

Chapter 4

Economic Life Within the System

Free Negroes in the South pursued a variety of economic activities. One historian has concluded that "on the farms that grew food for slaves and nonslaveholders, on the riverboats and drays that carried goods to and from plantations, and in the cities that mediated between the plantation heartland and the outside world, most free Negroes earned their livelihood." In Mobile County some free people of color, particularly the descendants of the French and Spanish, owned land, livestock, and slaves, which allowed them to make a comfortable living. Unlike most southern free Negroes who lived and worked in rural areas, most free nonwhites in Mobile County lived and worked in the city because there were more economic opportunities for them there, not because "the hard life in the countryside drove free Negroes to the cities." Some free people of color who owned real property and slaves were financially secure.¹

¹Berlin, Slaves Without Masters, pp. 217, 219.

At times economic restraints were put on southern free Negroes. For example, in Memphis free nonwhite butchers "were barred from the city market." Whites in Georgia had to approve the work done by free Negro masons.² In other areas economic restrictions seldom existed as, for example, with the rural Creoles of color along Cane River in Louisiana.³ In Mobile County free Negroes were generally allowed to earn a living in a number of ways--raising livestock, growing crops, operating businesses, or working for someone in skilled or unskilled positions.

One of the more prominent free persons of color in this society was Regis Bernody. Born in New Orleans around 1760, Bernody was a resourceful man who had several sources of income. In a controversy involving a tract of land "lying about one mile" south of Mobile, to which Bernody claimed ownership, white witnesses testified on his behalf that he made bricks on the disputed land. An officer of the "United States' service" certified that he had tried to purchase some brick from Bernody for Fort Charlotte, but Bernody was unable to furnish the materials. The officer accused the white man who also claimed the property of "beating and

²Ibid., p. 230. See also Mills, The Forgotten People, pp. 105-7.

³Mills, The Forgotten People, p. 107.

driving off all his [Bernody's] hands which were sent to work at the said brickyard."⁴

In his 1828 will, Bernody left indications of his wealth and economic endeavors. He bequeathed a lot on St. Francis Street in the town of Mobile to three daughters whom he had sired by Isabelle Bartheleme, a free woman of color. Catherine, the free woman of color who lived with him when he wrote his will, received \$1,000; his sister inherited \$500. To his other children he gave the rest of his estate, which in part consisted of lots in Mobile and Pensacola, cattle, horses, and furniture. Four of them were supposed to pay into the estate more than \$1,500 that he had loaned them.⁵ Bernody did not mention that nine slaves were part of his estate and were appraised at about \$2,600, which was about 70 percent of the value of his personal property. The value of some 150 head of cattle represented about one-sixth (17 percent) of his estate.⁶

Little is known about the economic activities of Bernody's children. Pierre, who (like his brother Etienne) assumed his father's first name as his surname, operated a stall in the market place; Etienne sold liquor. These two

⁴ASP: Public Lands, III: 454.

⁵Will Book 1, pp. 170-73.

⁶Estate of Regis Bernody, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 24.

examples suggest that, at least during the 1820s and 1830s, few economic restrictions were placed upon free Negroes.⁷

During the late 1830s free Negroes supported themselves in a variety of ways. In 1837 there were two bricklayers; two years later there was one. The 1838 city directory listed three shoemakers, five butchers, three grocers, one wood merchant, and one blacksmith. Other occupations held by free people of color included tailor, confectioner, bookseller, midwife, and operator of a boarding house.⁸ The 1837 directory lists at least two free Negroes who were steamboat stewards, one steamboat pilot, and a couple of fishermen and hunters.⁹

Some free nonwhite entrepreneurs placed advertisements in city directories. Sandy Strong, who was listed in the 1837 directory as a "bookseller and circulating library," changed jobs in order to sell groceries at the corner of Dauphin and St. Joachim Streets.¹⁰ He had a "supply of

⁷Mayor's Court Records, June 7, 1824, and April 22, 1833, microfilm reel 8, RG 18, S 1, CMMA. See also *ibid.*, December 26, 1822.

⁸Mobile Directory, Embracing Names of the Heads of Families and Persons in Business, Alphabetically Arranged for 1837 (Mobile: H. M. McGuire and T. C. Fay, 1837); Mobile Directory or Strangers' Guide for 1838 (Mobile: R. R. Dade, 1838); T. C. Fay, Mobile Directory or Strangers' Guide for 1839 (Mobile: R. R. Dade, 1839).

⁹Mobile Directory, 1837, pp. 36, 40, 55, 46, 60.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 54; Mobile Directory, 1838, p. 54 of advertisement section.

family provisions, together with other articles in this business as good and as cheap as can be had in any other store in Mobile, for cash and no mistake--(no liquors)."¹¹ A free Negro offered "boots and shoes to order for cash"; he also did repair work "on short notice, upon the above terms."¹²

Free Negro barbers also advertised their services in the city directory. "Elam Page--hair cutter, wig dresser, hair curler & shaver," one advertisement began, "has for sale perfumery, soaps of various kinds, razors, razor straps, combs, nail brushers, cologne water, curls, hair brushes, and many other articles in this line of business." In addition to these items, he also sold "gentlemen's collars, shirts, bosoms and stocks." Page, like other free Negroes in business for themselves, probably depended on white patronage for the services and goods he had to offer.¹³ George McBride, whose shop was located in the Alabama Hotel, had "eight first rate HAIR CUTTERS AND SHAVERS independent of ten boys in constant attendance." He claimed that he could "give as much satisfaction in this line as can be obtained in any similar establishment in the United States." McBride thanked his customers who could be "accommodated all hours, day or night, either at his shop or

¹¹Mobile Directory, 1838, p. 54 of advertisement section.

¹²Mobile Directory, 1839, p. 20 of advertisement section.

¹³Ibid., p. 104.

their private residences." If the number of people on his staff and his ability to place a full page advertisement in the city directory are indications of his economic security, it would seem that the Panic of 1837 and the ensuing depression did not affect his business.¹⁴

Before 1850 free women of color also worked in a variety of jobs. Among these were washer and ironer positions, a midwife, two women who ran boarding houses, and a confectioner.¹⁵ Louisa Barnes advertised that she had "for sale articles in the confectionary line, cakes, candies, cordials, cigars, raisins, fruits, corn-meal, rice, candles, starch, bread, crackers, butter, lard, sweet-meats, and a little almost of every little thing to turn a penny."¹⁶ Polite Collins, who "fitted up her house for the purpose of serving up COFFEE and CHOCOLATE at all reasonable hours, day or night, in first rate style," announced that "no pains will be spared to render her house a pleasant resort, and will endeavor to merit patronage."¹⁷ In addition to operating her coffee house, Collins and her

¹⁴Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁵Mobile Directory, 1837.

