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Slaveholders and slaves in Savannah's 1860 census

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ABSTRACT: This article re-examines the 1860 census for Savannah Georgia. It melds the free and slave census to gain insights into slave ownership, owners' occupations and makes tentative suggestions as to slave occupations. It argues that the concentration of slaveholding among a minority of locally born residents explains both the tensions evident in white society during the 1850s and actions taken to ease them. It also demonstrates that the widely used data for the number of urban slaves in Savannah overstates the actual number by *c*. 20 per cent. The census thus complicates our understanding of the vitality of late antebellum urban slavery.

The 1860 federal census is an oddly under-utilized, and often misunderstood, resource for the study of slavery in the southern United States. During the summer and autumn of that year, census enumerators visited each household recording in one schedule the number of free inhabitants, their names, age, gender, race, occupation, place of birth as well as an estimate of the value of the real and personal estate they owned. Simultaneously, they recorded, in a separate schedule, the age, gender and race (whether 'black' or 'mulatto') for each enslaved person. These schedules have been used by historians to document the growth of segments of the population, particularly immigrants, or to demonstrate the 'decline' or otherwise of urban enslavement.[1] Rarely, however, have the two schedules been used together, and yet doing so can be both rewarding and informative. Understanding where slaveholders and slaves lived provides information on social geography. Knowing who slaveholders were, and what they did, gives us clues as to what slaves did, and in the absence of a occupational census of slaves this is a valuable insight into the experiences of the enslaved. Understanding who owned slaves, and who

[1] The most notable to use the census in this manner are Richard Wade who argued that slavery was 'disintegrating' in cities by 1860, and Claudia Goldin who conversely argued that the 'decline' of slavery in cities was more due to a rapid rise in white populations than an actual decline in urban slave populations. R.C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820–1860* (Oxford, 1964), 3; C.D. Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820–1860: A Quantitative History* (Chicago, 1976).

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did not, also helps to deepen our understanding of the pervasiveness of the 'peculiar institution' in the American South. This article offers a detailed analysis of the census data for Savannah in 1860 before highlighting the ways that the census complicates and challenges existing interpretations of the nature of antebellum urban slavery.

Southern slavery was noted for its variety, indeed its flexibility as a method of organizing labour helped it to persist for so long.[2] While the vast majority of enslaved people worked on rural plantations producing staple crops (sugar, cotton, tobacco and rice) for export, agricultural labour was never the sole occupation for slaves. On many plantations, skilled slaves managed the complex refining process for sugar, the ginning of cotton, or oversaw the engineering work necessary for the flooding and draining of rice fields.[3] Moreover, the domestic army of cooks, maids, valets, gardeners and carriage drivers that ensured the smooth running of the 'big house' was drawn from the enslaved population.[4] Away from plantations, slaves worked in industries such as iron foundries and mills, in mines, on canals and railroads and more than 100,000 enslaved people lived in southern cities, the largest of which were New Orleans, Charleston, Richmond, Mobile, Memphis and Savannah.[5]

Urban slavery differed from rural slavery in a number of important ways. On the whole, city slaves were better fed, housed and dressed than their rural counterparts. Gaunt, tatty slaves reflected badly on the wealth and paternalism of the master and in the city, unlike on the plantation, they would be visible to wider society. Owners' concerns about their reputation thus ensured that city slaves usually enjoyed a higher standard of living than those resident on plantations. In the opinion of ex-slave Charles Ball, Savannah's enslaved people were 'comfortably dressed, and appeared to live well' especially when contrasted with his own experience on an upcountry cotton plantation.[6] City slaves often had greater freedom of movement than rural slaves since they were employed to move goods around the city, to deliver messages and to shop at the regular markets. They also consequently had more opportunities to interact with other enslaved people, with free black people (an almost entirely urban-based segment of southern society), and with non-slaveholding whites who

[2] For some indication of the variety of occupations done by the enslaved, see R.L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715–1865* (Westport, 1979); and C. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Masters and Slaves at Buffalo Forge* (New York, 1994).

[3] On the involvement of enslaved people in the management of water flows on rice plantations, see S.M. Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

[4] See E. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988)

[5] Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 12. Goldin counts 139,000 slaves living in incorporated towns and cities with populations over 2,500. The best general overview of urban slavery remains Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*.

[6] C. Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man* (New York, 1837), 369.

