Race Relations: A Family Story, 1765-1867

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RACE RELATIONS: A FAMILY STORY

1765 – 1867

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of American Studies
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Wendy Gonaver
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Wendy Gosner
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Approved, December 2001

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PREFACE

In 1903 W.E.B. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he asserted that the problem of the twentieth century would be that of the color line and introduced the idea of what he termed double consciousness. As Paul Gilroy has observed, “Double consciousness was initially used to convey the special difficulties arising from black internalization of American identity: ‘One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.’” Although Du Bois later revised his notion of double consciousness, expanding its parameters globally and eliminating the aspect of internal warfare, *The Souls of Black Folk* remains a vehement critique of racism in American society at the turn-of-the-century.1

A few years before the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois had lived in Philadelphia. His research on the black community there, published as *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899, introduced him to the Sanders family. The Sanderses were the children of a white man from Charleston, South Carolina, Richard W. Cogdell, and his slave, Sarah Sanders. Cogdell had purchased and furnished a house in Philadelphia for his mulatto children, spiriting them to the North by stagecoach just before the outbreak of the Civil War. The children settled into the community of prominent black

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Philadelphians and, after their father’s death in 1866, they preserved his family papers along with important artifacts from their own lives. The papers remained for generations in the basement of the house that Cogdell had purchased.

When Cogdell’s grand-daughter, Mrs. Lillie Venning Dickerson, celebrated her ninetieth birthday in 1992, she requested that her family decide what to do with the papers that had long been gathering dust in her Philadelphia home. Although her cousin, Mrs. Cordelia Brown of Detroit, had an interest in genealogy, the family agreed that the papers should be donated to an institution. They felt that interest in African-American history had grown and created a climate in which their papers, mementos, and books could be appreciated. They chose to donate the material to the Library Company of Philadelphia, based in part on the knowledgeable reception given them by librarian and African-Americanist Phillip Lapsansky. Two years later, when I was working at the Library Company, I was asked to catalogue and itemize the contents of the family’s collection. That experience convinced me that the material merited sustained, scholarly attention.

The family’s selectivity about when and where to donate their papers seemed a crucial lens through which to view the materials, so one of my first research initiatives was to interview some family members. They told me fascinating stories, some involving black luminaries who were guests in their house, such as the aforementioned W.E.B. Du Bois. Most of the family members’ knowledge about their history pertained to the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, stretching back a few decades before their own memories. Slavery had been a topic that was largely avoided by those closest to it—Richard Cogdell’s children. Yet they passed on the family papers that substantiated their
painful connection to slavery.

Why did they save the letterbooks of English colonist John Stevens (Richard Cogdell's grandfather), who wrote derisively about "mulatto wench[es]," along with newspaper clippings that celebrate black achievements? How do the nineteenth and twentieth-century materials, in which the voices of women and African-Americans emerge, relate to the earliest documents, in which the voices of white men dominate? My conversations with family members led me to appreciate that their compilation, preservation, and annotation of the materials that make up the Collection were acts that themselves constituted an historical interpretation. Specifically, I concluded that the Collection embodied one family's efforts to come to terms with what Du Bois called double consciousness. By juxtaposing the various components of the Collection, the family posited the importance of African-Americans to American history and at the same time laid claim to their own ancestral heritage--both "white" and "black"--in its entirety.

From *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), Du Bois countered historical narratives that celebrated progress while ignoring the centrality of slavery to American success and the hypocrisy of jim crow laws. I view the collation, preservation, and annotation of the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection through the generations as a collective corollary to Du Bois’s critique; this family project has been sustained from the moment the Sanders children took possession of their father’s papers in the late nineteenth century to the present day. The Collection contains painful reminders of slavery, and is a testimony against the whitewashing of history.

The poignancy of this testimony is highlighted by the fact that not far from Mrs. Lillie Venning Dickerson’s Philadelphia home, a distant cousin of hers named Paul
Stevens from Newark, New Jersey, was also preserving documents pertaining to the
Stevens and Cogdell families. Like Mrs. Dickerson, Mr. Stevens was the great, great,
great-grandchild of John Stevens. Unlike Mrs. Dickerson, Mr. Stevens was white. More
importantly, he was a Southern apologist who wrote “tart, topical, perceptive and
sometimes controversial” newspaper articles celebrating his pride in his Confederate
heritage. These articles were published in South Carolina newspapers dating from Mr.
Stevens’ retirement to Myrtle Beach in the nineteen-fifties until his death in 1969—the
same years during which the southern Civil Rights Movement unfolded. In one essay
from 1960, he wrote about a recent trip to South Africa. “This is not Latin America,” he
observed, “the land of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, with its mixed races. This is
a British dominion of English, Scotch, and Dutch.” Stevens opined that Capetown would
be “a very fine place to live,” in part because of apartheid, and he railed against
integration for allegedly promoting “miscegenation and its racial degeneracy.”

In 1959 Mr. Stevens donated his family papers to the South Caroliniana Library in
Columbia along with a sketch of his family history based upon his own genealogical
research. These papers complement those that constitute the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-
Venning Collection at the Library Company. More importantly, the lacunae in Mr.
Stevens’ reconstruction of his family history attest to the problem of the color line in the
twentieth century about which Du Bois wrote so eloquently. Whereas the Collection
preserved by Mrs. Dickerson reveals the family’s struggles and disappointments, their
on-going preoccupation with class and status, and the profound dilemmas of a bi-racial

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3 Paul Stevens, “Capetown, South Africa Has Much to Offer Tourist Trade,” *The Charleston News
and Courier*, March 13, 1960, 14A.
family living in a race-based, slave society, Mr. Stevens’s focus is best described as anglophilic hagiography. He was especially interested in war-time heroics, including the activities of his great-grandfather Peter Fayssoux Stevens, Superintendent of the Citadel during the Civil War.

“Six wars and ample time have intervened to account for the loss or destruction of records,” wrote Mr. Paul Stevens in a letter that accompanied his donation, “or for the distortion from generation to generation of those circumstances and occasions, handed down and not reduced to documents of record.” But, in fact, many of the documents to which Mr. Stevens may have referred were neither lost nor destroyed. Whether Mr. Stevens knew about his African-American relatives is perhaps an unanswerable question, but it is doubtful that he would have wished to acknowledge them. As for Mrs. Dickerson and her family, the segregated and hostile climate of the mid-twentieth century did not permit an open and honest exploration of mutual ties. “The Cogdell line,” Paul Stevens asserted in his letter, “has long since been extinct.”

The Cogdell line is not extinct, as this thesis will show. Yet, as Paul Gilroy has suggested, Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness in *Souls of Black Folk* is more than just a call to revise exclusionary, racist history. Although Du Bois’s book speaks to white Americans such as Paul Stevens by “challenging their sense of colour-coded civilization and national culture,” Gilroy argues that “it is also addressed to a wider, transnational community of readers both in the present and the future.” Du Bois put forth the concept

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4 Paul Stevens to E.L. Inabinett, Nov. 1959, Paul Stevens papers, The South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.
of double consciousness to express both the distinctive standpoint of African-Americans and “to illuminate the experience of post-slave populations in general.”5 Du Bois’s critics have successfully problematized his belief that a vanguard “talented tenth” would lead the way to full citizenship and prosperity for all African-Americans. Nevertheless, Du Bois conceived of a future in which history was no longer compartmentalized by race -- in which it was no longer possible to ignore African-American scholarship and perspectives on the past or to exclude them from American historiography and historical memory in general.

Of course, intimate relationships between masters and slaves have received scholarly attention over the years. “There is, apparently, nothing like a story involving race, sex, and interracial family lines to capture the American imagination,” scholar Annette Gordon-Reed has observed.6 Yet the treatment of this topic has largely been either superficial or highly problematic. In her book, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy, Gordon-Reed catalogued the panoply of distortions employed by historians who have defended Jefferson against charges that his slave, Sally Hemings, was his long-time lover and the mother of his children. One might dismiss this topic as motivated by prurient curiosity, but such a view would be short-sighted given the important place that “miscegenation” has occupied in the law, in political rhetoric, and in the lives of Americans from the colonial era to the present day.7

In 1995, historian Gary B. Nash published “The Hidden History of Mestizo

5 Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 126.

6 Nicholas Wade, “Taking New Measurements for Jefferson’s Pedestal,” The New York Times, March 7, 1999, 20. The occasion of Gordon-Reed’s comment was a symposium held at Monticello to discuss the recent DNA tests that confirm the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.

7 For comment on the use of the word “miscegenation” in this thesis, please see my introduction.
America" in the *Journal of American History*. In this essay Nash argued that acknowledging the heretofore hidden history of racial and cultural mixing in Anglo America might “produce a more cosmopolitan and just America” by exposing the futility of racialist hermeneutics. However, Nash cautioned that “when multiculturalism is used simply as multiracialism and as such pretends that culture can be transmitted through genes, it fosters identity politics that absolutize racial differences.” In the place of divisive ideologies and platforms of the “multicultural wars,” Nash echoed W.E.B. Du Bois by recommending a “pan-ethnic, pan-racial, antiracist sensibility.” The ultimate goal in emphasizing hybridity, Nash wrote, would be an increased appreciation for “affiliation by voluntary consent rather than prescribed descent.”

Of course, well into the antebellum era Americans readily employed categories such as “mulatto” and “mustizo,” socially if not legally, but the recognition of these racial groups did not fundamentally alter the rigid inequalities of white-supremacist southern society. In fact, Charleston and New Orleans produced a small, brown-skinned elite, who, like their brethren in Latin America, tried to maintain their freedom and property as well as their light-toned skin through careful intermarriage. Moreover, although “Anglo-chauvinists invented a racial typology and racial categorization to exclude and exploit many of America’s peoples,” today many minorities embrace the ethnoracial element of their self-identity in order to preserve a legacy of collective political strength and cultural wisdom in the face of past and ongoing injustices.

Nevertheless, Nash astutely pointed out that “arguments about culture are about

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9 Ibid., 962.
He implied that the history of mestizo American was not hidden—as the title of his essay suggests—but, rather, ignored by Anglophile historians and genealogists. Now it seems that “those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are not the only ones haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts”\(^{11}\); more and more interracial family histories are being published and well-received. Whether it is misguided romanticism or a longing for racial reconciliation that is responsible for the growing audience for these books, “miscegenation” is an interesting topic because of the multiple power struggles interracial relationships entail. These relationships embody, literally and metaphorically, a quadruple nexus of race, class, gender, and sexuality potentially as complicated as the double helix of a DNA strand. An exploration of that nexus might contribute significantly to a multicultural history that is neither compensatory nor “politically correct,” but, rather, necessary to a full understanding of the past.

Whether or not Thomas Jefferson had a thirty-year relationship with his slave Sally Hemings will not necessarily change opinion about Jefferson’s intellect or politics. Gordon-Reed anticipated as much in her book when she conceded that “the Republic will neither rise higher nor fall lower if this story is true or if it is proved false.”\(^{12}\) Nor will genetic proof of this affair, in and of itself, yield a broadened appreciation for African-American history. In fact, a few of the historians who were once reluctant to accept the story may interpret the DNA evidence as mere confirmation that Jefferson was a man of his time—as if that were a meaningful observation. However, this discovery and others

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 961.


\(^{12}\) Annette Gordon-Reed, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy (Charlottesville, Va., 1997), xiv.
like it mandate substantive consideration of interracial relationships. To paraphrase Gordon-Reed, the manner in which a topic is dealt with matters just as much if not more than the conclusions that are drawn.

Although interracial sex encompasses a wide range of relationships, in-depth studies of specific couples or instances may serve as an antidote to sweeping generalizations about miscegenation that contribute very little to an understanding of the scope and limitations of power and affection in a given society. Due to conventions regarding chronology and length, this thesis focuses to a considerable extent on white men within the Stevens-Cogdell family. However, my interpretation has been influenced significantly by feminist scholarship and African-American historiography. By framing this story with reference to how the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection came to be preserved, I hoped to make this influence is evident. In short, I hope that “Race Relations: A Family’s Story, 1765-1867” will prove useful in understanding the complicated nature of intimate interracial relations in America from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.
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ABSTRACT

In 1992 four African-American women donated their family papers to The Library Company of Philadelphia. These papers, known as the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection, document the fascinating odyssey of a white, English family transformed by its experiences in multiracial America. "Race Relations: A Family Story, 1765-1867" traces the lives of members of this one family, paying particular attention to their changing response to "miscegenation."

The story begins in 1765 with the arrival of London-born immigrant John Stevens and his family to frontier Georgia. A devastating fire at Stevens's plantation sparked a dramatic reversal of fortune for his family, leading to the seizure and sale of a mulatto child named Dick, who had been fathered by one of Stevens's sons. By following the ups and downs of the family, including their move without Dick to Charleston, South Carolina, I demonstrate that John Stevens's identity and his attitude toward miscegenation were shaped by his precarious status. I argue that only when social position was truly secure could interracial relationships be taken for granted as a feature of slaveholding society.

I then compare the racial attitudes of John Stevens with those of his daughter, Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey) Stevens Cogdell, and son, Jervis Henry (Harry), in order to stress the gendered nature of slavery. I argue that Tolsey demonstrated a greater capacity for empathy than did either her brother or her father, offering as proof the personalism that characterized her conduct and the denunciation of the sexual exploitation of women of color by white men that she wrote in her commonplace book. However, the sexual threat that slavery posed to white, Republican marriages led even Tolsey to deny that true virtue could ever be bestowed upon interracial unions.

Although the story continues to the present day, this thesis ends in 1867 with the death of Tolsey's youngest son, Richard Walpole Cogdell. Richard married one woman of color who passed for white, then shortly before her death became involved in a twenty-year relationship with his slave, Sarah Sanders, that produced ten children. I argue that irregularities in enforcing the law regarding slaves and free blacks and the inconsistencies of racial classification in general made intimacy possible, but also amplified tensions in Charleston society. As a result of his personal choices, Richard Cogdell's reputation suffered and he was forced to resettle with his mulatto children in Philadelphia.

By tracing the paths that family members chose or were forced to take, I aim to show that a family history is about routes as well as roots. Thus, Richard's and Sarah's relationship must be understood as part of an ongoing and interwoven family story of class ambitions, gender roles, and racial identities. As such, it attests richly, and sometimes poignantly, to the important place that interracial relationships have occupied in the law, in the political rhetoric, and in the personal lives of Americans from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day.
RACE RELATIONS: A FAMILY STORY, 1765-1867
INTRODUCTION

I have titled this thesis, "Race Relations: A Family Story, 1765-1867," because it suggests both the affectionate bonds between family members and the power relations that permeate them, in this case involving actual bondage. I offer a sustained look into the lives of members of one middle-class family, paying particular attention to their changing response to "miscegenation." I explicate how various family members negotiated relationships within their family and what these negotiations reveal about the broader community in which they occurred. I argue that only when social position was truly secure could miscegenation be taken for granted as a feature of slaveholding society.

Chapter one begins in 1765 with the arrival of London-born immigrant John Stevens and his family to frontier Georgia. I trace the ups and downs of the family's fortunes, including their move to Charleston, South Carolina. I demonstrate that John Stevens's identity and his attitude toward miscegenation were shaped by his precarious status. His failed attempt to become a planter and subsequent reliance upon his wife for financial support led him to frantically assert his wife's honor and his own gentility, to adamantly deny rumors that he had fathered a mulatto child, and to exclude black women from the category of virtuous women.

Chapter two looks at Stevens's children on the eve of the American Revolution and into the early Republic. I posit that, just as slavery remained integral to the economy of the South, it remained essential to the identities of middle-class whites. I compare the racial attitudes of daughter Tolsey and son Harry to those of their father in order to stress
the gendered nature of slavery. I argue that Tolsey demonstrated a greater capacity for empathy than did either her brother or her father, offering as proof the personalism that characterized her conduct and the denunciation of the sexual exploitation of women of color by white men that she wrote in her commonplace book. However, Republican motherhood—an ideology that restricted a white woman’s civic duty to the home, inculcating democratic values in her children and husband—was founded upon racial exclusivity in part because of the sexual threat that slavery posed to marriages. For this reason, even Tolsey denied that true virtue could ever be bestowed upon interracial unions.

In chapter three I look at Harry’s and Tolsey’s children, focusing on Tolsey’s son Richard Walpole Cogdell and his relationship with his slave Sarah Sanders, with whom he had ten children. I survey the historiography on interracial unions to contextualize their relationship. I argue that irregularities in enforcing the law regarding slaves and free blacks and the inconsistencies of racial classification in general made intimacy possible, albeit emotionally draining, but also amplified tensions in Charleston society. With the emergence of a non-slaveholding white majority in Charleston in the 1850s, free blacks and nominal slaves—many of whom were mulatto—came under fire. Consequently, Richard W. Cogdell’s reputation suffered and he was forced to flee with his children to Philadelphia. I conclude that Richard and Sarah’s relationship must be understood as part of an ongoing and interwoven family story of class ambitions, gender roles, and racial identities.

Finally, a note about word choice: I use the word “miscegenation” ahistorically and without the intention to offend. The term was invented in the nineteenth century and,
at that time, was used pejoratively. "Amalgamation" antedated miscegenation, but did not really persist as a term into the twentieth century. In short, my decision to use the word miscegenation is for convenience's sake only: it is too repetitive always to write "interracial relationship."
“The enjoyment of a negro or mulatto woman is spoken of as quite a common thing,” observed Bostonian Josiah Quincy about Charleston, South Carolina, in 1773; “no reluctance, delicacy, or shame is made about the matter.” Indeed, *The South Carolina Gazette* occasionally carried irreverent poems and letters on the subject of interracial liaisons. According to historian Winthrop Jordan, Charleston was the only English city on the continent where it was possible to debate publicly, “Is sex with Negroes right?” Planters had open sexual relationships with slave women throughout the entire lower South and the Caribbean, but Charleston was particularly renowned for such affairs.

The apparently casual attitude towards miscegenation contributed to the image of Charleston as a hedonistic haven. “Kiss white, kiss black, what’s the difference?,” asked one *Gazette* subscriber, but this and similar sentiments were offered anonymously. Moreover, the jocular doggerel obscures the politics of desire in a slave society. In addition to the fact that many of these relationships were exploitative, public indifference was often a mere posture—an affectation among gentlemen intended to convey roguish insouciance. As for the open and long-term relationships that some masters had with slave mistresses, only powerful planters could afford to be indiscreet without risking their positions and reputations.¹

John Stevens, whose letterbooks are the oldest documents in the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection, was well acquainted with the attitude and mores of the elite in the lower South. His letterbooks reveal his faltering efforts to create a genteel existence for himself and family first in Savannah, Georgia, and then in Charleston, South Carolina. Debt-ridden and battling rumors that he had fathered a mulatto child, Stevens was anxious to express his abhorrence of interracial sex. In addition to concerns about his own reputation, Stevens felt compelled to decry miscegenation in order to protect his wife from insult. Unable to offer her the security and prestige that plantation mistresses enjoyed, Stevens defended his wife's virtues in part by differentiating her from black women. Above all, Stevens tried to counter rumors about his personal conduct with public demonstrations of gentility.

Stevens had been a London merchant until his career was dashed when his only ship was seized by pirates near Barbados. He emigrated with his family to St. Kitts sometime in the late 1750s where, by his own estimation, he somehow acquired a "genteel fortune" of four thousand pounds sterling before moving again, this time to frontier Georgia, where land was practically being given away by the royal government to any white man who desired it. As a proprietary colony Georgia had prohibited slavery; when the Crown took it over in 1750, there followed a substantial wave of migrants from the West Indies who hoped that slave labor and lush land would make them wealthy. John Stevens, too, hoped to live the rest of his life as a propertied gentleman free from financial worries.
The influx of settlers to Georgia grew very quickly after 1763 due to Indian cession of three-and-a-half million acres of land at the end of the Seven Years War.\(^2\) By 1773 the slave population had risen from approximately zero (excluding those few who were imported illegally prior to 1750) to approximately 15,000, while the white population went from 1,900 (in 1751) to 18,000.\(^3\) Many late settlers were forced to take land farther away from Savannah than considerations of access and safety might have led them to prefer. Adding to their dissatisfaction, some unfortunate newcomers discovered that their would-be plantations were located on swampland. As early as 1750, traveler Johann Martin Boltzius wrote to an inquiring acquaintance, "whoever wants to have good land now would admittedly have to move farther up the Savannah River about 30 or 40 English miles."\(^4\)

Stevens and his family arrived in Savannah in April 1765. The Governor and Royal Council of Georgia granted John Stevens five hundred acres of land "on the south side of Turtle River at a Place called the little fresh Marsh," approximately forty-five miles downstream from Savannah (fig.2).\(^5\) Although this was not the most auspicious location,


\(^3\) Harold E. Davis, *The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1733-1776* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1976), 32. The exact number of slaves who were imported illegally prior to 1750 is not known.


\(^5\) "April 2, 1765," *Proceedings and Minutes of the Governor and Council of Georgia, from January 4, 1763 to December 2, 1766*, Allen D. Candler, comp., Volume IX in *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, Candler and Lucian Lamar, comps., (New York, 1904-1916), 325-26. There were three men named John Stevens living in Georgia at the same time. All of my citations from the published Georgia State Records refer exclusively to the John Stevenses Senior and Junior discussed in this paper. The other John Stevens resided in Georgia long before the John Stevenses from St. Kitts arrived, and the former also had a long career in the Commons House of Assembly and became Justice of the Peace after his namesakes relocated to South Carolina and Jamaica, respectively.
at least Stevens’s five hundred acres exceeded the typical “gentleman’s lot” of one hundred acres—a facetious label since most of the recipients were, according to Boltzius, “broken tradesmen and artisans.” 6

Stevens came to Georgia with a wife, four children, thirteen slaves, four thousand pounds, and dreams of becoming a planter. 7 He seems to have been slightly better off than the typical settler of middling means that James Habersham, one of Savannah’s earliest residents and a prominent merchant and planter, saw as the backbone of the colony as of 1765—incidentally the year of Stevens’s arrival. Habersham wrote of a class for whom “the Exportation of Lumber, Horses, Live stock &c... [had] principally been the means...[of acquiring] the little property they possess.” He noted that trade in Georgia generally involved small-scale goods carried out by “transient persons who have sent or brought small Vessels here with small cargoes, sometimes a few negroes and sometimes cash.” 8

Elite men like Habersham sought to prevent Georgia from being overrun by settlers whom Governor James Wright deemed “the worst kind of people.” Undesirables included petty traders with no agricultural aspirations, and squatters, referred to derisively by Habersham as “crackers,” who settled on land without applying for grants. 9 For despite the free land and the widespread prosperity that the lower South experienced in the late

8 “April 15, 1765,” The Letters of Hon. James Habersham, 1756-1775, Vol. VI in Collections of the Georgia Historical Society (Savannah, Ga., 1904), 31. This letter was sent to William Knox, Georgia’s Provincial Agent in London, to protest duties on American trade on the grounds that taxes were too burdensome for men of middling means.
eighteenth century, social mobility in Georgia was inhibited by profound social distinctions. Men like Habersham were at the pinnacle of the planter elite; they owned large plantations worked by hundreds of slaves and occupied positions of power within the royal government that gave them substantial control over their social inferiors. Habersham was appointed Secretary of the Province by the king in 1754 and president of the upper house of the General Assembly in 1767. Most settlers in Georgia dealt with him either through their acquisition of supplies from his Savannah store or through their requests for land grants before the Governor's Council over which he presided.10

As Harold E. Davis has argued, "Georgians could become gentlemen and did so in three ways: by possessing a fortune, by holding important public office, or merely by enjoying esteem."11 John Stevens pursued all three avenues: he had his cash, land, and slaves, and his projected profits from his plantation; he was appointed a Grand Juror of the Province; and he made the acquaintance of influential men like Council Member Clement Martin and James Habersham. In addition to his appearance before the latter upon application for a land grant, "a Handsome mulatto wench, the property of old Mrs. Habbersham," lived in the Stevens household.12 In his tastes and ambitions Stevens cut a cosmopolitan figure in a frontier colony. Among his property Stevens had a "favorite organ and instruments of every kind."13 Although skill in instrumental music was


11 Davis, The Fledgling Province, 146-47.

12 J. Stevens to J. Read, Apr. 11, 1769, John Stevens Letterbook, Box I, folio 2, Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection, The Library Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Hereafter Letterbook, B.1or 2, f.1-5). See also n. 49 below.

13 J. Stevens to William Savage, June 4, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
common, owning an organ was certainly rare; St. Paul’s in Augusta had one by 1763 and Savannah’s Christ Church had only just acquired one in 1765.

