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Cultivating capitalism: Sea Island Cotton, planter identity, and Atlantic connections in Antebellum Beaufort County, South Carolina

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Cultivating Capitalism:
Sea Island Cotton, Planter Identity, and Atlantic Connections in
Antebellum Beaufort County, South Carolina
Cameron Shirley

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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For my parents, who have supported and always challenged me to pursue my dreams.

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Abstract

Studies of southern planters and cotton litter the scholarship about antebellum America. These works often debate the capitalist, pre-capitalist, or anti-capitalist nature of the southern economy and slave-based plantation agriculture. This study examines how antebellum sea island cotton planters in South Carolina identified themselves and practiced as capitalists in the Atlantic World. Their identity was shaped by ongoing discussions in *The Southern Agriculturalist* which was published in Charleston between 1828 and 1846, and the periodical was dedicated to agricultural improvement. The ideal planter capitalist identity was defined by a dedication to agricultural innovation, an understanding of domestic and foreign markets, the successful management of enslaved labor, and advocacy for increased formal agricultural education at South Carolina College. One primary example of the planter capitalist class was William Elliott III from Beaufort, South Carolina. Through careful analysis of Elliott's personal and published writings, this project shows the ways Elliott dealt with various challenges in putting his identity into practice. Domestically, he was met increasing challenges from a rising professional class, state and federal governments, and his enslaved labor force. However, when he left the United States and traveled to Paris in the summer of 1855, Elliott gained a strong reputation as an agriculturalist and demonstrated a clear and calculated understanding of the potential threats of a French-controlled Algerian sea island cotton market. The international stage provided a unique opportunity for Elliott to demonstrate his role as a planter capitalist.

Introduction

You have no idea what a scene of busy industry the plantation here presents...¹

William Elliott to Phoebe Elliott (mother), February 3, 1853

I wish to make use of the position—to look into the secrets of the sea island trade...I shall be anxious too—to promote a direct trade...between Charleston and Havre.²

William Elliott to Phoebe Elliott (mother), May 12, 1855

William Elliott, a sea island cotton planter from Beaufort, South Carolina, wrote many letters to his mother discussing everything from the health of his children to the increasing threat of French grown cotton in Algeria. Through his comments on both productivity and adaptability, Elliott saw himself as the leader of a successful plantation and politically savvy enough to influence direct trade between South Carolina and France. These excerpts represent just two examples of categories that planters found important in their efforts to embody the identity of a planter capitalist in the Beaufort District of South Carolina. The *Atlantic World* proves to be a compelling and relevant way in which to study the lives of southern planters like William Elliott because one can see their struggles and successes managing a plantation from afar and the way they sought to direct the global cotton market.

Sea island cotton planters in the Beaufort District of South Carolina identified themselves as capitalists within the expanding global economy between 1830 and 1860. As these planter capitalists communicated through published articles in agricultural periodicals such as the *Southern Agriculturalist*, published in Charleston between 1828

¹William Elliott to Phoebe Elliott, February 3, 1853. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC. While all of the letters cited in this work are located and were read in their original form in the Elliott and Gonzales collection at UNC-Chapel Hill, a Ph.D. dissertation that has transcribed copies of the letters was used to decipher some of the handwriting that was unclear. See Beverly Scafidel, "The Letters of William Elliott," 1170 p. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1978.

²William Elliott to Phoebe Elliott, May 12, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

and 1846, they articulated the specific aspects of their identity they found to be most significant. One such planter capitalist was William Elliott III who was a contributor to the conversations within the *Southern Agriculturalist* and other agricultural periodicals throughout the late antebellum period. William Elliott thought of himself as a capitalist and embodied the primary categories defined by the *Southern Agriculturalist* as he participated in economic and political debates, advocated for educational reform, and represented South Carolina on the international stage. William Elliott was an exemplar of the planter capitalist class in the Beaufort District, sought to put into practice his identity as a capitalist amidst competing pressures from above and below, and ultimately found success in his international interactions in Paris, during the summer of 1855.

William Elliott and his fellow planter capitalists complicate historians' understanding of the relationship between agriculture, slavery, and the development of American capitalism. While this project contributes more directly to the recent historiographical trend discussing the history of capitalism in early America, it is necessary to begin by discussing the major historiographical debate that predates these new arguments. One group of scholars that these historians are responding to is historians who separated the existence of slavery in the South and the emerging capitalist economy in the North during the nineteenth century. Specifically, these historians saw southern slavery as an anti or pre-capitalist economic system that was neither modern nor compatible with the industrial North. This group of scholars finds common ground and their foundational approach in *The Political Economy of Slavery* by Eugene Genovese.³ Scholars working under the same assumptions as Genovese may now admit that the

³Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Society and Economy of the Slave South* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1965).

southern plantation economy exhibited some characteristics of capitalism, yet planters in no way could be called capitalists prior to the Civil War.⁴ The other group of southern economic historians argues that the slave south acted as its own type of capitalism: planter capitalism. This view sees the planters' connections and influence in a larger economic market and recognizes the incredible productivity of the slave system. This faction developed from the founding work *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman.⁵ Similarly, James Oakes in *The Ruling Race* extends his argument saying that planters themselves were capitalists, contrary to Genovese's interpretation.⁶ In the new introduction to the paperback edition, Oakes is less definitive in his argument, and suggests that his original argument, and Genovese's, are complicated by the lack of consensus on a definition of capitalism.⁷ Most recent scholars tend to broadly agree with the interpretation put forth by Fogel, Engerman, and Oakes, but they have found more nuanced and capable manners of explaining the compatibility and connections between the existence of slavery and capitalism.

⁴For examples of other historians like Genovese who share the pre-capitalist argument, see Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) and Douglas R. Egerton, "Markets Without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Summer 1996): 207-221.

⁵Robert Williams Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1974). The interpretation presented by Fogel and Engerman went against the mostly accepted opinion of the backwards economy of the South, but it was highly controversial when it was published due to some of the economic calculations and the way in which they portrayed enslaved workers. Other important works discussing southern capitalism include Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁶James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

⁷Oakes, *The Ruling Race*, xi-xii. For further discussion of the changing relationships between historians and the connections between slavery and capitalism, see William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003): 407-410.

Historians in the last two decades have become increasingly eager to study the history of capitalism in the United States as they have seen and experienced recent economic fluctuations in the twenty-first century. The most relevant and enticing aspect of this developing subfield is the attempt to combine “hardheaded economic analysis with the insights of social and cultural history.”⁸ These historians of early American capitalism are reacting to the larger social history turn of the late twentieth century that put human agency and studies from the “bottom-up” at the forefront of historical study. Dr. Jonathan Levy, one of several historians contributing to this recent trend, says, “in order to understand capitalism, you’ve got to understand capitalists.”⁹ It is in this way that a study of Elliott and others in his community finds relevance. Two important methodological questions provide a framework with which to understand these new studies: How have historians framed their work geographically to highlight aspects of American capitalism? and, How have historians accounted for, or dismissed, human agency within the larger structural system of capitalism? It is not only important to understand how recent contributions to the historiography address these larger issues, but also to show how this study seeks to fit within this growing field.

Understanding the ways in which historians choose to frame their works geographically provides a unique avenue through which to analyze the different benefits and drawbacks of these studies. Two different levels of geographical organization that historians have successfully employed over the last decade to make arguments about the

⁸Jennifer Schuessler, “In History Departments, It’s Up With Capitalism,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2013, accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/education/in-history-departments-its-up-with-capitalism.html?_r=0.

⁹Schuessler, “In History Departments, It’s Up With Capitalism.” Levy is currently an Associate Professor of History at Princeton University. His most recent work, discussed later, is *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

nature of the development of American capitalism include transnational and local frameworks.¹⁰ In his most recent work *River of Dark Dreams*, Walter Johnson traces the movement of cotton down the Mississippi River to the Port of New Orleans and further connects his narrative to the merchants and buyers in Liverpool and other cities in northern England.¹¹ Through this transnational approach, Johnson analyzes the significance cotton and slavery played in the development of American capitalism in the antebellum United States. Transnational methodologies allow the author to show how southerners looked for global solutions to their regional economic problems, specifically regarding slavery, in the mid-nineteenth century.¹² Johnson reveals the connected nature of this, albeit regional, economy and the larger industrial centers in the North and England. Finally, Johnson's consideration of southern imperialism in the 1840s and 1850s further solidifies the reasoning behind his transnational approach, highlighting the dedication with which many southern capitalists sought to maintain their slavery-based capitalist economy. In addition to successfully demonstrating how the North, Europe, and the South were connected as an intellectual community participating in capitalist economic transactions, Johnson's strengths include helping the reader trace the physical path of cotton from the Mississippi River Valley to the industrial centers in England. This nuanced approach adds to readers' understanding about the movement of cotton, money,

¹⁰The third category of geographical framework is the more traditional national framework. Historians studying the history of capitalism in the United States have also employed this framework successfully. While a full discuss is not relevant for this project, for examples of works using the national framework, see Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹¹Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹²Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 12.

and people throughout the Atlantic World to broaden general understandings of the global nature of southern economic development in the decades prior to the Civil War.¹³

A second framework that some scholars have used in studying the development of American capitalism is local in scope. One of the most successful recent studies of American capitalism is Seth Rockman's *Scraping By*, in which he carefully analyzes the significance of labor relations in the city of Baltimore through 1830.¹⁴ Rockman provides readers with a detailed look inside the various types of labor and their relationships to employers in the city. He articulates the ways in which these employers manipulated the labor market, attributing the opportunity to do so to an excess and diversity of labor within this booming early American city. Rockman successfully justifies his choice in looking at Baltimore by stating that "Baltimore embodied the ambitions and limitations of the new United States" and by explaining the complicated nature of Baltimore's labor diversity.¹⁵ Rockman argues that because of its unique situation, many of the conditions throughout early America came together in Baltimore, which is often considered the "most southern" northern city, as well as the "most northern" southern city. Rockman's choice to only study Baltimore is ultimately not an issue because he clearly defines his parameters. He discusses free white wage laborers, free African American laborers, and enslaved laborers that all populated the Baltimore labor market. While most cities did not have this diverse and relatively equal distribution of laborers, Rockman reveals categories of workers in Baltimore that existed in other parts of early America. Therefore, his

¹³For another recent work that presents a transnational framework discussing the development of American capitalism, see Jessica Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁴Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

¹⁵Rockman, *Scraping By*, 3.

conclusions, while local in scope, can be used by other historians as a starting point when attempting to uncover larger patterns and themes within the laboring classes of the United States.¹⁶

Due to the nature of the project, this study is limited in its ability to expand over a large geographical area. Therefore, the scope of the study is local in regards to its primary actors, focusing particularly on Beaufort County, South Carolina and the surrounding South Carolina low country. Due to the vast regional differences within the antebellum American South, this project cannot attempt to grapple with the divisions that existed among states and their prominent planter classes. Cotton planters from this area provide a viewpoint different from that of planters from the Deep South because of the quality of sea island cotton that was produced in this area. Sea island cotton is unique because it is “long-staple, silky-fibered, [and] smooth-seeded,” thus making it extremely valuable.¹⁷ Furthermore, studying sea island cotton planters in South Carolina is important, because they dealt publically with the issues of nullification and secession earlier than their peers in other southern states.

This project will also combine some of the methods and frameworks of transnational studies and works in the field of Atlantic History, like Johnson’s, to show the larger significance and connections between South Carolina and the Atlantic World. The approach to Atlantic History, and more broadly transnational studies, is based on a framework outlined by David Armitage and discussed by Alison Games in a 2006 article. Armitage labeled three main categories for approaching the Atlantic: “circum-Atlantic

¹⁶Rockman, *Scraping By*, 4.

¹⁷Lawrence S. Rowland, Alexander Moore, and George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume 1, 1514-1861* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 277. The more common short-staple cotton was much harder to gin and was not able to produce the same quality thread that sea island cotton produced.

history”, “trans-Atlantic history”, and “cis-Atlantic history.”¹⁸ The “cis-Atlantic” approach seeks to look at a single place within an Atlantic context, and according to Games, it is the “most accessible way for historians, particularly graduate students...to get into an Atlantic perspective.”¹⁹ Through a “cis-Atlantic” approach, this study seeks to highlight the ways Beaufort District planter capitalists interacted and participated within the Atlantic World through their knowledge and practice with sea island cotton. William Elliott, in particular, provides a unique example through which to study Beaufort planters in an Atlantic context because of his experience interacting with foreign agriculturalists and statesmen while representing South Carolina at the Paris Exposition in the summer of 1855.

The other major issue that historians of capitalism grapple with is the complicated relationship between human agency and larger systematic aspects of the political and economic landscape. As social history was popularized in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars overwhelmingly looked for aspects of human agency, a process which greatly influenced and added to the sophisticated nature of scholarship on slavery in the United States during the antebellum period. However, more scholars are now looking to balance the relationship between agency and power as they attempt to reconstruct the realities of the antebellum South. Specifically for historians of capitalism, this balancing act is significant because they must try to accurately account for the impact of human involvement within the larger system of economic power.

¹⁸David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. David Armitage, and Michael J. Braddick (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 11-27.

¹⁹Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *American Historical Review* (June 2006): 746.

In *A Nation of Counterfeiters*, Stephen Mihm focuses on highlighting the agency of people over any structure. It is not surprising, with Mihm's careful discussion of counterfeiters, that he says that "the history of counterfeiting is nothing if not a tale of legendary individuals, outsized personalities, and curious characters who exploited the ethical ambiguities of a market-driven society."²⁰ Giving almost all control to the human element of counterfeiting that permeated the capitalist market in the nineteenth century, Mihm fully articulates his view that people are the ones that both drive the economy and that have the ability to manipulate it to the fullest degree.

In contrast to Mihm's work, historians such as Jonathan Levy, Walter Johnson, and Seth Rockman provide balanced accounts that analyze and give weight to the significance of both human agency and the larger power structures in society. Jonathan Levy's *Freaks of Fortune* is extremely successful in bridging the gap between human agency and uncontrollable forces because he discusses both the inevitability of risk and the efforts by Americans to control risk through the development of risk management in the nineteenth century. Levy argues that in the development of American capitalism, it is important to consider the changing nature of "how Americans thought about the future, felt about the future, acted upon it, managed it, and sometimes simply resigned themselves to it."²¹ These words clearly articulate the dual nature of both agency and powerlessness within the human experience. While this book extends beyond the Civil War, the insights discussed about antebellum America are significant and recognize both human agency and forces outside of human control. For example, Levy discusses the connections between risk in the emerging capitalist world and the danger and uncertainty

²⁰Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters*, 16.

²¹Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 5.

that, in earlier centuries, was defined by the sea. Looking specifically at slave revolts on ships, Levy argues that it was difficult for contemporaries to understand those actions due to their inability to determine whether revolts should be considered “perils of the sea” or human actions that required careful consideration and reactions.²² The comparison Levy makes with nature, which humans typically fail to successfully control for extended periods of time, shows some of the larger forces that both the author and his nineteenth century subjects felt held power in their lives. Furthermore, Levy’s chapter on the development of actuarial science shows more careful human agency in efforts to combat risk and shows the development of risk management through insurance policies that continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century.²³

While he does not show the connected nature of agency and structures around a single idea like Levy does, Walter Johnson, in his book about slavery, cotton, and capitalism, provides examples that highlight both the agency of enslaved people and the uncontrollable larger power structures that influenced African American slaves and white slaveholders in the Mississippi River Valley. Johnson highlights the agency of enslaved people when discussing solidarity in slave communities. Here, Johnson argues that enslaved African Americans formed community ties that allowed them to be more confident when deciding to flee from their masters.²⁴ Johnson contrasts this example of slave agency with other examples of white power, like the ways white slaveholders used their power to control the food supply and implement starving tactics to persuade and

²²Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 23.

²³Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 60-103.

²⁴Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 214.

control enslaved African Americans on their plantations.²⁵ Furthermore, Johnson's lengthy discussion of steamboats and their role in the capitalist economy reveals one example of how the author places larger, uncontrollable forces within his narrative about agency and power. Johnson argues that inventions like the steamboat are typically associated with the history of technology, and then considered a product of an enterprising man. However, in this case, Johnson looks at steamboats as one cog in the larger capitalist machine. This economic element was volatile because explosions destroying cargo and killing people were common along the river, and the steamboat-run economy was limited by the environment of the river valley in places that were too shallow for steamboats to effectively reach.²⁶ Readers must carefully think about the nature of agency and power throughout Johnson's work, but upon close reading, the fluidity between these people and economic and natural forces is clearly revealed.

Similarly, Seth Rockman's study of early Baltimore successfully weaves together the human agency of a diverse group of workers while commenting on the lack of control and power they had within a larger economic system ruled by wealthy white employers in the city. While Rockman's overall argument states that white wealth in Baltimore was developed and maintained through the management of a diverse and coerced labor force, his analysis of the almshouse revealed the dual nature of agency and power. Rockman shows readers how the almshouse was created by white elites in Baltimore to manage the poor population through a controlled environment and how many elites gained political clout and personal prestige by advertising their benevolent actions. At the same time,

²⁵Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 178-179, 9. Johnson's dual focus on slave and "slaveholding agency" is unique and important to understanding the many perspectives within the Mississippi River Valley.

²⁶Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 74-79.

Rockman provides examples of wage workers who entered the almshouse, used it to their advantage and then left before doing their required work, thus exerting their own control in an environment in which they should, in theory, have no power.²⁷ Rockman also highlights agency in his discussion of African American women who became laundresses. While the wages these women received were not sufficient to provide for a family on their own, they had freedom and control over their own work because it was done in their homes, which allowed them to work outside the view of white mistresses.²⁸ Rockman's work is another example of history that succeeds in showing the dual nature of power and agency in a way that gives weight to both in different situations. Even within Baltimore, the workers were not always under complete control through the larger power and economic structures, nor were they completely free to make their own choices regardless of their constraints. Rockman's work stands above others in revealing the dual nature of power and agency and by providing persuasive evidence to support his claims.

Finally, some historians have turned in the opposite direction of many social historians of the late twentieth century and argue that the system of capitalism was much more powerful and limited much of the human agency that other historians have found significant. Edward Baptist's new work discussing slavery and its relationship to capitalism and growth in the United States is one example of this alternate perspective. Baptist shows the limited agency of enslaved African Americans throughout much of his discussion, arguing that the system of capitalism, controlled by elite white men, was often

²⁷For a more detailed account of the various ways elite and wage workers used the almshouse to their own advantages, see Chapter 7, "The Consequences of Failure" in Rockman, *Scraping By*, 195-230.

²⁸Rockman, *Scraping By*, 130-131.

too great a force for enslaved people to overcome.²⁹ One example of this is when Baptist discusses the slave auctions that occurred throughout the South during the peak of the internal slave trade. Baptist argues that auctions “destroyed the façade of negotiation with the enslaved” and that “only the most desperate plays had a chance.”³⁰ Baptist does make some nod to agency in his fourth chapter, which is supposed to discuss “left-handed resistance,” but this does not change the overall discussion of power and control that is present throughout the narrative.³¹ While Baptist’s conclusion does not seem to be the dominant perspective of those in this field, it is important to note that some historians, and potentially more in the near future, are looking to give more weight to power and structures than to the human agency of those in the lower strata of American society.

The subjects of this study are typically looked at within their role limiting agency of the enslaved population within the plantation system. While part of their planter capitalist identity was related to managing enslaved labor and that will be discussed in depth, the larger goal of this project is to look at the active participation of this group of men to show the power of human agency within the existing structures of government and the capitalist economy. While William Elliott and his fellow planter capitalists were not in control of the sea island cotton market and its many fluctuations, nor were they able to control legislation that affected their profits at the national level, these men were progressive agriculturalists who sought to create a better product within the confines of their own power. This work is able to focus on the ways the larger political and economic

²⁹Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

³⁰Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 98. This argument directly contradicts arguments made by Walter Johnson who argues that even on the auction block, enslaved men and women exercised agency, see Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

³¹Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 113.

power structures influenced the agency and power of one man. The second chapter highlights these themes as it reveals the struggles Elliott faced in combatting and controlling outside forces in his quest to embody the ideals of planter capitalism.

Beyond the ways this work address the balance between human agency and power, the choice to employ transnational and Atlantic World methodologies to the study of planter capitalists is significant. While plantations have been studied in many different ways over the last fifty years, a transnational approach to planter capitalists offers a new way to explain the complicated and often conflicting identities planters had within their community. In this case, a cis-Atlantic approach allows readers to view a subset of a population who was actively involved in the larger global community. The political and economic environment of the Atlantic World manipulated and was manipulated by planter capitalists in the Beaufort area in a way that would not be visible with merely a local or national context. William Elliott, in particular, provides a compelling reason to study planters within a global context. Most of the time Elliott is mentioned within the literature, he is discussed in relation to his lack of political success in the state or it is contextualized within biographical local histories that seek to boost his fame and importance through an exaggerated detailed discussion of his literary success. Without taking a transnational approach, the significance of Elliott's capitalist identity is hidden from the historical record. Through careful analysis of the individual, this work highlights new avenues through which planter capitalist identity can be studied within an Atlantic framework.