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usually constituted the largest segment of the urban population.[7] Some enslaved people were even permitted to hire their own time. Charles Ball 'saw many black men, who were slaves, and who yet acted as freemen so far, that they went out to work, where and with whom they pleased, received their own wages, and provided their own subsistence; but were obliged to pay a certain sum at the end of each week to their masters'.[8] The lack of stringent oversight of slaves was a characteristic feature of urban slavery, not because masters were unconcerned about the activities of their slaves, far from it, but because masters were effectively powerless to prevent it. Imprisoning the enslaved within the master's home would have reduced their usefulness significantly, and thus owners had to tolerate a degree of independence for their slaves and trust to the city watch to catch and punish those who over-stepped the mark too far.[9]

This article concentrates on Savannah, Georgia, the sixth largest southern city in 1860. With a total population of 22,302 in 1860 Savannah was only half the size of Charleston, 100 miles to the north in South Carolina, and far smaller than New Orleans, but was about the same size as Memphis and noticeably larger than Nashville or Norfolk.[10] As Georgia's largest port, and with excellent rail connections with the interior, Savannah was the premier cotton port on the Atlantic coast. In 1859–60, the total value of exports from Savannah exceeded $18 million, equivalent to more than half a billion dollars today.[11] Savannah's white population more than doubled between 1840 and 1860, fuelled by large-scale Irish, German and other European immigration. The enslaved population grew more slowly, from 4,694 in 1840 to 7,712 in 1860. As a proportion of the whole population, the black population fell from 46 per cent in 1850 to 38 per cent in 1860, while the enslaved declined from about 40 per cent to nearer 35 per cent over same period, though as we will see, there are reasons to question these figures.[12]

Out of a free population of 14,590 in 1860, just 976 individuals (6.7 per cent) were listed as slaveholders in the slave schedule, not counting businesses (9) or those who were not found in the Chatham County

[7] The best examinations of black life in Savannah are B. Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens, GA, 1995); and W.B. Johnson, *Black Savannah, 1788–1864* (Fayetteville, AR, 1996). On the interaction of the enslaved with poor whites, see T.J. Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1860* (Athens, GA, 2001). Among the several works that stress the opportunities open to urban bondsmen that were denied rural slaves, see D.R. Egerton, 'Slaves to the marketplace: economic liberty and black rebelliousness in the Atlantic world', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26 (2006), 617–39.

[8] Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 368.

[9] For a detailed study of the policing regime in Richmond, Virginia, see J. Campbell, *Slavery on Trial: Race, Class, and Criminal Justice in Antebellum Richmond, Virginia* (Gainesville, 2007).

[10] Data on the relative sizes of populations can be found in Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 52.

[11] W.J. Fraser, *Savannah in the Old South* (Athens, GA, 2003), 348.

[12] Data on 1840 was included in J. Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah* (Savannah, 1848), 13. All population data cited regarding the 1860 census comes from the manuscript slave and free schedules for Chatham County, Georgia.

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census (33) being either temporarily absent, or permanently resident in a neighbouring county. This does not give an accurate picture of slaveholding in the city since those belonging to a family that owned slaves would all have benefited from enslaved labour, not just the titular owner. The census enumerators helpfully counted the number of families in Savannah at 2,695 – defining a family as a household unit not just a blood relationship. Thus, an elderly female slaveowner who resided with her son or son-in-law was part of his household unit. Both might have owned slaves but the household unit has only been counted once. Of the 2,695 household units in Savannah in 1860, 826 (30.7 per cent) owned slaves. This methodology differs from that employed by Claudia Goldin whose quantitative study of urban slavery has helped to define the parameters of the field since the 1970s. Goldin assumed that only adult white males had direction of slave labour and calculated that 24 per cent of Savannah's white men aged over 19 had use of slaves.[13] Goldin ignores the fact that 29.7 per cent of Savannah's slaveholders were women, and a significant proportion of them lived alone or in all-female households. I believe the figure of 30.7 per cent of households having access to enslaved labour is a more accurate indicator of the pervasiveness of slavery in the city, and of course it means that 69.3 per cent of households did not own slaves. Some of those households might have made use of hired slave labour, and individual whites might have been employed in occupations involving the direction of enslaved workers, but ultimately they were not able to lay claim to the title of 'slaveowner'. Employers, hirers and overseers did not have the same right of life and death over enslaved people enjoyed by owners, and hired slaves always had recourse to their owner if they felt they were mistreated.[14]

There was considerable variation in the proportion of households owning slaves in the four census districts that made up Savannah, reflecting the social geography of the city. The 1st district, encompassing all the city west of West Broad Street and including the densely populated Oglethorpe Ward that included Yamacraw as well as the Central Railroad Depot, had the largest free population (4,713), and the largest number of household units (1,006), but the smallest proportion of slaveholding households (16.4 per cent). Irish and other European immigrants arriving during the first half of the nineteenth century had tended to congregate here, attracted by low-cost housing, and were more likely to earn their living via manual labour. Few had the resources to purchase slaves; indeed, the mean wealth owned by each family in this district was about $4,000, and plenty of households had no measurable real or personal estate. The mean wealth of Savannah's slaveholders, by contrast, exceeded $30,000. The 2nd district, from West Broad Street to Barnard Street, saw the proportion of

[13] Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 25.
[14] See J.D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 105–60.

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slaveholding families climb to 39.1 per cent. The 3rd district, however, was by far the wealthiest part of the city with mean wealth approaching $40,000. Encompassing the heart of the central business district from Barnard Street in the west to Abercorn Street in the east, and from the wharves on Bay Street to the southern boundary via the newly laid squares near Forsyth Park, this part of Savannah was where the elite chose to live. The proportion of slaveholding families peaked here at 57 per cent. The 4th and last district of the city from Abercorn Street eastward also included the poor eastern suburbs of Trustees' Gardens and Gilmerville. The proportion of slaveholding families fell to 24.3 per cent in this district.

