

Race, Manhood, and Manpower: Mobilizing Rural Georgia for World War I

BY GERALD E. SHENK

I N the summer of 1918, nearly a year after the first draft calls had gone out conscripting American men to help fight the "Great War" in Europe, Woodrow Wilson's administration was still tinkering with its novel draft law known as "Selective Service." As national criteria evolved for "selecting" who would go and who would stay, private citizens and administrators alike were by turns confused, frustrated, angry, or pleased by a succession of exemption policies. These policies reflected both the southern influence in Wilson's Progressivism and the ongoing personal antagonism between the president and Theodore Roosevelt. The Selective Service system was southern in that it vested real power in state and local officials. It defied Roosevelt, who wanted universal male conscription, in that it selected only a small percentage of the eligible men.¹

¹Several essays in John Milton Cooper, Jr., and Charles E. Neu, eds., *The Wilson Era: Essays in Honor of Arthur S. Link* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1991), explore localism and the concept of decentralized yet progressive government in Wilson's thinking. Of particular relevance here is William H. Harbaugh, "The Limits of Voluntarism: Farmers, County Agents, and the Conservation Movement" (123-55) who describes what he calls the "profoundly undemocratic consequences" wrought by localism in the county agent system established by the Smith-Lever Act, signed by Wilson in 1914 (132). On the dispute between Wilson and Roosevelt over selective versus universal conscription, see John Whiteclay Chambers II, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York, 1987), 136-38.

MR. SHENK is assistant professor of history at California State University, Monterey Bay.

comed Selective Service policies that seemed to favor the interests of planters. But they soon became angered that the system failed to recognize their right to laborers whom they conceived of as belonging to them. Although the Wilkes County draft board may have recommended exemptions for black sharecroppers working on land belonging to the Anderson women, a district board in Atlanta ordered that the men be inducted into the army. The two women engaged in a losing battle with a variety of state Selective Service officials to keep the men working on their small cotton plantation. Thus, Mrs. F. H. Anderson complained to Governor Hugh Dorsey that "Pink had had [four black men] put in deferred status last March, and we were assured that we could keep them until next November." Apologizing for having "so many young negroes," she explained that their families had been on her plantation since the Civil War. They had put in great crops, "so when the Government offered us these appeal cards we appealed for them." "Why," she demanded, "didn't this Board get my consent before they could reclassify my negroes?" She appended a "list of negroes taken from my farm," demanding that the government return them to her so that their crops would not go to waste.³

In many ways the Anderson women behaved as typical planters. They expressed a paternalistic concern for their "negroes," but they also made a proprietary claim on the bodies of black men living on their plantation. They assumed, as did other Georgia planters, that the history they shared with their "negroes" on a common geographic spot gave them the prerogative to speak for them within the public arena of the state. The words and actions of the Anderson women seem to rest on something like the legal concept of coverture, giving heads of households both the right and the responsibility to act in the public sphere for their dependents, despite the fact that in 1918 women in Georgia could neither vote nor hold elective office. The Anderson women, as women, lacked legal rights to exercise political power even as their social and economic position gave them some of the independence that many white southerners associated with manhood. If their political limitations weakened their influence with Selective Service of-

³Mrs. F. H. Anderson, Danburg, Wilkes Co., Ga., to Governor Hugh Dorsey, July 30, 1918, Farm Furloughs File, Box 3, World War I, Georgia State Council of Defense (hereinafter cited as GSCD), 1917-1918, RG 22-1-14, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Ga. (hereinafter cited as GDAH).

Neither the privileges of class, nor race, were sufficient to secure full access to power or independence of action. Although whiteness and high social and economic status could provide opportunities to join the dominant discourse, to be biologically male was the final essential element that would have made it possible for white persons of high status to claim the qualities of "manhood," which meant they would be citizens fully entitled to compete with other men in the public arena.⁵

The Anderson case, and many others contained in Georgia's wartime records, demonstrate variations in access to power and capacities for self-determination that were controlled by interdependent hierarchies of sex, race and class in Progressive Era Georgia. Various mixes of these status categories engendered people in relation to the state in very specific ways that largely determined their access to formal systems of power. As in the Anderson case, except in the city of Atlanta, African-American men had virtually no access to formal instruments of power. White persons in Georgia rarely expected, or invited, them to participate in the legal battles over their draft status. To white Georgians, African Americans, male and female, were assumed to be incompetent to act either in their own cause or on their own in the interests of the general polity. The official actors in the case at hand were the Anderson women (by virtue of class and race), the local lawyer (by virtue of sex, race and class), and members of the local and district boards (all white property-owning males). On the other hand, the racial status of African-American men gendered them as inherently unmanly in the eyes of white officials. To be sexually male did not imply manhood. To white officials, "negroes" by definition lacked capacity for manhood because, among other imputed attributes, they were presumed to be in a perpetual state of political and economic dependency. Black males thus had few avenues for achiev-

⁵The personal and political struggles for power between planters and town-based professionals and tensions between officials in Atlanta and traditional elites outside the state capital have been explored in much of the recent work on the New South. See Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York, 1992); Howard Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1992); William Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1912*, (Baton Rouge, La., 1951); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, 1983); and Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1983).



