

**The Nature of Resistance in South Carolina's
Works Progress Administration
Ex-Slave Narratives**
by
Gerald James Pierson

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*The Nature of Resistance in South Carolina's Works Progress
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The Nature of
RESISTANCE

in South Carolina's
Works Progress Administration
Ex-Slave Narratives

GERALD JAMES PIERSON

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To those who died to make men free.

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INTRODUCTION

The South Carolina Narratives

THE Federal Writers' Project, part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the 1930s, collected interviews from over 3500 former slaves throughout the United States. Since the task of interviewing was organized on a state-by-state basis and performed by local writers, both the quality and quantity of each state's material remains uneven. Some of the interviews, conducted for the most part in 1937 and 1938, were never sent to Washington by state WPA personnel. Those interviews that did make it to the national project offices often showed signs of local editing of material deemed objectionable to white sensibilities. After all the narratives appeared to have been forthcoming, the Federal Writers' Project deposited the original manuscripts in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress.¹

In 1972, historian George P. Rawick began the task of collecting and publishing all the extant interviews, beginning with the

1 George P. Rawick, "General Introduction," in *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, suppl. ser. one., 12 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 11:ix-lvi, esp. xvi-xxi. Narratives in Rawick's edition will be cited as in the following example for the sake of simplicity and accuracy: RS2V8AR1:155-56. "RS2V8" signifies that the narrative is to be found in volume eight of regular series two, as opposed to regular series one or either of the two supplemental series (SS). The "AR" denotes the Arkansas narratives. The "1:" means that the Arkansas narratives are divided into several parts, and this narrative is in part one, while the "155-56" represents the page numbers.

Library of Congress material. Rawick undertook an exhaustive search of local archives and found much of the missing material, as well as original, unedited versions of narratives already in the Rare Book Room. His findings, published in photo-reproduced form, filled two regular series totalling 19 volumes and two supplemental series of 22 volumes.²

The entire series, as edited by Rawick, contains interviews of 365 former South Carolina slaves. The majority of these ex-slaves, approximately 300, had been interviewed within the borders of the Palmetto State and their narratives are found in the regular and supplemental volumes devoted to that state. The remaining accounts, by those who had moved from South Carolina during and after slavery, are scattered throughout the rest of the collection. The largest numbers of such accounts can be found in the volumes devoted to Texas and Arkansas. (See table 1.) Although biased towards males, with a disproportionate number of household slaves, South Carolina's narratives are an invaluable resource to the scholar interested in slave resistance by the last generation of South Carolinians held in bondage, for, unlike contemporary non-slave sources, the narratives contain "the reactions and perspectives of those who had been enslaved."³

Table 2 gives an age and gender breakdown of the 365 confirmed former South Carolina slaves in the narrative collection. Slightly more than half were born during the decade of the 1850s, and another 17 percent entered this vale of tears between January 1860 and April 1865. These two groups, plus an additional 6.9

2 Ibid., ix–xiv. For a complete listing of volumes and contents, see Rawick, *American Slave*, suppl. ser. two, 1:ii.

3 Norman R. Yetman, "Ex-Slave Narratives and the Historiography of Slavery," *American Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1984): 181–210, quote on page 182. The South Carolina narratives are, of course, useful for the study of other topics besides resistance; for an example, see P.M. Mercer, "Tapping the Slave Narrative Collection for the Responses of Black South Carolinians to Emancipation and Reconstruction," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 25, no. 3 (1979): 358–74.