Although Savannah was a polyglot society, containing a high proportion of immigrants, the census demonstrates that slaveholding overwhelmingly remained something enjoyed by the southern-born.[15] Just under a quarter of Savannah's slaveholders were born in Savannah itself, and another 5 per cent were born in Chatham County that surrounded the city. A further 21 per cent were born elsewhere in Georgia, often in the counties adjacent to Chatham County, while 18 per cent came from other southern states, most frequently from neighbouring South Carolina. In total, 50 per cent of Savannah's slaveholders were born in Georgia, and 69 per cent were born in the South. These were people who had been born into a society where racial slavery was a normal part of life, and most probably a large proportion of the slaveholders in 1860 had inherited enslaved property at some point. Mary Mayer, a 17-year-old, owned 21 slaves in 1860 valued at $11,000, and most likely she had been given them or inherited them. Mayer was one of the youngest slaveholders in Savannah in 1860 as personal wealth tended to be concentrated among older residents. The average age of Savannah's slaveholders was 43.

Those born in the northern states accounted for 12 per cent of slaveholders, and some of those, such as William Gibbons, had long associations with Savannah and family roots in the area that stretched back to the eighteenth century. Immigrants from Europe, a majority (51.1 per cent) of adult white males, accounted for just 13 per cent of slaveholders. The concentration of slaveholding among the southern-born was vastly disproportionate to their actual numbers since only a third (33.4 per cent) of adult white males in Savannah in 1860 were southern-born.[16] The data shows just how hard it was for newly arrived immigrants to integrate into southern society and to save sufficient capital

[15] Using different methodology, Dennis Rousey has shown that 53% of southern-born men aged over 30 resident in Savannah in 1850 owned slaves compared to 17% of comparable immigrants. D.C. Rousey, 'Friends and foes of slavery: foreigners and northerners in the Old South', *Journal of Social History*, 35 (2001), 375.

[16] D.C. Rousey, 'From whence they came to Savannah: the origins of an urban population in the Old South', *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 79 (1995), 312. Irish immigrants alone constituted 31.8% of the adult white population.

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to purchase a slave.[17] It is also an indication that the locally born were disproportionately influential since they controlled far more personal wealth than immigrants. Only by marrying the slave and free census schedules does this discrepancy come to light.

The members of the city council during 1860 typify this concentration of power among the locally born. The 14 men elected in October 1859 included 7 born in Savannah, 3 born in South Carolina and 1 in Florida. The 3 'outsiders' born in societies without slavery were Connecticut-born lumber merchant John F. Wheaton who had been in Savannah for at least three years as his youngest child was born in the city; Englishman Robert Lachlison who had been in the city for at least 20 years, and Scotsman William M. Davidson. All councilmen owned slaves, and their mean wealth was more than $47,000.[18] Locally born slaveholders also occupied the positions of judge of the Inferior and Superior Courts, president of the Planter's Bank, president of the Marine Bank, city tax collector, sheriff, city jailor, and customs inspector.

The slave schedule permits a ready calculation to be made regarding average slaveholding size, but it is important to exercise caution when doing this. A simple arithmetic mean, dividing the number of slaves by the number of slaveholders yields the result of 7.9 slaves. This number rises to 9.3 slaves per slaveholding family. Neither number is an accurate reflection of typical slaveholding since they are skewed by a small number of very large slaveholdings. More accurate is the median slaveholding which was 4 and perhaps even more indicative is the mode, which was just 1. More than half of Savannah's slaveholders owned fewer than 5 slaves, and most frequently they owned 1.

The free schedule listed occupations for about three-quarters of Savannah's slaveholders, listed in Table 1.[19] Unsurprisingly, the most numerous (22.2 per cent) were trade merchants since Savannah was Georgia's largest port and indeed the largest exporter of cotton on the Atlantic coast. Merchants were needed to process the shipments from the interior, and ensure the right cotton was loaded onto the correct ship heading for the north or for Europe. Successful merchants made a great deal of money and invested some of this capital in enslaved labour. The wealthiest individual in Savannah was merchant Edward Padelford Sr, who was worth $460,000 according to the census (equivalent to roughly $12 million today). His wealth was not especially tied up in enslaved property, however, as he owned just eight slaves.

The second largest group of Savannah's slaveholders (21.9 per cent) can be classed as holding administrative positions. This is a diverse

[17] At a large sale of slaves in Savannah in March 1859, prime adult males fetched $1,600. *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 Mar. 1859.

[18] The list of those elected appears in the *Savannah Morning News*, 18 Oct. 1859.

[19] Goldin's study of the occupations of Savannah's slaveholders is based on sampling every eighth page of the slave census; my own analysis includes every individual listed in the slave census.

