

PROPERTY OWNING FREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE SOUTH, 1800-1870

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A reasonable reward will be paid for the recovery of any part of the articles missing," a notice in the *Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser* announced on April 11, 1814. "Silver Smith's and other persons dealing in silver, gold or plated ware, answering the description of the above, are requested to stop the same, and to give to either of the subscribers information of the same." It took nearly a full column to list the missing articles: a dozen large spoons, half dozen tea spoons and one soup ladle, all of silver, a dozen tea spoons and ladle stamped Carrol [of Philadelphia] and engraved with the letter L, two pair of decanter stands, three mahogany dining room tables, a tea table, round stand, three chests of drawers, a dozen chairs, six feather beds, four Marseilles quilts with fringe, one large blue and white counterpane, two lace shawls, one large laced quilt, a dozen wine glasses, four fluted decanters, a mahogany case with two rows of brass hoops, a spy glass marked London with mahogany case, clothing, jewelry, a tambour frame, and numerous other items. The notice explained that on the first night of spring a fire had swept through the residence of Selinah and Lydia Levingston. With the help of neighbors, the two women had carried their belongings into the street, but in the confusion that followed many of their possessions had been carried off by thieves.¹

Such notices were common enough during the early years of the nineteenth century, as fires and thefts plagued nearly every town and city in the South. What set this incident apart was that the two subscribers were free women of color. Their plea was entered under the names of their white "guardians." But how could two black women in Savannah acquire such a large personal estate? And how common *was* it for African-American women to own property? It seems doubtful that the Levingstons could have amassed such holdings by selling embroidered goods, as the listing of a tambour frame might suggest. It also seems doubtful that they could have acquired such items working at the menial occupations common to most free black women in the city. It is probable that they were somehow connected with whites, perhaps as mistresses of their male guardians. In any event, the record is not clear concerning how they obtained their possessions, only that they owned a remarkable list of valuables.

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Until recently, historians have paid little attention to the subject of property ownership among African-American women (or any women for that matter) during the nineteenth century. Early studies of slavery concentrated primarily on their role as "matriarchs" of slave families, while later investigations during the 1970s often focused on "black culture" and "black consciousness," emphasizing how, despite being sexually exploited by their white masters, African-American women played an important role in passing down a unique set of cultural values from one generation to the next.² Similarly, the literature on free African-Americans—from the early twentieth century university studies, to Carter G. Woodson and his followers, to the growing number of dissertations, articles, and books written during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—contains information on a broad range of subjects but only fleeting references to the special economic role of women.³

During the 1980s, this has slowly begun to change as scholars have turned their attention to the "internal slave economy" and free blacks in an urban setting. In their articles on slave property holding and market networks, historians Philip Morgan and Lawrence T. McDonnell have showed how some female slaves became actively engaged in buying and selling various goods. In her important analysis of free women of color in Petersburg, Virginia, Suzanne Lebsock noted that among the free blacks who managed to accumulate property, "a high proportion—40 to 50 percent—were women." In their studies of urban free blacks, Leonard Curry and Whittington B. Johnson discovered that black women were "quite visible" as property owners in Charleston, Louisville, Baltimore, Savannah, and other cities. In addition, Morgan, McDonnell, and others have examined the motives that prompted women to acquire property: slaves could provide better shelter and clothing for their children, add fruits and vegetables or store-bought items (coffee, tea, sugar, liquor) to their diets, travel by horse or wagon to visit relatives; a few could achieve a measure of autonomy within the "peculiar institution" or save enough to purchase themselves or loved ones out of slavery; free women of color could better defend themselves against the oppressive laws and institutions, seek legal redress within the court system, and sometimes secure white guardians and "protectors." They, too, were sometimes able to purchase loved ones out of bondage.⁴

Despite these recent studies, our understanding of the special economic role of black women is still in its infancy.⁵ It appears that slave women were just as active as slave men in the domestic slave economy and slave marketing systems in the South. They bought, sold, and traded garden crops, rice, cotton, corn, tobacco, sugar, hogs, cattle, horses, sheep, poultry, eggs, honey, fish, fruits, meats, pies, bread, cakes, and a long list of other items.⁶ It also appears that these slave economic networks were more prevalent than historians had previously believed, and that slave women were probably more active than men in what might be called the retail side of this trade.⁷ In towns and cities and some rural areas, black women established stands, stalls, and even small stores to sell various items; they also peddled fruits and vegetables from carts and wagons.⁸ While most of their business came from white customers, there is some evidence that the networks stretched from the countryside into towns and cities and included sales from market women to female domestic servants who were charged with the responsibility of obtaining groceries and others goods for the households of the white slaveowning aristocracy. As yet, however, we have achieved only a glimpse of the unique economic activities of slave women.⁹

While further research on this subject, as well as female slave hiring, self-hire, and self-purchase, will enlarge our understanding of black women's history, the purpose of this essay is more modest. It seeks to explore the nature and extent of property ownership among the relatively small group (compared with the slave population) of *free black women* in the South during the pre-Civil War period, and to assess the impact of the war on this group. What significance did free black women attach to owning property, how did their acquisitions differ in rural and urban areas, in different sections of the South, among blacks and mulattoes? What occupations did property owning free women of color follow? How did these occupations change over time? How much property did they accumulate and how did their holdings compare to those of men—black and white? How was property ownership connected to their attitudes toward marriage and their families, toward the region of their birth, toward dominant whites? What particular circumstances did they face in attempting to acquire property; how did they respond to those circumstances; and what does their response reveal about the social, cultural, and economic milieu in which they lived? As will be shown in the pages that follow, the unique and changing profile of free black women who owned property reveals a great deal about the nature of southern society.

