Sharecropping Agreement, 1870

Because Congress did not generally provide freedpeople with land, African Americans lacked the capital to start their own farms. At the same time, plantation owners needed labor to plant and harvest their crops for market. Out of mutual necessity, white plantation owners entered into sharecropping contracts with blacks to work their farms in exchange for a portion of the crop, such as the following contract between Willis P. Bocock and several of his former slaves. Bocock owned Waldwick Plantation in Marengo County, Alabama.

Contract made the 3rd day of January in the year 1870 between us the free people who have signed this paper of one part, and our employer, Willis P. Bocock, of the other part. We agree to take charge of and cultivate for the year 1870, a portion of land, say [left blank] acres or thereabouts, to be laid off to us by our employer on his plantation, and to tend the same well in the usual crops, in such proportions as we and he may agree upon. We are to furnish the necessary labor, say an average hand to every 15 acres in the crops, making in all average hands; and are to have all proper work done, ditching, fencing, repairing, etc., as well as cultivating and saving the crops of all kinds, so as to put and keep the land we occupy and tend in good order for cropping, and to make a good crop ourselves; and to do our fair share of job work about the place. . . . We are to be responsible for the good conduct of ourselves, our hands, and families, and agree that all shall be respectful to employer, owners, and manager, honest, industrious, and careful about everything, and shall not interrupt anything about the place, working as industriously the last part of the year as the first; and then our employer agrees that he and his manager shall treat us kindly, and help us to study our interest and do our duty. If any hand or family proves to be of bad character, or dishonest, or lazy, or disobedient, or any way unsuitable our employer or manager has the right, and we have the right, to have such turned off. . . .

For the labor and services of ourselves and hands rendered as above stated, we are to have one third part of all the crops, or their net-proceeds, made and secured, or prepared for market by our force. . . .

We are to be furnished by our employer through his manager with provisions if we call for them: not over one peck of meal or corn, and 3½ pounds of meat or its equivalent per week, for every 15 acres of land or average hand, to be charged to us at fair market prices. And whatever may be due by us, or our hands to our employer for provisions or anything else, during the year, is to be a lien on our share of the crops, and is to be retained by him out of the same before we receive our part.

Source: Waldwick Plantation Records, 1836-1971, LPH 74, box 1, folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives and History.