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Table 1: *Occupations of Savannah slaveholders, 1860*

Job category	No. of individuals	% of total
Administrative	165	21.97
Agricultural	48	6.39
Artisanal	86	11.45
Banking	30	3.99
Service	21	2.80
Industrial	29	3.86
Professional	43	5.73
Retail	110	14.65
Security	13	1.73
Trade	167	22.24
Transportation	39	5.19
Total	751	100

Source: Data taken from the Free and Slave Schedules of the 1860 Federal Census for Chatham County, Georgia. Microfilm, Georgia Archives.

Table 2: *Estimated occupations of Savannah's slaves*

Occupation	Total no. of slaves	%	Adult males	Adult females
Agricultural	1,463	19.02	505	542
Artisan	287	3.73	105	95
Domestic	3,649	47.43	931	1,411
Industrial	131	1.70	59	38
Retail	1,416	18.41	507	448
Transportation	270	3.51	118	69
Unknown	496	6.45	137	156
Totals	7,712		2,362	2,759

Note: Adult slaves are those over 15.
Source: Data taken from the Free and Slave Schedules of the 1860 Federal Census for Chatham County, Georgia. Microfilm, Georgia Archives.

category that included clerks, bookkeepers, lawyers, judges, custom officials, teachers and tax collectors. Occupations such as these are to be expected in a city that was home to superior and inferior courts and two tiers of local government (city and county). The wealthiest, Noah Knapp, judge of the inferior court, was worth more than $200,000 according to the census, but others such as teacher James Ballough, who owned one 50-year-old female slave, had a personal estate estimated at just $500.

Those employed in the retail sector comprised 14.6 per cent of slaveholders. This category includes anyone who owned a shop of some sort including grocers and those selling dry goods, boots, clothing, liquor,

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cigars, milk, jewellery, books and furniture. As with all towns, Savannah had the critical mass of population that made such shops viable and attracted people from surrounding counties and neighbouring South Carolina as a result. One of the wealthiest in this sector, worth more than $95,000, was John M. Cooper, 'dealer in books and stationery', and who also printed books. More immigrants than usual, particularly grocers, can be found among slaveholders in the retail sector. Irish-born grocer and dry-goods merchant James McIntire, worth $80,000, was one of the richest, though he had evidently been in Savannah some time as all his seven children, the oldest of whom was 13, had been born in the city.

While 11 per cent of slaveholders gave what can be termed an artisanal occupation they clearly were the most experienced and qualified in their trades. Most described themselves as a 'master builder, 'master mason', 'master carpenter' or 'master blacksmith' in recognition of their higher status. These individuals quite possibly managed a number of employees or apprentices, and were able to charge premium rates for top quality work. Master builder George Willett owned 18 slaves and had a total wealth calculated at nearly $100,000.

Smaller numbers (each under 7 per cent) of slaveholders worked in banking, in service occupations (such as managing boarding houses or hotels), in the medical or religious professions, in transportation (either for the railroads or as waggoners or mariners), and in the security business (as policemen or jailors). In contrast to several other southern cities, Richmond being one obvious example, only 3.8 per cent of Savannah's slaveholders had an industrial occupation, an indication that there were comparatively few steam presses, rice mills and foundries in the city.[20]

A small but significant number of slaveholders gave their occupation as farmer or planter. While it is easy to assume that some of these individuals were resident in town periodically but owned a plantation elsewhere, the reality is a little more complex and needs to be explained. Census enumerators split Chatham County into seven districts. Districts 1–4 contained the city of Savannah. District 6 (there was no district 5) was Cherokee Hill, or the rest of the county to the west and north-west. District 7 was Ogeechee, the rest of the county southwards to the Ogeechee River. District 8 was White Bluff, the rest of the county to the east, including several sea islands. Districts 1 and 4, however, did contain some agricultural land, and therefore residents could accurately describe themselves as planters. John Hover, owner of part of Vale Royal plantation that abutted the city to the west, was included in the census for the 1st district. George and Thomas Scriven, owners of Brewton Hill just to the east of the city, were included in the 4th district, as was Robert Habersham, owner of Causton's Bluff.[21]

[20] Goldin calculates that 53.9% of Richmond's adult white males were employed in manufacturing. Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 26.

[21] M. Granger (ed.), *Savannah River Plantations*, 2nd edn (Savannah, 1997), 471, 47–52.

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The classification of owners' occupations permits an estimate to be made of the employments of Savannah's enslaved population. There was no official attempt to undertake an occupational census of the enslaved and these figures are therefore to a significant degree conjectural and should be taken as indicative rather than literal. I have based my calculations on experience and on typical patterns of slave ownership. For instance, where an owner held only small numbers of slaves, most of whom were female, the overriding assumption was that these were domestic slaves. Where owners held larger numbers of slaves, more than could reasonably used in a domestic capacity, and where the occupation of the owner was known, then an assumption was made that the slaves were being used in relation to their business. The methodology probably undercounts domestic slaves, since it was likely that when a master owned large numbers of slaves a portion were actually used for domestic service. Conversely, as Jacqueline Jones has noted, domestic slaves were also utilized in other capacities according to the needs of the owner, so perhaps the bias is, to some extent, self-correcting.[22] The data is also largely silent on the extent of slave-hiring. Some slaveholders were noted in the census as residing in different counties, meaning that their slaves resident in Savannah were being hired by someone else and some instances are discussed below. The census does not, however, designate the number of slaves being hired between masters resident in the same city. We know from other sources that hiring-out by masters, and self-hire by the enslaved, was certainly happening in Savannah, but the census does not permit this to be quantified.[23] Nevertheless, even with these caveats, the estimated occupations for Savannah's slaves are illuminating.