I

The ability of free women of color to enter the property holding class varied considerably in different sections of the South. Though this changed from one generation to the next, and especially so after emancipation, and though any geographical division tends to minimize the significant diversity within the South, even within different states and counties, the subject can best be understood by analyzing two sub-regions within the South. In the Lower South, stretching from South Carolina to Louisiana and Texas, the free black population had emerged from a highly selective emancipation process or had arrived as immigrants from the Caribbean. They were often of mixed racial origin, skilled, and had received some education. Moreover, in South Carolina, Georgia, and the Gulf states, only a tiny proportion of the total black population—3.5 percent in 1820 down to 1.5 percent in 1860—claimed free status. In the Upper South, most free blacks were part of a large-scale indiscriminate manumission process during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were often black as opposed to mulatto, unskilled, and illiterate. They represented a substantially larger portion of the region's total black population, 10.6 percent in 1820, rising to nearly 13 percent four decades later.¹⁰

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, even in the lower states, only a small number of free women of color entered the property owning class. Working as laundresses, seamstresses, and servants, or in some instances managing small shops and stores, they struggled merely to provide a subsistence for themselves and their families, much less to acquire real estate and other property. They also confronted increasingly hostile legislative acts prohibiting them from selling certain types of food and beverages (beer, whiskey, wine, fruit, cakes, candy), managing certain types of businesses (coffee houses, retail liquor stores), or moving about from one location to another. In 1818, Georgia lawmakers denied free blacks the right to purchase or acquire real estate, or slaves, by conveyance, will, deed, or contract. Though this law was later repealed (except in Augusta, Darien, and Savannah) with regard to real property, it indicated the extraordinary lengths whites in some areas were willing to go to keep free blacks in a subordinate economic position.¹¹

The few extant tax assessment lists for communities in the Lower South reveal the difficulties free women of color had in acquiring an economic foothold. In 1820, the census listed 237 free black women over age fourteen in Chatham County (Savannah), Georgia. While some of them lived in families with male household heads, tax listings during the 1820s showed only thirty property owning black women. Most of them owned between fifty dollars and two hundred dollars worth of property, usually listed in the names of white trustees. Only a few—Catherine Richards, Mary Habersham, Hannah Lewis, and Fanny Williams—possessed property worth at least five hundred dollars. In other towns and cities, as well as scattered rural areas, the profile of property owning black women was much the same. Only in Charleston, New Orleans, and a few rural Louisiana parishes did more than a small number of free black women enter the tax rolls.¹²

Gradually during the antebellum period, however, free women of color in the Lower South expanded their property holdings. This was especially true in towns and cities where some free women of color entered more profitable occupations. In some instances, they were given a start by white husbands or fathers; in other cases, they were aided by white benefactors. As a consequence, some free women of color established hairdressing shops, confectioneries, bakeries, coffee houses, and boarding houses. A few managed large-scale enterprises or owned highly profitable businesses. It is ironic that some white men deemed it inappropriate for white women to enter the business world (and occasionally passed laws to this effect) but did not forbid black women from establishing enterprises.¹³

In Charleston, several free women of color, including Margaret Noisette, Marie Weston, and Ann Seymour, owned business establishments and rental buildings. They also acquired small slave labor forces. In Savannah, Susan Jackson ran a pastry shop in Reynolds Ward, the leading business section of the city, and eventually purchased her place of business, a brick building appraised at ten thousand dollars. Her neighbor, free mulatto Ann Gibbons, the descendant of a West African Ibo chieftain, lived comfortably on the income from her various rental properties. In New Orleans, Eulalie d' Mandeville Macarty, for many years the mistress of white businessman Eugene Macarty, established a wholesale mercantile and dry goods store, purchasing various manufactured items from abroad, housing them at her depot in Plaquemines Parish, and distributing them through a network of slaves to various retail outlets in the state. A shrewd businesswoman, she purchased stock, real estate, and discounted bank notes, eventually accumulating a personal fortune of \$155,000.¹⁴

One of the most remunerative occupations for free women of color was the hotel and boarding house business. Following the death of Charleston hotel owner Jehu Jones in 1833, the old Burrows-Hall Inn was taken over by Jones's stepdaughter, Ann Deas, and a few years later by Eliza Seymour Lee, who had previously operated a boarding house. The guests at this popular establishment included aristocratic slaveowners, Northern merchants, and virtually every distinguished foreign traveller who visited city. The famous English actress Fanny Kemble, who married Pierce Butler, the wealthy grandson of the Revolutionary War veteran and signer of the Declaration of Independence, was greatly impressed by her accommodations in Charleston in 1839 and complimented Eliza Lee as "a very obliging and civil colored woman who is extremely desirous of accommodating us to our minds." Lee's counterparts in the Crescent City included Lucy Ann Cheatham, Elizabeth Reid, Mary Harby, and Martha Johnson, all of whom kept comfortable and attractively decorated rooming and boarding houses. By 1860, including those

who rented or leased their establishments, there were ninety-four free women of color who ran rooming houses in Louisiana alone. Their average total estate—real and personal property—reached nearly eighteen hundred dollars.¹⁵

In the rural Lower South, a few free women of color entered the planter class. Most of them were directly related to whites, of French or Spanish and African heritage (creoles of color), or had at one time cohabited (since marriages between the races were illegal in every state) with a white planter. Usually they had either inherited their land or been given a start by a white benefactor. Yet it took financial ability and business acumen to expand their holdings. During the decades before the Civil War, a few women in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana managed highly profitable plantations. South Carolina rice planter Margaret Mitchell Harris, who had inherited twenty-one slaves from her father, the mulatto son of a white planter, produced 240,000 pounds of rice in 1849. During the 1850s, Ann Johnson, the wife of a Natchez, Mississippi, free African-American barber who had been murdered by a free black, owned a small slave labor force and managed a plantation a few miles from town. In Louisiana, Plaquemines Parish sugar planter Louise Oliver, Iberville Parish slaveowner Madam Cyprien Ricard, Natchitoches Parish planter Marie Suzanne Metoyer, St. John the Baptist plantation owner Louisa Ponis, and West Baton Rouge slaveowner Agnes Mahier were among the most prosperous free persons of color in their communities. They owned rice, sugar, and cotton estates, large herds of livestock, and valuable farm machinery.¹⁶

To manage their plantations, these women acquired increasing numbers of slaves. While occasionally manumitting a bondsman for long years of service or purchasing a family member to keep a slave family together, they generally bought and sold slaves as a matter of economic necessity. Like their white neighbors, they purchased, sold, mortgaged, willed, traded, and transferred fellow African-Americans, demanded long hours in the fields, and severely disciplined recalcitrant blacks. On sugar estates where the harvesting and pressing of the cane demanded, as it did in the Caribbean, sixteen and eighteen hour work days, they pushed their bondspeople incessantly; when slave women were unable to work such long hours, they stocked their plantations with young men. Among the twenty-eight field hands on Louise Oliver's estate, the men outnumbered the women three to one; in the age group fifteen to thirty-six, the ratio was four to one; only two slave women had any children. Nor were these African-American women averse to selling off a few slaves for a quick profit. Seeing such an opportunity, the heirs of St. Landry Parish slaveowner Felicite Oursol auctioned several field hands when prices rose during the 1850s. Similarly, the heirs of Francois Allain, of Pointe Coupee Parish, sold five slaves to pay some debts following Francois' death in 1839. One laconic sentence told of their eventual fate: "Desires, American negro girl aged about 15 years, was set up for sale and after crying her for some time and receiving frequent bids, therefor was finally Struck off to Joseph B. Bourgeat [Bourque]."¹⁷

