Cities of refuge : slave flight and illegal freedom in the American urban South, 1800-1860
Müller, V.F.

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

Author: Müller, V.F.
Title: Cities of refuge : slave flight and illegal freedom in the American urban South, 1800-1860
Issue Date: 2020-01-16

Chapter Two

A Mobile Elite: Profiling Southern Refugees

In December 1856, Frances, or, as she called herself, Fanny, about 26 years of age, decided to abscond from the man who held her as his legal slave. It took William Taber, the slaveowner, ten months before he placed an advertisement in *The Charleston Mercury* to find his human property. In order to describe her, he stated that Fanny was

> of a good height, brown complexion, rather sharp features; her upper front teeth gone, (but she may have false teeth to replace them, as she declared she would if she ran off,) talks like the North Carolina negros, where she was raised, but latterly has lived in Florida, has a pleasant expression, speaks slowly and deliberately, and altogether is a very likely girl.

Taber informed the newspaper's readership that Fanny "has been seen about town, until within the last three or four months," and he believed that she was "harbored by some white person in the City [of Charleston]." In the text, the slaveholder set a bounty of $100 on Fanny and an additional $50 "on proof to conviction of any responsible person who may have harbored her." This was a considerable amount of money suggesting that Fanny was a valuable bondswoman to Taber. In January 1859, Taber had still not been able to get her back although Fanny "has been seen often about the city" and the award had been risen to $300.[195]

As discussed in chapter one, over the course of the second slavery, the number of enslaved Americans who sought freedom by running away increased. Who were the men and women that took these decisions and actions? Taber's short ad on Fanny contains a great deal of valuable information to the backgrounds, all of which will return throughout this study. It includes the length of Fanny's absence, the color of her skin, her past, her owner's perception of her attitude, the involvement of third parties in her flight, and very importantly, her mobility. This ad helps formulate key questions concerning the profile of permanent slave refugees to urban cities. To what extent were some people more disposed to escape their owners than others? What were the necessary preconditions or skills to make a successful flight attempt? How did runaways escape and which strategies did they employ to secure their freedom? This chapter will analyze the profile of people who fled to southern cities as a small group of men and women. It will draw the journeys and methods of those who were able to make use of the opening spaces of freedom.

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[195] The headline of the ad, presumably to attract more attention, stated "$500 REWARD." *Charleston Mercury*, November 3, 1857; January 12, 1859.

Gender and Mobility

Runaway slave advertisements and jail statistics make clear that there was a gender imbalance within the runaway slave population of the American South. Previous studies have underscored this. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger evaluated over 2,000 runaway slave ads for the periods 1790-1816 and 1838-1860 and concluded that the share of women was remarkably stable, namely 19 percent for both periods. Yet, there were some interesting regional differences between the five states they analyzed. In the early period, the percentage of women was with 23 highest in South Carolina while in Louisiana they constituted some 11 percent. In the later period, Louisiana had the highest percentage of female runaways (29 percent), and Virginia the lowest (nine percent).[196] Leni Ashmore Sorensen's analysis of the Daybook of the Richmond Police shows that women made up 24.7 percent of runaways suspected of being in that city between 1834 and 1844.[197] Judith Kelleher Schafer's statistics on runaway slaves in New Orleans in the year 1850 indicate that 31.7 percent were women.[198]

The two studies on Richmond and New Orleans are of particular relevance because the analyses relate specifically to urban areas. In these cities, women constituted roughly one fourth to one third of slave refugees. These gender imbalances are remarkable but the share of women was still large enough as to concede them a significant role in southern urban slave flight. The claim that the archetypal runaway slave was a man is still correct, yet when looking at southern-internal flight, the presence of men loomed less prominent compared to escapes to other areas. Those who fled to the North were comprised of over 80 percent men. Among refugees to Mexico were even more men, namely almost 90 percent.[199] In order to understand the gendered dimensions, we have to contextualize gender in slave flight.

Explanations for the generally lower number of women who escaped slavery have usually been attributed to their social role in the community. Various historians have claimed that as daughters, wives, and especially mothers, enslaved women held more responsibilities at home and were therefore more reluctant to leave their families behind.[200] This line of reasoning holds normative implications that enslaved men were less likely to make sacrifices for their

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[196] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 210-212.

[197] Leni Ashmore Sorensen, "Absconded: Fugitive Slaves in the Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, 1834-1844" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 2005), 15.

