

SHADOWED THRESHOLDS: RURAL POVERTY
IN LOUISA COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1860-1900

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ABSTRACT

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A tracing of a random sample of black and white rural families through census and tax records in a Southern community after the Civil War--Louisa County, Virginia--illustrates the response of individual families to conditions of economic marginality. The war brought economic changes like the greater commercialization of land, labor, and capital that threatened the class and status positions of large landholders who, contrary to belief, survived the war in great numbers. The operation of a free market economy portended the kind of economic democracy that would bring an end to the traditional social order which the slave economy had guaranteed. Yet, between 1865 and 1870 traditional social arrangements persisted, as the aims of the large planters dovetailed with those of the Freedmen's Bureau, which was so interested in restricting the geographic mobility of the former slaves that they allowed the large planters to negotiate labor contracts whose terms perpetuated the old order. After 1870, however, the refusal of increasing numbers of freedmen to live and work under these conditions coupled with a long period of economic depression required other adjustments to preserve the old order. Large owners responded by choosing to operate as

commercial farmers, which proved unwise in a period of price decline for all farm commodities, and which led to some of the economic democracy large owners had previously avoided. Small numbers of blacks and whites reaped some of the rewards of the large owners' losses. Yet, the legacy of concentrated wealth built up in the slave economy persisted in the form of depleted soil, dependency for the majority of the population, and widespread poverty.

The shadow of poverty touched the thresholds of individual households and the institution of the family served as an adaptive mechanism under economically marginal conditions. Contrary to the popular myth about the "black matriarchy," a myth encouraged by the overemphasis given to this family type by E. Franklin Frazier and the "Moynihan Report," black families were typically two-parent households, an indication that slavery failed to destroy the vitality of the black family. Generally, household composition, as revealed in the manuscript census schedules of 1870, 1880, and 1900, appeared to be less an expression of cultural values, and more intimately related to economic pressures and social conditions. In the absence of social welfare institutions to mitigate the detrimental effects of poverty, the family filled the gap by assuming instrumental roles. In addition to changes in household composition, the effects of poverty are also evident in the demographic features of the two racial groups--in the age-sex composition of the populations, ages at marriage, and in sex and dependency ratios.

Public assistance for the poor was nearly nonexistent, and the history of Virginia's public relief legislation is a story of how poor laws developed into instruments of social control, a development that explains the parsimonious attitudes of civil officials in our period. Limited public assistance in the midst of concentrated wealth and increasing poverty raises a perplexing question. Why, under objective conditions where we might expect some form of collective action, did the South never have a revolution? After sifting through a rich body of European writing on peasant uprisings, a theory is proposed that relates collective action to the extent of mutual interdependence, a sense of group solidarity, that exists at the local level. Whatever the reason, the missing revolution allowed the resolution of the contradiction between a social order that implied class antagonism with desires for an ordered society.

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PREFACE

Any student who attempts to do a community study is faced with a number of problems, some of which are unique to this kind of study. Initially, he must parry critics who demand that a community be representative of a broad spectrum of American life. I recall some anguish over this argument in the early stages, and some time spent weighing counties on the basis of this or that set of factors before deciding that no community could reasonably lay claim to representativeness. The county upon which I finally settled--Louisa County, Virginia--is in no sense statistically representative. Yet, it is a Southern community that underwent processes of social and economic change that affected all Southern communities to some extent between 1860 and 1900, and therefore Louisa County is a case study of these representative social processes. Nothing beyond that is claimed.

In addition, a community study demands a certain competence in fields other than history if we are to have an integrated picture of the ways in which national events impinged upon the lives of plain people. Some understanding of sociology, anthropology, and economics is useful in this regard. Although I have had some formal

training in all these areas except anthropology, I make no claims to expertise. That has not prevented me from relying upon whatever knowledge I have in these disciplines in order to present a coherent picture of the social and economic order. I hope the value of an interdisciplinary perspective outweighs any errors I have committed in its pursuit.

Besides the interdisciplinary perspective, I have also consciously tried to make the study as comparative as possible. In no other area of American history does this seem more necessary than in the history of the South. Indeed, Southern history has had more than its share of provincialists whose narrow interests demand a fresh perspective if any advance is to be made in Southern historiography or if we are to frame questions that lead in new directions. We need to search for regularities in economic and social conditions in other societies that lead to similar regularities in economic and social behavior in the American South. In this way we should be able to discern patterns of behavior that result in generalized theories as explanations and thereby transcend the level of mere description. Success here will be decided by whatever further research this study provokes.

Not the least of the problems confronting the social historian is the kind of evidence used and the techniques employed to deal with this evidence. My study began

with a forty percent sample of all those who listed occupation on the 1880 manuscript census of population as "farmer." This produced 265 black and 290 white families which were then traced through the manuscript census schedules of agriculture of 1870 and 1880 as well as the population schedules for 1870 and 1900. Heads of household were also traced through local personal property and land tax books at decade intervals between 1860 and 1900 for more detailed economic data. Since no census of population or agriculture was available between 1880 and 1900, tax records proved to be valuable sources in filling this gap as well as serving other useful purposes noted throughout the study. Positive identification of heads of household on tax records is difficult, however, since one usually has nothing to go on except name and perhaps enumeration district. This problem was surmounted by eliminating all duplicate names from any further consideration. Thus, it was fortunate to have begun with more than ten percent of the population, for that permitted the elimination of families that could not be studied while still retaining a desirable proportion of Louisa County families. Actually, the final group included about eleven percent of the black and fifteen percent of the white population.

For those who have used the 1900 manuscript census, as I have, the protection of identities is required by

law for any information gathered on individuals from that census. I have afforded the same protection, however, regardless of the data source, out of a sense of honor, even though I suspect many of these plain people would now lend their names gladly to anyone trying to discover and articulate what they once knew so well but could not say. Thus, wherever possible, I have protected the identity of individuals by using their first name and the first letter of their last name only. In the case of a planter who has donated his plantation records to a library, it has been impossible to protect his identity and his full name has been used.

Such a massive collection of data cannot be analyzed manually. On each of the 555 families, for example, 170 different variables or pieces of information were collected. Computerization became a necessity and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was the computer program used for analysis. All of the information was initially taken from original sources in coded form so that it could be key-punched immediately without involving any additional steps of preparation. Generally, it was found useful to record most values verbatim since one might need the information in this form for some computations. Groupings into ranges can easily be accomplished later, if necessary, upon instructions to the computer. The only difficulty encountered

with SPSS was its requirement that a case have the same number of computer cards. Since this was a family study in which a separate card was assigned to each family member, and since all families do not have the same number of members, separate computer runs had to be made for family members and heads of household. Usually, this was only a minor, if time consuming, inconvenience.

Finally, and perhaps not unique to Southern history, the near total absence of case studies of this sort in Southern history has encouraged a rather free use of the sweeping generalization by students in the field.

Secondary literature, of which there is no scarcity, has repeated these generalizations with such frequency that they have attained the status of fact. More seriously, they have also framed the terms of the debate making Southern history a rather stagnant field and shutting off new ideas. I have tried to avoid these traps. Where I have challenged previous arguments, and I have done so often, it was because I genuinely doubted their validity, not out of any desire to make a reputation for myself at someone else's expense.

Generally, the study begins by contrasting the slave economy to the post-war economy in order to answer familiar questions about change and continuity in Southern history. Monthly reports of Freedmen's Bureau officers together with plantation records provide a composite

picture of rural society after the war, and reflect the response of farmers and laborers to shifting social and economic conditions. Chapter II deals with the demographic characteristics of the population, both as explanations for social change and as descriptions of how the lives of ordinary people were affected by conditions of economic marginality. Chapter III examines farm owners at all levels in detail, presents a picture of the social structure after the war, treats the major questions in Southern historiography, and stresses the correlation between poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth. Chapter IV focuses upon the dependent classes, the largest segment of the population, shows how they suffered from the concentration of wealth, and explains the adjustments they made. Chapter V examines the response of individual households to poverty, and reveals the resources upon which the people of Louisa came to depend in trying to mitigate the effects of poverty. Chapter VI reveals the limits of public assistance in Louisa, and traces the history of attitudes toward the poor which encouraged the parsimony of the last part of the nineteenth century. Chapter VII suggests some hypotheses about why such extraordinary conditions of poverty, the legacy of which was due in part to the absence of a thrust from the bottom, never led to a revolution in the South.

For those anxious to affix labels, let me hasten to add that the study pays no allegiance to specific ideologies of capitalism or Marxism. The goal has been one of eclecticism in which I have tried to avoid the narrowness of a specific ideological box without neglecting the valuable insights all ideologies contain to some extent. The choice of a specific viewpoint was always made because it seemed to have more explanatory force, apart from any other considerations.

I have acquired a number of debts in the course of this study. Most of the ideas about how to approach the work and what kinds of questions might be raised, I owe to Josef J. Barton; and I feel fortunate, indeed, that our paths crossed, not only because of his extraordinary depth as a first-rate historian from which I benefited, but also because I gained a life-long friend. I owe a large measure of thanks to Edward E. Younger who helped me get the kind of financial support necessary to continue the study and in whose seminar I first began to explore the topic of rural poverty. As program adviser during a good part of my graduate work, he has given me wise counsel and has been a steadfast supporter and friend. Robert Cross read the dissertation carefully and offered valuable criticisms. Tom G. Kessinger provided useful suggestions about particular problems. I must thank Charles B. Dew for several stimulating discussions of troublesome issues.

The staffs of the University of Virginia Library, the National Archives, especially James D. Walker, and the Virginia State Library have been especially helpful as were the clerks of the Louisa County Courthouse and I thank them all.

My family has contributed in ways some of which are hidden to both myself and them. My parents, Robert and Ruby Shifflett, would consider it thanks enough that I have told their story, the outcome of which they knew all along. My wife, Barbara, deserves more than I can or need say here. Her tireless efforts in typing and editing these pages and her labors to support me while the study was being completed made it all possible.

CHAPTER I

LOUISA COUNTY, THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORDER, 1860-1870

Louisa County was established in 1742 when it was separated from its eastern neighbor, Hanover County. It lies in the Virginia Piedmont and is nearly rectangular in shape, being 16 miles wide and 30 miles long. It has two major rivers, the South Anna that flows in a southwesterly direction 40 miles through the county, and the North Anna that flows east and southeast. The latter with Negro Run constitute Louisa's northern boundary. Throughout its history it has been a rural county; in 1970, 93 percent of its population still lived in the rural area. The county seat, Louisa, incorporated in 1873, was the largest town in 1970 with 633 inhabitants. The only other town of note was Mineral which had about 400 inhabitants in 1970.¹

A 1905 soil survey noted that Louisa County soil, mostly cecil sandy loam (46 percent) or cecil loam (34 percent), was poorer than other soils in the Virginia

¹J. Devereux Weeks, Dates of Origin of Virginia Counties and Municipalities (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Institute of Government, 1967), 5.

Piedmont.² Much of its poverty was due to a long history of tobacco cultivation which became the earliest staple crop. After most of the land was parcelled out in 400 acre plots in the 1720s for a small cash payment, tobacco growing began immediately and continued on a large scale until the 1850s when Louisa agriculture became more diversified.³

Before the war it was a large slaveholding county that included 4,573 slaves in 1790, a number that more than doubled in 70 years to 10,518 slaves in 1860. Its population continued to be predominantly black after the war; and although the proportion of blacks decreased with each decade, in 1900 Louisa black inhabitants were still numerically larger with 8,621 blacks and 7,896 whites.⁴

Before examining the social structure of Louisa after the war, it will be helpful to have some picture of the slave economy in order to understand what if any social and economic changes the war brought. The

²Hugh H. Bennett and W. E. McLendon, "Soil Survey of Louisa County, Virginia," in Field Operations of the Bureau of Soils, 1905 (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 7th Report, 1907), 191-192; for a history of the county characteristically preoccupied with the elite, see Malcolm H. Harris, History of Louisa County, Virginia (Richmond: The Dietz Press, Publishers, 1936).

³Harris, History of Louisa County, 5; Bennett and McLendon, "Soil Survey," 192.

⁴12th Census of the United States, Population (Washington, 1901), 43-44.

tendency among historians has been to see the war as a great watershed in Southern history. The war did settle several pivotal issues, of which slavery was the most prominent. Is there any further basis for assigning such importance to the Civil War, however? Through the use of a model we will be able to indicate the nature and dimensions of social and economic change and answer this question.

One of the great contributions of Eugene Genovese to Southern historiography is his view that slavery was more than an economic system; it was a system of specific social arrangements as well. In the aftermath of his argument this appears to be a rather simple and obvious point. Yet it was Genovese who recognized its significance and who assessed the economic costs to the South of definite social ideals. Retarded capital accumulation and the failure to develop home markets were some of the results of an allegiance to aristocratic, pre-middle class ideals.⁵

But he went even further. Construing capitalism in a narrow, undifferentiated sense, Genovese went on to deny that slavery was a capitalistic form of economic organization. Rather, its pre-rational, labor-intensive facets clashed with Northern industrial

⁵Eugene D. Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery (New York: Random House, Vintage Book Edition, 1961, 1965), see especially Chapter 1.

capitalism, and the Civil War became a confrontation between two economies of divergent economic goals.

Barrington Moore, who agreed that the civilizations of North and South were different, disagreed that the explanation of these differences required a denial that slave society was non-capitalist. In fact, the South had a capitalistic society--admittedly it lacked a thriving middle class, but the Southern economy actually promoted American industrial growth. The characteristic labor-repressive agricultural feature was only an obstacle to capitalism of a certain sort, i.e., the kind which included political and social democracy. Southern society did not impede development of a unique kind of capitalism, Moore argued, and although it may have been neither democratic nor competitive, it was nonetheless capitalist.⁶ In short, Moore had challenged the implicit presuppositions in Genovese's definition of capitalism. In this view capitalism need not be competitive or democratic to be capitalism.

Insofar as profit taking is a characteristic of capitalist ventures, recent scholarship supports the view of the plantation as a capitalist enterprise and the economy it created a capitalist economy. Alfred Conrad and John Meyer and, more recently, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman have found slavery a very

⁶Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

profitable undertaking.⁷ Moreover, other features of the slave economy also lead to the same conclusion. For example, the use of labor as a means of generating a surplus income, made possible because the return to labor is less than what the products of its efforts are worth, is typically capitalistic. So too is the plowing back of these profits into other income-generating factors (in this case land or slaves). Both the pre-war Northern and Southern economies in this sense were capitalist economies, motivated by capitalist goals, and operating under capitalist terms of profit and loss. Thus, the slave economy was built upon a capitalist base of economic organization.

The determination of the form of economic organization within the slave economy presents us with only half of the picture of the ante-bellum South, however, as Genovese argues. We are still left with the question of the relationship between a specific form of economic organization and the social structure itself. In order to pursue the connections between social stratification and economic organization and, ultimately, to address the question of social and economic change after the war, we need some greater understanding of these inter-

⁷Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South," Journal of Political Economy, LXVI (April, 1958), 95-130; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974).

relationships. In what ways do economies of a specific kind, such as the slave economy, shape social organization? How do alterations in economic organization set in motion forces which may alter the social structure as well?

It is essential to keep in mind that economic and social values in specific economies may rank differently in a hierarchy of values depending upon the nature of the economy itself. Important in this regard is the place of the market and its influence within a local economy. Karl Polanyi has pointed out the social implications of a localized traditional economy versus a rationalized market economy where the market has become the dominant institution. In a traditional economy, local markets develop as neighborhood trading centers, and although they are important to the life of a community, they never rise to dominate the social organization. In traditional economies which are typically self-sufficient, exchange is incidental because it does not provide the necessities of life. Most importantly, economic relations are subordinate to social organization and household autarky generally prevails.

In a market economy, on the other hand, which Polanyi defines as an economic system controlled, directed, and regulated by markets alone, the economic system shapes social organization and social relations.

Since the economic factor has come to assume crucial importance for the existence of the society, any other result is impossible. Society is organized around the economic system and is fashioned in such a way as to allow that system to function according to its own laws, rather than according to any predilections for specific social arrangements.

Furthermore, the market centered economy operates on the basis of certain economic laws that buttress its economic priorities, i.e., laws of supply and demand. Individual producers, who under a traditional economy produced chiefly to satisfy individual needs, when drawn into the market economy have their economic behavior dictated by these laws. Production and distribution of goods no longer depend upon custom or tradition based on a certain social ideal, but upon prices. Since prices form incomes, they alone determine who gets what, unless of course government intervention reorients these priorities. For the individual producer who is drawn into the market economy, his allegiance to more traditional social arrangements may have to give way to a social order where social ideals are subordinated to economic realities. At the very least, old social ideals are threatened by the transition.

One of the preconditions necessary to the rise of a market economy, Polanyi argues, is the commercialization of land, labor, and money, and the treatment of

them as commodities. A commodity is any item produced for sale, a condition not met by these three factors in their natural state. Labor is human activity not produced for sale, but for other reasons; land is just another name for nature; money is not produced either, and is only a token of purchasing power. Yet in the market economy these elements are treated as commodities with prices (wages, rent, and interest) which form incomes. Once they have been subordinated to the market, they become a part of the economic system and become subjected to market laws of supply and demand.

The step that transforms isolated, traditional markets into a market economy is crucial. Polanyi argues strongly that this is not the result of some inexorable law of barter whereby isolated markets invariably turn into larger nets. Rather, the market economy comes about as the result of artificial stimulants. For example, in Europe mercantilism was a transitional phase between the primitive and market economies. It was state intervention that initiated the transition, however, and ultimately paved the way for the market economy.⁸

Prior to the Civil War, although some feeble market activity stirred, Virginia failed to develop the

⁸Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944, 1957). This is basically a summary of Chapters 5 and 6, only a part of a magnificent piece of work.

internal market as an institution. During the last part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Richmond, Norfolk, Alexandria, and Fredericksburg were the only Virginia markets for farm products. Transportation systems were so under-developed, however, that these were nothing more than local farmer's markets. Old farmers related tales of the difficulties in hauling their produce over poor wagon roads to these points in order to exchange their grain or tobacco for supplies that could not be raised. Many fed their crops to livestock and then drove cattle and sheep to these markets.⁹ In the case of tobacco, the primary cash crop of Louisa County as well as many other Virginia counties, many small producers sold their staple locally to the general merchant in nearby communities who received it in exchange for debts or supplies. Even the larger farmers, who shipped the bulk of their tobacco to the more distant points were forced at times to sell to local processors, especially if their crop was rejected because of improper curing, poor handling, or trash contamination.¹⁰ In 1860 there were still 252 small tobacco factories in Virginia, most of which were located in

⁹"Historical Study of Prices Received by Producers of Farm Products in Virginia, 1801-1927," Virginia Polytechnic Institute Bulletin No. 37 (March, 1929), 1-10.

¹⁰Paul W. Gates, The Farmer's Age: Agriculture 1815-1860 (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960) /Vol. III of the Economic History of the United States/, 104.

rural districts.¹¹ The small number of market centers and the difficulty of reaching them limited most trade to the immediate area.

The measured pace of transportation developments hampered the growth of the market net and limited its scope as well. Although railroad building in Virginia had begun in the 1830s, prior to 1860 most of the lines connected local points and did not tie Virginia to any wider market nets. In 1831 the Staunton and Potomac and the Petersburg and Roanoke lines were built. These were followed by other connections in 1832, 1836, 1837, and 1838. In the 1840s, little railroad building occurred and Virginia concentrated on the James River and Great Kanawha Canals. Railroad building revived again in the 1850s and began to accelerate. In 1850 Virginia had 384 miles of single track which grew to 677 miles in 1852. This revival continued until 1860 when the Lynchburg, Virginia, and Tennessee Railroad opened, extending through the Blue Ridge mountains, into southwestern Virginia and on to Chattanooga. In addition, the Richmond, Danville, and Petersburg Railroad built a connection to Lynchburg in the same decade. These lines in the 1850s and 1860s began to bring Virginia into contact with the growing industrial cities, especially to the North, for the first time.¹²

¹¹Peterson, "Historical Study of Prices," 16.

¹²Ibid., 10-12.

The development of a market economy was also impeded by the kind of commerce that was actually being carried on prior to the war. As a region the South had become the source of most of the nations exports. In 1859 the South supplied three fourths of all the products exported by the United States. Although the war caused some diminution in this percentage, by 1867 the region was again supplying seven tenths of all domestic exports.¹³ This retarded the development of home markets, and acted as a brake on commercial activity throughout the South. Those markets, which the specialization in cotton and tobacco produced, tended to be far removed from the Southern economy.

Besides underdeveloped transportation nets and the nature of commercial transactions, land and capital were commercialized at very low levels, and labor had scarcely become commercialized at all, conditions which thwarted the advance of the market economy. In the case of land, a large portion of it was controlled by large planters and rarely came on to the market for sale. In 1860 Virginia was exceeded only by Georgia in the number of farms over 500 acres, with average farm size at 324 acres.¹⁴ The 1860 landbooks of Louisa County

¹³Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897 (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1945) /Vol. V of the Economic History of the United States, 110-120.

¹⁴Gates, The Farmer's Age, 110.

reveal that out of 1,166 landholders, 162 had farms over 500 acres. Moreover, this 14 percent of the landholders controlled close to one half of all the land in the county.¹⁵ If a plantation should be defined as an area larger than that which could be cultivated solely with family labor, an area close to 100 acres after the war,¹⁶ the grip of the planter could be said to be even more complete. In Louisa County in 1860 two thirds (N=777) of all owners held over 100 acres.

For a number of reasons, the commercialization of money was also minimal. Banking in the South did not become very extensive until after the Civil War. Since land was commercialized at such a low level, and since labor was scarcely commercialized at all, money did not play a very large role at the local level. In addition, few transactions required the actual transfer of money. Wage payments, debt liquidations, or purchases of general merchandise were primarily commodity exchanges

¹⁵The actual amounts were 139,984 out of a total of 317,612 acres.

¹⁶This definition of a plantation was also used by Roger W. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939, 1972), 239-241. The U.S. Department of Agriculture noted that most 100 acre farms averaged about 65 improved acres, see Bennett and McLendon, "Soil Survey," 211; besides the availability of family labor, the number of acres that can be farmed depends also upon the number of draft animals owned. W. J. Edwards has estimated that 25 acres per mule could be worked during the year, see Edwards, Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt (Boston: The Cowhill Company, 1918), 15.

and money was a very uncommon token of exchange. Such a low level of monetization within the rural economy was not conducive to the rise of a market economy.

Most of the labor in the South before the war was enslaved and its costs to the employer could be more easily controlled than would be the case in a competitive market situation. Planters decided upon the quantity of rations, and plantation records reveal a striking similarity. Decisions of allotments of clothing and rations were based upon neighborhood agreement crystallized by tradition. Price fluctuations that raised the commodity cost of labor were met by cutting rations or demanding increased labor intensity on the part of planter employers. In these and other ways planters encouraged the perpetuation of a pre-rational economy.

Thus, the slave economy was unique, incorporating elements of both a traditional and a market economy. It operated under categories of profit and loss while being led by an aristocracy, and supported by a truncated middle class. Owners were anxious to turn a profit, while at the same time the existing social order was higher in their hierarchy of values than the goal of achieving maximum economic gains. Indeed, planters were quick to point out that Southern society was different from that of the North because it rejected the more crass elements of the capitalist society such as the cash nexus as the basis for human relationships.

As a part of its uniqueness, the slave economy nurtured and perpetuated a rigid, class stratified social order. In Genovese's terms it "extruded a class of slaveholders with a special ideology and psychology and the political and economic power to impose their values on society as a whole."¹⁷ It is this ideology that explains their actions both before and, as we shall see, after the war. The desire to pursue rational economic goals while staving off the threat to existing social arrangements that this pursuit portended explains the mixed nature of the slave economy. That the planter class succeeded in having the best of both worlds was due to his complete control over land, labor, and money. This allowed him to extract a profit and to decide upon rules of production and distribution of goods without having to subordinate social organization to economic demands.

The Civil War had the potential, at least, of serving as the "artificial stimulant" in bringing a market economy to the South. And, indeed, it called forth many of the prerequisites. Land, labor, and money became increasingly commercialized, laying the foundations for the market economy, and the rise of a more rational capitalism. Whereas the renting of land had been uncommon before the war, afterwards the proliferation

¹⁷Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery, 8.

of cash and share tenants was widespread. Money, what little of it there was, also became commercialized. Merchants acted as bankers, loaning farmers tools and supplies until the crops were harvested and then demanded payment of the loan, plus an additional increment in interest for the risk this entailed.¹⁸ The increased importance of money in the economy can be seen in a law in effect in Virginia between 1870 and 1885, which raised the legal rate of interest from six percent to 12 percent in order to attract capital.¹⁹

For the followers of the old order, the most momentous change and one that threatened to fix the market economy firmly upon the region was the commercialization of labor. It increased the importance and need for a circulating medium as payments in kind gradually gave way to money wages. The Civil War had changed the legal status of the former slave and now arrangements between capital and labor would be perforce contractual. The planter could no longer pay what he thought the laborer deserved, and neither could he depend upon custom or tradition as a ceiling on wages. The market for labor had become competitive and, unless some way could be found to get around it, control over wage rates, the

¹⁸ Enoch Marvin Banks, The Economics of Land Tenure in Georgia (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1905), 54-55.

¹⁹ Peterson, "Historical Study of Prices," 16.

most important element in production cost, was no longer solely in the hands of the planter. And if one could not control so important a factor, it was entirely possible that one might lose his class and status position as well.

The general monetization of the rural economy that accompanied the commercialization of land, labor and capital, made prices more important in the post-war economy. Rent, wages, and interest were the prices of land, labor and capital, and their levels delimited the production and distribution of goods and services. The price mechanism threatened to remove the prerogatives of those with economic power to decide upon the particular shape of the social order. Decisions formerly their province would now be made for them unless some way could be found to escape the logic of the market economy.

Concurrent with these developments, was the simultaneous growth of transportation nets that had been accelerating since 1850. Improved transportation facilities turned heretofore local or neighborhood trading centers into primary markets. Lynchburg, Danville, and Richmond, who had all profited by the railroad building of the 1850s, enjoyed expanding networks after the war. An 1872 line extended the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad to Washington, D. C.; new lines by the Covington and Ohio and the Shenandoah

Valley Railroads opened up southwestern Virginia north from Roanoke to Hagerstown, Maryland, and west across the Alleghenies to the Big Sandy River.²⁰ The surge in the importance of national markets was reflected in the decline in village tobacco factories in Virginia from 252 in 1860 to 131 ten years later, and in the rise of small urban plants in the above mentioned cities, which together with Petersburg employed most of the state's tobacco workers.²¹ These developments contributed to the growth of distant market centers that obeyed the laws of supply and demand out of the range of planter domination.

Clearly, of much greater import than economic growth and the factor that laid the crucial foundation for structural changes in the Southern social order was the freeing of labor. By freeing a large labor force, the Civil War had loosed the powerful free-market mechanism of supply and demand which would now set wage rates rather than the planter himself. The slave economy had lost its base because those upon whose backs it was built were no longer assets, but liabilities, no longer credits but debits. Overnight the costs of farming the same acreage had inflated enormously, and

²⁰Ibid., 12.

²¹Gates, The Farmer's Age, 104; Peterson, "Historical Study of Prices," 8-12.

farming, even on a similar scale, now entailed greater financial outlays. If these costs could not be met, one simply had to make adjustments, such as reduce the scale of farming, or liquidate assets. These were not encouraging alternatives to those whose class position under slavery had been guaranteed.

Although the basis for the market economy had been laid by the war and economic change, its emergence was not inevitable. So much depended upon the response of large farmers, and even more crucial was the role of the national government. Would planters now have to attune their actions to the market place and disregard their predilections for any social organization other than that growing out of the market? The answer to that question depended upon the government's position. If large planters wished to continue to pursue the old social ideal, it would be necessary to have a pool of laborers whose costs would not be significantly higher than they were under slavery. A government policy that would encourage labor mobility could destroy this as an option. The availability of cheap labor was a prerequisite to the preservation of the old social order.

An excellent picture of capital-labor arrangements after the Civil War is contained in the Freedmen's Bureau records. Between 1865 and 1869 field officers of the Bureau filed monthly reports on conditions within the county of their responsibility. In these reports

are revealed the attitudes of individuals at all levels of society from the planter to the laborer. In addition, they contain a number of other things, such as reports on racial attitudes, unemployment, poverty, and legal problems of freedmen. Also, within these records are labor contracts between planters and laborers, and government circulars setting forth bureau policy on various matters. Generally, they present a rather complete picture of rural society during the period immediately after the Civil War.

A second model is needed to explain how the rise of the market economy affected capital-labor relationships (as revealed in Freedmen's Bureau records), and to demonstrate the impact of the market economy at the more personal level as well. For this purpose, all human relationships are divided into two categories: horizontal or vertical relationships, both of which are grounded in the principal of reciprocity. Individuals are linked to their families (horizontal ties) not only because of basic affectual needs, but because one's life chances are intimately associated with the family. In times of social distress and under crisis situations this interdependence of family members becomes more intense. This is especially true when alternative sources of aid and assistance are limited or non-existent,

in which case family solidarity becomes crucial in a functional way.²²

Likewise vertical ties with one's neighbors, landlord, store-keeper, or employer are reciprocal ties in which economic security is exchanged for rent, labor, or trade. Workers depend upon their landlord for basic needs in exchange for their labor. Merchants provide specific services to clients in return for compensation and further trade.

Periods of social upheaval that threaten to alter these time-honored relationships evoke discernible patterns of behavior on the part of those on either side of the exchange relationship. The responses that flow out of changed economic and social conditions go together to make up a cohesive portrait of the social order. It is this model that I shall use to explore exchange relationships in Louisa County after the Civil War as revealed in the records of the Freedmen's Bureau. We should be able to discern, in the structuring of these relationships, the attitudes and values of the participants, the responses to the market economy

²²For the development of these theoretical points and studies that make the theory operational, see Michael Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); especially 172-175; Allen W. Johnson, Sharecroppers of the Serato (Stanford University Press, 1971).

at different levels and more specifically, the extent to which the market economy developed in Louisa County between 1865 and 1870.

It is important to keep in mind that the war loosed two powerful, but contradictory, impulses. On the one hand, it had disturbed traditional arrangements between capital and labor and produced economic hardship. This intensified the needs of laborers for the economic security which only the planter could provide. Hence, one effect of the war was to heighten the laborer's sense of economic dependence. On the other hand, the war had also released another powerful countervailing force--the desire of large numbers of freedmen (and perhaps a few poor whites) to escape the social and economic dependence on those who had provided employment and social welfare. Thus, freedmen desired economic independence and the free choice of vertical ties. Yet, the need for security drew them into exchange relationships with neighbors, landlords, or employers where this freedom was jeopardized.

Contemporary polemicists had predicted that the end of slavery would bring a change in social and economic relationships. Many anti-slavery propagandists had argued that the abolition would "emancipate" the poor white laborer. In 1864 the Louisiana Constitutional Convention, dominated by whites of the lower classes,

had voted to abolish slavery in hopes that this would lead to an open market for labor where poor whites could compete with "free" slave labor.²³ In addition, many felt the demise of the plantation system would lead to land redistribution and a region of small farmers. Among the freedmen, rumors flourished about "40 acres and a mule."²⁴

However, the federal government was obviously convinced that the war should not become an occasion for rearranging the social order, for federal agencies firmly endorsed pre-existing social arrangements and even at times prescribed policies that perpetuated the status quo. In June 1865 the Richmond Office of the Freedmen's Bureau, a government agency established to safeguard the rights of former slaves, issued a general order stating that vagrancy would not be permitted; that neither blacks nor whites would be allowed "to abandon their proper occupations, to desert their families or roam in idleness about this Department."²⁵ A circular issued by the Washington office of the Bureau in November 1865 was even more specific. It stated that

²³Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 205.

²⁴Willie Lee Rose, "The Promise of Land," in Allen Weinstein and Frank Otto Gatell, eds., The Segregation Era, 1863-1954, 16-28.

²⁵General Order 77, 23 June 1865. Records of the Field Offices of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Records Group 105 (National Archives and Records Service).

when employment is offered and laborers refuse it, they should be treated as vagrants.²⁶

These circulars were issued when freedmen and whites began to exercise their newly acquired rights to break off vertical ties at their own choosing by rejecting labor contracts that were as oppressive as conditions of slavery. Noting this growing trend as well as the persistent rumor of land redistribution, the Bureau issued a circular in September 1865 giving specific instructions to Bureau Field Officers to quash the rumors about land. They were instructed to explain to freedmen that the government has only a small quantity of land, just enough for a few families and that no lands will be given to them. Tell them, the circular further instructed, that they should negotiate labor contracts "at once." Tell them that the system of contracts is not like slavery but "is adopted by free laborers everywhere."²⁷ In the cases of freedmen who resisted this new form of slavery, the November circular had provided legal means of dealing with them as lawbreakers.

²⁶Circular [No Number], 4 November 1865. Records Group 105.

²⁷Circular [No Number], 19 September 1865. Records Group 105. With regards to land, no land was ever confiscated in Louisa County. Land reports in the Bureau records show the Bureau never had more than 83,000 acres in Virginia, and by 1868 all but 10,000 acres of this had been returned to original owners.

Added degradation of the freedmen of Louisa came in the form of an order issued by the Justice of the Peace directing a patrol to visit all plantations in the district in order to collect "government" weapons in their possession. The order further authorized the same patrol to go around three times during Christmas week, and more often if necessary, to search the houses of any suspected of having concealed weapons. The Freedmen's Bureau officer in the district of which Louisa County was a part forwarded a copy of this order to Washington with the comment that the only weapons confiscated were those in the hands of blacks.²⁸ In economic terms, this meant that black workers who were unable to live on wages prescribed for them in contracts were also to be deprived of the opportunity to supplement their diets with game from the forest.