As one might expect, given that the median slaveholding was 4 and the mode only 1, nearly half of Savannah's slaves were working in a domestic capacity. Women were cooks, nurserymaids and chambermaids, while men were valets, gardeners and carriage drivers. If there was only one slave in the household, then inevitably the amount they could do was limited and perhaps the white family did certain things for themselves, or hired others for specific tasks. Families owning many slaves had every whim catered for, though, given the modest size of many town houses when compared with plantation homes, it is hard to see more than 10 domestic slaves being usefully employed. Adult women outnumbered men in domestic occupations by about 50 per cent and a significant number of children under 15 years old, perhaps as many as 1,000, also worked domestically tending fires, caring for children and running errands.[24] Not all slaves working in a domestic capacity were in a familial environment. William

[22] J. Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*, 2nd edn (New York, 2010), 21.

[23] For more on slave hire, see Johnson, *Black Savannah*, 95–7; and Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 64–6.

[24] On the preference of owners to use female slaves as domestics and the popularity of children as suitable replacements see Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 21–3.

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H. Wiltberger, for instance, owned the Pulaski Hotel and his 50 slaves were almost certainly cleaning rooms, caring for visitors' horses and preparing meals. Even smaller establishments, such as the City Hotel managed by Johanna Cass, had five slaves working alongside three young Irish women as chambermaids. Outside of the household, domestic slaves undertook errands such as delivering messages, visiting the market for fresh food, or collecting parcels. It was during these times that urban slaves could meet other enslaved people, exchange news, visit family and friends, attend worship or clandestinely visit a barroom. In essence, Savannah's slaves were no different from those of many other southern cities in this regard.[25] But if only about half of the enslaved worked in a domestic capacity what did the rest do?

The most surprising statistic to emerge from this estimate of the occupations of Savannah's slaves is that nearly 20 per cent were agricultural labourers. This estimate, directly contradictory to Claudia Goldin's assertion that the number of slaves in Savannah engaged in agricultural work was 'trivial', is based on a number of factors: occupation of owner; size of slaveholding; and sometimes location in the census.[26] Naturally, slaveholders classifying themselves as a planter or farmer were more likely to be using slaves as agricultural labourers while those owning large numbers of slaves were also probably using them in an agricultural capacity, since it was highly unlikely that anyone could meaningfully use more than 10 slaves in a domestic environment. Where family members, particularly wives, mothers and sisters, resided with a planter but had a substantial slaveholding of their own, it was assumed that these slaves were also field slaves. Location in the manuscript census was also indicative of agricultural use since slaves seemed to have been counted where they were found by the enumerator. Normally, there is a close correlation in the order that names were listed in the free and slave schedules, but occasionally names of owners in the slave schedule appear out of sequence. Amos Bradley, for example, described himself as a planter but only owned 1 slave. His name in the slave schedule is immediately followed by 6 other people, who together owned a further 13 slaves. Of these slaveholders, 4 were from other counties while the others lived elsewhere in the city. The obvious explanation is that these slaves were hired by Bradley for agricultural work and were listed by the census enumerator where he found them working.

The largest slaveholder in Savannah was planter George P. Scriven with exactly 200 bondpeople. He farmed Brewton Hill just to the east of the city, but resided with his brother, Thomas P. Scriven, who owned a further 148 slaves. While Thomas Scriven gave his occupation as 'physician', it is

[25] An 1848 census of Charleston that attempted a survey of enslaved occupations concluded that 87.6% of women and 55.7% of men worked in a domestic capacity. *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, for the Year 1848* (Charleston, 1849), 34.

[26] Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 22.

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almost certain that his 148 slaves were working alongside both his brother's 200 slaves and a further 156 slaves that were part of the estate of their father James P. Scriven who had died in 1859. The Scrivens were included as part of the 4th district in the 1860 census, as was Robert Habersham, owner of Causton's Bluff adjacent to Brewton Hall. Together, these planters owned 559 slaves. John Hover's 38 slaves working at Vale Royal plantation were included in the census for the 1st district.[27]

I estimate that about 18 per cent of Savannah's slaves were working in the retail sector, which is not to suggest they were actually selling goods to customers but instead they were most likely delivering purchased goods from one place to another or processing raw materials. Lumber merchant James Hines owned 41 slaves, and most likely used them to cut and transport timber to wherever it was needed. He was 1 of 5 lumber merchants to own more than 10 slaves. Cattle dealer James Sloan owned 23 slaves, and would probably have used them to feed and control his livestock. Butcher William H. Davis owned 13 slaves and perhaps set them on the messy job of preparing carcasses to be cut into saleable pieces. Ship chandler Joseph Claghorn would no doubt have used his 12 slaves to deliver supplies from his warehouses to ships docked at the city wharves. Savannah had a diverse economy that supported a large number of retail outlets. The census suggests that the enslaved worked at many of them.