[198] Judith Kelleher Schafer, "New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements," *Journal of Southern History* 47:1 (1981): 43. Note that these numbers vary significantly from studies on runaway slaves in the eighteenth century, which place the share of women around ten percent. Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 202. One explanation might lay in the generally lower numbers of enslaved African women brought to the North American colonies. For statistics on sex and age ratios in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, see David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, "Was the Slave Trade Dominated by Men?," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23:2 (1992): 237-257. For discussions on the backgrounds and fluctuations over time and space, see David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100-104; and Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 57-61.

[199] Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War. Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 107; and Mareite, "Conditional Freedom," 58. The picture of men as the only protagonists of slave flight was further engraved in historians' minds due to the fact that almost nine out of ten slave narratives were written by men. David Stefan Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 26, FN 22.

[200] Deborah White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1987), 70-71; and Freddie L. Parker, *Running for Freedom: Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1775-1840* (New York: Garland, 1993), 71. Older works include Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 198.

families and children and portrays women as more caring and more engaged in their communities. Some enslaved women surely felt this sort of social pressure. Runaway slave ads which indicate that a mother fled and left her children behind are indeed rare. "Motherhood was central to enslaved women's concept of womanhood, their experience in slavery, and their resistance efforts," as pointed out by Amani Marshall.[201]

Contrary to these arguments that attempt to explain the lower numbers of women escaping, it could also be argued that bondswomen had even stronger incentives to flee. Women were given no preferential treatment in slavery, yet sexual violence in slavery was an additional danger to their physical and mental health, including in the domestic slave trade. Formerly enslaved John Brown gave the account of a several days-long sexual abuse of an enslaved women by slave traders during the journey.[202] One of the reasons Harriet Jacobs, autobiographer of the only known runaway slave narrative written by a woman, decided to flee, or better said, to simulate her escape, were the constant sexual harassments by her master, who had, to her knowledge, already fathered 11 children by enslaved mothers.[203] Elizabeth Keckley, who later became an author, activist, and modiste to the First Lady Mary Lincoln, hardly went into more detail when she mentioned the continual rape by a white man: "I was regarded as fair-looking for one of my race, and for four years a white man—I spare the world his name—had base designs upon me. I do not care to dwell upon this subject, for it is one that is fraught with pain." After an abuse over years, Keckley became pregnant from him.[204] Nell Irvin Painter has laid out that rape of enslaved women is often hidden between the lines. In the case of Sojourner Truth, Painter speculates that she decided to keep parts of her story secreted out of concern about her credibility. Truth feared that readers would not believe her because it was "so unaccountable, so unreasonable, and what is usually called so unnatural."[205]

Flight from slavery, in contrast to families being separated, was an active choice and it cannot just be assumed that fathers had less desire to be with their families than mothers. Recent contributions by historians support this claim showing how important and indeed prioritized

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[201] Amani Marshall found only one woman out of 559 in South Carolina who was said to have absconded leaving her child behind. Amani Marshall, "Enslaved Women Runaways in South Carolina, 1820-1865" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2007), 87, 97. Leslie Schwalm has claimed that enslaved women much more frequently absconded for short periods of time rather than longer periods. In anticipation they arranged with friends or kin to look over their personal affairs. Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We. Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 41.

[202] Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 17-19.

[203] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 55. Jacob simulated her escape to the northern states while she lived for seven years in her grandmother's attic.

[204] Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., 1868), 38-39. Accounts of rape of and sexual encroachment on women can also be found in the narratives of men. George Teamoh, for instance, reported that his wife and youngest daughter were sold to a white man who abused them both. F. N. Boney, Richard L. Hume, and Rafia Zafar, *God Made Man, Man Made the Slave. The Autobiography of George Teamoh* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), 94-95. Teamoh completed his autobiography in 1874 but it was not published before 1990. "Preface," in Idem, ix-x.

