade forced strangers into the broad category, “slave,” new identities emerged rooted in common experience. These circumstances foreshadowed life in Georgia. First, African-European contact in West Africa demonstrated that black and white traders and merchants could form successful economic and political allegiances. Europeans had less success with religious and cultural conversions. Those who achieved more intensive cultural exchange immersed themselves in African culture learning the language of their host society, or unions with African women, and adopted new cultural practices. African conversions were generally pragmatic, enhancing their trade positions, ordered by a European parent, or forced as a condition of their service in European

135Lathan Windley, 22.
factories or towns. The latter conversions were not easily achieved and missionaries doubted the sincerity of their slaves' Christian beliefs. Military strength, a larger black population, language barriers, and Europeans' limited understanding of the societies they encountered offered a strained autonomy in coping with the chaos of slaving. Elite Africans had a greater measure of freedom in this respect and their involvement in the trade further limited the freedoms of those at risk for capture and removal. From this, captives learned that military, political, and economic alliances shielded communities from enslavement.

In North America, the resistance movement at Stono and frequent smaller challenges to slavery, demonstrated the potential danger blacks could present to the stability of white communities. Commoners in Africa showed similar abilities in disrupting the enslavement process. In West Africa and in the lowcountry, communal connections increased chances of survival within slavery or resistance to its demands. Georgia’s African trade transformed black community building. The black population grew in number, yet the advantages of that growth were accompanied by tremendous difficulties. Between 1766 and 1776, the majority of black Georgians were African born and an estimated 5,378 of the 6,163 captured and embarked in West Africa survived the journey to the colony. They wore the physical and emotional scars of these processes. The lives that they shaped in Georgia utilized tools from past experiences.

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136David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM.*
This chapter explores how disease and cultural difference led white Georgians towards distancing themselves from the African population. Considering them “sick and savage,” they isolated Africans in ways that permitted a strained autonomy as the laborers adapted to Georgia and shaped communal relationships, particularly during the seasoning period. During this phase, blacks formed relationships for resistance and more often, daily survival by crossing the social and physical, formal and informal boundaries imposed on Georgians. White, particularly elites, believed these codes were essential in ordering black society. Slavery systematically denied its laborers complete autonomy in building families and communities as they wished; yet institution could not function without compromise. Africans dismantled obstacles and improved their lives by embracing flexible communal and cultural boundaries. The success of these efforts must not be overstated. Colonial slave life in Georgia was marked by high death rates, low fertility among women, and brutal subjugation and punishments. Such challenges were often insurmountable, however the infant colony’s frontier terrain offered penetrable social, economic and geographic boundaries. Resistance, extra food and money, time with relatives, and access to limited leisure activities all derived from a complex web of fragile alliances.

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137 Distance has generally been discussed in relation to absentee ownership of sea island plantations. Lowcountry slaveholders often lived left plantation management to overseers and black drivers and lived closer to larger white populations. Betty Wood finds that absentee ownership prevailed in colonial Georgia where slaveholders owned multiple settlements, which they visited “only three or four times a year.” See Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 141.
Religion and Cultural Distance:

The role Christianity would play in black communities became a concern for whites when Georgia was first established. Although the Trustees prohibited slavery, they knew they would have contact with the institution and the Africans forced into service under its laws. As they discussed settlement plans, ideas relating to conversion of the enslaved population emerged. In association with the Reverend Thomas Bray, the Trustees published a sermon delivered by John Burton in 1732 that addressed the process of African conversion to Christianity. Proposing that missionary work should be an endeavor for the settlers, he advised a “vigorous application to this pious and charitable work.” Cultural barriers caused Europeans some trepidation in approaching the enslaved for religious conversion. White Georgians’ views of Africans were not uncommon in the eighteenth century America. They emphasized what they considered the “savagery” of Africans and discussed the barriers black “barbarity” imposed on missionary work. White Christians believed their work went far beyond introducing Christianity. Burton asked,

Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Then may the savage heathen become a Christian? They should first be civilized in order to become Christians: principles of Christianity must be built upon civility of manners.\(^{138}\)

Thus the first step towards conversion, he proposed, was “civilizing” the enslaved population. Whites gained little respect for African religions and cultures during their time

on the slaving coast. Their preoccupation with Africans’ physical traits reflected the dominant concern—meeting labor demands across the Atlantic.¹³⁹ For whites, conversion was a method of social control more a transfer of religious beliefs.

The ideals of the Thomas Bray Associates comprised the foundations of the early settlers’ approach to their socio-cultural relationship with Africans. Christian conversion had no widespread impact among most black Georgians during the eighteenth century. The charge to “civilize and then covert” foreshadowed a movement that gained momentum after the American Revolution. Georgia slave merchants and planters created a colonial market, after 1765, that valued African born laborers and presented them as the ideal servants. Conversely, missionaries considered Africans formidable challenges their work. “To conquer an inveterate habit to convert a Savage to Christianity, has to many appeared a task altogether impracticable.” Burton, upholding the ideals of the Bray Associates and other missionary societies, concluded that successful conversion was more likely among an American born black population. Christian missions in black Atlantic communities met obstacles as whites maneuvered through unfamiliar landscapes marked by linguistic and cultural barriers. Respected proselytizers, such as Thomas Thompson, noted their numerous failures, particularly in West Africa; and from such sources Burton concluded that Africans’ cultural savagery “unreasonably aggravated” the difficulties of conversion. Proclaiming that such obstacles were “still only difficulties,” his proposal reflected plans for limited religious work among Africans in Georgia.

The children of our slaves, those that are born in a Christian house, might at least be admitted to the privileges of the Christian covenant and the ordinary benefits of a Christian education.  

Aside from George Whitefield’s missionary work, few addressed conversion among the lowcountry African population. Planters expressed hostility towards such ideas and deemed Christianity an interference with plantation management and social control. In addition to inciting resistance, they were apprehensive of the actual time religious instruction would take from completion of daily labor tasks including the work necessary for black subsistence farming. Lowcountry whites criticized Jonathan Bryan’s black converts stating that they did, “nothing but pray and sing and thereby neglect their work.” Furthermore planters, merchants, and traders spent time with Africans, observing their cultural practices and the ways in which their societies functioned. Their observations challenged some of the fundamental tenants of missionary work among Africans. When William Knox addressed the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1768, he suggested his audience begin with the very basic ideals of religion. “Those creatures are even ignorant that there is a God, they must then be taught a maker before they can apprehend a redeemer.” Planters did not always agree. John

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140Burton, “The Duty and Reward”

141 George Whitefield was not an abolitionist. He, with Johann Martin Bolzius, Jonathan Bryan, and members of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and others criticized the brutal treatment of the enslaved population and supported missionary efforts towards widespread conversion of Africans in the North American colonies.


143William Knox, Three Tracts Respects the Conversion and Instruction of the Free Indians and Negroe slaves in the Colonies Addressed to the Venerable Society for the
Dovaston criticized missionaries’ assumptions about African religions stating, “the negroes are all of them sensible there is a God who rules and governs all things, and who made them.”

During the seasoning, the role of African spiritual-communal leaders was linked to the integration of new Africans and the overall cohesiveness of the enslaved community necessary for the plantation’s daily function. Missionary complaints, particularly in the nineteenth century, suggested that planters denied their laborers access to Christianity fearing they would learn a sense of justice and equality. Eighteenth century planters considered forced conversion an interference in African centered communal organization which was crucially linked to successful labor organization on plantations.

Whether preachers and planters agreed about the particulars of African religions, they generally concluded that early proselytizing was far too challenging and destined for failure. For preachers, recent arrivals grasped, “heathen beliefs” tightly and did not have the mental capacity to understand Christian religious instruction,

\[\text{a new negroe (as those lately imported from Africa are called), is a complete definition of indolent stupidity, nor could a more forcible means be employed for the conversion of a deist, than setting one of these creatures before him as an example of man in a state of nature unbiased by revelation of education.}\]

For planters, adding a prohibition of all African cultural and religious practices to the fragile process of enslavement could incite rebellion and an overall disruption of the plantation labor. Furthermore, the agricultural economy depended on its adaptation of

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*Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, 1768, 35.

144John Dovaston, *Agricultura Americana*

145William Knox, 16-17.
African-influenced cultural, agricultural and economic practices. Planeters held steadfast to their skepticism of religious conversion. Defeated preachers and missionaries lost hope among the African born and concluded that creole blacks were “undoubtedly capable of receiving instruction.” From the legalization of slavery to the eve of the American Revolution, the majority of Georgia’s enslaved population were African-born and considered “culturally savage” and incapable of receiving religious instruction.

White social and cultural distance left Georgia’s early black population, the majority of which was African-born, relatively free from conversion missions and the intense push for acculturation that accompanied them. Africans were far from autonomous and faced the challenge of combining various ethnicities and cultural practices into a larger labor community. In this venture however, Africans in Georgia met less direct cultural and religious interference from whites than other eighteenth century enslaved Americans.

Sickness and Physical Distance:
Concerns regarding illnesses Africans carried to Georgia also influenced whites’ efforts to socially and physically marginalize Africans who arrived via the middle passage. Prior to

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147William Knox, 17.
Africans’ forced migration, white Georgians had experienced one of colonial America’s
healthiest seasoning periods. Colonists knew that the African slave trade brought the
threat of morbid disease and illness, which could spread through the settlements quite
rapidly. Having survived recent battles with sickness, whites considered the threat of
epidemic disease as critical a factor as cultural and religious differences in distancing
themselves from the African population.

The slave trade introduced a physically weak, diseased labor population to the
colony. Unlike members of Georgia’s early black community, these African migrants had
little, if any, experience with American enslavement. In West Africa, the chaos of
increasing European demands for black laborers blended with African rulers’ want for
economic and political empowerment, devastating the lives of those captured for sale
removal. These demands did not go unchallenged and migration to the Americas
represented captives individual and communal defeats. Africans struggled to negotiate
slavery’s encroachment in varied ways, including compromise, resistance, and war. As
laborers arrived from Africa, they followed models of adaptation and resistance
established during the preslavery years, as well as, traditions carried from their homelands.

“New negroes” assumed the paradoxical role of defeated survivors. In this
respect, they had not been able to avoid enslavement, but they overcame new challenges
that emerged during transport to the coast, in slave forts, and during the middle passage.
For every two enslaved persons purchased in Africa, one was added to the new world
labor force. In addition to poor health conditions, the voyage caused emotional and
psychological trauma which could result in death. Planters and slave traders attributed
some deaths to “fixed melancholy” or the loss of the will to live. In Georgia, a new phase of survival ensued as Africans fought disease and death during the seasoning period.

The primary concern for blacks upon their arrival was recovery from the traumas of capture and enslavement in West Africa and the middle passage. Slaveholders, anxious to utilize new laborers, found blacks recovery period or seasoning a nuisance, but a necessary and critical phase of enslavement. Disembarkation at the ports of Savannah and Sunbury marked the beginning of the overall marginal attention whites gave to treating black health in the colony. Slave merchants and surgeons hid illnesses presenting “healthy negroes” at slave sales. They manipulated African bodies and hid the effects of their physical torment. Growths and ulcers were lanced and temporarily drained, oakum anus plugs were used to hide the symptoms of the “bloody flux,” bodies were blackened and greased in an attempt to make the Africans appear healthy to buyers. Quobna Ottobah Cugoano remembered the first sale in the Americas where he and his “fellow-captives were, again stripped naked for the brutal examination of their purchasers to view them, which, to many must add shame and grief to their other woe, as may


149For descriptions of slave sales that were similar to those in early Georgia see Alexander Falconbridge An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa (London, 1788. Reprinted New York: AMS Press, 1973)13-35; Walter Johnson provides a book-length discussion of the process of marketing and selling black laborers. His work examines the antebellum period, however his discussion of “turning people into products” hold true for aspects of colonial slave markets. See Johnson, Soul By Soul Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). For another detailed description of the “scramble” provided by traders to the West Indies and lowcountry, including a Georgia merchant, see Minutes of the Evidence Taken before the Committee of the Whole House...Respecting the Transportation of the Natives of Africa April 20, 1789. The John Carter Brown Library Providence, RI.
be evidently seen with sorrow, melancholy and despair marked upon their countenances.  

The great influx of blacks that entered Georgia was accompanied by an increase in disease.  Blacks and whites brought diseases from South Carolina and others were carried from West Africa.  As blacks cleared grounds for new settlements and plantations, trees that shaded the coastal lands were removed, thus creating ideal climate for malaria-carrying mosquitos, in areas where they had not existed before 1760.  The fear of the spread of disease was commonplace.  An act to prevent the spread of the smallpox was passed; and citizens placed newspaper ads warning of the dangers of spreading diseases and offering cures for common illnesses.  The most dreaded sicknesses were those that arrived on African slavers.  Betty Wood states that,

the two diseases feared, with good reason by the Georgians above all others were the highly contagious smallpox and yellow fever, two “Distempers” which they associated with Africa and the African.

In 1763, Georgia officials passed quarantine laws to prevent the spread of middle passages diseases.  For many Africans, the quarantines did not adequately address the suffering
and illnesses resulting from the middle passage and Africa’s internal trade. Thus the seasoning period on plantations and farms became a critical time for the restoration of health for new arrivals. Conversely, the seasoning also marked another phase of mortality, and those who survived the middle passage faced death again following disembarkation. Further travel after purchase, adaptation to the locale where one settled, and the challenges of daily live all presented more obstacles.\textsuperscript{154} White Georgians noted that,

inflammatory fevers of various kinds both continued and intermittent; wasting and tormenting fluxes most excruciating cholicks and dry belly aches; tremors, vertigoes, palsies, and a long train of painful and lingering nervous Distempers; which brought to many a cessation both from work and life.\textsuperscript{155}

Despite health risks, slave merchants sold Africans rather quickly after landing their ships. Darold Wax finds that, “slaves were seldom kept on hand for prolonged periods.”\textsuperscript{156} First, because Georgia law demanded it, and partly so merchants could rid themselves of their human merchandise before the hidden illnesses were discovered and new sickness emerged. Yet once purchases were made and true health conditions revealed, Africans died at an astonishing rate on plantations during the seasoning period. Betty Wood finds that weakened conditions of African arrivals “raised the very real

\textsuperscript{154}Patrick Manning, \textit{Migrations of Africans to the Americas: The Impact on Africans, Africa and the New World}, 69.

\textsuperscript{155}Quoted in Douglas C. Wilms, “The Development of Rice Culture,” 47.

\textsuperscript{156}Darold Wax, “New Negroes,” 210-211.
possibility that they might fall ill or die before their owners had seen any returns on their investments.”

In their weakened conditions, Africans also faced the possibility of contracting diseases from the local population. By 1763, smallpox outbreaks in South Carolina threatened Georgians as the flow of whites and blacks from that colony continued. Officials passed an ordinance to prevent a wave of illness in Georgia’s growing population. All infected persons placed public warnings, informing others of their illness, or faced legal recourse an fines. Planters and other colonists took personal measures to protect their human property from infection. Joseph Gibbons complained it was “a custom for travelers to pass and repass” through his plantation. Worried that the Carolina smallpox would spread among his enslaved population he demanded travelers “make use of the public road.”

The fragile condition of the enslaved, exacerbated by an epidemic disease, could bring labor to a halt and cause slaveholders significant losses in the early stages of agricultural development, where they already anticipated setbacks.

As the numbers of African imports increased after 1766, concerns over the integration of unhealthy Africans in the colony heightened, Gov. James Wright addressed colonists’ concerns for their health, and possible spread of middle passage disease by African arrivals,

health being a most desirable and valuable blessing, everyone must be disposed to contribute towards the attainment and continuance of it: And as we now begin to have importations of considerable cargoes of negroes

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158 *The Georgia Gazette* May 5, 1763.
from Africa, it becomes very necessary to guard against any contagious diseases being brought amongst us by negroe ships.\textsuperscript{159}

The governor recommended building a \textit{lazaretto} near the entrance of the river where ships and Africans could be “easily landed and aired” until fear of transferring illness subsided. Slaveholders took a required oath stating they had no knowledge of illnesses among their laborers. Those who did not comply with import regulations faced penalties. In cases of disease outbreaks on plantations, officials demanded that slaveholders affix written warnings “in the public road...signifying that the smallpox is at such house or plantation and a white cloth at the gate or entrance.” They posted additional warnings near churches and other public places.\textsuperscript{160} These policies were geared towards keeping a healthy distance from “new negroes.”

The introduction of unhealthy Africans might have also caused tensions within the slave quarters as American born and “seasoned” laborers sought protection from the illnesses middle passage survivors carried. Plantations’ boundaries did not allow much room for healthier blacks to distance themselves from new arrivals.\textsuperscript{161} Slaveholders warned of the dangers the smallpox and other middle passage diseases presented in the slave quarters adding, “when any negroe is soon to have this disorder [smallpox] take him

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{159}Ibid, November 12, 1766. Officials continued debating quarantine regulations in the 1770s. See discussion of a ship from Antigua with passengers infected with the smallpox in “Minutes of Meetings of the Council 1773” in Candler, \textit{Colonial Records} 12:356-359.
\item \textsuperscript{160}The \textit{Georgia Gazette}, December 20, 1764.
\item \textsuperscript{161}Prior to the Revolutionary war, historians estimate that sixty planter owned near all of Georgia’s black population of at least 13,000. More than two fifths of this population lived and worked on coastal plantations. See Sylvia Frey, \textit{Water from the Rock}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
from amongst your other slaves or he will infect the whole.”

The most influential eighteenth century planters suggested significant recovery time upon arrival in the new world. For Georgians, imports could not meet labor demands and little time was spent considering Africans’ health needs. Even on the better equipt plantations, rapid integration was the highest concern.

Physicians were targeted as the cause of the great number of black lives lost during seasoning period and in their general care of blacks on plantations. One planter criticized doctors for causing problems rather than caring for the enslaved population. He complained that,

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\text{Once, twice, or thrice in a week, to gallop to a plantation, to take peep into the hospital, or hot-house, as it is called, write in a book, “bleed this, purge that, blister another, here give an opiate, there the bark,” is not, in my opinion, taking care of, thought it may be called taking charge of, the healths of 4000 or 5000 negroes.}\]

Slaveholder John Dovaston believed American planters rushed Africans into hard field labor to soon after their arrival and failed to allow adequate time to restore their health after the impact of the middle passage. He urged that planters should take one year to introduce Africans to slavery. Even when planters preferred “new negroes,” they recognized the need to use blacks who had lived in the Americas to teach new imports

\[162\text{John Dovaston, }\textit{Agricultura Americana. American Husbandry, [manuscript], John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI (JCBL).}\]

\[163\text{A Jamaican Planter, }\textit{Notes on the Two Reports from the Committee of the Honourable House of Assembly in Jamaica. London: Printed and Sold by James Phillips, 1785, 60. The planter was appointed to examine and report to the house, the allegations and charges contained in several petitions presented to the British House of Commons relating to the slave trade and the treatment of the enslaved. JCBL.}\]
English and plantation tasks. Dovaston urged planter to take special care of what those he called “negroe nurses” who were essential to restore the health of middle passage survivors.\textsuperscript{164} Using the techniques and training of their home countries, African healers often had greater success treating illnesses, as well as, the trust of the community.

