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Down by the Riverside

A SOUTH CAROLINA SLAVE COMMUNITY

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Overseers and drivers normally performed their supervisory duties in the rice fields among the field hands. Another group of slaves—skilled artisans—were employed in non-field pursuits. The number of skilled occupations necessary to run a rice plantation is astounding. The following list, compiled from probate inventories and plantation records, gives an idea of the range of skills: animal raisers, baby keepers, barbers, blacksmiths, boatmen, bricklayers, butchers, butlers, carpenters, coachmen, cobblers, cooks, coopers, engineers, gardeners, gunkeepers, laundresses, lumbermen, maids, nurses,

pantry minders, saltworkers, seamstresses, shoemakers, stock minders, tailors, tanners, tinsmiths, trunk minders, valets, waiters, and weavers. Many of the skilled slaves followed two or more of these occupations, receiving careful training for their particular jobs.[89] The skilled slaves of All Saints Parish gave the lie to George Fitzhugh's obtuse advice to planters regarding blacks: "But don't attempt to make carpenters, or manufacturers, or house-servants, or hostlers, or gardeners of the men, nor seamstresses, nor washerwomen, nor cooks, nor chambermaids of the women. They are too slow, too faithless, too unskillful to succeed in such pursuits."[90]

West Africa was a land of consummate craftsmen, and enslaved Africans had brought with them to South Carolina highly developed technologies in metalwork, woodwork, leatherwork, ivorywork, pottery, and weaving. The natural environment of South Carolina was sufficiently like that of West Africa to render many of the skills learned in the Old World indispensable in the New World. Africans excelled not merely in heavy labor such as clearing land, but were so successful as bricklayers, butchers, carpenters, coachmen, farmers, fishers, and herdsmen that they were imported in larger and larger numbers. Not least of the ironies of the slave trade was that the skills of the Africans helped to strengthen the rationale behind their enslavement. The contribution of skilled slave craftsmen and mechanics to the economic development of the plantations has yet to be adequately credited.[91]

Not only were these skills retained and syncretized in the New World, but blacks responded eagerly to incentives to acquire new skills. As a general rule, young slaves aiming for plantation professions were apprenticed to senior craftsmen or craftswomen to be taught and trained. In some cases slaves were sent to Charleston or even to England to be taught particular skills such as cabinetry. The achievement of the slaves in building the plantation Big Houses, with their elaborate handfashioned iron grill work, magnificent cabinetry, and other decorative embellishments, is adequate testimony that the African inheritance of southern aesthetics included skills in wood

and ironworking that went far beyond mere physical labor. The slaves took a possessive pride in the Big Houses that they built, despite the humbler circumstances of their own cabins.[92]

Perhaps the elite of the slave craftsmen were the carpenters. Not only did the carpenters build the Big Houses and the rice mills, the slave cabins and the barns, using such hand tools as the saw, plane, axe, hatchet, auger, adze, chisel, and drawing knife, but also the trunks, or floodgates, that flooded and drained the rice fields, and the plantation fleet of flats, rowboats, and dugout canoes.[93]

One of the most talented carpenters in All Saints Parish was Renty Tucker of Hagley plantation. Said to have been trained for fine carpentry in England, Tucker built the famous chapel of St. Mary's, Weehawka, on Plowden C. J. Weston's plantation, working closely with the Westons on the design for the structure. He built a scale model of the chapel in January 1859 and started work on the foundation a few weeks later. By early May he had covered the nave and chancel. When the Westons returned from England at the end of November 1859, he had erected the church tower. By spring the stained-glass lancet windows and the clock and chimes for the tower had arrived from England, and St. Mary's, Weehawka, was formally opened. It featured carved oak stalls and double walls for coolness.[94]

Renty Tucker also built the summer home of the Westons on Pawleys Island, which Elizabeth Collins, their English housekeeper, described as "a castle so lofty that we could find a cool place almost in any part of the house." He made the building of cypress boards, probably hewn in the carpentry shop at Hagley and transported to Pawleys Island. Roman numerals were chiseled into the boards so that the building could be properly constructed on the island. Both wooden pegs and hand-cut nails were used to hold the framework together. The Weston home was considerably more elegant than the cottages of other planters on Pawleys Island.[95]