TABLE 1

WPA Sample Group
Residence When Interviewed

<i>State</i>	<i>Number</i>
Arkansas	21
Florida	8
Georgia	14
Maryland	1
Mississippi	4
North Carolina	2
Ohio	1
Oklahoma	1
South Carolina	303
Texas	10
TOTAL	365

TABLE 2

Gender and Age
Breakdown of Sample

<i>When born</i>	<i>Gender ratio*</i>		<i>Percentage of</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total†</i>
1830–1834	37.5	62.5	1.4	3.3	2.2
1835–1839	54.6	45.4	2.8	3.3	3.0
1840–1844	65.0	35.0	6.2	4.6	5.5
1845–1849	60.4	39.6	15.2	13.6	14.5
1850–1854	62.8	37.2	25.6	20.8	23.6
1855–1859	55.6	44.4	26.1	28.6	27.1
1860–1865	61.9	38.1	18.5	15.6	17.3
Pre-1865‡	36.0	64.0	4.3	10.4	6.9
TOTAL	57.8	42.2	100.0	100.0	100.0

* Male/female ratio of those born in given years expressed as a percentage.

† Total of 365 former slaves includes 211 males and 154 females.

‡ Birthdate unknown, but has memories of the Civil War.

percent who had juvenile memories of the Civil War but whose age could not be determined with any degree of accuracy, constitute three-fourths of the sample. Accordingly, any analysis of these narratives must take into account the fact that only one-fourth of the sample group evinced *adult* memories of slavery. The females interviewed tended to be slightly younger than the males: 24.8 percent of the females were born previous to the 1850s, while 25.6 percent of the males fall into the same category—the difference is statistically insignificant. Of more importance is the gender ratio to be found in the confirmed South Carolina slave narratives. Census data shows the actual 1860 male-to-female ratio among the slave population in South Carolina to be 48.9 percent male to 51.1 percent female. The ratio among members of the sample born before 1860 is 56 percent male to 44 percent female; overall, an even more lopsided 57.8 percent male to 42.2 percent female ratio is present. (See table 2.)

Another way to judge how representative the South Carolina narratives are—and thus to determine their validity as a source of information for slavery within the Palmetto State—is to see if their regional distribution is consistent with census figures for that period.⁴ Although every district in South Carolina is represented in the narratives, the distribution is skewed when compared with the 1860 census. Table 3 shows the percentage of the total 1860 slave population residing within each of the four distinct South Carolina landform regions. Figure 1 is a map of these regions.

The first, the outer coastal plain, is characterized by growths of the cabbage palmetto (*Chamaerops palmetto*), live oak, cypress, magnolia, and the saw-palmetto (*Chamaerops serrulata*), along

4 For a complete description of South Carolina's geography, see Charles F. Kovacik and John J. Winberry, *South Carolina: A Geography* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1987), 13–26. Kovacik and Winberry separate the sandhills from the Piedmont and distinguish between the outer coastal plain and the extreme coastal region, distinctions too narrow for the purpose of this study.

TABLE 3
WPA Sample Group
Population and Gender Representation by Region

<i>Region</i>	<i>1860 Census</i>	<i>WPA Sample</i>
Blue Ridge Mountains	11,244 slaves 2.8% of S.C.'s slaves 48.5% male	2 ex-slaves 0.5% of sample 50.0% male
Piedmont & Sandhills	170,385 slaves 42.3% of S.C.'s slaves 49.2% male	254 ex-slaves 69.6% of sample 59.8% male
Inner Coastal Plain	78,002 slaves 19.4% of S.C.'s slaves 49.0% male	33 ex-slaves 9.0% of sample 54.5% male
Outer Coastal Plain	142,775 slaves 35.5% of S.C.'s slaves 48.4% male	76 ex-slaves 21.1% of sample 52.6% male
TOTAL	402,406 slaves 48.9% male	365 ex-slaves 57.8% male

