

Agency In Truancy

Runaway Slaves and the Power
of Negotiation in the United States

1736 ~ 1840

Colin North

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Department of History
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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Abstract

Historians of the American South have been diverse in their descriptions of the master-slave relationship over the last half-century, and have engaged in lengthy discussions in an attempt to answer the intricate question of what life was like between slaves and their masters. The phenomenon of slave runaways has perhaps offered the most convincing evidence of the troubles on southern plantations, which has been used in recent decades to emphasize negotiation and agency in the shaping of master-slave relations. The last twenty years have been consequently marked by a plethora of studies that accentuate non-traditional slave holding as it becomes clearer that masters had to compromise with their human chattel. Through an examination 9,975 runaway slave advertisements and 943 testimonies of former slaves, this study illustrates how black bondsmen absented themselves so to negotiate the terms of their working and living conditions. It traces the acts of individual slave runaways in place of broader generalizations that have for a long time contributed to some of the myths and legends of American slavery through examination of the many reasons that slaves chose to stay in bondage.

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¹ Credit for this chart is properly given to Samuel H. Williamson and Louis P. Cain, who have noted that their work may be used for academic and non-profit purposes. If the corresponding chapter is published then the chart will be removed. Samuel H. Williamson and Louis P. Cain, *Measuring Worth In 2011 Dollars*. (University of Illinois at Chicago and Loyola University Chicago, 2011)
<http://www.measuringworth.com/slavery.php>

Introduction

♪ Run nigger run, Patteroller ketch
you, run nigger run like you did de
udder day. ♪

-Kitty Hill, ex-slave,
singing a slave-patrol
song, 17 August 1937 ¹

On 23 March 1804, an advertisement was placed in the Alexandria Daily Advertiser calling for the return of a black family who had fled a week earlier from their owner, Henry Talbutt of Rose Hill Fairfax County Virginia. Having “many connexions in Alexandria” wrote Talbutt, “it is probable that” Sam, Suckey, Jane, and three small children “may be sculking about that place.”² Just over two weeks later, another advertisement appeared in the same newspaper, announcing that after having returned or been returned to Rose Hill, Sam and his daughter Jane had once again made their escape. A third advertisement placed three weeks later revealed that Sam and Jane were still at large, and had been joined by Suckey, who was wife to Sam and mother to Jane. Having waited nineteen days after these slaves made their second escape, Talbutt stated in a

¹ George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Biography*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1977) vol. 14, 424; this song appeared in several slave interviews as written above, but the lyrics were changed in the movie *Twelve Years a Slave*; instead of chanting “like you did de udder day,” characters in the film were clearly heard singing “well you better get away.”

² All quotations for this paper have been left as found in the sources without changes to spelling, punctuation or grammar, except in cases in which it was necessary for readers’ comprehension. Any changes to quotations are denoted with “[].” In the case of multiple quotations from the same sources, a reference appears on the last sentence.

fourth advertisement, that “if the above negroes will return home, without putting the owner to any further expence, they will not be sold.”³

That all slave codes enacted in the United States contained guidelines for the pursuit and suppression of runaways is the first indication that the slaveholding South was rife with the issue. In fact, running was so widespread that historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger – a couple of distinguished scholars of American slavery – have recently pointed out that it was uncommon for a slave owner to “boast that none of his slaves had absconded during a given year.”⁴ One individual who posted for the return of his runaway went as far as to declare that absent slaves were “one of the greatest evils that our land is threatened with.”⁵ The issue proved so problematic that, at the height of the American slave system in the 1850s, certain members of the medical community even classified running as a mental illness.⁶ Runaway slaves were a problem for slaveholders since the earliest days of the American slave system. Yet, despite such widespread resistance from blacks, historians have only begun to discuss the importance of runaways within the past fifty years; and what is even more novel amongst historians

³ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political* (23 March 1804), (9 April 1804), (10 April 1804), (28 April 1804), Daniel Meaders, ed., *Advertisements For Runaway Slaves In Virginia, 1801-1820*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 32-33; see appendix I for complete text of all four notices. For every chapter, only key advertisements have been placed in an associated appendix so that readers may be able to further contextualize the sources.

⁴ Loren Schweninger, “Counting The Costs: Southern Planters and the Problem of Runaway Slaves, 1790-1860.” *Business and Economic History* 28:2 (Winter, 1999), 267; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger. *Runaway Slaves: Rebels On The Plantation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 280.

⁵ *Western Carolinian* (Salisbury) (30 October 1821), Freddie L. Parker, *Stealing a Little Freedom. Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994) 686-687.

⁶ Dr. Samuel Cartwright diagnosed runaways with “Drapetomania:” a disease of the mind that was the consequence of masters treating their slaves as equals. He drew biblical references in his pseudoscientific analysis to conclude that a cure could be achieved by making slaves submissive, and therefore docile. *De Bow's Review Of The Southern And Western United States*, 11:3, (Sept., 1851): 331-333.

of the American South is the realization that running was not necessarily an outright grab at freedom.

Of course slaves ran away for a multitude of reasons, resulting in absences that were in no way uniform in frequency nor in duration. Many fled in fear of, as well as in retaliation to punishments or arguments, to reunite with friends and loved ones, or in protest to the loss of a privilege that had perhaps given them more autonomy in their daily routines.⁷ The reality is that reasons for escape were numerous, but what is important to note is that even in those states that were in close proximity to what would become free territory (the Upper Southern States), those who posted advertisements for the return of runaways did so by using overwhelmingly provisional descriptions. Terms such as “absenteeism,” “truancy,” “lying out,” and “lurking about,” factored prominently in the notices, indicating that slaveholders often believed absence to be provisional and short-term.⁸ Consequently, historians of American slavery have recently redirected their attention to the many reasons that slaves had to stay in bondage, rendering a more composite perspective of slave culture. In other words, it is not only important to ask why slaves fled for a life of legal freedom, but equally important to ask why they did not.⁹ Although there is now considerable agreement that many runaways held out temporarily and sometimes for long periods in nearby forests, swamps, and towns, a systematic and composite study of absence and how owners negotiated for the return of slaves is still missing from the literature.

⁷ The reasons for a slave’s flight were numerous, and have already been discussed at length by Gerald Mullin, John Hope Franklin, Loren Schwening, and most recently, Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise. See Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 106; Franklin and Schwening, 19; Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, eds., *The Long Walk To Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), xiii.

⁸ Franklin and Schwening, 98.

⁹ I also emphasized this approach in Colin North, “A Temporal Examination of Slave Runaways, North Carolina: 1751-1840,” *Strata* 4, (Sept. 2012), 63.

Such an analysis can illuminate how and when owners were willing to peacefully negotiate with their slaves in lieu of threatening and violent gestures. Consequently, acts of concession provide evidence of slave agency within various master-slave relationships. These examples are exposed by underscoring how members of the master class balanced paternalistic notions of benevolence with their justifications of ownership and trade in human property. For an owner to have a runaway was an indication that slaves met with bad treatment, and lent legitimacy to those who touted the seemingly barbaric qualities of the slave institution. Slave owners found themselves under constant attack by those who cited the existence of runaways as evidence of the harsh realities of the domestic slave trade.

Members of the slaveholding gentry defended themselves from such attacks by reinforcing patriarchal notions of altruism in their attempts to distance themselves from the harsh realities of slave trading. Combined with the heightened threat of black rebellion, slaveholders adopted a system of social behaviours founded on the premise that the American slave system was one of the most lenient in the global history of human bondage. Combined with a rise in slave prices and organized abolitionist societies in the nineteenth century, it should be expected that non-violent negotiations with runaways would grow concurrently with the expansion of the American slave system.

The advertisements posted by Henry Talbutt particularly illustrate four interrelated themes of various master-slave relationships that have yet to be thoroughly fleshed out in American slave studies: (I) that absence was often a temporary affair and that masters consequently gave runaways an unspecified grace period before posting for their return; (II) that slave absence was taxing on the finances of masters and degraded

their social status; (III) that advertisements were posted in newspapers and in the vicinity of post-offices, court-houses, taverns, and other community forums with the hopes that runaways would hear of their owners' propositions by either word of mouth or by reading the advertisements themselves, and; (IV) that masters became more inclined to offer peaceful gestures of negotiation as slaves became increasingly valuable from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.

Although it remains unknown if Talbutt carried through with his offer in keeping his slave family intact, the agency that Sam, Suckey and Jane wielded in their act of defiance is revealing of the seemingly ironic power that slaves held over their masters. By physically leaving their lives of bondage – if only temporarily – slaves deprived owners of their productive values and undermined their social status in a society that was becoming increasingly hostile towards slave owners and those who supported them. In many instances runaways had the power to bring members of the slaveholding gentry to their knees. In desperation, many waived punishments and offered financial remuneration or non-tangible privileges to runaways if they would make haste and return on their own. Having done so, these owners recognized the de facto status of slaves that went beyond the legal definition of absolute property. As partial power holders, runaways were able to negotiate for better working and living conditions so to help determine the decisions that would affect their own lives. In other words, slaves held agency in their truancy.

Appendix I

Meaders, Daniel. *Advertisements For Runaway Slaves In Virginia, 1801-1820*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997) (all advertisements), 32-33.

Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political (23 March 1804):

Fifty Dollars Reward. Ran Away from the subscriber, on the 16th of March instant, Three Negroes – Sam, Suckey and Jane. Sam is about 40 years of age, 5 feet 10 inches high, black complexion, straight-limbed and well formed; he has a scar, with a streak of grey hairs, on his left cheek. They carried with them three small Children. They have many connexions in Alexandria, and it is probable they may be skulking about that place. The above reward will be paid for securing said negroes, and in proportion for either of them in any jail with all reasonable charges. Captains of vessels are forewarned at their peril, not to take them away. Henry Talbutt, Rose Hill. Fairfax County, Virginia. March 23.

Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political (9 April 1804):

Forty Dollars Reward, For taking up and securing in any jail, so that I get them again, Negroes Sam & Jane, who ran away out of my possession in Fairfax County about six miles above Alexandria on last Thursday. Sam is a stout well formed man, very black complexion, about forty years of age, a sour look, and has a streak of white hairs on his left cheek, together with a scar. Jane is between 15 and 16 years of age, very black complexion, sour look. She had on a striped jacket and petticoat, and is the daughter of Sam. If either of them is taken, half the reward will be paid, with reasonable expences if bro't home. All masters of vessels and others are warned not to harbor or carry them off, as in that case the law will be put in force against them. Henry Talbutt. Fairfax County, April 9.

Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political (10 April 1804):

Twenty Dollars Reward. Ranaway from the Subscriber living about six miles from the town of Alexandria, Negro Sucky, a low chunky woman, very black. Had on a brown jacket and petticoat. It is supposed she is lurking about the town of Alexandria, or she may go into Maryland in Charles County. Whosoever takes up the said Negro and confines him in any jail so that she may be had again, shall receive the above reward and all reasonable charges if brought home. Henry Talbutt; Fairfax County, April 10.

Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political (28 April 1804):

Thirty Dollars Reward, For taking up and securing in any jail, so that I get them again, Negroes Sam, Suckey & Jane, who ran away out of my possession in Fairfax County, about six miles from Alexandria, on Thursday the 5th instant. Sam ia a stout well formed man, very black complexion, about forty years of age, a sour look, and has a streak of white hairs on his left cheek, together with a scar. Sukey is a low, chunky woman, very black; had on a brown jacket and petticoat. Jane is between 15 and 16 years of age, very black and sour look; she had on a striped jacket and petticoat, and is the daughter of Sam and Suckey. It is supposed they are harbored in or near the town. The above reward will be paid for the three, or Ten Dollars for each. M'Kenzey Talbut. If the above negroes will return home, without putting the owner to any further expence, they will not be sold. All masters of vessels and others are warned not to harbor or carry them off, as in that case the law will be put in force against them. M'K. Talbut. April 28.

I Approaches & Methods

Historiography and Techniques of Analysis

“In some respects the eighteenth century slave was better off than the Negro of today. As a rule no Negro can now get his name into the leading newspapers unless he commits a heinous crime. At that time, however, masters in offering slaves for sale and advertising fugitives unconsciously spoke of their virtues as well as their shortcomings...”

- Association for the Study of African American Life and History, 1916¹

The framework for such a study has undoubtedly been shaped by revisionist discussions of plantation life that have taken place within the last eighty years. Beginning with James Hugo Johnston, Harvey Wish, Herbert Aptheker, as well as Raymond A. and Alice H. Bauer, it was becoming clear to historians as early as the 1930s that plantation life saw its share of work disruptions when these scholars brought to light various forms of slave resistance in response to Ulrich B. Phillips’ romantic description of American slavery.² These historians focused on the issues of slave branding, mutilation, rape, murder, and division of families that were lacking in Phillips’ *Life and Labor in the Old South*.

By the 1950s, many historians had become convinced of the influence of slave resistance in the shaping of master-slave relations, perhaps mostly owing to Kenneth

¹ Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc., “Eighteenth Century Slaves as Advertised by Their Masters.” *The Journal of Negro History* 1:2 (April, 1916), 163.

² James Hugo Johnston, “The Participation of White Men In Virginia Negro Insurrections,” *Journal of Negro History* 16 (April, 1931), 158-67; Harvey Wish, “American Slave Insurrections Before 1861,” *ibid.* 22 (July, 1937), 299-320; and “The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *Journal of Southern History* 5 (May, 1939), 206-22; Herbert Aptheker, “Maroons Within The Present Limits Of The United States,” *ibid.* 24 (April, 1939), 167-84, and *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Raymond A. and Alice H. Bayer, “Day To Day Resistance To Slavery,” *Journal of Negro History* 27 (October, 1942), 388-419; Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life And Labour In The Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), 196-203.

Stampp's description of 'troublesome property' in his 1956 study *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*.³ Other scholars like Stanley Elkins however, accentuated the childlike and docile characteristics of plantation slaves, which prompted discussions over the psychological impact of the slave institution.⁴ It was only in the 1960s and 70s that scholars began to utilize previously little to unused documents of slave culture in describing vibrant African American communities. Different forms of resistance were discussed as it related to black consciousness and family life. Emphasis was given to kinship systems, folk tales, spirituals, Afro-Christianity, and examples ranged from open rebellion to metonymic metaphors.

A few scholars focused their attention on the importance of fugitive slaves, having made use of runaway advertisements that were placed in local newspapers and other community forums by slave owners, members of their family, overseers, estate executors, sailors, and military officers, herein referred to as subscribers. Inspired by Lorenzo Greene's 1944 source review, Gerald Mullin and Lathan Windley were the first to exploit the documents to illustrate that slaves were not the content, idealized workers as portrayed by Phillips in *Life and Labor in the Old South*.⁵ Since then, these sources have become a mainstay for any study of Southern culture as they are some of the most reliable documents in studying master-slave relations.

Runaway advertisements were posted in a similar manner to notices posted today for lost pets and personal items, and are meticulously detailed and raw sources as the

³ Kenneth Stampp. *The Peculiar Institution: Slaver in the Ante-Bellum South* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

⁴ Stanley Elkins. *Slavery, A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. (New York: Universal Library, 1963).

⁵ Lorenzo J. Greene. "The New England Negro As Seen In Advertisements For Runaway Slaves," In *The Journal Of Negro History* 29:2 (April, 1944): 125-146.

capture of a slave depended on the accuracy of information they provided. Historians John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, and Jonathan Prude recently claimed that in these notices, runaways “were described by whites with more objectivity than any other group of slaves,” and “were among the only widespread descriptions treating the ‘lower sort’ as central characters.”⁶ Historian David Waldstreicher also recently trumpeted their usefulness when he described them as a form of proto-slave narrative. He claims that they are:

(t)he first published stories about slaves and their seizure of freedom. They differ from the later counternarratives of ex-slaves and abolitionists in that the advertisements attempted to use print to bolster confidence in slavery, rather than confidence in African Americans and their allies. Written by the master class, they not only reveal but also exemplify the profitable contradictions of the mid-Atlantic labor system.⁷

As the Association for the Study of African American Life and History similarly observed when they first brought the ads to the attention of researchers in 1916:

(i)n some respects the eighteenth century slave was better off than the Negro of today. As a rule no Negro can now get his name into the leading newspapers unless he commits a heinous crime. At that time, however, masters in offering slaves for sale and advertising fugitives unconsciously spoke of their virtues as well as their shortcomings... The blacks were becoming useful and skilled laborers, acquiring modern languages, learning to read and write, entering a few of the professions, exercising the rights of citizens, and climbing the social ladder to the extent of moving on a plane of equality with the poor whites.⁸

Despite their legal restrictions from reading and writing, and the pervasive acceptance of racial inferiority, auspicious descriptions of slaves were found in many advertisements.

⁶ Franklin and Schweninger; Jonathan Prude, “‘Lower Sort’: Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree laborers In America, 1750-1800.” *The Journal Of American History* 78:1 (Jun., 1991), 134.

⁷ David Waldstreicher. “Reading The Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence In Slavery In The Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic” in *William and Mary Quarterly*. Third Series 56:2 (Apr., 1999): 247.

⁸ Association for the Study of African American Life and History, 163.

These advertisements were written by individuals with a vested interest in the slave system, and to publish a notice was a demonstration that they were serious about the preservation of the institution, and its players. They were written without the concern that they would one day be used to reconstruct the lives of the enslaved. Consequently, these notices are akin to what the French-Medievalist Marc Bloch once referred to as “unconscious sources,” that because of their very nature, offer us one of the richest sources of commentary as articulated by his well-known expression: “witnesses in spite of themselves.”⁹ Subscribers had little to no reason to falsify information when they were advertising for the return of a slave – it was to their advantage to tell the truth. Perhaps slave owner Jacob Minitree of Charles County, Maryland exemplified the effectiveness of such notices when he advertised for his “Negro Wench,” and thought it necessary to warn that his “written Advertisements have been often set up at Port-Tobacco; but immediately pull’d [sic] down.”¹⁰ His concern over “some evil-minded People” is an indication of the relative success in retrieving slaves through the use of such notices.

Despite all the benefits of runaway slave advertisements, they are – like any other source – innately biased in their own unique way. Subscribers often felt the need to embellish the good treatment of their workforce, as they were expected to display benevolent attitudes towards their human property in an effort to illustrate that an organic relationship existed between masters and chattel. Slave runaways were an easy target for abolitionists, who pointed to their existence as evidence that slaves were not the content, idealized workforce that was purported in proslavery rhetoric. In an effort to dissuade

⁹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954), 51.

¹⁰ *Maryland Gazette* (6 April 1758), Windley, vol. 2, 30-31; Lathan A. Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History From The 1730 to 1790*, Vol. 2, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983) 30-31.

accusations that slaves were mistreated, these advertisements are rife with subscribers often gloating about the privileges they bestowed upon their workers.

Notwithstanding these issues, fugitive notices provide researchers with a higher resolution of nuances within various master-slave relationships, as the details of such relations lay within the disagreements that occurred between them. As historian Robert H. Gudmestad recently explained: “(s)laves’ reactions to the trade revealed the disparity between what owners wanted the master-slave relationship to be and what actually existed.”¹¹ Those historians who have examined the status of American slaves through a legal framework have thus discovered how whites wanted blacks to behave, not as they actually behaved. Legal codes were formulated by free, white, men, and court records are limited to select disagreements between blacks and whites as many slaves “were considered unworthy of trial.”¹²

In this light, advertisements have a decided advantage over legal documents, as they were published by individuals in varying economic stratas of the slave system, and not just by those who could afford to initiate lawful proceedings. “By focusing thus far on the legal status of slaves, we have given an oversimplified picture of institutional homogeneity,” explained historian David Brion Davis, when he pointed out the juncture at which the study of American slavery stood in regards to legal methodology with the advancement of comparative history in the 1960s:

In actuality, of course, American slavery took a great variety of forms that were largely the result of economic pressures and such derivative factors as the nature of employment, the number of slaves owned by a typical master,

¹¹ Robert H. Gudmestad, “Slave Resistance, Coffles, and Debates Over Slavery,” in *The Chattel Principle. Internal Slave Trades In The Americas*. Walter Johnson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 83.

¹² Ex-slave ‘Uncle Dave’ explained that “those slaves committing crimes against the state were often considered unworthy of trial, though some were brought to trial...” *The American Slave: A Composite Biography*. Rawick, ed., Vol. 12 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1977), 85.

and the proportion of slaves in a given society. (...) in many societies the slave has only gradually been differentiated from other kinds of unfree workers, and his status, rights, and obligations have been defined in practice before receiving legal recognition. (...) As comparative studies move ahead toward finer distinctions and a typology of slave systems, it is likely that less attention will be paid to legal status than to stages of economic development.¹³

The benefits of runaway slave advertisements are thus tremendous, and have been exploited by analysts in recent decades. Benjamin Quarles and Sylvia Frey have used them to show how slaves adopted the political rhetoric of the American Revolution; Woody Holton focused on the role of slaves and the “middling sorts” in bringing about American independence; Michael Gomez, Shane White, and Graham White used the notices to show how slaves maintained a sense of Afro-culture through hair styles and body language; David Waldstreicher and Amani Marshal have shown that runaways clothed themselves for the “performance of freedom,” as well as the roles they played in the revolutionary period.¹⁴ In her comparative analysis, Kirsten Denise Sword recently paralleled and contrasted the views that masters held towards their runaways and those of their “wayward wives.”¹⁵ Others have used the notices to assess degrees of acculturation,

¹³ David Brion Davis, “Slavery” in *The Comparative Approach to American History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 139-140, 134, 142.

¹⁴ Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro In The American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), ch. 3, with an emphasis on 42-50; Sylvia R. Frey, “Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks In The American Revolution,” *Journal of Southern History* 49:3 (August, 1983): 375-398; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water From The Rock: Black Resistance In A Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), Ch. 2 and 5; Woody Holton, “Rebel Against Rebel: Enslaved Virginians And The Coming Of The American Revolution,” *Virginia Magazine Of History And Biography* 105:3 (Spring, 1997): 157-192; Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities In The Colonial And Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture, From Its Beginnings To The Zoot Suit*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), ch. 1-4; David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), chapter 1, with an emphasis on 7-8; Amani Marshall, “‘They Will Endeavor To Pass For Free’: Enslaved Runaways’ Performances Of Freedom In Antebellum South Carolina,” In *Slavery and Abolition* 31:2 (June, 2010): 161-180.

¹⁵ Kirsten Denise Sword, “Wayward Wives, Runaway Slaves and the Limits of Patriarchal Authority in Early America” (Ph.D. Diss.: Harvard University, 2002) 19.

and to correlate rhythms of flight with agricultural patterns and slave demographics such as age and gender.

Historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger used them extensively in their 1999 study, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, which was the first composite analysis of American fugitive slaves.¹⁶ The book did much to discredit older assumptions that slaves were generally a diligent and content workforce, that racial violence was infrequent in their day-to-day lives, and that the majority of runaways made their way to the free northern states or Canada. Their study showed that slaves took flight for numerous reasons, and that most stayed in the South because of familial and kinship bonds. Although Franklin and Schweninger addressed the concept of slave bargaining, they devoted only six pages (out of four hundred and fifty-five) to the concept. Also absent from their work was an analysis of how this particular form of agency affected the status of slaves, which is of great importance, considering that these advertisements reveal that certain runaways wielded considerable economic and social power over their owners. As partial power holders, many runaways were able to use “flight” to negotiate for more autonomy in their everyday routines. This study fills in the contextual details of the negotiating process that Franklin and Schweninger diminished in consideration of time and space.

This thesis uses precisely 9,975 advertisements to assess when slaves fled, the financial and social costs of slave absence, and how long owners waited before posting for their return. This information was then cross-referenced with the words of former slaves through the use of slave narratives that were published before and after the Civil War, as well as ex-slave interviews that were mostly compiled by various journalists as

¹⁶ Franklin and Schweninger.

part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. Because the vast majority of those interviewed for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were children during the days of slavery, it is not surprising that only ten percent contained any commentary on what it was like to be a runaway slave – advertisements illustrate that most fled in their twenties and early thirties.¹⁷ Of the autobiographers however, sixty-five percent commented on what life was like as a runaway, which was anticipated, given that before emancipation, an autobiographer would have had to be self-purchased, emancipated, or a runaway slave.¹⁸

These sources have also been supplemented with the interviews of free blacks and former slaves that were compiled by Benjamin Drew on his tour of Canada West in the 1850s. By that time, Canada West had become a hub of abolitionist rhetoric as abolitionists looked to its various black communities as a test of proslavery racial theories. Black people could not survive if left to their own devices according to proslavery advocates. Despite the overt racism that black people faced on an everyday basis in Canada West, and the frequent attempts to extradite slaves back to the United States, the interviews collected by Benjamin Drew are advantageous to those of the WPA because of their timing: free blacks and former slaves, most of whom were middle-aged adults who had had long and recent experiences with the American slave system, were asked what it was like to be an African-American a decade before the outbreak of the Civil War.¹⁹

¹⁷ David Thomas Bailey has explained that 53% of those slaves interviewed for the project were born in the 1850s, 22% in the 1840s, 8% in the 1830s, and 1% in the 1820s. David Thomas Bailey, "A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony On Slavery," in *The Journal of Southern History*, 46 (Aug., 1980), 384.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 395.

¹⁹ The most known extradition requests were those of Thornton Blackburn, Solomon Mosely, Jesse Happy, and Nelson Hackett. Jason Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800-1865*. (New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1865), 37, 42, 64.

The slave testimony gathered by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, on the other hand, has major issues with sample quality. Historian C. Vann Woodward has explained the vast majority of slaves who were interviewed by the WPA were children during the days of slavery: “a period before the full rigors and worst aspects of the slave discipline were typically felt and a period more likely than others to be favorably colored in the memory of the aged.”²⁰ That these interviews were carried out sixty-five years after the Civil War, there is also much concern over the accuracy of information provided. The interviews were primarily conducted by white journalists, and at the height of the Jim Crow era. Southern etiquette towards blacks was not conducive to truth telling. “(C)aste etiquette generally impeded honest communication between southern blacks and whites,” explained historian John Blassingame.²¹ Nor did these WPA workers make it a standard to collect the commentary in controlled environments. The interview of former slave, Laura Bell, is particularly telling of the atmosphere in which some of the WPA commentary was collected. On 6 August 1937, WPA worker Mary A. Hicks interviewed Aunt Laura, aged 73, at her home in Raleigh, North Carolina:

Being informed that Laura Bell was an old slavery Negro, I went immediately to the little two-room shack with its fallen roof and shaky steps. As I approached the shack I noticed that the storm had done great damage to the chaney-berry tree in her yard, fallen limbs litterin’ the ground, which was an inch deep in garbage and water. (...) the Carolina Power and Light Company men, who were at work nearby, laughed as I climbed over the limbs and garbage and finally found room for one foot on the porch and one on the ground. (...) I cut the interview short, as the odor was anything but pleasant and I was getting tired of standing in that one little spot.²²

²⁰ C. Vann Woodward, “History From Slave Sources. The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography,” *The American Historical Review* 79:2 (Apr., 1974) 473.

²¹ John Blassingame, “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems,” *The Journal of Southern History* 41:4 (Nov., 1975), 481.

²² Rawick, Vol. 14, 100, 102.

It is clear that the interviews were not performed in the most ideal conditions. As John Blassingame once explained: “(d)iscrimination in employment led to a distortion of information; during the 1930s racist etiquette generally impeded honest communication between southern blacks and whites.”²³

Despite the classic debates over the integrity of slave testimony –mostly owing to the questionable journalism ethics of the WPA workers and abolitionist censoring of slave narratives and biographies – there are limited sources available that allow us to read the words of a people that had so few opportunities to document their thoughts.²⁴ Court records and newspaper advertisements have recently been claimed as the most underused and promising sources in the study of master-slave relations, yet these sources were predominantly written by white, literate people;²⁵ and if we want to uncover the many truths of plantation life, we must of course look to the testimony of both whites and blacks. “Neither the whites nor the blacks had a monopoly on truth, had rendered the veil cloaking the life of the other, or had seen clearly the pain and the joy bounded by color and caste,” warned John Blassingame in his 1972 review of ex-slave testimony. “The perceptions of neither can be accepted as encapsulating the totality of plantation life. Consequently, whether one focuses on the slaves or the master, one must systematically examine both black and white testimony.”²⁶

²³ Blassingame, “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems,” 481.

²⁴ For a summary of the classic debates on slave sources, see: C. Vann Woodward. “History From Slave Sources,” Review of George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, in *The American Historical Review*. 79:2 (Apr., 1974): 470-481; John Blassingame, “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems,” 473-492; as well as Bailey.

²⁵ Franklin and Schweninger argued in their introduction that court records and newspaper advertisements are “the most reliable and objective sources” in examining “the discontent of enslaved and illiterate people,” and “careful use of this evidence and other sources reveals the depth of hostility many slavers felt toward their owners and overseers.” Franklin and Schweninger, 2.

²⁶ Blassingame. “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems,” 492.

That only a handful of slaves were able to publish their life stories is of course problematic: their commentary numbers in the thousands, which represents only a small sample of a population that numbered in the millions, making it necessary to rely heavily on the commentary of literate contemporaries. But to disregard sources of black testimony because of their small size, would insinuate that all admissible evidence must be found in great numbers. Numbers do matter, but they cannot prove nor disprove behavior; they can only suggest it. It is important to remember that slaves, like other people, were capable of making independent, unpredictable, and sometimes irrational decisions that may not be greatly represented in the sources. Consequently, I have examined all slave testimony and fugitive advertisements available in an attempt to write a “‘history of the inarticulate’”: to see slavery also from the bottom up, and to discover the importance of slave culture for whites and blacks alike.”²⁷

Other studies that have used fugitive advertisements have sometimes excluded examining all available notices in an effort to balance data samples so to minimize the “credibility gap” for their comparative analyses.²⁸ I have not followed the same approach, even though this created huge disparities in sample sizes from state to state: South Carolina, 1731-1785 (2,403),²⁹ Virginia, 1736-1820 (2,313),³⁰ North Carolina, 1751-1840 (2,145),³¹ Maryland, 1745-1790 (1,055),³² New England, 1700-1789 (774),³³ New York

²⁷ Gerald Mullin. *Flight and Rebellion. Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), x-xi.

²⁸ Mitsuhiro Wada, “Running From Bondage: An Analysis Of The Newspaper Advertisements Of Runaway Slaves In Colonial Maryland And Georgia.” *Journal of the School of Letters* (Japan) 2 (2006), 12.

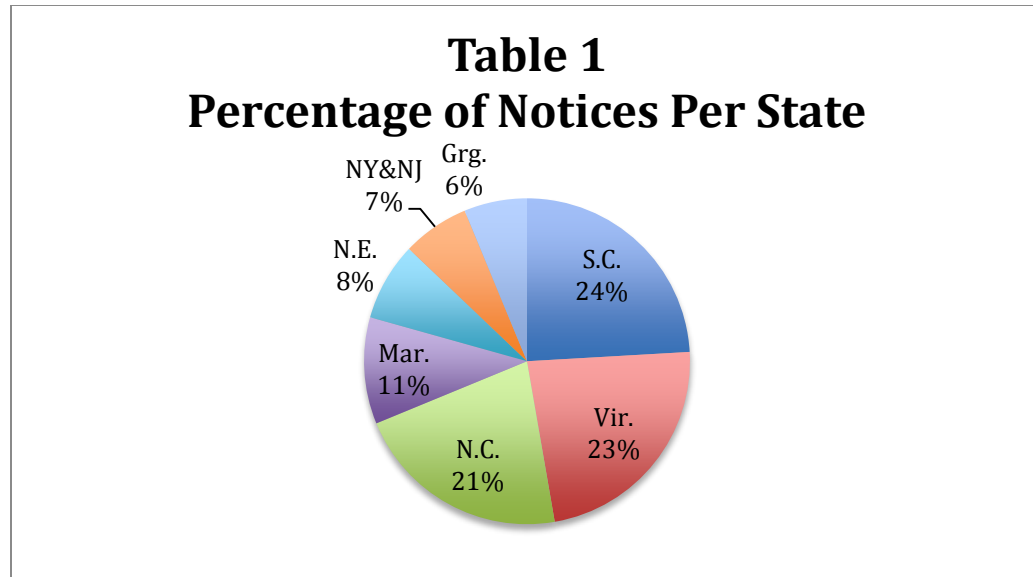
²⁹ Lathan Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History From The 1730 to 1790*, vol 3. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983).

³⁰ Daniel Meaders, *Advertisements For Runaway Slaves In Virginia, 1801-1820*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).

³¹ Windley, vol. 1; Freddie L. Parker, *Stealing A Little Freedom. Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994).

³² Windley, vol. 2.

& New Jersey, 1716-1783 (662),³⁴ and Georgia, 1763-1789 (623)³⁵ (see Table I). The logic behind this decision was to collect as much relevant literary commentary as possible, with selective attention given to the collection of quantitative information. Although I did not use all of the commentary, it was necessary to gain a broad perspective of master-slave relations in the initial stages of the project.



Because of the large disparities in sample sizes, I have been conservative in making explicit numerical comparisons from state to state. The vast majority of available notices are for the eighteenth century – a period in which the country saw significant socio-economic change with its increase in land and population. Conditions varied from one part of the country to another, which could have had a significant impact on a slave owner’s decision to advertise for a runaway. For example, that more notices existed in South Carolina newspapers does not necessarily mean that there were more runaways

³³ Antonio Bly, ed. *Escaping Bondage. A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves In Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700-1789*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

³⁴ Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, eds., *“Pretends to Be Free” Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1994).