The seasoning was not a period of recovery for many. One reason that planters such as William Beckford and John Dovaston encouraged extending the seasoning period was for greater chanced of recovery from illness among new groups of Africans, who suffered high death rates after slavers disembarked. Planters expected middle passage survivors to die in large numbers due to illnesses suffered in West Africa and during the journey to the Americas. Planters calculated that Africans “die off in fifteen years, and one third in the first three years” and that a high death rate among men resulted in a more balanced sex ratio.\textsuperscript{165} Men suffered more severe illnesses in consequence of being chained on slave ships, “which carry off a great number in seasoning. The deaths in seasoning must therefore, principally be among the men, and probably leave the sexes of the seasoned Africans nearly equal in proportion.”\textsuperscript{166} Diseases including small pox, the yaws, 


\textsuperscript{165}William Beckford, \textit{Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica Impartially Made for a Local Experience of Nearly Thirteen Years in that Island} (London, 1788). John Dovaston, \textit{Agricultural Americana American Husbandry} [manuscript] \textit{The John Carter Brown Library}, Providence, RI.

\textsuperscript{166}See discussion relating to sex ratios, and mortality during the seasoning among planters and traders in \textit{Minutes of the Evidence}. Some historians suggest that life expectancies among blacks were significantly longer. Herbert Klein estimated twenty five years for Brazil and thirty for the United States, although little consideration is given to time and space. Regardless of the life expectancy, scholars tend to agree that the birth rate remained quite low in the early period. Patrick Manning finds that most Africans died “early and without progeny.” See “Migrations of Africans,” 79.
worms, and chigoes (small mites that nest in the feet and hands), ravished and tormented Africans during their first year in the American colonies. Some diseases were noted to,

agonize the body in the most racking manner. Sometimes the slaves appear melancholy and dejected and in such a manner prior to death. Sometimes the negro appears as though he is mad, and turn about with desperate and ghastly looks. At other times the slaves will be taken with shaking fits...and the blood [will] be quite chilled to their thinking. Some are seized with sudden death after such chill; and some have their bellies bloated as if they had the dropsy.

William Beckford’s plan for “seasoning” new Africans to a life of slavery was concerned with more than their physical health. He urged planters to consider the mental anguish of their experiences in West Africa where they were, “subject to the chance of war, the danger of husband [or wife] or the loss of a child...seeing them snatched to undergo eternal banishment, or suffer the anticipation of death.”167 Planters believed connections between new Africans and those of the own ethnic or language group were beneficial and facilitated the restoration of mental and emotional health. Those who were familiar with American slavery assisted Africans as they adjusted to their new communities on plantations and farms.168

Scholars note that community formation began a new phase during the seasoning period. Recent scholarship refutes older notions that planters divided Africans of common ethnic backgrounds, believing such separation would prevent resistance. Throughout the Americas, planters stressed the importance of communication among Africans for the best integration of new arrivals, labor and language instruction, and health improvements.

167William Beckford, Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroses, 63.

168Ibid. Also see John Dovaston, Agricultura Americana.
Planter were also concerned with the impact of absolute despair, caused by harsh experiences in Africa and during the middle passage, on a new arrivals’ will to live. They could not easily drive Africans into labor with violence. Encouragement from slavery’s survivors, forced and sincere, achieved an uneasy balance with brutality in introducing Africans to American slavery.

Slaveholders did not generally show concern for the communal and familial separations Africans suffered or shortened seasoning periods. Planters and slave traders noted the “sorrow and despair, [caused] for no other reason than the separation from their old attachments.”169 Africans’ efforts to maintain old relations and from new ones convinced Beckford of the connection between separation and sorrow, the constant predilection they have upon all occasions, to those who have been purchased from the same cargo, and whom they emphatically distinguished by the appellation of ship-mates.170

Examples like this taught slaveholders that communal relations were essential to African survival. Those who survived the harsh conditions of the middle passage adjusted to slavery by re-establishing old relationships and building new networks. Planters linked depression and suicide to a loss of hope or will to live that accompanied the loss of a child, loved one or separation from a larger community. Beckford suggested that representatives from new arrivals’ homelands who spoke their languages be present upon

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169 Beckford, *The Situation of Negroes*, 7-10

170 Ibid; Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*...
arrival to “explain the nature of their expected service and how they are [were] to act to avoid punishment and extort indulgence.”

“Old negroes” or seasoned Africans eased the tensions new arrivals experienced during the earliest stages of the seasoning period and the first sale experience on the new world slave market. Beckford suggested that sales be private, avoiding the fear caused at public auctions “when crowds burst at once upon and surround them” which confirmed “their apprehensions of the miseries to come.” Private sales could emphasize keeping families together “with the same master or in the same neighborhood.” Seasoned Africans attended these private sales and comforted new arrivals. The presence of captives’ country men and women encouraged those on the auction block by suggesting, “that they may not enter with distrust into their new condition.” Support from survivors provided solace from tragedies of separation eased newcomers’ transitions to plantation life and labor. The defeated survivors envisioned living through the seasoning, stunning slaveholders as they “took to the hoe” as soon as they were able. Africans’ desire for survival helped them adjust in the yearly years as they sowed the seeds of a successful agricultural economy, and future black communities and resistance to slavery.

As in West Africa, the Americas presented numerous obstacles and challenges to enslaved persons’ basic survival. The African experience taught blacks that community

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171 Ibid


174 John Dovaston, *Agricultura Americana*
membership and protection were inextricably linked. The dangers of slavery and white oppression forced speedy connections among blacks. Planters favored the healthiest laborers who showed obedience to overseers for survival through the seasoning period. While obedience and health were key, they found that survival relied “more than all, upon the connections he [she] may form and the protection he [she] may find among negroes of consequence and power upon the plantation.”

Women formed communal bonds quickly and slaveholders found this advantageous. With the majority of African women laboring in the field, their rapid acclimation to enslaved life gave planters greater chances of successful crop production. In addition to her labor, the sooner a woman became pregnant, the sooner her progeny could benefit the planter. The rewards were not solely found in the labor potential of black children. Low birth rates and high infant mortality limited the growth of the laboring population through natural increase. Pregnancy encouraged communal bonding, and planters observed that pregnant women would “instantly make acquaintances, or form connections with those who have been purchased from their own country.” The “principal advantage” Beckford saw in a pregnant woman’s ties to the larger enslaved community was that she became attached “to that spot upon which her child is [was] born,” thus limiting resistance by strengthening the community’s connection to their new environment. The delayed rewards that proceeded the birth of enslaved children did not compare with the immediate benefits gained from unrestrained extraction of labor from black women.

\[175\text{Beckford, 12-15.}\]

\[176\text{Ibid.}\]
Generally, planters did not release women from labor long enough for healthy pregnancies, safe deliveries and adequate nurturing of newborns. Overseers drove pregnant black women in the fields until their delivery times and forced them back to field labor a short two to three weeks after their children were born. Many were reluctant to relinquish even this limited break from labor.177

During the colonial years, it was not uncommon for planters to hire-out enslaved women as caretakers for white children. Wet nurse hirings reveal black women’s limited opportunities to care for their own children and the high infant mortality rate that often left them childless shortly after giving birth. In 1766, a slaveholder sought to hire-out “a wet nurse who has lost her child, and is a healthy kind wench, a good cook, washer, and ironer;” another offered “a healthy careful negro wench for a wet nurse.”178 By the mid-eighteenth century American colonies were moving towards greater rates of natural increase among blacks, which was not occurring in Georgia. Slaveholders on an Ossabawa island plantation recorded under fifty births in over sixty years. Fifteen percent of those children died less than a year after their births and twenty percent were given

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178The Georgia Gazette, July 16, 1766 and October 8, 1766.
Eighteenth century planters, merchants and slaveholders recognized that women were unable to care for their children because of their labor duties and lost one fourth of their children between five to fourteen days of birth. They also placed blame for deaths on mothers’ use of “old world” traditions from Africa in raising their children. See Minutes of the Evidence and Francis Kemble, Journal of a Residence.


The African slave trade transported the greatest number of enslaved workers after 1765. Planters’ preferences for “new negroes” did not close internal slave marketing. Fueled in part by
to understand instruction, the rules and regulations of the plantation system, and the required labor tasks. Historical evidence suggests that relationships and communities were complex and not easily categorized. The harsh and brutal nature of African life under slavery forced unexpected enemies and alliances. Still a frontier, Georgia had penetrable physical and social boundaries. This allowed some blacks space for quasi-freedom outside the plantation and unexpected liberties within slavery’s confines which aided their basic survival. Those who entered the public sphere learned what they could about Georgia’s diverse population, particularly how they could negotiate for improved living conditions.

Much of Africans’ private lives was unknown to outsiders. Those who could observe black life found communities strongly influenced by West African cultural and religious traditions. For example, the presence of African day names reflected cultural influences from the lower Guinea region, Islamic names from the upper Guinea, and language structure and religious practices from the Angola region. Fewer examples exist of the maintenance of specific African ethnic ties in the North American colonies compared to other regions of the Americas. Traditions and cultural practices became more subtle as the enslaved were overwhelmed with day to day survival, accompanied by Georgia’s harsh aims to suppress African culture. Those who wished to bury the colony’s African heritage had little success before the revolutionary era. In the presence of whites, blacks were prohibited from using African names, religious practices and ceremonies.

the growth of colonial newspapers; North America’s domestic trade continued supplying Georgia with blacks from colonies further north. In particular, South Carolina was developing a lucrative internal network that sold black laborers to Georgia, North Carolina, and northern colonies. See Deyle, 204.
Whether or not these limitations were forced in their private communal space (and at times in the public sphere) requires a more complex examination of their daily lives.

Black Georgians wavered in their attitudes towards new arrivals. If they could recover from their recent voyage, they were added hands in the field, increased numbers in the community, potential allies, and at times they were fellow country women and men. The role those “old negroes” played in healing the sick and preparing them for plantation labor was, by force and choice, both heart-felt and pragmatic. In Georgia, Africans encountered a new, yet familiar world. Seasoned laborers had learned the rules and laws of Georgia enslavement; they knew the labor expected from them and enough about European cultures to negotiate a turbulent existence. In the early period, whites showed greater tolerance of African cultural practices because of the advantages they brought to plantation management. As a result, the structure of early Georgia’s black society closely resembled African societies. Black Georgians were multilingual and spoke African, European, and American Indian languages; their religious practices included Bakonga traditions, Yoruba deities, and Islam; and West African naming traditions persisted in various African languages and English. Above all, the common West African social order, which placed spiritual leaders and healers at the center of the community, formed the basis of black society in Georgia, as in other parts of the lowcountry and Caribbean.

Large black communities in the lowcountry and Caribbean, which had significant numbers of African born people and significant physical and cultural distance from white

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183For detailed study of African language structure in South Carolina’s Gullah dialect, see Lorenzo Greene, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949). See day names recorded in African languages and English in *Slave Inventory 1812* from a Georgia plantation. *Georgia Department of Archives and History*
society, utilized clear African traditions in rebuilding their communities. Deemed “superstitious traditions of witchcraft and sorcery” by whites, African socio-cultural and religious practices transformed to meet the communities’ needs. Behind the barriers slavery imposed, lived communities with profound belief in the spirit world and the strength and power women and men gained from Gods and ancestors. Women and men who could “foretell future events, can [could] cause happiness, pain and loss of life to persons who angered them or who refused them.”\(^{184}\)

The obeah women and men healed the sick, led rituals, and protected the enslaved from enemies within and outside the community, using amulets and prayers which defended and secured community members “from trouble and drives away [drove] all other spirits” and cured disease. Laborers placed amulets over their homes, protecting their property from others in the community who engaged in theft. Thieves attempting to enter a persons property “when the obia watches would be punished with diseases and blotches breaking out upon their feet and other parts of their bodies.”\(^{185}\) Diviners created protective amulets from roots, herbs and the remains of natures powerful forces and animals of the physical and spiritual world.\(^{186}\) John Dovaston discovered that among “the jaw bond of a hog, a lizard skeleton...and a serpent’s head” was the “skull of a white man.” As in African traditions, the ingredients were cut, tied and mixed with roots, salt,

\(^{184}\)John Dovaston, *Agricultura Americana*

\(^{185}\)Ibid.

\(^{186}\)Robert Farris Thompson discusses the prevalence of this Bakongo *minkisi* tradition in the American south in *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Philosophy.*
and water and then poured into a bottle. The spiritual leaders then “utter their strange jargon over making figures and circles in a hundred odd sources.”

Spiritual leaders earned the loyalty of the population which afforded them advantages, including reduced workloads, and personal wealth. The most powerful of the laborers, usually those most experienced in slavery, occasionally manipulated newcomers into tending their personal garden plots and performing extra labor tasks. Labor completed for agricultural export fell under the well-guarded instruction of planter and overseers. They had less authority over the internal functioning of black society. Within this system, conflicts developed over property and social and moral codes. Tensions alarmed planters who feared internal communal conflict threatened the overall order of labor production.

During the seasoning period, new identities emerged, forming a more cohesive enslaved community. Historical research reveals that adoption of the English language forged a clear African American identity; however the case of Georgia encourages a broader look at the significance of language. Africanists’ research demonstrates that various West African ethnic groups negotiated their multilingual worlds by using dominant languages as lingua franca and developing pidgin languages. Adopting new languages for

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188Eighteenth century whites, particularly slaveholders and missionaries, often spoke of the powerful position of spiritual leaders in enslaved societies. Observers deduced that obeah women and men used their respected position among Africans to avoid their plantations duties. Such conclusion may have overlooked cultural differences in payment and exchange. Africans had limited material wealth, however used their much sought after labor skills as a critical part of intra and intercommunal networks. For a detailed discussion of the abuses committed by spiritual leaders see John Dovaston, *Agricultura Americana*. 

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communication occurred regularly prior to Africans’ arrival in the new world. Learning English was a demand that Africans had to accept, however this alone did not build communication skills that enabled survival or resistance. Africans found in Georgia, a multilingual and multicultural world. In this world, learning German, Spanish, Creek, or a new African language could be equally as important as mastering English. English may have helped them communicate with each other, but it was the language of their most oppressive enemy. Those who could aid their resistance or survival often spoke something other than English. Therefore, as in Africa, learning the language of potential allies was paired discovering the what services they could offer towards strengthening networks. In this respect, “speaking their language” was as much figurative as real.

Africans entered a system which offered them virtually no freedoms or rights; the frontier offered a small degree of fluidity in the colony’s social, economic and physical boundaries. White slaveholders’ demand for thousands of African laborers created a demographic imbalance in the colony’s lowcountry region. Peter Wood’s early study of South Carolina’s black majority demonstrates the advantages enslaved populations accrued when they lived in large groups. Georgians feared a black majority threatened their security and curbed black numbers to prevent communal resistance. In shaping communal networks, black Georgians countered their slightly smaller numbers and unequal position by taking advantage of other demographic factors. Hence, the numerous Indian population and the middling and poor whites of Georgia, who outnumbered the slaveholders and other elites, offered possible alliances and avenues for challenging oppression. Several major communities formed immediately in Georgia, runaways,
plantation laborers in the lowcountry, and a small number of urban laborers near Savannah. These groups formed connections with each other as well as whites and Indians, but defined each particular community, and its friends and enemies, in varying ways.

The runaway population continued a strong presence after the legalization of the trade. Their relationships with whites, Indians, and at times other blacks were often marked by tension. As they built settlements in woods and swamps or planned escapes to Florida, the greatest fear these maroon communities stirred was of physical violence towards those who presented obstacles. At times, early Americans exaggerated the violent threat black society posed, however in early Georgia, white colonists had reason to believe such threats were real dangers. Violent attacks by black individuals or small groups were commonly described in colonial newspaper and discussed throughout the colony. For example, during its first year in print, several issues of *The Georgia Gazette* repeatedly called for the capture and return Scipio, who stabbed and murdered Alexander Crawford, the overseer of the plantation where he labored.189 Whites were constantly concerned that such resistance would eventually led to another Stono, or one of the numerous West Indian rebellions.

Concerns of maroon resistance in the West Indies and other colonies traveling to Georgia were reflected in colonial newspapers as white Georgians followed black Atlantic resistance closely. One uprising left forty to fifty whites dead, and several white women captured. The Africans sent a letter offering the whites the lower part of the colony as

189 See reports of the murder of Alexander Crawford in the *Georgia Gazette*, March 30-May 3, 1763.
part of a peace negotiation. The slave trader who passed the information to the *Gazette* escaped from the island. While at sea, he met a brig of five hundred white soldiers leaving Barbadoes, “being apprehensive the negroes would rebel there also.”\textsuperscript{190} The following month, colonists reported a shocking revolt in Jamaica where Africans butchered one slaveholder, “cutting off his hands, then his arms, his feet, and legs, and then broke his thighs” and killed his children. News of suppression of maroonage and rebellion brought a sense of relief to whites. The Africans in the Jamaica incident “were gibbeted alive, which had happily put a stop to their horrid designs.” Georgians also celebrated the end of an uprising in Grenada.

We hear, that the rebellious Negroes who had fled to the mountains in that island were entirely suppressed; the ringleaders perished, and the others properly disposed of.\textsuperscript{191}

Maroons received aid from enslaved populations who concealed their whereabouts, and provided necessary food and supplies, but occasionally maroons also threatened enslaved communities. The harsh frontier terrain and the possibility of capture by Indian and white search parties, presented tremendous challenges for maroon communities. For Africans, winning, securing and surviving freedom was near impossible in Georgia. Runaways pillaged white settlements for food and weapons, however under colonial slave law, capture brought severe punishments. In 1771, a black man was convicted of breaking into a shop and stealing goods. Although his owner for asked that he be spared and transported, officials sentenced him to execution and paid the planter

\textsuperscript{190}Ibid, June 23, 1763

\textsuperscript{191}Georgia Gazette
thirty pounds compensation for his loss of property. Expecting similar, severe retaliations from white communities, maroons targeted the homes and gardens in enslaved communities for necessary goods and supplies. One slaveholder found that maroons created tensions on his plantations by “debauching his wenches who have [had] husbands,” as well as women he called his “very own house wenches.” Maroon raids caused tension in slave quarters and planters delegated work they hoped would prevent theft and attacks.

Runaway negroes are subject to rob and plunder the grounds of the negroes. Build water around fields, have a watch dog. Old negroes that are past labor are fittest for such watches, as they are not so subject to sleep as young hard laboring negroes.

Weary from strenuous labor and banned from keeping weaponry, Africans on plantations were less prepared to protect their communities from such invasions and perhaps less likely to report them to planters and overseers. Many turned to the obeah for protection and punishment. Reflecting West African social traditions, black communities in the Americas relied on spiritual leaders and elders to uphold societal order,

by the placing of several of those obia things over the top of their house, it defends their property...and negroes do believe that should they dare to steal anything when the obia watches, they shall be punished with diseases and blotches breaking out upon their feet and other parts of their bodies.