The first white men drafted after America entered the First World War were usually given a festive send-off. These men, the first seven called in Monroe County accompanied by the local political elite, were chauffeured around the town square of Forsyth in September 1917 in a patriotic display. Such displays were rarely repeated for subsequent draftees. *Photograph from the Vanishing Georgia Collection, Georgia Department of Archives and History.*

voices speak frequently in the records of the Selective Service system and its related wartime institutions. They call attention to themselves in explicit contrast to "negroes," against whom they construct an identity of claimed privilege and authority.⁹

In the beginning, the Georgia planter class, and its political henchmen, the county sheriffs, eyed the draft with suspicion as a threat to local prerogatives. In fact, the Wilson administration threatened many local officials in rural Georgia with criminal prosecution for their refusal to carry out provisions of the Selec-

⁹My analysis here is inspired, in part, by the work of Edward Said, most recently in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1994), who is masterful in detecting ways in which meaningful silences in public discourse signify relations of power. See also the helpful "AHR Forum" on "Subaltern Studies" by Gayan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," Florencia Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," and Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99 (December 1994): 1475-1545.

both common and mail delivery can be controlled by employers. Draft boards in Georgia frequently had to rely on planters not only to deliver draft notices to the men who worked for them, but to read the contents to them as well. Even then, the chances were significant that the addressees would have moved without notifying the draft board. It did not take planters long to realize what advantages these conditions offered them. Planters who controlled the mail of their sharecroppers or wage hands could also control when and if those men would be drafted. If they withheld notices until the men were declared delinquent, planters could also receive a reward for turning them in to the authorities. This system reaffirmed paternalism and enhanced the planters' existing leverage over the draft-age men working for them. For their part, sharecroppers continued their frequent moves in search of the best possible situations.

Reports of delinquency ran high in Georgia and other southern states. It was highest among African-American men, and officials in Atlanta and Washington soon thought they had an explanation. In a letter to the provost marshal general, Georgia's officer in charge of Selective Service, Joel B. Mallet, stated it baldly, at first blaming the frequent moves of "negro" men:

The farming industry is largely carried by the white farm owners who employ ignorant negroes, by the year. It is customary for these negroes to move from farm to farm each year. . . . They are very ignorant, and seldom receiving mail never think of leaving their forwarding addresses with the postal authorities. As a consequence, many of these negroes have not received their Questionnaires or orders to appear for physical examination, and are, therefore, classed as delinquents.

But Mallet went on to blame planters as well. He complained that appeals to employers to assist local draft boards in spreading information had "not received the response that [they] should have." To correct this situation he urged legal sanctions against employers who failed to cooperate with Selective Service officials.¹²

¹²Memo from Joel B. Mallet, Officer in Charge of Selective Service Law, State of Georgia, to the Provost Marshall General, Washington, D. C., March 11, 1918, File 17-38, Box 109, States Files: Georgia, RG 163, SSS Records, 1917-1919, WNRC.

men in their jurisdictions.¹³ Equally important, each defendant testified that he relied upon a planter not only to bring him his mail, but to read it to him as well. Thomas Johnson described his experience with the draft as follows:

On Saturday, the man whom I worked for, Mr. E. D. Stubbs, of Hahira, Ga., came to me and said "you had better go to the court house, they sent you a card and are talking about coming after you." I immediately went to the court house in Valdosta, walking all of the way, except being given a lift enroute by a wagon. I, immediately upon arrival at the court house, went into sheriff Passmore's office and asked him if he had sent me a card, and he said yes, and told me to sit right there until after dinner. After dinner the deputy sheriff carried me down to the jail, and on Monday Morning he brought me to Camp Wheeler, with hand-cuffs on. As a matter of fact, I never received any notice to report for military duty.¹⁴

In a Lowndes County case, Charlie Hawkins reported his unsuccessful attempt to secure the assistance of his employer in answering the draft call. When Hawkins received his draft notice his boss agreed to take him to town the next morning. But when Hawkins arrived at the appointed time, his employer refused to see him and had his wife tell Hawkins that he would be unable to go. Lacking money for railroad fare, Hawkins told the investigator "I did not know anything else to do, except let them come after me." Three days later the sheriff arrested him on charges of delinquency and delivered him to Camp Wheeler as a deserter. Similarly, after the sheriff arrested William Lester of Telfair County and took him to camp as a draft evader, Lester swore that he only received mail through his employer and that he had never received any mail from the draft board.¹⁵

The testimony given by these men suggests that planters conspired with local draft boards and county sheriffs to control the release of black sharecroppers to the army according to their own convenience. Then planters would have the men arrested and delivered to the army camps as "slackers," for which the army pro-

¹³Memo from Major Harry T. Matthews, Inspector General, Camp Wheeler, Ga., to the Commanding General, Thirty First Division, Camp Wheeler, Ga., "Report of Investigation Concerning Negro Deserters," October 10, 1917, File 17-14, *ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.* Exhibit A.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Exhibits B, D, E, F.