Those who managed profitable businesses, owned farms or plantations, or had become large slaveholders represented only a tiny portion of the free black women in the Lower South. Among the 10,123 adult free black women in the region in 1850, only 561 were listed in the census as really owning heads of households. Among them, three out of four (427 of 561) lived in one state—Louisiana—and a near majority (257) in one city—New Orleans. Others were scattered in fifty-four counties from Georgetown, South Carolina, to Jackson County, Texas. They owned

\$1,671,400 worth of real estate, an average of \$2,979 per landholder, ranging from \$736 in Georgia to \$3,602 in Louisiana. A decade later, while the adult female free African-American population rose five percent, from 10,123 to 10,620, the number of real estate owners increased twenty-four percent, from 561 to 694, but now only half of them lived in Louisiana (359) and only twenty-eight percent (193) in the Crescent City. They owned \$1,870,200 in realty, \$2,695 per owner, ranging from \$897 in Florida to \$3,884 in Louisiana (see Appendixes 2 and 3). While other free women of color who owned property lived in families headed by free black men or property owning white men, only six percent of the adult female free African-American population in the region was separately listed in the census returns as real estate owners and household heads on the eve of the Civil War.¹⁸

The decline among female property owners in New Orleans and Louisiana reflected the increasing economic pressures free women of color confronted in some sections of the Lower South during the late antebellum period. In the midst of new restrictive laws, racial hostility, and increasing competition for skilled and semiskilled jobs, some women were forced to sell off some of their holdings, while others went into debt to continue their operations. A few became so fearful of the anti-free black enactments and pronouncements (there was sentiment in some quarters to remand free blacks to slavery) that they migrated to the North or the Caribbean. Some property owning free women of color were probably among the 291 emigres—described in a New Orleans newspaper "as literate and respectable free colored people"—who left the Crescent City in 1859 and early 1860 bound for the black republic of Haiti.¹⁹

Yet to describe the late antebellum era in the region as one of decline among property owning free women of color would be only partially correct. While some women lost their holdings or experienced financial reversals, others were able to maintain their real estate in tact, and a few, especially in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, actually expanded their estates or entered the property owning class for the first time. The number of women in South Carolina listed as real estate owners jumped from 56 to 198 during the 1850s, and their average holdings went from \$1,132 to \$1,581. This rise was in part a reflection of the probable undercount among property owners in the 1850 census; even so, such a substantial rise reflected economic advancement for some women. In Georgia, the number of real estate owners more than doubled, and in Alabama it increased nearly three-fold, and there was also a corresponding rise in mean value of their property, which, while not keeping pace with the inflation in land values, was significant considering the numerical increases. Thus, even in the midst of racial turbulence, free women of color who owned real estate outside of Louisiana were able to maintain their earlier gains and in some instances improve their economic position. Their ability to do so bore witness to their remarkable achievements even under the most adverse circumstances.

II

Free black women in the upper states possessed few of the economic advantages of their counterparts in the Lower South. They were rarely assisted by whites, possessed few skills, and sometimes had spent many years in slavery. Not only were they forced to deal with oppressive laws and legal restrictions, but in some areas they faced strong competition from other free blacks and slaves for even the most menial jobs. Among those who established small businesses, only a few were able to capture a profitable white clientele as were free women of color who ran boarding houses in the Gulf region and South Carolina. Among those who owned farms, only

three—Frankey Miles in Amelia and Priscilla Ivey in Mecklenburg counties Virginia, and Lydia Mangum of Wake County, North Carolina—could be classified as "planters." In the upper states, the vast majority of free black women, even in the property owning group, worked as laundresses, seamstresses, cooks, waitresses, domestic servants, and farm laborers; even those who entered "higher" occupations labored as nurses, midwives, milliners, or hairdressers.²⁰

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, despite a five-to-one population differential, fewer free black women in the Upper than in the Lower South were able to accumulate property. In rural areas of Virginia, in 1820, out of a total adult female free black population of more than seven thousand, probably not more than a few dozen free women of color in the entire state possessed real estate. In rural Maryland, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee, much the same was true, while in towns and cities, the number of free black women who purchased lots or houses remained negligible. In the District of Columbia, in 1825, a tax assessment list revealed that only six African-American women paid taxes on real estate. "The main explanation for this," historian Luther Porter Jackson observed, "lay in the fact that the [pre-]1830 generation of free Negroes had not been free long enough to establish themselves as property owners."²¹

Following 1830, increasing numbers of free women of color were able to enter the property holding class. Now a generation removed from bondage, taking advantage of increased market demands for semi- and unskilled workers (as some slave men were sold away in the lower states for higher prices), and, except in 1837-1843 and 1857-58, living in a period of general prosperity, free black women gradually began to acquire real estate and other property. In 1830 in Petersburg, Virginia, seven of the twenty-three black lot owners were women, including Mary Eppes, Kitty Smith, and Rebecca Brown, who owned between sixty and nine hundred dollars worth of realty. Thirty years later, in 1860, the number of black women who owned real estate in the city had risen to ninety-two, nearly 40 percent of the 231 total owners. Among the latter group, thirteen owned at least one thousand dollars worth. In Frankfort, Kentucky, among the small group of property owners in 1842 were several women, including Winny Lewis and Sally Chiles, who ran laundries and had saved enough to purchase their own homes valued at one thousand dollars each. Eighteen years later, ten of the thirty-five black realty owners in Franklin County (Frankfort) were women. In other towns and cities, including Baltimore, District of Columbia, Richmond, Nashville, Lexington, and St. Louis, there were similar rises in the number of women who entered the tax rolls during this generation.²²

The expansion of property ownership among free women of color in the upper states was clearly revealed in the census returns of 1850 and 1860. At mid-century, there were 695 free black women in the Upper South who owned a total of \$362,100 worth of real estate, or an average of \$521. While census takers often failed to list the occupations of these landholders, most worked as washerwomen and seamstresses, and only twenty-seven owned at least two thousand dollars worth of land and other property. A decade later, while the adult female free black population had increased only twelve percent (from 53,183 to 59,459), the number of realty owners rose seventy-six percent, from 695 to 1,223. They owned a total of \$912,500 worth of real estate, or \$746 per owner. Though their occupational status had not improved significantly, increasing numbers of free women of color owned large farms, plantations, or businesses. The number of female household heads who boasted at least two thousand dollars worth of real estate rose 237 percent, from twenty-seven to ninety-one. Of course, considering the fact that the adult female

free black population in the region stood at 59,459 in 1860, only a tiny number of free black women had entered the property holding group, but, as in the lower states, the number of individual property owners does not take into account the wives of property owning free African-American men (numbering more than 5,100 in the upper states), and the few free African-American women who cohabited with property owning white men.