Within this study, the efforts to highlight transnational themes along with looking at the power of humans within the capitalist system are paramount. In seeking to do so,

the study is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter identifies and explains the various aspects of the planter capitalist identity defined in the pages of the *Southern Agriculturalist* published in Charleston, South Carolina between 1828 and 1846. Many prominent sea island cotton planters contributed to the *Southern Agriculturalist* and discussed topics such as agricultural science, economics, labor, and education within local, national, and international contexts. Through the *Southern Agriculturalist* readers are privy to a forum through which planter capitalists discussed, debated, and shared their ideas and established the significance of these ideas to their identity as capitalists in the Atlantic World.

The second and third chapters then highlight the ways one planter sought to embody the ideals of the planter capitalist identity.³² These chapters focus on William Elliott III and his participation within the sea island cotton community. William Elliott III was a planter, sportsman, and politician in Beaufort County, South Carolina. Elliott's father, William Elliott II, was the first planter to introduce sea island cotton in Beaufort County. The introduction of *Gossypium Barbadosense*, the scientific name for sea island cotton, to the Beaufort area proved significant because the product itself was high quality long staple cotton with a silky texture that had smooth seeds, making it easier to gin.³³ Due to his father's instrumental role in South Carolina's agricultural development, Elliott was born into a family of means which provided him the opportunity to earn an

³²Identity is a term that has been criticized for its use because it can mean "too much...too little...or nothing at all" (1). In response to these critiques, some historians have begun using new terms like "identification" or "categorization." This study uses the term identity to describe the categories that were considered part of the ideal as discussed in the *Southern Agriculturalist*, but then transitions to using the phrase "identity in practice" or describes impediments to the ideal identity to show the fluidity and malleable nature of identity for the planters studied here. For more information on the debate over identity terminology, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-47.

³³Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 277.

education. Elliott completed his secondary education at Beaufort College from 1803-1806 before attending college at Harvard. However, due to a bout of terrible illness during his college tenure, Elliott was forced to return home, though he would eventually receive an honorary degree from the university years later.³⁴

Elliott was a dedicated agriculturalist and continuously sought out new techniques in planting, such as seed selection and efforts at the “diversification of southern agriculture.”³⁵ He wrote articles for the *Southern Agriculturist*, *DeBow’s Review*, and various Charleston newspapers, often under the pseudonym “Piscator” or “Venator.” His body of written work also included a five-act drama entitled “Fiesco: A Tragedy.”³⁶ Many of Elliott’s writings centered around his opinions on proper gamesmanship and sportsmanship concerning hunting and fishing. In 1846, Elliott published *Carolina Sports by Land and Water*, which would later prove to be his “most famous and lasting contribution to the antebellum literature of South Carolina.”³⁷ In his role as a politician and community member, William Elliott served as president for the Beaufort Agricultural Society, vice president of the South Carolina Agricultural Society, trustee of Beaufort College, and state representative and senator of the St. Helena Parish. Due to some controversies in opinion over the nullification crisis, Elliott resigned from the South Carolina Senate in 1832. Elliott was known to be a staunch Unionist and greatly disagreed with his constituency’s opinions about the nature of nullification.³⁸

³⁴Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 403.

³⁵Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 403.

³⁶Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 404.

³⁷ Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 404

³⁸Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 334-335, 404. The Nullification Crisis in South Carolina refers to the time period during Andrew Jackson’s presidency where the state of South Carolina decided to declare the Tariff of 1828 and 1832 unconstitutional, and thus the restrictions would not be enforced within the state’s boundaries. For more information on the nullification crisis in South Carolina,

The second chapter focuses on Elliott's efforts to embody certain aspects of the planter capitalist identity while in the United States between 1830 and 1850. Through personal papers and published writings, Elliott demonstrated the struggles that he faced when trying to live up to the high standards displayed in the pages of the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Elliott was met with challenges from the rising professional class, the government at the state and national level, and his enslaved labor force when trying to put his identity into practice. These challenges highlight the ways in which planter capitalists struggled and succeeded in embodying ideals that were often full of contradictions and limitations.

Finally, the third chapter discusses Elliott's larger and more significant role as a planter capitalist when he was in Paris in the summer and fall of 1855. William Elliott represented South Carolina at the Paris Exposition in 1855 and spoke to the Imperial and Central Agricultural Society of France on the subject of sea island cotton. Through his experience abroad, William Elliott recognized the scale with which France was succeeding at developing a profitable sea island cotton crop in Algeria. More importantly, Elliott made a more threatening observation during his time in Paris: the increasingly cordial and cooperative relationship between France and England. According to Elliott, this new alliance could prove dangerous to South Carolina's agricultural wealth. South Carolina was the main source of sea island cotton in the international market, but with the French using their imperial powers to cultivate sea island cotton in Algeria, Elliott foresaw a potentially severe threat to the state's economy. This chapter highlights the

see William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

ways Elliott demonstrated his planter capitalist identity while interacting with statesmen and agriculturalists on the global stage.³⁹

Sea island cotton planters in South Carolina attempted to embody the ideals of the planter capitalist identity articulated in the *Southern Agriculturalist*. This project does not seek to argue whether or not these planters were actually capitalists, but it finds that they identified themselves as such, and they worked to put this identity into practice within the Atlantic World. William Elliott and his peers thought carefully about methods of agricultural science and the economic ramifications of market changes.⁴⁰ They also understood that providing a foundation for education for future planter capitalists was significant to creating a learned society of agriculturalists. Finally, Elliott and his fellow planters struggled to embody the ideals of their planter capitalist identity due to the inherent contradictions they faced when their absentee status put their enslaved workers in charge of the daily plantation management. These aspects of the planter capitalist identity are seen throughout William Elliott's life as he sought to put his identity into practice on the domestic and international stage. This project highlights one small portion

³⁹This study is divided into two distinct sections. The first, in Chapter 1, looks at the intellectual side of planter capitalism and finds a place where these planters came together to construct their capitalist identity. The second part, in Chapter 2 and 3, looks at the specific behaviors of these planters. This study uses a framework similar to that used by Joyce Chaplin in her study of agricultural innovation and planters in the colonial and early national period. See Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

⁴⁰While this study argues that his dedication to agricultural innovation was a crucial part of William Elliott and other sea island cotton planters' identity, other scholars have seen agricultural innovation as a deviation or abnormality in the identity of prominent planters. Drew Gilpin Faust has studied the life of James Henry Hammond, one of the wealthiest and most prominent planters in antebellum South Carolina. A portion of Faust's argument states that Hammond's push for agricultural innovation on his plantation "created important underlying tensions in view of Hammond's decidedly prebourgeois notions of lordlike mastery" (112). This notion of Hammond's identity as "lordlike" is a compelling alternative to Elliott's self-proclaimed identity as a capitalist. According to Faust's research, if Hammond was ultimately driven by profit in a capitalist mindset he would not have stayed in South Carolina, but instead moved West to capitalize on new opportunities. For more information on this argument and James Henry Hammond, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

of American capitalists within the nineteenth century, who identified themselves and made significant contributions within the Atlantic World.

Chapter 1

The Southern Agriculturalist: A Forum for Planter Capitalists Between 1828 and 1846

It was 1785. The American colonists had just succeeded in winning independence from Great Britain. The leaders of the former colonies rejoiced! However, many of those who remained loyal to the crown were put in a difficult position. Loyalists often remained in the newly created United States, but some had a chance to start anew with lands portioned off for them, by the British, in Nova Scotia and the Bahama Islands. Those who migrated from South Carolina to the Bahamas are crucial to this story. The men and women who traveled to the Bahamas began planting long staple black seed cotton. This experiment was successful and many South Carolinians who stayed at home received news from relatives about this important scientific success. Relatives not only sent news from the Bahamas, but many sent seed back to Carolina. A particular handful of seeds in 1785 would change the course of South Carolina agricultural history. These seeds would develop into the prominent sea island cotton crop that would supply the state with wealth throughout the antebellum period.¹ After a generation of planters succeeded in planting a profitable sea island cotton crop, planters in the low country realized they would need to adapt their methods and market strategy to maintain wealth within the changing economic and political landscape in antebellum South Carolina.

Throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the South Carolina low country developed a competitive hold on the global cotton market with their superior product: sea island cotton. However, in the late 1820s planters in the Beaufort District

¹For a more detailed look at the history of sea island cotton and its introduction to the Carolinas, see B.R. Carroll, "A Sketch of the Agricultural History of South-Carolina; being a communication read before the Agricultural Society of St. John's, Colleton," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 12, 10 (December 1837): 617-629.

saw the price of cotton in the global market decrease. One reason for the drop in price was the overwhelming supply of short staple cotton that was produced in the Deep South. As several Beaufort District planter capitalists began to reevaluate their place in the expanding global economy, they realized that they were not alone in their desires to reestablish prominence in the market. While not everyone agreed on the best way to advance the growth and wealth of South Carolina's agricultural industry, they did believe something needed to change. As a result, Thomas Legare, the South Carolina State Agricultural Society's librarian, decided to create a publication solely devoted to the improvement of agriculture through shared knowledge. In 1828, Legare published the first issue of this publication called *The Southern Agriculturist*. Surprisingly, the *Southern Agriculturist* was the first periodical devoted to agriculture that was published south of Baltimore. Furthermore, its eighteen-year publication tenure was longer than many of its fellow agricultural publications in the North.²

While there is not an extensive collection of scholarship discussing the *Southern Agriculturist*, Theodore Rosengarten has briefly analyzed this publication and its role in the intellectual life of the planter class on the southern South Carolina coast. In his short essay, Rosengarten argues that the publication was reform-minded and analyzes the specific influence that Thomas Legare, the inaugural editor, had on the purpose and direction of the journal.³ Furthermore, Rosengarten links the development of the *Southern Agriculturist* to a larger movement of knowledge that emerged in the early

² Theodore Rosengarten, "The Southern Agriculturist in an Age of Reform," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, eds. Michael O'Brien, and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 280. Throughout the eighteen year time frame the name of the journal changed slightly depending on the editor. For a full understanding of the various name changes, see pg. 292-294. Throughout this paper, the journal will be referred to as the *Southern Agriculturist*, except when discussing publications from 1840 when the name of the journal was *The Southern Cabinet*. Other name changes were minimal and still involved "The Southern Agriculturist" in some way.

³Rosengarten, "The Southern Agriculturist in an Age of Reform," 279-294.

and mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Beyond Rosengarten's essay that was part of a collection of pieces on intellectual life in Charleston, scholars have not studied the *Southern Agriculturalist* as an individual publication, nor have they fully analyzed its role in the development of planter capitalist identity in South Carolina. However, scholars such as Sven Beckert have recognized the importance of information networks that planter capitalists comprised throughout the antebellum South.⁵ Furthermore, scholars have not spent as much time looking into the peculiarities of the sea island cotton community compared to cotton in the Deep South, despite the fact it was considered a completely separate industry from upland cotton produced throughout the South. One potential reason may be the low country's dedication to rice production. While rice would remain the most significant crop along the coast of South Carolina, sea island cotton brought South Carolina just over two-thirds of the wealth produced from rice, which makes it an important crop to consider.⁶

Beaufort District planter capitalists, and specifically sea island cotton planters, used the *Southern Agriculturalist* as a way to disseminate agricultural and commercial knowledge among the planter class. This forum for planter capitalists proved significant in creating the basis of knowledge for several planters who came of age during the early nineteenth century in the Beaufort District and greater-Charleston area. These planter capitalists actively sought out more information from a variety of sources in order to

⁴Rosengarten, "The Southern Agriculturalist in an Age of Reform," 280.

⁵Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014): 115.

⁶Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Volume II* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 679-680. Based on numbers from sea island production in this comprehensive agricultural work, it can be determined that the value of sea island cotton produced in 1858 was approximately \$2, 578, 045. This calculation was based off the average monthly price of sea island cotton in 1858, 29.3 cents/lb. and the data that stated 8, 798, 790 lbs. of sea island cotton was produced in 1858. While these numbers are based in a year at the end of my target range, they are the most representative to convey the significance of sea island cotton within the economy of South Carolina at the time.

refine and improve their product before sending it to market. They were active participants in the Atlantic World who shared and understood the intellectual property required to be contributing members of the capitalist community. The content referring to sea island cotton and its planters in the *Southern Agriculturalist* falls into three main categories: agricultural science, global markets and commercial development, and labor management. All three topics received discussion over many issues and several years of the publication, revealing the importance that planter capitalists placed on these facets of their agricultural pursuits. Planter capitalists also pushed to establish a professorship of agriculture at South Carolina College. This final portion of planters' efforts to exchange and debate relevant topics revealed their efforts to ensure the agricultural success of future planter capitalists in South Carolina.

The factual and experimental knowledge that became the crux of the *Southern Agriculturalist* was not always produced organically in the minds of southern planters. A large number of the published articles reprinted in the *Southern Agriculturalist* came from either northern agricultural journals or European publications. This transfer of information and reliance on outside information is crucial to understanding the process and value of the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Beyond the reprinting of scientific articles, the original communication produced for the journal often revealed the planters' intellectual ties to Europe and the North. As shown in the final chapter, some sea island cotton planters had a deep understanding of global efforts at cotton cultivation and the connected nature of the world economy.⁷

⁷Each issue of the *Southern Agriculturalist* is divided into three main sections. Part I consisted of original communications that were published first, and foremost, in the journal. Articles in this section include original essays written by planters on specific and relevant topics, but this section also consists of published addresses that had been given before various agricultural societies, mainly in South Carolina and

One major topic that planters wrote about and wanted to learn more about was agricultural science. Articles related to the scientific aspects of sea island cotton included essays, debates, and addresses published about the best type of manure, the proper timing and maintenance of cotton plants, and the relationship of sea island cotton, genetically, to other varieties of cotton in the global marketplace. Planter capitalists argued that salt mud should be the manure of choice for sea island planters, that the super fine varieties of sea island cotton vastly out-performed, based on price per pound, other types of cotton in the market, and therefore, should continue to be grown based on the quality of the vegetable fiber despite the overall drop in prices due to abundant production in the Deep South.⁸

The overall impression given to readers throughout the publication tenure of the *Southern Agriculturalist* was that in order to continue to live prosperously, planters must take more care to understand the scientific principles related to their craft. Examples in the preparation and use of manure, along with the arguments for a careful selection of seed and discussion of the genetic make-up of cotton species, allowed planters to think more consciously about the scientific aspects of cotton cultivation. These planters shared both their practical experiences and their knowledge of foreign and northern practices related to manure experimentation, cotton species, and seed selection.

not published in other forums. Part II included the editor's selection of articles published in other journals that he found particularly useful for the planters in South Carolina. This portion of the journal also supplemented the selected articles with reviews of articles when relevant. Finally, Part III of the journal was called "Miscellaneous Agricultural Information." In this section, there were brief comments about a variety of different agricultural topics, often no more than three or four sentences. This was said to be for the casual reader, who may find no interest in the larger topics at hand. For more information about the specific parts of the *Southern Agriculturalist*, see Thomas Legare, "Introduction," *The Southern Agriculturalist and Register of Rural Affairs Adapted to the Southern Section of the United States* 1, 1 (January 1828): iv-vi.

⁸These topics prove to be the most significant for planter capitalists' discussions of agricultural science in the mid and late antebellum period. For more information about the ways in which agricultural science became a crucial part of planter identity in the colonial period and early republic, see Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation & Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Sea island cotton was primarily grown in the lower sea islands between Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia. Many contributors to the *Southern Agriculturalist* commented on the proper manure and soil fit for sea island cotton. Discussions of manure within the publication provide one avenue to analyze the ways in which planter capitalists sought to adopt scientific principles and manipulate their environment in order to create the highest quality and most profitable sea island cotton crop. Planter capitalists made several key arguments regarding the scientific make-up of manures and soil that were preferable for sea island cotton. In addition to these scientific discussions, planter capitalists also looked to Europe to provide other examples of successful manure experimentation used to maximize crop profitability.

Planter capitalists in South Carolina formed a special committee in the 1830s to investigate the use of marsh-mud as the primary manure for cotton, which showed their dedication to scientific properties in manure. Their 1832 report was published in the January 1833 issue of the *Southern Agriculturalist*. According to their report, it was recommended that those who planted cotton on the sea islands use marsh mud as manure because it worked well with the sandy soil of the area.⁹ Throughout the article, the author discussed the chemical make-up and benefits of marsh mud, including the salt component. Furthermore, the article revealed that marsh mud was able to give “particular benefit” during droughts.¹⁰ This allowed the committee to show ways in which planters could prepare for the unexpected weather conditions that often destroyed their crops. During the 1830s, the cotton boom in the Deep South had greatly hurt the price of cotton

⁹“Art. I.—Report of Committee, on Marsh-Mud as a Manure for Cotton,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 6, 1 (January 1833): 1-7.

¹⁰“Art I.—Report of Committee, on Marsh-Mud as a Manure for Cotton,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*: 3.

for South Carolina growers. Therefore, without the best quality product, sea island cotton planters would not be able to maintain the lifestyle they had become accustomed to during their own cotton boom in the late 1810s and early 1820s.

The specific details of marsh mud, presented in the report, came from the committee's research, but they also borrowed information published previously by Whitemarsh B. Seabrook. W.B. Seabrook was a prominent planter from Edisto Island, a small sea island located off the southern coast of South Carolina. Among many other political and community roles, Seabrook was president of the South Carolina Agricultural Society, a South Carolina College trustee from 1829-1837, and the sixty-third Governor of South Carolina from 1848-1850.¹¹ According to the Committee, the composition of marsh mud included equal parts sand and salt, no more than one-ninth vegetable matter, and "between one-third and one-fourth" clay.¹² Despite arguing that marsh mud was the right choice of manure for sea island cotton crops, the article stated that multiple levels of manuring was the best course of action because "salt-mud is not sufficient, applied alone, to ensure a crop from a poor soil."¹³ Finally, the article gave readers a clear understanding of some of the drawbacks related to the use of salt mud as manure. For example, the author stated that "salt in excess" would not only destroy the crop that was currently in the ground, but would also greatly limit the soil's ability to be productive for

¹¹For more biographical information related to Seabrook see, National Governors Association, "South Carolina Governor Whitemarsh Benjamin Seabrook," *National Governors Association: The Collective Voice of the Nation's Governors*, accessed September 1, 2014, nga.org. For more information regarding Seabrook's role in the larger Beaufort community, see Lawrence S. Rowland, Alexander Moore, and George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume 1, 1514-1861* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

¹²"Art I.—Report of Committee, on Marsh-Mud as a Manure for Cotton," *The Southern Agriculturalist*: 2.

¹³"Art I.—Report of Committee, on Marsh-Mud as a Manure for Cotton," *The Southern Agriculturalist*: 3. Salt-mud and marsh mud were used interchangeable in this article and throughout the publication tenure of *The Southern Agriculturalist*. Therefore, it will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

several years.¹⁴ By recognizing the drawbacks of salt mud as manure, the author allowed further conversations to contribute to readers' understanding of the manuring process. Other articles confirmed the committee's approach to understanding the best manure for sea island cotton planters. For example, "St. Helena" argued that "salt-mud, salt-marsh, and even common salt" were all the best choices for manure in sea island cotton beds.¹⁵ This author extended his contribution by presenting readers with the different ways that planters could apply manure and which he thought was the best method. According to "St. Helena," the preferred time to apply manure was in the wet stage, because the dried out manure lost some of its nutrient value, most importantly saline.¹⁶

Nicholas Herbemont, a contributor to the *Southern Agriculturalist*, also agreed with the claim that salt marsh made the best manure for sea island cotton. However, Herbemont's conclusions were based less on his experimentation and more on the result that "the finest cotton produced [was] that cultivated within the influence of the sea-air."¹⁷ Herbemont's ideas about salt manure were revealed throughout an excerpt of a letter to Whitemarsh B. Seabrook that was then published in the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Herbemont, although not a cotton planter himself, was a planter who championed the call to diversify crops. However, based on his decision to write to Seabrook, he must have

¹⁴Art I.—Report of Committee, on Marsh-Mud as a Manure for Cotton," *The Southern Agriculturalist*: 7.

¹⁵St. Helena, "On the Cultivation of the Sea-Island or Long-Staple cotton," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 10, 4 (April 1837): 174.