³⁵ Windley, vol. 4.

than in Georgia (which had the fewest number of ads), but is perhaps indicative of a rise in the use of the mass; or “that running away was so common and capture and return so frequent that, despite the pervasive nature of the runaway ads, those who were described in such a manner represent only a small segment of runaways. They may, therefore, have been among the most prized slaves.”³⁶ As historian Jonathan Prude observed in his assessment of the notices, “transportation difficulties combined with the modest but real cost of the ads (probably about ten shillings in the 1770s) may have meant that runaways fleeing comparatively prosperous masters located near newspaper offices were most likely to be described in print.”³⁷ Because the value of a slave was measured in both material and immaterial ways, their intangible values makes it very difficult to maintain a control group from which a sample of data can be drawn. It is likely that numerous concerns went into the decision to post for a runaway slave, which changed from owner to owner.

Advertisements therefore only give us a limited look at the slave community, as the decision to place a notice was dependent on many variables: a slave’s past voluntary return, the ease and cost with which a notice could be placed, waiting for numerous slaves to flee before posting an notice, or perhaps a recent sighting of the runaway(s). The individuals described within advertisements thus “represent only the most visible tip of an otherwise indeterminate iceberg,” rendering the data too skewed to make numerical comparisons from state to state with seemingly scientific accuracy.³⁸ This data also obviously does not reflect the vast majority of runaways who went unadvertised, so to

³⁶ Wada, 14; Franklin and Schweninger, 170.

³⁷ Prude, 129.

³⁸ Philip D. Morgan, “Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance For Slave Culture. *Slavery & Abolition* 6:3 (1985), 57-58.

recklessly quantify notices and have them speak for all runaways would be akin to writing black history in strictly cliometric terms, which seems to rob African-Americans of any sort of sentient quality. Historian Larry Rivers probably put it best in his recent study of Floridian runaways, when he reminded us that:

(w)ith every step taken remember that our subjects were human beings filled with all the talents, intelligence, and shortcomings of other human beings. They did not exist simply as statistics, and I do not believe their story should be told as if that were all that their lives and experiences constituted.³⁹

In reconstructing the lives of people, the reality is that human action cannot always be quantified, nor is all information numerically important. If Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's 1974 study of American slave life has taught us anything, it is that statistics cannot alone be used to reveal the intricacies of human thought and action. Through the strict use of quantitative data, *Time On The Cross* argued that the South's economic success derived from a competent and diligent labour force that was well treated, and therefore well behaved, because of the high values that slave owners placed on their human property. Fogel and Engerman geometrically indexed information found in agricultural and population censuses, probate records, plantation ledgers, shipping manifests, and travel accounts, to conclude that the use of slave labour in the South had proven to be relatively more efficient than northern farms which utilized free labour. It was one of several revisionist works released in the 1970s that was produced in-part as a challenge to Stanley Elkins' 'Sambo' model of slave life, and was passionately embraced

³⁹ Larry Eugene Rivers. *Rebels and Runaways, Slave Resistance In Nineteenth-Century Florida*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 3.

by those seeking to describe the American slave system as anything other than ruthless manipulation in the wake of the American Civil Rights Movement.⁴⁰

Fogel and Engerman's methodology is now widely rejected, as it relied strictly on the use of quantitative methods in reconstructing a system that was both economically and socially pervasive.⁴¹ "By labeling the history of enslaved people the human side, historians have long underestimated the salience of economics to the condition of enslaved humanity," explained Walter Johnson upon reviewing the methodology amongst social and economic historians before the 1970s:

(a)t the same time, by treating the history of the slave traders as "economic history" they have defined away the very humanity of the nevertheless objectionable avarice and savagery of the slave business. Relegating the history of the perpetrators of the slave trade to the category of the merely (or inevitably) economic invites us to misunderstand our human condition as being both beyond economics and morally blameless.⁴²

That being said, quantitative sources surely have decided advantages over qualitative sources, but this does not deter from the reality that the slave system was one

⁴⁰ For more information, see: Jennifer Karns Alexander and the related chapter on slavery. Jennifer Karns Alexander, *The Mantra of Efficiency* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time On the Cross* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974); Peter Kolchin has pointed out that among the most important revisionist works are those of George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); in Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *The Journal of American History* 70 (Dec. 1983): 581.

⁴¹ The criticisms rendered by fellow economists Paul David and Peter Temin were perhaps the most common amongst those who disagreed with the findings of *Time On The Cross*: its methodological economic framework rested on the assumption that slaves maximized their productive output, and that any economic analysis could not account for their lack of choice as coerced labourers. Alexander, 139; Eugene Genovese had also warned in 1965 that an analysis of a slave system's efficiency was logistically impossible as any form of accounting for the output of white farmers that toiled in the fields next to their slaves is nothing "better than baseless guessing," and one cannot measure how slave labour was allocated for such basic tasks that were not recognized in plantation records as part of the total productive output, such as food production. See Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies In The Economy And Society Of The Slave South* (New York: Random House, 1965) 46-47.

⁴² Walter Johnson. "Introduction," In *The Chattel Principle. Internal Slave Trades In The Americas*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 28.

that involved both rational and irrational people. Certain economic historians make the mistake of touting the seeming objectivity and neutrality of financial documents and other quantitative sources in their efforts to scientifically reconstruct the past, without taking into account the illogicality that is part of the truth of human existence.

Consequently, few economic analysts will deny the inability of scientific models to account for inefficiencies brought about random occurrence and human emotion. The imagery of a drunk and violent master, for example, figures quite prominently in various slave testimonies, and directly challenges the claim that the exorbitant cost of slaves usually if not always deterred owners from harming their labour force. “The pro-slavery argument that self interest will deter men from destroying their own property, is erroneous as it is in opposition to a hundred facts,” explained runaway Henri Goings. “Few men will flog their horses to death but cruelty to animals is itself a crime too frequently left unpunished. How much more than are the uncontrolled passions of the hot blooded Southerner vented upon his human Chattel.”⁴³ Slave owners were often irrational in their behavior, and violence was undoubtedly a common feature of slave life that may not be reflected in numerical terms. Consequently, this study gives more weight to literary commentary, and although regression and correlation analysis is employed for statistical purposes, any quantitative conclusions rendered from the notices are intended to be conservative estimates.⁴⁴

⁴³ Henry Goings. *Rambles Of A Runaway From Southern Slavery*. Calbin Schermerhorn, Michael Punkett, and Edward Gaynor, eds.. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 28.

⁴⁴ I see slaves as both economic and social actors, and do specifically place my work within the historiography of capitalism. That American slavery was as much a social institution as it was economic, I see the master-slave relationship as one that evolved in a transitional phase of development; as existing in a state of limbo between European feudalism and the emerging free market. Thus, my work can be placed within the realm of social historiography with elements of economic history found throughout. As slaveholder paternalism was shaped by socio-economic

All quantitative analyses have also been limited to Virginia and North Carolina, as they were the only two states that had advertisements available for both eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was pertinent to have notices from both periods as slave bargaining practices changed considerably with the rise in slave prices and organized abolitionist societies at the dawn of the nineteenth century. The newspapers from which advertisements were drawn for nineteenth century Virginia, were also the only ones available that were printed on a daily basis. This is important as these notices give us the most accurate representation of the time allowances given to slaves before their overlords went through the formal steps of retrieving them. The majority of available advertisements were predominantly from the eighteenth century, and were posted on a weekly or monthly basis. Virginia also had the second highest number of advertisements available, and was one of the three states that had black WPA workers in the 1930s.⁴⁵ Former slave Rev. Ishrael Massie probably exemplified the superior quality of the Virginian interviews that were collected by black WPA workers when he stated to his interviewer, Susie Byrd: “Lord child, ef ya start me I kin tell ya a mess ‘bout reb times, but I ain’t tellin’ white folks nuthin’ ‘cause I’m skeer’d to make enemies.”⁴⁶

Virginia was also one of the first two states to have had slave surpluses at the end of the eighteenth century, which had a profound impact on bargaining practices. By the early nineteenth century, separation from friends and family was becoming an ever-increasing reality for those living in the Upper South as a large, domestic trade in slaves

factors, I have no doubt that both emotional and economic forces were mutually shaped by one another.

⁴⁵ The two other states were Florida and Louisiana. John Blassingame. “Using The Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches And Problems,” 481.

⁴⁶ Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, eds. *Wheevils In the Wheat. Interviews With Virginia Ex-Slaves*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 205.

supplied the newly settled regions of the South and West with a steady source of acculturated slaves who had become surplus hands with Virginia's switch from tobacco to grain cultivation in the late eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, individual slave sales were on the rise in the Chesapeake, as well as new forms of labour management that had been previously unseen in the state's history. As Michael Tadman wrote in 1989, "no historian of American slavery can ignore slave trading, the separation of slave families, and the impact of such events upon master-slave relations."⁴⁷ Given the increase in slave trading, it seems that changes in the master-slave relationship would most likely be seen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Chesapeake. As historian David Brion Davis observed in the late 1960s:

(a) more relaxed paternalism tended to appear when prices had fallen, when there was little incentive to maximize production, and when planters in longer-settled regions looked to social and cultural distinctions to differentiate themselves from new generations of hard-driving speculators. Thus in the mid-nineteenth century there is evidence that in such states as Virginia and Maryland a more easy-going, paternalistic pattern of slavery was emerging....⁴⁸

Of course, a recent methodological trend amongst historians of American history has been to emphasize the experiences of a small group of people living in one time and place. This approach has been part of a larger effort to minimize generalizations that have for a long time plagued the study of American slavery, as conditions varied in accordance with the nature of work and density of black populations and proximity to white communities. "[O]ne must be careful not to lump all plantation agriculture in an undifferentiated class," warned Davis.⁴⁹ The pace and rhythm of work varied from crop

⁴⁷ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 3.

⁴⁸ David Brion Davis, "Slavery," in *The Comparative Approach to American History*, 142.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 140.

to crop. “Although slavery was a hemispheric and continental institution,” explained Phillip Morgan in his 1998 comparative study of eighteenth century Chesapeake and Lowcountry, “it varied greatly across space.”⁵⁰ In his most recent study of slave agency, Damian Pargas went as far to argue:

the varied nature of regional agriculture in diverse southern localities was the most important underlying factor in the development of slave family life—not because it dictated the experiences of slave families from above per se, but because it confronted them with a basic framework of boundaries and opportunities with respect to family contact, child care, family-based internal production, marriage strategies, and long-term stability.⁵¹

Consequently, Morgan and Pargas are among many historians who have identified various geographical ‘counterpoints’ in which the working and living conditions of slaves contrasted as they were put to producing tobacco (Virginia and North Carolina), rice (South Carolina), and sugar (Louisiana). This three-pronged approach was not entirely possible for this study, however, as many of the sources required for such an analysis were simply not available. Although attention is given to the nature of work in regards to the North-South dichotomy, this study gives considerable attention to themes within various slave communities, and does not necessarily follow a strict chronological order.

That being said, I do not argue that most owners engaged in negotiations with their property; nor were slaves equal partners in the negotiating process. The literary component of this analysis is one that included an examination of 943 former slaves from nine different colonies/states, with examples of negotiation found irregularly throughout. This study focuses on those few, irregular, but important examples. That Henry Talbutt eventually offered not to sell his slave family if they willingly returned home, speaks to a

⁵⁰ Phillip Morgan. *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture In The Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xvi.

⁵¹ Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarters And The Fields. New Perspectives On The History Of The South*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 4.

dialectical relationship of compromise that may or may not have been common. Talbutt believed he knew how to draw his slaves back to their places of work, which suggests that a discussion took place or perhaps that an insinuation was made prior to escape that specifically addressed the living arrangements of his slaves. By absenting themselves twice within a six-week period, Sam, Suckey, and Jane, engaged in a form of de facto labour strike that may have been one of the most costly and disgracing acts for a slave owner. By “skulking about” only miles down the road, these slaves tested the limits that their productive and social powers held over their masters. We will look at the impact of those powers, and conclude with an assessment of how they changed the de facto status of American slave labourers.

Appendix II

Virginia Gazette (Rind) (22 September 1768), Lathan Windley, ed. Runaway Slave Advertisements. A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790. vol. 1, 289-290:

RAN away last April, from one of the subscriber's quarters in Loudoun, (where he had been a short time sawing) a Mulatto slave belonging to Samuel Selden, jun. named Peter Deadfoot, though it is supposed he has changed his name, as he the day before attempted to pass for a freeman, and had got as far as Noland's ferry, on his way to Philadelphia, by a forged pass, in which he was called William Swann. He is a tall, slim, clean limbed, active, genteel, handsome fellow, with broad shoulders; about 22 years of age, a dark Mulatto, with a nose rather flat than otherwise, very sensible, and smooth tongued; but is apt to speak quick, swear, and with dreadful curses upon himself, in defence of his innocence, if taxed with a fault, even when guilty; which may be easily discovered, by any person's taxing him with being run away. He is an indifferent shoemaker, a good butcher, ploughman, and carter; and excellent sawyer, and waterman, understands breaking oxen well, and is one of the best scythemen, either with or without a cradle, in America; in short, he is so ingenious a fellow, that he can turn his hand to anything; he has a great share of pride, though he is very obliging, is extremely fond of dress; and though his holiday clothes were taken from him, when he first attempted to get off, yet, as he has probably passed for a freeman, I make no doubt he has supplied himself with others, as such a fellow would readily get employment; it has been reported that he was seen on board a vessel in York river, near York town; but for my own part, I suspect that he is either in Prince William county, Charles county in Maryland (in both which places he has relations) or in the neighbourhood of Winchester. Whoever apprehends the said slave, and conveys him to me in Stafford county, shall receive, if taken within ten miles of my house, Five Pounds; if above fifty miles, Ten Pounds; and if above one hundred miles, Twenty Pounds reward, besides what the law allows. THOMSON MASON.

Maryland Gazette (Annapolis) (6 April 1758), Runaway Slave Advertisements. A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790. Windley, vol. 2, 30-31.

THE Subscriber, living near Allen's Fresh, in Charles County, near a Year ago, gave Leave to a Negro Wench to go and see her Husband at Port-Tobacco, and she has not yet return'd, and is suppos'd to be harbour'd and detain'd by some evil-minded People, as he has lately been offered 70 l. Sterling for her. She is a likely young Wench, named Sue, marked with the Small-Pox, and has a young Child with her named Jen, about 18 Months old; she can Cook, Wash and Iron, and is very hand in a House. Whoever takes up the said Wench and Child, and brings them home, shall have FIVE POUNDS Reward, paid by JACOB ANDREW MINITREE. N.B. Written

Advertisements have been often set up at Port-Tobacco; but immediately pull'd down.

II Time & Proximity

Runaway Slaves and the Temporality of Absence

“As he took nothing with him but an osnabrug shirt, a pair of tow linen trousers, and a pair of old shoes. I have hitherto forborne advertising him, thinking he was lurking in the neighbourhood, and would soon return home of his own accord.”

-George Lux advertising for Jem,
Chatsworth, Maryland 1779.¹

Since slaves undoubtedly led exhausting and exploited lives, were often subject to physical abuse, and faced unimaginable hardship in their legal status as personal property, it is not difficult to fathom the great appeal in leaving such a life behind. Though the odds were against them, there were always those recalcitrant slaves who would rather be killed in their attempts at escape than live another day as the property of another. Many made their way to distant and remote areas such as the western and southern frontiers, and others to free land like the Northern United States. Many also fled with the hopes of leaving the United States altogether, and for some, the continent completely.

Almost immediately after the first black bondsmen were introduced into the English colonies, they endeavoured to leave their lives of bondage. Tales of their escape are numerous in the literature on American slavery, and they are stories with which most North Americans are probably familiar. But the unfortunate reality is that very few African-born slaves ever made it back to their places of origin, and of those individuals born into American slavery, most of them died in bondage. Even assuming that runaways

¹ *Baltimore Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (13 July 1779), Lathan Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History From The 1730 to 1790*, vol. 2 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 226.

knew the location of, and how to get to free or remote territory, there existed a vast system of civil agreements and legal codes that restricted the movement of black people.

English law did not officially recognize the institution of slavery in the early 1600s, but it did recognize other forms of “unfree” labour. British men, women, and children, who were either criminals, victims of kidnapping, or generally the middling English poor, were indentured to work alongside the first blacks introduced into the North American mainland. Consequently, newly arrived Atlantic Creoles were treated like any other form of “unfree” people, and their autonomy was gradually restricted by similar legislation that applied to indentured whites. Blacks were also subject to suspicion if not found travelling in the company of a white person, and runaways were chased by patrols, hunted by dogs, and often severely punished or even killed upon their capture.² Repeat runaways were also often chained, and many were even maimed in an effort to keep them at their places of work.

Although Virginia was the first colony to enact laws that dealt specifically with slave runaways, the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law gave effect to the Fugitive Slave Clause of the United States Constitution, which brought the issue of property retrieval to the attention of state lawmakers.³ While neither the words “slave” nor “slavery” were used in the text, their omission can be understood as an attempt to make clear that the institution existed only at a state level. It would take nearly another sixty years for the government to make the issue of runaways a federal matter with the passing of the Second Fugitive

² When Thomas Hunter advertised for Bob, he explained that “he may possibly have a ticket that I gave him two days before he went away... mentioning he was in quest of a run-away...” *State Gazette of South-Carolina* (1 May 1786), Windley, v. 3, 397.

³ Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution stated that: “No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.” *Constitution of the United States* (1787), Article 4, Section 2.

Slave Law of 1850, after which many blacks in the United States faced the looming threat of kidnapping by con artists looking to turn a profit. “There are a large number of free negroes residing in the Southern states,” remarked William Craft in his 1860 narrative of escape with his wife Ellen:

but in Georgia (and I believe in all the slave States,) every colored person’s complexion is prima facie evidence of his being a slave; and the lowest villain in the country, should he be a white man, has the legal power to arrest, and question, in the most inquisitorial and insulting manner, any coloured person, male or female, that he may find at large, particularly at night and on Sundays, without a written pass, signed by the master or some one in authority; or stamped free papers, certifying that the person is the rightful owner of himself.⁴

The use of the telegraph and railroad in the antebellum period also facilitated quicker means of communication, and new systems of surveillance and control were put in place around the country following various slave uprisings, particularly those on the island of Saint Domingue in the 1790s, and Nat Turner’s failed rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831.⁵ Combined with great distances, hazardous terrain, unpredictable weather, little food, and often no shelter, the odds of surviving such a journey likely seemed daunting to anyone deliberating a permanent escape from their lives of bondage. “How could dem Niggers run off to de North when dem patterollers and deir hounds was waitin’ to run ‘em down and beat ‘em up?” asked former Georgian slave Alice Green.⁶ Accentuating this point, former slave William Craft explained before him and his wife Ellen made their to Philadelphia in 1848: “after puzzling our brains for years, we were

⁴ William and Ellen Craft, “From Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery,” in Carbado and Weise, eds., *The Long Walk to Freedom*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 210.

⁵ Reactive legislation was enacted in Virginia (1801, 1802, 1804, 1805, 1806), North Carolina (1802), South Carolina (1800, 1805), Georgia (1802, 1804), Maryland (1805), and the Mississippi Territory (1805). Tim Matthewson, “Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 140:1 (Mar., 1996) 25.

⁶ Rawick, ed., vol. 12, part 2, 43.

reluctantly driven to the sad conclusion, that it was almost impossible to escape from slavery in Georgia, and travel 1,000 miles across the slave States.”⁷

Of those slaves who made it abroad, there is also considerable evidence that many did not consider it their home. Civil War historian William Gladstone has estimated that over a thousand blacks who made it to Upper Canada/Canada West – some of whom had spent years establishing new lives abroad – attempted to return to the United States and enlist with the Northern armies with the onset of hostilities.⁸ As former slave, St. Catherines resident, and well-known Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman explained before the war: “I have no opportunity to see my friends... We would rather stay in our native land, if we could be as free as there as we are here.”⁹ And after deciding to make his escape to Canada West, William Grose similarly explained: “I intended on staying in my “native country, - but I saw so many mean-looking men, that I did not dare to stay.”¹⁰ Perhaps Alexander Hamilton of London described a general feeling amongst many residents of Canada West when he commented: “(s)ome of us would like to live in the South if slavery was done away with, and the laws were right.”¹¹

Whether it was nostalgia for their place of birth, the desire to be reunited with family and friends, or most likely a combination of the two, there seems to have been considerable drive amongst runaway slaves to stay within the United States. Repatriation was also promoted by those who saw the various black communities of Canada West as a

⁷ Carbado and Weise, eds., 207.

⁸ Jacqueline Tobin, *From Midnight To Dawn: The Last Tracks of the Underground Railroad*. (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 223-224.

⁹ Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View Of Slavery: The Refugee; or, The Narratives Of Fugitive Slaves In Canada Related By Themselves, With An Account Of The History And Condition Of The Colored Population Of Upper Canada The Refugee, or, The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves In Canada*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008) 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 86.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 178-179.

template for black achievement that newly freed slaves of the defeated south could replicate during Reconstruction. Hence the once thriving black communities in Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catherines, London, Chatham, Buxton, Windsor, Colchester, and Amherstburg, diminished in substantial numbers following the Confederate surrender, and did not regain their antebellum population levels.¹²

Although many runaways had been seeking sanctuary in the British North American provinces since the early 1800s, the accepted figure for those blacks who made it to Canada prior to the Civil War is only about 75,000, many of whom were also free blacks, not merely runaway slaves.¹³ While slavery as an institution never gained a strong footing in the Canadas, its gradual economic dismantling only started in 1793, and only in Upper Canada. It would take another thirty years for similar legislation to come to fruition in Lower Canada. The Act also did not free a single slave, but did rule that no person could be placed in bondage in the future, and made no allowance for their further importation. Slavery died by the late 1790s in Upper Canada as numerous slave owners, most of whom were United Empire Loyalists who had settled in the region following the American Revolutionary War, slowly disposed of their slaves by selling them south. Word of a slave-less land subsequently spread to American slave communities with the arrival of these northern slaves, as well as the return of American soldiers and their

¹² Jacqueline Tobin has pointed out that census figures from Canada West indicate that its black population went from “approximately thirty-five thousand to forty thousand in 1861 to about thirteen thousand five hundred in 1871.” Tobin, 235; Canada West was well known as a destination for black immigration, so much so, that after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the *American Freedmen’s Commission* dispatched Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe to report on the various black settlements of the area. The other two commissions – James McKaye and Robert Dale Owen – were sent to the southern states to interview former slaves and field commanders. Samuel Gridley Howe, *The Refugee From Slavery In Canada West: Report To The Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission*. (Boston, 1864).

¹³ Kerry Walters, “Underground Railroad: A Reference Guide,” *School Library Journal*, 58:8, (August, 2013); historian Robins Winks has indicated that the black population of Canada may have been only as high as forty thousand by the eve of the Civil War, of which thirty thousand were fugitive slaves, Robin Winks, *The Blacks In Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1971), 240.

human property from British lands after the War of 1812. By the early 1800s, many blacks began to consider Canada a legitimate destination for immigration, but it was not until after the revival of the notorious Black Code in the 1820s, and passing of the Second Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, that an increasing number fled from the social, economic, and political oppression they faced in the Northern United States.¹⁴

Because slavery in Upper Canada was only gradually abolished seventy years before the Civil War, it is reasonable that a comparatively small number of American slaves ever made their way to the Canadas. One recent scholarly study has cited a mere 1,000 to 2,000 slaves per year as having successfully made it in the three years preceding the Civil War, which was the heyday of black immigration to Canada.¹⁵ Numerically speaking, “(t)he exodus of fleeing slaves from the South is pictured as a flood,” rather than what can more appropriately be called “a trickle.”¹⁶ In contrast to the some four million individuals who found themselves caught in the American slave system by the eve of the Civil War, those who made it to Canada in the preceding decades constituted only a very small minority.

There were of course other immigration options available to slaves that did not include the Canadas. Many made their way to various parts of Spanish America, including many islands in the Caribbean. Thousands fled to the British during the American Revolutionary War, many of whom were relocated north of the forty-ninth

¹⁴ Blacks faced many forms of discrimination that encouraged emigration to the Canadas in the early nineteenth century: segregated schools, the inability to transfer property, and the denial of civil rights, but the real impetus to emigrate came after the Peace of 1815, when competition in the labour market increased in the northern states with the arrival of central and northwestern European immigrants (particularly Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and German). Blacks were slowly pushed out of work as employers began to favour European in place of African labour. Jason Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800-1865*. (New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1865) 26, 61.

¹⁵ Kerry Walters, 6; Carbado and Weise, xvii.

¹⁶ Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967) 7.

parallel or brought back to England upon the closure of hostilities.¹⁷ Thousands also fled to Haiti in the 1820s, although a number of them returned to the United States “because they found the linguistic, religious and social character of Haiti too foreign.”¹⁸ Tens of thousands of blacks made it to these destinations, yet the total number still represents a very small portion in comparison to the millions who were caught in the American slave system over its two and a half centuries of existence. Although the exact number of runaways “of course, can never be determined,” Gara has explained that “the proportion of runaways to the entire slave population was small. They were numbered in the thousands, and only a small percentage of the millions of slaves in the South.”¹⁹

Perhaps a discouraging caveat to permanent escape was the very real possibility that a runaway would likely never see his or her loved ones again. By the mid eighteenth century, approximately half of all slaves in the colonial United States were second, third, and fourth generation African-Americans who had been born into family units; and if historians of American slavery can agree on anything from published slave narratives and interviews, it is that familial and fraternal bonds resonated strongly amongst the acculturated slave population.²⁰ Running was a highly individualistic act, as a slave’s

¹⁷ Allan Kulikoff has estimated that three to five thousand, or 2 to 3 percent of the Chesapeake’s black adult population fled to the British in response to Lord Dunmore’s emancipation proclamation. Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves. The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 418.

¹⁸ The total number of free blacks that were transported to Liberia by the American Colonization Society is approximately thirteen thousand, some of which could have been runaway slaves. One subscriber stated outright in his advertisement that his slave would associate himself with the Colonization Society in an effort to escape. *Hillsborough Recorder* (25 November 1829), Parker, 680; Haiti was the first independent black polity in the Western Hemisphere, and guaranteed citizenship to any black person who set foot on its soil. Tim Matthewson, 24; Ashli White, “The Politics of ‘French negroes’ in the United States,” *Historical Reflections* 1 (2003): 120.

¹⁹ Gara, 36.

²⁰ By 1750, foreign-born blacks accounted for 50% of all blacks in the United States. The American slave population is distinctive from others of the *New World* as it was the first to reproduce itself, which was achieved by the early 1700s. For those slaves in Jamaica, Brazil, and the French West Indies, rates of natural decrease persisted into the 1800s. Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and*

mobility was severely diminished by attempts to retrieve family and friends from sometimes-distance estates, as well as tending to the various needs of children and the elderly during escape.

Newly arrived, first-generation slaves, however – those who were forcefully removed from their families and shipped across the Atlantic – obviously did not have the same ‘American-based’ familial bonds as acculturated American slaves. But Africans surely forged friendships and allies in their new roles as forced labourers, and undoubtedly felt a degree of affinity towards those same individuals who may have provided the only comfort throughout one of the most traumatic episodes of their life. The Middle Passage and subsequent introduction into Anglo-American culture were unquestionably distressing and harrowing experiences, and there is little doubt that such suffering induced many Africans to confide in one another for comfort, despite the linguistic differences that may have existed between them.

Of those acculturated slaves, however, there is considerable evidence to show that many of them preferred to be distanced from their spouses in order to gain the associated privileges of mobility that accompanied cross-plantation marriages. “Slaves always wanted to marry a gal on ‘nother plantation cause dey could git a pass to go visit ‘em on

Fall of American Slavery (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 32, 123-126; the natural increase of the American slave population can be attributed to two factors that were unique to the North American English colonies: (I) that the first slaves to arrive had a relatively balanced ratio of men to women as they were the leftover slaves that were deemed inadequate for the harsh labour regimes of the Caribbean sugar basin, and; (II) the labour required to produce tobacco, wheat, rice, indigo, and cotton, was significantly more conducive to reproduction as it was less strenuous than sugar. Everywhere sugar was cultivated and harvested in the Western Hemisphere, there was a natural decrease in the population that labored to produce it. Consequently, the North American colonies were the first to wane their dependence on the transatlantic slave trade. Michael Tadman, “The Demographic Cost of Sugar,” in *The American Historical Review* 105 (Dec. 2000), 1536-1538.

Saddy nights,” explained former slave Tom Epps of Prince George County, Virginia.²¹ Many subscribers even stated that they would give their slaves long periods of leave to visit family. Subscriber William Black for example, posted that he sometimes gave Aberdeen as long as a month to go and see his wife.²² Many slaves undeniably coveted the temporary freedoms associated with intervals of provisional, but sanctioned absences. So common was the desire to “marry abroad” that many slave owners undoubtedly lamented such arrangements. As Louisiana planter Bennet Barrow outlined in his Rules for the Highland Plantation in 1838:

No rule that I have stated is of more importance than that relating to negroes marrying out of the plantation it seems to me, from What observations I have made, it is utterly impossible to have any method, or regularity when the men and women are permitted to take wives and husbands indiscriminately off the plantation, negroes are very much desposed to pursue a course of this kind, and without being able to assign any good reason, though the motive can be readily perceived, and is a strong one with them, but one that tend not in the Least to the benefit of the Master, or their ultimate good.... in allowing the men to marry out of the plantation, you give them an uncontrollable right to be frequently absent.²³

Although there is much to be said for familial and kinship determinism – the idea that the unification with friends and family was the guiding factor in a slave’s decision making process – the absolutism of the concept seems to discount the likely reality that blacks experienced the same marital issues and familial infighting that other human

²¹ Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, eds. *Wheevils In The Wheat. Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976) 89; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974) 472-75; Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) 135-42; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America* (Boston: O. Johnson, 1844), 16; Larry Gara has also explained that some slaves fled specifically because they wanted to get away from family. One particular runaway wanted a “divorce” from his spouse. Gara, 24.

²² *Virginia Gazette* (12 May 1777), Windley, v. 1, 188-189.

²³ Bennet Barrow, “Highland Plantation Journal, 1 May 1838,” *Reading The American Past*, Michael P. Johnson, ed. (MacMillan, 2012) 256-257.

beings face.²⁴ In this light, it should be recognized that running was not always with the intent of living with family and friends.

In examining the general notions that surface in slave sources, however, Orlando Paterson has emphasized the high degree to which familial and kinship systems resonated amongst the antebellum slave community. “Nothing comes across more dramatically from the hundreds of interviews with American ex-slaves than the fear of separation,” he explained. “Peter Clifton, an eighty-nine-year-old ex-slave from South Carolina was typical when he said: (...) a man was scared all de time of being sold away from his wife and chillum.”²⁵ Former slave William Grimes likewise attested that “(t)here is nothing in slavery, perhaps, more painful, than the unavoidable separation of parents and children....”²⁶

The demography of fugitives are revealing in this regard, as they illustrate that the vast majority of nineteenth century Virginian runaways were men in their mid twenties (See Tables III and IV).²⁷ In his study of runaways from colonial South Carolina, historian Philip Morgan likewise noted “that the vast majority of runaways were young

²⁴ Former Virginia slave and St. Catherines resident, Dan Josiah Lockhart explained: “I don’t want any man to meddle with my wife – I bothered her enough, and didn’t want anybody else to trouble her at all.” Drew, 49-50.

²⁵ Orlando Paterson. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 6.

²⁶ Richard Bell. “Slave Suicide, Abolition and the Problem of Resistance.” *Slavery & Abolition* 33:4 (Dec., 2012), 535.

²⁷ Larry Rivers has most recently illustrated that between the years 1838 and 1860, women accounted for a minority of runaways in Louisiana (29%), South Carolina (19%), North Carolina (14%), Tennessee (12%), and Virginia (9%). Rivers, 99; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger observed that it was younger slaves that tended to run. In an examination of advertisements from 1790-1816 and 1838-1860, they discovered that “while the profile of runaways was diverse, there was a remarkable consistency over time. Indeed, as the peculiar institution evolved and changed in unprecedented ways over more than sixty years, the profile of runaways, with few exceptions, remained virtually unchanged.” Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels On The Plantation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 210; in his examination of colonial runaways, Mitsuhiro Wada similarly observed that the average age was 27.5 years in Maryland, and 26.5 years in Georgia. Mitsuhiro Wada, “Running from Bondage: An Analysis of the Newspaper Advertisements of Runaway Slaves in Colonial Maryland and Georgia,” *Journal of the School of Letters* (Japan), 2 (2006): 15.