On June 27, 1765, just two months after settling his tract, Stevens took out an ad in the *Georgia Gazette*. It expressed both his attachment to his land and the vehemence with which he felt entitled to protect his new plantation:

> Whereas the house and wine room belonging to the subscriber...was, on Friday night last, broke open by some negroes, who took from thence a quantity of rum and Madeira wine; and whereas it has been a common practice for trading boats and others to land their people, and remain whole nights and days on the plantation, to the great prejudice of the subscriber; this is therefore to give notice to all trading boats and others, that, from and after this advertisement, any negroe [sic] or negroes who shall be found landing, or within the fences on the said plantation, not having a proper note from their owners, shall be whipped according to law, if in the day time: And, for better securing my property at night, I hereby give notice, that on Monday evening next I shall lay two spring-man-traps near my landing and dwelling-house, and keep fire arms ready in case of the least attempt.14

Clearly Stevens was living large on his plot, importing rum and Madeira, which carried a heavy tariff, and then storing it in a special room. He may have irritated his neighbors by belligerently refusing to share his landing. Although the tone of the notice is not unusual, particularly as it pertains to “negroes,” it is the very ordinariness that is noteworthy. Stevens’s haughty tone, self-assurance, and threats against trespassers demonstrate that he was comfortable in adopting the mannerisms of the slaveholding elite.

Four months after his advertisement appeared in the *Georgia Gazette*, Stevens’s eldest son John (Jack) gave Savannah’s first public concert on November 17, 1765 in honor of his appointment as organist to Christ Church. On King George’s birthday the

14 Davis, *The Fledgling Province*, 103-104. This cannot be the other John Stevens because he did not acquire property until after 1765. He also lived in the Midway District rather than at Joseph’s Town, the site of the plantation in this ad. This advertisement is also quoted in Philip D. Morgan, “Black Life in Eighteenth Century Charleston,” *Perspectives in American History, Vol. I* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 199-200; and in Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens, Ga., 1984), 189. Morgan uses the reference to demonstrate that all-slave crews became targets of complaint in the lower South. Wood uses it much as I have here – to emphasize the attitude of planters towards slaves.
following year, Jack organized and performed a tribute concert held at Lyon's Tavern after which a birthday ball was held. It was one of the few balls that Georgia's elite enjoyed. In 1772, James Habersham regretfully admitted that "We have no Plays, Operas, or public Exhibitions, either in point of Literature or Amusements, to animadvert upon."16

It was shortly after this concert in honor of the king's birthday that John Stevens's fortunes and public reputation began a precipitous decline. In his own words, "I had the misfortune of seeing my property moulder away in the most amazing manner." Disease struck the small group of slaves that he had brought with him from St. Kitts, killing nine men. And then on January 6, 1766, just at the seven-month date at which he was eligible to register the grant, his house was set on fire while he and his family were visiting friends; the arson was committed, he alleged, by "a party of runaway Negroes."17 All of Stevens's belongings, including his paper currency, were gone.

The culprits were never captured, but it is possible a band of runaway slaves did indeed set fire to Stevens's home. Just a year earlier a group of runaways had banded

15 Davis, The Fledgling Province, 192. Davis does not connect John Stevens Jr., musician, with the Joseph's Town planter who placed the ad in the Georgia Gazette. Likewise, he notes that Stevens later "played with some distinction at St. Michael's in Charleston"; he did not realize that it was John Stevens Sr. who had relocated to that city. John Stevens, Jr., did, however, play the organ in Kingston, Jamaica, following his move to that colony.


17 J. Stevens to W. Savage, Jun. 4, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. See also J. Stevens to L. Stevens, Feb. 28, 1770, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. This sequence of events, as related by Stevens, is contradicted by the Minutes of the Governor and Council of Georgia which indicate that Stevens still owned 13 slaves even after the fire (see n. 20). The Council either failed to note the change in the number of Stevens's slaves since his arrival in Georgia, or Stevens managed to replace the nine slaves who had died despite the fire and subsequent financial duress. It is also possible that Stevens purchased nine more slaves after receiving his land grant but prior to the fire to supplement the thirteen slaves he already owned. Or perhaps Stevens provided his correspondents with a synopsis of events that, while true in essence, was inaccurate with regard to details.
together in the swamps on the south side of the Savannah River and from there proceeded farther into Georgia to rob and harass the plantation owners who wanted to enslave or punish them. Their actions led the Governor’s Council to offer cash rewards for their capture: five pounds sterling for every male slave captured alive, two pounds for any woman, child, or the head of any man resisting capture.\textsuperscript{18} A band of white planters led a counter-assault, but few facts survive regarding the incident because it took place during the Stamp Act crisis when the \textit{Georgia Gazette} temporarily suspended publication. A similar incident occurred on another plantation in 1772, according to the Council’s minute book, but John Stevens’s fire was not recorded.\textsuperscript{19} Although Stevens never mentioned his neighbors as possible arsonists, that the fire occurred around the seven-month deadline for permanently obtaining his land grant raises serious suspicions. Perhaps covetous neighbors or squatters hoped to drive him off in order to claim the land for themselves.

In July 1766, Stevens again petitioned the Governor’s Council. With a new baby boy named Clement (Clem), Stevens expressed his desire “to relinquish that Tract [on Turtle River].” He prayed instead “for one thousand Acres on the north side of great Ogechee River.”\textsuperscript{20} His request was granted with the same stipulations as the first request: that he survey the acreage within six months and register for the grant the following month (fig.3). “On going to survey,” Stevens discovered that the land he desired was not


\textsuperscript{19} Davis, \textit{The Fledgling Province}, 139.

vacant. Perhaps fearing a confrontation with the current occupants, Stevens returned to the Council to request one thousand acres nearby called “Bassett’s old Field.” Again, Stevens’s request was granted with the same stipulations.21

Stevens immediately set to work. A letter written a few years later to his Savannah lawyer, James Read, indicates that Stevens attempted cattle-raising. There was a pine barren on his newly-acquired property, but Stevens did not mention whether he had tried logging or the production of naval stores.22 That Stevens ever cultivated rice is unlikely, both because of his small enslaved work force and because of the amount of pasturage he needed for cattle. In a letter to another Savannah attorney, William Greene, Stevens noted that a William Grover, Esq., owed him for “60 bushels of corn delivr’d to [him] by his express order and direction,” but it is not clear whether Stevens had raised the corn or merely acted as a middleman.23 It is apparent in his letters that he had contacts in many regions of the Atlantic world with whom he engaged in small-scale trading of alcohol and food.

Notwithstanding the subsequent land grant, the fire had devastated Stevens’s finances. Nearing fifty years of age with two young children, three teenage sons, and a wife, John Stevens had experienced a dramatic reversal of fortune. To ease the burden, his eldest son, John (Jack), struck out on his own for Jamaica. The second eldest, Jervis Henry (Harry), stayed behind to help his father. The third son, Joseph (Jo), ran off to sea at age twelve. Even with two fewer mouths to feed, John Stevens found it increasingly

21 Ibid.
22 J. Stevens to J. Read, May 8, 1770, John Stevens Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
23 J. Stevens to W. Greene, Sept. 9, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
difficult to provide for his family, let alone maintain the lifestyle to which he aspired. In September 1766, Stevens gave notice in the *Georgia Gazette* that he intended to sell at public vendue “a few valuable negroe men and women.” Included in the sale were a remarkably good carpenter, “an exceeding good cook” who also served as barber and housepainter, some sawyers, and “some house wenches who are capable of all kind of household business and field work also.”\(^2\) Although Stevens wrote to a friend that his first order of business after the fire was to sell all his slaves, one slave he did not sell was his grandson, Dick.\(^2\)\(^5\)

Another letter that Stevens wrote years later indicates that one of his elder sons, either Jack or Harry, had fathered a child with a slave woman. Dick’s birth date is unknown—he was probably no older than four as of 1767—and so is the identity of his mother. She may have been one of the “house wenches” sold at public auction in 1766. Harry was born in London in June 1750, so he would have been only fifteen years old when he arrived in Georgia.\(^2\)\(^6\) Although Jack was six years older, Harry may have been Dick’s father since it was he, rather than the primary heir, Jack, who became his father’s “second self” while Jack departed for Jamaica.\(^2\)\(^7\) Stevens asserted that Harry “must be a father to my young children and a protector to his mother when I am called upon to quit

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\(^2\)\(^5\) J. Stevens to W. Mann, Oct. 20, 1768, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

\(^2\)\(^6\) George W. Williams, “Eighteenth-Century Organists of St. Michael’s, Charleston,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 53 (October, 1952), 216.

\(^2\)\(^7\) J. Stevens to J. Mathias, Dec. 18, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. In other letters Stevens refers to Harry as his “right hand.” John Stevens, Jr. was born in London in 1744 and died on May 5, 1801, in Montego Bay, Jamaica. This information comes from two sources: Paul Stevens Papers, South Caroliniana Library (hereafter SCL), and Richard W. Cogdell to anonymous, n.d., B.I, f.5, p.7, LCP.
this stage"—a responsibility that would ordinarily have fallen upon the eldest son. The fact that Harry remained at home to attend to his father's affairs, which included persistent efforts to locate Dick after he was seized and sold, suggests that he may have felt closer to and more responsible for the enslaved boy than did Jack. Of course, it is also possible that John Stevens wanted Harry to stay at home because he thought that Jack was irresponsible and, perhaps, sexually promiscuous.

Dick was seized and sold at public auction in the fall of 1767 in order to pay off a portion of the senior John Stevens's debts; the seizure must have been painful to Stevens. The attachment that he felt towards the boy is evidenced by his unwillingness to sell him despite mounting debts. In fact, Stevens preferred to humble himself by advertising in the Georgia Gazette his services as a bookkeeper and music instructor— and he disliked teaching— rather than sell Dick. He even withheld Dick when all of his other possessions were sold at public auction by order of the Provost Marshall on August 19, 1767. For a social man whose ambition it was to enjoy the fruits and rights of a gentleman, the spectacle of his personal belongings being sold at public auction was humiliating. Stevens's anguish was compounded by grief over Dick's seizure by Clement Martin, a Council member and a former friend.

Martin was able to sell Dick because Stevens, given his much reduced circumstances, had left Georgia to explore opportunities in Charleston, leaving his family behind for the time being. The journal of Georgia's Common House Assembly recorded

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29 June 10, 1767, The Georgia Gazette, p.4, col.1. In a letter to his son Jack dated July 28, 1770, Stevens writes that he hopes Jack's new position as organist in Kinston, Jamaica will provide him with enough income so that he can avoid giving lessons since neither he nor his father are "overfond" of teaching.
his departure, noting that he had defaulted on a fifty-pound sterling loan, of which the payment with interest was secured with a mortgage of a portion of Stevens’s land. Since Stevens had departed “without perfecting the Security proposed” nor had “his Majesty’s Grants yet passed for the said land,” the Assembly ordered that the grant be given in trust to Clement Martin. Martin was charged with disposing of Stevens’s debts since he already owed Stevens money. But Martin never attended to Stevens’s debts and instead allowed neighbors to plunder Stevens’s cattle, squat on his land, and cut down trees in his pine barren. Eventually Stevens settled his debts and saw one of his neighbors arrested, but the breach between Stevens and Martin was never repaired.  

Two years after Dick’s seizure Stevens wrote a confrontational letter to Martin decrying his refusal to make good on the loan that Stevens, in formerly flush times, had extended to him and for unlawfully taking Dick while Stevens was away from his home:

Query. . . What humanity did I experience from Mr. Martin when I solicited the payment of a small balance on our private account which (though you acknowledged to be due to me and gave me your word of honor to pay me in cash), you afterwards, under color of its being part of my estate [and thus due to other creditors], unjustly withheld; when almost on my knees I pleaded on behalf of a starving wife and children. I say Sir – you have stood by, and calmly seen the very Bed (which had been given me, after that unhappy fire of my House) sold by Marshall: and have wanton’d at the sport. Again, reflect on the unjust and cruel circumstance of your taking the mulatto boy from my wife and selling him at public vendue, of whom, Mr. Bowman tells me, the good people of Georgia have done me the honor to proclaim me the father. 

Disgraced, Stevens nonetheless tried to maintain the public face of a patriarch by portraying his begging and supplication as duty to family and not personal, emotional weakness. He concluded his diatribe against Martin by demanding that the boy be

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31 John Stevens to Clement Martin, Jun. 14, 1770, B.I, f. 2.
returned. In addition, he wrote letters to his attorney in Savannah inquiring about Dick's whereabouts in order to buy him back.

Although it is notable that John Stevens opted to hold onto his own flesh and blood, whatever warm feelings he may have had about Dick did not alter his conviction that slavery was justifiable. In fact, as Stevens’s debts increased, so too did his support for repressive slave codes. On December 24, 1766, Stevens and his fellow Grand Jurors of Georgia published an open letter to the community in the *Georgia Gazette* calling for stricter adherence to the Negro Act. The jurors were particularly offended by slaves’ attendance at funerals “in large bodies in the night,” their selling of commodities without tickets from their masters, their frequenting musters and taverns, “and in a most notorious manner breaking the Lord’s Day.”

That Stevens would want tighter surveillance of slaves is not surprising since he believed them to be responsible for breaking into his wine room and later for burning down his house. But the jurors’ primary grievance was that “felons, negroes, and debtors” were “blended together” in Savannah’s jail. At issue, and of no small relevance to Stevens at that time, was the understanding that treating criminals indiscriminately regardless of race or nature of their crimes made it impossible for debtors to maintain their identification with the genteel elite. Of course the slave code also made interracial sexual relations punishable by fines and lashes, but apparently Stevens was not worried about strict adherence to the law with regard to his son’s illicit behavior.

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33 Ibid.
When Stevens arrived in Charleston in 1768 he had no money to speak of, no
slaves, and no land grant to fuel his ambitions. Moreover, he had only a brief window of
opportunity to establish himself before rumors of his skipping out on Savannah creditors
made their way north. “Rumor could be a sharp affliction for a new immigrant to the
colonies,” writes one historian. “If countervailing evidences were not ready to hand, the
Atlantic’s expanse kept a bad report alive. Rumor possessed an entertainment value.”
Stevens’s anxiety must have been particularly acute, for in addition to his financial
disasters he endured gossip about his personal life. Despite his attachment to Dick,
Stevens, in his letter of reproach to Clement Martin, angrily denied rumors that he was
Dick’s father:

Know, Sir, I am the lawful husband of a woman I love; that the small education I have
received and the religion I profess has ever taught me to live above so gross, so mean an
act as that of placing a negro slave on a footing with a virtuous woman. I hold such an act
in so horrid a light that I would not (even to be master of ten provinces) wear such a
crime about me; that I believe him to be the child of my son I have already owned to you,
when I looked on you as my friend, and I now repeat it. . . . I can challenge you, Sir, or any
man living, to stand forth and, with justice, accuse me. Wretches and underhand rascals
have taken advantage of my misfortunes and have endeavored to stain my character. . . . I
now glory that I am environed by men of sense, discernment, uprightness, humanity, and
learning. Many of them have been your intimates, who, now shudder at the recital of this
most shocking story.

Given the prevalence of interracial sex, and the casualness with which Charlestonians
supposedly regarded it, Stevens’s outrage perhaps seems excessive. The force of
Stevens’s rebuttal to “the good people of Georgia” seems to be directly proportionate to
his uncertain status as a supplicant to Charleston’s elite. Stevens’s claim that he would
not “wear such a crime” suggests that his preoccupation with his public reputation, along

34 David S. Shields, Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997),
278.

with the love he felt for his wife, prevented him from being intimate with an enslaved woman. To emphasize how “horrid” miscegenation was to him, Stevens claimed that he would rather reject the opportunity to be “master of Ten Provinces” than commit such a crime, which reconfirms that the attainment of wealth and power was, indeed, important to him.36

Just how much of the shocking story Stevens relayed to his new acquaintances in Charleston is not clear. Stevens never discussed Dick in his letters to friends in England and the Caribbean, although he wrote in depth about his many trials and tribulations. Only those individuals who were directly involved with Dick’s seizure and potential recovery knew firsthand of his relation to the family. Even the letters Stevens wrote to his attorney in Savannah, who was surely apprised of the situation, were worded in such a way as to suggest that Stevens merely resented Martin’s subversion of his authority. Again, it seems that an indifferent attitude towards sex with slaves was only possible in an anonymous context such as unsigned letters to the newspaper.

Incensed by the rumors spread by Georgians and cognizant of the importance of first impressions, Stevens wasted no time before demonstrating his worthiness to the gentlemen of Charleston. Although he didn’t have the usual letters of introduction or any institutional connections to ease his assimilation, he did possess musical skill. Upon his arrival, members of St. Michael’s Church sponsored a benefit concert for the Stevens family. Stevens’s performance led to a temporary position as the organist of St. Michael’s

36 It is telling that Stevens ended his tirade by inverting the “shocking story” so that Martin’s reputation was maligned; gossip was a two-way street, and many people would have known about Martin’s protracted battle with his own son over six thousand pounds. See Greene, “Travails of an Infant Colony,” in Jackson and Spalding, eds., Forty Years of Diversity, 297.
for fifty pounds annually, a job he shared with his son Harry. In yet another instance of fortunate timing, Stevens temporarily replaced Charleston’s absent Deputy Postmaster. The job did not pay especially well—again only fifty pounds a year—but it conferred a modicum of prestige and did much to shore up Stevens’s wounded pride. It also brought him into closer contact with the network of cross-Atlantic communication than he had experienced in Georgia.

Any cravings Stevens had for cosmopolitan living were also satisfied by the coffee room that Mrs. Stevens opened in August 1768. The money to begin this venture came from Stevens’s concert at St. Michael’s, but in order to shield himself from creditors he gave his wife “feme sole” status. A feme sole trader was simply a married woman who, with her husband’s permission, could transact business in her own name. Mary Stevens was one of approximately fifty female entrepreneurs in Charleston. A front-page advertisement in the *South Carolina Gazette* from July 11, 1768, reads:

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MARY STEVENS, sole-trader, Having taken a commodious house the corner of Longitude Lane on-the-Bay, proposes keeping a private BOARDING HOUSE for eight gentlemen which she will open the 25th instant; those gentlemen who intend to favour her with their company, are desired to give their names. Also LODGINGS for a few. She has for sale, choice old Jamaica and West Indian Rum, and the best London Madeira, either in casks or bottle.
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In his letters Stevens referred to the establishment only as a coffee room, which carried an air of sophistication exceeding that of a boarding house. To his son Jack in Jamaica he

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37 J. Stevens to James Johnson, July 20, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

38 *South Carolina Gazette*, July 11, 1768, p.1. The number fifty is an approximation that comes from the number of women given notice in the Gazette to pay permit taxes; the notice appeared over several weeks and the number of women listed, including Mary Stevens, never exceeded fifty. Moreover, from 1754 to 1776 there were only fifty-three registered feme sole traders. There probably were women who operated without a license, but the number of unlicensed feme sole traders is unknown. See Mary Roberts Parramore, “For Her Sole and Separate Use:” *Feme Sole Trader Status in Early South Carolina* (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina: 1991), 10.
bragged that "not a man of any consequence in the town (or who passes) but comes to the
Coffee Room," adding that his new success resulted from diligence and "close attention
to business and the utmost regularity."  

John Stevens was clearly involved in his wife's business. He furtively requested
that a friend pay for a subscription to the Georgia Gazette for the coffeehouse "in my
wife's name, not in mine." When clients failed to pay their bills, Stevens intervened "in
order to save Mrs. Stevens's credit." Stevens wrote to all his friends and acquaintances
to apprise them of his new venture. In one such letter, he wrote that the Coffeehouse was
"frequented by the officers of His Majesty's Navy and Army and the first people of the
town only; this with the small salary. . . [from the post office] just serves with great
prudence to keep us genteel." There was even a crowd of regulars whom Stevens
dubbed "the Gents of the Monday night." But drinking claret by his fire with his
customers, as Stevens was wont to do, did not entirely offset his anxieties. The threat of
Georgia creditors demanding payment was constant and debtors' prison seemed
imminent. "For on the honour of a man," Stevens assured one lender whom he begged for
forbearance, "I have it not in my possibility to pay [you] at present." John Stevens had
come to the lower South to fulfill his dream of being patriarch of a plantation. He ended

39 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Jr., April 29, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
40 J. Stevens to John Holmes, July 20, 1769, Letterbook, B. I, f.2.
41 J. Stevens to J. Brewton, Nov. 22, 1770, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.
42 J. Stevens to Paul Whitehead, Dec. 6, 1770, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.
43 J. Stevens to Peter Delancey, April 9, 1771, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.
44 J. Stevens to James Read, Dec. 22, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. Read was Stevens's attorney in
Savannah. The debt of sixty pounds sterling was owed to a Mr. Shephale.
his days, however, a man beset by creditors, whose only real means of support was from his wife.

According to her husband, Mary Stevens was “an affectionate wife. . . my companion and comfort under all my difficulties, and whose behavior has ever gained her esteem and respect.” 45 She also “work[ed] hard” and was his helpmate. In addition to being a good wife, John Stevens’s praised Mary for being a caring mother. He repeatedly reminded their son Jack in Jamaica of his obligations to his mother. When Jack responded favorably, Stevens wrote, “your mother desires I tell you this last letter of yours comforted her; she says till then, you have forgot to bestow even one poor thought on a mother, whose first care has ever been her children; and whose heart continues to yearn for their welfare. I am commissioned to tell you she loves you affectionately.”46 Stevens also invoked similar images in letters to others. To a former friend and house guest he sputtered, “you insulted a woman [Mrs. Stevens] who had been a mother to you ten fold.”47

“Crucial to the foundations of the social order in the colony and to the ongoing process of English identity formation,” writes one scholar of colonial Virginia, “the opposition of ‘good wives’ and ‘nasty wenches’ would figure significantly in the legal definitions of racial difference that were to emerge over the next fifty years.”48 Although South Carolina had a majority-slave population and lacked Virginia’s long history of

45 J. Stevens to James Mathias, Dec. 18, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
46 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Feb. 10, 1770, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
47 J. Stevens to J. Holmes, Apr. 25, 1771, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.
white indentured service, the good wife/nasty wench dichotomy is roughly applicable. It seems that John Stevens's descriptions of Mary Stevens as a good wife, no matter how accurate, were directly related to his failure to make her a plantation mistress. The precariousness of Stevens's social position impelled him to assert his wife's honorable station in part by differentiating her from black women. In his letter to Clement Martin, Stevens insisted that he would never place a "black slave" on an equal footing with "a virtuous woman;" the categories of virtuous (white) women and black female slaves were mutually exclusive in his mind. Thus Stevens bewailed to Clement Martin the cruel and unlawful seizure of his mulatto grandson, Dick, to Clement Martin, but never mentioned who or where Dick's mother was. It is striking that with one hand Stevens strove to recover his grandson, while with the other hand he penned a letter that denigrated women of color. One wonders whether Stevens would have felt differently had Dick been a female child.

Similarly, although he defended his wife from customers who refused to pay their bills, he denied liability for credit extended to the "Handsome mulatto wench, the property of old Mrs. Habbersham" who had purchased goods at Habersham's store while living with the Stevenses. "If they thought it proper to give her credit" Stevens maintained, "how unjust it is to load me with a matter of this kind." Of course, the difference arises from the fact that Stevens's wife was acting as a kind of financial "front" for him, so his welfare was inextricably linked to hers. In fact, the very same personal financial interest that promoted Stevens's defense of his wife's credit likewise impelled him to disavow the debts of the mulatto woman. Nevertheless, his choice of

49 J. Stevens to J. Read, Apr. 11, 1769, Letterbook, B.l, f.2.
words is noteworthy. Stevens was comfortable relegating slave women to the category of unreliable “wench” and furious whenever anyone impugned his wife’s character and, by extension, his own. The more insecure his position in society, the greater his sensitivity about any perceived slight. Recalling an incident when some hired collectors confronted his wife, Stevens fumed to his lawyer, “[they] ill-treated her with such indecent language, as you Sir would blush to read, and I should be almost distracted to commit to paper.” 50 Such an ugly incident only served to remind Stevens that he was relatively powerless to do anything about it.

Just as Stevens failed to mention Dick in his letters to friends, he never wrote to them about his frustrating inability to protect his wife from insults. In a letter to a newly married friend in St. Kitt’s, Stevens sent his congratulations and advice for the new bride: “Tell her if she intends to oblige me she must continue to love, honor, and obey my friend and her husband.”51 Although this demand was delivered in a letter that was generally humorous—even bawdy—in tone and in which Stevens professed an affection for his own wife that was doubtless sincere and mutual, the joke was nevertheless premised upon the acceptance of patriarchal authority in a marriage.