¹⁶St. Helena, "On the Cultivation of the Sea-Island or Long-Staple cotton," *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 174.

¹⁷N. Herbemont, "Art. XVI.— On Sea-Ashes as a Manure," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 7, 3 (March 1834): 129.

been confident in his understanding of the significance of manure in the sea island community.¹⁸

Excerpts from published articles further articulated ideas about scientific aspects of salt manure. In the first year of the *Southern Agriculturalist*'s publication, an article from *Gardener's Magazine* was selected to accompany the original correspondence of the July issue. *Gardener's Magazine* was an agricultural magazine published in London by J.C. Loudon who had previously worked in publishing encyclopedias of gardening and agriculture.¹⁹ The article re-published in the *Southern Agriculturalist* discussed the benefits of using salt in manure for various crops. According to the author, C.W. Johnson of England, "there [was] no plant which [was] fostered either by the gardener or the farmer, that [could not] be benefited by a judicious application of Salt."²⁰ These ideas were similarly confirmed for the sea island community by later publications from planters in the South Carolina area. It is likely that after reading articles, such as this, planters began to more vigorously study salt in manure and determine ways to experiment with salt application. Furthermore, sea island planters knew there was an abundance of saline in a variety of materials in their growing environment due to the location near the sea.

¹⁸Nicholas Herbemont was an agricultural capitalist who practiced mainly in cultivating grapes for wine in South Carolina. As one of the first people to introduce this crop into South Carolina, Herbemont revealed his dedication and expertise in agricultural science that planter capitalists found important. It is not surprising that Herbemont frequently contributed to the *Southern Agriculturalist* in the early years because of Legare's clear focus and drive for the diversification of crops in the state. For the purpose of this paper, Herbemont will be considered a relevant planter within the sea island community because of his dedication to agricultural science and his avid participation in conversations related to sea island cotton. For more information and a detailed look at writings related to wine making, see David S. Shields, ed. *Pioneering American Wine: The Writings of Nicholas Herbemont, Master Viticulturist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

¹⁹*The Gardener's Magazine* 4 (1828): 1-561, accessed September 25, 2015. <https://archive.org/stream/gardenersmagazi02cgoog#page/n560/mode/1up>.

²⁰C.W. Johnson, "Art. II.—On the Use of Salt as a Manure [from the Gardener's Magazine]," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 1, 7 (July 1828): 319.

Thomas Legare not only printed selections from European agricultural journals, but also recognized the importance of selecting excerpts from northern agricultural journals that commented on manuring practices. One such journal was *American Farmer* published in Baltimore between 1819 and 1834.²¹ In several issues of the 1831 volume, Thomas Legare published a series of agricultural essays written by F.A. Ismar that were initially published in *American Farmer*. F.A. Ismar was a prominent international scholar of agricultural and industrial education. In 1831, Ismar gave two speeches in Washington D.C. commenting on the preparations needed for the United States to create viable schools of industry and agriculture based on the model adopted by the Hofwyl school in Switzerland.²² The first essay published in June 1831 dealt primarily with manure, something which Ismar felt was “much neglected in this country.”²³ Throughout this first essay, Ismar detailed the scientific properties of manure fermentation as it related to three main stages of fermentation: putrefaction, destruction, and burning. According to the author, for use in agriculture, farmers should use the fermented dung manure following the second stage because it was most concentrated with salt which “become drier and brighter” leading to a more useful manure to complement soil.²⁴ Ismar also discussed the proper ways to store dung manure based on his knowledge of Holland’s methods. While Holland, in Ismar’s opinion, properly used stables to create and store the fermented

²¹There were several similar versions of this publication published throughout the antebellum and postbellum years in Baltimore. While the editor may have changed, the general purpose behind this publication throughout the nineteenth century remained chiefly agriculture. For specific information about *American Farmer* see the finding aid on the Library of Congress website, “About the American farmer,” *Library of Congress*, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sf88091326/>.

²²For a detailed look at Ismar’s speeches, see F.A. Ismar, *Emanuel Fellenberg’s Institution, at Hofwyl, in Switzerland: Two Lectures, Delivered in Georgetown, D.C.* (Georgetown: Columbian Gazette Office, 1831). More details about the Hofwyl school will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

²³F.A. Ismar, “Art I.—Essays on Agriculture—No. 1 [from the American Farmer],” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 4, 6 (June 1831): 306.

²⁴Ismar, “Art I.—Essays on Agriculture—No. 1,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 307.

manure, agriculturalists in the United States chose to process and hold this fermented material in an open air which destroyed all of the advantageous properties of the manure.

The scientific aspects of salt manure discussion throughout the *Southern Agriculturalist* reveal one area in which planter capitalists focused their attention and began to create a community for sharing information. Planter capitalists read about and contributed to discussions about manure and soil based on examples from the international agricultural community. Looking beyond Ismar's critique of dung storage in the United States, others specifically connected their discussions of salt mud and manure to practices in other places, mostly Europe. For example, in Herbemont's article he supported his conclusion with evidence from his general understanding and books related to manure for agricultural purposes in Holland. According to Herbemont, the manure collected and used throughout Holland was so rich that it was known to be transported to surrounding areas. Holland's manure market was a vital component of the country's commerce for many years.²⁵ Through knowledge of agricultural practices in Europe, Herbemont was able to contribute to the growing conversation about manure use in the South and particularly the sea island cotton region of South Carolina.

Furthermore, Herbemont explained, in detail, how the Dutch created their manure and argued that the southern states had the organic materials necessary to create their own salt-based manures:

It is called, 'Cendres-demer,' (sea-ashes) and is nothing else than salt or brackish marsh or peat, reduced to ashes. By this process of burning, this substance is rendered comparatively very light, and probably its fertilizing properties

²⁵Herbemont, "Art. XVI—On Sea-Ashes as a Manure," *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 129.

concentrated. There is probably no country on this globe that has more of this substance than these Southern States...²⁶

Through the above statement, Herbemont gave readers a basic understanding of the agricultural scientific principles behind sea ash as manure. Planter capitalists, according to Herbemont, could easily make salt ash to use as manure and revealed that the South had the proper materials to earn a profit from a manure market. Herbemont believed that Seabrook had the proper network of people, financial stability, and agricultural prowess to help “some enterprising and patriotic persons” create a large scale manure market.²⁷ While it cannot be determined whether Herbemont actually pursued a potential market for manure created by southern planters, he thought carefully about the project and determined that the North could be a potential recipient for that manure. Furthermore, Herbemont utilized language that referred to the South as a separate country. This idea, presented in the 1834 volume, came as the conversations about potential secession and growing regional tensions were beginning to gain momentum in South Carolina through pressure under the Nullification Crisis during the previous two years.²⁸

Similar to the ways Herbemont pulled examples from Holland to support his knowledge of salt marsh manure, Johnson revealed that salt use was not “confined to England; it extend[ed] from the Rice growers of Hindostan, to the Flax cultivators of America; it ha[d] been applied with advantage to the fields of France, as well as to those of Nubia.”²⁹ Here, Johnson called attention to the various parts of the world that were

²⁶Herbemont, “Art. XVI—On Sea-Ashes as a Manure,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 129.

²⁷Herbemont, “Art. XVI—On Sea-Ashes as a Manure,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 129.

²⁸More details about the Tariffs of 1828 and 1829 and Nullification will be discussed in the next section.

²⁹Johnson, “Art II—On the Use of Salt as Manure,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 320. Based on the definition of Hindustan, it can be determined that Johnson was referring to the upper region of India when he references “Hindustan” in the previous quotation. See, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the*

having success with using salt as a main component in manure. He found commonalities among manures in northern India, the Americas, France (a major competitor of the British in the nineteenth century), and Africa. Throughout the article, Johnson also referenced the many ways that farmers failed using salt as manure, primarily focusing on the over-use of salt. This warning heads the same call mentioned several years later by the committee on salt manure in the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Legare showed his readers Johnson's global understanding and the international use of salt manure and further connected his readers with intellectual property that allowed them to recognize the potential benefits that salt manure could bring for their sea island cotton crop.

While manure was a topic that aroused much discussion, contributors and readers of the *Southern Agriculturalist* were also very interested in discussing the types of seed that produced their variety of sea island cotton and its genetic properties.³⁰ Whitmarsh B. Seabrook carefully documented reasons why those planters located along the coast of South Carolina should continue to cultivate sea island cotton. Several of Seabrook's ideas were based on economic calculations, which will be discussed later, but he also discussed the origin of seed and genetic properties that made the superfine cotton cultivated in South Carolina's sea islands. Seabrook argued that regardless of the changes made in cultivation techniques or basic agricultural practices, the cotton grown in the South Carolina uplands and general interior of the South could never reach the same quality as that which was grown on the sea islands because of the superior quality of species that

English Language, accessed October 3, 2014,
<https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=Hindustan>.

³⁰For information regarding seed selection and other agricultural reforms for short staple or Petit Gulf cotton in the Deep South, see Walter Johnson, *A River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013): 151-175.

flourished in that environment.³¹ Sea island cotton was considered to be high quality due to its silky texture that was not harmed in the ginning process because the smooth seeds made it easier to gin.³² In a footnote, Seabrook provided readers with a detailed list of the different species of cotton implying that many agriculturalists or yeoman farmers might not fully understand the scientific differences among the various strains of cotton grown throughout the world.

As gathered from his initial discussion of genetic species and the geographical importance of the sea islands, Seabrook was not threatened by domestic competition in the form of short staple cotton. He wrote that “no art [could] make uplands [cotton] equal to sea-islands”³³ because it was scientifically a different species. Based on this conclusion, he continued to recommend that planters cultivate sea island cotton despite the slight drop in prices per pound. However, Seabrook expressed budding concerns about a potential type of cotton cultivated in South America. As Seabrook understood it, the South American cotton market that was growing in size consisted of “precisely the same class [of cotton] as that which [was] cultivated on the sea-board” of South Carolina.³⁴ Seabrook commented on the extensive coastal lands that South America could use for cotton production and concluded that they would be a serious competitor to the sea island community in the South Carolina low country. He saw great potential for South American cotton to become a driving force in the superfine cotton market and

³¹Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, “Art. I.—On the Variety of Cotton, proper to be Cultivated on the Sea-Islands,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 4, 7 (July 1831): 342-343.

³²Rowland, et. al, *The History of Beaufort County*, 277.

³³Seabrook, “Art. I—On the Variety of Cotton, proper to be Cultivated on the Sea-Islands,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 342-343.

³⁴Seabrook, “Art. I—On the Variety of Cotton, proper to be Cultivated on the Sea-Islands,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 343.

recognized the continent's existing relationship with England could turn it into a profitable relationship for British manufacturers.³⁵

Even as the tariff crisis mounted throughout the early nineteenth century, Seabrook continued to recommend that superfine sea island cotton be cultivated in contrast to that which was not as high quality. However, in sharing his opinion, Seabrook introduced readers to the many scientific limitations of trying to produce valuable sea island cotton. For example, he discussed the ways in which sea island cotton was limited because each sea island cotton pod on the stalk produced a lower quantity of cotton than the less luxurious short staple crop. Seabrook revealed that "4 or 5lbs. of the seed" would not "yield more than 1lb. in the ginned state."³⁶ Despite the scientific limitations that Seabrook mentioned, he argued for the continued production of sea island cotton because he felt the health of the stalk was more important to the cultivation of a prosperous cotton crop than merely the volume of cotton that could be produced. Because of the fineness of sea island cotton, it often sold for a slightly higher price than its short-staple counterpart from the Mississippi Valley. However, the price also limited the parties willing to buy large quantities because of the cheaper and more readily available short staple cotton that was entering the global market. Seabrook's careful arguments were relevant both to the current sea island cotton planters and subsequent generations as they looked for potential new crops to cultivate because of the state of price depreciation that continued throughout the 1830s.³⁷

³⁵Seabrook, "Art. I.—On the Variety of Cotton, proper to be Cultivated on the Sea-Islands," *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 343.

³⁶Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, "Art. II.—Remarks on the Comparative advantages of cultivating fine and superfine Sea-Island Cottons," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 6, 1 (January 1833): 12.

³⁷Several other articles from the *Southern Agriculturalist* give readers information about cultivating quality crops from a careful selection of seed. For more examples of foreign excerpts commenting on seed selection in a variety of crops and plants, see Dr. Bronn, "Art. LXXVII—The

In the nineteenth century, more and more sea island cotton planters began to realize that their planting practices needed to be based upon a foundation of scientific agricultural principles. However, they also knew that this scientific knowledge was not enough to be prosperous in the larger and more competitive global market of the early nineteenth century. For this reason, contributors to the *Southern Agriculturalist* wrote pieces that discussed the sea island cotton market and the government influences on that market. Through these discussions several general conclusions can be made: the vibrant growth and prosperity of the sea island market in the 1810s and early 1820s was no longer present in the aftermath of the Tariff of 1828, and during this time period South Carolinians, especially those with cotton interests, became more and more hostile to the federal government and began talking of secession and greater local control. Through specific correspondence among contributors and careful consideration of European governmental control, these planter capitalists revealed that they knew more than just the scientific aspects of their craft. Understanding the tariff situation allowed these men to comment on a national event that they were deeply connected to, and also provided a forum through which they could advocate for local and state-level reforms. Planter capitalists commented on political institutions and their effects on the market, and recognized the strength of South Carolina's agricultural influence and began articulating some ideas that would eventually be connected to the language of secession in the late 1850s and 1860.

influence of the Origins of Seeds on the quantity and quality of crops [Translated for the *Farmer's Register* from the *Journal d'Agriculture etc. des Pays Bass*],” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 6, 12 (December 1833): 644-648; and “Mexico-Egyptian Cotton [From the *Southern Telegraph*],” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 12, 2 (February 1839): 96-97.

The Tariff of 1828 was extremely controversial because it taxed imported goods and added ad valorem tax on all cotton that was exported.³⁸ This tax was beneficial for the Northern manufacturers because it protected domestic production, but it essentially limited the wealth potential for cotton planters who saw a dramatic loss in overall profit per pound of cotton. Due to the dramatic influence of the tariff, many planter capitalists were outraged with the level of control exercised by the federal government in the state and local concerns of cotton planters. In response to this tariff, South Carolinians created controversy that influenced the nation through the Nullification Crisis. In response to the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832, South Carolina's state legislature accused the tariff of being unconstitutional, and therefore, it was not to be put into effect within the bounds of the state. The call for Nullification from South Carolina posed a threat to the general well-being of the Union and it could be argued this was one of the first steps in the sectional crisis resulting in the Civil War. South Carolina was still the first state to secede in 1860, even though secession was prevented in the 1830s.³⁹

Throughout his writings, Seabrook specifically revealed his negative feelings towards the federal government mandated Tariffs of 1828 and 1832. In an article published in 1832, Seabrook commented on the "theory and practice of agriculture," but

³⁸Rowland, et. al, *The History of Beaufort County*, 333. An ad valorem tax indicates that the tax is raised or lowered based on the overall price in the market and is a certain percentage of the market price. Therefore, this is not a flat tax, but one based on value.

³⁹For more information about the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 and subsequent Nullification Crisis in South Carolina, see William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Furthermore, nullification had a particularly strong faction of support in the Beaufort District of South Carolina. The political careers of William Elliott III, Robert Barnwell Rhett, and many others were greatly influenced by the nullification controversy. For more specific information about the relationship between local politics in the Beaufort District and the larger nullification movement, see Rowland, et. al, "Nullification Crisis and the Rise of the Rhett Faction," in *The History of Beaufort County*, 333-346.

due to the expanding controversy regarding nullification at the time, Seabrook felt compelled to comment about the crisis:

The excitement consequent on the struggle in which we are engaged with the Federal Government, must plead my apology. When our rights shall be restored, and the State shall once more exhibit the animating scene of olden times, my humble services shall be at your command.⁴⁰

Due to the controversial nature of the event, Seabrook could not help mentioning the events related to tariffs and nullification even in an article that was focused on agricultural theory. Seabrook's language clearly portrayed his negative opinions of the tariffs and influence of the federal government on the economic well-being of the state. As with most of his peers, Seabrook believed that his rights were being taken away by the federal government because they were interfering in business with which they had no authority.⁴¹ The conversation that Seabrook contributed to in the early 1830s was merely one piece of the larger discussion on states' rights in the south in the decades leading up to the Civil War.

Seabrook had a clear understanding of the impact the tariff had on specific sea island cotton prices, but waited until controversy subsided to articulate his full opinions in writing. According to Seabrook's article published in 1842, "from 1827 to 1833, inclusive, when the tariff policy was in the ascendant, the average price of long-cotton

⁴⁰ Whitmarsh B. Seabrook, "Art. XLII—Reflections on the Theory and Practice of Agriculture," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 5, 5 (May 1832): 225

⁴¹It is important to note that not all sea island planters supported the radical policies included in the Nullification Ordinance that threatened secession if Jackson and the federal government didn't repeal the tariff policies. William Elliott III, the subject of the remaining two chapters of this thesis, was a staunch Unionist who resigned his position in the state legislature during this time period because he felt he could not represent his constituents' wishes regarding nullification. Rowland, et.al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 334-335.

was less by about five pence, than at any former or succeeding corresponding period.”⁴² In supporting this assertion, Seabrook provided a chart that details the exports and price per pound for sea island cotton between 1805 and 1841. It is clear based on this chart that the tariff greatly hurt the profit potential for sea island cotton planters, not because of the amount they were able to physically export, but because of the dramatic drop in the average price per pound planters received for their cotton in the global market.⁴³ Based solely on the numbers, it was easy to understand why South Carolinians, and in this case, specifically sea island planters, were not pleased with the tariff policies in 1828. Seabrook took his argument further by explaining how the tariff “drove many of [the] most enterprising agriculturalists from the State,” and that it limited the ability for South Carolina to grow its wealth.⁴⁴ Because the majority of wealth in South Carolina, and the South in general, was based on agricultural endeavors, the vacant plantations and loss of agriculturalists in the region would hurt the overall economy of the state.

Another voice in this conversation about the unnecessary actions by the federal government came from William Alston who shared his views on the tariff controversy by publishing the address that was given to the “Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River.”⁴⁵ Alston clearly stated the purpose behind the creation of this society in his opening remarks:

⁴²Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, “Report of the Committee on Sea Island Cotton,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* (New Series) 2, 1 (January 1842): 3.

⁴³Seabrook, “Report of the Committee on Sea Island Cotton,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 17.

⁴⁴Seabrook, “Report of the Committee on Sea Island Cotton,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 4.

⁴⁵William J. Alston, “Art. I—An Address delivered before the ‘Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River,’ Fairfield District (S.C.) on its first Anniversary, in July, 1829,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 3, 3 (March 1830): 113-120. William Alston, an extremely wealthy planter, primarily grew rice in the low country, but his thoughts still provide a good way to view the opinions of planter capitalists in the area. For more information on the Alston family see William Scarborough, *Masters of The Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

A lively sense of the importance of arresting the evils of an unwise legislation, was the proximate cause of the formation of this institution. In relation to the tariff law, lately passed by Congress, it is a local institution designed to countervail the local legislation of the general government. Its origin is associated with the most momentous crisis in the history of this confederacy...⁴⁶

While it was clear as to the political opinions of the society merely from its name, the poignant words spoken by Alston at this anniversary meeting provided readers unfamiliar with this society an understanding of its specific feelings towards the tariff policies and the federal government's wrongful involvement in local affairs. Alston not only argued that the federal government should remain out of the local purview, but also called the specific decision "unwise" presumably because he was aware of the potential ways South Carolinians would force the issue, culminating in the Nullification Ordinance.

During the time surrounding the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 and subsequent Nullification Crisis, various contributors to the *Southern Agriculturalist* used the federal government's actions to support their argument for more state legislative control and patronage of agriculture in the state. For example, when Thomas Spaulding of Sapelo Island was asked if South Carolina's legislature should become a "protector of agriculture" he responded by writing, "I reply who else can be? Who else should be? The general government never have been; the general government never will be: we no longer have reliance upon her equity or impartiality."⁴⁷ There was no question how Spaulding felt

⁴⁶Alston, "Art. I. An Address delivered before the 'Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River,'" *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 113.

⁴⁷Thomas Spaulding, "Art. I—Copy of a Letter to Mr. Crawford, on Legislative Patronage," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 1, 10 (October 1828): 433. Thomas Spaulding was a member of the sea island community and participated in the conversations regarding cotton prices and the boom in the 1820s. However, most of the land he owned by the end of his life, and his legacy remains, a part of Sapelo Island, in Georgia, just south of Savannah. See, Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 290.

about the role of the federal government and where its loyalties remained. As with many Southerners, Spaulding saw the federal government as partial to northern manufacturers as it, supposedly, limited the rights of Southern states who relied mainly on agricultural pursuits.

