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Susanna Ashton, ed. *I Belong to South Carolina: South Carolina Slave Narratives.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010. ix + 317 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-900-3; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57003-901-0.

Margaret Belser Hollis, Allen H. Stokes, eds. *Twilight on the South Carolina Rice Fields: Letters of the Heyward Family, 1862-1871.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010. 344 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-894-5.

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"There is nothing good to be said of American Slavery": Masters, Slaves, and Freed People in South Carolina[1]

In December 1860, South Carolina moved decisively to the center of the national stage when, after Abraham Lincoln's election, it seceded from the Union, precipitating the crises that led to the creation of the Confederate States of America and, a few months later, to civil war. The state that was, as local politician James Petigru remarked right after secession, "too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum" would lead the charge for Southern independence while its artillery batteries in Charleston would fire the opening shots of the conflict.[2] Home to more than four hundred thousand enslaved men and women and just under three hundred thousand white people on the eve of the war, South Carolina was, in many ways, a microcosm of the American South. Within its borders resided some of its wealthiest planters, including the Heyward family, along with a small, influential coterie of writers and politicians who had helped forge the ideology of Southern nationalism. However, if the upper echelons of white society demonstrated a significant degree of solidarity and uniformity, then the organization of slavery throughout the state exhibited considerable diversity and variation, shaped primarily by geography and the agricultural demands of its two main staples: cotton, cultivated in the state's midsection; and rice, grown on low-country plantations.

In these two books, the authors have mined a wonderfully rich vein of primary sources (slave narratives and family correspondence) to provide a comprehensive picture of the diverse worlds inhabited by enslaved Carolinians and their masters in the antebellum era and in the years during which the seismic upheavals of war and devastating defeat tore this society apart. Moreover, emancipation of its enslaved laborers and destruction of the Southern dream of independence made the war the transformative event in the lives of the men and women whose autobiographies and letters are collected here. Those wishing to hear the voices of masters and slaves in peace and war will learn much about slavery and freedom in South Carolina from these volumes.

Edited by Susanna Ashton, *I Belong to South Carolina* opens with the *Memoirs of Boston King, a Black Preacher*, first published in 1798. His narrative serves as a useful reminder of the impact that the American Revolution had on black life both in North America and the broader Atlantic world, and just how profoundly the war for independence dislocated their communities. Born a slave on a low-country plantation in 1760, King fled to the British in 1780, eventually ending up in New York, where, now a free man, he worked as a pilot and got married before being evacuated along with thousands of loyalists and former slaves to Nova Scotia at the war's end. From here, he embarked on a series of Atlantic crossings. In 1792, he sailed for Sierra Leone. Two years later, he went to a Methodist school in England, returning to Africa in 1796 where he died in 1802. For King, it was the British defeat at the hands of the revolutionaries that opened the door to freedom; for the other authors in this collection, it was the failure of the South to gain its independence and the revolution of emancipation that provided a path to their liberation.

The volume concludes with Sam Aleckson's *Before the War and After the Union: An Autobiography* (published in 1919). In contrast to King's wanderings, Aleckson's travels were far less extensive. He too was born a slave on a low-country plantation nine years before the war. In Charleston in the late spring of 1861, he watched men march off to war before he found himself in the army, serving his owner as an "officer's boy" clad in "a con-

federate gray jacket, blue pants, and a Beauregard hat" (p. 262). Stationed on James Island, his duties, he recalled, were "very light," occasionally watching Union ships bombard Charleston, hunting turkeys, and rowing officers into the city (p. 264). Aleckson's narrative is somewhat vague about his experiences immediately following the war, but he clearly found the years of Reconstruction fraught with difficulties, noting how white Carolinians laid blame for their problems at the door of freed men and women. With the rise of Wade Hampton, who became governor in 1876, and the reemergence of the Democratic Party, which heralded the beginning of the Jim Crow era, he moved North to the small town of Spring Lake, Connecticut, to live among "the liberty-loving men and women, who did so much for the amelioration of the race" (p. 284).