other state. A memo to Mallet indicated that most of these men were "negroes," and implied that many boards resisted sending healthy and hard-working black males.¹⁷

Nevertheless, in Georgia as a whole, the number of African-American men requested in the first draft was only a small fraction of the total call. In fact, in October, Washington ordered the boards to call 40 percent of their quota of white men and only 13 percent of their quota of African-American men. Most boards should have had little trouble meeting the latter call since black men were less likely to have been exempted or deferred.¹⁸ In counties with a large black population, the larger quota for whites meant that some boards would have to call all available white men. The experience of the local board in Coweta County, which sent its full "colored" quota on schedule, illustrates the extra burdens placed on white men by the federal policy. Although 56 percent of its registrants were African American and nearly all of these were certified available in August and September 1917, the board called only 40 black men in 1917, while calling 110 white men.¹⁹ Still, some local boards regularly failed to meet their "colored" quotas while filling their white requirement. By December 1917, Camp Gordon, which received most of Georgia's "colored quota," reported that "more than six thousand colored men" out of nine thousand total due in the fall drafts had "not been called to date."²⁰

In some parts of the cotton belt planter fears of a shortage of African-American workers were shared by the moderately well-off yeomanry to whom a cheap reserve labor force was also important.

¹⁷E. J. Reagan, Chairman, District Board, Northern Georgia, to Adjutant General of Georgia, September 25, 1917, File 41-7, Box 112, *ibid.*; Hubert Work, Major, M. R. C. (for Enoch H. Crowder, P.M.G.), to Mallet, June 5, 1917, "Subject: Rejected Negroes," File 32-11, *ibid.* The latter document reads, in part: "Many complaints come to this office from army camps that local boards are inducting into service registrants who are utterly worthless for any purpose in the army and presumably were equally useless at home." File 32 in this box contains many individual cases of "negroes" sent to camp missing various limbs and appendages or suffering from debilitating illnesses.

¹⁸Emmet J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago, 1919), 9, 69.

¹⁹"Lists of Men Ordered to Report for Induction," local board for Coweta County, SSS Records, 1917-1919, RG 163, National Archives Branch, East Point, Ga.

²⁰Erwin, CB Camp Gordon, to P.M.G., December 3, 1917, "Re: Telegram Dec. for explanation of the discrepancies between number of men called and those accepted at this cantonment," File 62-4, Box 114, States Files: Georgia, SSS Records, 1917-1919, RG 163, WNRC.

Georgia's political leaders feared that once African-American males had experienced the higher pay and greater freedom associated with work in war industries, or the self-respect that might accompany military service, they would also demand greater social and political freedoms. Price Gilbert, chairman of the Georgia Council of Defense, fumed early in the war that even respectable "negroes" were more interested in taking advantage of the flush of prosperity to press for social equality and political rights than in winning the war.²⁵ The only solutions immediately obvious to Gilbert lay either in higher returns to blacks for farming, or the imposition of social controls. The first solution carried the same danger that well-paying jobs in industry offered—better living conditions that would give African-American men a greater sense of their importance, and thus threaten planter dominance.

The white men who served on the Georgia Council of Defense hoped to find a solution to this dilemma while ensuring that the draft law would be enforced throughout the state.²⁶ They would have been skeptical of economist Gavin Wright's argument that racial segregation in southern industries can be explained by market dynamics. They firmly believed that without government assistance in controlling the labor of black males, market forces would erode the racial caste system. This system provided both a process through which elite white males gained a sense of their own manhood and as a structure to divide and control laborers. Wright asserts "that racial practices of employers were almost completely unregulated by law in the southern states. Explicitly racial laws enforced segregation in public conveyances, marriage, schools, places of public accommodations, amusement, and burial, but not employment."²⁷ But the Labor Committee of the Georgia Council of Defense made it clear that one goal of racially specific laws was labor control. And they were particularly con-

²⁵Price Gilbert to Arthur Fleming, Council of National Defense, August 10, 1918, "Negro Organization File," Box 3, *ibid.*

²⁶The Georgia Council of Defense had a "Women's Committee" that, based on the volume of surviving records, appears to have been more active than the all-male council. Yet, it took its orders from the men. It also appears that the Council of Defense mostly discussed issues of wartime mobilization that resulted in the production of policy statements, while the women did much of the work of collecting and distributing information, and organizing home production of food, clothing, and bandages. See RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

²⁷Wright, *Old South, New South*, 178-81.