Richmond, of J. Motte Alston's Woodbourne plantation, was another extraordinarily talented slave carpenter. Purchased by Alston from his father, Thomas Pinckney Alston,

Richmond built the Big House at Woodbourne, assisted only when he had to handle timber too heavy for him. He also built the Alston summer cottage on the creek at Murrells Inlet—Sunnyside. Richmond built the frame at Woodbourne, moved it across the Waccamaw on flats, and hauled it to the shore by teams of oxen. Alston was so impressed that he made provisions in his will to free Richmond and his wife.[96]

Carpenters were trained by master craftsmen in large carpenter shops on the plantations. Four or five apprentices studied annually under Thomas Bonneau, a slave who was chief carpenter for Robert F. W. Allston. Bonneau took pride that he did not turn out "jack-legs," his term for mediocre craftsmen, but men of skill. Bonneau built a plantation chapel for Allston, although not so elaborate as that built by Renty Tucker at Hagley.[97] Among the prized slave carpenters of the Waccamaw were Hardtimes Sparkman of Mt. Arena, Welcome Beese of Oatland, and the large battery of carpenters at Brookgreen plantation—Lazrus, David, Joe, Cato, Sam, Tom, Jacob, Jim, Philip, Cain, Moses, and Aaron.[98]

Good carpenters were in demand and were able to hire out their labor off the plantation, paying their masters a portion of their income. James Sparkman, whose extensive holdings included Mt. Arena on Sandy Island for a period, hired a carpenter from Benjamin Dunkin in 1846 to help build a house. In 1854 he paid $120 for the hire of a carpenter, a sum nearly twice the cost of a horse and four times the cost of a boat. Four years earlier he had *sold* a slave named Bella for less. Robert F. W. Allston also hired carpenters frequently.[99]

The tools carpenters had to work with were crude. When Anthony started working for Sparkman in January 1853 (probably hired), he had the following available to him: 1 jack plane; 1 fore plane; 1 hand saw (all old); 1 axe (broad); 1 adze; 1 square; and 2 chisels (good). The carpentry crew at Brookgreen had a slightly larger repertory of tools to choose from: band saw; 1-inch chisel; ½-inch chisel; 2-inch augur; 1 ½-inch augur; 7.8-inch augur; adze; hatchet; broad axe; square; compass; plane; and saw. Thus the achievement of the skilled carpenters on the Waccamaw rice plantations is all the

more remarkable for having been accomplished with such limited tools.[100]

Among the skilled occupations on the rice plantations, blacksmiths were necessary to shoe the horses, make horseshoes and nails, and keep the axles, wheels, and other metalwork used on the plantation in repair. The blacksmith shop on the Robert F. W. Allston estate was described as completely equipped and up-to-date, with apprentices being trained under the careful eye of the master blacksmith, a slave named Guy Walker. Among the tools the young apprentices would learn to use were the bellows, anvil, vice, hammer, tongs, dog, coal chisel, and nailmakers.[101]

Other young slaves, men and women, who showed promise of development were trained as coopers, slatworkers, or as mechanics to work in such rice mills as Robert F. W. Allston's pounding mill, reputedly the largest in the state. Salt boiling was carried on by slaves without supervision, according to Allston's daughter. "My father had the faculty for organization," she wrote, "and his negro men were remarkably well-trained, intelligent, and self-reliant."[102]

Slave women were employed in the tasks of spinning, dyeing, weaving, and sewing to provide clothing for the plantation. Much of the dyeing was done with black walnut and indigo. Some of the weavers managed to weave beyond their task-limit without the overseers noticing. They sold the extra cloth to poor whites in the parish. Occasionally they sold more than they had woven beyond their quota and had to work up into the night so as not to get caught, as in the case of Margaret Bryant's mother. "Po-buckra come there and buy cloth from Mom," Margaret Bryant recalled to Chandler. "Buy three and four yards. Ma sell that have to weave day and night to please obersheer."[103] The looms were manually operated. William Oliver recalled, "My mother was a weaver, old timey loom. Cotton and wool, sheckel (shuttle)." Margaret Bryant said that while her mother wove, there were also two women carding and two women spinning. "Ma wop 'em off. Send duh sheckel (shuttle) through there."[104]