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192 Colonial Records 11:305. Mary Maxwell and John Houston were paid 25 and forty pounds respectively for Crop ear’d Tom and George who were executed in 1771 and 1773.

193 See Patrick Mackay’s comment in Georgia Gazette, September 29, 1763.

194 John Dovaston, Agricultura Americana

195 John Dovaston, Agricultura Americana
Enslaved communities also presented challenges to black maroons. They could earn money and other rewards for participating in the capture and return of runaways. This adverse relationship was at times unavoidable when masters and overseers forced their laborers to expose plots and hunt for runaways. Maroons were could not secure reliable allies, and as their relationships with enslaved blacks and Indians were fragile against white demands and encouragement for disloyalty to black freedom. Finally the frontier presented a paradox for escaped Africans. The unsettled territory offered hiding places and a challenging natural world of swamps, wildlife, and overall harsh conditions making survival difficult. Solomon Joell found an escapee, “almost perished” stating, “there were three more negroe men with him who died for want of water.”

Stories of runaways defeated by the environment traveled through enslaved communities and deterred many from risking escape.

Black-white relationships in Georgia were tense and plagued by violent conflicts. Slaveholders established an agricultural economy in which Africans struggled for basic survival under oppressive laws and labor codes. The slaveholding class represented a small minority of the colony’s larger white society. Whether or not they held slaves, all whites were expected to patrol black communities and uphold colonial laws that forced social, political, and economic distance between the races. Full participation in suppressing the enslaved population protected the interests of the minority slaveholding elite, and gave poorer whites hope for prosperous futures. White unity, however was not easily achieved. Recalling tensions of the preslavery years and failed attempts to build a

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196Geogia Gazette, August 27, 1766.
labor force dominated with European indentured servants, Georgians could not escape ever-present class tensions. For the enslaved, this divide in white society created opportunities for beneficial connections with struggling whites.

Historians Betty Wood and Timothy Lockley discovered that informal economic and social communities shaped by blacks and poor whites in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With permission from slaveholders, Georgia law granted blacks marketing privileges. Carrying special passes, they officially bartered with other colonists primarily selling fruit, vegetables, and plantation crops for their owners. Those who were could get to the markets thrived in an atmosphere, heavily influenced by African cultural practices and dominated by black women. Marketing had been a central part of their former lives in West Africa.

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social exchange. In Georgia, Africans used the marketplace as a center for establishing networks with others who provided goods and services, thus enhancing their living conditions. Such social interactions were impossible if Savannah’s strict trade guidelines were respected by all whites. Through illicit trading, blacks earned money, goods and socialized with persons of differing backgrounds. In particular, they acquired and sold goods to poorer whites at low prices, thus presenting themselves as more than *slaves*. As reliable allies, blacks proved they could assist common settlers has they etched out an arduous life in a challenging and dangerous frontier.

Whites faced violent attacks from Indian communities conducted as revenge for white violence, as well as, initiated to curb white expansion in the territory. By the 1760's, James Habersham stated, “Indian affairs still remain in a very uncertain and ticklish situation.” Contemplating the size of the Indian population a lowcountry minister lamented, “by their vastly superior numbers we should be crushed by one or the other.” In this very precarious position, Georgians sought alliances with some Indian communities, the major goal being the prevention of such attacks. Africans added another dimension to white-Indian relations that was both potentially harmful and advantageous for both sides. Daniel F. Littlefield reveals that the threat of African-Indian alliances “nagged the whites and helped to shape their relations with Indians.” The relationships that Africans formed with whites and Indians could prove valuable towards improving life

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201 Ibid.
under slavery. Yet, as slaves, with few recognized liberties and highly valued labor skills, their relationships with both groups included forced submission.

Georgia Indian communities, including branches of the Cherokee, Creek, and Chickasaw nations participated in African enslavement. Blacks were forced to labor in Indian agricultural enterprises, were traded and sold as chattel, and runaways were hunted and returned to white planters. The ways in which Africans were categorized in Indian societies is difficult to ascertain. Scholars have noted that Africans were generally introduced to Indians in a manner that demonstrated their servile position among whites, thus influencing notions of African inferiority among Indians. As white Georgians pressed their Indian allies to adopt European agricultural practices, some utilized slavery to satisfy a portion of their labor needs.

African-Indian relations transformed in the wake of major events, in particular the Yamasee War and the American Revolution altered the boundaries of their networks. Relationships varied depending on time and space, as well as each group’s position in European society. South Carolina’s Yamasee War marked a critical turning point for African-Indian relations. White encouragement of hostility between the races made significant headway as African slaves served in military companies.202 Their participation in the war against fifteen Indian nations, drove a deeper divide between the groups which ironically shared a similar struggle against oppression, enslavement, and removal. Gary Nash finds that any alliances after the Yamasee war were further deterred by a shift in Indian-White relations when various ethnic groups “were more intent on using white

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202 Gary Nash finds “half the Carolinian force that Governor Craven led against the Yamasee in 1715 was black” *Red, White, and Black*, 311.
society for their own ends than eliminating it altogether.”

Thus Indians were less likely to form military alliances with blacks. This was an early lesson for lowcountry whites who recognized the potentially devastating impact such alliances could have on their society which was demographically overwhelmed, leaving them particularly vulnerable if the African and Indian populations joined forces. As whites began their migration to Georgia, they worked towards maintaining and strengthening the African-Indian divide in the aftermath of the Yamasee war. Officials recalled it had “always been the policy of the government to create in Indians an aversion to blacks” and that relations among the groups were “thought detrimental as an intimacy between them ought be avoided.”

Daniel Littlefield notes that the “early trading activities of the Georgians afforded little, if any, opportunity for Creek-African contact since Georgia had excluded blacks from her bounds.” Georgia official established policies that limited contact among Africans and Indians by prohibiting traders from using any form of black enslaved labor in Indian territory. Such laws were frequently violated. After the Yamasee War, European traders introduced enslaved black labor in Indian societies. Southeastern Indians were not strangers to slavery and the common practice of integrating war captives, particularly women and children, into their communities as laborers of inferior or slave status was an integral part of Indian social and political organization. Prior to the

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203Ibid, 314.


revolutionary era, Indian societies showed little interest in integrating racialized slavery into their communities’ social and labor organization. In particular, Creek communities had observed black slavery among white traders, yet no move to adopt this practice occurred prior to the war. Historians conclude that although Indians did not initially enslave Africans, they considered them inferior because of their oppressed status among whites.207

Studies, which reveal Indians’ notions of African inferiority, should take into account, change over time and ethnic diversity. Relations between these groups were varied and not all Indian nation had the same interactions with Georgia’s enslaved population. In the colonial era, the people living in “Indian land” might have only seen blacks as servants for white traders, however other Indians were also held in bondage and labored with Africans on Georgia farms and plantations. In 1767, The Georgia Gazette advertised the sale of an “A Handsome Young Indian Princess and a Country born Negro Boy,” revealing the value of both races as slaves in white society.208 The blacks who migrated from neighboring South Carolina included a number of enslaved persons categorized as “mustee,” noting African and Indian parentage, in their communities. This biracial population grew in Georgia as African and Indian unions produced children described as “negroes of Indian extraction.”209


208The Georgia Gazette, April 15, 1767.

209Georgia Gazette..., see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s discussion of the term “grif,” used in colonial Louisiana in her book, Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole
African-Indian relationships led to cultural borrowing that influenced black acculturation. The focus of acculturation among the enslaved is often limited to adaptation of cultural practices from the whites they encountered. In Georgia, where African-Indian contact was frequent, much of the process of Americanization in slave communities included adaptation of Indian cultures as well. This form of acculturation occurred when runaways sought protection, and if not freedom, less oppressive servitude in Indian societies. Africans who lived among Indians and familiarized themselves with Indian territory, culture, and language and even served as valued as guides and interpreters for whites traveling in Indian territories.210

Cultural similarities among African and Indian ethnic groups enhanced their relationships. Theda Perdue finds that common ideas regarding agriculture, animal symbolism, emphasis on community versus individualism and the central role of kinships all worked towards creating mutually beneficial relationships in southern slave societies.211 Africans and Indians had some mutual interest in loosening the grip of oppression and slavery, even if it would not bring absolute autonomy or freedom. Likewise, cultural exchange was critical, particularly for Africans who engaged cultural blending as a survival strategy.

210 Scottish travelers in Georgia and East Florida used several black women as interpreters when they encountered Indians. See., John Marrant stated that he, “learnt to speak their tongue in the highest stile,” while he lived with a group of Cherokee in the lowcountry. see Marrant, “A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black,” in Vincent Carretta, ed. Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 110.

tactic. Thus, blacks studied Indian language and culture and searched for support among those who presented a substantial threat to white society.  

African-Indian relations in Georgia are most often categorized as communication introduced and defined by whites. The Indian populations either protected or returned black runaways, participated in slave trading, and utilized slave labor. Within the boundaries of enslavement, Africans and Indians met where each group’s power was limited. Likewise, Indians had fewer opportunities for systematic domination of Africans in frontier regions that protected black runaways, mainly Spanish Florida. Whether African-Indian unions or contact resulted in children, the cultural exchange occurred. Africans’ experience in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual communities in their homelands aided in their absorption into Indian communities.

Whites found themselves caught between strong Indian and African forces and diminished the threat by emphasizing black aggression against Indians, as well as, white communities. In 1765, an Indian man and a white named Durham Hancock were murdered and two black women and a black man were accused of the crime. Officials ordered that once the blacks were convicted, the “execution of them be in various parts of the Province, as an example; and to invite the Indians to see the executions.”  

Such invitations to executions of persons who unlawfully attacked Indian communities were part of colonial peace treaties and laws that demanded allegiance form local Indians in

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212 Olaudah Equiano remarked that the two books he “loved above all others” were the his Bible and the Guide to the Indians, see Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano edited with an introduction by Robert J. Allison (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1995), 104.

213 The Georgia Gazette, November 12, 1765.
capturing, returning black runaways and suppressing and punishing black resistance. Thus African-Indian alliances were fragile and often broken if threatened by the more powerful position of white Georgians. For example, in May 1767, the white servant of a Scottish trader was murdered in Creek country. The Indian nation apologized for the murder committed by “an outlawed villain” and “hoped their whole nation would not be deemed culpable.” Towards repairing the damage the murder caused to their relations with white Georgians, the Creeks “promised to deliver up all the runaway negroes harboured in the nation.”

Georgia planters’ great demand for enslaved laborers encouraged a variety of trade opportunities for whites and Indians who were not part of the smaller, elite slave merchant class that controlled the majority of the slave trafficking in the colony. Freedom was near impossible for blacks to obtain, those who did so whether legally or through escape, found themselves in a fragile position, for with the prevalence of kidnaping in the colony, one’s freedom was never secure. James Skirving was not sure what led to the disappearance of a man enslaved on his plantation. He wrote,

I am apprehensive he might have gone away with a gang of Creek Indians which were down at that time, or that He may be taken up some of the back settlers, who I am informed, frequently conceal runaway negroes, and work them in their own fields, or change them in some of the northern colonies for horses.

Indians sent parties out to kidnap blacks to sell into slavery. Poor whites also placed barriers. Mark Carr of Sunbury, described white backcountry settlers as “a lawless sort of

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214 The Georgia Gazette June 3, 1767.

215 Georgia Gazette
people,” but found their communities “of public utility” due to their efforts in apprehending runaways from South Carolina and Georgia headed towards Augustine. Likewise, white Georgians established laws that offered rewards to Indians who returned runaways, dead or alive.

Creek Indians and white settlers of the backcountry took advantage of opportunities to utilize black labor from runaways as well as those they themselves captured or “stole” from larger plantations and farms. Such practices were not uncommon and Indians were known to “frequently conceal them [blacks] and work them on their lands” and sell them on the slave market. Thus runaway advertisements reflected rather vague knowledge of the cause of an enslaved person’s disappearance from a particular plantation or farm. During the early years when the numbers of laborers available could not meet planter demands, “carrying off” a competitor’s human property was practiced regularly. John Lightenstone sought an African woman missing from his plantation and stated there was “great reason to think the Indians have [had] carried her off.”

William Lyttleton wrote the Board of Trade and Plantations about this frequent lowcountry practice of kidnapping and sale of Africans, executed by local Indian slave traders. White Georgians and South Carolinians valued this role as a means of preventing

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217 Joseph Gibbons, The Georgia Gazette; Gregory Dowd states that “captive African-Americans were sometimes adopted, but they were increasingly enslaved in the course of the late eighteenth century, and were often carried great distances to be sold to other Euro-Americans,” Gregory Evans Dowd, A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 153.

218 The Georgia Gazette, March 18, 1767.
the growth of the free black population emerging in neighboring Spanish Florida.

Lieutenant Taylor at Frederica reported fifty Creeks were stationed at St. John’s River
awaiting “reinforcements from their nation.” He continued,

They are going with an intention to fall upon a fort belonging
to the Spaniards near St. Augustine, which fort is garrisoned
by Negroes whom they hope to bring away in order that they
may dispose of them to the English as slaves.\textsuperscript{219}

African-Indian tensions proved beneficial for white Georgians in their efforts towards
managing growing problems from the continual flow of runaways in the colony. These
actions certainly caused labor shortages, but whites also sought preventions of the violent
attacks which often accompanied blacks’ freedom agenda. Since the preslavery years,
Africans targeted whites and Indians in small scale attacks where they were considered
obstacles in the path to freedom.

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\textit{Equiano’s Georgia}

During the eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano worked for a slave merchant who
sold human cargoes on Savannah’s slave market, providing “new negroes” via West
Indian islands, such as Monserrat. In this capacity, he visited Georgia’s urban and rural
black communities. Equiano’s experiences in the lowcountry reveal a complex society
where social boundaries tightly constricted Georgians of all racial and ethnic backgrounds,
yet informal social and economic networks emerged as critical support units for blacks.
For the well-traveled African, Georgia was among the most repressive societies he visited.

\textsuperscript{219}Letter from William Henry Lyttleton, Esq. September 15, 1757. Great Britain Colonial
Office of America and the West Indies. COS/376-377 Public Records Office.
Institutionalized and informal violence made escaping slavery’s social, economic, political, and geographic boundaries a dangerous venture.

Once docked, Equiano visited black communities in Savannah and surrounding areas. Pondering his own religious beliefs, he had opportunity to hear George Whitefield preach and during his visits he stayed at the home of his friend, Mosa. His Muslim name suggests he might have influenced Equiano who, after this visit to Georgia, spoke of his interest in Islam. Observing that none of the white Christians around him kept the ten commandments and that he excelled all in “keeping eight out of ten,” Equiano found, “those who termed themselves Christians not so honest or so good in their morals as the Turks, I really thought the Turks were in a safer way of salvation than my neighbors.” Equiano, Interesting Narrative, 152.

After a failed attempt to help a friend gain his freedom which ended in Equiano losing his money and a severe punishment for his enslaved friend, he again considered Islam.

Suffering much by villians...brought me very low, so that I became a burden to myself and viewed all things around me as emptiness and vanity, which could give no satisfaction to a troubled conscience. I was again determined to go to Turkey and resolved, at that time, never more to return to England. I engaged as a steward on board a Turkeyman (the Wester Hall, Captain Lina) but was prevented by means of my late captain, Mr. Hughes, and others.

These cross-cultural experiences were met with tremendous challenges that nearly killed Equiano. During his Sunday visit to the laborers on Dr. Perkins plantation, he

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221Equiano, Interesting Narrative, 152.
suffered a beating from the planter and another white man that left him in bed for sixteen to eighteen days and unable to work for four weeks. The attack was prompted by the planters disapproval of a “strange negro” among his laborers, reflecting planters’ growing concerns with the black Atlantic’s emerging communication network. While visiting Mosa, two white patrols came to his home, drank and socialized with the Africans and exchanged goods with Equiano. He was surprised when they suddenly took him into custody because Mosa, a slave, had broken colonial slave law by leaving his light on after nine in the evening. Like countless other black Georgians, Equiano found himself trapped by the unpredictable nature of black-white relations. Both races benefitted from informal unions, which were unequal to blacks disadvantage. Whites sacrificed black partners if such actions promised rewards or saved them from legal prosecution or social ostracism. Equiano’s close escape from the goal’s whipping post was not his final challenge. During a subsequent journey, kidnappers attacked him outside of Savannah. Claiming he was a runaway, one proclaimed to the other “this is the very fellow we are looking for, that you lost.” After another narrow escape, Equiano anxiously left for Montserrat and took “a final farewell of the American quarters of the globe.”

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223Blacks and whites, usually men, commonly socialized and drank in “tipling houses” in and around Savannah. Georgia officials grew weary of these activities and worked towards ending social interracial gatherings.

224Equiano, 135.
Prior to the antebellum era, Georgia’s free black population did not rise above 1,763 persons. Equiano’s experiences as an enslaved and then free man in Georgia demonstrate the precarious state of black freedom in the colony that equated “black” with “slave” in almost every situation. Paradoxically, within the colony’s boundaries, people surpassed racial, ethnic, and national boundaries as they formed relationships that aided negotiating slavery’s rigid territory. They forced spaces where goods, information, culture, and ideas were exchanged in informal, and often illegal, networks. Yet, the challenges to black community building were brutal as whites elites worked to “divide and rule” Georgia’s population. Equiano’s tribulations in Georgia were so troubling that in describing his departure he remarked,

I thus took a final leave of Georgia, for the treatment I had received in it disgusted me very much against the place; and when I left it and sailed for Martinique I determined never more to revisit it.225

Lowcountry Africans shared Equiano’s “disgust” and waited for prime opportunities for their own departures. The American Revolution placed 15,000 enslaved Georgians in a chaotic and violent war that dually heightened and devastated black resistance.

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225Equiano, 136.
CHAPTER 5

“THE WAR IN SLAVES”

Do you ask why those mothers and children were thus butchered in cold blood? I answer, they were slain for adhering to the doctrine that “all men are endowed by their Creator with the inalienable right to enjoy life and liberty.” Holding to this doctrine of Hancock and Jefferson, the power of the nation was arrayed against them, and our army employed to deprive them of life.”

--William C. Nell

In 1855, William C. Nell described a violent end to the freedom a group of Georgia blacks gained after the American Revolution. The capture of “Blount’s Fort” in 1816, led by General Andrew Jackson, was “one of the most cruel massacres which ever disgraced American arms.” For near forty years, forty miles south of the Georgia border on the Apalachicola river, blacks who “during the Revolution...caught the spirit of liberty” formed maroon communities in Florida. At the end of the War of 1812, a group of these settlers took possession of an abandoned fort which was attacked by the United States Army. Wearing “marks of the thong” and the “brand of his master upon his shoulder,” one man struggled against the American troops and “finally, closed with the emphatic

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declaration, ‘Give me liberty, or give me death!’”227 After an explosion caused by the army’s cannon shoots, Colonel Clinch wavered through a scene “horrible beyond description.”228 Twenty Georgia slaveholders stood by, ready to claim their property. Nell lamented, “some fifteen persons in the fort survived the terrible explosion, and they now sleep in servile graves, or moan and weep in bondage.”229

Nell’s *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855) recorded the “services and sufferings” of black soldiers in the war who “had no historian” to preserve their record. He was one of a growing number of nineteenth century blacks recalling the black revolutionary cause in their own struggle for emancipation. When Frederick Douglass carried his anti-slavery agenda to England, Americans criticized him for delivering what they considered a brutal attack on the United States. Accusing him of treason, American audiences received him with distrust and skepticism at the American Anti-Slavery meeting in May of 1847. William Lloyd Garrison calmed the audience as he introduced Douglass by assuring them of the former slave’s love for his country. Douglass, unwilling to soothe the audiences’ discomfort, responded directly to Garrison’s introduction and America’s outrage at his oratories on slavery. “I have no love for America, as such; I have no patriotism; I have no country.” He continued with a harsh

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227Ibid., 259.