Perhaps the most valuable texts in this volume are those that transcend the traditional antebellum/postbellum divide. People's lives, whether free or enslaved, rarely conform to convenient chronological categories. In several narratives, the authors record their experiences of peace, war, and freedom. For Jacob Stroyer, born on a large plantation near Columbia in 1849, the war loomed particularly large. Only twelve when hostilities commenced, he was soon put to work for the Confederate cause. In 1863, along with thousands of slaves from across the state, he was taken to Charleston, and assigned to work on the defenses on Sullivan's Island, the place where his African-born father likely disembarked in the first years of the century. Although brief, Stroyer's account provides a fascinating glimpse of military life along the low-country coastline with its vivid recollections of slaves boldly swimming from the island to an adjacent one held by Union soldiers, and the unsuccessful efforts of Confederate patrols to recapture those who had made the journey to freedom.

He also experienced the terrors of war firsthand when, working on the shattered walls and parapets of Fort Sumter, he found himself under a bombardment from Union gunboats, barely escaping alive when mortar shells exploded above the shed in which he had sought shelter. In fact, some slaves from Edward Barnwell Heyward's Combahee plantations may have worked alongside Stroyer on Sullivan's Island or been killed during this attack. Returning to his owner's plantation in late 1864, he only had to wait a few months until General William Tecumseh Sherman and his army advanced into central South Carolina, bringing destruction to the plantation regime and freedom to its slaves. Stroyer's account closes on an elegiac note. He recalls the day of jubilee when, with the sun "just making its appearance from behind the hills" on a beautiful spring day, he gazed down a gathering of freed men and women, crowded beneath the "flag of liberty." Then, with the Stars and Stripes fluttering in the breeze, these former slaves, voices raised "like distant thunder," began singing "Old master gone away, and the darkies all at home / There must be now the kingdom come and the year of jubilee" (p. 166).

In addition to these texts, the volume contains the brief account of the life of Clarinda, a black woman about whom we know very little other than an anonymous writer took down her account of her conversion and subsequent life of piety, a text that reads less like a traditional slave narrative and more like a pilgrim's progress. Even her status remains a mystery, with the narrative providing no indication of whether she was free or enslaved. The remaining autobiographies are more reminiscent of the genre. In "Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave," which first appeared in the *Advocate of Freedom* in 1838, the anonymous author records the violence that he both suffered and witnessed, recalling Frederick Douglass's descriptions of the countless beatings and floggings that Edward Lloyd and his overseers inflicted on the slaves at his plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Making his way to Charleston, he managed to stow away on a vessel taking cotton to Boston, arriving there in late 1837. John Andrew Jackson's narrative, entitled *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* and published in 1862, follows a similar pattern: born on a cotton plantation in the state's midsection, he records the brutality and cruelty of enslavement, describing whippings and other punishments meted out by his owner who, he wrote, was "equal to the devil himself" (p. 91). He too fled to Charleston and, hiding between cotton bales on a ship heading north, safely arrived in Boston in early 1847. Moving to nearby Salem, he managed to avoid recapture when, in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act, bounty hunters came North, searching for him and other escapees.

In stark contrast to these accounts of violence and terror, the reminiscence of Irving Lowery in his *Life on the Old Plantation in Antebellum Days* offers an alternative way of recounting and remembering enslavement. Born a slave in 1850 and nineteen years later admitted as the first student to Claflin University, the author downplays the brutality of slave life, offering instead a series of sketches of plantation life, including descriptions of possum hunting, log rolling, corn shucking, church services, and Christmas celebrations. Opening by recalling "the wonderful old plantation" on which he and about forty other slaves lived, Lowery paints a picture of a pas-