¹⁶Mobile Directory, 1839, p. 92.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 31.

mother purchased two coffee stands in the public market.¹⁸ Sally Pope owned a boarding house at the northeast corner of St. Michael and Claiborne, the value of her real estate being \$3,500.¹⁹ Rachel Glover managed a small grocery store, which in 1840 contained merchandise valued at twenty dollars. The value of her real estate for 1840 and 1846 was \$3,500.²⁰ Two Negroes operated cook shops.²¹

After 1850 most free women of color held menial positions. Only three were listed in the 1850 census as having occupations; all three were laborers. Ten years later, sixty-nine free Negro women, ten of whom were laborers, worked in Mobile; nearly one in five were dressmakers or seamstresses.²² Slightly over half worked as washwomen and about one in ten was employed as some type of domestic servant.²³ One was listed as a retired midwife,

¹⁸Polite Collins to the Mayor and Boards of Aldermen and Common Council, March 31, 1841, Box 4, Envelope 7, Folder 4, Document 6, RG 3, S 1, CMMA. The purchase was made in October 1840. See also Amos, Cotton City, p. 97.

¹⁹City Tax Book, 1846, microfilm reel 6.

²⁰Edwin T. Wood, Mobile Directory, and Register, for 1844, Embracing the Names of Firms, the Individuals Composing them, and Householders Generally within the City Limits, Alphabetically Arranged (Mobile: Dade and Thompson, 1844), p. 68; City Tax Book, 1840, microfilm reel 4; City Tax Book, 1846, microfilm reel 6.

²¹City Tax Book, 1847, microfilm reel 6. The two were Allen Duncan and Richard Hastie.

²²The exact percentage is 18.8.

²³Domestic servants as listed in the census include domestics, servants, houseservants, and housekeepers.

the only free person of color reported in the 1850 and 1860 federal censuses for Mobile County who represented the medical profession. Some were nurses, but none of them was reported in the federal censuses.²⁴

One of several free Negro grocers in Mobile was Clement B. Joseph. In 1846, the value of merchandise in his shop was \$100; the value dropped to a low of \$50 in 1852, doubled to \$100 in 1853, and in three years, it again doubled to \$200. The Civil War affected his business as the value of his merchandise dropped to \$100. Conditions improved thereafter, and for 1864, the value doubled.²⁵

Joseph's success as a businessman is reflected in his real estate holdings. Between 1844 and 1861 he and his wife purchased at least ten lots of land. Tax records indicate that between 1846 and 1853 the values of his real estate fluctuated between \$2,000 and \$3,000; after 1853, the value rose significantly to correspond with his land purchases. In 1856, for example, the value of his real estate was \$8,500. In 1860 the value was \$8,000, by 1863 it had increased to \$9,500, and by 1864 the value had risen to

²⁴See, for example, City Court, Final Record and Judgment Book 10, June 1858--July 1859, Civil Cases 5111--5510, *Polite Collins v. H. R. DeReviere*, Case 5131, pp. 15-16.

²⁵*Mobile Directory*, 1844, p. 78; City Tax Book, 1846, microfilm reel 6; *ibid.*, 1852, microfilm reel 7; *ibid.*, 1853, microfilm reel 10; *ibid.*, 1856, microfilm reel 9; *ibid.*, 1863, microfilm reel 17, p. 118; *ibid.*, 1864, microfilm reel 17, p. 1.

\$11,300. Of the eighty-six free people of color reporting real estate values for the 1860 census, none had real estate values greater than Joseph's, although two others did equal his.²⁶ By way of comparison, only 2 percent of the 721 free Negro real estate owners in Charleston in 1860 had values of \$8,000 or higher.²⁷

Nearly one in four free Negro laborers, some of whom were slaveowners, possessed their own land. For instance, the 1850 census and city tax records list Arthur Taylor as a laborer owning real estate valued at \$1,600. Taylor was one of about a dozen free Negro laborers who owned slaves. Perhaps the term "laborer" is a misleading description when applied to Taylor. If he could afford to own slaves, assuming these were not family members, his economic status should have been higher than the term "laborer" connotes. According to 1852 city tax records, he owned three slaves

²⁶City Tax Book, 1856, microfilm reel 9; *ibid.*, 1860, microfilm reel 15; *ibid.*, 1863, microfilm reel 16; *ibid.*, 1864, microfilm reel 17; Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, Ward 4, p. 33, Dwelling 225, Household 236. The census rate is an assessed rate, rather than actual valuation--which was often substantially higher.

²⁷Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, p. 342, Table 6. Another free Negro shopkeeper was Alex Baudin. The assessed value of his real estate in 1850 was \$5,000, the highest real estate value among free Negroes whose real estate values were listed in the 1850 federal census. Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, p. 297, Dwelling 356, Household 385; City Tax Book, 1856, microfilm reel 9.

worth \$1,000.²⁸ Charles Leavens, whose 1860 real estate was assessed at \$1,500, also owned a slave valued at \$500.²⁹ Another free nonwhite laborer owned real estate assessed at \$600 and four slaves.³⁰ Most free nonwhite laborers apparently did not own their own property--at least they do not appear either on tax lists or in the deed records, nor are they listed in the censuses as having real estate.

Carpentry was a popular trade among free people of color. The 1837 city directory included five carpenters, one of whom was a ship's carpenter; the following year there were still five free Negro carpenters working in Mobile. In 1839 there were three carpenters.³¹ In 1850, thirty-three of them practiced this craft, including a cabinet maker and a ship's carpenter. The number of free Negro carpenters in 1860 decreased to twenty-eight, or about 9 percent of the free Negro work force.

²⁸Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, p. 300, Dwelling 415, Household 445; City Tax Book, 1852, microfilm reel 9.

²⁹Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, Ward 7, p. 72, Dwelling 753, Household 670; City Tax Book, 1853, microfilm reel 10.

³⁰Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, Ward 6, p. 53, Dwelling 439, Household 450; Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Ward 6, p. 10.

³¹Mobile Directory, 1837; Mobile Directory, 1838; Fay, Mobile Directory, 1839.

One family established its own carpentry business. Several city directories indicate that John Collins was a carpenter, and according to the federal census other family members were involved in "manufacturing" which probably meant building boats. Through 1860 the family continued to practice this trade.³²

According to tradition, the Collins family operated the oldest boat-building business on the Gulf Coast. Their operation was located near the area where Fowl River flows into Mobile Bay. In a twentieth-century interview, John Collins, Jr., related that he constructed vessels with generally the same tools and methods that his father had used in 1863 and earlier. Tradition holds that for at least a hundred years members of the Collins family built different types of boats--"from row boats to sister ships of the Confederate blockade-runner." The founder of the shipyard built "the ways and the crab--the device for hauling 20-ton craft onto the inclined ways." John Collins,

³²Mobile Directory, 1837, p. 18; Mobile Directory, 1838, p. 27; Mobile Directory, 1839, p. 55; Mobile Directory, 1844, p. 56; Sixth Census, 1840, Mobile County, p. 89; *ibid.*, City of Mobile, pp. 93, 108; Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, p. 422, Dwelling 2175, Household 2364; *ibid.*, p. 331, Dwelling 885, Household 908; Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, City of Mobile, Ward 7, p. 8, Dwelling and Household 61; *ibid.*, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 27, Dwelling 213, Household 175.