Patriarchy was somewhat tempered by sentimental feeling in the eighteenth century as companionate marriages became increasingly common, but a husband’s and father’s power over his family remained preeminent. John Stevens’s fondness for and his reliance upon his wife did not preclude his maintenance of patriarchal norms. In return for her hard work and observance of her husband’s authority, Mary received praise and

50 J. Stevens to J. Read, Apr. 21, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

51 J. Stevens to J. Corlet, Apr. 17, 1771, Letterbook II, B.I. f.2.
protection. She relied on her husband because as a man he had greater advantages maneuvering in the public sphere. John Stevens cultivated contacts and, when the need arose, went after clients who cheated his wife. Yet his ability to guard her honor and defend her from insults was seriously compromised by his own financial failures, so he protested her mistreatment in angry letters with the frantic energy of a profoundly insecure man.

Although his finances and aspirations were more modest in Charleston than they had been in Georgia, Stevens still possessed genteel tastes and mannerisms, wit, and the ability to write alternately scathing and obsequious letters. He was proud not only of his appointments at the Post Office and St. Michael’s, but also of his literary accomplishments. His fluency with language and music marked him as a gentleman. Consequently, Stevens grew agitated when the formalities of deference were denied him. He castigated John Brewton, the nephew of one of Charleston’s elite, Miles Brewton, for sending an “extraordinary ungenteel note... delivered [to Stevens] by [Brewton’s] young man, without even the civility of it being directed or folded up.” Brewton had run up an account at the Coffeehouse which was outstanding after seventeen months.\(^{52}\) After two attempts to get Brewton to pay his bill were rebuffed, Stevens chided, “your uncle, sir, or any other gentleman would not have thrown out such a scandalous aspersion against any man above the character of a common imposer.” Claiming that he had lived to the age of fifty “without ever having the least attempt on my character,” Stevens concluded that his only recourse was to seek redress and payment from Brewton’s well-heeled uncle.\(^{53}\)

\(^{52}\) J. Stevens to J. Brewton, Nov. 22, 1770, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.

\(^{53}\) J. Stevens to J. Brewton, Nov. 27, 1770, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.
Stevens wrote a series of letters to his son Jack, some pithy and others affectionate, all replete with advice to pay attention to civility in “conversation, morals, and mode of writing.”

Jack tended to ignore his father’s advice and admonitions to adopt “genteel, obliging behavior” in order to get ahead, and occasionally the two locked horns, as in the following example:

You know, friend Jack, when I read a man’s letter, I likewise read the man: give me leave to tell you, your last letter contains many contrarities—great want of stability—no settled theme—rough, rough, rough—superlatively rough—mettle indeed....Your application of the words Transportation—get a living without sucking (and many others) with the inferences you draw, are unthinkingly apply’d—carry the appearance of wrath— and are striking proofs of a rough, unpolish’d temper, therefore I pass them over to the account of what I have often recommended to you....You say you have a strong, black, beard—wear it with discretion and do not let the world see your beard grow grey, while you head remains green—Jack, Jack; when will you make me happy and let me give over preaching?

Indeed, Stevens’s epistle included a lengthy sermon on the many advantages his son had enjoyed compared with his own childhood, in which he had worked long hours at his uncle’s counting house without benefit of a formal education or the instructive example of a fond father.

At one point Jack wanted his father to join him in Jamaica, or at least to send money. Stevens turned down his son’s invitation and assured him that he hadn’t any money to spare. For his part, Jack craftily tried to lure his brother Harry away from their father’s watchful eye. This met with even greater anger from their father, who counted upon Harry to assume the role of family patriarch after his death. The criticism abated when Jack apparently informed his happy father that he had acquired a plantation of his

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54 J. Stevens to William Mann, Apr. 29, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. Stevens requested that Mann assist Jack in cultivating good habits and manners.

55 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Jr., Apr. 29, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
own. Unfortunately this was a misunderstanding that resulted from Jack’s verbal imprecision; he was still an overseer on someone else’s plantation. Stevens relented, for once, encouraging Jack to keep his mind on his business instead of berating him for misrepresenting his position. Presumably John Stevens understood his son’s restless ambition and keen desire to advance. He counseled Jack to be patient, and told him about a dutiful servant whose master posthumously rewarded him with five thousand pounds.

Stevens was less understanding when Jack enlisted his employer, Charles Seymour of Hope Estate in Seguania, Jamaica, to solicit his father on his behalf. “There needed not that kind of voucher which you send me with Mr. Seymour’s name,” Stevens scolded his son. “Can you prevail on me,” he added, “to believe you had not, (amidst all your violent hurry of business), time for one poor thought of an affectionate mother and the little folks?” This letter is not unlike the one sent to Clement Martin in which Stevens couched his emotions in terms of his patriarchal, protective role regarding his wife and children. Mother and “the little folks” ostensibly pined for the return of the affection they felt for Jack, whereas Stevens was curious about the young man’s reaction to his doings in business matters. The two letters are similar also in their concern for public appearances. In fact, to alleviate the embarrassment that he felt because of Mr. Seymour’s involvement in his son’s appeal for money, Stevens wrote him a minimally

56 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Jr., Sept. 9, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. “By your expression ‘that you are extremely engaged in YOUR plantation business’ – ‘that you are endeavoring to get enough to be able to sett you down hereafter easie and quiet – which you hope to do in a few years.’ I judge you have a plantation of your own,” the elder Stevens wrote, “and that your former situation when you went to Mr. Seymour is quite forgot.”

57 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Jr., Feb. 28, 1770, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

58 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Jr., Aug. 9, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
cordial letter thanking Seymour for his interest in Jack. To Jack, Stevens afterward sent numerous letters that sarcastically referred to his son’s unbelievably busy schedule.

Many of Stevens’s concerns about his son were shared by other fathers of the era. They tried to inculcate values such as industriousness and politeness in their children and worried about the seductions of lethargy and insolence. In part their worries responded to popular stereotypes applied to colonial society by English gentility. Colonists sought to disprove the notion that their distance from the metropolitan center of England put them at risk of reversion to savagery. Likewise they knew that reliance on slave labor made them vulnerable to charges of social and economic backwardness.59 In one of his many instructional letters to his son in Jamaica, John Stevens wrote: “What you stile [sic] getting a living, I call mere breathing; the brutes of the field live--but rational beings should aspire to something more, or in what do we differ from them.”60 Colonists used their letters and their parenting to prevent their families from confirming images of hedonism and laziness.

Elite planters frequently sent their sons out of the South for their education, usually to England. John Stevens could not afford to send his children away for a genteel education. However, he praised acquaintances who did. In a letter to his friend George Savage of Antigua he wrote that he “rejoice[d]” to hear that his children had been sent to London for schooling. As was his habit, Stevens imputed any sadness over those


60 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, Jr., Apr. 29, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. The exact meaning of brute here is somewhat ambiguous. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, as an adjective brute can describe a person or thing, e.g. brute intellect. In the earliest written examples of its usage, brute often modified an animal, as in brute beast. John Stevens’s “brutes of the field” probably refers to animals, but it may also refer to field slaves. See Karl Jacoby, “Slaves By Nature? Domestic Animals and Human Slaves,” Slavery and Abolition, 15 (April 1994), 89-97.
children's absence to Mrs. Savage exclusively. "Though her affection and fondness may cause some momentary heartaches," he opined, her comfort would be in the anticipated pleasure of having accomplished children--a satisfaction "which none but virtuous children can give, or fond and affectionate parents receive." Neglecting to mention the various ways in which his own children had disappointed him, Stevens noted how grateful son Harry was to have received hospitality from "Mama Savage" in Antigua.

More importantly, Stevens argued for the necessity of sending the children to London. His argument echoed much of what he wrote to and about his three eldest sons. Comparing his own youth in London at his uncle's counting house with the leisurely childhood of his sons, Stevens feared that his sons had neither the values nor the inclination to make their fortunes in life. Compounding this anxiety was the fact that his youngest children had never known anything but colonial towns. Perhaps to counterbalance this cultural deficit, Stevens requested a lesson book from London to teach daughter Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey), born in St. Kitts, how to play the harpsichord.

In every letter John Stevens wrote to his son, Jack, he portrayed himself as a shining example of the success attainable by hard work and deferential manners. While he had, in fact, recovered considerably from the debacle of Georgia, Stevens omitted the gloomier aspects of his life in Charleston. The events that had transpired in Georgia cast a shadow over his prospects in South Carolina, a fact that he chose not to relate to his wayward son or to any of his friends in England or the West Indies. His troubles in

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61 J. Stevens to G. Savage, Sept. 3, 1769, Letterbook, B. I, f.2.

62 J. Stevens to Benjamin Yarnold, Nov. 2, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. Yarnold had preceded Stevens as organist at St. Michael's, and it was he who arranged the benefit concert on Stevens's behalf.
Charleston first came to the fore in June 1769 when he applied to the wardens and vestry of St. Michael’s Church for a permanent position as organist. Stevens’s request was rejected despite his humble tone, flowery prose, and satisfactory performance as temporary organist for six months previous.63

The vestry also wrote a letter that same day to one Thomas L. Smith, who had offered to procure in Great Britain “a Skillful Person as Organist for St. Michael’s Church.” They stressed that payment was by subscription, but guaranteed the prospective organist fifty pounds sterling a year in any case as an inducement, as well as twenty pounds to cover passage to the colony. The vestrymen suggested that Smith inform candidates about the advantages to be derived from the position, such as the opportunity to teach music. Finally, in what may have been an allusion to Stevens, they concluded:

The Disadvantages many Persons labour under on their arrival to this Province, on account of their being Married Men and having Familys are so obvious that we must therefore request you would procure a Single Gentleman who, if a Sober Man, and Cleaver [sic] in his Business will have an Opportunity of Advancing himself by marriage and Settling Amongst, Sir, Your very Humble Servants.64

Stevens must have found out about the arrangement with Smith, for he fired off another letter to inquire whether he had ever offended the vestry and to assure them that he would concede the position to the former organist should he return from England to claim his post. He assured the vestry that the mere satisfaction of serving the people of Charleston

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63 “J. Ward to J. Stevens, June 5, 1769,” Mrs. C. G. Howe and Mrs. Chas. F. Middleton, eds., Minutes of St. Michael’s Church, Charleston, South Carolina, 1758-1797 (Charleston, S.C., n.d.), 76.

64 “Church Wardens and Vestry Men to Thomas L. Smith, June 5, 1769,” Howe and Middleton, Minutes of St. Michael’s Church, 76.
was worth more to him than the money. “Let me intreat you not to adopt a stranger,” he pleaded.  

Oddly enough, the next two pages of St. Michael’s minute book are missing. But apparently Stevens was permitted to remain as organist until his replacement arrived, which, fortunately for him, never happened. What remains unclear is whether Stevens ever satisfied the vestry and why they were unwilling to give him the appointment. The letter to Smith offers some tantalizing possibilities. They may not have regarded Stevens as a “skillful” player; or perhaps Stevens did not play enough subscription concerts, but relied instead on the fifty pounds per year. Just two months earlier Stevens had complained that warden Owens had refused to pay “the remaining part of my son’s and my salary as organist.” Stevens apparently made a nuisance of himself in order to collect by calling on vestryman William Burrows. The latter’s clerk put off the caller by claiming that his employer was indisposed at that time.

Another disappointment occurred shortly after Stevens’s failure at St. Michael’s. In June 1769, Stevens wrote to South Carolina’s Governor, Lord Charles Greville Montagu, regarding the state of the Charleston Post Office. He wrote that the Deputy Postmaster, Peter Delancey, had neglected “to transmit the necessary quarterly accounts home, to their Lordship the Post Master General.” Consequently, Delancey faced

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65 J. Stevens to Wardens and Vestry, June 6, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

66 J. Stevens to W. Burrows, Apr. 11, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

67 It is also possible that the wardens and vestry heard from hostile sources in Savannah who gave a different version of events there than Stevens had. Charleston merchant Henry Laurens was but one church member who was friendly with James Habersham, and owned property near Stevens’s first plantation on Turtle River in Georgia. The wardens and vestrymen of St. Michael’s were, along with their colleagues at St. Philip’s, some of the most influential men of Charleston. They were responsible for electing all city officials and for levying taxes on slaves and real estate. In short, they were well-connected with all the important figures in the king’s government.
suspension and Stevens hoped that Lord Montagu would put in a good word for him as a replacement. He added that his own “quarterly account has been faithfully settled.” Stevens was clearly dismayed by the response he received from Lord Montagu the next day. He responded immediately:

Permit me to assure your Lordship that no circumstance of my life has ever given me more real concern than the receipt of your Lordship’s letter deliv’rd me this morning. I can with truth affirm that since I have acted in the post office I have never (on my part) caused the least delay or been guilty of the smallest neglect.68

In an exceedingly self-deprecating tone, he concluded by asking where he might have appeared to be remiss in his duties. Two weeks later he submitted to Lord Montagu an account of the money owed to the post office along with some complimentary subscription papers and best wishes for a safe return to “our native country.”69 Montagu was a twenty-eight-year-old governor with little tolerance for what he considered the provincial life of South Carolina. He was probably thoroughly uninterested in the likes of John Stevens and utterly unmoved by his obsequiousness.70

Why Lord Montagu accused Stevens of impropriety in the first place is an unanswerable question. However, his Lordship was a friend of prominent Georgians and had even been a guest of the Habershams when visiting Savannah. While it is not certain that Habersham was the source of malicious gossip (he once wrote in a letter to the Earl of Hillsborough that “it is very painful to me to say or even insinuate a disrespectful word

68 J. Stevens to Lord Montagu, June 22 & 23, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
69 J. Stevens to Lord Montagu, July 11, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
of anyone”), Habersham did accuse Stevens of delaying his mail in a letter to Governor James Wright of Georgia in June 1772. Habersham opined that “the Detention of Public Letters is very disagreeable, and may be attended with bad Consequences.”

The tide of public favor, at least among Charleston’s elite, appeared to be turning against John Stevens. At the same time, Stevens experienced more intimate woes. A little over a month before Stevens wrote to the wardens and vestry of St. Michael’s, Stevens’s sixth child, an infant son named Ben, died. Then, shortly after his last letter to Lord Montagu, Stevens discovered that his third son, a seaman named Joseph, was ill somewhere in Bristol, England. The last time Stevens had seen Jo was two years earlier when “he arrived naked in Charleston” after having experienced the middle passage, shipwreck, and attack by Spanish pirates. Father and son had quarreled about the latter’s alleged insolence towards his commanding Captain. Perhaps Stevens’s insistence on genteel manners seemed absurd to a teenager who had spent the last four years at sea. Jo had then departed “with a man [John Stevens] did not altogether approve of,” and his father had not seen nor heard from him until a distressing note from Jo arrived in July of 1769.

Demonstrating a mixture of compassion and patriarchal power, Stevens chose to keep secret from his wife the contents of the letter from Jo in order to protect her ostensibly delicate constitution. Stevens merely told her that a letter had arrived and that Jo was “well.” Apparently this information alone was enough to render Mary “unfitt for

71 April 30, 1772, Letters of James Habersham, in Collections of the Georgia Historical Society, VI, 179 & 183. Stevens had since died, so Habersham’s accusations did not produce bad consequences.

72 J. Stevens to J. Mathias, Dec. 18, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.

73 J. Stevens to Margaret Willis, July 15, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
several hours[;] she was near being totally lost with joy.” According to her husband, full disclosure of Jo’s letter “would have killed her on the spot.” Stevens decided to limit his wife’s knowledge of the particulars of the letter after consulting with their teenage son Harry. Stevens then sent Jo’s letter to Jack and wrote letters to acquaintances in Bristol trying to locate Jo so that he could be sent back home. But young Jo died before Stevens could find him, and the circumstances of his death were apparently shameful. It is not clear whether Mary Stevens was ever fully informed about Jo’s sad fate, although Stevens did write a cautionary letter to his eldest son in Jamaica about the possibility of ending up like poor Jo.

Despite Stevens’s advice to his sons regarding the necessity of cultivating an obliging demeanor, he was not able to parlay his own genteel manners into permanent positions at either St. Michael’s or the Post Office. He believed that even friends were beginning to mock him, and he lashed out at them in response. John Holmes from Savannah had done Stevens the favor of purchasing the *Georgia Gazette* for Stevens’s coffee room, and for his trouble he received an acid note of thanks that berated Holmes for failing to buy the paper in Mrs. Stevens’s name. Holmes again aroused Stevens’s ire by demanding money owed him, perhaps for the newspaper. Stevens then reminded Holmes of the debt of gratitude he owed the Stevens family for hosting him, procuring him a position as a teacher, and giving him fifty pounds sterling upon his arrival in the West Indies. When Holmes responded insultingly, Stevens exploded with rage:

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74 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, July 28, 1770, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
You do me the honor to approve (what you very politely and learnedly call) my "knack of letter writing and method of telling my own story." I claim no other merit than that of writing and speaking plain honest truth and to such I will ever dare subscribe my name. You have [been] to this hour (and ever will remain) an Insignificant Nothing; be contented to act in the sphere which best suits you — that of a Servant. Nor dare attempt to sore [sic] above your appointed Station. I really cannot, with truth, pay you the least compliment on your literary performances. But Oh! What shall I say to thee, thou ungreatful savage; thou that has practiced on me for thy use. Thou most insignificant, ungreatful Two Faced Imp. Hold the mirror of reflection yourself and read over the copy of that vile, unconnected letter, which you had the impudence to direct to me, without a date, without form, unlicked as yourself — and know that I have been your friend. Oh! Thou fool — cudgel thy empty brain — write on — I'll answer thee — be still more (if thou canst) a Devil.75

In addition to questioning Stevens's truthfulness, Holmes implied that one of the few remaining feathers in Stevens's cap—his literary skill—was merely superficial, shallow, and self-serving. The insinuation was too much for Stevens to bear after so many disappointments. His vituperative and didactic response betrays, however, his own insecurities and even substantiates Holmes's criticism.

Stevens was not a teacher like Holmes—a position the former apparently equated with that of servant—but he was reliant upon the good will of Charleston’s elite, and their initial favor was receding. How irksome it must have been to fifty-year-old John Stevens to write a fawning letter to a twenty-eight-year-old governor, Lord Montagu, begging for appointment to the Post Office! And how very taxing to maintain a public face of being a man above reproach and insult, when, in reality, Stevens perceived insults and condescension coming from every corner except, perhaps, from his good wife, Mary.

Stevens’s hopes for a permanent appointment were rekindled, however, when the Deputy Postmaster, Peter Delancey, was killed in a duel in August 1771. Never one to

75 J. Stevens to J. Holmes, May 17, 1771, Letterbook, B.I, f.2. Holmes was not a servant but a teacher; Stevens held both professions in low regard. That Holmes was a teacher is substantiated by two documents: a letter Stevens wrote to Holmes on April 25, 1771 ("I, sir, procured your admittance into the family you first went into as a teacher"); and Holmes's advertisement for his school in the Georgia Gazette on May 21, 1766, p. 1, col. 2.
miss an opportunity, Stevens immediately fired off a series of letters to individuals connected with the General Post Office in London, as well as a letter to an old friend employed at the Custom House in London, Henry Saxby, to ask that he put in a good word for Stevens. The very next day Stevens sent more letters, this time with greater alarm. Charlestonian William H. Drayton had paid Stevens a visit, and, according to the latter, “he told me he supposed I know of his having been appointed to execute the late Peter Delancey’s post of Deputy Post Master.” Stevens rebuffed him by demanding a warrant from London to turn over His Majesty’s mail. The following afternoon several merchants who opposed Drayton came to the post office to ascertain whether he had succeeded in gaining control. Buoyed by the merchants’ support of his candidacy, Stevens then penned a private letter to Anthony Todd of the General Post Office warning him that disruption of mail service might exacerbate an already inflammatory situation.

Apart from his personal stake in this matter, Stevens was correct to worry about the safety of the mail. Robberies were not uncommon, and protests against royal policies were growing steadily. William Drayton was, in fact, a member of the Secret Committee, a group of budding revolutionaries; he would go on in 1775 to successfully seize the royal mail. Drayton kept up the pressure, demanding that Stevens account for Peter Delancey’s bookkeeping, for instance, but Stevens was able continually to foil him. Nevertheless, by October Stevens still had not heard whether he had been appointed Postmaster. Determined to “live happy in [his] own way” regardless of the outcome,

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76 J. Stevens to Anthony Todd, Aug. 21, 1771, Letterbook, B.I, F.2.
77 J. Stevens to A. Todd, Aug. 25, 1771, Letterbook, B.I, f.2.
78 J. Stevens to W. Drayton, Aug. 31, 1771, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2.
Stevens wrote a letter to prominent Charleston merchant and planter Henry Laurens to remind him of Delancey’s death and to again request the position. Laurens responded discouragingly:

No doubt. . . that many Applications were previously lodged for securing the Post. For my own part I can do nothing more at present to serve you than to speak in your favor. But as the Lieutenant Governor has appointed pro tempore W. H. Drayton, Esquire and must undoubtedly have back’d his Appointment with a Recommendation, there is scarcely Room for hopes of . . . Success.

Perhaps further salting the wounds to Stevens’s pride, Laurens added that Stevens might be able to retain his current position of Secretary “if it’s worth your while. . . small pay and all the drudgery.” Despite the insult, London eventually interceded. Stevens stayed on as Secretary to the new appointee, a Mr. Timothy.

Just about the time things started to look up for John Stevens, he died. His obituary in the South Carolina Gazette reads:

On Monday last died, after a very short illness, and very much regretted, having, by his obliging Conduct in the several spheres wherein he acted, gained universal Esteem, Mr. John Stevens, Secretary to His Majesty’s Deputy-Post Master General for the Southern District of North America, and Deputy Post-Master of this town, ever since Mr. Timothy’s resignation, lately elected Organist of St. Michael’s Church, and also lately appointed by the Hon. George Saxby, Esq. His Majesty’s Receiver General, to be his Deputy.

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79 J. Stevens to James Garden, Sept. 1, 1771, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2. “If I should not be appointed, I am just where I was, and am determined to live happy in my own way.”


Stevens finally got his keenly sought-after positions, but did not live long enough to enjoy them. He died three days before he was to give a subscription concert at St. Michael’s, to be followed the next week by his son Harry’s concert. Presumably he died a happy man. There are no personal records to document his family’s grief.

An arriviste in Georgia, a frontier colony, John Stevens tried to model his life after that of the English gentry. His efforts were continually frustrated by his neighbors, his slaves, disease, and his own arrogance. The five hundred acres upon which he cultivated his aspirations were robbed and burned. He turned to his neighbors for assistance only to discover that his reputation rested on a slippery slope. Even his personal dominion, as patriarch of his family, was undermined by uncertainty: his children did not fully share his values or always follow his directives, and he was unable to offer his wife the security and riches that planters’ wives enjoyed. Yet Stevens asserted his stature despite his pecuniary failures through genteel displays of musical and literary accomplishment, as well as the celebratory and protective trumpeting of his wife’s goodness. Stevens’s gentility was premised upon notions of white superiority, but miscegenation within his family complicated the alleged natural, hierarchical order of the world. For despite Charleston’s reputation as a city where casual attitudes towards interracial sex prevailed, an accusation of licentiousness with slaves could damage a man’s social mobility.

There does not seem ever to have been a reunion between Dick and the Stevenses. Even if Dick had been located, his future might have been less than idyllic in his father’s home, given the Stevenses’ acceptance of the norms and racially deprecatory usages of slavery. Consider a letter that John Stevens wrote to a slaveholder to request that the man
sell him a boy, Cupid, whom he characterized as “a little idle fellow and continually running away,” so that he could “make Harry a compliment of him.” By deprecating Cupid’s personal qualities Stevens aimed to talk down his price, but the tone of the request also exemplifies the kind banter that gentlemen used to convey a posture of detachment and superiority.

Yet Stevens’s distress at the loss of Dick suggests that he and his family were able to see at least some individual slaves as more than mere property; similarly, Harry stipulated in his will of 1828 that his executors sell “the whole of my slaves, Negroes and Mulattos except for my old servant George,” who had served him in the American Revolution. One wonders whether Harry might have freed Dick had he been given the opportunity. However, it is reasonable to rule out the possibility that he might have eventually sold Dick.

John and Mary Stevens’s children eventually achieved the material comfort and social success to which their father had aspired, but interracial sex continued to be a relevant issue in their lives. The next chapter of this thesis deals with the entrenchment of racial slavery and its centrality to identity--focusing on the Stevens family--from the eve of the Revolution through the early Republic.