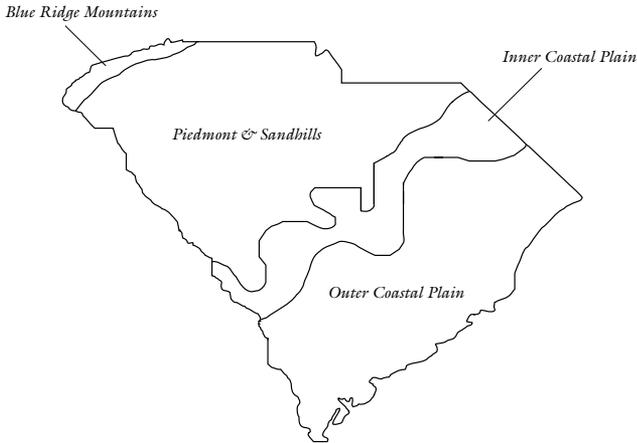
Source: United States Census Office, *Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 280.

with a variety of less-distinguished swamp plants.⁵ By the antebellum era, agriculture in the area had changed from the earlier colonial indigo-based economy with some cultivation of rice to an economy dependent upon the large-scale production of rice and sea island cotton. By 1840 Georgetown, a single district in this region, was producing almost half the total rice crop in the United States. Sweet potatoes were cultivated here and became

5 Ibid., 23–26. See also Francis Lieber, “Indigenous Growths of South Carolina,” *DeBow’s Review* 28 (May 1860): 607–609, esp. 608.

FIGURE 1

South Carolina
Landform Regions



Adapted from Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina*, 13–26.

a major food source for the slave population.⁶ Rice production is a labor-intensive endeavor and, according to the 1860 census, slaves constituted 66 percent of the total population in this region. In 1860, 35.5 percent of South Carolina's slave population, with a 48.4 percent male to 51.6 percent female gender ratio, lived and worked on the outer coastal plain. The WPA narratives, however, underrepresent the total number of outer coastal plain slaves, but overrepresent males within the sample. Only 21.1

6 Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina*, 72–75, 88–91, 99–101; George C. Rogers Jr., *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 324–41, esp. 324–25; Sherman L. Ricards and George M. Blackburn, "A Demographic History of Slavery: Georgetown County, South Carolina, 1850," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 76 (October 1975): 215–24, esp. 220–21.

percent of those interviewed reported being held as slaves within this area. Of the WPA sample group, 52.6 percent were male.⁷ (See table 3.)

The inner coastal plain is drier than the outer plain region and forms a transition between the coastal plain and the sandhills guarding the Piedmont. The gently rolling hills of the inner coastal plain are naturally covered with grasses and pine. Although cultivated with wheat and indigo in the colonial era, planters supplanted these crops with “King Cotton” during antebellum days. The Eighth Census found that 62.2 percent of this region’s population to be enslaved, with a slave gender ratio of 49 percent male to 51 percent female. According to the figures gathered in 1860, 19.4 percent of South Carolina’s slave population resided on the inner coastal plain.⁸ Analysis of the WPA narratives again shows underrepresentation, with only nine percent of those interviewed claiming slavery-era residence here—less than half the figure a proper distribution should show. In addition, and as always, males are slightly overrepresented, with 54.5 percent of this region’s sample comprised of men. (See table 3.)

The sandhill and Piedmont region of South Carolina constitute the heart of the state. Forests of Spanish oak, black walnut, chestnut, hickory, cedar, and pine (useful for turpentine production) grow amid an extensive network of rivers, creeks, and streams.⁹ This natural drainage network assisted the colonial culture of tobacco and wheat in this area. By the antebellum era,

7 United States Census Office, *Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 280. The racial demography of South Carolina’s population, both within the outer coastal plain and elsewhere, had been firmly established by 1740. See Peter H. Wood, “‘More Like a Negro Country’: Demographic Patterns in Colonial South Carolina,” in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Slavery and Race in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 131–71.