After the yarn was spun, dyed, and woven into cloth,

seamstresses sewed it into clothing and other household furnishings. Margaret, the head seamstress at Hagley plantation, worked with other seamstresses to make new drawing-room curtains and covers. Most of the plantation sewing, however, involved making clothes. For example, Margaret worked closely with Emily Weston during April and early May 1859 in cutting out and sewing clothes for the children on Weston's plantations. While many of the seamstresses worked closely with "Ole Miss," as Margaret did, a well-trained seamstress did not require close supervision. When Emily Weston left for an extended visit to England early in May 1859, she left minute instructions with her seamstress Dolly as to the type and quantity of garments to be produced. In December, upon her return, she inspected the work done by the plantation seamstresses. Given the clothing necessities of the large plantation work force, most plantations had a crew of seamstresses who worked more or less full time on sewing.[105]

One of the most important of the crafts practiced by skilled slave artisans on the Waccamaw was the making of an earthenware that has come to be called Colono-ware. Colono-ware shards have been excavated at plantation sites in All Saints Parish as well as throughout the South Carolina lowcountry. This unglazed, low-fired ceramic, once thought to have been produced by free Indians for trade with the colonists (because it was found on plantation sites rather than in Indian settlements), is now recognized as the product of slave potters. It is most commonly found on slave sites in the South Carolina lowcountry. A similar unglazed earthenware was produced by slaves on plantations in Barbados and, in fact, may have been brought to South Carolina by the large number of slaves imported from there. South Carolina Colono-ware constitutes an especially interesting example of cultural syncretism in that it incorporates elements of both African and Indian pottery traditions. Production of Colono-ware appears to have ended in the early nineteenth century with the increased accessibility of ceramics and ironware and with the end of the slave trade.[106]

Talented slave basketmakers were responsible for producing the fanner baskets used for winnowing rice. These and

other baskets made by the slaves were examples of coil basketry, which is indubitably of African origin. Coil baskets, unlike the woven baskets of American Indians, were made by wrapping dried palmetto fronds around bundles of sweetgrass roughly eighteen to twenty inches long and one-third to one-half inch in diameter. Pine needles were sometimes mixed with the sweetgrass for decorative effect. Maria, an African-born slave of Robert F. W. Allston, was one such basketmaker. "Maum Maria," recalled Allston's daughter, "made wonderful baskets and wove beautiful rugs from the rushes that grew along Long Cane Creek."[107]

Africans such as Maria and their descendants responded to incentives to learn new skills on the Waccamaw plantations; but they blended the new, acquired modes of expression with ancestral, remembered modes of expression in a process of artistic creolization. The acquisition of preferred positions on the plantations by virtue of inherited and acquired skills may be seen as part of the process by which the slaves of All Saints Parish helped to create a more orderly and predictable world for themselves, one in which the old virtues of beauty and skill and craftsmanship still counted for something. The practice of these skills—and the status that accrued to skilled workers—gave talented slaves both a sense of self-esteem and a certain measure of freedom from supervision, which enabled them to make their work patterns more tolerable, and even occasionally glorious, parts of a meaningful culture, however artificially constricted it may have been.[108]

10

Not all the skilled workers on a rice plantation were involved in rice cultivation or craft production. Each plantation had certain slaves designated and trained to serve its transportation needs. Boatmen, for example, took charge of the fleet of flats, rowboats, and dugout canoes. Boats were valuable property, and the boat crews were charged with their use and care. All the boats were kept sheltered from the sun, except when being used, and were locked up at night. Captain Charlie, chief boatman for the plantations of Plowden C. J. Weston, was assisted by a crew of eight men, described by an English visitor as "fine, strong, good-natured fellows." Even vessels as large as schooners were occasionally manned entirely by slaves. One of Robert F. W. Allston's overseers wrote of the *Waccamaw*, which picked up rice at the Allston rice mill, that "there is no white men in her when she comes to the mill."[109]

Although the Waccamaw River served as the principal avenue of transportation in All Saints Parish, land transportation had to be used as well. The head coachman on a rice plantation was an elite figure and one of the most privileged slaves. The chief coachman for Plowden and Emily Weston was Prince, a man of enormous talent and dignity. He never resorted to the whip with his horses, but commanded them with his voice alone. Aleck Parker, Governor Robert F. W. Allston's head coachman, commanded even greater deference among the Allston family. Once, when young Elizabeth Allston and her friends began to sing in the carriage as it rode through the streets of Charleston, he addressed her sternly, "Miss Betsy, if unna [second person plural] kyant behave unna self, I'll tek yu straight home! Dis ain't no conduk fu de Gubner karridge!"[110]

