

African American Status and Identity in a Postbellum Community:

An Analysis of the Manuscript Census Returns

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African American communities of the post-Civil War South were marked by complex distinctions of status based on land tenure and occupation. The agricultural ladder of success ranged from landowners at the top, to renters, sharecroppers, and finally agricultural laborers. Since African Americans as a group were kept on the bottom rung of the whole social structure, historians have tended to overlook distinctions among them. If historians discussed rural blacks of the Reconstruction era at all, they tended to view them as an undifferentiated mass of agricultural workers or, at best, as tenant farmers. This oversight has hindered historians' understanding of the time span in which tenantry was established. Furthermore, it has obscured the political struggles that existed between freedmen and whites in the postwar period, including white attempts to manipulate black land tenure through legislation, bureaucratic action, economic pressure, and terror, and African American attempts to negotiate fair labor practices.¹

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1. Historians and economists who have portrayed Reconstruction-era African Americans as tenant farmers include Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South* (New York: BasicBooks, 1986); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984); Jay R. Mandle, *The Roots of Black Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978); and Jonathan M. Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

In assessing Reconstruction, scholars have too often looked at national politics or, at best, at statehouses. Instead, historians need to measure the impact of Reconstruction on people at the local level, in the day-to-day changes over time, to see how politics influenced their daily lives for better or worse.²

This paper carefully examines, through analysis of census data, the economic successes of African Americans on the local level during Reconstruction. The paper shows that part of the reason that the more successful former slaves could climb the agricultural ladder from the hired-labor rung to the sharecropping/tenancy rung during the 1870s was due to politics working in tandem with economics. This local study allows an examination close enough to differentiate two distinct political phases. During one phase, African Americans held tremendous political power and economic independence was possible. Tenantry meant autonomy. During the second phase, when whites again seized political control, economic gains became less substantive. African Americans could still climb the economic ladder up to tenantry, but tenantry no longer necessarily meant autonomy.

A study of the changes in the economic status of African Americans in Edgefield District, South Carolina, concludes with the realization that Reconstruction was successful from 1868 to 1876. During Reconstruction, in-

2. "Perhaps the remarkable thing about Reconstruction was not that it failed, but that it was attempted at all and survived as long as it did," Eric Foner wrote in *Reconstruction*, while acknowledging "one can, I think, imagine alternative scenarios and modest successes." Thus, even Eric Foner in his monumental revisionist study of Reconstruction retreated from earlier, more positive, assessments about Reconstruction, to ultimately settle for defending the goals of Reconstruction. Like scholars before him, Foner finally suggested that Reconstruction could not have worked given the assumptions of the mid-nineteenth century. Foner had earlier adhered to the school of thought that the failure of the federal government to provide lands for the freedmen was the major flaw of Reconstruction strategy. I am very much in sympathy with this now somewhat dated 1960s argument. However, even these scholars have looked at the post-Reconstruction period and argued backwards. We need to reassess the situation from the local perspective. See especially LaWanda Cox, "The Promise of Land for the Freedmen," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45 (December 1958): 413-40; LaWanda Cox and John H. Cox, *Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865-1866: Dilemma of Reconstruction America* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Staughton Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964); William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). On the land question, see Herman Belz, "The New Orthodoxy in Reconstruction Historiography," *Reviews in American History* 1 (March 1973): 106-13.

creasing numbers of African Americans forged identities as farm tenants and operators, and negotiations about labor disputes were settled fairly by locally elected boards. But that very accomplishment brought about the political mobilization of the white minority who used every device in its power to overthrow the level playing field. Nevertheless the negotiations and the compromises worked out among the people of Edgefield after the Civil War succeeded for a time.³

By using the federal *Population and Agricultural Manuscript Census Returns* (hereafter *MCR*) for 1870 and 1880 (see Methodological Appendix), this paper examines African American occupations and economic structures in Edgefield District, in the heavy cotton-producing belt of South Carolina, and in the village of Edgefield, the county seat and modest commercial hub of this predominantly rural area. Details in these census records reveal tenantry patterns. Also, census labels for farm occupation and operation along with demographic and economic information from linked population and agricultural schedules of the decade provide an image of rural African American identity within the prevalent racial and class system of the time.

In Edgefield District following the Civil War, most African Americans could find work only as wage laborers. Early in the postwar period, white community leaders tried to prevent white landowners from renting land to African Americans so that black laborers were forced to work either for wages or for a share of the crop. In December 1865, William Henry Trescott, South Carolina's special lobbyist in Washington, wrote to Governor James L. Orr, "You will find that this question of the control of labor underlies every other question of state interest." Shortly thereafter the editor of the local paper announced that if Congress disallowed the proposed state black codes "compelling the negro to labor," the "alternative is to keep the negro from becoming a landholder." The editor called for a "tax of one to five thousand dollars upon every white man who sells, or *rents*, [emphasis added] gives, loans, or any way conveys, to a negro, any tract, parcel, or message of land" and urged whites to contract in writing to "pay to said negro a specified sum." The purpose of such laws was to "force [African Americans]

3. For a description of Edgefield County, see Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield County, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

to hire themselves to some white man, they must then labor or starve.”⁴

In reaction to the successful election of African Americans and other Republicans to state and local offices in 1868 and 1870, the white minority formed Agricultural and Police Clubs in every township in Edgefield District. Each club adopted the rules presented at a mass meeting of whites at the courthouse. All members agreed not to sell land to African Americans. Furthermore, the rules of the club forbade renting land to African Americans, whether for money or part of the crop. White landowners were to hire African Americans either for wages or for a share of the crop. The meeting took place on Sales Day, 8 December 1870, and that date is significant. The popular notion of Reconstruction suggests that most African Americans were on family tenant farms by the end of 1870. In reality, at this time white landowners are contracting with each other not to rent land to African Americans.⁵

Traditionally historians and economists have explained the development of tenantry as the fragmentation of the plantation system, whereby large tracts of land were broken up during Reconstruction and parceled out in small holdings among white and black farmers. This was not so easily done. The process took years of experimentation and struggle. In the years immediately after the Civil War, white planters tried to hire black laborers and to work them in gangs as under slavery. However, African American laborers rebelled against the gang labor system. The goals of the two groups were at loggerheads. The economic goal of the African American community was landownership and its accompanying financial independence. The goal of the white community was cheap labor dependent on landowners for jobs. The crucial issue was control: who would control the labor, the laborer or the landowner. The freedmen, preferring independent landownership, were willing to compromise and become tenants for an agreed upon rent. Plantation owners, preferring to re-enslave the African American workers, were willing to seek a more attainable option, agreeing to pay wages or a share

4. William Henry Trescott to Governor James L. Orr, 13 December 1865, Governor James L. Orr Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia (hereafter SCDAH); *Edgefield Advertiser*, 8 November 1865.

5. *Edgefield Advertiser*, 3 and 10 November 1870; Vernon Burton, “Race and Reconstruction,” *Journal of Social History* 12 (Fall 1978): 35–37.

of the crop for labor. But these mutual concessions were only the beginning.