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82 J. Stevens to Patrick Reilly, Jan. 22, 1771, Letterbook II, B. I, f. 2.

83 Last Will and Testament of Jervis Henry Stevens, Wills of Charleston County, Book G, 1826-1834, 241, SCDAH.
CHAPTER TWO

“Every White Man Having Such Connection”

Despite his twentieth-century efforts to uncover his genealogy, Paul Stevens found it difficult to trace the life of John Stevens and his family. He observed that “the shifts between London, St. Christopher’s (St. Kitts), Montego Bay, Jamaica, Charleston[,] Georgia and Florida, breaks the continuity of the English family of Stevens.... the family seems to have been on the move.” Paul Stevens was also skeptical of research assistance that his grandfather, another avid genealogist, had received from British barristers who were all too eager to connect Stevens to “illustrious and noble British families.”¹ Mr. Stevens was able to determine correctly that John Stevens had been a failed merchant of London, but other details eluded his grasp.

Although Lillie Dickerson possessed John Stevens’s letterbooks, she too knew very little about him. The letterbooks had been preserved by her family but were infrequently, if ever, consulted because the content of the letters elicited profoundly ambivalent feelings in Stevens’s African-American descendents. They had no first-hand knowledge of this man, and his abhorrence of interracial sex and cavalier attitude towards slavery was hurtful. Their only connection to John Stevens was through his grandson, Richard Cogdell, who may have doubted his mother’s assessment that Stevens was “the

¹ Paul Stevens Papers, November 1959, South Caroliniana Library (hereafter SCL). Paul Stevens writes that British informants asserted that John Stevens was the son of Commodore John Cruickblake Stevens, Royal Navy, and Lady Mary Walpole, niece of Sir Robert Walpole, The Earl of Oxford. Indeed, John Stevens’s youngest son was named Clement Crookblake and his daughter, Mary Ann Elizabeth, named her youngest son Richard Walpole.
finest man who ever lived.” One can only wonder how Richard, who fled from his home in Charleston to bring his mulatto children to Philadelphia in order to protect them, may have reacted to John Stevens’ vehement statements against miscegenation. As for Richard’s mulatto children, Mrs. Lillie Dickerson recalls that her grandmother (one of Richard’s daughters) never talked about slavery or miscegenation. To have broached the issues raised by John Stevens’s letterbooks would have pained a generation anxious to sever its connection with slavery. Consequently, neither Mrs. Dickerson nor her surviving family knew about John Stevens’s mulatto grandson Dick.

Dick’s removal from the Stevenses’ lives was attended by two ironies—that it was this very disappearance that led to his introduction into the historical record; and that then, having so come into view, he disappeared again from the historical memory of his fellow descendants of John Stevens. But this partial erasure is not so surprising given John Stevens’s obsession with propriety—a value he inculcated in his children. As I have argued in chapter one, Stevens’s anxious attempts to refute the accusation that he was Dick’s father are commensurate with the instability of his own social position vis-a-vis his superiors in Charleston. Although the American Revolution helped Stevens’s children attain the financial stability that had eluded their father, their respectability rested upon a bedrock of slavery and restrictive racial codes. While the Revolution prompted some white Southerners, particularly in the Upper South, to question their commitment to slavery, gradual tightening of the slave code in South Carolina ensured that that institution would remain integral to the economy and to the identities of whites who profited from it in varying degrees.

“Perhaps the society of no colony was more unequal,” writes historian Gordon S.

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Wood, "more riven by discrepancies of rich and poor, more dominated by an ostentatious aristocracy than that of South Carolina." Yet Carolinian Christopher Gadsden argued that, compared with the condition of the poor elsewhere in the world, life in Charleston among the laboring classes was not so bad. Although he did not mention the condition of black slaves, white Charlestonians of modest means knew that their lot was far better than that of enslaved workers. On occasion, the comparison was explicit. For example, in April 1773 the vestry of St. Michael’s recognized a petition from the “poor white people” of Charleston requesting permission to bring chairs to church and place them in the aisles during services. In response to this request, the vestry resolved that permanent benches be made and affixed to the aisles and to a spot near the pulpit. Accordingly, the vestry ordered the Sexton to remove the portable benches and property of black parishioners “now plac’d [sic] in those places” to the galleries or under the belfry. Thereafter, the vestry noted that “no Negroes shall be permitted to sitt on the benches so ordered to be made.”

Despite such shows of racial solidarity, South Carolina remained, to a significant degree, a highly stratified plantation society. The very magnanimity of the vestry’s gesture on behalf of “poor white people”--a twice-repeated description--seems suspiciously superficial. Moreover, “the planters, despite their aristocratic poses, were often very busy, commercially involved men.” Their livelihoods were more directly tied to the fluctuations of international trade than were those of the landed aristocracy in England. For this reason, and because they themselves wanted power, prior to the

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4 Mrs. C. G. Howe and Mrs. Chas. F. Middleton, eds., *Minutes of St. Michael’s Church, Charleston, South Carolina, 1758-1797* (Charleston, n.d.), 108.

Revolution they angrily protested imperial directives that replaced local authorities with puppets or "placemen." Monarchical patronage was viewed as a corrupt system that upheld private interests at the expense of the public good. "Such corruption had turned the colonies into a dumping ground for worthless place-seekers from Britain, 'strangers ignorant of the interests and laws of the Colonies . . . sent over,' complained William Henry Drayton of South Carolina, 'to fill offices of 200 or 300 pounds per annum, as their only subsistence in life.'"6

Given his opposition to placemen, Drayton's attempt to take over His Majesty's Post Office in 1771 was not merely a slight against John Stevens, but a preventative measure designed to fill the position of Deputy Postmaster with a local representative. Although Stevens was a local, albeit a recent arrival, Drayton did not take his candidacy seriously. He believed that well-to-do gentry were exclusively fit, as well as obligated, to provide leadership; "important offices were supposed to be held only by those who were already worthy and had already achieved economic and social superiority."7 Drayton went so far as to argue that nature had never intended for "the profanum vulgus" to be politicians. Such men were unprepared for statesmanship, having studied only the rules on "how to cut up a beast in the market to the best advantage, to cobble an old shoe in the neatest manner, or to build a necessary house [privy]."8

John Stevens was neither a butcher nor a cobbler, but he was reliant upon the annual salaries of his positions at the Post Office and St. Michael's, and he had been accused of manipulating the mail to serve his own needs. Certainly Drayton and the rest of the Secret Committee would not have looked kindly upon Stevens's attempt, had they

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6 Ibid., 174-175.
7 Ibid., 83.
8 Ibid., 246. These are Drayton's words.
known about it, to secure the position of Deputy Postmaster by appealing to London rather than to local authorities. On the other hand, even though Stevens was no wealthier than the average laborer, his sympathies were closer to the planter class because of his refined tastes and literacy and his aspirations to join that class. Being so closely bound up with his superiors, Stevens was subject to their whims and to downward turns in their fortunes. Dependent as he was on appointments at a time when the authority to appoint was contested, Stevens’s road to modest gentility was strewn with obstacles.

The power struggles between colonial authorities and the Crown intensified after Stevens’s death in 1772. That same year Governor Montagu infuriated members of the South Carolina Assembly by spontaneously demanding that it meet in Beaufort rather than Charleston, seventy-five miles away. Montagu had hoped to discourage the leaders of the nascent revolutionary movement, but instead added fuel to the fire by delaying the meeting three days, making a condescending speech before the Assembly, then ordering the members to reconvene in Charleston. At the same time, Parliament passed the Tea Act, which set off protests up and down the eastern seaboard. Had John Stevens lived, his appointment as Deputy to His Majesty’s General Receiver would have put him in the unfortunate position of tax collector to an unhappy populace.

In the midst of this mounting tension, Jervis Henry (Harry) Stevens was experiencing a personal crisis. As his father’s “second self,” he had shared the position of organist with John. After his father’s unexpected death, Harry applied to the vestry for the permanent appointment and was rejected. The church minutes note that “[J.H. Stevens’s] abilities as an Organist the vestry were acquainted with, they desired Mrs. [Ann] Windsor to play Two Sundays, which she complied with, and the Vestry were so

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well satisfied with her Performance, That it was this Day agreed [to offer her the position].” Mrs. Windsor thus became the first woman to hold the post, and she received the same salary as her male predecessor, John Stevens: fifty pounds a year. Harry Stevens was summarily dismissed just twenty-five days after his father’s death and four days shy of his twenty-second birthday.

Harry was able, however, to succeed his father at the post office in the position of Secretary to the new Postmaster, George Roupell. The job was still fraught with troubles. In July 1775, William Henry Drayton, John Neufville, and Thomas Corbet paid Harry a visit while he was at work. They arrived at the post office, approached the window that opened onto the street, and demanded the mail that had just arrived from Falmouth, Massachusetts. Harry gave a “peremptory refusal.” The men then threatened to break open the door, and, indeed, came into the building in order to make good on the threat. Years later Harry recounted what had transpired to Drayton’s son, who was writing an account of the Revolution:

Being then alone in the office, assorting the letters, and late in the evening – the door, but a slight one – and fearing the confusion the breaking it open might cause; as well as exposing the letters and papers of the Office unnecessarily – I did open the door, and admit those gentlemen. They selected all the public documents, and took them away – (I afterwards learnt[,] to the Secret Committee.)

The men were too late to seize the dispatches intended for newly-appointed Governor Campbell of South Carolina and for John Stuart, his Secretary of Indian Affairs, but they did obtain an official letter to the Governor of North Carolina that encouraged his plans to raise the residents of four counties whose loyalties were with the King. They also intercepted a letter from Governor James Wright of Georgia calling for support from His

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10 Howe and Middleton, eds., Minutes of St. Michael’s Church, 94.

Majesty's troops. Finally, the men seized the provincial arsenal and powder magazine, and they interrogated agents of Indian Affairs to determine whether royal authorities were attempting to incite the Cherokee to wage war against the rebellious colonists.\(^{12}\)

The Secret Committee’s successful venture jeopardized Harry’s job. He had taken a considerable risk when he had opened the door to the post office. He was twenty-five years old and newly married. If not for the successful Revolution, he could have lost his job and any hope for an appointment within the royal government. He faced a dilemma once independence was declared; commit treason against England, the country of his birth, or remain loyal and hope that the familiar system of patronage would reward him once the Crown put down the rebellion. Harry weighed his options and threw in his lot with the rebels. Shortly after the fighting began, he volunteered for service with Colonel Hezekiah Maham’s calvary. He was appointed adjutant with the rank of Captain and participated in every battle that the Regiment fought.\(^{13}\)

Although the militia horsemen were not considered as disciplined and dependable as other troops—there were numerous complaints about their plundering and drunkenness\(^{14}\)—Harry Stevens conducted himself admirably. His duties as adjutant included distributing orders and perfecting the system of military discipline. According to claims he filed after the war, which were supported by witnesses, Harry was “frequently employed in separate and confidential enterprises.” His estate “exhausted on the altar of patriotism,” and “bereft of all but his good name and a heart purely American,” Harry was rewarded for his exemplary service with a land grant of five hundred acres in

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 309-311.

\(^{13}\) Jean Martin Flynn, *The Militia in Antebellum South Carolina Society* (Spartanburg, S.C., 1991), 80-81. Colonel Maham’s troops built Fort Watson, a stockade built on a thirty-foot mound that rose from an open plain on the north side of the Santee River.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
Colleton County in the upper part of South Carolina.\textsuperscript{15}

Harry was not alone in his faithful service to his fledgling nation; his slave George accompanied him throughout the Revolution. George probably originally belonged to Mary Stevens. In her will from July 1782 she gave her “Negro Man George” to her youngest son, Clement.\textsuperscript{16} As Clement was only fifteen years old when his mother died the following month, George was held in trust by Harry until the latter’s younger brother reached the age of twenty-one. Clement eventually left South Carolina to join the brother he had never met, Jack, in Jamaica.\textsuperscript{17} George apparently stayed behind, as Harry Stevens’s will in 1828 directed his executors to sell “the whole of my slaves negroes & Mulattoes [,] Except my old servant George whom I wish to leave in care of my beloved daughter Mary Ann Jane Kennedy for his faithful Services rendered to me during the Revolutionary War [,] and to request that he be treated with kindness and attention while he lives.”\textsuperscript{18}

Given that some slaves were manumitted due to their honorable service during the Revolution, merely being spared the auction block seems a paltry reward. But there were obstacles that impeded manumissions in the lower South. In 1800, the South Carolina legislature attempted to restrict the number of slaves emancipated by requiring candidates for manumission to prove their capacity for self-support before a court of magistrates and freeholders. In 1820 the law decreed that only the state legislature could


\textsuperscript{16} Will of Mary Stevens, \textit{Wills of Charleston County}, Book A, 1783-1786, 176, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (hereafter SCDAH).

\textsuperscript{17} Richard W. Cogdell to anonymous, B.I, f.5, p.7, LCP. This document appears to be a rough draft of a family history written by Cogdell for a relative in England. Cogdell writes, “In the year 1802 or 1803, I spent a year in Jamaica with my uncle Clement Crook Blake Stevens.” He also notes that John Stevens (Jack) had died the year before at age fifty-seven, so it is possible that Clement and Jack never met.

\textsuperscript{18} “Will of Jervis Henry Stevens,” \textit{Wills of Charleston County}, Book G, 1826-1834, 241, SCDAH.
free slaves, imposed restrictions on already-freed blacks, and prohibited immigration of
free blacks to South Carolina.\textsuperscript{19} Harry had ample time before 1820 to emancipate George
had he so desired, but it is possible that he felt that George would not be able to prove he
could support himself.

Shortly after Mary Stevens’s death in 1782, British troops left Charleston with the
silver, plates, church books, and bells of St. Michael’s. The war had ended and
Charleston was in ruins. In 1783 and 1784 riots spread throughout the city, sometimes
directed at those who had been loyal to the Crown and sometimes arising from pre­
exiting class tension between planters and mechanics.\textsuperscript{20} How the Stevens family fared
during these violent clashes and what the various members of the family thought about
the rioters is unknown. For Harry, however, the aftermath of the Revolution yielded
opportunity and productivity. In addition to his land grant, he received a temporary
appointment as organist for St. Michael’s from August 1, 1783, to April 1, 1784. In
October 1783 he and his brother Clement leased for twenty-five pounds a year a corner
lot on Church Street adjacent to One St. Michael’s Alley, the two-story wooden house
where Mary Stevens had lived.\textsuperscript{21} It is unclear for what purpose the lot was leased. During
this time Harry composed two hymns, “Church Street” and “Hackney” (fig.6), and he
continued to work at the post office.\textsuperscript{22} In 1784, widower Harry married Susannah, widow

\textsuperscript{19} Bernard E. Powers, Jr., \textit{Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885} (Fayetteville, Ark.,

\textsuperscript{20} Rosen, \textit{A Short History of Charleston}, 57-58.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{South Carolina Deed Abstracts, 1783-1788}, Brent H. Holcomb, comp., (Columbia, S.C., 1996),
18.

\textsuperscript{22} George W. Williams, “Eighteenth-Century Organists of St. Michael’s,” \textit{South Carolina
Historical Magazine}, vol. 53 (October 1952), 219.
of Captain Philip Sullivan.\textsuperscript{23} After this time, he dropped out of the public record for several years.

He resurfaced in 1790 when he was appointed organist at St. Philip's Church, just a few blocks away from St. Michael's. He held the post for twenty-five years, receiving forty-five pounds a year until 1806, when his salary was raised to eighty pounds. In 1791, Harry and Susannah baptized their first and only child, Mary Ann Jane, at St. Philip's Church. That same year he was elected Grand Pursuivant of the Grand Lodge of Ancient York Masons; he became Grand Marshal in 1799 (until 1800), and Deputy Grand Master in 1815. Beginning in 1801 he was elected city sheriff and reelected annually for almost twenty consecutive years, and he was Coroner for Charleston District from 1802 through 1822. After his brother Jack's death in 1801 in Jamaica, Harry and Susannah took in Jack's son, Clement William.\textsuperscript{24} In 1809 Harry was involved in some sort of conduct or dispute, probably relating to his part of the worship service, that provoked the vestry to order him to "conform to the rubrics of the book of Common Prayer." Two years later his wife died and four years after her death he resigned as organist. "He continued to be active in military affairs and was in 1813 quartermaster of a cavalry regiment attached to the Seventh Brigade of South Carolina Militia. He was also secretary and treasurer of the Amateur Society, a musical organization."\textsuperscript{25}

Harry's various appointments would have pleased his father. Equally impressive was the fact that he acquired a fair amount of property. The reasons for Harry's success are multiple. Whereas John Stevens had been an unknown newcomer to Charleston at a

\textsuperscript{23} Mabel L. Webber, comp., "Marriage and Death Notices from the South Carolina Weekly Gazette," \textit{The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine}, vol. 19 (July, 1918), 136.

\textsuperscript{24} Paul Stevens papers, SCL. According to Paul Stevens, Jack had six children, but only Clement William survived. This is also confirmed by a family history that Richard Walpole Cogdell wrote; see n. 14.

\textsuperscript{25} Williams, "Eighteenth Century Organists of St. Michael's," 219-220.
time of widespread unease and political strife, Harry was a familiar, permanent resident of the city who came of age in comparatively fortunate circumstances. Although the American Revolution did not topple the power of the planter elite in South Carolina, the political landscape was altered through the expansion of the franchise. Middling men like Harry were celebrated in political rhetoric for their supposed indifference to the mind-numbing lethargy of poverty as well as to the corrupting indolence of great wealth. Harry's participation in the militia undoubtedly expanded his range of contacts and facilitated his rise to prosperity.

In addition to his five hundred acres in Colleton County, Harry bought a few small lots in Charleston. One such purchase was near the Ashley River in Canonsborough, north of the city in what was called the Charleston Neck. Canonsborough was not incorporated until 1853, but Harry's purchase there was a sound investment. Daniel Cannon, for whom the neighborhood was named, sold most of his land to wealthy speculators who, in turn, subdivided their purchases, enabling entrepreneurs like Harry to acquire plots. Eventually the area became a thriving section of Charleston that was home to many free blacks and working-class whites and immigrants. Two blocks away from Harry's plot on Coming Street, for instance, was located one of the first free black schools. Harry and his family, however, settled at 64 Tradd Street, a few houses down from the new post office and one block away from St. Michael's Alley (fig.6).

26 McCrady Plats, (Microfilm, plats #217, #3705, #4075, and #7943), SCDAH. In public records Harry's birth-name, Jervis Henry Stevens, is alternately listed as: Jarvis Henry Stevens, Jervis H. Stevens, Jerois H. Stevens, Jerois Henry Stevens, Jervais Henry Stevens, Jervis Stevens, Jervis H. Stevens, Jervis Henny Stevens, Jervis Hery Stephens, Gervais H. Stevens, H. J. Stevens, Irois Henry Stevens, and J. H. Stevens.

27 Dale Rosengarten et al., Between the Tracks: Charleston's East Side During the Nineteenth Century (Charleston, S.C., 1987), 5-15.

28 The Directory and Stranger's Guide, for the City of Charleston; also a Directory for Charleston
As Harry flourished, he made numerous expenditures to improve his home. Neighbor and glazier Alexander Crawford was hired to paper, paint, and install glass in windows, lanterns, and picture frames there on numerous occasions. Nevertheless, Harry's neighborhood was an unfashionable, noisy, and dirty commercial district where wagons from the countryside came to unload cotton and other merchandise. The buying and selling of slaves took place a block away in an area bounded by Broad, East Bay, Queen, and Meeting Streets.

The 1790 census shows that Harry Stevens lived with his wife and eleven slaves; ten years later he apparently owned 15 people. A striking feature of his will is that the request to sell all of his slaves was tagged onto a recommendation to his heirs to sell his tenement houses "as all wooden houses require constant repairing and great expense to keep them in tenantable order." With both human and inanimate property, his primary interest seems to have been the bottom line: the will included no request to keep slave families together, assuming that some of the slaves Harry owned were related or had family nearby.

Bills of sale provide brief glimpses of Harry Stevens's slaves. Between 1774 and 1828 he purchased fourteen slaves ranging in age from eleven to sixty years old. Nine of

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Neck, (Charleston: 1809) 91, SCL. Stevens is not listed in the directory for 1782, but the post office had moved from Longitude and Bay to 45 Tradd Street. The location is given under the Deputy Post Master's name, George Roupell. The 1822 directory (see p. 80) lists Stevens at 118 Tradd St. on the corner of St. Michael's Alley. This probably reflects a renumbering of the city's addresses rather than a move.

29 Alexander Crawford daybook (1785-1795), South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina, pp. 133, 134, 140, 142, 145, 149, 151, 156, 157, and 161. Crawford also worked for Harry's sister on two occasions; see pp. 162 and 172.

30 Rosen, A Short History of Charleston, 78-79.


32 Will of Jervis Henry Stevens, Wills of Charleston County, Book G, 1826-1834, 241, SCDAH.
the fourteen were women or girls, and two of the fourteen were from out-of-state. Of course this list does not include those slaves whom Harry or his wife inherited, nor does it include any children his female slaves may have had. Harry also bought and sold slaves on behalf of other Charleston slaveholders, and here the record suggests some concern for keeping black families together. In 1805 Harry purchased in his own right from a free black woman named Susan Fenwicke, a mustizo slave named Barsheba along with her two sons named George and Angus. A bill of sale from 1813 indicates that as “Trustee for Barsheba Cattel, free black”--certainly his former slave--Harry purchased a slave named Rose, “about 28 years old,” again from Susan Fenwicke. The following year he sold “a slave named Rose, alias Rose Gordon, seamstress, about 27 years old” for Barsheba. This complicated series of sales suggests more than just commercial slaveholding; Harry may have been trying to help a family or group of friends buy one another and subvert the laws that restricted their freedom.

All in all, the record of sales suggests multiple scenarios and raises even more questions. Why did Harry purchase and apparently emancipate one family group yet leave no instructions in his will regarding the remainder of his slaves? Were the slaves purchased from states other than South Carolina being separated from, or reunited with, their families? Why was Barsheba Cattel, who had been purchased from a free black

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33 Bills of Sale, (Microfilm, vol. 2Q, p. 85; vol. 3N, p. 303; vol. 3T, pp. 371 and 374; vol. 4A, pp. 449 and 528; vol. 4D, pp. 154, 181, and 250; vol. 4F, pp. 148, 216, and 404; vol. 5G, p. 256), SCDAH. Harry bought Hagar in 1774, eleven-year-old Sue in 1802, forty-year old Scipio from Kentucky in 1804, and twelve-year old Sukey sometime in the early nineteenth century. In 1810 he bought mulatto Betsey Mackie, 19, from Virginia and fifty-year-old Hannah. Mulatto Dolly, 45, Adam, 35, and mulatto bricklayer Romeo, 20, were purchased the following year. In 1812 Harry bought Mary, aged fifty, Nancy, about fifteen years old, and King, aged forty. He bought Cuffy, aged sixty, in 1813 and, finally, just a few months before his death in July 1828 he bought a slave named Juliet.

34 Bills of Sale, (Microfilm, vol. 3X, p. 76; vol. 4F, p. 402; vol. 4I, p. 221), SCDAH. See also Larry Koger, Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860 (Jefferson, N.C.: 1985), 39. Koger argues that Barsheba Cattle [Cattel] was a commercial slaveholder. He may be correct, but it is not clear whether he was aware that Cattle and Rose were once slaves together, owned by free black Susan Fenwicke. See chapter three for further discussion of Koger’s book.
woman, set free? Why were none of the other slaves emancipated, including George, who had served Harry in the American Revolution and probably had been with the family the longest?

These questions may be unanswerable, but the existing record suggests that Harry accepted slavery as a fact of life. His attitude towards the institution appears to have been similar to his father’s, but perhaps the depth and duration of Harry’s personal experiences with slaves, as Dick’s father or uncle and as master to George during the Revolution, made him simultaneously more familiar with slaves’ humanity and, ironically, more profoundly and prosaically entrenched in the slave system than his father. John Stevens viewed slaves as workmen or wenches from whom he could derive a fortune; Harry may have thought of slaves as complete human beings, but the effect of this realization on his behavior was irregular, at best. Moreover, Harry’s attitude was reinforced by the general economic and political commitment to slavery in post-Revolutionary South Carolina.