Jr., reported that his father had a forge and made his own nails.³³

Of the thirty-six farmers listed in the 1860 federal census, only one was a free woman of color, Marie Louise Crozie.³⁴ Her farm consisted of twenty-four acres, half of which were improved; the cash value of the farm was reported as six hundred dollars, the value of the livestock one hundred dollars. She produced thirty-five bushels of corn, sixty bushels of sweet potatoes, and sixty pounds of honey. Crozie owned five slaves, four of whom were adult males.³⁵

White employers placed advertisements in Mobile newspapers announcing job opportunities for both whites and nonwhites. Employers usually did not specify the status of the Negro--slave or free--whom they wanted to hire, but they generally indicated which race they preferred. Few employers indicated how much they would pay, but some did

³³Mobile Press Register, November 3, 1946. The Mobile Press Register stated that the Collins's family operation was "still the able organization it was a century past. Business has not forsaken the little yard in its idyllic spot for bustling, booming spots where rivet hammers and the hiss of welders' torches indicate the modern-style shipyards."

³⁴Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 17, Dwelling 127, Household 105.

³⁵Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 1. At one time, she owned property in the town of Hancockville or Portersville in south Mobile County, and land that bordered the Gulf of Mexico. See, for example, Deed Book 11, pp. 482-84, 515-56.

mention that workers would receive liberal wages. Jobs available to women included some of the more common tasks that were listed in the 1860 federal census, such as washer and ironer, cook, and some occupations not recorded on the census, such as nurse. Positions for Negro men included deck hands, firemen on steamers, and wood choppers.

A few examples of the types of jobs advertised will illustrate the economic situation. In 1843 someone wanted to hire a "white or colored woman to do the work of a small family in the country."³⁶ Another unidentified employer sought a "colored woman to cook. One of good character--will have a permanent situation."³⁷ A steamboat company advertised that it needed "twelve good Negroes" to work for "liberal wages," and another specified that it "wanted to hire ten or fifteen Negroes, as firemen and deckhands on a No. 1 boat. Wages \$35 per month for the season."³⁸ In 1853 someone "wanted an active colored man, for housework and dining room servant. He must be trusty and willing to make himself useful. To such, liberal wages will be paid. A yearly engagement preferred."³⁹

³⁶Mobile Register and Journal, May 11, 1843.

³⁷Ibid., March 23, 1847.

³⁸Mobile Advertiser Semi-Weekly for the Country, November 10, 1850; *ibid.*, December 8, 1850.

³⁹Mobile Daily Advertiser, December 23, 1853.

Some free Negroes apprenticed themselves to learn trades. Training in any trade set them apart not only from unskilled free people of color but also from many slaves. One ambitious young free man of color, for example, bound himself to a Mobile white in order to learn the trade of blacksmithing. His apprenticeship contract was the standard one used by white youths; he was to serve for five years and to follow strict rules. He was not allowed to play cards, dice, "or any unlawful game," nor was he allowed to "frequent taverns or houses retailing spiritous liquors." He also agreed not to marry during this period and not to "absent himself from his master's service at any time without master's consent." In return, the white employer was to provide food, clothing, housing, "and all other necessaries fit and convenient for such an apprentice."⁴⁰ A free boy of color was bound to Thomas J. Riley, who agreed to "provide a sufficiency of good and wholesome provisions, furnish all necessary clothing, washing, and lodging." Riley was supposed to "treat him with kindness and humanity and instruct him in the trade . . . of slating." In addition, Riley was to educate the apprentice, and at the end of his term, to furnish him "with at least two complete new suits of clothing."⁴¹

⁴⁰Miscellaneous Book A, pp. 20-21.

⁴¹Orphans Court Minutes, Book 9, p. 227. See also Miscellaneous Book A, pp. 113-15, for another example of an apprenticeship.

Not all free Negro apprentices learned crafts. In 1858 Ellen Lewis bound her daughter until she reached eighteen to a white man of Mobile County "for the purpose of learning and being taught the business of house-keeping"; the agreement did not contain provisions concerning food, clothing, or education.⁴² Another free woman of color bound herself and her two children, thus allowing her to be with her family. The daughter was to serve a period of six years, and the mother and son each for ten years. The children "were to be taught the trade of serving people and were to receive their food and clothing." As one historian points out, "this arrangement seems to have been made as a continuation of a situation that already existed." The white man to whom the woman and her children were bound had been supporting them "for some time, so the drawing up of the articles of agreement was largely a legal formality." Most of the other apprenticeships involving free nonwhites did, however, mention the details of the agreements; and usually white masters provided food and clothing.⁴³

Some free Negroes earned additional income by leasing some of their property in the city of Mobile. Free Negroes usually rented land to whites for periods ranging from five to ten years, with certain conditions placed upon the

⁴²Orphans Court Minutes, Book 10, p. 421.

⁴³Boucher, "The Free Negro in Alabama," pp. 59-60. See also Administrator's Account Book 5, p. 413.

lessee, such as having to build upon the property. Bazile Chastang rented a lot in the town of Mobile to Mathew C. Toulmin for \$200 due in six months and one hundred dollars within twelve months. There were no written conditions placed upon Toulmin. Thus, Chastang was landlord to a very prominent white resident.⁴⁴ Three years later, Bazile leased another lot for a term of seven years.⁴⁵ Isabelle Chastang, sister of Bazile, leased a lot and tenement on the corner of Dauphin and St. Joachim Streets to a white man named Peter Dubose for seven years. The rent was \$250, payable in quarterly installments, and Dubose was to pay all taxes on the property. He was to erect "one good and substantial wooden frame building of two stories high thirty-two feet long and twenty-two feet wide, well plastered or sealed on the inside" before the end of the first year of the lease. It was also his responsibility to keep this structure in good repairs for the duration of the agreement, and he was to insure the building.⁴⁶

Zeno Chastang, Isabelle's brother, executed a long-term lease with Lorenzo Gomez for a lot at the southwest corner of Dauphin and Wilkinson Streets. Gomez was to have possession for ten years at the price of twelve dollars per month. As with some other leases, Gomez agreed to keep the

⁴⁴Miscellaneous Book A, p. 24.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 105-7.

⁴⁶Miscellaneous Book B, pp. 119-21.

house in good repair, and Chastang allowed a customary thirty-day grace period in the payment of the rent. Chastang, in order to protect his property, wisely added a provision that if the house burned as a result of the negligence of Gomez, Gomez would have to rebuild though the renter would not be held responsible if the house burned through someone else's carelessness.⁴⁷

Antoine Trouillet, a free man of color, rented a much more valuable lot in the city of Mobile to three white men. The lease was for ten years beginning in April 1839, the annual rent being \$1,200, payable \$100 at the end of each month. If the rent fell more than thirty days in arrears, Trouillet could cancel the lease. The three white men agreed to erect a brick building eleven feet high "on the outer sides or lines of said lot except the front on Conception Street which is to be two stories high and covered with a slate or zinc roof." The lessees also agreed to "surrender the property at the end of ten years, or sooner if necessary, leaving all of the improvements thereon."⁴⁸ Perhaps due to the economically depressed conditions in Mobile, it became necessary to terminate the lease. About two years later Trouillet rented the same lot

⁴⁷Miscellaneous Book G, p. 261.

⁴⁸Miscellaneous Book C, pp. 283-85.

to another white Mobilian for a term of eight years under the same conditions.⁴⁹

Clair Chavanna and her children also leased property. In early 1840 they leased a lot to a white man for eight years at the annual price of \$240, payable in monthly installments. If the lessee became fifteen days behind on the rent the premises could be repossessed. In addition, the lessee was required to build a "substantial brick house, two stories high . . . to be covered with slate, built of good material and finished in a workmanlike manner." The tenant also agreed to keep the house in good repair, keep it insured, pay all taxes, and surrender the property at the end of the lease.⁵⁰ A month later the Chavannas rented another lot to a different white man under the same conditions except that they gave this lessee a thirty-day grace period.⁵¹ Assuming the terms of both leases were honored, the free Negroes would have earned \$3,840 for the eight-year period--and added two brick dwellings to their list of property.