Amidst negotiation and compromise, white landowners gravitated to sharecropping and tenantry, which had existed before the Civil War. African Americans released from slavery considered farm tenancy a step up. Tenantry allowed people without capital to gain access to land and work it as a family farm. As tenants, African Americans had some control of the land and their own lives. They could pursue the Jeffersonian ideal of the independent yeoman. They could nurture their strong desire for land ownership. While this consensus is generally correct, it omits the crucial role that politics played in the development of tenantry. Moreover, the received wisdom on the development of tenantry gives the false impression that by 1880 tenantry was widespread and that almost all African American households were families of tenant farmers. However, careful study of the manuscript census returns reveals that, while the number of African American family tenant farmers increased dramatically, in fact, less than half of all black household heads operated a farm as late as 1880. Typical African American households were still dependent on whites for wage labor income and were not operating farms as either renters or sharecroppers.⁶

Those African Americans who were fortunate enough to be landowners were a small elite in the black community. Ownership of land had a special significance for freedmen in this southern land-oriented community. Land meant a tangible home. Within a community whose rulers depicted blacks as Africans and not as Americans or southerners, land was a key to citizenship and acceptance. In 1850 in Edgefield District, three African Americans (out of 285 free African Americans, 48 household heads, or 6 percent) owned land. In 1860 thirteen did (out of 173 free blacks, 32 household heads, almost 41 percent). Five years later, when free African Americans numbered 25,417 (4,873 household heads) only 81 (1.7

6. James R. Irwin, "Farmers and Laborers: A Note on Black Occupations in the Postbellum South," *Agricultural History* 64 (Winter 1990): 53–60; Robert Tracy McKenzie, in *One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil-War Era Tennessee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123–41, found this same pattern for Tennessee. McKenzie characterizes a "standard scenario" among historians who suggest that "by 1880, if not much sooner, the great majority of former masters, whether graciously or grudgingly, had adopted a labor system in which black families cultivated particular plots as sharecroppers or tenants rather than working for cash or share wages under central direction" (134).

percent) owned any land; their landownership was virtually nonexistent.⁷

For a quantitative analysis of the population and agricultural manuscript census returns, the remainder of this essay uses the core community of townships surrounding Edgefield courthouse (see Methodological Appendix). Of all African Americans in the 1870 Edgefield core community, only thirty-two household heads reported real estate in the *Population MCR*. Of these thirty-two landowners, twenty-six owned farms they operated. This 2.4 percent of the 1,094 African American household heads in the 1870 Edgefield core community compares to 52.2 percent of the 467 white household heads who owned and operated farms. An additional 3 percent of black household heads in the 1870 Edgefield core community were tenants, either renters or sharecroppers. The overwhelming majority of African Americans were not operating farms either as owners or tenants, but worked for wages.⁸

Most freedmen recorded neither personal nor real property, yet social distinctions of occupational groupings existed. Table 1 groups into eight categories all the occupations for African American household heads in the 1870 core community, and the demographic data from the *Population MCR* reveals a hierarchical structure. “Farmers” were second in wealth only to the small group of three professionals. Farmers were, on the average, ten years older than “Farm Laborers,” the other agricultural occupation recognized by the census. Farmer households tended to be larger, probably because farmers were older than farm laborers and also because farmers needed more people and could afford to support more people to work the farms.⁹

7. Two 1860 black landowners were not household heads; only 1.7 percent of African American household heads owned any land compared to 54.4 percent of the 3,419 white household heads.

8. Three Edgefield core community African Americans who were not household heads were operating farms they did not own in the 1870 *Agricultural MCR*. Their occupations listed in the *Population MCR* are “Farmer,” “Farm Laborer,” and “Keeping House.”

9. Lawrence Stone, “Social Mobility in England, 1500–1700,” *Past and Present* 33 (April 1966): 16–55, suggests a useful model for rural societies. Stone’s model is implied in this paper and fully developed in Burton, *In My Father’s House* and in Orville Vernon Burton, “Ungrateful Servants? Edgefield’s Black Reconstruction: Part 1 of the Total History of Edgefield County, South Carolina” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976), 194–293. Occupational groupings are given for 1870 and 1880 on 151, 217, 408, 409. See Appendix table A to compare the core community groupings with the occupational grouping of all white and black household heads in 1870 and 1880 Edgefield County.

Table 1. 1870 African American Household Heads (HH) Categorized By Occupation

<i>Occupational grouping</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>% all HH</i>	<i>% male</i>	<i>Mean age</i>	<i>Mean + blacks/ family</i>	<i>% of group w/o personal estate</i>	<i>Mean personal eateate for HH w/more than 0</i>	<i>% of group w/o real estate</i>	<i>Mean real estate for HH w/more than 0</i>	<i># operating a farm</i>	<i>% of group operating a farm</i>	<i>% of group literate</i>
Farmer	40	3.7	100.0	47.6	6.6	32.5	\$197.96	45.0	\$415.00	33	82.5	17.5
Laborer	930	85.0	94.3	37.5	5.3	96.2	82.63	99.6	137.50	19	2.0	4.1
Professional	3	0.3	100.0	46.7	3.3	0	233.33	33.3	950.00	1	33.3	100.0
Artisan	37	3.4	100.0	41.7	6.0	62.2	146.79	94.6	430.00	5	13.5	43.2
Domestic	24	2.2	12.5	36.8	3.8	100.0	—	100.0	—	0	0	8.3
Keeping house	52	4.8	—	42.0	4.4	96.2	350.00	96.2	900.00	1	1.9	1.9
Law officer	4	0.4	100.0	28.5	6.5*	100.0	—	75.0	150.00	0	50.0	50.0
Other	4	0.4	7.5	34.0	2.8	100.0	—	100.0	—	0	0	0
Totals	1,094	100.0	88.4	38.2	5.3	92.6	\$187.55	97.1	\$449.69	59	5.4	6.3

*This is misleading since thirteen state guards lived in one household.

SOURCE: 1870 Edgefield Core Community Data.

Thirty-three of these forty Farmers were listed as farm operators in the *Agricultural MCR*, and twenty-two of them owned their own land. Eleven Farmer household heads were tenants. They were clearly the most independent of the tenants and grew a wide variety of crops, including cotton and grains for market and vegetables for home use. Two Farmer tenants hired other laborers for part of the farming year (see table 2).

Farm Laborer was the lowest status agricultural occupation. Ninety-one percent of African American male household heads (and 42 percent of female household heads) were Farm Laborers. In almost every household

Table 2. 1870 African American Household Head (HH) Tenants Operating Farms They Did Not Own, Categorized by Occupation

	<i>Farmers</i> (<i>N</i> = 11)		<i>Farm Laborers</i> (<i>N</i> = 17)		<i>Artisans</i> (<i>N</i> = 5)		<i>Totals</i> (<i>N</i> = 33)	
# blacks	7.1	(2.8)	6.9	(2.6)	6.9	(2.9)	6.9	(2.9)
Age	45.1	(14.4)	41.8	(8.2)	37.4	(9.0)	42.2	(10.0)
\$ per. est.	155.91	(78.4)	130.88	(80.3)	135.85	(65.2)	139.85	(76.2)
# school child.	0.5	(1.3)	0.3	(0.3)	-	-	0.3	(0.8)
Imprv. acr.	43.1	(19.1)	-	-	-	-	14.3	(23.2)
Unimprv. acr.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
\$ farm	318.18	(130.9)	-	-	-	-	106.06	(169.0)
\$ tools	16.82	(11.0)	2.1	(4.3)	-	-	6.67	(10.0)
\$ anmls.	155.36	(70.0)	133.18	(42.7)	96.0	(93.8)	134.94	(62.6)
\$ wage paid	28.63	(68.7)	-	-	-	-	9.5	(40.8)
\$ prod.	326.27	(204.8)	75.71	(44.0)	59.0	(49.2)	156.70	(171.0)
\$ home prod.	17.3	(13.8)	5.18	(8.8)	-	-	8.4	(11.9)
\$ anmls. kill.	28.54	(21.6)	5.88	(12.3)	-	-	12.54	(18.9)
# work anmls.	1.4	(0.7)	1.3	(0.7)	0.8	(0.8)	1.3	(0.7)
# cows	4.0	(3.4)	1.6	(1.1)	1.4	(2.6)	2.3	(2.5)
Lbs. butter	56.8	(52.5)	18.2	(34.8)	-	-	28.3	(49.9)
# swine	7.0	(5.4)	3.6	(3.4)	5.4	(5.7)	5.0	(4.6)
Bu. wheat	13.8	(17.6)	-	-	-	-	4.6	(11.8)
Bu. corn	98.4	(86.9)	-	-	-	-	32.8	(67.6)
Bu. oats	40.4	(41.6)	-	-	-	-	13.5	(30.2)
Bales cotton	1.2	(0.7)	-	-	-	-	0.4	(0.7)
Bu. beans	0.3	(0.9)	-	-	-	-	0.09	(0.5)
Bu. potatoes	6.6	(8.5)	1.7	(5.1)	-	-	3.1	(6.5)
% male	100		100		100		100	
% literate	18.2		17.6		40		21.2	

SOURCE: 1870 Edgefield Core Community Data.