toral existence where the barns were "full to overflowing" with food, the orchards and grape arbors were laden with fruit, and the animals grazed leisurely under "a large and beautiful walnut tree" (pp. 183-184). The slaves were, he noted, "a fine-looking set of human beings" who, thanks to the Christian instincts of John Frierson, the owner of Pudden Swamp plantation, were "warmly clad, well fed and humanely treated" (p. 190). This strategy clearly paid dividends. "Such things as bloodhounds and nigger traders were," he wrote, " scarce in that community ... it was a rare thing for slaves to be bought and sold in that neighborhood" (pp. 185-186). This bucolic narrative ends on a poignant note with Lowery recalling "The Breaking Up of the Old Plantation" when, on "a beautiful spring day" in 1865, Frierson stood before his slaves, telling them that "you are no longer my slaves, but you all are now free," concluding with the hope that they would remain "friends and good neighbors" whether they choose to work for him or strike out on their own (p. 224). By the following year, however, many had "pulled out and made their homes elsewhere ... all scattered, as it were, by the four winds of heaven, never to come together again until the judgment" (p. 275). Lowey too left the plantation, becoming a teacher and a Methodist minister rather than a tenant farmer, receiving his education at Claflin and Wesleyan Academy in Massachusetts before returning south to teach and preach.

The narratives collected in *I Belong to South Carolina* complement the slave autobiographies with which modern readers are more familiar, such as Charles Ball's *Fifty Years in Chains* (1836) and the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845). In fact, as Ashton and Cooper Leigh Hill note in their epilogue, "fewer than a dozen [narratives] address in any detail the slave experience in South Carolina" (p. 294). We are thus indebted to Ashton and her co-compilers for bringing these seven texts to a wider readership. Moreover, the brief commentaries that accompany each narrative provide readers with valuable biographical details as well as a succinct analysis of the text itself while the introductory essay examines the common thematic concerns and stylistic conventions present in these works.

In contrast to the geographical and chronological sweep of *I Belong to South Carolina*, *Twilight on the South Carolina Rice Fields* examines, through the letters of the Heyward family, a very specific time and place: the last three years of the war and the first six years of Reconstruction on their extensive rice plantations along the lower reaches of the Combahee River. Although this volume spans less than a decade, its correspondents touch on a number of topics addressed by the authors in Ashton's volume, including the impact of the war on the home front, the wide-reaching impact of emancipation, and the effort to restore the plantation regime in the face of insurmountable odds. Thus, for scholars working not just on black and white life in nineteenth-century South Carolina, but for those concerned with broader questions, such as the making and destruction of the Confederacy and the transition from slavery to freedom, these books provide a wealth of primary materials.

While Stroyer and hundreds of thousands of other enslaved Carolinians enthusiastically embraced freedom, the Heyward family struggled to adjust to the new realities that defeat and emancipation brought. It is a tale told primarily through the letters of Edward Barnwell Heyward and Catherine, his wife (although other family members are included here). Heyward's lands were part of the vast plantation complex that stretched for over two hundred miles along the Atlantic coastlines of South Carolina and Georgia. Built with mud, water, and the agricultural skills of enslaved Africans imported to the low country in the early eighteenth century, this agricultural kingdom generated immense wealth for an elite that had consolidated its political and economic power by mid-century. Among those present at the creation of this vast hydraulic empire was the first generation of the Heyward family; Barnwell's generation, however, would preside over the first years of its long, slow disintegration that began in the years after the war.

Although the Heywards spilt much ink on everyday matters, including family news, health, and the weather, there are few letters in the first half of the volume in which the war does not intrude. In fact, hostilities came to their neighborhood in late 1861 when Union forces took the Sea Islands, setting up their headquarters in Beaufort on Port Royal Island. Yet, even though the enemy was just a few dozen miles away, the labyrinth of creeks and rivers helped protect the family's plantations on the mainland. Only in early 1865 did the war come to their front door when Sherman's army, advancing from Savannah en route to Columbia, marched along the Combahee, forcing Heyward to evacuate his plantation. "It is sad enough leaving the place," he told Catherine in January 1865, "but now the time is come" (p. 194). And along the Combahee River, slavery's time too had come. Rather than issue orders for local defense, Heyward, who served as a lieutenant in a corps of engineers, now sat down to write labor contracts between himself and "the freedmen on the plantation of E. B. Heyward" (p. 204).