The term nurse was used to designate two plantation occupations—those who cared for the sick and those who cared for the children. The medical nurses (men and women) were responsible for helping the physicians who were employed by the plantations, usually on a contractual basis. The physicians extracted teeth, lanced carbuncles, dressed wounds, performed obstetrical services and minor surgery, and prescribed medicines, liniment, and porter.[111] The nurses' principal duties involved keeping the floors, bedding, blankets, and utensils of the plantation hospitals clean and caring for the immediate needs of the sick. They did not normally administer medicine to patients except upon orders of the physician. Typical medicines given to ailing slaves included magnesia, calomel, tartar emetic, paregoric, laudanum, quinine, cream of tartar, castor oil, and opium.[112] Typically there was one person designated plantation nurse, who might be male or female. Many women received some nursing training, because seriously ill patients

often required nursing full time. Slaves who needed surgery or specialized medical care were sent to Charleston for treatment.[113]

The job of children's nurse was typically assigned to slave women who were either too old or too young to work in the fields. This followed a common West African practice of utilizing the skills of the elderly. These nurses would keep the little slave children in a special "chillun house," or day nursery, while their parents worked in the rice fields or other jobs. Margaret Bryant recalled many years later, "My Pa sister, Ritta One, had that job. Nuss (nurse) the chillen. . . . All size chillun." Some nurses became exclusive nurses for white children, as in the case of the mother of Ben Horry: "My mother nuss (nurse). Get up so high—natural nuss for white people."[114]

The cooks were an important part of the skilled work force on a rice plantation. Food for the sick was prepared by the nurses; otherwise the cooks were responsible for cooking food for everyone on the plantation. Plowden C. J. Weston had one cook who specialized in cooking for the rice-field workers and another who cooked for carpenters, millers, and high-ground workers. By having two cooks working closer to the scene of the work, it was possible to serve meals while they were still hot without requiring time-consuming boat rides to and from the rice fields. James Sparkman assigned a cook especially for the field hands. Most of the plantations had a separate cook for the children. The midday meals were served communally, either in or near the fields, or at some central location on the plantation. Morning and evening meals were usually eaten at home. The renown that the slave cooks earned for their cooking was equalled by the admiration they attracted for their imaginative use of spices. The taste for highly spiced cooking, at least partially inherited from Africa, was transmitted to the whites through the Big House kitchens. The various dishes developed by slave cooks, which would later become famous as soul food, were by no means restricted to blacks, nor even to the poorer segment of the white plantation.[115]

Other slaves served as gardeners for the Big House flower

gardens. Emily Weston wrote in her diary of her efforts to have the road to Hagley House smoothed and made into an integral part of the landscaping: "Fine and warmer, but again in the road and finished cutting. Then walked to see the Rosa's and Mr. R took me to see the garden really getting into order and showing seeds coming up." And again, "Fine and warm, but in the road again but did not quite finish there being so many stumps to dig out." Weston also commented in her diary on the progress of one of the slaves in learning the skill of gardening: "Agrippa just now beginning to hoe weeds in the garden, going there every day, and I hope may turn out a trifle (at any rate) of a gardener."[116]

The stable hands were responsible for all the horses, mules, oxen, and other livestock on the plantation. One slave was in charge of all the oxen, and he was responsible for half a task of plowing as well. The overseer was to provide the stable hands with straw, tailing, and coarse flour for the oxen. Plowing and carting depended upon the appearance of the oxen. Mules were also under the year-round care of a single person. The mules were fed on flour and cut-up tailing. During periods of hard work the mules' diets were supplemented with corn and cut-up crab grass mixed with straw and flour. During the summer, when not in use, they were turned out on the marsh to feed. Plowden C. J. Weston probably spoke for many planters when he wrote, "It is easy to keep an animal once fat in good condition, but extremely difficult to get one into condition who is worked down." Therefore, the slaves charged with taking care of the livestock had significant responsibilities. Not only must the livestock be kept in good condition, but the livestock implements—harness, chains, yokes, and plows, along with the carts and wagons—as well. Stables and ox-houses were to be cleaned out weekly, and the oxen and mules were cleaned down each evening.[117]