Another example of the interjection of the federal government into the domain of vertical relationships was its action in setting wage rates and "overseeing" tenure arrangements. A circular issued in July 1865 instructed district commanders to determine "in your own mind" rates of wages and enforce that rate. The circular continued that these wages should be secured by a lien on the crops or land. It concluded that

²⁸Order signed by Justice of the Peace, 18 December 1865; accompanied by letter from Freedmen's Bureau officer, 4th District, to Washington Headquarters, 26 February 1866. Records Group 105.

peonage or apprenticeship would not be tolerated--at least, not "without proper consent."²⁹ Thus we are able to be more precise about the development of the lien system than the conclusion that it "sprang up out of the ruins of the old regime, and spread like Jimson weed."³⁰ If it was a response to the absence of credit, it was a practice promoted and sanctioned by the national government.

Thus, the policies of the federal government as exercised through its administrative arm, the Freedmen's Bureau, underpinned the "new" social order. They allowed the large planter to farm in much the same way as he had before the war. By encouraging familiar vertical relationships, the federal government provided a pool of laborers necessary to the continuation of the large scale planter farm. Moreover, more radical measures, such as land redistribution, that might have lead to a more democratic society were rejected. In the light of these policies, former slaves had no choice immediately after the war but to negotiate labor contracts on whatever terms the planter offered. In most cases, reciprocity as the typical basis of contractual arrangements gave way to necessity, a transition that destroyed the laborer's potential freedom.

²⁹Circular No. 11, 12 July 1865.

³⁰C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 [Vol. IX in A History of the South] (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1970), 180.

Terms of contracts varied from case to case. Generally, however, they provided basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing in return for the services of a laborer and sometimes of his family also. The Freedmen's Bureau was charged with the responsibility of overseeing these contracts, a duty its officers discharged in a rather haphazard manner. Many contracts in the Freedmen's Bureau records had no approval signature indicating that a Bureau officer had seen them. In cases where they had been approved, few noticable differences could be found between those they had reviewed and those they had not. In November 1865 the Bureau issued a circular informing field officers that there was no need to conform to the sample form of contract sent out from the Washington headquarters, an instruction that gave great latitude to those charged with review of contracts.³¹

A close examination of the contracts themselves give some idea of the nature of vertical and horizontal relationships during the period.³² Thomas Watson, a large slaveholding planter in Louisa County who owned over 1,000 acres, hired many of his former slaves to

³¹Circular [No Number], 4 November 1865. Records Group 105.

³²Information gathered from contracts was taken from those labor contracts in the papers of Thomas Watson, Alderman Library, University of Virginia; or, where noted, from contracts of Louisa County farmers located in the Freedmen's Bureau records, Records Group 105.

work for him soon after the war. Most of his contracts were not renting arrangements whereby the contractee received a plot of land to farm. Rather they were arrangements for labor in return for services. Horace W. and his wife rented a room in a house located on Watson's land on a month to month basis for \$1.50 per month. Their job was to guard Watson's orchards, crops, and lands and to keep out vagrants, "whether black or white." The contract stipulated that wood be used sparingly, and that it could only be cut from a designated section of the forest. The value of anything stolen would be required in services from Horace. The contract could be terminated at Watson's discretion.

More typical were those contracts that included whole families. William O., another large planter in the county both before and after the war, hired John A. and his wife Milly who had five small children. O. promised to feed, clothe, and care for the family for the rest of the year in return for their "wages." O. claimed in the contract that this was much more than they were worth and that he did it for their benefit. In January 1866, O. signed on Jacob R. as farm laborer for \$8 per month. In addition, he could allow his mother to live in one room of his quarters, and she was permitted to get firewood from the place and cultivate an acre or two without charge. Both families were

given rations of three pounds of bacon and a peck and a half of meal per adult per week.

In nearly all cases, the wages offered--usually \$8-\$9 a month--were never seen in the form of cash by the laborer. Frequently, one month was retained by the planter as security, and payments, if any were made only quarterly. Final settlement occurred once a year which meant that deductions were made for any food, clothing, and shelter furnished. Most came out with less than \$15 due them at final settlement.

In Goochland County, which adjoins Louisa, the Freedmen's Bureau officer, reporting on conditions there in his monthly report of December 1867, stated that he had been examining accounts of laborers for the past year. Most laborers, he found, used up their designated wage in food and had little left over. Planters owing laborers gave payments to them in the form of orders at the country store. The merchant, who knew he would have to wait for his money from the planter, would sell to the laborer at a higher price. The officer also stated that many laborers reported to him that they had to be watchdogs to avoid being cheated. Neighboring Madison County reported similar conditions. The Louisa officer stated that wages ranged from \$5-\$10 a month which was consumed in exorbitant rent and

oppressive charges. Threats of brow beating, delay, and refusal to pay wages were common.³³

In the event of sickness or any absence from work, pay was either not given the laborer or reduced along with rations. If a child became ill and the planter had to pay for doctor's bills, the head of the household had to work off this amount. The penalty for disobedience was forfeiture of a month's "pay" and discharge. If the worker left without notice, he forfeited the right to all due him.

In a number of contracts, it was obvious that the laborer was paying back an obligation for something the planter had done for him. During the war Watson had moved to Henry County in southwestern Virginia. When the war ended, he paid the railroad fare and other expenses incurred by several former slaves for their move back to his Louisa plantation. In return, the laborer had to work for him at a designated wage rate to pay off this debt. In addition, some contracts in the Freedmen's Bureau records suggest that some laborers paid a specified amount in cash in order to gain a contract initially.

A number of parents hired out their children, some as young as eight years of age. Sometimes they might

³³Monthly Reports of Freedmen's Bureau officers, August 1865-April 1869. Goochland, Madison, and Louisa Counties, Records Group 105.

work on the same farm with their parents, while in other cases they might work on farms where the parents were not located. Sam Q. hired his son Albert, 10 years of age, and daughter Jane, 8 years of age, to Watson who was "to feed, and clothe said children, as similar children hired by others, are fed and clothed in the Green Springs neighborhood." If the children became ill and Watson occurred any expense as a result, Q. would have to pay Watson back in labor. Q. instructed Watson to raise his children "in the way they should go" and agreed that Watson "may inflict moderate and proper chastisement." Q. requested that his children be employed "in labor suited to their ages," and that they be treated with kindness.

As far as the freedman himself was concerned, the most desirable form of contract was that in which he received a piece of land in return for payment in kind or cash. These contracts were more difficult to secure and often went to the most faithful of the former slaves. Typical of tenant contracts was that between Watson and John T. who rented a plot upon which he was instructed to raise corn. For the land, T. had to return to Watson one fourth of the corn crop, including fodder and shucks. Since T. had apparently secured the privilege to farm as a tenant by building a cabin for himself and his family on Watson's land, rent for the house, garden patch, and firewood were considered paid

for one year. The contract further stated that T. would work and "cause his children to work for Watson at neighborhood wage rates." At harvesting times and when T. was not cultivating his own land, T. "and his people" had to work for Watson whenever he required it. Watson was to have preference over T.'s labor and any failure here would be grounds for Watson to repossess the land and house. The contract closed by reminding T. that the main reason Watson was making this arrangement was to secure labor, otherwise he would not rent the land.

With some variations, Watson's other tenant contracts were of a similar nature. Most of the time Watson got permanent improvements--land cleared, cabins built, fields ditched, or fences erected--as a result of the leasing arrangements. Those who had not built cabins themselves or who were not obligated by previous labor services, were assessed a rent of \$36 per year, payable monthly and in advance, with three months payment due the first month. Watson had 10 tenants on his Chestnut Farm place under this arrangement. Most of them had five acres each and one half an acre for a garden plot.

In all of these contracts stipulations are included with regard to lodgers or boarders. Watson and other farmers of his size in the neighborhood viewed lodgers and boarders as hangers-on or vagrants and attempted to keep them away from their farms. In a letter to a friend, Watson complained about a former

slave who had nursed his wife and who now wanted to come and live (or die) on his place. Watson had previously agreed to let her come, if she could not find anything else, and now she was asking for that privilege. Interestingly, she declined to stay in the main house but desired a place in the Chestnut Farm area where black tenants were settled. Watson felt that this was because she would not have the same freedom of "harbouring idle children and grandchildren--and entertaining her friends and their friends."³⁴

Other contracts in the Freedmen's Bureau records are more specific in regard to terms. Some planters furnished land, teams, and tools. The tenant might have to furnish extra labor to cultivate the portion rented to him or reimburse the planter if he hired day laborers. Some tenants were required to pay for one half of the iron and steel used on the farm for things like horseshoes or tools. Some had to furnish feed for one half of the oxen; others were required to give up one third of the chickens raised on the farm during the year; still others had to pay for guano, if the planter furnished it. Most were required to work the land as the planter saw fit, to keep up the fences, to care for the stock, to repair buildings or cultivate garden and truck patches that provided produce for the

³⁴Letter from Thomas S. Watson to V. H. Robertson, 2 September 1868. Watson Papers.

planter's family, and to cut and haul firewood for the main house. For these services the tenant might get anywhere from one fourth to even division of crop yields. Unlike laborers, food, clothing, or medical bills were paid out of his own cash received from his share of the crops.

It is impossible to quantify the frequency of one or another labor arrangement. As the foregoing suggests, contracts were quite varied in their terms, each incorporating some nuance based upon past experiences of the participants. Yet some significant, general observations need to be made.

For those who were forced by necessity to make these contracts (which is probably most of the freedmen since few would agree to such unfair arrangements otherwise), it is obvious that in doing so they badly compromised their independence out of necessity. They were free in theory only; in actuality they were a dependent group who had to temporarily lay aside their desires for independence out of the need for security, assistance, accommodation, employment, and welfare. Real substance might have been given to their status as free men and women had the national government forced reciprocity into vertical relationships. The government's commitment stopped at the door of legal equality, however. When reciprocity was not permitted to operate in

contractual arrangements, however, it mattered little about the legal niceties of free or unfree. After all the shedding of blood, the social order after the war was much like the old. Government intervention on the side of the planter stood in the path of the self-regulating market economy, blocking the kinds of structural change that might have resulted from a new form of economic organization.

Something else quite striking is evident in these contracts however. Horizontal relationships among freedmen indicate the responses of individual families to the human wreckage set adrift by the government's refusal to force reciprocity into vertical relationships. Black families served as adaptive mechanisms by assuming the roles of security, public assistance, and accomodation, roles normally satisfied through the proper functioning of vertical relationships. Many planters could not understand why black homes included so many friends, grandchildren, distant relatives, and other outsiders. Horizontal ties of this nature were foreign to those who had, relatively and absolutely, diminished needs for social welfare. To planters like Watson, these kinds of domestic groupings were nothing more than indications of widespread vagrancy and he was determined not to allow it. Since the federal government had made it relatively easy to prosecute vagrants,

it was not difficult for Watson and others to interject themselves into the most intimate of relationships.

Many freedmen must have felt that they were worse off now than before the war. They no longer had the protection afforded by slavery where the laborer had to be taken care of regardless of economic conditions. Slaves were assured of food, clothing, and shelter, even when economic conditions were not good. There was no such thing as unemployment, and even those with a greater share of human weaknesses than others were cared for. After the war the laborer was more frequently abandoned or forced to live under conditions of peonage or de facto, if not de jure slavery. Those attempting to retain some independence in structuring vertical ties of their own choosing, were labelled as "loafers," "vagrants," or "idlers." Refusal to work under the planter's terms constituted grounds for social abandonment since it was felt that public assistance would only encourage such behavior. As we shall see later, aid to the indigent became less of a way to relieve poverty and more of a tool of social control.

Thus, it is not surprising that large numbers of laborers streamed out of counties like Louisa and into cities such as Lynchburg, Roanoke, Norfolk, Charlottesville, and Richmond after the war. The Lynchburg Bureau officer reported many freedmen refusing to go

to the county to work because of the wage rates. This should not have been surprising since labor in Lynchburg, as well as in other cities, was scarce, and since able-bodied men and women might receive \$10 to \$15 per week as factory operatives as opposed to wage rates for agricultural laborers of \$5 to \$10 per month.³⁵ Bureau officers could not convince their charges in the cities to return to the county, although they report pressure from planters to make them return. The Norfolk officer found few cases of unemployed blacks. Richmond (and Lynchburg to a lesser extent) had jobs for black laborers whenever tobacco factories were in operation. Even the large scale and massive unemployment that resulted as each crop of tobacco was processed and the factories temporarily shut down could not induce blacks to return.³⁶

Black migration led to cries of labor shortages on the part of planters and Bureau officers perpetuated this myth in their reports. The Louisa County officer consistently reported that there were no cases where there were laborers able to work, but where no employment could be found. Occasionally, the same notion

³⁵These wage rates are quoted in monthly reports of the Lynchburg officer. Records Group 105. They are also reported in various state agricultural reports.

³⁶Reports of Refugees and Freedmen, Cities of Lynchburg, Richmond, Norfolk, and Charlottesville, 1866-1867. Records Group 105.

turns up in studies of the South after the war and is repeated as an explanation of Southern economic conditions. These are veranda perspectives, however. The shortage was one of planters willing to pay a living wage and to provide a decent standard of living. Laborers who could command twice as much for their efforts in the city did not hesitate to take advantage of this opportunity.

Another reason, besides higher wages, that blacks streamed into the cities was a greater availability of relief assistance. Counties provided little money for freed paupers, while municipal authorities with their greater revenues made appropriations for this purpose. Even the Freedmen's Bureau dispersed more rations in urban areas. In addition, urban areas had other public assistance institutions, such as the Home for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind in Lynchburg, as well as hospitals and sanitoriums. The Norfolk Bureau officer reported that most destitute freedmen in the city could be provided for by the Bureau.

More important, however, than higher wages and the greater availability of public assistance as impulses to migrate, was the greater independence and freedom the migrant found in the city, or put another way, the opportunity to return reciprocity to vertical and horizontal relationships. No doubt there were some instances

where the freedmen would have been better off as far as basic needs are concerned to have remained in the county. At least there he could have avoided urban conditions of overcrowding, epidemics of disease, and even poorer housing than his country cabin. However, he could not escape the intense surveillance that not only affected vertical ties, but spilled over into more private human relationships. The vertical ties he established in the city may have been only slightly more reciprocal than those in the country, but when he went home at night he was free to have whomever he chose in his house. Aid and assistance in times of trouble were more readily available where there was a larger concentration of one's kind in various conditions of well being. No planter was there to invade this realm of privacy or to prescribe the nature of horizontal relationships. One could include an unemployed, orphaned, widowed, or sick friend or relative in the household without anyone's permission. In addition, when no alternative means existed to meet these emergencies, horizontal relationships assumed crucial importance and dependence upon one another (reciprocity) became a way of survival. Denied these alternatives in the country, the migrant freedmen and women rushed to the cities. Finally, there was a certain psychological comfort to be derived from living in a large community composed of one's neighbors and kin.

Bureau reports suggest that economic conditions may have operated to recruit for urban areas a certain strata of the black population, such as the unemployed. The August 1866 report of the officer in Louisa concluded that most freedmen who worked on rented land with the necessary means (tools and stock), or those who worked for shares, and those on other contracts made out better economically than most others. On the other hand, those without the means to work the land--monthly workers, and especially day workers, did poorly and resorted to stealing and other acts in order to live. In Louisa the latter group was receiving most of the rations dispersed by the Bureau.³⁷ Perhaps, it was also this group that was the first to move to the urban areas as well. I shall be able to say more about this process of recruitment when we look at white and black laborers more closely.

A group seldom referred to during this period and about which information is difficult to obtain is that of destitute whites, composed of agricultural laborers, unskilled workers, tenants, and sharecroppers. In 1880 they constituted 60 percent of the white population sample. Unfortunately, I shall have to begin my treatment of this group with the tax and census records from

³⁷ Reports of Refugees and Freedmen, Louisa County, August 1866. Records Group 105.

1870 forward. However, the Freedmen's Bureau records do make scattered references to them.

It must have become immediately obvious to the poor whites after the war that nothing had changed to "emancipate" them in an economic sense, or any other sense. The first annual report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the State of Virginia summed up in a revealing way the attitude of planters regarding white agricultural laborers:

Suppose it were practical to employ white laborers--that we had money enough to pay them double what we have to pay the Negro--to afford them lodgings doubly as expensive as what the Negro is content with--to give them flour in place of corn bread, and that we could get from them double the labor we can get from the Negro (which is a mere hypothesis), then what will become of the negro [sic]. They have to be supported somehow and southern farmers need laborers they can superintend, watch and direct.³⁸

Although these statements were made in 1877, they no doubt explained the earlier attitudes of large numbers of planters toward white laborers as well. There was simply no way of getting white laborers to do what black laborers did under the conditions and with the wages paid to freedmen.

³⁸First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Virginia (Richmond: Public Printing, 1877), 48. Annual reports of agriculture for the state of Virginia are hereafter cited as State Report of Agriculture and the date.

The most frequent references to poor whites are in terms of things like whiskey distilleries, stealing, barnburning, intemperance, and other such acts. Similar to their attitudes toward vagrancy among freedmen, planters and Bureau officers saw these acts solely in terms of violations of legal codes and normative conventions. More than likely, however, these were in an indeterminate number of cases primitive forms of social protest. Hobsbawm has noted that these "primitive rebels" have emerged in pre-industrial, traditional societies in times where they have judged themselves to be excessively poor or oppressed, and have engaged in acts which they do not view as crimes, but which state or local rulers regard as criminal violations.³⁹ In light of the fact that some residents of the county had been denied the right to live while others were denied the freedom to pursue horizontal and vertical relationships of their own making, acts of vagrancy or chicken-stealing may be viewed as responses to a social order which has become extraordinarily oppressive. To view these responses as mere violations of social and legal conventions, is also a veranda perspective and a rather cruel one at that. Stealing to live or distilling whiskey from the vantage point of those without

³⁹E. J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1959).

sufficient alternatives to making a living is not a criminal act but the exercising of one's prerogative to life itself.

Five large planters in Charlotte County, Virginia, were interviewed by Bureau officers in 1866 and asked a series of questions, one of which was about theft in their neighborhood, its extent and character. They acknowledged its occurrence, one planter claiming that many hogs had been stolen. Several mentioned that poor whites as well as blacks were involved. One noted that it occurred among those who had no regular employment, such as day laborers or those living on land so poor they could not support themselves.⁴⁰ Moreover, the Louisa County Bureau officer noted an incidence of stealing, barn-burning, and injury to cattle, also attributing some of it to poor whites.⁴¹ Activities of this nature need to be explored more fully in terms other than simply as violations of legal conventions.

Clearly, Louisa County immediately after the Civil War was, like that before, "the world the slaveholders made." The Civil War was an event that might have transformed economic and social relations, might have made the

⁴⁰ Reports of Refugees and Freedmen, Interviews with Planters in Charlotte County, Virginia, June, 1866. Records Group 105.

⁴¹ Reports of Refugees and Freedmen, Louisa County Monthly Report, February, 1866.

South a full-blown market economy. Yet, the economic values that threatened the old social ideal never altered social organization because an economic elite continued their hold over Louisa society. There was some economic change brought about by the war, but it took place within the framework of social continuity. Although most of the preconditions of the market economy had emerged in 1865 with the ending of the war, the free market economy did not flower until after 1869 when the Freedmen's Bureau left and government intervention was removed. The intervention into the economy by the federal government on the side of the planter guaranteed the traditional configuration of social organization familiar in the slave economy. The policies of the federal government administered through the Freedmen's Bureau dovetailed nicely with planter desires. Government approval of the removal of reciprocity from vertical relationships allowed the planter to continue to dominate rural society.

With the departure of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1869, the last obstacle to the self-regulating market economy evaporated. However, laws of supply and demand proved to be no more neutral, as far as the laborer was concerned, than the national government. Indeed, freedmen were now more vulnerable than they had been as slaves where paternalism offered protection that a market

economy no longer guaranteed. Under the market economy, it was every man for himself, and these conditions were unfair to those on an unequal footing. When the form of economic organization assumed capital and labor were on equal terms in the face of vast inequalities of wealth, and when government intervention was considered a tampering with the "free" market economy, the planter was likely to dominate rural society for a long time and the laborer likely to suffer substantially.

The extent to which the slaveholding planter dominated post-war Louisa after 1870 and the role this played in contributing to rural poverty should become obvious as we examine economic conditions among freeholders and dependent classes. In doing so we should be able to gain some clearer understanding of the nature of vertical relationships in a market economy. In the chapter on family structure and the socio-economic order I will discuss how horizontal relationships varied with economic security. Through an examination of poor laws and the attitudes toward public assistance we will be able to see the changing attitudes toward poverty and how these laws evolved into effective instruments of social control.

CHAPTER II

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

In the hands of the social historian demographic variables may serve the field of social history as leading economic indicators serve the field of economics. Upturns and downturns in birth and death rates are two leading social indicators that precede and portend changes in social, political, or economic spheres. In addition, fluctuations in mortality or fertility are often responses to other changes, as the death rate responded to improved medical practices in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. Regardless of whether they act as cause or effect, however, rates of birth and death along with other demographic characteristics like age and sex composition and dependency ratios offer valuable clues to a population's social history. They may indicate the extent of economic development, the nature of a population's health, general migratory patterns, or even the kind of family life we might expect. What follows is an attempt to add to our understanding of Louisa County in the last third of the nineteenth century by focusing on some of these variables.

Age and sex are basic population characteristics, and the distribution of the population on the basis of

these variables is a first step toward understanding demographic structure. Unfortunately, the censuses for our period do not reflect the age-sex distribution of the population at the county level. Therefore, we must depend upon the sample population for these basic characteristics. Table 2.1 is an age-sex distribution of the total sample population. Sex ratios (males divided by females times 100) which indicate the number of males per 100 females in the population have been computed for each age group.

A comparison of white sex ratios with those of the black population indicate striking differences in the two population groups, and they suggest the different experience of the two groups. Most populations have sex ratios at birth in the range of 105 to 106. Since more male fetuses miscarry than female and since the death rate of males is typically higher from birth forward than that of females, this initial excess of males over females is usually dissipated as the life cycle of the population progresses. The white population resembles the model, at least up to the age group 55-64, as the first age group reflects the slight overage of male fetuses that has disappeared by age 19. The black population presents an entirely different picture, however. At the outset, unlike the model, the black population has an excess of females that gradually increases (except for a slight change in the age group 11-18) up

Table 2.1: Age-Sex Distribution and Age-Specific Sex Ratios, Louisa County Sample Population, 1880

<u>White</u>				
<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Sex Ratio</u>
1-10	234	224	458	104
11-18	151	148	299	102
19-24	84	95	179	88
25-34	97	103	200	94
35-44	77	87	164	89
45-54	73	79	152	92
55-64	61	51	112	120
65-74	28	19	47	147
75+	<u>16</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>160</u>
Totals	821	816	1,637	101

<u>Black</u>				
<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Sex Ratio</u>
1-10	304	321	625	95
11-18	194	198	392	98
19-24	94	100	194	94
25-34	76	96	172	79
35-44	64	79	143	81
45-54	72	67	139	107
55-64	57	30	87	190
65-74	24	16	40	150
75+	<u>11</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>69</u>
Totals	896	923	1,819	97

until the age group 45-54. What this pattern suggests and what later data confirms, as we shall see, is the comparatively poorer state of health among the black population. A population in a poor nutritional state may be expected to have lower sex ratios at birth both because infant mortality is higher and because fewer male fetuses can be expected to survive.

Perhaps it is common knowledge that the black population was in a poorer state of health than the white after the Civil War. However, a sex ratio of 95 at birth has as much explanatory as descriptive power. An initial excess of females in a population that increases as the life cycle matures leads to imbalances in the population where the formation of family units is impossible for a number of women. The need for sexual fulfillment among this group may produce extraordinary stress upon stable family units due to competition for a limited number of males. Moreover, some of the excess of woman-headed households among the black population over that of whites observed in 1880 may be due to unique demographic experience of blacks as indicated by these patterns of sex ratios. Although the 1880 census revealed small percentages of single mothers in both racial groups, the incidence among the black group was much higher where six percent ($N=123$) of all the black families in the county were composed of unwed mothers. Among whites, less than one percent were unwed mothers ($N=13$).

Certainly, sex imbalances within the black population explain why woman-headed households were more frequent in this racial group.

The extreme excess of males among both population groups beginning around age 55 is more difficult to explain, particularly since we are accustomed to the twentieth century phenomenon of females outliving males. Yet, DuBois found similar sex ratio patterns in the tobacco center of Farmville, Virginia, in 1897, in which the sex ratio in the first age group was 85, but where males began to increase in the later age groups, just as in Louisa. Similarly, Johnson noted the initial female dominance as well as an enormous excess of males beginning at age 40 in a study of rural Alabama in the 1920s. The sex ratio in Alabama, for example, in the 45-49 age group was 139.¹

A number of hypotheses might be advanced for the excess of males in the older age groups. In the first place, the greater longevity of females familiar to us in the twentieth century may not have been true in the nineteenth century, and in fact women may not have outlived men. Women of Louisa, as members generally of low-income farm families, frequently worked outside the

¹W. E. B. DuBois, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study," Bulletin No. 14 (U.S. Department of Labor, January, 1898), 8; Charles S. Johnson, Shadow of the Plantation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934, 1966), fn. 10, p. 15.

home either as farm workers or as domestic servants in addition to their tasks as housewives. Poverty made this a necessity for large numbers. This alone, perhaps, would not have shortened their life span, but, coupled with the debilitating effects of bearing large numbers of children, rural women had much harsher lives than men. The censuses of 1870 to 1900 indicate the average family size in Louisa County for the four decades was 5.5.² However, this figure includes women who never married or never produced children and therefore underestimates the average number of children each mother produced. In addition, this average is also distorting because it is based upon family size on the day of the enumerator's visit and does not reflect the numbers of children ever born by the mother. The 1900 manuscript census permits us to circumvent this difficulty because it contains the category of number of children ever born by the mother. A 10 percent sample of the Louisa County population

²The number of families for 1870 and 1880 was not given in the general tables of the census for individual counties but was derived by totaling family numbers used by the census enumerators in the manuscript schedules. These are subject to error because some enumerators defined a family as all those under one roof while others made allowances for multiple family dwellings. For the 1890 and 1900 decades the general tables give the number of families by county as well as average family size. In both cases the number of families and average family size are rough estimates of these variables only. A more refined determination of actual family size has been gained through the population samples of 1880 and 1900.

(every tenth family on the census) indicates that of those white mothers who had children, the average number was 4.9. For black mothers the average number of children ever born was 6.2.³ Thus, high birth rates might explain the excess of males in the higher age groups insofar as this resulted in the premature deaths of black and white women.

Another possible, if less plausible, explanation is migration--either the out-migration of females or the in-migration of males. There is no evidence that either of these was the case in these age groups, however. Black females did out-migrate but in the younger age groups as DuBois found in Philadelphia in the 1890s.⁴ Moreover, sex ratios for the nearest urban center of Richmond, some 50 miles or more distant from Louisa County, show a particularly strong female dominance for both races in the age groups between 15 and 29.⁵ Thus, although females probably out-migrated from Louisa, they did so at younger ages, something which does not account for their absence in the older categories. No

³These figures are based upon a 10 percent sample of the Louisa population in 1900. The sample was not totally random in that every tenth person was selected. Insofar, as the population was clustered on some basis, and I found no strong evidence that this was widespread, the sample would be biased in that respect.

⁴W. E. B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro (New York: Schocken Books, 1899, 1967).

⁵Twelfth Census of the United States, Population, Vol. II, Table 9, p. 142.

evidence exists to suggest that black males in-migrated in the older age groups.

Not only do sex ratios reveal the demographic structure of a population, but age composition is equally informative. Age distribution has a substantial influence on population growth and on household composition within the population. For example, in populations with a large proportion of its members under 18 we would expect high birth rates, high death rates and rapid population turnover. In addition, populations that have a scarcity of persons in the age groups from 18-34 suggest high out-migration. The age composition of the Louisa County population in 1880 is visually represented in the population pyramids of Figures 2.1 and 2.2. The pyramid is a percentage distribution of Louisa's population cross-classified by sex and age.

The broad base of both pyramids and relatively small shares at the upper ages identifies both racial groups as high fertility populations. The black population, however, has a much larger percentage of its members under 18. The total number of youth to be supported by each 100 productive members in society is referred to as the youth dependency ratio.⁶ Even though this definition of youth as those under 18 is different from usual

⁶The ratio is the number of persons ages 0-18 divided by the number ages 15-64 times 100.

determinations as those under 15, and therefore inflates the ratio somewhat in comparison to other populations, nevertheless ratios of both racial groups in Louisa are above those of industrialized nations.⁷ In the case of the white population in Louisa, each 100 productive persons was supporting 94 youth dependents. In striking contrast, each 100 productive black adults was supporting 138 young persons. This constituted a severe economic drag on the black population of Louisa and made it much more difficult to make real economic gains. In addition, the broader base of the black pyramid indicates the higher birth rates of this group, something already confirmed by the higher numbers of children ever born as indicated in the 1900 sample.

The higher youth dependency ratio among the black community in Louisa is in part due to the phenomenon of migration and the patterns of this movement. Table 2.2 indicates the extent of this migration in the diminishing percentages of blacks in the county between 1860 and 1900. In 1860 blacks constituted 63 percent of the population while in 1900 the percentage was just over one half. As we have already seen, the shape of the black population pyramid suggests that most of the emigrants

⁷In developing nations more than 40 percent of the population is comprised of children under 15, while in industrialized nations about 25 percent fall in this age category. See Donald J. Bogue, Principles of Demography (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969), 149.

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Figure 2.1: Population Pyramid for
White Sample, Louisa
County, 1880

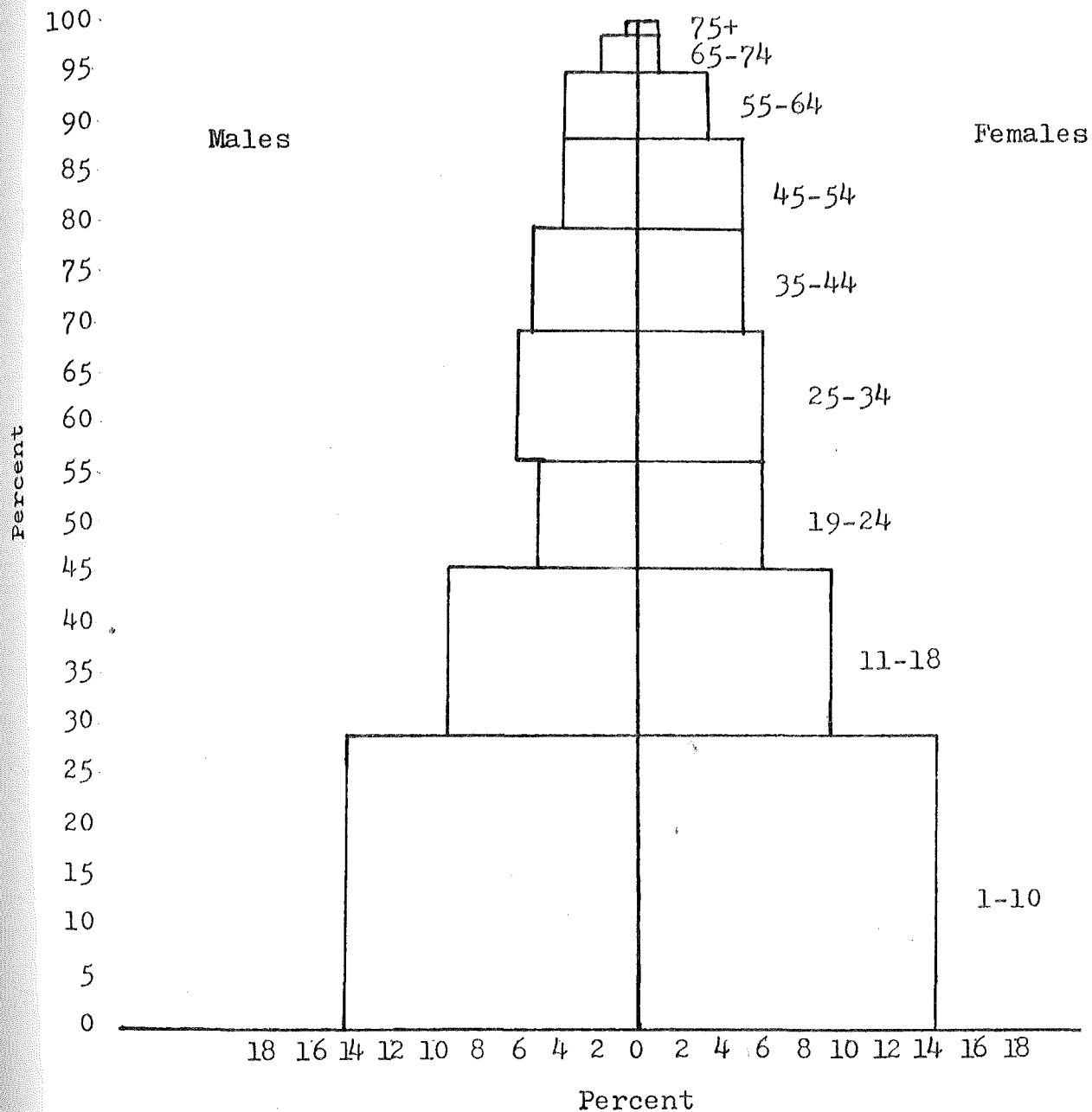
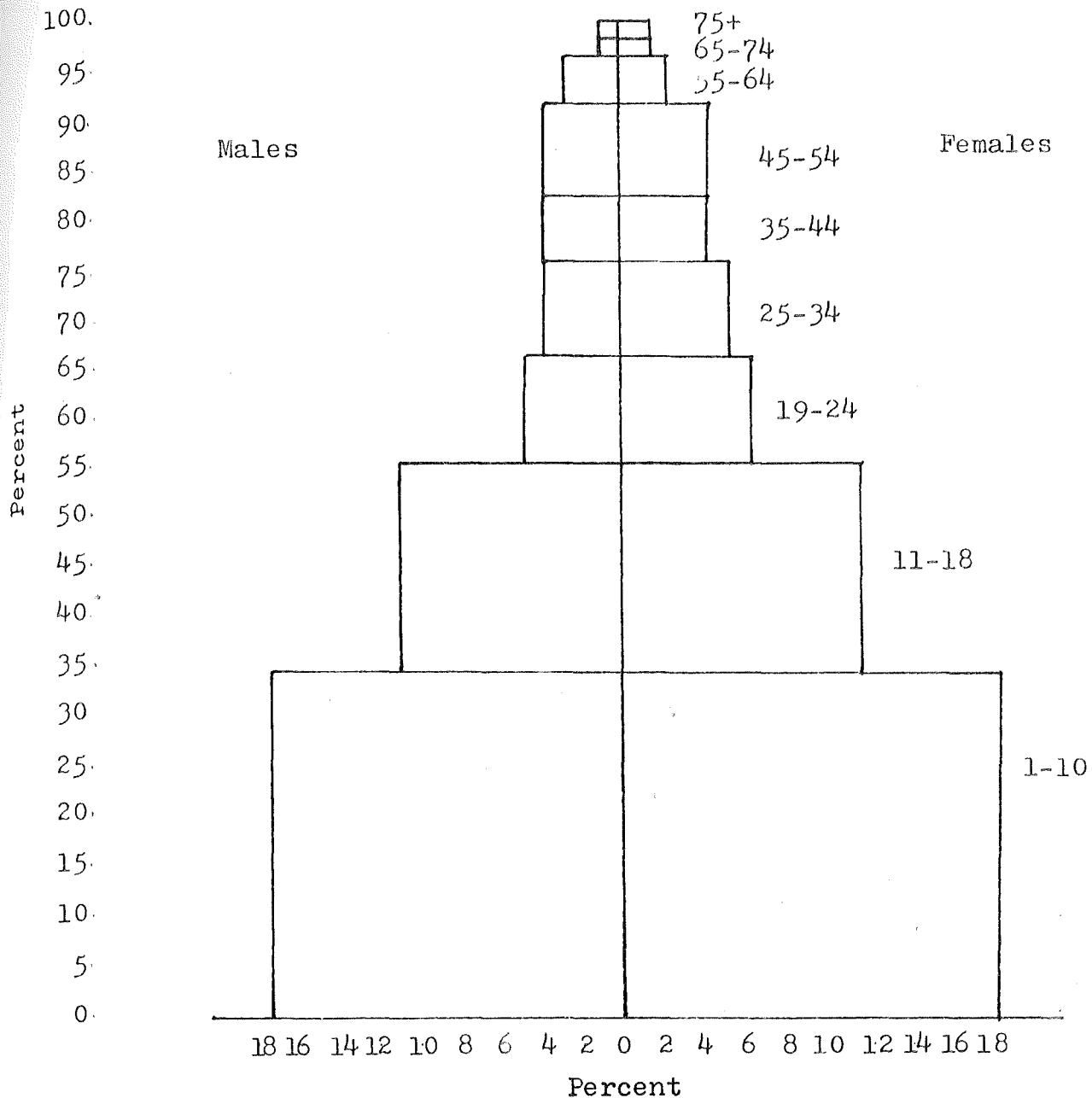


Figure 2.2: Population Pyramid for
Black Sample, Louisa
County, 1880



were generally in the age group 19-44, an age when children were also more likely to be a part of the household. DuBois' study of Philadelphia found that the

Table 2.2: Louisa County
Population, 1860-1900

<u>Year</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>% Change</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>% Change</u>	<u>Total</u>
1860	6,183	--	10,518	--	16,701
1870	6,269	+1	10,063	-4	16,332
1880	7,409	+15	11,531	+13	18,940
1890	7,192	-3	9,805	-18	16,997
1900	7,896	+9	8,621	-14	16,517

newcomers often settled in the city, leaving children behind until they were economically able to support them. This accounted for the small family size among blacks in Philadelphia (the average was 3.2) and the large numbers of youth in Farmville.⁸ The same was true in Louisa, and the numbers of black families who did this increased as the black population of the county diminished. For example, 7 percent (N=17) of the sample black households in 1880 contained grandchildren, but this had increased to 18 percent (N=27) of the 1900 one-in-ten sample. This increase corresponds to decades of sharp decreases in the Louisa black community. Thus,

⁸DuBois, "The Negroes of Farmville," pp. 9, 164-165.

the greater numbers of young people among the black population is related not only to higher birth rates among this group, but also to the increasing numbers of children left behind by parents who migrated.