Domestic, agricultural and retail work together account for about 85 per cent of Savannah's slaves. Fewer than 4 per cent were working in what I classify as the artisanal trades of carpenter, blacksmith, builder, shipwright and seamstress. Some of these slaves might have actually undertaken skilled or semi-skilled work, but as with slaves in the retail business, it is more likely that these slaves were used to fetch and carry goods and materials. A similar number of slaves were involved in the transportation sector. Some worked on river boats, but the vast majority were employed by either the Central Railroad or the Savannah, Albany and Gulf Railroad. The former ran to Macon and South Carolina while the latter ran south to Florida. The Central Railroad Company itself owned 53 slaves (down from 122 owned in 1850 when the railroad depot was being constructed), but most slaves seem to have been owned by those working on the railroad as conductors, superintendents or engineers. Slaves would have been used to do the heavy, dirty work of maintaining locomotives in working condition, while ensuring supplies of coal and water were always available. No doubt they also unloaded the cotton as it came from the interior and ensured it made its way to the wharves for loading onto ships. There is some evidence that black workers in Savannah were used as strike breakers. An advert in the *Daily Morning News* in 1856 sought up to 200 black workers to load and unload vessels at the wharves in response to a strike by white workers for higher wages.[28]

[27] Granger, ed., *Savannah River Plantations*, 471, 47–52.
[28] *Daily Morning News*, 5 Dec. 1856.

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Table 3: *Residence of Savannah's population*

	Free popn 1860	Free popn 1848	Slaves 1860	Slaves 1848
1st district	4,713	1,394	1,330	1,167
2nd district	2,381	2,846	1,576	1,923
3rd district	3,497	1,933	3,008	1,417
4th district	3,999	1,713	1,800	1,179
Total	14,590	7,886	7,714	5,686

Source: Data taken from Joseph Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah* (Savannah: Edward C. Councell, 1848), and the Free and Slave Schedules of the 1860 Federal Census for Chatham County, Georgia. Microfilm, Georgia Archives.

Fewer than 2 per cent of adult slaves were working in industrial occupations in one of Savannah's saw mills, rice mills, cotton presses, or in iron foundries. Although as one might expect male slaves significantly outnumbered female slaves in this category, it was perhaps unusual to employ female slaves in industry at all. Yet another source confirms the result: in 1848, Bancroft had recorded that the Upper Steam Rice Mill in Oglethorpe Ward employed 50 black women, though their precise occupations at the mill went unreported.[29] It is likely that hired slaves, who were impossible to enumerate accurately, augmented the enslaved labour used in Savannah's industrial sites since such practices were common elsewhere.[30] Even if hired slaves doubled the number of enslaved people in industrial occupations, the fact remains that Savannah's industrial sector was small in comparison to cities in Virginia. Nearly 3,400 slaves worked in tobacco factories in Richmond and a further 450 worked at the city's Tredegar Iron Works.[31]

As the 1860 census divided Savannah into four districts, it is possible to map where the free and enslaved populations resided. As Table 3 demonstrates, most white people lived on the fringes of the city, in Yamacraw and Robertsville in the west, and Trustees Gardens and Gilmerville in the east. The largest enslaved population, however, was in the central 3rd district, containing the wealthiest homes of the elite.

There is some reason to be suspicious of these figures, particularly relating to slave residency since it almost certainly does not take into account slaves who lived apart from their masters. In 1848, Joseph Bancroft undertook a census of the city on behalf of the city council and resolved to count

[29] Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah*, 34. In 1848, Bancroft counted 4 cotton presses, 2 rice mills, 7 saw mills, 3 steam works and 2 iron foundries in the city.
[30] Fraser, *Savannah in the Old South*, 248–51; R.S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (Oxford, 1970), 128–45; Dew, *Bond of Iron*, 32–40, 67–70.
[31] Starobin, *Industrial Slavery*, 15–16.

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the slave population in their places of abode, without recourse to owners. Some objections may attend this mode, but under the system so much in vogue at the present time of permitting this class of our population to live in streets and lanes by themselves, it has proved more reliable than the old system, of depending upon owners for returns.[32]

Bancroft's census was based on each city ward, not entirely coterminous with the census districts, but a rough comparison can still be made. Bancroft's census found most slaves living in the second district containing Currytown with plenty of cheap rented housing. It seems possible therefore that the 1860 census probably over-counted the number of slaves living in the central 3rd district.