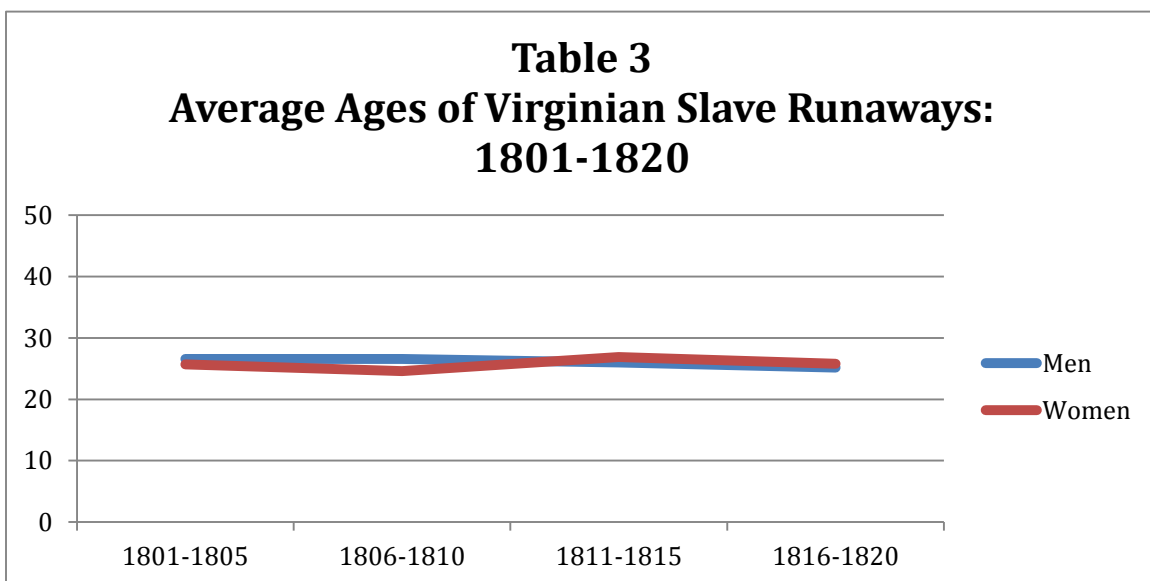
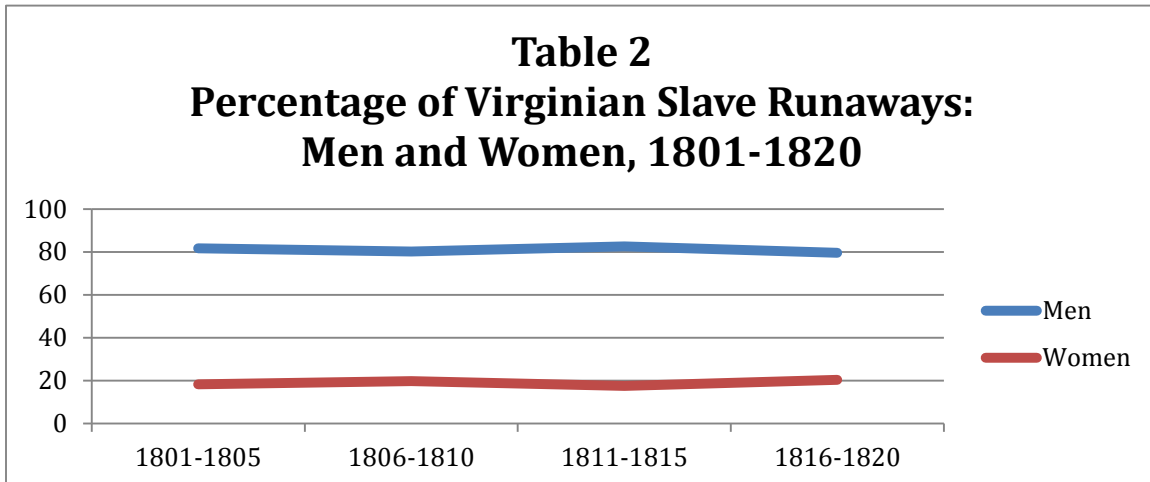
men. Presumably, these were precisely the slaves who found it hardest to find mates, been separated from close kin, and who had not yet formed households of their own.”²⁸ Indeed, as American slavery changed in new and profound ways in the nineteenth century, “the profile of runaways, with few exceptions, remained virtually unchanged.”²⁹ In his study of Virginian runaways, historian Stanley Campbell similarly attributed this demographic trend to the various maternal responsibilities of childbearing.³⁰ Even members of the master class were aware that men were more prone to run. Former slave John Holmes of Hanover County, Virginia explained that his overseer “whipped the women, but he did not whip the men, for fear they would run away.”³¹

²⁸ Philip Morgan, “Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance For Slave Culture. *Slavery and Abolition* 6:3 (1985), 72-73.

²⁹ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 210.

³⁰ Out of the 1,253 slaves examined in advertisements found in the *Richmond Enquirer*, Campbell states that 84.1 percent were male, 13.9 percent female, and 2 percent were children. “Runaway Slaves,” in *The Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery* ed. Randall M. Miller and John David Smith. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 650.

³¹ Drew, 168.



Sometimes such tactics had an opposite effect. Former Virginian slave Isaac Williams explained that he had fled specifically to avoid witnessing the violence that was inflicted upon his family. When asked if he would leave his wife and children, he responded:

(w)hat's the reason I wouldn't? to stay here with half enough to eat, and to see my wife persecuted for nothing when I can do her no good." (...) ...if ever I get away from that wife, I'll never have another in slavery, to be served in that way.³²

³² Drew, 58.

And Williams was not alone in his reasoning. Former slave David West, of King and Queen County, Virginia, boasted of his good treatment while in slavery, but explained that as “(m)y master died, and I heard that I was to be sold, which would separate me from my family, and knowing no law which would defend me, I concluded to come away.”³³ Upon discovering that he and his wife were to be separated, Henry Atkinson of Norfolk Virginia likewise “concluded that it would be right to leave her.”³⁴ Despite such misgivings about staying in slavery, it is clear that many would have preferred to stay with their loved ones, even if that meant living as slaves. “(H)ad it not been for near and dear friends,” said former slave Rev. Alexander Hemsley, “I should not have remained in slavery so long.”³⁵ It seems that many were not so willing to induce separation from their familial and kinship networks, especially if it was not thrust upon them.

In this light, it should not be surprising that there were always those runaways who were suspected of having fled so as to retrieve relatives from neighbouring counties, colonies or states. That the populating of newly acquired territories in the early seventeenth century was done primarily by whites and blacks from the Upper South, slaves certainly had incentives to run in many directions.³⁶ But prior to the mid-eighteenth century, slave families remained relatively intact, as it was customary to sell farms and their associated labour forces as complete units. It was not until the 1750s that separation from friends and family became a common feature of slave life, particularly in Virginia

³³ Drew, 87-88.

³⁴ Ibid, 81-82.

³⁵ Ibid, 33.

³⁶ Gerald Mullin has explained that North Carolina in particular, was a “haven” for fugitive slaves, “as both whites and blacks played a substantial role in populating the state in the middle of the 18th century. Family break up was unavoidable and provided an incentive for slaves to run south.” Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 110.

with its growing slave population. “The selling of humans from one colonist to another had of course always taken place,” explains historian Steven Deyle:

(i)n the early eighteenth century, however, these sales usually involved either entire estates or the occasional individual sold to settle debts and balance accounts. By the second half of the century, though, more and more slaves found themselves being sold to new owners and for a multitude of reasons, especially in Virginia with its large black population.³⁷

The overseas demand for tobacco had collapsed as war and crop failures in Europe stimulated a local demand for grains in the 1790s. The less laborious demands of wheat production, rather than the more intensive tobacco, resulted in a surplus of slaves who were either sold away to plantations in the newly settled lands and existing states that held slave deficits, or they were hired out to various individuals who could not afford to purchase slaves, but required the labour for seasonal work.³⁸ With the newfound demand for slave labour in the expanding cotton belt in the 1790s, and the banning of the British and American transatlantic slave trades in 1807-'08, a large, regional trade in slaves had developed in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. Soon after, North Carolina and the District of Columbia became export states, and “(b)y the 1820s, South Carolina and Kentucky (...) and eventually in the 1850s Georgia and Tennessee also became net exporters...”³⁹ Although this movement can most likely be traced to economic concerns, historian Phillip Schwartz has also shown that the trade was fed in-part, by a growth in

³⁷ Steven Deyle, “The Irony Of Liberty: Origins Of The Domestic Slave Trade,” *Journal Of The Early Republic* 12:1 (Spring, 1992), 52-53.

³⁸ Harold Gill has stated that wheat had become Virginia’s second staple by the 1770s. Jr. Harold B. Gill, “Wheat Culture In Colonial Virginia,” *Agricultural History* 52:3 (Jul, 1978), 382. By 1787, one observer commented that Virginia had “more slaves than she wanted.” Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 19.

³⁹ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 6-7.

slave criminality that was brought on by racial tensions in late eighteenth century Virginia.⁴⁰

There is now very little debate over the expansion of slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but Tadman has shown us that the movement of blacks from the Upper South to the Lower South was primarily done through slave trading, not planter migration, meaning that the majority of slaves who were caught in the domestic trade were generally transferred without their loved ones. And the likelihood that a slave born in the exporting states would be sold in his or her lifetime was quite high. Most recently, Michael Tadman estimated that the odds for children were as high as one in three.⁴¹ Teenagers would have faced a ten percent chance of being sold, approximately one third to one fifth of all marriages would have been broken up by sale, with approximately half of all slaves having endured “a major family separation” in their life.⁴² To use Herbert Gutman’s term, these sales would have had a “geometric effect” on those remaining slaves who were not sold off, leaving spouses, children, parents, siblings, and other relatives with the impact of division.⁴³ In other words, the repercussions of slave trading on slave life were ubiquitous. One former slave from North Carolina, Robert Glenn once mentioned that he “was bought and sold three times in one day.”⁴⁴ As domestic trading became more pervasive in the Upper South in the early nineteenth

⁴⁰ Phillip, Schwartz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves & The Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988).

⁴¹ Michael Tadman, “Interregional Slave Trade of the U.S. South,” Turner, Mary, ed. *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining In the Americas*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 131.

⁴² Tadman defines a major family separation as “young children and those in their early teens separated from parents, or husband divided from wife.” Michael Tadman, “Interregional Slave Trade of the U.S. South,” *Chattel Principle*, 131; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 45, 153; also see Robert H. Gudmestad, *Slave Resistance, Coffles, and Debates over Slavery*,” *Chattel Principle*, 78..

⁴³ Gutman, 146-48.

⁴⁴ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 329.

century, the affinity to reunify with loved ones certainly enticed many slaves to run in all sorts of directions, right at the same time that the North was becoming more closely aligned with legal and metaphorical notions of black freedom.⁴⁵ Some owners even created genealogical charts for their slaves in the event that they might flee, as it was presumed that runaways would return to their family.⁴⁶

The advertisement of H.G. Burton of Halifax, North Carolina, makes clear that subscribers did not discount the possibility that their runaways would make their way North, or deeper into the slaveholding states. Posting for the return of Essex in 1818, Burton offered a reward of one hundred dollars “for the apprehension and securing [of him] in jail in any of the adjoining states...,” and “as he absconded without any known cause,” Burton was “at a loss to conjecture what direction he may go....” Consequently, Burton advertised for Essex in newspapers in Raleigh, Fayetteville, Edenton, Norfolk, and Petersburg (VA). He even submitted his notice to the *Nashville Whig*, six hundred miles West.⁴⁷

In general, slaves ran in all directions, and they ran for a multitude of reasons, but what has just been made clear is that the very nature of escape assured that the act was a very lonely and extremely difficult affair. The likelihood of surviving such a trek must have seemed daunting to slaves considering escape to free land; coupled with the discouraging possibility of never finding nor ever seeing their loved ones again, it should not be surprising that many slaves took temporary leaves of absence as a substitution for

⁴⁵ Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre has argued that some of the “most apparent metonymic metaphors” were “hell=farther south, and “heaven=Canada (north).” Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre, “Double Meaning of Spirituals,” in *The Journal of Black Studies* 17:4 (Jun, 1987), 389.

⁴⁶ Franklin and Schweningen, 166.

⁴⁷ *The North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser* (23 January 1818), Freddie L. Parker, ed. *Stealing a Little Freedom: Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791–1840*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994) 121.

a freedom they would likely never have. One popular assumption in the history of American slavery is that those who fled had “an inherent yearning for freedom,” explained historian Larry Gara in his 1967 study of the Underground Railroad. “...(T)he legend takes little account of the practical situation in which the slave found himself or the very limited alternatives which that situation offered.”⁴⁸ Those runaways “who rode the underground line often did so after having already completed the most difficult and dangerous phase of their journey alone and unaided.”⁴⁹ The famed orator, intellectual, and Maryland runaway, Frederick Douglass seems to have exemplified Gara’s point quite clearly when he wrote about one of his many attempts at escape, having explained that him and his fellow runaways:

were stung by scorpions, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot, - after swimming rivers, (...) sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness, - we were overtaken by our pursuers... I say, this picture sometimes appaled us, and made us ‘rather bear those ills we had, Than fly to others, that we knew not of.’⁵⁰

It is therefore inappropriate to assume that all runaways fled for a life of legal freedom:

Though their lives were difficult, often cruelly burdensome, still many of them preferred immediate and tangible relief to the uncertainties of an abstract freedom. Thus slaveowners and overseers faced the constant problem of absenteeism of slaves who ran off in anger, in fear, or simply in the desire to avoid work.⁵¹

These absences varied in length, ranging from short stints, to prolonged periods. Many sought refuge in nearby secluded land, such as forests and swamps, while others sought more populated urban centres where they could blend in with local middling sorts.

⁴⁸ Gara, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁰ Carbado and Weise, 56.

⁵¹ Gara, 3, 40.

At the same time however, the general trend amongst slave owners was to conjecture that their slaves were heading to the Northern United States, but:

the increasing trend to head north... should be kept in the context of improved transportation and communications systems, the increased sophistication of slaves in finding out about how and where to go, and the fact that the great majority of runaways-even among those advertised in newspapers-still remained in the South.⁵²

That subscribers felt the need to point out that their runaways would probably make a permanent escape is the first indication that alternatives were available to slaves. If short-term absences were not common, then subscribers would not have felt the need to make a distinction between the two. Such was the case when George Washington of Fairfax, Virginia advertised for the return of Neptune and Cupid. Washington explained that:

As they went off without the least Suspicion, Provocation, or Difference with any Body, or the least angry Word or Abuse from their Overseers, 'tis supposed they will hardly lurk about in the Neighbourhood, but steer some direct Course (which cannot even be guessed at) in Hopes of an Escape...⁵³

When Philip M'Guire of Chowan County, North Carolina placed an advertisement for Dinah in 1808, he thought it necessary to warn that:

she is the wife of negro Hews, the property of Col. John Bond, of this County... and who, as he informed me, would keep his wife out eternally. This circumstance is mentioned to remind those who may take her, that Hews will, at the risk of his life, rescue her, should it come to his knowledge. (...) I have been informed that said wench is lurking in and about Edenton, for the purpose, I suppose, of better effecting her escape, together with her husband, who has threatened to march off, and take her with him.⁵⁴

Predictions such as M'Guire's were often accompanied by descriptions of runaways, as their successful escape depended on their ability to avoid recognition. Subscribers were

⁵² Franklin and Schweninger, 122.

⁵³ *Maryland Gazette* (20 August 1761), Windley, Vol. 2, 41-42.

⁵⁴ *The Edenton Gazette and North Carolina General Advertiser* (27 April 1808), Parker, 342.

thus quick to conjecture that runaways had wittingly changed their appearances. Take George Lux of Chartsworth Maryland, who posted for Jem in the *Baltimore Advertiser* ten days after his escape. He explained that he thought him to be “lurking in the neighbourhood” because “he took nothing with him but an osnabrug shirt, a pair of tow linen trousers, and a pair of old shoes.”⁵⁵ It is apparent in the text of the notice that Lux was confident that Jem was neither trying to reach free territory, nor be away for very long. If he were, Lux thought Jem smart enough to bring a change of clothes with him. Changing apparel was one of the basic ways slaves went about eluding capture.

Similarly, when Edward Dulin of Clover Hill, Virginia advertised for the return of Lewis and Emanuel, he likewise used their clothing to make a distinction in predicting their intentions. He opened with a description of Lewis:

about 18 years old, not very black, supposed to be between 5 feet 6 and 5 feet 8 inches high, straight and rather slender made, two of his upper front teeth gone, which leaves a considerable gap – his dress not recollected, except when he went off he had on a coarse drab colored roundabout jacket and blue mixed jersey pantaloons much worn & had been patched with striped home-made cloth – he may change his cloaths, as his acquaintance in the county and Alexandria and neighborhood is extensive – he is slovenly in his apparel, pert, talkative and assuming among his equals.⁵⁶

Dulin then went on to describe Emanuel, who ran away the next morning:

30 years of age, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, stout made across the shoulders, large feet, very much knock-knee'd, which occasions an appearance of a rocking motion in walking, or a lighter shade than Lewis; his cloaths not known as he has sundry and frequently changes them; (...) I did suppose Lewis only absconded for fear of correction, he having been very impertinent to his overseer; but Emanuel, who has a wife in the neighborhood from whom he has removed his cloths, having also absconded, I suppose it is intended by them to endeavor to get entirely off.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Baltimore Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (13 July 1779), Windley, vol. 2, 226.

⁵⁶ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political* (24 June 1809), Meaders, 115.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Dulin's apparent ambiguity over Lewis's initial intentions highlights the dichotomy of thought regarding runaway slaves. Dulin's original belief was that "Lewis only absconded for fear of correction," yet because Emanuel took his "sundry" clothes with him, "and frequently changes them," he supposes "it is intended by them to endeavor to get entirely off." Samuel White of Haverhill Massachusetts similarly indicated that Boston had "a light colour'd great Coat a red Cap with a black Wig, and will doubtless, as is usual for Runaways, change and vary his Dress, as often as possible, that he may the more effectually compleat his Design."⁵⁸ James Inglehart of Anne-Arundel Maryland likewise explained that Josh, Bob, and London were wearing Osnaburg cloathing when they departed, "but there is no doubt but they will change it, as I am satisfied 'tis their design to make a permanent escape."⁵⁹

Acknowledging the vast distances required and great dangers involved in reaching free territory, especially for those living in the Deep South, historian Amani Marshal has recently illustrated one of the ways that blacks escaped immediate bondage, but continued to reside in the South and attempted to live as free people by manipulating whites and their perceptions of race and liberty:

Acculturated women and men engaged in intricate performances in which they exploited colour, dress, language, and employment skills to transcend lines of race and class, in order to assume free identities. Recognising [sic] that freedom could be performed, if not legally attained, the majority of runaways did not strike out for free territory. Instead, many remained in the South where they created free identities that enabled them to secure employment, enjoy mobility, and maintain kinship ties, if only temporarily.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Boston Gazette* (5 May 1747), Bly, 66.

⁵⁹ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser* [1 August 1820], Meaders, 335.

⁶⁰ Amani Marshal, "'They Will Endeavor To Pass For Free': Enslaved Runaways' Performances Of Freedom In Antebellum South Carolina," *Slavery & Abolition* 31:2 (June, 2010): 161.

Hundreds of runaways sought the anonymity of the city, where they lived in a state of quasi-freedom. Referring specifically to antebellum Charleston, Marshal has explained that a “three-tier racial cast system” had emerged, “where free persons of colour held a precarious middle ground between free whites and enslaved blacks. Slaveholding whites encouraged the growth of a loyal middle caste, allowing free mulattoes with whom they shared blood ties or business connections to attain a modest level of wealth and respectability.”⁶¹ A relatively large, free black community had emerged in Charleston by the eve of the Civil War, which made it the most popular urban destination for fugitive slaves in the southeastern United States.⁶² Many were legally free blacks, but many were also runaways who had found refuge and anonymity amongst the city’s larger population:

This group included skilled bondservants who hired their time in the city. They had autonomy to procure employment, negotiate wages, retain a portion of their profits, and live away from their owners. (...) They were de facto free persons who lived and worked as free people despite their lack of official state documentation to prove their freedom. Legally, they were slaves, as were any children a woman in this position might have, and could be seized and sold by the state. Until they were captured, however, they were legally entitled to own property and live as free persons of colour.⁶³

Although much can be said about the pragmatic and logistical advantages of escape that slaves in the Upper South had over their companions in the Lower South, advertisements from nineteenth century Virginian newspapers reveal that many runaways also attempted to perform freedom in nearby towns, despite their close proximity to the Northern United States and Upper Canada. The conjecture of many subscribers makes

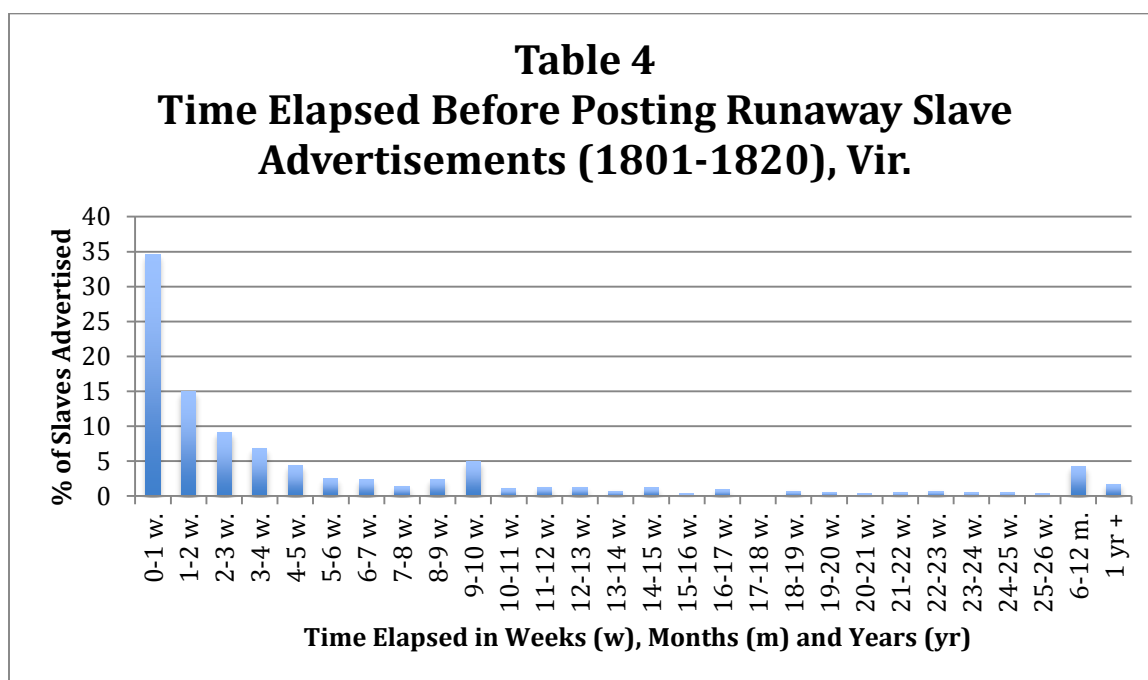
⁶¹ Marshal, 165.

⁶² Marshal has pointed out that the free black population of Charleston had grown to 3441 people by 1850, which represents 8 percent of the city’s total population. Ibid, 164.

⁶³ Ibid, 164.

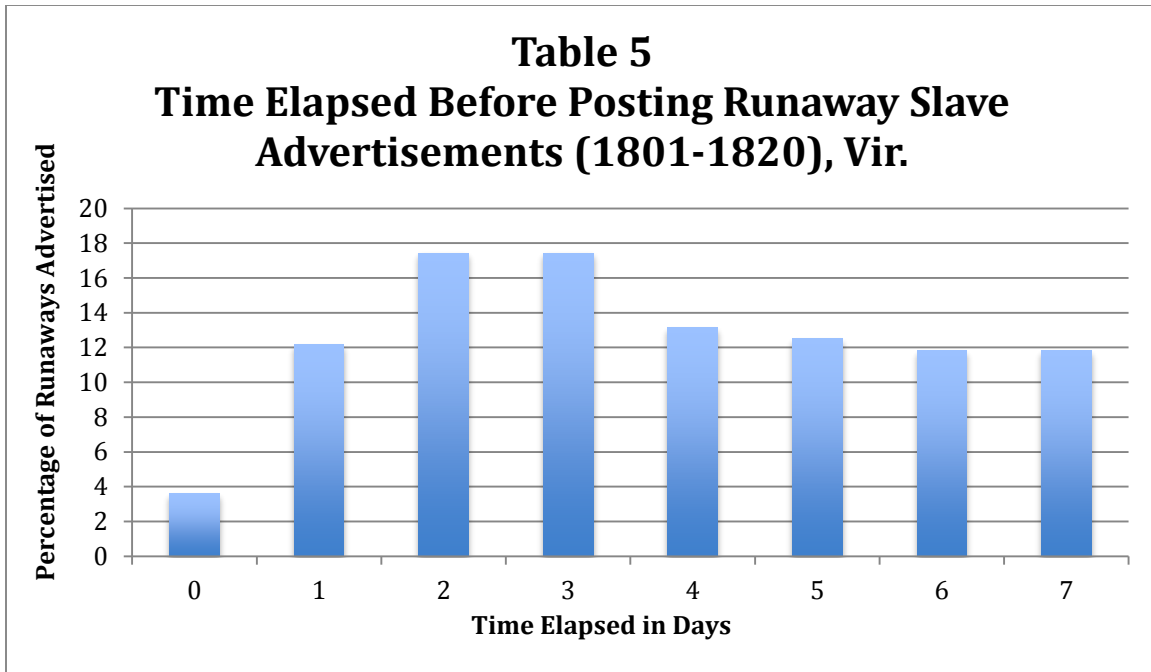
clear that those runaways who fled with “an Intent never to return to their owner,” were not necessarily trying to go great distances.⁶⁴

The statistics accumulated from early nineteenth century Virginian runaway advertisements help give a larger picture of subscribers and their understanding of slave absence. Approximately half of all subscribers (50.46%) posted two weeks after their runaways had made their initial escape, approximately a third (34.63%) posted after a month, and roughly one in every twenty (5.52%) posted six months to over a year after their slaves had made their initial elopement (See Table IV).⁶⁵



⁶⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette* (11 July 1771), Windley, v. 3, 302.

⁶⁵ These statistics have been compiled only from those advertisements that have definitive indications of the disparity between when slaves fled and when an advertisement was written. These notices were found throughout the book. Meaders.



Although notices only give us a limited sample of the runaway slave population, these statistics make clear that many subscribers believed that it was still feasible to retrieve their property even after long periods of absence. When Robert Brown posted for Daniel in 1813 for instance, he did so three months after he had fled from his farm near Middleburg, Virginia: “Having been informed that he is now in this town,” presumably seeking employment as a waiter or cook, Brown posted two advertisements for Daniel within a span of three days. Even after an absence of three months, Daniel was in Alexandria less than fifty miles away.⁶⁶ In posting for Jane a year and a half after her escape from Fairfax County Virginia, Sally Lindsay – the executor of the deceased, Opie Lindsay – explained that Jane “was frequently seen and heard of through the neighborhood for the first eight months after she went away.” Although Jane was then presumed to be “lurking about Alexandria, Georgetown or the City of Washington, where she has a number of acquaintances and some relations...,” it became clear to readers that

⁶⁶ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political* (7 July 1813, 10 July 1813), Meaders, 194.

Jane had stuck around Fairfax as she “has a husband in this neighborhood, and I have reason to believe he frequently sees her.”⁶⁷ Similarly, when Reuben Mansfield posted an advertisement for the return of Garland, it was sixteen months after he had fled Albemarle County, Virginia. Though it is unclear if Mansfield had previously advertised for Garland, what is important is that he published an advertisement nearly a year and a half after his slave’s initial elopement. Mansfield believed that Garland, after having “being so long runaway,” was visiting friends and family less than a hundred miles down the road.⁶⁸ And when Richard Norris posted for the return of Alse and her mother Winny in the *Alexandria Daily Advertiser* in July 1804, he explained that Winny “has been a runaway for about 6 years. She was for sometime in Alexandria, called her name Winny Buckner, and once hired herself to a Mr. Sutton of that place.”⁶⁹ It is clear that even after long absences, slaves were not necessarily trying to escape to the north.

Although it is unclear if Norris believed that Winny was attempting to pass as a free person, many other subscribers detailed the artistic qualities of such performances. “(I)t is said” that Jonathan “passes for a free man,” said subscriber John Anderton, “and that he has been lately seen working at Mr. Moore’s mill, in Baltimore-Town” further up the Chesapeake Bay.⁷⁰ After Amy’s escape, Parker Hare of Petersburg Virginia, explained that she took with her a “change of apparel, which makes her appear more like a free woman...” and “probably goes by the name of Betty Browne, having stolen an indenture of one of that name, (...) and by this indenture hath gained her liberty.”⁷¹ When Nicholas Maccubbin of Annapolis Maryland posted for the return of Celia, he described her as

⁶⁷ *Alexandria Gazette* (4 November 1815) Meaders, 231.

⁶⁸ *The Richmond Enquirer* (24 July 1812), Ibid, 185.

⁶⁹ *Alexandria Advertiser* (22 July 1804), Ibid, 38.

⁷⁰ *Baltimore Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (22 July 1783) Windley, v.2, 289-290.

⁷¹ *Virginia Gazette* (26 October 1769), Windley, v. 1, 301.

having “an Osnabrigs Petticoat and Waistcoat, and a blue and White Cotton Handkerchief;” but, it became apparent to readers that Celia was not necessarily looking to escape the colony when Maccubbin explained that “she at Times dresses in Men’s Cloaths, and changes her own and Master’s Name, when it suits her; and at other Times pretends to be Free.”⁷² Thomas Gaskins of Northumberland, Virginia made a similar prediction when he described David as:

a very cunning artful Fellow, I imagine he will sell and swap his Clothes as may suit him. Though his Hair is of the Negro Kind, he keeps it very high and well combed; but, as he wants to be free, I imagine he will cut it off, and get a Wig to alter and disguise himself. (...) He can read pretty well, and I make no Doubt will endeavor to pass for a Freeman and get himself a forged Pass...⁷³

In publishing his narrative towards the end of the nineteenth century, Isaac D. Williams also had some illuminating commentary on the act of performing freedom. In their attempts to reach Philadelphia in 1852, he and his fellow runaways had to cross the city to reach the railway. “Coming very near Washington” explained Williams, “we reached a tollgate and bought a cigar apiece from the man who kept it, who took us for Washington darkes:”

(y)ou see going to the city we were not so likely to be suspected of being runaways as we would be if fleeing from it... All of us lit out cigars and put our hats on one side of our heads as though we were out on a lark together. Then I directed Nicholas to go across the street while Banks and I strolled along together in a free and easy sort of style. This would be about the last thing the authorities would expect in runaways. We passed along the elegant streets, looking everybody in the face and acting as though we feared nothing. We were not expected in the least... We met several policemen and passed them without their saying a word to us.⁷⁴

⁷² *Maryland Gazette* (14 August 1751), Windley, v. 2, 15.

⁷³ *Virginia Gazette* (5 November 1772) Ibid, v. 1, 123.

⁷⁴ “From Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life. Reminiscences as told by Isaac D. Williams to “Tege,” in Barbado and Weise, 160.

It is clear that the concept of performing freedom was one that was known to both slaves and subscribers alike. Many took up lives living and working amongst populations of local whites, while others lurked about in nearby forests or swamplands. Because many runaways were not far from their places of work, and usually returned on their own, many subscribers were even hesitant to use the term ‘runaway’; various legal stipulations existed around the country that allowed for a slave to be away for a determined amount of time before he or she would be considered as such. For instance, Alabama state law allowed slave owners to wait up to ten days before reporting a missing slave, at which point they would legally qualify as a runaway.⁷⁵ In his legal assessment, James Sellers explained that “(a) slave who merely went off on a short trip, did not fall into this classification.”⁷⁶ Hence the reason Job Colcock was probably so tentative when he advertised for the return of his slave in the Charleston *Royal Gazette*. Colcock explained that since Leonard “has absented himself some time from me; this looks so much like running away...”⁷⁷

And Colcock was by no means alone in waiting “some time” before making the official declaration that he had a runaway on his hands. Approximately a third (34.62%) of nineteenth century Virginian runaway advertisements were posted within the first week of a slave’s escape, and just under a half (49.54%) were posted within two weeks. (See Table IV). And when we look at the statistics for those who posted within the first week of a slave’s escape (Table V), we still see an average wait time of approximately half a week (3-4 days). One in every twenty (5.47%) subscribers placed a notice up to

⁷⁵ H. Toulmin, *A Digest Of The Laws of Alabama: Containing the Statutes and Resolutions in Force at the End of the General Assembly in January, 1823: To Which Is Added an Appendix* (1823), 630.

⁷⁶ James Benson Sellers, *Slavery In Alabama*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama: 1950), 266.

⁷⁷ *Royal Gazette* (14-18 July 1781), Windley, v. 3, 584-585.

two days after their slave's escape, indicating that the vast majority (94.53%) gave their runaways a grace period of at least a couple of days.⁷⁸ With roughly half having posted after a few days, but within the first couple of weeks, these statistics suggest that if a master was going to post for a runaway, they generally waited just over a week before doing so. As George Lux of Chatsworth Maryland explained when he posted for Jem ten days after his escape: "I have hitherto forborne advertising him, thinking he was lurking in the neighbourhood, and would soon return home of his own accord."⁷⁹

These statistics coupled with George Lux's commentary offer us a vivid picture of master-slave relations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Chesapeake: that short, periodic absences from work were tolerated, but only insofar as they did not significantly challenge a master's right to ownership. That is, as long as slaves did not impinge upon their masters' finances and reputations. Longer absences were not unheard of, but that such short-term absences were allowed indicates that subscribers did not necessarily consider their slave's absence to be vindictive. The commentary of former slaves can corroborate that many would simply "slip away" to pray, when they wanted to visit friends and family outside of working hours, or when they wanted to avoid watching the punishment of a loved one.⁸⁰ The words of subscriber Archibald Cary also illustrates that absences were also often caused by miscommunication. Cary explained that as his "new Negroe Man Slave, who was imported this Summer... cannot tell who he belongs to he may be committed to Prison... The little Time I had him he went by the Name of

⁷⁸ Given that newspapers were not printed on a daily basis in the eighteenth century, slave owners were most likely unable to submit advertisements the same day that their slave escaped. Those advertisements gathered by Daniel Meaders for the nineteenth century however, indicate that they were published on a daily basis, and still show an average grace period of 3-4 days. Meaders.

⁷⁹ *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (13 July 1779), Windley, vol. 2, 226.

⁸⁰ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 157, 160.

David, tho' he may not now remember it..."⁸¹ Similarly, subscriber Matthew Tuell indicated that his two "Negro Lads named GEORGE and STEPNEY" may not be to blame for their absence when he explained that he had hired out the two for seven years: "I have Reason to suspect that Mr. Digges, under Pretence of their Time being expired (which I am ready to dispute to the contrary) sent a Negro in the Night Time to inveigle them away."⁸² Such testimony prompts us to read the words of subscribers against the grain, meaning that a large portion of absentee slaves probably went unnoticed or intentionally unadvertised.