Temporary separation of migrating black parents from their children coupled with the willingness of other families in Louisa to include these children in their households are good examples of the adaptability of the black family in general. Unlike the white family, social and economic realities within the black community burdened black families with more instrumental roles. This will become clearer when we deal with household composition as a response to poverty in Chapter V.

Age at marriage and spacing of children are other useful social indicators. High birth rates may be related to the tendency for women in the population to marry at young ages. On the other hand, men who postpone marriage are usually part of a population where economic insecurity makes earlier marriage difficult. In either case the decision to marry is one whose explanation, whether cultural or economic, adds a further dimension to our understanding of a community's social history. Likewise, spacing of children after marriage gives us some insight into the parents' economic position and their assessment of the future.

The 1900 manuscript census provides a convenient record from which age at marriage may be derived. Unlike

the other censuses, that of 1900 included a category, "number of years married." The subtraction of this figure from the ages given for parental members of the household provides the ages at marriage, while the figure may also be used to determine the decade of marriage. Thus, we are able to determine not only the age at marriage, but also how this changed for each cohort. Table 2.3 indicates the ages of marriage among blacks and whites in Louisa County, depending upon the decade in which

Table 2.3: Average Age at Marriage
by Cohorts, Louisa County

<u>Decade of Marriage</u>	<u>White Females</u>	<u>White Males</u>	<u>Black Females</u>	<u>Black Males</u>
1850s	20.1	24.1	Too Few Cases	Too Few Cases
1860s	23.2	24.8	20.6	25.1
1870s	20.7	26.4	20.9	24.2
1880s	23.3	25.6	21.9	25.8
1890s	22.8	24.2	22.8	26.8

they were married. (See Appendix 2.2 for a fuller breakdown of marriages by age categories which formed the basis of this figure.) The striking fact is the late age of marriage for males of both racial groups. While black males postponed marriage slightly longer than did white, both found it necessary to delay marriage often beyond the age of 25. Another striking characteristic

is the tendency, with slight variation, of white males and females to marry younger as the twentieth century approached while the opposite was the case for black males and females. DuBois also noted that the black age at marriage was young during slavery and for the first generation after the Civil War. However, the second generation had begun to postpone marriage because of economic conditions.⁹ Thus, within the rural South after the war, the relative economic insecurity of the black community manifested itself in delayed marriages. Furthermore, the tendency of black females to marry younger than their white counterpart explains why black families were larger than white, i.e., because of the extension of the potential child-bearing period.

Within the same sample and among those cases in which it could be determined,¹⁰ spacing of children varied among the two racial groups. In neither case, however, did children arrive immediately after marriage. Among whites, the mean interval was two years between marriage and the arrival of the first child. The interval was even longer in the black community where the first child did not arrive until three years after marriage.

⁹DuBois, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰In order to be certain about the spacing of children, the computations had to be narrowed to those cases where children ever born and children in the household were identical figures on the census page. This was the case in 55 white and 41 black families in the 1900 sample.

The mean interval between the first and second child was nearly two years for both groups, while succeeding arrivals evidenced only slight differences. In no case, was the interval ever less than two years for either group perhaps because of breast feeding. Thus, delayed marriage was also accompanied by spacing of children that corresponds to periods of lactation for mothers, and the popular notion of poor rural black and white families having one child after another was not the case in the economically marginal economy of Louisa.

In spite of the spaced arrival of children, black families did tend to be larger for the reasons already given, and indeed might have been larger still had it not been for the higher mortality rates within the black community. The most common causes of death in Louisa, and in the United States generally, in the last third of the nineteenth century were in order of importance infant mortality, tuberculosis, and pneumonia.¹¹ The 1880 manuscript census schedules of social statistics reveal these as the most frequent causes of death in Louisa. The schedules also show how much more virulent these diseases were in the black community. Black infant mortality was nearly four times that of white; blacks were three times more likely to die from

¹¹Tenth Census of the United States, Population, clvii, pp. 164-165.

tuberculosis than white; and even pneumonia deaths were nearly twice those of the white racial group.

Some differences might have been anticipated because blacks outnumbered whites in the county in 1880. However, even when allowances for population size are made, the black racial group was proportionately more susceptible to these diseases than was the white. Infant mortality for white male fetuses, for example, was 85 per 1,000 while for black fetuses the rate was 145 per 1,000. Generally, the overall death rate per 1,000 in Louisa in 1880 was 15 for whites and 22 for blacks.¹²

Unfortunately, even these statistics on deaths, collected by census officials who admitted they fell far short of actual deaths, are suspect as contemporary demographers have noted.¹³ The manuscript schedules

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Reynolds Farley, "The Demographic Rates and Social Institutions of the Nineteenth-Century Negro Population: A Stable Population Analysis," Demography, 2 (1965), 386-398. The author uses quasi-stable population techniques to assess black fertility and mortality levels in the nineteenth century. The effort is an attempt to correct the fluctuations in the population censuses that many suspect are due to enumeration errors. The results are even higher mortality and fertility rates than the census reports. Infant mortality between 1850 and 1880 is an astounding 300 per 1,000, and the crude death rate per 1,000 a very high 35. If these figures are correct, the black population of nineteenth-century America was experiencing population fluctuations similar to European populations in times of disease plagues. For an understanding of the changes in mortality rates in the period see Robert Higgs, "Mortality in Rural America, 1870-1920: Estimates and Conjectures," Explorations in Economic History, 10 (Winter, 1973), 177-195.

reveal the remarks of enumerators who found difficulty reaching some physicians, deaths reported from memory by others, and cases where the physicians refused to cooperate or could not be found. Moreover, enumerators of Louisa noted a hesitancy within the black community to give the numbers and causes of deaths. Finally, one can only speculate that many deaths escaped the attention of government officials, especially in a poor county where proper medical care was out of the reach of much of the population as remains true today.¹⁴

If we cannot depend upon the absolute figures for deaths as a basis of comparison, we can note their relative significance among the two racial groups in Louisa County. Here, as we have seen, the black population succumbed to the common killers of 1880 in much greater numbers than the white population. The virulency of highly infectious diseases was, perhaps, magnified by the crowded and poorly insulated houses of the poor.

¹⁴ It seems remarkable that we have more detailed demographic data on seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe than we do on the nineteenth and twentieth century United States. More alarming, is the prospect for the future which promises to get worse rather than better. For example, all of the manuscript census schedules of agriculture for the twentieth century have been destroyed because, as census bureau officials informed me, they needed storage space. In fact, there is even rumor that the population schedules after 1900 may also be destroyed for the same reason. Thus, it will become increasingly difficult to write the social history of this country, and we will have been denied the perspective of all those plain people from whom history has the most to learn.

Chapter V will indicate the complex nature of black household composition whereby black households often served as public welfare institutions. The crowding of large numbers of diverse individuals into poorly insulated dwellings may have been responsible for the higher death rates in this community. In addition, we know little about the diets of the two racial groups, and although they may have been more varied than what has been suggested because of garden patches and livestock, dietary deficiencies may also explain a portion of the differences in rates of death.¹⁵ Regardless of the reasons, a higher rate of infant mortality is a factor whose demographic significance needs to be stressed. As we have observed in the discussion of sex ratios, infant mortality produced a predominantly female black population, which meant higher birth rates and population growth among a group least capable of caring for the young. And, when death rates are high in early years of life, a large number of youths never live to make a contribution to the community's welfare.

The disparate demographic experiences of the two racial groups explain differences that some have previously wished to associate with cultural norms and

¹⁵It has already been suggested that improvements in housing and diet are responsible for whatever declines occurred in mortality rates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Higgs, "Mortality in Rural America," 192-194.

and dissimilar life styles. Black women did not have more children than white simply because of unique normative considerations, but because they tended to marry at younger ages than did white women. Moreover, the higher birth rates resulting from this choice were balanced by higher infant mortality that held population growth in check. In addition, the rural black community was typically surrounded by large numbers of children deposited there while parents were establishing themselves in an urban area, or perhaps by unwed mothers working to support them. Hence, differences between the two racial groups were not cultural, but economic and demographic pressures evoked these responses. Whatever the causes, the rearing of children could only place additional strains on an already economically marginal community.

Other demographic factors seem to be associated, not with a specific racial group, but with rural poverty itself, or with customary child-rearing practices. Both groups found it necessary to delay marriage, and both spaced children at intervals that match the lactation periods of mothers. Rural poverty demanded the former, and the fact that black males married at even older ages than whites, and that black couples waited longer to have the first child, reveal just another level of economic hardship. Emigration, especially in the 1880s,

differentiated also according to the severity of economic plight, was another "option" taken by Louisa's residents. Thus, delayed marriage, planned spacing of children, and emigration were three ways that Louisa's population responded demographically to economic marginality.

CHAPTER III

FREEHOLDERS

Anyone in search of explanations for the depressed state of Southern agriculture after the Civil War will find no scarcity of these. Factors such as soil exhaustion, one-crop agriculture, the lack of credit, a shiftless and lazy labor force, a large number of backward and provincial farmers who retarded Southern economic growth by refusing to rationalize, and price decline constitute a frequently intoned litany of causes. Some scholars, in an attempt to make sense out of such a confusing array of issues, have stressed one or two of these factors as being most important as historical antecedents of post-war agricultural decline. Others have attempted to show how all are equally important and have refused to confront the question of relative importance. Regardless of the approach, students exploring the field of Southern history have felt compelled to recognize these forces.

It cannot be denied that such things as soil exhaustion, price decline, and the absence of credit mechanisms in the South after the war were important factors. Anyone, through even a casual examination of Southern

history, could discern their prevalence. Tobacco and cotton had been farmed on Southern soil since colonial times without any regard for their depleting effects, the absence of any sort of credit institutions is well known during the period, and the decline in the prices of agricultural commodities continued unabated except for brief periods between 1865 and 1900.

What is disputable is the extent to which factors such as these are explanations and the extent to which they are merely descriptions. At one time or another, all have been pressed into the service of explanation. We need to examine each of them in order to assess their causal force. It may be that they describe what they have been alleged to have explained, and that the same set of factors transferred to another context would not have caused the sort of agricultural depression familiar to the South. In some cases, we may even need to abandon an argument altogether, such as the one that the South was retarded in its economic development by a backward group of farmers who refused to rationalize. By focusing our attention on the Southern rural community of Louisa between 1865 and 1900 we will be able to measure the explanatory power of these old arguments and come to some better understanding of why the South took the course it did after the war.

The first contributors to the debate emerged soon after the war among a group of men who believed that the path to Southern economic growth lay in reconciliation with the North. In stressing the mutual benefits that could be derived through economic cooperation, "New South prophets" like Henry W. Grady of the Atlanta Constitution, James D. DeBow of Debow's Review, Henry Watterson of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Richard H. Edmonds of the Baltimore Manufacturers' Record, and a score of others, hoped to woo Northern labor and capital and transform the Southern economy. By skillful manipulation of the myths surrounding the Old South, these men built a credo of the New South designed not only to economically revive the region, but also, just as importantly, to preserve the class and racial status quo. In pursuit of these goals, they created a highly inflated and distorting picture of the South's real economic condition--a New South myth.¹ The image of a benighted region was replaced by that of a prosperous and growing section making real economic gains. Rural poverty, which was already serious in 1870, had become widespread all over the South by 1900. Never at a loss for symbols, New South prophets attributed these conditions to "poor

¹Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed, a Study in Southern Mythmaking (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

whites," low downs, "clay eaters," or "crackers" who were not only responsible for poverty in particular but for holding back the South generally.²

Preachers of this economic gospel could point to the 1880 census which indicated a large increase in small farms and a decline in those of larger categories. This allowed them to write propogandistic pamphlets in which they referred to the "rise of poor whites" as a testament to the South's economic democracy. Disregarding the exceptional qualities of the few individuals, as Roger Shugg has pointed out, these pamphlets suggested that those who worked themselves up from the bottom were the rule.³ Also, conveniently forgotten was the contradiction in their argument which made the poor white a model of Southern economic democracy on the one hand, and a millstone on the other. The immigration pamphlet was designed for a specific goal, however, and a true picture of economic conditions in the South was not its intention. Rather, they were meant to attract white European immigrants to settle upon lands abandoned by former planters. A realistic picture of the Southern

²C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1970), 175-178.

³Roger W. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939, 1972), 274-278.

economy would not have promoted this aim. More important, was to present the South as a land of equal opportunity.

The extent to which the Civil War was a watershed in economic democracy has continued to be a question mark in the academic community, if not among all those plain people who grew up there and knew better. Few paid much attention to Enoch Banks in 1905 when his study of Georgia indicated that the census had exaggerated the breakup of former plantations. Indeed, as late as 1902 less than four percent of Georgia landowners controlled a quarter of the land.⁴ A further challenge came in 1939 by Shugg who admitted that he had found some land redistribution in Louisiana after the war, but only a limited amount. Indeed, the plantation (a farm over 100 acres) had not only survived, its share of arable land had actually grown.⁵ Shugg's voice was drowned out by the Vanderbilt studies in the 1940s in which Frank Owsley ignoring the devastating criticism of Fabian Linden, published what he felt was proof of a thriving middle-class yeomanry in the South before the Civil War.⁶ If this was true before the war, might it not also have continued afterwards?

⁴Enoch Marvin Banks, The Economics of Land Tenure in Georgia (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1905), 40.

⁵Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 236.

⁶Frank L. Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949); Fabian Linden, "Economic Democracy in the Slave South: An Appraisal of Some Recent Views," Journal of Negro History, 31 (April, 1946), 140-189.

Recent studies taking up the issue of economic democracy before the war, however, have vindicated Barrington Moore's characterization of Owsley's work as "utter rubbish" and "folklorish sociology."⁷ Studies by Gavin Wright in the cotton South and Randolph Campbell in Texas have shown that wealth was not only concentrated in the 1850s, but that this concentration was on the increase. In terms of farm values, the distribution of improved acreage, the share of slaves, and crop production, the position of the small operator or non-slaveholder declined when compared to large owners and slaveholders. In addition, Campbell noted that the political leadership was also in the hands of those with a clear cut economic superiority.⁸

These studies have lent weight to C. Vann Woodward's conclusion that economic democracy after the war had been exaggerated. In his popular and impressive study, he pointed out how post-war enumerators had counted each plot of land farmed by a sharecropper as a farm. This had given the false impression that the Civil War had been a revolution in land tenure when it might have been more

⁷Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, 117.

⁸Gavin Wright, "Economic Democracy and the Concentration of Agricultural Wealth in the Cotton South, 1850-1860," Agricultural History, XLIV (January, 1970), 63-93; and Randolph B. Campbell, "Planters and Plain Folk: Harrison County, Texas, as a Test Case, 1850-1860," Journal of Southern History, XL (August, 1974), 369-398.

aptly termed a revolution in the labor system. Woodward denied, however, that the planter had also survived. In fact, to an increasing extent they came to be replaced by Northerners and absentee owners.⁹

In Louisa County the evidence supports the trends noted by Shugg, Banks, and Woodward. County landbooks in 1860 reveal that the top 5 percent of the landowners held 22 percent of the land (N=58). In 1870 the same percentage held 24 percent of the land (N=68), and by 1880 this had increased to 28 percent (N=95). Mean farm size among the white sample of owners also indicates only slight changes over the period. In 1870 the mean for white owners was 300 acres, followed by 299, 253, and 213 in 1880, 1890, and 1900 respectively. These means are not far from the mean size of 324 acres revealed on the 1860 landbook. The standard deviation among white families from the mean in 1880 of 310 units indicates a wide variance in farm size and certainly is not suggestive of economic democracy, even among whites alone. Neither is the decline of only 11 percent in the 500 acre and over category between 1860 and 1870.¹⁰ Nor is the mean size for black owners which hovered around 30 acres over the four decades. The Civil War had brought no halt to land concentration, and indeed, it had increased after 1865.

⁹Woodward, Origins of the New South, 175-178.

¹⁰In 1860 there were 162 farmers in this category compared to 145 in 1870.

Not only did wealth remain concentrated in Louisa after the war, but most of it also remained in the same hands. Substantial numbers of pre-war planters could be located as landholders in the county afterwards as well. County landbooks reveal that of the 145 owners in 1870 who held more than 500 acres, as few as two thirds and as many as three fourths were located on the 1860 landbook, depending upon whether one assumes names like M. A. Smith and Matthew A. Smith are the same person. When one makes some allowance for mortality, a good guess would be that somewhere around 70 percent of the pre-war planters of this size survived the "democratizing" effects of the war.

To resolve the question of economic democracy is to dissipate most of the haze that surrounds the debate about economic conditions in the rural sector of the Southern economy. But in order to make this clear, and to illustrate why this is the case, we must deal with the remaining issues of controversy such as the backward and unscientific farming practices of the small farmer and his "refusal" to rationalize, price decline, and soil exhaustion resulting from one-crop agricultural practices.

Generally, we shall see that the period between 1870 and 1900 was one of economic stagnation and decline detrimental to farmers at all levels and to the population generally. We will discover that this had little

if anything to do with backwardness or the hesitancy of farmers to adopt scientific methods (rationalization). In fact, in a period of almost uninterrupted price decline, economic rationalization was an unwise course, since its impact was greatly intensified the more one became integrated into the market economy. Neither do factors such as soil exhaustion, one-crop agriculture, or the absence of credit mechanisms have much explanatory power. Much more important was the commitment by a group who controlled the economic power of the county to the preservation of the existing order, a commitment that blocked a major avenue of change and consigned the entire county to economic stagnation. Unwilling to pursue any course that might lead to a change in rank, large landholders perpetuated what they had fathered, until even they were threatened by the consequences. For reasons we will investigate later, this was allowed to go unchallenged by the characteristic resignation of the lower orders, and the fate of the county was thereby sealed.

There is little doubt that the last one third of the nineteenth century was a period of economic depression. Between 1865 and 1895 prices the farmer received for his products plunged steadily downward (except for a brief rise from 1881 to 1883), reaching their lowest point in 1896. Wheat, corn, and tobacco, which had been the three principal crops of Virginia since Colonial

times, all suffered price declines. Wheat, selling for \$2.31 per bushel in 1866 was bringing \$.68 per bushel in 1896; corn went from \$.89 per bushel to \$.34; and bright tobacco that was selling for \$13.32 per pound in 1875 would only bring \$6.46 in 1896.¹¹ Other farm products followed the same trend: bacon dropped from \$.17 per pound in 1866 to \$.10 in 1896; butter declined from \$.25 per pound in 1870 to \$.14 in 1896; eggs dropped from \$.21 per dozen in 1866 to \$.14 in 1896. Generally, in order to get the same return in 1896 that the farmer was receiving immediately after the war, the farmer had to produce from two to three times as much as he had in 1866. No relief came until 1896 when farm prices began to rise, a trend that continued until the end of World War I. The rise came too late for many, however, and a whole generation of farmers never knew anything but hard times.

That the period was one of economic downturn and increasing impoverishment can also be seen by examining assessed values of taxable personal property in Louisa in 1866 and 1896. The average assessed value of horses

¹¹Prices quoted here are taken from Arthur G. Peterson, "Historical Study of Prices Received by Producers of Farm Products in Virginia, 1801-1927," Virginia Polytechnic Institute Technical Bulletin No. 37 (March, 1929), 1-218. His prices are the average prices of farm products received by producers each month as collected from records of original sales. My quotations are averages of Peterson's monthly averages.

went from \$60 per horse in 1866 to \$32 in 1896; cattle went from \$17 to \$10 per head; hogs from \$3.80 to \$1.73. The value of all machinery in the county declined from a total assessed value of \$37,560 to \$8,860 in 1896, and the total assessed value of furniture was halved. The most revealing index of economic decline is the total assessed value of all personal property per male 21 years of age and over which dropped from \$255 per capita in 1870 to \$87 per capita in 1896, an indication of the total impoverishment of an entire community. Obviously, the South had become a national economic problem long before it was defined as such by those of the New Deal.

Yet, price decline by itself does not explain the predicament of Southern agriculture, although it may be descriptively important. The South was not unique in experiencing a decline in the prices of agricultural commodities. The same trend was occurring all over the United States, something that eventually led to the Populist movement which was not a regional but a national form of agrarian protest in response to a national depression.¹²

Southern Populism was as close as the South ever came to a grass-roots movement of social protest. It

¹²Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897 (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1945), 291-328; see also John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, a History of the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931).

excluded the lowest classes, however, although it was composed of those from the lower levels of society such as farmers, railroad workers, and mechanics. Sheldon Hackney, in a study of Alabama Populists, found the followers to be the more transient group tenuously connected to society. They were mostly "superfluous farmers" or ineffectively organized workers not linked to influential Alabamians by kinship or close association. They came from isolated areas and from areas where Southern myths such as the "Old South," the "Lost Cause," and the "New South" were not very effective. He concludes that it would have been pathological for them to have insisted upon preservation of the old order.¹³

Yet, they were neither revolutionary nor reform minded. In fact, they had no guiding ideology and were motivated primarily by conspiracy theories which implied that all one had to do was to get rid of the conspiracy and return to the traditional system. In their view, they were nothing more than a middle class majority that was being neglected. They supported reforms, such as government ownership of railroads, federally financed credit plans, and a protective tariff, of a more conservative nature while rejecting those, such as child

¹³Sheldon Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 30-31.

labor, convict lease, or taxes, or more revolutionary import.¹⁴ Their latent commitment to the old order surfaced in 1896 when they joined the Progressive movement, a reform movement firmly committed to the status quo, and became swallowed up in its goals.

Although price decline was not unique to the South, it cannot be denied that other factors may have made its effects more intense in that region. Suffering from the long-term effects of soil depletion, post-war destruction, and a lack of machinery due to a past kind of labor-intensive agriculture, the South was in a weakened position when the depression came. After the war the South had one 800 pound mule for each farm laborer compared to three 1,500 pound horses per laborer in the central West.¹⁵ In addition, between 1859 and 1899 the South's proportion of the total U.S. grain production decreased from 42 percent to 23 percent as the opening up of the Northwest moved the granary of the continent further westward and denied the South a market in the process.¹⁶ It must be remembered, however, that past practices which had led to these conditions required radical measures that, if taken, might have made the effects

¹⁴Ibid., 47.

¹⁵Thomas F. Hunt, "Cereal Farming in the South," in J. C. Ballagh, ed. The South in the Building of the Nation, Vol. 6 (Richmond: The Southern Publication Society, 1909), 108.

¹⁶Ibid., 114.

scarcely more detrimental to Southern farmers than Northern. If the West, for example, had had the same sort of concentration of economic resources in a small number of hands dedicated to preserving a specific racial and class status quo, price decline would have been more intense there as well. It was this dedication to an old order rather than price decline that caused the latter to become more intense in the South after 1865.

What price decline meant to farmers at different economic levels remains to be examined. At this point, we need to concern ourselves with certain questions: To what extent was economic rationalization a wise choice in a period of declining prices? What were the motivations of those who chose a specific course of economic action? Is the position of the small farmer in the economy due to his backwardness, or laziness, or lack of entrepreneurial abilities?

In dealing with the question of economic rationalization, one is immediately confronted with the small farmer's position in the economy. On the one hand, scholars like Owsley have tried to portray him as the embodiment of the Jeffersonian ideal with the characteristic virtues of frugality, diligence, and uprightness. The difficulty has come in trying to harmonize this view with that presented by those using the capitalist model to explain the economic behavior of farmers at all levels, in which case those who do not generate a profit,

frequently the small farmer, are classified as failures. Some have resolved this contradictory description of the small farmer as both frugal and inefficient by retaining the capitalist model as an explanation of the economic behavior of farmers in general while reserving the "family farm" as an ideological construct stripped of any economic meaning. The family farmer as an economic type has been ignored as a result, or treated as a victim of his provincial and backward views. Teodor Shanin has noted that rural sociology since its beginning in the United States has limited itself to fairly advanced capitalist farming and dealt with the agricultural sector in terms of the efficient use of resources and profitability.¹⁷ Rural sociologists, who were actively engaged in studies of rural populations in the 1920s, were the first to append the term "marginal" to the small, self-sufficient farmer. This has promoted, encouraged, and sanctified the notion that the only "good" farmer is the capitalist farmer, all others being "marginal" and therefore doomed to extinction.

That sizeable numbers of small farmers persisted in the South past the point where the balance sheet indicated bankruptcy, indicates that it is the model rather than the farmer that has failed. Conceptual

¹⁷Teodor Shanin, "The Nature and Logic of the Peasant Economy, 1: a Generalization," Journal of Peasant Studies, 1 (October, 1973), 65.

rearmament is a necessity if we are to break out of the box that has limited our understanding of a significant segment of rural society. The capitalist model must be replaced by a more sanguine view of the rural population, one that views farmers, both rich and poor, as economic men who do maximize the use of available resources and whose conditions of poverty or wealth are explicable in terms other than the absence of entrepreneurial abilities or limited aspirations. Poverty is not a choice growing out of cultural weaknesses any more than wealth is a manifestation of cultural strengths. This is not meant to deny that men have different abilities. What it does deny is that cultural factors are adequate explanations of class differences. It is not necessary to appeal to cultural differences when economic factors provide a satisfactory answer. Recent research by a large number of economists finds overwhelming evidence that farmers at all economic levels respond to economic incentives.¹⁸ Much more important than cultural variables

¹⁸Theodore Schultz, Transforming Traditional Agriculture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. "Risk, Uncertainty, and the Subsistence Farmer," in George Dalton, ed. Economic Development and Social Change (Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, 1971), 566-574; also Wharton, "Subsistence Agriculture: Concepts and Scope," in Wharton, ed. Subsistence Agriculture and Economic Development (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 12-20; for two outstanding studies that demonstrate that poor farmers respond to the same economic incentives as rich, see Frank Cancian, Change and Uncertainty in a Peasant Economy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972); and Allen W. Johnson, Sharecroppers of the Sertão (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

are the actual conditions in which men find themselves and the freedom which they have to improve their lot. Finally, it seems unwarranted to assume that all men are motivated solely by calculations of profit. At times, we may be able to suggest the operation of noneconomic motivations, but only after passing them through the filter of economic analysis.

Above all, what the new model should reflect is the extent of integration into the market economy. This is important, not as an index of exposure and acceptance of modernizing influences as it has traditionally been taken to be, but as an indication of the completeness to which one has become subjected to the pricing system and the laws of supply and demand.¹⁹ Polanyi has already alerted us to some of the results that might obtain when an entire economy comes to revolve around the marketplace.²⁰ What we need to examine is the impact of the market economy upon individual households in Louisa.

¹⁹Market integration as an important indicator of a willingness to modernize and the criteria that should form an index to measure such integration were topics discussed in 1965 at a conference that brought together social scientists from 11 different countries at the University of Hawaii. The conference concerned itself primarily with the subsistence farmer. In constructing my index, I have used most of the same criteria agreed upon by the conferees as good indicators of market integration. However, I have not limited the index to subsistence farmers, but have applied it to owners at all levels. See Wharton, "Subsistence Agriculture," 566-574.

²⁰Polanyi, The Great Transformation.

Two sources of economic data on farm families who have some access to land either as owners or renters are the agricultural censuses of 1870 and 1880. In these records one finds rich detail regarding crops raised, farm size, livestock holdings, and general production figures. Admittedly, the methods used to collect this information make the results open to challenge in some respects. Enumerators went from farm to farm and filled out their census sheets by asking the farmer questions about his farming operations and recording the answers in the appropriate blocks. Figures on the values of livestock, machinery, production, and the farm itself were nothing more than estimates given to the enumerator by the farmer. The Superintendent of Agriculture recognized the possibility of errors and agreed that no estimate of agricultural productions was entitled to much more than "the credit of good intentions."²¹ Yet farmers had the advantage of the knowledge of the enumerator when estimating production. Moreover, little advantage was to be gained by lying, and the Superintendent found farmers generally cooperative in disclosing such confidential data. Generally, then, although some errors of judgment as well as intent no doubt were committed, census records are as creditable a source of

²¹"Remarks Upon the Statistics of Agriculture," Ninth Census, Agriculture, Vol. III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 74.

evidence as the culled papers of national leaders, and perhaps an even better one since there is no patterned attempt to deceive.

In the 1880 manuscript census schedules of agriculture, four variables were selected as indicators among Louisa families of the extent of their dealings in the marketplace. These were: the amount of hired labor used during the year, the importance of tobacco in relation to other crops raised, and the amounts of butter and eggs produced on the farm above what might be consumed. When an index of market integration was applied to farm owners in 1880 of a certain size, it became obvious that farmers of small acreages were much less integrated than those with more substantial holdings.²²

The categories of farm size to which the index of market integration was applied, categories used throughout the analysis of farm owners, were 1-100 acre farmers, 101-300 acre farmers, and those holding more than 300 acres. These categories are also arbitrary and the dividing points are open to criticism. However, it was found that they did reflect definite patterns of economic behavior, and in the final analysis, any other scheme of division would have led to similar results. Although the acreage breakpoints are arbitrary, they are not illogical. As indicated earlier, a farm of somewhere

²²See Appendix 3.1 for the explanation of this index.

around 100 acres could be cultivated solely with family labor in 1880, given the level of technology at that time. Moreover, for those who think of a farm of this size to be quite large to be considered a family farm, and it is much larger than peasant family farms in Europe, it must also be pointed out that the soil of Louisa County in 1880 was extremely poor. A soil survey of the county in 1905 concluded that Louisa soils differed in general from most of the rest of the Virginia Piedmont in the "extreme poverty of their organic content."²³ Given the need to let some land lie fallow so that it can regain some of its fertility even for more healthy soils, this need was greater in Louisa because of these conditions. At best, no more than one third of arable land of a farm was under cultivation in any given growing season.²⁴ Similarly, the middling-sized category of 101-300 acres is a division made for the sake of convenience; yet, as we shall see later, this group of farmers occupies a point between the small

²³Bennett and McLendon, "Soil Survey of Louisa County," 196.