In another part of his address to the anti-tariff society, William Alston echoed Spaulding's ideas about the federal government's partiality to northern interests when he stated that the tariff laws were an effort "to blight the prosperity of the Southern States," and in turn support the overall efforts of Northern wealth and political dominance.⁴⁸ The conclusion of Alston's address detailed the various ways in which the federal government had hurt South Carolina in recent years, including the establishment of the National Bank.⁴⁹ Looking to reveal the problems of federal governmental influence and attempting to show the strength and necessity of state and local entities, Alston's address accurately portrayed the feelings of many who were part of the agricultural community in the late 1820s and 1830s. These men, who were significantly impacted by the tariffs, were influential in leading the nullification faction in the South Carolina low country.

For Spaulding, agricultural patronage through state legislative efforts was the most effective and efficient way for South Carolina to combat the negative effects of the tariffs. Again, looking to Europe seemed to comfort Spaulding and provide the necessary evidence to support state-sponsored agricultural efforts. Spaulding provided readers with examples from European countries that greatly supported their citizens' agricultural pursuits. He argued that efforts by France and Spain to patronize through "pattern farms"

⁴⁸Alston, "Art. I. An Address delivered before the 'Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River,'" *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 114.

⁴⁹Alston, "Art. I. An Address delivered before the 'Anti-Tariff Agricultural Society of Broad River,'" *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 119-120

in order to “introduce experiment and invite observation” was too expensive for South Carolina to employ and that the French and Spanish had ultimately failed in their attempts to make their efforts successful.⁵⁰ Instead, Spaulding argued that the nature of legislative involvement should be more focused on the introduction of plants from foreign countries and increased financial support to allow crops, such as wine and silk, to expand South Carolina’s agricultural profile beyond rice and cotton cultivation. Finally, his last solution was a call for legislative involvement in the development of manufacturing of coarse cloth in the South. He felt this approach would greatly hurt Northern manufacturers by limiting Southern reliance on Northern products.⁵¹ Spaulding provided readers with a detailed look at the ways South Carolina was going to be hurt if its people stood by and let the federal government take advantage of them through tariff policies.

Beyond discussions of agricultural science, planter capitalists were cognizant of the larger influences of the global cotton market and its connection to federal policies. Contributors to the *Southern Agriculturalist* condemned the federal government’s influence in local affairs and argued, as Spaulding did, for greater involvement from the state legislature because of agriculture’s importance to the welfare of the entire state, and even nation. Based on the discussions thus far, it was clear planter capitalists understood and shared their knowledge related to science, economics, and government. While it is not directly relevant to our discussion, it is important to note that these planter capitalists showed in their writings that they also valued industry in the form of transportation and

⁵⁰Spaulding, “Art. I—Copy of a Letter to Mr. Crawford,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 434.

⁵¹Spaulding, “Art. I—Copy of a Letter to Mr. Crawford,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 434-435.

technology to improve the quality and quantity of cotton that was produced on various plantations.⁵²

The third major topic discussed by planter capitalists in the pages of the *Southern Agriculturalist* was the management of enslaved workers on plantations. One historian who has recently grappled with the relationship of slavery and capitalism is Edward Baptist. In his newly published book *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Baptist narrates the history of the United States between the signing of the Constitution and the Civil War specifically looking at slavery's expansion into the old southwest and articulating the very specific connections that expansion had to the development of capitalism and economic prosperity in the United States. Seeking to make a historical and deeply provocative argument, he writes that "enslaved African Americans built the modern United States, and indeed the entire modern world..."⁵³ The idea that the profits attributed to the United States were earned through the forced labor of hundreds of thousands of slaves provides historians with a complicated past to uncover and reconsider. However, for the purpose of this project, comments related to slavery will be limited to the understanding of labor management through the eyes of planter capitalists in the sea island community.

⁵²For examples of articles related to industrial transportation, see P.C. Grimball, Proposed Plan, and estimate of cost of a Ferry-Boat, suitable for Southern Rivers, with a Representation, by way of Explanation," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 8, 1 (January 1835): 11-13; "The application of Steam to Agricultural Purposes..." *The Southern Agriculturalist* 7, 9 (September 1834): 501; and "Advantages to Charleston and South-Carolina, to be derived from a Direct Trade; with reflections on the Rail Road and Canal Communications of the South. With a Map," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 12, 5 (May 1839): 237-248. For examples of articles discussing the late Eli Whitney and cotton gin technology, see "S", "Art. LXIII—Sketch of the life of the late Eli Whitney, with some Remarks on the invention of the Saw-Gin," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 5, 8 (August 1832): 393-403; "A Small Planter," "Art. XCII—Remarks on the 'Sketch of the Life of Eli Whitney'," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 5, 12 (December 1832): 626-629; and Dr. CHS W. Capers, "Art. X—Remarks on the origins and introduction of Whitney's Saw Gins into the Southern States, with a Notice of some errors in the Life of Eli Whitney, by Professor Olmstead, contained in Silliman's Journal," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 7, 2 (February 1834): 70-76.

⁵³Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xxiii.

Enslaved labor management was not a primary topic of conversation within the *Southern Agriculturalist*, but it was discussed in several articles in the 1830s. It is crucial to provide commentary on this aspect of conversations in the *Southern Agriculturalist* because these ideas connected back to understanding how to manage a productive labor force in order to keep profits high. The labor of enslaved African Americans allowed these planter capitalists to participate in politics, scientific discussions, and ultimately act as capitalists in their community. Furthermore, discussions of slavery were another example of the way planter capitalists incorporated arguments based on examples in Europe into their capitalist identity. This was crucial in their discussion of enslaved African Americans because these conversations were happening at a time in which more people throughout the Western world were debating some of the economic and moral ills of slavery.

Despite the relatively low percentage of articles discussing enslaved labor management, contributors mostly provided a consistent argument. Aspects of paternalism litter planter capitalists' discussions of slavery. The language used to describe the planter's relationship with his enslaved workers was one that highlighted a perceived parent-child relationship between master and slave. Historians traditionally discussed ideas related to paternalism and capitalism separately, arguing that if planters were paternalistic they could not be described as capitalists. These historians would fall either into the Genovese or Oakes school of thought regarding ideas of paternalism or capitalism.⁵⁴ In his most recent work, Sven Beckert dismisses much of the paternalistic

⁵⁴For more information regarding the paternalism argument, see Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). For the primary counter to Genovese's paternalism argument, see James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

interpretation in his discussion of southern plantations when he writes, “the all-encompassing control of workers—a core characteristic of capitalism—experienced its first great success on the cotton plantations of the American South.”⁵⁵ According to Beckert, planters were ultimately in control of their labor force through the policies of slavery and regardless of the master-slave relationship, that complete control was a crucial component of capitalism. Attempting to combine aspects of paternalist thought and capitalism, William Scarborough’s *Masters of the Big House* analyzes the dual relationship and difficulties faced trying to define planters in one category.⁵⁶ This newer more flexible framework provides the foundation for this discussion of slavery and capitalism, arguing that planters’ language of paternalism does not diminish their role and identity as capitalists in the Atlantic World. Planter capitalists’ paternalistic mindset can be seen clearly within writings about hierarchy on plantations, rules that governed enslaved workers, and through their attempt to articulate feelings they thought slaves had while working within their plantation-style capitalist regime.

In an anonymous letter published in 1833, one contributor revealed his paternalistic view by sharing the three principles that governed the ways he treated and managed the enslaved people on his plantation:

First—That there should be a perfect understanding between the master and his slave.

Secondly—That certain rules should be laid down on the plantation, which should be considered fundamental rules, never to be deviated from, and which should be distinctly understood by all, and,

⁵⁵Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*: 115.

⁵⁶Scarborough, “Lords and Capitalists: The Ideology of the Master Class,” in *Masters of the Big House*: 406-426.

Thirdly—That there should be uniformity of conduct on the part of the master, who ought to exhibit considerable interest in the proceedings on his plantation, and an ambition to excel.⁵⁷

It was difficult to miss the connection between the rules and principles established on this capitalist's plantation and those which govern the life of a small child under the care of a strict parent. The "perfect understanding" that was discussed later in the article provided absolute authority for the master over the slave and was designed to prohibit enslaved workers from acting under their own will. While enslaved workers continuously undermined the authority of their masters through both large and small acts of resistance and practiced agency within their plantation community, masters felt they needed to establish the façade of absolute rule throughout their plantations. This planter also established specific rules which further defined his control over enslaved workers. These rules included limited movement off the plantation, limited social freedom through marriage, and limited economic freedom.⁵⁸ Finally, the third principle mirrored the idea that parents provide equal or complimentary control over their children. It was important for this planter to show his enslaved workers that they were all equal in his eyes which he thought would help establish order on the plantation. This anonymous planter also felt that the "general conduct of a master ha[d] a very considerable influence on the character and habits of his slaves," which not only imposed the planters' thoughts and will on his slaves but potentially exaggerated the daily impact the planter actually had on the enslaved population.⁵⁹

⁵⁷"Art. XXXVII.—On the Management of Slaves," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 6, 6 (June 1833): 281-282.

⁵⁸"Art. XXXVII.—On the Management of Slaves," *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 282.

⁵⁹"Art. XXXVII.—On the Management of Slaves," *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 286.

Contributors also sought to justify their position on slavery, countering Northern and foreign voices who criticized Southern slavery. According to “A Reader,” Africans were inferior to those of European descent, this condition was unchanging, it was “the best” situation for those of African descent.⁶⁰ Through this idea, the identity of the benevolent slaveholder helping the unfortunate slave was reinforced to justify Southern slaveholding. The author was aware that many recent travelers to the South had commented that the region “should not be ranked with civilized nations.”⁶¹ He also utilized foreign examples to justify slavery. In doing so, the author provided an excerpt of a book written by the Prussian Prince Puckler Muskau discussing serfs in Russia. According to Prince Muskau, “the situation of [their] peasants was infinitely preferable to that of the majority of small English farmers.”⁶² Through this statement the Prince argued that the benevolent treatment of a set lower class should be preferred to the dismal lifestyle of a small, but free, farmer. The excerpt discussed the differences between his perceptions of slavery and the class of serfs by arguing that “the poor are every where slaves, even in the midst of the most advanced state of civilization and liberal institutions” and while he thought independence for all peasants was something that the world should strive for, it should only be attempted in places “where it [could] be done without endangering the rights and interest of those more immediately interested.”⁶³ Using this final remark, the planter contributing to the journal concluded that if all people of African descent were freed in the South, it would completely dismantle society and

⁶⁰“A Reader,” “Agricultural Laborers,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 8, 1 (January 1835): 8.

⁶¹“A Reader,” “Agricultural Laborers,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 9.

⁶²“A Reader,” “Agricultural Laborers,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 9.

⁶³“A Reader,” “Agricultural Laborers,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 10.

then the nation would “lose its rank and caste among civilized nations.”⁶⁴ Through explanation and evidence from foreign dignitaries, this author presented his readers with the understanding that African slavery must be maintained in order to have a stable society that was connected and recognized in the larger Western civilized world. These ideas connected back to the nature with which planter capitalists understand the management of slaves and also the importance of southern participation in larger global affairs both politically and economically.

Whitemarsh Seabrook’s contributions to the slavery discussion were based in similar ideas of inferiority, but he discussed these ideas in relation to plantation management and the unsuccessfulness of many sea island planters. According to Seabrook, there were four main reasons for the unsuccessful nature of certain sea island cotton planters: “1st. Absence in the summer months. 2d. The want of strict personal supervision when the Planter is at home. 3d. Over-planting. 4th. Ignorance.”⁶⁵ While none of these reasons specifically mention slavery or the limitations of enslaved people, in the remainder of this article he expressed his views about the problems with relying on enslaved Africans to manage sea island plantations. Because, Seabrook argued, the majority of overseers who maintained the daily workings of plantations for absentee planters were of African descent and uneducated, they were not able to make decisions thinking about “economizing labour[sic] and time” which was “a matter of immense moment to the agriculturalist.”⁶⁶ His racist tendencies are obvious through these ideas that innate inferiority prevented Africans from understanding the same ideas that their

⁶⁴“A Reader,” “Agricultural Laborers,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 10.

⁶⁵Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, “Art. XXI—On the Causes of the general Unsuccessfulness of the Sea-Island Planters,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 7, 4 (April 1834): 177.

⁶⁶Seabrook, “Art. XXI—On the Causes of the general Unsuccessfulness of the Sea-Island Planters,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 177.

masters of European descent took seriously in order to maximize efficiency. Beyond the clear public expressions of racism, Seabrook's ideas revealed an important aspect of his understanding of a planter capitalist identity. Based in his discussions, it is clear that Seabrook valued applying scientific, economic, and capitalistic principles within the daily workings of sea island cotton plantations.

More degrading comments towards those of African descent filled Seabrook's discussion. He argued that Africans had a limited capacity to understand and think about the future. According to Seabrook, the thoughts of a man of African descent were "limited to the present—he never thinks of to-morrow."⁶⁷ Seabrook used his arguments to reveal the stupidity of planters who left their plantations all summer in the hands of overseers of African descent or those who failed to look at the work of their slaves while home on their plantation. In making this argument, Seabrook mobilized racism to argue for more efficient and progressive agricultural practices, which makes it complicated to decipher Seabrook's overall goal or purpose behind his specific labor argument. Seabrook not only discussed the problem that he saw regarding black overseers, but also presented a solution to the problem. His solution was to make overseeing an established profession that held similar, but not equal, esteem to planters. Through this discussion, he advocated for a fundamental change in southern society that, in his mind, would allow sea island cotton planters to be more profitable in their agricultural pursuits.

Through various written pieces published in the *Southern Agriculturalist*, it was clear that planter capitalists relied on slave labor and sought out ways to better manage that labor force in order to maximize profits. The language used to describe enslaved

⁶⁷Seabrook, "ART. XXI—On the Causes of the general Unsuccessfulness of the Sea-Island Planters," *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 178.

workers and instruct other agriculturalists on the proper management of slaves further solidified the paternalistic viewpoints of many slaveholders in the South Carolina low country, a view that was prominent, but not isolated, to this tiny coastal community. This study does not want to justify the actions of planter capitalists nor limit the view of enslaved workers to a machine-like labor supply, but merely present the viewpoint that planter capitalists publically shared through their writings during the early nineteenth century in the *Southern Agriculturalist*.

The *Southern Agriculturalist* allowed planter capitalist contributors and its readers to better understand what was important and relevant to their role in the global economy. These agriculturalists were seeking a transformation in the ways husbandry was conducted in their community and therefore they fought to continue this type of communication and instruction past their individual lifetimes. For planter capitalists in South Carolina, this push was articulated throughout the *Southern Agriculturalist* as they petitioned and argued with the state legislature to establish a professorship of agriculture at South Carolina College. The push for more formal practical education reveals planter capitalists' dedication to teaching agricultural science to future generations and provides another avenue to see their increasing connections to and understanding of their place in the global community as they viewed the ways the North and Europe developed agricultural education programs.

Beginning in the early antebellum period, planter capitalists discussed ideas regarding the increase in scientific education at the college level. It is typical for historians looking at education to discuss the rise of scientific or practical education as

being primarily fought for in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁸ However, based on a careful reading of *The Southern Agriculturalist*, it can be argued that specific ideas regarding scientific agricultural education were present in the minds of planter capitalists many decades before the movement was successful following the Civil War. While the efforts to promote science as a part of higher education reform were not successful at the national level until the passage of the Morrill Land-Grant Act in 1862 and a specific department geared toward agriculture was not developed at South Carolina College until the 1880s, the ideas that formed a foundation for the development of agricultural and science schools in the southern states were discussed often in the *Southern Agriculturalist* throughout the 1830s.⁶⁹

Whitemarsh B. Seabrook was one contributor who discussed the state of agricultural education. According to Seabrook, “Agriculture [had] too long been deemed an art,” and therefore, it suffered in practical scientific observation.⁷⁰ In order to aid in the transformation of these thoughts, Seabrook articulated his support for the proposed professorship of agriculture at South Carolina College. He argued that it would not only be beneficial for those who would inherit plantations, both large and small, but to all men

⁶⁸For a brief introduction to some of the early schools of agriculture established in the United States and a general discussion of the push for practical education, see Roger L. Gieger, “The Rise and Fall of Useful Knowledge: Higher Education for Science, Agriculture, and the Mechanic Arts, 1850-1875,” in Roger L. Geiger, ed., *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000): 153-168.

⁶⁹One aspect of the Morrill Land-Grant Act provided the financial assistance to build what are referred to as “land-grant” colleges. These colleges received federal and state level funding in order to provide “the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life,” U.S. Government, 7 U.S. Code § 304 - Investment of proceeds of sale of land or scrip, *Legal Information Institute*, Cornell University Law School, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/7/304>.

⁷⁰Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, “Extract, From an Address delivered at the first anniversary meeting of the United Agricultural Society of South Carolina, in the Hall of the House of Representatives, at Columbia, on Thursday, 6th December, 1827,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 9, 3 (March 1836): 126.

who would someday be involved in contributing to the well-being of the state. In his address, Seabrook argued that even those who would go into jobs as lawyers or merchants could benefit from a primary understanding of agricultural principles.⁷¹

In advocating for formal agricultural education, many contributors provided evidence of successful programs in agricultural education. For example, Seabrook used examples from Europe to show the great strides that had been made in agricultural education. According to Seabrook, the “first Agricultural School in Europe, was founded at Milau in 1770.”⁷² He followed this statement up by listing the other European countries where schools were established, including “Switzerland, Prussia, Italy, France, and the Austrian States.”⁷³ He gave specific details about the success of the Hofwyl School in Switzerland whose students were employed in positions of high authority throughout the country directing “the labours of Agriculture.”⁷⁴ The successes that Seabrook highlighted mirror the role that his fellow planter capitalists played in southern society. By showing that these agricultural schools were producing more than glorified small farmers, Seabrook revealed the great benefits that the elite planter class could have with increased education.

Another article further established the origins of formal agricultural education in Europe. An excerpt from *British Farmer's Magazine* was presented in the June 1837 issue of the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Mentioning Switzerland as a primary location for agricultural schools, this article established the basic foundation for understanding the

⁷¹Seabrook, “Extract,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 128-129.

⁷²Seabrook, “Extract,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 129.

⁷³Seabrook, “Extract,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 129.

⁷⁴Seabrook, “Extract,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 129.

development of agricultural schools in Europe.⁷⁵ While many planter capitalists were merely looking for a department and professorship of agriculture at South Carolina College, this article revealed the ways in which schools particularly designed for agriculture could be organized. According to Donbavand, the author, it was important to understand the basis for setting up schools in Switzerland, but stated that these principles would not apply directly to Britain. Donbavand established his own plan for agricultural schools in his country. According to this plan, there needed to be a balance between scientific book learning and practical applications on farms designed for school use.

Through his discussion, Donbavand established ten areas of study that needed to be incorporated into agricultural schools: “the art of performing the manual operations of agriculture; simple mechanics; land surveying, and the art of valuing rents and tillage, botany, geology, mechanical drawing, animal pathology, physiology, and veterinary medicine, entomology, chemistry, and English grammar and composition.”⁷⁶ Through a diverse curriculum, the students would be able to enter agricultural work in a variety of fields. These areas of study would also be beneficial for those looking to establish specific classes related to agriculture at South Carolina College. These planter capitalists looked to Europe to support their arguments about why agricultural schools were necessary, and also to find evidence of how to create a relevant curriculum and present students with appropriate knowledge related to the science of agriculture.

Beyond foreign influence, some contributors looked to discuss aspects of honor and revitalizing the foreign reputation of the planter class through their call for education at the highest level. Thomas Legare addressed the St. Andrew’s Agricultural Society and

⁷⁵B. Donbavand, “Agricultural Schools [From the British Farmers Magazine],” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 10, 6 (June 1837): 316-322.

⁷⁶Donbavand, “Agricultural Schools,” *The Southern Agriculturalist*, 521-522.

discussed the vital importance of scientific agricultural education. While the specific aspects of science he found most important are not relevant to this discussion, his overall argument at the end of the address calling young people to strive for creating an educated planter class was one of the most explicit arguments in favor of agricultural education. Legare hoped that a professorship of agriculture could be established at South Carolina College because he disliked the association of planters with outdated inherited estates. Legare wanted others to

see enterprising and energetic young men, springing up in every quarter to represent the character of the Carolina planter, with dignity and respectability.