8 United States Census Office, *Preliminary Report*, 280.

9 Lieber, “Indigenous Growths,” 608. See also Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina*, 16–18, 26–27.

however, this region's fertile fields saw the planting of cotton on a large scale. Wheat and tobacco production became restricted to the upper Piedmont. Although successfully grown throughout the state, corn production tended to be concentrated in the Piedmont.¹⁰ The salubrious atmosphere of this region attracted white settlements, and the Piedmont became the most urbanized area of South Carolina. (See figure 2.) The establishment of the manufacturing town of Graniteville in Edgefield District, part of this region, symbolized the nascent industrial development of the Piedmont in the antebellum era. Accordingly, slaves were still the majority here, at 53 percent of the total 1860 population, but more than half of South Carolina's white population lived in the sandhills or the Piedmont. This same area held 42.3 percent of the Palmetto State's slave population, with a 49.2 percent male to 50.8 percent female slave gender ratio.¹¹ The narrative collection greatly overrepresents this region, with 69.9 percent of the total WPA sample. Again, males are overrepresented by a significant margin, for men constitute 59.8 percent of this region's narrative sample. (See table 3.)

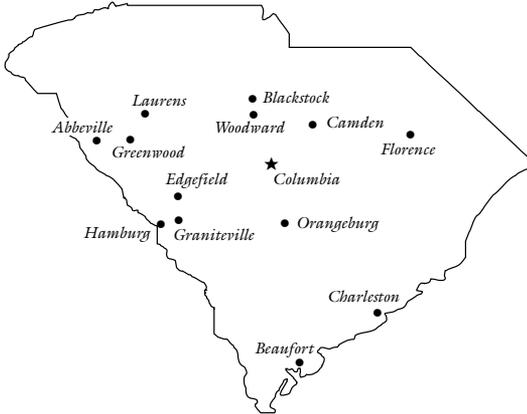
The final area, the Blue Ridge region—named for the mountains—contains many trees on its slopes. These trees include the spruce pine, the white pine, the rock chestnut oak, and the “long-leafed cucumber tree” (*Magnolia auriculata*). Poor whites with few or no slaves accounted for much of this region's agricultural production. The physical features of the land made large-scale operations difficult and few wealthy planters, who had to worry about economies of scale, expressed much interest in operating plantations in the region.¹² Slaves were a minority here, accounting for only 27.1 percent of the population, with 48.9

10 Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina*, 72, 99–102.

11 United States Census Office, *Preliminary Report*, 280.

12 Liebner, “Indigenous Growths,” 607–608; Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina*, 99–102.

FIGURE 2

South Carolina
Cities and Towns

Adapted from *South Carolina Road Map* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 1986).

percent of them male. Only 2.8 percent of the state's slave population lived here.¹³ Just two former slaves from the WPA collection came from this area. (See table 3.)

The WPA sample is imperfectly distributed according to the 1860 census. The overrepresentation of informants in the sandhills and Piedmont region and consequent underrepresentation of the other areas was probably due to the relative ease of interviewing those in the Piedmont. South Carolina's road system is most extensive in the Piedmont, and former slaves in this area would be more likely to live near the closely spaced towns and cities of this region. Former slaves in the coastal zones, with the exception

13 United States Census Office, *Preliminary Report*, 280.

of those in or near Charleston, would be more difficult to locate and interview than those up country. In addition, the relative isolation of those in the low country served to keep them from the attention of the WPA interviewers. Nevertheless, the relative ranking of the regions in the WPA sample remains the same as that shown in the 1860 census.

The gender ratio problem may have been caused by any number of factors. It could simply be a vagary of the selection process, or a product of conscious or subconscious bias. In any event, these departures from the norm do not invalidate the use of the WPA narratives, but instead show in what areas the researcher has to be most careful in making generalizations and in drawing conclusions. A recognition that the narratives are flawed is the first step to their utilization.

The narratives are also biased in that a larger percentage of skilled slaves and house servants appear to be present than existed in reality. Of those 170 former slaves whose occupations can be discerned—46.6 percent of the total WPA sample—73.3 percent of the males and a mere 36.3 percent of the females were field hands. (See table 4.) In the Piedmont region during that period, according to one researcher's data, three-fourths of the men and 63 percent of the women worked as field hands. In the low country, the percentage neared 90 percent and 80 percent, respectively.¹⁴

Again, there are a number of possible reasons for this discrepancy. First, the youthfulness of the sample during slavery must account for some of this variance. Children often performed chores around the house and yard until they were old enough to toil in the field. Second, this may have been a product of selectivity

14 Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 180–82; David Doar, *Rice and Rice Planting in the South Carolina Low Country* (Charleston, Charleston Museum, 1936), 37–38.