²⁴The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommended that not over one third of the arable land be cultivated; see Bennett and McLendon, "Soil Survey of Louisa County," 211; see also Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 270-271, where he shows that most Louisiana farmers cultivated about a third of their arable land.

family farm and the large commercialized farm and the contrasts between it and the other groups are important distinctions.

What seems important is that, in addition to the other requirements, the economic model should distribute farmers on a continuum somewhere between total subsistence and total rationalization. Pure subsistence production where all produce is consumed and where none is sold, and where no goods from outside the individual household are purchased, a condition that probably exists in few places in the world, stands at one end of the scale. At the other end stand the wholly rationalized farmer who consumes none of his produce, but sells it all at the marketplace where he also buys all of his needs, a condition likewise rare in the real world. Between these two ideal types, one can place the farm owners in the sample population of Louisa.

Table 3.1: Level of Market Integration
by Farm Size, 1880

<u>Level</u>	<u>Percentage in Each Category</u>			
	<u>1-100 Acres</u>		<u>101-300 Acres*</u>	<u>300 Acres and Over*</u>
	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>White</u>
Low	81	93	49	28
Moderate	15	7	44	33
High	4	--	6	40
(N)	(26)	(28)	(47)	(40)

*No blacks in these categories.

The index of integration suggests increasing market contacts when farm size exceeds 100 acres, as Table 3.1 indicates. The small farmer appears to be raising little outside of family needs and to be consuming most of his produce. The very large farmer, on the other hand, produces much more than is necessary to satisfy family demands, and probably sells much of the excess in local markets. Both the middling-sized and the large farmer are much more intimately associated with the outside commercial world than is the case with small farmers. Finally, black small farmers appear to be the most self sufficient of all.

When each of the components of this index is examined in greater detail, a clearer picture emerges of the different levels of commercialization. One of the most important parts of the index is the amount of labor used by the farm owner. For some the use of another man's labor by the owner in order to generate a surplus income, only a portion of the total value of which is returned to the laborer, is fundamental to a capitalist economy. The trouble with this is that alone it is not restrictive enough in delineating the capitalist from the non-capitalist. Large farmers might employ no labor at all and still be highly commercialized in that they raise mostly cash crops or livestock and sell at a profit. That profit might be reinvested in land or bonds which might be sold at a still greater profit.

The state agricultural report of 1883 indicated the tendency of large farmers to place their wealth in money, stocks, or bonds that are not taxable in order to dodge the assessor.²⁵ Likewise small farmers may use seasonal labor to help with the harvesting of crops and still remain basically self sufficient in which case their use of labor led to little capital formation. Hence, the use of labor as the sole basis of a particular kind of economy, whether peasant or capitalist, has some limitations as an economic model. By itself, it is a poor gauge of the nature and extent of market integration, something that is important in assessing the impact of the market economy on individual farmers.

Nevertheless, it is generally true that those hiring the most labor are those most tied to the market economy. Table 3.2 shows that nearly three fourths of white small farmers employed no labor while this was true of just over one fourth of the very large farmers. The more laborers one hired the more one could produce for sale on the market. At the same time, however, the greater use of labor increased one's total costs which had to be met by the sale of agricultural products. When the prices that one received dropped, as they did throughout the

²⁵ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Virginia (Richmond: Public Printing, 1883), 19. Hereinafter referred to as State Report of Agriculture along with the year. Unlike stocks and bonds, money in excess of \$600 was taxed.

Table 3.2: Percentage of Black and White Farmers Using No Labor and Producing No Eggs, Butter, or Tobacco, 1880

<u>Farm Size</u> (acres)	<u>No Labor</u>		<u>No Tobacco</u>		<u>No Eggs</u>		<u>No Butter</u>		<u>(N)</u>	
	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>
1-100	89	73	54	61	29	27	29	27	28	26
101-300	--	34	--	38	--	15	--	35	--	47
301 & Over	--	28	--	33	--	5	--	4	--	40

period, this had the effect of raising the cost of labor. In commodity terms, for example, a reduction in the price of corn meant that the same man-hour of labor might be increased from one to two bushels of corn. If one were using several laborers, then, a price decline affected that planter more severely than it did the more self-sufficient farmer not so closely tied to the market laws of supply and demand.

Table 3.2 also reveals that the larger farmers produced greater amounts of tobacco, eggs, and butter. In the case of tobacco, unlike the other two commodities, all of that crop had to be sold on the market at the going rate. To place too much of one's acreage in tobacco was to gamble on starvation. Of those farmers in the over 300 acre category who were raising tobacco in 1880, 89 percent of them (N=24) had five percent or less of their improved acreage in this cash crop. The

percentages were 76 and 54 percent for the white middling and small farmers respectively, and 45 percent for the small black farmer. In addition, tobacco raising required more labor than any other crop. Besides preparing the soil, it had to be transplanted, wormed and suckered, primed and topped, cut and housed, cured, sorted, graded, and packed. It demanded three plowings and three hoeings, all of which had to be done by hand except the plowing. The man-labor hours required to raise one acre of tobacco was between 327 and 461, depending on whether one raised dark or bright varieties. In contrast, the man-labor hours needed to produce an acre of corn was 57.²⁶ Hence, those who devoted even a few acres to tobacco were unavoidably drawn into the market economy for all that meant in times of price fluctuations.

The production of eggs and butter was another matter. These could serve both consumption needs as well as provide cash. The 1880 census was the first census that gathered statistics on these commodities. That is unfortunate because the results showed that these were the products of more farm owners than any other commodities. For the purposes here, their importance is related to the extent to which they formed farm incomes for farmers of various sizes. In 1880 the census reported the growth

²⁶A. P. Brodell, "Cost of Producing Virginia Dark and Bright Tobacco and Incomes from Farming, 1922-1925," Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin, No. 255 (Blacksburg, Virginia, 1927), 32.

in cheese and butter factories and creameries in the Northern states where much of the dairy produce was going. In addition, the same census estimated that the farmer could expect a moderate return on eggs of \$.12 per dozen.²⁷ Some owners were raising larger amounts of these commodities than they could consume, and although there is no way of knowing exactly how much each farmer actually sold, it is certain that those producing the largest amounts did receive some cash return that varied with price changes.

Thus, what the index of market integration, composed of these four variables, does is to measure the extent to which one has become a commercial farmer. Perhaps it comes as a surprise to no one that the small farmer more closely resembles the self-subsistent family farmer; or that the farmer holding over 300 acres resembles what can be called the entrepreneurial farmer. We shall refer to the farmer holding 101-300 acres as the middling farmer. With each step up the scale from family farm to entrepreneurial farm, one's self sufficiency diminished as more and more needs came to be filled via market exchange. In the same process, prices over which the farmer had no control took on increased importance. Individual choices over what and how much to grow were taken out of one's hands as household autonomy gave way

²⁷Tenth Census of the United States, Agriculture (Washington, 1883), 7-33.

to the logic of supply and demand. The family farmer might smile or grumble and go on hoeing, while the entrepreneurial farmer burnt the midnight oil pouring over tobacco prices in the local newspapers and fretting about his alternatives.

Freeholders in Louisa County never constituted more than a minority of the population among both racial groups between 1870 and 1900, as Table 3.3 indicates.²⁸ In the case of white families, at their highest level in 1890 they composed only 41 percent of the sample population (N=117). The highest level for black families was reached in 1900 where they made up just over one third of the sample group (N=88). In 1880 at least, farm owners were a very elite and privileged group.

Table 3.3: Freeholders in the Sample Population, 1870-1900

Farm Type	<u>Percent in Each Decade</u>							
	<u>1870</u>		<u>1880</u>		<u>1890</u>		<u>1900</u>	
	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Family Farmer	7	1	9	11	13	22	15	32
Middling Farmer	13	--	16	--	17	1	16	1
Entrepreneurial Farmer	10	--	14	--	11	--	8	--
(N)	(88)	(2)	(113)	(28)	(117)	(59)	(113)	(88)

²⁸For an explanation of how tenure was determined, see Appendix 3.2.

In order to understand the changes affecting farm owners at each level during the period, we need to trace those owners in the three acreage categories shown in Table 3.3 for the year 1880.²⁹ This group includes 26 white and 28 black small farmers, 47 white middling farmers, and 40 entrepreneurial farmers.

Some index of wealth or poverty is needed that indicates access to economic resources in order to reflect the different economic positions of each group. In addition to occupation, command over available resources is a fundamental measure of class stratification.³⁰

²⁹The 1880 group was selected for a number of reasons. The entire study began with a 40 percent random sample of those who listed their occupation as "farmer" on the 1880 census of population, even though a tracing over several decades from 1870 forward was contemplated. Since the 1870 census is notorious for its under-enumeration of blacks, it was felt that 1880 was a more representative census from which to select a sample. Moreover, the quality of the 1880 enumerators was considered superior to those in 1870 due to the greater care that went into their selection. Furthermore, it was to be a study of household composition as well. Since 1870 does not indicate the relationship of household members to the head of household, it was felt that greater certainty of household membership in 1870 could be gained by beginning with 1880 where one's relationship to the household head was certain, and where this list of household names could then be helpful in deriving household composition in 1870. Thus, 1880 becomes a pivotal year in which the sample from that census was traced backwards into the 1870 census and local tax records and forward into the same records in 1890 and 1900. I will follow the same logic in dealing with each occupational component of the population, whether freeholders, leaseholders, or laborers.

³⁰Stephan Thernstrom has emphasized the significance of occupation along with command over available economic resources as measures of poverty. See Thernstrom, "Poverty in Historical Perspective," in Daniel P. Moynihan, ed., On Understanding Poverty (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), 160-186.

Table 3.4 illustrates the distribution of the sample population ranked on the basis of an index of economic status.³¹ Small farmers of both racial groups are highly concentrated in the lower two ranks. The pronounced shift in status among the larger farmers is evidence of the advantages these two groups had as a result of their larger command of available economic resources. Hypothetically, at least, their superior economic position

Table 3.4: Comparative Economic Status
of Louisa County Farm Owners
in 1880 (in terms of 1870 prices)

<u>Economic Status</u>	<u>Percentage in Each Group</u>					
	<u>Family Farmer</u>		<u>Middling Farmer</u>		<u>Entrepreneurial Farmer</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Lower Quartile	29	23	--	9	--	3
Second Quartile	71	73	--	30	--	13
Third Quartile	--	--	--	55	--	33
Upper Quartile	--	--	--	6	--	53
(N)	(28)	(26)		(47)		(40)

greatly enhanced their ability to not only preserve their status position, but to make gains that would widen the gap even further between themselves and the remainder of the population.

³¹For an explanation of how this index was formed, see Appendix 3.3.

Hidden within this indicator of absolute inequality, moreover, is any distinction between different types of resources, some of which are productive factors and others which are consumable factors. In economic terms, the possession of furniture is not at all equivalent to that of land, machinery, or draft animals, even though its display might bring certain psychological advantages especially to those unable to accumulate the more productive factors. What is important, especially in a rural society where one's potential output depends upon control over yield-producing factors, are those resources that multiply yields. Access to land, machinery, and draft animals certainly provide greater opportunities for social mobility than does access to consumables or resources incapable of generating additional produce.

Table 3.5: Percentage of Farm Owners in 1880 whose Index of Economic Status Included Some Machinery, Draft Animals, Livestock, or Furniture, by Race

<u>Farm Type</u>	<u>Machinery</u>		<u>Draft Animals</u>		<u>Livestock</u>		<u>Furniture</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Family	29	49	25	54	71	73	79	73
Middling	--	83	--	85	--	87	--	87
Entrepreneurial	--	87	--	92	--	92	--	95

Table 3.5 shows that it was not land alone that gave the larger farmers clear advantages, but their comparatively higher command over the yield-producing factors. About half of the white family farmers had machinery or draft animals while this was the case among nine tenths of white middling and entrepreneurial farmers. The situation was even more serious among black owners in which three fourths of the farmers lacked income-generating factors. Moreover, in the case of black farmers, over two thirds (N=19) of those in 1880 possessed livestock whose assessed value did not exceed \$50. Nearly the same was true with white small owners (N=17). The average assessed value of a hog in 1880 was \$2 while that of a cow was \$12. Thus, in the case of small owners, livestock tended to be a consumed resource basically rather than a source of wealth.

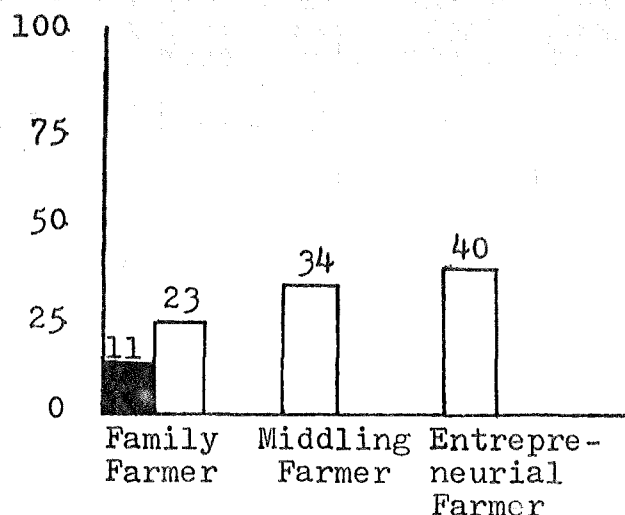
Given the advantages the larger farmers had in yield-producing factors, one would have expected this group to have prospered during the period, and the family farmer to have disappeared. The index of economic status seems to indicate that the large farmer was prospering. Moreover, the same index of class stratification applied to any other time during the period would lead to the same conclusion. Perhaps, more than anything else this has convinced most observers that rationalization was the course of the wise because the "proof of the pudding is in the eating." When one samples the population at any

time during the last third of the nineteenth century in Virginia and finds the larger farmers on the top of the social pyramid and the family farmer on the bottom, the conclusion seems inescapable that rationalization and success are intimately related. Just as obvious is the conclusion that the small farmer could not survive because of his failure (or refusal) to commercialize. It is but a short step from this argument to the further conclusion (or justification) that everyone has benefited from this process because the "marginal" have been eliminated.³²

If rationalization was the course of the wise we would expect the group of farmers pursuing this course to have made great gains. Likewise, those rejecting modernization should have been squeezed out. It is only by tracing individual farmers through time that we can test this generalization encouraged by a static picture of class stratification. An examination of the gains and losses in the amounts and values of personal property and land over the period seriously challenges the correlation of success with rationalization.

³²Public policy toward the farm sector since the Civil War has typically favored the large scale commercial farmer even though that policy has been a response to fears about the demise of the small family farm. The justification for such a policy is that the government cannot encourage the "marginal" farmer whose productivity is geared just to feeding his own family.

Figure 3.1: Percentage of Farm Owners Suffering Personal Property Losses, in all Categories 1870-1900 by Farm Type (Blacks are represented by solid bar.)



(N) (28)(26) (47) (40)

Louisa personal property tax books indicated that of those families experiencing personal property losses in all categories (draft animals, livestock, machinery, and furniture) the losses were the most severe among those owners who had advanced to the highest levels of rationalization (Figure 3.1). Significantly, the group least tied to the market, such as the black owners, was the one in which the fewest owners experienced losses. Moreover, in the most rationalized group (entrepreneurial farmers) only two farmers suffered no losses at all (5 percent) while the same was true with eight (31 percent) white family farmers. Clearly, in terms of personal

property changes, those farmers most active in the market economy were taking the greatest losses.

The same pattern was evident in land changes over the period (Table 3.6). Owners who were selling their land in the largest numbers were the middling and entrepreneurial farmers while those increasing their acreage or staying the same most frequently were black and white family farmers. This pattern of land change suggests that the more rationalized farmer was paying a very high price in order to hold on to his status position. The cost was the highest for the middling farmer who did not have the cushion of wealth possessed by the large planter who could sell small acreages without the same threat to his position in the short run. Again these patterns of land change indicate the problems of rationalization in a period of price decline.

Table 3.6: Land Changes Among Farm Owners
1870-1900 by Farm Type

Farm Type	(Percentage in each group)							
	<u>Increased Acreage</u>		<u>Decreased Acreage</u>		<u>Stayed Same</u>		(N)	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Family	46	14	31	29	23	50	(26)	(28)
Middling	--	13	--	60	--	17	--	(47)
Entrepre- neurial	--	30	--	53	--	15	--	(40)

Still another indication of the different effects of economic downturn among farmers at various levels of market integration is duration of stay in the county. In order to arrive at a persistence rate, farmers were divided into groups, the most persistent group being those present for the entire period between 1870 and 1900 and the least persistent being those present in 1880 only. Since it was found that the population schedules of the census frequently missed some who were actually in the county, the personal property tax book was used as the basis of the persistence rate. A check was also made to determine if age tended to be a factor more frequently among any one group. It was found that each group had similar percentages of those under 21 years of age and over 45 in 1880, and therefore age did not affect one group more than another.

The most persistent group was the black family farmer where nearly three fourths ($N=20$) were in the county for the entire period. This is a remarkable persistence rate given all the anxiety expressed by the white population through the Freedmen's Bureau papers about the wandering black population after the Civil War. Most of this movement, however, was among those who had no claim to land or any means of making a living. It is in this light that Stamp's conclusion about the absence of land redistribution being the greatest failure of

Reconstruction finds meaning.³³ The stability for which the pre-war rural South longed, and the alarm over the fluid black population could both have been satisfied had freedmen been provided with the means of making a living after the war. Yet, even without government assistance, black families made extraordinary economic gains. Black landowners who composed less than one percent of the black sample population in 1870 (N=2) had by 1900 come to include over one third of the sample (N=88). In fact the spread of "Jim Crow" laws was related to the rising economic competition of blacks.³⁴ Obviously, many black families did not need anything more than an equal chance to the right to live. They had within themselves the means and will to improve their lot, something not even slavery had destroyed.

The other most self-reliant group, white family farmers, had the lowest persistence of the three owner groups. Only 46 percent (N=12) of these farmers were present in the county throughout the period. The reasons are not entirely clear, but their patterns of land changes and personal property gains and losses suggests that they were not being "pushed" out of farming. Instead, it may be the case that they were being "lured" out by the attraction of better paying jobs. The 1889 report

³³Kenneth M. Stamp, The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965).

³⁴C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow.

of the State Commissioner of Agriculture noted the increasing frequency with which white laborers were replacing black laborers in railroads, tobacco works, and as factory operatives in mines and furnaces. In fact, this was a pattern all over the South that intensified as poverty deepened.³⁵ Mining companies had begun to settle in Louisa as early as 1877, although they were small and short-lived. Iron, copper ore, and gold quartz at first worked by black laborers, apparently came to be manned by white laborers in the 1890s, many of whom might have been former family farmers. By 1893 no manufacturing establishments remained in the county at all, and many of the mines had closed.³⁶ Black laborers who had been displaced either bought some of the cheap land vacated by whites or went North to find work.³⁷

Persistence rates among the more rationalized farmers followed the patterns we have come to expect, however, being the lowest among the most rationalized group of entrepreneurial farmers (63 percent). Even the rate among middling farmers was below that of the black family (66 percent). That only two thirds of the large

³⁵Walter L. Fleming, "Labor and Labor Conditions," in Ballagh, The South in the Building of a Nation, 41-48.

³⁶State Report of Agriculture, 1889, pp. 3-24; 1877, pp. 109-110; 1893, pp. 31-46.

³⁷Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 313.

landholders managed to survive while three fourths of black family farmers did so does not support the widely held notion that rationalization was the key to success. In a period of price decline it was a most foolhardy course and one certain to lead to eventual economic disaster. The wisest course was to steer a path as far from the market place as possible, for self reliance was like money in the bank.

Although the relative effects of price decline varied depending upon the level of market integration, no one was totally unaffected by it. The impact was greatest absolutely upon the larger farmers because they had the most to lose. Generally, as the depression continued and deepened over the period everyone in the community felt its force, however, and fewer and fewer families made up the upper quartiles of the index of economic status. Figure 3.2 is an attempt to represent graphically poverty's effect upon farm owners between 1870 and 1900. The "0" line represents the midpoint between the upper and lower quartiles. The percentage above the line, represented by a bar for farmers of different sizes, shows the number of farmers in each size-race group whose index of economic status (composed of livestock, draft animals, land, and machinery) placed them in the upper one half of the population in terms of wealth. Those below the "0" line, of course, are

those whose wealth placed them in the lower half of the population. The index of economic status used for locating owners on the graph is based throughout on 1870 values.

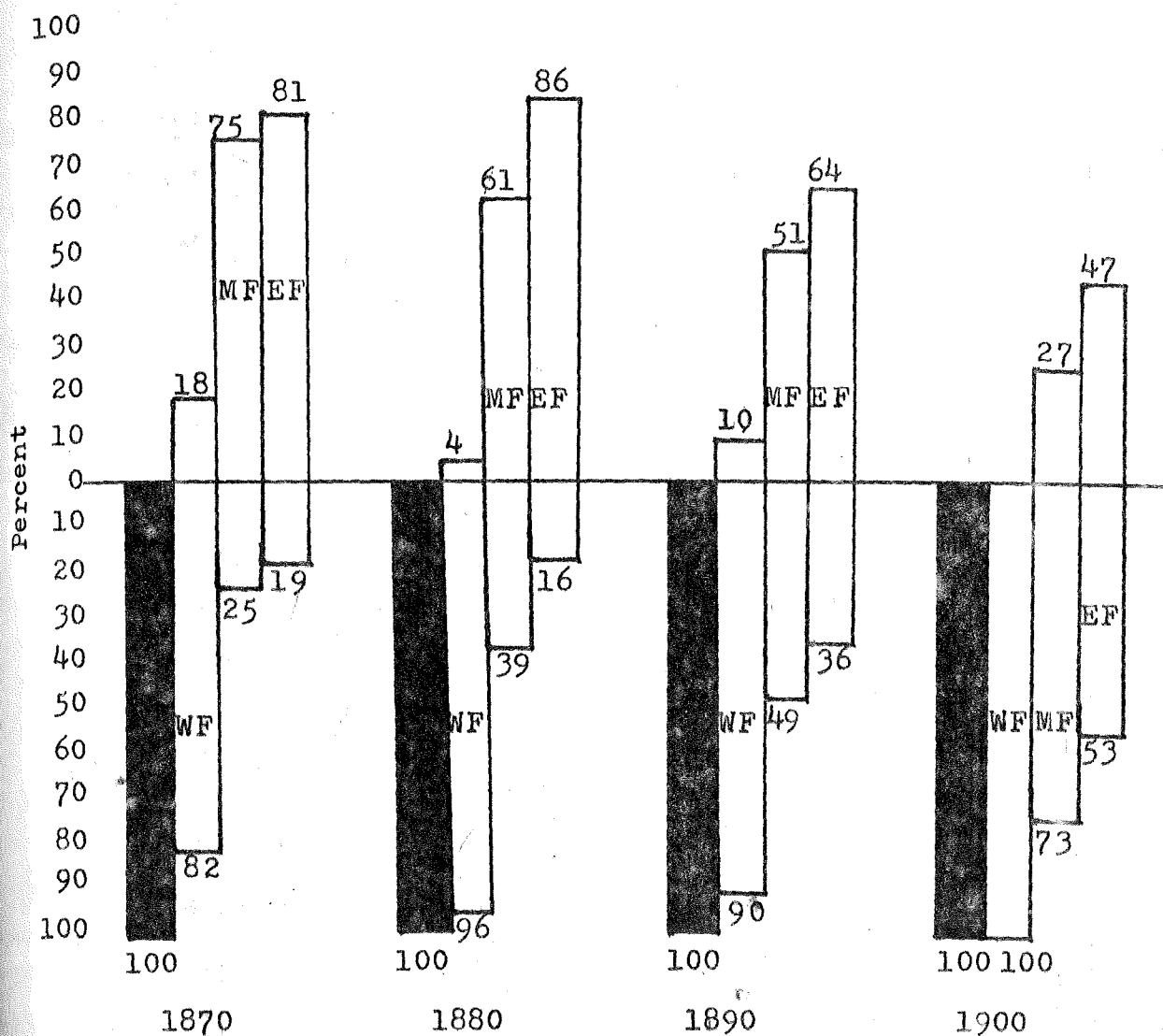
As Figure 3.2 shows, great gaps between rich and poor had existed in 1870, but by 1900 poverty came to act as a powerful levelling mechanism as increasing numbers of middling and entrepreneurial farmers joined the family farmers in the lower quartiles of the economic status index. Not even the cushion of greater resources was sufficient to prevent the more wealthy from being dragged down with the rest. Most of these advantages had been negated by the insistence of these groups upon rationalization and by their refusal to become more self-sufficient. Family farmers, who had not been unaffected by these price changes, survived and did reasonably well under the circumstances only because they avoided being drawn into the market. Thus, it was not the Civil War that became the watershed of economic democracy in Louisa County, but poverty that roared across the county like a brush fire inflicting misery upon everyone in its path.

Thus, it would appear that it is not the commitment to self-sufficiency in the post-war period that is in need of explanation, for this was a logical economic course in a period of price decline. More puzzling is the dedication to a highly commercialized agriculture on the part of the larger farmers whose choice required

liquidation of assets in order to preserve their position in the society. But that is just the point. Large farmers seemed to have been less motivated by economic rationale than by other concerns, the most prominent of which was to preserve an accustomed way of life regardless of the costs. Neither the interests of soil conservation nor the interests of the county at large prevailed over their own economic self interests. They seemed never to have grasped the implications of their pre-eminent position in rural society and the importance their economic decisions had for the entire rural economy. Whether they controlled the county politically is not known, except for those large farmers whose names turn up as Overseers of the Poor, sheriff, or in other minor offices. Yet even a minimal control over county offices would have made little difference for political power has never been exercised in disregard of those with economic power. There is no evidence that Louisa County was any different, while much evidence exists that political decisions were made which supported their exalted economic position.

But what about other factors, such as soil exhaustion? How much weight can one assign to this as an explanation of the South's backwardness after the war? Soil depleting agricultural practices began as early as 1742 when Louisa was separated from Hanover County and became a county in its own right. English immigrants who first

Upper Quartiles



Lower Quartiles

Figure 3.2: Changes in Economic Status 1870-1900 by Farm Type (Blacks are represented by solid bars; white family farmers as WF, entrepreneurial farmers as EF, and middling farmers as MF.)

settled there raised tobacco almost exclusively as new fields were cleared every three years to replace those exhausted from the continuous cultivation of one crop without rotation or manuring. The colonial legislature very early attempted to stop this practice by requiring that other crops such as wheat, corn, and flax be grown. This met with only limited success until 1850 when deep plowing, crop rotation, and the use of Peruvian guanos and plasters began to be used, especially in the so called "Green Springs" district, an area that has continued to be the most fertile in the county.³⁸ This suggests that soil exhaustion is not irreversible and even the most depleted soil can be reclaimed in a few years by the application of organic manures, the planting and plowing under of nitrogen-producing plants, and crop rotation that leaves fields fallow for a season. State agricultural reports during this period are replete with advice to farmers to shift to stock raising as a means of soil reclamation. More stock meant more manure. Moreover, cattle could be fed with hay, a crop that was good for the soil. Because of the availability of cheap land and labor, however, farmers practiced a labor-intensive agriculture. When the condition of scarcely commercialized land and labor obtain, as was the case

³⁸Bennett and McLendon, "Soil Survey of Louisa County," 191-192.

prior to 1865, and when monocultural agriculture can exploit these advantages, the incentive is to continue doing so until it is no longer profitable.

Even as early as 1860, however, Louisa agriculture was quite diversified and could in no sense be called a one-crop economy (Table 3.7). If tobacco was the main cash crop, it did not dominate the economy. Five times more acreage was devoted to wheat, three times more to maize, and twice as much acreage was devoted to oats as was planted in tobacco in 1860. Farmers also raised beef and milch cattle, swine, and a surprising number of sheep. Perhaps many, as in the post-war period, also grew Irish and sweet potatoes, raised some chickens, sold a little wood cut off their farm, had a few fruit trees, and produced a bit of honey.

Although the 1870 figures reflect the disruptive effects of the war, they also indicate a continuation in pre-war trends which lasted until 1880, when a significant shift in agricultural practices occurred. In the 1880s the demand for dairy products began to rise in urban areas. Louisa's proximity to urban centers such as Richmond and Washington, D. C., made the county a significant supplier of these products. State agricultural reports between 1887 and 1899 constantly refer to the rising amounts of butter being shipped out of the county to D. C., to the increase in the number of creameries in the state, and to the frequency with which

dairy and poultry products had become the primary cash "crops."³⁹ Table 3.7 indicates the extent to which Louisa farmers were responding to the state-wide trend. Milk sold or produced on farms went from 851 gallons in 1880 to 1.1 million gallons in 1900. Eggs produced doubled in the same period, while the numbers of beef and milch cows also increased. As one might expect, with this shift in consumer demand for dairy products that induced farmers to raise more chickens and livestock, forage crops of hay and maize took on increased importance.

Thus, neither one crop agriculture nor soil exhaustion explain the patterns of behavior or plight of farmers in this rural Southern community. Instead, farmers were responding to some extent to the laws of supply and demand whether they took advantage of the cheapness of labor or a rising urban demand for farm products. If the price of tobacco had remained high, farmers would have found ways of continuing to raise such a soil-depleting crop. But this was not the case, and in 1891 the State Agricultural Report stated that wheat had surpassed tobacco as a more profitable crop.⁴⁰

Another frequently stated explanation of the depressed state of Southern agriculture after the war is the absence of credit. Due to the weakness of the

³⁹State Agricultural Report, 1887, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1893, 1899.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1891, 19.

Table 3.7: Major Crops, Livestock, and Produce, Louisa County, 1860-1900

<u>Item</u>	<u>Unit of Measure-</u> <u>ment</u>	<u>1860</u>	<u>1870</u>	<u>1880</u>	<u>1890</u>	<u>1900</u>
Hay	acres	9,559	886	2,131	4,602	4,950
Tobacco	acres	5,998	1,162	2,978	1,269	2,647
Maize	acres	19,184	7,597	23,807	18,497	24,005
Wheat	acres	25,826	12,635	11,928	5,738	6,381
Oats	acres	11,007	8,425	10,329	6,501	3,294
Horses	each	2,485	1,734	2,167	2,134	3,169
Milch Cows	each	3,050	2,375	3,357	3,742	3,725
Other Cows	each	4,377	1,658	3,360	3,172	4,428
Sheep	each	7,674	2,088	4,001	5,144	3,872
Swine	each	16,259	6,354	11,224	10,817	10,851
Eggs	dozen	--	--	106,949	78,875	257,520
Butter	pounds	93,860	75,914	118,174	220,637	181,790
Milch	gallons	--	--	851	888,272	1,080,579

SOURCE: General tables, U.S. Census, 1860-1900. Crop figures for 1860 and 1870 were changed from pounds, bushels, or tons in order to make the table comparable. Average yields, as indicated by federal agricultural reports of the period, were used to derive acreages. These were: tobacco--800 pounds/acre; maize--20 bushels/acre; wheat--10 bushels/acre; oats--15 bushels/acre; hay--1.3 tons/acre.

Southern farm bloc in Congress in 1862 when the National Banking Act was framed, national banks in the South were very scarce and even when restrictions on the number were lifted the South failed to get its share. In 1895 in the United States there was one bank to every 16,600 inhabitants whereas in Texas there was one bank to every 58,130 inhabitants.⁴¹ Most banks after the war were

⁴¹Woodward, Origins of the New South, 183.

state or private concerns in the South, if they survived at all. One study finds no state banks in Virginia in 1865. Gradually, state banks emerged, slowly at first, and then grew very rapidly between 1886 and 1892.

National banks also grew during the same period, though at a much slower rate. In 1880 Virginia had 17 national, 44 state, and 33 private banks. In 1890 this increased to 32 national, 76 state, and 31 private banks.⁴² State banks grew much faster because state statutes required only \$10,000 for capitalization as opposed to \$50,000 for national banks, as well as less rigid reserve requirements. Even with their emergence, however, the farmer could not be very hopeful. National banks could not loan on real estate, the farmer's most prominent asset. Moreover, state and private banks were not publicly regulated, and such low capitalization rates provided extremely small pools of potential mortgage money. Under these conditions a doubling in the number of banks would have benefited only a small minority of large farmers who had sufficient assets to back up any demand for cash.

The substitute for the absence of credit mechanisms was the lien system in which the unplanted crop was pledged to pay for a loan in the form of supplies. Besides answering the need for credit, however, the lien system served a more fundamental goal--it preserved an accustomed

⁴²Davis R. Dewey, "Banking in the South," in Ballagh, The South in the Building of the Nation, 426-433.

social system. Under its operation labor could be controlled and impressed into the service of the lien holder. As we have seen, this was not just a regional aim, but one first endorsed by the national government in the form of the Freedmen's Bureau. There was nothing naturally evil about the lien system. Indeed, it was a rather ingenious device that had the potential of being an avenue of social mobility, and concomitantly, of economic democracy. It served, as perhaps no other mechanism could, as a means by which ordinary laborers could first become semi-independent farmers, and eventually totally independent owners. The threat that this posed for those dedicated to a more patrician society was neatly disposed of when the books were balanced at the end of the period of contract. Frequently, this final accounting placed the tenant in the planter's debt, something that required another year's services. Yet, federal and local regulation of labor contracts could have prevented these cases of peonage, and the lien system need not have been abandoned simply because it was abused. In fact, in some cases it did serve as a ladder of social ability because some large farmers insisted upon treating their tenants fairly. One study of a Tidewater Virginia county between 1860 and 1920 found over 70 percent of the black farm owners had been cash tenants or sharecroppers

before becoming owners.⁴³ Perhaps, this is why other, more traditional large farmers disliked it as a system of credit. In any case, its potential as a force for economic democracy was just as great as that of a banking system that would have favored only those with sufficient collateral, such as the large farmer. Under a banking system of credit, rural society might easily have turned into one consisting of large owners and laborers, denying to laborers the more desirable semi-autonomous status of tenant.