228Quoted in Landers, *Blacks in Spanish Florida*, 234.

229Although some of the dates and names are different, Nell and Jane Landers describe this incident as part of Andrew Jackson’s three week campaign, the First Seminole War. Landers calls Nell’s “Blount’s Fort” the “Negro Fort at Prospect Bluff.” See Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 235-237.
critique of the Constitution and expressed a desire to see the country “overthrown as
speedily as possible, and its Constitution shivered in a thousand fragments.”

From this experience emerged his 1852 address, “What to the American Slave, is
the Fourth of July?” Disappointments, injustices, and failures that black Americans faced
in the years following the American Revolution loomed in a dark cloud over the
generations that followed. The black struggle for freedom was lost and all their efforts
used to support white liberty. Slavery continued and their children and new black
migrants suffered from their defeated cause. White Americans increasingly boasted of
their nations’ dedication to freedom and liberty; and their glorious chants dropped a bitter
tone on black America. As grand as their celebrations of independence grew, the memory
of broken promises and failed resistance grew as much in black communities. White
Americans’ rarely acknowledged the black revolutionary cause and even invited Douglass
to address participants at a Fourth of July celebration held in Rochester, New York at
Corinthian Hall. Shocked as he was by the invitation, he could not ignore the opportunity
to recall the Revolution’s black agenda sarcastically asking, “why am I called upon to
speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national
independence? Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?”
The British were not the only people who suffered defeat in the final years of the war. As

230Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave, Is The Fourth of July?” as quoted in the
pamphlet Oration Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5, 1852
(Rochester, 1852). Philip Foner and Robert James Branham, editors, Lift Every Voice African

231Foner, Lift Every Voice, 255.
Douglass considered the fate of the enslaved and the “hideous and revolting” conduct of the nation, he stated that Americans were “false to the past,”

What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.\textsuperscript{232}

For nineteenth century black Americans, the memory of the American Revolution conjured feelings of a bitter defeat and denial of the very principles whites celebrated. Freedom and liberty never reached the black majority, in spite of their efforts. Frederick Douglass spoke as a representative of America’s defeated black nation and although he argued a powerful case his words, like those of many other free and enslaved blacks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had no significant impact on America’s memory of the independence movement and black life during the era. Popular and scholarly discussions of the Revolution continued inviting early black America to a celebration of independence, freedom, and liberty they did not enjoy. American historiography marginalized the enslaved from the revolutionary era, limiting discussions of race to debates concerning the morality and constitutionality of slavery as it provided a philosophical challenge to liberty and a “problem” for the emerging nation.\textsuperscript{233} Others assumed a contributionist model, acknowledged the black presence during the war, and

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid, 258.

evaluated the ways in which enslaved men served patriot and loyalist militaries as soldiers, guides, informants and laborers. Sylvia Frey’s work offers a more complex gaze at black revolutionary war resistance, noting that “slave resistance during the revolutionary conflict was far more extensive than had hitherto been recognized.” Frey expands the work of Herbert Aptheker and Benjamin Quarles by asking more questions about the nature of slave resistance; providing a detailed discussion of the war on the southern front; and demonstrating how partisan groups used slavery and slaves as pawns in the larger conflict.

This chapter examines the complex blend of gains and losses blacks in Georgia faced during the revolutionary era. Georgia patriots battled, maimed, killed and died in unprecedented numbers supporting varying notions of independence from powers they believed reduced them to servitude; thus rendering them no better than the enslaved race of their emerging nation. For Georgia loyalists, conflicts with rebels threatened the stability of slavery and lucrative agricultural enterprises supported by strong partnerships they formed with their mother country and her colonies. Patriots and Loyalists did agree that the value of slave labor could be used as an effective “pawn” in the conflict. During the war, Africans used the vulnerability of the planter class to push their freedom agenda,


however, cast as “prizes of war,” their resistance was compromised and stifled by formidable obstacles to their revolutionary cause.

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One the eve of the American Revolution, Georgia was the least prepared of the American colonies. Internally, the planter elite had not established a comfortable measure of economic security nor control over the population. Georgia’s small planter class owned an estimated 15,000 slaves at the beginning of the war.236 As difficult as life was for blacks, poorer whites and Indians living in the region, the frontier proved advantageous as it limited restrictions and strict enforcement of colonial law. Africans’ social and physical mobility, particularly near Savannah, concerned whites. War threatened white elites’ upperhand in the colony’s intricate system of racial powerplay, and promised a vengeful African resistance movement. Such an uprising could only be worse if groups of whites and Indians formed alliances with enslaved laborers.

The conflict was perhaps more devastating than any had imagined. During the war, black Georgians suffered possibly more than any other Americans as they faced separation, starvation, sickness, removal, and death on the Revolution’s most “extreme and violent” southern front.237 Sylvia Frey finds that in Georgia, the predatory war was often a brutalizing and demoralizing experience. Capture by a partisan band meant the scattering of family and friends, black and white, it meant disruption and difficult readjustment; in countless cases it meant death.238

236 See Wood, Slavery in Colonial Georgia; Frey, Water from the Rock.

237 Frey, Water From the Rock, 82.

238 Ibid., 83.
The violence Africans in Georgia suffered stemmed from the prevalent kidnaping campaigns, which marked them the “prized booty” of raids. Attacks came from both formal patriot and loyal excursions, as well as, more informal engagements by whites and Indians expanding their colonial practice of capturing Africans for the slave market. Black Georgians could trust few in this atmosphere where kidnappers emerged from all fronts and protection from relatively few. Blacks’ economic and social networks were destroyed forcing them into a confinement they had not previously known; one that left them almost completely at the mercy of the slaveholder, depending on him or her for food, shelter, and medical attention, among other life necessities. This situation was particularly devastating for blacks who labored for supporters of the Crown. Loyalists, faced grave impoverishment and property loss, thus creating destitute circumstances that spiraled downward and dealt the enslaved the most severe blow.

As Benjamin Quarles’ early work notes, revolutionary era slave resistance in Georgia can not be simply defined as patriot or loyalist. Historians suggest a link between their actions during the war and early slave resistance. Bondage forced quite a different conceptualization of freedom among the enslaved. In Georgia, where black freedom was most unusual, resistance goals where not always absolute freedom, defined as formal emancipation or permanent escape from bondage. As chapter three discussed, blacks worked to earn freedoms within the boundaries of slavery. The impact of the revolution on lowcountry Africans varied. War, chaos, and the disruption of daily life provided opportunities for new freedoms and conversely destroyed others won in earlier

years. Although final goals of freedom might have been shared, the actions people took towards liberty followed varying paths as did their successes and losses.

By 1776, at least 5,378 of Georgia’s 15,000 Africans had arrived in Georgia directly from the Atlantic slaving coast within a decade of America’s declaration of independence. The smallest percentage of the population, the North American born, was quickly introduced to a chaos the majority of black Georgians knew well. From the African perspective, the War for Independence created familiar scenes of violent struggles for political and economic empire and social dominance. Combating forces in Georgia viewed the enslaved laboring class as a center piece in a power play that could bring wealth to the victor and ruin to the opposition. This was a chaos similar to what many had experienced in West Africa. After 1776, they again faced forced migration to lands where the “seasoning” process began again as they adjusted to new masters, labor requirements and communities.

Although earlier studies limited black revolutionary action to military involvement, they did demonstrate that Africans participated in the war in multifaceted ways. Black enlistment was highly contested in Georgia and eventually rejected by the white population. Most of Georgia was still considered “a wild and unpeopled” frontier where race relations were unstable. Whites guarded against possible violence from Indians and Africans. The physical demands blacks faced did not curb the flow of their escapes and other forms of resistance throughout the colony. No American colony could prevent black resistance, however Georgia felt less prepared than others to suppress a slave

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uprising. The white population had not yet reached a comfortable level of social control which other slave societies had achieved. In Georgia, the idea of arming blacks was unacceptable to most who imagined the communities would seize the opportunity to seek revenge for their oppression. The British and their supporters did not trust arming Africans. Military officials did find numerous arduous tasks in their barracks and public works for black volunteers, runaways, and captives.²⁴¹

Black Georgians served as guides, maneuvering British soldiers through the forest, swamps, and rivers of the colony using their escape routes.²⁴² Both Patriots and Loyalists found that blacks were a valuable labor source in constructing roads, fortifications and anywhere needed for the general support of their armies. In particular, serving “the King’s works” presented a major shift in black labor duties. Military officials forced blacks off plantations and farms, breaking family ties and communal networks. Black impressment was critical to the British defense; and although wealthy planters faced losses from disruptions in the plantation system, they were required to give the military control of black laborers. For example, the gallies at Sapelo, Sunbury, Ossabaw, and Savannah were “manned entirely with Governor Wright’s negroes.”²⁴³

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²⁴²Negro in the Revolution in Georgia.

²⁴³Lieut. Colonel Brown to General Patrick Tonyn, April 6, 1776. All of the blacks on Mary Butler’s plantation were sent to the Charleston Engineer Department, Mary Butler to Sir Guy Carleton, September 16, 1782, Sir Guy Carleton Papers 17:143, *The David Library of the American Revolution*, Washington Crossing, PA (DLAR); Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock*, 82-87.
This redirection of labor had grave consequences for Africans. Plantation labor was brutal, but within its structure, the enslaved had developed means of support and supplementation of their rations, clothing and shelter. Since the preslavery years, blacks labored in personal gardens, sold goods in the marketplace, and bartered in the informal economy. As loyalists increasingly lost their lands and connections with other whites, blacks suffered a loss of the fragile and limited autonomy they created in colonial society’s support systems which all community members, especially the impoverished, relied upon for survival. The disruption of war placed the enslaved at the mercy of their white owners as they endured a loss in communal power. That power had always been precarious, however black movement was further restricted by wartime boundaries. Africans had less time to labor for the good of their families and communities. In the past these extra activities conducted during “time off” provided few extras and more often supplemented life’s bare essentials. Divisions in revolutionary white society, often made Africans’ allies in their informal networks, the enemies of their overwhelmingly loyalist masters.

By the siege of Savannah in 1780, the war became more violent and patriot resistance increased. The hardship of war caused wide-spread suffering in the loyalist communities. Jacob Bühler faced the kind of attack many feared when “the rebels

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245 Frey, Water from the Rock, 103.
plundered his house, tied his hands and ill treated his wife and children.” Two of his children died from their injuries his wife was “turned into a cripple,” and four of his slave laborers were kidnapped. As they faced murder and violence from patriot troops, they also feared famine which appeared inevitable with their grounds lying fallow and their laborers serving the Crown. The situation was so desperate that communities sent letters to British officials, pleading for assistance and predicting death without external aid. As the war disrupted the plantation system and pulled Africans from plantations, whites could no longer depend upon their slaves for the basic necessities of life. In contrast, with blacks informal survival networks closed, slaveholders were expected to support the very people they considered critical to their own survival. If there was ever a question about the significance of black autonomy and the laborers’ wider contribution to the survival of all in a given plantation community; the answer was revealed during the war. The loyalists wrote,

His majesty’s subjects have no place of security, outside the lines of Savannah--Their negroes which were formerly a considerable part of their riches being confined to the town, have become a heavy and almost insupportable burden to them. Many respectable inhabitants are reduced to indigence and poverty for want of sufficient protection and support to enable them to live at home and cultivate their farms in security.

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The Revolution opened doors previously closed to Africans; yet paradoxically, the chaos closed other doors to self-sufficiency causing heightened discontentment and desperation. Blacks ran from slavery in the revolutionary era because war created opportunities for success and because they faced death if they did not. Revolutionary black resistance was a complex blend of choice and force.

Facing kidnappers and removal, blacks left Georgia plantations on their own accord. Some followed colonial routes to Florida, and others escaped to various plantations, farms, other American colonies, securing family and community ties. The years of conflict produced a heightened number of family escapes. More blacks ran with their spouses and children, were suspected to be harbored by relatives, or hid on plantations were they had relatives. Brisbane escaped from bondage and was “harbored by negroes at Sabine Fields plantation.” One month after her escape from Stono, South Carolina, Sue was discovered “at Mr. Gillyvay’s plantation on Hutchinson Island” among his laborers. Jamie Dally, who lived on the Gibbon’s plantation, hid a fourteen year old in April of 1781. The escapee, also named Jamie, was likely his son.248 If planters believed blacks escaped from bondage as opposed to being “carried off” by the enemy; the first step they took towards forcing their return was looking for them on plantations where they had family. When twenty seven year old carpenter, Dick escaped bondage, his owner

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248 The Georgia Gazette, January 4, 1781; March 1, 1781; and April 5, 1781. For a collection of runaway advertisements from 1730 to 1790 see Lathan Windley, compiler, Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).
quickly noted that he had a wife and child enslaved by a Mrs. Patton and stated that he probably “went to Savannah were he was raised.”

Although the Revolution made family bonds more fragile than they had been when whites were at peace, the events occasionally proved advantageous. In particular men used the chaos of war to aid their escapes, yet the autonomy they gained was limited and uncertain. Revolutionary era runaway advertisements demonstrate that opportunities for freedom through military service were opened to a small percentage of the overall population, but were well known and used by others squeezed out of enlistment. Realizing that loyalists would recognize those serving the British as friends to their cause, runaways often used military disguise in their escape plans. Hercules, Jacob, Jemmy, York, and Dick all wore soldiers uniforms when they left their plantations. Blacks believed that any association they could draw with the military would provide temporary cover from planters. A well know Savannah man, Sandy, left his plantation and joined his wife wearing “a short dark brown coat with white buttons, white breeches, round hat, and scarlet coat face with blue.” In this attire, his owner warned that he “may try to pass as an officer’s servant.” Once the elements of kidnaping and escapes from plantation to plantation as efforts to preserve family and community bonds are considered with the traditional model of black resistance, the goals of such actions must be broadened. Benjamin Quarles contends the enslaved population’s loyalty was to the principle of

249 The Georgia Gazette, May 3, 1781.

250 The Georgia Gazette, October 12, 1780; January 18, 1781; March 8, 1781; and June 28, 1781.

251 The Georgia Gazette, May 3, 1781.
freedom. This may have been the larger long-term goal, but their actions suggest more immediate efforts to prevent permanent family and community separation. Rather than running to freedom, many ran to slavery on plantations where they had spouses, children, and other relations.

Recognizing these immediate goals does not negate Sylvia Frey’s theory that blacks viewed British forces as a possible path to freedom and protection. Likewise these immediate goals were part of a larger movement that sought abolition and autonomy. Once families were united, they often escaped, as a unit, to British lines. The black revolutionary agenda clashed with British plans for their lives. England’s military agenda envisioned limited offers of freedom for blacks and have no plans for the disruption of the southern plantation system.²⁵² Still, they found their own mission overcome by black demands. Henry Clinton wrote General Cornwallis regarding the interference blacks caused to England’s mission,

As to the negroes, I will leave such orders as I hope will prevent the confusion that would arise from a further desertion of them to us and I will consider of some scheme for placing these we have on abandoned plantations in which they may subsist, In the meantime your Lordship can make such arrangements as will discourage their joining us.²⁵³

Lowcountry blacks could expect possible aid from the British if they were considered property of “friends of the government.” Others “not under the protection of the government” belonged “to the public and after serving it faithfully, were entitled to

²⁵²Frey, Water From the Rock, 89.

their freedom.” The British knew this offer of protection and emancipation would overwhelm their war agenda. The large enslaved populations of South Carolina and Georgia were active in resistance and freedom movements that pre-dated America’s independence struggle. British military officers found that the black agenda demanded their consideration and found black Georgians, “exceeding unwilling to return to hard labor and severe punishment from their former masters.” Disorder caused by black escapes forced a formal policy of forgiveness from slaveholders who restraint from severe punishment of runaways who returned to slave their plantations. After Mary escaped, her slaveholder promised, “if she returns home on her own accord she shall be forgiven.” Clinton and Cornwallis also discussed settling freed blacks on forfeited lands after the war to meet the community’s demand for autonomy. As in the past, black and white agendas generally collided. Cornwallis concluded, “there are so many different interests to attend to on the arrangements required, that it is impossible to settle anything positive.” The issue regarding postwar land distribution proved most challenging. The general believed the presence of a free black population among defeated patriots could benefit the Crown; “they [the blacks] would be a check upon the others.” As he

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254Lieut. Alexander Leslie to Sir Guy Carleton, October 18, 1782, Carleton Papers; Alured Clarke to Cornwallis July 10, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, PRO 30/11/2.

255Ibid.

256“Memoranda for the Commandant of Charleston and Lieut. General Earl Cornwallis” June 3, 1780, Carleton Papers.

257Windley, Runaway Advertisements, 82-83.

258“Memoranda for the Commandant”
contemplated the friction among interests—patriot and loyalist, black and white—he added, “and it is possible just the contrary.”

Postwar plans for Georgia’s blacks were critical enough to warrant immediate attention; however the events of the war offered quite enough challenges to daily survival. Famine, disease and kidnapping posed constant threats. The Loyalists who held them in bondage faced grave dangers from rebel forces which exacerbated their wartime difficulties. Loyal Georgians described “the deplorable state of the colony” which caused them to suffer “depredations, murders and wanton ravages of the enemy.” Rebel forces roved through their settlements attacking those “attached to governments,” stealing cattle and other livestock and capturing Africans for trade. As long as they remained with their owners, blacks relied on assistance from slaveholders who thought themselves “poor and distressed refugees” reduced to begging the crown for provisions and protection; contending they had “every reason to dread that famine would ensue.” After missing the planting season in February 1782, they revisited the colony’s early agricultural rise and the centrality of black labor to its success,

without the cultivation of our lands, this valuable province, which might have been, and still may be made exceedingly beneficial to his majesty’s dominion, will greatly suffer for want of provisions, and effectual support and consequently must sink into inevitable ruin.

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259Ibid.

260Letter to Henry Clinton from James Simpson July 1780. Carleton Papers. Letter states, “a malignant fever hath broke out amongst the negroes who have loited in and about Charles Town since the surrender, which sweeps them away in great numbers.”