An indication that Bancroft was possibly correct in locating a sizeable population of enslaved people away from their owners can also be found in the census. One column in the slave schedule was the number of 'negro houses' but for roughly two-thirds of slaveholders this was left blank. This can be explained in two ways: either slaves were not resident with their owner or slaves resided in the main residence with the white family in attic bedrooms or cellars. There is insufficient information in the census to state which was truly the case. For those who did list 'negro houses' the mean occupancy was four slaves per house (2.5 adults, 1.5 children).

Savannah's enslaved population was certainly diverse. About a third were children aged under 15, but only 53 children were held in bondage without an adult slave present to teach them the best ways to survive enslavement.[33] Of slaveholders, 15 per cent owned no adult women, but twice as many owned no adult men – an indication that women were generally preferred as domestic servants. Yet, fully half of all slaveholding households contained enslaved men, women and children, and from the way the census was compiled it can be inferred that family life was certainly possible since adults and children were often grouped together in family units on the slave schedule. Overall, as was common in many other cities, enslaved adult women outnumbered enslaved adult men in Savannah but not massively so – 53 per cent to 47 per cent.[34]

A detailed examination of Savannah's 1860 census therefore leads to several important conclusions for the historian of urban slavery. First, it shows that fewer than a third of white citizens directed the labour of slaves, and that slaveholding was concentrated among locally born, older residents. This meant that a large part of the white population, specifically the younger immigrant part, were not directly involved in the

[32] Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah*, 3.

[33] On this aspect of slave childhood, see W. King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America* (Indianapolis, 1995), 67–74; and M.J. Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 75–130.

[34] Baltimore, Washington and St Louis had far more enslaved women than men, while Richmond was one of the few to have a male majority due to the large numbers of men in industrial occupations. Charleston's gender ratio was similar to Savannah's. All data is from Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 66.

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slave economy. Before 1850, the number and proportion of poor white immigrants had remained fairly stable. While immigrants had always been an important segment of white society, their numbers had generally grown in concert with the overall rise in the city's population. Between 1850 and 1860, that dynamic clearly changed and the near doubling of the white population within a decade, as the census demonstrates, was driven almost entirely by immigration from Europe. For the elite, this was a matter of concern since a sizeable portion of the white population had no real incentive to participate in the active policing of slave behaviour, and indeed many were happy to sell alcohol and other items to slaves in contravention of city and state laws.[35]

The census therefore secondarily exposes the fault lines in Savannah's society, and helps to explain the measures taken by the elite during the 1850s to bridge them. Poor white immigrants who had not grown up in a society based on racial slavery were clearly not personally invested in the maintenance of strict boundaries between free and slave. To them, a drunk slave was the master's problem, not society's problem, and the profit that could result was far more relevant and important than any notional white solidarity. Many poorer whites discovered that merely having white skin was insufficient to feed and house their families. As I have argued elsewhere, it was this fear that poor whites might make common cause with the enslaved population that persuaded elites to support schemes of public education in the city whereby all white children would receive instruction in the southern mode of living.[36] It is no coincidence that the first public schools in the city opened in 1855, catering for the rapidly growing white population. Mayor Charles Colcock Jones reported in 1861 that 'advantages are thereby afforded to the poor of our city, for acquiring the elementary principles of a common school education, which would not be, in many instances, otherwise enjoyed ... Educational expenditures realize always an abundant harvest, in the increased intelligence and good order of the community.'[37]

Other racial privileges were also trumpeted, such as the franchise for all adult white males, regardless of ethnic origin or wealth, while welfare opportunities for the most needy were expanded. The elite male membership of the Union Society in Savannah for example, which managed the Bethesda Orphanage for Boys, doubled during the 1850s, and the society's assets increased by more than $10,000. The extra money paid for better facilities and for more orphan boys to be educated and cared for. One 10-year-old recipient of this benevolence told his benefactors: 'We will not forget the fealty we owe our generous South.'[38] Expanded provision

[35] See T. Lockley, 'Trading encounters between non-elite whites and African Americans in Savannah, 1790–1860', *Journal of Southern History*, 66 (2000), 25–48.
[36] T. Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville, 2007), 197–8.
[37] *Report of Charles C. Jones, Jr., Mayor, of the City of Savannah for the Year Ending September 30, 1861* (Savannah, 1861), 21.
[38] Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*, 149.

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for poor whites during the 1850s clearly helped to foster a sense of white solidarity in a racially divided society.