The intellectual emulation which would thus be excited, would have a tendency to drive from our honourable calling, the drones of society; and the name of the planter would then become synonymous with that of the educated gentleman.⁷⁷

Through these strong convictions, Legare gave readers hope that the planter class would remain influential in South Carolina's society and agriculture would not be considered an older profession that was less prestigious than professions of medicine, law, and manufacturing. Education, for the planter capitalist, would give legitimacy to what they accomplished even if many planters were already adopting and incorporating aspects of agricultural science into their daily plantation regimes.

The efforts of these planter capitalists to fight for a professorship of agriculture at South Carolina College was the culminating solution for their goal of establishing and pursuing the study of agriculture in a scientific manner. They found a way to value their own education through individual readings and study, but wanted to expand and improve

⁷⁷Dr. Thomas Legare, "Address delivered before the St. Andrew's Agricultural and Police Society of James Island, on the 7th of April 1835," *The Southern Agriculturalist* 8, 5 (May 1835): 236.

the general knowledge related to agriculture and have it easily accessible to future generations. These planters looked to Europe to understand and establish their programs in agricultural science. The transfer of ideas across the Atlantic Ocean further connected planter capitalists, in an intellectual way, to the expanding global economy.

Planter capitalists developed a core set of topics through which their identity was formed within the Atlantic World. One aspect of that identity was a deep understanding of agricultural science. Specifically, they were interested in manuring practices and the different scientific varieties of cotton seeds. Furthermore, planter capitalists in the South Carolina low country had extensive knowledge regarding the global cotton market and how to best contribute and participate in that ever-changing world. By artfully combatting tariffs imposed by the national government and the vast expansion of short staple cotton into the Deep South, planters in the greater-Charleston area sought to reestablish their footing in the expansive cotton market. A third aspect of planter capitalists' knowledge base was understanding the nature of labor and how to best manage that labor in order to be efficient and profitable. Planters' paternalistic viewpoints contributed to the continued enslavement of African Americans who were the primary force that planters felt they needed to manage. All of these ideas came together as planter capitalists discussed establishing agricultural science as part of the curriculum at South Carolina College. These planters felt future generations deserved specific education related to their overall goals of becoming planter capitalists.

While this chapter has clearly shown the transfer of ideas throughout the planter capitalist community in the South Carolina low country, there were specific planters who put these various ideas into practice and succeeded in participating in the larger Atlantic

World. One planter that embodied the ideals of the planter capitalist identity described in the *Southern Agriculturalist* and participated in the larger Atlantic World was William Elliott III from the sea island growing community in the Beaufort District. His practical knowledge and foreign travel contributed to his role within this expanding community and his story will serve as a primary case study in the two chapters that follow. Elliott's story provides an example of an individual who sought to put the many ideals set forth in the *Southern Agriculturalist* into practice.

Chapter 2

Identity in Practice: The Complicated Nature of William Elliott's Role as a Planter Capitalist

In the fall of 1855, William Elliott became involved in a heated debate regarding property rights. His son Ralph at the Pon Pon plantation, and Price, his neighbor, came to blows after Ralph accused the neighbor of illegally trading goods with the enslaved people who worked and lived at Pon Pon. The reactions became heated when Ralph pushed Price to the ground. In response, Price shot at Ralph twice, barely missing his head. Ralph left the skirmish with just two bullet holes in his hat. He was left feeling like his status had been violated, and therefore, with his father's help, filed a law suit against Price. William Elliott then became involved as the legal battle took place, with Ralph thinking that Price was clearly at fault because he had fired the shots. However, William Elliott understood the "cartography of power in low country Carolina" and knew that the location of the incident was a crucial aspect of his son's battle with the yeoman farmer.¹

This minor confrontation with Price provides one example of the ways in which William Elliott and other planters were being challenged in the mid-to-late antebellum period. In this case, Elliott and his son's power was challenged by a yeoman farmer who sought out his own claims to property rights. As will be shown throughout this chapter, William Elliott was challenged from above and below by a variety of outside forces in addition to the yeoman class. The purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with a greater understanding of how William Elliott, an exemplar of the planter capitalist class, attempted to put the ideas distributed through the *Southern Agriculturalist* into practice. Not all of Elliott's efforts to embody the ideals of the planter capitalist identity were

¹Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 6. The vignette provided above was taken from the introduction of McCurry's first chapter.

effective because of a variety of external forces that he managed, in some cases, and succumbed to, in others. Three major groups that challenged and influenced Elliott's participation as a planter included the rising professional class, the government at both the state and federal level, and the enslaved population. These three categories will thus create the organizational framework for this chapter. Following this, the discussion will culminate in a final chapter examining Elliott's most successful efforts to elevate his status in the larger Atlantic World.

Often contributing to agricultural and literary publications, William Elliott became well known for his knowledge related to a variety of subjects, including agricultural science, economics, government, and education. All of these components facilitated Elliott's understanding of himself and his participation as a capitalist in the Atlantic economy. As an avid contributor to the *Southern Agriculturalist*, Elliott wrote on a wide range of topics and participated in the conversations about the relationship of planter capitalists to the rest of society. The contributors to the *Southern Agriculturalist* provided a compelling collection of qualifications with which to construct a definition of the ideal planter capitalist. These qualifications included a deep understanding and ongoing dedication to agricultural science as a means of improving production and product, the ability to participate knowledgably in economic transactions and debate various economic policies regarding both domestic and foreign markets, a careful consideration of plantation management including the management of an enslaved labor force, and an effort to promote the professional education of future planters in an attempt to maintain their wealth and status in society. Based on Elliott's contributions in the *Southern Agriculturalist* and his prominence in the South Carolina low country

community, these categories of discussion will be the basis for understanding Elliott's strengths and weaknesses in embodying the ideals of the planter capitalist identity.

While Elliott specifically used the word capitalist to define himself and others like him in his discussions, and the *Southern Agriculturalist* provides a unique window into one way to define a planter capitalist, scholars who write about capitalism, slavery, and cotton have also sought to provide their own definitions of planter capitalism or choose not to use the word capitalist to define planters like William Elliott. For example, Laurence Shore in *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* studies the "words and actions" of Southern elites in order to show the changes between antebellum and postbellum southern political economy and elite culture.² Shore argues that because the antebellum plantation South was not a pre-capitalist society, the planters themselves didn't have to change very much when transitioning their elite society after the end of slavery in the United States. According to Shore two defining characteristics of the "slaveholding capitalist" were that "he sacrificed short-term growth spurts for long-term profits, and he replaced boorishness with refinement."³ Here Shore's definition finds parallels with the ideas professed in the *Southern Agriculturalist* because it highlights long-term progress, which became important in the various progressive agricultural practices that were adopted and discussed throughout the community. In highlighting the capitalist aspects of planters, Shore also places a strong emphasis on plantation culture and refinement, which is something that contributors to the *Southern*

²Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), xii.

³Shore, *Southern Capitalists*, 18. Shore's basis for this argument was found in the ideas promoted by Edward Ruffin, a Virginia slaveholder in the antebellum period. For more information about Ruffin and Shore's overall ideas about slaveholding capitalists, see Chapter 1, "Slaveholding Capitalists: The Evolution of the Antebellum South's Peculiar Identity" in *Southern Capitalists*, 16-41.

Agriculturalist did not explicitly discuss. However, contributors' push for formal education may have held similar meaning to the cultural significance Shore recognizes.

Shore, throughout his work, was explicit in naming the slaveholding planters as capitalists. However, not all historians use those words so precisely, even as they are talking about the importance and significance of slavery in the capitalist system. Historians in the last two decades have shown the undeniable connections between slavery and capitalism, but most choose not to use the word "capitalist" to identify planters. In *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Edward Baptist argues for the centrality of slavery and the enslaved to capitalism and the wealth of the United States, but he uses words such as "enslaver" and "manager" to describe planters who controlled the large-scale plantations, or "labor camps", in the newly developing Deep South.⁴ These labels tie closely to his overall purpose in revealing the unquestionable brutality of the internal slave trade and large scale plantation slavery. While Baptist finds capitalism and slavery as ultimately connected, his focus is to highlight violence and the physical effects of American slavery, instead of the capitalist mindset of plantation managers.

Another historian contributing to the conversations regarding cotton and the development of capitalism is Sven Beckert. In his recently published work, Beckert looks at the development of capitalism over several centuries showing how cotton helped shape and change our current state of global capitalism. Throughout his global history, Beckert only refers to those manufacturing elite in Britain, the North, and later, in other developing nations, as capitalists. When discussing "war capitalism," the first stage of capitalism involving slavery and other forms of unfree labor, Beckert comments on the

⁴Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

southern United States and planters, but he limits his use of the word “capitalist” to describe the British industrial titans and does not extend that identity descriptor to the planters in his narrative.⁵ Given Beckert’s previous work and background, it is not surprising that he limits the capitalist label for those involved in the industrial production of cotton. Beckert is a historian of American capitalism, but his previous work focuses primarily on the urban business elite that experienced vast increases in wealth and status during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶ Despite the more narrow definition of capitalist, Beckert’s *Empire of Cotton* prompts historians to contribute to what he and others have already advanced by asking questions about the capitalists who managed the enslaved labor force instead of merely those capitalists who reaped the benefits of raw cotton grown in an exploitative environment in a far corner of the world. It is necessary to call these planters “capitalists” because they described themselves in that way and they saw themselves as holding an equal, if not more important, role than manufacturers in the global cotton market. Though planters like Elliott clearly saw themselves as capitalists, they struggled to live up to the ideals they championed.

Beyond challenges from yeoman farmers as mentioned previously, one prominent group that began directly challenging Elliott and his fellow planter capitalists’ way of life was the rising professional class. This class was occupied by lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and others who worked in what are considered white-collar jobs today. The professional class in South Carolina was gradually gaining prominence as cities grew and needed greater professional infrastructure for society to operate. Not only was the

⁵For more information on how Beckert discusses and defines war capitalism and southern planters’ role in the exploitation of enslaved labor, see Sven Beckert, *The Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 98-135.

⁶Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

professional class increasing in size, but they were also providing wealth and taking credit for the success of the state. One such professional was Edmund Rhett. Rhett was involved in the legal, business and finance world as a lawyer. After graduating from Yale College in 1830, Rhett opened two law practices at Ashepoo Ferry and in Beaufort.⁷ Elliott and Rhett were quite different in their professional lives, yet their choice of career was not the only difference between the two men; while Elliott was a staunch Unionist and did not support nullification or secession talks in the 1850s, Rhett was “the leader of the secessionist faction in St. Helena Parish.”⁸ As Elliott in the mid-antebellum period was discussing the prominence of agriculture and its vast importance to the state of South Carolina, Rhett was quick to disagree. This initial challenge provided Elliott an opportunity to defend his position and thus exemplify some of the aspects of the planter capitalist identity related broadly to economics.

Through two oral addresses and two articles published in several installments over many issues of the *Southern Agriculturalist*, William Elliott and Edmund Rhett debated the question: Who was the producer of wealth in the South? Elliott argued that planters were the main producers of wealth. In contrast, Rhett reasoned that the professionals were equal to agriculturalists in their role as the producers of wealth in the South. This argument proved significant because it was directly challenging the old status quo that placed planters at the forefront of southern society. The debates between Elliott and Rhett extended over several years and throughout different publication forums which signaled that others in the community would have also been aware and interested in this challenge.

⁷Lawrence S. Rowland, Alexander Moore, and George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume 1, 1514-1861* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 423.

⁸Rowland, et. al., *The History of Beaufort County*, 423.

The debate between Elliott and Rhett began in the pages of the *Southern Cabinet*, the renamed version of the *Southern Agriculturalist*, when Rhett contributed his agricultural address entitled “Who is the Producer?” which was delivered before the Beaufort Agricultural Society in August 1840.⁹ Countering earlier arguments presented by French and American economists, Rhett’s argument in this address was that “every result of human labor which accomplishes [satisfying the wants and needs of people], whether tangible or intangible, material or immaterial, no matter what, has of necessity some exchangeable value, and is so far an element of wealth.”¹⁰ Through this statement, Rhett argued against the idea that agricultural production was the primary wealth of a nation: an argument that William Elliott would vehemently defend.¹¹ Elliott’s response to Rhett’s provocative argument and defense of his place in society provides a unique vantage point to view his efforts to put into practice the ideals of his planter identity.¹²

William Elliott initially commented on the fact that Rhett’s address was in direct conflict with an address that Elliott had given to the Beaufort Agricultural Society two years earlier. This prompted Elliott to respond aggressively to Rhett’s argument that gave little credit to the wealth produced by Elliott and his peers. Despite presenting these ideas previously, Elliott declared that “the Planters ha[d] not been awakened to the necessity of

⁹Edmund Rhett, “Agricultural Address—Entitled ‘Who is the Producer?’ Delivered before the Beaufort Agricultural Society, August 1840,” *The Southern Cabinet* 12, 1 (December 1840): 705-716.

¹⁰Rhett, “Who is the Producer?” *The Southern Cabinet*, 708.

¹¹While both men published and spoke to defend their opinions, for the remainder of this chapter, Rhett’s ideas will only be discussed in the context of Elliott. Rhett’s specific language will not be analyzed here. For a more detailed look at Rhett’s use of language see, Rhett, “Who is the Producer?” *The Southern Cabinet*.

¹²The section that follows will discuss the specific language and ideas that Elliott presented in his published writings in the *The Southern Cabinet* and a follow-up piece that was published independently. This section does not seek to argue that Elliott’s argument was better or worse than Rhett’s, but merely seeks to use the argument as a foundation to analyze Elliott’s experiences as a planter feeling pressure from a rising professional class.

protecting their own interests.”¹³ Due to this lack of change and the subsequent publishing of Rhett’s “notable opinions,” Elliott felt it was necessary to reiterate his main claims and provide greater analysis of his larger argument about the role of planter capitalists in South Carolina.¹⁴ His initial comment called “the Soil of Carolina” the “great laboratory of her wealth” and argued that “the planter [was] the principal elaborator.”¹⁵ Through this short statement readers understood the main facet of Elliott’s point of view: agriculture and agriculturalists’ primary role in developing South Carolina’s wealth.

While his experience as a planter was limited to South Carolina, Elliott did not limit his overall conclusions to his state. Instead, Elliott argued for the regional importance of planters. He clearly stated his thesis after defending agriculture as an occupational category:

the agriculturist was in this region the chief producer. That while the merchant, mechanic, manufacturer, and other classes engaged in various branches of industry, contributed to the great aggregate of wealth, the planter was, nevertheless, the most important contributor. That lawyers, doctors, clergymen, soldiers and others, were not directly producers.¹⁶

Here, Elliott articulated his specific opinions on planters and their roles as producers of wealth, and he dismissed Rhett’s ideas that members of the professional class were equal

¹³William Elliott, *Examination of Mr. Edmund Rhett’s Address: On the Question “Who is the Producer?”* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1841), 4. This publication is a consolidated version of the letters sent to the editor of the *Southern Agriculturalist* responding to Rhett’s statements. For ease of use, this will be the version cited throughout the remainder of the chapter.

¹⁴Elliott, *Examination of Mr. Edmund Rhett’s Address*, 4.

¹⁵Elliott, *Examination of Mr. Edmund Rhett’s Address*, 4.

¹⁶ William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated: His Claim Examined—to Be Considered a Direct Producer: The Chief Producer: And a Chief Taxpayer of South Carolina* (Charleston: Burges & James, 1842), 4.

to agriculturalists in their role as producers of wealth. Echoing his previous publication, Elliott presented readers with the idea that planter capitalists also contributed to the wealth of their respective state through a large proportion of taxes. The planters often owned the largest tracts of land and a vast number of slaves, both of which were highly taxed.¹⁷ By paying higher taxes, the planters gave large sums of money to the state and these taxes would have generally supported the overall welfare of its people.

In his published writings and private correspondence, Elliott did not attempt to argue that professions besides agriculture were unimportant. In fact, he was careful to do just the opposite when he wrote, “I am not Vandal enough to say, that the class of learned professions are therefore useless, or could in any well-ordered society be dispensed with: I merely say that they are not producers, except incidentally.”¹⁸ This spoke to Elliott’s audience in both cases: planter capitalists. These planters argued for greater attention to education and intellectual efforts from their fellow planters in order to improve the level of agricultural production in South Carolina. In his role as a capitalist, Elliott did not think negatively about those learned professions, but instead wanted planters to emulate some aspects of intellectual pursuits in order to produce the vast wealth he felt South Carolina needed in order to prosper.

In an attempt to continue this public debate, Elliott published a piece entitled *The Planter Vindicated: His Claims Examined—to be Considered a Direct Producer: The Chief Producer: And Chief Taxpayer of South Carolina*. The introduction of this piece revealed his intended audience, the “members of the agricultural societies of South Carolina,” and it gave insight into his general feelings about planters as the chief

¹⁷William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 4-5.

¹⁸Elliott, *An Examination of Mr. Edmund Rhett’s Address*, 5.

producers in the state.¹⁹ Elliott's piece argued that the primary producers of wealth in the South were the planters, who he also referred to as capitalists. As in his piece in the *Southern Agriculturalist*, Elliott first articulated that "Agriculture [was] the leading pursuit of this State, and the entire South."²⁰ While it does not seem questionable that agriculture was a prominent feature in Southern society, Elliott tried to provide some evidence to support his claim. According to Elliott, the availability of cheap land, the "possession of a peculiar class of laborers," the existence of adaptive agricultural techniques, and the valuable nature of the crops all solidified agriculture's prominence in the region.²¹ In presenting this evidence, Elliott listed the different aspects of production that made agriculture the prominent occupational category for many people in the South.

Elliott further complicated his readers' understanding of the producers of wealth when he gave some credit to the technology that was aiding in the productive nature of plantations in the early to mid-nineteenth century. While still attempting to dismiss Rhett's argument, Elliott believed that "the Planter [was] not to enjoy the exclusive honor of producing his cotton."²² According to Elliott, "Whitney the inventor of the saw-gin. Arkwright[*sic*] the inventor of the spinning jenny. [And] Watt the improver of the steam engine" were also vital producers of the region's wealth.²³ For Elliott, the marriage of agriculture and technology was one way that wealth was produced in South Carolina. Elliott believed that the accomplishments of the aforementioned inventors should not go without praise. When describing Whitney's merits, Elliott wrote, "his was a great invention, fashioning the industry, and directing into new channels the entire agricultural

¹⁹William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 2.

²⁰William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 4.

²¹William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 4.

²²Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 13.

²³Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 13.

labor of a people.”²⁴ Elliott clearly saw the connections between the saw-gin, the daily operations of cotton plantations, and the industrial market for agricultural products which shows basic understanding of the connected nature of the economic system.²⁵

Furthermore, Elliott’s travels to the North exposed him to many technologies that were not often seen throughout the South, and through personal correspondence his economic discussions continued, connecting the improvement of technology with increased wealth outside of southern plantations. In many of his letters to his wife, mother, and children, Elliott commented on the prosperity he saw throughout the North. In one letter from 1844, Elliott explained this prosperity and connected it with the dedication that northerners had to manufacturing raw products, specifically cotton, from the southern states. Elliott not only recognized the wealth of many northern industrial centers, but also voiced his opinion about the distribution of wealth throughout the country when he wrote, “I think it is high time that our own country should come in for a share of these profits.”²⁶ Beyond labeling the South as a country, Elliott said that it was unfair that southerners often were not given equal weight in the prosperity from their own agricultural products. Elliott saw that northern factories were “so fully employed” while “in the mean time we who raise the cotton—starve.”²⁷ Clearly, William Elliott and his fellow planter capitalists were not starving and enjoyed many luxuries in their lives including travel, European commodities, and the ownership of land and enslaved people.

²⁴Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 13.

²⁵There currently exists scholarly debate about the myth surrounding Eli Whitney and the cotton gin. While this debate is important in the larger field of slavery and technology studies, this study does not seek to argue one way or another, but merely takes into account Elliott’s view of technology and the credit he bestowed upon Whitney. For a detailed history about the cotton gin in world history and its connection to the American South, see Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

²⁶William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 11, 1844. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

²⁷William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 11, 1844.

While Elliott's correspondence in the 1830s and 1840s showed that he was constantly concerned about the fluctuating price of sea island cotton, his overall purpose in describing himself in the class of struggling people was complicated and difficult to understand. In this private letter, Elliott did not need to manipulate his language for political purposes, but he may have still felt the sting that many Southerners, and South Carolinians specifically, felt following the tariff debates in the 1830s. The struggles between northern manufacturing and southern agricultural production would continue to influence political and economic ties throughout the nineteenth century. In seeking to embody the ideals of the planter capitalist identity, Elliott was involved in and discussed economics as he met complications from the professional class.