Finally, we are left with the explanation that the small farmer did not respond to economic incentives, that he preferred the status quo, that his hesitancy to rationalize grew out of a predisposition toward backwardness, and that this attitude on the part of a significant portion of the rural population retarded Southern economic growth. Much of the force of this argument has already been blunted by showing that rationalization was not the wisest course during a period of price decline. Moreover, it has been shown that the small command of yield-producing factors along with the economic inability to increase these factors prevented some family farmers from taking such a course, even if they had wanted to. Yet, there is even more direct evidence that

⁴³Scarborough, W. S., "Tenancy and Ownership Among Negro Farmers in Southampton County, Virginia," United States Department of Agriculture Bulletin, No. 1404 (April, 1929), 1-27.

small owners were not servants of these attitudes. Admittedly scant, nevertheless there is evidence that black and white small farmers were economic maximizers, that they were attempting to improve their lot, and that they were even more committed to change than the larger farmers who were satisfied to preserve what they had. Important in this determination is the element of risk, the intensity of which varies with one's location in the economic and social order. Frank Cancian has argued, in a study of farmers of different economic means in the highlands of Mexico, that the desire for a higher rank induces men to take risks in uncertain situations. The measurement of this desire among farmers of different ranks and conditions permits an explanation of differentiated responses in terms of a general account of stratification and risk taking.⁴⁴ For example, an acre of land dedicated to a cash crop whose return is uncertain involves a much greater risk for the small farmer than it does for the large.

One good measure of risk in 1880 is the amount of one's improved acreage devoted to tobacco. The greater the proportion of one's resources dedicated to a cash crop that could not be eaten, the greater the risk. The 1880 census of agriculture indicates that among the sample population 22 percent of black family farmers

⁴⁴Cancian, Change and Uncertainty, 136-137.

(N=6) and 20 percent (N=5) of white family farmers had over 5 percent of their improved acreage in tobacco. The percentages were 15 percent (N=7) and 8 percent (N=3) for middling and entrepreneurial farmers respectively. The greater inclination to venturesomeness in these cases where the risks are much higher for the smaller farmers and when the rate of return on the investment of one's resources is uncertain suggests a strong desire to improve one's location in the social order. Understandable in these terms, such behavior is baffling to those who attempt to explain it solely in terms of economic rationale. State agricultural reports reflect the disdain of large capitalist farmers for the small black and white farmer who is raising "inferior" tobacco and thereby causing the decline in tobacco prices. And, economically, the tying up of one's resources in time and money on a crop that will not supply their basic needs is irrational. Yet there is no necessity to explain such behavior in rational, economic terms. The non-economic motivations of rank improvement, a search for consolidating and improving status, is a plausible alternative.

Nowhere was this desire to better one's position in rural society more evident than among the black community. Beginning from conditions of destitution in 1865, 88 black families out of a sample of 253 managed to acquire land by 1900. The personal property tax book

of 1880 revealed that 21 percent of all black families of the sample (N=54) owned no taxable personal property. Another 25 percent (N=64) had nothing except furniture valued from between \$5 and \$10. Add to that another 20 percent (N=50) whose personal property consisted of a few cows, pigs, and perhaps a draft animal, and one has accounted for all the taxable personal property of three fourths of the black community. Given these meager holdings soon after the war, their gains are of heroic proportions, as well as a testament to their desire to improve their lot.

Nor were these gains restricted to poor counties like Louisa. One estimate has blacks owning under 500 acres in 24 counties of the Tidewater after the war. In the same counties by 1912 they owned 421,465 acres.⁴⁵ In Prince Edward County, a tobacco growing county of the Virginia Piedmont, blacks owned 13 percent of the land by 1906.⁴⁶ In my view, these gains are not at all diminished by the fact that blacks constituted much higher percentages of the population. One must give credit where credit is due, and the uglier aspects of the emancipation period should only highlight these gains,

⁴⁵T. C. Walker, "Development in the Tidewater Counties of Virginia," The Annals, American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. XLIX (September, 1913), 28-31.

⁴⁶W. T. B. Williams, "Local Conditions Among Negroes, III, Prince Edward County, Virginia," Southern Workman, Vol. XXXV (April, 1906), 239-244.

not detract from them in the haste to make the obvious and tired case against the South as a racist society.


There is also other evidence of the willingness of small farmers to take risks as a means of improving their rank in society. The use of fertilizer on a small farmer's land in 1880 entailed the investment of resources in a product which, although widely advertised to increase production, was not certain to do so. The state agricultural report of 1880 questioned whether fertilizer would pay, given its high price and the low prices of farm produce.⁴⁷ Whether it actually increased soil fertility depended upon certain factors. If the humus content of the soil was too low, the application of chemicals alone would not restore the soil to more productive levels, and could actually be harmful. The agricultural reports of 1885 and 1887 reminded farmers that chemical fertilizers must be used with vegetable matter and not alone.⁴⁸ Moreover, the farmer had to know exactly what types of chemicals would most likely result in increased fertility. Large farmers who either had this knowledge from experience, or greater literacy, or who could get soil analysis tests could take advantage of fertilizers, and, more importantly, were less uncertain as to the probable outcome of its application.

⁴⁷State Agricultural Report, 1880, pp. 125-131.

⁴⁸State Agriculture Report, 1885, pp. 2-3; 1887, p. 11.

For these reasons, the use of fertilizer was a more risky proposition for the small farmer who may have been less informed about their general use. Furthermore, just as in the case of tobacco, the investment in a bag of fertilizer for the large farmer was a much smaller venture of his resources than the same investment would have been for the smaller freeholder. Yet the 1880 census of agriculture indicated that 31 percent (N=8) of the small white owners used some fertilizer while the same was true for 38 percent (N=18) and 63 percent (N=25) of middling and large farmers respectively. Only 7 percent of the small black owners used any fertilizer. The relatively large numbers of white small owners using fertilizer suggests their willingness to take what was for them a substantial risk in order to raise their levels of productivity and improve their positions. That more black small owners did not follow the same course is probably due to their more depressed economic condition.

On the other hand, the absence of a desire to change (commitment to the status quo) was obvious among the larger farmers both before and after the war. Before the war Virginia ranked near the bottom among the Southern states in average value per acre of farm land. This was because she also had more unimproved land in farms than any other state except Texas. It was a common practice among planters to purchase and hold land in



excess of operating needs in order to profit from an anticipated increase in its value at resale, to replace depleted soils, or to simply assure greater social prestige.⁴⁹ Moreover, since the seventeenth century when the leading gentry began to acquire lands, it had been customary to pass on to younger sons and even daughters portions of the family estate, so that great clans like the Carters and the Lees became scattered over the state on estates of equal influence.⁵⁰ The result of this was that by 1860 Virginia had just over a third (36 percent) of its farm land under cultivation compared to two thirds in Northern states like New York and Pennsylvania. Louisa County was above the state average in land under cultivation before the war with one half of its land in improved acreage in 1860. After the war, however, general census tables show that it moved closer to the state average, with 39 percent of its land improved in 1870, a figure that remained the same through 1900.

The consequences of the ownership and control over so much unproductive land by a small number of the community was enormous. It tied up capital, dispersed

⁴⁹Paul W. Gates, The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 112.

⁵⁰Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in James Morton Smith, ed. Seventeenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 90-115.

the population, depressed assessments because of lack of improvements, made the financing of internal improvements difficult, prevented the utilization of the land by small farmers, and ultimately, deepened the impoverishment of the entire population of the county. Decreasing land and personal property values over the period also meant decreasing revenues for the county, something that required raises in taxes. This only made conditions worse and contributed to the cyclical pattern detrimental to all. Moreover, not only did tax raises hit the smaller farmers harder, there is also evidence that tax collection was unfair in other ways. Land owned by black farmers was frequently assessed at a higher per acre value than that of whites, even when the two properties were adjacent. The 1893 agricultural report noted complaints among farmers that tax assessors were not assessing land equally, and that lands of the same value might be assessed differently.⁵¹ In addition, I noticed, while tracing owners through county landbooks that large landholders might not show up at all on the tax book in one decade only to reappear in subsequent landbooks with the same acreage as in the last period. This suggests that these strangely absent owners never left the county, but enjoyed some favor from the tax collector.

⁵¹State Agricultural Report, 1893, p. 6.

Although tax administration may remain forever shrouded in doubt, the dedication to the existing social order and its perpetuation among the economic elite is clear. So too are the cruel effects of such dedication on an entire economy and its population. Louisa County had enough arable land to decently feed, clothe and house its population with little difficulty. Rural poverty, whose shadow hovered near the doorsteps of so many families, need not have been such a threatening force. Admittedly inadequate by itself, land redistribution would have been a step in the right direction, and certainly more effective than public assistance parcelled out by the economic elite who carped about how much this was costing the county. There was little chance of this kind of reform coming from the top, however. By putting an end to confiscation immediately after the war and forcing laborers to sign unfavorable contracts, the federal government had given its approval to the existing social order. The local economic elite did not miss the cue. Satisfied with their rank in the existing order, they felt no need to take measures that might lead to a rearrangement of the social order and threaten their location. Any impetus for change had to come from the grassroots.

Along with land redistribution, a strong commitment to improving the capabilities of its farm population would have resulted in the most beneficial social change

to the community at large. Of the three factors of land, quality of material factors, and capabilities of the farm population, Schultz had argued that the latter is the most important in moving low income communities to more prosperous levels.⁵²

However, the economy stagnated primarily because modernization necessitated fundamental changes in the prevailing class system. It mattered little whether these changes might not also ultimately redound to the benefit of all when the interests of the few was at stake. Large farmers valued a social and economic order of the kind they knew as slaveholding planters. As the market economy advanced, bringing with it price fluctuations and legally free labor, and subjecting the planter more completely to the laws of supply and demand in the process, large planters were forced into a choice of two courses. They could farm on a smaller scale giving up concerns for status and the amenities of the old order, or they could try and retain the old social order where economic arrangements were secondary to social arrangements and where questions of status took precedence over those of economics.

The evidence suggests that most threw economics to the wind out of a desire to preserve familiar social arrangements. They did so by negotiating labor contracts

⁵²Shultz, Transforming Traditional Agriculture, 22-23; 175-206.

setting forth conditions similar to those under slavery; by holding wages at extremely low levels; by leasing out portions of their land; by avoiding taxes as much as possible; by attempting to make their farms profit-making enterprises; by improving the soil and their holdings only to the extent necessary to break even or perhaps turn a profit; and probably by other ways not publicly revealed. The cushion of their resources enabled them to withstand the costs their priorities exacted. Much of them were paid by the county as a whole in the form of poor roads, inadequate education systems, high taxes for those least able to pay, unemployment, starvation wages, inadequate funds for public assistance, and widespread poverty in general.

These findings suggest that in a period of uncertainty when risk is at a high level those most resistant to change are middle and upper class groups who have the least to gain and the most to lose from any changes. Those at the lowest levels are more inclined to venturesomeness because change promises to improve their rank. In both cases consideration of rank and the desire for rank may be the key to "who among the blind will act in innovative ways."⁵³

⁵³Cancian, Change and Uncertainty, 158.

CHAPTER IV

DEPENDENT CLASSES

Lewis C., a 38-year old white agricultural laborer, and Delilah his 30-year old wife were trying to support themselves and two small children in 1870. Their only taxable personal property was a single milch cow, and thus nearly all of their support had to come from Lewis's wages. By 1880 six more children had arrived, and, fortunately, Lewis had managed to buy a horse and several pigs along with some furniture valued under \$10. He had also acquired a few hand tools worth almost \$10. By 1890, however, the C. family could no longer be located in the county.

Julian M., a 31-year old black agricultural laborer, and his 27-year old wife, Victoria, were struggling to make a living in Louisa in 1870 for themselves and two very small children. They owned nothing beyond tables, beds, and chairs worth less than \$10. By 1880 they had made no gains whatsoever in spite of the need to feed three more children. Unlike Lewis C., who was fortunate enough to have some livestock, the M.'s were totally dependent upon Julian's wages. Like Lewis C., however, by 1890 they disappeared from all county records.

Robert D., a 47-year old white tenant, lived with his 35-year old widowed sister in 1880 and her seven year old daughter and five year old son. In 1870, census records show Robert farming 100 out of the 300 acres he had rented. He owned about \$60 worth of machinery and livestock valued about \$200 and consisting of one horse, and several milch cows and pigs. He was raising corn, wheat, and oats and producing between \$200-\$300 worth of farm products in 1870; he was even in the position to hire an outside laborer. By 1880, however, Robert was only farming 70 out of the 300 acres and producing about half of his 1870 output. Instead of a horse, he had gone to oxen that were cheaper to feed and he no longer hired an outside laborer. In addition, he had switched to raising Irish potatoes and tobacco and sold most of his machinery. In 1890 Robert had no taxable personal property after which he disappeared from all records.

Edmund F., a 54-year old black tenant, and his 61-year old wife Sallie were renting an indeterminate number of acres in 1870. Some of their children had already left home and they were also caring for several unrelated persons. Unlike Robert D., their white counterpart, the F.'s owned nothing beyond a little household furniture. In 1880, Edmund was farming three of the five acres he had rented. He had two acres in sweet potatoes, two in wheat, and one in tobacco. He owned no draft animals or machinery and had very little help since all of his

children were gone by 1880 when they were caring for a nine-year old granddaughter. By 1890 the family could no longer be located on local records.

A large proportion of Louisa's population in the last third of the nineteenth century had to be satisfied with a dependent status, either in the form of renting another man's land or simply working for wages. For example, two fifths (N=119) of the white and over half (N=143) of the black sample group remained in these categories over their entire residence in the county. There was the most tenuous of relationships in rural society, and economic security was a constant concern since the prosperity upon which it depended was always fragile. Insecurity increased in a period of economic depression when dependent groups were usually the first to feel the effects of a sagging economy in wage cuts or in difficulty finding employment.

Among the dependent classes, farm laborers were the most economically insecure, the poorest inhabitants of the county. One fourth of the black sample population (N=63) and 16 percent (N=47) of the white sample fell into this category. They fell to the bottom of the Louisa social order not only because of their occupational rank, but also because of their limited access to available resources. The farm laborers' index of economic status, an index used to differentiate land owners (and one whose composition is based upon the values

of land, livestock, machinery, draft animals, and furniture) reveals their meager share of the county's wealth.¹ At the time of the sample in 1880, nine tenths (N=57) of the black laborers fell into the lowest quartile of the index: they either held no resources at all (49 percent) or owned property whose total value was less than \$50 (41 percent). Among white laborers, nearly two thirds composed the lowest quartile: those with no taxable property (55 percent) or those with less than \$50 worth (17 percent).²

Among those laborers who did pay a sum beyond the poll tax (those who held some taxable personal property), their taxes indicate their meager holdings. Only one fourth of black farm laborers had property worth more than \$50 while the same was true of just over a third (N=8) of all white laborers. In 1880 the average value of commodities in Louisa was as follows: \$40 per horse,

¹For an explanation of the index, see Appendix 3.3

²In both racial groups, where census schedules located laborers in the county in 1880, but where personal property tax books reveal no payment of the required capitation tax of \$1 for all males 21 and over, the reason for non-payment is unclear. The head tax may have been paid in some cases by the worker's employer. Instances of this were found in the plantation records of Thomas Watson after the war in which receipts are included for payment of the tax for his laborers. One other possibility is that this is just another example of the inadequate (or unfair, since larger numbers of white laborers show non-payment than black) administration of tax collection.

\$12 per cow, and \$2 per hog.³ Thus, the net worth of most laborers might have been only a single horse or less than three cows. Not horses or cows, however, but furniture--tables, chairs, a bed--was the most common taxable property among laborers. Indeed, among black workers in over one half of the cases (N=17), furniture was the largest component of net worth, followed by livestock and draft animals. More white laboring families than blacks held livestock and draft animals; furniture was the most valuable resource for just over a fourth (N=6) of these families.

As we noted among freeholders and as we are reminded here, the kinds of resources one controls are more important in the long run than the amount. In the case of these laborers, we should note the extremely limited access to yield-producing factors. Of 63 black laborers in 1880, only six owned a draft animal and four held some machinery--less than \$10 worth. Among 47 white laborers, nine had a draft animal and seven some machinery. Thus, in both cases, not only was the laborer almost totally dependent upon the owner who employed him, but also likely to remain in that position, unless he was able to accumulate some wealth by laying aside a portion of his wages.

³These averages were gained from personal property tax books for 1880 by dividing the total number of animals in the county by their total assessed value.

Given the wage rates that prevailed in the last third of the nineteenth century, accumulating any money at all would have been an extraordinary accomplishment for the wage worker. As we have seen through the examination of labor contracts between 1865 and 1870, wage rates ranged between \$5 and \$10 per month for black laborers. The 1870 social statistics schedules of the U.S. census reported average wages of farm hands in Louisa of \$8 per month if they were hired by the month and boarded.

"Boarded" usually meant they took the noon meal on the farm on which they worked. The average wages of a day laborer with board was \$.50 per day and \$.63 per day without the noon meal. Female domestic servants in 1870 could expect \$2 per week without board. In 1877 wages for farm laborers in Virginia still averaged \$9 per month for men while women could expect only half as much, both of which were the lowest wage rates in the country.

In 1874, for example, wage rates for farm laborers averaged \$20 per month in Maine, \$18.75 in New Hampshire, \$17.53 in the western states, and \$16.93 in the middle west.⁴ By 1893 things had not improved very much, since the average wage per month in Louisa with board was \$11, only \$3 above the rate in 1870. The daily rate had climbed only seven cents in the 23 years since 1870, having reached seventy cents per day without board.

⁴State Report of Agriculture, (1887), p. 49.

There is no way of telling what the laborers on our sample were paid, whether they were considered day laborers (the best guess since contracts usually went to tenants or sharecroppers) or longer term contract laborers. In any case, the sums were paltry.

In order to have some idea of the difficulty these workers must have had in laying aside any funds, we must have some understanding of the cost of living during this period. W. E. B. DuBois, in a study of the small village of Farmville, Virginia, in 1897, consulted three leading black grocers who maintained accounts for various black families trading at their stores. For a family of five, the minimal annual amount needed for fuel, clothing, and shelter was about \$175 in 1897.⁵ At the day-laborer wage rate in Louisa during the 1890s one would have to work nearly every day of the year just to make enough for the necessities of life. Even at the higher contract rate, one would have to exercise abnormal frugality over a number of years in order to save anything.

At wage rates scarcely capable of guaranteeing anything except human misery, farm owners had difficulty hiring white laborers and keeping black laborers. State agricultural reports often referred to these difficulties and, in an attempt to attract immigrants as

⁵DuBois, "The Negroes of Farmville," 28-29.

would-be farm owners, these reports typically emphasized the advantages of "colored laborers," especially their "cheapness" and "contentment." White laborers demanded better quarters, more pay, and were harder to please generally.⁶ "Control" over the laborers was something state reports frequently mentioned. In fact, the report of 1887 spoke out against public education because of its "detrimental" effects in making the black laborer more "inefficient," something the report felt had also "made itself felt in the white race," in spite of the fact that an earlier report had stressed the correlation between education and good farming.⁷ Other reports noted the black laborers' "desire to march off for public gatherings," another problem in "control" in their view.⁸

Generally, then, the black laborer was thought easier to control than his white counterpart, and for this reason more than anything else seemed to be preferred by white owners. The state agricultural report of 1890 noted that the black worker was "contented, free from strikes and disturbances," and hard to beat except by the "best class" of white laborers, presumably not the

⁶See State Report of Agriculture, (1877), pp. 48-49; and (1879), pp. 129-131.

⁷State Report of Agriculture, (1887), p. 15; (1880), pp. 132-134.

⁸State Report of Agriculture, (1889), pp. 23-24.

"trouble-makers."⁹ The 1893 report stressed these same values, calling blacks "experienced, docile, tractable, cheap, contented," and "without expensive tastes."¹⁰ Owner-employers took advantage of this obsequiousness by rewarding it with employment or by getting rid of "trouble-makers." Longer term contracts were plums saved for the "loyal," while transient laborers were hired during peak harvest seasons and paid the paltry sums already noted. Ideally, planters hoped that these labor policies would produce a core of dependable black laborers who would work their farms as long as they were able. In reality, planters became the victims of the contradictions embedded in a labor policy which encouraged only enough remuneration to insure dependence but too little to assure a decent standard of living for the laborer and his family. The result, as we shall see when we examine persistence rates, was a high turnover among this group, whereupon cries of "labor shortage" among the owners indicated their blindness to the contradictions in their own logic.

There was little farm laborers could do to improve their precarious position, short of demanding they be treated better. Even the cushion which the tenant or sharecropper had in the form of land, machinery,

⁹State Report of Agriculture, (1890), p. 20.

¹⁰State Report of Agriculture, (1893), p. 20.

livestock, and draft animals, albeit much of it leased, was not available to the laborer. Very small percentages of farm laborers had livestock and, as we have seen, in many cases furniture was their most valuable possession. Perhaps some survived by the produce from the farm of their employer, and some may have also cultivated small garden patches. One way in which they responded to their plight was by having family members work outside the household. The 1880 manuscript census of population shows more members among families of farm laborers working outside the household than any other agricultural group. In both cases almost half of the families had members with outside occupations.¹¹ The major response, however, was migration.

It should come as no surprise that this group was the least persistent of all agricultural groups in the county during the period, except perhaps white tenants and sharecroppers. Unlike the high persistence rates noted for freeholders in Chapter II, farm laborers are characterized by the short duration of their residence in the county. We saw in Chapter III the rather high persistence rates for farm owners, ranging from a low of 43 percent for white family farmers to nearly 71 percent among black family farmers. Nothing approaching this magnitude was the case for farm laborers.

¹¹For black laboring families the percentage was 46 (N=35) and for white, 45 (N=21).

Only 17 percent of the white farm laborers (N=8) were present throughout the period and 18 percent of the black laborers (N=11). A striking 43 percent of the white laborers (N=20) were present fewer than ten years, while the same was true for just over a fourth of black laborers (N=17). In both cases, approximately 60 percent of farm laborers remained in the county for a decade or less, with black laborers being slightly more persistent than white. Farm laborers, then, whose stake in Louisa society was the smallest, contributed the largest numbers to those leaving the county. Only two white and one black laborers survived from 1880 to 1900, in spite of the fact that 35 percent of the white sample (N=98) and 30 percent of the black sample (N=77) persisted for 20 years. The black laborer owned an unencumbered farm while the two white laborers held mortgaged farms.

Precisely where all these laborers went to pursue their version of the "American dream" is a story that remains untold except in aggregate statistics about mass population movements during this period. Whether they wandered into adjoining counties or drifted into nearby Richmond, it is certain they were in flight from rural poverty.

Tenants and sharecroppers composed the other dependent class in Louisa County, and they made up nearly a third of the black (N=80) and a fourth of the white

(N=72) sample population.¹² Nearly two thirds of the black tenants and sharecroppers (N=49) in 1880 had been working under these arrangements since 1870, and perhaps since before the war. However, the whites in 1880 contained only 29 percent (N=21) of those tenants and sharecroppers who had been present in 1870. As we shall see later, whites in these occupational categories were just as quick to move as laborers, and more likely to move on than their black counterparts.

Tenants and sharecroppers were clearly better off than farm laborers but not in as good a position as small family farmers. In 1880 just under a third of the black tenants and sharecroppers (N=24) and just over a third of the white (N=25) had no resources whatsoever, a situation among two thirds to three fourths of farm laborers. White renters commanded greater resources than black, and in fact, small percentages of whites gained control over significant resources. Only in 1890 did a single black renter make gains comparable to whites and he had disappeared by 1900. Reflecting the fluctuations in the economy, renters' fortunes deteriorated in the seventies, improved in the eighties, and hit their lowest point in the nineties, when they lost control over many of their resources.

¹² Tenants and sharecroppers are those whose occupation is described as such on the 1880 manuscript census schedules of agriculture.

In many ways the status of renter was much superior to that of laborer. The renter could draw upon the surplus of the employer and could use his credit to get necessary supplies. Most importantly, he had access to yield-producing factors of land and whatever machinery or draft animals he could coax out of the owner. It is difficult to generalize about the specific nature of renter contracts even when these contracts are available as was the case with those in the Freedmen's Bureau records, and even more difficult to generalize about their conditions when we have to depend upon scattered references in state agricultural reports. Only by looking at their taxable property, observing their records of farm production revealed on the agricultural census schedules, and comparing their progress to that of laborers and owners are we able to gain some picture of their economic position.

Table 4.1 reveals that white renters were doing quite well in comparison to black, and even surpassed the black family farmer in their control over the yield-producing factors of draft animals and machinery. The table also indicates that the status of tenant or sharecropper was a lowly one, superior to that of the black laborer only because he was able to accumulate larger amounts of the available resources. However, the position of the black renter was lower than that of the white laborer in terms of yield-producing

Table 4.1: Relative Position of Tenants
and Sharecroppers, 1880

(Percentage and Number
Holding Some of the Resource)

<u>Status</u>	<u>Machinery</u>		<u>Livestock</u>		<u>Draft Animals</u>		<u>Furniture</u>	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Tenants and Sharecroppers								
White	40	(29)	64	(46)	44	(32)	64	(41)
Black	13	(10)	55	(44)	11	(9)	65	(52)
Laborers								
White	15	(7)	38	(18)	25	(12)	42	(20)
Black	6	(4)	35	(22)	12	(7)	46	(29)
Family Farmers								
White	39	(10)	74	(19)	54	(14)	73	(19)
Black	29	(8)	72	(20)	25	(7)	79	(22)
Entrepre- neurial Farmers								
White	95	(35)	92	(37)	92	(37)	95	(38)

factors. Thus, in terms of control over economic factors of a long term income-generating nature, the white renter was comparable to the black small owner and the white laborer was comparable to the black renter. What this illustrates is that no occupational rank alone, but race also determined one's access to resources.

The advantages that a greater command over yield-producing factors gave to the white renter is reflected in (and explains to an indeterminate extent) the amount of acreage cultivated, the utilization of fertilizer and

labor, the level of market integration, and in yields. White renters were able to cultivate more land than black (Table 4.2) and that alone would have given them higher yields. Their greater wealth also meant they could use more fertilizer, and they did. Among white renters 43 percent (N=31) were applying fertilizer to their land in 1880, while only 17 percent (N=14) were doing so. When the same measures of market integration are applied to renters as was done to owners in Chapter III, we note that white renters are higher on the continuum of rationality than black. White renters were integrated into the market at a moderate level in 24 percent of the cases (N=33), while black renters were concentrated (85 percent) at the lowest levels. White renters even made use of outside labor in nearly half of the cases (53 percent), something that was rarely true among blacks (11 percent). Thus, it is not surprising that yields given on the 1880 census for black tenants and sharecroppers of all products produced, consumed, or sold during the year are below those of white renters. Among white renters, 56 percent (N=40) produced over \$100 compared to 26 percent (N=21) of black renters. However, these differences cannot be attributed to the inefficiency or laziness of the black renter compared to the white, as farmers during the

period were quick to do or to the lack of white supervision as later studies have done, until some account is taken of inequality of resources.¹³

Table 4.2: Relative Position of Tenants and Sharecroppers in Terms of Improved Acreage and Production of Eggs and Butter, 1880

(Percentage and Number in Each Group)

	Improved Acreage (acres)		Eggs (dozen)				Butter (lbs.)					
<u>Status</u>	<u>Und. 50</u>	<u>Ov. 50</u>	<u>Und. 200</u>	<u>Ov. 200</u>			<u>Und. 100</u>	<u>Ov. 100</u>				
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)		
Tenants & Sharecroppers												
White	55	(45)	43	(40)	76	(56)	21	(15)	61	(47)	32	(23)
Black	90	(72)	5	(4)	69	(55)	30	(24)	47	(37)	53	(42)
Family Farmers												
White	54	(14)	8	(2)	57	(15)	15	(4)	43	(11)	31	(8)
Black	71	(20)	-	-	43	(12)	29	(8)	25	(7)	46	(13)
Entrepre- neurial Farmers												
White	8	(3)	84	(35)	53	(21)	43	(17)	28	(11)	68	(27)

Renters generally, however, tended to be more productive than small family farmers, something that was probably due to their sharing of the resources of their

¹³Farmer's comments are reported in State Report of Agriculture, (1877), pp. 48-49; (1893), p. 20; for a statement on black labor inefficiency, see Walter L. Fleming, "Labor and Labor Conditions," in Ballagh, ed. The South in the Building of the Nation, 41-48.

employer. Larger numbers of renters cultivated the land than did small owners, and they tended to produce larger amounts of eggs and butter than small owners (Table 4.2). Before one concludes that this means the status of renter was superior to that of owner, however, some indication of the amount of produce the renter was actually able to keep for himself would be necessary. No record of this is available, of course, but Table 4.1, which is based on the taxable property of individuals in the different occupational categories, does not indicate the return to the renter was such as to place him in a superior economic position to the owner.

Just as was the case among owners, the principal crops raised by renters were maize, wheat, and oats in order of importance. About sixty percent of both racial groups were also raising some tobacco.¹⁴ Since it was solely a cash crop, tobacco formed at least some of the income for renters. Secondary sources in Southern history often mention one fourth to one third of the renters' produce going to the owner, but no record of the exact share paid to the owner is available for this period for Louisiana farmers. Some of the eggs and butter produced on renter farms might also have gone to the owner in the form of rent, but this too remains uncertain. Finally, it is impossible to determine how much freedom

¹⁴For blacks N=48 and for whites N=40.

the renter actually had in deciding what crops to grow or what animals to keep. It is known that where the two racial groups had complete freedom to decide, such as among the family farmers, they raised less tobacco than the renters. However, since they also raised smaller percentages of corn, wheat, and oats, the decision to grow less tobacco as well may reflect nothing more than the small owner's limited access to yield-producing factors. And, as we have already noted, small farmers could not tie up too much of their land and other resources, especially time, in a crop as risky as tobacco, since crop failure portended disaster. ✓

Swine, milch cows, and chickens were the principal kinds of livestock kept by renters, as was the case among owners. The 1870 and 1880 censuses of agriculture indicate that this was the case, and that few farmers, except the very large owner who might have concentrated on the raising of one specific animal, raised any sheep. Moreover, renters were just as likely to have livestock as owners--both groups had no more than eight percent of their numbers having no livestock at all. Among those with the smallest livestock values, the milch cow was the most likely to be missing because of her higher initial cost and the expense of feeding her.

Renters, like everyone else in Louisa County in the last third of the nineteenth century, saw whatever accumulations they had managed to build up eroded by the effects

of the depression. Almost half of the black renters (N=38) of the 1880 sample had no other taxable personal property in 1870, as indicated by the tax book for that year, beyond furniture. Often the furniture they owned was not assessed above \$10 in value. Add to this another 28 percent (N=22) who, in addition to furniture, had small amounts of livestock, either cows or pigs, and one has accounted for all of the personal property owned by over three fourths of the tenants and sharecroppers in the sample. The depression meant that each year their holdings were assessed at smaller values, an advantage when it came time to pay taxes, but one that would be immediately offset the moment the renter attempted to liquidate his assets. White renters, on the other hand, began with an advantage in personal property holdings in 1870, a fact reflected especially in their greater holdings of property other than furniture, and also in the smaller percentages who had nothing in 1870 of taxable value. Over three fourths (N=31) had taxable property beyond furniture.

Yet the striking fact is that these initial advantages enjoyed by white renters were not translated into gains of the magnitude experienced by black renters without the advantages. By tracing each renter through the personal property tax books for as long as he remained in the county, we are able to determine the gains or losses each person experienced in the four variables

of machinery, livestock, draft animals, or furniture. In the black community, 59 percent (N=39) of the renters who remained in the county one decade or longer either suffered no losses at all in the assessed values of any of the variables or added to the value of at least one of them over their residence in the county. But in the white community, only one third (N=18) realized similar gains and 57 percent (N=24) experienced some loss in personal property values during their residence. Thus, in spite of the white renter's larger command over yield-producing factors and in spite of the fact that this made him more productive, he still did not make the kinds of gains we noted in the black community. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the white renter was dealing more heavily in the market place, as his index of market integration indicates, in which he experienced the same adverse effects we noted among farm owners who were highly integrated. More important, however, are the differences in the numbers of members employed in the household. Census records show that nearly two thirds of black renter families (N=49) contained members of the household who were employed compared to less than one third of white renter families (N=22). The greater utilization of the family as a labor unit among black renters probably explains their superior economic advances, a point that will become clearer when we take a close look at the family in Chapter V.

Persistence rates among the renter groups resemble those of the laborer, as we might expect. Equally small percentages of renters were present throughout the entire period as was the case among laborers. More pronounced among this group, however, is the tendency of the black renter to remain in the county longer than the white renter. In 35 percent of the cases (N=25), the white tenant or sharecropper was present on the 1880 census only, something true in only 10 percent of the black cases (N=8). More common within the black community was the persistence since 1870 of black renters in which 35 percent (N=28) could be found on both the 1870 and 1880 tax books. In both cases, however, large percentages stayed in the county for a decade or less and both left in large numbers during the eighties.

Throughout we have noted the correlation between economic conditions and rates of persistence. Farm owners remained in the county longer than any other occupational group and many probably were born and died in Louisa County. Laborers were an extremely fluid group moving in and out of the county in the space of a decade or less. Renters fell somewhere in between these, more mobile than the owner, less mobile than the laborer. Again, the renters' diminished mobility in comparison to that of the laborer seems related to a comparatively superior economic position. On the 1900 manuscript census schedules of population 16 white and

20 black tenants and sharecroppers out of the original 1880 sample were still in the county. In the white group, 13 had managed to secure unencumbered farms while three still rented a farm. Among blacks, eight had become farm owners, six still rented, and six held mortgaged farms. For these small numbers the highly touted ladder of social mobility worked. However, the ladder goes down as well as up, something that escaped the attention perhaps of county residents when the larger numbers not making it left the area. From our vantage point it is clear, however, that economic gains and geographic mobility were related.