African American males over the age of ten who were not domestic servants or students were Farm Laborers. Many African American children and women residing in another's household recorded their occupation as Farm Laborer. Thus, the overwhelming number of African American household heads were ranked occupationally at the same level as almost any black child.

Yet differences existed even among the members of this lowest class. Two persons labeled Farm Laborers in the *Population MCR* owned the farms they operated and demographically resembled Farmers more than Farm Laborers. Another seventeen Farm Laborers were listed as tenants in the *Agricultural MCR*. These persons represented an intermediate group. Thirteen of them owned draft animals, like Farmers, but only three of them owned farming implements, whereas all of the tenants who were Farmers owned their own tools. Farm Laborers generally had fewer hogs and cattle than did Farmers. None of the Farm Laborers listed improved acreage; presumably the acreage was listed with the farm owner's plantation. No tenants—Farm Laborers or Farmers—had unimproved acreage, which provided game, fence and fire wood, and pasture, all of which was important for the operation of an efficient farm.

Only two Farm Laborer tenants itemized any farm produce—one recorded ten bushels of potatoes and the other, nineteen—but many reported a small total value in dollars of farm produce. This produce often represented commercial crops that were itemized in the census records of the landowner: Farm Laborer tenants were often controlled very closely by the landowner and required to plant the crops the landowner specified. Farmer tenants recorded their produce under their own names, another sign that they possessed a greater degree of independence and autonomy in their work arrangements than Farm Laborers and that the occupation of Farmer carried a degree of prestige.

There was a substantial and practical difference between renting land and paying with part of the crop versus receiving part of the crop as a wage, which was understood by both landowners and workers. This distinction between paying rent and sharecropping is important. A renting tenant had more control over his own time and activities. The sharecropper,

unlike the renter, had little control over what crops were planted or how they were sold.¹⁰

Nevertheless, since the vast majority of Edgefield freedmen neither owned nor rented land and owned very little personal property, tenantry, including sharecropping, was actually a relatively privileged position. African American renters and sharecroppers may have been tied to the land and to the landowners who supplied them, but they were economically and socially better off than the agricultural laborers, who were dependent upon either landowners or tenants for daily or seasonal employment. Tenantry did not emancipate African Americans from the control of other men, but it did provide them with a means of less dependent economic existence.

In the years following the 1870 census, Republicans in federal, state, and especially local government took a number of steps to break up the antebellum plantation system. The most important government agency for land distribution was the South Carolina Land Commission, whose charge was to buy land and sell it in farm-size plots at reasonable rates to landless people. Another major Republican program was to shift the state and county tax bases to break up large estates. The Land Commission and the state and local tax measures were complementary programs to help freedmen buy land.¹¹

Another important, though less dramatic, change in the law gave land-

10. Burton, "Race and Reconstruction," 32–56; *Edgefield Advertiser*, 3 and 10 November 1870; J. C. A. Stagg, "The Problem of Klan Violence: The South Carolina Up-Country, 1868–1871," *Journal of American Studies* 8 (December 1974): 309; Thomas J. Edwards, "The Tenant System and Some Changes Since Emancipation," in *The Negro's Progress in Fifty Years*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (September 1913): 38–46; John Richard Dennett, *The South As It Is: 1865–1866*, ed. Henry M. Christman (London: Sidgwick & Johnson, 1965), 256–62.

11. Burton, "Race and Reconstruction"; Carol K. Rothrock Bleser, *The Promised Land: The History of the South Carolina Land Commission, 1869–1890* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969); Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *Promiseland: A Century of Life in a Negro Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861–1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 144–48, 149, 158–59, 173, 312, 358, 457; Francis Butler Simkins and Robert Hilliard Woody, *South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 178, 180. In addition to the state property tax, there was a county property tax administered by local Republicans. *Edgefield Advertiser*, 3 February and 15 December 1870, 9 March and 6 April 1871, 6 and 13 June 1872.

less African Americans greater control over their own labor and over the crops they raised on someone else's land. A state law strengthened the laborer's claim to the crop and his bargaining power with the landowner. The worker was given the first lien on the crop, and landowners were prohibited from prosecuting laborers for unperformed tasks not specified in a written contract. Moreover, laborers could, without cost, prosecute landowners by a simple appeal to county officials who were elected by popular vote under home rule established by Republicans. Trial justices became especially important to laborers and tenants because they had jurisdiction in cases involving penalties or judgments of one hundred dollars or less. African Americans began to receive equal treatment in disputes as increasing numbers of African Americans became trial justices and filled other local offices. The tenant became more nearly autonomous in law and steadily gained control of land and labor. However, most whites did not appreciate this change; in 1872 the *Edgefield Advertiser* claimed that no white landowner could get a "fair" hearing.¹²

The 1880 *MCR* shows far more freedmen, although still a minority, operating farms than in 1870. Table 3 groups the 1880 occupations listed for African Americans. Demographic data listed in 1880 shows a more distinct hierarchical occupational structure than that in the 1870 *Population MCR*. Occupational labels lent a special identity to African Americans. Moreover, the various distinctions among farm operators reveal an agricultural ladder whereby rural African Americans could achieve occupational and social mobility.

In 1880, core community African Americans operated 706 (65.7 percent) of the 1,074 farms listed in the *Agricultural MCR* as compared to 16.1 percent of the 385 farms in 1870. All but twenty-one of the 1880

12. Burton, "Race and Reconstruction"; *Edgefield Advertiser*, 13 January 1870 and 13 June 1872; South Carolina, *Revised Statutes of the State of South Carolina* (1873); Williamson, *After Slavery*, 113, 114, 172, 329–30; George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes 1877–1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 108–11; Stagg, "The Problem of Klan Violence," 313. For a suggestive comparison of the use of factory legislation in industrialized nations, see Reinhard Bendix, *Work and Authority in Industry: Ideologies of Management in the Course of Industrialization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 8. Simkins and Woody, *South Carolina Reconstruction*, 101–2; Works Progress Administration, "Edgefield" (unpublished typed manuscript, n.d.), SCDAH.