The yard watchman was responsible for the crops in the yard and for the barns. Rice was stored in the barns and threshing took place in the barnyards. Weston instructed his overseers to keep a close watch on the barnyard: "As soon as

the people come in in the morning the barnyard doors should be locked and not be opened again until work is over, except to admit the suckling children."[118]

The rice plantations also had poultry yards where fowl were raised and pastures for sheep and dairy cattle. Almira Coffin wrote a friend in New England that "the cows are the meanest looking animals you ever saw" but thought "the sheep are very decent." Simmon was in charge of the sheep and dairy cows on the estate of Plowden C. J. Weston, while Tamar had charge of the poultry yard. Occasionally slaves who were otherwise employed also raised poultry. Gabriel, for instance, tried to raise ducks. One of the Weston hogs caused him to lose two ducks. He reported to Emily Weston, "Your hog, ma'am, done eat two my ducks." "How so, Gabriel?" she replied. "You should keep them in." "See, ma'am, young duck bery lobe run bout, and your pen broke. . . . I like sell my duck when dem big enough." She promised to have Simmon mend the hog pen.[119]

The skilled workers, especially the carpenters and mechanics, enjoyed a measure of status, deference, and independence in their work patterns on the plantations. The children of field hands were taught respect for these skilled workers because of their talents. Their status did not, however, seem to create a gulf between them and the field hands. The inventories reveal numerous examples of skilled craftsmen married to prime field hands, or ditchmen married to house servants. On the rice plantations of the Waccamaw, mechanics, craftsmen, and other skilled workers generally made common cause with house servants and field slaves. Together they created and maintained, against frightful odds, a slave community.[120]

11

A wide variety of occupations is subsumed under the general label house servants—butlers, cooks, valets, maids, waiters and waitresses, laundresses, and children's nurses, among others. When Adele Petigru Allston was a young bride, she became quite upset when she discovered what a large household

staff she was expected to manage. She went to her husband on the verge of tears:

> There are too many servants; I do not know what to do with them. There is Mary, the cook; Milly, the laundress; Caroline, the housemaid; Cinda, the seamstress; Peter, the butler; Andrew, the second dining-room man; Aleck, the coachman; and Moses, the gardner. And George, the scullion, and the boy in the yard besides! I cannot find work for them! After breakfast, when they line up and ask, "Miss, wha' yu' want me fu' do today?" I feel like running away. Please send some of them away, for Lavinia is capable of doing the work of two of them. Please send them away, half of them, at least.

Her husband, Robert, told her that he could not. They were house servants, trained for house work and not for field work. It would be cruel, he said, to send them into the fields. "As soon as you get accustomed to the life here you will know there is plenty for them to do. The house is large and to keep it perfectly clean takes constant work. Then there is the constant need of having clothes cut and made for the babies and little children on the place; the nourishment, soup, etc. to be made and sent to the sick. You will find that there is really more work than there are hands for, in a little while." She found her husband's prediction to be accurate, their daughter wrote, "but it took all her own precious time to direct and plan and carry out the work."[121]

The duties of the house servants included cooking, cleaning, washing, nursing, looking after the children, and generally waiting on the master and mistress and their family. There seems to have been a considerable degree of specialization in household tasks, but regardless of specialty a house servant might find duties quite varied, as the following sequence in the diary of Emily Weston indicates:

> Tuesday, March 15. Hector and Caesar went to Laurel Hill to pack up all those things Plowden has determined to bring out of the house, and also the wine.
>
> Wednesday, March 16. Plowden off early to Laurel Hill to see after the things there to be sent down in flats. These arrived at 4 o'clock and very busy we were having them brought up—not

finished until ½ past 8. Such a collection of articles I scarcely knew where to stow them.

Thursday, March 17. Busy putting things a little in order, unpacking china, glass, etc., and about 4 another flat came with the portion of wine already packed. Had it put into baskets and deposited in the new-made cellar under the portico.

Friday was rainy, and Saturday and Sunday were holidays, but on Monday the house servants returned to packing.