As these figures suggest there was a sharp contrast between the Upper and Lower South with regard to property ownership among free women of color. In the upper states, three out of five were listed in the census as "black" rather than "mulatto," and about the same (sixty-three percent in 1850 and fifty-five percent in 1860) could neither read nor write, while in the lower states, only one out of four was listed as "black" and between forty-six and twenty-seven percent (1850 and 1860) as being illiterate. Not only were they more likely to be listed as black and illiterate, but property owning free women of color in the upper states controlled less than one-third of the average real estate of their counterparts in the deep South, and, compared with the total adult female black population, they were less likely to own any realty.²³

Yet the censuses of 1850 and 1860 also revealed the beginnings of a shift as free black women in the upper states enlarged their holdings more rapidly than their counterparts in the Lower South. Expanding economic opportunities, the increased availability of land in some sections, and inflation of land values for those who had previously acquired real estate accounted for some of the Upper South's expansion, but the rise was primarily due to the relentless drive on the part of free black women to gain an economic stake. While the median realty holdings in both sections remained the same, the average value for women in the upper states rose forty-three percent, while in the lower states it was slowly declining. There was also a significantly greater increase in the number of property owners in the upper states compared with the Lower South (see Appendixes 1 and 2). Even working at the most menial tasks (which, unlike the lower states, most of them continued to do), frugal and industrious women could earn as much as their male counterparts—day laborers and farm hands—and, increasingly, they put their extra earnings into the acquisition of land.

III

Not only did some free women of color exert great effort to enter the property owning class, they controlled a substantial portion of the South's antebellum free African-American wealth. According to the census, free black women owned real estate worth \$2,033,500 in 1850, or twenty-seven percent of the total owned by blacks. A decade later they owned \$2,782,700 of \$12,807,100 in real property, or twenty-two percent. The small percentage decline was due mainly to the marked expansion of property holding among men in the Upper South rather than any significant drop in the number of female owners. Moreover, they owned, on average, more property than their male counterparts. In 1850, the difference was \$1,619 compared with \$1,169. During the 1850s, with the surge into the property-owning group in the upper states, the gap narrowed, but black women still controlled slightly larger average estates in realty (\$1,452 vs. \$1,303) than free African-American men. Both of these measurements—the large proportion among the property owning class and the greater average real estate wealth—reflected the unique condition of free black women during the antebellum era.

It is difficult to make comparisons with whites since the most accurate analysis of middle-period wealth holding includes only men, and since the census returns, from which averages are derived, used a typical American household as a frame of reference—that is, male family head. But the fact that all except a small portion of white wealth was controlled by males is itself important. Free black women control a substantially larger share of the black wealth than white women controlled of the white wealth. Compared with whites, as would be expected, their holdings were minuscule. At mid-century, the average real estate owned by white males over twenty-one in the nation stood at about one thousand dollars and during the next decade it rose fifty percent, to about fifteen hundred dollars." Among all adult free black women, a total of more than 63,306 in 1850, the mean holding was only thirty-two dollars (excluding women living with men); a decade later, among the 70,079 adult free black women, it had risen to only forty dollars, less than three percent of the figure for white men. But the average real estate holdings for the nearly two thousand free women of color who were listed in the returns as realty owners, which stood at \$1,452 in 1860, bore witness to the remarkable achievement of a small group of black women, all the more remarkable since some of them started out as slaves.²⁵

These averages do not include the several hundred free black women who lived with propertied white men, bore their children, and shared, at least to some extent, in their wealth and accumulations. Most interracial couples lived in the lower states, but a sizeable group lived in the Upper South. Free black women lived with men who were comparatively well off by the standards of the day. On the eve of the Civil War, the average real estate holdings of property owning whites who cohabited with black women (at least those who were listed in the census in such a manner, approximately 233 in 1860) stood at \$3,296 in the upper states, and \$3,580 in the lower tier. Several of these women lived with men who were extremely prosperous. Thirty-eight-year-old Antoinette Angelette of Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, for example, bore the children of sixty-year-old sugar planter Sylvestre Dobard, while New Orleans free mulatto Lucy Cheatham (who later changed her name to Lucy Ann Hagan) lived part of the time with financier and cotton merchant John Hagan who controlled assets of \$160,000. Mary Fenno, the wealthiest black woman in Arkansas, was the virtual wife of Joseph Fenno, a prosperous Little Rock businessman, while Lucy Bedford of Nashville was left an estate in excess of \$85,000 by trader, businessman, and slaveowner William Bedford who lived with Lucy most of his adult life. While not legally married, most of these women of color shared their white mates' wealth or received some property at the time of their deaths.²⁶

The unique status of free women of color in the South before the Civil War, their ability to carve out a niche in the local economies, and their relations with whites had a dramatic effect on the free black family. For a variety of reasons, property owning free black women remained circumspect about committing themselves to marriage. Those who had saved some money, acquired real estate, or operated a business could lose everything by the wrong choice of a mate since the courts invariably recognized the property rights of men. Those who were attempting to purchase a loved one out of bondage often did not wish to assume the additional family responsibilities of marriage. Some black women chose to live with a partner without formalizing marital vows. Others chose to live alone or with their children. Property owning women sometimes required African-American men to sign "a conveyance in trust" promising not to disturb the property they brought to a union. Some of the more than 400 free black women listed in the 1850 and 1860 census returns as having separate property holdings, though living with a male head of

family, had probably made some sort of prenuptial arrangements about their holdings. In addition, "marriage" to a slave could bring heartache and financial difficulties, even though the children of such a union would be free; and in most locations, especially in cities and states like Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and parts of Louisiana, free black women greatly outnumbered free black men of marriageable age, further limiting opportunities for "normal" family relations.²⁷

Even when property owning black women did commit themselves to marriage, they faced the destructive forces of disease and death that were so prevalent during the nineteenth century. The moving testimony of forty-two-year old Hillery Deering following the death of his sister, Sophie Jackson, involving the distribution of Sophie's estate reveals the difficulties confronting other free black women. Their father had died in 1846 when they were still quite young, and their mother in 1858 or 1859. "Sophie Jackson, Matilda Bartlett and I are the only children my mother had," Deering explained. "Moses Jackson, the husband of Sophie, died in St. Louis about fourteen years ago [1854, and] their children all died when young, none of whom married. The husband of Matilda Bartlett & she & their children are all dead. None of the children married. I am the only relative of Sophie Jackson living."²⁸