261Commons House of Assembly. February 23, 1782. “Letter to Governor on deplorable state of colony.”
Fearing attacks from partisan groups, loss of property, and the destruction of their livelihoods, loyalist slaveholding families relocated and transported their human property to areas where they could work on new lands or be hired out to other plantations and farms.²⁶²

White refugees’ flight form Georgia reflected not only the continuous threat of famine, disease and murder; slaveholders left the colony in search of employment for their laborers. The loyalists’ property losses left them few options for agricultural production. They considered northern relocation tracks unfavorable,

To go to New York with our negroes on whose labor the future subsistence of our families depend would have added, if possible to our distress as we had no mode of employing them there nor could we dispose of them there to any advantage.²⁶³

Georgia refugees preferred transport to East Florida or the British West Indies. Again, despite British offers of freedom to select slaves, their plans for the majority of Georgia blacks did not include emancipation. They worked towards meeting Loyalists demands for relocation to areas were they could re-establish their agricultural enterprises and resume monetary gains they previously enjoyed from forced labor. By 1783, thousands of whites and blacks moved to East Florida. Georgia whites informed British officials that if any further evacuations took place it seemed,

hardly needful to add that in case of such a removal, Jamaica or some other of our [British] West India islands, is the only part of

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²⁶²Loyalists also organized and fought to protect their human property. For information on Thomas Brown, who raised troops from South Carolina and Georgia refugees, see Gary D. Olson, “Thomas Brown, Loyalist Partisan, and the Revolutionary War in Georgia, 1777-1782,” Georgia Historical Quarterly 54(1970)1-19.

²⁶³Georgia Refugees to Guy Carleton July 31, 1782. Carleton Papers, 3:44-45.
the British dominions where we can employ our slaves to any advantage.\footnote{Ibid.}

These requests limited the number of Georgia blacks who had access to freedom under British rule. The numbers relocated or laboring in public works and noncombatant military service always overwhelmed those who were promised freedom after wartime service. For example, compared to the several thousand Georgia blacks who were transported to St. Augustine in July 1783; the British military expected to enlist one 140 the following month.\footnote{Proposal submitted by Lieutenant Colonel Morse to Brigadier General Fox. Halifax August 23, 1783 Carleton Papers}

Labor demands throughout the British colonies pushed blacks’ opportunities for freedom further from reach and forced more family and communal separation under relocation. Blacks who escaped to British lines without their master and those considered patriot property faced transport with fewer chances of maintaining social connections. Blacks found themselves in such situations when British officials filled loyalist requests for laborers abroad. General Edward Matthew of Antigua petitioned Henry White for lowcountry black laborers,

What is most particularly required her, I am afraid will not be in your power to send us from New York, namely negroes. You will please send them in the Morse vessel or in ships or vessels that may be coming to the West Indies...supply a number not exceeding two hundred...and bring them to St. Lucia with rice for the maintenance of them for at least four months.\footnote{Antigua. Major General Edward Matthew to Henry White date[?] Guy Carleton Papers. Matthew also requested laborers for St. Lucia, see his letter to Henry White April 26, 1782, Carleton Papers 12:146.}
For black Georgians, relocation could occur in several stages. The refugees who moved to East Florida in 1783, after finding no opportunity to work their slaves in New York, met a desperate situation in the colony. Earlier migrants, particularly South Carolinians, had more rights to rations and other forms of support. Georgians were allotted half the rations of their neighbors and the black population suffered most from the shortage, as whites met their own needs before considering the condition of the enslaved. White Georgians sought alleviation from the “very great distress which was much to be apprehended from a scarcity of provisions in Florida,” with another black transport. James Wright requested “transporting about two thousand negroes to Jamaica.”

General Alexander Leslie wrote Sir Guy Carleton concerning Wright’s request and the provisions shortage. The situation caused him to conclude,

“I am the more particular in stating this circumstance, as I think it highly probably a similar requisition will be made on the evacuation of this place, and that many of the inhabitants will desire to remove their property to the West Indies.”

The first major wave of relocation occurred after the British evacuation of Savannah in 1782. During this time, Georgia planters moved south to East Florida, but after the Second Treaty of Paris of 1783 surrendered East and West Florida back to Spain, a second wave of slave relocation to the West Indies ensued. General Assembly member, James Butler, forced those he held in bondage into in multiple stages of relocation. His laborers’ experiences demonstrate the scope of removal and labor

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267 Lieutenant General Alexander Leslie to General Sir Guy Carleton July 19, 1782 Guy Carleton Papers 23:208; and Miscellaneous Documents Relating to Refugees, 1780-1836 DLAR

268 Ibid.
transitions enslaved Georgians experienced. Bulter was born into a South Carolinian slaveholding family and moved to Georgia with his father and their laborers in 1753. During the Revolution, harassment from French and American armies forced him to run to Savannah “where many of his negroes were employed raising defense works against the siege.” He left the city in 1779 under the loyalist evacuation and settled in East Florida with “his negroes and as much property as they could carry, and when that territory was ceded to Spain, he removed his negroes to Jamaica.”

Georgia refugees’ requests to British officials often stood in direct opposition to the agendas of those they enslaved. Transport caused complications for white refugees, but for blacks, it had the most harmful impact, including starvation and sickness. In East Florida, General Leslie predicted he would soon move his troops due the “uncommon degree” of sickness. Any Africans who ran to South Carolina, or were captured and transported there faced similar conditions. In Charleston, James Simpson reported that “a malignant fever hath broke out amongst the negroes...which sweeps them away in great numbers.” As far as Simpson could tell, the disease had not infected any white people. Accompanying these challenges to daily life, was the ever present threat to family and community security. Even the gains some achieved during the war in the lowcountry could be overturned by loyalists’ forced transports. A debate between slaveholders over the ownership of a woman, Rynah, recalls how blacks took advantage of the wartime

269Peter Coldham, 755.

270General Alexander Lesile to Henry Clinton date[?], Carleton Papers

271To Henry Clinton from James Simpson July 16, 1780, Carleton Papers
South Carolina planter, Rawlins Lowndes, complained that Rynah, a valuable house servant, was "seduced away by her husband Wil, after the capture of Charleston and carried to Georgia." In Georgia, Rynah and Wil continued laboring as slaves for Captain Durnford, but were able to live together, unlike in the years prior to the war. After the evacuation of Georgia, Rynah was not returned to Lowndes and relocated to New York with her husband. Disregarding Rynah’s family connections, Lowndes petitioned the for her return because he was concerned about the emotional state of his family who were “particularly attached to this negro woman who nursed my children, and had the care of their infancy.”

Loyalist and British agendas clashed regarding protection of slaveholders’ human property. John Murray, left his Georgia plantation in 1776 and his wife stayed behind to “protect it from the rebels,” believing they had “nothing to fear from the British.” In September of that year, rumors of a new chance for freedom spread through black communities in South Carolina and Georgia located near the Savannah river, declaring that the captain of the Sphinx, James Reid, “would free all the negroes who joined him.” Eighteen blacks held on the Murray plantation left to join Reid. Mrs. Murray braved a boat ride through enemy territory to British lines where her demands for the return of the laborers she claimed as family property were refused.

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273 Coldham, American Migrations, 775-777.
The situation at the Murray plantation reveals a complex web of opposing agendas. Loyalists argued the British seized property, including slaves, thus reducing them to starvation and other such destitute conditions. Loyalists held mixed feelings towards the British army. They wanted protection and uninterrupted use of their slave laborers. News of the approaching siege of Savannah prompted Georgia planters recovery of laborers who had been servicing the public works since the war’s outbreak. Colonel Fuser reported,

Since news of the raising the siege of Savannah; most of the planters have retaken their negroes; I am sorry to tell your excellency that the Governor’s negroes were the very first who went away: I sent an officer to acquaint him with it, his answer was that he knew nothing of it, and that he would order them back, but he has not done it yet.\(^{274}\)

He concluded that the Lieutenant Governor and the Attorney General “retook theirs also.”

Several weeks later he found that “most of the planters had retaken their negroes form the King’s works.”\(^{275}\) Africans found themselves tossed between these agendas, as they moved from back and forth from plantations to barracks. If they remained with their masters they received fewer necessities and more work.

British attempts to meet some of the demands of Georgia’s black agenda clashed in three major ways. First, the majority of blacks were loyal, not simply to the principle of liberty, but to their families and communities. These bonds crossed tory and rebel plantations and few offered clear and true loyalties to either cause and thus escaped from

\(^{274}\text{Lieut Colonel Fuser to General Sir Henry Clinton November 21, 1779, Carleton Papers; See the order for 400 to 500 to work at the engineering department, James Wright to Lord George Germain, November 5, 1779, “Letters of James Wright,” in Collections of the Georgia Historical Society}\)

\(^{275}\text{Ibid., December 12, 1779.}\)
plantations of British sympathizers. Second, the promise of freedom was primarily an tool for creating an immediate military labor force. The British further separated blacks communities as they met rising demand from military officials throughout the colonies by exporting laborers from the numbers of blacks who successfully escaped to their lines. As mentioned previously, generals from St. Lucia and East Florida were among those who wrote letters requesting black laborers. Those who escaped the Murray plantation were sent to East Florida where they were faced further separation when some were kidnaped by rebel forces or recaptured and returned to the Georgia plantation. In the post war years, Murray’s son recalled the fate of the captured laborers forced back to the plantation. His father, “recovered a few but was unable to keep them. Some ran away, others were captured by the French on their way to Savannah, and other were lost.”

Finally, as blacks embraced freedom proclamations, which passed quickly through communal networks, they overwhelmed the British military with a increasing demands for assistance, protection, and emancipation. Captain George Bowen described the chaos that emerged from the James Reid freedom rumor.

Many negroes escaped form their owners and took refuge on HM ships following a proclamation by Lord Dunmore promising them protection against severities that might be inflicted if they returned to their owners. The negroes taken on board the fleet were a great encumbrance because their consumption of provisions obliged ships to leave station, thereby losing their command of the entrance to Savannah River. The rebels immediately fortified it so that it could not be regained.

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276 Ibid.

277 Coldham, 777.
Whether Blacks expected freedom or protection from the British is difficult to determine. All faced uncertain futures, regardless of their captures and enslavers loyalties. British officials initially discussed possibilities for emancipation and resettlement. As their victory became less likely and demands for slave labor heightened throughout their colonies, black agendas were increasingly overlooked. General Leslie and Guy Carleton discussed the great necessity of white refugee removal and added,

the Negroes still more numerous; in whatever manner we may dispose of such of them, who were taken on the sequestered estates; those who have voluntarily come in, under the faith of our protection, cannot in justice be abandoned to the merciless resentment of their former master; I shall form these under some regulation, and make an appointment of proper officers to superintend them, they may then be sent to Florida, Jamaica, or other parts of the West Indies...to which they will continue to be useful. \(^{278}\)

Africans “lived under the constant threat of being captured by one group or another.”\(^{279}\) They saw their masters struggling with unfamiliar difficulties and played white vulnerability to their advantages when possible. In some unique and unusual fashion, the conflict of war occasionally afforded blacks a degree of power they did not have in peace time. As their labor grew more valuable as an economic, political, and military strengthening tool for both sides of the war, they had difficulty maintaining freedom and producing long-lasting benefits from resistance. Towards this end, blacks had to clearly distinguish white agendas and understand how the population was divided. Most crucial was the ability to understand how each group visualized their place in society. Simply put, the majority desired blacks as laborers, but the enslaved had to gain

\(^{278}\)5261 Lieutenant Alexander Leslie to Sir Guy Carleton date [?], Carleton Papers

some knowledge of the kind of labor they demanded, its location, and most of all whether it would disrupt family and community bonds. These factors guided blacks decisions regarding resistance. Where and when one should escape or whether or not it was feasible. Furthermore the extent to which kidnapping hindered resistance should not be understated because its prevalence made distinguishing runaways from kidnapees difficult. Some of the best examples of these complications are found in revolutionary era runaway advertisements.

During the war, the notion of blacks as valuable property grew, as Patriots and Loyalists sought slave labor for agricultural production as well as other labor needs that arose relating to military issues, such as repairing roads and building fortifications. Procuring enslaved labor became a military strategy for dismantling the strength of the enemy’s position. For this reason, kidnapping emerged as a common practice for both sides. Therefore planters could not always determine, with certainty, whether their laborers escaped bondage or were kidnapped by enemy forces. Especially when large groups of blacks left plantations, planter were unsure of the circumstances of their removal. Their newspaper advertisements used phrases including, “supposed to be carried of,” “enticed away,” and “may have been carried to.” The common nature of kidnapping

280 Gov. James Wright noted that, “the negroes were in general carried away by the rebel owners into South Carolina” leaving them with “no negroes to cultivate and plant.” See his letter to Lord George Germain February 10, 1780, “Letters of James Wright, 274.

281 Douglas Wilms finds that “most plantations were abandoned during the war and feel into disuse, while cattle and slaves were stolen by roving bandits.” See Douglas Wilms, “The Development of Rice Culture in 18th Century Georgia,” Southeaster Geographer 12, no.1(1980):55; “Letters of Joseph Clay, Merchant pf Savannah 1776-1793 and a List of Ships and Vessels Entered at the Port of Savannah for May 1765,1766 and 1767,” in Collections of the Georgia Historical Society 8 (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1913).
suggests that on some levels resistance in the form of escape, may be overstated in the historiography since we know that planters often had little evidence of the actual circumstances surrounding slave disappearances. For example, during several weeks in 1780, blacks on the sea islands and near Savannah confronted several large scale kidnapping expeditions executed by Patriots. Among these captures, was a campaign of four boats landed by rebels who “carried off near one hundred and forty negroes.” A subsequent attack occurred near Savannah where patriots “burned all the barns of rice belonging to the Governor’s farms that district, and carried away as many of the negroes as they could.”

This does not suggest that planters had no accurate information regarding slave resistance. The information they were able to gather suggests that while freedom may have been the ultimate goal of the black stream of resistance; their immediate actions often reflected attempts to maintain family connections during the period of conflict. Blacks were unsure of their fate which could force separation at any time. Slave sales had always been a threat to black community, but Georgia’s revolutionary chaos brought higher risks. The war created an atmosphere similar to their West African experiences. Varying groups with differing agendas for shaping America’s power structure, all saw the enslaved as objects of empowerment. The intense competition of warfare disrupted the already fragile connections among families and communities. In West Africa, social systems that relegated some to slave status, traditionally offered minimal protections and rights to laborers. Warfare accompanied the rise of the Atlantic trade and shattered slaves’ minimal

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282 Two letters from Major General Augustine Prevost to Sir Henry Clinton, February 11, 1780 and March 30, 1780, Carleton Papers.
freedoms, as they became not only laborers and profit makers, but the critical link in building empire. This scenario repeated itself in Georgia during the Revolution. Africans were again subjected to sale, relocation within the colony or to other regions, or transport abroad. Thousands who arrived within the previous decade witnessed their families and communities divided and sold at various points from the interior of West Africa to coastal towns and to the Americas. The Revolution forced another phase of separation.

Considering this challenge to black life, perhaps many runaways sought to preserve connections because they knew how suddenly they could be destroyed and how regularly it occurred during war. As discussed in chapter two, they came from societies who had struggled against such attacks for centuries.

_Aftermath of the War_

The aftermath of the war had varying impact on black life. Few won England’s promised freedom and life was precarious for those who escaped to freedom in northern societies where the limits of black freedom fostered uneasiness and insecurities in black free communities. Thousands who survived the southern battle ground where transported to new slave societies where they faced more devastating disease and famine and difficult adjustments to new labor regimes and unfamiliar communities. Persons transported to the West Indies saw no alleviation of their distressed condition. The refugees, white and black, arrived to the islands battered from a brutal war and suffering from inefficient provisions. As in North America, black Georgians endured greater hardships than white loyalists in West Indian societies. Life was particularly brutal in Jamaica, a primary
destination for relocation. On that island, Georgia planters forced their weary laborers into field labor soon after arrival. Reminiscent of the prewar years, slaveholders pushed for the profits of agricultural labor with little consideration of health conditions in the laboring community. With no time for recovery and insufficient medical treatment, sickness and disease spread rapidly. Charles Ogelvie reported to Sir Guy Carleton,
great sickness has prevailed amongst the negroes of your memorialists since their arrival in this island, which together with the excessive and uncommon dry weather that still prevails, has rendered it impossible to make any great progress in their endeavors to raise provisions. 283

With no land, white Georgians had a difficult time employing their laborers who were healthy and therefore requested more provisions until they could find land or hire out those who could work.

During the years following the Revolution, some loyalist planters returned and joined other slaveholders in rebuilding the agricultural economy under a new statehood. The state’s boundaries extended to support new slave imports and growth of its agricultural economy. White society achieved these transformations without the divisive debate over slavery that occurred in the colonial era. America’s ideological controversy over slavery had no significant impact on loosening the reigns of black oppression in Georgia. The state entered the early national period with strong, widespread dedication to forced black labor. As in the early period, planters and other pro-slavery factions considered slavery a necessary factor for insuring a successful agricultural economy and the overall strength of the state. The Revolution interrupted Georgia’s economic growth with the Loyalist exodus and subsequent removal of the black population by removal,

283 Charles Ogelvie and others to Sir Guy Carleton April 8, 1783, Carleton Papers

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kidnapping, escape and death. Cotton, formerly produced for domestic use, became a major export crop for lowcountry planters. They moved towards cotton production to avoid creating a dependency on English merchants. As a result of the war, planters also needed an alternate use for their lands once rice and indigo markets closed. The first step towards rebuilding was replenishing the diminished enslaved population and addressing problems relating to controlling the labor force, now pressing more than ever for the end of slavery.

The United States plans to force Spain to cede Florida began closing that region off to black Georgians as an avenue towards liberty. The expansionist plans of the early national period strained African-Indian relations in the southeast. Indian enslavement of Africans intensified in the years proceeding the American Revolution, as more communities adopted African slavery. Georgia Indians fought for and against Patriot, yet regardless of their wartime loyalties, all felt the pressures of the expansionist platform of the new nation. African slavery accompanied tense relations with white society. Benjamin Hawkins’ tour through the Creek Nation at the end of the eighteenth century reveals that Indians who had close ties with whites or had adopted colonists’ agricultural practices constituted the major slaveholers in Indian society. All the slaveholders encountered in every Creek town, excluding Sau-woo-ge-lo, were described as white traders, “half-breeds” or whites who had been captured and continued living in Creek country. Peter McQueen, head of an Upper Creek warrior town had “a valuable property
in negroes and stock,” A white woman, Hannah Hale, who had been captured at eleven or twelve, eventually married the leader of Thlot-lo-gul-gau and held “one negro boy.”

The Lower Creeks, Patriot adversaries, held Africans in bondage as well. The British offered Africans as rewards for Creek assistance during the Revolution. Africans established the Creek Nation’s most successful agricultural enterprises in corn, rice, and livestock. Hawkins observed,

Several of these Indians have negroes, taken during the revolutionary war, and where they are there is more industry and better farms. These negroes were, many of them, given by agents of Great Britain to the Indians, in payment for their services and they generally call themselves King’s gifts.

Enslaving Africans moved Creeks and other Indians towards the settle agricultural lifestyle white Georgians insisted they adopt as a necessary step towards “civilized” and peaceful alliances.