was mostly framed as a problem of race—or more precisely, of “negroes”—although the council in a sense racialized and gendered some white men as both less than white and less than men because they acted in ways generally attributed to “negroes.” According to the council, many able-bodied males chose not to work full time, or worked in non-essential occupations, creating a shortage of workers for war-related work. In April 1918, the Committee on Labor of the Georgia Council of Defense asserted that “a portion of the common labor of the State is shirking and we have a great many slackers among them.” State Commissioner of Commerce and Labor H. M. Stanley, who served as the committee chairman, estimated that employers had on hand up to 50 percent more laborers than they would need if there were some way to compel full-time labor of all help. He advocated strengthening the existing vagrancy laws, not in order to put people to work “on the rock pile,” as he put it, but in order to place them “where their labor is most needed.” In what can only be interpreted as approval of existing peonage practices, he sent letters to local judges throughout Georgia advising them to parole men arrested as vagrants to work for farmers in the surrounding countryside. Stanley argued that the “most serious question with respect to Georgia is to get the common labor that we have to make a crop, work in fertilizer factories, etc., and even to work on municipal and government contracts.” In a tone consistent with the condescension implied in the common practice of referring to black males as “boys,” he added that the exodus of labor was hurting the state, because “a free ride to Hadley’s Bend, Tenn.,” appeals to the common laborer. “Getting away into a new country, jumping his debts., etc., also appeal to him.” Other committee members agreed. “The skilled laborers of the State give very little trouble,” said Game and Fish Commissioner Sam J. Slate. “It is the ordinary laborers who are delighted with and seize the opportunity to be drifting from place to place.”²⁸ He had drawn a portrait of the “common laborer” as childlike, im-

²⁸Memorandum of Proceedings of Meeting of the Committee on Labor, April 23, 1918,” pp. 1-12, Labor File, Box 2; and letter of May 28, 1918, from the Chairman of the Georgia State Council of Defense to the Council of National Defense, p. 9, File 4, Box 2, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

an image was foundational to their claim of superiority as men who were themselves none of those things.



Two auxiliary programs of the Selective Service system took some of the burden off of the Council of Defense Labor Committee and seemed to promise even more effective solutions to the labor crisis. At the same time, they would expand the channels through which elite white men could impose their will on a subordinate population. The first was a system of "farm furloughs"; the second was essentially a work draft known as "work or fight." These combined easily with the existing traditions of labor coercion and social control.

In March 1918, Congress amended the Selective Service Act to permit army camp commanders to furlough drafted men to farms for short periods during planting and harvest time. Like many wartime programs, the farm furlough program had an informal beginning, and an irregular operation. Selective Service officials in 1917 had temporarily released some farm men to complete their harvests.³¹ In Georgia, camp commanders were formally granting furloughs as early as April 1918, when the program was announced and state quotas established.³² Although policymakers in Washington said they had set up the program to relieve individual cases of hardship rather than to correct the rural labor shortage, state and local officials seized upon it as a way to maintain the farm labor supply while adding yet another vehicle for controlling African-American men. In addition, commanders at some army training camps, where black draftees were more likely to be considered excess baggage than soldier material, may also have welcomed the program. In fact, a 1917 report in the *New York Age*, a northern black newspaper, lends credence to suspicions that the furlough program received its first impetus from the concerns of federal of-

³¹Telegrams from Swift, CB Camp Gordon, to Provost Marshal General, September 21, 1917, and Crowder, Provost Marshal General-Army, to Commanding General, Camp Gordon, Georgia, File 54-1, States Files: Georgia, SSS Records, 1917-1919, WNRC. Crowder's telegram also instructed the local draft board to call another man to replace the one temporarily discharged.

³²R. W. Grow to Governor Hugh M. Dorsey, June 29, 1918, Farm Furlough File 2, Box 3, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

secure affidavits from at least "two men not related to [the] applicant or soldier." They then had to secure the endorsement of their local board before sending this material to the Bureau of Farm Furloughs in Atlanta. The presumption was that (male) neighbors and the local board would be familiar enough with local conditions to spot fraudulent claims and stop them before they could be sent to Atlanta. In reality, this meant that traditional community controls on farm labor were strengthened. Those who relied heaviest on farm laborers often were, of course, the political and economic patrons of the local draft board members.³⁷

But by September the program was left primarily to the discretion of camp commanders, and it became even more arbitrary. Since their primary interest was in providing men to fight, commanders were not always concerned with community needs. Their responses to furlough requests thus turned as much on military considerations as on local labor situations. Still, it appears they sought to appease influential local white men. Most camps cooperated enthusiastically while a few shunned the program. Camps Gordon, near Norcross, and Greenleaf, at Chicamauga Park, granted furloughs readily on the basis of recommendations either from local boards or the Bureau of Farm Furloughs. However, Camp Wheeler at first flatly denied all requests for furloughs. It would later furlough men upon the request of several large planters, but it bypassed the Bureau. The commander of Fort Screven, near Savannah, wrote to the Bureau in August 1918, that "the country is now engaged in a great war which must take precedence over crops and all other matters. . . . The furloughing of a single soldier at this time for more than a few days is out of the question."³⁸

Racial considerations may account for policy variations among commanders. In practical terms a racially weighted policy would benefit large-scale white planters at the expense of the white yeomanry. At the beginning of the war Camp Gordon was

³⁷Copies of the furlough application forms are in File 2967-10, *ibid.* See also the federal regulations issued for the administration of this program in General Orders No. 31, War Department, Washington, April 2, 1918.