This type of absence was so common "that most planters either did not make it a matter of record or simply referred to it in a random manner in their correspondence."⁸³ Many slaves also ran away after a brawl with fellow slaves, overseers, or masters. "It is very common for slaves, when whipped or threatened with a whipping, to run into the woods," explained former North Carolinian slave James Curry:

and after a short time, when subdued by hunger, not knowing whither to flee for relief, to return and throw themselves upon the mercy of their masters. Therefore, when a slave runs away, on such an occasion, it is expected that he will soon return, and little trouble is taken about it for some days.⁸⁴

If and when, a subscriber decided to post for a runaway, their commentary makes clear that they viewed runaways on a spectrum of time, with permanency on one end, short-term on the other, and the majority of runaways having fallen somewhere in between. Former slave Lorenzo Ivy of Pittsylvania County, Virginia seemed to illustrate the dichotomy when he commented: "Runaways! Lawd, yes, dey had plenty of runaways. Dere was two kin's of runaways—dem what hid in de woods an' dem what ran away to

⁸¹ *Virginia Gazette* (Hunter) (14 November 1751), Windley, vol. 1, 24.

⁸² *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (11 June 1772), Ibid, 115.

⁸³ Mullin, 56.

⁸⁴ James Curry, "Narrative Of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave," In Carbado and Weise, eds., 33.

free lan! Mos' slaves jes' runaway an' hide in de woods for a week an two an' den come on back.”⁸⁵

Spurred on by a random argument or punishment, many slaves made off for short periods until their anger and frustration had mitigated, and eventually returned on their own. Posting in the Annapolis *Maryland Gazette* in 1775, Thomas Jones seems to have expected James to reappear when he noted that he “took an abrupt leave of his overseer last Wednesday,” and bemoaned that he “has not yet returned...”⁸⁶ Subscriber Mary Clay probably best described the repetitive nature of absences when she explained Jude “has been subject to running away ever since she was ten years old.”⁸⁷ But perhaps the commentary of former Virginian slave, Rev. Ishrael Massie can attest to the pervasiveness of such escapes. “Aw chile, woods stayed full of niggers...” he remarked. “Dese slaves stay in woods ‘til dey git tired. Come back to marster, git a beatin’-‘nine and thirty,’ dey use to call hit.”⁸⁸ Former Virginian slave, Uncle Jeff Stanfield similarly explained that his sister Lizzie was always fighting with the master, and likewise returned after a brief skirmish: “(o)ne day de marster carried her in a room to whip her, but she beat him an’ den broke out of de room an’ ran away an’ stayed all night an’ came back de next day.”⁸⁹

Former Virginian slave, Mrs. Liza Brown similarly commented on the temporary nature of such absences, but continued to explain that they had the potential to turn longer than over night: “(y)es, de slaves used to run away f’om our flock an’ stay in de woods. (...) When de runaway slaves git tired in de woods, dey come back home an’ ole Marsa

⁸⁵ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 153.

⁸⁶ *Maryland Gazette* (13 April 1775), Windley, v. 2, 109-110.

⁸⁷ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (20 October 1768), Ibid, vol. 1, 65.

⁸⁸ Perdue, Barden. and Phillips, 209.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 280.

would beat ‘em up again. Den sometimes dey take to de woods again an’ stay.”⁹⁰ Former Virginia slave Charles Crawley remarked that “(w)hen slaves ran away dey was brought back to dey master and mistess. When dey couldn’t ketch ‘em dey didn’ bother, yes let ‘em go. Sometimes de slaves would go an’ take up an’ live at together places; some of dem lived in de woods off of takin’ tings, sech as hogs, corn an’ vegetables from other folks farm.”⁹¹ The commentary of former Virginian slave Cornelia Carney likewise illustrates that longer absences would be had by slaves that were lurking nearby. She explained:

(f)ather got beat up so much da tarter while he run away an’ lived in de woods. Used to slip back to de house Saddy nights an’ sometime Sunday when he knowed Marse and Missus done gone to meetin’. Mama used to send John, my oldes’ brother, out to de woods wid food fo’ father, an’ what he didn’t git fum us de Lawd provided. Never did ketch him, though ole Marse search real sharp.⁹²

Former Virginian slave Mr. Beverly Jones explained that his uncle Jack “was always runnin’ away,” and boasted that he once stayed out for five years.⁹³ And former slave Charles Grandy described a fellow bondsman by the name of John Sally who apparently “runned away an’ didn’ never come back. Didn’ go no place neither. Stayed right ‘roun’ de plantation. Use to come in at night an’ steal hawgs an’ chickens fer foud. Dat ole man died in de woods. Never did come out.”⁹⁴ Summarizing the general feeling towards some runaways, one former slave remarked that “(d)ey stayed in de woods a long time an’ dere

⁹⁰ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 63.

⁹¹ Ibid, 78.

⁹² Ibid, 67.

⁹³ Ibid, 181.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 117.

beards growed so long dat no one could very well recerginize dem. Dey actually look like wild men.”⁹⁵

Former slave Arthur Greene likewise attested to the long-term but close proximity of absent slaves despite a close proximity to, but isolation from local white populations. He explained that he knew of a man who “lived in a cave de groun’ fer fifteen yeahs ‘fo’ Lee’s surrender:”

He made himself a den under de groun’; he an’ his wife, an’ raised fifteen chillum down dar. Ha! Ha! Ha! Had a child fur every ‘ear he stayed in dar. Dis den slopped [sloped] back to keep water from coming in. Hit was near a crick what he could git water; he jes’ had to hide or die one, ‘cause his marster was gonna kill him. ‘Cose I knowed dis nigger well. His name was Pattin. Dey uster burn bark fur wood ‘cause hit didn’t smoke. He got food by goin’ ‘bout nights an’ steal a hog, cow, er anythin’ an’ carry down dar. No mam, de chillum an’ wife never came out de den. Ef dey did an’ was seen dey wouldn’ neber gone back.⁹⁶

Former Virginian slave Rev. Ishrael Massie described a similar situation in which a slave family lived in what he described as a “vault in th’ woods:”

It was “fixed jes like dis room an’ he had a wife an’ two boys dat he reaised under dar. (...) Dar wuz a hole cut in de groun’. I don’ cut a many a one an’ stole lumber at night to kiver hit over wid. Den dirt wuz piled on top of dis plank so dat hit won’t rain in dar. Den he has him some piping-through-like-made of wood dat runned so many feet in de groun’. Dis carried smoke way away from dis cave. Fer fir used oak bark ‘cause hit didn’t give much smoke. He had him a hole to come up on lan’. Dar wuz sticks, pine beard, and trash on top to kiver de hole. Ha, ha, ha. Ya could stan’ right over dis hole an’ wouldn’t kno’ hit. Dis cave wuz not far from de crick. Reasons fer dat is ya could git water-an’ de dirt we throwd in crick to be washed down. (...) T’other part of dis is de room wuz 10 feet square. In dis room dar wuz a bed made out of rails. De mattress wuz made out of his wife’s old dresses an’ somebody else’s dat he could steal. De fiah place wuz made of rocks an’ bricks. Dar wuz no stoves. Sawed off blocks wuz used fer his chairs. Cooking things wuz old pieces of pots an’ pans broken at de great house.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 54-55.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 125.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 209-210.

Although recent studies have discounted the existence of an extensive network of petite maroon colonies in the antebellum Upper South, the former slaves of late antebellum Virginia attest to the existence of smaller, independent slave communities that lived in isolated areas for extended periods of time.⁹⁸ Of course, historians have for a long time known about the attraction of the Great Dismal Swamp; located on the border of Virginia and North Carolina, Great Dismal is over 450 square kilometres of woody marshland that provided a safe haven for many runaways.⁹⁹ Despite Great Dismal, Loren Schweningen recently argued that “(i)n the Chesapeake region, the terrain and majority white population made establishing runaway encampments difficult. (...) such endeavors were rare and by the late eighteenth century, with the decline of Africans in the slave population, these resurrected African enclaves became virtually nonexistent.”¹⁰⁰ Yet, descriptions of Chesapeake slaves living in ground burrows and caves on the eve of the Civil War cannot be ignored, albeit these encampments seem smaller, less complex, and comprised of acculturated blacks unlike the ones Schweningen described on the early eighteenth century South Carolinian frontier, West Florida, and Louisiana.¹⁰¹

Although the Chesapeake had always been one of the most densely populated regions of the North American mainland, it appears that many runaway slaves were able

⁹⁸ Gerald Mullin argued that “maroonage depended on a terrain of relatively inaccessible wilderness, and the Southern frontier was vast and rugged.” Gerald Mullin, *Africa in America, Africa In America. Slave Acculturation and Resistance In The American South and British Caribbean, 1736-1831*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 45.

⁹⁹ “Dey hide in Dismal swamp in holes in de groun’ so hidden dey stay dere years an’ white folks, dogs, or nothin’ else could fine ‘em,” explained former Virginian slave, Mrs. Sis Shackelford; Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 252.

¹⁰⁰ Loren Schweningen, “Maroons and Flight: An Overview.” (Paper presented at the Fourth Annual International Conference at the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition. 2002), 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 5.

to maintain a life of relative autonomy that was closer to home.¹⁰² Even the Chesapeake's close proximity to the free Northern States did not deter many slaves from running very far, as runaway advertisements and slave testimonials offer vivid evidence that attests to the often provisional but commonly long-term nature of slave absence. Although there were always those slaves who would rather die in their attempts at escape than to return to their lives of bondage, these sources show that alternatives were available that helped neutralize whatever affinity slaves might have otherwise felt for a life of legal freedom. As we will see, these absences were extremely costly to owners, and challenged the social norm that came to hold the whole system in place.

¹⁰² Lincoln Mullen, "The Spread of U.S. Slavery, 1790–1860," interactive map, (Accessed 10 October 2014) <http://lincolnmullen.com/projects/slavery/>, doi: 10.5281/zenodo.9825; Minnesota Population Center, National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 2.0 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2011), <http://www.nhgis.org>.

Appendix III

The North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser (23 January 1818) Freddie Parker, Stealing a Little Freedom. Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 121:

ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD, For the apprehension and securing in jail in any of the adjoin states, a negro man slave by the name of ESSEX, the property of Mrs. Mary Jones, Halifax, North-Carolina, :-Should he be apprehended in this state a reward of FIFTY DOLLARS will be paid for his being secured, so that his owner may get him, should he be brought home all reasonable expences will be paid in addition to the said reward. Essex is an excellent SHOE_MAKER, a deep mulatto, about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, square built, speaks quick, full eyes, very fond of spirituous liquors, and when drunk is very apt to be insolent. As he absconded without any known cause, I am at a loss to conjecture what direction he may go. H.G. BURTON

Halifax, Jan. 15, 1818.

The Editors of the Fayetteville Observer, Edenton Gazette, norfolkd Herald, Petersburg Intelligencer, and Nashville Whig, are requested to give the above three insertions, and forward their accounts to the Star office, Raleigh.

Baltimore Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser (13 July 1779), Lathan Windley, Runaway Slave Advertisements. A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790, vol. 2, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 226:

SIXTY DOLLARS REWARD.

Chatsworth, July 12, 1779.

RAN away from the Subscriber, about ten days ago, a NEGRO MAN, named Jem, about 30 years old, 5 feet 10 inches high, straight, and well limbed. As he took nothing with him but an osnabrug shirt, a pair of tow linen trousers, and a pair of old shoes. I have hitherto forborne advertising him, thinking he was lurking in the neighbourhood, and would soon return home of his own accord. When he went off, he had on an iron collar, which was put on him to keep him at home, but probably is, ere this, taken off. As my late father bought the said Jem of Mr. Richard Owings, son of Samuel, and he of Mr. Charles Wells, Sen. He may be lurking near their houses. Whoever brings the said Jem home, shall have the above reward, and reasonable charges paid, by GEORGE LUX.

III The Economic & Moral Costs of Absence

Unproductive, Devalued Property, and Consequences
for 'Paternalism' and 'Social Death' in Slave Studies.

“As this inhuman creature, when she went away, left myself extreme ill in one bed, her mistress in another, and two of my children, not one able to help the other, she must be conscious of some very atrocious crime: I therefore humbly request every friend and acquaintance I have, in town and country, to use their utmost endeavours, in taking and delivering the said wench and children to me, or to the warden of the work-house...”

-Stephen Hartley, advertising
for Kate, 13 October 1757¹

So far we have seen that slave absence was a pervasive problem in the eighteenth and nineteenth century United States, and that running was considered as much a temporary affair as it was permanent to both slaves and the master class alike. Now that the temporality of running has been fleshed out, we will look at the socio-economic costs of absence for those who owned or hired slaves for seasonal work. This will position us for the final chapter, in which we will examine how subscribers negotiated with runaways in their attempts to minimize those costs. To those who benefited from slave labour, running was an economically burdening and socially debasing act; this was especially the case if slaves fled when their labour was needed most, and as organized abolitionism grew in the antebellum period. As political tensions magnified over the continuance of American slavery, owners became more inclined to tout benevolent qualities of the master-slave relationship and attribute the existence of runaways to malignant abolitionism. With the expansion of the slave system and development of pro-slavery

¹ *South-Carolina Gazette* (Timothy)(13 October 1757), Lathan Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History From The 1730 to 1790*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), v. 3, 158-159.

paternalist attitudes in the nineteenth century, runaway slaves adversely affected the finances of masters and increasingly challenged their social authority in ways previously unseen in the country's history. As slavery became more profitable, truant slaves demonstrated their de facto economic and social powers in contemporary society.

In November 1793, William Littlejohn, a local merchant and lawyer in Edenton North Carolina, sold "an old stout negro fellow named DICK PEPPER" to one George MacKenzy. Upon the transfer of sale, Dick immediately escaped from his new owner, and found various terms of work as a caulker over the next several years. Almost five years later, an advertisement appeared in the Edenton State Gazette of North Carolina, which had been placed by MacKenzy after incidentally encountering Dick on Ballard's Bridge approximately fifteen miles outside of town. "(U)pon seizing him," explained MacKenzy, "he knocked down my servant and endeavoured to get me down... I found passes granted to him by people of property, and one from a Lady, authorizing any person to employ or deal with said slave according to law." MacKenzy explained that he had "been informed where he [Dick] has worked at his trade with different people, and they may depend on being prosecuted, as it is a most villainous practice to harbor any persons property, and deprive the master of his slave's labour, and of which the owner and family might stand in need of." He offered a reward of ten dollars "to any person delivering me the named slave, and all reasonable charges."²

We will probably never know if MacKenzy ever recaptured Dick or if he eventually confronted those who employed his runaway, but what is certain is that this was not an isolated incident for this subscriber. For appearing in the same newspaper

² *State Gazette of North Carolina* (4 July 1798), Freddie L. Parker, ed., *Stealing a Little Freedom: Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791–1840*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 35.

approximately a month later was another advertisement placed by MacKenzy, rewarding four dollars for the return of a twenty-year old “yellow negro slave... named SIP” who had fled a week after MacKenzy had placed his last notice. He claimed to be informed that Sip was “harboured about town” and forewarned:

all Captains of vessels from carrying him on board their vessels, or employing him upon any pretence whatever and all persons from harbouring him in their kitchens, houses or premises, as they may depend on being prosecuted, if found in any person’s house, or employ...³

It is clear through the text of his notices that MacKenzy was distressed by the lack of cooperation he was receiving from local “people of property,” and by the loss inflicted upon his finances as a result of his slaves’ absences. He was aware that runaways would be assisted during their absence, regardless of whether they were lurking about or putting great distances between them and their places of work.

Broadly speaking, runaways were helped by a variety of people: white, black, free, and enslaved. Subscribers were usually quick to predict that they would be assisted by family and friends, fellow runaways, poor whites, and especially free blacks and known abolitionists. In fact, concerns that northerners would encourage slave insolence became particularly prominent in Virginia as the issue of slavery became central to legislative debates in the 1840s and ‘50s.⁴ In notices for fugitive slaves, it was even common for subscribers to outright accuse individuals and families thought to be aiding and abetting runaways, to allude to “some resigning person,” or to refer to “some rascals,

³ *State Gazette of North Carolina* [Edenton] (8 August 1798), North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements Digital Collection. The University of North Carolina (Greensboro) (Accessed 1 December 2014): <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/RAS>

⁴ Franklin and Schweninger have argued that this was particularly true in Virginia with its large black population and close proximity to the Northern states. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels On The Plantation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 278.

whose names I forbear to mention.”⁵ It was also thought “that a caution against harbouring or entertaining” known runaways was “unnecessary,” as a simple suggestion that one was helping fugitives was enough to ruin their reputation.⁶

For practical reasons, subscribers were usually quick to presume that runaways would seek out the assistance of individuals with access to various locales and waterways. These parties included fellow slaves or indentured servants, such as fishing, market, and kitchen bondsmen, but also free middling whites such as masters of vessels and their crews.⁷ In 1804, an incident in Richmond Virginia, pitted fifty-four residents against captains of northern vessels who were suspected of having incited slaves to run.⁸ “In those days a good ship captain would hide a slave way up in the top sail and carry him out of Virginia to New York and Boston,” former slave Richard Slaughter explained.⁹ Subscriber William Saunders seems to have exemplified the hostility that slave owners harboured towards various watermen, when in 1810 he advertised for his

⁵ George Turberville’s advertisement for Will is particularly descriptive in its accusations. He named five individuals outright, and gave details of their professions and where they lived. *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie) (15 March 1776), Windley, vol. 1, 249-250; Thos. Bell, *Sen* similarly wrote that his runaway had “some relations on the Hickory Mountain, in this county; he was very intimate in the family of Peter Chavas (a free man of colour,) who has left this county, and is now living in or near the Hawfields, Orange county, and also with the Carters’ free persons of colour, who not live in Guilford county; he also had some connexion with the Hathcocks, who ran away from Chatham a year or two since, and are now living in Davidson county. I have good reason to believe the Hathcocks, Carters, or Chavas would harbor him, and render any assistance in their power.” *The Star* (Raleigh), (24 May 1827), Freddie Parker, ed., *Stealing a Little Freedom: Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791–1840*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 480; *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (30 October 1819), Daniel Meaders, ed., *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves In Virginia, 1801-1820*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 327; (10 March 1826), Parker, 477.

⁶ Quotations are taken from Robert C. Nicholas’s advertisement for his “negro man BAILEY.” *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Nicolson) (7 August 1779), Windley, v. 1, 205; Franklin and Schweningen, 278.

⁷ Phillip Morgan identified “Fishing Negroes”, market slaves, and ‘kitchen Negroes” in Charleston, and Gerald Mullin also noted that ship captains and watermen were the most frequent offenders of the slave code in South Carolina. Philip D. Morgan. “Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance For Slave Culture.” *Slavery and Abolition* 6:3, (1985,) 71; Gerald Mullin. *Flight and Rebellion. Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (Oxford University Press: New York, 1972,) 114.

⁸ Franklin and Schweningen, 276.

⁹ Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, eds. *Wheevils In The Wheat. Interviews With Virginia Ex-Slaves*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976) 272.

two slaves: “JIM, commonly called Jim Duckenfield... [and] TOM, commonly called by the name of Tom Cook....” He offered a reward of forty dollars for their return or securing “in any goal,” and included a general forewarning to anyone “harboring, employing or carrying” them off “under penalty of the law.” He then gave special mention to “all Masters of vessels in particular,” who:

are cautioned against taking them on board their vessel under any pretence whatever. Should any Captain or commander so far offend the majority of the law as to take them on board their vessel, and time information of the same being given by any person, so that the ordinary process can be served on said Captain or commander, 100 dollars reward will be given to such person, or fifty dollars in either case. To be convicted of such a crime is, we presume, within the knowledge of every person, punishable with death.¹⁰

Although most subscribers were not as extreme as Saunders in their threats of legal recourse, these advertisements exemplify the suspicions that slave owners harboured towards other individuals thought to be helping, stealing, employing, or collaborating with runaway slaves. That almost every advertisement included a reminder that helping runaways was illegal indicates that subscribers were well aware of, and probably paranoid over the prospect. They are revealing of the expectations that truancy was a problem that demanded the assistance of everyone, although distrustful about whether they would receive it.

Such reactions from the master class were undoubtedly prompted by the financial loss and social embarrassment brought on by missing slaves. By the early eighteenth century, black bondage had been completely integrated as an established institution of colonial life as it served two fundamental needs: it provided a long-term solution to the problem of labour, and it elevated the social status of whites looking to distinguish

¹⁰ *The Edenton Gazette and North Carolina General Advertiser* (25 May 1810), Parker, 350.

themselves in an increasingly hierarchical and racist society. No free person would willingly labour for another person as land was plentiful, free people would rationally toil their own land, and white indentures were unsustainable as they would eventually secure their own land and servants once their terms of service were complete.¹¹ As the slave population began to increase naturally in the early eighteenth century Chesapeake, historian Allan Kulikoff has explained that black bondsmen “provided the material basis for the development of a gentry ruling class in the region: wealthy men invested heavily in slaves, and these men and women produced vast quantities of tobacco for their masters.”¹² By the revolutionary period, when the Founding Fathers declared their rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” while they simultaneously condoned an institution that enslaved a fifth of the population, the “central paradox of American history” was not a contemporary oversight or hypocrisy, but can be better understood as a reflection of slavery’s socio-economic importance by the 1770s.¹³

What the members of the Continental Congress could not ignore was the very real possibility that emancipation would paralyze their efforts at independence and contribute to economic destabilization. Commerce was the best way to fund the war and establish American credit abroad; and tobacco, the most lucrative commodity available to colonists, was produced primarily by slaves. As historian Edmund Morgan once commented, “to a very large degree, Americans bought their independence with slave

¹¹ Evsey D. Domar has argued that large stretches of land in the English colonies, coupled with a relatively small population, created a high demand for a coerced workforce amongst European settlers: no rational free person would work for another, as they would toil their own land. That white servitude existed before black servitude should also be a prime indication that racism was not necessarily the cause of slavery. Evsey D. Domar. “The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis.” In *The Journal of Economic History* 30:1 (Mar., 1970), 30.

¹² Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves. The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 6.

¹³ Edmund S. Morgan, “Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox,” *The Journal of American History* 59:1 (Jun., 1972), 6.

labor.”¹⁴ Hence the royal emancipation proclamations issued during the war by the fourth Earl of Dunmore John Murray, and British General Sir Henry Clinton. Since Dunmore initially pledged freedom to slaves if they fled to the British, and Clinton later declared freedom to all slaves of American patriots regardless if they fought against rebels, their proclamations can be seen as intentional economic offensives against the embryonic United States.¹⁵ In light of the realities faced by the delegates of the Continental Congress, independence from Britain was the most pressing concern. The issue of slavery was thus only partially addressed by the national congress and later discussed in the constitutional debates of 1787; the result of this was a continuance of the African trade for another twenty years, after which time it would be abolished, but during which time the nature of American slavery had changed dramatically.¹⁶

The removal of British forces from the trans-Appalachian West allowed for the massive westward and southwestward expansion of Southern cultures that was driven by changes in agriculture in the 1780s and ‘90s. Virginia’s surplus slave pool was slowly traded off to the expanding agricultural sectors of the South, where advancements in

¹⁴ Edmund Morgan, 6.

¹⁵ Although Dunmore’s proclamation of 1775 only promised freedom to slaves who fled to the British, Clinton’s declaration of 1779 extended that freedom to all slaves belonging to American patriots, regardless if they fought against the rebels. Although Clinton’s declaration was more likely the result of desperation during wartime, some scholars have regarded it as another example of gradual emancipatory measures leading up to British abolition in 1833. Though the British Empire could have absorbed American slaves into their own slave system, that Dunmore and Clinton did not, lends credibility to the moral argument for their emancipation declarations. Archibald Campbell’s notice illuminates some of the transnational legalities of *new world* slavery that has some implications on the debate. In advertising for Tom in the *Virginia Gazette*, he explained that he probably had free papers as he was from Bermuda where it is common for owners to bring their slaves to sea with them. He described it as “very customary, in War Time, to procure Passes for them as Freemen, in Case they should be taken by the Enemy.” *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (17 September 1771) in Windley, vol. 1, 100.

¹⁶ In order to counter southern fears that congress would use its constitutional powers to regulate commerce and eventually abolish slavery, they compromised in Article 1 section 9 of the Constitution, which stated that Congress could tax imported slaves but could not abolish the slave trade; nor could this provision be “changed by amendment, thus, giving the slave trade a 20 year reprieve.” David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 122.

processing technology rendered the profitability of cotton cultivation little more than a question of labourers. Whereas, the majority of colonial slaves were amassed in the Upper South and put primarily to producing tobacco, the majority of post-colonial slaves were spread over much greater distances in the South, West, and primarily put to producing cotton. Such developments breathed new life into American slavery and new ways of capitalizing on human property: planters in the South benefited from the cultivation of a new agricultural product while their counterparts in the Upper South benefited from new systems of slave-hiring and a thriving domestic demand for slaves.

As Michael Tadman has more succinctly explained, by the 1790s:

plantation monocultures had ‘exhausted’ the soil. Instead of ‘running itself out’ through unprofitability, however, slavery was ‘kept alive by ... [the] unnatural process’ of interregional slavemongering. Thus, the planters of the Upper South (the slave ‘exporting states’) were seen as becoming economically dependent upon selling a substantial proportion of their bondsmen to the new and expanding cotton regions of the Lower South.¹⁷

Historian Allan Kulikoff similarly explained that after Independence:

Chesapeake society became even more patriarchal, hierarchical, and racist than before. Gentlemen adopted republican rhetoric, but maintained their authority; planters devised ingenious systems of slave hire that made slave labor profitable in a system of diversified agriculture; and migration permitted those who remained to continue to own lands and grow crops in the same ways as their ancestors. And out-migrants carried the Chesapeake social system to the Southwest, where they adapted it to the cotton agriculture of the antebellum South.¹⁸

With the expansion of the American slave system and closure of the African trade, American slaves naturally became more lucrative commodities. Although the trade had been under attack for a variety of economic and moral reasons in the colonial period,

¹⁷ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 4.

¹⁸ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves. The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 13-14.

war with Great Britain helped usher in a new wave of serious advocacy.¹⁹ On 1 January 1808, the earliest date allowed by the Constitution, Southern slave owners conceded to Congress's banning of the trade when it was clear that slaves would be needed in large numbers in the coming decades. What is a matter of some debate, however, is the extent to which American slaveholders imported slaves in the decades leading up to abolition, an issue more related to the extent that planters questioned whether natural growth of the American slave population would keep up with the South's long-term economic growth.²⁰ Whatever the case, there is consensus that there was little political or social opposition to abolition of the African trade: it was done away with primarily for political

¹⁹ Slavery had come under attack by many religious and political leaders in the colonial period, who cited a multitude of philosophical and economic reasons for abolition. Pennsylvania Quakers were able to pass the first formal antislavery resolution in 1688, Chesapeake legislators tried to unilaterally do away with the trade from 1765-1775, and the first abolition society was also founded in Philadelphia in 1775. Many Northern States even passed gradual abolitionist legislation during the war. Vermont (1777), Pennsylvania (1780), and Massachusetts (1783) passed legislation, and Connecticut followed soon after (1784). Richard K. MacMaster. "Arthur Lee's "Address on Slavery": An Aspect of Virginia's Struggle to End the Slave Trade, 1765-1774," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 80:2 (Apr., 1972), 143.

²⁰ Drawing on substantial archival material, the recent work of historian James McMillin shows that American involvement in the trade was actually at an all time high by the eve of its closing: approximately 170,000 slaves were imported into North America from 1783 to 1810, more than half of which took place in the latter decade. The slave population had been growing naturally since the mid eighteenth century, but it was uncertain if slave births would keep pace with the growing demand for cotton. "So why did slave owners in the United States concede to their country's withdrawal from the international slave trade at the very moment when demand for slave labor was increasing," asks historian Adam Rothman. "The nationalist impetus of the American Revolution," he answers, "was crucial." He explains that war with England "infused southern slaveowners with a powerful Anglophobia that reinforced southern opposition to the international slave trade, especially in the Upper South. After the revolution, southern slaveowners in Virginia and Maryland not only indicted England for having refused to prohibit the slave trade to its North American colonies, but they condemned England's continued domination... the abolition of the African slave trade would emancipate America from British slave traders and was therefore consistent with the principles of the revolution." Although American involvement in the trade was growing, Rothman maintains that the national impetus of the American Revolution was powerful enough to silence whatever aversion slave owners might have otherwise felt towards abolition. However, historian Steven Deyle has argued that slave owners were not opposed to abolition of the trade as an over supply had decreased the general market value of slaves and therefore American involvement was shrinking, not growing. The majority of Americans were opposed to the trade as early as the 1780s, mainly because it "diverted Americans from the paradox of condoning slavery while professing liberty and equality for all. It was easier to attack a problem whose source was distant and for which blame could be attributed to the British." See Adam Rothman, "Domestication of the U.S. Slave Trade," in Walter Johnson, ed., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades In The Americas*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 35; and Steven Deyle, "The Irony of Liberty: Origins of the Domestic Slave Trade," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 12:1 (Spring, 1992), 40.

and commercial concerns. The trade was English dominated and its abolition was in keeping with the revolutionary spirit. Despite its reopening in some states, and the existence of a smaller, illegal trade in Atlantic slaves up until the Civil War, the vast majority of slave trades after 1808 were conducted through the domestic trade.

With the increasing demand for labour and Congress' closing of the transatlantic trade in the early nineteenth century, slave prices generally soared. The average relative cost of a slave in 1804 was approximately \$300. By 1861, it was almost \$800 (See Table VI). Owners were expected to pay taxes on their human holdings, and by the 1830s, they even started to take out life insurance policies on them. Insuring slaves became "a way to protect families against the loss of their primary breadwinner" explains historian Sharon Ann Murphy.²¹ The domestic trade made slave owning the most profitable venture of nineteenth century America, and by 1860, the total value of slave property was:

(r)oughly three times greater than the total amount of all capital invested in manufacturing in the North and South combined, three times the amount invested in railroads, and seven times the amount invested in banks. It was also equal to about seven times the total value of all currency in circulation in the country, three times the value of the entire livestock population, twelve times the value of all American farm implements and machinery, twelve times the value of the entire U.S. cotton crop, and forty-eight times the total expenditures of the federal government that year. The domestic slave trade had made human property one of the most prominent forms of investment in the country, second only to land. In fact, by 1860, in the slaveholding states alone, slave property had surpassed the assessed value of real estate.²²

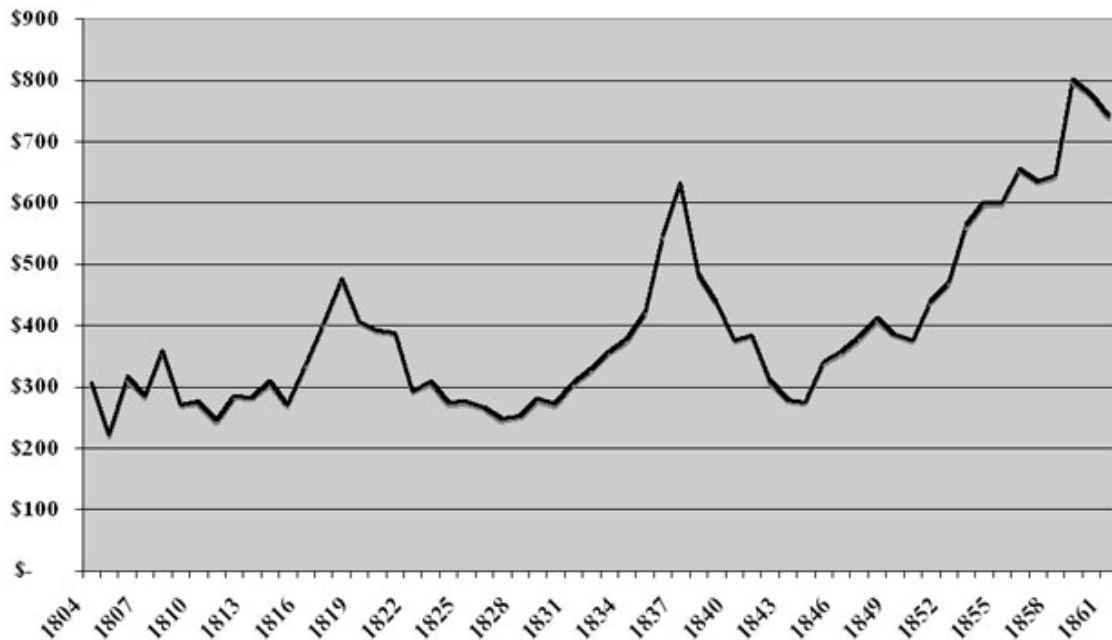
Although there were certainly points at which slave prices fluctuated with general market cycles of expansion and recession, economic historians Samuel Williamson and Louis

²¹ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 151; Sharon Ann Murphy has shown that the rise in life insurance policies for slaves paralleled the rise of industrial slavery. See Sharon Ann Murphy, "Securing Human Property: Slavery, Life Insurance, and Industrialization In The Upper South," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25:4 (Winter, 2005), 617-619.

²² Steven Deyle, 95.

Cain recently stated: “it is clear,” that over the course of the nineteenth century, “the market for slaves was active, and that slaves were regarded as more valuable.”²³

Table 6
Average Price of a Slave Over Time (\$2011)²⁴



²³ These values are taken from Samuel H. Williamson and Louis P. Cain’s online project, *Measuring Worth In 2011 Dollars*. Williamson and Cain have indicated that their material can be borrowed for academic purposes if proper credit is given. Williamson and Cain have explained some of the economic conditions of boom and bust: “During and after the War of 1812 there was a 40% increase in all prices, with the price of raw cotton more than doubling during the same period. In the 1830s, the price of slaves increased quickly due to expectations bred by discussions to refund the federal budget surplus to the states. Discussions about ‘internal improvements’ (e.g., canals and railroads) led to a boom in land prices and, once again, cotton prices. After the ‘Panic of 1837’ there was a long depression. Finally, the almost three-fold increase in prices after 1843 can be explained by several factors, including the rapid increase in the worldwide demand for cotton and increased productivity in the New South attributable to better soil and improvements in the cotton plant.” Samuel H. Williamson and Louis P. Cain, *Measuring Worth In 2011 Dollars*. (University of Illinois at Chicago and Loyola University Chicago, 2011) <http://www.measuringworth.com/slavery.php>; and Susan B. Carter. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 3:158-224; Steven Deyle has estimated that slave prices more than tripled in the same period. “Domestic Slave Trade In America,” *Chattel Principle*, 94-95.