In the Creek nation, racialized agricultural labor was not as static as colonial slavery dictated, particularly concerning gender roles. Indian women continued in their valued capacity as agriculturalists. They integrated cotton crops into Indian society as women participated in most stages of production, including planting, harvesting, spinning and weaving. White traders who married and fathered children with Indian women

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285Hawkins, 66.
worked their families in cotton fields. The wives and children of Scottish trader, Robert Gruerson, and English trader, John Townshend, “raised cotton and learned to spin.” Gruerson employed “eleven hands, red, white and black, in spinning and weaving, and the other part of his family in raising and preparing cotton for them.” Furthermore, Indian societies created a unique form of African enslavement that fit their cultural norms. Crucial to this transformation was an near emasculation of black men, who did not perform men’s work. They were not warriors and hunters, and thus not real men. Historian Gregory Dowd finds that “slavery permitted Indian elites to take on selected accouterments of ‘civilization’ of Anglo-American culture, without violating their concepts of gender.”

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When Benjamin Quarles wrote his path-breaking work, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, early Americanists had marginalized black life in the era to such a degree that little, if any, revolutionary historiography sought to understand their experiences. Comparable to the work of William C. Nell, Quarles highlighted the contributions blacks made during the war and the impact that the era had on their lives. Limiting his focus to enslaved men, he found that during the Revolution “his loyalty was not to a place nor to a people, but to a principle.” The war further provided the black man an opportunity to “emerge from his status as a rejected inferior to become a comrade in

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Thus whether they fought for the Patriots or the British, the ultimate goal was emancipation and although “American independence did not bring all that many Negroes had hoped for,” the Revolutionary era “marked out an irreversible path toward freedom, that henceforth there could be no turning back even if there was a slowing down.”

The “slowing down” of the black freedom movement lasted near a century for the majority of the enslaved population. Slavery became more entrenched, the African slave trade re-opened, and the enslaved population grew rapidly. Black Georgians who were forced abroad and those who remained “found the postwar period a disappointment to their hopes.” In contrast, historians emphasize supposed progress made during the era. The Antislavery movement increased momentum in the North, Christianity questioned the morality of slavery and evangelists worked towards converting their black brethren, who in turn adopted the religion as a communal support system. With the “master narrative” in tact the enslaved find themselves disillusioned, but critical contributors to America’s emerging principles of liberty.

Blacks who earned the most significant revolutionary advantages lived in northern states. Georgians fared far worse and faced a white community hastily preparing a rebuiling slavery and strengthening black oppression. Joyce Chaplin concludes that, “the lack of revolutionary change in black slavery during the era of the American Revolution

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288Quarles, vii.

289Ibid, x.

290Ibid, 200.

was nowhere more apparent than in South Carolina and Georgia.”292 She views the “reordering of the physical environment” in the postwar years as a period of social change when planters “were privately willing to consider relinquishing some power over slaves in order to remain, formally, their master.”293 This process formally recognized autonomy in the slave community as rice planters, “inspired by a nationalist spirit of improvement,” maintained slavery “yet conceded more than ever to their slaves’ dissenting vision of themselves as a semiautonomous people.”294 The compromises white planters made with black laborers made their improvement efforts work; made them wealthier; and ironically, relinquishing a small degree of power on the plantation made them more powerful in the larger American society. Inspired Eugene Genovese, Charles Joyner, and early studies of the antebellum slave community Chaplin discovers that in the lowcountry the world that whites made, based on slavery, “also provided a separate world for the slaves themselves, which accompanied the expansion of slavery.”295 Can this minimal loosening of the reigns of oppression be viewed as a revolutionary gain for lowcountry black communities whose primary wartime agenda was liberation form slavery’s brutal confinement? African Americans words and actions expressed a deep felt sense that they lost their battle. The ultimate goal was not autonomy in slavery, but autonomy in freedom. Perhaps small


293Ibid.,30.

294Ibid, 61.

295Ibid., 59.
number of the more fortunate black Americans may have embraced Phillis Wheatley’s hopeful message in her poem to William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth,

No more, America, in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress’d complain,
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant t’enslave the land.296

After the war, far more were angered by what they considered a national hypocrisy, which used them to secure liberty for whites and returned thousands of broken promises and shattered and scattered families and communities across the western hemisphere. After the war, Jupiter Hammon continued life in bondage and judged “the conduct of the white people in the late war,"

How much money has been spent and how many lives have been lost to defend their liberty! I must say that I have hoped that God would open their eyes, when they were so much engaged for liberty, to think of the state of the poor blacks and to pity us.297

Black Georgians saw, in the chaos of war, opportunities for significant expansion of their long-running struggle for freedom. They sought protection from the British, served their military, escaped, and surmounted plantation boundaries to unite their families. As had always been true in Georgia, they had difficulty securing freedom.


297Quoted in Benjamin Quarles, 182. The use of these quotations does not suggest that Wheatley and Hammon expressed opposing views. Hammon held Wheatley in high regard. See his poem dedicated to her, “An address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years fo age, and soon became acquainted wiht the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” in Carreta, ed. Unchained Voices, 28-30.
Surrounded by anxious kidnappers and cut from communal associations, the majority of escapees found freedom a temporary and troublesome existence. Blacks lost new found liberties rather quickly as they were captured in raids and defeated by the environment.

The revolution was a cold and hard reminder of the limits of resistance. For Georgia whites, the decrease in the enslaved population after the war was rarely considered the result of widespread black resistance. As they petitioned for the return of their laborers from other whites and Indians, they generally viewed their losses as “stolen property.” The parallels between lowcountry blacks’ experiences in West Africa and Georgia were strikingly similar. At the end of the eighteenth century, slave trade surgeon Alexander Falconbridge stated that, “in Africa a *piratical expedition for making slaves* is termed *war.*” Describing the state’s losses in the aftermath of the war, slave merchant Joseph Clay called the revolution in Georgia, “The War in Slaves.”

The final chapter seeks a better understanding of the impact of the Georgia black populations’ revolutionary losses and the actions they took to carve out new or regain minimal autonomy established before the war. National dismissal of the majority of blacks’ aims in the struggle afforded slaveholders continued power over black life and whether compromises were made or not, “autonomy” remained fragile, limited by white society. It was not at all the true freedom the black community wanted from their wartime sacrifices. As they had in previous years, enslaved Georgians forced the boundaries of

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slavery, expanding them when they could. Despite their efforts, most eighteenth century
Africans in Georgia died bound by the system they had hoped to finally dismantle in the
era of independence.
CHAPTER 6

“CONJUH MUST BE FOUGHT WITH CONJUH”

As far as superstitions are concerned, Uncle Rias said that he knew quite a few “conjure men” whom the Negroes looked up to, respected, and feared as the equivalent of witches, wizards, and magicians. These either brought their “lore” with them from Africa or absorbed it from their African forefathers. He gave as wide a berth as possible to “all sich,” for he knew that they had secret “doin’s and carryin’s-on.” These people, said Uncle Rias were not intelligent, but they seemed to have highly sensitized minds. He also stated categorically that had the Southern Whites not curbed the mumbo-jumboism of his people, it would not now be safe “to step out yo’ do’ at night.”

In summarizing his feelings about those bygone days, Uncle Rias said he was of the opinion that slavery was both right and wrong. In that it raised the Negro from a savage state, it was a blessing to his race. On the other hand, in that it permanently established the idea of the Negro’s inferiority, it was wrong and a curse.

Rias Body’s comments exemplify the results of early national Georgia’s complex phase of community and cultural transformations in black society. As slaveholders pulled tighter reigns around their enslaved laborers, others felt prepared to push a “civilizing mission” and force wide-spread suppression of African cultural practices, or “curb the mumbo-jumboism” in enslaved communities. Such missionary efforts were part of an international movement towards refining African-European relationships in Africa, Europe and the Americas in the final decades of the 1700’s and the early nineteenth century. This

final chapter examines postwar religious instruction in the slave quarters juxtaposition with the development of the early national slave trade. Missionaries had limited impact in transforming the structure of enslaved communities, which were dually influenced by a constant flow of African arrivals. Presented with selected tenants of Christianity and African-centered philosophy and religion, black Georgians overwhelmingly found “African lore” a more practical tool for social organization. Finally, the chapter discusses the ways in which black life and labor in Georgia were examined across the Atlantic as power relations shifted and accommodated international changes spawned in the aftermath of America’s revolutionary war.

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As Americans laid the foundations of a new, independent nation, slavery became a central issue in defining republicanism. During the war, Patriot rhetoric declared the revolution, a struggle for freedom and liberty. Victory promised the colonists release from Britain’s oppressive grip, which they believed denied political and economic rights guaranteed by law and by God. In the postwar years, Americans discovered that the end of British rule only heightened tensions regarding racial slavery. Having cast themselves in the role of “slaves” to the Crown, whites could not ignore the deeper implications of claiming liberty and freedom as national treasures when the black population, the majority held in bondage, had few if any rights in the new states. Slavery seemed an unlikely companion for the new republic.300 Philosophically, black bondage certainly had no place

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in a free nation; and colonists had faced international criticism by opponents who were “astonished to see a people eager for liberty holding negroes in bondage.” Criticism came from within as well. Thomas Paine called the enslavement of Africans a “savage practice” that was “contrary to the light of nature.” One of the nation’s wealthiest planters, slave merchant Henry Laurens, contemplated the incompatibility of slavery with the ideals of the emerging nation. He discussed plans for emancipation with his son John, not less than $20000 Sty would all my negroes produce if sold at public auction tomorrow. I am not the man who enslaved them, they are indebted to English men for that favor...I am not one of those who dare trust in Providence for defense and security of their own liberty while they enslave thousands who are as well entitled to freedom as themselves.

Influence for debates over the compatibility of slavery and republicanism extended beyond the words of white philosophers and slaveholders. Whites met pressure from black populations, free and enslaved, North and South. Whether blacks supported patriot and loyalists causes, escaped bondage, or seized opportunities which granted small rewards from the chaos of war, they clearly engaged the revolutionary era’s liberty theme. Blacks’ interpretation of the independence movement supported their longstanding struggle for freedom and seemed the greatest opportunity for a national-wide push for emancipation since the beginning of the slavery era.


\[303\] Henry Laurens to John Laurens, August 14, 1776 in Burns, *Am I Not a Man*, 428.

\[304\] Gary Nash states that, “the American Revolution represents the largest slave uprising in our history.” See Nash, *Race and Revolution*, 57.
developed their own “stream of resistance,” demanding an end to slavery, political and economic freedom, and cultural autonomy. After the war, they did not sit idly while whites decided if the country could function without slavery. More information exists describing how blacks in northern societies forced a space for themselves in the early national period, as well as, the measures white society took to keep them out of the emerging American identity. On the southern front, finding a space in the early national formal dialogue regarding slavery was even more dangerous and difficult. Lowcountry black society had little, if any, support for their freedom movement after the British defeat and evacuation. South Carolina and Georgia did not waver in their support of slavery as an absolute necessity in the deep South’s agricultural economy. Any discussion of an end to forced labor and slave trading threatened national unity. The top priorities of lowcountry whites were reorganizing their war-torn societies, replenishing the black laboring population and rebuilding the export economy, including an expansion of the cotton industry.

Gary Nash linked the failure of postwar abolition with two main problems that threatened immeasurable conflict for the nation in the wake of emancipation. First, abolition posed economic questions regarding compensation for former slaveholders and

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307 Sylvia Frey finds that, “white planters and merchants of the revolutionary generation were convinced that full economic recovery was inseparably linked to the restoration of slave labor.” See Frey, *Water From the Rock*, 211.
reordering the structure of state economies, particularly in the southern region. Second, contemplating emancipation raised concerns about how the United States envisioned space for a large free black population. Over 150 years of racial slavery resulted in dangerous tensions among blacks and whites. Could there be equality and peace between the races? Much of the postwar antislavery sentiment did not envision Americans of African descent as respected citizens, connected to the nation’s political, social, and economic locales. Black revolutionary ideology, their varied participation in the war, and their history of resistance alarmed white society. Fearing racial violence, economic competition, and a shift in social mores, America abandoned abolition calling slavery an immoral, but necessary institution. Northern states adopted long-range plans for the gradual emancipation of the region’s enslaved population. Although riddled with limitations and inconsistencies, northern black society grasped the region’s antislavery sentiment and carved out a secretive and fragile network that paved a path to freedom for those held in bondage.

The situation for blacks in the lowcountry was grave. The nation abandoned their freedom movement and supported lowcountry whites’ demand for the re-opening of the

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African slave trade, the expansion of slavery and rededication to black oppression.

Literature examining black life in Georgia during the revolutionary era finds several key results of the war relating to slavery and Africans. First, escape, death, and removal all caused a remarkable depletion of the planter class’ laboring population. Second, early Americanists find that lowcountry black resistance in the revolutionary era forced the planter class into negotiations with their laborers as they frantically worked towards rebuilding their plantations and the broader economy. Finally, historians note that the shift from rice to cotton, a less demanding crop, reduced the severity of labor tasks for enslaved blacks and presented new opportunities for skilled positions.311

A closer examination of the transformation of Georgia’s slave trade suggests historians, searching for some reward for black revolutionary resistance in the deep South, are overlooking striking evidence of greater obstacles confronting black communities in the early national period. Georgia replenished its laboring population by re-opening trade with West Africa and forcing record numbers of captives through the tumultuous middle passage. Available records show that at least 9,520 captives sailed legally from Africa to Georgia in the years proceeding the Revolution.312 By 1790, the enslaved population was twice as large as the prewar labor force.313 This heightened scale of trade was a grave


313Sylvia Frey notes a population of 20,000 by 1787 and 29, 264 by 1790. Frey, Water from the Rock, 212; Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population before
disappointment to black Americans throughout the states who hoped the Constitution
would end the infamous traffic that dehumanized their fellow Africans. Increased numbers
of African born persons in Georgia’s enslaved communities raises questions about cultural
development in the early national period. If Georgia’s “new Negro” population had
grown so significantly, why are scholars finding the emergence of a clear African
American culture in the state after the American Revolution? Are they applying broad
generalizations about the larger black American society and creolization to the lowcountry
state? There is no simple answer, rather a complex set of events that transformed postwar
race relations and had varying impact on black society.

Re-opening the African Trade and Strengthening Missionary Work

At the close of the Revolution, rebuilding the black labor community was central
to whites’ vision of the state’s re-emergence as one of the Nation’s leading agricultural
centers. Criticism of the African trade heightened world-wide as the British aimed for its
abolition and moved towards refocusing their economic interests and trade relations in
Africa. Against this backdrop of anti-slave trade fervor, Georgians chose a pro-slave
trade platform and demanded permission to quickly increase the enslaved population with
slave imports. America’s new federal government met their demands.

Georgia’s early national slave trade began as the colonial enterprise. The planter
class and the agricultural economy suffered tremendously from wartime property loses and
other devastations. Not only did families and communities face challenging recovery from

the trauma of war, their plantation system was in a state of disarray. Destruction caused by years of turmoil and conflict demanded they build a “new” Georgia or as they saw it, “begin the world again.” For wealthy Georgians, a profitable and thriving slave market was key to a new start for their state. Mirroring the rhetoric of the colonial slavery debate, they considered Africans “the one needful thing” for state reconstruction. For individual interest and state commerce, the “negro business” was “to the trade of this country as the soul to the body.”

Likewise, preferences for enslaved laborers followed patterns established by the first slave market. Slave merchants first re-established trade with the West Indies, particularly Jamaica. Considering prewar trade connections, and the fact that thousands of lowcountry Africans were removed to the islands during the war, it seemed a likely place for trade. Postwar stresses created a need for a variety of goods from the West Indies, however merchants could earn the greatest profits by participating in the slave market sending human cargoes to Georgia via the islands. Slave merchant Joseph Clay, alerted his colleagues that slaves would “be in great demand and will bring high prices,” thus

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expanding trade “beyond conception.” He advised that “the best way for you to place your money here will be by commerce.”

Early national planters and merchants did not share their colonial counterparts preference for West Indian blacks’ experience and familiarity with plantation labor. This market was valued, rather, for its ability to meet Georgia’s labor needs faster and cheaper than trade from the African coast. Merchants stated the island trade was “not the channel we [they] would wish to attain them through–tis from the coast only we wish to receive them.” Prewar exchange patterns taught merchants that they could expect more profits from direct African imports. In the years proceeding the war, they did not move directly to the slaving coast because of economic distress. Merchants expressed a desire for direct trade with West Africa as soon as the voyages could be financed, noting that “negroes from Africa will do far better” and would “yield a great profit.” By 1791, merchants re-established the state’s Atlantic trade connections; and by 1795 at least 1,600 Africans were forced from the slave coast and disembarked in Georgia.

Thus the re-opening of the slave trade brought captives from the West African continent face to face with black Georgians who were also suffering from the destruction caused by combating societies who hunted them as “spoils of war.” Remarkably, the

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317 See Joseph Clay’s letters to Joachim Noel Fanning, April 23, 1783; George Meade, April 22, 1783; and Messrs Scott Dover Taylor & Bell, April 16, 1783 in “Letters of Joseph Clay, Coll of GHS 8:185-193.

318 Ibid.

319 Ibid.

majority of Africans in postwar Georgia had lived as war captives, war booty, and/or gifts of war on African and American soil. Early national new arrivals’ experiences were similar to those who arrived in the colonial era, however the former faced more intense acculturation pressures.

By the latter part of the eighteenth century, religious missionaries felt better prepared for success as they approached enslaved communities for conversion.321 In Georgia and other regions where the laboring population had large numbers of African born persons, Christians found their work difficult. Language and cultural barriers remained and reminded whites of challenging ventures in eighteenth century West Africa. At that time, cultural differences discouraged widespread missions in colonial Georgia and religious leaders waited for the growth of a creole population before extending their work. During the latter decades of the eighteenth century, America witnessed the growth of the black creole population and missionaries believed they would find success among those born into slavery. The early national trade’s importation of blacks from the islands and West Africa strengthened African cultural practices in the lowcountry. Although the new state still had a large African born population, missionaries where not as apprehensive about their religious duties as they had been in the colonial era. They were, however, “a little troubled to observe how small a progress” had been made in “delivering those poor creatures from the pagan darkness.”322

321Placing Georgia in the Atlantic here is influenced by Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood’s important work, Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

322A Letter of the Lord Bishop of London to the Masters and Mistresses of Families in the English Plantations Abroad; Exhorting them to Encourage and Promote the Instruction of their
The barriers of language and culture remained an obstacle for proselytization. In the years following the war, missionaries had a clearer idea, gained from trial and error, about how they could best promote religious conversion. Likewise, over a century of slavery and debates regarding its morality, gave them a more focused goal and purpose in converting Africans in America than they had when they met them in their homelands.