Thus, the social, economic, and demographic pressures working against monogamous free African-American family life were substantial. While economic pressures made it advantageous for white families to live together—the more children the more workers on the farm or partners in a business—just the opposite was true for the free black family. Spouses and children became a liability and an economic drain. A profile of female black property owners at mid-century suggests some of these difficulties. As a group they were extremely old, over fifty in the Upper South, and over forty-eight in the lower states. Only one out of four was in her teens, twenties, and thirties, while nearly one out of three in the upper states and one out of four in the lower states was age sixty or older. This was at a time when the life expectancy for white men who reached age twenty-one was under fifty, and the average white wealth holder was six or eight years younger than the average black woman who owned property. While the census did not list the family relationships within each household, these women had fewer than two children living with them at the time of the listing. In part, this was due to their age, but even younger property owning women, those in the thirties and forties, had fewer children than either slave or white families.²⁹

Their unique situation also had an effect on their attitudes toward their home communities. Most property owning free black women had spent many years building up their estates and acquiring reputations of honesty and frugality in their communities. Consequently, few were willing to leave familiar surroundings to migrate to a neighboring state or leave the South. At a time when white Southerners, often leading coffles of slaves, moved restlessly from one location to another, free women of color stayed in the towns and rural areas where they had been born and had lived all their lives. The vast majority of the black female property owners—seventy-five percent in 1850 and eighty-two percent in 1860—owned their land in the state of their birth.³⁰ Some of those born out-of-state, especially in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri, had been originally carried to the west as slaves. Their attitudes toward their home communities were summarized by Elvira Jones, a free black in Richmond, Virginia, who had acquired a small house on the outskirts of town and purchased her two children out of bondage. When she learned

that she might have to emigrate because of a law requiring her children, as recently emancipated slaves, to leave the commonwealth within a year, she petitioned the legislature. "Tis with anxious and trembling for [e] bodings then that your Petitioner presents herself before the Legislature to supplicate of their liberality and clemency, permission to herself and children to live and die in the Land of their nativity." She argued that she had acquired, through "great frugality," some "small pecuniary resources." It was her opinion that the "endearments of kindred and of home" were more important to the "humble and obscure" than "to persons more elevated in life."³¹

The plea of Elvira Jones to remain near "kindred" and "home" suggests the unique and ambiguous condition of property owning free women of color in the antebellum South. For some, the long road from slavery to freedom had consumed their most productive years; for others, it took a substantial effort to extricate their children or family members from bondage. They were forced to deal with oppressive laws, the violent hostility of whites, tenuous and sometimes volatile relationships with black men, and the difficulties of maintaining "normal" family relations in the midst of slave society. Yet they struggled to overcome these difficulties through hard work and the acquisition of property. In the Upper South, where their economic opportunities were limited, they controlled relatively small estates, but in the lower states, where there were better opportunities, some black women became relatively prosperous. In all, free women of color made substantial economic gains in the decades leading up to the Civil War.

IV

The social and economic forces that had created a unique environment for property ownership among free black women were swept away by emancipation. The changing profile of female black property owners during the 1860s not only indicates the new developments occurring during the postwar era but suggests how these developments differed in the Lower and Upper South among former slaves and former free persons of color. In both the lower and upper states, freedom brought an infusion of former slave women into the property owning ranks. While not a precise indicator of former status, the changes in color and literacy at least point to the ability of some freedwomen to acquire real estate. Prior to the war, more than three out of four property owners in the lower states were described as persons of mixed racial ancestry, and the same proportion as literate. A decade later, more than half of the women who owned property in the region were listed as black (836 of 1,562 or 53.5 percent), and two out of three were illiterate. In the Upper South, the changes were less dramatic, but there was a rise among those listed as black, from fifty-eight percent to sixty-five percent, and among those who could neither read nor write, from fifty-five percent to seventy-seven percent.

The movement of freedwomen into the property owning class can also be seen in an analysis of the changes in the total estate holdings among black women. Prior to the war, free black women in the lower states who owned at least one hundred dollars worth of real *and/or* personal property controlled more than three million dollars worth of wealth (Table 1), nearly three times as much as their counterparts in the upper states. But by 1870, not only did their total holdings decline slightly, but black women in the upper states surged ahead in total estate and mean holdings (Table 2).

Table 1
Total Estate Holdings Among Property Owning
Free Black Women in the South, 1860

	sum	mean	cases
Lower South	\$3,082,800	\$2,597	1,187
Upper South	\$1,315,200	\$713	1,844
Total	\$4,398,000	\$1,451	3,031

Table 2
Total Estate Holdings Among Property Owning
Free Black Women in the South, 1870

	sum	mean	cases
Lower South	\$2,737,800	\$560	4,892
Upper South	\$2,921,200	\$654	4,470
Total	\$5,659,000	\$604	9,362

(Source: Computed from USMSPC, 1860, 1870)

These changes, as well as the substantial increases in both sections among those who owned only a few hundred dollars worth of property (see Appendixes 4-6), point to both a rise in the number of freedwomen among property owners and the postwar transformation among former property owning free women of color.³²

In the Lower South, antebellum free women of color experienced a decline in their property holdings during the war and in its immediate aftermath. Some lost their plantations and slaves in the wake of Union advances between 1862 and 1865, while others suffered from crop failures, droughts, labor problems, and unsettled economic conditions during the Reconstruction period. They found it extremely difficult to obtain loans to rebuild or expand their plantations. In urban areas, the changing nature of race relations—the entry of blacks into politics, racial unrest and violence, racial separation in churches and schools—made it difficult for free African-American businesswomen to maintain their former clientele of white planters, businessmen, and professionals who were themselves experiencing economic problems. Moreover, the breakup of the prewar clans during the Reconstruction period and the changing nature of the paternalistic bonds between former free women of color and whites left property owning black women more vulnerable to creditors or whites who sought to lay claim to their property. In a number of instances, former free women of color found it more difficult to defend their holdings after the war than they had during the antebellum period.³³

Within five years after the war, most free women of color in South Carolina and Louisiana who had once owned large farms and plantations or managed successful businesses had either lost their holdings or suffered significant financial reversals. Even in towns and cities, where most free black women had invested in real estate rather than slaves, they suffered losses. There are obvious difficulties in seeking to trace women from one census to the next, but only a few of those listed in 1860 as realty owners remained as property holders a decade later. Partially reflecting this decline was the drop in the mean real estate holdings among all property holding black women in the Lower South, from \$2,695 in 1860 to \$1,120 in 1870 (see Appendixes 2 and 3)—a decline greater than the general depreciation in the South's land values.³⁴

