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## THE SLAVE'S DREAM

Besides the ungathered rice he lay,  
His sickle in his hand;  
His breast was bare, his matted hair  
Was buried in the sand.  
Again, in the mist and shadow of sleep,  
He saw his native Land.



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Slave's Dream"

The landscape served as the canvas upon which enslaved men and women forged a life and identity during the antebellum and postbellum period. This chapter establishes in lowcountry Georgia a sense of place, defined as a "feeling and understanding of a particular locale inscribed over time" by those who lived and traveled there.<sup>1</sup> The ambivalence of the landscape as a place of terror and community is narrated through the individual and collective voices of African Americans who reenvisioned their objective reality by challenging the isolation of their physical geography; they engaged in what Toni Morrison fashioned as remembering and (dis)remembering elements of their African culture through revisions of the past and through political activity.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, political activity is understood as an organized collective action that affects power relations. Sterling Stuckey, Lawrence Levine, and Eugene Genovese have each looked beyond subversive acts for evidence of the deeper cultural and social resistance found in folkways, religious practices, and family life.<sup>3</sup>

Lowcountry Georgia emerged as the principal area for antebellum rice production. As late as 1860, twelve of the seventeen largest slave owners in the United States were rice planters.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, rice plantations were larger than other staple crop plantations in the South and in several respects resembled Caribbean estates. By 1830 rice had surpassed cotton as king in Georgia's five coastal counties: Chatham, Liberty, McIntosh, Glynn, and Camden. This region is divided into six natural ecosystems: barrier islands, coastal marine, estuaries and sounds, mainland upland, rivers, and swamps. The growth of rice in Georgia depended on