³⁸Archibald Campbell, Col., Coast Artillery Corps, Commanding, Ft. Screven, Ga., to Director, Bureau of Farm Furloughs, Georgia Council of Defense, Farm Furlough File 2, Box 3, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

cials defined manhood, and many phrased their appeals in those terms. Many recognized their duty as white men to offer their sons to the nation, frequently combining pleas for the release of their sons with statements that they did not want them to be "slackers."⁴⁰

Most applications seem to have come from relatively poor white farmers who either owned a small amount of land or rented their farms. Their correspondence depicts a rural wartime population consisting of several groups: white fathers deprived of the essential labor of their sons; white women forced to do the work of men and deprived of the support and protection of their husbands, sons and fathers; and black men who were essential to the rural economy but viewed as an increasing threat in the face of the declining presence of white males. Black women and their children are largely invisible. The letters were often written on scraps of paper, many in pencil. The English is awkward and the spelling often phonetic. Appealing for the return of a son, John H. Ferguson of Talbotton described the hardships caused by his son's absence:

Me and his mama are both old and in bad health, and no one to see after us at all,,[sic] and he left a big two horse farm to see after, and no one to see after it for me and one hand to gather it. . . . The farm is two miles from home and his crop is going to waste,,[sic] Wish you would find out where they sent him,,[sic] wish you would do everything you can to get his furlough.

A woman from Fayetteville pleaded with Governor Dorsey to help secure a furlough for a man who had "a farm and two little motherless children."⁴¹ R. C. White, from Suwanee, said that because of his illness and advanced age he could not work for more than half a day, yet the draft board took his only son and "they carried him to camps just the same. Now we are just poor renters and [k]now only farming. Now what are we to do with our only plow hand gone?"⁴² A farmer from Coolidge felt torn between economic necessity and the possibility that social scorn would follow early re-

⁴⁰I discuss this issue in greater detail in "Work or Fight: Selective Service and Manhood in the Progressive Era" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1992), 80-83, 87-96.

⁴¹John H. Ferguson, Talbotton, Ga., to Governor Dorsey, September 8, 1918; daughter of Tom Dorsey to Governor Dorsey, September 1918, unfiled loose papers, Box 1, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

⁴²R. C. White to Governor Dorsey, August 14, 1918, Farm Furlough File 2, Box 3, *ibid.*

mary cash crop of peanuts, such as lard, meat, and corn, on the local market but had no success because the merchants "were also farmers and had these things on their own farms."⁴⁵

But the issues were not solely economic. White women who lived in rural areas often feared being left alone without a white man to protect them from the dangers they imagined African-American men posed. Mrs. E. R. Griner of Daisy, Georgia, said that she needed to have her son returned to her "as I am needing him both for protection and dependence I am here with three girls and no protection surrounded with negroes no whites nearer than one and half mile I am afraid to stay home at night. . . . I can't get anyone to work at two dollars per day."⁴⁶ R. O. Moore of LaGrange voiced a similar concern for his brother's wife; he wrote that she was living two miles away, had no one to gather the crop, "an [sic] she cant stay there at night alone."⁴⁷ Since the voices of black men are scarce in these records, and those of black women virtually mute, we are left to wonder to what extent black women whose male relatives had left felt vulnerable to impositions, sexual and otherwise, from the white men remaining in the countryside. For a century after the Civil War, southern white men's sexual access to black women was virtually assured by the legal system. Between emancipation and 1969, not a single southern white male was ever convicted of raping, or attempting to rape, a black woman.⁴⁸ Just as the absence in the court records of black women's complaints against white men for sexual violence will not sustain a claim that white men did not rape black women, the absence of their voices in the furlough records should be seen as little more than an acknowledgment on their part that the system did not exist to respond to their needs. In all likelihood, most blacks stoically recognized that state institutions, as instruments of wealthy white men, were implicated in organized violence against them. By contrast, many poor white men signified a perhaps naive belief that state institutions would protect their interests. They failed to rec-

⁴⁵R. W. Grow to Governor Dorsey, June 29, 1918, Farm Furlough File 2, Box 3, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

⁴⁶Letter from E. R. Griner, Daisy, Ga, August 5, 1917, *ibid.*

⁴⁷R. O. Moore to Marion W. Stump, August 13, 1918, *ibid.*

⁴⁸Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985), 164, citing the 1969 findings of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

hood—that which was achieved by white men only through willing service to the nation. Reading similar complaints made by British colonial officials against native workers, Edward Said has pointed out that such observations “commodified [the workers] and their labor and glossed over the actual historical conditions, spiriting away the facts of drudgery and resistance.” But beyond obscuring the workers’ reality, such accounts also “spirited away, occluded, and elided the real power of the observer, who . . . could pronounce on the reality of native peoples as from an invisible point of super-objective perspective.”³² Similarly, members of the planter class claimed superior, objective insights into the being of “negroes.” Such planters included the Anderson women, who grounded their rights to, and responsibility for, dependent “negroes” in a common history in a (colonized) place. And their own being was constructed out of what the “negro” objectively was not. For planters and colonizers the function of objectivity has been to name and scrutinize at arms’ length that which is genuinely other. What could be identified as most unlike the observer, then, was what might be most objectively “known,” and through “knowing,” controlled.³³