Monday, March 21. Off early to superintend the packing up the remainder of the Laurel Hill wine, Hector and Jack going with me. All was in the flat by 4 o'clock, and quite a business it was! . . . Hector staid to mind the wine and flat started for Hagley in the evening.

Tuesday, March 22. The flat with wine arrived and began to unload about 10. I and Margaret, with one of the boys, put up the wine as it was brought in baskets and tired enough I was when the business was over.[122]

When a planter acquired a new plantation, it was often house servants who were entrusted with seeing to housing for the slaves, as when Plowden C. J. Weston moved some of his Laurel Hill slaves to his newly acquired True Blue plantation. In addition, when the master's family moved to a new residence (as many of them did during 1862 when Union gunboats cruised the Waccamaw, raiding the plantations), the task of preparing the new residence for occupancy normally fell to a house servant. When Emily Weston moved to Snow Hill plantation near Conwayborough in Horry District while her husband was in the army, Gabriel was sent ahead to get the house ready.[123]

Some house servants, such as Jemmy, the Westons' butler, and Nelson, the Allstons' butler, also acquired managerial responsibilities, being left in charge of other house servants when the master's family was away. When Emily Weston moved to Snow Hill, Dolly, a house maid, was left in charge of a skeleton staff at Hagley.[124]

In many cases there was a white woman who served as something of an overseer to the house servants. Almira Coffin

spoke of the daughter of Benjamin F. Dunkin having "a first rate white woman for housekeeper who has the care of everything." Elizabeth Collins, a young English woman, served essentially the same function for Emily Weston. Collins kept the household women at Hagley occupied during part of the day with sewing: "The women's house work was generally done about eleven o'clock, and the rest of the day spent in making garments for the field hands. Of course, the cutting out, &c, came to my lot, which was no play game, the number of negroes being between three and four hundred."[125]

Male domestics were sometimes especially trained to serve at the Hot and Hot Fish Club, an elite social club of the Waccamaw planters, where liveried servants served elaborate meals and drinks, and planters bowled and played billiards in the comfortable club house each Friday from June to mid-October. Other male domestics were trained to be valets, or "body-servants." Julia Peterkin, who lived on the Waccamaw in the early twentieth century after her father became a co-owner of Brookgreen plantation, described some of the duties of a valet: "A gentleman . . . is not considered extravagant if a 'body-servant' brings his coffee before he gets out of bed in the morning, presses his clothes, shines his boots, saddles his horse and attends to his hounds and bulldogs. The body-servant's duties may also include making his employer's mint julep in the summer, hot toddies in the winter, and keeping his spirits cheered whenever he gets down at heart."

The duties of male domestics could be quite varied. On one occasion Adele Allston went to look at a rice field ready to be harvested, traveling in a small boat steered by her husband and rowed by Nelson the butler and another slave. Robert F. W. Allston asked Nelson to put out his oar to steady the boat as Adele began to depart. Just as she was stepping on the bank, Nelson removed his oar from the water. The boat spun around and Adele plunged into the water up to her waist, greatly agitated.[126]

Planters regarded house servants to be of a higher status than that of field hands because of their training and the higher price they commanded in the marketplace. Slaves generally

seem to have shared a sense of status stratification ranging from house servants at the top through drivers and artisans on down to field hands. The Allston house servants were said to have felt themselves "vastly superior to the ordinary run of negroes, the aristocracy of the race." Ben Horry regarded his mother as "up so high" because she was a nurse to the white children. Ex-slave Mariah Heywood, according to Chandler, felt herself to be of a higher status because she was a house servant who identified closely with her master's family. "The fact that she was raised by aristocrats," Chandler wrote, "shows plainly in her dealings with both races." Elizabeth Allston Pringle, on the other hand, contended that "Negroes are by nature aristocrats, and have the keenest appreciation and perception of what constitutes a gentleman."[127]

House servants generally had lighter work than field hands on the rice plantations of All Saints Parish. Their closer contact with the master and mistress, however, had both advantages and disadvantages. They typically obtained better and more clothing and food, often from the master's own table. The Reverend James L. Belin specified in his will his desire that the inheritors of his house servants furnish them daily with "a plentiful supply of such food as they eat themselves; for my servants have been accustomed to such as my table afforded." Similarly, their housing, located between the street of the field hands and the Big House, was often superior to that furnished other slaves. Their relationships with the whites were more amiable, and house servants as well as skilled slaves were taken along on trips with the master or mistress. The closer relationship with the master and his family, or, as Ben Horry put it, the fact that "just the house servant get Marse Josh' and Miss Bess' ear" enabled some house servants to move to more favored positions on the staff than field hands could.[128]