Table 3. 1880 African American Households Heads (HH)
Grouped Occupationally

<i>Occupational grouping</i>	<i>% of all HH</i>	<i>% male</i>	<i>Mean # blacks/family</i>	<i>Mean age</i>	<i>% literate</i>	<i>Mean # of children in school</i>	<i>Number</i>
Farmer	42.4	97.5	6.0	41.3	14.8	0.53	710
Laborer	46.0	87.9	3.8	33.5	10.9	0.16	770
Professional	0.4	100.0	6.7	43.7	100.0	1.67	6
Artisan	2.2	100.0	6.2	42.2	37.8	0.46	37
Domestic	5.2	10.3	3.3	39.4	10.3	0.17	87
Keeping house	2.5	0.0	4.4	49.1	9.5	0.4	42
Other	1.2	71.4	3.0	53.5	23.8	0.1	21
Mail carrier	0.1	100.0	7.0	30.0	0.0	1.0	1
Totals	100.0	85.8	4.8	38.0	13.6	0.34	1,674

SOURCE: 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

African American farm operators were household heads. Overall, in 1880 roughly four out of every ten African American household heads were farm operators. All evidence from the *Agricultural and Population MCR* demonstrates the higher economic position of black farm operators over other African Americans. Table 4 groups African American household heads who are not operating farms according to the occupation listed for them in the *Population MCR*, and table 5 does the same for the black household heads who did operate farms. If the overall means for each group are compared, farm operators for every occupational group ranked higher than the others in age, percentage of male-headed households, literacy rates, likelihood of having children in school, and size of households.

The operation of a farm contributed in a number of ways to the well-being of a household. As table 5 shows, the average farm operator produced, in addition to cotton, a substantial amount of food for his family: each farm had an average of slightly more than 2 head of cattle, 3 hogs, and 9 chickens, and produced 20.2 pounds of butter and 23 dozen eggs a year. The *Agricultural MCR* also reveals plantings of food crops, especially corn but also wheat, oats, beans, and potatoes. Turnip greens, onions, tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, and collards were produced but not reported in the *Agricultural MCR*. Farm operators were frequently able to hire African Amer-

Table 4. 1880 African American Household Heads Not Operating a Farm
Categorized by Occupation

	<i>Mean # blacks (SD)</i>	<i>% male</i>	<i>Mean age (SD)</i>	<i>% literate</i>	<i>Mean # children in school</i>
Farmer N = 75	5.2 (2.7)	100.0	39.2 (15.0)	14.7	0.4 (1.0)
Laborer N = 731	3.7 (2.2)	87.3	33.4 (13.9)	10.9	0.2 (0.5)
Professional N = 3	8.0 (4.0)	100.0	39.7 (23.1)	100.0	1.0 (1.7)
Artisan N = 31	4.8 (2.8)	100.0	42.4 (14.2)	35.5	0.4 (0.7)
Domestic N = 87	3.3 (2.2)	10.3	39.4 (15.5)	10.3	0.2 (0.5)
Keeping house N = 40	4.4 (2.5)	0.0	49.1 (14.2)	10.0	0.4 (0.8)
Other N = 21	3.0 (1.8)	71.4	53.5 (25.4)	23.8	0.05 (0.2)
Mail carrier N = 1	7.0 (0.0)	100.0	30.0 (0.0)	0.0	1.0 (0.0)
Totals N = 989	3.9 (2.3)	78.1	35.7 (15.1)	12.4	0.2 (0.6)

SOURCE: 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

icans from outside their households to work on farms at times of peak labor demand. A few black farm operators even hired some white laborers. The two African American women household heads whose occupations were “Keeping House,” and who successfully operated farms (see table 5, which shows they have the highest cotton production of any occupational grouping), had been free, landowning African Americans before the Civil War. Their children and hired laborers worked the farm for them.¹³

13. Figures adjusted for farm operators who are not reporting produce or not growing certain crops are found in Burton, “Ungrateful Servants,” 194–293. *Edgefield Advertiser*, 3 December 1867, 26 May, 9 June, 27 October, and 10 November 1870, 31 July and 14 September 1871, 25 July 1872.

**Table 5. 1880 African American Household Heads
Who Are Farm Operators**

<i>Variables and standard deviations (SD)</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Laborer</i>	<i>Profes- sional</i>	<i>Artisan</i>	<i>Keeping house</i>	<i>Totals</i>
# blacks	6.1	5.4	5.3	7.0	5.0	6.1
(SD)	(2.7)	(2.3)	(2.8)	(3.8)	(2.8)	(2.7)
% males	97.2	100	100	100	0.0	97.1
Age	41.6	36.3	47.7	41.2	48.0	41.3
(SD)	(13.2)	(12.3)	(15.4)	(2.6)	(17.0)	(13.2)
% literate	14.8	10.3	100	50.0	0.0	15.2
Children	0.54	0.38	2.3	1.0	0.5	0.5
in school	(1.1)	(0.7)	(2.1)	(1.7)	(0.7)	(1.1)
Acreage	29.2	22.7	22.7	15.0	25.0	29.0
improved	(21.7)	(15.9)	(10.8)	(12.8)	(21.2)	(21.3)
Unimproved	9.2	2.4	4.0	4.2	0	8.7
acreage	(42.7)	(10.1)	(3.5)	(6.6)	0	(41.2)
\$ farm	235	247	300	268	100	236
(SD)	(343)	(209)	(100)	(604)	(141)	(338)
\$ tools	11.6	19.5	7.3	4.5	10.0	12.0
(SD)	(20.3)	(22.2)	(2.3)	(3.4)	(0.0)	(20.3)
\$ livestock	69	85	78	99	13	70
(SD)	(72)	(69)	(43)	(71)	(18)	(72)
\$ fences	9.4	10.4	7.7	6.7	5.0	9.4
(SD)	(11.6)	(17.0)	(2.5)	(6.1)	(7.1)	(11.9)
\$ fertilizers	15.3	13.5	8.3	1.7	5.0	15.1
(SD)	(22.9)	(15.1)	(7.6)	(4.1)	(7.1)	(22.4)
\$ wages paid	10.0	4.9	0	16.7	7.5	9.7
(SD)	(43.7)	(8.4)	0	(40.8)	(10.6)	(42.3)
# weeks hired	2.6	2.6	0	0	2.5	2.5
(SD)	(9.0)	(6.7)	0	0	(3.5)	(8.8)
\$ farm produce	304	311	231	155	250	303
(SD)	(239)	(174)	(78)	(153)	(71)	(234)
# work animals	1.0	1.2	2.0	0.7	0.5	1.0
(SD)	(1.0)	(0.8)	(1.7)	(0.5)	(0.7)	(1.0)
# cattle	2.2	2.5	3.0	1.0	0	2.2
(SD)	(2.6)	(2.4)	(1.0)	(1.1)	0	(2.5)
Lbs. butter	20.3	21.3	29.3	2.0	0	20.2
(SD)	(35.6)	(18.9)	(10.1)	(4.9)	0	(34.7)
# swine	3.2	4.4	5.7	3.7	1.0	3.3
(SD)	(3.6)	(5.0)	(4.5)	(2.7)	(1.4)	(3.7)
# chickens	9.2	9.6	16.3	5.3	7.5	9.2
(SD)	(7.3)	(9.5)	(7.1)	(7.9)	(10.6)	(7.5)
Doz. eggs	23.1	21.7	41.7	14.3	5.0	23.0
(SD)	(25.5)	(22.4)	(29.3)	(20.1)	(7.1)	(25.3)