[205] Sojourner Truth was sold to different owners who probably all abused her. Later, she was forcedly married to a fellow slave. Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 16. For a study on rape in slavery, see Thelma Jennings, "'Us Colored Women Had to Go Through a Plenty': Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women," *Journal of Women's History* 1:3 (1990): 45-74. On the much less often occurring but nonetheless existing sexual abuse of enslaved men, see Thomas A. Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20:3 (2011): 445-464.

kinship ties, families, and monogamous love was for enslaved women *and* men.[206] Yet, in the lives of enslaved people there were many factors that lay outside their area of influence, most dramatic of which was being sold away from loved ones. A number of slave narratives display the pain of enslaved men of being separated from their families, among them the one by Charles Ball. He was separated from his wife Judah when he was sold from Maryland first to South Carolina and subsequently to Georgia. In the moment of hearing about his fate, "the thoughts of my wife and children rushed across my mind, and my heart died away within me." Ball constantly referred to his family throughout his narrative expressing the sufferings of forced separation. After the death of his most recent master, he concluded that "my heart yearned for my wife and children, from whom I had now been separated more than four years." He broke free and returned to them.[207]

Without looking closely at the different situations men and women found themselves in, it seems too one-sided to claim that men saw it as less problematic to be separated from their loved ones.[208] At the same time, the majority of women did indeed not have very good preconditions to escape. Men in the nineteenth-century United States enjoyed greater mobility than women. This held true for all men and women but had even more severe consequences for African Americans, particularly those in bondage. Higher mobility was in the majority of cases due to the tasks and professions enslaved people performed, according to Susan O'Donovan. The division of tasks was based on gender assumptions, which contributed to different experiences women had in slavery.[209] Plantation workers, women and men, constituted the bulk of American slaves in the nineteenth century.[210] They were mostly bound to their plantations and the nearby surroundings. Yet, looking at those employed in other sectors, it becomes apparent that enslaved African Americans possessed a series of different professional skills which furnished them with varying degrees of mobility and leeway, which in some cases even came close to nominal freedom. Rather than gendered family roles, mobility was the most important attribute responsible for the gender imbalances in slave flight.

This speaks to differences between average field hands and a small group of more privileged slaves. Like Solomon Northup, who unsuccessfully tried to escape for 12 years, the vast majority of enslaved African Americans had virtually no chance to free themselves by running away. Those who did have a chance, fulfilled certain criteria. To understand them, we will first turn to Ira Berlin before modifying his concept of the slave elite and applying it to this study. Berlin has found that the runaway slave population was largely not comprised of average field hands. Rather, he has labeled them the "slave elite" and claims that they were "more skilled, sophisticated, and aggressive than the mass of slaves." They were made up of mechanics, artisans, domestics, and drivers.[211] At first sight, runaway slave advertisements

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[206] Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*; Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Idem, *Family or Freedom: Free People of Color in the Antebellum South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012); and Doddington, *Slave Masculinities*.

[207] Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 36, 287.

[208] This claim contradicts Dorothy Roberts who stated that "most slave women formed maternal bonds so strong that they renounced the quest for freedom for the sake of their children." Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 44, originally published 1997.

[209] Susan E. O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

[210] For a breakdown of slave workers by plantation unit and numbers, see Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 31-32.

[211] Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 160. This contradicts the claim of Franklin and Schweninger only at first sight. They suggested that the largest group of runaways were young, strong, male field slaves. Franklin and

back up Berlin's claim about the slave elite, as well as the very high bounties that enslavers set on many escapees. It was worth $200 to Dick's owner to get him back after Dick absconded in 1836. Since "Dick is a brick moulder by trade," he was of high value as a slave.[212] It was precisely slaves' capacities as human beings that gave them so much value.[213] A professional training, mobility, mental capacities, and autonomy turned enslaved African Americans into valuable property whilst at the same time increasing their chances of successful permanent escape. Contemporary observers understood this. The English traveler Marianne Finch found that "those whom good treatment has rendered most fit for freedom, are the most desired as slaves."[214]

Finch's argumentation seems to especially fit enslaved people whose skills made them extremely valuable, like Isaac Wallace. Sometimes calling himself Ezekiel, Wallace ran away near Baltimore in September 1817. "He is a shoemaker by trade, and carried with him all his tools," stated his master and offered $100 for getting him back. And further, "He is a very good ploughman, and excellent with the axe, scythe and cradle."[215] Shoemakers and brick molders were common in runaway slave advertisements, as well as blacksmiths, sawyers, carpenters, caulkers, and waiters. Indeed, oftentimes not only their skills were mentioned but also the quality of their work, hinting at the monetary value these people presented to their owners. Sam Howard, for instance, was an "excellent wood cutter," Julis was described as a "good sawyer, rough carpenter, and can work pretty well at the coopers trade," and Bennett Taylor's master thought of him as an "excellent black smith and gun-smith."[216] Because these "elite" slaves were so valuable, we must assume that masters invested in runaway slave advertisements much more frequently than for bondspeople of less monetary value. In this light, it is altogether possible that the share of women among the refugee population was higher than it appears.