“Knowing,” then, the uselessness of expecting patriotic service from African-American men, planters could imagine no alternatives to using wartime programs to prevent them from leaving agricultural work where they would be under the supervision of white men. But although the argument was couched in terms of patriotic service, these planters had clearly identifiable economic interests that were threatened when the war economy offered new opportunities to blacks. Thus, the Screven County planters warned that drafting “the single men has a tendency to so diminish the size of our wages farms [sic] as to make their productiveness almost negligible.” And the effect would cascade down through the rest of the black labor force. They reported the additional loss of the seasonal labor of “negro women, old men and

³²*Ibid.* Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 167-68. Also helpful here is James Scott’s use of the concept of public and hidden transcripts. The contributions of the dominant group to the public transcript are “based on a premise or claim to inherent superiority by ruling elites.” In this case, superiority is inferred from the obvious inferiority of the subordinate. Scott, “Domination, Acting and Fantasy,” in JoAnn Martin and Carolyn Nordstrom, eds., *The Paths to Domination, Resistance and Terror* (Berkeley, Cal., 1992), 74.

³³On the power of “knowing” within systems of domination, see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1963), 36.

of colored soldiers for a period of thirty days to assist in saving this crop," makes perfect sense if we understand him as a white man who believed that his right to citizenship partly rested on his duty to care for, control, and secure production from dependent individuals, and on his ability to translate performance of this duty into economic independence. Many others like him circumvented the bureaucracy. In the late summer of 1918, for example, a committee of planters from Bibb County, in the cotton belt, arranged a meeting with the commander at nearby Camp Wheeler. They demanded that he furlough large groups of black soldiers to help pick their cotton. As a result, Camp Wheeler reversed its previous refusal to grant furloughs. As one newspaper reported, "one hundred Negro soldiers from Camp Wheeler" were furloughed "to pick cotton around Macon in Bibb Co."⁵⁵

Many planters requested that specific black draftees be furloughed, and in so doing, claimed proprietary rights to them. In August, Pink Anderson, who had already lost four tenants to the draft, wrote: "Another one of [my] negroes was called to war and left this morning for Camp Wheeler." Anderson added that she had arranged for the local board to recommend a furlough for this particular man. As was the case in her attempts to secure agricultural exemptions for her four workers drafted previously, there is no indication that this draftee had any involvement in the process, or that he wished to be furloughed.⁵⁶ The case of Solomon Lee, a black sharecropper from Statesboro, was similar. The day after he was drafted, the owner of the land Lee was farming applied for "a farm furlough for Solomon Lee, Col., [colored] who was carried off yesterday with the Bullock quota in present call. He was working a share crop for me, and I have no one to put in his place."⁵⁷ Local officials defended such practices on the grounds that African-American laborers were incapable of applying on their own behalf. The sheriff of Mitchell County reported to the U.S. Department of Agriculture that the serious shortage in farm

⁵⁵Unidentified newspaper clipping dated September 5, 1918; letter from J. D. Gardner, Chairman, Mitchell Co. Council of Defense, to Governor Dorsey, September 7, 1918, Farm Furloughs/Negroes File 4, Box 1, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

⁵⁶Pink Anderson to Marion W. Stump, Director, Bureau of Farm Furloughs, Georgia Council of Defense, August 2, 1918, Farm Furlough File 2, Box 3, *ibid.*

⁵⁷C. D. Marsh to Director, Bureau of Farm Furloughs, July 17, 1918, File 3, *ibid.*

Grow's basic charges had some validity. While most applications were from white farmers, most of the men being furloughed were "negroes." On the other hand, this was hardly a favor to them. Few of the furloughed African-American men had any reason to desire a release from military service. Army pay combined with allowances for dependents exceeded what they could hope to earn picking cotton, and the army withheld pay from soldiers on furlough, depending upon planters to pay the going wage.⁶⁰ Regardless of the preferences of either black or white draftees, the racial policies of the army itself would have made it easier for a commander to release black rather than white soldiers. According to the furlough regulations, commanders could not release men who were in training, or about to be in training, for immediate overseas duty.⁶¹ Because southern congressmen had objected to ordering white and black men into combat together, the army placed all African-American combat troops in one division, the 92nd, and when they were sent to France, brigaded them with the French Army. This severely limited the demands of the army for black soldiers while increasing the need for white soldiers. Compounding this, white draft age men were 59 percent more likely to be given an exempt or deferred status than were African-American men. As Emmett J. Scott, the African-American Special Assistant to the Secretary of War reported, "proportionately more Negroes were drafted than was true of whites."⁶² Under such conditions camp commanders would not have felt that the black soldiers under their command were important to the war effort. In addition, most of the recent African-American draftees were held at southern camps where the potential for racial conflict with white residents was real. Violent confrontations between white residents and black soldiers had left seventeen white people dead in the streets of Houston, Texas, and resulted in the execution of thirteen black draftees and life imprisonment for forty-one others.⁶³ Commanders of southern camps, therefore, must have wel-

⁶⁰Joel Mallet to Enoch Crowder, October 16, 1918, File 17-167, Box 110, States Files: Georgia, RG 163, SSS Records, 1917-1919, WNRC.

⁶¹Scott's *Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, 9.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 69.