⁴⁹Miscellaneous Book D, pp. 372-73. For other leases involving whites and free Negroes see Miscellaneous Book A, pp. 11-12, Miscellaneous Book B, p. 40, Miscellaneous Book D, pp. 68-70, 71-73, 98, 135-37.

⁵⁰Miscellaneous Book D, pp. 68-70. Clair Chavanna's surname also appears in the records as either Bazile or Padille.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 71-73. An indication of the property's worth is suggested when the free people of color sold both lots for \$1,000 each to the wharfingers Charles P. Gage and Duke W. Goodman. See Deed Book 3, new series, pp. 240-41.

In addition to free Negroes who worked in the city, others earned a living from the land. Two who acquired substantial tracts in the Mobile area were Bazile Chastang, son of Dr. John Chastang, and Alexis Trouillet, son of Peter Trouillet. In 1804 the two younger men petitioned the commandant at Mobile that they were "about to form a partnership in raising cattle." Chastang supported his claim by informing the commandant that he was "settled with a family and a natural daughter," and that he and Trouillet both had useful trades. They argued their case well as the Spanish commandant, Joachim de Ossorno, permitted them to take possession of the land.⁵² In early 1808 Trouillet increased his landholdings by petitioning for a piece of vacant property on the bank of Bayou Bay Minette. Claiming that he had no "other lands whereon he can exercise the business of agriculture," Trouillet argued that he wanted to improve the acreage, something he apparently did not do with the tract he had previously acquired with Chastang. Spanish authorities granted his request.⁵³

The exact number of cattle held by the partnership of Chastang and Trouillet when they acquired their land is unknown. However, in 1810 Trouillet purchased fifty head of horned cattle, along with a house and lot in the city of

⁵²Ledger 13, pp. 143-44. The land was situated between Bayou Chickasabogue and Bayou Bucuma.

⁵³Ibid., p. 145.

Mobile and three slaves for a thousand dollars. The two free Negroes evidently continued to raise livestock, if not together, then separately for several years. An inventory of Trouillet's estate filed in October 1823, contained, for example, two hundred head of cattle, and other livestock, and Chastang's estate included sixty head of cattle and other livestock.⁵⁴

Had he had such holdings in 1850 or 1860, Trouillet would have been one of the largest cattle raisers among free Negroes in Mobile County. Out of fifteen, only two others owned more cattle in 1850 than Trouillet did during the early 1820s. None of the forty free Negro farmers in 1860 owned more cattle than he.⁵⁵ These figures indicate the importance of raising livestock in early Mobile County history, as well as the apparent success of Trouillet.

⁵⁴Inventory of Alexis Trouillet, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 373. In her will which was filed in 1830, Margaret Trouillet, daughter of Alexis, left 100 head of cattle for her children, suggesting that she continued her father's cattle raising. See Will Book 1, pp. 176-77. Inventory of Bazile Chastang, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 56.

⁵⁵This is based upon an analysis of the data from the Seventh and Eighth Censuses, Agricultural Schedules. At his death, Chastang owned more than twice the average number of cattle per farm in 1850 Mobile County. The average number of "other cattle" per farm in 1850 Mobile County was only twenty-seven; Chastang owned sixty.

The inventories of other free people of color are further evidence that the raising of livestock was of great importance. The estate of Regis Bernody contained 150 head of cattle, worth about \$600, along with four horses valued at \$100.⁵⁶ Bernody's son, Etienne, also owned twenty head of cattle, valued at \$100.⁵⁷ When Jane Andry's estate was inventoried in 1848, it included about sixty head of cattle, appraised at \$270.⁵⁸ Her administrator reported that the "neat cattle" were at large in the woods and would likely be killed or lost. The Orphans Court authorized the administrator to sell the cattle inasmuch as it would be too expensive to take care of them.⁵⁹ Another free woman of color after the death of her husband depended upon the sale of "meat from the large stock of cattle" that he left to help support her family.⁶⁰ And yet another set up a deed of trust for several free persons of color who were to use, for example, one hundred head of cattle running at large at Dog River, about forty miles from the city of Mobile.⁶¹ Similarly the 1820 inventory of a free nonwhite male

⁵⁶Inventory of Regis Bernody, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 24.

⁵⁷Inventory of Etienne Bernody, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 23.

⁵⁸Administrator's Account Book 1, pp. 340-41.

⁵⁹Orphans Court Minutes, Book 4, p. 462.

⁶⁰Martin Durand v. Polite Collins, et. al., Chancery Court Case 1030, Loose Paper File Collection.

⁶¹Deed Book 4, old series, pp. 329-30.

contained twenty-one head of cattle, a common item in most of the estate records filed before 1850.⁶²

Several sources can be consulted in order to determine how people earned a living after 1850 and whether they owned property. In addition to the 1850 and 1860 federal censuses that list occupations and real and personal estate values, tax lists, slave schedules, and deeds provide information on the economic activities of free people of color. For a statistical study, however, the censuses provide a convenient way to ascertain people's occupations.

The 1850 and 1860 censuses indicate that free Negroes continued to pursue a variety of economic activities. According to the 1850 census there were 173 free people of color listed with jobs, both skilled and unskilled; in 1860 there were 319. About one in three free Negro workers in 1850 were "laborers," but in 1860 only one in five were classified as such, although they were still the largest single group among free Negro workers. Free Negro farmers were the second largest group--nearly one in four in 1850 and about one in ten in 1860. They also practiced a variety of trades, including cigar making, blacksmithing, painting, shoemaking, and brickmasonry; they also worked as draymen,

⁶²Inventory of Regis Duret, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 95.

cooks, cotton samplers, tailors, fishermen, butchers, and stewards.⁶³

The 1850 and 1860 agricultural censuses provide the best means for a statistical study of farms. The agricultural census lists each farmer or tenant, with various data such as farm size, farm value, livestock value, number and type of livestock, amount of crops produced, and other related information. In Mobile County, fifteen qualifying farms appear in 1850 and forty in 1860. Not all the nonwhites who operated these farms were actual landowners, but they did own livestock or grew crops. The averages given below for each category do not represent all free Negro farmers, only those reporting the particular item in question.

The average size of farms owned by free Negro farmers generally increased in the decade prior to the Civil War. In 1850 the average farm operated by free people of color contained about 270 total acres, in amounts ranging from six acres to 1,625 acres. On the other hand, the average of all farms in Mobile County contained about 180 total acres.⁶⁴

⁶³This analysis is based on data from the Seventh and Eighth Censuses, 1850-1860, Population Schedules. One free man of color not listed in the census was employed as a cook on a steamboat that operated on the Alabama River. See Administrator's Account Book 5, p. 413.

⁶⁴See J. D. B. DeBow, Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), p. 429 for acreage in Mobile County.