Harry’s sister Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey), like most women, has little presence in the public record. But in 1775 she began a commonplace book in which she recorded poems, aphorisms, and excerpts from newspapers and books. Although most entries are not dated, the few that are indicate that she kept her journal until 1823. This book, together with the documents that comprise the slender public record of her life, evidence striking differences between Tolsey’s views on slavery and those of her brother and father. Historian Suzanne Lebsock has argued that “when women were in a position to make decisions about money, about family, about slaves, and about their own capabilities, their choices were often different than those made by men.” More often than not, and more often than men, whenever possible women eschewed marriage or remarriage in favor of independence. To protect their precarious autonomy they were cautious about their finances, and demonstrated particular concern in their wills with
regard to especially vulnerable heirs such as poor relatives, daughters, and slaves. Women, in short, operated within a “distinct female value system” that Lebsock characterizes as “persistent personalism.” And personalism—making empathetic decisions based on first-hand experience—sometimes prompted white women to be “a subversive influence on chattel slavery.” The life of Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey) Stevens Cogdell is exemplary in all respects.

Tolsey’s commonplace book contains odes to music, joy, and hope. There is also the following newspaper excerpt:

Liberty is so sacred a treasure to be in the smallest degree violated; it is the means of enjoying every other blessing in civil society, and is dearer to the noble and enlightened mind than life itself.

This is complemented by a similar but more vehement quotation: “May we be slaves to nothing but duty—may we never be blind to our own faults—Bless Our Country and may it continue to be the Land of Liberty to the end of time.” Other entries in her book suggest her struggles to understand what liberty and, conversely, slavery meant in the context of her own life.

There are only two entries in which Tolsey wrote her original views. One is about predestination, expressed haltingly because she professed to have heard discussions about it but had apparently never volunteered an opinion. Her education was limited: her father had taught her to play the harpsichord “tolerable well,” she was literate, and according to

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36 Ibid., 138.

37 Mary Ann Elizabeth Stevens Cogdell, Commonplace Book, B.I, f.3, LCP.

38 Ibid.
her father, could dance and work (i.e., do needlework).\textsuperscript{39} By all accounts her schooling was typical for a girl of her class. In fact, ornamental accomplishments such as music and dancing were common enough among the middling classes by the end of the eighteenth century to be mocked in publications and performances. According to one scholar, “the ambitious middle-class male parent seeking these acquirements for his daughters (or the daughters seeking them in spite of their fathers) consistently made fools of themselves as stock figures in visual caricature, literature, and on the stage.” Such satire betrayed upper-class unease with the changing social milieu and blamed the changes on “the rising-yet-inferior class” and on its girls.\textsuperscript{40} Perhaps John Stevens moderated his assessment of his daughter’s talents—only once did he gush about Tolsey’s “amazing” skills—to distinguish himself from the buffoonish bourgeois fathers of the stereotype while still enjoying the prestige of having a musical daughter.\textsuperscript{41}

This prestige derived not only from the genteel display of leisure involved in learning music, but also from his daughter’s display of discipline. “Music helped produce an ideologically correct species of woman,” writes scholar Richard Leppert; “in the eyes of men music accordingly contributed to social stability by keeping women in the place that men had assigned them.”\textsuperscript{42} Like her mother, Tolsey’s good behavior reflected well upon her father’s role as music teacher and as patriarch. John Stevens was proud of his daughter, but, as with his wife, his affection for Tolsey was expressed in patriarchal

\textsuperscript{39} J. Stevens to John Corlet, Apr. 17, 1771, Letterbook II, B.I, f.2, LCP.


\textsuperscript{41} J. Stevens to James Mathias, Dec. 18, 1769, Letterbook, B.I, f.2, LCP. “The next [child] a sensible girl 8 years old born in St. Kitts; plays the harpsichord, reads, wrights [sic], works, dances, all amazingly for her age.”

\textsuperscript{42} Richard Leppert, \textit{Music and Image}, 29.
terms. "I intend to bestow much care on [Tolsey]," John Stevens wrote to his son Jack, "that she may be a credit to you when I'm gone."43 Demonstrating kindness as well as authority, Stevens encouraged Jack to write a line to his sister and send a small package directly to her. Tolsey begged her father for permission to visit with Jack, saying that she could "keep his [Jack's] house, mend his linen, and a thousand things." Her father, in turn, promised her that "as soon as she could play the harpsichord, read, work, and dance fitt [sic] to be heard or seen by the ladies in Jamaica [he] would endeavor to prevail on [Jack] to permit her to pay [him] a visit."44

The American Revolution may have altered class relations somewhat, but, as evidenced by the Charleston riots of 1783 and 1784, tensions still ran high. In addition to the class struggles over eligibility for participation in the new American government, white women sought a public role for themselves. Though barred from voting or holding office, women's contributions to and suffering for American victory were symbolically recognized by the reification of what scholar Linda Kerber has termed the republican mother.45 The republican mother cultivated civic virtue in her children, making her home a wellspring of democracy. Thus female virtue was rhetorically celebrated—a woman's nature was even said to be purer than a man's because she was not subject to the corrupting influence of worldly affairs—but it was tied to domesticity.

Similarly, "the marital relationship was intended as a model for society, its affectionate ties of love expected to train citizens in the republican virtues of service to others."46 The American model marriage was celebrated for the alleged egalitarian

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43 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, March 13, 1770, B.I, f.2, LCP.
44 J. Stevens to J. Stevens, July 28, 1770, B.I, f.2, LCP.
46 Anya Jabour, "'No Fetters But Such as Love Shall Forge': Elizabeth and William Wirt and
relationship between the sexes, freed from the patriarchal norms of English aristocracy. While companionate marriages and the increasing use of separate estates to safeguard a family’s property from a potentially derelict husband undoubtedly improved the quality of life for many white women, the republican mother was not so different from the good wife or daughter of the recent past.

In many respects, Tolsey’s middle-class, female training prepared her perfectly for marriage and motherhood. If she ever resented displaying her genteel talents within a patriarchal context, she never revealed these feelings in her commonplace book. In fact, she once told her son that her father was “the finest man who ever lived.”47 She treasured her father’s heart-shaped diamond ring and wore it every day after his death; she eventually bequeathed it to another son with the express desire that it stay in the family.48 Moreover, Tolsey’s commitment to family was deeply—almost comically—sentimental. Consider the following passage that she excerpted from Voltaire’s “On Marriage,” which contrasts a bad marriage with the paradise of a loving marriage:

Each finds in each a dearer self. Their souls glow with a sacred flame, which love has kindled and honour purgd from all the vulgar drops of creeping base desires and low pursuits. They both avow and glory in their passion, what heavenly transports while they eye their little offspring, prattling innocence.49

It is apparent that Tolsey shared her father’s dismay over unsanctified fornication. It is not clear whether her own marriage met her lofty expectations.

At age seventeen, in May 1777, Tolsey married George Cogdell, a captain in the

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47 Richard W. Cogdell to anonymous, B.I, f.5, p.7, LCP.

48 Will of Mary Ann Elizabeth Cogdell, Wills of Charleston County, Book G, 1826-1834, 177, SCDAH.

49 Mary Ann Elizabeth Stevens Cogdell, Commonplace Book, B.I, f.3.
fifth regiment of riflemen from Georgetown, South Carolina. Captain Cogdell was twenty-three years older than his bride, and his family was wealthier than the Stevenses. The couple had three children together: John Stevens Cogdell, Clement Stevens Cogdell, and Richard Walpole Cogdell. Charleston poll lists for the municipal election of 1787 show the couple living in Tolsey’s childhood home at One St. Michael’s Alley. However, the house did not belong to Captain Cogdell. Tolsey’s mother, Mary Stevens, had included stipulations in her will to protect her daughter. Specifically, Mary requested that after her youngest son Clement reached the age of twenty-one the tenement and lot, along with all of the furnishings, be held in trust by Harry for her “beloved Daughter... for and during the term of her natural Life, without being subject or liable” to any husband.

Given Mary Stevens’s experiences as the wife of an indebted man and as a feme sole trader, it is not surprising that she made special provisions in her will for Tolsey. In protecting Tolsey’s inheritance, Mary Stevens was not necessarily making a statement about her son-in-law’s trustworthiness. Suzanne Lebsock has pointed out that women’s wills typically deviated from men’s wills. Women, no matter how inconsequential their estates, tended to leave personalized and specific instructions. Mothers also tended to favor their daughters both because they felt a special affection for them, and because they often had first-hand knowledge of the constraints faced by financially dependent women. Beyond the anxiety and trauma that Mary Stevens had dealt with when her

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52 Will of Mary Stevens, *Wills of Charleston County*, Book A, 1783-1786, 176, SCDAH.

husband's fortune vanished and his reputation suffered, her will reflects the fact that Tolsey was her only surviving daughter. In addition to the deaths of her sons Jo and Ben, Mary Stevens had apparently endured miscarriages or infant deaths of three female babies, all named Mary or Mary Ann, by the time Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey) was born in St. Kitts.\footnote{Richard Cogdell to anonymous, B.I, f.5, p.7, LCP.} Perhaps, then, Tolsey enjoyed a unique claim upon her mother's affection.

Tolsey's husband died after a brief illness in March 1792 and was buried in Georgetown. She remained at One St. Michael's Alley. She never remarried; instead, she opened a school for girls.\footnote{The \textit{Stranger's Guide} for 1822 lists Tolsey at 5 St. Michael's Alley. This may reflect a renumbering of addresses in the city rather than a move.} As a young woman with three sons, the youngest just four years old at the time of his father's death, Tolsey's decision to support herself and her children by working is quite extraordinary. In her study of nineteenth-century Petersburg, Virginia, Suzanne Lebsock found that the number of widows who avoided remarriage grew steadily, so Tolsey fits within this larger pattern. Nevertheless, "autonomy did not come easily to nineteenth-century women . . . most women were neither trained nor rewarded for pursuing an independent course."\footnote{Lebsock, \textit{The Free Women of Petersburg}, p. 116.} The young woman who had haltingly discussed predestination in her commonplace book had apparently matured to be a competent and spirited adult who stretched the confines of republican motherhood as best she could.

It is not known which academic subjects Tolsey taught the girls who attended her school. Needlework was an important skill that Tolsey had learned at a young age, and she likely shared her expertise with her pupils. Perhaps she was even able to profit from the musical proficiency she had acquired while under her father's care. In addition
to book learning and practical skills, the cultivation of character was particularly important in female education. “Students were expected to absorb the personal virtues of their teachers, and to that end, most of the women who ran academies sacrificed their privacy and took in several students as boarders.” Some of Tolsey’s students lived with her, supplementing her income through room and board fees and providing her with a forum to express her ideals and opinions.

The second original composition in Tolsey’s commonplace book concerns gender and slavery, and it provides a glimpse of the type of moral lesson that she may have taught her students. The entry, dated 1805, begins with an extract from Marcus Rainsford’s *The Historical Account of Hayte*, that reads, “By what strange perversion of reason can it be deemed disgraceful in a white man to marry a black or mulatto woman, when it is not thought dishonorable in him to be connected with her in the most licentious familiarity.” To this Tolsey responded:

> The laws of a country are imperfect allowing such familiarity with impunity, every white man having such connection, should be compelled by the laws of humanity to marry the person, black or mulatto, with whom such familiarities [sic] have existed [and] to have no intercourse with genteel society or to appear in any public place of amusement on an equality with other citizens and their seats in a house of public worship in a suitable place for such offenders.  

Ironically, Tolsey wrote this passage at the same time that her brother Harry was organist for St. Philip’s Church. Tolsey must have remembered Dick, who was probably Harry’s mulatto son. Even had she no memory of him, she would have heard about his seizure and perhaps was even aware that her father had tried to locate and repurchase his grandson. She may also have read her father’s letters about Dick sometime after his death.

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57 Ibid., p. 174.

58 Mary Ann Elizabeth Stevens Cogdell, Commonplace Book, B.I, f.3.
in 1772. Tolsey’s appeal to the “laws of humanity” was surely shaped by her own personal experiences.

Tolsey was offended by interracial “licentiousness” much as her father had been upset by the accusation that he had fathered Dick, but there are differences between his protestation and hers. Whereas John Stevens had argued that he would never place a black woman on an equal footing with a virtuous, i.e. white, woman, his daughter insisted that even the wealthiest man marry the black woman with whom he had been “connected” for humanity’s sake. Tolsey separated moral character from class status or wealth, and even called for humane treatment of blacks. She maintained that no matter who one was, a virtuous lifestyle was possible and demanded institutional reinforcement. At the same time, she insisted that the white male perpetrator of “miscegenation” be punished by banishment from genteel society, and, indeed, from the white race. Tolsey’s generosity only stretched so far: miscegenators, even those who had made wives out of their former concubines, were to be treated with disdain. They had to join blacks and mulattos in the gallery for church services and live as if they themselves had become free persons of color. Thus, even marriage could not, in her view, bestow true virtue on interracial unions.

Privately, John Stevens may have shared his daughter’s limited expressions of empathy. Certainly Stevens viewed himself as a morally upright man. Indeed, if his letters to his son Jack are any indication, he considered himself a paragon of virtue and generosity. That the material rewards to which he felt entitled were not always forthcoming was not an indication of poor character or lack of ambition but of injustices done to him. Moreover, Stevens characterized Dick’s unlawful seizure as a particular cruelty that exceeded the loss of other property, and he tried to locate the boy. In fact, he
even offered to buy Dick back at a time when his finances were shaky. Publicly, however, Stevens maintained the face of a patriarch: rational, unsentimental, and even cavalier vis-a-vis mulatto "wenches."

Tolsey offered no commentary about whether all fornicators should be separated from society. Either she could not conceive--or concede--that unmarried white women might also be subjected to the predations of white males, or she believed that they were better able to resist illicit overtures. Moreover, there is no room in her scenario for a willing female participant, white or black, in a sexual affair. The reason for this omission is that Tolsey understood that female virtue and respectability required chastity and elevation above "creeping base desires." The worldly ambition that her father had advocated to his sons was not a realistic goal for his daughter, her dedication to freedom and civil society notwithstanding. What Tolsey and other white women were able to possess was virtue and a superior moral character. And from this lofty position Tolsey argued that protection be conferred upon at least some black and mulatto women through marriage with white men, if only to preserve the sanctity of marriage in general and thus safeguard white women's comparatively elevated positions in society. Nevertheless, Tolsey's protest, however muted, against exploitative and licentious relationships between white men and women of color is quite extraordinary. She was obviously outraged by the sexual exploitation faced by some women of color and willing to ally with them, at least in the privacy of her commonplace book, against white men.

As Suzanne Lebsock has noted, women "were alert to the special case, to the personal exception."59 Women's personal frame of reference applied to their wills as well; they tended to reward qualities of loyalty and affection and provide special treatment for slaves. Tolsey used her will to do better than Harry did in his. A cautious

woman, she wrote her will in 1815 because she was about to embark on a voyage to Jamaica. She left her “Negro Man Dumfries,” whom she had purchased in 1807, to her middle son Clement. She bequeathed her “servant man Jack” to her executors, sons John Stephano and Richard Walpole, with the express understanding that they “shall duly and in conformity with the requisites of the acts of Assembly in such cases made and provided Emancipate Liber ate and set free the said servant man Jack that he may not serve any person as a slave after my death.” Jack had been twenty-six years old when she purchased him in 1802. She asked that “faithful, constant Venus,” mentioned in her mother’s will thirty years earlier, be provided with “a comfortable support from the residue of my estate.” Not mentioned in her will is Saiyra, whom she had bought in 1799. Similarly, there is no bill of sale for Sam, but Tolsey’s will directs her executors to sell him “together with my carriage and Horses and every other part of my furniture.”

Tolsey returned from Jamaica and lived a full life for the next twelve years. She was an amateur artist, painting scenes from nature, and apparently followed the theater. One of Tolsey’s entries in her commonplace book is a copy of the obituary for actor George Kemble, the father of actress/abolitionist Fanny Kemble. Since Kemble never played Charleston, it is possible that she saw him perform elsewhere. Curiously, after her death on July 4, 1827, Tolsey was buried in Charleston rather than next to her husband in Georgetown. Her sons placed a conspicuous and elaborate marble monument to their mother inside of St. Philip’s Church (fig.8). Carved by her eldest son, who had changed his name to John Stephano, the wall sculpture is of three men--her sons--depicted

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60 Will of Mary Ann Elizabeth Cogdell, Wills of Charleston County, Book G, 1826-1834, 177, SCDAH.
classically, draped in mourning over a grave. Beneath that the monument reads, in part:

Left a widowed mother at an early period of life, her talents enabled her to occupy, and maintain, such a position in society; as to secure for her, the respect and regard of a large community. To all the virtues which adorn her sex, she added an energy of character peculiarly her own. In the important sphere of female education she long continued to serve her generation; and the lives and character of many still attest to her eminent ability and success.61

Tolsey ended her life an accomplished and independent woman. Her desire for autonomy and the personalism that characterized her conduct was shared by other women in her position, but is nevertheless extraordinary.

Tolsey’s entire life had been spent in the Caribbean (St. Kitt’s) and the lower South; a slave society was all that she knew. Like her brother, she was intimately familiar with the irregularities and injustices of slavery. But her gender had a modestly subversive impact upon her views of slavery. The moral authority she derived from being of the virtuous sex enabled her, at least in her own thoughts, to denounce white men—possibly even her brother—who took advantage of slave women. But her protest was itself enshrouded in the same ideology that upheld slavery in the first place.

Just as race was integral to the formation of her father’s ideas about gentility and, by implication, class, race was also a definitive component of womanhood. John Stevens’s distinction between virtuous women and slave women was not overturned by his daughter, though it was modified. As a good daughter, Tolsey had reflected her father’s status through her behaviors and accomplishments. As a republican mother, her civic virtue depended largely upon the quality of her home life. Although Tolsey succeeded in making her home into a school, the girls whom she taught were expected to become suitable wives and mothers. Male promiscuity in a slave society threatened not

61 I copied the text upon a visit to St. Philip’s.
only the family, but also the civic ideal and consequently the social order. Therefore, it was Tolsey's opinion that men should be compelled to marry their black or mulatto mistresses. However, according to Tolsey, true virtue would still elude these couples—a fact that would be symbolized by their segregation at church and at public amusements. Given her opinion, it is ironic that Tolsey was aunt to one mulatto and would become grandmother to many more.

South Carolina was a society still highly stratified by class, race, and gender. While Harry and Tolsey achieved the financial stability that had eluded their father, the respectability they enjoyed stemmed from a widespread desire on the part of whites of all classes to maintain a racial allegiance, albeit for different reasons. Status was still derived in part from demonstrations of gentility such as the pursuit of leisure. And, most importantly, leisure and pleasure were dependent upon the labor of slaves. In chapter three, I will return to the issue of miscegenation and discuss how material desires, including sexual desire, continued into the antebellum era to be a defining element of Charleston's middle class, of which the Stevens family were a part.
CHAPTER THREE

“A Truer Heart Never”

In August, 1830, in Charleston, South Carolina, Richard Walpole Cogdell purchased “a Negro Girl (slave) named Sarah Martha.”¹ Her last name was Sanders, and she and Richard would go on to have a twenty-year relationship that would produce ten children. Richard was the son of Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey) Cogdell, who had argued in her commonplace book that white men who had affairs with black or mulatto women ought to marry their paramours and be cut off from genteel society. He was also the nephew of Jervis Henry (Harry) Stevens, who had probably fathered a mulatto son named Dick; and the grandson of John Stevens, who had railed against miscegenation in his letters. Thus Richard’s and Sarah’s relationship represents an intriguing stage in the Stevens and Cogdell family history.

Richard Cogdell and his brothers enjoyed a comfortable life as third-generation Charlestonians; they were civic-minded, sociable men whose material desires were predicated upon slavery. More than fifty years had passed since their grandfather had worried that rumors about Dick’s paternity would threaten his own social mobility. Richard Cogdell and his brothers were sufficiently established, and they did not distance themselves from miscegenation. Yet despite the apparent ease with which Richard

¹ Bills of Sale, August 7, 1830 (microfilm, vol. 5K, South Carolina Department of Archives and History [hereafter SCDAH]), 285.
entered into an intimate relationship with Sarah, their affair was fraught with unresolved tensions concerning class, gender, and race relations in Charleston society. Irregularities in the enforcement of the law regarding free blacks and slaves, as well as inconsistencies in racial classification, made interracial intimacy possible. But the prosperity and visibility of free blacks and nominal slaves also exacerbated inequalities between whites. The attempted slave revolt masterminded by Denmark Vesey in 1822 provided an opportunity for whites to close ranks despite class disparities, but laws passed in the wake of the conspiracy were only intermittently enforced. By the 1850s, however, with the emergence of a white majority in Charleston, a more rigid regime came forth. Free blacks were subjected to arrest and intimidation, and friendly whites were unable to extend personal favors and paternalistic protection. Richard’s complacency was shattered; his reputation suffered; and he was forced to flee with his mulatto children to Philadelphia – forever altering the lives of his descendants and ultimately influencing the entire Stevens and Cogdell family story.

In *White Over Black*, historian Winthrop Jordan observed that Charleston, South Carolina, was the only eighteenth-century English city on the continent where it was possible to jest in public about interracial sex. As I argue in chapter one of this thesis, I think that Jordan overestimated the apparent casualness with which interracial sex was regarded. For John Stevens, for example, miscegenation was no laughing matter. However, Jordan also characterized miscegenation as a tragedy for all involved. In his view, philandering white men were diminished by their lack of self-control, and their white wives were shamed and confused.

The dissipation of the white gentleman was as much a tragedy for his white lady as for him. A biracial environment warped her affective life in two directions at once, for she was made to feel that sensual involvement with the opposite sex burned bright and hot
Jordan wrote that white men rationalized their behavior by displacing their lasciviousness onto black women; thus white women were associated with asexual purity and black women with sexual passion. Had Tolsey’s commonplace book been available to Jordan before he published his book in 1968, he might have cited her views on marriage and on miscegenation to support his interpretation. Yet I think that Tolsey’s musings reflect more than an alleged warping of her “affective life.” Personal feelings and attitudes towards sex were not all that was at stake in instances of illicit interracial affairs. As I argued in chapter two, Tolsey disapproved of miscegenation because such unions diminished the power that was available to her as a virtuous, i.e. white, republican woman within the body politic. Any threat to companionate marriage was viewed as a threat to civic life since the home was supposed to be a well-spring of democracy.

According to Jordan, white philanderers were ultimately unable to deal with the consequences of their passions; they usually declined to give legal or social recognition to their children borne of slave mothers. By contrast, Eugene Genovese in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* argued that blatant sexual exploitation of black women ran counter to the paternalist ethos of the planter class. In his view, miscegenation involved mostly young, single, black women whose intimate experiences fell somewhere between “seduction” and “rape.” The “fancy girl” markets in cities like New Orleans and Charleston even offered some slave women a certain amount of leverage in structuring their lives. “Most men,” Genovese opined, “even free-wheeling, gambling, whoring

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young aristocrats, do not readily indulge their sadistic impulses. It would be hard to live with a beautiful and submissive young woman for long and to continue to consider her mere property or a mere object of sexual gratification, especially since the free gift of her beauty has so much more to offer than her yielding to force."4

Genovese concluded that most instances of miscegenation involved wealthy white planters who were partnered with willing black or mulatto women. In his scenario, poor or middle-class whites seldom gained access to black women because they could not effectively challenge planter hegemony. This interpretation has been challenged by scholars such as Joel Williamson, who has argued instead that the class background of the white perpetrators varied according to geographic region. In New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States, Williamson asserted that demography determined the extent and nature of intimate relationships between blacks and whites. In short, he posited that in the upper South interracial relations were predominantly between poorer whites and slaves, whereas the lower South supported more relationships between elite planters and their slaves.5

Genovese’s assertion that black women could refuse poorer, ergo less desirable, white men is questionable, since black women had little to no legal recourse against whites of any class. In fact, some scholars have argued that all interracial relationships, in the context of a slave society, were coercive.6 According to scholar Martha Hodes, even

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4 Ibid., 417.


6 For instance, see Karen A. Getman, “Sexual Control in the Slaveholding South: The Implementation and Maintenance of a Racial Caste System,” Harvard Women’s Law Journal 7 (1984). Deborah Gray White in Ar’n’t I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York, 1985) also argues that most miscegenation involved the coercion or rape of slave women, but her book is a thematic exploration of female-slave archetypes, not a social history per se.
white women were sometimes able to force enslaved black men into unwanted sexual relations. However, other scholars have seized upon the agency that Genovese attributed to "fancy girls" to argue that despite severe constraints, many slaves led lives that exceeded the legal parameters intended to control them.