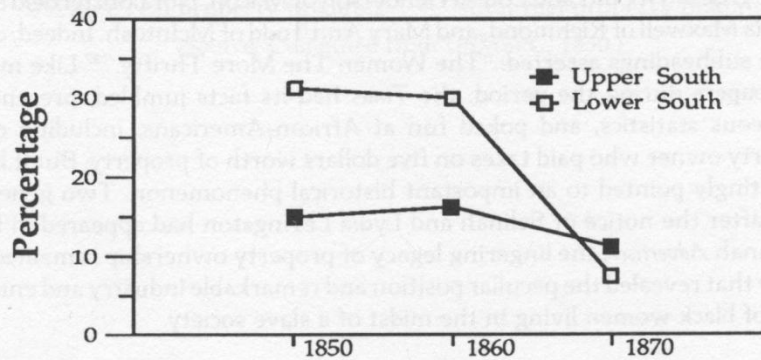
In the Upper South, there was more continuity from the antebellum to the postbellum periods among property owning free black women. In some areas, especially the western states of Kentucky and Missouri, whites were less opposed to black proprietorship than in the more densely populated black belt regions of the lower states. In some border cities, economic activity had increased substantially during the war. While cities such as Columbia, Charleston, Mobile, and New Orleans had experienced the brunt of Union artillery or burning and destruction, Baltimore, the District of Columbia, Lexington, Louisville, Nashville, and St. Louis had witnessed an economic boom during the war years. As a result, a number of antebellum free black women in the region, including, among others, North Carolina seamstress Martha Armstrong, District of Columbia laundress Elizabeth Bean, and Kentucky housekeeper Milly Lewis, survived the war with their holdings intact or slightly improved. Reflecting this continuity was the rise in the average holdings of female black real estate owners in the upper states between 1860 and 1870, from \$746 to \$887.³⁵

Even more revealing in measuring these changes are comparisons of median (fiftieth percentile) holdings and standard deviations (dispersion from the mean) among female real estate owners in the two sections. Prior to the war, the median real estate value for the group in the upper states was three hundred dollars, compared with one thousand dollars in the lower states, and the standard deviation of 18.53 compared with 93.71 in the Lower South. Following the war, the median in both sections stood at five hundred dollars, and the dispersion from the mean was almost exactly the same (see Appendixes 5 and 6). In short, while there were increasing numbers of former slave women entering the property owning rolls in both sections, the changes in the median holding and the standard deviation pointed to a much stronger prewar continuity in the upper states than in the Lower South.

The infusion of freedwomen into the property-owning class and the changing profile of former free African-American property owners, however, paled with respect to the relative decline among all female black realty owners compared with their male counterparts. In the lower states, the proportion among black realty owners who were women dropped from 30 percent to 7.6 percent; in the upper states, from 17 percent to 11 percent. Even with increases in the Upper South, the total value of female-held black realty rose only 43 percent, from \$2,782,700 in 1860, to \$3,984,000 a decade later, this at a time when the real estate owned by black men rose nearly 200 percent. By 1870, black women controlled only twelve percent of the black-owned real estate in the South, compared with twenty-two percent a decade earlier.

This relative decline during the early postwar years, despite the huge numerical increase among free women in the wake of emancipation, tells us a good deal about black women during the nineteenth century. Former slaves could now legally marry black men. Former free women of color could now choose from a larger number of possible partners. Not only did the proportional drop among female property owners correspond with a substantial rise in male land owners in the region, but unlike the antebellum period, when more than half of the black real estate owners were free women of color or free black men living alone or without a spouse, now more than eighty percent of the land owners lived in family units of husband and wife (at least as suggested by the surnames listed in the population

Proportion of Female Black Realty Owners, Upper and Lower South



censuses) and children. Thus, the destructive forces on the family during the slavery era, which affected not only the slave but the free African-American family, were largely eliminated during the postwar years. As a result, black women overwhelmingly chose to live in stable families with their husbands and children. Ironically, however, this decreased their personal autonomy as their separate property holdings diminished.³⁶

Thus, during the first seven decades of the nineteenth century, the profile of property owning black women changed dramatically. In the Lower South, a small group of free women of color, mostly mulattoes who had been assisted by whites, emerged as property owners early in the century, but by the 1840s and 1850s, they found it increasingly difficult to expand their holdings. In the Upper South, it took a generation of freedom before free black women, usually unskilled and rarely assisted by whites, were able to begin acquiring property. The Civil War accelerated the sectional leveling that had begun during the late antebellum period. Perhaps most importantly, there was a significant proportional decline among women compared with men during the early postwar era. The unique and special role of free black women, then, grew out of the peculiar conditions they confronted in a society based on slavery. Forced to acquire a subsistence for themselves, thrust into a position of family head and provider, or at least a co-equal with men in these regards, sometimes not able to find a suitable mate, free black women sought to acquire property as a means of protection, economic independence, and self-sufficiency.

In 1874, *The New York Times* ran a half-column article (extracted in large part from the *Atlanta Herald*) titled "Negro Property Holders: Some Interesting Statistics From Georgia." After discussing the rise of black property ownership among former slaves following the Civil War, the newspaper noted a curious phenomenon, the significant amount of property controlled by black women. Among the fifteen most prosperous blacks in Georgia, those with holdings of at least five thousand dollars, the paper listed eight women: Claudia Gibbons, Eliza Fowler, and Celia Middleton of Chatham County, Eliza Woodiff and Louisa Henderson of Macon, Nora Butterfield and Isabella Maxwell of Richmond, and Mary Ann Todd of McIntosh. Indeed, one of the subheadings asserted: "The Women The More Thrifty."³⁷ Like most newspapers during the period, the *Times* had its facts jumbled, presented erroneous statistics, and poked fun at African-Americans, including one property owner who paid taxes on five dollars worth of property. But it had unwittingly pointed to an important historical phenomenon. Two generations after the notice of Selinah and Lydia Levingston had appeared in the *Savannah Advertiser*, the lingering

legacy of property ownership remained, a legacy that revealed the peculiar position and remarkable industry and enterprise of black women living in the midst of a slave society.

Appendix 1

Female Black Realty Owners in the Upper South, 1850

state	owners	arph*	trph**
Delaware	39	\$921	\$35,900
District of Columbia	30	\$507	\$15,200
Kentucky	119	\$534	\$63,500
Maryland	111	\$363	\$40,300
Missouri	19	\$911	\$17,300
North Carolina	112	\$400	\$44,800
Tennessee	31	\$629	\$19,500
Virginia	234	\$537	\$125,600
total	695	\$521	\$362,100

Female Black Realty Owners in the Lower South, 1850

Alabama	16	\$813	\$13,000
Arkansas	7	\$743	\$5,200
Florida	17	\$929	\$15,800
Georgia	22	\$736	\$16,200
Louisiana	427	\$3,602	\$1,538,100
Mississippi	13	\$1,338	\$17,400
South Carolina	56	\$1,132	\$63,400
Texas	3	\$767	\$2,300
total	561	\$2,979	\$1,671,400
total in South	1,256	\$1,619	\$2,033,500

*average real property holdings **total real property holdings

(Source: Computed from USMSPC, 1850.)