The figure representing the average farm size for free Negroes is misleading since the three largest farms (owned by Zeno Chastang, Sr., Maximilian Dubroca, and Maximilian Collins) contained about 3,300 acres, or about 80 percent of the total acreage owned by free Negro farmers. All other farms had fewer than 150 acres. Perhaps more typical of farms owned by free people of color was that of Zeno Chastang, Jr., which contained a total of forty acres, ten of which were improved, or that of Maximilian Andry, which contained ninety-five acres, fifteen of which were improved.⁶⁵ In 1860 the average number of acres per farm operated by free Negroes rose to nearly 360 acres, ranging in size from three acres to 2,010 acres.⁶⁶ Two of the three largest landowners, including Zeno Chastang, Sr., and Maximilian Collins, held about 43 percent of all acreage possessed by free people of color.⁶⁷ In 1850 the average number of improved acres per farm run by free Negroes was about twenty-one; individually they ranged from six to forty-five acres. Ten years later the average declined slightly to around eighteen acres per farm, in amounts

⁶⁵This analysis is based upon free Negro farmers reporting in the Seventh and Eighth Censuses of the United States, 1850 and 1860, Agricultural Schedules.

⁶⁶It should be remembered that these figures reflect only those reporting acreage.

⁶⁷See Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 3, for Chastang and *ibid.*, Southern Division, p. 3, for Collins, and p. 5, for Edward Parker, one of the three largest free nonwhite landowners in Mobile County in 1860.

ranging from three acres to eighty acres. In 1850 the average number of unimproved acres per farm owned by free Negroes was about 315, in amounts ranging from ten acres to 1,600 acres.⁶⁸ In 1860 the average number of unimproved acres was about 380, in amounts ranging from nine acres to 2,000 acres. (See tables 1-6, appendix.)

As it had been in previous years, in 1850 and 1860 the raising of livestock was important to free Negro farmers. In 1850 nine of the fifteen had livestock whose value was equal to or greater than the cash value of their farms; only one of the fifteen had no livestock. In 1860 nineteen of the forty landowners had livestock whose value was equal to or greater than the cash value of their farms; and two of the farmers had no livestock. These figures suggest that the raising of livestock was at least as important as producing crops and that the land may have been more suitable for raising animals.

⁶⁸It should be noted that not all farms contained both improved and unimproved acres. Averages were determined by dividing the number of farms reporting acreage into the total amount of acres, improved, unimproved, or the combined total of both, hence the apparent discrepancy in the 1850 figures for the average size of farms in total acres. This same method was used for other agricultural data from the 1850 and 1860 censuses. Averages, therefore, do not reflect farms not reporting the particular data in question.

Livestock values varied widely. In 1850 the appraised valuation ranged in amounts from \$270 to \$2,600. In that year the average value of livestock for free Negro farmers reporting livestock values was \$1,035; in 1860 it was nearly \$630. By contrast, in 1850 the average livestock on all farms in Mobile County was \$951, indicating that free Negro farmers relied more upon livestock for livelihood than did the general populace.⁶⁹ Maximilian Collins had the highest livestock value; only three others reported values of at least half his figure.⁷⁰ In 1860 livestock values ranged in amounts from \$25 to \$3,200. In that year Zeno Chastang, Jr., had the most valuable herd.⁷¹ (See tables 7-8, appendix.)

The most important livestock raised by the studied population were beef cattle, swine, milk cows, and horses. In 1850 among the thirteen free Negroes owning cattle, the average number of cattle owned was 87, compared with 27 for all Mobile County farms. Two cattle raisers owned nearly 55 percent of all such stock owned by free people of color, the largest cattle herder being Zeno Chastang, Sr., with 350

⁶⁹Mobile County livestock values are from J. D. B. DeBow, Seventh Census, p. 430. The number of county farms is from J. D. B. DeBow, Statistical View of the United States (Washington: Beverly Tucker, 1854), p. 196. See Seventh and Eighth Censuses, 1850 and 1860, Agricultural Schedules, for data on individual farms.

⁷⁰Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

⁷¹Chastang appears in Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 3.

head. These 1850 figures demonstrate the importance of free Negro cattle raisers, who, with an abundance of cattle, doubtless sold their surplus to the local markets.⁷²

In 1860 the number of cattle owned was more evenly distributed among free Negro farmers than it had been ten years before. In 1860 thirty of the forty free Negro farmers owned cattle, having an average of about thirty-four per cattle owner, a decline from 1850 which perhaps may be attributed to the partial division of the elder Zeno Chastang's large stock of cattle among some of his sons; three of them appear on the 1860 agricultural census as having no land, yet they owned over 100 cattle, indicating that their livestock foraged the countryside or family land. Zeno Chastang, Jr., also showed an increase from 1850, suggesting perhaps that he may also have received some cattle from his father.⁷³ In 1860 the younger Zeno, who owned 160 cattle, was the only free Negro to own more than a hundred head.⁷⁴ As a whole, the Chastang family dominated cattle raising among their caste in Mobile County. Maximilian Collins, the second largest owner in 1850 with

⁷²The number of cattle for Mobile County is from DeBow, Seventh Census, p. 429. Chastang appears in Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

⁷³See Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 1, for Chastang and his three sons, E. Z., J. Z., and L. Z. Zeno Chastang, Jr., appears on p. 3 of *ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 3.

250 cattle, had only forty ten years later.⁷⁵ (See tables 9-10, appendix.)

Many free Negro farmers owned swine. In 1850 all but two of the fifteen possessed hogs. They owned 340, an average of twenty-six per farmer owning swine, which is about five more than the average of all farmers in Mobile County. The number of swine owned ranged from five to that of Maximilian Collins's seventy.⁷⁶ In 1860 slightly more than half of the free nonwhite farmers, twenty-three in number, owned 470 swine. As was true for cattle, the number of hogs declined from 1850 to an average of twenty per farm. The two largest hog raisers owned sixty and seventy, and both had livestock values greater than the cash values of their farms. The third largest hog raiser, Zeno Chastang, Jr., owned thirty-five swine.⁷⁷ (See tables 11-12, appendix.)

More free nonwhite farmers owned cows than they did swine. In 1850 all but two farms contained cows. Thirteen farmers owned 350 cows, in numbers ranging from six to fifty-three, for an average of about twenty-seven. In

⁷⁵Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule; Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 3. The value of Collins's livestock dropped from \$2,600 in 1850 to \$900 in 1860.

⁷⁶Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

⁷⁷Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 3.

contrast, the average number owned by all farmers in Mobile County was ten cows. The two largest owners of cows, Zeno Chastang Sr., and his son Zeno, owned 103, or about 30 percent of all cows in the possession of free Negroes. By contrast, Sylvester Andry (son of Simon Andry and Jane) and his son Jerome owned only nineteen cows.⁷⁸ In 1860, thirty-two of the forty farms contained 533 cows, an average of seventeen per farmer. The number of cows owned ranged from one to seventy-five. Five of the seven free Negroes who owned the most cows were again members of Zeno Chastang senior's family. Zeno and his four sons owned about 37 percent of all cows owned by free Negro farmers or nearly 5 percent of all cows in Mobile County.⁷⁹ (See tables 13-14, appendix.)

Most free Negro farmers in Mobile County in 1850 and 1860 owned horses. In 1850 all but two farms contained at least one horse; six farms possessed one each, and the other seven owned two each. For all county farms the average was about four horses. In 1860 ten farms operated by free Negroes did not own any horses, fourteen owned one each, and

⁷⁸The number of cows for Mobile County is from DeBow, Seventh Census, p. 429. The Chastangs and Andrys appear in Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule. The value of the livestock owned by the two Chastangs was equal to about one-fourth the total of all free Negro farmers.