In "Unfixing Race: Class, Power, and Identity in an Interracial Family," Thomas E. Buckley traced the lives of members of a well-to-do interracial family in the early Republic period in Virginia. He suggested that the superior class credentials for this family were more relevant to the lives of the various family members than was their race. Hence, it was possible for one mulatto man from this family to marry a white woman from a respectable family and, later, to cohabit with another white woman. Buckley concluded that "emancipated slaves and free blacks did not necessarily live circumspectly on the margins of southern society, and that identities for southern blacks before Emancipation could be constructed on bases other than race."³

Richard Cogdell's and Sarah Sanders's interracial union does not wholly conform to any of the various patterns described by Jordan, Genovese, Williamson, or Buckley. Theirs was an apparently monogamous relationship that lasted for twenty years. Richard was neither a wealthy planter nor a young aristocrat when the affair commenced, but a middle-aged bank teller. Of course, Richard's and Sarah's relationship was not without its coercive elements. Sarah was owned by Richard and conceived their first child at the age of sixteen while living with him and his wife. However, Richard not only recognized his mulatto children, but he went to considerable pains to protect, to educate, and provide for them. Thus the children enjoyed privileges denied to most African-Americans in the

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antebellum period, and eventually Richard freed his mulatto family and moved them North. But as long as the family remained in South Carolina these advantages did not outweigh the limitations that were imposed upon them because of their race.

Perhaps Richard Cogdell took an interest in his children because he was just four years old when his own father died in 1792. He and his brothers were raised thereafter by their mother at her boarding school at One St. Michael’s Alley, just around the corner from their uncle Harry and cousin Mary Jane on Tradd Street. Richard’s home life appears to have been intellectually and creatively stimulating. His mother, Tolsey, was a teacher and an amateur artist. His Uncle Harry was a landowner and a musician. Richard’s eldest brother John Stevens Cogdell, ten years his senior, lived at home while attending the College of Charleston. Richard may have attended the same college, for he later served on the Board of Trustees there. After attending the College, John studied law in the office of Hon. William Johnson, Jr., who later became a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1799, John was admitted to the bar and, following a long trip to Europe, returned to practice law across from his mother at Two St. Michael’s Alley.

Richard, too, was well-traveled. In 1802 he journeyed to Jamaica, where he spent a year with his Uncle Clement at “Save Rent,” the latter’s plantation near Kingston. He returned to Charleston, probably accompanied by his cousin, Clement William Stevens--

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8 J. H. Easterby, *A History of the College of Charleston, Founded 1770* (Charleston, SC, 1935), 50. Most of the early records of the College of Charleston were destroyed, so there are very few documents that indicate who attended the institution. Extant records are housed in Special Collections at the Robert Scott Small Library of the College of Charleston. It is also possible that Richard did not attend the College of Charleston despite his involvement on the Board of Trustees from 1838-1839. After 1836, when the city took over the administration of the college, the Trustees were required to include a city alderman on the Board. Richard was an alderman at the time of his service on the Board. Nevertheless, there were other aldermen who could have served on the Board instead of Richard, so it is possible that Richard was appointed because of his previous ties to the school.

Jack's only surviving child and Paul Stevens's great-great-grandfather—who lived with Harry. Richard also accompanied his elder brother John on a Mediterranean tour in 1800. Together they landed at Gibraltar and spent the next eight months journeying through Italy, stopping in Pisa, Florence, Siena, and Rome. They marveled at the cathedrals and other buildings that exceeded the grandeur of the finest planter's house in Charleston. In Rome they made the acquaintance of Pope Pius VII, the illustrious sculptor Canova, and other dignitaries. In between these edifying excursions, they undoubtedly roamed the streets and cafes - an intoxicating experience for a thirteen-year old youth like Richard. In short, the trip made a powerful and lasting impression on both men. Thereafter they strove to lead cultured and cosmopolitan lives reminiscent of what they had witnessed in Rome, which was, at that time, the center of artistic life in Europe.

The idea of returning to Europe preoccupied Richard and John, but insolvency forced them to postpone any such venture. By 1809 Richard was working as a clerk at the Bank of the State of South Carolina. John, who had since changed his middle name from "Stevens" to "Stephano," opened his own law practice. In November 1806 John

10 R. W. Cogdell to anonymous, Box I, folio 5, The Library Company of Philadelphia (hereafter B.I, f.1-6, LCP); Paul Stevens to E.L. Inabinett, Nov. 1959, South Caroliniana Library (hereafter SCL). "Anonymous" is most likely a relative in England, related to the Mary Ann Elizabeth Stevens of Bristol, England, whose letters Paul Stevens donated to the South Caroliniana Library.

11 Lawrence Perry Middleton, John Stevens Cogdell, Charleston Artist (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina: 1973), 27-28. Middleton gets this information from John Belton O'Neall, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina (Charleston, SC, 1859), 216. It is also repeated in an essay by A.S. Salley, Jr. in the The News and Courier, July 14, 1901, Cogdell folder 30-04, Charleston Historical Society, Charleston, S.C.. I have no primary sources to verify that Richard accompanied his brother on this trip. O'Neall was a contemporary of both Richard and John, so he may have had first-hand knowledge of their joint trip. Similarly, Salley got this information from, in his words, "a few now living who once knew him [John S. Cogdell]." John S. Cogdell's notebooks, which are kept by the Historical Society in Charleston, may mention Richard's presence on the trip. However, because of the deteriorating condition of the original notebooks, the Society only permits researchers to view a handwritten copy of the two notebooks. Unfortunately, this copy contains numerous gaps where the transcriber was unable to decipher the original.

12 The Directory and Stranger's Guide, for the City of Charleston (Charleston, S.C., 1809), SCL, 73.
married Maria Gilchrist, the daughter of a wealthy merchant. The following spring he visited President Thomas Jefferson in Washington, probably seeking an appointment as a diplomat to Italy in order to indulge his burgeoning passion for art. He intended to present Jefferson with a bust of Pope Pius given to him by the pontiff himself, but wound up sending it to him with a letter a few days later. The President was apparently impressed, for he did indeed appoint John as consul at Rome. However, the position was purely honorary and "conveyed no emolument," so John was obliged to turn it down. He contented himself thereafter with painting and sculpting in his spare time, becoming an accomplished amateur.

In May of 1806 Richard married a woman named Cecille Langlois. According to the notice in the Charleston Courier, both Richard and Cecille were "of this city [Charleston]," but Cecille may actually have been a native of Santo Domingo. After the Revolution in Santo Domingo (1791-1793), Charleston was flooded with refugees. Many French planters brought their slaves with them, and many free mulattos - who had formed a middle caste - also migrated. Several mulattos from Santo Domingo settled in Richard Cogdell’s neighborhood. Maria Rose Derac and her stepdaughter and their four slaves lived two blocks away at 11 Legare Street. Francoise Perrier lived near Harry at 48 Tradd Street. Free Negro Capitation (i.e. individual or head tax) records indicate that a

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14 Middleton, John Stevens, 30.
16 Larry Koger, Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860 (Jefferson, N.C., 1985), 179. Koger describes Antoinette Langlois as a commercial slaveholder because in 1827 she purchased a girl named Sylvanie, whom she then sold seven years later at a higher price. See p. 98.
Langlois family of free blacks—Joseph, Antoinette, and Maria—lived in the same neighborhood along with their slaves beginning in 1826.\(^\text{17}\)

Maria Zellis Langlois, a white woman identified in the 1809 Charleston city directory as a schoolteacher, also lived nearby on Tradd Street. She cared for two of Richard’s and Cecille’s sons when, as adults, they both became gravely ill.\(^\text{18}\) Maria’s naturalization papers from 1841 show that she was from Santo Domingo.\(^\text{19}\) What if any relationship existed between Richard’s wife Cecille, Maria Zellis, and the free black Langlois family is unclear. Nevertheless, the possibilities are intriguing because in August of 1812, Cecille and Richard baptized their second son at St. Philip’s Church. The son, Richard Clement Cogdell, is identified in the church register as “a child of color.”\(^\text{20}\)

There are two possible explanations for Richard Clement’s complexion: one, that Cecille had an extramarital affair with a black or mulatto man, or, two, that Cecille’s ancestry was partially African. An affair on Cecille’s part seems unlikely, because Richard Walpole is listed as the father on the church record, and for a white woman to have had an extramarital affair, especially with a black or mulatto man, would have been a scandal. Such affairs occurred, as historian Martha Hodes has detailed, but the evidence for them is generally found in criminal court records, not church baptisms.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{17}\) State Free Negro Capitation Tax Books, Charleston, South Carolina, (microfilm, Roll #1, 1826, SCDAH).

\(^{18}\) Maria Langlois to Daniel Horlbeck, August 15, 1860, B.I, f.5. Horlbeck was a close friend of Richard’s who handled his affairs when the latter was away from South Carolina; he forwarded the letter to Richard. The 1822 Stranger’s Guide to Charleston lists Maria as a widowed teacher living at 28 King Street; in 1831 and in 1835 her address is listed as the corner of Pitt and Montague Streets. For 1840, she is listed as Madame Langlois.

\(^{19}\) Brent H. Holcomb, comp., South Carolina Naturalizations, 1783-1850 (Baltimore, Md., 1985), 20.


\(^{21}\) See Martha Elizabeth Hodes, White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South (New Haven, CT: 1997).
On the other hand, it is possible that Cecille was herself the product of an interracial relationship. In South Carolina, unlike most other Southern states, marriage between a free person of color and a white person was legal, albeit extremely rare; and she may have been born to unwed parents. However, Cecille was not officially identified as a woman of color. The most logical hypothesis is that Cecille was a “quadroon” or “octoroon,” perhaps distantly related to the free black Langlois family who were her neighbors in Charleston. She passed for white but gave birth to one child with a comparatively dark complexion. As she was already married and had given birth to a light-skinned child prior to Richard Clement’s arrival, the matter was apparently ignored.

Richard and Cecille had two more sons after Richard Clement, born in 1818 and 1821 respectively. John Stephano and his wife never had children. Richard’s and John’s cousin, Mary Jane (Harry’s daughter), married a lawyer named Lionel Kennedy; their first child, named Susannah after her maternal grandmother, was born in 1812 - the same year as Richard Clement. The Kennedys had their second child the following year, and named her Mary Ann Elizabeth after her maternal aunt. Their third and last child, a boy named Jervis Henry after his maternal grandfather, was born in 1814. Everyone continued to live in the same neighborhood, probably visiting one another frequently.

As the family grew larger, its various members established themselves in Charleston. In addition to his job as a bank teller, Richard became a city warden and then an alderman. Richard was less ambitious in his career than his brother or cousin-in-law,

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22 Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York: 1984), 53. The authors note that in 1860 there were 71 co-residing interracial couples in all of South Carolina. Forty-four of these families were composed of mulatto men (except for 2 black men) with white wives. I maintain that it would have been scandalous had a married “white” woman had an affair with a black or mulatto man.

concentrating instead on developing an active and urbane social life. In addition to his knowledge of French, he was at least functionally fluent in Spanish, as evidenced by his correspondence. Balls, horseracing, and theater were interests he pursued avidly. Richard was a good friend of John B. Irving, planter and Jockey Club founder. Every February the Jockey Club sponsored horse races that marked the peak of Charleston's social season. People came from all around to see and be seen, as well as to lose or win money on bets. After the races spectators attended private dinners or public banquets; then "they danced away their nights at balls given by the St. Andrew's or the St. Cecelia's Societies." In 1822 Richard served as manager to a large ball held at St. Andrews Hall.

John B. Irving eventually published his sentimental reminiscences of the antebellum good life spent traipsing around town with Richard Cogdell and other like-minded, fun-loving gentlemen. In later years, after Richard had left Charleston, the two of them corresponded about racing and gambling. But living large had its down side. In 1824 Richard was challenged to a duel with rifles – the ultimate test of a Southern gentleman's character. Just what he had done to provoke this challenge is unclear. Richard sought outside intervention to discourage the use of firearms, but to no avail. He may indeed have been forced to fight, and, luckily, no harm befell him.

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24 J.M. de Castillo y Lanzas to Ricardo W. Cogdell, Sept. 19, 1835, and Nov. 22, 1936, B.I, f.6, LCP.


26 Program for ball at St. Andrews Hall, B.I, f.5, LCP.

27 J. Hampden Wigfall [to Richard W. Cogdell], March 22, 1824, BI. f.4, p.13 verso (hereafter v); and Judgment of peers, March 23, 1824, B.I, f.4, p.14, LCP. Items in the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection that have page numbers are located in a scrapbook. The page numbers given here correspond to the numbers that have been penciled onto the pages with affixed items and do not correspond to the printed page numbers of the scrapbook itself.
Richard’s brother John Stephano Cogdell, on the other hand, participated in comparatively serious and sedate civic institutions such as the Charleston Library Society. Above all, he pursued his career with unstinting dedication. His law practice was reputed to be one of the most lucrative in town. In 1810 he was elected to the state’s House of Representatives, and he was continually re-elected to that body until his retirement in 1818. While in the legislature he served on numerous committees, including Military Affairs, Ways and Means, Inland Navigation, and Claims and Rules. John Stephano Cogdell introduced only a few bills, mostly pertaining to legal affairs and banking. For example, in 1813 he put forward a bill to prohibit any member of the legislature “from becoming a candidate for any office of profit or trust.”

In the last years of his tenure he proposed bills to amend bank charters, regulate bonds and securities, and impose restrictions on directors and officers of South Carolina banks. In 1819 John’s peers appointed him to the position of Comptroller-General, making him responsible for the state’s financial records and the collection of revenues. His deputy was none other than his uncle Harry.

The entire Stevens and Cogdell clan must have been proud of John Stephano. He had risen from a relatively humble background to a seat in the South Carolina House of Representatives. A portrait of John painted by I. R. Smith in 1812 shows him seated at a desk covered with documents; he looks both serious and fashionable (fig. 12). Behind him are shelves filled with law books and a portfolio titled *Sketches Taken in a Trip Through South Carolina* that denote his professional achievements and his artistic

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29 Ibid., 12.
talents. One need only compare the straw armchair and pine benches of his childhood home with the fine mahogany furniture and oil paintings that filled his adult home to comprehend the importance of John’s social and professional accomplishments to his identity. He was pretentious—the changed middle name attests to that—but he worked hard. His success and prosperity fulfilled the dreams of respectability that had animated his grandfather and namesake, John Stevens.

Nevertheless, John Stephano was hardly a great social reformer. He championed education for the Charleston Orphan House, where he was a commissioner, but he opposed free schools for the general public. He fought against legislation outlawing duels, and introduced and supported legislation “for the better ordering and governing of negroes and other slaves in the province.” Similarly, in his private journal he recorded his disgust with blacks he encountered on a trip through North Carolina. He complained of the carriage drivers’ insolence (“more rudeness than from all those [drivers] at the east and north together”) and decried “their cruelty to horses, their blasphemous expressions and profane language.”

John’s social conservatism and Richard’s indulgence in sophisticated frivolity are connected. As historians Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease have observed, “Charleston’s associational life . . . was broadly inclusive. Play and ceremony provided the necessary glue of cohesion in a community where the dichotomies of slave/free and

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black/white precluded theories of socioeconomic mobility in which work was the source of property and prestige.” Although social mobility was possible, as is demonstrated by John’s success, “little was said of work as the route to wealth, or of wealth as the route to elite standing, or of urban endeavor as the route to planting.” Instead, family ties and aristocratic styles in the pursuit of pleasure were emphasized, creating the impression of a static society in which everyone knew his or her place. However, because stylish and entertaining pursuits such as horse racing were broadly inclusive, lower class whites were encouraged to believe that common interests bound them together with upper class whites. To have emphasized work over style as the path to affluence and power might have elided black laborers with white workers, thereby damaging community cohesion among whites.34

Racial solidarity among whites was reinforced in times of conflict, such as when Denmark Vesey’s plot for a slave insurrection was discovered in 1822. Vesey was an African-born, free black carpenter who spent most of his youth as a slave to a sea captain. He traveled extensively between Africa, the Caribbean, and the lower South before settling in Charleston after buying his freedom in 1800. As the mastermind behind the rebellion, he carefully recruited slaves and a few free blacks to participate, even writing to black Jacobins in Santo Domingo to request aid. The insurrection was planned over the course of four years, but, as the day approached, the plot unraveled. A close associate of Vesey’s made a fatal error of judgment when he tried to recruit a slave named Peter Desverneys.35


35 Koger, Black Slaveowners, 183.
Desverneys was troubled by the plan to kill white Charlestonians. He sought the advice of a free black, William Penceel, who encouraged Desverneys to inform his master, Colonel J. C. Prioleau, of the plot. Once apprised of the situation, Colonel Prioleau contacted the authorities and set off a series of investigations that eventually led to the arrest of 131 individuals, including Denmark Vesey and the other rebel leaders. Of those arrested, thirty-five were executed, thirty were deported from the country, one was whipped, one was banished from South Carolina, eleven were recommended for banishment at their owners' expense, fifteen were acquitted, and charges were dropped against the remaining thirty-eight for lack of sufficient evidence.\footnote{36 John Oliver Killens, The Trial Record of Denmark Vesey (Boston, 1970), 140-146. This is a reprint with an introduction by Killens of An Official Report of the Trial of Sundry Negroes by Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker (Charleston: 1822).}

In addition, four white men were tried and convicted of a misdemeanor for inciting slaves to rebellion. Richard Cogdell was involved in the arrest of one of these men. Acting in his capacity as city warden, Richard was summoned to the home of a free black named Joe who, along with his son-in-law, masqueraded as would-be insurrectionists to entrap a Scotsman named William Allen. Richard and the city intendant (chief warden), James Hamilton Jr., hid themselves in a small upper room to observe the meeting. From that vantage point they witnessed Allen claiming to have extensive knowledge of the plot and declare that he was in favor of indiscriminate killing of all whites. He assured his black hosts that "though he had a white face, he was a Negro in heart." Allen's hosts, however, had plied him with brandy during the course of the meeting so that by the end of the evening Allen was intoxicated. Cogdell and Hamilton were thus able to seize Allen in the street and take him to the Guard House. Allen apparently made no attempt to resist arrest, but protested that his true interest in the
insurrection was the prospect of a financial reward for his assistance. The authors of the trial report later reassured white Carolinians that "the freedom of blacks was an object of no importance to [Allen]." 3 7

Richard Cogdell's cousin-in-law, Lionel Kennedy, was one of two authors of the Denmark Vesey trial report, and one of eight magistrates who presided over the trial. The proceedings obsessed even those Charlestonians not directly involved, so it is likely that the topic preoccupied the Cogdell and Kennedy households. For one thing, the trial revealed that the neighborhood around St. Michael's Church had been a primary target. The arsenal and Guard House on Meeting Street just across from the Church held the majority of arms for the entire state. One group of rebels had intended to convene on Bay Street, where Mary Stevens had once kept her coffee house, and march from there to the arsenal. Another group led by Vesey would have joined the first battalion at the Guard House, killing any pedestrians they encountered on the way in order to prevent them from assembling or sounding an alarm. Co-conspirator Gullah Jack would have led a group from Boundary Street to King Street in order to seize weapons from two stores located there. Other rebels planned to rise up on nearby plantations and then blockade the outer edges of the city, but the neighborhood where Richard and his immediate and extended family lived would have been the epicenter of the storm. 3 8

Throughout the trial, the issue that allegedly perplexed white observers was why the leaders of the rebellion, who enjoyed either freedom or great liberties bestowed by their owners, would risk their lives on such a scheme. Lionel Kennedy and Thomas H. Parker noted with incredulity in their trial report that the majority of insurrectionists were

37 Ibid., 148-150.
38 Ibid., 23-26.
first-rate craftsmen and/or servants who were trusted by whites. Most of those convicted, the authors asserted, possessed "the highest confidence of their owners, and not one of bad character." The only motive of which Kennedy and Parker could conceive that would lead Denmark Vesey to spearhead a violent rebellion was his desire to liberate his children from bondage. They observed with grudging admiration mixed with fear that all the leaders conducted themselves during the trial with unshakable composure. Of one defendant they wrote: "He did not seem to fear personal consequences, for his whole behavior indicated the reverse; but exhibited an evident anxiety for the success of their plan, in which his whole soul was embarked."39

Of course, the claim that Vesey's actions were incomprehensible to whites was somewhat disingenuous. Lionel Kennedy, for instance, had become an honorary member of the Charleston Society of the Cincinatti on July 4, 1808. He delivered a passionate oration before the congregation of St. Philip's Church on July 5, 1813, to commemorate the attainment of American Independence. In this speech he described Americans as being happily situated between poverty and opulence, and America as the only true Republic, bound to become "the PARENT of UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION."40 Of course, fomenting a slave revolt was not what Kennedy had in mind. Nevertheless, Kennedy understood the desire for freedom and self-determination. The Vesey plot did not surprise Kennedy and other white Charlestonians because they could not imagine free blacks and slaves desiring autonomy and power, but rather because they had not anticipated that some blacks would be willing to fight for those things against tremendous odds. It was this chilling realization that led to the passage of harsher laws to regulate the

39 Ibid., 31.

40 Lionel H. Kennedy, "An Oration delivered in St. Philip's Church; Before the Inhabitants of Charleston, South Carolina," July 5, 1813 (printed by W.P. Young, Charleston, S.C.), n.d., SCL.
movements of free blacks. From then on any free black who left the state was prohibited from returning, and every free black man over the age of fifteen was required to find a “respectable” white guardian willing to swear in writing before a district court clerk to “the good character and correct habits” of the freeman. The penalty for violation of either law was enslavement.\(^{41}\)

The traitorous Peter Desverneyes, however, was liberated on December 25, 1822, as a reward for his betrayal of Vesey. According to historian Larry Koger, as a free man Desverneyes “was not ostracized by the Negro elite.”\(^{42}\) In fact, he married Sarah A. Cole, the daughter of Sally Seymour, a renowned pastry cook in Charleston. His marriage made him the brother-in-law of William W. Seymour, a member of the exclusive Brown Fellowship Society and the owner of a tavern and eight slaves. Desverneyes’ sister-in-law was Eliza Lee, a slave-owner and successful hotel proprietor; Richard Cogdell was one of her first patrons.\(^{43}\)

In *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*, Koger asserted that Desverneyes was typical of the black elite. “Whenever possible,” wrote Koger, “the Negro elite cultivated their relationships with the white aristocracy.” They lived in the same neighborhoods, attended St. Philip’s and St. Michael’s, and “shunned the slave community.” The Brown Fellowship Society even discriminated against free persons with dark skin. “For the children of white men and black women,” Koger observed, “the relationship to whites was even closer.”\(^{44}\) Once freed from slavery,

\(^{41}\) Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 43.

\(^{42}\) Koger, *Slaveowners*, 177.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 155. Cogdell was the first recorded patron at Lee’s newly-opened Jones Inn, but the Inn was her second establishment.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 165-167.
few mulatto children sought to distance themselves from their fathers. Rather, according to Koger, they relied upon white relatives and friends to protect their interests, including their right to own other human beings. According to Koger, had more free blacks shared Denmark Vesey's despair at being unable to liberate the rest of his family from slavery, they would have joined the rebellion. "Since the right to purchase loved ones was firmly established in South Carolina," he concluded, "the stimulus needed to radicalize the free Negro community of Charleston was absent."\textsuperscript{45}

While Koger's analysis is an important corrective to an overly rosy view of black slaveholding as wholly benevolent - he astutely points out that free blacks were also commercial slaveholders - he overstates his case. There were more enslaved mulattos, even if some enjoyed \textit{de facto} freedom, than there were free mulattos. Moreover, the family networks that bound the black community together were more complex than first appearances may suggest. Peter Desverneyes, for example, owned six slaves by 1840. Two of these slaves were Lavinia Cole and her husband Alfred Sanders. Lavinia shared the same last name as Desverneyes's wife, although it is unclear whether there was a blood relationship between them.\textsuperscript{46} Alfred Sanders may have been related to his neighbor, Sarah Sanders, who, by 1840, had been intimately involved with her owner, Richard W. Cogdell, for ten years.

Desverneyes may have kept slaves solely for commercial purposes, as Koger has argued: Alfred Sanders worked as a dray driver and Lavinia hired out her services. In addition, in 1838 Lavinia gave birth to a son named George, whom Desverneyes sold in

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 185.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 165-167. Koger offers no comment on the fact that Desverneyes's wife and his slave shared the same family name.
But the proximity of free and enslaved blacks with the same last names, most of whom were enmeshed in complicated relationships with white Charlestonians upon whom they were dependent for protection and for their livelihoods, suggests that the enslaved status of some family members was not necessarily a radicalizing force for their free relatives in the sense that it may have been for Vesey. In fact, many conscientious free blacks may have chosen not to support Vesey’s rebellion for fear of jeopardizing the safety of their enslaved relatives. As historians Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark have argued, “to avoid revolutionary violence did not necessarily mean slavish submission to white power.”