Despite the advantages that accrued to house servants because of their closer association with the master's family, however, these servants were more constrained to behave as their masters wished them to behave, in contrast with field hands who managed to make even work activities occasions for socializing and had more occasions to socialize away from the

watchful eyes of the masters and overseers. Field hands could work for themselves or relax on weekends, evenings after tasks were completed, and holidays. House servants, by contrast, were on constant call and had to take turns working on holidays. An extreme example was the situation of women house servants, who were sometimes overpowered and raped by a master or the master's son while the mistress was not at home. Ben Horry described one case: "Susan was a house women," he told Chandler. "To my knowledge she had three white chillun. Not WANT 'em HAB 'em. Women overpowered." Although their tasks were more arduous and their tangible rewards more meager, field hands nevertheless had some advantages denied house servants.[129]

No great gulf separated house slaves from field hands or other slaves, although it is true that a strong undercurrent of hostility toward house servants by other slaves is evident in black oral tradition. House servants were sometimes regarded as traitors by other slaves because of their more amiable relationships with the whites. In fact, however, house servants seem to have been runaways to a larger degree than field hands, perhaps largely because of greater opportunities. For instance, Plowden Weston's young gunkeeper, Frank, escaped in 1862, when Union gunboats were cruising the Waccamaw. And Adele Allston entertained suspicions of her "highly favored servant" Mary in 1864. Not only had Mary's sons Thomas and Scotland run off, but also her daughter and her family and her brother Tom the carpenter and all his family. Mrs. Allston considered that "too many instances in her family for me to suppose she is ignorant of their plans and designs." She felt that Mary should not be allowed to remain in her position "in charge of the house with the keys, etc. unless she can prove her innocence."[130]

The expectation of group loyalty and solidarity seems to be part of the culture of institutions in which the group is essentially isolated from the broader society and has to live and work within a more-or-less controlled daily round. Those who appear to defy or disregard that expected solidarity may become the objects of extreme hostility on the part of the others.

Real group loyalty is rarely more than tenuous in such situations, however, as each individual pursues personal strategies of adaptation. On the Waccamaw rice plantations it would seem more appropriate to think in terms of degrees of solidarity as one attempts to understand the many ways in which slaves deftly blended accommodation and resistance as a means of putting up with what they had to put up with and of getting out of what they could get out of. Nowhere were these twin forms of the adaptive process more subtly tested than in the Big House, with its interracial interdependence, attachments, and hostilities, its ironic affections and hatreds. The highly ambiguous situation of the house servants made it possible for them to occupy a special position between the street and the Big House and to play an intermediary role in the creolization of each. House servants took elements of black culture into the culinary, religious, and folkloristic patterns of the Big House and brought elements of white culture to the street. It was through the house servants that black southerners derived much of their European heritage, and white southerners derived much of their African heritage.[131]

12

Not all slaves worked on their masters' plantations. Some slaves, especially those with exceptional skills, hired out to work on other plantations, on the docks, or in hotels or stables in nearby Georgetown. Masters normally arranged for the hiring of field hands and domestics, but skilled carpenters, craftsmen, and others often made arrangements for themselves. While slaves who hired out had to hand over to their masters a certain portion of their earnings—often the major portion—they otherwise lived more or less outside a masters' jurisdiction for the duration of the job.[132]

Scipio, a slave who hired his time as a teamster, carriage driver, and porter in Georgetown, captured the imagination of a New York visitor. James Roberts Gilmore made Scipio a central figure in his pseudonymously published *Among the Pines*:

> He was a genuine native African, and a most original and genuine specimen of his race. His thin, close-cut lips, straight nose and European features contrasted strangely with a skin of ebony blackness, and the quiet, simple dignity of his manner betokened superior intelligence. When a boy, he was with his mother, kidnapped by a hostile tribe, and sold to the traders at Cape Lopez, on the western coast of Africa. There, in the slave-pen, the mother died, and he, a child of seven years, was sent in the slave ship to Cuba. At Havana, when sixteen, he attracted the notice of a gentleman residing in Charleston, who bought him and took him to "the states." He lived as house-servant in the family of this gentleman till 1855, when his master died, leaving him a legacy to a daughter. This lady, a kind, indulgent mistress, had since allowed him to "hire his time," and he then carried on an "independent business," as porter, and doer of all work around the wharves and streets of Georgetown. He thus gained a comfortable living, besides paying to his mistress one hundred and fifty dollars yearly for the privilege of earning his own support.[133]

Slave carpenters were especially in demand. James Sparkman hired a carpenter from Benjamin Dunkin on a nearly regular basis. Henry, a carpenter on Ralph Nesbit's Caledonia plantation, was hired by All Saints Church, Waccamaw, for carpentry work on the church. William Oliver's father, Caesar Oliver, hired out at some point in his career. "Hire they self out as stevedore—anything they could—and pay massa so much for the time," William Oliver recalled. "Smart slave do that. Oh, yes, my father do that." Robert F. W. Allston sometimes hired as many as twenty carpenters to work on the rice mill at Waverly plantation.[134]

The South Carolina General Assembly in 1845 made it unlawful for a master to let slaves hire out, but the law was never enforced and was widely flouted. Newspapers openly advertised slave hirings, as for example the following from the *Winyah Intelligencer* in Georgetown:

> Field negroes to hire. The subscriber will hire, before the Market House, at auction, on Monday the third of January next, if

fair, and if not, the first fair day after, between twenty and thirty field hands, with their families.

Persons who hire will be required to give notes with approved personal security, and to furnish each negro with a suit of summer and winter clothes, and each of the laboring negroes a pair of shoes.[135]

During the Civil War the Confederate government hired slaves, by conscription, from Robert F. W. Allston, his son Benjamin, Charles Alston, John Magill, Ralph Nesbit, Martha Pyatt, Joshua John Ward's sons Maham and Benjamin, and Plowden C. J. Weston, among other Waccamaw planters. One of the slaves hired from Mrs. Pyatt was her carpenter Welcome Beese, who was sent to work on fortifications and to help build artillery batteries at Little River on the northern end of the Waccamaw Neck, at Florence about seventy miles inland, and at Charleston.[136]

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Thus the slaves of All Saints Parish worked—as field hands or yard workers, as drivers or occasionally overseers, as skilled artisans, boatmen, coachmen, nurses, cooks, or house servants—and took pride in their achievements. On one level, at least, they certainly responded favorably to their masters' incentives. They claimed the rewards for highly developed skills and for perfect work attendance, and they produced enormous crops of rice. They responded more favorably to positive incentives than to punishments, as evidenced by their lower productivity at Richmond Hill, the seat of the most notoriously cruel of All Saints masters. To say, however, that the slaves were generally productive and proud, and to say that they did not routinely malinger or deliberately mishandle tools and livestock, is not to say that they had internalized the values of their masters. When opportunities for escape were few and chances for success were slim, the slaves of All Saints Parish were cooperative and productive. When the pressure of Union gunboats on the Waccamaw after 1862 vastly increased the possibilities of a successful escape, they deserted in droves.

Slave work patterns on the Waccamaw illustrate a particularly interesting example of cultural creolization. There was certainly strong continuity with African work patterns in both field work and in skilled crafts; however, slaves responded positively to incentives to learn new skills from the whites and even from the Indians. Furthermore, the imposition of African communal work behavior on the masters' individualistic task system illustrates an even more striking adaptation of elements of African culture to a very different environment. The status distinctions made by the masters, which set managerial slaves, skilled craftsmen, and house servants apart from field hands were observed by many slaves as well. Nevertheless, there was a strong sense of solidarity among the slave community, in which ditchman married weaver and butler married field hand. Rice plantation slaves were neither Sambos nor Horatio Algers. If they were efficient workers *within* the system of paternalism, they were also effective workers *of* the system, and they knew how to work it for their own ends. How efficiently the slaves worked within the system to produce rice is illustrated by examining the total number of slaves on the various plantations from Table 1 and the output they produced (both in terms of acres cultivated and the pounds of rice obtained) from Table 2. How effectively the slaves worked the system to require the masters to provide them more time for their own purposes—and what they did with that time—will be examined in the following chapters.