Another trend which made the position of those in the dependent classes precarious in the 1880s was the shift to a different kind of farming. In 1880 the Commissioner of Agriculture began to recommend that the growing of tobacco either be abandoned totally or be sharply reduced, and that farmers switch to stock raising. The reasons given for this suggestion was the heavy tax on the crop, the time it consumed, the large quantity of manure it required (which left little manure for other crops), and the amount of labor involved at every step of its production.¹⁵ For the large farmers of Louisa who had the means to make this kind of drastic shift and who must have been anxious to change to anything

¹⁵State Report of Agriculture, (1880), p. 21.

that would be more profitable, this suggestion must have been attractive. Louisa's soil, which had never been very fertile, needed this kind of fertilization, and chemical fertilizers would not do. As we noted in Chapter III, Louisa farmers took the advice and during the eighties and nineties shifted to grass and hay and planted less tobacco, corn, wheat, and oats.¹⁶

As had been the case so often in the county's history, the change benefited only a small percentage of the population, the large farmer who had resources such as large acreages he could turn into grasslands. Many of the fruits of this switch were not even reaped in the county since Louisa transported its products to creameries to be processed outside, the closest being in the adjoining county of Orange.¹⁷ In 1899 the flow of dairy products was largely outside of the state, so that Virginia was not even supplying one half of its home demand.¹⁸ Although this had been the case throughout the history of post-war Louisa and therefore was not unusual, it was more outrageous since the export was food in this case where there was an active domestic demand. Since

¹⁶See Table 3.7, Chapter III; other evidence of this shift is contained in state agricultural reports in which state officials queried county officials as to the financial conditions of farmers in the county and the trends in agriculture. See the following reports, (1895), pp. 74; 92; (1899), pp. 15-20.

¹⁷State Report of Agriculture, (1889), p. 15

¹⁸State Report of Agriculture, (1899), p. 6.

neither the county nor private individuals took the initiative to build creameries in Louisa, county farmers moved their dairy products to outside processing centers where they would be shipped to feed the populations of Washington, Baltimore, and New York while Louisa residents bought these products in general stores after they had been shipped back from the processing center.

One of the most far reaching effects of this shift in agricultural practices was the diminished demand for labor, especially non-skilled farm hands. By 1893 most labor in Virginia was being hired under contract and the demand was for dairymen, poultrymen, and stock handlers, men skilled in the use of improved implements and machinery. Unskilled laborers had great difficulty finding regular employment and could depend on occasional jobs in peak seasons only.¹⁹ Herein lies much of the explanation for the low persistence rates among renters and laborers, and the explanation for the timing of the out-migration. As we have noted, the heaviest periods of out-migration came after 1880, and, as we have also noted, it was in the eighties that the shift to the more specialized type of dairy farming began, a trend that continued into the nineties. As acreage previously planted in corn, wheat, oats or tobacco was shifted to timothy, clover, alfalfa or turned into

¹⁹State Report of Agriculture, (1893), p. 20; (1895), p. 22.

pasture, the tasks of planting, cultivating, and harvesting became more simplified processes requiring smaller numbers of specialized laborers. For those who shifted to ensilage feeding, the shucking and shocking of corn was replaced by the simpler processes of cutting and chopping which demanded less labor.²⁰

Before the Civil War the dependent position of workers was obvious, but afterwards this dependency was more hidden as the labor contract and the wage payment gave to vertical relationships a fictitious aura of reciprocity, a false notion that the worker had rights. Yet, dependent classes had no voice in economic decisions that affected their very livelihood. Price decline caused the employer to throw as much of the burden of inflation on the laborer as possible, and the criteria that formed the basis of contracts was not the needs of individual families, but the profit margin of the landlord. Falling prices might have led to an agricultural revolution, but in fact very little mechanization developed in Louisa. Instead owners were able to shift to the more common sense practice of dairy farming that benefited the few

²⁰ Mechanization had greatly reduced the man-hours and demand for labor in the agricultural sector in the United States by 1900. See Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier, 125-147; however, there is no evidence that Louisa farmers were mechanizing. In fact, the large farmer's value of machinery in 1900 for the sample population was even less in 1900 than 1880. In any case, the shift to dairy farming could be made without large amounts of machinery.

at the expense of the many. Generally, then, the position of the worker in the post-war economy deteriorated. Owners decided who would be employed, for how long, and at what wage rates, and these decisions charted the destiny of large segments of Louisa's population.

Just as in nineteenth century England, although for different reasons, poverty had become "nakedly visible as propertyless labour."²¹ Agrarian capitalism had developed into the same kind of "vast lunacy" where farmers were encouraged to pay as little as possible while faulting the dependent classes for low levels of productivity.²² By tying the wage rate to his profit margin, the landlord helped to contribute to the pauperization that spread over the Louisa countryside. In many cases, however, these choices led to such economic stagnation that not even the landlord could survive.

The rigidly stratified social order of the slave economy in which the large landholders, by virtue of their economic power, retained their exalted position in the social structure persisted in spite of, indeed because of, the market economy. The position of the dependent classes did not improve in a free market economy because laws of supply and demand are not impersonal forces. The worker, whose only asset was his

²¹E. J. Hobsbaum and George Rude', Captain Swing (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 35.

²²Ibid., 51.

labor, had no position of equality when bargaining away that asset. Now more fully exposed than ever, protection in the form of labor unions or government assistance took on renewed importance. When public welfare failed to offer adequate protection, as we shall see in Chapter VI, collective action was the final court of appeal.

Thus, rural poverty exposed the fundamental contradictions in the nineteenth century Louisa social order. Employers wanted a free market for some and a controlled one for others; a stable society, but one based on inequalities of wealth; an economy that implied class antagonism and a well ordered society. Landlords preserved stability in an unequal society by extending contracts to "safe" laborers, and by keeping out "trouble-makers." Moreover, by holding out migration before the laborer as the means of escape, they reaped its benefits as a safety value which drained off the dissatisfied. Yet rural poverty persisted as a legacy for years afterwards.

CHAPTER V

SHADOWED THRESHOLDS, FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORDER

As rural poverty spread across Louisa County in the last part of the nineteenth century, large portions of the population felt its effects. This was especially the case because of the difficulty of obtaining local relief, as we shall see in the following chapter. Moreover, the impact of poverty during this period was bound to be more severe in the absence of other social welfare programs with which we are familiar in the twentieth century. Nothing like workmen's compensation existed to mitigate the effects of accidents; no unemployment insurance cushioned the blows of depression; no social security aided those beyond the years at which they were able to work; and no life insurance provided for burial expenses. Even the social welfare institutions that sprang up in urban areas to aid the indigent were nearly (though not totally) absent in the rural area. Without these kinds of assistance, things like accidents, sickness, loss of job, aging, death, and poverty became critical events in the lives of many people.

The survival of those living in conditions of economic marginality who have been denied access to the economic

resources of the community suggests some powerful adaptive mechanisms.¹ In looking for the source of these mechanisms, household and family groupings take on renewed importance. How do individual families respond to poverty when they have no alternative modes of assistance? What does the form of domestic groups, which we find on census records, tell us about rural poverty and its effects on household composition? Through a close look at the families of Louisa in 1880, we will be able to answer these questions.

Table 5.1 summarizes the results of a sorting of the sample population into family types based on those actually residing in the household at the time of the 1880 census.²

¹Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and John F. Szwed, "Introduction," in Whitten and Szwed, eds., Afro-American Anthropology (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 23-53.

²For suggestions about the formation of family typologies, see Pauline M. Kolenda, "Region, Caste, and Family Structure: A Comparative Study of the Indian 'Joint' Family," in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds. Structure and Change in Indian Society (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), 339-396. The "All Other" category is distributed as follows:

<u>Type Household</u>	<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>	
	%	(N)	%	(N)
Single Person	2	(5)	5	(14)
Single Head with other members	4	(10)	7	(20)
Widowed Heads	10	(25)	8	(24)
Nuclear family with Grandchildren	7	(18)	2	(5)
Stem Family (married children living with parents)	4	(11)	2	(6)
Unable to determine	1	(2)	2	(5)

The simple nuclear family was the most common family type, and, among both blacks and whites, almost half of the families were of this kind. What does the proportion of nuclear families indicate about a population, however? What is to be made of the prevalence and frequency of different family types? What do they tell us about the social and economic order of which they are a part? What can be learned from a comparison of black and white family types? Those interested in the history of the family have been engaged in a debate over some of these questions. Before discussing more fully the meaning of the categories used in Table 5.1, we must explore some of the divergent views in order to gain some perspective on our argument.

In the past, scholars generally concentrated their attention on the nuclear and the extended family types--the former, those cases in which just the husband, wife, and children are present in the house, and the latter, those with relatives present (usually married children). Talcott Parsons has called the nuclear family the "normal household unit,"³ thereby assigning to it a normative (i.e., cultural) value and implicitly categorizing other forms as abnormal. Moreover, Parsons has also argued that the extended family has emerged

³Talcott Parsons, "The Kinship System of the Contemporary United States," in Parsons, ed., Essays in Sociological Theory (New York: The Free Press, 1954), 177-196.

as the family type most suited to an industrial age of specialized functions. It meets the demands, Parsons argues, of a socially mobile people. It also is especially suited to the socialization of the young, one of the family's primary functions.⁴

Table 5.1: Household Composition Among the Sample Population, Louisa County, 1880

<u>Family Type</u>	<u>Percent of Families</u>		<u>Number</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Simple nuclear family (husband and wife with or without un- married children)	46	47	116	136
Supplemented nuclear family (simple nuclear family with relatives in the household)	18	13	44	37
Augmented nuclear family (simple nuclear family with outsiders in the household)	8	14	20	41
All other	28	26	71	74

Peter Laslett has challenged the notion that family types embody social norms and attitudes. Laslett argues that the form of the household group reflects not cultural values alone, but rather represents a response to

⁴Talcott Parsons, "The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and to the Social Structure," in Parsons and Robert F. Bales, eds., Family Socialization and Interaction Process (Glencoe, Illinois, 1955), 3-33; for a challenge to this view see Richard Sennett, Families Against the City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

agricultural practices and patterns of land distribution and redistribution.⁵ Laslett's most striking finding is that the nuclear family did not "emerge," but in fact has been prevalent since the late sixteenth century. Indeed, for Laslett the nuclear family is the "ordinary expected normal framework of domestic existence," the form of family organization which we must assume to be present unless the contrary can be proven.⁶ He then shifts our attention to these other unheard features of households and families--features whose outlines tell us a good deal about the formation of families in the past.

The nuclear family--father, mother, and children bound together as producers and consumers--played an

⁵See the introduction in Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds., Household and Family in Past Time (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), xi, 1-89, where Laslett also differs with some of the points made in this article, especially those concerning the use of the life cycle in family analysis. For his argument on the prevalence of the nuclear family type, see The World We Have Lost (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), as well as "Size and Structure of the Household in England Over Three Centuries," Population Studies, 23 (1969), 199-223. For a perceptive explanation of the relationship between inheritance patterns and family structure, see H. J. Habakkuk, "Family Structure and Economic Change in Nineteenth Century Europe," The Journal of Economic History, 15 (1955), 1-12. For an outstanding historical study of these relationships, see Philip J. Greven, Jr., Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

⁶Laslett, introduction to Laslett and Wall, eds. Household and Family in Past Time, XI.

important role in the lives of both black and white rural Southerners as it had in the lives of European peasants. But merely to establish the importance of the nuclear family is not enough. Indeed, figures from the census pages present a picture of household composition that is informative, but these figures can also be misleading. Such statistics are nothing more than passive reflections of what in reality is a changing phenomenon--household composition over time. Very few households have the same membership between marriage and death of one of the initial marriage partners. The proportion of nuclear families in a population that one gathers from census data can only take us so far. To stop there, blinds us to what is occurring within the household and presents us with a picture of the family as a static institution. In reality household composition is a dynamic process. When examined in the light of this reality, household composition gives up a wealth of information that is of enormous value to the social historian.

Lutz Berkner has recently argued in a significant study of peasant family structure that households are not static images of society, but rather they are organic wholes in some stage of development.⁷ As the "workshop of social reproduction," the domestic group proceeds

⁷Lutz K. Berkner, "The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household: An Eighteenth Century Austrian Example," American Historical Review, 77 (April, 1972), 398-418.

through a developmental cycle; hence residence patterns at any given moment are crystallizations of the developmental process.⁸ What is needed is a model that will transform the frozen figures of father, mother, children, relatives, and unrelated members which stare out at us from the pages of the manuscript census into a dynamic social system. For this purpose, I divided the households of the sample population of Louisa County in 1880 into groups based on certain criteria: newlyweds (newly married couples without children); young families (couples where the wife was less than 45 years of age with children in the family, but where no children were employed or married); mid-stage families (couples where the wife was at any age but where children were employed or married or both); and mature families (couples where the wife was over 45 years of age and where all children had left the home).⁹

⁸Meyer Fortes, "The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups," in Jack Goody, ed. Kinship (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), 85-98. See also Paul C. Glick, "The Family Cycle," American Sociological Review, 12 (April, 1947), 164-174 and Glick and Robert Parke, Jr., "New Approaches in Studying the Life Cycle of the Family," Demography, 2 (1965), 187-202.

⁹The life cycle model is less likely to be distorting if it is tied to the age of the mother than if it is based on the age of the head of the household as used by Berkner. In the former case, it is more attuned to the child-bearing years of the family. It is possible for the head of household to be past this period in age, while this may not be a true reflection of the developmental phase of the family as a whole. This is especially true where a large age difference exists between the household head and his wife, a not uncommon situation among a number of black families. That family structure and some measure of family age are related seems undeniable, however, as argued by Thomas K. Burch, "Comparative Family Structure: A Demographic Approach," Estadistica, 26 (1968), 291-293.

Table 5.2: Family Type (in percentages) by Stage of Development, Sample Population, Louisa County, 1880

Stage of Development	Family Type			(N)
	Simple Nuclear	Supplemented Nuclear	Augmented Nuclear	
Newlyweds				
White	54	31*	15	13
Black	10	60	30	10
Young Families				
White	59*	19	22*	104
Black	67	22	11	79
Mid-stage Families				
White	67*	14	20*	66
Black	73	17	10	70
Matured Families				
White	65*	13*	23	31
Black	46	36	18	22

*Black-white differences significant at .10.¹⁰

When domestic groupings are distributed on the basis of this model, it becomes obvious that family types vary with stage of development. Table 5.2 shows that in the sample population of Louisa County, black families were most likely nuclear in form when children began to arrive (young families) and when children began to leave their families of origin for employment and marriage

¹⁰Tests of statistical significance were made on this table, as well as others in the chapter, to determine the probability of differences in sample findings among the two groups from those of the population universe that were attributable to sampling error. At the .90 level (one tail $P=.10$) differences in question could not be accounted for on the grounds of sampling error and thus the sample differences reflect real differences in the population universe. For an explanation of this procedure and the tables used for the tests, see Gerhard Lenski, The Religious Factor, Appendix I (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1963), 367-376.

(mid-stage). White families also had higher percentages of simple nuclear families in some stages than in others. The simple nuclear family was least likely in the households of black newlyweds. At this stage in the black family's development, 90 percent of black families included relatives or outsiders. Frequently, white families at this stage also had relatives and outsiders resident (46 percent). The white family, however, at the time of formation was not nearly so prone to take in these groups as blacks.

Perhaps two examples will illustrate the point that family types are not the same throughout the family cycle. By tracing families through the manuscript censuses for the period from 1870 to 1900, changing household composition can be seen clearly. Neither of the examples given below can be said to be typical or average cases in the sense that they follow precisely the major trends in household composition shown in Table 5.2. The number of newlyweds in the sample population was so small (as was the number in this category who remained in the county over the 30-year period) that I could not choose a family of this sort in 1870 that exhibited ideal-typical characteristics. The two examples, however, do illustrate well the point I am trying to make here: namely, that household composition changes over the family cycle.

John S. a 20-year old black agricultural laborer, lived in a household in 1870 composed of himself, his 16-year old wife and a baby less than one year old. In 1880 S. had added more children: two daughters, one born in 1873 and the other in 1879; and one son born in 1874. However, his family was no longer just a simple nuclear family: it now contained his 50-year old mother-in-law and his 19-year old sister-in-law. By 1900 S.'s household had changed again. At this time it included, besides S. and his wife, six children, one of which was his married daughter, and her child whose father was absent. Over a span of thirty years the household of S. had changed from a simple nuclear family to a supplemented nuclear family, and finally to a type which was placed in the category "all other." The likelihood seems great that changes also occurred in other years.

David H., a 25-year old white agricultural laborer in 1870, lived in a household made up of his 35-year old wife, two step-children and several unrelated white residents. By 1880 H. had acquired a farm of his own and his household now included his wife and her two children by a former marriage, plus two more children of his own: a daughter who was born in 1875 and a son born in 1877. In 1900 H.'s household composition changed again. It now included, besides his wife, two sons, one of whom was now employed as a postmaster and the other as a laborer, and a grandchild of one of his

married children, not residing in the house. Over the 30-year span, H.'s household had changed from an augmented nuclear family to a simple nuclear family and then to a type not categorized herein.

As Table 5.2 and these two examples illustrate, the relative frequency of family types, both black and white, may not tell us very much about family structure. A high percentage of nuclear families in a population may be nothing more than a reflection of the demographic reality that in most societies the nuclear family type is the most frequent form.¹¹ But, as we have seen, the family is in constant flux, as relatives and unrelated persons move in and out; their arrivals and departures alter household composition as the family cycle progresses. At certain points, this process made the nuclear family a minority family type among blacks and nearly a minority among whites. Demographic realities alone, however, do not explain why family structure changes in the ways we have observed. Why is the simple nuclear family more prevalent in some stages of the life cycle than in others? Are differences in the predominance of certain family types a function of

¹¹Thomas K. Burch, "Some Demographic Determinants of Average Household Size: An Analytic Approach," in Laslett and Wall, eds., Household and Family in Past Time, 91-102; see also Burch, "The Size and Structure of Families: A Comparative Analysis of Census Data," American Sociological Review, 32 (1967), 347-363.

cultural choices, as Parsons has argued, or are social and economic conditions a more important influence upon family structure, as Laslett has suggested? Before posing some answers to these questions, a few observations must be made.

All household groupings, regardless of race, are reflections of the socio-economic order of which they are a part. They are the meeting places where the social order joins the economic order to produce specific socio-economic configurations. As such, they are mirrors of society at points in time. To the social historian, denied the sources of material available to those studying elites, data on domestic groupings provides indispensable clues to the results of the interaction between the market and the individual households of plain people.

Hypothetically, it seems reasonable to assume that household composition at a given stage of the family cycle is neither wholly a product of cultural mores nor totally economically determined. It is certain, however, that domestic groups must be able to survive as economic units before they can fulfill any of their social functions. Thus, it makes little sense to talk about family forms in cultural terms, terms which presume little constraint to social and economic forces, without first ascertaining the extent to which they have been influenced by economic pressures. Indeed, it is not necessary to appeal to cultural differences in

explaining household composition so long as social and economic factors provide a satisfactory answer. Through an examination of families in the various phases of their development we will be able to demonstrate the relationship between household composition and the social and economic order, and we will be able to see how far socio-economic explanations go in explaining changing household composition.

A. V. Chayanov, a Russian economist who made a thorough study of peasant behavior at the individual family level and was the leading Russian authority on agricultural economics from 1919 to 1930, argued that the value and intensity of economic activity are dependent upon family size and composition. Just as family size is in constant flux, so too is the volume of economic activity necessary to succor a family unit. Synthesizing a vast body of economic and statistical data gathered by college students, doctors, nurses, and university teachers who had quit their jobs in the 1860s to go and live among the Russian peasantry, Chayanov found that the number of consumers which each worker must support changes as the family passes through its cycle. Predictably, with fewer mouths to feed, homes of newlyweds have low consumer/worker ratios. When children arrive and up to the time when they find jobs, the consumer/worker ratio will probably be very high. As children find employment, the ratio diminishes and

finally returns to its lowest level as they leave home. Hence, satisfaction of family demands requires more labor at some phases of the family cycle than at others.¹²

Chayanov's finding that labor needs among peasant farm families vary throughout the family's cycle may be observed among farm families in Virginia in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In Table 5.3, the sample population of Louisa County in 1880 is distributed according to the number of workers in the household supporting each consumer, or what I have called the consumer/worker ratio. When this ratio is correlated with the family cycle, a graphic picture of the different burdens borne by families at various stages of their development emerges. For example, young families of both races had a very high consumer/worker ratio; but as children began to work, the ratio diminished.

Variations in the consumer/worker ratio can be illustrated by reference to the two households previously used as examples. H., the white agricultural laborer, had a ratio of 1.50 in 1870. By 1880 with the arrival

¹²A. V. Chayanov, The Theory of Peasant Economy, Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay, and R. E. F. Smith, eds., (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1966), 53-69. This is a brilliant theoretical treatment of the relationship between the life cycle and family structure. Chayanov divided all members of a household into either consumers or workers and then divided the number of workers into the number of consumers to get a consumer/worker ratio. He used this ratio to support his contention that family size determined farm size. He viewed peasant families as "labor machines" which seek to satisfy their consumption demands but do not desire to make a profit.

of additional children it rose to 6.00 and then declined to 1.67 in 1900 as his children found employment and began to leave home. The household of S., the black agricultural laborer, had a consumer/worker ratio of 3.00 initially. This was reduced to 1.75 in 1880 with the arrival of a working sister-in-law and with children now old enough to work. In 1900 the ratio returned to a level of 3.00. Changes in this ratio among these families confirm the hypothesis that labor needs vary with the stage of the family cycle.

Newlywed and mature families, however, exhibit a less uniform pattern than those of young and mid-stage families. This is especially the case among black families where a larger percentage of those in the newlywed and mature categories have ratios over 2.33 than one would expect, given the small numbers of children in these households. Two-thirds of these young and old black households had ratios over 2.33, whereas, among whites, only a third of young households fell in this range, while a half of old households did so. It is also evident in the home of S. where the ratio at these two stages is higher than might be expected.

Consumer/worker ratios above 2.33 among households at stages of development where children are not resident and where household economic pressures are more relaxed, indicates that families in these stages may not be following the patterns predicted by the logic of the

Table 5.3: Consumer/Worker Ratio by
Stage of Family Development

Stage of Development	<u>Consumer/Worker Ratio</u> (percent in each column)						(N)
	<u>1.00- 1.80</u>	<u>1.81- 2.33</u>	<u>2.34- 3.00</u>	<u>3.01- 5.00</u>	<u>5.01- 9.99</u>	<u>over 10.00</u>	
Newlyweds							
Black	25	8	17	33	17	-	12
White	15	46	31	8	-	1	13
Young families							
Black	3	8	20	23	39	9	82
White	6	11	21	28	26	8	107
Mid-stage families							
Black	27	33	20	18	2	-	94
White	37	23	23	15	3	-	71
Mature families							
Black	9	24	30	30	3	3	33
White	16	32	21	18	11	3	38

consumer/worker ratio. The lack of uniformity in the black ratio (and to a lesser extent in that of whites also) throughout the family cycle suggests a curvilinear effect whereby families at the ends (newlyweds and mature families) may not act according to the principles that explain the behavior of those in the middle (young and mid-stage families). This same sort of curvilinearity is observable in Table 5.2 where a line describing the frequency of the simple nuclear family type would not resemble the normal curve over the family cycle.

In order to understand the lack of uniformity among black households, let us pursue for a while the hypothesis that internal labor needs determine household composition over the entire life cycle. This means, hypothetically,

that fulfillment of family needs, i.e., economic demands, explain satisfactorily the composition of black domestic groups at all stages of the family cycle. In this case newlyweds and mature families would behave according to the same principles that explain household composition among families in the middle stages of development. By a close examination of household composition at each stage of the family cycle, we will be able to test the extent to which both racial groups act according to some general economic theory of household composition such as that of the consumer/worker ratio.

Figure 5.1 shows household composition at the various stages of the family cycle. Graph I of the Figure gives the percentages of all black and white households that contained relatives. Graphs II, III, and IV show the kinds of outsiders present only in those households that contained outsiders. The most commonly present outsiders in the black households of newlyweds were friends, persons of unknown relationship, or itinerants. Among families with outsiders resident, this category was present in two-thirds of the cases. Boarders and renters in much lower percentages were the only other outsiders in these young households. When children arrived, the numbers of friends, unknowns, or itinerants was sharply reduced, the number of boarders diminished and a few households began to take in servants. As children began to work and marry, friends returned to these maturing households while few

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boarders and servants remained. As the family's life cycle was completed, servants disappeared completely, the number of boarders increased slightly, and friends again made up the largest group of outsiders in black households.

Black and white households also differ with regard to the frequency at which relatives are included. One out of three white households begin with some kind of relative resident while half of black newlyweds did so. Although the number of households with relatives declined from an initial high point, nevertheless one fourth of the black households still had relatives in the mature stage.

These patterns leave little doubt that household composition among young and mid-stage families was largely the result of responses to increased pressures to produce more. As children began to arrive and the burdens of support became heavier on adult members of the household, families of both racial groups were forced to make the changes necessary to insure family survival. However, as the figures also show, the response of the two communities was not the same.

Among black families, as economic burdens mounted with the arrival of children (when the consumer/worker ratio increased beyond 2.33), the number of consumers was reduced and black families rid themselves of relatives and outsiders such as friends. During the mid-stage

when children began to work and relieve adult members of some of the burden of economic support, black families were again able to take in outsiders such as friends.

White families also reacted to the same pressure to expand the volume of economic activity and provide for the economic well being of the family. However, many of these families were able to exploit a readily available source of servant labor in 1880. Although white households did rid themselves of a few friends and relatives, nevertheless, their labor needs in these two middle stages are supplied mostly by servants.

Hence, both black and white families during their youth and mid-career sought to reach a point of equilibrium when the volume of household economic activity satisfied family demands; they achieved this by continually altering household composition. The alterations in family form that changing economic pressures induced were critical adjustments necessary to family survival. Black families made different adjustments because of their incapacity to meet family demands otherwise. In these two stages internal economic factors provide satisfactory explanations of household composition.

If, however, as we have predicted the volume of economic activity determines household composition throughout the life cycle, then we would also expect household economic factors to account for family residence decisions during the other two stages as well--newlyweds

and mature families--and we would expect certain conditions to hold. For example, families in those stages where economic pressures are much more relaxed because of the absence of children would not be expected to include outsiders, relatives or servants (working adults) since there is no internal economic need to increase production. Moreover, one would expect the simple nuclear family--the family type with fewest available adult workers--to appear most frequently at those stages in the family when the expansion of economic activity is least necessary--among newlyweds and mature families.

In fact, internal economic needs fail to explain adequately household composition during these two end phases of the family cycle. As we have seen in Figure 5.1, white newlyweds and mature families included servant laborers in the household (contributing members) in significant numbers, even when there was no pressing need for additional residents to work (when the consumer/worker ratio was between 1.00 and 2.33). In the final phase when labor demands were again reduced, white families still supplemented their budget by including servants. Neither did black families in these stages act according to our predictions. Black newlyweds gave homes to large numbers of friends and half of these new families included relatives. Mature families also opened their homes up to friends and relatives apart from a need for a source of labor.

Because of these residence choices, the simple nuclear family--a family type we had expected to see most often among newlyweds and mature families--actually showed up more often in the middle stages of the family cycle. As Table 5.4 shows among white families the simple nuclear family predominated throughout the cycle of development. Nonetheless, the lowest frequency came at just those

Table 5.4: Simple Nuclear Family as a Percentage of Total Families

<u>Stage of Development</u>	<u>Percent of Total Families</u>		<u>Number</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Newlyweds	8	54	12	13
*Young Families	65	57	82	107
*Mid-stage Families	54	65	94	71
*Mature Families	30	53	33	38

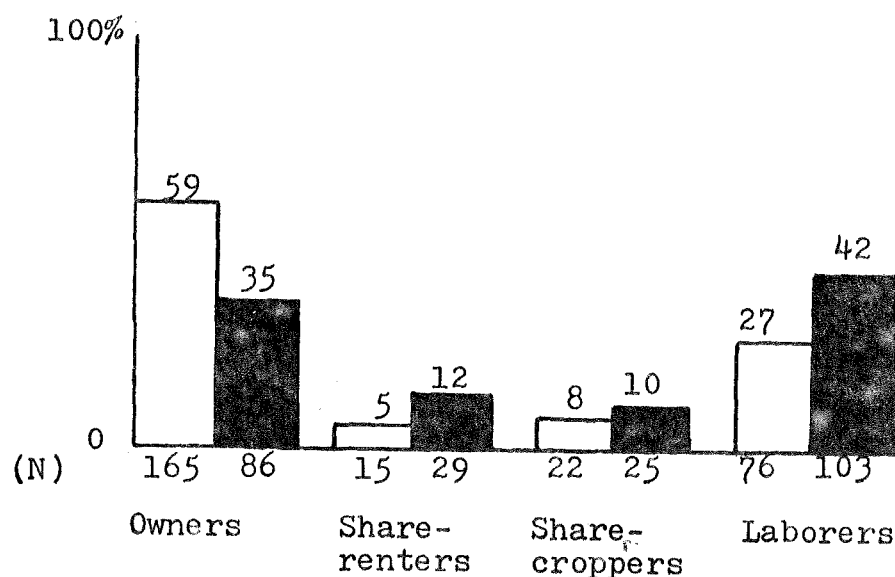
*Black-White differences significant at .10.

instances where our null hypothesis--that the volume of economic activity determines family composition--predicted its highest frequency. In the case of black families, the null hypothesis makes less sense, since black families in these stages lived in supplemented or augmented families even more often than white.

This means that we must reject any effort to explain household composition as a mere reflection of families' labor requirements. What I have done is to eliminate

any simple theory of the relationship between labor requirements and family composition over the entire family cycle. We are still left with the problem of explaining household composition during the first and final phases of family development. The explanation of particular domestic groupings in these stages lies in differentiated socio-economic conditions prevailing in the South in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Figure 5.2: Tenure (blacks are represented by solid bars.)



In general, it will come as no surprise to anyone that the black community was much more impoverished relative to the white. On the basis of two variables--occupational rank and command over available resources--

this condition is clearly reflected.¹³ Figure 5.2 illustrates the poverty of the sample black community relative to that of the white, if one assumes that the position of owner is the highest status level while the base is composed of agricultural laborers. Among whites, nearly two-thirds are owners with the remainder falling into the lower ranks. In the case of blacks, the opposite condition prevails and nearly two-thirds of them compose the lower status categories.

On the basis of access to available resources, economic differences are even more striking. When the sample white population is grouped into quartiles (or as nearly as possible) on the basis of the amount of land, machinery, draft animals, and livestock controlled by each family and used as a standard, the relative poverty of the black community is thrown into sharp relief. Table 5.5 reflects that no black family ever reached the upper level while 97 percent of them were concentrated in the bottom two ranks.¹⁴

¹³Stephan Thernstrom has emphasized the significance of these two variables as measures of poverty; see Thernstrom, "Poverty in Historical Perspective," in Moynihan, ed., On Understanding Poverty, 160-186. The basis of data on tenure was the Manuscript Census Schedule of Agriculture for 1880. As noted in Appendix 3.2 this is an inflated figure for actual owners, but for our purposes here the census figures are sufficient since it is the relative position of the two racial groups that is important.

¹⁴For an explanation of the index of economic status, see Appendix 3.3.

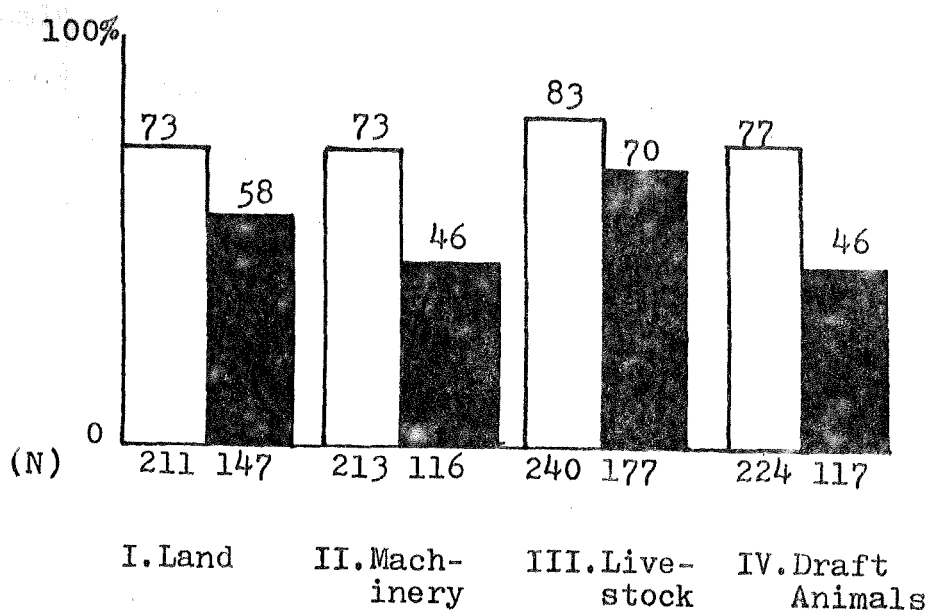
Table 5.5: Comparative Economic Status of
Louisa County Families*

<u>Economic Status</u>	<u>Percent of Families</u>		<u>Number</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Lower Quartile	63	27	159	78
Second Quartile	34	27	85	78
Third Quartile	4	23	10	67
Upper Quartile	--	23	--	67

*Black-white differences significant at .10 in all cases.