The third important conclusion from the census concerns the numbers of slaves in the city. The presence of a large number of field slaves in Savannah's slave schedule for 1860 considerably inflates the number of slaves who supposedly lived there. All previous studies of Savannah's enslaved population have simply counted up the slaves in the first four districts from the 1860 census and presented them as urban dwellers. As my data demonstrates, this is a false conclusion and overstates the number of slaves in the city by roughly 20 per cent. These 1,463 field slaves were not 'urban slaves' in the sense that historians have come to accept. While they might have been able to visit the city more easily than those further afield, in reality they would have been restricted to clandestine evening and weekend sojourns. They did not have the relative freedoms to travel around the city, to visit and mingle on a daily basis with other slaves, free blacks and poor whites, or to drink regularly in secret establishments. Perhaps a new category of 'semi-urban' needs to be created to account for slaves who lived within a five mile radius of a city. In Savannah's case, the semi-urban slave population was perhaps as large as the actual urban population, since it would encompass some of the 7,095 enslaved people in Chatham County's census districts 6, 7 and 8 as well as a portion of the 9,794 people enslaved in St Peter's Parish, Beaufort District, South Carolina. But, in the end, those enslaved on nearby rice plantations cannot be called 'urban slaves' without rendering the definition meaningless.[39]

It is not possible to discern whether this error in calculating the size of Savannah's urban enslaved population only occurred in 1860, or if it had happened before. The slave schedule for 1850 did not split Chatham County into separate districts so the city cannot easily be disaggregated from the surrounding county. It is clear that the enumerators travelled from one end of the county to the other, since the pattern from studying the slave schedule is a series of large slaveholdings typical of plantations, followed by smaller slaveholdings typical of the city, and then large slaveholdings again. It is not possible to mark a clear distinction between these two patterns, however, as there are also pages with middle-sized slaveholdings which could be either the city or the rural county. Using alternative quantitative sources such as city directories to assess residency in 1850 might work for male slaveholders but not for female slaveholders who are generally underrepresented in city directories. The widely cited figure for Savannah's enslaved population in 1850 is 6,231, but it is far from clear how that figure has been calculated given the problem outlined above.[40] Bancroft's city census for 1848 counted 5,686 enslaved people

[39] For a detailed analysis of black life on Argyle Island, very close to Savannah, see W. Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Oxford, 1996).
[40] Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 52.

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resident in the city, 545 fewer than the reported figure for the 1850 census and is, I believe, a better representation of the actual population.

Ensuring that the count of enslaved people in Savannah is accurate is important because it affects our understanding of the strength of the system of slavery in the city. Using the federal census alone indicates that the enslaved population grew by 23.7 per cent during the 1850s, from 6,231 to 7,712. Such a rapid rise would support the argument that slavery remained a vital and healthy part of Savannah's economy, underpinning the economic growth of the city and its geographic expansion. Savannah's enslaved population did not grow naturally, death rates exceeded birth rates throughout the antebellum era, thus the enslaved population only grew via the importation of slaves.[41] For the enslaved population to grow, owners must have thought that it made economic sense to either purchase more slaves or relocate them from rural areas to the city. Using the 1848 city census as a benchmark, and the revised figures for 1860 that exclude plantation slaves, it becomes apparent that the enslaved population grew by only 9.9 per cent in 12 years. In the same period, the white population grew by 91.2 per cent. Instead of slavery being a key part of Savannah's economic boom, the revised figures indicate that slavery was becoming a far more marginal part of the city's economy. The proportion of the city's population that was enslaved had remained fairly constant at around 40 per cent for the first half of the nineteenth century, but fell dramatically to just 30 per cent in 1860. In the decade before the Civil War, Savannah was becoming both whiter and freer as immigrants from Europe began to dominate the economy. Occupations that were previously perceived to be beneath white people, such as general labouring, unloading ships or railroad maintenance, were, by 1860, being done by Irish immigrants.

Nearly 50 years ago, Richard Wade published *Slavery in the Cities* wherein he argued, amongst other things, that slavery and urban life were somewhat incompatible. In particular, he noted that slaves were declining as a proportion of the urban population.[42] Claudia Goldin's *Urban Slavery* 12 years later offered a more nuanced interpretation of the 'decline' of slavery in the cities. She observed that many cities saw substantial rises in the absolute slave population, and when taken together with data on the high prices for slaves this suggests that demand for urban slaves remained strong. In her interpretation, the massive increase in white urban populations should not mask the underlying vitality of urban enslavement.[43] Goldin's interpretation, at least when applied to Savannah, is flawed because the data itself is flawed. Savannah's enslaved population did not grow anything like as fast as she thought. Only with serious examination of both the free and slave schedules of the census, alongside

[41] See T. Lockley, 'Black mortality in Antebellum Savannah', *Social History of Medicine* (online publication 30 Apr. 2013).
[42] Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 243–81.
[43] Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 123–32.

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other data relating to plantation ownership, can errant plantations that have been included in an urban area be identified and excluded. Perhaps the enslaved populations of other cities have been similarly miscalculated, but without a detailed study such as this one for each city it would be hard to tell. A tentative glimpse at the population figures for Charleston suggests that the federal census is just as flawed as for Savannah: the federal census in 1860 counted 40,195 people in Charleston, whereas a census for the city council a year later counted 48,409. Since it is highly unlikely the city's population grew by 20 per cent in 12 months, there is an underlying explanation for the discrepancy yet to emerge.[44] The 1860 census certainly has the potential to deepen our understanding of the nature of urban enslavement on the eve of the Civil War, but it should be used with great diligence and extreme amounts of caution.

[44] The discrepancy perhaps comes from confusion as to the status of the suburb of Charleston Neck that was annexed to the city in 1849.

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