Table 5. Continued

<i>Variables and standard deviations (SD)</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Laborer</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Artisan</i>	<i>Keeping house</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Bu. wheat	5.6	8.7	10.0	10.5	30.0	5.9
(SD)	(11.5)	(14.4)	(10.0)	(25.7)	(35.4)	(12.0)
Bu. corn	67.4	70.3	43.3	35.3	62.5	67.2
(SD)	(58.2)	(58.6)	(25.2)	(41.9)	(17.7)	(57.9)
Acres corn	9.7	8.3	5.3	6.3	12.5	9.6
(SD)	(6.7)	(6.1)	(1.5)	(6.1)	(3.5)	(6.7)
Bu. oats	16.1	32.3	6.7	5.8	65.0	17.1
(SD)	(39.6)	(69.2)	(5.8)	(12.0)	(49.5)	(41.8)
Acres oats	2.0	8.7	1.7	0.8	13.5	2.1
(SD)	(3.8)	(5.2)	(2.1)	(1.3)	(16.3)	(4.0)
Bales cotton	5.2	4.1	3.0	3.1	5.5	5.2
(SD)	(4.5)	(3.0)	(1.0)	(3.6)	(2.1)	(4.4)
Acres cotton	15.2	12.7	8.3	11.7	32.5	15.0
(SD)	(10.5)	(7.6)	(1.5)	(8.9)	(24.7)	(10.4)
Bu. beans	2.4	2.3	3.3	0.5	10.0	2.4
(SD)	(5.5)	(5.0)	(4.2)	(1.2)	(14.1)	(5.5)
Bu. potatoes	13.6	31.6	22.7	8.3	5.0	14.5
(SD)	(20.5)	(37.5)	(23.7)	(20.4)	(7.1)	(22.1)
Acres potatoes	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.4
(SD)	(0.4)	(0.6)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.2)	(0.4)
\$ wood	13.1	9.1	8.3	19.7	1.5	12.9
(SD)	(27.1)	(16.8)	(10.4)	(39.6)	(2.1)	(26.6)
Cords of wood	10.1	5.2	6.7	19.3	3.0	9.9
(SD)	(18.5)	(9.1)	(7.6)	(39.7)	(4.2)	(18.3)
Sheep	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
(SD)	(1.5)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(1.5)
Lbs. wool	0.4	0	0	0	0	0.4
(SD)	(9.9)	0	0	0	0	(9.6)
\$ orchard prods.	0.5	5.7	0	0	0	0.8
(SD)	(3.8)	(32.2)	0	0	0	(8.5)
Acres in other crops	0.03	0.5	0	0	0	0.06
(SD)	(0.4)	(3.2)	0	0	0	(0.9)
Lbs. honey	0.2	0	0	0	0	0.2
(SD)	(2.9)	0	0	0	0	(2.8)
Gal. molasses	5.7	5.0	0	0.8	4.0	5.6
(SD)	(16.7)	(14.2)	0	(2.0)	(5.7)	(16.4)
% of owners	97.4	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	5.5
% of renters	93.0	4.7	0.5	1.4	0.5	64.8
% sharers	91.1	8.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	29.6
N	635	39	3	6	2	685

SOURCE: 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

A minority of African Americans operated farms, and scarcely any owned their land. In the 1880 Edgefield core community, 41 percent of white household heads owned and operated farms (more than a 10 percentage-point decline for whites since the 1870 census). Only 2.3 percent of black household heads did so. Twenty-six black landowners in the Edgefield core community persisted from 1870 to 1880; twenty-four still owned their land. (This degree of stability is remarkable.) Moreover, the percentage of farm owners is nearly identical for both 1870 and 1880. The vast majority still did not own land. Although some African Americans acquired land during Reconstruction through various Republican-sponsored measures, these programs appear not to have helped very much (they might have helped if they had been federally and state supported and/or given more time). As table 6 shows, landowners were older than tenants, had more acres to farm, more tools to farm with, more work animals, hogs, cows, chickens, and so forth. They did not necessarily produce more cotton or more corn than other farm operators. Nevertheless, they constituted a definite elite in the agricultural society of African Americans in Edgefield County.

Table 7 matches farm operators as listed in the *Agricultural MCR* with their respective occupations from the *Population MCR*. Table 8 shows the relationship between tenure and occupation. Some farm operators declared nonagricultural occupations. Three “Professionals” operated farms, including a minister who owned his farm. The son of a preacher—Reconstruction political leader also operated a farm owned by his father, in whose household he lived. Six “Artisans” operated farms, including four blacksmiths, a well digger, and a wheelwright. Blacksmiths may have been more able than other artisans to combine farming with their trade and more able to raise money to buy tools and negotiate with a landowner. Two widows who gave their occupation as “Keeping House” also operated farms; their families provided the labor.¹⁴

Table 8 categorizes African American household heads by occupation and by operation of a farm. Most farm operators in 1880 had agricultural occupations. Thirty-seven landowners, 413 renters, and 185 sharecroppers—a

14. The Reconstruction leader’s son is a reminder of the close connections the black elite had to the rural economic system.

**Table 6. 1880 African American Household Heads
Who Are Also Farm Operators Categorized by Tenure**

	<i>Owners</i> (<i>N</i> = 38) Mean (SD)		<i>Renters</i> (<i>N</i> = 444) Mean (SD)		<i>Sharers</i> (<i>N</i> = 203) Mean (SD)		<i>Totals</i> (<i>N</i> = 685) Mean (SD)	
Blacks in household	6.2	(3.3)	6.1	(2.6)	6.1	(2.6)	6.1	(2.7)
Age	50.2	(14.0)	41.2	(12.6)	39.8	(13.6)	41.3	(13.2)
Children in school	0.7	(1.1)	0.5	(1.0)	0.6	(1.1)	0.5	(1.0)
Acres improved	36.7	(29.9)	27.2	(18.0)	31.6	(25.3)	29.0	(21.3)
Acres unimproved	45.3	(86.5)	5.5	(36.0)	8.9	(35.5)	8.7	(41.2)
\$ val. of farm	445.0	(665.0)	237.0	(308.0)	194.0	(295.0)	236.0	(338.0)
\$ val. of tools	16.4	(17.3)	12.7	(18.0)	9.6	(24.9)	12.0	(20.3)
\$ val. of livestock	94.5	(85.2)	75.8	(69.6)	53.0	(70.7)	70.1	(71.7)
\$ val. of fences	9.8	(8.6)	9.5	(10.8)	9.0	(14.4)	9.4	(11.9)
\$ val. of fertilizers	18.3	(24.3)	16.6	(22.6)	11.0	(21.0)	15.0	(22.4)
\$ wages paid to laborers	18.1	(69.9)	9.0	(31.5)	9.6	(54.4)	9.7	(42.3)
# people hired	2.0	(8.6)	2.6	(7.9)	2.5	(9.9)	2.4	(8.6)
\$ val. of farm produce	274.0	(196.0)	325.0	(237.0)	260.0	(229.0)	302.0	(234.0)
# work animals	1.7	(1.4)	1.1	(0.9)	0.7	(1.0)	1.0	(1.0)
# heads of cattle	4.2	(3.5)	2.2	(2.3)	2.0	(2.7)	2.2	(2.5)
Lbs. of butter	34.2	(40.7)	19.8	(35.1)	18.5	(32.1)	20.2	(34.7)
# heads of swine	5.0	(4.3)	3.3	(3.8)	3.0	(3.4)	3.3	(3.7)
# heads of poultry	12.7	(9.1)	9.1	(7.4)	8.9	(7.1)	9.2	(7.5)
Dozens of eggs	26.2	(20.2)	22.6	(26.9)	23.1	(22.2)	23.0	(25.3)
Bushels of wheat	12.5	(16.5)	5.1	(10.3)	6.2	(13.9)	5.9	(12.0)
Acres in wheat	1.9	(1.7)	0.9	(1.8)	1.2	(2.2)	1.1	(1.9)
Bushels of corn	61.7	(41.7)	65.3	(56.2)	72.3	(63.8)	67.1	(57.9)
Acres in corn	9.4	(6.2)	9.4	(6.4)	10.0	(7.4)	9.6	(6.7)
Bushels of oats	20.8	(43.7)	11.8	(19.8)	27.7	(67.2)	17.0	(41.8)
Acres in oats	2.5	(3.8)	1.7	(2.8)	2.8	(5.7)	2.1	(4.0)
Bales of cotton	4.5	(3.9)	5.5	(4.4)	4.4	(4.2)	5.2	(4.4)
Acres in cotton	13.9	(10.8)	16.0	(10.4)	13.1	(10.1)	15.0	(10.4)
Bushels of beans	2.5	(4.4)	2.7	(5.7)	1.9	(5.1)	2.4	(5.5)
Bushels of potatoes	16.6	(23.5)	14.9	(22.4)	13.3	(21.4)	14.5	(22.1)
Acres in potatoes	0.3	(0.3)	0.4	(0.4)	0.3	(0.4)	0.4	(0.4)
Cords of wood cut	15.1	(12.9)	9.0	(19.4)	10.8	(16.7)	9.9	(18.3)
\$ val. of wood cut	22.3	(19.8)	9.0	(15.4)	19.6	(41.3)	12.9	(26.6)
\$ val. orchard produce	3.4	(8.6)	0	(0)	2.0	(15.0)	0.8	(8.5)
Gal. of molasses	6.2	(15.4)	5.1	(17.2)	6.5	(14.7)	5.5	(16.4)
Acres in other crops	0.27	(1.62)	0.05	(0.95)	0.03	(0.22)	0.06	(0.86)
% literate	12.5		54.8		32.7		15.2	
% male	100.0		98.2		94.1		97.1	