Not only was poverty in the black community more pervasive, it was also more likely to remain so because of the kinds of economic resources blacks possessed, some of which are much more valuable in the long run than others. Generally, black families commanded consumable resources, as opposed to those capable of multiplying yields. As Figure 5.3 shows, both racial groups possessed more livestock than anything else. However, since black families were so poorly represented in other categories, their comparatively large investment in livestock meant that many families did not have the types of resources that would enable them to generate income even sufficient to replace hogs, chickens, or cows. Land was the next category where black families were most frequently found, but since less than half had yield-producing factors (machinery and draft animals) with which to exploit this resource, it was of little value as a means of livelihood.

Figure 5.3: Proportion of Families Having:
 I. Land; II. Machinery; III. Livestock;
 IV. Draft Animals (black families
 represented by solid bars)



Generally, then one's place in the rural community was determined by access to these four economic resources: land, machinery, livestock, and draft animals. When economic status was correlated with the values of these four variables, the relative poverty of the black community was obvious.¹⁵ So too, was the importance of access to these economic resources in defining one's status

¹⁵Economic status and the values of these four variables were very strongly related: the value of gamma ranged from a low of .89 to a high of .995. The value of gamma can fall between -1 and +1 depending on the strength of association. All ties are rejected; see L. A. Goodman and W. H. Kruskal, "Measures of Association for Cross Classifications," Journal of the American Statistical Association, 49 (1954), 732-764.

position. Among both races, those who fell into the lower status quartile were those having small portions of land, livestock, machinery, or work animals. Since black families possessed so few of the available resources they dominated the base of the social order. Even more serious was their inability to improve their situation, since the resources they did control were those that continually had to be replaced (livestock), or those that could not be exploited (land) without other resources (draft animals, machinery, or labor).

The present and continual access of whites, in general, to means of production, while blacks were confined to resources of a low or non-yield type, made it possible for white families to realize some wealth accumulation over the family cycle, while black families struggled to hold their own. Our expectations of the greater capacity of white families to accumulate wealth are borne out in Table 5.6. As white families matured they generally acquired more goods--not merely consumables, but more resources that enhanced their capacity to make it in rural society. Hence, they enjoyed gains in status, gains that are reflected here in the shift of mid-stage and mature white families into the third and highest economic quartiles, and in the consequent decline of families with fewer or no resources among the maturing households.

The same was not true of black families, however. There was some gain in resources as families matured, but those households never included more than a small fraction of the black community. Even more revealingly, those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder grew in frequency among mature families, just that phase of family development when some accumulation of resources might be expected. The point where black families made the most significant economic gains is the mid-stage where children were working, but as Table 5.6 shows, these were only temporary. Indeed, many black families tended to lose whatever gains they made earlier and many slid backwards as the family matured.

Table 5.6: Economic Status Over
the Family Cycle

<u>Economic Status</u>	<u>State of Development</u>							
	<u>Newlyweds</u>		<u>Young Families</u>		<u>Mid-Stage Families</u>		<u>Mature Families</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Lower Quartile	67	46	68	30	55	21	61	18
Second Quartile	33	23	29	28	39	30	33	13
Third Quartile	--	23	1	20	5	20	6	34
Upper Quartile	--	8	--	22	--	30	--	34
(N)	12	13	82	107	94	71	33	38

This does not mean that rural poverty was a racial phenomenon. In fact, white families were well represented among the lower ranks of the community. Moreover, families

of both racial groups with limited means of production-- i.e., plows, harrows, draft animals, and arable land-- could not meet increased production needs by enlarging the sown area. For those families in this predicament some of the gap between need and supply was filled by greater exploitation of family labor--everybody just worked harder and longer. Agee told of this increased labor intensity among poor families of the American South, while Chayanov documented a similar reaction among poor Russian farm families.¹⁶

Blacks, however, were much more concentrated in the lower ranges of economic status. These harsh economic realities were more likely to affect black than white household composition during the first and final phases of the family cycle. Moreover, not only was black poverty more concentrated, but chances of escape were more difficult, since black families' access to means of production was very limited. Opportunities for social mobility never materialized for most black families, and, as we have already seen, the majority slipped backward.

It is within this context of widespread poverty in the black community that we must seek an explanation of black household composition during the first and last phases of the family cycle. How is this

¹⁶James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 289-315; Chayanov, The Theory of Peasant Economy, 42-86.

condition of poverty in resources related to household composition among newlyweds and mature families? Raymond Smith has noted that the lower-class family in the United States typically relies on external networks of kin even while living in a nuclear family group. Unlike the isolated, nuclear family of the American middle class, lower-class families develop strong kinship nets not always reflected in household composition.¹⁷ Michael Young and Peter Willmott have also confirmed class differences among household composition in a study comparing lower- and middle-class kin nets in London. Unlike middle-class households, working-class families in London were characterized by reciprocal visiting, while temporary boarding was also common.¹⁸

In a recent study of nineteenth century Lancashire families, Michael Anderson suggests why lower-class families take on these characteristics described by Smith, Young, and Willmott. Anderson found evidence that strong kinship ties were often necessitated by intense needs for aid and assistance that could not otherwise be fulfilled. He argues that the basis of family solidarity

¹⁷Raymond T. Smith, "The Nuclear Family in Afro-American Kinship," Journal of Comparative Family Studies, I (Autumn, 1970), 55-70. The standard work on the black family is E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

¹⁸Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Family and Kinship in East London (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971).

among the poor was absolute interdependence of family members who had no alternatives for the provision of crucial needs. On the other hand, where it was possible for individuals to satisfy their needs without resorting to kin, kinship obligations were much less urgent.¹⁹

As we have already seen, poverty was much more widespread in the black community, and, as we shall see in Chapter VI, few blacks or poor whites could expect assistance outside of the family net. Thus aid among blacks had to be obtained mostly from family help or, in the absence of a family, from friends willing to take outsiders into their households. In addition to affectional roles normally filled by families in general, lower-class black families were burdened with instrumental roles as well, functions not demanded of white or black middle class families. No other means were available whereby many blacks could survive.

Since black newlyweds and mature families included outsiders and relatives in their household most frequently, as Table 5.2 shows, and since these were the periods in the family cycle where black families were the poorest, as Table 5.6 shows, obviously their inclusion is not related to internal labor needs. Only if these people could become contributing members of the household

¹⁹Michael Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

would this have made economic sense. Perhaps, some of them did. Yet the striking fact is that only about half of the outsiders whom the young and old families accepted were actually employed--that is, were workers rather than consumers. In the case of relatives, manuscript census schedules also revealed that black households most often took in mothers or mothers-in-law, not potential contributors such as brothers and sisters. Therefore, both newlyweds and mature families, while relatively free of the burdens of supporting children, often became caretakers of aged dependents and homeless outsiders.

Thus, it appears that the explanation for black household composition in the first and final phases of the life cycle is largely explained by prevailing social and economic conditions outside the home. Black families provided homes for the aged, the homeless, and the unemployed at points in the family's development when economic burdens were less intense, though certainly still very real. These people sought such homes because their life chances were inexorably bound up with those of family and friends, and because no alternative sources of employment, income, accommodation, protection, or social welfare were available. The burden of poverty induced black families to fall back on themselves, to rely on kinship networks, to be their brother's keeper.

In comparison, many poor white families could act on the model of homo economicus because they were able

to exploit an available source of labor. The augmented nuclear family, the family type that includes outsiders, was well represented in all phases of the white families' development (Table 5.2). Moreover, nearly as many poor white families employed servant labor as those in the higher ranges of the economic status index. However, the extensive use of servants came at the expense of strong kinship relations. On a continuum of family behavior from highly normative to highly calculative,²⁰ poor white families moved in the direction of the highly calculative because servant labor enabled them to be more self-reliant and less dependent on kinship networks for employment, income, and social welfare. Census data indicates that white augmented households included employed outsiders 93 percent of the time (N=38). In addition, in white supplemented nuclear families (families with relatives resident) the group of relatives most frequently accepted were those more likely to be contributors--sisters and sisters-in-law--than consumers.

Hence, it would seem that household composition is a phenomenon whose complexity is not captured by the simple division of families into categories of nuclear versus extended. Greater understanding may be gained by developing a dynamic picture keyed to changes that occur within the family between formation and maturation. With

²⁰Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire, 172-175.

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such a model one can observe the economic adjustments necessitated by demographic changes in each household. However, the family cycle model does have its limitations. At those points in the development of the family where demographic change is more limited and economic pressures, therefore, less intense, such a model may be inadequate to account for household composition, and we must begin to search for explanations in the surrounding socio-economic order, such as poverty and caste.

One of the most striking things which this evidence on black and white family structure reveals is the way in which the family served as an adaptive mechanism under conditions of poverty. Kinship ties reached beyond the boundaries of individual nuclear households, building up networks of relationships that served as pools of resources. This was more often true within the black community because poverty was more widespread there. Black economic marginality necessitated a heavy reliance on kinsmen, friends, and exploitable companions. Ties were built to a variety of neighbors, relatives, and friends as a way of tapping the surplus of associates.²¹ All of this indicates that the primacy of the middle class norm of the nuclear family type as the "normal" household group, or as the irreducible unit of social

²¹For a good treatment of this argument, see Whitten and Szwed, "Introduction," pp. 23-53.

organization may have no validity under conditions of poverty.²² When poverty crossed the thresholds of individual households in Louisa, the family was turned into an institution of social welfare and the major means of survival.

²²Others have also challenged the idea that the nuclear family is the primary unit of social organization. See, for example, R. N. Adams, "The Nature of the Family," in Jack Goody, ed., Kinship (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971), 19-37. For a good study of the impact of poverty on the family, see Raymond T. Smith, The Negro Family in British Guiana (London: Routledge and Kegan, Limited, 1956).

CHAPTER VI

POOR LAWS AND EVOLVING DEFINITIONS OF THE POOR

Many of the attitudes toward the poor in Louisa County in the last third of the nineteenth century had been shaped long before the Civil War and economic downturn brought increases in the numbers of indigent. Although the administrative machinery of Virginia's welfare system that regulated aid to the poor after 1865 dated from 1785 when the church replaced the state as caretaker of the poor, important developments prior to 1785 also had a formative influence on legislation. A survey of public relief legislation from colonial times illustrated changing attitudes regarding the poor down through Virginia's history. An examination of this legislation will allow us some greater understanding of the social order in the period between 1865 and 1900. More specifically, a survey of poor laws will indicate how attitudes developed in the past framed the response to poverty in our period.

The history of Virginia's public relief is not a history of magnanimity. In 1908 Virginia disbursed only six percent of all state revenues for poor relief, four percent going to almshouses and two percent for outdoor

relief. In 1964, Virginia's public assistance programs were the smallest in the nation. The per capita expenditure for public assistance payments was \$7.05. In all categories of the public assistance program including old age assistance, medical care for the aged, aid to the blind, aid to the permanently and totally disabled, aid to dependent children, and general relief, Virginia was far below the national average in per capita expenditures. Disbursements for general relief were \$.38 per capita in Virginia in 1964 compared to a national average of \$1.93.¹ The explanations for this parsimony are wrapped up within the history of Virginia's public relief legislation.

In the seventeenth century the numbers of poor in need of some form of relief were so small that aid to the indigent had not become a public problem. Land was plentiful and opportunities abounded for making a living. Laws that were passed dealt only with children of the poor and were designed to give them a means of earning a living. In 1646 a law was passed for public flax houses to employ poor children, although none were ever established, and in 1668 the Virginia General Assembly made provision for workhouses for poor children. These

¹Joseph Cepuran, Public Assistance and Child Welfare: The Virginia Pattern, 1646 to 1964 (Charlottesville, Virginia: Institute of Government, University of Virginia, 1968), 4-5; First Annual Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1909), 1, 14.

were also designed to provide trade education that would prepare the indigent for future occupations. The rich resources of a virgin land made other forms of relief less pressing.²

In 1661 the Virginia Assembly formally adopted the English common law regarding the poor which recognized the moral obligation of the public to support the poor, but carried no legal obligation because the church was given the responsibility for their care and support. Those who needed care, such as paupers and convicts who had come to America seeking opportunities, the sick and aged, and dependent orphans, or children of poor white servants looked to the local parish vestry for assistance.³ These helpless individuals might be cared for in the homes of others or receive some form of outdoor relief and children needing assistance might be treated as apprentices. In any case, the parish church of each county was the administrative unit and poor law officials were vestrymen. Vestrymen, usually the leading men of the community, levied and collected local taxes, served as an investigatory body, maintained roads and property boundaries, and cared for the poor. Levies on

²Arthur W. James, The Disappearance of the County Almshouse in Virginia (Richmond: State Department of Public Welfare, 1926), 5-7.

³Harriet L. Tynes, "History of Poor Relief Legislation in Virginia," Unpublished Master's Thesis, School of Social Science Administration, University of Chicago, 1932.

the "tithables" (white males 16 years of age and over and male and female servants of that age) provided the revenues for these purposes.⁴ Throughout the seventeenth century, however, the numbers of poor were small and parish churches were able to meet most of the needs.

In the eighteenth century the numbers of poor in Colonial Virginia increased. Rural changes in England around the 1720s encouraged the immigration of those less capable of supporting themselves. The conversion of tilled land to pasture, the concentration of landholding, and the displacement of the English peasant farmer had nearly destroyed the English peasant economy, even before the Enclosure Act in 1764. Two out of every three English families had already been divorced from the land.⁵ Those who came to America in response to these conditions contributed to a rising dependent group. A 1755 act of the Virginia Assembly began with the statement, "Whereas, the number of poor people hath of late years much increased throughout this colony," and ended by directing parishes to establish workhouses. The first poorhouse in Virginia was built in Fredericksville Parish of Louisa County in 1756 while others

⁴Frank William Hoffer, Counties in Transition: A Study of County Public and Private Welfare Administration in Virginia (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Institute for Research in Social Sciences, University of Virginia, 1929), 47-69; Tynes, "History of Poor Relief," 10-12.

⁵W. G. Hoskins, The Midland Peasant (London: Macmillan and Company, 1957), 216-227.

followed in other parishes in 1767, 1771 and 1772. As the numbers of poor increased with demographic growth and economic change, enormous changes also occurred in public attitudes toward the poor.⁶

The emergence of the workhouse was a subtle shift in itself in new attitudes toward the poor, whether or not that was understood at the time. It was the first step away from treatment of the poor as a community problem. It had always been the churchwarden's duty to place the plight of each potential recipient of assistance before the entire congregation. In these gatherings citizens came together as a community, were informed about particular circumstances of their brothers and sisters, and made collective decisions about solutions. The move toward institutionalization of the poor made this process obsolete. Poor houses provided ready-made solutions to the question of what to do about the poor and encouraged a standardization of response. When the community no longer was required to formulate solutions keyed to individual needs, lack of concern was sure to follow.

Institutionalization also tended to set the poor apart from the rest of the community by treating them as outsiders rather than members. This was a natural consequence of removing individuals from their neighborhoods

⁶James, The Disappearance of the County Almshouse, 7-8.

and placing them in a special location. Beyond this, however, almshouses also tended to be located at physically remote spots. The State Board of Charities and Corrections that inspected almshouses in 1908 noted that one of the general and unfortunate facts about these institutions was that they were situated so far from the community that they were seldom visited. In fact, one of the largest expenses of the Board in its investigation was "team hire" to reach the almshouse from the nearest railroad station.⁷ Physical isolation meant that the community would no longer even be informed about the numbers and conditions of the poor.

Even more serious than this, however, the 1755 act, which gave vestries the authority to erect, purchase, or hire buildings to house the poor, also attached a stigma to those who became a part of this institution. Each person in the home was required by law to wear a shoulder patch identifying his parish and social status. The penalty for failure to comply was whipping, a punishment also meted out to residents of the almshouse who disobeyed the rules.⁸ Institutionalization then began the whole process of degradation of the poor from which American society has yet to escape.

⁷First Annual Report, 39.

⁸James, The Disappearance of the County Almshouse, 7-8; Robert H. Kirkwood, Fit Surroundings: District Homes Replace County Almshouses in Virginia (Richmond: Virginia Department of Public Welfare, 1948), 20-23.

The American Revolution brought further changes in Virginia's public assistance program as poor laws got caught up in the movement to disestablish the English church. Acts of the General Assembly in 1780 and 1785 took welfare out of the hands of the church and placed its administration under civil hegemony. County courts divided counties into districts and held elections of freeholders and housekeepers to elect three "discreet, fit, and proper person" called "Overseers of the Poor" to administer the public assistance program.⁹ The Overseers whose terms of office were for three years levied county tithables and appointed a superintendent of the poor, a salaried official who usually lived in the almshouse and supervised its day to day operation. Overseers were elected on the basis of their dedication to parsimony regardless of their fitness otherwise.¹⁰

Not only were the Overseers charged with aiding the poor, but they were also responsible for the blind, crippled, physically handicapped, and eventually the insane. Since the county almshouse was the only institution for county welfare problems it gradually became a "dumping ground" for all sorts of helpless individuals. When the State Board of Charities and Corrections

⁹Tynes, "History of Poor Relief," 15-20; Cepuran, Public Assistance and Child Welfare, 8-37; Hoffer, Counties in Transition, 51.

¹⁰Tynes, "History of Poor Relief," 36-39.

inspected Virginia's almshouses in 1908 they found not only the poor, but the insane, feeble-minded, epileptics, tubercular patients, the blind, and the delinquent. It had become easy to shuffle the incapacitated off to the almshouse and forget about them.¹¹ The identification of those whose only problem might be the failure to find work with all sorts of other social ills further degraded the status of poverty. The almshouse had become stigmatized as a collection point for social misfits, including the poor.

Other conditions growing out of civil custody of the poor only added to the abhorrence of poverty by gradually eroding the status of the poor. Civil custody brought with it rules and reports familiar to a bureaucratic apparatus along with the customary concerns for efficiency, a term widely recognized to connote the greatest possible saving of the taxpayers money. For the first time records were to be kept of persons who received aid, and these had to be filed in the county court house (per a 1786 amendment) where they were open to public inspection. To have one's name displayed in this manner destroyed individual privacy and family pride.¹² Finally, the 1785 law authorized the Overseers to force people to work in their districts, especially those who might

¹¹Kirkwood, Fit Surroundings, 27-28.

¹²Hoffer, Counties in Transition, 53; Tynes, "History of Poor Relief," 21.

become "burdensome to the industrious."¹³ The assumption in this provision that the poor might be those who would not work unless compelled is a recurrent theme in Virginia social welfare legislation. Human dignity and pride do not seem to have been the objectives of this legislation, however. It was more important to safeguard society from the development of a dependent class. Yet, the lumping together of the poor with other "undesirable" elements of society gradually made poverty distasteful to self-respecting men.

The nature of the reports, required of the superintendent, indicate the concerns of the state regarding residents of the almshouse. The superintendent had to report once a year on the numbers of paupers provided for during the year, the number of blacks and whites aided, the length of time spent in the almshouse, how much information was required on the products raised on the farm and how the proceeds were spent.¹⁴ More important considerations from the resident's point of view, such as the reason of admission, the character of employment, the history of one's case, or any record of progress was neither required nor maintained. Residents lived and died with no record of their almshouse

¹³Hoffer, Counties in Transition, 53.

¹⁴First Annual Report, 24-29.

life save the initial record of admission and discharge by death.¹⁵ The treatment of the poor as debits on a balance sheet was an additional humiliation.

If the poor were uncertain of their "place" before they arrived at the almshouse, the treatment they received upon taking up residence must have left no doubts. Even the physical plant suggests a lonely and depressing world and Louisa County's almshouse is a good example. Built on the cottage plan, a plan preferred in the South because it provided for racial segregation, it was located several miles from the county courthouse. It consisted of three buildings, two of which were ten room cabins surrounding the superintendent's residence. Up to three people might be placed in a room that was heated by a fireplace and lighted by lamps. There was no water in the cottages and segregation was by race and sex.¹⁶ To this environment came the able bodied poor who were housed with the sick and those with emotional illnesses or contagious diseases. It is not surprising that the almshouse came to be a place of last resort avoided by the physically sound. The State Board of Charities and Corrections reported that in 1908 all of Virginia's almshouses contained 1,811 "inmates," 1,076 whites and 735 blacks. So few of these were able to

¹⁵Hoffer, Counties in Transition, 74-75.

¹⁶First Annual Report, 71.

work that the Board recommended that the idea of almshouse as a workhouse be abandoned and that they be "depopulated."¹⁷ Abstracts of the annual reports of the Overseers of the Poor in the late 1870s indicate the almshouse was only caring for an average of 24 individuals a year, none of whom could work.¹⁸ Thus, the number of citizens residing in the almshouse is less indicative of the extent of rural poverty and more indicative of the poor's determination to avoid such humiliating treatment. Moreover, the impact of the almshouse went beyond the effects it had on the actual residents. It was an unmistakable signal to the poor of the local government's perception of them as social misfits.

One of the most devastating blows struck to the self image of the poor as well as a clear indication of how abruptly official attitudes toward the poor had changed since the early colonial period was a 1787 statute that defined vagrancy. Any able bodied man with a family whose income was insufficient to insure him from becoming a "county charge" was to be considered a vagrant. Single men out of work and found loitering or begging or those who refused to pay their taxes were placed in the same category. Overseers of the Poor were directed to inform Justices of the Peace of vagrants in

¹⁷Ibid., 22.

¹⁸Annual Report of the Auditor of Public Accounts of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1876, 1880, 1881, Documents No. 6, 15, and 18 respectively.

their districts who would be arrested, turned over to the Overseers, and forced to work up to three months at the best wages available.¹⁹ This was a striking change in the treatment of the poor as the helpless were turned into criminals and former caretakers of the poor turned into informers and prosecutors. Perhaps, this identification of those at lower economic levels with the criminal reflected an increasing involvement of the poor in illegal activities, or what was defined as illegal activity. We cannot be sure, however, until a study is made of the frequency and nature of criminal activity and its relationship to economic distress. Although the reasons may be unclear, it remains significant that the poor for the first time had been placed in the same category with law breakers.

Further changes in poor laws in the nineteenth century indicate the increasing tendency to use statutes as instruments of social control, an 1806 law required all emancipated slaves to leave the state within one year. Failure to obey would forfeit the slave's freedom and he would then be sold by the Overseers of the Poor. In 1827 emancipated slaves who stayed over one year could be treated as misdemeanants, indicted by a grand jury, and sold by the sheriff if found guilty. Poor laws could be put to other uses as well. In 1806 a law made

¹⁹Tynes, "History of Poor Relief," 29-36.

provision for apprenticing up to 40 children aged five to eight years to the Superintendent of the Manufactory of Arms, but when manufacturing never developed in Virginia, the system was not extended.²⁰

Each of the state constitutional conventions in the nineteenth century favored statutes whose functions as instruments of social control were unmistakable. The 1830 convention took away their right to vote, and required all those who refused outdoor aid (usually so small a family could not live on it) to be placed in the almshouse. The 1862 convention expanded the definition of vagrancy to include those who refuse to work at the "going wage," who refuse to do the work allotted to them by Overseers of the Poor, who return to the community from which they have been ejected, and all who are not residents of the state of Virginia found loitering or begging. All could be arrested upon a warrant by the Overseers, tried, and if found guilty sentenced to three months labor. Those who were not residents of the state could be arrested without a warrant.²¹ These laws also completed the process of criminalization of the poor that had begun with the 1787 statute.

Thus, on the eve of the American Civil War, Virginia society's attitude toward the poor was well defined and

²⁰ Ibid., 52.

²¹ Ibid., 56-84.

was not limited to economic distinctions alone or even primarily. The poor were also part of a status group of unmistakable location. Even the terminology in which the debate about the poor was framed had changed. They were no longer referred to as individuals but as "charges," "loafers," "wards," or "inmates." Their individual problems were no longer placed before the entire community by a churchwarden in order to reach a collective solution. "What to do with the poor" was a question routinely and swiftly decided by an Overseer who offered institutionalization or withheld it at his discretion. Relief legislation became devoid of any curative aspects, and instead its focus was preventive, designed to save the taxpayer's money in the name of efficiency.

Most damaging was the association of poverty with criminality. Civil officials spoke of the poor and the vagrant in the same breath and passed laws to punish violators. This, along with the housing of the poor with other socially discredited elements of the population, fostered an image of the indigent as a part of a status group of disrepute, a group comprised of vagabonds and vagrants. By the time of the Civil War, social attitudes towards the poor were already well defined.

Attitudes toward the poor, as revealed in public relief legislation, changed little after the war, although there were a number of changes in the administrative machinery. The emphasis on institutionalization remained,

and outdoor relief continued to be spurned as an alternative. The Superintendent of the Poor, who now had more authority than previously in deciding upon aid to the poor, was given authority by the 1868 constitutional convention to reject those sent to him by the Overseers if he felt they should not be in the almshouse. This was tantamount to no aid at all, because the Overseers who sent these cases to the Superintendent had already decided the almshouse was a place of final resort. Since the Superintendent got nothing for each person admitted, and since they might add to his expenses, he had a vested interest in keeping the number down.²² This was a striking change in a course of about 115 years where decisions about the poor devolved from the entire community to one individual.

In 1876 an Act of the Virginia Assembly revealed the degrading way the poor had come to be treated. When three poor mountain counties of Virginia (Scott, Lee, and Grayson) appealed to the legislature to do something about the widespread poverty in their counties, the Assembly responded with a law that permitted the county to farm out its poor to the lowest bidder. The bidder would supply clothing and other essentials and act as their Superintendent of the Poor for which he was to receive the rents and profits of the poor farm in

²²Ibid., 71-76.

addition to a government payment of a specified amount per capita. In 1877 five other Virginia counties joined this group until the abuses became so great the scheme was abandoned. Two other laws of significance were passed before the 1902 constitutional convention. In 1887 a law was passed putting the 1865 vagrancy laws back into force that Reconstruction had temporarily suspended, and in 1896 a law was passed to forbid cities to discharge any vagrants unless they promised to leave town.²³

As the institutional care of "social outcasts" increased in popularity after the war and the almshouse became a depository for not only the poor but the disabled in general, conditions became so deplorable in the almshouses that citizens-reform groups organized to stop the abuses. Yet officialdom acted in a manner characteristically casual where clients were suppliants and where largess promised no kudos. North Carolina was the first Southern state to sanction any sort of state action to clean up the almshouse by establishing a State Board of Charity and Corrections in 1869.²⁴ Nearly 40 years passed before the Virginia bureaucracy recognized the need for similar action. Although the Virginia Conference of Charity and Corrections was formed in 1900, it took the supporters four years to convince the Governor that he should recommend state action to

²³Ibid., 80-82.

²⁴Cepuran, Public Assistance and Child Welfare, 12.

the General Assembly. It took another four years to establish the State Board of Charity and Corrections and get its first report.²⁵

When the State Board of Charities and Corrections inspected all 108 almshouses in the state in 1907, they discovered conditions we might anticipate in a society where the political leadership has courted the strong by defining aid to the weak as "coddling." Old men and women lived in filthy rooms, some dying alone with no one to care for them. One almshouse housed 19 "inmates" in five cottage rooms. Tuberculosis victims slept in the same rooms with the healthy. One superintendent had nailed shut the windows of his cottages to keep residents from leaving the cottage except with his permission. In another instance, inspectors found a 21-year old girl who carried a ball and chain during the day weighing 28 pounds to keep her from wandering away. The Superintendent explained he did not have time to look after her and he could not afford anyone to watch her. When the state board reported this, the girl was declared insane and transferred to a state hospital.²⁶ In fact, the Board found very few poor in the poorhouse. Most were aged, infirm, or physically or emotionally disabled,

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶First Annual Report, 40-153. The almshouse in each county and city in the state of Virginia is described in detail.

and because of this less than a fourth of the 25,000 acres of farm land owned by these almshouses was being farmed. Obviously, that which was being farmed was not being spent upon the residents as it was designed to be. One of the recommendations of the board was "depopulation" and the closing or consolidation of almshouses "to save money."²⁷ Depopulation meant farming the insane out to state hospitals, the tubercular to sanitariums, the blind to homes for the blind, and the aged to county homes. This was the program implemented in the early twentieth century.²⁸

Thus, the history of Virginia's public relief legislation revealed the attitudes toward the poor that had come to prevail among officialdom by the last third of the nineteenth century. In addition, these same attitudes are also revealed in the Freedmen's Bureau records that record the debate between local and federal officials over aid to the destitute immediately after the war. Squabbles between Bureau officials and local politicians over the poor indicate the precarious position of the poor after the Civil War and the low esteem with which they had come to be regarded.

²⁷Ibid., 38, 219-227. One is reminded of the same program now widely discussed as the "solution" for mental institutions with the same commitment to efficiency and disregard for the welfare of the individual.

²⁸Kirkwood, Fit Surroundings, 32; James, The Disappearance of the County Almshouse, 16.

The Freedman's Bureau had been established primarily to aid and protect freed slaves. In many counties, however, the Bureau also issued rations to poor whites as well, if only for a brief period. This was because, as Bureau officers noted, many poor whites (as well as poor blacks) had refused the ignominious solution of the almshouse. The Bureau officer in Goochland County, Louisa's neighbor, explained that many of the poor would suffer a great deal rather than go to the almshouse.²⁹ Poor whites, who saw in the Bureau a way to avoid the almshouse and still survive, must have been disappointed in September 1865 when a general order was issued that destitute whites would no longer come within the provision of the Bureau.³⁰

As far as the freedmen were concerned, the Bureau's policy was to encourage the county to care for them either by placing them in the almshouse or by outdoor relief. If this failed, the Bureau would fill the gap by issuing rations. What this meant for the poor was that they frequently were neglected while local and national officials debated about who was to provide for

²⁹Records of the Field Offices of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, Monthly Report, Goochland County, November 20, 1868, Records Group 105 (National Archives and Record Service). Hereinafter referred to as Freedmen's Bureau Records.

³⁰Freedmen's Bureau Records, General Order No. 20, September 16, 1865.

them. In cases where local officials could not be induced to aid freedmen, the Bureau still hesitated to grant them rations and did so only as a last resort. Usually, especially in the case of men, they first attempted to coerce laborers into labor contracts, regardless of the terms. This they had been encouraged to do by order of the district superintendent in July 1865 that directed them not to issue rations to anyone able to work so long as employment could be found.³¹ In fact, the principles to be adhered to in regard to paupers was to get each county, parish, township, or city to care and provide for its own poor.³²

Local officials frequently made excuses in order to force the Bureau to care for the former slaves. Orange County Overseers of the Poor responded to the Bureau's inquiry as to what they intended to do about destitute freedmen by asserting they had neither the authority nor the ability to care for these individuals. The Board of Supervisors, they argued, could only support people in the poor house and that was presently filled with poor whites. Moreover, the present levy for such support did not include blacks, so they were not authorized to receive aid from these funds. Fluvanna County reported that they

³¹Freedmen's Bureau Records, Order signed by Captain Cramden, District Superintendent, July 6, 1865.

³²Freedmen's Bureau Records, Circular Letter, October 4, 1865.

gave out rations "in extreme cases," and as a rule "helped those who cannot help themselves." Culpeper County asserted that county funds would be distributed to poor blacks and whites indiscriminately, but that funds in general were short because not enough had been appropriated to take care of the poor. Giles County assured the Bureau that all freedmen who had been residents of the county for twelve months and "who are not able to take care of themselves" would be provided assistance. They continued that those moving to the county that could not support themselves would be "run out." Other counties hid behind legal barriers whenever they could. Princess Anne reminded the Bureau that Sections 7 and 8, Chapter 51, of the Code of Virginia forbade any county from taking care of a white or black coming into the county from another county. The most astounding report came from Essex County whose funds were limited because their poor funds had been invested in various bank and railroad stocks, none of which were now paying a dividend.³³

The Freedman's Bureau elicited these responses from individual counties by sending a questionnaire to the chairman of county boards of overseers. It asked four questions: Will you give the same aid to destitute blacks settled in your county as whites? What will be the extent

³³Freedmen's Bureau Records, Monthly Reports, Orange County, April 2, 1865; Fluvanna County, April 9, 1866; Culpeper County, April, 1866; Giles County, April 12, 1866; Princess Anne County, August 1865; Essex County, April 27, 1866.

and character of this aid? How will the aid be granted? Will you provide for all destitute freedmen, and if not, what proportion? When Louisa County received its questionnaire it responded in a way similar to other counties. To the first question, the overseers claimed they would give aid to destitute blacks as soon as the money was raised by a general levy. They promised that the extent and character of the aid would be the same as that given the poor whites. To the question of how the aid would be granted overseers stated: "Many years ago houses and lands were set aside by the county where those in need of county support are sent." They claimed all poor were taken care of there. Finally, they promised that freedmen would be treated like white persons without discrimination.³⁴ In follow-up reports Louisa officials reported that all indigent whites were being cared for by civil authorities, and that freedmen were being placed in the almshouse if necessary.³⁵

Regardless of the promises that were made, the evidence indicates that very few blacks or whites were aided either in the almshouse or through outdoor relief, as we have seen. Essentially frugality in expenditures was the result of the same prevailing attitudes that had shaped public relief legislation. Not only was this true at the

³⁴Freedmen's Bureau Records, Monthly Report, Louisa County, April, 1866.

³⁵Ibid., May 24, 1866 and October 1866.

local level, but Bureau officers themselves were adherents of the same views. Many anxiously wrote into their reports to headquarters that in their administration of aid they had guarded against "dependency." The Richmond officer reported that he had spot checked his case records to make sure only the "deserving" get rations. On another occasion he reported he had increased rations, but hastened to add that he had been careful to avoid dependency.³⁶ Other Bureau officers recommended that it probably would be better not to issue any further rations because the denial would make people industrious, while relatives and the county poorhouse would handle the rest.

The view that aid to the poor was like a narcotic to which the recipient might become addicted if it was continued over a period of time was another manifestation of how society had come to assess poverty and the poor. The fault for their condition lay with the poor themselves, and not with the larger society. It was a human weakness and a private rather than a public problem. Sickness, disabling accidents, emotional distress, disease, congenital illnesses, or infirmity, all of which frequently led to poverty, were not social problems but unfortunate visitations. The dispensation of public assistance, therefore, was a privilege, and it must be limited in amount and duration. To do otherwise would encourage the poor not to improve themselves.