Sarah Sanders’s relationship with Richard Cogdell offers interesting insights into the dilemmas faced by slaves with close ties to white slaveholders. Sarah’s relationship with Richard afforded her some material privileges, yet the frustrations and limitations of such a bond were formidable. Only three months after Richard’s wife Cecille died in 1832, Sarah gave birth to her first child by her master. It is impossible to gauge the circumstances under which she became pregnant. Perhaps Cecille was ill and incapacitated, and Richard, out of loneliness, turned to his sixteen-year-old slave for affection. Almost every year thereafter Sarah was either pregnant or tending to a newborn, most of whom did not live into adulthood. She died at age 35 in 1850, just two days after bearing their tenth child.

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47 Ibid.

48 Johnson and Roark, Black Masters, 41.

49 Annual Report of The Library Company of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: 1991), 28. See also “incomplete family tree,” Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection, LCP. Librarian Philip Lapsansky and the donors of the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection compiled the birth dates of the Sanders children based upon the family’s Bible. Richard’s and Sarah’s first child, Robert, was born on March 1, 1832. Cecille Langlois Cogdell’s death on January 2, 1832 is recorded in St. Philip’s Register, SCDAH.
The nature of Sarah’s and Richard’s long relationship is elusive; there are no extant documents written by Sarah, although she was literate. It would have been difficult for Richard to emancipate Sarah or the children, and doing so would have required their permanent removal from the state of South Carolina. Thus the fact that they remained his slaves is not adequate evidence of his feelings towards them or towards the institution of slavery. Before purchasing Sarah in 1830, Richard had bought only one other slave, John, a cook and shoemaker whom he sold in 1822. In 1836 Richard sold two more slaves, a mother and daughter named Flora and Katy, respectively, whom he had presumably acquired through his wife. The following year Richard purchased another slave named John; there is no record as to whether he was ever sold or emancipated. Finally, in 1840 Richard inherited a number of slaves from his father’s relatives in Georgetown. There are no bills of sale for any of these slaves nor are any of them mentioned in Richard’s will. Among these slaves was a woman named Chloe; she may be the “Chloe Cogdell” who paid capitation taxes as though she were free and for whom Richard Cogdell acted as character witness and guardian. It seems possible that Chloe, and perhaps almost all of Richard’s bondpeople, were nominal slaves—that is to say, slaves who, like Richard’s and Sarah’s children, lived as if they were free blacks.

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51 State Free Negro Capitation Tax Books, Charleston, South Carolina, (microfilm, Roll#1, 1811, SCDAH), 3. Chloe Cogdell is first listed in 1811; she is noted as residing “at Mr. Cogdell’s.” Her name appears thereafter in 1822, 1823, 1826, 1827, 1832, and 1833 at various addresses in St. Michael’s and St. Philip’s parishes. It is possible that the Chloe whom Richard inherited in 1840 was a different woman, but I suspect that she is the same person because of a suggestive letter that Richard received from his brother John. John wrote of the lawyer handling the estate of which Chloe and the other slaves were a part: “I hope Mr. Waterman understands clearly all your interests - he writes in so confused a manner.” Of particular concern to John was that the slaves be considered Richard’s property exclusively. John also enclosed a witnessed document transferring all rights to the estate to Richard. See John S. Cogdell to Richard W. Cogdell, Jan. 24, 1840, B.I, f.6, p.26; Jan. 9, 1840, B.I, f.6, p.27, LCP.
The long duration of their relationship, Richard’s letters to Sarah and his consistent interest in their children’s welfare attest to a mutually affectionate partnership. All of the children were well-educated, either by private tutors or in one of several schools that were run by free persons of color. Richard even hired a French musician to give two of his daughters, Cordelia and Sarah, piano lessons.\(^{52}\) The children’s education is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that by 1834, under pressure from none other than Cogdell’s cousin, lawmaker Lionel Kennedy, it became illegal for free persons of color to teach slaves or other free persons to read. Kennedy successfully agitated for this prohibition after an episode involving three free African-American students of teacher and freeman Daniel Payne. Payne sent the students to Kennedy’s plantation where they were to have obtained from the latter’s slaves a certain poisonous snake for scientific study. “Kennedy discovered the boys, quizzed them about their errand and Payne’s curriculum, and, although there was nothing subversive about either, became alarmed, probably remembering the Denmark Vesey trial he had witnessed twelve years earlier.” Payne fled Charleston, fearing for his life.\(^{53}\)

Of course, people routinely violated laws pertaining to slaves and free blacks, and, so long as the violation was not flagrant, nothing necessarily came of it. Schools for free blacks continued to operate after 1834, but with the understanding that tacit approval could turn to condemnation at the whim of someone like Lionel Kennedy. According to historians Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, teachers in schools for free blacks

\(^{52}\) James Garcia to R.W.Cogdell, Jan. 1847, B.I, f.4, LCP. In this letter Garcia requests payment for 33 piano lessons given to Cordelia and 29 given to Sarah. According to Naturalization records, James Garcia was a “Professor of Music” from Dunkirk, France, who became an American citizen in 1839. See Holcomb, *South Carolina Naturalizations, 1783-1850*, 76. Evidence regarding the children’s education comes from Richard’s will (see n. 85 below); their own correspondence; the fact that one daughter eventually taught school in Brooklyn, New York; and oral histories.

\(^{53}\) Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 224.
“taught their students something that might have aroused white concern had whites given it much thought: public behavior had to comply rigidly with white assumptions about racial order and with the law; private life was another matter, more relaxed, more flexible, more free, though never without risk.”

Richard’s and Sarah’s children must have presented a dilemma for Kennedy, as their education was both a public and a private matter. Kennedy believed that Denmark Vesey’s motivation in starting a rebellion had been the desire to set his children free. Perhaps, however, he decided that paternal affection did not warrant punishment when his own relatives were involved. Richard never faced prosecution for educating his children.

If the uncertainties that plagued free blacks were trying, slaves such as Sarah and the children who had much de facto freedom had to contend with equally volatile situations. For example, there was always the danger that Richard would die and leave his illegitimate family at the mercy of his sons by Cecille, all of whom had reputations as drunkards. This danger must have been felt all the more keenly whenever Richard was away from home. When Richard traveled around the country or abroad, he left Sarah with the name of a contact person whom she might call upon should she need anything during his absence, and he returned with presents for his family. Yet these thoughtful gestures probably did little to alleviate Sarah’s anxiety regarding her safety and that of the children.

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54 Ibid.

55 Supporting evidence for this assertion comes from four different sources: an interview by the author with Mrs. Lillie Venning Dickerson in September 1997 in Philadelphia; John S. Cogdell to Richard W. Cogdell, Jan. 18, 1840, B. I, f.6, LCP, in which John writes that Richard’s son George had been absent from his job for two days – “my apprehension [is that] he was not pursuing an unimpeachable career”); the charge against Richard Clement by the U.S. Navy for drunkenness on the job (see n. 63 below); and the fact that all of Richard’s sons predeceased him. Maria Langlois took care of sons Charles and George on their deathbeds. She reported that Charles had no use of his legs and suffered from dementia (see n. 77 below).
In June 1844, just three months after John Stephano returned from a long-awaited Continental tour, his brother Richard traveled to England\textsuperscript{56}; he spent October and November of that year in Paris.\textsuperscript{57} In December 1844, Richard was in St. Augustine, Florida, to meet his second son by Cecille, Richard Clement. Their reunion was an unhappy one. Richard Clement was being dishonorably dismissed from the navy for, among other charges, having been too drunk to perform his duties. Miserable, Richard penned a letter to Sarah. “My dear Sarah,” he began,

With a heavy heart I write you a few lines to tell you that, as I feared, Richard has been ordered to be dismissed from the navy, and unless the President chooses [sic] to soften the sentence he is lost forever and my peace with it.... If it was not for shame to see my old friends and enemies upon Richard’s disgrace, I would return immediately. I have no pleasure or peace under the circumstances.... I am almost always in my apartments and take no pleasure abroad. No person has had the power to charm me[,] be assured. Women I never think of. The children I hope are well and behave. Kiss them for me and say I pray for them all and hope to see them without being ashamed of them. I will not forget presents when I come home.

Concluding that he was too unhappy to write more, he admonished Sarah to “keep pure and all will yet go well,” and signed the letter, “most affectionately.”\textsuperscript{58} Richard’s assurances of his continued affection for Sarah and their children speak to the heightened insecurity inherent in a relationship based exclusively on trust between unequal partners. Had Richard abdicated his familial responsibilities, Sarah would not have had any legal recourse. In fact, both of them could have been punished for their illegal union.

If Richard returned to Charleston at all after his stay in St. Augustine, it was only for a brief visit. By January 8, 1845, he was back in Paris to attend a ball at the Palais des

\textsuperscript{56} Middleton, \textit{John Stevens Cogdell}, 30. See also n. 60.

\textsuperscript{57} Passport, June–Nov., 1844, B.I, f.5; concert program from Hanover Square, England, June 24, 1844, B.I, f.6; letter requesting tickets for the opera in Paris, Nov. 20, 1844, B. I, f.4; permission to tour Palace at Tuilleries, 1844, B.I, f.5, LCP.

\textsuperscript{58} Richard W. Cogdell to Sarah Sanders, Dec. 20, 1844, B. I, f.4, p.10v, LCP.
Tuileries the following week. He spent most of that year abroad, traveling throughout Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy.\(^5\) Meanwhile, Sarah and the children remained in Charleston. Although the couple did not live together anyway - Sarah and the children lived on Bedon’s Alley not too far from Richard, who lived nearby on Broad Street - this prolonged separation may have been an onerous burden for Sarah.\(^6\)

She had to contend with the children’s needs largely by herself while their father was away having a grand time on his Grand Tour.

Eventually Richard did return, but perhaps not to open arms. Among the papers preserved by Richard Cogdell’s children is an undated, unsigned letter written in Richard’s handwriting that was probably sent to Sarah. It reads, in part:

Can the heart that has been deceived trust again? Can feelings that have been cruelly wounded, crushed to the earth, expand again in affectionate confidence? Never!... From the charges you make against me, I will not attempt to vindicate myself - it would be an admission that it were possible for me to be guilty of them. How little do you understand my character! What little justices you have ever done me! But resentments have subsided with me and I forgive freely. That you may yet be happy and deservedly happy is my very earnest prayer. Farewell!! I restore you to yourself. If the power’s mine; be healed, be happy! You may find a more congenial, more complying mind, a truer heart never!...You have furnished me with argument, which it is evident you wish me to make use of; to free you from the reciprocity of continuing attentions which have become irksome to you to pay - Henceforth be free - In your occasional visits, for I do not see how I shall be able to explain your total absence - you will find me the same - unchanged in manner or in feeling - I have not a heart that can hate - because it dared not love entirely. Farewell!!

May the blessing of Heaven rest upon you and upon your children - May they requite you for all your domestic unhappiness - My best wishes, my warmest aspirations, shall ever be yours - return this if you please.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) Passport, 1845, B.I, f.5; invitation to a ball at Tuileries on the 14th, January 8, 1845, B.I, f.5; credit statement, Jan. 14, 1845, B. I, f.6; letter of introduction and statement of good credit from Paris, Jan. 25, 1845 (with list of contacts), B.I, f.6; passport from France to enter Great Britain, May 1845, B.I, f.5; and receipt from Guerlain, Paris, for six bottles of toilet water, Oct. 20, 1845, 4 B. I, f.6, LCP. There is also a receipt from a glove-maker (12 pairs of ladies’ gloves may well have been presents for his daughters) in Paris from 1856, but there is no other evidence to suggest that Cogdell purchased these in person.

\(^6\) R.W.C. to S.M.S., Dec. 20, 1844, B.I, f.4, p. 10v, LCP. The envelope is addressed to Sarah at “Dutriex Court, Bedon’s Alley.” The Stranger’s Guide to Charleston lists Richard’s address as the corner of Broad Street and Gadsden Alley in 1835 (the same address as the Bank of the State of South Carolina where he worked) and at 65 Broad in 1849 and 1851.

\(^6\) Anonymous [R. W. Cogdell] to anonymous [S. M. Sanders], Box I, f.6, p. 30. There are two other, incomplete versions of this document – all in Richard Cogdell’s script – suggesting that he tried
It is impossible to determine the exact circumstances that prompted this exchange—or even the exact date of the letter—but, regardless, the estrangement expressed in the letter may well have percolated during Richard’s absences. With the birth of each child, their father’s casual attitude towards their need for attention and care may have aggravated Sarah’s sense of potential imperilment. As Sarah got older, she probably became more assertive and demanding. Whether her demands were adequately met by her partner is unknowable, but, at any rate, the conflict at the heart of this letter was either ignored or resolved; their relationship continued. Of course, there were few other alternatives. Despite Richard’s invitation to “henceforth be free,” Sarah could not have attained actual freedom in South Carolina and the children still needed financial support and protection.

Gradually, however, it seems that Richard did become more responsive to Sarah’s concerns. Richard Clement’s dismissal from the navy may have provided the first impetus for change. Richard Clement, who had been identified on his baptismal record as a “child of color,” had apparently lived his life as a white man. Like his mother, Richard Clement exemplifies the inconsistencies that defied neat racial categorization and strict enforcement of the law. He rose through the navy, achieving the rank of lieutenant, and might have continued to ascend in his career had he not been on board the USS Yorktown on November 30, 1845.

The sloop of war Yorktown was near Philadelphia when its captain spotted a suspicious-looking ship. On further inspection it was discovered that the barque Pons, although she flew the American flag, was captained by a Portugese named J. B. Gallano.
The *Pons* had no papers and an illegal cargo of 915 slaves. Lieutenant Cogdell was sent on board as prize master and ordered to take the slaves, as well as the captain and four crew members, to Monrovia, Liberia. He departed on December 1, 1845, and spent the next thirteen days piloting a rickety ship filled with stolen, sick, and dying human cargo. The sails and rigging were, according to Lieutenant Cogdell, “so old as to be scarcely fit for the passage across the Atlantic.” Every day an average of nearly a dozen slaves died and were thrown overboard, reaching a total of 159 deaths before arrival in Cape Mesurado on the evening of December 14, 1845.62

Having reached its new destination and unloaded its human cargo after what must have been an awful voyage, the *Pons* was outfitted for her return to America. Repairs were made and provisions purchased. Lieutenant Cogdell, however, was too ill to participate. According to an anonymous accuser, Cogdell got so drunk that he was totally incapacitated for days. For his part, Cogdell maintained that the “*deliriums tremens*” he experienced were not from alcohol poisoning, but “the effects of fever.” Moreover, he asserted that despite his inability to personally supervise the various duties required before setting sail again, he “never ceased to give [his] mental attention to every department under [his] care.” In answer to another accusation that he had charged to the navy the medical treatment he required after allegedly drinking to excess, Cogdell retorted that it was simply his “misfortune” that treatment for all crew members in need of medical attention had been inadvertently attributed solely to him.63

62 Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Officers below the rank of Commander, 1802-1884, Richard Clement Cogdell to George Bancroft, n.d. [March 1-31, 1846] (microfilm, vol. M148, roll 173, National Archives), 5.

63 Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Officers below the rank of Commander, 1802-1884, Richard Clement Cogdell to George Bancroft, April 24, 1846 (microfilm, vol. M148, roll 173, National Archives), 162.
Despite his protestations to the contrary, it is possible that Richard Clement did make himself sick with alcohol after completing a reverse Middle Passage. Both he and his three brothers were rumored to be drunks. The trip across the Atlantic may have been psychologically harrowing for a man who had to keep secret his own mixed-race parentage. Although there is no record of Lieutenant Cogdell’s innermost thoughts, it is reasonable to suppose that the experience of piloting a slave ship aroused painful and complicated feelings in him and that he chose to ease his burden with liquor.

If the voyage to Africa was wrenching, the return trip saw its share of sorrows as well. Cogdell and his crew left on January 1, 1846, but did not arrive back in America until the first of March. “I have had a very long passage,” he reported to the Secretary of the Navy, “occasioned by the winds and weather[,] the first part calm and light breezes, the latter head winds and gales of wind from N[orth] and W[est] with little interruption from the 11th [of] Feb[ruar]y to the first [of] March.” The difficulty and duration of the trip may have led Richard Clement to reflect further on the first leg of the enslaved Africans’ triple trans-Atlantic journey—the segment they had traveled aboard the Pons prior to their recapture. Adding to the myriad miseries of the entire trip, master’s mate J. E. Lawrence took ill on January 12 and died eighteen days later.64

Unfortunately, the tribulations did not end once Lieutenant Cogdell set foot in America. Almost immediately he was charged with misconduct, not only for alleged drunkenness while on duty, but also for abusive and insulting deportment towards master’s mate Lawrence.65 Cogdell emphatically denied the latter charge, asserting that “not an unpleasant word passed between us during our association.” He confessed that he


65 Letters sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers, 1798-1868, George Bancroft to Richard C. Cogdell, April 16, 1846 (microfilm vol. M149, roll 41, National Archives), 218.
did ask Lawrence to take the advice of an experienced sailor with regard to the weather. Nevertheless, he did not think that this gesture could be construed as disrespectful.

Surprised and indignant, Cogdell observed:

It is exceedingly strange that there should be evinced on the part of the Department disposition to listen to and base accusations against an officer on reports and rumors reaching that office without being sustained by any official report[,] it amounts to persecution [sic]. I was ordered to Washington a short time since[,] and when I appeared there I found there had been a charge made against me but I could not obtain from you the person[‘]s name who had made it. If I am to be continually annoyed in this way, I must most respectfully request the Dept. to furnish me with such allegations in a tangible form that I may know from whence they come and be prepared to meet them.66

Perhaps Richard Clement was guilty on all counts. But it does indeed seem odd that the Secretary of the Navy would apparently value the testimony of a tired and frustrated crew member over that of an officer. Pessimistic about the possibility for a fair proceeding, Richard Clement resigned before the trial was held.

Before long the scandal’s ripples reached Charleston. If Sarah Sanders was ever envious of Richard Clement for his legally-defensible freedom, if she ever thought it unfair that his mixed-race ancestry did not seem to handicap him the way that her mulatto children were constrained, her jealousy may have turned to pity in the wake of his horrible experience. Although Richard Clement never specified in writing why he thought he was being persecuted, it is possible that the rumors about him also encompassed his racial identity. Even if the navy was unaware of the classification on his baptismal record, the gossip in Charleston was probably more informed. As with Richard Walpole Cogdell’s relationship with Sarah Sanders, his son’s former identity as a “child of color” was an open secret that may have already attracted hostility and mockery from some

66 Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Officers below the rank of Commander, 1802-1884, Richard Clement Cogdell to George Bancroft, March 1-31, 1846 (microfilm, vol. M148, roll 173, National Archives), 6.
quarters. Inconsistencies in racial classification and in enforcement of the law had made intimacy possible, but they also amplified tension in Charleston.

Richard Walpole Cogdell had been a socially active man who enjoyed travel, the theater, balls, and horse-racing. His love of the good life, his sons’ failures, and his long-standing affair with his slave may have coalesced in the eyes of some Charlestonians to produce a less-than-flattering portrait. In his memoirs, professor and former politician Frederick Adolphus Porcher recalled his interactions with Richard Cogdell at Warm Springs, a popular summer resort. “Mr. Cogdell piqued himself upon the elegance of his manners,” Porcher observed with obvious condescension; “[Cogdell] was supreme director of the Interior. He governed the ball room.”

In contrast with his elder brother, Richard Walpole had pursued entertainment and pleasure with a vigor that exceeded his civic or work-related ambitions. Whereas Richard was a bank teller, his brother John Stephano was a prominent lawyer and the president of the Bank of South Carolina. Richard served as a city warden, alderman, and periodically as captain of various volunteer brigades; John as city warden, alderman, and oft-elected state representative. Richard briefly sat on the Board of Trustees of Charleston College - possibly just to fulfill his obligation as an alderman – and served for one year as commissioner of the almshouse. John was a long-time commissioner of the Charleston Orphan House, President of the Charleston Library Society, and President of the Charleston Bridge Company. Following in his uncle Harry’s footsteps, John served as

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68 Certificates for Richard W. Cogdell, B.II, f.3, LCP. Richard was sworn in as captain of Beat Company No. 2 of the 29th Regiment of the 7th Brigade in 1817. He resigned from the Company in 1827. Six years later he became captain of the State Guards, a volunteer corps. These activities were civic-minded, but typically entailed a fair amount of socializing and male camaraderie.

Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge to which Richard belonged. John was “a proficient performer on the French horn” and played the piano and organ as well, sometimes substituting for the organist at St. Michael’s, where he was also a vestryman. John’s artistic talents were most evident in the plastic and graphic arts; he was an accomplished sculptor and painter who co-founded the South Carolina Academy of Fine Arts. In addition, John was a member of the Cincinnati, of the Union Light Infantry, and of the Fusileers.70

Although Richard may have embraced non-edifying gaiety more readily than his brother, it is clear that both men wanted to be a part of a cosmopolitan and intellectually stimulating environment. However, Charleston was not the city it had been when John Stevens settled there in the late eighteenth century. As the nineteenth century progressed, Charleston gradually declined in population and in cultural prominence. The city had comparatively few institutions to support education, the arts and sciences, and public welfare, although it could boast some of the earliest charter dates for such endeavors. One case in point is the College of Charleston. When John Stephano Cogdell attended in the 1790s, the College was essentially a grammar school. Despite ambitious expansion plans, thirty years later it had fallen into disrepair, and the quality of education had declined precipitously. It attracted the attention of the community only when some particularly vicious act of delinquency was committed, such as when a student killed a passerby by throwing a stone at her.71 Of course, such episodes were often exaggerated by those

70 Newspaper clipping by A.S. Salley, Jr., John S. Cogdell file 30-04, SCHS.

71 Anonymous, “A Historical Sketch of the College of Charleston, South Carolina,” American Quarterly Register 12 (November 1839), 8, SCL. This is a reprint; the date of the original is not known.
whose superior class credentials inspired them to castigate the character and education of social inferiors.

Charleston’s decline was concomitant with the rise to prominence of politician John C. Calhoun. As a Congressional representative of South Carolina (1811-1816), Calhoun had been a devout nationalist and an avid supporter of the War of 1812. However, by the 1830s Calhoun was espousing a pro-slavery, state’s-rights ideology that crystallized during the nullification crisis of 1832. Calhoun’s growing popularity prior to his death in 1850 was troubling to members of the Cogdell family. John Stephano Cogdell, for instance, stood with Calhoun’s opponent, Joel R. Poinsett, during the nullification crisis. In a letter to a colleague, John lamented that Poinsett’s political opponents had “used and abused the system of Internal Improvements and its expenditures in order to defeat [Poinsett’s] elections.”

Even after the nullification crisis was over, John continued to oppose Calhoun. In February of 1846, a year before his death, John wrote to Calhoun, who was then chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, to protest the latter’s banking policies and to promote instead the use of a single federal treasury note. John also served as secretary and treasurer for the Academy of Fine Arts while Poinsett was president.

Although Richard W. Cogdell was no abolitionist, Calhoun’s vehement, pro-slavery views did not augur well for his children’s welfare. Even Lionel Kennedy, who

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72 Middleton, John Stevens Cogdell, 14-15. The letter is to F.H. Elmore, Oct. 9, 1820, in the State Finance Records at SCDAH.