²⁴ Credit for this chart can be attributed to Samuel H. Williamson and Louis P. Cain, who have declared that their work may be cited. *Measuring Worth In 2011 Dollars*. See citation above.

Given the increasing value of slaves from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, the total capital losses posed by escapes had the potential to be likened to grand larceny. Slaves could “steal themselves” as many subscribers put it, or they could be stolen by others. The result of a permanent absence was the same: all capital and productive value was lost. Even if runaways eventually returned, owners still faced significant depreciations if their slave was a known runaway. A slave would only reach optimal market value if they did not have a history of behavioural issues, and the issuing of a runaway notice was a public statement to the contrary.²⁵ One subscriber made it a point to mention that it was a skill to determine if a slave was a “good negroe,” whereas another seems to have been avoiding depreciation when he emphasized that his slave had not ran but had in fact been kidnapped and would be willing to provide his name, owner, and place of residence.²⁶ So prevalent were concerns over depreciation that in Virginia, many traders even signed affidavits that testified to the good nature of their human chattel.²⁷ That most runaways went unadvertised can then presumably be attributed to an owner’s aversion to depreciation. In fact, many subscribers attempted to sell their runaways directly in notices, which always accompanied a significant drop in price. “If the taker up

²⁵ It was common for subscribers to mention that their slaves were subject to running. Take the subscriber Thomas Cowle, who stated that Charles “is much addicted to running away....” *Virginia Gazette* (Rind) (22 February 1770), Windley, vol. 1, 302; of course, prices for slaves varied from time to time, from market to market, and in accordance with their physical attributes and character traits. Gender, age, skill, and personality, were all variables in determining a slave’s price. Children and the elderly generally fetched much smaller prices, and skilled slaves were particularly valued, such as artisans, industrial workers, and good domestic servants. Men and women were generally of equal worth, and both reached their optimal market value in their late teens and twenties. This has been challenged by Daina Ramey Berry, who has shown through an examination of plantations in Georgia, that men and women were generally well matched in terms of price, although “findings for slave prices based on age categories in increments of ten years illustrate that enslaved females carried higher prices than did males on some estates until the age of thirty.” Daina Ramey Berry, “Value, Labor, and Price in a Georgia Slave Community,” in Walter Johnson, ed., 61.

²⁶ *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political* (9 March 1816), *The Richmond Enquirer* (15 June 1815), Meaders, 262, 252.

²⁷ Franklin and Schweningen, 269.

chooses to purchase him, he shall have a great Bargain in him,” explained planter Edmund Berkeley of King William County Virginia when he advertised for Harry in 1771.²⁸ “I will sell him cheap as he runs,” explained another.²⁹ In posting for runaways, it is clear that subscribers were not necessarily attempting to physically retrieve their property, but trying to cut their losses and salvage any remaining value.

Depreciation was so drastic that many subscribers were understandably suspicious of fraudsters and con artists. As it became clear in the 1790s that the prosperity of the new nation depended on slavery, “(s)o did its corollary,” explains historian Gerald Mullin: “that slaves who ran away were activated by the ever-present ‘ill-disposed person’ or some other outsider.”³⁰ Subscriber John Mercer explained that “I have great reason to believe, that he is privately encouraged to run away,” when he advertised for his “Negro Man named Joe.” Mercer assumed he was “harboured and concealed, that I may be induced to sell him, having had several Offers made me for him since he went off...”³¹ Thomas Mundell of Prince George County, Maryland similarly indicated that he was being cheated, when he explained that Ben had recently broken out of the county jail “where he had been put for security... he was accompanied by a white man of the name of Earl, who had been committed for robbery. (...) I think it is probable he may carry Ben with him and pass him as his slave until he has an opportunity of selling him.”³² Former Virginian slave, William Brown similarly claimed to have been secreted by his former master’s second husband, who “was watching the advertisements, to let the reward run up high, so as to get a great sum. The mistress told me he was calculating to pocket the

²⁸ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (31 October 1771), Windley, vol. 1, 101-102.

²⁹ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter) (31 October 1777), Ibid, 187.

³⁰ Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, 116.

³¹ *Virginia Gazette* (Parks) (5-12 September 1745), Windley, vol. 1, 13-14.

³² *Alexandria Daily Advertiser, Commercial and Political*. (28 October 1806), Meaders, 72.

reward, and return me into the hands of my owners.”³³ Since runaways were profitable to slave hunters, it is logical that harbourers would be met with aggression. After “a most horrid fight” with four white apprentices at one of Baltimore’s shipyards, Frederick Douglas explained: “the slightest manifestation of humanity toward a colored person was denounced as abolitionism, and that name subjected its bearer to frightful liabilities. The watchwords of the blood-minded in that region, and in those days, were, ‘Damn the abolitionists!’ and ‘Damn the niggers!’”³⁴ This was an assertion that “became an entrenched part of master class ideology, in Latin America as well as the United States,” explains historian David Brion Davis.³⁵

This however, did not prevent slaveholders from doing business with mischievous entrepreneurs. Mrs. Virginia Hayes Shepherd of Churchland, Virginia described some of the “peculiar dealings” blacks had with whites. “I am thinking about the scheme of a white northerner named Kingman,” Shepherd explained:

(i)f they were treated too cruelly, our folks would always run away and hide in the woods. They were seldom captured even with dogs. One day a colored man ran away and could not be found. Kingman went to the Negro’s master and offered to buy the man in the woods. Because the man was at that time not recoverable, Kingman secured a great reduction in price. Then Kingman sent the man word to come on out of the woods and to hire himself out. Later he let the slave buy his freedom. Negroes got into the habit of running away for Kingman, while Kingman bought them.³⁶

³³ Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View Of Slavery: The Refugee: or, The Narratives Of Fugitive Slaves In Canada Related By Themselves, With An Account Of The History And Condition Of The Colored Population Of Upper Canada*. Boston: J.P. Jewitt and Company, 1856) 282-283.

³⁴ “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, An American Slave. Written by Himself,” in *The Long Walk To Freedom*, 65.

³⁵ Tim Matthewson quoting David Brion Davis, “Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 140:1 (Mar., 1996): 41; Matthewson has also explained that the writings of the Virginian planter John Taylor, established the popular base for the slavery’s positive-good argument in the United States. Taylor advanced “that slavery should be considered a permanent feature of American life... [and] rejected the view that slavery caused slave revolt, and he argued instead that dangerous antislavery orations had provoked the Dominguan revolution.” Matthewson, 26.

³⁶ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 261.

Runaways also stole various items from their living and working environments, and many committed acts of felony before making their escape. In more mechanized work settings – such as the sugar parishes of antebellum Louisiana – the opportunities for industrial sabotage were endless.³⁷ Subscriber Adam Muir of Worcester County Maryland, explained that Cuffy, “a pretty tall, well-made, supple Negro Man,” had run off with one “William Robeson, a Blacksmith, who was suspected of having broke open the Subscriber’s Store, and carrying off several Pieces of fine Linnens, white and brown Fustians, &c. He ran off some Days before the Negro Fellow, to have an Opportunity of selling the Goods.”³⁸ Edward Carter of Fredericksburg Virginia, thought that his slave had been “cajoled” away by men who wanted to “elope” to Charleston in 1790. “He carried off a dusty coloured bay horse, worth about twenty pounds.”³⁹ In advertising for Jack, subscriber John Stratton of Northampton County, Virginia was “afraid a certain Peter Gossigon, formerly a Skipper from this Shore... may have carried him to the Western Shore... My Slaves inform me he has been endeavouring to persuade them to go with him and he will free them... that he requested them to advise him how to rob me...”⁴⁰

The potential criminality resulting from absence was endless, as were the total capital losses incurred if a slave never returned. Yet as we saw in the previous chapter, masters knew that the majority of slaves took temporary leaves of absence and therefore

³⁷ Richard Follet has shown us that in Louisiana, the use of steam-powered mills began to outgrow horse-drawn mills by the 1830s. Given the sheer expense of industrial machinery, Follet finds it striking that planters still relied on a system of labour that “brazenly flouted free labour ideology” as slaves would have more opportunity to inflict extreme financial harm through sabotage. Follet, Richard. *Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820-1860*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 126; and Richard Follet, “Slavery and Technology in Louisiana’s Sugar Bowl,” *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 82.

³⁸ *Annapolis Maryland Gazette*, (9 June 1747), Windley, vol. 2, 4-5.

³⁹ *Virginia Independent Chronicle and General Advertiser* (Davis), (9 June 1790), Ibid Vol. 1, 415.

⁴⁰ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (23 January 1772), Ibid, 107.

did not advertise for their return. Thus, capital losses resulting from permanent escapes and depreciation were most likely smaller than those incurred by lost labour.⁴¹ Although there is now agreement that slaves fled their places of work throughout all months of the year, there is also considerable consensus that running was most frequent during seasons of harder labour.

In 1966, historian Ulrich Phillips explained that slave owners viewed slave absence as “a problem in somewhat the same class with disease, disability and death, since for industrial purposes a slave absent was no better than a slave sick, and a permanent escape was the equivalent of a death on the plantation.”⁴² When subscriber John Dulin advertised for Daniel in the *Alexandria Daily Gazette*, he likewise seemed to be drawing a relationship between the labour he lost on his ostensibly sick slave, and the additional loss inflicted by his subsequent elopement. He explained that Daniel had “appeared to be very unwell for two or three years past and has done nothing; before that time he was a good hand to put up post and rail fence, and ditching, which he no doubt will engage in should he get a distance from home -- he is good at all kinds of plantation work.”⁴³

The data rendered for this study supports many other studies that have correlated higher rates of slave absence with seasons of harder labour – a relationship that is well corroborated by various plantation records and slaveholder journals.⁴⁴ Historians Franklin and Schweninger have also observed that even though the demographics of runaway

⁴¹ Franklin and Schweninger have also argued this point. Franklin and Schweninger, 282.

⁴² Ulrich B. Phillips. *American Negro Slavery*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966) 303.

⁴³ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political* (7 May 1811), Meaders, 152.

⁴⁴ Lathan Windley, *A Profile of Runaway Slaves In Virginia and South Carolina From 1730 to 1787*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 113-114, 174; Mitsuhiro Wada, “Running from Bondage: An Analysis of the Newspaper Advertisements of Runaway Slaves in Colonial Maryland and Georgia,” *Journal of the School of Letters* (Japan), 2 (2006), 16-17; Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967) 22.

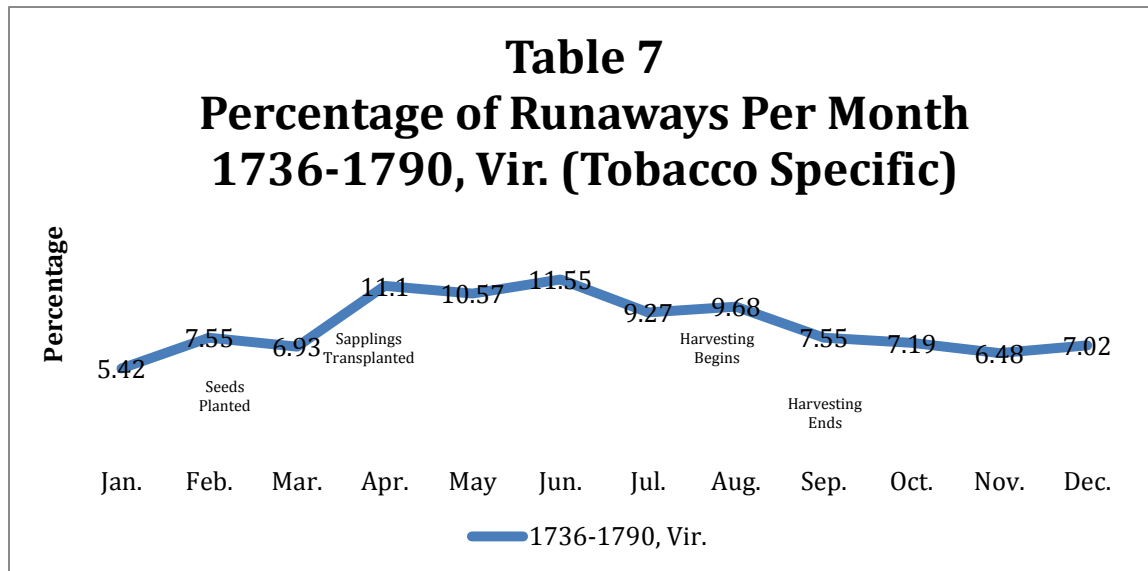
slaves was diverse, “the largest segment of the runaway army included strong, young field hands in their late teens and twenties....”⁴⁵ Although slaves fled throughout all months of the year, there were generally higher rates of running throughout the warmer months of late spring and summer, which coincided with the beginning of the tobacco planting and transplanting seasons. Between the months of April and September however, the majority (59.72%) of total slaves made their escape. For instance, out of all eighteenth century Virginian slaves advertised in newspapers, just under a fifth (19.99%) accounted for elopements throughout the months of December, January, and February (see Table VII). In contrast, the months of April, May, and June accounted for just under a third (31.18%) of all elopements. Historian Phillip Morgan also looked extensively at Virginian runaway patterns in his 1998 study *Slave Counterpoint*, and likewise noticed a slightly lower frequency of running throughout the winter months as well as three peaks in April, May, and June. Starting in April, the tobacco seed that had been planted in the late winter, required transplantation for maturation. It was at this point that both studies saw an increase in elopements, just before harvesting in the late summer and early fall. “A heap o’ de slaves would runaway and hide in de woods to keep from working so hard....” explained former Floridian slave Clayborn Gantling.⁴⁶ “Sometimes slave jus’ run’ ‘way to de woods fo’ a week or two to git a res’ fum de fiel’, an’ den dey come on back,” echoed a former Virginian slave Lorenzo Ivy.⁴⁷ “More Virginia slaves ran away in April than in any other month,” explains Morgan, when “(a)lmost all slaves were pressed into service... Transplanting, weeding, and replanting kept slaves occupied through early

⁴⁵ Franklin and Schweningen, 210.

⁴⁶ Rawick, ed., v. 12, 141.

⁴⁷ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 153-154.

summer.”⁴⁸ Aware of this annual pattern, many planters “attempted to avert flight by distributing rum, meat, and clothing.”⁴⁹ To illustrate a “counterpoint,” Morgan also examined runaway patterns in South Carolina, and likewise noted an increase during the more labourious process of rice cultivation. It was in “June, the month when hoeing began,” that masters “saw more runaways than any other month,” he explained.⁵⁰



Subscribers were also willing to blatantly disclose the financial losses they incurred as a result of slave absence. Subscriber Lionel Chalmer had hired out Belinda from one George Logan for an indeterminable amount of time. After having made her escape, an advertisement appeared in the *South-Carolina Gazette* announcing that “in whose House soever she is caught, they shall be made to pay the Fine which the law has provided, and

⁴⁸ Phillip Morgan. *Slave Counterpoint., Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 152, 167, 177-178; John Blassingame also noted that slaves mostly ran on weekends, during the Christmas seasons, and “the months when corn was still standing in the fields.” John Blassingame. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life In The Antebellum South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 112.

⁴⁹ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 151.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 151.

Wages for the whole Time of her Absence, which is near 5 Months.”⁵¹ When Whitmill Hill placed a notice for Yarmouth in the *State Gazette of North Carolina*, he explained that “he cost me the price of four common negroes, and has never, since I owned him, received a stroke from me, no master of a vessel would be guilty of so high an offence to justice, as to endeavor to deprive me of him....”⁵² When H.D. Gough advertised for Will in the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, he similarly explained that a previous elopement had run him “upwards of Twenty Pounds.”⁵³ In advertising for Peter in the *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, William Hollis forwarned all ship captains from carrying off the said runaway “on penalty of paying me one thousand dollars damage.”⁵⁴ William Walter similarly explained that his slave Bristol was “used to work out with a monthly ticket, but as person have a good while past harboured, entertained and employed the said fellow without a ticket... I have lost above 300 l (...) All persons indebted to me for the work of the said fellow, are desired to make immediate payment: all unpaid by the 10th of January 1764, I will send writs and warrants for.”⁵⁵

As it is impossible to determine the exact number of runaways and the time they were away from work, it is likewise impossible to determine the extent of pecuniary loss that resulted from absence; an endeavor made more complex by those runaways who also worked in the domestic sphere, in the trades, as well as in manufacturing establishments. But perhaps some indication of the disparity caused by absence can be found in the haste with which many subscribers wanted their workers returned. When John Kent advertised for Sam in July 1777, he offered five pounds for his apprehension and securing, but only

⁵¹ *South-Carolina Gazette* (22 January 1741), Windley, v. 3, 44.

⁵² *State Gazette of North Carolina* (Edenton) (2 March 1793), Parker, 21-22.

⁵³ *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (16 September 1785), Windley, v. 2, 336.

⁵⁴ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (5 March 1817), Meaders, 297.

⁵⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette* (10-17 December 1763), Windley, vol. 3, 240.

if he was delivered “within a month from this date.”⁵⁶ Similarly, when Anthony Thornton Junior posted for the return of “a likely Negro Boy named Toby” in the second week of February, he made it clear that a reward of “THREE POUNDS” would only be given if Toby were returned “between this and the 9th of March....”⁵⁷ And when Plato “(r)an away from the sloop George,” subscriber T. Butler offered a twenty dollar reward if he was “apprehended this day, or ten dollars if delivered to me... at anytime hereafter, or secured in any jail so that I get him again.”⁵⁸ Although the majority of subscribers did not place an expiry date on the rewards they posted, it was rare to find a notice that did not offer some form of compensation for services rendered by capturers.

Given the extent of running, historian Winthrop Jordan presumed years ago: “probably more time, more money and energy [was] expended on the problem of runaway slaves by slave owners, legislators, constables, jailers and newspaper printers than on any other aspect of administering the slave system.”⁵⁹ Former Virginian slave Frank Bell made similar observations: “(c)ost a lot of money, it did, when you go git a runaway slave. ‘Hue and Cry’ dey called it, you got to put notice in de papers, an’ you got to pay a reward to whoever catches de runaway.”⁶⁰ Even less wealthy owners were compelled to offer compensation for services: “I have already been at considerable expence and trouble on account of said Negro, being myself lame, and him the only property of the kind I possess,” wrote subscriber Paul Karriker when he advertised for Simon Peter in 1811. “It is hoped that all the well disposed will be as active in their

⁵⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (18 July 1777), Windley, v. 1, 262

⁵⁷ *Virginia Gazette* (11 February 1772), Ibid, 109

⁵⁸ *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer* (25 May 1802), Meaders, 11.

⁵⁹ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black, American Attitudes Towards The Negro: 1150-1812*. 2nd Ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 107.

⁶⁰ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 27.

exertions to apprehend said Runaway as if it was in my power to pay a much larger reward....”⁶¹

Subscribers offered payment to slave hunters in various forms of currency as well as in trade.⁶² The son of Maryland slaves Parson Williams explained that “(t)here was a standing reward for the capture of a runaway. The Indians who caught a runaway slave received a ‘match coat.’”⁶³ Former slave Page Harris explained that she grew up near Chicamuxen in Charles County Maryland on a farm “known as Blood Hound Manor.” Her master, Mr. Stafford raised and trained blood hounds that were used to hunt runaways in Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland. “He would charge according to the value and worth of the slave captured,” Harris explained.⁶⁴ Subscriber Andrew Lewis probably typified the most common reward structure however, when he offered to reimburse anyone according to their “Distance, Trouble, and Expenche.”⁶⁵ However subscribers chose to reward hunters, historians Franklin and Schweninger have most recently shown that they generally accounted for approximately five percent of the slave’s overall value.⁶⁶

The language used by subscribers indicate that offering compensation to retrievers was customary, in addition to the legal requirement of paying any charges the runaway might have incurred during his or her absence. There was clearly social protocol to be followed on top of the legal requirement of helping owners capture absent slaves.

⁶¹ *The Star* (Raleigh)(31 May 1811) Parker, 401.

⁶² Whitaker Campbell offered “one thousand pounds of crop tobacco for information on his runaways, *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* (16 February 1782), Windley, v. 1, 212; and Joseph Lewis similarly offered “one thousand weight of inspected James river tobacco...” *Virginia Gazette or American Advertiser* (3 July 1784), Ibid, 360-61.

⁶³ Rawick, vol. 16, 71.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁶⁵ *Virginia Gazette*, (23 September 1775), Windley, vol. 1, 171.

⁶⁶ Franklin and Schweninger, 282.

Subscriber John Shipwright specifically mentioned that he would offer a reward “as is customary” when he advertised for Phillis in 1741.⁶⁷ It was an acknowledgement that assistance in the matter did not go unnoticed, and that owners were meeting their social obligations to retrievers. If one was to encounter a runaway, it was not enough to simply send them on their way. By the mid eighteenth century, everyone – black and white, free and enslaved – was expected to assist in the capture of runaway slaves. As an anonymous former Mississippi slave explained that when he fled for Canada West, “the coloured people were as eager to catch me as the whites.”⁶⁸ It was even acceptable for owners to request that individuals check their estates after a slave had made their escape.⁶⁹ For instance, Nathan Fletcher posted an advertisement in the *Virginia Independent Chronicle* to inform readers that he was in the possession of a runaway:

(c)ame to my house, the 22nd instant, a run-away negro man slave, named BOB HE was formerly my property, but sold some years ago; he informs me he has been sold several times since, and that he now belongs to George Hewbank, alias Cubank, of Albemarle County, he has been in this neighbourhood eight or nine months lurking, stealing, and doing of mischief. His master may have him on proving his property, and paying charges.⁷⁰

Similarly, subscriber William Bell posted in March 1771 for “THE Negro fellow named JEFFERY, whom I advertised in this paper of the 18th of October last, [and] continues still unclaimed...”⁷¹ Upon finding a runaway, one was either expected to make a public announcement, or hand them over to local authorities. Subscriber James Parsons seems dismayed by the tendencies that were developing amongst South Carolina frontiersmen

⁶⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette* (Timothy)(9-16 April 1741), Windley, v. 3, 45.

⁶⁸ Drew, 258.

⁶⁹ When John Holladay advertised for Cambridge, he stated that as “he has a wife at almost every landing on Rappahannock, Mattapony, and Pamunkey rivers, I beg the favour of all that are settled on the above rivers to have their Negro quarter searched for him.” *Virginia Gazette* (21 April 1768), Windley, v. 1, 59.

⁷⁰ *Virginia Independent Chronicle* (Davis) (18 July 1787), Ibid, 391.

⁷¹ *Virginia Gazette* (Rind) (28 March 1771), Ibid, 310-311.

when he advertised for a series of runaways in the early 1760s, and felt the need to remind readers of their legal and social obligations to slave owners:

it has lately become a pernicious custom for back-settlers when they meet with run away negroes, and for some of the magistrates and others in the back parts of the country when such negroes are brought to them, to publish purposely blind advertisements for a short time of them, and afterwards keep them at work for themselves, instead of bringing or sending them, according to law, to the warden of the work-house, who would properly, and for a proper time, advertise and describe them, and in whose possession losers would have an opportunity of seeing and finding them, I will, in order (as far as in me lies) to bring to justice such and the like offenders....⁷²

Fortunately for subscribers, they could seek legal recourse in the various slave codes enacted over the centuries if they felt they had been defrauded. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 leveled a five hundred dollar fine on any person who “knowingly and willingly obstruct[ed] or hinder[ed]” the retrieval of missing slaves. “This “penalty [could] (...) be recovered by and for the benefit of [the] (...) claimant, by action of debt, in any Court proper to try the same....”⁷³ That such a provision was included in the Act makes clear that the new government recognized the potentially high financial losses incurred by owners in the event of a missing slave. As it would take a common labourer several years to save even a few hundred dollars, the provision was evidently a strong demonstration of the government’s intention of deterring anyone from helping or encouraging runaway slaves.

Although the act of 1793 was ambiguous in who was legally responsible for the return of runaways, the act of 1850 leveled a legal duty on all citizens to assist federal marshals in their pursuit and apprehension. Northern response to the second act was

⁷² *South-Carolina Gazette* (Timothy) (22-29 January 1763), Windley, vol. 3, 227-228.

⁷³ *Proceedings and Debates of the House of Representatives of the United States at the Second Session of the Second Congress, Begun at the City of Philadelphia, November 5, 1792.*, "Annals of Congress, 2nd Congress, 2nd Session" (November 5, 1792 to March 2, 1793), 1415.

strong, and refusal to enforce its provisions became a prominent antagonism in the events leading up to the Civil War. The assistance and cooperation that slave owners came to expect from everyone by law, came to be viewed by abolitionists and antislavery supporters as contradictions to the notions of altruism and benevolence that paternalists touted in defense of their rights to own human property. As tensions magnified between northerners and southerners in the antebellum period, slave owners found themselves under increasing attack by antislavery advocates, who cited the existence of runaways as evidence of the violent and exploitive nature of the institution. To many contemporaries, runaways illustrated that slaves were discontent in their roles as bondsmen, as it was thought that they would not leave a life of good treatment.

In fact, many subscribers felt the need to insist that their slaves were not physically mistreated, that they left without cause, and generally tended to downplay their own wrongdoing.⁷⁴ Many even reveled in the care they had taken in providing a relatively “comfortable” life for their labourers. Thomas Ringgold of Kent County, Maryland thought it to be “very alarming” that his slave Toby, should have run away in an attempt at “getting his Liberty (...) as he has been always too kindly used, if any Thing, by his Master, and one in whom his Master has put great Confidence, and depended on him to overlook the rest of his Slaves, and he had no kind of Provocation to go off.”⁷⁵ One colonial New Englander thought his runaway “has lost himself by his going without the least provocation.”⁷⁶ Subscriber Landon Carter explained that Phill had

⁷⁴ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (2 January 1817), Meaders, 295.

⁷⁵ *Maryland Gazette* (20 March 1755), Windley, v. 2, 23.

⁷⁶ *The Pennsylvania Journal, and the Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia) (1 July 1762), in Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, eds., “Pretends to Be Free” *Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994) 93; *New England Weekly Journal* (2 August 1731) in Antonio Bly, ed. *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary*

run “away from my plantation at Sabine Hall, about six weeks ago, and really for nothing at all....”⁷⁷ And another subscriber seemed to be vindicating himself of blame when he could “assign no Reason for his [slave] running away, but quarrelling with his Wife.”⁷⁸ When Joseph M’Caughey advertised for Aaron in the *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, he explained that “(h)e is gone away from an ill grounded apprehension of being sent to the back country, and from no dissatisfaction at his situation.”⁷⁹ Nicholas Worthington of Ann-Arundel Maryland also felt the need to divulge details of a recent punishment when he explained that Wat had “been used as a waiting-man till about two years ago, when, for his misdeeds in rifling when abroad, I was obliged to turn him to labour...”⁸⁰ Subscriber William Payne also seemed to have been defending himself when he explained that his “Negro Girl, named Hagar, about 14 Years of Age... is supposed to be harbour’d in some Negro Quarter, as her Father and Mother Encourages her in Elopements, under a Pretence that she is ill used at Home.”⁸¹ One subscriber from Williamsburg, Virginia similarly claimed to have “been always tender of my slaves, and particularly attentive to the good usage of them...”⁸²

Other subscribers seemed to be bragging about the favourable living conditions they provided for their chattel. Subscriber John Alderson explained that Isac’s servile state “could not have been more comfortable than it had been made in point of diet,

History Of Runaway Slaves In Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700-1789 (Lexington: Lanham, 2012) 41.

⁷⁷ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie) (5 April 1776), Windley, vol. 1, 250-251.

⁷⁸ *Virginia Gazette* (19 Dec. 1777) Ibid, 190.

⁷⁹ *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* (Nicolson) (8 October 1789), Ibid, 243-244.

⁸⁰ *Baltimore Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (19 January 1790), Ibid, Vol. 2, 402.

⁸¹ *Annapolis Maryland Gazette* (2 October 1766), Ibid, 67.

⁸² *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (14 January 1767), in Ibid vol. 1, 48-49.

lodging and clothing, by me, since placing him in the smith's shop in particular...."⁸³

Nicholas Worthington of Ann-Arundel Maryland was presumably proud about the level of nourishment he provided for his slaves, when he explained that his "young MULATTO MAN SLAVE named WAT... puts on a smiling countenance, and shews his teeth, which are a good set, and pretty white..."⁸⁴ Although some WPA interviews have indicated that many owners took great concern in the well-being of their labourers, they have also shown that these concerns were more closely related to their slave's physical rather than mental health.⁸⁵ Only in the late antebellum period was it proposed that running was a mental illness, which was likely influenced by the rise of Darwinian thought. After all, lashings, brandings, and mutilations were indications that a slave was unruly, and given the extent to which slaves were physically inspected on the auction block, the appearance of scarring diminished their value. Former Georgia slave (Isaac or Isaiah) Green explained that "(m)y ol' marster never did whup me an' he didn't 'low none o' de overseers to whup me either. (...) You see if a slave wus scarred he wouldn't bring as much as one with a smooth hide in case de marster wanted to sell him, 'cause de buyers would see de scars an' say dat he wus a bad nigger."⁸⁶ Hence some owners used

⁸³ *North-Carolina Gazette, or Impartial Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser* (New Bern) (21 January 1797), Parker, 16-17.

⁸⁴ *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (19 January 1790) (Baltimore), Windley, vol. 2, 402.

⁸⁵ See the interviews of William McCullough and Augustus Ladson in Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 77, 125; in advertising for Abram, John Mahew indicated that he has "a scar on the left side of his neck occasioned by cutting with a Lancer for the scrofula." Mahew's notice shows that action was taken if slaves came down with sickness, in this case Tuberculosis. *Western Carolinian* (Salisbury) (4 July 1831), Parker, 708; James Mercer's notice for Christmas also indicated that he had "been inoculated for the Smallpox, but has no Marks except the Scar of the Incision on one Arm..." *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) (19 March 1772), *Ibid* vol. 1, 111.

⁸⁶ Rawick, vol. 16, part 2, 57.

cherry sapplings when they whipped their slaves, “cause a cherry sapling don’t make no soar on a slave’s back.”⁸⁷

Whether subscribers were genuine in their convictions of benevolence is still a matter of debate, but what should be recognized at this juncture is that American paternalist attitudes were in no way static or inflexible. In 1989, Michael Tadman conceptualized a three to four-level hierarchy of the concept, having illustrated that there were variances in the extent to which slaveholders ascribed to the philosophy.⁸⁸ The interview with Mrs. Patience M. Avery was perhaps the most idealistic description of slaveholder paternalism found in the sources. Born in the middle of the Civil War, she explained that Tom Hatcher, her father and master:

was very kind to his slaves an’ didn’t ‘low dem to be too severely punished Yes, sometimes slaves would run away an’ take refuge on Tom Hatcher’s place an’ he was very kin’ to ‘em an’ didn’t return ‘em to dey masters. Yes, he protect dem ‘til he foun’ out where dey came f’om an’ de circumstances o’ de leavin’. Well, yes his ‘state was said to be a refuge fer slaves when dey ran away f’om dey cruel masters.⁸⁹

Avery’s interview offers some vivid imagery of mid-nineteenth century slaveholder attitudes towards blacks. Her commentary illustrates that the act of running was at odds with purported social theories of paternal care and guidance. If it was thought that a slave was mistreated, other free whites might inquire. However controversial it has now

⁸⁷ Perdue, Barden and Phillips 27.

⁸⁸ “A first category is that of the ‘broad paternalists’ who took a wide view of their role, including in it a firmly held belief that the emotional and family welfare of slaves was more important than the convenience of masters. A second group consists of the ‘narrow paternalists,’ for whom the protection of the slave family was secondary to white convenience, but who made some effort to provide for physical needs and perhaps to limit work loads somewhat. The third and fourth categories would, for the slaves, be a little different, but they can be termed ‘theoretical paternalists’ and ‘supremacy policemen.’ By ‘theoretical paternalists’ I mean to identify a group who used the language of paternalism as far as it occurred in proslavery arguments, but who in practice took from that framework only the idea of race hierarchy and innate white ‘superiority.’ The final category includes those not greatly inclined to trouble with self-legitimizing theory, but simply inclined toward a tough day-to-day assertion of white power.” See Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 218.

⁸⁹ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 15.

become to imply that slaves and masters felt a genuine affinity towards one another, sources have shown that slave owners were at least concerned with the appearance of magnanimity in community newspapers, billboards, and other public forums. These apprehensions became more prevalent after independence, argues historian Lorena Walsh, when the replacement of appointed offices with elective ones made aspiring politicians more conscious of their displays of civility. Former slave Mrs. Francis Henderson once commented that as a slave she would have preferred to live in Washington, because “(t)here are so many congressmen there that the slaves are not treated so badly as in other parts.”⁹⁰ Even George Washington faced an assault on his reputation when a controversy over maize distribution took place on his estate.⁹¹

What these sources have shown is that it was not enough to simply own slaves; one was also expected to display benevolent and charitable behavior towards their human property if they were to maintain their societal respectability. This held even more true in the Upper South, where by the early nineteenth century the slaveholding gentry was looking for ways to distinguish themselves from new generations of hard-driving traders and young entrepreneurs. One of the ways they did this was by showing reluctance in the selling of their slaveholdings.⁹² The slave trade separated enslaved parents from children, husbands from wives, and severed many kinship bonds that blacks constructed over their lives. They were often dramatic acts that accompanied crying, wailing, begging, outburst of anger, the theatrics of which were well known to slaves and free people alike. Former Maryland slave, Mrs. Henry Brant explained that she was traded off as a result of her master’s gambling: “I made such a fuss, (and the people told him ‘t was a sham to let me

⁹⁰ Drew, 161.