The letters written during the war cover a variety of topics, ranging from the vicissitudes of military service

and the considerable problems that Heyward faced while he struggled to grow rice and other crops to broader discussions about the prosecution of the conflict and its larger purpose and meaning. Writing from his camp outside the coastal hamlet of Chisolmville, he plainly stated what he believed to be the central issue of the war. "We ask only one thing–Independence," he told Catherine, "that being granted everything else is included," further noting that "it is not slavery we are fighting for" (p. 90). As an officer in the Confederate army; a leading member of the low-country elite; and a graduate of South Carolina College, a center of Southern radicalism and the alma mater of men like James Henry Hammond and the cane-wielding Preston Brooks, Heyward never questioned the conflict's underlying assumptions. In these wartime letters, he emerges as a dutiful and conscientious officer; a loyal and loving husband; and a man desperate to keeping his plantation operations running, a task that he placed in the hands of Stephen Boineau whose letters to his employer reveal the considerable difficulties entailed in managing an increasingly intransigent workforce as the war moved ever closer and as daily life on the home front disintegrated.

Catherine is perhaps less accepting of the war, although she held firm opinions about its prosecution and lamented, like many white Southern women, about the immense toll that the conflict took on soldiers and their families. "Oh dear," she wrote on one occasion, "I do wish the war was over" (p. 26). Learning about Chancellorsville and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's death in May 1863, she wrote to her husband, arguing that "Gen'l Lee has paid too dearly for his great victory" (p. 27). Two months later, lamenting the fall of Vicksburg and, after receiving contradictory reports about Lee's campaign into Pennsylvania that would end in defeat at Gettysburg, she wrote that "if he does not succeed, the Yankees will hold their heads up again, and the peace party will lower theirs" (p. 38). In other letters (and after 1863, her letter writing drops away significantly), Catherine conveys a sense that the Confederacy was a doomed enterprise.

And so it was. Its collapse in 1865 resulted in the world of the Heywards and thousands of other planters being turned upside down. Now unable to coerce his labor, Barnwell struggled to adjust to a new regime in which labor contracts rather than whips organized social relations between employer and employee. For Heyward, perhaps the real moment of recognition that his former slaves were "forever free" came when nearly 250 freed men and women signed (or made their mark) the "Terms of Agreement Between Charles and E. B. Heyward Esqrs and Certain Labourers" that described the rights and obligations of both parties for the next six months. For these former slaves, the document's last clause–"We freedmen on plantation of E. B. Heyward … accept this offer and hereby bind ourselves by this contract"–was their first practical step toward freedom (p. 204). It was also a world in which the Federal government was a very real presence. In early 1866, Brigadier General Ralph Ely, the commander of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina, endorsed that Heyward and his employees had "faithfully performed all the obligations of this contract" (p. 206). The transition from slavery to free labor was now underway along the Combahee.

The region's occupation by Federal officials and Union soldiers along with the activities of newly emancipated men and women, busily testing the limits of their freedom by overturning old forms of racial etiquette that had informed practices during the antebellum years, only deepened the rage and frustration of white Southerners, still reeling from defeat. In late August 1868, these powerful currents of discontent combined with a wave of labor militancy by freed men and women demanding better wages led to the "Combahee Riot." The editors include local newspaper accounts and Heyward's correspondence, providing a complex and, at times, contradictory picture of this incident in which strikers intimated those unwilling to join them and then overpowered the local sheriff and his men who had come to restore order. The arrival of Union troops only added to the chaos. For the editors of the *Charleston Mercury*, this incident was yet another opportunity to excoriate the Federal government and its agents, and to damn "the negro conventicle in Columbia" (i.e., the state legislature) along with Republican lawmakers (p. 337). For Heyward, however, it forced him to consider his own attitudes toward the new social order. Even though he regarded soldiers stationed locally as "a low set and I wish them all out of the neighborhood," he also acknowledged that the "negroes must have protection and they must have government" (pp. 329, 344). Then, again realizing just how profoundly circumstances had changed and that old order needed to be restored, he noted, "Our late institution furnished this very perfectly so we all thought. But it has been changed for us and we must try to recover our position among the negroes and I am perfectly satisfied that gentlemen can be found … who can 'direct the storm' and bring the old ship safely into port" (p. 344). Not until Hampton's election to the governorship in 1875 and the return of the Democratic Party to power in Columbia were such people back in power.[3]