Appendix 2

Female Free Black Realty Owners in the Upper South, 1860

state	owners	arph	trph
Delaware	55	\$465	\$25,600
District of Columbia	116	\$1,138	\$132,000
Kentucky	139	\$688	\$95,600
Maryland	243	\$465	\$113,100
Missouri	36	\$3,422	\$123,200
North Carolina	185	\$428	\$79,200
Tennessee	58	\$1,628	\$94,400
Virginia	391	\$638	\$249,400
total	1,223	\$746	\$912,500

Female Free Black Realty Owners in the Lower South, 1860

Alabama	40	\$1,080	\$43,200
Arkansas	*	*	*
Florida	30	\$897	\$26,900
Georgia	46	\$1,065	\$49,000
Louisiana	359	\$3,884	\$1,394,300
Mississippi	13	\$2,015	\$26,200
South Carolina	198	\$1,581	\$313,000
Texas	8	\$2,200	\$17,600
total	694	\$2,695	\$1,870,200
total in South	1,917	\$1,452	\$2,782,700

* = none

(Source: Computed from USMSPC, 1860)

Appendix 3

Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Upper South, 1870

state	owners	arph	trph
Delaware	91	\$989	\$90,000
District of Columbia	189	\$2,142	\$404,800
Kentucky	402	\$923	\$371,200
Maryland	469	\$756	\$354,500
Missouri	243	\$994	\$241,500
North Carolina	307	\$464	\$142,400
Tennessee	297	\$889	\$263,900
Virginia	517	\$709	\$366,500
total	2,515	\$889	\$2,234,300

Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Lower South, 1870

Alabama	116	\$1,211	\$140,500
Arkansas	69	\$900	\$62,100
Florida	68	\$541	\$36,800
Georgia	223	\$724	\$161,400
Louisiana	439	\$1,967	\$863,600
Mississippi	248	\$723	\$179,200
South Carolina	305	\$836	\$254,900
Texas	94	\$545	\$51,200
total	1,562	\$1,120	\$1,749,700
total for South	4,077	\$977	\$3,984,000

(Source: Computed from USMSPC, 1870. To obtain property owners with estates valued at from \$100 to \$900, a sample of 7,855 propertied blacks was used.)

Appendix 4

Distribution Analysis Among Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Lower South, 1850

Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
\$100-200	58	10.3	10.3
300-400	68	12.1	22.5
500-600	56	10.0	32.4
700-900	44	7.8	40.3
1,000-1,900	124	22.1	62.4
2,000-2,900	61	10.9	73.3
3,000-4,900	64	11.4	84.7
5,000 or more	86	15.3	100.0

Mean = \$2,979 Median = \$1,000 Std Dev = 68.99
Minimum = \$100 Maximum = \$92,000

Distribution Analysis Among Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Upper South, 1850

Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
\$100-200	283	40.7	40.7
300-400	195	28.1	68.8
500-600	99	14.2	83.0
700-900	33	4.7	87.8
1,000-1,900	58	8.3	96.1
2,000-2,900	12	1.7	97.8
3,000-4,900	11	1.6	99.4
5,000 or more	4	.6	100.0

Mean = \$521 Median = \$300 Std Dev = 10.28
Minimum = \$100 Maximum = \$20,000

Appendix 5

Distribution Analysis Among Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Lower South, 1860

Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
\$100-200	56	8.1	8.1
300-400	70	10.0	18.2
500-600	94	13.5	31.7
700-900	46	6.6	38.3
1,000-1,900	204	29.4	67.7
2,000-2,900	90	13.0	80.7
3,000-4,900	54	7.8	88.5
5,000 or more	80	11.5	100.0

Mean = \$2,695 Median = \$1,000 Std Dev = 93.71
Minimum = \$100 Maximum = \$200,000

Distribution Analysis Among Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Upper South, 1860

Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
\$100-200	456	37.3	37.3
300-400	245	20.0	57.3
500-600	174	14.2	71.5
700-900	95	7.8	79.3
1,000-1,900	162	13.2	92.6
2,000-2,900	37	3.0	95.6
3,000-4,900	32	2.6	98.2
5,000 or more	22	1.8	100.0

Mean = \$746 Median = \$300 Std Dev = 18.53
Minimum = \$100 Maximum = \$50,000

Appendix 6

Distribution Analysis Among Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Lower South, 1870

Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
\$100-200	363	23.2	23.2
300-400	283	18.1	41.4
500-600	292	18.7	60.1
700-900	141	9.0	69.1
1,000-1,900	242	15.5	84.6
2,000-2,900	92	5.9	90.5
3,000-4,900	82	5.2	95.7
5,000 or more	67	4.3	100.0

Mean = \$1,120 Median = \$500 Std Dev = 22.38
Minimum = \$100 Maximum = \$50,000

Distribution Analysis Among Female Black Real Estate Owners in the Upper South, 1870

Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
\$100-200	540	21.5	21.5
300-400	703	28.0	49.4
500-600	472	18.8	68.2
700-900	208	8.3	76.5
1,000-1,900	357	14.2	90.7
2,000-2,900	115	4.6	95.2
3,000-4,900	59	2.3	97.6
5,000 or more	61	2.4	100.0