Although Berlin is right in that the slave elite was well positioned for flight, professional skills were not the main factor that furnished enslaved people with mobility. His slave elite is close to the artisans of traditional studies of the working class,[217] yet he does not analyze the broad array of occupations that could create mobility, including skilled *and* unskilled work. To adapt this concept to this study, a broad horizon counted more than professional skills when it came to forging ties and making plans to escape. Drivers, errand boys, and vendors of all sorts worked in jobs for which no special formation was needed. However, an unskilled errand boy or an enslaved huckster could capitalize on their mobility to get to the nearest city or to forge important contacts. This held likewise true for women. More often than being field workers,

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Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 209-210. It is important to keep in mind that Franklin and Schweninger pinpointed *temporary* absenteeism as the most common form of slave flight and made this the focus of their study. When looking at absconders who intended to stay out of slavery on a *permanent* basis, however, the profile of runaways slightly changes. Within truancy, hiding around and near plantations was the dominant feature, which was mostly undertaken by plantation workers.

[212] *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 1836.

[213] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams. Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 66.

[214] Marianne Finch, *An Englishwoman's Experience in America* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 144, originally published London: Richard Bentley, 1853.

[215] *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, November 4, 1817.

[216] *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, October 29, 1816; and *Enquirer*, August 1, 1806; October 4, 1808.

[217] See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), ch. 8. See also Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975); and Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America. Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

women who ran away were washerwomen, seamstresses, cooks, or servants, like Beckey, "an excellent seamstress," who also "understands keeping a cake shop."[218] Although not skilled in the actual meaning of the word, bondswoman specialized in certain areas of hand- or craftwork and some acquired high expertise in their professions.[219] Women and men with expertise often worked under less supervision and were regularly send or rented out to other places. This increased their mobility, their circle of acquaintances, and their knowledge of the close-by and distant world.

Runaway slave ads speak volumes about the mobility of the absconded without reference to skills. For example, Nelson Duncan, a slave who fled from Richmond in 1837, had been a carriage driver and frequently drove his master's carriage from Petersburg, where they resided, to Richmond. Thereby, Duncan acquired knowledge about routes and made contacts. Catherine, an enslaved woman from Manchester, Virginia, was employed at carrying milk to Richmond. She ran away in 1838.[220] Not in all cases, moreover, was it mandatory that the persons fleeing possessed this knowledge and experience themselves. Through kin networks and exchange of information, prospective refugees could benefit from the mobility of others. This inherited mobility capital worked especially for those with large personal networks.[221] When bondspeople lived close to roads, rivers, or towns, they could not only physically escape more easily, they were also in a better position to meet people who could provide them with information.

Mobility was clearly related to jobs and tasks but it could also be achieved outside the realms of work. Moving for non-work-related reasons likewise enlarged people's orientation in the outside world. Yet, it was again mostly men who officially as well as clandestinely visited spouses, lovers, and family members at different plantations, just like it was mostly men who drove carriages and delivered messages. Enslaved women on the roads were therefore less common and more suspicious.[222] Through travelling between plantations, commuting from countryside to town, and moving within cities, many enslaved men—but also women—covered physical distances, which allowed them to expand their horizon in a quite literal way. This allowed, for instance, plantation workers to also run away, and at times they were likewise considered very valuable by their owners.

Jarrett, "an excellent hand on a farm," for one, absconded slavery in 1817 and found a bounty of $100 on himself.[223] An insightful source are plantation books in which masters or overseers recorded the daily work of each enslaved laborer and which show the absence of those who had run away. For example, on Exeter Plantation, South Carolina, temporary absconders

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[218] *Augusta Chronicle*, May 20, 1826.

[219] The problem of the categorization of skilled and unskilled labor is that it derives from work certified by craft guilds that could vouch for high quality. It therefore excludes women's work who often learned at home or elsewhere where training was not linked to a certificate. Dirk Hoerder, "Transcultural Approaches to Gendered Labour Migration: From the Nineteenth-Century Proletarian to Twenty-First Century Caregiver Mass Migrations," in *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations. A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries*, ed. Dirk Hoerder and Amarijt Kaur (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 25. The way "skilled" is used here refers to occupations that included a time of apprenticeship or professional formation.