⁷⁹Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 1.

the most owned by one farmer was six, for an average of two for farmers owning horses.⁸⁰ (See tables 15-16, appendix.)

In addition to raising livestock, many free nonwhite farmers grew corn to feed their families, slaves, and livestock. In 1850 the amount of corn produced on any one farm ranged from 100 to 2,000 bushels. Excluding the one farm that grew no corn, the other free Negroes produced a total of 4,975 bushels--an average of some 350 bushels each. In contrast, the average Mobile County farm produced less than half that amount, or about 140 bushels per farm.⁸¹ Again, the average stated for free Negro farmers is misleading since two farmers (Zeno Chastang, Sr., who produced 2,000 bushels, and Maximilian Dubroca, who produced 800) accounted for nearly 60 percent of all corn grown by free Negro farmers. Perhaps more typical was the farm of Theodore Collins. In 1850 he produced 100 bushels of corn on six improved acres; the cash value of his farm was \$200, and the value of his livestock was \$310.⁸²

In 1860 the percent of free Negro farmers growing corn was drastically down, although the number of farmers was up; production of corn was down. Twenty-seven of the forty examined farmers produced corn, in amounts ranging from six

⁸⁰This is based on the Seventh and Eighth Censuses, Agricultural Schedules and DeBow, Seventh Census, p. 429.

⁸¹DeBow, Seventh Census, p. 430.

⁸²Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

to 1,200 bushels, or an average of 230 bushels per farmer growing any corn. According to the agricultural census, of the thirteen farmers who did not produce corn, seven did not own any land. Two others, however, who did produce some corn, did not own their land, one of whom was a son of the elder Zeno Chastang. Zeno Sr., produced the largest single amount 1,200 bushels, or about 20 percent of all corn produced by free Negro farmers in Mobile County. In contrast, Joseph Rabby, a free man of color of south Mobile County, produced fifty bushels of corn on twelve improved acres to feed his family, four slaves, and livestock.⁸³ (See tables 17-18, appendix.)

Clearly, the Chastangs were the dominant agricultural family among free Negroes in north Mobile County. They inherited their father's estate and expanded upon the resources he left for them. In 1860 Zeno Chastang, Sr., owned over 1,300 acres and 29 slaves. In that same year at least seven members of this Chastang family, including the elder Zeno, owned over 2,600 acres, or nearly one-fourth of all land held by free Negro farmers.⁸⁴

⁸³Chastang is listed in Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 1; see *ibid.*, Southern Division, p. 1, and Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Southern Division, p. 2, for data on Rabby.

⁸⁴Zeno Chastang, Sr., appears in Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural and Slave Schedules, Mobile County, Northern Division, pp. 1 and 6, respectively. See also Administrator's Account Book 20, pp. 213-15.

Leading the free Negro farmers in south Mobile County was Maximilian Collins. According to the 1850 agricultural census, he owned 1,625 acres, was the largest free nonwhite landowner in the entire county, and owned nearly 1,450 acres more than the average farm for the county, white or nonwhite. In 1850 the cash value of his farm was \$4,000, or about twice the average for farms in the county. Ten years later he possessed about two hundred fewer total acres, yet the cash value of his farm remained the same.⁸⁵ The press praised the quality of the oranges that Collins grew: "They were delicious and of the most exquisite flavor. From about thirty trees, we are told, Jack realizes annually from \$800 to \$1,000," a figure over twice that listed in the 1850 agricultural census for the value of orchard products.⁸⁶ The Mobile Register and Journal also complimented Hortense Collins, Maximilian's wife, and their oranges: "We are indebted to the politeness of Madame Hortense Colin, a Creole resident of the Island, for a box of the genuine Hesperian fruit, golden oranges, which are as large, firm, and sweetly flavored as any brought from more tropical regions." The Register and Journal thanked Hortense "for

⁸⁵Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule; Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 3; Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 27, Dwelling 213, Household 175.

⁸⁶Alabama Planter, November 27, 1848; Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

this acceptable present" and encouraged "her and others in the cultivation of this delicious fruit."⁸⁷

Not all free Negro farmers were as productive as Collins or Zeno Chastang, Sr., but some smaller farmers probably sold their produce in the city of Mobile. Joseph Rabby, for example, produced \$2,400 worth of market garden items on twenty-one acres, twelve of which were improved, suggesting that he sold vegetables in local markets. He also produced fifty bushels of corn, 240 bushels of oats, and twenty-five bushels of sweet potatoes.⁸⁸ The value of market garden produce for Louis Ella was \$1,000. He also produced six bushels of corn, fifty pounds of rice, and fifty bushels of sweet potatoes on three improved acres; the cash value of his farm was \$300.⁸⁹

In addition to supplying produce for market, some free people of color in the county were butchers. The value of animals slaughtered on the farm of William George, who owned twenty acres (ten of which were improved), was over \$3,500. According to the agricultural census he did not own livestock, nor did he produce any crops. This appears to be an error on the part of the enumerator. The cash value of

⁸⁷Mobile Register and Journal, December 4, 1848.

⁸⁸Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 1.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 3.

of his farm was reported as \$1,000.⁹⁰ In 1850 only three other free Negro farmers reported values of animals slaughtered; the total amount was under \$500. In contrast, the average value of animals slaughtered for all county farms was about \$730. In 1860 the value of animals slaughtered on the farm of William Nicholas was \$4,000, the highest amount for any free Negro farmer; the cash value of his farm was \$2,000. Eighteen other farmers reported values for animals slaughtered, but the total amount for them was only about \$2,100, or an average of about \$115, suggesting that they probably did not supply much meat to local markets.⁹¹ (See tables 19-20, appendix.)

Production of rice was limited to a few free Negro farmers. Though Mobile County was not the center of Alabama rice production, its farms in 1850 produced over 90,000 pounds of rice, of which free nonwhite farmers produced nearly 11,270 pounds, or about 12 percent of all rice grown in the county. Six of them produced rice in amounts ranging from 640 pounds to 3,200 pounds. Maximilian Collins produced the most of any single unit and Zeno Chastang, Sr.,

⁹⁰Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

⁹¹See DeBow, Seventh Census, p. 430, for Mobile County's amount of the value of animals slaughtered. See Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 9, for the data on Nicholas.

the second largest amount, 2,560 pounds.⁹² In 1860 production of rice decreased considerably. Six of the studied families produced only 1,000 pounds, or less than 2 percent of the county total, in amounts ranging from fifteen pounds to 450 pounds. Zeno Chastang, Sr., and Maximilian Collins together produced only 465 pounds.⁹³

Production of other crops by free Negro farmers was either non-existent or on a limited scale. According to the 1850 agricultural census Mobile County farms did not produce raw sugar cane, cotton, tobacco, or hemp. In 1850 Maximilian Collins produced the only recorded oats among his class, fifty bushels. Also in 1850, fourteen farms produced 2,100 pounds of butter, in amounts ranging from fifty to 300 pounds, or an average of 150 pounds per farmer producing butter. Five produced 1,470 pounds of cheese, in amounts ranging from 100 pounds to 750 pounds.⁹⁴ According to the 1860 agricultural census Mobile County farms did not produce raw sugar cane or hemp and only 440 bales of cotton and thirty pounds of tobacco, none of which was produced by free

⁹²DeBow, *Seventh Census*, p. 430; *Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County*. In 1850 Barbour County produced the most of any county.