SOURCE: 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

**Table 7. 1880 African American Household Heads
Categorized by Occupation and Tenure**

<i>Occupational grouping</i>	<i># owners</i>	<i>% owners</i>	<i>% of all owners</i>	<i># renters</i>	<i>% renters</i>	<i>% of all renters</i>	<i># share croppers</i>	<i>% share croppers</i>	<i>% of all share croppers</i>	<i># non-farm operators</i>	<i>% non-farm operators</i>	<i>% of all non-farm operators</i>
Farmer N = 710	37	5.2	97.4	413	58.2	93.0	185	26.1	91.1	75	10.6	7.6
Laborer N = 770	-	-	-	21	2.7	4.7	18	2.3	8.9	73	94.9	73.9
Professional N = 6	1	16.7	2.6	2	33.3	0.5	-	-	-	3	50.0	0.3
Artisan N = 37	-	-	-	6	15.8	1.4	-	-	-	31	83.8	3.1
Keeping house- N = 42	-	-	-	2	4.8	0.5	-	-	-	40	95.2	4.0
Domestic N = 87	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	87	100.0	8.8
Other N = 21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	100.0	2.1
Mail carrier N = 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	100.0	0.1
Totals N = 1,674	38	2.3	100.0	444	26.5	100.0	203	12.1	100.0	989	59.1	100.0

SOURCE: 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

**Table 8. African American Heads of Households
Categorized by Occupation and Operation of a Farm, 1880**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i># who are operating a farm</i>	<i>% of occupation</i>	<i>% of all farm operators</i>	<i># of occupation not operating a farm</i>	<i>% of occupation not operating a farm</i>	<i>% of all non-farm operators</i>
Farmer	710	635	89.4	92.7	75	10.6	7.6
Laborer	770	39	5.1	5.7	731	94.9	73.9
Professional	6	3	50.0	0.4	3	50.0	0.3
Artisan	37	6	16.2	0.8	31	83.8	3.1
Domestic	87	-	-	-	87	100.0	8.8
Keeping house	42	2	4.8	0.3	40	95.2	4.0
Other	21	-	-	-	21	100.0	2.1
Mail carrier	1	-	-	-	1	100.0	0.1
Totals	1,674	685	40.9	100.0	989	59.1	100.0

SOURCE: 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

total of 635 farm operators—listed their occupation as Farmer. Farm operators were seldom “Laborers” or Farm Laborers, the lowest in status of the agricultural occupations. Out of 770 Laborers and Farm Laborers, only thirty-nine operated farms. For our purposes Laborers and Farm Laborers can be treated as a single group. Table 3 shows that they were younger than any other occupational group and, except for the “Domestics,” had fewer members in their households than other gainfully employed groups—two persons fewer than Farmers, and about one person less than the average African American household. Their households were less likely than others to have children in school.¹⁵

Table 9 summarizes comparisons between the 1870 and 1880 *MCR*. Of the 1,674 black household heads in the 1880 Edgefield core community, 703 had lived there in 1870, either as household heads or in the household of someone else. Table 9 summarizes their occupational mobility between 1870 and 1880.

Of the twenty-seven Farmers in 1870 who were household heads in 1880, only two of them had experienced a decline in occupational status to Laborer. One Farmer was a preacher, and almost 90 percent of them had remained Farmers. This is the highest stability rate of any occupational group of 1870. The overall rate of occupational stability reported in table 9 was 36.7 percent.

Over half of those who were Laborers in 1870 were Farmers in 1880. About a third (35.5 percent) of the 1870 Farm Laborers were essentially at the same occupational status in 1880. Two Farm Laborers in 1880 had no occupational listing, and three were in jail. Seven of the women who had been Farm Laborers in 1870 were reported “keeping house” in 1880. These women had all been widowed since 1870 when they were not household heads. Although only one male Farm Laborer became a domestic servant in 1880, ten women who had been Farm Laborers had become domestic servants; one Farm Laborer became a laundress and one a cook. These moves into domestic services reflected the new spatial dimensions of tenantry and would later help create the myth of the black matriarchy.¹⁶

15. Ninety-seven household heads reported an occupation of farming and are included in the Farmer category. Sixty-eight of those farming are listed as operating farms in the 1880 *Agricultural MCR*.

16. A black matriarchy did not exist in rural Edgefield. In rural patriarchal southern culture,

Table 9. 1880 African American Household Heads:
Occupational Mobility 1870 to 1880

	<i>1880 Occupational Category</i>							<i>Total</i>
	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Laborer</i>	<i>Profes- sional</i>	<i>Artisan</i>	<i>Domestic</i>	<i>Keeping house</i>	<i>Other</i>	
Farmer								
N	24	3	1	—	—	—	—	27
%	(88.9)	(7.4)	(3.7)	—	—	—	—	(100.0)
Laborer								
N	354	214	2	8	13	7	5	603
%	(58.7)	(35.5)	(0.3)	(1.3)	(2.2)	(1.2)	(0.8)	(100.0)
Professional								
N	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	3
%	(66.7)	—	(33.3)	—	—	—	—	(100.0)
Artisan								
N	8	2	1	8	—	—	—	19
%	(42.1)	(10.5)	(5.3)	(42.1)	—	—	—	(100.0)
Law officer								
N	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	2
%	(50.0)	(50.0)	—	—	—	—	—	(100.0)
Domestic								
N	2	4	—	1	4	4	—	15
%	(13.3)	(26.7)	—	(6.7)	(26.7)	(26.7)	—	(100.0)
Keeping house								
N	—	2	—	—	3	7	—	12
%	—	(16.7)	—	—	(25.0)	(58.3)	—	(100.0)
Others								
at school (10)								
at home (11)								
N	—	22	—	—	—	—	—	22
%	—	(100.0)	—	—	—	—	—	(100.0)
Totals	391	247	5	17	20	18	5	703

SOURCE: 1870 and 1880 Edgefield Core Community Data.

white landowners, generally men, preferred to deal with black men who headed families when contracting for labor. At the same time, women who headed families without a man present preferred to live in town where they were less vulnerable to sexual harassment and violent terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Furthermore, in town women could find jobs as domestics or laun-

The greatest difference between 1870 and 1880 was that approximately 59 percent, some 354 out of 602, of those who had been Farm Laborers in 1870 were Farmers in 1880. The vast majority of these were tenants. Other 1870 Farm Laborers moved upward in the occupational structure: eight became skilled or semiskilled nonagricultural workers, three became carpenters, four blacksmiths, and one a well digger. One Farm Laborer became a school teacher, and another a preacher. This suggests a general improvement in the situation of the African American agricultural population from 1870 to 1880.