Looking beyond his conflict with the rising professional class, William Elliott was also challenged by and forced to deal explicitly with the state and federal government which complicated his efforts to embody the ideals of planter capitalism. Throughout his published and personal writings, Elliott argued for greater support from the government for planter capitalists. Specifically, Elliott argued for financial support for planters to implement progressive agricultural practices and for South Carolina College to establish a program for the study of agricultural science. Through his actions and arguments at the state and national level, Elliott exhibited the ideals of the planter capitalist identity.

One area which concerned Elliott at the state level was taxes. Throughout his writings Elliott articulated his ideas about the taxes that the planter class paid, therefore contributing large amounts of money to the state. This money, as far as Elliott was concerned, was not properly utilized by the legislature to benefit agriculturalists. Elliott had further concerns regarding the way funds were appropriated throughout the state, a

problem shared by many low country citizens. In a letter to his wife while in legislative session in Columbia, Elliott wrote that he had “lost [his] relish extremely for Legislation” because the internal improvements, like canals, which were built using tax-payer money did not fully extend to the sea islands.²⁸ Therefore, not only did Elliott see much of his wealth being allocated to the state through taxation, but he was not able to reap any of the general benefits that were afforded to constituents in the upcountry. This was a specific grievance that affected Elliott and his fellow Beaufort-area sea island cotton planters more because of their crucial ties to the coastal community. However, it is important to note that as indicated in articles in the *Southern Agriculturalist* some internal improvements would begin to reach the sea islands in the decades following Elliott’s early letter to his wife. These internal improvements would begin to change the way Elliott and other planter capitalists communicated with one another and transported their agricultural products throughout the national and international markets.²⁹

Elliott further argued that while planters contributed the majority of tax revenue to the state, there were “no schools for improvement in their art, no bounties for encouragement, no surveys, Geological or Agricultural had been instituted” to aid in the continued progress and prosperity of the agriculturalist.³⁰ One component of Elliott’s list of demands was his call for surveys, both geological and agricultural. These surveys would advertise the significance of agriculture to the state and would provide planters with an overall account of what others were doing throughout South Carolina. According to Elliott, these were common in states that valued agriculture. To make his point even

²⁸William Elliott to Ann Elliott, December 15, 1820. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

²⁹For examples of articles that discussed these improvements, see Chapter 1, pg. 42.

³⁰Elliott, *An Examination of Mr. Edmund Rhett’s Address*, 3.

more provocative, Elliott provided an example of a state who had dedicated effort to improving agriculture: “I blush when I recollect that the State of Massachusetts, with her barren soil, and with an immense stake in manufacturing and commercial industry, has done more to develop [sic] the resources of her territory than we, who have but this one great interest to foster.”³¹ It should be noted that his choice to provide an example of a northern state would not have gone unnoticed as sectional tensions rose in the 1840s. While he did not appreciate the lack of effort from the current state legislature, William Elliott’s arguments calling for increased legislative support not only blamed the legislative body, but he also blamed his fellow planters for not recognizing their own status in society. He wanted his fellow agriculturalists to be more forceful in pushing for a progressive agricultural agenda within the political realm in order to make changes that could insure the state’s future prosperity.³² In this way, Elliott hoped to directly confront the challenges imposed on planters by the state government.

Despite his call for greater support from the state legislature, Elliott wanted less interference from the government at the federal level because of their efforts to impose legislation that affected his ability to participate in the free market Atlantic economy. As discussed in the previous chapter, the crisis surrounding the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 provided a major point of controversy between South Carolinians and the federal government. With these tensions came increasing threats of secession from South

³¹Elliott, *An Examination of Mr. Edmund Rhett’s Address*, 4.

³²While not representative of the overall make-up of the state government, based on information found in the records of the South Carolina General Assembly, planters held a significant portion of Senate seats during the mid-antebellum period, despite not holding an exclusive majority. What is also clear is that many of the men were described as planters along with another profession. While this complicates our understanding of Elliott’s claims about the lack of planter support in state government, it does provide some evidence to show that those who actively pursued other professions outside of their planting obligations may have been more concerned with protecting their professional job instead of their agricultural interests. For more details on the make-up of the state senate, see *Biographical Directory of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, 1776-1964*. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1964.

Carolínians and many in the Beaufort District led this call for action, which resulted in the Nullification Crisis.³³ While Elliott did not support the tariffs, as they hurt his overall profit line, as a Unionist, he was very much against the threats of secession that accompanied them. He was one of the few, especially in Beaufort County, who opposed separating from the Union in the 1830s.³⁴ Luckily, as Elliott saw it, South Carolina did not have the support from other states to actively pursue the process of seceding from the Union. According to Elliott, “The representatives of the People will not expose the state single handed to war with the Gen Gov nor consent to recede[sic] unless some other states will join...”³⁵ Similarly, Elliott told his wife several years later, that support from North Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia was not solidified and therefore, he could not see South Carolina continuing to argue for secession.³⁶

While Elliott was in the minority within the Beaufort community with his strong unionist leanings, his understanding of the national government’s policies and their influence on his community were clear. Elliott’s analysis of the political situation surrounding the tariffs and subsequent nullification highlighted one aspect of his identity. Providing ample evidence throughout his letters, Elliott revealed the ways in which he understood how his small community fit within the larger Atlantic economy. Elliott disagreed with the tariffs implemented during Jackson’s presidency because of their

³³For more detailed information regarding the tariffs and Nullification Crisis in the 1830s, see Chapter 1, pg. 36.

³⁴Rowland, et. al. *The History of Beaufort County*, 333-346.

³⁵William Elliott to Ann Elliott, December 6, 1828. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

³⁶William Elliott to Ann Elliott, December 5, 1831. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC. For more details about Elliott’s personal feelings towards the tariff controversy, see William Elliott to Ann Elliott, November 28, 1827; William Elliott to Phoebe Elliott, September 9, 1828; and William Elliott to Robert W. Barnwell, n.d. 1832. All letters are part of the Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

detrimental effects on his community's ability to profit in the sea island cotton market. Elliott realistically wasn't worried about South Carolina seceding in the 1830s, yet knew what it could mean for the still new nation and its economy. More specifically, Elliott knew that Beaufort and the sea islands operated a niche within the cotton market that could be profitable but was also greatly subject to market fluctuations. Elliott was worried about his personal stake in the market and continued to search for improvements agriculturally and economically to help the South Carolina low country maintain a hold on that sector of the Atlantic cotton market.³⁷

Looking beyond the economic influences of the state and federal government on the sea island community, Elliott and his fellow planter capitalists had another area in which they wanted more support from the state government: education. Elliott's economic arguments were the prominent topic in the written debate with Edmund Rhett, but he also advocated for more practical education within the college system. In the conclusion of his lengthy economic address refuting Rhett's argument, Elliott exclaimed, "I wish to see agriculture studied as a science at the South-Carolina College."³⁸ Elliott explained that the youth of the time, in "eight cases out of ten" would be involved in the pursuit of agriculture.³⁹ Furthermore, he "wish[ed] to see agriculture, founded on something better than observation."⁴⁰ These declarations connected Elliott to the larger arguments about agricultural education that were presented in the *Southern*

³⁷Sven Beckert discusses several reasons that American cotton planters needed to worry about their place within the global cotton market including the British aversion to slave labor, the impending civil war, and the South's slow development into a manufacturing region. However, Beckert does not attribute much significance to the tariff debate. For more detailed information about changes in the global source of raw cotton, see Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*.

³⁸William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 22.

³⁹William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 22

⁴⁰William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 22.

Agriculturalist by Whitemarsh Seabrook and Dr. Thomas Legare.⁴¹ All three of these men were active community members and sought to improve the reputation that planters held within a community of educated men.

However, Elliott did not always portray the same ideas in his private writings as he did in his public writings, further complicating his identity as a planter capitalist. Elliott felt that because he left “the ideal for the practical” he was not considered a fully educated or important man.⁴² With this statement to his former classmate, Elliott was not lauding his practical knowledge and use of agricultural science, but instead he lamented his lack of personal prestige because he felt that a formal classics-based education was more meaningful. Elliott seemed to be dissatisfied with his education and use of it, maybe because he was forced to leave Harvard due to ill health, despite his high class standing. While Elliott received an honorary degree, he was not able to complete his studies which might account for his wishful thoughts about what his life could have been if he had been able to finish.

Despite this negative attitude about his own educational pursuits, Elliott noted that he did not feel out of place even in circles of well-educated men. In a letter to his wife while travelling in Boston, Elliott wrote, “I find myself self-circulating with authors—reviewers—chief justices, professors and divines without experiencing—with all my comparative deficiency in learning—any painful sense of inferiority.”⁴³ This points to two main aspects of Elliott’s situation. The first is that Elliott felt that he had a “deficiency in learning” because he was not fully educated through the college system.

⁴¹For more information regarding Seabrook and Legare’s ideas, see Chapter 1, pg. 50-53.

⁴²William Elliott to William Plummer, n.d. 1846. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁴³William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 9, 1836. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

This inferiority may have originated in feelings related to social class or aspects of masculinity, but we cannot know for sure. This statement also showed that Elliott's self-taught agricultural, political, and economic knowledge was important and allowed him to converse with people of different backgrounds and maintain a sense of inclusion within these high society social circles in the northern professional world.

Elliott had conflicting ideas about the role of practical or traditional educational curriculum in his public and private writings, but it seemed that he took a more active role in promoting practical education for his son Ralph who studied at the University of Virginia. When William Elliott was in school, education in the United States was dominated by the more traditional classic curriculum consisting of language studies in Latin and Greek, mathematics and natural philosophy, divinity and oration exercises, and classic literature.⁴⁴ In contrast, in a letter to Ralph in the fall of 1851, Elliott told his son that he had registered him for courses in "1. Mathematics 2. Natural Philosophy 3. Moral Philosophy 4. Chemistry."⁴⁵ While the first three courses were typical of a liberal arts education, the choice to sign Ralph up for a chemistry class showed some emphasis on practical knowledge that could be used to help Ralph in his future as a planter. It did not suggest that Elliott felt all scientific and practical education was better than more traditional studies, but these choices for his son revealed that despite feeling ashamed or slighted because of his own lack of formal education, Elliott's true ideas about practical agricultural education were not just for the public discussion. In concluding the letter to

⁴⁴Roger L. Geiger, "Introduction," in Roger L. Geiger, ed., *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 16-18. While there were regional differences in education, these divisions did not become solidified until the latter part of the antebellum period, thus not directly relevant to Elliott's formal educational experience.

⁴⁵William Elliott to Ralph Elliott, September 5, 1851. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

his son, Elliott wrote that education was not a frivolous hobby that elite planters adopted, but instead that it should be used to “serve you through life.” This final statement provided the fundamental aspects of Elliott’s call for practical knowledge for both his own family and the state as a whole through programs at South Carolina College.

As shown throughout the discussion of Elliott and his interactions with governments at both the state and national level, the practice of planter capitalism in the ideal form, demonstrated through the forum of the *Southern Agriculturalist*, was not always seamless. Elliott in many cases struggled to adapt and practice what he portrayed outwardly in his debates and public discourse. Elliott’s discussion and arguments regarding education contributed to his ability to embody ideals of planter capitalism as he sought to establish the foundation for continued wealth for the planter class, yet it is unclear if any of his specific ideas were put into practice when South Carolina College created their agricultural programs.

Thus far, William Elliott’s attempts to portray the ideals of a planter capitalist have been discussed by looking at how he challenged and was challenged by both a rising professional class and the state and federal government. However, Elliott also faced challenges from those who were not in positions of power while working out his identity in practice. A third important lens through which to view Elliott’s efforts is in the interactions between Elliott and the enslaved population he sought to manage. Analyzing the ways in which Elliott discussed his enslaved workers revealed he was knowledgeable and relatively successful in his management of enslaved workers. It is also clear that enslaved workers exercised agency through various acts of resistance, challenging the authority and control Elliott wanted to have. Furthermore, his absentee status much of the

year required Elliott to give more freedom and power to enslaved overseers, and he recognized this as one of the many faults within his planter community.

Often discussed in the *Southern Agriculturalist*, understanding and managing labor was a primary aspect of planter capitalist identity. Despite their often absentee role, planter capitalists understood the monetary value of capitalizing on the labor of enslaved workers. Similar to Whitemarsh Seabrook's understanding of the different benefits and drawbacks of the enslaved labor force used to cultivate cotton, William Elliott understood the nature of the labor force and sought to make it as productive as possible. Various scholars in recent decades have taken care to dismantle the ideas of a pre-capitalist South and in doing so, argue for the total reevaluation of American prosperity and growth. One example of a work that seeks to reframe our understanding of the development of American capitalism is Edward Baptist's most recent book *The Half Has Never Been Told* which was discussed previously.⁴⁶ These ideas more generally were articulated prior to Baptist's work. For example, in a collection of essays edited by Cathy Matson, Seth Rockman provides the concluding essay entitled "The Unfree Origins of American Capitalism."⁴⁷ In this essay, Rockman argues that the development of American capitalism was "built upon a series of exploitive relationships."⁴⁸ Rockman and other scholars argue that slavery, as the most exploitative form of labor, was a key component of the national economy and should not be posed as the antithesis to the free wage labor

⁴⁶Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*. For more detailed explanation of the historiographical contributions see the discussion on pg. 11-12 in the Introduction and pg. 37-38 in Chapter One.

⁴⁷Seth Rockman, "The Unfree Origins of American Capitalism," in Cathy Matson, ed., *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006): 335-361.

⁴⁸Rockman, "The Unfree Origins of American Capitalism," 346.

economy of the North, which itself was exploitative.⁴⁹ As with his peers, the way William Elliott discussed the organized labor structure and incorporated racism into his justification of enslaved workers further complicates historians' discussions of the early American economy.

When writing about an effective labor force within the ongoing debate with Edmund Rhett, Elliott broke down levels of production into three distinct groups of people who produced wealth in South Carolina. He began with “the capitalist” or the planter who invested his money, his mind, and his might, into the development of a profitable plantation.⁵⁰ Elliott also recognized that others in this agricultural system were producers of wealth. The overseer was the next person Elliott found to be a producer, as he “applie[d] his intellectual and bodily labor in subordination to his principal.”⁵¹ Finally, Elliott revealed the last group he identified as part of the agriculturist producers: slaves. Elliott described slave labor as “reluctant, blind, unprofitable, and but little removed from mere brute force.”⁵² He continued by arguing that slave labor could only be turned into productive labor under the “intellectual power” of the planter.⁵³ This final statement is an example of what he felt was an important part of planter capitalism: managing labor through thoughtful practice and intellectual reasoning.⁵⁴

⁴⁹For more detailed explanation of Rockman's arguments regarding unfree labor see Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

⁵⁰William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 9.

⁵¹William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 9.

⁵²William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 9.

⁵³William Elliott, *The Planter Vindicated*, 9.

⁵⁴The way Elliott described the roles of capitalist planters, overseers, and slaves mirrors the way that his contemporaries often described the set-up of industrial factories. In industrial settings, there was typically an owner of the factory who invested capital into the building, supplies, and labor needed to produce goods. The daily operations were then monitored by a manager, or overseer, who was subordinate to the owner. Finally, there were workers who physically produced the industrial goods and had limited autonomy or creative freedom in their purely physical work. While this oversimplifies the set-up of a capitalist industrial factory and does not seek to compare the experience of enslaved field workers and free

William Elliott also discussed various aspects of slavery and his enslaved labor force in his private correspondence with family and friends. Throughout his letters, Elliott commented on the sale of enslaved workers and the market prices for slaves. Elliott discussed the strategy of selling his slaves and the qualities that would help the sale earn a profit. For example, Elliott wrote to Thomas Rhett Smith, a fellow Beaufort County planter, that Smith should send him a “copy of a list of the negroes—with their qualities,” which referenced their specific jobs or skills.⁵⁵ With this information, Elliott thought he could help Smith sell some of the enslaved workers to his brother Dr. Elliott who was looking to “purchase a Carpenter and family.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, Elliott informed his friend that he heard that “carpenters and coopers” sold “well in Charleston.”⁵⁷ Through this small example, it is clear that Elliott discussed the market for enslaved labor in Charleston, directing his peers in procuring good money for the sale of their slaves. Although this is not surprising, it does mean that at a basic level Elliott was successful in articulating one aspect of what he considered the ideal planter capitalist identity. In a letter to Smith the next month, Elliott discussed his recent purchases: “Grace with her family—and Lydia with her children and part of Joe’s family were among the purchases [he] made.”⁵⁸ Therefore, Elliott not only commented on the general state of the market for enslaved labor but fully participated in its transfer of enslaved African Americans from one plantation to another.

wage laborers in factories, the structural comparisons are useful in understanding the relationship of agriculture to capitalism and industrialization.

⁵⁵William Elliott to Thomas Rhett Smith, January 28, 1827. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁵⁶William Elliott to Thomas Rhett Smith, January 28, 1827.

⁵⁷William Elliott to Thomas Rhett Smith, January 28, 1827.

⁵⁸William Elliott to Thomas Rhett Smith, February 8, 1827. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

More significantly, in the letter Elliott wrote to Smith he connected the micro interactions within his own community to the larger narrative of slavery in the South and the experiences of enslaved African Americans. Elliott only purchased “part of Joe’s family” which highlighted the separation that many African American families experienced throughout their lifetime. His choice to purchase part of the enslaved family was probably calculated to gain the best value of labor for the most reasonable price. Therefore, in this purchase, Elliott bought women and children that could increase his overall output through reproductive capabilities, but these enslaved African Americans were not as valued in the market as young men. As the internal slave trade from the Upper to the Deep South cotton belt continued to increase between 1820 and 1860, more and more enslaved families were broken up. Often the young enslaved men would be sold for high prices to planters or slave traders selling to white men starting large plantations in the emerging cotton kingdom.⁵⁹ Elliott was aware of the significance of selling enslaved workers as the antebellum period continued and more western land was taken away from Native Americans and put under United States control. Aware of the current political strife in the southwest, Elliott wrote to his wife while in Charleston that “if the news of the annexation of Texas could be credited it would raise the price of negroes to over 400 average.”⁶⁰ Elliott was not only aware of the potential annexation of Texas, but he also had an acute sense of what that new land could do for the price of slaves. These ideas further demonstrated the connected nature of the antebellum economy, but also solidified that William Elliott was a planter who was aware of the

⁵⁹For more information, see Chapter 1 “Feet,” in Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶⁰William Elliott to Ann Elliott, February 24, 1844. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

significance of owning enslaved workers within the continuously expanding United States.

A second avenue through which Elliott discussed enslaved African Americans in his private correspondence was in relation to the specific details of his own plantations. Elliott had to balance the power and control he felt was necessary over the enslaved labor force with the power he had to give to African American overseers. In looking at the many letters Elliott wrote to his wife, mother, and children regarding the plantation, it can be determined that Isaac, a male slave, had slightly more control than the average enslaved worker on Elliott's plantations. Elliott trusted Isaac, and Isaac managed much of the daily workings on the Cheeha and Grove plantations. Isaac was mentioned in many letters by name, further revealing his importance because he was not grouped in with other enslaved people that Elliott discussed in the letters. For example, writing to his wife one spring day, Elliott specifically named Isaac and said he had "everything in great forwardness having nearly completed his planting."⁶¹

Despite the trust that Elliott placed in his overseers, Isaac was not always praised for his efforts and Elliott commented to his wife about the inability of his enslaved workers to conduct business in a way he thought was proper. Specifically looking at Isaac, Elliott was appalled at the decision Isaac had made to send off a group of workers into poor weather. Elliott described Isaac's actions as "positively criminal" and said that "he sent them off in weather—not fit for a dog to be abroad in."⁶² While this example isn't specifically related to work, it does show that Elliott's expectations were not met.

⁶¹William Elliott to Ann Elliott, April 5, 1822. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁶²William Elliott to Ann Elliott, December 21, 1851. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

Other examples revealed the disgust and racist attitudes Elliott had towards his enslaved workers more generally. Elliott was often absent from his various plantations while travelling north or on business in the city, and many times when he returned to check on the plantations Elliott was disappointed in their current state. In one instance Elliott told his wife that he found his “blundering Driver had left undone the things which he ought to have done” forcing him to stay longer at the Cheeha plantation than he had originally planned.⁶³ He continued by describing the plantation as “ill-managed” which provided a clear viewpoint onto his ideas about the abilities of that particular unnamed enslaved man. In another example, Elliott found that his cattle were eating the cotton crop left in the fields and he placed the blame on his “manager and drivers” who “did not appear to have troubled themselves with any calculations of cost.”⁶⁴ Here Elliott assumed that the enslaved African Americans did not have the forethought to recognize the price of the cotton they were allowing his cattle to eat. Without knowing more about the enslaved population at Elliott’s various plantations it cannot be known for sure, but this could have been one example of slave resistance, and thus revealed great planning and forethought to understand the economic damage they could cause. Instead of thinking that his cotton crop was unfit for market, like several years earlier, Elliott argued that the Cheeha plantation was in shambles “from in-com-pe-ten-cy.”⁶⁵ Based on these examples, Elliott saw his enslaved people as incompetent and did not fully consider other reasons for the failure of crops or overall plantation problems which showed that he felt it was reasonable to blame his enslaved workers.