⁹³See Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. 3, for Mobile County production of rice. *Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division*, p. 1; *ibid*, *Southern Division*, p. 3.

⁹⁴DeBow, *Seventh Census*, pp. 431-33; *Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule*.

Negro farmers.⁹⁵ In 1860 free nonwhite farmers produced 240 bushels of oats, 860 pounds of butter, and 348 pounds of cheese.⁹⁶ These figures indicate that free Negro farmers did not rely upon staple crops to support themselves.

At least one free Negro benefited from the natural resources of the region. The enterprising Zeno Chastang, Sr., who owned more than twelve hundred acres of unimproved land in 1860, sold wood to steamboats that passed his property on the Mobile River. When he extended credit to the captain of the steamboat and the captain fell behind in his payments in 1841, Chastang took the matter before the Circuit Court--which ruled in Chastang's favor.⁹⁷

The federal censuses of 1830 to 1860 provide a convenient way to determine slaveownership of Mobile County residents. However, the censuses do not accurately represent ownership by the general populace. Therefore, to attain a more thorough analysis of slaveownership in the period of this study, other sources such as tax lists, estate inventories, and church records must be consulted. All these sources have been used to compile statistics on

⁹⁵Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860, pp. 3, 5.

⁹⁶Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule.

⁹⁷Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 1; Zeno Chastang v. Steamboat Favorite, Circuit Court Case 15489, Loose Paper File Collection.

those individuals identified as slaveowners in the censuses. (Some free Negro slaveholders may be excluded from this study since they sometimes shared both first and last names with whites, and therefore it cannot be precisely argued that these slaveholders were nonwhite.)

Slaveownership among free people of color was concentrated in the hands of a few. In 1830 twenty-five free Negroes owned about 110 slaves, about half of which were owned by four free Negroes. Nineteen of the owners had five or fewer slaves each, which accounted for about 40 percent of all slaves owned by free people of color. According to the federal censuses, there were more free Negro slaveholders in 1840 than in any other year. In that year there were seventy-five free people of color who owned 243 slaves; there were sixty-three free Negroes, 84 percent of all free Negro slaveowners, who owned between one and five slaves each. Among free nonwhite slaveowners, the five largest held 28 percent of the slaves.⁹⁸

During the next two decades the number of owners and the number of slaves that free Negroes possessed declined. In 1850 forty-eight free people of color held 204 slaves; there were thirty-five free Negroes who had between one and five slaves each; seven owned eighty-five, or 42 percent of the slaves. In 1860 thirty-three free nonwhites possessed

⁹⁸Fifth and Sixth Censuses, 1830 and 1840.

163 slaves; twenty-three had between one and five each, for a total of fifty slaves, or 30 percent of all slaves owned by free people of color. In contrast, five free Negroes owned eighty bondsmen, or about half of all slaves owned by free Negroes.⁹⁹ (See table 21, appendix.)

Many of the free Negro slaveowners lived in rural areas and were descendants of the French and Spanish. Several members of the Andry family, including Romain, Sylvester, and Jerome, each owned a number of slaves. In 1860 Louise Andry, the largest slaveowner of the Andry family, owned thirteen slaves who lived in three slave houses.¹⁰⁰ Zeno Chastang, Sr., owned more slaves and land than any other member of the Chastang family--white or Negro. According to the 1850 and 1860 censuses, he owned twenty-seven and twenty-nine slaves, respectively; the latter group shared four slave cabins.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Zeno Chastang, Jr., in 1860 owned only three slaves who evidently shared one cabin, and his uncle John Chastang, a farmer in north Mobile

⁹⁹Seventh and Eighth Censuses, 1850 and 1860, Slave Schedules.

¹⁰⁰See, for example, Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, pp. 6 and 8. Louise Andry appears on p. 8, *ibid.* It is assumed that this is the correct Louise Andry. Jerome Andry, whose wife was Louise Chastang, daughter of the elder Zeno Chastang, appears on the 1860 slave schedule with one slave, and it is probable that his wife did not appear separately on the slave schedule.

¹⁰¹Seventh Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, p. 211; Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 6.

County, owned seven slaves.¹⁰² In 1850 the slave schedule listed Maximilian Dubroca with forty-one slaves, and in 1860 with forty slaves who lived in six cabins.¹⁰³ Maximilian's sister, who lived in the same neighborhood as her brother in north Mobile County, also owned slaves.¹⁰⁴ One of the larger slaveholders in Mobile County was Maximilian Collins; he owned ten slaves in 1850 and sixteen in 1860. In 1850 only three of the slaves were adults; in 1860 only five were over the age of twenty-one, and two of these were females.¹⁰⁵

Not all free Negro slaveowners lived in rural areas, nor did they all descend from white settlers. Most of the free nonwhite slaveowners in the city owned fewer than five slaves. City tax records list some free Negro slaveowners who do not appear as such in the federal censuses. Margaret Darrington, for instance, appears on city tax lists several times, having one slave valued at \$150; according to 1852 tax records, she owned two slaves valued at five hundred

¹⁰²Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 6.

¹⁰³Seventh Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, p. 207; Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 6. Although the 1850 slave census lists Maximilian as the sole owner of the forty slaves, it appears that he and his brother were listed together as the owners of the forty-one slaves.

¹⁰⁴Eighth Census, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, Northern Division, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵Seventh Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Mobile County; Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Mobile County, Southern Division, p. 3.

dollars.¹⁰⁶ Some "colored" people appear in city tax records as slaveowners, yet they do not appear in other records, suggesting that they were possibly slaves living on their own as free people. For instance, Sarah Marshall, a "colored" woman, appears in city tax records as the owner of one slave worth three hundred dollars.¹⁰⁷

Free Negroes obtained slaves from others of their race as well as from white owners, in several different ways and for different reasons. Some purchased them; others acquired slaves through trusts or gifts. They also sold slaves to whites, though this did not happen frequently. In about one-fifth of all slave purchases, free Negroes bought relatives with the intention of manumitting them. For instance, in 1845 Isadore Dubroca purchased his slave sister Adelaide for six hundred dollars. The sale was made "at the express desire of the said Adelaide, the said Isadore being her brother and for the purpose of making her free as far as the law will permit--and this is also the wish of her late mistress."¹⁰⁸ A white man sold a five-year-old slave to a free woman of color upon condition that she free the slave when the slave reached the age of twenty-one.¹⁰⁹ Pierre

¹⁰⁶Sixth Census, 1840, City of Mobile, p. 136; City Tax Books 1840 and 1846, microfilm reels 4 and 6, respectively; City Tax Book, 1852, microfilm reel 9.

¹⁰⁷City Tax Book, 1856, microfilm reel 9.

¹⁰⁸Miscellaneous Book E, pp. 163-64.

¹⁰⁹Miscellaneous Book B, p. 162.