TABLE 4
WPA Sample Group
Task Differentiation by Gender

<i>Region</i>	<i>Percentage among</i>		<i>Combined Percentage</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
General	70.0%	36.3	54.1	68.5	31.5
Stock tender	3.3	0.0	1.8	100.0	0.0
ALL FIELD	73.3	36.3	55.9	69.9	30.1
General	23.4	60.0	40.7	30.4	69.6
Childcare	0.0	2.5	1.2	0.0	100.0
Midwife	0.0	1.2	0.6	0.0	100.0
Carpenter	1.1	0.0	0.6	100.0	0.0
Spinner	1.1	0.0	0.6	100.0	0.0
Livery	1.1	0.0	0.6	100.0	0.0
ALL HOUSE	26.7	63.7	44.1	26.1	73.9

Note: Includes all 170 sampled slaves with an identifiable task classification.

on the part of the informant. The former slave may have thought that the interviewer would prefer to listen to stories of the manse rather than the field. Third, house servants ate more and better food than field hands. Although they were worked hard by their owners, house servants as a group suffered less from the overexertion which afflicted and shortened the lives of field hands.¹⁵ In short, former house servants were more likely to have

15 C. W. Harper, "House Servants and Field Hands: Fragmentation in the Antebellum Slave Community," *North Carolina Historical Review* 55 (Winter 1978): 42-59.

survived long enough to be interviewed by a WPA worker. In addition, the former slaves may have considered household work to be of higher status than field work and adjusted their reminiscences accordingly.¹⁶ The final, and most plausible, conjecture is that former household servants were better known to and still had contacts within the white community. When WPA workers searched for former slaves, they likely interviewed both those known to themselves and those they were directed to by local contacts.

Again, this flaw does not invalidate the narrative collection as a source for information concerning resistance among the last generation of enslaved South Carolinians. It does, however, make it imperative that any conclusions drawn from the narratives recognize this important variance from the reality of slavery in South Carolina during the antebellum era.

Accordingly, this study uses the South Carolina narratives to explore the nature of resistance evinced by them. Although the narratives lend themselves more to qualitative analysis due to their colloquial and anecdotal character, quantitative methods will also be used, in order to establish trends hinted at and to test assumptions and hypotheses. Historian Norman Yetman described the difficulties of such an approach in 1984:

The urge to undertake some sort of statistical analysis of the ex-slave narratives is almost irresistible, primarily because of the sheer numbers of individuals whose life histories are represented. . . . With a sample so large, it is at least hypothetically possible to determine more precisely, *how* “often” slaveholders sought to make marriage solemn, *how* frequently ceremonies were performed in churches, and *how* often by planters in the big house.

However, if historians urged caution in the qualitative use of the ex-slave narratives, they have been even more circumspect about the possibility of subjecting these data to quantitative analysis. C. Vann Woodward, in a generally sympathetic review of *The American Slave*,

16 Ibid., 42–43.

has argued that the interviews are not amenable to quantification, although they “contain evidence and answers of some sort for almost any kind of question that can be asked about life under slavery.”¹⁷

Yetman notes that Rawick, whom he calls “one of the staunchest advocates of using the narratives,” cautioned scholars about the danger of relying upon the narratives as a quantitative source for studying certain subjects.¹⁸ Rawick himself has not used quantitative methods in any of his research based on the WPA interviews.

