

ABSTRACT
**ENGINEERING THE ALTAMAHA:
PLANTERS, SLAVES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT
IN THE GEORGIA TIDEWATER**

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The development of a plantation economy in coastal Georgia, based on the production of sea island cotton and rice, has been discussed and analyzed in several scholarly studies. This paper will proceed within the context of these studies, but will discuss more fully the significance of the physical environment of the coastal region through the successes and failures of the people who would gain their livelihoods from it during the antebellum period and just after the Civil War. Rice agriculture, especially, required the application of large amounts of labor to manipulate the tidewater environment, to create the hydraulic grid of banks, canals, ditches, and drains necessary to control the flow of tides and rivers. This enormous redefinition of the tidewater had significant consequences, both human and natural. At the same time, this mutual evolution of culture and nature was part of a larger and longer process of redefining nature in America.