Regis, who wanted to marry a slave belonging to a white resident of Mobile, asked his father, Regis Bernody, to buy the woman. After Bernody did so, he sold her to his son for eight hundred dollars; Pierre then married her. Bernody also purchased this woman's two children, who possibly could have been his grandchildren.¹¹⁰

The case of another free man of color, William Jones of Mobile County, illustrates that slaves could not only earn enough money to purchase their own freedom but also that of their family. In his 1838 will, Jones declared that he was a "colored man, was once a slave, but now am free, having purchased myself of the heirs of Benjamin Bennet of the county of Perry and state of Alabama, and was duly emancipated in the year 1834." Jones also wrote that he "purchased and paid for my wife Nancy, and my daughter Louisa." Since he did not emancipate them, Jones instructed his executor to "use all legal means" to free his wife and daughter. In case there was any doubt, Jones declared that "I therefore their rightful owner . . . set free . . . my wife Nancy and my daughter Louisa."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Works Progress Administration, Interesting Transcriptions from the Chancery Court Records of the County of Mobile for 1824-1860, with Appropriate Index, Prepared from Original Data from the Municipal and Court Records Project of the Works Progress Administration, 1939. Pierre Regis applied to the Alabama legislature to manumit his wife since he did not wish any children to be born of a slave wife.

¹¹¹Will Book 2, p. 12. No evidence has been found to suggest they were legally freed.

Instead of purchasing slaves, other free Negroes hired them. A document found in the estate records of a free woman of color indicates that she hired a slave for about five weeks.¹¹² In 1830 two free men of color violated a city ordinance against hiring slaves.¹¹³ The slave of another free person of color was hired out in New Orleans.¹¹⁴ A white slaveowner sued Sophia Pendegrast, a free woman of color and daughter of Isabelle Chastang, claiming that she owed him for the hire of a female slave. The plaintiff evidently settled the dispute out of court since he dismissed the case.¹¹⁵

Like white slaveowners, free Negroes hired out their slaves. An agent of Louise Laurendine reported that he had taken her slave to New Orleans and hired him out to a butcher for three years. The agent claimed that the slave was "a continued expense to his owner--he would not work, but was a lazy, good for nothing, do-nothing boy." Laurendine denied that she ever made "any profits from him

¹¹²Estate of Clair Bazile, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 16.

¹¹³City v. John Brown, f.m.c., May 10, 1830, and City v. George Brown, f.m.c., December 16, 1830, both in Mayor's Court Records, microfilm reel 8, RG 18, S 1, CMMA.

¹¹⁴Margaret Collins v. Louise Laurendine, alias Madame Benjamin, Chancery Court Case 1373, Loose Paper File Collection.

¹¹⁵Circuit Court, Judgment Book 2, Cases 2590--3141, Isaac Johnson v. Sophia Pendegrast, alias Sophia Dubroca, Circuit Court Case 2785, pp. 228-29.

whatever--she insists that he has caused her great expense."¹¹⁶

In at least one instance the court protected a free Negro's title to a slave. In late 1850, Marie L. Crozie purchased a slave named Fanny for \$380, but several years later Crozie sued the previous owner. She sought one thousand dollars "for breach of warranty . . . whereby the defendant in writing warranted and defended the said slave named Fanny." Crozie argued that the title to the slave had failed and that she lost possession of the slave as a result of a decision by the Chancery Court of Mobile County. The court ruled in favor of Crozie, and the jury assessed damages at nearly five hundred dollars.¹¹⁷

A great deal of the assets of the free mulatto elite of Mobile County were tied to slaves. Estate inventories often included the number of slaves owned and their worth. Those with the highest known values of slaves lived in north Mobile County where free people of color relied upon the land and livestock. Thirty slaves of the estate of Zeno Chastang, Sr., were appraised at \$23,525, the highest recorded amount for any free Negro slaveowner in Mobile

¹¹⁶Margaret Collins v. Louise Laurendine, alias Madame Benjamin, Chancery Court Case 1373, Loose Paper File Collection.

¹¹⁷Circuit Court, Final Record, 1856-57, Civil Cases 21856--22104 and 28469--29067, Marie Louise Crozie v. Richard D. Price, Case 29016, Spring 1858, pp. 560-6.

County. This dollar amount represented nearly all the total value of his personal estate.¹¹⁸ The estate of Zeno's brother, Bazile, which was appraised in 1831, included two slaves, valued at \$900, which represented nearly 70 percent of his personal property.¹¹⁹ In 1828 slaves of the white Maximilian Dubroca's estate were worth \$3,675, or 86 percent of his personal property.¹²⁰ The inventory of the estate of Jane Andry included thirteen slaves valued at \$4,400, or more than 90 percent of the total inventory. Two years later thirteen slaves of her estate, most of whom had been included in the previous inventory, were assessed at \$5,875.¹²¹ The estate of Jane's son, Maximilian, included eight slaves worth \$3,765, or 84 percent of the total inventory.¹²² Jane's other son, Sylvester, whose estate was appraised in 1851, had seven slaves valued at \$2,750, or about 80 percent of his personal property.¹²³ The inventory of the estate of Faustin Collins, who owned several lots in the city of Mobile, included six slaves, worth \$5,150, about

¹¹⁸Administrator's Account Book 20, pp. 213-15; slaves represented 96 percent of the estate's value.

¹¹⁹Estate of Bazile Chastang, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 56.

¹²⁰Estate of Maximilian Dubroca, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 94.

¹²¹Administrator's Account Book 1, pp. 340-41; Orphans Court Minutes, Book 6, pp. 22, 24.

¹²²Administrator's Account Book 6, p. 26.

¹²³Estate of Sylvester Andry, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 9.

40 percent of his property, both real and personal.¹²⁴

Finally, the holdings of Louise Laurendine included three slaves, including Gregory, a forty-two year old bricklayer appraised at \$800, and Pierre, a cook, worth \$600.¹²⁵

Free Negroes in rural Mobile County generally owned their own land, livestock, and slaves. Raising livestock was an important activity for them, as was producing some crops for market. The Creoles of color in north Mobile County, particularly the Andrys, Chastangs, and Dubrocas, took the resources that their white ancestors left for them, especially land and slaves, and continued to increase their holdings. They were allowed to raise and sell whatever livestock and crops they chose for their sustenance.¹²⁶

Urban free Negroes, like their counterparts in rural Mobile County, encountered few restrictions upon their economic endeavors. They operated their own businesses during economically depressed conditions as well as during prosperous years. Although no extant records kept by such business owners have been located, evidence suggests that some free people of color did well in their pursuit of economic security. They practiced a variety of trades, such

¹²⁴Estate of Faustin Collins, Loose Paper File Collection, Number 67.

¹²⁵Administrator's Account Book 4, pp. 335-36. See also Orphans Court Minutes, Book 6, p. 325.

¹²⁶See Johnson and Roark, Black Masters, p. 58.

as carpentry, bricklaying, and blacksmithing as well as holding other positions, such as cotton sampler, drayman, cigar maker, and barber. Although 1860 census data indicate that only eighty-six free Negroes reported any real estate values, this should not be taken as an accurate barometer of the financial status of free people of color. (In 1850 only twenty-four free nonwhite households reported real estate values.) Other sources such as tax lists, estate inventories, and deed records, show the inaccuracies of the censuses. Free Negroes who owned land and slaves comprised an elite class among free people of color in antebellum Mobile, and they set themselves apart from free nonwhites as well as lower class whites.