⁶³The trial, which had the largest number of defendants of any murder trial in American history, took a single day. Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge, La., 1976), is the standard account.

scarce in areas close to war production plants. Many African-American women whose husbands now earned enough to support them dropped out of the wage labor force. The chairman of the Mitchell County Council of Defense complained that "the allotment for support allowed by the government to the wives, sisters and other dependents of the negro soldiers has made it well nigh impossible to get the negro women to do anything of value on the farms." But he predicted that the situation would improve with the "work or fight" law.⁶⁵

The Georgia legislation went significantly beyond the federal law. It applied to all male residents of Georgia between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five. Failure to be "regularly engaged in some lawful, useful and recognized business, profession, occupation, trade or employment" was declared a misdemeanor and made a person liable, not for induction, but for arrest and possible imprisonment. In addition, enforcement of this law would be local and according to the judgment, or perhaps whim, of the local sheriff or police department or the political patrons who controlled them. Having sufficient income or independent means to support oneself was no defense. Any law enforcement official who failed to enforce this law would be guilty of a misdemeanor.⁶⁶

Some African-American men in Georgia were quick to express distaste for the law. "This bill has stirred up the colored people throughout the state," wrote a minister in Atlanta. "Already large numbers of people are speaking of leaving Georgia," he added.⁶⁷ Atlanta's black community was credited with persuading state legislators not to include women within the provisions of the law. But the same group lacked the clout to prevent the bill from passing. It was also powerless to block the local "work or fight" ordinances passed in many Georgia counties. Many of these did permit the arrest of women who either were not working or had unacceptable jobs. The stresses that the war had placed on social relations

⁶⁵J. D. Gardner, Chairman, Mitchell County Council of Defense to Governor Dorsey, August 26, 1918, Labor File, Box 2, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH. See also Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, 1984), 141.

⁶⁶*Georgia Laws*, 1918, Part I, Title VI, No. 348. "Work Required of Able-Bodied Persons," Act approved August 8, 1918 (Atlanta, 1919).

⁶⁷Reverend Henry H. Proctor, Pastor, First Congregational Church of Atlanta, to Governor Dorsey, July 26, 1918, Negro Organization File, Box 3, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

Illegal enforcement of the "work or fight" law was apparently still not enough for the Georgia Council of Defense, whose primary concern had been with preserving a stable, obedient, and dependent labor force in cotton cultivation. The state chairman, Judge Price Gilbert, continued to fear that expanded job opportunities in Georgia as a result of the war would lead to a loosening of the social and economic restraints on the African-American population. Finally, seeking assistance from black leaders against such dangers, the council organized a Negro Workers' Advisory Committee made up of "respectable" African-American men from across the state. In a letter to Clark Howell of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Gilbert explained that the purpose of the advisory committee was to make sure that the flush economic times did not result in less work from rural African Americans:

We hope to get more and a better quality of labor from the negro. . . . He is not simply to labor until he has acquired enough money to last him two or three days and then knock off until he spends it, but he is to labor six days in the week regardless of whether he needs the money, because the Government needs his services in useful labor. Equally important with this is to teach him the value and sanctity on his contract which he has made with his employer to labor.⁷⁰

When Gilbert wrote this letter, he was fresh from a stormy meeting with one hundred of those white-approved African-American leaders called together to help create the Negro Workers' Advisory Committee. The constitution adopted by this committee declared that it would secure "from Negro laborers greater production in industry and agriculture for winning the war."⁷¹ President Wilson's Director of Negro Economics, George E. Haynes, who was a Booker T. Washington protégé, presided. Haynes warned Georgia officials to keep word of the conference from spreading beyond those invited to participate. "We do not care for a great deal of agitation about this conference," Haynes wrote to the Georgia Commissioner of Labor.⁷² Judge Gilbert was the fea-

⁷⁰Gilbert to Clark Howell, August 26, 1918, Negro Organization File, Box 3, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

⁷¹Constitution of the Negro Workers' Advisory Committee, undated, *ibid.*

⁷²George E. Haynes to H. M. Stanley, July 15, 1918, *ibid.*

reported that "this meeting had seized upon the occasion for negro laudation and the furtherance of selfish interests. The attention paid to them by the Government seems to impress them with the idea that now is the time to strike for individual betterment."⁷⁵ In virtually all of his voluminous correspondence regarding this meeting, Gilbert repeatedly returned to this theme. Better relations between the races, he advised patronizingly, depended upon African Americans recognizing "the binding force of contracts" and "improving the condition of the morals of their race," developments that Gilbert and his allies, based upon what they "knew" about "negroes," were confident would never occur.⁷⁶

Some Georgia blacks were willing to promote Gilbert's agenda. E. W. Garner wrote Gilbert that "I hold myself at your orders as a representative of the Negro people of Jeff Davis Co. Should there be any orders to hand down to my people I shall be glad to do so."⁷⁷ H. M. Hubbard, principal of the Forsyth Normal and Industrial School, County Training School for Colored Youth, responded to Gilbert's invitation to attend the meeting by saying "the Negro is patriotic and must contribute valuably [to the war effort]."⁷⁸ These few individuals were not sufficient to ease Gilbert's racial fears. In fact, he appears to have ignored all such correspondence. Those African-American correspondents to whom he did respond frightened him. G. W. Upshaw, for example, wanted to know "how long we must do all you say for us to do educatively, industrially, morally, etc.," before regaining the right to vote? Upshaw, a black farmer from Cartersville, then laid forth why "negroes" had earned the rights of citizenship:

⁷⁵Gilbert to Fleming, August 10, 1918, *ibid.* That black men who had been handpicked by white men were unwilling to participate in wartime programs without some guarantee of improved conditions for their race confirms recent scholarship questioning whether W. E. B. Du Bois spoke for most blacks when he called for them to "close ranks" with whites for the duration of the war. See Mark Ellis, "'Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors': W. E. B. Du Bois in World War I," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 96-124, and Steven A. Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921," *Journal of American History* 82 (March 1996): 1478-1504.

⁷⁶Gilbert to Isma Dooley, August 10, 1918, Negro Meeting File, Box 5, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

⁷⁷Garner to Governor Dorsey, August 10, 1918, accepting his appointment to the Negro Workers' Advisory Committee, Negro Labor Organization File, Box 3, *ibid.*

⁷⁸H. M. Hubbard to Gilbert, July 29, 1918, *ibid.*

mote undue race ambitions." Alexander responded that he had previously investigated the Negroes of Georgia and found "no disloyal purposes . . . , but rather a purpose to insist upon certain rights to which they conceived they were entitled under the laws of Georgia, and of which they claim they are deprived." Gilbert demanded specifics as to "the rights to which they conceived themselves entitled," but Alexander dodged the question and told Gilbert that the Bureau of Investigation would make further inquiry.⁸⁰

There was a role for white women, as well, but it was not as participants in legal and regulatory activities as the Anderson women had hoped. Instead, according to the council, "white women [could] accomplish much individual work . . . with Negro women who work for them."⁸¹ In other words, white women should use whatever influence they had with black women to persuade them to remain at work in those jobs the white male elite deemed appropriate for their race and sex. By entering the fray over the draft status and labor of black men, the Anderson women had gone beyond the role envisioned for them by Georgia's wartime leaders. These wealthy white women and their southern white sisters would shortly achieve legal, if not necessarily effective, political equality with white men through the Nineteenth Amendment. But the disfranchising laws that had applied to black men kept black women from making similar political gains. The increased independence achieved by many African-American women in Georgia during the war also inspired them to demand suffrage in 1920, but that right was brutally denied them.⁸²

The end of the war in the fall of 1918 would relieve neither Georgia's rural labor crisis nor the racial fears of whites like Price Gilbert. So, as Georgia's elite white men had modified the programs of the Selective Service system to make them consistent with existing social relations, after the war they continued to seek solutions to their labor problems through traditional coercive meas-

⁸⁰Gilbert to Alexander, September 4, 1918; Alexander to Gilbert, September 5, 1918; Gilbert to Alexander, September 7, 1918; Alexander to Gilbert, September 9, 1918. Negro Organization File, Box 3, GSCD, RG 22-1-14, GDAH.

⁸¹Council of National Defense, "Program for Organization of Negroes by the Southern State Councils," *ibid.*

⁸²Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 164-70; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985), 193.

dimmed for African-American men and women that their wartime expectations might be met. If some of the coercive labor mechanisms in rural Georgia seemed to weaken under the pressures of wartime exigencies and the greater competition for labor, in general they survived the crisis. Many oppressive institutions emerged strengthened from the war years, in part because the wartime state affirmed the legitimacy of manhood as a system of domination constructed not only by sex, but by race and class as well. Despite the highly publicized migration of African Americans to the North, only a few Georgia counties experienced a decline in farm labor as great as 1 percent. Lynchings, chain gangs, peonage, and other means of controlling the South's dependent men remained important elements of southern society in the 1920s.⁸⁶

This history suggests that there was little distinction between private power and public, or state, authority in Progressive Era Georgia. The apparatus of the state did not exist apart from the private social and economic interests of elite white men. Especially in rural Georgia, the state was an extension of the informal social relations by which dominant white males justified their exercise of power. White men who controlled government institutions could ignore white women, such as the Andersons, who tried to exercise political power. In vain, poorer white men, relatively feminized by both poverty and political disempowerment, like R. W. Grow, held tightly to whiteness and their status as potential soldiers as primary signifiers of manly status. G. W. Upshaw had all the requirements for manhood except whiteness and was therefore denied citizenship rights. White men and women of all classes shared a belief that "negroes" represented the traits of non-manliness: subservience, dependence, malleability. They were thus ambivalent about conscripting black males for military service. On the one hand, they believed it necessary to coerce "negroes"; on the other, the manly performance of military service should be reserved for white men. As a result, when Georgia turned the draft into a system to coerce the civilian labor of African-American men, it reinforced their dependent position, it confirmed the exclusion of women from the realm of the state, it preserved some white men's sense of manhood, and it got the cotton picked.

⁸⁶Daniel, *Breaking the Land*, 163; John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana, Ill., 1977), 203-205.