⁹¹ Lorena S. Walsh. “Work & Resistance In the New Republic,” in Mary Turner, ed., 101, 117-118.

⁹² Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 190-191.

go to a trader,- that I was too good a girl for that, having taken care of him in sickness,- that I ought to have had a chance to find some one to buy me,) that he felt ashamed of what he had done, and bought me back.”⁹³ Former Maryland slave Reverend Alexander Hemsley stated that “(t)he unwillingness to separate husbands and wives, parents and children was so great, that to part them seemed to me a sin higher than the heavens,-it was dreadful to hear about their outcries, as they were forced into the wagons of the drivers.”⁹⁴ Former slave George Johnson commented that “(w)hipping and slashing are bad enough, but selling children from their mothers and husbands from their wives is worse.”⁹⁵ Former slave James Williams likewise explained that “(i)t is an awful thing to a Virginia slave to be sold for the Alabama and Mississippi country. I have known some of them to die of grief, and others to commit suicide, on account of it.”⁹⁶ Trading was of course a central feature of Harriet Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In the opening scene the Kentucky slave holder Mr. Shelby informs slave trader Mr. Haley that if he wanted to purchase any slaves, “you’d best not let your business in this neighborhood be known. It will get out among my boys, and it will not be a particularly quiet business getting away any of my fellows, if they know it, Ill promise you.”⁹⁷ Even free whites wrote to their politicians concerned over “the abominable Trade,” as one Delaware Quaker put it in his letter to President John Adams in 1798. “(P)erhaps the President as prime Magistrate in the United States, may be entirely without the knowledge of this atrocious & abominable Crime,” wrote Warner Mifflin. In his eyes, the domestic trade:

⁹³ Drew, 346.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 38-39.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

⁹⁶ James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 32.

⁹⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005) 8.

afflicted Blacks, like droves of Cattel for Market; carrying them into the Southern States for Speculation; regardless of the separation of near Connections & natural ties.” Mifflin claimed that he “was deeply afflicted under a Sense of the Guilt hereby brought on our Nation, which seemed to me, if the Practice continued, was likely to produce punishment on the Government, Rulers and those in Authority, who did not exert themselves for the suppression of this cruel Practice.”⁹⁸

A look at language provides some direction in understanding the various relationships between whites and blacks. Gerald Mullin has explained that “(t)he tone and phrases masters used while punishing slaves indicate that they viewed slave rebelliousness in the context of the Fifth Commandment-Honour thy father and thy mother-assuming that both slaves and free had certain rights, duties, and responsibilities toward one another.”⁹⁹ When slave holder John Taylor received word from two runaways stating they would only return if they were hired out or sold to a new master, he replied: “I will do neither until they return to a sense of duty.”¹⁰⁰ It was convenient for American slaveholders to adopt various attitudes that justified slavery as a positive good.¹⁰¹ Providing sustenance was a slaveholder’s primary responsibility. “Nutrition,” explains Sidney Mintz, “was the ‘principal long-term supply-cost.’”¹⁰² Hence many slave owners allowed their slaves to plant their own crops when they were not carrying out their official duties; it subsidized some of the expenses of slaveholding. Because masters viewed themselves as providers, slaves were likewise expected to reciprocate with their

⁹⁸ Steven Deyle quoting Warner Mifflin, “The Irony of Liberty: Origins of the Domestic Slave Trade,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 12:1 (Spring, 1992), 37.

⁹⁹ Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Mullin, *Africa in America*, 91.

¹⁰¹ The concept is most associated with the economic theories of John C. Calhoun, but the ideology probably came to maturity in the late 1850s with the *Mudsill* speech of the South Carolinian senator James Henry Hammond.; Lacy K. Jr. Ford “Republican Ideology In a Slave Society: The Political Economy of John C. Calhoun,” *Journal of Southern History* 54 (1988): 405-24.

¹⁰² Sidney Mintz. “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 2:1 (1978), 91.

obedience; at least this is what it seemed when Stephen Hartley denounced Kate in his notice:

(a)s this inhuman creature, when she went away, left myself extreme ill in one bed, her mistress in another, and two of my children, not one able to help the other, she must be conscious of some very atrocious crime: I therefore humbly request every friend and acquaintance I have, in town and country, to use their utmost endeavours, in taking and delivering the said wench and children to me, or to the warden of the work-house...¹⁰³

Running was an indication that the relationship between masters and slaves, with all its “rights, duties, and responsibilities,” had broken down.¹⁰⁴ It was a de facto form of protest. As historians Hilary Beckles and Karl Watson similarly observed in their study of eighteenth century Barbadian runaways, fugitives deprived their masters of both their productive and commercial value, and degraded their owner’s social status by constantly denying their authority.¹⁰⁵

With the dawn of the nineteenth century, denying this authority meant rejecting claims that the American slave system was one of the most lenient in history. Historian Peter Kolchin has argued that there were many characteristics of southern slavery that supported slaveholders in this claim. The “resident character” of the southern plantation system, he argues, is the most relevant to discussions concerning American paternalist attitudes:

(t)he small size of southern holdings enabled masters to know their slaves personally, and, unlike slaveowners elsewhere, they routinely intervened in their slaves’ lives on a daily basis. Such interference was by no means always desirable from the point of view of the slaves. True, southern slaveowners read the Bible to their slaves, gave parties for them, personally nursed the sick, and bombarded the reading public with admonitions to feed, clothe, and

¹⁰³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, (13 October 1757), Windley, v. 3, 158-159.

¹⁰⁴ Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Hilary Beckles and Karl Watson. “Social Protest and Labour Bargaining: The Changing Nature of Slaves’ Responses to Plantation Life In Eighteenth-Century Barbados,” *Slavery and Abolition* 8 (1987) 277.

house their “people” well. At the same time, however, they meddled constantly in the slaves’ lives, scolding, nagging, childing, punishing, and insisting that blacks were incapable of managing without the loving care and direction of their superiors.¹⁰⁶

This is not to say that American slaves were less exploited than other slaves of the New World, but that they faced different forms of exploitation. As the majority of the slave population was held in smaller concentrations, “the great majority of American slaves, unlike those in many other countries, were in constant contact with whites.”¹⁰⁷ Such contrasts of proximity fermented closer relations between free whites and bonded blacks in the United States, and although these differences did not prevent slaves from rebelling, that the slave population was also spread over much greater distances likely thwarted the kind of mass solidarity that was needed for large-scale insurrection.¹⁰⁸

American slaveholders needed no more convincing proof of this than when slave revolt struck one of the largest colonies in the Caribbean sugar basin. The uprisings on

¹⁰⁶ Peter Kolchin, “Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective,” *The Journal of American History* 70:3 (Dec., 1983), 586.

¹⁰⁷ Whereas three in every four American slaves lived on holdings between one to forty-nine other slaves, the same ratio of Jamaican slaves, for instance, lived on holdings with fifty-one to two hundred other slaves. Unlike their counterparts in the Caribbean, American slaves lived on much smaller holdings spread over much larger distances. There were of course many exceptions, which Kolchin explains were more common “among the coastal rice lands of South Carolina and Georgia and the large cotton and sugarcane plantations along the lower Mississippi River....” Peter Kolchin, 583-585.

¹⁰⁸ *New World* slave owners had of course never been eager to commit themselves to a large population of foreign captives, and their ambitions for fortune were always balanced by a fear of racial war. Colonial Virginia and South Carolina legislators had in fact sent petitions to the King, requesting a curtailment on the further importation of blacks. In South Carolina – the slave-trading centre of the English colonies – efforts were made to encourage the immigration of white servants in place of blacks as early as 1698, the reason being that “the great number of negroes which of late have been imported into this Collony may endanger the safety thereof.” In 1776, Virginian legislators similarly accused the king of maintaining a “detestable and insupportable tyranny, by ... prompting our negroes to rise in arms among us, those very negroes whom, by an inhuman use of his negative, he hath refused us permission to exclude by law.” As much as this rhetoric could be the exaggerations of colonial legislators and politicians in a time of heated relations with Great Britain, South Carolina and the Chesapeake had been exposed to a variety of black conspiracies in the eighteenth century, which no doubt contributed to notions of black revolt amongst whites, such as those in Isle of Wight county in 1710 (Virginia), Prince George county in 1739 and 1740 (Maryland), and the slave rebellion at Stono in 1739 (South Carolina). W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade To The United States Of America* Vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 17-18, 20-22.

the island of Saint Domingue, and the eventual independence of the first black and second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere, shook the confidence of slave owners, and those who had a vested interest in the maintenance of the institution in both Europe and the New World.¹⁰⁹ News of the complete and merciless annihilation of the island's white population traversed the Atlantic and put into question the security of white populations.¹¹⁰ In the United States, Haiti contributed towards tighter systems of legal and social control for blacks.¹¹¹ Virginia in particular, was home to several plots thought to be related to "missionaries of sedition from Saint Domingue."¹¹² Haiti also offered freedom to any black that set foot on its soil, and studies have shown that thousands of American blacks left for the island nation in the 1820s.¹¹³ Only one advertisement was found, however, in which the subscriber specifically assumed that his

¹⁰⁹ As historian Franklin Knight commented: "(t)he Haitian model of state formation drove xenophobic fear into the hearts of all whites from Boston to Buenos Aires and shattered their complacency about the unquestioned superiority of their own political models." Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 105:1 (Feb., 2000), 105.

¹¹⁰ News of the events was widely reported in many coastal American towns, where approximately 5,000 black refugees arrived on the eastern shores of the United States in the 1790s alone. Fears resounded amongst local whites that these "French negroes" would disrupt the good character of American slaves, a term that "came to mean something more than simply a slave from the French West Indies," explains historian Ashli White. "With the advent of the Haitian Revolution, white Americans applied the label almost exclusively to exiled black and colored Saint Dominguans and attributed to them a spirit of rebellion." Ashli White, "The Politics of 'French negroes' in the United States," *Historical Reflections* 1 (2003): 104-105.

¹¹¹ Tim Matthewson has explained that "American interests were closely tied to Saint Domingue's plantation society and because they saw slave revolt as wholly destructive, as antiwhite and antiplantation, leading to Negro massacre or domination of whites, the destruction of economy and industry, and a reversion to barbarism." Reactive legislation was enacted in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Maryland, and the Mississippi Territory between 1801 and 1806, all of which attempted to further control the movements of the black population. Virginian slaves, for example, were required to leave the state within a year after having obtained their freedom. Matthewson, "Jefferson and The Nonrecognition of Haiti," 25; Tim Matthewson, "Abraham Bishop. "The Rights of Black Men," and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution." *The Journal of Negro History* 67:2 (Summer, 1982), 149.

¹¹² The Gabriel conspiracy of 1800, and the subsequent Easter Plot of 1802 both took place around Richmond, Virginia, and were conjectured to have included thousands of slaves inspired by leaders from Saint Domingue. Matthewson, "Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti," 25.

¹¹³ "In Haiti, all citizens were legally equal, regardless of color, race, or condition." Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 105:1 (Feb., 1000), 205; Ashli White has indicated that "(s)mall numbers moved to Haiti in the early 1820s; encouraged by positive reports, thousands followed. 1824 was a high point when between 6,000 to 7,000 black Americans left for the island." Ashli White, 120.

runaway would “take shipping for Hayti.”¹¹⁴ But whatever economic and social dangers the Haitian Revolution came to pose to white Americans, it ironically contributed towards a refined sense of slaveholding culture in the United States by prompting whites to examine the attributes of their own slave system in determining if large-scale insurrection could happen at home.

The first reports of the events on the island seem to have attributed their brutality to the harsher regimes of the imperial sugar colonies, which had existed far longer than slavery had existed in the English colonies and on a much greater scale.¹¹⁵ With the advent of Haiti, American planters consequently became more inclined to applaud the seemingly more intimate qualities of their slave society and attribute the horrors of Saint Domingue to the apathetic slaveholding regimes of the Caribbean sugar basin.

Commenting on the general attitude amongst American whites, Ashli White has explained that many “poems, anecdotes and articles lamented the cruelty of West Indian slaveowners, with Saint Domingue often singled out as a place with particularly barbarous master-slave relations.”¹¹⁶ Even French contemporaries held the view that American slaveholders should be commended for their treatment of their labourers: “(a)s

¹¹⁴ Matthewson, “Jefferson And The Nonrecognition of Haiti,” 22; *Carolina Observer* (7 June 1831), in Parker, 587.

¹¹⁵ So toiling was the cultivation, harvesting, and milling of the cane that planters were forced to confront the appalling death toll that production left in its wake. Everywhere sugar was produced by slaves in the *new world*, the result was a natural decrease in the labour force; consequently, Spanish, French, and English sugar planters were forced to rely on the Atlantic trade to maintain production, as the number of slave deaths would exceed births. The American slave population, however, had reached natural increase by the early eighteenth century. Whereas the vastly smaller population of American slaves lived in comparatively milder zones and were mainly put to producing tobacco, rice, and indigo, Caribbean slaves laboured under the warmer conditions of the tropics, and were put to the much more strenuous production of sugar, which had a far greater death toll. This is not completely true however, as roughly five percent of American slaves labored in the sugar parishes of Louisiana, which also experienced a natural decrease in population, forcing planters to rely on an external source of labour, mainly through a large costal trade in domestic American slaves made available in New Orleans. Michael Tadman, “The Demographic Cost of Sugar,” *The American Historical Review* 105 (Dec., 2000), 1544.

¹¹⁶ Ashli White, 104-106.

the exile Mederic-Louis-Elie Moreau de St. Mery complained in his journal, ‘(s)ince the misfortunes of the French colonies, it has been the habit in France to praise the attitude of the United States toward slaves.’”¹¹⁷

Such developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reinforced slave owners’ claims that they were “emotionally attached to their slaves, that they encouraged the institution of the family among them, and that they sold slaves (especially to traders) only in the most extreme of circumstances,” such as a death or bankruptcy.¹¹⁸ At the same time, slaves were becoming more valuable as tradable commodities. Thus, the gentry in the Upper South was becoming more socially dependent on holding slaves, yet at the same time, economically dependent on the trading of slaves. Even “reformers in the southern United States elaborated a pro-slavery worldview that distinguished between slave trading and slaveholding.”¹¹⁹ Legislators rebuked slave trading because it represented “European commercialism and mercantilism; it sapped the country’s economic resources and undermined their political security.” Slaveholding, on the other hand, became a fundamental feature of American republicanism: it increased their independence by adding to their wealth. The major issue of course, was that in order to hold slaves, one had to purchase slaves. Thus, slave trading was a corollary to slaveholding.¹²⁰ Their growth was concurrent and interrelated.

One is thus forced to confront the apparent contradiction that a belief system such as paternalism, with all its platonic and altruistic claims, thrived along side another

¹¹⁷ Ashli White, 106; also see Robert Fogel’s section entitled ‘The Population Question’ in Robert Fogel. *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989) 116-123.

¹¹⁸ Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 111.

¹¹⁹ Adam Rothman, “Domestication of the U.S. Slave Trade,” in Walter Johnson, ed., 32.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 32-33.

system that caused such despair. Although the majority of American slaves never experienced the incomprehensible uncertainty that accompanied sale, the ubiquity of domestic trading – starting with the Chesapeake in the late eighteenth century – would have sewn some deep seeds of distrust between slaves and slaveholders.¹²¹ “Of course Virginia was a slave breedin state,” exclaimed former Georgia slave Snovey Jackson; “and niggers was sold off jes’ like stock. Families was all broke up and never seed one ‘nother no mo.’”¹²² That 200,000 slaves per decade were shipped on average from the Upper South to the Lower South between 1820 and 1860, it is likely that the ubiquity of trading prevented any truly familial relationships from developing between masters and their slaves.¹²³ Although many paternalists claimed that they would only sell their slaves upon their death beds or in times of financial stress, the utter scale of regional trading throughout the nineteenth century illustrates “a system in chronic disorder, with special ‘emergencies’ and ‘necessities’ spilling out from every farm and village,” argues Tadman.¹²⁴ Such “massive interregional traffic” suggests that slaves would have had a profound distrust of the master class.¹²⁵

The reactions that we have seen from subscribers warrant certain conceptual reevaluations over the legitimacy of paternalism as a concept in American slave studies, as well as questions of power and how it relates to forms of agency in various slave enclaves. Some historians of the Old South have most recently appropriated the words of

¹²¹ Michael Tadman also argued this point. See Tadman, “Interregional Slave Trade of the U.S. South,” in Walter Johnson, ed., 131.

¹²² Interview with Aunt Snovey Jackson, *The American Slave*, vol. 16, part 2, 304; despite her claim that slaves were “bred,” historian Michael Tadman has rejected the concept of stud farms, citing the complete lack of evidence in slave sources and planter correspondences. To breed slaves also seems economically unfeasible, as a child would need to be at least eight years old before they could be sold. Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 124-125.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

the fugitive slave James W.C. Pennington in their attempts to draw attention to continuity in every master-slave relationship: “the being of slavery,” he wrote in 1849, ”lay in “the chattel principle...” (...) even slaves who seemed for the moment to live good lives would inevitably be drawn into the worst abuses of the system by the price that was on their heads and the trade it represented.”¹²⁶ Former Virginian slave, Isaac Williams seemed to exemplify this eventuality when he explained that “(e)very man came to be sold for her lifetime....”¹²⁷ However genuine slave owners were in their convictions that their slaves were akin to their children, they were still assets, and could be liquidated if needed. The maintenance of the slave system however, still required a degree of racial harmony. Thus paternalism was more likely a façade for the various attitudes and behaviours that were adopted by whites in their attempts to reconcile their economic and social justifications for racial bondage in a world that was becoming increasingly hostile to slave holding in general, and slave trading in particular. “Until recently, scholarly interpretations over planter ideology [have been] divided into two prevailing camps,” explained historian Richard Follet in 2008:

(t)he first portrayed the slaveholders as paternalistic lords who eschewed capitalist values (...) while the second depicted them as shrewd entrepreneurs whose *raison d’être* lay in business success (...) The intellectual gap between these interpretations has narrowed in the past decade and almost all scholars now agree that planters combined both ‘modern and pre-modern impulses’ and embraced both the capitalist market and a social ideology based on hierarchy, honor, and paternalism.¹²⁸

Historian Lucy Ford has offered a similar perspective, having explained that “paternalism was the language of the proslavery tract, the slave management essay, the monthly

¹²⁶ Walter Johnson, ed. “Introduction,” in Walter Johnson, ed., I.

¹²⁷ Drew, 54.

¹²⁸ Richard Follet, “Documenting the Louisiana Sugar Economy, 1845-1917: An On-line Database Project,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 35 (October, 2008), 806-807.

sermon, and even the daily lives of some masters, but it was only one language of slavery.”¹²⁹ In her study of American imperial attitudes that developed towards blacks in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, Mary A. Renda has gone on to explain:

“(p)aternalism was an assertion of authority, superiority, and control expressed in the metaphor of a father’s relationship with his children. It was a form of domination, a relation of power, masked as benevolent by its reference to paternal care and guidance, but structured equally by norms of paternal authority and discipline. In this sense, paternalism should not be seen in opposition to violence, but rather as one among several cultural vehicles for it.”¹³⁰

Renda’s argument has some profound consequences for the dated yet still lingering concept of social death in slave studies, as well as discussions of intent and how it relates to notions of protest in the American slave psyche. To believe that the American slave system, with all its harsh qualities, created a “totally nullifying experience” implies that slaves did not react to their oppression. Historian Orlando Patterson, who originally coined the term, did not mean to imply that slaves did not express themselves, but that they partook in informal communities that were not recognized by formal institutions, and therefore had little to no social support.¹³¹ Yet, if these advertisements have shown us anything, it is that bondsmen surely responded to their domination, which through various newspapers had de facto recognition from free whites from around the country. As historian Franklin Knight noted: “(r)egardless of the extreme degree of coercion, it is fatuous to insist that slavery obliterated from Africans and their descendants the ability to be creative, socially active, and even to establish some modicum of self-respect and

¹²⁹ Lucy Ford, “Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade,” in Walter Johnson, ed., 149.

¹³⁰ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 15.

¹³¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5-6.

economic status.”¹³² By “stealing a little freedom” if not a life of legal freedom, slaves were costing their owners their time, their money, and their social prestige.¹³³ In the next chapter, we will look at how masters attempted to mitigate those costs, and how slaves exercised the power of their absence in their struggles to have agency over their own lives. After all, many slaves recognized the power of their truancy, and struck out with the aim of demonstrating it.

¹³² Franklin Knight, 109.

¹³³ To use the title of Freddie L. Parker’s compilation of runaway slave advertisements, Parker.

Appendix IV

State Gazette of North Carolina (Edenton) (4 JULY 1798), Stealing a Little Freedom. Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840, Freddie Parker, ed., (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 35:

RUN away from the subscriber, on the 7th of April last, an old stout negro fellow named DICK PEPPER, a caulker by trade, and is well known in the neighbouring counties.-He had been run away from November 1793, 'till the above date, when I fell in with him by accident on Ballard's Bridge; upon seizing him he knocked down my servant and endeavoured to get me down, in the presence of one Solomon Elliot. In searching him, I found passes granted to him by people of property, and one from a Lady, authorizing any person to employ or deal with said slave according to law. I have also been informed where he has worked at his trade with different people, and they may depend on being prosecuted, as it is a most villainous practice to harbor any persons property, and deprive the master of his slave's labour, and of which the owner and family might stand in need of. I do forwarn all persons harboring, employing, or carrying him from this state.-I bought him November 1793, from William Littjohn, Esq. Merchant Edenton from which period he was run away till the 7th April. The above reward will be paid to any person delivering me the named slave, and all reasonable charges.

Edenton, July 4, 1798.

GEORGE MACKENZY

The Edenton Gazette and North Carolina General Advertiser (25 May 1810), Stealing a Little Freedom. Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840, Parker, ed., (New York: Garland Pub., 1994), 350:

40 Dollars Reward. Runaway from the subscriber on the 21st inst. two negro fellows, named JIM & TOM [...] JIM, commonly called Jim Duckenfield, is about 25 years of age, five feet 2 or 3 inches high, tolerable black, a bushy head of hair, grum look, speaks pretty sulky when spoken to, and has a very perceivable defect in his right eye. He carried with him a number of good clothes, exclusive of his daily apparel, which is homespun dyed black. TOM, commonly called by the name of Tom Cook, is about 21 years of age, five feet 6 or 8 inches high, of a yellowish complexion, has an impediment in his speech, and one leg shorter than the other, which occasions him to limp considerably. He has a number of clothes, all of which he took with him. These fellows both ran off together, with an intention, no doubt, of making their way to the northward. The above reward, and all travelling expences will be paid to any person who will deliver them to the subscribers, or secure them in any goal so that we get them again, or 20 Dollars for either. All persons whatever are hereby forwarned against harboring, employing or carrying him off under the penalty of the law: And all Masters of vessels in particular are cautioned against taking them on board their vessel under any

pretence whatever. Should any Captain or commander so far offend the majority of the law as to take them on board their vessel, and timely information of the same being given by any person, so that the ordinary process can ve served on said Captain or commander, 100 dollars reward will be given to such person, or fifty dollars in either case. To be convicted of such a crime is, we presume, within the knowledge of every person, punishable with death. William Saunders, Willis Wilder.

Virginia Gazette (Parks) (5-12 September 1745), Runaway Slave Advertisements. A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790. Vol. 1, Windley, 13-14:

Stafford, Sept. 3, 1745.

RAN away from the Subscriber, about the 20th of July last, a Negro Man named Joe, (who formerly belonged and was Coachman to Mr. Belfield, of Richmond County) he was for some Time after he first ran away lurking about the Widow Belfield's Plantation, and was outlaw'd in Richmond County, but is supposed to be lately removed up to Orange: He is a short, well-set Fellow, about 26 Years of Age, and took with him several Cloaths, among the rest a Suit of Blue, lined and faced with Red, with white Metal Buttons. Whoever will secure and bring home the said negroe, shall receive Two Pistoles Reward, besides what the Law allows: And as I have great Reason to believe, that he is privately encouraged to run away, and then harboured and concealed, that I may be induced to sell him, having had several Offers made me for him since he went off: I hereby promise, that if any One will discover where he has been harboured and concealed, so that the Person or Persons so harbouring him may be thereof convicted, I will pay to such Discovered Ten Pistoles upon the Conviction. This being the third Trip he has made since I bought him in January last, I desire he may receive such Correction in his Way home as the Law directs, when apprehended. And I take this Opportunity to give public Notice, That I shall always be willing to reward any Person, according to his Trouble, that shall take up and bring home any negroe belonging to me, that shall be found abroad without a Note or other sufficient Pass. John Mercer.

South-Carolina Gazette (Timothy) (10-17 December 1763), Windley, vol. 3, 240:

RUN AWAY some time since, a negro slave called BRISTOL, well known in the southern and middle parts of the province, as a remarkable good wheelwright, and used to work out with a monthly ticket, but as person have a good while past harboured, entertained and employed the said fellow without a ticket, by which I have lost above 300 l. I do promise a reward of Fifty Pounds to any person, who shall inform aof his being harboured or employed by any person or persons whatsoever, so that the offender may be convicted thereof: And I will give to any person the sum Ten Pounds, who shall take the said fellow and deliver him to me, or to the warden of the Work-house. William Walter. All persons indebted to me for the work of the said fellow,

are desired to make immediate payment: all unpaid by the 10th of January 1764, I will send writs and warrants for.

Virginia Independent Chronicle (Davis) (18 July 1787), Windley, vol. 3, 391:

Came to my house, the 22nd instant, a run-away negro man slave, named BOB[.] HE was formerly my property, but sold some years ago; he informs me he has been sold several times since, and that he now belongs to George Hewbank, alias Cubank, of Albemarle County, he has been in this neighbourhood eight or nine months lurking, stealing, and doing of mischief. His master may have him on proving his property, and paying charges. NATHAN FLETCHER. Gloucester County, June 24, 1787.

South-Carolina Gazette (Timothy) (13 October 1757) Windley, vol. 3, 158-159:

RUN AWAY from the Subscriber, at Wando, a negro woman named KATE, about 32 years old, of a yellowish complexion, hollow jaw'd, a pouting look, all her upper fore-teeth gone, and speaks good English, formerly belong'd to Mrs. L'Escott, and afterwards to Paul Villepontoux, of whom she was purchased. She is well known in Charles-Town, and it's supposed has changed her name and is harboured there (as she formerly was for 23 months together); and 'tis probable she will get into some of the negro washing-houses or kitchens, to be employ'd in them, and say she belongs to Mr. Villepontoux aforesaid. She is 7 months gone with child; and carried with her, her son Billy (a squat well-set boy about 13 years of age, who is apt to stutter when spoke smartly to), and her daughter Alce (a girl about 5 years old, with a mark in her forehead and another somewhere about her breast, occasioned by accidental burns, and silver drops in her ears. She will no doubt change her dress, but had on when she went away, a blue jacket (the sleeves scalloped) and petticoat. As this inhuman creature, when she went away, left myself extreme ill in one bed, her mistress in another, and two of my children, not one able to help the other, she must be conscious of some very atrocious crime: I therefore humbly request every friend and acquaintance I have, in town and country, to use their utmost endeavours, in taking and delivering the said wench and children to me, or to the warden of the work-house; hereby promising a reward of 10 l. for so doing, and 20 l. to whoever will prove where she is harboured or employed. STEPHEN HARTLEY.

IV Power & Negotiation

Dialectical Resistance and the Emergence of a Free Working Class

“To all worthy Brothers and other Generous Commanders of Ships or other Vessels Sailing between the Poles, – as also to all the valourous Sons of Zebulon and others, whoever dispers’d upon the wide surface of old Ocean, or upon any island or Main-land upon this habitable Globe, into whose Hands these may chance to fall. (...) If he returns voluntarily he shall not be whipt as he deserves, but I will either sell him to a good Ship Master, or let him as he shall chuse, till he has earnt his prime Colt &c. when I will give him his Freedom...”

-Samuel Swift advertising
for Scipio, 16 July 1770¹

Despite the various linguistic barriers that persisted amongst “newly” imported black people in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the relationship between masters and slaves had always been one of partial negotiation since the earliest days of the American slave system.² As no legal structure existed for the institution in the formative decades of the English colonies, the first Atlantic creoles were able to secure various “privileges” that would become common for slaves in the colonial and post-colonial periods.³ Many managed to secure plots of land on which they could grow their own crops and raise livestock, and many were even allowed to retain a portion of

¹ *Boston Evening Post* (16 July 1770), in Antonio Bly, *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1770-1789*, (Lexington: Lanham, 2012) 153-154.

² Historian Michael Mullin has used the term “new” not necessarily to describe newly imported slaves, but those “who did not speak English well and were called ‘new’ until they did so.” Given that the African trade was closed in 1808, it can be assumed that linguistic barriers between masters and slaves continued into the mid antebellum period. Michael Mullin, *African in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and British Caribbean, 1736-1831*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 3.

³ Every type of worker in the New World, including slaves, first practiced various forms of collective labour negotiations that are commonplace today. As early as 1656, one colonist noted that most masters assigned parcels of land to their slaves to grow their own tobacco, on which they also planted vegetables and raised horses. Loren Schweningen, “The Underside of Slavery; the Internal Economy, Self-hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865,” *Slavery & Abolition* 12:2 (1991), 2.

earnings brought in by the sale of these items at market.⁴ As the black population became increasingly acculturated, fewer barriers in communication allowed for greater dialectical exchanges between masters and slaves. Blacks became increasingly capable of using the slave system to their advantage, which contributed to the emergence of self-hiring practices, an underground economy, and a group of bondsmen who lived relatively autonomous lives.⁵ By the Revolutionary War, the various customs that allowed for these developments, “had been firmly established for many generations,” which allowed slaves greater liberties and even the possibility of securing their legal freedom.⁶ As the slave system expanded after Independence, subscribers became more inclined to appeal to these privileges in hopes of mitigating the financial and social costs incurred by their absent property. In no way were slaves equal partners in these negotiations, but their increasing socio-economic powers are outlined by a decline in the frequency with which subscribers outlawed runaways from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The increasing costs of absence gave slaves leverage in negotiating with their masters for

⁴ Former slave Rastus Jones has indicated that even in the late antebellum period: “In both North Carolina and Mississippi, it was a custom of Mr. Jones to give each deserving, adult Negro slave an acre or two of land to work for himself and reap any profits derived therefrom.” George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*. Vol. 12, part 2 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1977) 356-357.

⁵ Gerald Mullin’s argued in 1972 that as slaves became increasingly acculturated, they became more difficult for whites to control. Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion. Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 38; historian Loren Schweninger has labeled these developments the “underside of slavery.” Loren Schweninger, “The Underside of Slavery; the Internal Economy, Self-hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865,” *Slavery & Abolition* 12:2 (1991) 1; historian Sidney Mintz has argued that the ability to grow and sell their own produce instilled a sense of autonomy in slaves; it allowed them to work without supervision and in groups of their choosing, it allowed them to make economic decisions for themselves, and finally, “it dramatized the nature of the slave regimen, and the humanity of the slaves, to anyone intelligent enough to make the inferences. That these people, seemingly so sodden and stupid and dull... could turn out to be lively, intelligent, and even happy when working on their own plots... Thus the slaves were able to transform what had begun as a coercive form into something else: when a slave sold part of his own production, this meant a ‘radical breach’ in the slave mode of production.” Sidney Mintz, “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 2: 1 (Summer, 1978), 93-94.

⁶ Loren Schweninger, “The underside of slavery,” 3. This was especially true in the Upper South where and increasing number of term labourers were held. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves, Runaway Slaves: Rebels On The Plantation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 106-107.

better working and living conditions, and through this process, they transcended their status as legal chattel by receiving de facto recognition as an emerging free working class.

Before discussing the details of these negotiations, it is first necessary to address the cultural significance of running and how it relates to the wider theme of resistance in American slave studies. Although earlier opinions of slave resistance relied on the premise that blacks were unable to fundamentally influence society, it has become clear that the traditional model of master-absolutism is unworkable, as it is undermined by numerous examples of slave agency that have been brought to light within the past few decades.⁷ For example, the legal reactions and social stigmas adopted by whites in response to Haiti are the most convincing pieces of evidence that contemporaries believed that slaves could effect change through their actions.⁸ But, that the Old South saw comparatively fewer slave rebellions should not be taken as an indication that American slaves resisted any less than other slave populations of the New World. It is more likely that because they experienced different forms of exploitation, their reactions manifested differently: given their numerical inferiority and dispersal over larger distances, American slaves did not have the kind of mass solidarity that was needed for large-scale insurrection, as in other slave societies like Haiti. It also “seems plausible that

⁷ To use the term agency requires clarification on what exactly is meant by the word. For this study, “self-directed action” is the most precise definition, as addressed by historian Walter Johnson. In this sense, agency is “not necessarily synonymous with humanity and resistance, especially if one deals with the concepts of betrayal and collaboration.” Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History*, 37:1 (2003), 115-116; Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) ix.

⁸ Similarly, historians of British Abolition have also argued that contemporaries realized that if emancipatory measures were not taken (top-down), slavery would be abolished through violent insurrection (bottom up). Thus, slaves were not idle beneficiaries of abolitionism as the earliest studies have argued, but were outright actors in the abolitionist cause. See Seymour Drescher, *Econocide*, 2nd Ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xxvi.

if American Negroes sometimes benefited by a close relationship with white families,” commented historian David Brion Davis:

they were also denied the sense of massive solidarity that was probably essential for revolt. In the West Indies slaves not only had the opportunity to plan and organize revolts, but they were seldom tied by the close bonds of loyalty that led so many North American slaves to divulge plots before they were hardly formed.⁹

Consequently, the lack of slave rebellions in the American South can most likely be attributed to the belief amongst blacks that any form of independence gained by outright acts of violence would be short lived; so they instead opted for more sustainable ways to go about resisting their roles as bondsmen.