74 Middleton, John Stevens Cogdell, 46.
may fully have shared Calhoun’s views about slavery, had reason to dislike him: Calhoun refused to appoint Kennedy as judge to the United States District Court.\textsuperscript{75}

Frederick Adolphus Porcher was elected to the state legislature three times before retiring from politics in 1840. He supported Calhoun and maintained strong states’-rights convictions throughout his life.\textsuperscript{76} Porcher attributed Charleston’s decline to the intellectual and moral sloth of planters who had allegedly given up cultivation of their minds and finer sensibilities to cultivate instead their cash crops and base pursuits.\textsuperscript{77} Although Richard Cogdell was not a planter, Porcher’s disdain for him may be partly attributable to his relationship with Sarah Sanders. In his memoirs, Porcher maligned Cogdell’s reputation, casting him as a bumbling \textit{bon vivant} and hinting, through a reference to Cogdell’s move to the North, about his supposedly unsavory personal life with a black mistress. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
Mr. Cogdell was one of the best specimens of a \textit{petit maître} I ever saw. He looked for elegance, where others sought only utility, a very nice [i.e., punctilious] observer of small proprieties. I can not say that he was either much liked or respected in Charleston. Finally abandoning his family he went to live in Pennsylvania. The following anecdote will illustrate what I mean by saying that he was a nice observer of small proprieties. The Mayor of Charleston T.L. Hutchinson, one day dined with him, and having greatly admired a certain wine which was served at dinner, he wrote a note to him the next day to ask where the same could be obtained. Several days passed without an answer. One morning Cogdell went to the Mayor’s office with an open letter in his hand, which he laid before Hutchinson, begging to be informed whether the name subscribed to it was his. It was the note about the wine. Hutchinson replying that it was his, Cogdell thanked him for the information, and went out without another word. In the course of the day an answer to the note was sent. Hutchinson’s name was so badly written as to be utterly illegible; but
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} W. Edwin Hemphill (ed.), \textit{The Papers of John C. Calhoun, Vol. VII, 1822-1823} (Columbia, SC: 1973), 376-377. Only two months after the Denmark Vesey trial report was published, Robert Y. Hayne wrote to John C. Calhoun about the judicial position on December 7, 1822: “I have also heard today that Mr. L[jionel] H. Kennedy has made an application. He is also a respectable man, of good principles, amiable character, & worthy of public confidence. But on the score of talents and learning I should consider him inferior to several of the applicants.”

\textsuperscript{76} William M. Matthews, ed., \textit{Agriculture, Geology, and Society in Antebellum South Carolina: The Private Diary of Edmund Ruffin, 1843} (Athens, Ga., 1992), 329.

It is telling that Porcher described Richard’s decision to flee with his children by Sarah Sanders as abandonment of his family. In fact, it was just the opposite. Clearly, broader political differences and disparate alliances underpinned differences between Porcher’s and Cogdell’s respective lifestyles.

However, Porcher’s scathing assessment of Cogdell may have been somewhat accurate. Perhaps Richard Cogdell was a man who indulged his passions readily, and fancied himself a connoisseur and a sophisticate. Perhaps he even thought that his illicit relationship with Sarah Sanders fit an image of himself as a carefree yet elegant widower. Friend and fellow bon vivant John B. Irving teasingly referred to Richard in a letter as “a gallant gay Lothario, gallivanting where ladies must do congregate.” In short, Richard may well have been a *bourgeois gentil’homme* whose material life, including his sexuality, was made possible by the existence of racial slavery. But whatever image he projected, and despite the long periods he spent away from his children, Richard Cogdell was sentimental at heart. There came a time in his life when he had to leave behind the world of conviviality he had enjoyed in Charleston. Six years after Sarah’s death in 1850, Richard hired a stagecoach to take his and Sarah’s five surviving children to freedom and comparative security in Philadelphia. This event was so momentous in the lives of the Sanders children that it became a story familiar to their descendants. Whether Richard

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78 Porcher, “Ten Years, 1848-1858,” 92.


80 Charles F. Cogdell to Richard W. Cogdell, October 1, 1856, B.I, f.4, LCP. The date of arrival in Philadelphia is not exact. However, 1856 is the earliest date of any letter sent to R.W. Cogdell in Philadelphia. The detail about the stagecoach comes from the family’s oral tradition.
accompanied his children on their journey is unknown, but it is certain that he moved to Philadelphia to be near them.

Richard’s decision to give Robert (b. 1832), Julia (b. 1835-1840), Sarah Ann (b. 1836-1841), Cordelia (b. 1841), and Sophia Elizabeth (b. 1843-1848) a reasonable future came at a personal cost. In addition to sneers from acquaintances like Frederick Porcher, Cogdell suffered accusations from relatives that he was abandoning them. Maria Z. Langlois implied as much in a letter to Richard’s friend, Daniel Horlbeck. Langlois had taken care of Richard’s and Cecille’s son George until his death in 1852. In 1860, she wrote to Horlbeck about the care she was currently providing to Richard’s and Cecille’s son Charles. Charles was without the use of his legs and suffered from what Langlois diagnosed as “mania.” She wrote of him:

> Every want and attention he can want shall be attended to[.] [H]e still thinks his Father visits him. . . it is a satisfaction to me that I am enabled to bestow on him those cares that none but one who is truly interested, would think of. . . He told me today, [""]do you know that my mind is affected? I fancy I am always with those who are dead, and that Father comes to see me every day[."] I never encourage his illusions, but tell him the truth when he asks about any one. [""]Your father is not here, C[harles], therefore he cannot come to see you.["] 81

Although Langlois may not have begrudged the Sanders children their freedom, perhaps she would have preferred to deny them their father’s presence in Philadelphia. At any rate, Horlbeck dutifully passed along to Richard her guilt-provoking message. For his part, Richard Cogdell begrudged his and Sarah’s children nothing. They were given a sizable and well-appointed house; they even had a servant, Clara, who had accompanied them North.82

81 Maria Zellis Langlois to Daniel Horlbeck, Aug. 15, 1860, B.I, f.5, LCP.

82 This information comes from an interview with Mrs. Lillie Venning Dickerson. Clara eventually left the Sanders family to marry, but she returned after her marriage turned sour.
In her lifetime Sarah had probably pressured Richard to make such a bold move. After her death, Richard was forced to consider anew their children’s welfare. Ever since the Denmark Vesey affair, free blacks and nominal slaves had faced periodic times of repression that usually subsided. There was the 1822 law passed in the immediate aftermath of the trial that required free blacks to have white guardians, followed by Lionel Kennedy’s successful campaign in 1834 to prohibit free blacks from learning to read. In 1841, the South Carolina legislature banned the use of trusts to evade the law against manumission. The closing of this emancipation loophole may have been of particular concern for the Sanders children. In addition, the children were getting older. As highly educated and skilled nominal slaves, they were faced with diminishing employment opportunities.

During the 1850s Charleston’s demographics shifted dramatically; for the first time in its history the city acquired a white majority. Demand for slaves in the cotton belt prompted more and more masters to sell their slaves southwest, and white immigration also grew. In the 1830s slaves constituted 51 percent of the city’s population and whites 42 percent. Thirty years later slaves made up 34 percent of the city’s inhabitants and white Charlestonians 58 percent. This shift may have meant that a larger class of white workers believed they were facing direct competition with the remaining skilled free black and enslaved workers. Moreover, the shift meant that white laborers enjoyed greater political influence in Charleston than they ever had before. They used this new leverage to pressure city officials to enforce the badge law (all slaves who hired out their labor had to purchase and wear identifying badges) and the capitation tax law. Their campaign was a success: in October of 1858, city police arrested fifty-three free persons of color for
failure to pay their capitation tax, after having made only five arrests in the previous four months for the same offense.\textsuperscript{83}

Many free blacks, nominal slaves, and sympathetic white Charlestonians were so accustomed to waiting out the periodic storms of racial hostility that sometimes swept through the city, that they failed to see the warning signs that the days of tacit toleration were quickly coming to an end. In August of 1860, the Charleston \textit{Courier} reported the recent arrest of sixty or seventy African-Americans for working without proper identification badges. Those arrested argued that they were not required to wear the badges because they were not slaves. However, the court decided against them on the basis that only African-Americans emancipated before 1820 were legitimately free. Panic ensued among the free black community, many of whom could not produce the required documentary evidence that their freedom antedated 1820. Many rushed to purchase slave badges, hoping to retain whatever position and property they enjoyed through private agreements with friendly white guardians.\textsuperscript{84}

Clearly, the Sanderses had left Charleston in the nick of time. This fact was reiterated by an incident involving another family of nominal slaves. Moses Levy, a former policeman who lived on Tradd Street just opposite Adger’s Wharf, where steamers from New York docked, reported that he had observed a free man of color illegally re-entering Charleston from one of the ships. The man turned out to be Joseph

\textsuperscript{83} Johnson and Roark, \textit{Black Masters}, 185-187. The authors write that in 1860, more than two-thirds of Charleston’s free men of color were skilled tradesmen. Carpenters were the most numerous. Six out of ten free women of color worked in the needle trades. It was blacks who held these high-skill jobs who attracted the animus of white mechanics. In an interview, Mrs. Lillie Venning Dickerson told me that Richard’s and Sarah’s son Robert worked as a carpenter in Philadelphia, and that their daughter Cordelia became a seamstress. Although tensions between white and black workers were high in Philadelphia as well as in Charleston, at least there was little threat of being arrested and experiencing state-enforced enslavement.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 238.
Noisette, a thirty-year old farmer who lived on the outskirts of town. Despite the intercession of several whites, Noisette was arrested. He narrowly avoided being sold into slavery by his lawyer's clever argument that Noisette was, technically, already a slave, and that therefore the law against re-entry did not apply. The children of Philip Stanislas Noisette and his slave Celestine had been declared free by their father in 1835. Despite the fact that the Noisettes had lived as free blacks ever since then, acquiring a sizable amount of property, after Joseph's arrest they were considered slaves by the law.85

Joseph Noisette's arrest in August of 1860 convinced many free blacks and nominal slaves that it was time to leave South Carolina. By the following November, two hundred refugees from Charleston arrived in their new hometown of Philadelphia.86 In fact, just a year before Joseph's arrest, several other members of the Noisette family had migrated to Philadelphia. Charleston district court clerk Daniel Horlbeck drafted the papers that enabled them to travel without risk of seizure. They were received in Philadelphia by Richard Walpole Cogdell, who appeared in a Philadelphia Court to vouch that they were who their papers said they were.87 And Daniel Horlbeck's brother, Elias, wrote to Richard immediately after Joseph's arrest to ask for help on behalf of another member of the Noisette family who wanted to have his manumission papers "recorded in the proper office or offices in Philadelphia."88

In South Carolina, it was not uncommon for a certain segment of white Charleston to intercede on the behalf of the mulatto elite. Whether the motivation was paternalistic

85 Ibid., 252-253.

86 Ibid., 274.

87 Noisette Family Papers, June 6, 1859, and July 1, 1859, SCL. The Horbecks were apparently well-acquainted with the Noisettes. Elias Horlbeck had once lent money to Alexander Noisette in order to enable the latter to purchase land in Charleston Neck; see Feb. 5, 1867.

88 Elias Horlbeck to Richard W. Cogdell, August 26, 1860, B.I, f.1, LCP.
guardianship or a more straightforward kind of friendship, these private actions and occasional efforts at public persuasion constituted localized, non-political responses. However, for Richard Cogdell this local custom metamorphosed into a more explicit politics once he moved North. To some extent, Cogdell's politicization was unavoidable in the context of mounting tension over whether the South would secede. But the other factor in his awakening may have been the influence of his newly freed children.

As was the case in Charleston, Richard did not live with his children at their Philadelphia home but stayed instead at a nearby hotel.89 Initially their father safeguarded the Sanderses' new property through traditional means by giving it in trust to his legitimate son, Charles Cogdell. This was a risky arrangement because Charles was not particularly reliable. In 1853 Charles wrote a letter to his father to say that creditors were depriving him of his "enjoysments" by their "hourly persecution," thereby impairing his "usefulness" and making it impossible for him "to work with spirit." He asked his father to intercede, arguing that the premature deaths of his four brothers left him "the only one who has any right to expect aid and assistance at your hands."90 Despite this selfish claim, in 1856 Charles wrote from Charleston to assure his father that the latter's wishes vis-a-vis his children would be carried out. "Dear Father," Charles began,

I have been informed by our mutual friend Mr. Daniel Horlbeck that it was your special desire that I should allow your children by Sarah Sanders to occupy the house [in Philadelphia] belonging to you and now occupied by them as a residence. . . I hereby declare that they shall continue to occupy said house as a residence during my life on whatever terms you may please to suggest.91

89 Patrick Ward to Daniel Horlbeck, Dec. 27, 1866, B.I, f.6, LCP. Ward was the proprietor of La Pierre hotel in Philadelphia where Richard W. Cogdell stayed. See also J. B. Irving to D. Horlbeck, Dec. 23, 1860, B.I, f.5, LCP.

90 Charles Cogdell to Richard W. Cogdell, March, 1853, B.I, f.4, LCP.

91 Charles F. Cogdell to Richard W. Cogdell, October 1, 1856, B.I, f.4, p.16, LCP.
Two years later, concurrent with the Noisette scandal, Richard wrote a last will and testament to make his arrangement with Charles official. He stressed that he had educated his children “as efficiently as circumstances would permit” and had “made great personal sacrifices that they should in case of marriage have their little property.”

However, Charles Cogdell died on September 3, 1860, barely a month after his father’s will was written. By the following December, South Carolina had seceded from the Union. “So the die is cast and South Carolina stands before the world a Sovereign State,” gloated Richard’s old friend John Irving in a letter, “what an easy victory will be hers, if the other Southern states will immediately cooperate.” “What,” Irving queried in another letter, “do the black Republicans about you, who could not believe the South in earnest, think now? They have not seen all yet we are going to do, to rebuke them for their insolence! Our redemption draweth nigh, and their Ruin!! God be with you!”

It is difficult to gauge just what Richard and his children thought about the impending conflict, or even to what degree they shared a common opinion. Richard’s correspondence with old friends like John B. Irving and Daniel Horlbeck suggest that Richard sometimes missed their company and the familiar environment of Charleston. He may have yearned for the days when, as a younger man, his life had seemed less complicated. Unlike John B. Irving, however, Richard could not boast about the South prior to the Civil War, nor could he uncritically romanticize antebellum society after the War.

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92 Last Will and Testament of Richard W. Cogdell, 1867, Vol. 51, p. 640-641, SCDAH. A copy of the will is also found in B.I, f.4, p.31v, LCP.

Perhaps Richard was a Republican despite his personal attachment to Charleston. According to family tradition, Richard commissioned a cameo ring of Republican Charles Sumner for one of his daughters.\textsuperscript{94} Even if this particular story is apocryphal, it does reveal a larger truth about Richard’s commitment to his children. Richard had broken from his circle of friends and familiar ways of life in order to provide his children with an opportunity to enjoy a decent future. Moreover, he chose to remain geographically close to them rather than return to South Carolina. The affection Richard felt for his children--and they for him, as is evidenced by their letters to him--and the developments that had driven them from Charleston must have affected Richard’s political views, even if some ambivalence remained. At the very least, the political cartoons that featured Sumner courting a grotesquely characterized black woman would probably have resonated negatively with him (fig. 12).

In June of 1863, Richard revoked his previous will and wrote a new one in which he left his entire estate outright to be divided equally among his and Sarah’s children. In February 1866, following the death of daughter Sophie, Richard added a codicil in which he left to his two daughters, Julia and Cordelia, all of his household property, including “jewelry, silver, china, pictures, books, piano, beds and bedding linen and other furniture.”\textsuperscript{95} Less than a year later, in December 1866, Richard Walpole Cogdell died at the age of 79.\textsuperscript{96} Following his wishes, his children shipped his body back to Charleston.

\textsuperscript{94} According to Mrs. Cordelia Brown, the family story is that Richard W. Cogdell commissioned in France a cameo ring depicting an abolitionist. Having examined the ring in question, it is my opinion that the image on the ring is that of Republican Charles Sumner. Although Sumner was not a well-known figure in France, it is possible that the ring was indeed made there, albeit Cogdell may have bought it in Philadelphia. Many cameos and silhouettes were imported from France in the nineteenth century, since there were comparatively few miniaturists in the United States at that time.

\textsuperscript{95} Last Will and Testament of Richard W. Cogdell, Vol. 51 (1867), p. 640-641, SCDAH.

\textsuperscript{96} Pinckney, Register of St. Philip’s, 69.
John B. Irving made the funeral arrangements. Horlbeck also swore out an oath that Richard "gave away his household furniture sometime before his death and has no property [in Philadelphia]" in order to protect the children from their father's creditors. According to her descendants, daughters Julia and Cordelia accompanied the body back to Charleston. They are supposed to have attended their father's funeral, but remained at the back of the church.

As a young man Richard W. Cogdell had been carefree and sociable. Although he was not a planter, he was like his grandfather in that he cultivated the tastes and mannerisms of the elite. Unlike his grandfather, however, Richard was a third-generation Charlestonian from an established and respectable family that had successfully climbed the ladder to prosperity and prestige. Richard was therefore capable of adopting the casual attitude towards miscegenation that his grandfather had not been capable of. He married a woman, Cecille Langlois, who may have been distantly related to a free black family of the same name. Their second-born son, Richard Clement, was identified as a child of color on his baptismal certificate. Finally, in 1830 Richard began a twenty-year affair with his slave, Sarah Sanders, that produced ten children.

But by Sarah's death in 1850, the political climate in Charleston had changed. Casual attitudes towards interracial sex were undermined by the growth of a white majority in Charleston, including a large working-class component that challenged the already white-supremacist but selectively permissive attitudes and mores of the slaveholding elite. Laws regulating slaves and free blacks multiplied and regular

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97 D. Horlbeck to J. Sanders, December 1866, B.I, f.5, LCP.

98 Charleston County Inventories, 1864-1867, "Cogdell, Richard W., April 1867," p.177, SCDAH. Even before Richard W. Cogdell's burial, Daniel Horlbeck received a letter from the proprietor of La Pierre hotel, where Cogdell had resided in Philadelphia, demanding five year's worth of back-payment. See n. 87.
crackdowns were directed at those who would bend the rules or ignore the irregularities. Richard's affection for his mulatto family became insupportable; he was denigrated by his states'-rights, pro-slavery peers as an irresponsible bon vivant. Richard’s complacency was finally shattered by the impending danger to his surviving children. He fled with them to Philadelphia and thus forever altered the lives of his descendants, as well as the entire Stevens and Cogdell family story.

98 Charleston County Inventories, 1864-1867, “Cogdell, Richard W., April 1867,” p.177, SCDAH. Even before Richard W. Cogdell’s burial, Daniel Horlbeck received a letter from the proprietor of La Pierre hotel, where Cogdell had resided in Philadelphia, demanding five year’s worth of back-payment. See n. 87.
CONCLUSION

With the move to Philadelphia, an entirely new chapter commenced in the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning family story. Richard W. Cogdell provided his mulatto children with material comforts exceeding those that his grandfather, John Stevens, had given to Harry and Tolsey. In fact, Stevens's bequest to his children was simply his letterbooks and one heart-shaped diamond ring that Tolsey wore until her death. Both these objects wound up in the possession of the Sanders children, an ironic twist given Stevens's abhorrence of interracial sex. But despite the financial security, the education, and the affection that their father had given them—or perhaps because of these things—the Sanders children felt keenly their exclusion from full participation in American society.

In fact, they were excluded from claiming a part of their own family history. The end of Reconstruction and the subsequent unleashing of widespread white hostility towards blacks, frequently crystallizing into agitation against miscegenation between white women and black men, meant that the documents and artifacts that substantiated the Sanderses' connection to their white relatives had to be kept private. Then too, examining the musings of their white ancestors might have pained descendants eager to get past slavery and get on with their exemplary lives as members of Du Bois's “talented tenth.”

1 Tolsey left the ring to her son, John Stephano Cogdell. But because John had no children he, in turn, left it to Richard Walpole Cogdell in his will of 1846.
Although the subsequent history of the Sanders-Venning branch of the family (Richard’s and Sarah’s daughter Julia Sanders married Edward D. Venning) lies outside the scope of this thesis, its various members did indeed lead accomplished lives and make significant contributions to the African-American community of Philadelphia, especially in the field of education. But the weight of the past exerted both a magnetic and a repellant force on the family’s memory. Julia’s granddaughter, Mrs. Lillie Venning Dickerson, recalls coming home one day when she was a child to discover her aunt, Sallie Venning Holden, burning a portrait of Richard W. Cogdell. Sallie was Richard’s granddaughter, though she never knew “Grandfather Cogdell,” as he was called. Perhaps Sallie regarded the portrait, possibly painted by John Stephano, as an effigy through which she intended to incinerate the painful legacy of slavery.

On the other hand, another of Richard’s grandsons, Richard Sanders Chew, seemed to crave a connection with his namesake Richard W. Cogdell. Richard S. Chew was one the first black students to attend the University of Pennsylvania. Writing in the privacy of his notebook, on the pages where he completed his lessons in geometry, he sometimes replaced “Sanders” with “Cogdell.” Fittingly, someone eventually turned Richard S. Chew’s notebook into a scrapbook with many of the letters and memorabilia of Richard W. Cogdell pasted over Chew’s notes. Thoughts about the past and an awareness of history may have occupied a mere fraction of the family’s collective consciousness, but apparently the subject was compelling enough to inspire poignant and even angry acts on the part of its various members.²

² Notebook, Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning Collection, B.I, f.4., LCP.
Richard Walpole Cogdell’s children and their descendants were forced to confront the past in a way that their distant relatives were not. Paul Stevens, for example, grew up in Newark, New Jersey, apparently unaware that his family had a long history of interracial intimacy. He retired to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in the late 1950s and began a second career as a reactionary contributor to local papers. One wonders whether, had Mr. Stevens known about his family’s history, he would have publicly railed against miscegenation and civil rights activists. One also wonders whether Mr. Stevens’ protestations disguised deeper ambivalence.

Paul Stevens’s great, great, great-grandfather, John Stevens, had once decried miscegenation in order to distance himself from charges that he had fathered his mulatto slave Dick. In part, his denial was based upon the belief that liaisons with slaves jeopardized one’s social standing. So, too, Mary Ann Elizabeth (Tolsey) Stevens felt the need to differentiate herself from black women by making true virtue the exclusive prerogative of white Republican women. Of course, it is possible to over-analogize Paul Stevens’s feelings with those of his ancestors and thereby underestimate change over time. Yet it is equally important not to overlook the striking similarities between Paul Stevens’s notion of the ideal civil society and the “genteel” slave society of which John Stevens and his children aspired to be a part. In an essay for The Charleston News and Courier, Paul Stevens baldly asserted, “the simple truth is that where Negroes are equal in number to whites, or predominant, the white man must control or get out.”

In a story that is awash in irony, the final irony is that just the opposite calculus held true for Richard W. Cogdell. Despite Richard’s comparatively secure social

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3 Paul Stevens, “Capetown, South Africa Has Much to Offer Tourist Trade,” The Charleston News and Courier, March 13, 1960, 14A.
standing, it was precisely the growth of a white majority in Charleston in the 1850s that forced him to move with his and Sarah Sanders's children to Philadelphia. He died after ten years in the North, and after his death in 1867 his children became the caretakers of his family papers. To these manuscripts they added their own artifacts to document their achievements. They also passed down stories to document their struggles. These papers and stories attest richly, and sometimes poignantly, to the important and on-going place that miscegenation has occupied in the law, in the political rhetoric, and in the personal lives of Americans like the members of the Stevens-Cogdell/Sanders-Venning family.
John and Mary Stevens (not including children who died in England prior to 1765)

- John (Jack)
  - John
  - John Stevens
  - Dick
  - Susannah Sullivan
    - Mary Ann Jane
      - Dick
      - Cecille Langlois
        - Sarah Martha Sanders (slave)
          - Edward D. Venning
            - George Edward (one of ten children)
              - Julia Capps
                - Mary
      - Lionel H. Kennedy
        - Susannah
        - Mary Ann Elizabeth
          - Henry L.
          - Paul
      - James Henry
      - Mary Ann Jane
        - Joseph Cooper
          - Clement
            - George Cosdell
              - John Stevens (Stephanos)
              - Clement Burgess
              - Richard Wallpole
            - Mary Ann Jane
      - Jane Henley
        - Dick
          - Susannah Sullivan
            - Ben (died as baby)
            - Clement Crookblake
            - Joseph Porter (died at sea)
            - John Stevens (Stephanos)
            - Clement Burgess
            - Richard Wallpole
        - John
          - John Stevens
          - Dick
          - Susannah Sullivan
            - Mary Ann Jane
              - Dick
              - Cecille Langlois
                - Sarah Martha Sanders (slave)
                  - Edward D. Venning
                    - George Edward (one of ten children)
                      - Julia Capps
                        - Mary
                - Mary Ann Jane
                  - Dick
                  - Cecille Langlois
                    - Sarah Martha Sanders (slave)
                      - Edward D. Venning
                        - George Edward (one of ten children)
                          - Julia Capps
                            - Mary
            - Sarah Martha Sanders
              - Edward D. Venning
                - George Edward (one of ten children)
                  - Julia Capps
                    - Mary

Courtesy the author.
Georgia Governor and Council Journal, 1761-1767, ix.

HYMN AND PSALM TUNES BY STEVENS

From MS Choirmaster's Book of Jacob Eckhard

South Carolina Historical Magazine 53(1952), 217-218.
Courtesy the author.
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