³⁶Freedmen's Bureau Records, Monthly Reports, City of Richmond, April 1866 and February 2, 1867.

In many cases the rations the Bureau did dispense after the war went to assist poor widows with large families, women whose husbands had abandoned them with children, and the aged. The Charlottesville officer stated that these families were the ones most frequently in need of assistance. A number of husbands had run away and changed their names to avoid having to support their families. This imposed an especially difficult hardship upon the women who were legally barred from working if they had children. In several cases, Richmond also reported that rations were primarily being issued to the aged, infirm, and widowed mothers. The Charlottesville officer noted that abandonment was most frequent in the case where there were large numbers of children. Even Madison County, predominantly a rural area, reported a large number of these kinds of dependents in the county.³⁷

Once the Freedmen's Bureau was dissolved, destitute blacks were at the mercy of local officials even more completely than before. As the manuscript census schedules of social statistics for the years 1870 and 1880 show, public assistance was scant indeed and certainly not indicative of the widespread need for help. In 1870 only 30 paupers in Louisa were supported during the year at a total cost to the county of \$2,500. In 1880, a total of

³⁷Freedmen's Bureau Records, Monthly Reports, City of Charlottesville, May and July, 1866 and January 1867; City of Richmond, December, 1866, May, 1868, and November 1868; Madison County, March, 1866.

38 people were aided. Most of the assistance, at least in 1880, went for the care of the aged who received three fourths of all poor relief. Moreover, in 1880, although the population of Louisa was 61 percent black, more whites were aided than blacks.³⁸

In the face of inadequate public assistance, poor black families were left with essentially three alternatives: creation of their own voluntary associations, migration out of the county to places where jobs or public assistance were more plentiful, or greater dependency upon the institution of the family itself as an instrument of public welfare. The roles the family played in this situation are discussed in Chapter V. Rural black voluntary associations such as the Order of Saint Luke that sprang up in Virginia in 1867 or the Order of Good Samaritans established in some areas in 1872 also filled some of the needs essential to survival. Small sick and death benefits were paid to the members of these groups out of a levy on the individual members. This relieved some families from the embarrassment and humiliation of having to be buried by the county or from having to depend on county officials for cash assistance.³⁹ In

³⁸Manuscript Census Schedules of Population, 1870 and 1880, Virginia State Library.

³⁹John Marcus Ellison, Negro Organizations and Leadership in Relation to Rural Life in Virginia (Blacksburg, Virginia: Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Bulletin No. 290, 1933).

some urban areas of the South these associations were even more prolific than in rural areas. As early as 1849, 106 such organizations existed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Petersburg, Virginia had 22 benefit societies in 1898.⁴⁰ Some rose to become solvent business enterprises in the twentieth century, such as the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company,⁴¹ and wherever they existed they filled needs crucial to survival.

Migration came to be the "alternative" for some black families. As early as 1866 the Richmond Bureau officer estimated that at least 15,000 freed blacks had joined the 5,000 who had been slaves in the city before the Civil War. This large influx had surged in from neighboring counties, and they came without property, without any arrangements for employment, without any support or any definite plans. They congregated in the city, "filling up every cellar and shanty that can afford shelter."⁴² Moreover, in this and other cities, they were frequently in flight from paltry wages in the rural areas barely sufficient to sustain life. And they came to seize that measure of freedom and independence the Civil War had awakened in them. Most Bureau officers

⁴⁰Walter B. Weare, Black Business in the New South, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

⁴¹Ibid., 9, 11.

⁴²Freedmen's Bureau Records, Monthly Report, City of Richmond, March, 1866.

refer to the ebb and flow of migration to Southern cities in this period as a rhythmic response to prosperity or the lack of it in rural areas.

In 1879 Northern states like Kansas and Indiana where many migrants had begun to settle became quite concerned with the numbers of blacks moving to their areas. On a motion from a senator from Indiana, a Senate committee was established to investigate the causes of migration and the minority report signed by Northern Republicans laid the blame on conditions in the South. These organizations printed circulars and sent their members traveling throughout the South.⁴³ One author had estimated that 20,000 to 25,000 settled in Kansas in 1879.⁴⁴ Precious little is known about the patterns of black migration during this period, whether it occurred singly or in families, whether whole communities or families from scattered communities was the trend, whether migrants from certain areas were more prone to migrate to specific cities, or the exact routes the migrants took. A tracing of individual black families from their rural origins to urban centers would add enormously to our understanding of this process and the effects it had

⁴³"Senate Report on the Exodus of 1879," Journal of Negro History (January, 1919), 57-92.

⁴⁴Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., The Rise of the City, 1878-1898 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 376.

upon families in general. Regardless of their destination, black families to some extent were exercising one of the few options they had.

Poor white families were only slightly better off than black. Public assistance, though more easily obtained in their case, if only because they could depend upon the almshouse, was nevertheless always less than adequate. The previously mentioned reports of the Overseers of the Poor testify to the inadequacies, regardless of race. Yet, poor whites had some advantages over their black counterparts.

Homes for the "deaf and dumb," the blind, and orphans were established for Virginia whites in advance of those for blacks. In addition homes for white confederate veterans kept many out of almshouses. Daughters of the Confederacy and United Confederate Veterans aided the needy and disabled. In the 1890s, when economic depression worsened and rural poverty increased, every Southern state legislature voted pensions for confederate veterans. Widows and indigent veterans received \$60 per year and disabled veterans received higher increments based on the nature of the disability.⁴⁵ These provisions

⁴⁵William H. Glasson, "Confederate Pensions, Homes, and Relief Measures in the South," in James C. Ballagh, ed., The South in the Building of the Nation, Vol. 6 (Richmond: The Southern Publication Society, 1909), 446-450.

made poverty at least respectable. By the twentieth century Virginia was paying 13,000 pensioners.⁴⁶

Attitudes toward the poor that had come to prevail in Virginia after the Civil War were no different than national trends. Robert Bremner observed that public poor relief was in poor repute over the entire United States in the nineteenth century. Public indifference toward the helpless was common and stemmed from the emphasis upon self-help. Even those reformers who advertised the disgraceful conditions within the nation's almshouses, such as Josephine Shaw Lowell, also argued that public assistance should be given "not only sparingly, but grudgingly."⁴⁷ However, there was one big difference between the rural South and the urban North. In the urban areas of the North, private charities flourished, whether charity organization societies, the mission church, the settlement house, or YMCAs or YWCAs. In rural areas, poverty might go unnoticed, visible only to those who left the travelled roads and saw the run-down shanties scattered over the countryside. No mission church or charity association ministered to the misery of the rural poor, and they were forced to find other means of assistance such as kinship nets or neighbors.

⁴⁶Ibid., 449.

⁴⁷Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New York: New York University Press, 1956, 1969), 47-48.

Yet rural poverty was just as pervasive as the more dense concentrations of the urban poor who captured the reformer's attention. In fact, there may have been more poor per capita in rural areas than in urban.

Thus, the status of the poor began to decline the moment their welfare passed into the hands of civil officials. Gradually, over a period of a hundred years, the poor lost more and more of the rights accorded to ordinary citizens, until by the time of our period they were located among the criminal element. Civil officials no longer felt obliged to support them. Indeed, their obligations ran in the opposite direction, to a constituency who demanded they practice parsimony in the distribution of the taxpayer's dollar. In no other area was it more imperative to be frugal than in expenditures for poor relief which many felt benefited only the few non-contributing members of society. The invisibility of rural poverty perpetuated the notion that it was not very extensive and encouraged apathy and frugality. The association of the poor with law breakers could only have aroused the pride of the rural people to the point where they might deny their own needs for assistance and refuse to recognize their own poverty.

The evolution of attitudes toward the poor in Virginia raises some interesting questions about the Southern social order. Why, in such a rigidly class stratified society, as was the case in Louisa County immediately

after the Civil War, when poverty is not only widespread but increasing, is there no challenge to the existing social structure? What was the obstacle to collective action in this Southern county, and perhaps in other Southern counties in similar circumstances? Why would such large numbers allow themselves to be defined as criminals? Did the social distinctions which were promoted by Virginia's relief legislation act as barriers to class conflict or resistance? These and other questions will be probed in the conclusion.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: THE MISSING REVOLUTION

Like some fictitious phenomenon from the world of fantasy, the tentacles of rural poverty reached into nearly every corner of Louisa County by 1900. Unlike the world of fantasy, however, no hero emerged to rid the people of the menace, no legendary Robin Hood to balance the scales of justice. Although it may be impossible to accumulate the precise statistics of misery, the exact figures of the incomes upon which hard-working men were expected to maintain a family, the size of pittances that passed for relief, the kinds of diets which were supposed to support bone grinding labors, or the extent of shanties and hovels that were homes, if not houses, the realities of these conditions are documented in the indelible marks left upon the individuals and families we have studied. Delayed marriages, orphaned children, homeless unemployed drifters, and, above all, foreshortened lives and high death rates are imprints that cannot be erased. When we add to this what we do know for certain--that 41 percent of the white population and 56 percent of the black population had to survive at wage rates that seem impossible to sustain life, that another indeterminate

number scratched out a living on small patches whose soil had been drained by previous farming methods, the misery of the many contrasts sharply with the comfort of the few.

Moreover, as the New Deal's definition of the South as the "Nation's No. 1 economic problem" suggests, rural poverty did not disappear with the return to prosperity in 1896.¹ The legacy of two centuries cannot be erased in two generations. Indeed, in 1929 rural poverty in Louisa County and in Virginia generally had worsened. In that year 60 percent of Louisa's farm population (owners, operators, and tenants) had a gross income of \$600 or less, an amount which rural sociologists considered to be at the level of bare subsistence. Most held a sixth grade education, lived in poor housing and paid little or no tax. One half of Virginia's rural population fell into this category in 1929, including three fourths of the black population.² In fact, by this time the poverty existing all over the rural

¹See George B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 599 where President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech is quoted in which he refers to the South as an economic problem of the first magnitude.

²W. E. Garnett, "Does Virginia Care," (Blacksburg, Virginia: VPI Bulletin No. 3, Mimeograph, January, 1936), 1-16.

South was well documented.³ Nor has that legacy disappeared yet, and now as then the costs are being paid in terms of incompetent or inadequate medical care or treatment priced out of the range of many rural families, or poorly supported rural schools where students are given educations that place them at a disadvantage when competing with their urban neighbors.

The point here, however, is not to make the case for Louisa as a poor community. That has already been done. Nor is the purpose to summarize the findings that have emerged in the study. Rather, what I want to do is to pose certain questions that have often remained beneath the surface in the study, questions that center around conflict, and to suggest some hypothetical answers to these questions that seem to flow out of the study itself. Certainly, the intent is not to prove anything, for, as we shall see, the historiography of conflict in the American South has not reached that stage of maturity. Rather, we are at the point where questions are more helpful than answers, and where answers must take the form of theories in which one is willing to risk some future embarrassment on the chance that the right question might be posed.

³See Arthur F. Raper, Preface to Peasantry (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936); Arthur F. Raper and Ira De A. Reid, Sharecroppers All (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941); Johnson, Shadow of the Plantation.

If we should press our ears close to the Southern soil in this period in sure and certain knowledge that we would be able to hear the thunderous roar of rebellion and revolution for which such conditions of poverty and inequality seem logically to call, we would be met with a mysteriously hushed stillness.⁴ Of course, not all of the silence can be explained in terms of a real absence of rebellion. Historians tend to find that for which they are looking, and, as I have already argued, what might pass as violations of conventional legal codes may actually be primitive forms of social protest. Thus, this period in the history of the American South, which seems so void of rebellion (save in the Populist movement that was far from rebellious since it was really dedicated to the status quo, as Sheldon Hackney has shown), may only appear so because historians have not been looking for instances of social protest.⁵ Nevertheless, this myopia would potentially explain only a part of the quietude. Historians are, after all, sensitive people; had social protest been on the scale that we might expect when half of the population was oppressed, someone would have noticed it. Thus, we are left with explaining a certain lack of rebellion when objective conditions suggest the opposite.

⁴That this was true all over the South is confirmed in Theodore Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

⁵Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama.

The explanation for this absence, we have been led to believe, is that race divided more than class could unite, a phrase that appears to explain everything while actually explaining very little.⁶ This hypothesis would not, for example, explain why large numbers of poor whites who were losing ground both figuratively and literally before the Civil War did not rise up in rebellion. Nor does it explain why whites or blacks as separate racial groups could not have also acted as separate economic classes during the spread of rural poverty.) What the theme of race seems to suggest is a numeric relationship between rebellion and its dynamic that could never explain the moment of conflict, if only because the potential participants are shut off from its perception. At any rate, I want to explore other theories about the absence of collective action in the American South and to borrow from a rich body of European literature dealing with the conditions that seem to have been important to peasant uprisings.

In discussing the factors surrounding European peasant revolts, what is meant is not the common sense notion that in order to start a revolt certain things are needed. I am not posing "prerequisites" for collective action in some deterministic sense nor suggesting that had specific factors been present revolt would have

⁶See Woodward, Origins of the New South, 222; or Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 218.

been inevitable. Rather, I am asking the question, what set of conditions that has often led to rebellion among depressed segments of European rural populations were absent in the American South, and how did their absence act as a barrier to revolution?⁷

One of the characteristics of agrarian movements has been a vision or myth of a more just and egalitarian society than that which exists in the present. The myth may be either forward looking toward the creation of a new order or backward looking to a golden past.⁸ It is important that the vision go beyond some vaguely defined notion of a better world to include a belief in a more just society, a belief called forth by the injustices of the moment. However, as we are reminded by one who has studied peasant movements, the rise of a common myth of transcendent justice provides a vision but does not move the peasant to action; it unites but does not organize a peasantry.⁹ That requires a leadership.

Roland Mousnier in a study of peasant uprisings in the seventeenth century found that neither conditions of

⁷For the use of "prerequisite" as a heuristic device as distinct from its deterministic qualities, see Alexander Gerschenkron, "Reflections on the Concept of 'Prerequisites' of Modern Industrialization," in Gerschenkron, Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 31-51.

⁸Eric R. Wolf, Peasants (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 106-109.

⁹Ibid.

misery in the agrarian sector nor a division into potentially antagonistic classes were sufficient as causes of peasant revolt. Rather, some form of outside organization and leadership was necessary to lead or exploit this reservoir of unrest.¹⁰ There was no requirement, however, for a formal and highly structured organization. In fact, the leadership role might have been filled by more primitive forms of organization, such as the "social bandit."¹¹ Robin Hood in England, Janošík in Slovakia, and Diego Corrientes in southern Spain are examples of charismatic leaders who have emerged out of peasant society to champion the poor and oppressed. Regardless of whether leadership takes a primitive or formal organization, the point is that objective conditions of oppression and misery alone are not sufficient to provoke revolt. Indeed, a general peasant movement transcending "local boundaries seems impossible apart from help, either from outside or from above."¹²

Besides utopian myths and leadership, students of peasant unrest have also correlated revolution with periods of social or political flux. The likelihood

¹⁰ Roland Mousnier, Peasant Uprisings in Seventeenth-Century France, Russia, and China, translated by Brian Pearce (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970).

¹¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), 13-29.

¹² E. J. Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. I (October, 1973), 3-22.

that a leadership will be able to lead a peasantry into revolution is greater under conditions of major and prolonged social disturbance in which the traditional order is shaken.¹³ For this reason, Hobsbawm has called the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "the classical age of the social bandit" in the history of peasant societies.¹⁴ Other historians, like Charles Tilly, offer a more political interpretation of collective violence in which protests flow out of the struggle for established places in the structure of power, a battle between groups gaining or losing membership in the political community.¹⁵ Most seem to agree, however, that periods of change, either political or social, are more likely to produce agrarian revolt.

More important than visions, or social bandits, or periods of flux, however, is group solidarity at the local level. The local arena is the "little community" within which social relationships among peasants, and between peasants and non-peasants, lead to the formation of group identity and solidarity. Thus, the little community is the basic unit of peasant life and a fundamental

¹³Wolf, Peasants, 109.

¹⁴Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, 24.

¹⁵Charles Tilly, "Collective Violence in European Perspective," in Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, eds. Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), 4-45; see also Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," 13.

organ in any broader system of communal societies. Because of its importance as a place where group definition is formed, we need to examine the structuring of relationships in this setting--i.e., the formation of group identity--as a part of the larger question of collective action. I do not wish to deny what Hobsbawm has so convincingly argued, namely that local or regional action rarely leads to a national peasant movement without an external organizing force.¹⁶ Rather, I want to probe how local communities themselves, by generating an inclusive concept of identity ultimately become the building blocks of a broader agrarian movement. The nature of the ties at the local level is extremely important if local movements are to become regional or national in scope. When do small farmers, tenants and laborers living under similar conditions of economic marginality enter into manifold relations with one another and why is this important? When do they begin to see themselves as a peasantry?

Commenting on the French peasantry in the nineteenth century, Karl Marx recognized how small-holding peasants might constitute a "vast mass" without any sense of its own identity. Isolated by their mode of production, poor means of communication, and poverty, and dependent only upon themselves for the means of life, intercourse

¹⁶Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," 9-11.

with the larger society was unnecessary. He writes:

A small holding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests beget no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.¹⁷

It is important, therefore, to probe how the homologous "sack of potatoes" might become a unified whole.

Collective action demands that the peasantry act together for their common good. Thus, ties must be built first across household boundaries in order for some sense of a collectivity to develop and before parochial limits can be transcended. Edward Banfield, in a study of poverty and backwardness in southern Italy, related the depressed conditions he found to the inability of the villagers to act together for any end transcending the immediate material interest of the nuclear family, something he labeled "amoral familism." The concentration of the villagers on the interesse of the immediate family

¹⁷Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 124.

led Banfield to conclude that the lack of any association beyond the household was a very important limiting factor upon economic development. The important fact for our purposes is that the maximization of the material short-run advantage of the nuclear family contributed to backwardness because organized action, which was much more difficult to achieve and maintain in a society of such limited interdependence, never developed.¹⁸

In a study of a southern Spanish town during a period of economic decline in the twentieth century, Julian Pitt-Rivers found the "community" of the peasant limited to the narrow horizons of the pueblo. Like Banfield's, Pitt-Rivers' study illustrates the correlation between the lack of mutual rights and obligations outside the elementary family on the one hand, and lack of recognized obligations among fellow townsmen on the other hand. Thus, the link to the State and the world beyond the pueblo was made by the wealthy and professionals, the ruling group, and poorer people insisted upon isolation. Outside ties were weakened when local ties seldom extended beyond the immediate family, and the Anarchist movement never became anything more than a congeries of disconnected local outbreaks.¹⁹

¹⁸Edward C. Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

¹⁹Julian Pitt-Rivers, The People of the Sierra (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 16; 24-34; 98-111.

Both Banfield and Pitt-Rivers have shown how social relationships at the local level have implications for a successful national movement of agrarian protest. When the isolated nuclear family is the basic cell in the social structure, any conception of the physical community as a communal group is weakened. The very idea of a community beyond a cluster of individuals living in close physical proximity is void of meaning. Finally, the absence of a corporate structure at the local level impedes the development of group identity and prevents the local unit from ever becoming one of the building blocks of a national movement.

The failure of collective action in the American South was due to the absence of many of these factors present in times of European peasant revolts. Poor whites and blacks in the last third of the nineteenth century had little to go on in a past that provided no model of justice and equality. Slavery and aristocracy would not do as the "golden age." Most blacks and poor whites had never known anything except subjugation and vast inequalities in wealth, and neither had their fathers or grandfathers. The vision of a more just society had to be provided in the form of charismatic leaders, if it was to supply the necessary incentive to collective action, because the utopias lay outside the experience of the participants.

Robin Hoods were scarce indeed in our period, however, and for very good reasons. Hobsbawm has pointed out how important it is that the incipient social bandit not be regarded as a criminal by local convention.²⁰ The difficulty was that in the group from which these leaders were most likely to rise, the poor themselves, poverty had become associated with crime, and vagabonds and vagrants could not be received as leaders. In Chapter VI we have seen how poor laws functioned as instruments of social control, defining the poor as members of an inferior status group. Definitions of this sort not only destroyed the legitimacy of the poor as leaders, but destroyed the legitimacy of conflict as well.

Definitions of the poor strictly in economic terms have implications far different from definitions that include social distinctions as well. In the first case where the poor are set apart as a class, their economic interests are antagonistic to those at a higher economic level. These distinctions promote cleavages that can lead to class conflict and ultimately threaten the entire social order. Poor laws grounded in economic differences alone have the potential of developing class consciousness, a definition that weakens their force as a mechanism of social control. In the second case, where

²⁰Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, 16-17.

the poor are set apart as a status group, the promotion of social as opposed to class distinctions assigns to them a definite and fixed status in the social order. Typically, their "place" in Virginia was among the most "undesirable" elements of society as poor laws defined the poor in a very discrediting way. This had important meaning for the social order. Laws that included ignominious and degrading assumptions regarding the poor drove those who were in this category economically closer to the social values of higher economic groups as they attempted to separate themselves from "undesirable" elements. Social distinctions, then, forged self-definitions on the part of the poor that were detrimental to class consciousness. The poor no longer identified their interests at the class level, and indeed may have sought to avoid being typed as a part of an economic class. Unwilling to be associated with "the poor" insofar as that means "loafers," "ne'er-do-wells," or "undesirables," the economically depressed became strangers unto themselves.

Thus, social welfare legislation in the South generally and in Virginia in particular may have been an important factor in weakening group identity as a prelude to collective action. Wealth had intrinsic merit and poverty intrinsic inferiority. The poor were not economically defined with formal rights in law,

politics, and society, but as members of an inferior "class."²¹ Resistance to economic inequality failed because that inequality was shrouded in an ideology that denied its existence, and order prevailed, not because inequality had disappeared, but because it had been legitimated by law. Under these conditions it is not surprising that although hatred and resentment of the poor grew, it never found collective expression.

Other pre-requisites were lacking as well. The Civil War, we have been lead to believe, upset the traditional order thereby creating a situation where leaders might have lead a depressed group into rebellion or revolution. Chapter III indicates that much of this thinking partakes more of myth than reality, however, at least in Louisa County. Land tax books of 1870 for Louisa show 1,357 landowners in the county. Given a total of about 3,300 families in that decade, only one in three families could have owned the land, even if every one of the owners constituted a family. Moreover, much of the land was still in the same hands in 1870 as in 1860. Politically, the war brought changes that gave the poor a greater voice in government because the southwestern section of the state and the

²¹Hobsbawm and Rude have shown how important formal or informal rights of the poor are as causes for rebellion because their violation leads to revolt. See Hobsbawm and Rude, Captain Swing, 65-66.

Shenandoah Valley counties, which had large numbers of poor whites, had enlarged representations in the Virginia Assembly. In the Virginia Tidewater and Piedmont, however, the large landholder reigned until economic changes gradually caused a transfer of power to political machines manipulated by lawyers and businessmen.²²

These were not the kind of major and prolonged social and political upheavals of the sort that lead to revolutions, however, and change took place gradually and within a context of continuity.

The kind of group solidarity that could have eventuated in a broader movement of agrarian protest was active in one element of the Louisa population during our period. As we have seen in Chapter V, ties in the black community extended beyond the boundaries of the immediate family and, although we cannot be sure, perhaps across local county lines as well. A strong sense of brotherhood prevailed within the black community, where concern for friends and neighbors was indicated by the willingness of many families to take outsiders and unemployed relatives into the household, even though they were often economic burdens. The black family served broader needs than those of the

²²George M. McFarland, "The Extension of Democracy in Virginia, 1850-1895," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1934).

immediate household, and ties beyond the individual family linked households together as units of a much larger whole. The same was not true within the white community, where the use of servant labor and the inclusion of only those who might make an economic contribution suggest the immediate interests of the nuclear family prevailed over other interests. It is hardly necessary to show why the greater group solidarity in the black community did not lead to revolution. The heritage of slavery and its aftermath left a tradition of accommodation to paternalistic authority, and unarmed, timid, and economically dependent blacks could not overcome this handicap. Under these conditions, group solidarity functioned, not as a force for collective action, but out of a need to survive.²³

Thus, the depressed members of the white population held the key to social change in Louisa, and their silence in the nineteenth century was a significant factor in the continuation of the status quo. Had they developed the same kind of group solidarity as the black community, obstacles like the lack of visions of a more just society, the absence of revolutionary leaders, or a static social order might have been overcome.

²³Eugene D. Genovese, "The Legacy of Slavery and the Roots of Black Nationalism," in Genovese, In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), pp. 129-157.

They failed to constitute themselves as a group, however, and resolved their difficulties in private ways.

Chapter IV has shown how the white dependent classes were the most fluid of all groups, frequently staying in the county less than a decade. The constant migration into and out of the county meant that the white poor were never the same group and the absence of any durable social relationships must have made the formation of a communal society nearly impossible. Moreover, the constant coming and going of people may have provided too little time for pent up resentment to reach the point where feelings of injustice might goad the victims into open rebellion.²⁴ For all this, the ruling group was thankful in spite of the fact that the missing revolution perpetuated conditions under which not even the rich prospered.

²⁴The footloose fluidity of nineteenth-century America is well documented. See Stephan Thernstrom and Peter R. Knights, "Men in Motion: Some Data and Speculations about Urban Population Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America," The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 1 (Autumn, 1970), 7-35; Merle Curti, et. al., The Making of an American Community; for the relationship between militancy and mobility see Stephan Thernstrom, "Working Class Social Mobility in Industrial America," in Melvin Richter, ed. Essays in Theory and History, An Approach to Social Sciences (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 221-238; and Thernstrom, "Urbanization, Migration, and Social Mobility in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed. Towards a New Past (New York: Random House, 1968), 158-175.

The lack of group solidarity among depressed whites, the absence of charismatic leaders and of utopian myths, and the burdens of caste coupled with the continuing power of the State are some, if not all, of the reasons why the people of Louisa never rebelled. We have stressed as a fundamental factor the concept of family obligation beyond household boundaries, as a necessary precondition to group solidarity, and as an ideal more likely to lead to the kinds of diffuse ties that ultimately result in a movement of agrarian protest. Certainly the list is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to be. Neither does it "prove" anything, perhaps, beyond my determination to push the question into other areas besides race.

If the reasons for the missing revolution lie just outside the borders of proof, the consequences of its absence do not. So much of the history of nineteenth-century Louisa is a story of the heritage of a concentration of wealth. For example, not until the turn of the twentieth century did Louisa have a hard-surfaced road, and most of the roads in 1891 consisted of nothing more than ditches and a series of mudholes around the edges of corn fields. In 1893 it required a half a day to make a six to seven mile round-trip to town.²⁵ Declining tax revenues on large unimproved holdings left county coffers nearly empty and provided

²⁵State Agricultural Report, (1891), pp. 156-157; (1893), p. 21.

little money for public services like roads and schools. Large acreages lay idle while entire families searched for a way to make a living. Even state officials noted this irony--in the 1895 agricultural report they commented that many Virginians were land poor, meaning many had too much of their wealth tied up in land.²⁶ The missing revolution was striking evidence of how successful the ruling group had been in resolving the contradiction between vast inequalities of wealth and an ordered society. Not even public abandonment provoked the poor to wrath, nor anything else beyond an endless search for the means, if not the right, to live.

²⁶State Agricultural Report, (1895), p. 5.

Appendix 2.1: Distribution of Louisa County
Population Cross-classified
by Sex and Age

<u>White</u>			
<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
1-10	14	14	28
11-18	9	9	18
19-24	5	6	11
25-34	6	6	12
35-44	5	5	10
45-54	4	5	9
55-64	4	3	7
65-74	2	1	3
75+	1	1	2

<u>Black</u>			
<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
1-10	17	18	34
11-18	11	11	22
19-24	5	6	11
25-34	4	5	9
35-44	4	4	8
45-54	4	4	8
55-64	3	2	5
65-74	1	1	2
75+	1	1	1

Appendix 2.2: Marriages in Age Categories
by Cohorts, Louisa County

White Females

<u>Cohorts by Decade of Marriage</u>	<u>Age Categories (% and Number)</u>			
	<u>15-20</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-35</u>
1850s	10 (4)	8 (3)	--	--
1860s	18 (7)	25(10)	27 (3)	29 (2)
1870s	23 (9)	18 (7)	9 (1)	--
1880s	18 (7)	28(11)	27 (3)	29 (2)
1890s	<u>31(12)</u>	<u>23 (9)</u>	<u>36 (4)</u>	<u>43 (3)</u>
(N)	39	40	11	7

White Males

<u>Cohorts by Decade of Marriage</u>	<u>Age Categories (% and Number)</u>			
	<u>15-20</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-35</u>
1850s	8 (1)	11 (5)	8 (2)	--
1860s	25 (3)	24(11)	29 (7)	13 (1)
1870s	8 (1)	13 (6)	21 (5)	25 (2)
1880s	17 (2)	24(11)	21 (5)	38 (3)
1890s	<u>42 (5)</u>	<u>27(12)</u>	<u>21 (5)</u>	<u>25 (2)</u>
(N)	12	45	24	8

Appendix 2.2 (Continued)

Black FemalesAge Categories (% and Number)

<u>Cohorts by Decade of Marriage</u>	<u>15-20</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-35</u>
1850s	4 (2)	--	--	--
1860s	25(12)	20 (5)	10 (1)	17 (1)
1870s	25(12)	16 (4)	40 (4)	--
1880s	31(15)	16 (4)	20 (2)	67 (4)
1890s	<u>15 (7)</u>	<u>48(12)</u>	<u>30 (3)</u>	<u>17 (1)</u>
(N)	48	25	10	6

Black MalesAge Categories (% and Number)

<u>Cohorts by Decade of Marriage</u>	<u>15-20</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-35</u>
1850s	9 (2)	--	5 (1)	--
1860s	23 (5)	29 (6)	29 (6)	21 (3)
1870s	27 (6)	10 (2)	14 (3)	21 (3)
1880s	27 (6)	24 (5)	24 (5)	43 (6)
1890s	<u>14 (3)</u>	<u>38 (8)</u>	<u>29 (6)</u>	<u>14 (2)</u>
(N)	22	21	21	14

Appendix 3.1: Index of Market Integration

The index of market integration was formed to measure the potential levels of market integration among farm owners. It was based upon the four variables of tobacco, labor, eggs, and butter. Three values were assigned to each of these four variables for each family. In the case of labor, if no outside labor had been used during the year, a value of 0 was assigned; for up to 1 laborer, a value of 1 was given; 2 was assigned for more than one laborer. For tobacco the categories were none raised; some raised, but not one of the principal crops; and tobacco as a principal crop. The same values were assigned to each of these categories as they were for butter and eggs. In the case of butter, the break points were arbitrarily set at 0-50 pounds, 51-100 pounds, and over 101 pounds. For eggs, the levels were 0-100 dozen, 101-199 dozen, and 200 or more dozen. This scheme assigns up to 50 pounds of butter and 100 dozen eggs to each family for possible consumption needs. Presumably, all produce over these limits might be sold.

The index of integration was computed for each farm-owning family by adding the values of these four variables. Those with a low index number would be those using little hired labor, raising little or no tobacco, and consuming most of the butter and eggs they produced.

Appendix 3.2: Determination of Farm Tenure

As Merle Curti discovered in The Making of An American Community (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), the identification of farm owners from the census records is a difficult if not impossible task. Not until 1880 was the census taker directed to record the tenure of the farmer. Yet even those listed as owners on the agricultural schedule included all persons in charge of a working farm, even if they were renters or absentee managers. In addition, many of those whose occupation was listed as "farmer" on the population schedule could not be located on the schedule of agriculture. Finally, a "farm" in the census definition excluded all those holding under three acres (See Curti, pp. 59-60; 455-456). Tax records used in conjunction with the census schedules, however, permit positive identification of actual owners, as long as two or more persons of identical names do not appear on the landbooks. When this happened in the case of my sample, I eliminated that person from any further consideration in the study. Thus, in order to qualify as an owner in this study, both of the following conditions had to be met: occupation must be given as "farmer" on the population schedule; and the person's name had to appear on the land tax book of Louisa County. Furthermore, since it

is obvious that the census meant to distinguish the "farmer without a farm" from both the owner and the laborer, in cases where the agricultural schedule called the individual an operator and where that same individual could not be located on the land records of the county, I have assumed that he was a tenant.

A comparison of the number listed by the agricultural schedule as owners with those actually found on the landbooks suggests the extent to which census records have exaggerated the number of farm owners. On the 1880 agricultural census schedule, 58 percent of the sample of white farmers (N=165) and 34 percent of the sample of black farmers (N=86) might be construed as owners. In fact, in that year only 40 percent of the white sample and 11 percent of the black sample were actually found on the local landbooks.

Appendix 3.3: Index of Economic Status

In constructing what I shall call the index of economic status, I included five variables, the values of which came from local land and personal property tax books: land, machinery, draft animals, livestock, and furniture. For each variable, the population was divided into fourths based on the assessed value of each individual's property. Since the index was formed in 1870 and since this year was used to establish the intervals for all other decades after 1870, the index is in terms of 1870 prices. A rank number between zero and three was assigned to each fourth, the number increasing as one's value of a particular resource increased:

Values (in dollars)
of

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Land</u>	<u>Machinery</u>	<u>Draft Animals</u>	<u>Livestock</u>	<u>Furniture</u>
0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1-472	1-10	1-75	1-75	1-50
2	473-2,150	11-50	76-200	76-200	51-100
3	Over 2,150	51-500	201-1,000	201-1,300	101-1,000

The index of economic status is a sum of the rank-figures for each variable. For example, if a family had a rank of 3 for land, 2 for machinery, 4 for livestock, 2 for draft animals, and 3 for furniture, their index number

would be 14. After an index was computed for each white family, the families were grouped into four quartiles (or as close as possible): lower quartile, second quartile, third quartile, and an upper quartile. This ranking of white families became a standard that formed the basis of the ranking of black families

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