Slaves took part in many acts of non-violent resistance, but this does not infer that they capitulated to their masters; more accurately, slaves pursued a course of compromise with the hope of bettering themselves and those they loved. For instance, the presence of an island-wide military force in eighteenth century Barbados, allowed for greater relaxations of control after three slave rebellions struck the island between 1649 and 1692. Nothing resembling insurrection was recorded for over a century thereafter, but this does not mean that slaves abandoned hope of a better life. As historians Hilary Beckles and Karl Watson have explained: the period of insurrection in the seventeenth century “gave way to patterns of collective behavior characterised primarily by limited protest and the seeking of socio-economic concessions from masters – both within the

⁹ David Brion Davis, “Slavery,” In *The Comparative Approach to American History*, C. Vann Woodward, ed. *The Comparative Approach To American History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 141.

production process and in socio-cultural life.”¹⁰ Like the slaves of eighteenth century Barbados, American slaves recognized that:

(s)urvival clearly required some degree of conformity to established norms and expectations. Yet, within a social system which placed more value upon the productive capacity of labour power than the social worth of labourers, some measure of resistance was necessary in order to survive.¹¹

In this light, running should not be squarely placed under the rubric of resistance, but regarded as a vehicle for socio-cultural exchange.¹² As Walter Johnson explained in his 2003 critique of the “new social history, historians have for a long time mistakenly treated acts of resistance in isolation from one another without paying much attention to overlapping themes of causation: “the terms of ‘everyday’ and ‘revolutionary’ have, at least in the literature on slavery, been allowed for too long to stand in unproductive opposition to one another rather than being thought of as dialectically inter-related.”¹³ Meaning, slaves who engaged in acts of non-violent resistance likely experienced thoughts of aggression towards whites, but did not always have the same opportunities to express themselves in the ways that other slaves did. Thus, it is not acts of violence that should be of central importance to studies of slave resistance, as violence “established de facto a bottom line to exploitation levels;” but, it also “put a certain premium (...) on methods of resolving work-place conflicts short of retaliatory violence.”¹⁴ Consequently, it is the preceding process of exchange between masters and chattel that is far more representative of slave resistance in the American context. Examples of violence directed

¹⁰ Hillary Beckles and Karl Watson. “Social Protest and Labour Bargaining: The Changing Nature of Slaves’ Responses to Plantation Life in Eighteenth-Century Barbados,” *Slavery and Abolition* 8 (1987), 275, 273.

¹¹ Beckles and Watson, 273.

¹² Phillip Morgan uses the same approach. Phillip Morgan, “Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance for Slave Culture,” *Slavery & Abolition* 6:3 (1985), 74.

¹³ Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* 37:1 (Autumn, 2003), 118.

¹⁴ Mary Turner, “Introduction,” in Mary Turner, ed. *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining In the Americas*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 2.

at whites are more representative of the breaking point in a much longer saga of exchange; thus, studies that give special focus to violence do not reflect the diverse ways that slaves resisted on a long-term and everyday basis. There is a reason why historian Phillip Morgan's 1998 study of southern culture did not include a section on resistance, as it permeated all aspects of a slave's life: "(i)n work and in play, in public and in private, violently and quietly, slaves struggled against masters."¹⁵ Given that retaliatory floggings, maiming, and even death was threatened to violently disobedient slaves, blacks most likely believed that any form of violent resistance against whites, however immediately satisfying, was a temporary solution to their long-term goals of betterment. Put simply, violence was typically a measure of last resort.

Absence without permission however, was an alternative form of resistance; it was widespread, and fortunately for historians, documented quite frequently and with great detail. It was one of the ways that slaves went about resisting the lawful and collective attitudes held by proslavery advocates. Unlike legally free people, slaves had more than just their labour to offer: they were themselves commodities, and by running away, they removed capital and productive power from the consumer market. It was part of a greater strategy of resistance that flouted the legal measures and social theories that kept blacks bound as uneducated, immobilized individuals who did not own the legal title to their person and consequently could not own property.

¹⁵ Historian Michael Mullin made a similar argument in 1992: "(a) fair proportion of slaves on most plantations resisted. However, they did so in a quiet, day-to-day way that did not add up to much. There was a rebelliousness that seldom challenged slavery, nor much less curtailed appreciably productivity and profit." Gerald Mullin, *Africa in America. Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 77; Walter Johnson, "On Agency," 116-118; Phillip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture In The Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) xxii; and Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (New York: University Press, 1972), 105-116.

One advertisement illustrates the all-encompassing nature of resistance quite clearly, when on 18 November 1775 subscriber Robert Brent placed an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* for his “Negro Man named CHARLES....” He had run away the previous night, having stolen “several of my Shirts, a Pair of new Saddle Bags, and two MARES....” He was described as “a very shrewd sensible Fellow... can both read and write; and as he always waited upon me, he must be well known through most of Virginia and Maryland.” Brent offered a five-pound reward for the securing of his runaway and mares, and explained that Charles eloped “from no Cause of Complaint, or Dread of a Whipping (for he has always been remarkably indulged, indeed too much so) but from a determined Resolution to get Liberty....” Brent noted “(f)rom many Circumstances, there is Reason to believe he intends an Attempt to get to Lord Dunmore; and as I have Reason to believe his Design of going off was long premeditated, and that he has gone off with some Accomplices, I am apprehensive he may prove daring and resolute, if endeavoured to be taken.” Two weeks later, the mares returned and Brent assumed “great Probability” that a certain free man named Kelly had taken Charles off in an oyster boat at Dumfries along with a local “white Servant.” He increased his reward from five to ten pounds for capturing Charles, and offered “a handsome gratuity to any Person who can convict Kelly of having carried him off.”¹⁶

That death was threatened to any slave who fled to the British, it seems reasonable that Charles would be described with such tenaciousness.¹⁷ In fact, there are many striking features of Brent’s notice that have ranging implications for studies of slave agency and corridors of communication through which subscribers and runaways

¹⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter) (18 November 1775), Windley, vol. 1, 172-173.

¹⁷ Lathan Windley, *A Profile of Runaway Slaves in Virginia and South Carolina From 1730 Through 1787*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 13.

negotiated with one another for power. Particular attention should be paid to the overarching sense of resolve in the observations Brent made of Charles's recent elopement. In predicting that Charles would be "daring and resolute" in his bid to reach the British, Brent described blacks and their abilities to think prudently, devise strategy, and persist in long-term planning. According to his owner, Charles was "a very shrewd sensible Fellow" who fled with a "long premeditated" and "determined Resolution to get Liberty." In detailing the context of Charles' escape, Brent testified to the resilience and cunning of black people, which is hardly reflective of the same patronizing attitudes of slaveholder paternalism that we saw in the previous chapter. Although many white contemporaries held the view that blacks, because of their racially inferior predisposition, were generally uneducated and driven primarily by instinct, subscribers like Brent have vividly illustrated that many slaves could read and write, many were mobile and knowledgeable of the geo-political landscape, and many were quite calculating in their pursuit for more autonomy.

Although Brent presumably wrote his notice knowing that the largest demographic of readership would be literate white people, there is substantial evidence to suggest that runaways were also the target audience for such advertisements. "There is often a progress in human affairs which may indeed be retarded, but which nothing can arrest... Of such sort is the advancement of knowledge among the negroes of this country..." wrote the lawyer and aristocrat St. George Tucker when he warned the Virginia state legislature in 1800; "(e)very year adds to the number of those who can read and write."¹⁸ Knowing that his runaway was a cunning, literate slave with knowledge of the Chesapeake region, Brent likely knew that Charles would be able to elude capture, that he

¹⁸ Gerald Mullin. *Flight and Rebellion*, viii.

would potentially read the advertisement himself, or that details of the notice would be passed along to him through various networks of kinship. The words of runaway slave and publisher, James Curry seems to have been speaking for all blacks when he deplored that “(t)he slaves, altho’ kept in the lowest ignorance in which it is possible to keep them, are, nevertheless, far more intelligent than they are usually represented, or than they ever appear to white people.”¹⁹ Thus, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that absence was often premeditated, and a mechanism through which slaves could induce negotiations with masters.

As often as subscribers attributed absence to random bouts of defiance, many attributed escape to a deep-rooted, intrinsic fixation that percolated into fruition rather than having flowed into sporadic outbursts. It has been proposed that the average rise in the number of spring and summer absences that we saw in chapter three, is evidence that running was often premeditated; yet, more substantial examples are available.²⁰ Former slave, Rev. Alexander Hemsley seems to have spoken for many bondsmen when he explained that his “escape was not owing to any sudden impulse or fear of present punishment, but from a natural wish to be free...”²¹ His words can be associated with those recalcitrant slaves who eventually attained a life of permanent freedom, or would not stop running until they had been maimed or killed. When Mr. Dandridge of Hanover, Virginia posted for Will and Sam in July 1766, he similarly described them as “both very sensible likely Fellows,” and explicitly stated that he thought they would “get out of the

¹⁹ James Curry, “Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave, (1840)” in *The Long Walk to Freedom*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 28.

²⁰ Jonathan Prude, ““Lower Sort”: Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800.” *The Journal of American History* 78:1 (Jun., 1991), 140.

²¹ Benjamin Drew, ed., *A North-Side View Of Slavery: The Refugee: or, The Narratives Of Fugitive Slaves In Canada Related By Themselves, With An Account Of The History And Condition Of The Colored Population Of Upper Canada*. (Boston: J.P. Jewitt and Company, 1856), 33.

Colony” as “their Scheme for going off has been for some Time planned.”²² In posting for Johnny in the *Virginia Gazette* in February 1768, Lewis Burwell detailed his slave’s premeditations when he explained that he was at a loss to indicate what “clothes he [Johnny] may have, as those he had on when he went away have been found near the water side, I suppose to prevent any inquiry, and to favour his making his escape out of the colony, as he might think I should suspect he had drowned himself.”²³ Subscriber Nathaniel Richards likewise believed that Ben had staged his own death when he explained that he “pretended that he was going to swim, and as he never returned, and next day his Clothes were found near the Shore, he was supposed to be drown’d, till his Character was known, which gives Reason to suppose he took that Method to deceive his Master and prevent a Search.”²⁴ Former Tennessee slave John Warren also had some pretty vivid testimony of pre-departure preparations when he explained how he would evade the bloodhounds that would surely be sent to subdue him:

I knew how to kill the scent of dogs when they came after me: I could do it with red pepper. Another way which I have practiced is, to dig into a grave where a man has been buried a long time, get the dust of the man, make it into a paste with water, and put it on the feet, knees, and elbows, or wherever I touched the bushes. The dog won’t follow that.²⁵

Runaway Isaac D. Williams had a similar story of his premeditated escape:

(w)e had taken the precaution to bring with us some red onions and spruce pine for the purpose of rubbing our boots so as to divert the scent of the dogs. (...) We went up to a big leafy tree and commenced rubbing our backs vigorously against the bark. This was for the purpose of making the dogs think we had climbed it. The scent of the onions and spruce pine we rubbed on our boots would not be followed by them, while the human scent on the bark would always claim their attention.

²² *Virginia Gazette* (8 August 1766), Windley, vol. 1, 283.

²³ *Virginia Gazette* (11 February 1768), Ibid, 57-58.

²⁴ *The New York Gazette; or, The Weekly Post-Boy* (4 September 1766), Hodges and Brown, eds. “Pretends to Be Free” *Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 142-143.

²⁵ Drew, 186. Former slave Mom Hester Hunter of Marion South Carolina has also explained that many slaves would hide in graveyards as whites were generally scared of cemeteries. Rawick, vol. 3, part 2, 357.

Escaping slaves frequently have adopted this stratagem and got away successfully when almost captured.²⁶

Former Virginian slave Mrs. Georgina Gibbs has also explained that because her master would not permit slave visitations between neighbouring estates, “(s)ometimes de men slaves would put logs in de beds, and dey’d cover ‘em up, den dey go out. Mastah would see de logs and think dey wuz de slaves.”²⁷

Slaves clearly made preparations for both short and long terms of absence, a reality known to both slaves and the master class alike. That many runaways stayed out for only a couple of weeks or even days, many attempted to reach a compromise with masters by gaining leverage through their absence. After sharing a story of when her mother confronted a ruthless overseer, former slave Mrs. Virginia Shepherd described another woman “something like mother in spirit” who lived in Southhampton County, Virginia:

this woman would work, but if you drove her too hard, she’d git stubborn like a mule and quit. Her name was Miss Julian Wright. Julian worked in the field. She was a smart strong and stubborn woman. When they got rough on her, she got rough on them and ran away in the woods. One day she ran away and hid a long time.²⁸

After receiving a whipping for not cutting wheat to his master’s satisfaction, former slave Henry Bank of Stafford County Virginia fled to the woods for three months “in order that master might sell me running, – I did n’t care much whose hands I fell into, if I got out of his. He put out advertisements for me, as I was told, of twenty-five dollars reward, for bringing me home not injured.”²⁹ Advertising in *The Star* in 1830, North Carolina

²⁶ Isaac D. Williams, “Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life. Reminiscences as told by Isaac D. Williams to “Tege”” in *The Long Walk To Freedom*, Cecon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, eds, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 146.

²⁷ The editor mentioned that the spelling of Georgina sometimes changed to Georgianna. Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, eds. *Wheevils In The Wheat. Interviews With Virginia Ex-Slaves*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976) 104-105.

²⁸ Ibid, 259.

²⁹ Drew, 75.

subscriber B.C. Eaton explained that his “negro man ARTHUR” ran away a year prior, and “had not long known him” before making his escape:

(h)e is by profession a carpenter, and he has been working at that trade for several years past in Raleigh, and was working there at the time he went off. He is frequently seen lurking about Raleigh and its vicinity. He has a wife in that place, where he no doubt stays the greater part of his time. From the length of time he has been gone, he may try and pass as a free man. (...) As I have no doubt but he relies upon being sold, I wish to be distinctly understood that he cannot be bought at any time, so long as he is a runaway.³⁰

Presuming that Eaton was correct in his assumption that Arthur was attempting to live a life of relative autonomy with his wife in Raleigh, he also assumed that he was being manipulated into selling Arthur to someone who was more amenable to him continuing his employment as a carpenter in the city. Mrs. Shepherd and Arthur have shown us that bondsmen asserted their agency by removing their power from “the slave mode of production.”³¹ As we saw in chapter two, most runaways travelled only short distances from work as they knew that brief periods of truancy were tolerated. Although reasons for temporary absence were numerous and by no means always vindictive, slaves also stayed out for short periods:

to temporarily withhold their labor as a form of economic negation with their slave owners. Slavery involved a constant process of negotiation, as slaves bargained over the pace of work, free time, monetary rewards, and the freedom to practice burials, marriages, and religious ceremonies away from white oversight. Running away was a part of this negotiation process.³²

In her analysis of eighteenth century family life in America, historian Kerstin Denise Sword similarly remarked that absenting “was a longstanding and tacitly accepted means

³⁰ *The Star* (Raleigh) (21 October 1830), Freddie L. Parker, ed., *Stealing a Little Freedom: Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791–1840*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 495-496.

³¹ Sidney Mintz, “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 2: 1, (1978), 93-94.

³² Carbado and Weise, xvi-xvii.

by which wives (like servants and slaves) negotiated for power in the household.”³³ Of course, it is not enough to simply assume that negotiations took place; it is necessary to examine how such communication was made possible, and what kind of threats and concessions were made through these systems.

The sources paint the existence of many networks through which runaways and subscribers communicated with one another. One subscriber seems to have exemplified the usefulness of the media, when in 1761 slaveholder John Lloyd of Stamford Connecticut advertised for his “Negro Man Servant named Cyrus....” He insisted that by “inserting advertisements in the several News Papers [it] is judged the most expeditious Method of spreading them far & near,” and went on to ask: “if any Gentlemen will be so good, when they have read their Papers, to cut out this advertisement and set it up in the most public Place, it will be esteem’d as a Favour....”³⁴ Subscriber Samuel Swift seemed to be illustrating the vast geographical coverage of the media when he addressed his notice “(t)o all worthy Brothers and other Generous Commanders of Ships or other Vessels Sailing between the Poles, - as also to all the valourous Sons of Zebulon and others, whoever dispers’d upon the wide surface of old Ocean, or upon any island or Main-land upon this habitable Globe, into whose hands these may chance to fall.”³⁵ Such exposure consequently means that the audience for these notices was likely diverse. Historian Jonathan Prude has explained that one in twenty households were on formal subscription lists by the late 1700s:

³³ Kirsten Denise Sword, “Wayward Wives, Runaway Slaves and the Limits of Patriarchal Authority in Early America,” (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002), 19.

³⁴ *Boston Evening-Post* (19 November 1761), Antonio Bly, ed. *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History Of Runaway Slaves In Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700-1789*. (Lexington: Lanham, 2012), 144.

³⁵ *Boston Evening Post* (16 July 1770), Ibid, 153-154.

(m)oreover, the practice of reading the newspapers aloud and passing them on probably meant that the ads' information reached people beyond those who were on subscription lists... The practice of running the same ad repeatedly suggests not only assumptions that newspaper readers alternated between skimming and scrutinizing these texts, but also that a given paper's readership might change from week to week.³⁶

The testimony of former Virginia slave and resident of Canada West, James W. Sumler illustrates that subscribers achieved relative success in communicating with their runaways through advertisements. Sumler recalled seeing such a notice when he fled his home in Norfolk, Virginia in early 1855:

I left home at 2 P.M., and walked a very considerable distance. Then I saw fit to remain concealed nine months. Meanwhile I was advertised, and a reward of \$200 was offered for me. On seeing this I felt somewhat troubled in mind, - at last I started, but I had to run back to my hiding-place. A second time I got very near a place where I would have been safe, but I was pursued, and had again to put back. A third time I was successful.³⁷

Former North Carolina slave, Robert Glenn has even indicated that black bondsmen may have also had access to various technological networks of communication. Upon being sold, Glenn explained that his "mother found out by the 'Grapevine telegraph' that I was going to be carried to [K]entucky."³⁸ But presuming that runaways did not have access to such formal networks, communication was still possible via a system of informal messengers and informants. Masters frequently used other slaves to convey information, and they "carried news from one plantation to another by riding mules or horses...."³⁹ Former Kentucky slave, Mrs. Julia King explained that "(t)he slaves used to get together in their cabins and tell one another the news in the evening. They visited, the

³⁶ Jonathan Prude, "'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800," *The Journal of American History* 78:1 (Jun., 1991), 129 including footnote 10; also see Frank Luther Mott's study of American newspapers to see where Jonathan Prude drew his statistics. Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years, 1690-1940* (New York, 1947), 59.

³⁷ Drew, 98.

³⁸ Rawick, vol. 14, part 1, 331.

³⁹ *Ibid*, vol. 2, part 1, 28.

same as anybody else.”⁴⁰ Former South Carolina slave Benjamin Russel similarly remarked:

How did we get news? Many plantations were strict about this, but the greater the precaution the alerter became the slaves, the wider they opened their ears and the more eager they became for outside information. The source were: Girls that waited on the tables, the ladies’ maids and the drivers; they would pick up everything they heard and pass it on to the other slaves.⁴¹

Many masters were acutely aware of such networks. Upon advertising for Adam in the *New-Jersey Gazette* in 1783, subscriber David Cowell made clear that his notice was a forwarning to “all people from harbouring, employing, or dealing with the said negro, and to beg that they would... give information or encourage him to return to his duty, which will prove much to the advantage of the negro....”⁴² Former North Carolina slave, Joe High explained that when his brother Taylor ran away, “(y)oung master sent him word to come on back home; he won’t goin’ to whup him, and he come back. Yes, he come back.”⁴³ Similarly, former slave Henry Gowens mentioned that after slaves fled the plantation, his master would send “word by slaves that if they saw the runaways, to tell them if they would come home and go to work, they should not be whipped. Then they would come in.”⁴⁴ In advertising for Clem in November 1786, subscriber Thomas Hart offered forty shillings to his runaway if he returned on his own, and “esteem[ed] it a great favour of any persons who may have it in their power to communicate this piece of intelligence to the said Negro, and assure him that I will not deceive him in failing to make good my promise.”⁴⁵ After his sale to a speculator heading to New Orleans, Edward

⁴⁰ Rawick, vol. 16, 59.

⁴¹ Ibid, vol. 3, part 4, 52-53.

⁴² *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton) (25 June 1783), Hodges and Brown, ed. 287-288.

⁴³ Rawick, vol. 14, part 1, 413.

⁴⁴ Drew, 140.

⁴⁵ Baltimore *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (28 November 1786), Windley, ed. vol. 2, 354-355.

Hicks fled back to his home in Lunenburg Virginia where his mother and brothers lived.

Upon his return, he was given something to eat:

I was then advised (as the advertisement was just out from the nigger-trader) to go on to an old house where cotton was kept, and there stay until the advertisement was over. For they drive for runaways there with bloodhounds, and a great many men moving abreast, so that they will have a man unless he is a long distance under the ground. I went to the cotton house, and got under the cotton, and stayed till the drive was over—some two or three days.⁴⁶

When former Virginia slave, Charles Bentley made his break for Canada West, he similarly recalled “a druggist [that] came to me, and said an advertisement describing me was in the tavern.” After hearing a description of himself, “(m)y friends advised me to remove further.”⁴⁷ His friends undoubtedly feared that if he did not leave the area he would likely be caught and punished, maybe even to the point of death; and their fears were not completely unfounded.

As early as 1672, colonial administrators made clear distinctions between slaves who were simply away without permission, and those who could be legally killed for their transgressions.⁴⁸ In addition to suppressing rebellious black behaviour, Virginia’s General Assembly hoped to prevent white servants and natives from joining insolent slaves by enacting legislation that deemed it legal to wound or kill black bondsmen. Four omnibus laws were passed between 1705 and 1797 in Virginia, all of which legally encoded a slaveholder’s right to “issue a proclamation” via two justices in the case of “desperate, courageous and ‘incorrigible slaves....’” Those who killed outlawed slaves

⁴⁶ Drew, 261.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 109.

⁴⁸ ACT VIII. In the 1660s, the legislature of Virginia forbid any white servant from helping a black escape, and required them to pay fines if that slave became lost or died while they were at large. White servants were to work longer than their stipulated terms of service if they aided or abetted a slave in their escape ACT XXII. ‘English Running Away With Negroes,’ p. 26; ACT CII. ‘Run-aways,’ ACT X. An act for preventing Negroes Insurrections. William Waller Hening, ed. *The Statutes At Large Being A Collection Of All The Laws Of Virginia, From The First Session of The Legislature, In the Year 1619*. Vol. 2 (New York: R. & W. & Bartow, 1823) 26, 299-300, 116-117, 481-482.

collected rewards and even a fee from public coffers. Outlawry was the most lethal tactic employed by subscribers in their efforts to retrieve absent slaves as it turned a common runaway into the prey of a bloodsport. Outlining the provisions of outlawry, historian Gerald Mullin has explained:

if the slave does not immediately return, anyone whatsoever may kill or destroy such slaves by such ways and means as he ... shall think fit ... If the slave is apprehended ... it shall ... be lawful for the county court, to order such punishment to the said slave, either by dismembering, or in any other way ... as they in their discretion shall think fit, for the reclaiming any such incorrigible slave, and terrifying others from the like practices.⁴⁹

The notice posted by Christopher Dudley and John Spicer, two of the Justices of the Peace” for Onslow County, North Carolina typifies a Proclamation of Outlawry, although most advertisements used a shorter abbreviated text to indicate that the said slave was now a criminal by law and could be treated as such:

(w)hereas complaint hath been this day made to us, by John Fullwood of the said County, that a certain negro Slave belonging to him, named CUFF, hath absented from his said master’s service, and is lurking about in the County, committing many acts of felony. These are therefore, in the name of the sate, to command the said slave Cuff forthwith to surrender himself and return home to his said master. And we do hereby also require the Sheriff of the said county of Onslow, to make diligent search and pursuit after the above mentioned slave, and him having found, to apprehend and secure so that he may be conveyed to his said master, or otherwise discharged as the law directs. And the said Sheriff is hereby empowered to raise and take with him such power of his county as he shall think fit, for apprehending the said slave. And we do hereby by virtue of an Act of Assembly of this state concerning servants and slaves, intimate and declare, if the said slave Cuff does not surrender himself and return home, immediately after the publication of these presents, that any person may kill and destroy the said slave, by such means as he or they may think fit, without accusation impeachment of any crime or offence for so doing, or without incurring any penalty or forfeiture thereby.⁵⁰

Using the more common abridged text, subscriber Thomas Tucker illustrated the difference between absence and outlawry when he offered thirty pounds:

⁴⁹ Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 57.

⁵⁰ *Willmington Gazette* (27 January 1807) Parker, 169-170.

THIRTY POUNDS (...) to any person that takes, and brings Cyrus to his master; and TWENTY POUNDS for Dorinda... (...) If these slaves will return to their duty within ten days, they shall be pardoned their past offence: But if they do not then return, nor are taken; in that case the above reward will be given for them dead or alive...⁵¹

Proclamations of outlawry were few, and usually accompanied a slew of offences.

Subscriber John Smith outlawed Mann “from his threatening to burn my houses.”⁵² And

when subscriber John Burgwin advertised for three runaways in Hall’s Wilimington

Gazette in 1797, he explained that Frank:

(h)ad been lately whipped for a felony he committed, and had an iron on one of his legs. The other named NED, who served his time with Messrs. Harris and Springs, blacksmith, in Wilmington... has been persuaded to his elopement by Frank, for the purpose of filing off his iron clogg... [and] that my negro fellow York, (advertised in this paper) has been harboured by some evil disposed person... The said three fellows are outlawed, and may be shot, unless they return to me in ten days.⁵³

Although justifications for outlawry were numerous, declines in the rate that subscribers outlawed runaways indicates that with the expansion of American slavery and the adoption of paternalist attitudes after Independence, subscribers became less willing to kill their absent property. The disparity between runaways and outlaws can thus be considered a representation of the value that masters placed on their slaves, and consequently, the power that slaves held in their truancy.

Of the 2,313 advertisements for Virginia, just over five percent were for outlawed slaves from 1736 to 1790, without a single outlaw recorded from 1801 to 1820. Of the 2,145 advertisements for North Carolina, there is a similar pattern of decline as outlaws accounted for fewer than twenty-two percent from 1751 to 1799, and fewer than three percent from 1800 to 1840. Even though outlawing was never a popular choice, these

⁵¹ *South-Carolina Gazette* (1-7 February 1759), Windley, vol. 3, 170.

⁵² *Virginia Gazette* (4 February 1768), *Ibid.*, v. 1, 284.

⁵³ *Hall’s Wilmington Gazette* (20 April 1797), Parker, 128.

statistics illustrate that it became less common in the nineteenth century. In relation to slave trading, declines in the frequency of outlawry seem to have paralleled the transition from a slave importing to slave exporting state. As slaves became increasingly lucrative commodities, and slaveholders came under increasing pressure to display benevolent attitudes towards their human property, subscribers were less willing to have slaves killed while they were absent without permission.

Table 8
Percentage of Runaway/Outlawed
Advertisements Per Time Period,
Virginia

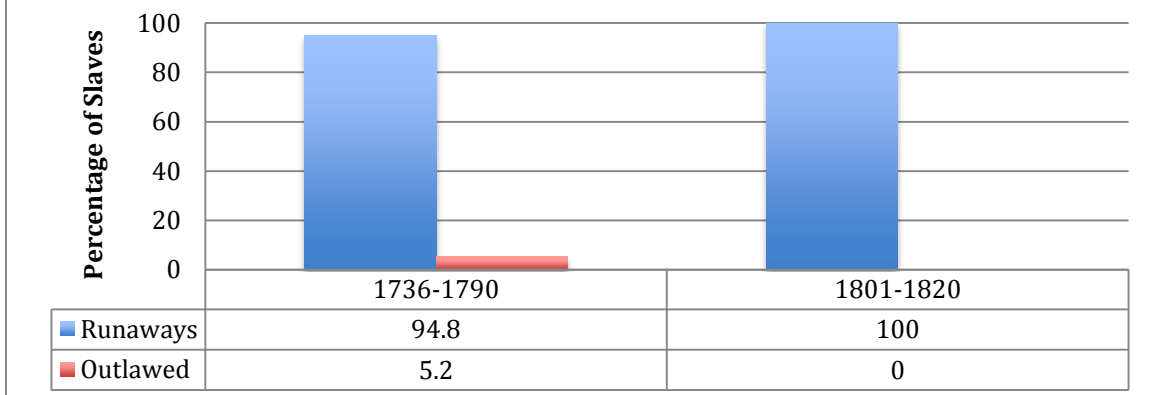
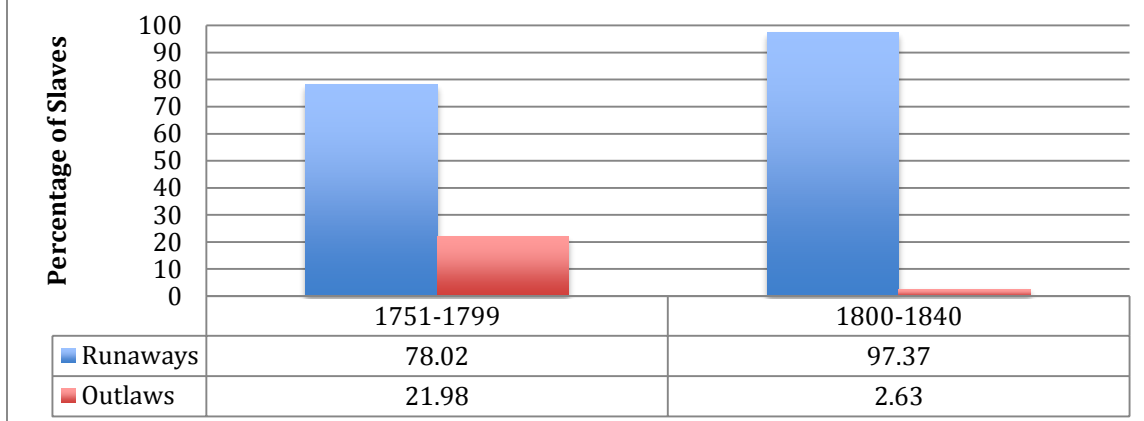


Table 9
Percentage of Runaway/Outlawed
Advertisements Per Time Period,
North Carolina



When subscribers pursued non-violent negotiations, the most common tactic was the assurance that a runaway would be pardoned “and meet with good treatment” if they willingly returned home.⁵⁴ In advertisement for Titus, Charles Atkins explained that he has “constantly offered among negroes of his acquaintance, to forgive him if he returned of his own accord.”⁵⁵ Recognizing that runaways might require a period of deliberation or time to travel home, subscribers were also inclined to allow for additional grace periods. James Michie’s advertisement was probably the most typical of such offers when he declared “that if they will within one month from this date, come home to their master, they shall be entirely forgiven, and the punishment notwithstanding 6 months absence, totally remitted.”⁵⁶ Advertising two weeks after Cassius’s escape, A. Moore similarly

⁵⁴ *State Gazette of South-Carolina* (18 August 1788), Windley, v. 3, 407.

⁵⁵ *Royal South-Carolina Gazette* (20 June 1780), Ibid, 707-708.

⁵⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette* (9-16 April 1754), Ibid, 127.

declared “that if he will return within one month from this date, he will be forgiven, and may resume his services free from the punishment he merits.”⁵⁷

Other examples of non-violent negotiations indicate that masters were aware of their runaways’ grievances and speak directly to the requests of slaves themselves.

Former South Carolina slave Annie Lumpkin explained that she remembered “one big black man” who attempted to leave South Carolina, but was caught while trying to secure passage in Charleston:

(h)e tell the overseer who questioned him after he was brought back: ‘Sho’, I try to git away from this sort of thing. I was goin’ to Massachusetts, and hire out ‘til I git ‘nough to carry me to my home in Africa.’ It was de rule when a trial was bein’ held lak this, for all de bosses and sometimes de missus to be there to listen and to ask the run’way slave some questions.⁵⁸

When John Edmondson advertised for Tom, he explained that he had “reason to believe, from what he told my overseer a little before he went off, that he intends for South Carolina, as his wife was sold to a gentleman there a few months ago; and my refusing to sell him is the only occasion of running away.”⁵⁹ Simon Doyle similarly explained that his slave, Sampson most likely made his way to the eastern shore of Maryland, “having frequently expressed a desire to be there.”⁶⁰ In advertising for Polly in 1826, subscriber Lunsford Scott mentioned that in his “former advertisement, I stated that from threats which the wench made prior to her elopement, they would, by changing their names, and getting forged free papers, endeavor to make their escape to some free state...”⁶¹

Concessions from subscribers came in many forms, but tended to revolve around two general themes: privileges that improved the working and living conditions of slaves.

⁵⁷ *The Richmond Enquirer* (9 January 1816), Meaders, 288.

⁵⁸ Rawick, vol. 3, part 3, 130.

⁵⁹ *Virginia Gazette* (21 August 1778), Windley, v. 1, 275.

⁶⁰ *Maryland Gazette* (18 September 1777), Ibid, v. 2, 119.

⁶¹ *Free Press* (Halifax and Tarboro) (22 August 1826), Parker, 725-226.

These arrangements always included the promise of more autonomy, including the ability to procure a new owner, retain a portion of earnings, and even the opportunity to purchase their legal freedom. In no way were these concessions altruistic, as it is clear that many subscribers felt they were being strong-armed into granting their runaways privileges; hence subscriber Adrian Loyer seemed defeated when he posted for the return of Jenny in the *Savannah Georgia Gazette* in March 1768. Having been sold to Mr. Edward Davis, a merchant of Charlestown, Jenny fled “from on board the schooner Jane... on the 29th February last...” He offered a reward of ten shillings sterling “to any person that will apprehend the said wench, and deliver her to the subscriber, the Warden of the Work-House, or her master in Charlestown,” but seemed helpless in his own powers of retrieval when he conceded that “any person that has a mind to buy a good house wench, as she does not chuse to live in Charlestown, may treat with ADRIAN LOYER.”⁶² Thus the empowerment slaves gained by their truancy was in no way absolute nor beneficial, as it seems that many subscribers simply wanted to rid themselves of unruly chattel. For instance, former slave Dan Josiah Lockhart of Frederick County Virginia was made overseer on his master’s farm. “I was harder on the servants than he wanted I should be,” explained Lockhart:

(a)t another time he undertook to whip me, and I told him I would leave him if he did. I had my mind on my wife, Maria. She was sold to a man in Winchester, eight miles. This was too far,—so I wanted to be sold. He said if he sold me, he would sell me where I would never see her.⁶³

In this sense, the threat of truancy was not conducive to better living conditions; there is evidence, however, that subscribers conceded to their slaves’ demands.