Fifty-three years after Reverend John Burton preached to the Trustees of Georgia, another Bray Associate, Reverend Duke, offered a twelve step process for successful conversion. Rather than distancing themselves from Africans and their culture, missionaries had to confront and destroy African beliefs and symbols. Duke presented his plan,

    to overthrow, if I can, some pernicious principles and tenets in our slaves, that make them so much the dupes of superstitions, and often destroy that interest their respective owners have in their labor and service.323

Three of Duke’s twelve steps to conversion plan explained the being of God, the nature of worship and obedience, prayer, and God’s miracles and salvation. The remaining steps all emphasized using Christianity for social control and dismantling African beliefs. Missionaries emphasized obedience to the master, preached against polygamy, theft, drunkenness, and finally the “happy condition of good negroes...in opposition to those who are bad, and constantly subject to punishments.”324 Most of Duke’s instructions read more like slave codes than religious teachings.

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323Abstract of the Evidence Delivered Before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, in the Years 1790 and 1791; on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Edinburgh, 1791) JCBL.

324Ibid.
The Sixth. The ten commandments shortly explained, in which the sin of murder will be shown to be a heinous and grievous crime, whether perpetrated by sudden passion and violence, or from willful and deliberate malice; destroying life by poison, or nay secret means shown to be cruel and unlawful. A dissuasive from self-murder.

The Seventh. What marriage means, and exhortation against polygamy and unlawful concubinage.

The Eighth. The Negroes superstitious notions concerning their dead, their funeral rites, and commemoration of their dead family examined and exploded.

The Ninth. All witchcraft, obeah, conjurors, oaths or swearing upon grave dirt, show to be foolish and absurd. The scripture account of the dead, and spirits examined in contraction to the notions. The art and craft of the obeah-people shown to be absurd, and not worthy of credit. A caution against such delusion, which may so far affect their minds, as to occasion total neglect of their own preservation, and thereby make them guilty of the crime of self-murder.325

William Knox’s approach was similar. He advocated a “short summary” of religion.326 The rest of a missionary’s “one hour on Sundays” focused on Africans’ behavior, warning that God punished “roguery, mischief, lying before or after death.” Disobedient slaves could expect God “to put it in their masters hearts to punish them” before death, and give them to the Devil upon death. In contrast, “those who do their work without knavery or murmuring” received the master’s kindness, and after death, “plenty of good things.” If blacks had any doubts concerning the authority of their

325Ibid.

326Knox’s views are particularly valuable because he was a close friend of Georgian, James Habersham. He corresponded with him regularly regarding Georgia blacks and also owned a plantation there.
religious instructors, Knox suggested evangelists state that, “God sent the missionary to tell them what to do and would be angry if they did not mind what he told them.”

White Georgians, as well as other Americans (including some blacks), grew less tolerant of African culture in the early national period. As slaveholders embraced paternalism, shaping the enslaved community into loyal laborers obedient to their masters and to Christianity, became a priority. Disputes over the nature of enslavement led more Americans to the idea that slavery, a necessary evil, was only justifiable if it saved bondspersons from a worse fate, sin and savagery. Paternalism and conversion appealed to America’s ethnocentrism and racism. Evangelists descended on enslaved communities with a message of hope and compensation for their lost revolutionary cause. Baptism would release them from “a worse bondage, the bondage and slavery of sin.” They could have the freedom the so poignantly demanded—in the afterlife.

Black Georgians response to proselytization varied. Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood describe the emergence of a postwar Christian social order where southern blacks created culture within a white context and used Christianity as a tool for unifying various African ethnic groups and shaping a more inclusive identity. The case of Georgia complicates this theory by raising questions regarding how the emergence of Afro-Christianity

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328 Ibid.

coincided with the state’s highest numbers of African arrivals and their impact on shaping worldviews.

The success of conversion among black Georgians is generally promoted with analyses of George Liele’s work in establishing early churches in Georgia and the West Indies. Liele built a noteworthy following through his “backcountry preaching” in Georgia and the Carolinas. His experiences, however, stood apart from most Georgians. The Virginia-born slave’s master, Henry Sharp, was “caught up in the evangelical revivals that swept the Atlantic World.” Sharp became a deacon; married the sister of the local minister; and like planters such as Jonathan Bryan and George Galphin, “he encouraged blacks...to attend local meetings.” Liele’s associates and converts primarily lived on plantations where the slaveholders shared Sharp’s sentiments and also encouraged conversions. The relationship between power and acculturation is as critical in understanding Christian conversion in Georgia as in West Africa. Comparable to missionary success in slaving regions, when faced with large African-born populations Christians found success among blacks serving masters who supported conversion as a necessary phase of social control. Thus it is difficult to distinguish true conversions and abandonment of African worldviews from pragmatic choices which avoided situations where rejecting Christianity required defying the master—an offense generally corrected with brutal physical punishment.

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Georgia’s African trade resumed alongside the fervor of religious missions. The lowcountry’s African-born population increased when most of the nation’s black communities were well into the process of Americanization or creolization as they developed a distinct African American culture. The uniqueness of lowcountry black culture in the early national period is directly linked to the increase of African imports after the American Revolution. As in parts of the West Indies and Latin America, Georgia’s continuous flow of African imports strengthened cultural influences from slaves’ places of origin. At least one third of Georgia’s enslaved population was transported via the African trade in the early national period resulting in cultural influences in the lowcountry that resembled those of the Caribbean more than states further north. For example, scholars find that the unique language structure found in the early lowcountry are not so unusual when studied with black Atlantic communities in coastal West Africa and the Caribbean. Frederick G. Cassidy finds that “Gullah and Jamaican Creole were similar enough to be taken as virtual equivalents.”331 The similarities demonstrate that, although whites believed the growing African American population would by accompanied by a decrease in Africa’s cultural influence, West African arrivals continually provided alternatives to Christianity and European cultural norms. Black community structure relied upon African influenced cultural and religious practices. As in South Carolina, nineteenth century traditions in Georgia reflected growing influence from the southern slave coast (Lower Guinea and Angolan regions). In particular, Bakongo

traditions shaped black philosophy and religion. More than maintaining specific ethnic
traditions, black Georgians’ cultural transformation support the scholarly opinion that
however diverse African cultural practices were, they shared recognizable commonalities.
In Georgia, black communities embraced practices and beliefs common to a wide-range of
ethnic groups. Adopting more generalized cultural practices (as opposed to Christian
conversion) allowed enslaved persons to overcome ethnic difference in ordering their
communities under the strains of slavery, understanding their world, and determining what
actions could alter their condition. Black Atlantic communities transformed African
religions, art, and philosophy and made them applicable to the circumstances of their
enslavement.

As Christians pressed for an end to African religious practices in the slave quarters,
black Georgians sought protection of their cultural autonomy through secrecy. The
invisible institution Albert Raboteau found in the antebellum era likely planted roots under
Christians’ “civilizing missions.” This notion of hidden culture does not suggest that
some Africans did not embrace Christianity, rather that most were careful not to reveal the
level of importance African religious traditions had in their communities. Furthermore,

332 For a path-breaking study of the Bakongo influence on African American philosophy and art in
Georgia and the southern United States, see Robert Farris Thompson’s chapter, “The Sign of the
Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art and Religion in the Americas,” in his book, Flash of the
For an outstanding book-length discussion of the transformations of African religions and cultural
and community develop in the South Carolina sea islands see Margaret Washington Creel, A
Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs (New York: New

333 Albert J. Raboteau discusses the syncretism of Christianity and African religions in
antebellum African America in his early work, Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the
whites missions offered “bits and pieces” of Christianity, emphasizing tenants that supported their own agendas. Christianity in this limited scope was not comparable to African philosophy and religious practices which were intricately woven into everyday life. In this respect, abandonment of African worldviews was near impossible for enslaved Georgians.

When asked if she knew about “conjuring and superstition,” “Aunt Mary replied that she did, but regarding specific details of her beliefs she remarked, “sho ain’t gonuh tell nobody.” The way the question was posed reveals a significant problem in scholarly approaches to slave culture and religion, particularly in the American historical field. Considered “superstitions,” “mumbo-jumboism,” “and simplistic animist beliefs, African religions have not been respected or considered capable of creating societal order. Black Georgians focused greater attention on transforming African religion and culture as opposed to adopting Christianity. The significance of Africa and African philosophy as the centerpiece of community structure remained critical well into the twentieth century. Black communities turned to Africa for healing, resolution of internal and external conflicts, and interpreting life experiences. In particular, postwar Christian missionaries had little success in diminishing the significance of the spiritual leader in Georgia’s black communities.

Methodologies from African history and African American Studies can enhance our understanding of early national black society in Georgia. Historians painstakingly search for the actual space where communities met and shaped their cultural worlds.

334Georgia Writer’s Project, interview with Aunt Mary in Drums and Shadows, 2.
Churches, schools, formal organizations all provide evidence of organized communities.
Approaching lowcountry blacks with this conceptual framework can be misleading.
Religion and culture were inextricably linked as in West Africa and permeated daily life
whether or not they had a specific church for worship. West African societal organization
did not mirror that of Europeans; and using white society as a vantage point for examining
and analyzing Africans in Georgia, limits the ways in which scholars understand
community and cultural development. Searching for the familiar—churches, religious
practices, and English speakers—historians finally felt comfortable labeling black Georgians
“African American” when they found a place of worship in the early nineteenth century.
Black society was still different, “a separate world,” but a community easing closer to
white society. Assuming whites practiced *authentic* Christianity, historians quickly remind
us that enslaved populations blended proper Christianity with elements of their old world
African traditions. The numbers of blacks, such as George Liele, who formally joined
Christian churches in Georgia was significant and included those who established one of
the first black churches in the nation, and established churches abroad. The number of
Africans who did not convert was larger than Georgia’s black Christian population. With
deep consideration of African philosophy, which influenced early Georgia blacks, one
may better describe their evolving religion as more “American Bakongo” or “American
Yoruba” than Afro-Christianity. As in the colonial era, black Georgians private lives
centered around African traditions and the transformation of those practices into useful
techniques for managing their societies and negotiating slavery’s harsh terrain.
Black Georgians who were receptive to Christianity viewed it through the lenses of their own religious beliefs. Georgian Thomas Smith related Christianity to African traditions, stating that the “magical power” of Moses, who “turned a rod to a snake,” still existed Georgia’s black communities.

Dat happen in Africa duh Bible say. Ain dat show dat Africa wuz a lan uh magic powuh since duh beginning uh history. Well den, duh descendants ub Africans hab duh same gif tuh do unnatchel ting.335

Although increasingly influenced by European culture and philosophy, black Georgians found their unique worldviews best suited for interpreting their experiences. Nathaniel John Lewis captured this best when he explained to white interviewers that he must seek revenge on someone who cast a spell to cause him physical pain. The interviewers suggested that he see a physician, explaining that because of his age his pain was likely cause by an illness. Veiled in Lewis’ response, was the notion that blacks had their own way of understanding the world. He dismissed the white interviewers’ analyses of his condition replying, “conjuh must be fought with conjuh.”336

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335 Interview with Thomas Smith, *Drums and Shadows*, 28.

Georgia, the ways in which the enslaved population transformed in the postwar years conversely impacted the shape African-European relations ships in the West Indies and West Africa. Just as missionaries in Europe, Africa, and throughout the Americas exchanged information and ideas regarding religious conversion and acculturation, other groups sought international forums to discuss management of enslaved populations.

International forums addressed the impact of centuries of slaving on the general condition of Africans and their descendants, and they ways in which free and slave nations would handle the inevitable close of the African slave trade. Black Georgians became central in these Atlantic world debates in two major areas, both relating to the end of centuries of slaving in West Africa. First, black life in Georgia served as a model for meeting labor demands with African routes closed, and second merchants in Great Britain considered lowcountry blacks central in redefining their trade relations with West Africans.

Slaveholders and merchants who were part of the expanding agricultural societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries considered Britain’s move towards abolishing the African trade with concern. In particular, Georgians could not fully meet planters’ demands for labor as new agricultural enterprises emerged from new land sales. Slaveholders and merchants felt their “prospects greatly brightening” as most of the “old inhabitants returned with their property and amazing numbers of new settlers” arrived each year. Fearing an inability to meet labor demands, lowcountry planters and their counterparts in the West Indies grew interested in finding an early response to a certain

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crisis in the wake of British abolition. Slaveholders and merchants defended the African trade and discussed alternate labor sources during the final decade of the eighteenth century. They concluded that the most promising avenue towards avoiding labor shortages, if Africans could no longer be procured from the slaving coast, was in promoting natural increase.

During the years proceeding the American Revolution, few slave societies could boast a noteworthy natural increase among its enslaved population. The idea that healthy births could soon be crucial to slavery’s agricultural economies persuaded slaveholders and traders to reflect on black women’s lives under enslavement from the slaving coast, through the middle passage, and on new world plantations. The most striking similarities throughout these Atlantic communities were the abuses and harsh conditions black women suffered and the impact such conditions on black motherhood. Issac Parker led slaveholders in testimony of women’s experiences in the process of enslavement. Onboard an African slaver he recalled that a woman listened helplessly for four days as her sickly nine month old child was brutalized by the captain because he could not eat. When the child finally died the captain,

then called its mother to heave it overboard, beating her for refusing. He however forced her to take it up, and go to the ship’s side where holding her head on one side to avoid the sight, she dropped her child overboard, after which she cried for many hours.338

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338Abstract of Evidence, 47-48.
Others added testimony of rapes and other abuses committed on slavers. They then found “it impossible to pass over in silence the almost total want of indulgence which the women slaves frequently experienced during the operations in the field.”

In the Americas, planters admitted that enslaved women’s lives included harsh punishments and little relief from labor during pregnancy. The most planters did towards saving unborn children from the whippings their mothers received was “to dig a hole in the ground in which they out the bellies of pregnant women while they whip them.” In addition to hard labor, planters noted the prevalent sexual abuse that black women faced, including forced prostitution when they were “obliged to bring their owner a certain payment per week.” Aside from prostitution, any woman called upon by a planter or overseer for sexual gratification had to “come or be flogged.” One planter stated that masters offered enslaved women to their visitors and he had “know compulsion used to oblige such to submit to prostitution.” Hercules Ross discussed sexual torture of women laborers recounting “the cries of some poor wretch...suspended by the wrists to a tree, swinging to and fro.” He saw her master with “a flick of fire which he held so as occasionally to touch her about her private parts as she swung..and continued this torture with unmoved countenance.” Testimonies continued and as the discussion moved towards addressing the impact of these circumstances on female reproduction, participants

339Ibid, 55.
340Ibid.
341Ibid.
342Ibid, 68.
343Ibid.
turned to “Mr. Baille,” a slave merchant from Georgia, for a discussion of “how to increase the birthrate and things preventing ‘universal increase.’” Baille relayed the general complaints of black women on lowcountry plantations which mainly “arose from extreme fatigue.” Stating that “a little rest generally restored them without any medicine being necessary,” Baille named the first prevention of natural increase, “forcing women to labor beyond their strength.” Harsh punishments followed, and then the fact that plantation society “paid no attention to marriage of slaves,” was considered a cause of black women’s supposed promiscuity and sexual exploitation. The final three factors preventing natural increase in lowcountry and Caribbean slave societies emphasized the condition of women during pregnancy when they were overworked and severely punished too close to the time of birth, thus causing miscarriages. The poor condition of housing for those giving birth, and returning to the field too early and with children who were exposed to unhealthy weather conditions also contributed to high infant mortality.

The final recommendations of the meeting included discontinuing brutal punishment on pregnant women, particularly excessive flogging, and lightening plantation tasks in an effort to improve women’s health to decrease the overwhelming number of miscarriages. The task system was presented as a model system for alleviating women’s suffering. Baille explained how lowcountry blacks were assigned daily tasks on

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344 Ibid, 112.

345 Testimonies from seven of the participants suggested that white men could “violate the chastity” of black women “at discretion” stating that such actions occurred because among the enslaved there was. “promiscuous intercourse...as they please.” Abstract of Evidence, 112-113.

346 Abstract of Evidence, 113.
plantations and noted that “the negroes generally helped those who could not finish as soon as the rest, so that they left the field at once.” Several West Indian planters, impressed with this model, arranged for the hire of sixty lowcountry blacks to test tasking in Jamaica.347

Historians have often described changes in America’s post revolutionary war race relations as an outcome of growing challenges to black enslavement emerging from Americans’ debates regarding its place in the new republic. Scholars maintain that lowcountry black resistance forced planters to relinquish greater autonomy in enslaved communities and lessen the severity of labor tasks. When considered in context of the Atlantic world, it is apparent that slave societies throughout the Americas shared an interest in, at least, discussing a formal plan to improve the general condition of plantation life. The primary motivation for this shift in the postwar years was in promoting natural increase for the expansion of slavery rather than forced negotiations with enslaved populations during the delicate period of rebuilding plantation society after the war. In fact, the wide-spread reaction to revolutionary black resistance was more severe punishment for those who challenged enslavement. In 1782, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur described the gruesome execution of black man accused of killing his overseer. “Suspended in a cage and left to expire,” de Crevecoeur stated that, in the new republic, whites told him that, “the laws of self-preservation rendered such executions necessary” reflecting actions towards suppression as opposed to negotiation in the

347Ibid.
lowcountry. Atlantic planters’ ideas about minimal improvements for black laborers were motivated by their fears of the end of the African trade and the growing idea that it was “cheaper to breed than to import.” North America’s southern planters provided “evidence that the breeding of slaves was considered so profitable...that people held them for this purpose alone, independently of any prospect from the fruits of their labor.”

The close of the African trade also threatened abolition’s sponsors. Seeking new paths to Africa’s resources, Britain worked towards reshaping their national interests in the continent. Redefining African-European trade relations became the center of international debate. By the end of the eighteenth century, humanitarians heightened criticisms of the cruelty of the slave trade and its devastating impact on captives. They could not, however, deny the benefits of West African commerce for European and American merchants and planters, nor its broader significance in increasing national wealth and power. The Committee of the African Institution convened shortly after the abolition of the slave trade to develop a plan for continuing trade with Africa. They defined their objectives,

1. The natives of Africa suffered in Europe’s intercourse with Africa. The Institution desires to repair those wrongs and promote their civilization and happiness.
2. The abolition of the slave trade will remove the long term barrier to the natural course of social improvement in Africa.
3. Introduce useful knowledge and industry among the Africans (agricultural and commercial) that will be legitimate and beneficial to the natives and the manufacturers of Great Britain and Ireland.

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349 Abstract of Evidence, 126.

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4. With the suppression of the trade, the present period is peculiarly favorable for giving a new direction to the industry and commerce of Africa.
5. That for these purposes a Society be immediately formed, to be called The African Institution.\(^{350}\)

African Institution members did not see their purpose as a religious mission. Avoiding encroachment “on the province of institutions already established for the diffusion of Christianity” they envisioned their influence in the economic realm. This was, however, still a critical part of curbing African “savagery” and the Institution offered “a plan which proposes to introduce the blessings of civilized society among a people sunk in ignorance and barbarism.”\(^{351}\) The first task at hand was reconstructing the image of “the African.” He was still thought uncivilized, yet his capabilities and been degraded in slavery. “The portrait of the negro has seldom been drawn but by the pencil of his oppressor.”\(^{352}\) These images were not simply inaccurate, but also inconsistent. Committee members believed slaveholders ascribed peoples of African descent “insensibility and excessive passion, apathy and enthusiasm, want of natural affection and a fond attachment to their friends, shipmates, and countrymen.”\(^{353}\) For the Committee, such contradictions raised questions concerning Africans’ assumed inability to manage


\(^{351}\)Ibid, 9.