These statistics neglect the complexity of the political situation, especially the resumption of political control by white Democrats in 1876–77. The tenantry system had very strong political implications. During slavery, living arrangements in slave quarters fostered a slave community, and during Reconstruction, this same living pattern facilitated political and military organization among African Americans. By dispersing African American farmers into the countryside, tenantry made political and military organization more difficult for them. In addition, African Americans isolated on thirty- to sixty-acre plots were more vulnerable to white vigilantes and terrorist groups than African Americans living nearer one another. The tenantry system, then, helped white Democrats to wrest control of the government.

In 1876 white Democrats seized control of state and local political processes through fraud and intimidation. The new elections cut short all

dresses in the homes of whites. During Reconstruction, when African Americans held some local elected and appointed offices, the difference in the towns between the number of families headed by black and white women was inconsequential. Only after Reconstruction, when whites excluded blacks from political power and forced African American men to work only in agricultural occupations, were more black female-headed households prevalent in town. Political control affected economic development. See Appendix table B, which shows the distribution of all household heads by gender for Edgefield County in rural and town areas.

For sixty years scholars believed that black men were not heading African American families, but careful study of the different patterns of families in the countryside, small hinterland towns, and cities showed that in the countryside black families were overwhelmingly headed by men. In the cities and towns, however, both black and white families had a substantial number (but never a majority) of families headed by women. Previous scholars conducted their research in towns and cities, where one could quickly and conveniently survey houses on streets; they did not conduct research in the countryside where one had to travel miles on inadequate roads to find tenant homes. Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 279–313, 315–21.

efforts at fair play between whites and blacks in labor negotiations and effectively closed legal avenues which had been opened for African Americans to redress grievances. At the state level the lien laws were readjusted to benefit the landowner. Whereas, under Republican rule, the man who grew the crop (the tenant) had the first lien on the crop, the Democrats immediately reversed this and gave priority to the landowner. They also increased the percentage that the landowner could take as a lien, which had been deliberately limited by the Republicans. Moreover, the Democrats prevented tenants from obtaining liens from merchants; they wanted to prevent even this bit of independence from the landlord. These changes in the legal position of tenants enabled white landowners to rent farms without relinquishing economic control. New legislation reduced the tenant to the legal position of an employed wage earner, although he might have the occupational status of a Farmer. Therefore, after the 1876 reestablishment of white political control, landowners were more willing to acknowledge African Americans as autonomous farmers.

In a myriad of ways, conditions were worse for African American tenants in 1880 under the Democrats than they had been under Republican laws and administrators. After 1877 landowners, secure in the Democrats' political control, took advantage of African Americans' desire for personal autonomy by charging exorbitant rents. Since white officials at the local level were unsympathetic to African Americans, arguments over rent were futile. A renter paid a stipulated amount of cotton for every acre under cultivation—on average the rent was one lint cotton bale of 450 pounds for the use of from six to eight acres of land. The renter furnished his own fertilizer, stock, and farming implements. The average renter produced only 5.5 bales of cotton from the 32.8 acres he rented. Thin soil produced poor yields unless heavily fertilized, and black renters from the Edgefield core community reported an average expenditure of \$16.84 for fertilizer in the 1880 *Agricultural MCR*. After paying for fertilizer and other supplies, a tenant retained little at the end of the year. In 1881, another burden was a law which required farmers to fence livestock, or pay fines for all animals that ran free. Forced to pay for each acre in a lot, a renter could not afford to leave land unimproved as a source for fence

rails. Only 14.7 percent of African American renters in the Edgefield core community had any unimproved acreage in the 1880 *Agricultural MCR*. Even before the stock law was passed, renters had expended an average \$9.45 for the construction of fences on the land they worked. These conditions led to economic disaster for most of Edgefield's renters. So, although renting was the preferable option, many African Americans working on shares with white landlords and subject to their discipline ended 1880 in better material circumstances than did Edgefield's renters.¹⁷

By 1880 the African American role in the agricultural framework was almost entirely self-contained and, except on the lowest levels, was no longer in competition with the white social structure, as it had been during Reconstruction. Changes in the occupational structure from 1870 to 1880 seem to indicate improved status for many African Americans, but their loss of political power effected a radically diminished economic opportunity. Although most African Americans were now confined to the lowest economic rung of a southern segmented society, within this caste of traditional agricultural labor, distinctions among African Americans had actually increased from 1870 to 1880 as measured by the manuscript census returns. These finely drawn distinctions, for example between sharecropper and renter or between farmer and farm laborer, held meaning within the African American community and certainly for individual perceptions of themselves within the postbellum South. The connections among politics, economics, and social systems defy easy categorization; yet, historians need to take these identities and perceptions into account when faced with the traditionally undifferentiated mass of rural southern African Americans during and after Reconstruction.

17. Burton, "Race and Reconstruction"; *Edgefield Chronicle*, 4, 12, and 25 January 1882; *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1881*, 6 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1882), 812–13; *New York Tribune*, 5 January 1882, 5; *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, Passed at the Regular Session of 1881–2*, no. 472, 591–94, and amended, No. 603, 854; South Carolina, *South Carolina Revised Statutes, 1878–1882* (Columbia, 1882); Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 17–173. The adjusted figures for all the farm operators are higher, and the comparative information for sharecroppers is in Burton, "Ungrateful Servants," 194–293.

Methodological Appendix:

The *Population MCRs* for both 1870 and 1880 list the basic demographic data on each individual, grouped by household, together with his or her occupation and in 1870 the values of real and personal property. The *Agricultural MCRs*, listed by farm operator, detail categories such as crops produced, value of farm, acreage, livestock, fences, and home manufactures. For the first time in 1880, the *Agricultural MCR* included the type of tenure of the farm operators, whether the person operating the farm owned it, rented it, or was sharecropping the land. For 1870 it is necessary to refer to the *Population MCR* to see if the operator reported any real estate value. For owners, the value of the farm recorded in the *Agricultural MCR* usually matched the real estate value from the *Population MCR*.