⁶³William Elliott to Ann Elliott, April 5, 1822.

⁶⁴William Elliott to Ann Elliott, December 25, 1852. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁶⁵William Elliott to Anne Elliott, December 25, 1852.

However, Elliott placed some responsibility on himself and his fellow planter capitalists as he felt that the absentee status of most planter capitalists hurt the overall ability for their plantations to be successful. In a letter to his wife, Elliott lamented, “What I regret is, that I should have been so absent so long from my business—which furnishes so many loose scr[ews] that the master’s presence is necessary to fix in their place.”⁶⁶ Here Elliott expressed regret regarding his absentee status, thinking that the plantation would have been more productive if he had stayed to manage the African American overseers. What was also important in this excerpt was Elliott’s use of the word “business” to describe his plantation. Not only did Elliott see himself as the only true master on his plantation, but he seemed to think of this plantation as equal to a business in the more traditional sense. Understanding Elliott’s perception that enslaved African American workers, even overseers, were unable to perform the necessary tasks connected back to the ideas professed by Whitemarsh Seabrook in his article that discussed the problems with absentee planters and called for a new class of white overseers to be implemented within the existing labor system.⁶⁷

As a planter capitalist, William Elliott understood the importance of a solid labor force and the necessity of proper management of that force. Through both published and private writings, Elliott revealed his opinions of some enslaved African Americans as more positive than others, while commenting on the inability of enslaved African Americans to be able to properly manage the plantations while he was away. In Elliott’s mind, his presence was the only way to guarantee an efficient plantation that sought to maximize his profits. Elliott also saw the larger significance of the slave trade and

⁶⁶William Elliott to Ann Elliott, February 19, 1852. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁶⁷See pg. 48, for discussion of this article in the first chapter.

markets for enslaved workers that he both described and participated in throughout his time as a slaveholder. It was clear Elliott understood the implications of coerced labor and the slave trade on both the local and national scales. In his complicated relationship discussing both enslaved workers' limited competency while remaining ultimately reliant on their labor and intelligence to run the plantation, Elliott revealed an important contradiction that was faced by planter capitalists seeking to take credit for the agricultural wealth in South Carolina.

As seen through the discussion of Elliott's domestic role as a planter capitalist, the majority of his work was dedicated to understanding, articulating, and exercising power within his community. Power is what ultimately gave Elliott and his peers the ability to exercise their version of planter capitalism during the middle and late antebellum period. Planter capitalists were forced to negotiate power and control between themselves, a rising professional class, the state and federal government, and their enslaved laborers. Through these negotiations, Elliott was able to put into practice many of the ideals represented in the type of planter capitalism articulated in the *Southern Agriculturalist*. Elliott debated and discussed ideas related to economics, politics, education, and labor while seeking to embody the planter capitalist identity. Throughout his writings, the way in which Elliott discussed enslaved labor and managing that labor force showed the contradictions that absentee planter capitalists needed to address. While Elliott prided himself on being able to effectively manage a labor force, a hallmark of planter capitalism, he often placed more of his control in the hands of black overseers, as seen in the example of Isaac. These negotiations of power and control show that Elliott's experiences trying to embody the ideals of a planter were often complicated and full of

gray areas. The next chapter will address the ways Elliott was more successful in his attempts to fulfill aspects of his planter capitalist identity when he traveled abroad to represent South Carolina at the Paris Exposition in 1855.

Chapter 3

Personal Identity on the International Stage: William Elliott in Paris, Summer 1855

“Agriculture furnishes *subsistence* to the human family, and up to that point at which it enables one to provide subsistence for many, there is not progress; there is no civilization. But from this first stage, gentlemen, it seems to be that agricultural science has made an imposing stride. She is no longer content with subsisting, she now aspires to clothe the world.”¹

These words were part of William Elliott’s opening remarks in his address to the Imperial and Agricultural Society of France given at the Paris Exposition in 1855. In this short opening, Elliott addressed themes including internationalism, also known as “protoglobalization,” that began during the second half of the nineteenth century, and innovation and progress which continued to be hallmarks of a successful world exhibition.² While discussing agricultural science, and more specifically cotton throughout his speech, Elliott argued that without progress there could be no civilization and one aspect of that progress was improvements in agricultural science. Furthermore, his comments regarding the changing goal to “clothe the world” revealed the intensification of global commodity networks within the Atlantic World, of which Elliott and his fellow planter capitalists were an integral part.

As Elliott sought to embody the ideals of planter capitalism in the late antebellum period, he was given the chance to put his identity into practice on the international stage in the summer and fall of 1855. Elliott was selected by the governor of South Carolina to represent the state at the Paris Exposition in 1855 and to give a speech on sea island cotton to the Imperial and Agricultural Society of France. In his speech, personal

¹William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant: Address to the Imperial and Central Agriculture Society of France,” *DeBow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 20, no. 5 (May 1856): 571a, accessed October 28, 2013, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acg1336.1-20.005>.

²For more information on the beginning efforts at globalization during the nineteenth century, see Wolfram Kaiser, “Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions, 1851-1862,” *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (September 2005): 563-590.

correspondence while in Paris, and his response upon returning from Europe, Elliott discussed agricultural science related to sea island cotton, looking at how the French could potentially succeed in its cultivation in Algeria, and revealed the changing relationship between Great Britain and France. Through his orations and writings, Elliott exemplified characteristics of the ideal planter capitalist as defined by himself and others who were contributors to the *Southern Agriculturalist* while interacting within the global community that gathered in Paris in 1855.

William Elliott's speech to the Imperial and Central Agricultural Society of France was part of the larger experience of the Paris Exposition of 1855. This exposition, created to promote French art, culture, and industry was instrumental in both fostering peaceful relations between England and France and bringing prestige to Napoleon III. Within the two month period, the exposition was said to have had a total of 5, 162, 330 visitors.³ Echoing the idea of national superiority, one historian writes, the "Exposition universelle...provided a forum for the vaunting of national pride and claims of superiority within an international framework."⁴ Clearly the French were concerned and wanted to appear strong in the global community, thus hosting an exhibition was one way to portray that strength. However, it is important to note that while in Paris, Elliott sought out recognition for his community's sea island cotton production within an international framework. One of the direct results of the exhibition was the liberalization of France's

³These numbers come from an official report by Prince Napoleon, which was cited in Margueritte Murphy, "Becoming Cosmopolitan: Viewing and Reviewing the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 32, no. 1 (March 2010): 32.

⁴Murphy, "Becoming Cosmopolitan," 34.

free trade policies, which is telling, seeing as Elliott spoke of free trade in his speech, as it related to cotton.⁵

The exhibition was also seen as a “peace-making mechanism” during the crucial Crimean War, which occupied the minds of many European leaders.⁶ In her analysis of the Fine Arts exhibit at the exhibition, historian Marcia Pointon acknowledges the critical connection between the exhibition and the Crimean war. She describes the scene as British and French soldiers were fighting alongside one another, while their paintings hung side by side in the exhibition hall. More broadly, Pointon argues that “both the war and the exhibition were seen to be as much a testing ground for national morality and economic efficiency as for military or artistic genius.”⁷ The deeply connected nature of the war in Crimea and the relationship between France and Great Britain was also recognized by contemporaries experiencing the buzz in Paris during the summer of 1855. Elliott was aware and commented frequently on the growing closeness between two, previously hostile, world empires.

One of the primary aspects of the ideal planter was a dedication to improving agricultural practices through an understanding of progressive agricultural science. William Elliott demonstrated his understanding of agricultural science relating to sea island cotton in his address to the Imperial and Agricultural Society of France which was subsequently published in *DeBow's Review*.⁸ In this speech, William Elliott discussed

⁵Kaiser, “Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions,” 583.

⁶Murphy, “Becoming Cosmopolitan,” 32.

⁷Marcia Pointon, “‘From the Midst of Warfare and its Incidents to the Peaceful Scenes of Home’: The Exposition Universielle of 1855,” *Journal of European Studies* (December 1981): 236.

⁸By 1855, *The Southern Agriculturalist* was no longer in print. Similar to what *The Southern Agriculturalist* did in defining and shaping the views of the South Carolina planter community, *DeBow's Review* demonstrated the economic and social ambitions of southern society and was one of the most prominent and widely-read southern periodicals leading up to the Civil War. For more information about

agricultural and economic aspects of sea island cotton, and specifically addressed the way sea island cotton facilitated connections between South Carolina and France.⁹ In his opening remarks, Elliott indicated that it was an honor for him to speak to the society about the importance of agriculture and cotton, and reiterated the fact that he was a seasoned cultivator of cotton. Elliott described his experience with cotton as “casual and interrupted” yet spanning “a period of forty-four years.”¹⁰ His knowledge of the different types of cotton, their historical origins, and various cultivation techniques was clearly revealed throughout his speech to the French society.¹¹

Demonstrating knowledge of various types of cotton and the continents to which each type is indigenous was a crucial part of Elliott’s identity as a planter capitalist. Elliott said that “*Gossypium Arboreum*,” the type of cotton typically found in “India and other tropical countries,” was not the type the United States cultivated.¹² He stated that the United States’ lack of “*Gossypium Arboreum*” was a calculated choice by American planters who preferred to plant cotton with new seed every year.¹³ Elliott utilized the scientific name for different cotton varieties throughout his speech and insisted that the sea island cotton “should exclusively be known as *Gossypium Barbadosense*,” merely one example of his scientific focus.¹⁴

Accompanying his discussion of the scientific names, Elliott took a moment to explain the history of sea island cotton in the United States. According to Elliott, “the

DeBow’s Review, see Herman Clarence Nixon, “DeBow’s Review,” *The Sewanee Review* 39, no. 1 (January-March 1931): 54-61.

⁹Elliott’s speech was given during the summer of 1855. William Elliott gave the speech in French, however, the printed version in *DeBow’s Review* was in English, printed almost a year after his speech in Paris.

¹⁰William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 571a.

¹¹William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 572a-574a.

¹²William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant: 571a.

¹³William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 571a.

¹⁴William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 573a.

seed of this plant [was] said to have been brought from the Bahama Islands to Georgia between the years of 1785 and 1790.”¹⁵ This revealed that sea island cotton cultivated in the United States was of foreign origins. Elliott may have found this to be an important point to discuss early on in his speech because it showed the ability for Georgia and subsequently South Carolina planters to adapt cotton seeds to a new climate.

Furthermore, Elliott pointed to the significance of the name *Gossypium Barbadense* as deriving from the “origin” or “early cultivation” of sea island cotton on “the Island of Barbadoes.” Therefore, the name was not only significant to differentiate sea island cotton from short staple varieties, but it was carefully linked to its place of origin.¹⁶

While Elliott found that the history of sea island cotton and its early arrival in South Carolina was important, he stated that the original cotton that arrived, known as “Anguilla cotton” was “inferior to the Carolina” sea island cotton that was cultivated in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ According to Elliott there were two main reasons why cotton, of the same seed and genetic makeup could be of vastly different qualities. The first reason Elliott discussed was one out of any person’s control, location and climate. These were not qualities that Elliott or his predecessors could change, but they understood the necessary environmental conditions that made their location suitable for sea island cotton cultivation. Elliott also voiced that even within similar climate conditions, sea island cotton crops could differ greatly. To this end, he continued by articulating the importance of improving sea island culture.¹⁸ When discussing this, Elliott provided details from his

¹⁵William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 572a.

¹⁶William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 572a.

¹⁷William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 574a.

¹⁸“Culture” as used throughout this piece seems to be describing the way in which planter capitalists tend to the soil, select the seed, plant the crop, manage the crop while it is in the ground, and the proper ways in which the crop is cultivated on a daily basis. Therefore, the word “culture” will be used in a similar fashion throughout this section.

South Carolina community that he felt were vital to the success of sea island cotton in the region. For example, he described the timing of the planting process from creating the proper beds with manure in February to the general growing season between April and August.¹⁹ He also highlighted the importance of dry seasons and argued that the “neglect most fatal to a remunerative return is defective draining.”²⁰ Finally, Elliott told his audience that “seaweed, salt marsh, salt mud, compounded with the sweepings of the stables and cattle pens [were] successfully used to stimulate the production of sea island cottons on lands to which they are not naturally adapted.”²¹ Through these natural additives, Elliott demonstrated different ways to cultivate sea island cotton in places that had previously not been fit for production. He did not claim to be in charge of the process of trial and error, but he was clearly active in current discussions about the process of agricultural science through experimentation that required not only book study but also practical application. Elliott’s basic description of the climate suited for sea island cotton was necessary in his speech, but his discussion of planters adapting and improving their cotton culture was more significant to his identity as a planter capitalist. As shown throughout the discussion of the *Southern Agriculturalist*, the planter community valued experimentation and manipulation of soil and manure as they sought to improve their own sea island cotton crop.²²

In addition to his description of the South Carolina climate and culture, Elliott described the geography of Algeria and other northern African lands that the French controlled. In an article published upon his return from Paris, Elliott articulated the

¹⁹William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 575a.

²⁰William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 575a.

²¹William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 575a.

²²Elliott presented ideas similar to those discussed in the *Southern Agriculturalist*. See Chapter 1 for more details regarding salt and manure in sea island cotton cultivation.

relationship between Algeria's landscape and cotton production to a larger audience of planter capitalists who read *DeBow's Review*. Elliott provided a detailed discussion of the landscape of French Algeria, concluding that some portions of the French-controlled land provided the proper growing conditions for sea island cotton, except that which was occupied by mountains.²³ Along with the general geographical layout, he demonstrated an understanding of the seasonal differences and how that would influence certain geographical regions. He concluded that the rich, fertile land fit for sea island cotton was only located in the plains at the foot of the mountains and argued that the valleys were "rich, but narrow, and fed by very inconsiderable streams, which are swollen during the winter by the rains, and almost dried up during the summer by the intense heats prevailing at that season."²⁴ Therefore, even the land that was available for cultivation may have struggled to become prosperous because of seasonal weather patterns. Elliott also addressed the prospect and possibility of irrigation, concluding that the amount of suitable land capable of complete irrigation during the summer months was even more limited.²⁵

Despite some of the potential geographical limitations, the French were cultivating high quality cotton that was on display at the Paris Exhibition. Elliott commented on the reality of French cultivation in many letters to his family. For example, Elliott wrote home to his son Ralph describing the high quality of the products on display in the Algerian exhibit. He posed the question, "What if they have already beat us in sea island cottons?" Then he told his son that he shouldn't be surprised to hear such

²³William Elliott, "Southern Cotton—Competition of Algeria," *DeBow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 24, no. 3 (March 1858): 194, accessed November 4, 2013, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acg1336.1-24.003>.

²⁴William Elliott, "Southern Cotton," 194.

²⁵William Elliott, "Southern Cotton," 195.

news because the quality of the cotton was extremely high.²⁶ Elliott continued by echoing many of the same ideas that he addressed in his public speech to the society including the suitable nature of Algeria's climate and soil. In another letter, this time upon his return from Paris, Elliott wrote to Governor James Adams of South Carolina thanking him for the opportunity to travel to Paris. He also commented on the state of South Carolina's products compared to others at the exhibition. According to Elliott, South Carolina's "sea island cottons, were only equaled, if equaled at all, by the cottons of Algeria."²⁷ While slightly contradicting the ideas he put forth in letters to his son, Elliott assured the Governor of the great position that South Carolina sea island cotton held within the global market, but also gave him some idea that Algerian cotton grown with French support could be a likely source of competition. Elliott added that the sea island cotton grown in Algeria came from "Carolina seed" which further connected the community to his interactions in Paris.²⁸ In both published writings and private correspondence, Elliott exhibited an understanding of agricultural science directly connected to his identity as a planter capitalist, and was able to effectively communicate these ideas to his fellow planter capitalists through publications in *DeBow's Review*.

Beyond sharing details regarding Algerian cotton cultivation, Elliott was boastful in his letters home to his family. In the days following his address, Elliott wrote home to his daughter Caroline. He began telling a story, seemingly about a man who was slated to give a speech at the exposition and although he was not prepared to do so, gave his speech entirely in French. According to Elliott, "the American determined to face the

²⁶William Elliott to Ralph Elliott, July 5, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

²⁷William Elliott to Governor James Adams, November 22, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

²⁸William Elliott to Governor James Adams, November 22, 1855.

music declined the offer, and began” to give the speech in French and the audience “fixed attention to the end of his address.”²⁹ In reality, the story he was telling was his own.

William Elliott was extremely proud of his speech given in French to what he called “the most learned society in the world.”³⁰ Elliott also reiterated the details of his speech to his wife several days later. In his letter to Ann, Elliott wrote that the society was “composed of the most learned men of France—authors chemists, agriculturalists.”³¹ Elliott recognized the importance of those professions within French society and the idea that agriculturalists were among those of the most educated class connected Elliott’s thoughts to those that advocated for more formal education for aspiring planter capitalists in South Carolina.

Elliott was aware of the reputation he was developing while in Paris, specifically that which was based on his education. Writing to Ann, Elliott said,

and now, my dear wife, I am known afar off and have a reputation as a ready speaker, and a liberal thinker—and a man of letters! A reputation—that I could never win at home—against the party intolerance, and jealousy, or bigotry—or whatever other narrow spirit it was—that carefully excluded me from all opportunity of showing my good qualities.³²

Here Elliott revealed that his speech gave him a reputation to be proud of and one that was based on his intellectual capabilities. More importantly, he articulated the idea that he was limited by other factors in fully practicing his identity as a planter capitalist while

²⁹William Elliott to Carolina Elliott, July 5, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

³⁰William Elliott to Carolina Elliott, July 5, 1855.

³¹William Elliott to Ann Elliott, July 14, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

³²William Elliott to Ann Elliott, July 14, 1855.

at home and his time in Paris allowed him to show those “good qualities” he knew he was capable of embodying. Elliott does not provide specific details as to why he felt more constrained at home, but part of his identity as a planter capitalist would have been difficult to practice with his staunch Unionist stance and the growing hostility towards the federal government in the Beaufort District and South Carolina more generally. Therefore, in Paris, he was no longer confined by his political views and the limited voice he had in the political realm, but was merely judged based on his agricultural knowledge. It is also significant to note that Elliott’s reputation and notoriety in the United States may have improved based on his experiences in Paris. While he published many articles in the *Southern Agriculturalist*, a regional publication, following his experiences in Paris, Elliott’s articles were published in *DeBow’s Review* which had a much larger, national readership.

Elliott was able to comment on more than agricultural science during his time in Paris. He was also able to show an understanding of the global cotton market and European foreign relations in his speech, personal correspondence, and essays upon returning from his trip. Elliott’s knowledge of Algerian climate and geography was not random as he understood the potential ramifications of the French cultivating sea island cotton in Algeria. Algeria became a French colony in 1830, and according to Elliott, the French were actively pursuing the creation of a sea island cotton crop that could be used to supply their domestic cotton needs.³³ The two main foreign relations realities that

³³I have not found any other discussion of Algeria as it relates to cotton production in the 1850s in the secondary literature. Therefore, some of Elliott’s claims are impossible to back up. Sven Beckert is one historian who mentions Algeria in the context of the expansion of growing cotton throughout the world. However, Beckert, like most, limit this discussion to the Civil War and post-Civil War period as they seek to show the changing nature following a limited cotton market from the southern United States. However, Elliott and his writings reveal an important challenge to this typical conversation because it places Algerian cotton production and French governmental support for it prior to 1861. For more information on Beckert’s

Elliott recognized while in Paris were the newly forming relationship between England and France, and the limits of French-Algerian cotton production within the global market.