\(^{352}\)Ibid, 18

\(^{353}\)Ibid, 20.
independent agricultural enterprises that would connection their communities to Britain through trade.

Europeans with interests in West Africa were also impressed with Georgia’s black laborers and the state’s lucrative cotton market. Records from the general meetings of the African Institution from 1807-1810 reveal plans to promote agricultural production in indigo, rice, and especially cotton in West Africa. By the third annual meeting they reported,

Notwithstanding the American Embargo, not less than twelve puncheons of cotton seed, half being of the Sea Island, and the other half of the Upland or Bowed Cotton, have been procured from Georgia, and conveyed to Sierra Leone and other parts of the coast.\textsuperscript{354}

Their interest in cotton stemmed from strained trade relations in the postwar years. Finding that “under the pressure of the American Embargo, hardly any article could better repay the cultivator,” they sought an avenue of trade that would save them from possible economic strife under Thomas Jefferson’s Embargo Act of 1807. Towards this end, they needed more than cotton seeds and hired planter, Alderman Shaw from Georgia to produce a text with instructions for successful cotton production. \textit{Directions for the Culture of Cotton in Africa} described how black Georgians performed the difficult tasks of clearly grounds for new cotton crops. Each laborer tended to four acres of cotton and four acres of provisions and was expected to pick 50lbs of cotton per day. Shaw suggested West Africans should utilize cotton gins, although hand-picking was the preferred method for superior results in the lowcountry. The society printed 500 copies of

\textsuperscript{354}Report of the Directors of the Institution, Read at the General Meeting on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of March, 1809. To which is added, a List of Subscribers. (London, 1809), 4. JCBL.
the text and discussed plans to translate the text in Arabic and eventually the Susu language from the Sierra Leone region, as well as, other principle African languages. They then hoped to engage “natives of Africa or the descendants of Africans” living in Georgia or other parts of America or the West Indies to, “instruct the natives in the cultivation and manufacture of indigo, cotton and rice production.”

“The negroes publicly say they will rule the country”

This study opens with Georgia as a struggling colony unable to compete in colonial markets without black labor. Little more than fifty years after the legalization of slavery, Georgia’s enslaved population became central in plans to improve slave life, promote natural increase throughout the Americas, and in plans to create new European controlled commerce in West Africa. Georgia’s growth in the early national period blockaded avenues of resistance for enslaved blacks. They, in turn, penetrated walls constructed between Georgia and Florida, seizing opportunities in the outbreak of another war with Great Britain. Although possibilities for alliances with Georgia Indians were strained after the revolution, the Seminole still posed a substantial military threat further south. Africans who had escaped there in the prewar years joined Spanish and British

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troops during the War of 1812. As in the revolutionary era, blacks goals differed from those who granted them freedom,

The black troops in Florida, many who were lowcountry runaways, became a powerful threat to their former slaveholders. William Ashley stated that by 1813 they were, “getting very bad and oppressive on the inhabitants of East Florida and from their enmity towards the people of this state, we have no doubt, but they will shortly begin to exercise their influence over our slaves.” They stated their purpose clearly, “to protect all negroes that would come to them.” Africans threatened violence if whites did not accept being “governed by negroes,” promising that, “they would slap any white man’s jaws who would dare to say anything not pleasing to them.” Jacob Summerlin reported that “the negroes publicly say they will rule the country.”

East Florida Patriots proposed joining forces with Georgia and found the alliance,

absolutely necessary for the future security of the people of Georgia that the Indians and negroes should be severely scourged as the Negro Establishment is daily increasing under the patronage of the Spanish and British faction.

As in the colonial era, those who were able to escape bondage found power in Florida. Whites complained that “the negro soldiers on St. Johns have an entire ascendency—they treat the white inhabitants with utmost insolence-- and perhaps it would cost a master his

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357William Ashley to David B. Mitchell, June 11, 1813. Georgia and Florida Land Sales, 1764-1850, *GDAH*

358Deposition of James Black, June 11, 1813, Georgia and Florida Land Sales.

359Depositon of Jacob Summerlin, June 16, 1813, Georgia and Florida Land Sales.

360Ibid.
life, were he to correct his slave.” None of the runaways had been returned rather continued “to be armed and form, with all the runaways from Georgia and Carolina, a part of the militia.”

Perhaps Africans in Florida did not know the extent of the challenge they faced in “ruling the country” and protecting the freedom of escapees. As remarkable as their experiences in the region were, they comprised a small percentage of Georgia’s mounting enslaved population who were able to achieve even this limited freedom. The United States’ efforts to dismantle Seminole power in Florida had grave consequences for black Georgians. The events of the War of 1812 provided freedom opportunities through alliances with Indian and British troops, yet as in the aftermath of the revolutionary war, America’s victory marked black Georgians’ failure. As America strengthened power in the southeast, the boundaries of enslavement tightened and fueled an emerging domestic slave trade to Georgia.

361Ibid.
CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE

“THERE IS NO GRASS IN GEORGIA”

We had reached the main road, and had come up with a gang of negroes, some of whom were hand-cuffed two and two, and fastened to a long chain running between the two ranks. There were also a good many women and children, but none of these were chained. The children seemed to be all above ten years of age, and I soon learnt that they had been purchased in different places, and were for the most part strangers to one another and to the negroes in the coffle. They were waiting for Finney to come up. I fell into the rank, and we set off on our journey to Georgia.  

Although the slaveholding class represented Georgia as a model for worldwide improvement in slave communities, the state’s enslaved community described unrelenting anguish from the poverty, hunger, abuse, and family separation they endured. Visitors described Georgia as “generally very sickly” and “miserably poor.” In the lowcountry, where rice agriculture continued, “rampant mortality contrasted greatly with the wider North American demographic trend towards a rapidly increasing African-American

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{362}F.N. Boney, ed., Slave Life In Georgia: A Narrative Of The Life, Sufferings, And Escape Of John Brown, A Fugitive Slave (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1972), 17.}}\]

population.” Greater availability of land initiated the expansion of cotton in upland areas. Ebenezer Kellogg, a New England visitor to Georgia commented, “at this place I hear nothing but talk of the price of cotton. The Georgians are madly devoted to cotton...the planters are all alive with hopes.” Planters’ devotion to cotton and a rapid expansion of the industry undermined early plans for natural increase. For black Georgians, labor demands did not decrease significantly, brutal punishments prevailed, and women’s pleas for improvements towards the care of their children were not answered by slaveholders and overseers. With the routes of the African trade closed and limited returns from natural increase, planters turned to the rising United States domestic trade for slave laborers.

The growth or the internal trade shattered black America’s hopes and dealt a severe blow to their freedom movement. Walter Johnson states that, “in the seven decades between the Constitution and the Civil war, approximately one million enslaved people were relocated from the upper South to the lower South.” Internal slave trading shocked blacks who considered themselves Americans, forced reconsideration of black identity and a redefinition of the boundaries of their communities. Many found their lives more connected to Africa than they had imagined, as the sufferings of the ancestors

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became their real-life experiences. With the expansion of the domestic slave trade, the American landscape transformed and mirrored the eighteenth century’s horrific tales of the West African slaving coast. Those stories, which were becoming part of the black American memory, became tragic scenes in states, free and slave.

In 1855 fugitive slave John Brown, alias Fed or Benford, published a narrative of his life and sufferings as an enslaved American Southerner. His narrative captures the impact of the growing domestic slave trade, Georgia’s territorial expansion, and the cotton boom on the enslaved population, a community with an increasing awareness of its impact on the broader American society. The emerging domestic trade was particularly valuable to Virginia planters. The state began a small scale slave trade with Georgia in the colonial period and expanded its scope after the American revolution as they sought profit from a reduction of their large enslaved population. This system of slave trading separated Brown from his Virginia family when he was sold to a trader traveling to Georgia. He and his mother labored for Betty Moore in Southampton County, Virginia while his father was held on the plantation of a man named Benford or Binford in Northampton County, North Carolina. Betty Moore intended to sell her human property to markets further south. Even during her final years, she summoned the black children of the plantation every morning to give them a daily dose of “garlic and rue” which she claimed would make them “grow likely for the market.” In addition to medicinal treatments, she forced them to run for exercise under the threat of lashes from a cowhide the children called, “the blue lizard.”

\[367\] Boney, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 7-10.
The separation Brown suffered from his family was arguably the childhood event that had the greatest impact on his life. His description of the atmosphere in the community during the time of sale and separation demonstrates critical turning points that many blacks in Georgia experienced prior to their arrival in the state and often several times thereafter. Families faced grave consequences under plantation regulations that made parental and marriage ties difficult to maintain. Labor requirements had prevented most black Georgian women from providing adequate care for their children who they spent little time with in their early years. Husbands and wives, at times living on separate plantations, visited each other only occasionally. Yet, these tremendous obstacles did not dismantle family affection, especially the parent-child bond. Brown recalls the grief family separation caused. The adults of the community spent as much time as they could discussing the probable impact of upcoming sales as they met at night and in the fields, “whispering to one another in secrecy.” They speculated about final destinations, wondering if children, husbands and wives would be sold to the same planter. Brown remarked that “women who had young children cried very much” and his mother kissed him and his siblings “a good deal oftener.” Most often, there was not enough time to plan escapes or resist as slaveholders avoided such reactions by informing blacks only during the final hours preceding sales—a process black Georgians called “selling them softly.” Shortly after blacks learned of planters’ plans that would disrupt and separate their communities, the day of sale had arrived. The most they could do was offer each other brief well-wishes and farewells accompanied by “much crying and wailing.” This they completed “preparations for parting for life by kissing one another over and over again,
and saying good bye.\textsuperscript{368} With this, Brown was forced on journey to slavery that resembled the experiences of his Ibo grandfather’s eighteenth century capture in Africa and passage to Virginia.

As the Revolutionary War had years before, the domestic slave trade transformed the American landscape, recreating the terrain of the West African slaving regions. The “coffle” Brown was forced to join chained men, women and other children on a whip driven march to Georgia. The group was diverse and comprised blacks from various regional and ethnic backgrounds. Brown described how he and a new group of recently purchased blacks were integrated into a group of “negro speculator,” Starling Finney’s, captives. During the six week march, Finney stopped at many points buying and disposing of his human property. Like eighteenth century West Africa’s internal path to coastal slave factories and holding cells, the brutality of the American journey extended beyond tremendous physical exertion and included poor nourishment, as the captives received no food until noon and then again at nine o’clock in the evening. Difficulties were intensified by cruel punishments, mental anguish brought about by the grief of family separation, and rape.\textsuperscript{369}

In the American context, Brown’s “negro stealers” or slave traders played a role similar to West African traders. By taking advantage of various opportunities for purchasing slaves, including kidnaping and coercion, traders earned money by providing prized laborers to a hungry slave market. Like their eighteenth century counterparts,

\textsuperscript{368}Ibid, 11.

\textsuperscript{369}Ibid, 18-19.
“negro stealers” of the early national period spent significant time masking the harsh treatment their captives endured. Their main goal was to make them appear healthy for the market. As in the African trade, American captives were “danced” for exercise, accompanied by the rhythms of their nation, played by fiddlers rather than the drummers of the eighteenth century. Merchants shaved their captives bodies, dyed grey hairs, and provided better nourishment as auction day approached. “Negro speculators” from Washington, Kentucky, and Virginia (among other states) brought large groups of “fresh arrivals” for the market to replenish the numbers “thinned by sales.” Traders explored extreme measures to hide disease, illness, and injuries among the captives. Brown did not reveal much of the details, only stating that they were “handled in the grossest manner, and inspected with the most elaborate and disgusting minuteness.” He concludes, that “only those who have gone through the ordeal can tell” the details of this “horrible picture.”

The time a captive was held in an American “slave-pen” shared similar traits to the West African counterpart as well. John Brown’s time in a New Orleans slave-pen described men, women, and children separated in the “awfully gloomy place.” Treatment meted out to the youngest and most attractive women captives led Brown to conclude that “the slave-pen was only another name for a brothel.” He also observed the diversity of the community held captive in the slave-pen, “the slaves are brought form all parts, are of all sorts, sizes, and ages, and arrive in various states of fatigue and condition.”

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370Ibid, 99 and Johnson, Soul by Soul, 117-188.

371Ibid.
On early nineteenth century plantations, enslaved laborers completed the arduous tasks necessary in establishing new agricultural enterprises. The labor may not have been as brutal on cotton plantations as the infamous conditions of rice cultivation. Nonetheless, paternalism and religious conversion did not bring positive change regarding the violence of slavery. The threat of physical harm remained a constant tribulation among blacks. Brown details more than fifteen standard methods of punishment used to torture the enslaved on plantations, farms, and in slave-pens throughout the South, but particularly in Georgia. The culture of the community was colored with references to violence. An attempt to avoid punishment was to “save one’s back.” Black Georgians were not simply “whipped,” rather punished with specific forms of the abuse. Those, particularly overseers, with expertise could cut the skin with a whip, or strike the back just enough to raise blisters. The hickory rod, cow-hide. Bull-ship, cobbling paddle, chickney-pen switches, and flopping paddle all inflicted different injuries. As the community members were forced to endure, witness, and participate in punishment, the occurrences shaped their language and world view. The picket, a most gruesome method of whipping the victim while he or she dangled in the air brought so many close to death, it was known among black Georgians as “swinging between heaven and earth.” They further revealed the despair of new arrivals to the colony through song. The lyrics, “Oh! My massa told me, there is no grass in Georgia” was, supposed to be the lamentation of a slave from one of the more northerly states, Virginia or Carolina, where the labor of hoeing the weeds, or grass as they call it, is not nearly so severe as here, in the rice and cotton lands of Georgia.  

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Certainly revenge for hard labor and punishment was desired and attempted, as was escape. Yet, through their continual silence regarding the details of much of their torment, the enslaved held steadfast to a spiritual belief that their tormentors would be punished in an afterworld. Brown proclaimed, “god has recorded the wickedness that is done there and punishment will assuredly fall upon the guilty.”373

As previous years had shown, not all was left to God. Black Georgians took action and fought to expose the injustices of slavery and end the misery it produced. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is found in the diary of Francis Kemble, who wrote of the frequent “petitions” she entertained from the women on her husband’s Georgia plantations. In addition to requests for food, cloth, and relief from labor the women detailed the suffering they endured from the overall brutality of their condition. Kemble recalled the visit of one emaciated woman,

she was the mother of a very large family, and complained to me that, with childbearing and hard field labor, her back was almost broken in two. With an almost savage vehemence of gesticulation, she suddenly tore up her scanty clothing, and exhibited a spectacle with which I was inconceivably shocked and sickened.374

Thus as the violence overwhelmed them, the enslaved moved to overwhelm whites with stories of the torture of slavery towards their efforts to gain more liberties within the system as well as to secure freedom and the ultimate dismantling of the institution.

Georgia blacks’ ideals of freedom had been oriented towards the south in Spanish territory and at times towards the West in Indian territory prior to the Revolution. The


war for Independence added northern routes to freedom and introduced the British as possible protectors of black liberty, England represented a combination of the two. As Brown recounts the sufferings of his life, he remarks, “Oh that the fine ladies of England could see with my eyes!”

Exposing the violence whites perpetrated against blacks was critical towards shaping black abolitionism of the early nineteenth century. Thus Brown’s goal in describing the horrors of slave life in Georgia was to build a body of evidence of injustice; present it to white society, and then call for the end of the system. More than a victim of Georgia’s oppression, he presents the condition of those he refers to as his “companions in slavery” and calls for political action, including a boycott of cotton products and development of new markets in the West Indies and Africa. Whether he truly supported the latter idea is debatable. What is clear is that he continued what he considered a valuable skill learned in slavery, “an instinctive knowledge of character acquired from a long habit of studying the expression of the countenance” of whites. This skill was used to study masters, mistresses, overseers, slave traders to detect whether they “intended mischief” in order “to dodge him out of his revenge.”

Understanding what was important to whites was just as crucial in Brown’s freedom. Whether he truly held a similar agenda or not, he knew white interests and inserted the experiences of the enslaved in Georgia as a key element of the abolitionist movement.

Nineteenth century black Georgians also traveled to Africa as free persons, promoting spread Christianity and pushing for an end to the human trafficking that caused

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375 Boney, *Slave Life in Georgia*

376 Ibid.
their communities over a century of despair. After Ellen and William Craft’s well-publicized escape from slavery, the couple worked towards eradicating Georgia’s infamous subjugation and trade of black people. William Craft even traveled to Dahomey, a West African kingdom that owed its wealth and power to its participation in human trafficking, and asked the king of the nation to abolish slavery and slave trading among his people. Black Georgians may have lost the war for Independence, however they continued their freedom movement. Shaped by their experiences in West African, the West Indies, and the sea islands, the black Atlantic offered the America’s most radical revolutionary ideology. Black Georgians had few true allies and overwhelmingly, their communities received no support. They were angered and felt betrayed, yet held steadfast to ideals they helped define as a critical stream of the era’s dialog of liberty and equality, in addition to the physical sacrifices they offered.

Having heard while in Slavery that ‘God made of one blood all nations of men,’ and also that the American Declaration of Independence says, that ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;’ we could not understand by what right we were held as ‘chattels.” Therefore, we felt perfectly justified in undertaking the dangerous and exciting task of “running a thousand miles” in order to obtain those rights which are so vividly set forth in the Declaration.377

As black Georgians shaped an American identity, Africa’s influences continued through illegal slave importations from Africa, as well as, black society’s continued use of their motherland’s flexible and practical cultural practices and philosophies. Robert Farris

Thompson finds that the god “Eshu-Elegba became one of the most important images in the black Atlantic world.” Eshu, the “homeless wanderer” and Elegba the “owner-of-power” was associated with change and “came to be regarded as the very embodiment of the crossroads.” In 1858, the last recorded slaver entered Georgia directly from West-Central Africa with a human cargo of 350. More than the owner could have imagined, the ship’s name, Wanderer, spoke volumes of the larger significance of the transport’s impact on community and cultural development in Georgia’s enslaved communities.

Georgia blacks pushed a forceful freedom agenda, but faced defeat and hardened oppression in the early national period. They shifted focus and created new methods of survival in the face of increased acculturation pressures and changes in the agricultural economy. The enslaved community became more diversified in the early national period and a widening range of national and international experiences enhanced the freedom movement, broadening freedom’s destinations and protective communities. As the number of American born blacks grew, Africa became an old world. For some, particularly those who embraced Christianity, it was as savage and superstitious as whites had always proclaimed. For most, Africa and Africans were a source of old world knowledge and strength. Georgia’s emerging African American population found in Africa, a place to return to freedom, a healing power, and a negotiator for intracommunal social and cultural issues.

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