Perhaps the most statistical approach to the Federal Writers’ Project narratives has been Paul Escott’s *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*. Escott used a computer to compare the eighty-one variables he looked for in each narrative—of course, he did not *find* that many in each interview—and used these computations to support his conclusions.¹⁹ Despite this “impression that Escott is more rigorous and less impressionistic in his use of the Slave Narrative Collection than other scholars,” he has been criticized for allowing his “assertions to exceed the evidence he provides to support them.”²⁰ Yetman, noting that others have used the narratives extensively to support diametrically opposed theories of slavery—Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman, to name two—is correct in his assertion that “the portrait of slavery that is derived from the ex-slave interviews is at all times a function of the creative imagination of the historian who uses these materials.”²¹

Statistics can be used with caution as a tool to help understand the narratives, but the honest scholar does not claim that objective

17 Yetman, “Ex-Slave Interviews,” 202–203. Emphasis in original.

18 *Ibid.*, 203.

19 Paul Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 6–20.

20 Yetman, “Ex-Slave Interviews,” 203.

21 *Ibid.*, 209–10.

truth must lie inherent in the raw data generated by any such analysis. Instead, one should recognize that the vague and ghostly prejudices and biases present in the narratives cloud our vision and make it impossible to articulate any general statement with absolute certainty. The narratives contain a number of traps ready to snare unwary researchers, including a “caste etiquette” that masks and softens responses to sensitive questions, conscious and subconscious editing by the interviewer, and the incomplete and faulty memories of elderly participants.²²

As noted above, South Carolina contributed the memories of 365 of its former slaves to the collection: about one out of every ten narratives in the whole collection is from South Carolina. Of the interviews collected in that state, Rawick writes that “there is certainly no evidence of tampering, and only a relatively small number of narratives were kept back.”²³ To establish the veracity and thus the utility of South Carolina’s narratives, internal details were checked and suspect narratives discarded from the sample.

The year of birth for each informant has been calculated as closely as possible, given the limitations of the information included in each narrative. The age of each former slave at the time of the WPA interview was subtracted from the year interviewed, usually 1937, but occasionally 1938.²⁴

Approximations had to be made several times when former slaves did not know how old they were. In some cases, ages were obtained by internal evidence, such as the youthfulness of the informant when war or peace was declared or from memories of other historically significant events. All those born after slavery

22 Rawick, *American Slave*, suppl. ser. one, 11:xxxiii.

23 *Ibid.*, 11:xvii.

24 One apparent problem does arise from this method: if a former slave had not yet celebrated his or her birthday for the year in which he or she was interviewed, the calculation would be off by a year in favor of youth. This difficulty, in the opinion of the author, is not significant enough to attempt to account for mathematically.

had ended were removed from the sample, as were those who were merely infants when the war ended.

Every stated place of residence, even if only a reference to a nearby creek or crossroads, was sought on United States Geological Survey 1:24,000 quadrangle maps, both to verify its position within the border of South Carolina and to establish the precise district of residence for statistical purposes. This search proved to be successful in most cases. As for those who gave insufficient details concerning their residence during slavery, the majority could be confirmed as South Carolinians by using census records in a novel way.

Every master mentioned by those they had enslaved—over four hundred names in all—was looked up in an antebellum census index.²⁵ This was done for several reasons.

First, this enabled many ex-slaves' narratives which had been excluded from the sample for lack of provable South Carolina residence to be returned if their masters' domiciles could be found within the Palmetto State. Second, former slaves who noted only vague landmarks such as rivers or railroad tracks could be located through their owners in a more positive manner by district and township. Third, since interviewers often had to guess at the spelling of masters' names due to the illiteracy and age of their informants, the census index proved helpful in orthographical arbitration.²⁶ Finally, errors resulting from a misreading of a particular narrative can be corrected using the index.²⁷

25 Ronald U. Jackson, ed., *South Carolina 1850 Census Index* (Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1976).

26 An example of this would be trying to prove Burt Maybin and Bert Mabin to be different people. The former is found in RS1V3SC3:172-75 and the latter in RS1V3SC3:260-62.

