



Harvesting Freedom: African American Agrarianism in Civil War Era South Carolina (Contributions in American History)

By Akiko Ochiai

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From early in the Civil War, the Sea Islands of South Carolina set the stage for an exciting experiment in freedpeople's independence. Lowcountry South Carolina is particularly significant, not only for its aristocratic planters and its high profile in the secession, but for the degree of autonomy that the slaves acquired during seasons of absentee proprietorship. No place ever came closer to realizing the dream of Forty Acres and a Mule than this region, and consequently no place saw more vigorous struggles over land possession. Proving to the world their abilities to purchase lands, to organize cooperatives, and to participate in political parties, the African Americans of the lowcountry forged and fought for their own agrarian dreams.

A highlight of Sea Island history was the Port Royal Experiment, when northern volunteer missionaries provided education to freedpeople, and General Rufus Saxton actively initiated Sherman's Field Orders commandeering the coast for African American homesteaders. When freedom gave them the chance, this group embraced education and democratic self-rule with abilities that even their supporters underestimated. This is the true story of their triumphs and failures in the struggle to claim the lands on which their forefathers toiled and died.

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Editorial Review

Review

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"Demonstrating solid research and sound conclusions, *Harvesting Freedom* makes an important contribution to the scholarship concerning the African American quest for land in Civil War- and Reconstruction-era South Carolina. . . . [T]his fine work clearly illustrates how blacks on the Sea Islands marched to the beat of a different drummer." - **The South Carolina Historical Magazine**

"[L]ocal illustration of freedpeople's fitness for freedom constitutes the historical significance of *Harvesting Freedom* for Reconstruction scholarship. . . . [V]ery well argued, organized, and documented." - **Civil War Book Review**

About the Author

Akiko Ochiai is associate professor of American history at Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan, specializing in African-American history and culture. A graduate of Tsuda College, she received an MA from the University of Iowa and a PhD in American History from Tsukuba University. In addition to numerous articles in Japanese, her English articles appear in the *New England Quarterly*, *Soundings*, *The Griot*, and *The Journal of American and Canadian Studies*.

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