Mean = \$887 Median = \$500 Std Dev = 20.02
Minimum = \$100 Maximum = \$50,000

(Source for Appendixes: Computed From USMSPC, 1850, 1860, 1870.) Methodological Note: During the middle-period, census takers were instructed to record the estimated value of real (1850-70) and personal (1860-70) property held by every household head and individual property owner in the United States. An individual's real and personal property combined comprise the total estate as cited above. While the method of personal inquiry resulted in rough estimates rather than precise valuations, there is little doubt that the censuses are unique and extremely valuable documents for estimating wealth holdings. In his exhaustive study of Edgefield County, South Carolina, Orville Vernon Burton praised the 1870 census takers in that locale as extremely knowledgeable and conscientious. Their work, he said, provided the most detailed, accurate, and complete information available on the county's population—black and white. Economist Lee Soltow has described the middle-period census returns as "unique" and "precious" not only in helping us understand American inequality but also in permitting us to

comprehend the basic nature of capitalism and individualism. Unlike tax assessment volumes and other types of local records concerning property ownership, the census returns are the only source that consistently connect gender, racial identity, and wealth for the South as a whole. Blacks with more than five thousand dollars worth of property were usually checked in at least one other source. For the purposes of citation, I have used the printed page numbers or the handwritten page numbers in the upper right hand corner of the right-hand page. The page cited includes both the page on which the number appears and the unnumbered facing page. For wealth holders with between one hundred dollars and nine hundred dollars worth of property in 1870, a sample was taken from every twentieth printed page of the manuscript volumes. The sampling procedure is subject to a small margin of error. [See Raymond Jessen, *Statistical Survey Techniques* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), 407; and Frank Yates, *Sampling Methods for Censuses and Surveys*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1981), 140.] All of these data were analyzed with SPSSX (the most recent version of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The program used to generate a profile of the lower group in 1870 utilized the "do if" and "loop" commands. After perusing the census returns, I occasionally ran across the name of a property owner missed by the census takers (or whom I missed). These names were added to my census data and are cited as "Computed from USMSPC" although they came from county court records, scattered assessment lists, and several reliable secondary sources. Thus, in 1860, among the 1,917 female real property owners, ninety-three, or five percent, were derived from sources other than the census. I have checked my data against the findings of Lee Soltow and other historians who have used the census for investigations of particular states and locales and find them to be generally compatible.

NOTES

1. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, April 11, 1814, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
2. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 40-41; and "The Negro Slave Family," *Journal of Negro History* 15 (April 1930), 198-259; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 53-54; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 117-21; John Blassingame, *The Slave Community. Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 8; Bettina Aptheker, *Woman's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 89-110; Darlene Clark Hine and Kate Wittenstein, "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex," in *Black Women Cross-Culturally*, ed. Filomina Chioma Steady (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1981); Deborah G. White, "Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South," *Journal of Family History* 8 (Fall 1983): 248-61; Dorothy

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3. See: John H. Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1913); James M. Wright, *The Free Negro in Maryland, 1634-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921); Rosser Howard Taylor, *The Free Negro in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1920); Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830* (Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1924); Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1942); John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943); Donald E. Everett, "The Free Persons of Color in New Orleans, 1830-1865," Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1952; Edward F. Sweat, "The Free Negro in Antebellum Georgia," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1957; Letitia W. Brown, *Free Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1790-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Herbert E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1972); Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).
4. Philip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the-MidNineteenth-Century Low Country," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (August 1983): 399-420; Lawrence T. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community," in Winfred B. Moore, Jr., et al., eds., *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988); Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1984), 90; Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 44; Whittington B. Johnson, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Savannah: An Economic Profile," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 64 (Winter 1980): 426-27.
5. See: Caroline Matheny Dillman, "The Sparsity of Research and Publications on Southern Women: Definitional Complexities, Methodological Problems, and Other Impediments," in Dillman, ed., *Southern Women* (New York: Hemisphere Publishing Co., 1988), 1-18; and Carolyn E. Wedin, "The Civil War and Black Women on the Sea Islands," in *ibid.*, 71-80.
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7. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master," 33; George Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, supplement, ser. 2, 10 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1979), Vol. 2, pt. 2, 26; Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, 19 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), Vol. 7, pt. 1, 111; John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches,*

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 27. Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, chap. 4; RCPC Charleston, S. C., Miscellaneous Land Records, bk. L8 (September 14, 1814), 31, in Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston Salem, North Carolina; RCPC, St. Louis, Mo., Marriage Records, Vol. 13 (February 12, 1868), 222; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 136-37; RPPC, New Orleans, La., Successions, #361, April 19, 1879, at New Orleans Public Library. In the above succession (estate) it was noted that Louisa Boisdore was allowed to retain the eighteen hundred dollars she had brought to her marriage twenty-

eight years before. In the South as a whole, adult free women of color (twenty years and older) in 1850 and 1860 represented fifty-five percent of the free Negro population. Calculated from *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), xliii; *Population of the United States in 1860*; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 594.

28. RCPC, St. Louis, Mo., Estates, #8741, July 13, 1869. 29
29. Computed from USMSPC, 1850, 1860. The census did not note family relationships. The data include those living in the same household with the same surname whose relative age would indicate probable son or daughter relationship. While it is difficult to determine relationship in some instances, a fairly accurate estimate of the number of children in the same household can be made in most cases. For the comparative demographic literature on free black households and the role of women, see: Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Theodore Hershberg, and John Modell, "The Origins of the Female-Headed Black Family: The Impact of the Urban Experience," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (Autumn 1975): 211-33; Crandall A. Shifflett, "The Household Composition of Rural Black Families: Louisa County, Virginia, 1880," *ibid.*, 236-60; Paul J. Lammemeier, "The Urban Black Family of the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Black Family Structure in the Ohio Valley, 1850-1880," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (August 1973): 440-56; George Blackburn and Sherman L. Ricards, "The Mother-Headed Family among Free Negroes in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850-1860," *Phylon* 42 (March 1981): 11-21; Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 89, 280.
30. Computed from USMSPC, 1850, 1860. These percentages include the District of Columbia. For 1860, there are sixty-five missing cases (3.4 percent) for individuals who were taken from local probate records. Thus the percent born in-state is the valid percent and excludes the missing cases.
31. Legislative Records, Petition of Elvira Jones to the Virginia General Assembly, Henrico County, December 5, 1823, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Vir.; see also John Dungee to Virginia General Assembly, December 19, 1825, in James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 278.
32. Computed from USMSPC, 1860, 1870. The proportion of free Negroes and slaves of mixed racial ancestry in the general population in 1860 was as follows: free Negroes in the Lower South, 76 percent; slaves in the Lower South, 8.5 percent; free Negroes in the Upper South, 35 percent; slaves in the Upper South, 13.4 percent. See Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 178. 33
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Pulaski Co., Ark., Estates, #184, November 17, 1866, in Arkansas Historical Commission State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

34. Soltow, *Men and Wealth in the United States*, 64.
35. USMSPC, New Hanover Co., N.C., Wilmington, 1860, 343; *ibid.*, 1870, 412; *ibid.*, District of Columbia, 7th Ward, 1860, 879; *ibid.*, 1870, 450; *ibid.*, Jefferson Co., Ken., Louisville, 2nd Ward, 1860, 586; *ibid.*, 4th Ward, 1870, 340.
36. Computed from USMSPC, 1860, 1870. To obtain property owners with estates in 1870 valued between one hundred dollars and nine hundred dollars, a sample of 7855 propertied blacks (from every twentieth printed page in the manuscript census) was used.
37. *The New York Times*, November 4, 1874.