⁶² *Savannah Georgia Gazette* (9 March 1768), Windley, vol. 4, 28.

⁶³ Drew, 45.

Posting in the *Raleigh Register* and *North Carolina Weekly Advertiser* in June 1827, subscriber William Polk indicated that Martin had run away the previous July. As he ran “away under the impression of his being sold to Mr. Boylan and as he had no objection to live with me, if he returns in one month from this time, he shall be received and pardoned, and I will put him on my Westbrook Farm in Johnston county, near to where his wife lives.” Polk made clear that “(s)hould he not come in, within the time specified, the above reward [twenty five dollars] will be given for his apprehension and delivery to me in Raleigh.”⁶⁴ Subscriber William Roberts noted that Tena “was taken away from my plantation by Toby, a fellow belonging to Mr. William Maxwell...,” which was preceded by the escape of “a Negro Fellow named Peter” eight weeks prior. After offering various rewards for their delivery or information of their harbourers, Roberts declared that “(i)f either of them will return home, of their own accord they will be forgiven, and will have leave to look for a master where they shall choose.”⁶⁵ Subscriber Thomas Whitesides explained that Jemmy and Athy had been runaways for about two months when he advertised for their return in the *South Carolina Gazette*. He offered a reward of fifty pounds “on proof of any white person’s harbouring the said slaves, or Five Pounds if delivered at the work house...,” and concluded that “(i)f the above negroes will return home they will be pardoned, and have tickets given them to look for a new master.”⁶⁶ Indicating that “a young Ebo Negro Man named Tom” had runaway approximately fifteen months prior, subscriber William Price offered a reward of twenty pounds for his delivery or securing; “but if the said Tom will return to the subscriber within one month from the date hereof, he shall have pardon for his past

⁶⁴ *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser* (15 June 1827), Parker, 310.

⁶⁵ Charleston *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (22-31 May 1776), Windley, vol. 3, 484.

⁶⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette* (31 October to 7 November 1761), Ibid, 204-205.

offence, with liberty to get another master.”⁶⁷ Subscriber James Ellinor explained that he had recently “purchased from Mr. S.L. Hart, [a] negro man ISHAM, Advertised in this paper as a runaway—and hereby gives notice, that if said runaway will surrender himself he can either go to work for me, or I will give him a permit to seek another master.”⁶⁸ Hugh and Jim were given permission to be away from their home in Beaufort North Carolina for two weeks, and having taken longer than permitted, subscriber James Manney posted a reward of fifty dollars for their delivery to the jail at New Bern, and further declared that “if they return to me immediately, without cost, I will endeavor to sell them to the man they want to live with. When Hugh reads this, he had better reflect on his error, and come home without delay.”⁶⁹ Subscriber Arch’d McRae indicated that he would give fifty dollars:

for the apprehension of a Negro Woman named BESS, and her CHILDREN... This woman has been runaway about 8 years, and was the property of Joseph Green... She was sold at public sale... and purchased by John P. Gause, esq. who sold her with all the children she may have. It is possible that this woman may be passing by some assumed name, and as free, and that her children may be in some keeping as such. If this woman will come in to me, and bring her children, without further trouble or expense, I will, in the event of her being dissatisfied with me as her owner, give her leave to suit herself with one to her liking.⁷⁰

Indicating how runaways could go about responding to such offers, subscriber W. Lee indicated that if his runaways “will return of their own accord they shall have a ticket to choose their own master by applying as above.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Charleston *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (7-14 August 1769), Windley, vol. 3, 430-431.

⁶⁸ *Free Press* (24 May 1831), Parker, 735-736.

⁶⁹ *Carolina Centinel* (9 November 1831) (both quotes), Parker, 660.

⁷⁰ *People’s Press* (Wilmington), (18 March 1835), Ibid, 830.

⁷¹ Charleston *South-Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser* (23-25 March 1784), Windley, vol. 3, 732.

Offers made to slaves went beyond selling them to new owners, as many subscribers allowed for slaves to work away from white oversight. Upon advertising for the return of Jessa, subscriber Thomas Hunter offered a ten dollar reward for her delivery or securing in the Wilmington jail, but conceded that “(i)f she will return to me in the course of two or three months from this time, I will give her the liberty of procuring another master, provided she does not wish to live with me, or hiring her own time.”⁷² Having explained that Johny had been purchased from Mr. John Waddell, subscriber George Gibbs thought it probable that Johny was visiting his mother and uncle on Waddell’s plantation. Gibbs offered a reward of ten dollars to any one who delivered Johny to the Wilmington goal, and further declared that “(i)f he returns of his own accord he shall not be punished, and may work in town.”⁷³

Although it was rare to find a notice in which subscribers offered runaways their legal freedom, one notice was found that illustrates that manumission was not off the negotiating table. When subscriber Samuel Swift posted a notice for Scipio in the *Boston Evening Post* in 1770, he declared that:

(i)f he returns voluntarily he shall not be whipt as he deserves, but I will either sell him to a good Ship Master, or let him as he shall chuse, till he has earnt his prime Colt &c. when I will give him his Freedom – but if any shall bring or convey him to his Master, shall be paid EIGHT DOLLARS....⁷⁴

Former Maryland slave Mrs. Henry Brant explained that she was traded as a result of her master’s gambling, and after receiving severe chastisement from local whites, her master “gave me a chance to buy myself.” He offered her:

one year to pay \$270; before the year was out, I offered him \$150 in part payment,-he would n’t take that unless I’d pay all. I then asked him, would he

⁷² *The True Republican or American Whig* (Wilmington) (6 June 1809), Parker, 541-542.

⁷³ *Wilmington Gazette* (13 June 1799), Ibid, 138.

⁷⁴ *Boston Evening Post* (16 July 1770), Bly, 153-154.

take that, and security for \$120, payable six months after, and give me my papers down. He refused. Then I said to myself, 'If you won't take that, you shan't take any.' I started for Canada, and travelled in style...⁷⁵

Acknowledging the distrust that many slaves must have felt towards their masters, subscribers often felt the need to emphasize the authenticity of their offers. Despite seemingly altruistic non-violent offers of concession, slaves were undoubtedly skeptical about any promises of forgiveness and recompense. Former Virginian slave, William Brooks explained that "(s)ome times dey beat 'em so bad dey run away an' hide in de woods. Ole master he tell one a his slaves – tell 'em come back. He ain' gonna beat 'em any mo'. Purty soon dey come back an' he beat 'em worse'n ever fer runnin' way."⁷⁶ Former slave Henry Atkinson of Norfolk Virginia similarly explained that when his owner died, his will stipulated that her slaves be freed and her estate divided amongst them equally. His employer however, "kept feeding us with the tale that we should have our time, and still kept hiring us out. This was done to keep us from running away."⁷⁷ After years of absence, Harriet Jacobs received word from her master that if she returned "I could be purchased by my relatives or any one who wished to buy me. I knew this cunning master too well not to believe that this was a trap laid for me; and so all my friends understood it."⁷⁸ In advertising for Clem, Thomas Hart proposed to give a reward of forty shillings:

(p)rovided he will surrender himself... and shall esteem it a great favour of any persons who may have it in their power to communicate this piece of intelligence to the said Negro, and assure him that I will not deceive him in failing to make good my promise.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Drew, 346-347.

⁷⁶ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 57.

⁷⁷ Drew, 81.

⁷⁸ Harriet Jacobs, "Incidents In the Life of a Slave Girl," Carbado and Weise, eds., 186-187.

⁷⁹ *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (28 November 1786), Windley, v. 2, 354-355.

Although it remains unknown if Hart followed through with his proposal, there is evidence to suggest that some subscribers did hold true to their promises. In advertising for Abram, John Forbes claimed that he had already made the necessary arrangements required for his slave's willful return:

WHEREAS I purchased, 22nd July last, at Mr. John Snow's sale, in St. John's parish, a negro man named Abram, and the same day sold him to Francis Lejau, Esq; which negro having absented himself ever since; This is therefore to offer him forgiveness if he will immediately come to Charles-Town, where he shall live with me agreeable to his own request, as I have settled that point with capt. Lejau.⁸⁰

Inversely, there are also indications that slaves did not follow through with the conditions of their negotiated return. When James Hitchings advertised for the return of Ned and Chance, he similarly explained that he had already made good on his proposal:

I purchased said Negro (Ned), and that not without his own avowed consent; yet, notwithstanding, the rascal was base enough to run off, and that without any cause given him to justify such infamous and ungrateful behaviour, yet nevertheless, I further indulged the fugitive refugee rascal (...) to choose another master; when he chose to live with Col. Nathaniel Ramsay, to whom I wrote a letter, and gave Negro Ned and Chance, a pass to go to Col. Ramsey, who had agreed (upon their going unto him) to purchase the before-mentioned Negroes of me. Chance, like an honest and grateful Negro, being sensible of the indulgence given to him, went unto Col. Ramsey, with whom he is happily placed; but that infamous and unprincipled rascal Ned, still holds out...⁸¹

Subscriber Mungo Ponton offered twenty dollars reward for the securing of his "Negro Fellow MYLES... I gave him some time in August, a pass to procure another master, which he may use as an instrument for his escape."⁸² Subscriber William Mitchell offered a twenty-five dollar reward for the securing of Abram, and explained that "(s)ome days ago, he had permission to seek a master, and I gave him a pass to that effect, which he

⁸⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette* (25 September – 2 October 1762), Windley, v. 3, 221.

⁸¹ *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (6 September 1785), Ibid, v. 2, 334.

⁸² *North Carolina* (7 September 1795), Parker, 49.

has never returned, and probably still uses. This is therefore to inform all persons, that said pass is annulled....”⁸³ But perhaps the most extreme reaction to slave deception was posted by an unidentified subscriber who remarked that “TWO NEGRO FELLOWS called BRISTOL & MOSES [had] eloped” the previous month, and gave special mention to:

BRISTOL... [who] ran away from John G. Bount, Esquire, some years ago, and after weeks of persuasion and many fair promises prevail; led on the subscriber to purchase him upon an expressly stipulated condition that having been used to his plantation and management for the time he was in treaty with Mr. Bount, and being satisfied to submit to any kind of work or discipline or the other Negroes, if he ran away after drawing me into a loss by inducing me to purchase and then absconding, he would be satisfied to forfeit his head—he was solemnly assured that a reward for his head would be offered him such case. He has now left my service without smallest provocation, without having ever been whipped in it, without undergoing the most laborious and disagreeable parts of duty, after committing some and been accused of many thefts, and under peculiar circumstances of treachery and provocation.—I do therefore, in consequence of the above mentioned solemn assurance, made to him and with his own consent, offer a Reward of FIFTY DOLLARS to any person who will produce to me his Head, severed from his body; provided he is shot in being taken or making his escape when called on to surrender.-⁸⁴

This notice exemplifies the extent of frustration experienced by subscribers in their attempts to retrieve runaways, and likewise illustrates the power of truancy to effect change in the lives of slaves. The existence of these negotiations illustrate that absence offered slaves substantial leverage in their pursuit for more autonomy, even at times when great legal and social barriers were adopted to prevent them from attaining the same level of freedom as contemporary whites.⁸⁵ In detailing the junctures through which information was relayed, it has been shown that master-slave relations in eighteenth and

⁸³ *Carolina Centinel* (New Bern) (13 November 1824), Parker, 644.

⁸⁴ *Wilmington Gazette* (5 May 1803), Ibid, 153-154.

⁸⁵ David Brion Davis has pointed out that thousands of American slaves purchased their freedom after having made installment payments, but this was far more common in Latin America, although realistically, a Latin American slave had no better of a chance than an American slave of becoming manumitted. David Brion Davis, “Slavery,” in C. Vann Woodward, ed. *The Comparative Approach To American History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 137-139.

nineteenth century America were often ones of negotiation. In the concluding section of this study, we will discuss how truancy produced upward social mobility for runaways, and how this facilitated the adoption of certain behaviours fundamental to an emerging free working class.

Appendix V

Virginia Gazette (Dixon & Hunter) (18 November 1775), Lathan Windley, ed., *Runaway Slave Advertisements. A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*. Vol. 1 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 172-173:

STAFFORD County, AQUIA, Nov. 2, 1775.

RAN away last Night, from the Subscriber, a Negro Man named CHARLES, who is a very shrewd sensible Fellow, and can both read and write; and as he always waited upon me, he must be well known through most of Virginia and Maryland. He is very black, has a large Nose, and is about 5 Feet 8 or 10 Inches high. He took a Variety of Clothes which I cannot well particularise, stole several of my Shirts, a Pair of new Saddle Bags, and two MARES, one a darkish, the other a light Bay, with a Blaze and white Feet, and about 3 Years old. From many circumstances, there is Reason to believe he intends an Attempt to get to Lord Dunmore; and as I have Reason to believe his Design of going off was long premeditated, and that he has gone off with some Accomplices, I am apprehensive he may prove daring and resolute, if endeavoured to be taken. His Elopement was from no Cause of Complaint, or Dread of a Whipping (for he has always been remarkably indulged, indeed too much so) but from a determined Resolution to get Liberty, as he conceived, by flying to Lord Dunmore. I will give 5 l. to any Person who secures him and the Mares, so that I get them again. ROBERT BRENT. Since writing the above Advertisement, the Mares have returned; and there is a great Probability, from many Circumstances, to conclude that he was taken from Dumfries, in Company with a white Servant of Mr. Andrew Leitch's, in an Oyster Boat belonging to one Kelly, near Smith's Point, in Northumberland. I will give 10 l. if he is taken, and allow a handsome gratuity to any Person who can convict Kelly of having carried him off.

Baltimore *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (28 november 1786), *Ibid*, vol. 2: 354-355:

A Runaway Negro Man Slave. RAN AWAY, from Captain James Bosley, about the time of his moving from this State to Cumberland River, a NEGRO MAN SLAVE, named CLEM, about 23 years of age; the cause of his running away was supposed to be owing to his having a wife in the neighbourhood of Joppa, in Baltimore County, where the said Bosley then resided, as he soon returned to Mr. Gittings, a brother-in-law of Mr. Bosley, and continued with him until Mr. Abraham Risteau returned from Cumberland, who had here purchased him from Bosley, and has now sold him to me, who will give Forty Shillings Reward to any person that will apprehend and deliver him to me in Hager's Town, Washington County, or to Mr. Edward Carvell Tolley, in Harford County, who is authorized by me to dispose of him in the said neighbourhood of Hoppa, provided he should be unwilling to serve me; or I will give the same sum to the Negro himself, provided he will surrender

himself either to Mr. Tolley, or myself; and shall esteem it a great favour of any persons who may have it in their power to communicate this piece of intelligence to the said Negro, and assure him that I will not deceive him in failing to make good my promise. THOMAS HART. November 20, 1786.

Boston Evening Post (16 July 1770), Antonio Bly, ed., *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700-1789* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 153-154:

To all worthy Brothers and other Generous Commanders of Ships or other Vessels Sailling between the Poles, – as also to all the valourous Sons of Zebulon and others, whoever dispers'd upon the wide surface of old Ocean, or upon any island or Main-land upon this habitable Globe, into whose Hands these may chance to fall. Note well – THAT on the 23d of May 1770, SCIPIO, a Negro Man near 23 Years old, Ran from the Subscriber – He is five feet and 3 or 4 inches high, little more or less, and well set, his Hair or Wool (unless shav'd) comes low upon his Cheeks, his Fore Teeth rather Splaying, has an Incision mark on one of his Arms, where he was Inoculated, and 2 or 3 Scars in one of his Legs where he was lanced, is pretty black, with a flattish nose, tho' not that flat so peculiar to Negroes, is very artful – Speaks plain but something inward and hollow, inclines much to the Sea, will make an able Seaman, and is a Cooper. –If he returns voluntarily he shall not be whipt as he deserves, but I will either sell him to a good Ship Master, or let him as he shall chuse, till he has earnt his prime Cot &c. when I will give him his Freedom – but if any shall bring or convey him to his Master, shall be paid EIGHT DOLLARS, by SAMUEL SWIFT.

Conclusion

Socio-Economic Status? Ascending Beyond a Slave Labouring Class

“De massa and de missus was so good to us
 ‘til de slaves on other plantations was
 jealous; they call us free niggers befo’ we
 was freed.”

-Interview with Margaret Hughes,
 ex-slave, c. 1930s ¹

When sociologist and historian Walter Johnson sat down to write a paper on the new social history in 2003, he admitted that it was difficult for him to disentangle “the categories of ‘humanity’ and (liberal) ‘agency’” [from which] has emerged a strange syllogism in which the bare fact (as opposed to the self-conscious assertion) of enslaved ‘humanity’ has come to be seen as ‘resistance to slavery.’”² His trepidation stemmed from seemingly “natural” notions of nineteenth century European liberalism that do not account for the many and varied ways slaves bettered themselves that fell short of legal freedom.³ When agency is defined as “self-direct action” or “independent will and volition,” Johnson argues that it loses its resonance amongst those who closely associate the term with humanity, especially when one deals with instances of collaboration and treachery. Although slaves fled their masters for numerous reasons, it has just been demonstrated that the act was not always intended as a measure to procure immediate and legal rights as free people. In highlighting the dialectical exchanges brought about by

¹ George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*. Vol. 2, part 2 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1977), 327.

² Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1 (2003), 113, 115.

³ *Ibid*, 115.

absence, truancy can be regarded as a means of negotiation between slaves and the master class that often involved instances of treachery from both parties.

Slave absence was a pervasive feature of colonial and post-colonial life in the United States, and it was a phenomenon with tremendous nuances in terms of duration, costs, and consequences. Although blacks were legally bound as property by the late seventeenth century, slaveholders were forced to confront the economic and social powers of slaves made apparent by their absence. Through this process, many slaves were able to induce subscribers into peaceful negotiations for their willful return, which afforded them a life of relative autonomy and advancements in socio-economic status. Despite their lawful notoriety as immobilized, property-less workers, there are many indications that slaves were grasping the fundamentals of a free working people. That is, through the power of truancy, whether actual or perceived, many slaves were able to secure privileges that granted them increased access to property and mobility; and there are even indications that these “privileges” were perceived by slaves as de facto rights.

Many owners apparently had little to no control over the autonomy of their slaves. When South Carolina subscriber John Fisher posted for the return of Quamina, he described him as “impudent” and “has told me to my face, ‘he can go when he pleases, and I can do nothing to him....’”⁴ A decade before the start of the Civil War, former Virginia slave Charles Brown similarly explained:

I was used kindly, as I always did my work faithfully. But I knew I ought to be free. I told my master one day – said I, ‘You white folks set the bad example of stealing – you stole us from Africa, and not content with that, if any got free here, you stole them afterward, and so we are made slaves.’ I told

⁴ *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (21 February 1781), Lathan Windley, ed., *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History From The 1730 to 1790*, vol. 3 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 577.

him, I would not stay. He shed tears, and said he thought I would be the last one to leave him. A year after, I left for the North.⁵

Offering a similar perspective, former slave and Virginian runaway Mr. Bohm asserted that “(s)lavery is the worst kind of robbery.”⁶ Although Bohm did not elaborate on what exactly he meant by this statement, he was presumably referring to the denial of legal freedom that affected some four million African Americans by the mid-nineteenth century. His use of the word “robbery” seems to denote what he believed should be a relationship of reciprocity; that is, by restricting the legal freedoms of black people, masters willingly entered into a system of social obligations required to maintain racial harmony. When masters reneged on these obligations, some form of protest was required in order to restore the social balance. Theft to slaves, whether tangible (an item) or intangible (time), was not viewed in the same manner as masters; stealing was merely a slave collecting their dues.⁷ Former Georgian slave Pierce Cody explained that “stealing... was not tolerated” nor was it particularly required of him as “food, clothing, and shelter were furnished” for those slaves who stayed on the plantation, but:

(c)onnected with nearly every home were those persons who lived ‘in the woods’ in preference to doing the labor necessary to remain at their home. (...) As food became scarce, they sneaked to the quarters in the still of the night and coaxed some friend to get food for them from the smokehouse. Their supply obtained, they would leave again. This was not considered stealing.⁸

⁵ Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View Of Slavery: The Refugee: or, The Narratives Of Fugitive Slaves In Canada Related By Themselves, With An Account Of The History And Condition Of The Colored Population Of Upper Canada*. (Boston: J.P. Jewitt and Company, 1856), 350-351.

⁶ Ibid, 43.

⁷ Historians Franklin and Schweninger have also argued this point, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels On The Plantation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79-80.

⁸ Rawick, vol. 12, 198-199.

Alice Baugh recalled her “mammy tell ‘bout de Issue Frees of Edgecombe County when she wuz a little gal.” Her commentary illustrates that slaves’ experienced freedom both near and far from white oversight. Baugh explained that:

de Issue Frees wuz mixed wid de white folks, an’ uv cou’sse dat make ‘em free. Sometimes dey stay on de plantation, but a whole heap uv dem, long wid niggers who had done runned away from dere master, dugged caves in de woods, an’ dar dey lived an’ raised dere famblies dar. Dey ain’t wored much clothes an’ what dey got to eat an’ to w’ar dey swiped from de white folkses.⁹

Various sources have also given the impression that these freedoms, whether condoned or condemned by the master class, were not easily overturned. When Governor James Wright left his plantation in the hands of a friend when he visited England in the summer of 1773, he discovered that slaves had grown accustomed to unmolested travel on the Sundays. After having attempted to rotate twenty slaves from one of Wright’s plantations to another, James Habersham eventually agreed to pay each slave:

’half a Crown a Piece for the two Sundays’ and a ‘Dram Each’ upon their arrival at their temporary work-place. Habersham assured Wright that his money had been ‘prudently bestowed, as it will make the People happy, and save [you] a great many barrels of Rice’.¹⁰

Historian Betty Wood believes that this scenario reveals that by the revolutionary period, the privilege of mobility was beginning to be regarded by slaves as a right, and that masters would need to incur some cost for slaves to relinquish that right.¹¹ As Wood succinctly concluded: “(m)ost owners found that they had little choice but to acknowledge as a right that which slaves had already claimed as such.”¹²

⁹ Rawick, vol. 14, part. 1, 84-85.

¹⁰ Betty Wood, “Never On A Sunday: Slavery & the Sabbath in Lowcountry Georgia,” in Mary Turner, ed., *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining In the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 79.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 80.

¹² *Ibid*, 81.

In this light, it should not be surprising that there are indications that slaves were grasping the essence of wage labour. Former slave Mrs. Virginia Hayes Shepherd explained that her master and father allowed his slaves “to hire themselves out and when they come home he got what he could out of them. No, he never bothered to collect their wages himself. In fact, our master allowed his slaves so much freedom that we were called free niggers by slaves on other plantations.”¹³ Former Maryland slave William Howard similarly explained that his master allowed him to hire his own time, “giving her seven dollars a month, although I could earn a great deal more. The reason she did this was, she was afraid I would come away....”¹⁴ Former Maryland slave Page Harris told a similar story about “Old Pete the mechanic,” who:

was working on farm near La Plata, he decided to run away as he had done on several previous occasions. He was known by some as the herb doctor and healer. He would not be punished on any condition nor would he work unless he was paid something. It was said that he would save money and give it to people who wanted to run away. He was charged with aiding a girl to flee. He was to be whipped by the sheriff of Charles County for aiding the girl to run away. He heard of it, left the night before he was to be whipped, he went to the swamp in the cove or about 5 miles from where his master lived. He eluded the dogs for several weeks, escaped, got to Boston and no one to this day has any idea how he did it; but he did.¹⁵

There are even indications that many former slaves considered payment to be retroactive. When subscriber John Lisle posted a reward of fifty dollars in the *Richmond Enquirer* for the delivery of “a certain Macall Medford” to the Philadelphia jail, he explained that he was

formerly of this city, and since of the city of London. (...) He arrived at Norfolk, from England, last February, and declared his intention was immediately to repair to Philadelphia, in order to bring me to account for

¹³ Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Wheevils In The Wheat. Interviews With Virginia Ex-Slaves*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 255.

¹⁴ Drew, 111.

¹⁵ Rawick, vol. 16, 22.

certain monies he alledged I owed him, and no longer ago than the 21st June, he wrote to a gentleman in this city, saying he would be up in a few days; in consequence of which, I have waited patiently ever since, but finding his promises merit no attention, and determined to make another effort to get hold of him, (having already sent twice after him without effect,) I do with confidence, call on the virtuous part of the community, to assist in bringing to justice, a man, whose conduct towards me, has been marked by the deepest duplicity, ingratitude and fraud.¹⁶

Having presumably attained his freedom in England following the 1772 Somerset decision, it seems as though Medford returned to his former owner to collect wages due for services past rendered. In detailing the way that many runaways performed freedom if they could not attain legal manumission, this study is in agreement with historian Amani Marshal, who has argued that many slaves were grasping the essence of a free working people, “not by setting foot on Northern soil, but by donning the clothing, speaking the language, and actually playing the role of a free person.”¹⁷

Of course, slaves bargained for much more than access to mobility and property. Upon first reviewing runaway slave advertisements in 1916, it is little wonder that the Association for the Study of African American Life and History remarked that black people:

were becoming useful and skilled laborers, acquiring modern languages, learning to read and write, entering a few of the professions, exercising the rights of citizens, and climbing the social ladder to the extent of moving on a plane of equality with the poor whites.¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Richmond Enquirer* (27 January 1809), Daniel Meaders, ed., *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves In Virginia, 1801-1820*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 122.

¹⁷ Amani Marshal, “‘They Will Endeavor to Pass for Free’: Enslaved Runaways’ Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina,” *Slavery & Abolition* 31:2 (June, 2010), 176.

¹⁸ Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc., “Eighteenth Century Slaves as Advertised by Their Masters.” *The Journal of Negro History* 1:2 (April, 1916), 163.

Vocalizing how black bondsmen viewed their upward mobility, former South Carolina slave Margaret Hughes explained that “(d)e massa and de missus was so good to us ‘til de slaves on other plantations was jealous; they call us free niggers befo’ we was freed.”¹⁹

Having cross-referenced the words of subscribers with those of former slaves, it has become apparent that black bondsmen tended to view relations with poor whites as “perpetual class warfare:” the slave sources are littered with tense and often physical encounters between them and what slaves called the “white trash.”²⁰ Illustrating the perceived difference between poor whites and members of the slave owning gentry, former Georgia slave James Bolton explained that the “overseers warn’t quality whit folkses like our marster and mistess...Overseers was ju’ there on the business of getting’ the work done....”²¹ Former Virginia slave Silas Jackson explained that “the overseers were connected with the patrollers, not only to watch our slaves, but sometimes for the rewards for other slaves who had run away from other plantations. This feature caused a great deal of trouble between the whites and blacks.”²² Born on Kent Island Maryland, former slave Perry Lewis explained that on the eastern shore of Maryland:

there were many poor people and many of whom were employed as overseers, you naturally heard of patrollers and we had them and many of them. I have heard that patrollers were on Kent Island and the colored people would go out in the country on the roads, create a disturbance to attract the patrollers’ attention. They would tie ropes, and grape vines across the roads, so when the patrollers would come to the scene of the disturbance on horseback and at full tilt, they would be caught, throwing those who would come in contact with the rope or vine off the horse, sometimes badly injuring the riders. This would create hatred between the slaves, the free people, the patrollers and other white people who were concerned.²³

¹⁹ Rawick, vol. 2, part 2, 327.

²⁰ C. Vann Woodward. “History from Slave Sources. The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography,” Review of George P. Rawick. *The American Historical Review* 79:2 (Apr., 1974), 479; Rawick, vol. 16, 40.

²¹ *Ibid*, vol. 12, 95-96.

²² *Ibid*, vol. 16, 32.

²³ *Ibid*, 49-50.

Slaves and their abilities to achieve upward mobility undoubtedly exacerbated tensions between blacks and whites as two distinct social groups. “Despite the frustration and anger of masters, slaves sometimes refused to work at the pace demanded of them and played master against overseer to try to gain the upper hand,” explained historian Allan Kulikoff. “Although neither of these strategies gave slaves much independence, they created living space within the system and defined the boundaries of race relations.”²⁴ There are many documented instances of owners appointing slaves as overseers, or employing free white labourers when hazardous working conditions contributed to appalling death rates.²⁵ It has even been suggested that white aversion to black social mobility was extreme enough to have possibly spawned the world’s earliest fascist movement.

Political scientist Robert Paxton has argued that it “should not be surprising” that the United States or France, “the most precocious democracies... should have generated precocious backlashes against democracy.” As former confederate citizens grew increasingly concerned that blacks would gain rights to suffrage, the Klu Klux Klan was an extension of pre-war patrollers that attempted to restore pre-war social order. Paxton has explained that:

(b)y adopting a uniform (white robe and hood), as well as by their techniques of intimidation and their conviction that violence was justified in the cause of their group’s destiny, the first version of the Klan in the defeated American

²⁴ Alan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves. The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 388.

²⁵ Journalist William Howard Russell explained that in the sugar parishes of Louisiana, ditching, trenching, cleaning the wastelands, and hewing down the forests was generally done by Irish labourers given the high mortality rate. Plantation owners thought it more economical to pay waged labourers than lose the commercial and productive value of a slave. William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*. (New York: Harpber & Brothers, 1863), 104.

South was arguably a remarkable preview of the way fascist movements were to function in interwar Europe.²⁶

Many former slaves drew parallels between the Klu Klux Klan and the poor whites of the pre-war years. George Jackson of Loudon County, Virginia specifically mentioned that “(d)e Klu Klux Klan, we called dem de paroles, dey would run de colored people, who were out late, back home.”²⁷ Former Georgia slave, Emmaline Heard likewise explained that “(s)laves who chanced to be visiting away from his plantation without a pass from his owner would be severely handled if caught by the Ku Klux Klan or ‘paterrollers’ as they were more commonly called.”²⁸ Former Virginia slave William Brooks similarly explained that “paddyrollers” were comprised of both whites and blacks: “(d)ey wear long pointed caps an’ go roun’ nights an’ days. (...) Dey hiden in de bushes an’ make soun’ lak dis ‘Klu Kluck.’”²⁹

Acknowledging the mutual benefit of allowing slaves certain forms of autonomy, historian Sidney Mintz warned in 1978 that perhaps “our conceptions of freedom and unfreedom are probably too narrow and extreme.”³⁰ In light of the negotiations that subscribers pursued with absent slaves, it seems counterintuitive that members of an apparently powerless group were able to negotiate for improved working and living conditions with another group that legally held all the power. Unlike free workers, slaves were not only defined by their productive and commercial capabilities, but also by their social powers. With their ability to remove themselves from their lives of bondage, slaves effectively held enough agency to effect change in their own lives. As historian Michael

²⁶ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 49.

²⁷ Rawick, vol. 16, 47.

²⁸ Rawick, vol. 16, part 2, 151-152.

²⁹ Perdue, Barden and Phillips, 56.

³⁰ Sidney Mintz, “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 2:1 (Summer, 1978), 96.

Johnson argued in his 1981 study of South Carolina runaways, absent slaves shared common agency in that “they deprived their masters control over their labor, at least for a time.”³¹ Despite their legal status as bound, property-less workers, fugitive notices and former slave commentary illustrate that black bondsmen certainly held agency in their truancy. Increasingly unwilling to destroy such valuable pieces of property, subscribers appeared to concede to the wishes of their slaves, which is important, because when one typically thinks of slaves and power, one usually thinks of slaves as having little to no power at all.

³¹ Michael P. Johnson, “Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799-1830,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 38:3 (July, 1981), 418.

Appendix VI

Charleston *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (21 February 1781) in Lathan Windley, ed., *Runaway Slave Advertisements. A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, vol. 3 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 577:

Two Guineas Reward. RUN away a young negro fellow, named Quamina, well known in and about Charlestown by his impudent behavior; he has told me to my face, "he can go when he pleases, and I can do nothing to him, nor shall I ever get a copper for him" I will pay the above reward to any person that will deliver him to me or the keeper of the Sugar-House; and I hereby forbid his being harboured or employed by any person or persons, as any so offending may depend on being prosecuted, by JOHN FISHER.

N.B. He is country born, about 17 years of age, no particular marks, about 5 feet 6 inches high, a carver and chair maker by trade; as to his dress he is at no loss to change it.

The Richmond Enquirer (27 January 1809), in Daniel Meaders, ed., *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves In Virginia, 1801-1820*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997) 122:

Fifty Dollars Reward, and reasonable charges, will be paid by the subscriber, for the delivery, at the jail of Philadelphia, of a certain Macall Medford, formerly of this city, and since of the city of London. Any person wishing to undertake the apprehension of said Medford, will be furnished with full powers under a bail piece, for the purpose, and a description of his person. He arrived at Norfolk, from England, last February, and declared his intention was immediately to repair to Philadelphia, in order to bring me to account for certain monies he alledged I owed him, and no longer ago than the 21st June, he wrote to a gentleman in this city, saying he would be up in a few days; in consequence of which, I have waited patiently ever since, but finding his promises merit no attention, and determined to make another effort to get hold of him, (having already sent twice after him without effect,) I do with confidence, call on the virtuous part of the community, to assist in bringing to justice, a man, whose conduct towards me, has been marked by the deepest duplicity, ingratitude and fraud. John Lisle, Late John lisle, Jr. Philadelphia. January 27.

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