Similar cross references provide such information as race, literacy, land ownership, and number of children of the farm operator. It should be remembered that a person's occupation was recorded in the *Population MCR*; the name of the person operating a farm is found in the *Agricultural MCR*. The words "Farmer," "Farming," "Laborer," and "Farm Laborer" refer to occupations listed in the *Population MCR*; they should not be confused with the term "farm operator," a status denoted only by listing in the *Agricultural MCR*. For a discussion of the deficiencies of the 1870 census, see Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, "The Impact of the Civil War and the Emancipation of Southern Agriculture," *Explorations in Economic History* 12 (February 1975): 6–11. The much-trumpeted census underenumeration has scared too many scholars away from the 1870 *Population and Agricultural MCRs*, leaving historians with painfully little systematic data for the early period of Reconstruction. Most of the undercount was actually in the cities and not in rural areas, and Edgefield District/County had a more accurate 1870 census count than did the state. The South Carolina African American population in 1860 was 412,000 and in 1870 was 416,000. The South Carolina 1870 figure is only about 1 percent above the 1860 value; for Edgefield District it is 6.5 percent higher (see Appendix 1). Even with the 1870 census undercount for the state, the conclusions about Edgefield in this paper are valid. In Edgefield County the cen-

sus marshal and his assistants for 1870 were native residents familiar with the county and its denizens. There is also reason to suppose that the detailed questions for Edgefield concerning African Americans are very accurate, since the enumerators themselves were either freedmen or whites sympathetic to African Americans. Moreover, the Republican governor of South Carolina ordered the partisan census enumerators to act as enlistment officers for the militia. This entailed getting the name and age of all adult black males.¹⁸

For the 1850 to the 1880 manuscript censuses, this paper includes every person and household and every farm in the old Edgefield District in an Edgefield data base. For most of the analysis of this article it relies on a hand-linked group of townships. After 1868, the county was divided into townships. This study focuses on Edgefield village and the townships immediately surrounding it, designated the Edgefield core community. In 1870, six contiguous townships provide data. In 1880, this same geographical area made up only five townships, due to township boundary alterations. In 1880 Pickens township extended farther into the hinterlands than in 1870 and included about two-thirds of the new railroad town of Johnston at one extreme and half of the town of Edgefield at the other. This new town of Johnston somewhat complicates the 1880 data, but I chose not to exclude Johnston from the 1880 core community. The townships that constitute the Edgefield core community all focused economically on Edgefield courthouse. Comparison of appended tables A and B for every household in 1870 and 1880 illustrate that the proportions of occupations and demographic data are representative for the core community. A comparison of appended table A, "Occupation of Household Heads, 1870 and 1880," and table 3, "1880 Black Household Heads Grouped Occupationally," illustrates the slight bias caused by including towns in the core community. Therefore, appended table A shows that for all African American Edgefield County household heads in 1880, 49.9 percent were Farmers and 45 percent were Laborers. Table 3 for the five Edgefield core community townships shows nearly the identical number of Laborers, 46 percent, but

18. Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 326–34, and "Ungrateful Servants," 14–22, 184, discuss the use of *MCR* in detail.

fewer Farmers, only 42.4 percent.¹⁹ Important evidence awaits harvesting from the 1870 and 1880 manuscript census returns.

Appendix 1

Population of Edgefield County, 1840–1900

	<i>Edgefield aggregate population</i>	<i># White</i>	<i># Black</i>	<i># Black</i>	<i>% Black for S.C.</i>
1840	32,852	15,020	17,832	54.3	56.4
1850	39,262	16,252	23,010	58.6	58.9
1860	39,887**	15,653	24,233	60.7	58.6
1870	42,486**	17,040	25,417	59.8	58.9
1880*	45,018	16,018	29,826	65.1	60.7
1890	49,259**	17,340	31,916	64.8	59.9
1900*	25,478	7,347	18,131	71.2	58.4

*1871, 1895, 1897: parts of county were lost to form new counties.

**When the total exceeds the sum of blacks and whites, Indians have been added.

SOURCE: Edgefield Data Base.

Appendix 2

Population of Edgefield Village

<i>Year</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% Black</i>
1860	514	4*	518	0.7
1870	341	505	846	59.6
1880	332	476	808	58.9

*The census enumerator did not specify the number of slaves within the corporate limits.

SOURCE: Edgefield Data Base.

19. The Edgefield core community was originally designed from post office lists because in 1870 and 1880, townships were chosen corresponding to the post offices. I consulted the Dunn, Barlow Co., *Mercantile Reference Books*, in order to determine where various businesses were located in the county. I also used maps to find those businesses not in the towns. United States Post Office, "Records of Transportation Routes of Cross-Country Mail Delivery, Site Location Reports of Postal Stations, Records of Appointment of Postmasters, Edgefield County, South Carolina," RG R628, National Archives; Richard S. Alcorn, "Leadership and Stability in America: A Case Study of an Illinois Town," *Journal of American History* 61 (December 1974): 687, n. 4, succinctly discusses "core" and "central place in a community." For bibliographical references on central place theory see Brian Joe Lobley Berry and Allen Pred, *Central Place Studies: A Bibliography of Theory and Applications* (Philadelphia: Regional Science Institute, 1965).

Appendix Table A.
Occupations of Household Heads, 1870 and 1880 (percentages)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>1870</i>				<i>1880</i>			
	<i>White</i>		<i>Black</i>		<i>White</i>		<i>Black</i>	
	<i>Male</i> <i>(N=2,801)</i>	<i>Female</i> <i>(N=619)</i>	<i>Male</i> <i>(N=4,080)</i>	<i>Female</i> <i>(N=794)</i>	<i>Male</i> <i>(N=2,862)</i>	<i>Female</i> <i>(N=441)</i>	<i>Male</i> <i>(N=5,158)</i>	<i>Female</i> <i>(N=811)</i>
Farmer	57.7	11.0	2.6	0.1	77.5	23.0	49.9	8.0
Laborer	30.2	3.4	92.4	50.4	9.6	6.2	45.0	46.8
Artisan and Semi-skilled	3.8	0	2.8	0	3.7	0	1.4	0
Professional, business, low white collar	7.0	0.4	0.4	0	7.8	0.5	0.4	0
Domestic	0	2.2	0.4	17.7	0.1	3.1	2.3	18.1
Keeping House	0	75.9	0	28.2	0	58.3	0	14.5
Other	1.3	7.1	0	3.5	1.3	8.9	1.0	2.6

NOTE: Percentages subject to rounding.

SOURCE: Edgefield Data Base.

Appendix Table B.

Selected Characteristics of Households by Town and Hinterland, 1870 and 1880 (percentages shown with selected characteristics except for average number in household and average age household head)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Incorporated towns^a</i>				<i>Hinterland</i>			
	<i>1870</i>		<i>1880</i>		<i>1870</i>		<i>1880</i>	
	<i>Black (N=267)</i>	<i>White (N=119)</i>	<i>Black (N=201)</i>	<i>White (N=75)</i>	<i>Black (N=4,608)</i>	<i>White (N=3,301)</i>	<i>Black (N=5,766)</i>	<i>White (N=3,128)</i>
Male-headed	83.9	82.0	63.2	82.9	84.1	82.2	87.2	86.9
With children attending school	21.3	53.4	12.6	45.3	5.7	25.5	9.4	30.2
Children attending school (% of school age children)	13.0	37.6	5.9	24.5	3.7	17.4	6.2	21.9
Mean number	4.7	4.5	3.6	4.1	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.8
Mean age of household head	40.0	44.7	36.8	41.1	38.5	42.2	37.8	41.6
Mulatto ^b	22.1	–	21.4	–	10.1	–	9.6	–
Literacy of household head	8.6	86.6	16.4	97.7	4.1	84.0	16.4	86.1
Children and both parents present	50.9	48.7	37.8	51.4	60.0	58.0	63.2	65.3
Single-parent families ^c	44.1	57.8	70.1	33.1	39.3	39.7	24.2	22.0
Single-parent households as a percent of two-parent households	28.7	41.4	65.8	30.0	27.3	29.9	20.1	18.5
Working wives	13.0	2.8	55.2	0	36.2	1.1	62.4	3.4

NOTES: Table excludes seven families headed by Indians. Percentages subject to rounding.

^aIncludes in 1870 the township of Hamburg (partly rural) and Edgefield Court House.

^bMulattoes included in all black percentages and totals.

^cIncludes households.

SOURCE: Edgefield Data Base.