Paris, and France more generally, was on display for the world during the summer of 1855. Despite the historic struggles between the French and British empires, the excitement and popularity brought by the exhibition prompted Queen Victoria to visit Paris in August 1855. When Elliott first heard of the possibility for the Queen visiting the Emperor, he wrote to his wife saying that one purpose of the Queen's visit was "to shew[sic] the world the closeness of the alliance between these old rival powers—who for the present find it convenient to join hands."³⁴ Here Elliott revealed that the alliance between France and Great Britain was merely a political move that the Queen sought to advertise through an appearance in Paris following the exhibition. Furthermore, Elliott described the relationship as "convenient" which points to his feelings that the two empires would not remain friendly for an extended period of time.³⁵

Despite the seemingly temporary thawing between France and England, Elliott was distressed by the public display of their closeness shown through the Queen's visit. He was also concerned because of the way the Queen's visit had changed the atmosphere of the entire city, to the point where he was impatient waiting for the time that Paris "ceased to be part of London."³⁶ He shared this anxiety with his wife in letters throughout the summer and early fall while he was still in Paris. In August, Elliott wrote, "This English Alliance, which the visit of the Queen is intended to strengthen—has placed

discussion related to Algeria, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014): 249-251.

³⁴William Elliott to Ann Elliott, July 31, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

³⁵Part of this show by the Queen and the growing closeness between France and Great Britain stemmed from their alliance against Russia in the Crimean War that lasted from 1853-1856.

³⁶William Elliott to Ann Elliott, August 27, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

Americans on an unpleasant footing here compared with that they formerly held.”³⁷ In September, Elliott articulated similar ideas when he wrote that “the intimate alliance between England and France bodes us no good.”³⁸ In both cases, Elliott told his wife that the alliance between these two world powers would be problematic for Americans. He was particularly concerned with the effect of the new alliance on the sea island cotton community. Elliott argued that the reason the French were “trying in Algeria [was] to make herself independent of us” which he saw as a direct connection to the improved relationship between France and England because Elliott thought England wanted to see the United States suffer.³⁹ Therefore, as France became more entwined in British interests, Elliott foresaw the continued deterioration of the relationship between France and the United States.

One of the primary reasons that Elliott feared the relationship between France and England was based on the idea that England would find a new source of cotton through the French efforts in Algeria. Not only was he concerned with France creating a new market for England to pull raw materials from, but he was aware that the English were supplying funds to help the French profit in their Algerian sea island cotton crop.⁴⁰ According to Elliott, the French government was already intimately tied to the agricultural efforts in Algeria: “the whole power of the French Government is directed towards making Algeria a great and prosperous colony; and especially to make her furnish the needful supply of sea-island cottons.”⁴¹ Elliott recognized the direct financial

³⁷William Elliott to Ann Elliott, August 27, 1855.

³⁸William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 20, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

³⁹William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 20, 1855.

⁴⁰This is not surprising due to the fact that sea island cotton, from its initial entry into the market, was “in demand by Manchester manufacturers” due to its high quality; Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 101.

⁴¹William Elliott, “Southern Cotton,” 195.

support provided by the French government that was building new infrastructure to support cotton cultivation and subsidizing the substantial salaries for the men who were in charge scientifically and practically in cultivating the crop.⁴² Elliott juxtaposed the high level of government involvement in France with the less direct support for agriculture from government in the United States when he wrote that Americans could “scarcely comprehend the force of the phrase, ‘the power of the Government’” because it was so different from what they experienced.⁴³ Regardless of Elliott’s feelings about whether or not the French government was too involved or the United States government was involved too little, he became more adamantly concerned when he heard of the English becoming closely tied to French Algeria. After describing the successful cultivation of sea island cotton in Algeria for more than a decade, Elliott reported the following to his fellow planter capitalists in *DeBow’s Review*:

But it will surprise the American planter much more to learn that not only France but England likewise, is satisfied with this success, and that companies are in contemplation, if not actually organized *of which the capital is furnished by Manchester*, to cultivate sea-island cottons in Algeria, on English account!⁴⁴

Therefore, not only did Algerian cotton cultivation have full support of the French government, but the English were beginning to become directly involved in promoting the success of cotton cultivation in the French colony. Here Elliott said he had information from an “unofficial, but highly reliable authority” which provided further justification and evidence for his claims. This would have been particularly distressing news for many sea island cotton planters and planter capitalists more broadly who

⁴²William Elliott, “Southern Cotton,” 195.

⁴³William Elliott, “Southern Cotton,” 195.

⁴⁴William Elliott, “Southern Cotton,” 199.

understood the problematic relationship between Great Britain and France that could potentially cause a cut in the profits for American sea island cotton planters within the market.

Furthermore, Elliott was concerned with the relationship between France and England due to their views on the growing disunion in the United States. With sectional tensions in the United States continuing to increase throughout the 1850s, the debates between the ardent supporters of slavery and its opponents, including abolitionists, were not conducted in a vacuum. The *Atlantic World* was aware of the tensions surrounding the expansion and maintenance of slavery in the United States. Elliott knew this and saw how the French and English were reacting to those developments while he was in Paris. Based on Elliott's experiences, the English and the French felt that the United States' power was "precarious" because of the dissention among its people regarding slavery.⁴⁵ Beyond recognizing the strong sectional tensions in the United States, the French also understood some of the unique solutions that proslavery politicians were attempting to use to expand territory with slave labor. For example, Elliott wrote in a letter to his wife, that a "Frenchman" had told him, "If you interfere in Cuba we shall have war."⁴⁶ The Frenchman was referring to the efforts made by some southern imperialists in the 1850s to extend territorial expansion into Cuba because it would be considered a slave state. Elliott understood the militaristic culture of the French, and therefore, knew that the Frenchman was not exaggerating in his explicit threat to the Americans.⁴⁷

⁴⁵William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 20, 1855.

⁴⁶William Elliott to Ann Elliott, September 20, 1855.

⁴⁷Walter Johnson has analyzed efforts at southern imperialism, including attempts to annex Cuba. For a more detailed account of southern imperialism, see "Tales of the Mississippian Empire," "The Material Limits of 'Manifest Destiny'," and "'The Grey-Eyed Man of Destiny'" in Walter Johnson, *A River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013), 303-394.

Elliott later wrote that these European powers felt that the “dissolution of the Union” was “inevitable” and something that both “Englishmen and Frenchman exult[ed] at.”⁴⁸ However, these European empires were not unaware of the important role that America’s raw materials, specifically cotton, played in their industrial wealth and financial success. Elliott stated that this awareness caused “some of the merchants” in France to discuss the establishment of “commercial relations with us—in advance—and in anticipation of this event.”⁴⁹ Here, Elliott identified “us” as the South, which provided some indication of where his loyalties remained, despite his Unionist political stance. This attempt at direct trade between the port at Le Havre and Charleston would have been extremely profitable for the sea island community due to the crucial place that cotton held in imports at Le Havre. Commenting on the significance of cotton in France, Sven Beckert writes, “cotton became as central to Le Havre as it had become to Liverpool.”⁵⁰ Therefore, Elliott would have wanted to cultivate all potential opportunities for direct trade with France. Elliott did not comment in more detail about how far the discussions of formal trade agreements in the event of secession went, but the idea that foreign countries would recognize the South as an independent nation and establish trading relationships with the South was something that appeared likely in the minds of many Southerners at the outbreak of war.⁵¹

⁴⁸William Elliott to Ann Elliott, October 6, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁴⁹William Elliott to Ann Elliott, October 6, 1855.

⁵⁰Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*: 216.

⁵¹Scholars have analyzed the nature with which foreign governments sought to establish trade relations with the South during the Civil War. For more information about these arguments specifically regarding the interactions between the South and Great Britain, see Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Martin Crawford, *The Anglo-American Crisis of the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Times and America, 1850-1862* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2012); and Henry

Elliott's discussion of sectional tensions, foreign recognition of sectional tensions and Southern planters' discussion of the South as separate from the United States as a whole complicates what some historians have stated about southern planters and European travel. Specifically, Daniel Kilbride writes that "planters going abroad during the antebellum period almost never used their travels to comment on the growing sectional conflict, to differentiate themselves from northerners, to depict the South as a distinct zone of Anglo-Atlantic culture, or to defend slavery."⁵² Kilbride continues by arguing that Southern planters' experiences during European travel highlight important aspects of their national identity that are often dismissed during a time of increasing tensions domestically.⁵³ This was clearly not the case for William Elliott as he articulated ideas about slavery, sectionalism, and the South as a separate sphere throughout his writings while in Paris in 1855. While much of Kilbride's work is focused on travel literature instead of personal correspondence, it is important to note the vast differences between Kilbride's examples and William Elliot's experience abroad, and it illuminates reasons to look at multiple types of sources to determine how planters highlighted either sectionalism or nationalism.⁵⁴

In addition to understanding the general nature of European foreign relations, Elliott articulated the ramifications of Algerian sea island cotton production for the nature of the market more generally. Similar to the information portrayed in his letter to the

Blumenthal, "Confederate Diplomacy: Popular Notions and International Realities," *The Journal of Southern History* 32, 2 (May 1966): 151-171.

⁵²Daniel Kilbride, "Travel, Ritual, and National Identity: Planters on the European Tour, 1820-1860," *The Journal of Southern History* 69, 3 (August 2003): 552.

⁵³Kilbride, "Travel, Ritual, and National Identity," 552-553, 562.

⁵⁴It is also important to note that Elliott's time in Paris was not specifically designed for tourism and travel. However, he did travel in England prior to heading to Paris and spent ample time touring Paris while he was there. The difference in purpose of travel may account for his focus on sectional identity versus national identity, but it still proves to be an important addition to other historical opinions on southern planters and European travel.

governor, Elliott told the Imperial and Agricultural Society in France that “it is with the arrows from our own quiver that you meet us in the contest.”⁵⁵ This is the portion of the address in which Elliott transitioned from a discussion of agricultural science and began laying out the details of what the French efforts in Algeria would do to the overall market. Elliott was clear to point out that the French were having success cultivating sea island cotton from seeds that originated in South Carolina. More importantly he phrased the interaction as a “contest” which further solidified his thoughts about how French financed Algerian cotton could be a reasonable competitor to that of the South Carolina sea islands.

While speaking to the Imperial and Agricultural Society, Elliott reiterated the close economic connections that existed between America and Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. He argued that “few stronger ties of interest can be interposed, few better securities for continued good-will can be devised than those which America offers to Europe in the mutual benefits of the cotton trade.”⁵⁶ Elliott saw the relationship between American cotton and European manufacturers as critical for both diplomatic and economic relations between the continents. Therefore, it was not agreeable for France to think about providing sea island cotton through their own colonial ventures. This would not only hurt South Carolina, Elliott argued, but also be detrimental to the diplomatic and political connections forged between the United States and various European powers.

Still, Elliott understood that the French were going to continue cultivating cotton if that was what they saw as best for their individual interests. He continued by saying that the United States would need to “accommodate ourselves as we best may to the new

⁵⁵William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 576a.

⁵⁶William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 578a.

condition of things that may result” from the increased production of sea island cotton in Algeria.⁵⁷ Elliott wanted to make it clear that despite not wanting the French to continue their cultivation efforts, there was room in the market for both parties, and stated that the two powers were “under no obligation to destroy each other for self preservation.”⁵⁸ Therefore, Elliott was pragmatic with his speech in France, not wanting to hurt the chances of a continued strong relationship between sea island cotton cultivators in South Carolina and French manufacturers who wanted high quality cotton. He understood that if France was successful in cultivating sea island cotton in Algeria on a large scale, the market would need to be shared and wanted to extend a diplomatic and economic courtesy before it was too late.

However, time and audience changed some of Elliott’s tone and argument about Algerian cotton production and the ways in which it could be detrimental to his fellow planter capitalists in the South Carolina low country. In the article published following his trip to Paris, Elliott was less concerned about French funded and Algerian grown sea island cotton becoming a dominant force in the global cotton market. Instead he felt it would merely have an impact on the French domestic market. While it is not certain, potentially the time away from Paris, more detailed information, and an increased study of Algeria’s prospects allowed Elliott to make a more tempered argument about the threat coming from Algerian cotton than he was able to do during his time in Paris. Elliott wrote,

...if the present ratio of increase be continued for five years, France will supply herself from her Algerian possessions, with her whole required stock of these fine

⁵⁷William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 576a.

⁵⁸William Elliott, “The Cotton Plant,” 578a.

cottons. She would effect this result, in our opinion, by violating all just maxims of political economy, and at great cost to herself; but we should be wrong to suppose that she will not do it...But the injury to our interests from the Algerian culture of fine cottons must stop here. Beyond the frontier of France, these forced productions must fail of a market. They cannot displace ours, or compete with them, except within these protected limits.⁵⁹

Through this excerpt, it was clear that Elliott recognized France's capabilities in Algeria and how their efforts to produce sea island cotton could impact their participation in the larger market. Elliott saw that the cotton produced would soon be able to supply France's domestic needs, therefore, it would take a portion of the market that South Carolina's sea island cotton occupied. This would have been problematic for planters in South Carolina who supplied the French who in turn manufactured twenty-five percent of the bales of sea island cotton produced world-wide in a year.⁶⁰ According to Elliott, the impact Algerian cotton cultivation could have on the market was limited because he reasoned that Algerian-grown cotton could only be profitable within the protected realm of French governmental support. Therefore, Elliott felt safer about the possibility of losing the dominating share of the sea island cotton market.

Elliott's understanding of the potential influence of a French-supported Algerian cotton crop was complicated by one final comment, that connects directly back to Elliott's identity as a planter through the management of a plantation and slave-based

⁵⁹William Elliott, "Southern Cotton," 196.

⁶⁰This percentage was calculated based on Elliott's own numbers that he provided in his address to the French Imperial and Agricultural Society. According to Elliott, 40,000 bales of sea island cotton were produced and 10,000 of those bales were directly manufactured in France. While he does not specifically say that the United States provided all of France's sea island cotton, based on the limited areas that could grow the crop and the high quality that the French adhered to, it is reasonable to assume much of it was grown in the United States.

labor. According to Elliott's analysis, "the scarcity of labor, and its consequent high price constitute[d], in fact, [France's] chief impediment" in producing large quantities of sea island cotton.⁶¹ Elliott felt that because France did not have a ready supply of enslaved African laborers, they would not be able to cultivate sea island cotton at a cost that was reasonable to make their product marketable within the current state of the sea island cotton economy. Elliott voiced these same opinions in his private writings home, specifically when speaking with his son Ralph. While at the Exhibition, Elliott wrote to tell his son of the fine quality of sea island cotton in the Algerian exhibit: "The climate and soil suit—all that saves us is their want of negroes. They cannot get the labor to cultivate the soil."⁶² In a letter several weeks later, Elliott commented that even though the French hired American planters to come help modify the sea island culture to the Algerian climate "they cannot make Frenchmen work under the heat—and the Arabs won't—and the negroes" were not compatible. Elliott commented on the various groups that were available for the French to employ, but focused on the inabilities of the "negro" population. A summary of the significance of these thoughts came in the published essay following his return from France. Elliott was confident, at that point, that the United States' control of the sea island markets would remain "unrivaled" and the first reason for that assertion was their "command of the labor best adapted to the culture."⁶³ Elliott claimed that slavery was the most efficient and only viable way to cultivate sea island cotton in a profitable manner. Elliott's use of labor to determine the significance of

⁶¹William Elliott, "Southern Cotton," 198.

⁶²William Elliott to Ralph Elliott, July 30, 1855. Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701-1898, Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁶³William Elliott, "Southern Cotton," 199.

France's operation was a final way Elliott portrayed aspects of the ideal planter based on interactions in Paris.

As Elliott mentioned in the letter home to his wife, his experiences in Paris allowed him to gain a reputable position within the ranks of learned men. Elliott felt valued in his interactions in France more than he was at home, and he also exhibited many of the main characteristics of a planter capitalist in doing so. Through his detailed knowledge of agricultural science, the global sea island cotton market, and European foreign relations, Elliott exemplified the ideals used to define planter capitalists. Despite his difficulties in embodying these ideas while in South Carolina, Elliott found his place within the capitalist community while traveling and interacting with other members of the Atlantic World in Paris.

Conclusion

As this study has gone from a broad discussion of planter capitalists in the greater-Beaufort area to a focused study of William Elliott III, the themes have remained the same. Planter capitalists in South Carolina found themselves actively involved in the Atlantic World through more than the mere movement and trade of cotton. These planter capitalists were intellectually engaged within their community and sought to discuss and debate a variety of subjects related to the cultivation of sea island cotton. In doing so, they put into practice the very ideals they used to define their identity as planter capitalists.

In Chapter 1 we see this on a broad scale through a community of planters over an eighteen year period. Using the *Southern Agriculturalist* as the primary piece of evidence, a general definition of the aspects of planter capitalist identity was gleaned. This agricultural periodical was a forum through which planter capitalists discussed important topics related to their profession as planters in South Carolina. The main categories of intellectual discussion were based in agricultural science, global commodity markets and foreign affairs, and labor management. By looking at planter capitalists' ideas regarding these three topics, one can better understand the facets of planter capitalism they found significant and places where these planter capitalists disagreed and found common ground. Furthermore, all of these categories were then used to advocate for future generations through discussions of increased funding and the creation of a program of agricultural science at South Carolina College. This final piece of discussion within the planter capitalist forum reveals the dedication with which these capitalists thought about

future generations of planters and shows the significance they began placing on formal education and practical study at universities.

Therefore, when looking to create a formal definition of a planter capitalist based on the community of planters in the South Carolina low country, the identity was based on a deep understanding of agricultural science and a desire to improve cultivation techniques, the ability to actively engage in discussion of economics and foreign market relations, the dedication to the proper management of an enslaved labor force, and the promotion of agricultural education at the highest level. As the focus narrowed to look at William Elliott over several decades in the mid-to-late antebellum period, Chapter 2 provides a case study to view the struggles and competing powers that prevented planter capitalists from carrying out their ideal identity. William Elliott met challenges from a rising professional class, the government at the state and federal levels, and his enslaved labor force on his various plantations. The way Elliott responded to these levels of conflict allowed him to put his identity into practice, while also revealing contradictions in the planter lifestyle. For example, the understanding and practice of managing and controlling labor was based on intellectual ideas in theory, however, many planters operated as absentee planters, thus giving increasing power to black overseers who were then ultimately in charge of running the plantation.

Finally, when Elliott was able to escape from the growing frustration and challenges he met at home, he found that he was widely accepted abroad. In Chapter 3, the focus on Elliott is further isolated to a few months when he was in Paris in 1855. After being selected as the representative from South Carolina at the Paris Exposition in 1855, Elliott gave a speech to the Imperial and Agricultural Society of France in which he

demonstrated his deep understanding of agricultural science as it related to sea island cotton and his recognition of France's attempts to develop a cotton market in Algeria. Through this speech and the many letters he sent home to his family, Elliott further demonstrated the identity of the ideal planter capitalist as he began evaluating the increasingly cordial relationship between France and England, put on display by a visit to Paris by Queen Victoria in the early fall of 1855.

The experiences and writings of William Elliott provide one example of the way planter capitalists worked out their identity in practice, the struggles they met, and those who sought to prevent their capitalist identity from being fully recognized. Elliott and his peers attempted to understand the greater Atlantic World and improve their own agricultural pursuits, thus making them contributing members of the Atlantic community. These subjects could not be studied within the vacuum that is often looked at when studying southern history, and more specifically planters. Atlantic history, and in this case a "cis-Atlantic" history is the only way to truly understand the relationship these planters had to their community and the economy of the mid-nineteenth century.¹ As historians continue to set topics traditionally in the field of Southern history within Atlantic and transnational frameworks, they will find greater relevance and broader conclusions that will shed light on other aspects of global history. Here, this study hopes to prompt further studies into the French cultivating of sea island cotton in Algeria. While outside of the scope of planter studies in Beaufort County, the efforts to cultivate sea island cotton in Algeria may have caught the attention of others in the global cotton

¹David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History" in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 11-27.

community who were preparing to find new sources of cotton if American cotton exports were disrupted by violent conflict.

Within the larger body of work analyzing the history of American capitalism, some scholars have been increasingly interested in studying the relationship between slavery, capitalism, and American wealth. This study, with a focus on a single community of planters, provides a new avenue for future studies in this field. Historians must take studies of planter capitalist identity and connect it with the many discussions of enslaved laborers who were the backbone for the majority of economic wealth in the early United States.² In Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told*, the subjects are the enslaved men and women who were exploited in the creation of a prosperous country. In Beckert's *The Empire of Cotton*, the primary subjects are those who managed the British side of the cotton manufacturing industry. New studies, one day, will hopefully be able to combine the narratives of these groups of men and women to provide a nuanced and detailed account of planter capitalism and the vast group of exploited laborers involved in cotton cultivation.

As historians have observed the increasing gap in wealth throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and continue to experience major economic downturns like the Great Recession of 2008, they will continue to find interest in studying the development of early American capitalism and its connection to the social history of the United States. Through capitalism studies, historians have found a platform with which to provide provocative and timely accounts of our nation's history and help readers recognize the

²See Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), for a provocative example of these arguments.

similarities between the process and experiences in the nineteenth century and our current economic system.

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