Barnwell and his fellow low-country planters, however, would neither direct nor manage to weather the

storm. His death in 1871 at the age of forty-five further contributed to the slow, but inexorable decline of rice cultivation along the coastal plain. Even before the devastation that war and emancipation brought to the region, rice planters were no longer generating the immense profits that they had once enjoyed. With rice from South and Southeast Asia dominating the international marketplace in the last third of the nineteenth century, the vast estates along the Combahee and the other rivers of the low country were slowly abandoned. It would be Heyward's son, Duncan Clinch Heyward, who, in *Seed From Madagascar*, first published in 1937, describes the rise and fall of his and other low-country planter families, a book that was as much a work of history as it was an epitaph for the rice kingdom.

In his introductory essay, Peter Coclanis provides a survey of the history of rice cultivation in the low country. Author of articles on the history and economics of rice production and *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920* (1989), the definitive economic and demographic history of the region, he is the ideal guide to the region's agricultural and economic history. Along with an elegant and succinct discussion of the "rice revolution" in the early eighteenth century and its demographic consequences, and the subsequent expansion of the plantation complex along the Carolina coast, Coclanis also places the low country's rice economy within an international context. This essay, however, rarely moves beyond the confines of the rice field to examine some of the major political and cultural storms that buffeted the Heywards and other prominent low-country plantation families. This is, I believe, a missed opportunity as Coclanis has trenchant insights into this revolutionary moment in American history when millions of enslaved people were emancipated; when the government endeavored to safeguard that freedom; and when the South's ruling race sought to reassert its power and authority, in ways both legitimate and illegitimate, over the shattered remnants of their society. Hollis and Stokes have done an excellent job editing and annotating the letters and other related documents, including the roster of the freed men and women who worked on Heyward's lands right at the end of the war. Perhaps the only omission is a map that would enable readers unfamiliar with the low country to locate the various places mentioned in the correspondence.

These volumes are a significant addition to the library of printed primary sources on slavery and freedom in the nineteenth-century South. Placed alongside other collections that give voice to the experiences of slaves and freed people, such as *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (edited by Ira Berlin and others [1985-2008]) and other anthologies of slave narratives, including those collected by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s (later published as *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, edited by George P. Rawick [1972-79]) or those digitized in *Documenting the American South* and other electronic archives, these volumes further complicate our understanding of slavery and freedom in nineteenth-century South Carolina. Any student or scholar seeking to understand the experience of the Civil War and its consequences on the low-country plantation regime will find *Twilight on the South Carolina Rice Fields* a fine place to start their investigations while those wishing to move beyond the coastal plain should consider *I Belong to South Carolina* as a point of departure. Moreover, with the sesquicentennial of the Civil War now in full swing and with publishers taking full advantage of the moment, one hopes that these volumes will not be lost in the flood of books that will doubtless be pouring forth from the presses in the next few years as the nation's relationship with this transformative period in its history grows ever deeper and more complex.

Notes

[1]. The title quotation comes from Sam Aleckson, B*efore the War and After the Union: An Autobiography*, in *I Belong to South Carolina*, 239.

[2]. Earl Schenck Miers, *The Great Rebellion: The Emergence of the American Conscience* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958), 50

[3]. On the Combahee riot and other episodes of unrest and violence in the postbellum low country, see Brian Kelly, "Black Laborers, the Republican Party, and the Crisis of Reconstruction in Lowcountry South Carolina," *International Review of Social History* 51 (December 2006): 375-414; Eric Foner, *Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 74-135; and George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 170.

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