27 Norrece Thomas Jones made such an error in his otherwise excellent dissertation, "Control Mechanisms in South Carolina Slave Society, 1800-1865," (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1981), 103, when he noted that "the driver on General Bratton Canaan's plantation was the only slave given 'de honor to wear boots.'" There was no General Canaan in South Carolina, but there was a General John Bratton who owned a plantation named "Canaan" in Fairfield

A large number of informants have two interviews to their credit in the collection. In such cases the dual interviews are treated statistically as a single source. Although subtle biases are common throughout the narratives, outright fabrication appears to be rare. Perhaps the most mendacious former South Carolina slave was Richard Mack, one of these informants with two narratives in the collection. Mack had a tendency towards self-aggrandizement, and claimed in the first interview to have known General Robert E. Lee during the Civil War. Asked by his incredulous interviewer, Martha S. Pinckney, to describe Lee's famous horse, Mack answered with the correct color: gray. He then told of having once received a \$500 tip for polishing the boots of his master's friend.²⁸ Both of these memories *could* be true, but seem unlikely. He might have seen Lee during the war and, given the inflationary state of the Confederate economy, \$500 was less than it might first appear. In a second interview, though, this time to a J.O.C. Tiedman, Mack spoke of making a balloon flight over the city of Charleston during the war with a young German named Count Zeppelin. Tiedman checked a number of sources and concluded that Mack's "claim of having made an ascension in an observation balloon, during the War, is a myth."²⁹ All of Mack's claims, especially anything elevating him or his character, have to be doubted by careful scholars.³⁰

District. The error results from not checking Phillip Evans' statement that he was "born at General Bratton Canaan place" (RS1V2SC2:34). See Jackson, ed., *South Carolina Census Index*, and "Hon. John Bratton," in *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men of the Carolinas of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Madison, Wis.: Brant & Fuller, 1892; reprint, Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Co., 1972), 1:433–36.

28 RS1V3SC3:151–56.

29 SS2V1SC:383–85, quote on page 385.

30 Eugene Genovese may have been taken in by Mack: "Richard Mack, among others, recalled that he could finish a given task quickly and would then help others so that they would avoid punishment." See Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 323. This does not imply that such behavior did not exist—Silva (Sylvia) Durant, in

External evidence will also be used. Primary sources, such as plantation journals, diaries, newspapers, and the accounts of visitors to the region have been consulted to help place the narratives in the proper cultural and temporal context. These sources, as well as secondary works, have been used to test some of the conclusions drawn from the narratives. Finally, since the narratives cannot always supply adequate data on the resistance found therein, external sources are necessary to fill in the gaps. One obvious example of this is runaway ages—a lacuna admirably filled by extrapolating data from runaway notices in regional newspapers.

Since the definition of resistance includes more than just running away, a variety of behaviors found in the narratives should be scrutinized. First, to understand the nature of slave resistance, it first becomes necessary to establish a proper definition of the word “resistance.” This word means, in the sense used in this study, any conscious subversion of the slave labor system, be it interference with the purpose of slave labor, production, or with the means slaveholders and Southern society used to control the slave labor force. By this definition, acts ranging from insurrection to malingering to the maintenance of black society under the demands of planter-class hegemony count as resistance.³¹

These acts include theft, disinclination to work, disobedience, assaulting the master or overseer, joining Union forces during the Civil War, and suicide, among others. In addition, the

RS1V2SC1:337–48, esp. 345, also mentions helping others—but just that Mack’s assertions are poor evidence.

31 A review of the various theories of resistance, and a discussion of this study’s place in relation to them follows in the first chapter. The demarcation line between resistance and planter control of slaves can be fuzzy at times. Religion, for instance, served two purposes: slaveholders used religion to spread their version of morality—subservience, obedience, and meekness—while the slaves used religion to help maintain community cohesiveness in the face of planter-class hegemonic demands and pressures. For a good general introduction to religion and slavery, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).