[220] Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, February 2, 1837; January 11, 1838, UVA.

[221] The concept of inherited mobility capital derives from David Cairns, *Youth Transitions, International Student Mobility and Spatial Reflexivity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 43.

[222] Sylviane A. Diouf, "Borderland Maroons," in *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Damian Alan Pargas (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 184.

[223] *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, September 4, 1817.

were listed with the date of their escape and the date they came back (or were brought back). Enslaved people who did not return eventually disappeared from the listings of the record books, like Silvey. She was reported absent over the entire period of one record book, from January 10 to December 24, 1854. In the next preserved ledger from 1856, she was absent from the very beginning, January 7, and it can be assumed that she was also not found in the interim of the year 1855. On March 24, she then stopped being listed in the work book.[224] Silvey was not retrieved. These examples testify to the permanent flight of enslaved plantation workers.

Figure 5: Mobile Occupations Broadened the Networks of Black People[225]

Based on Silvey's sex, it is statistically more likely that she sought freedom in an urban center in the South than leave the slaveholding states. Indeed, compared to the gender divisions of slave flight to the North and Mexico, women were much more present in southern-internal escapes than to other regions.[226] Southern cities, in comparison to other destinations, presented a particular opportunity for women who sought to free themselves by running away.[227]

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[224] Motte Plantation Record Book, Record Book, July – December 1854; and Motte Plantation Record Book, Plantation Exeter, Work Book, January 1856, Dr. J. B. Motte, SCLC.

[225] NARA, Freedpeople Working at the James Hopkinson Plantation at Edisto Island, South Carolina, Postbellum, in Carole Emberton, "A Hungry Belly and Freedom," *We're History* (November 25, 2014), URL: http://werehistory.org/hungry-belly-and-freedom/, accessed July 2, 2019.

[226] Exemptions were flights during war time. The turnover of "normal" conditions often enabled enslaved people to escape in groups, sometimes entire families. For the Civil War, see Delbanco, *War Before the War*, 3-60; and Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky from Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 158, originally published 1992. For escapes during the Revolutionary War, see Matthew Spooner, "Freedom, Reenslavement, and Movement in the Revolutionary South," in *Race and Nation in the Age of Emancipations*, ed. Whitney Nell Stewart and John Garrison Marks (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 16.

[227] Women were furthermore in other ways essentially involved in flights, namely by supporting the ones escaping (as well as aiding them after arrival, as shall be shown). Most runaways of course had allies. They shared their

Freedom-based migration, regardless of gender, was mostly the outcome of preexisting mobility. This was the most important precondition.

In line with the age range of the most valuable bondspeople, the majority of slave refugees were between their late teens and late thirties.[228] Reckoning with their physical fitness to wage an escape attempt, their mental abilities to assimilate to the free population, their chances to find a job and make money for themselves, and the hope to have a family and see their children grow up in freedom, provided them with a window of about 20 years. Bondspeople who were already older could shy away from risking their lives or putting their lives upside down by running away. When northern journalist James Redpath asked an enslaved man "if he did not think of escaping before" he was an old man, the man abnegated. "I wouldn't run the risk now of trying to escape. It's hardly so much an object, sir, when a man's turned the hill."[229] The youngest enslaved child fleeing alone, who has been found in this study, was Marvin, eight years old. He disappeared in New Orleans in 1853.[230]

In the decades before the Civil War, an enslaved American who was born and died under the same master was almost an exception. Arthur, 25 to 30 years old, was advertised as a runaway slave in 1821. Besides describing his physical features including marks of the whip, wounds and mutilations, slaveholder Robert Martin from North Carolina included a history of sales: Arthur

> was born in Maryland, and when about fourteen years of age, was sold to John or James M'Gill, in Wilmington, N.C.—by M'Gill to Blue—by Blue to Wm. Thomas, on Pedee, S.C.—runaway from Thomas and got back to Wilmington and passed as a free man for some time; at last was apprehended and put in goal, sold by order of Thomas in Wilmington goal to John M'Daniel of South-Carolina—by M'Daniel to Night—by Night to Alexander Bell—by Bell to me. Said negro may have obtained a free pass, or have been taken off by some evil disposed person [...].[231]

Manifold sales were devastating for the lives of enslaved people who saw themselves again and again ripped apart from the people and environments the had gotten used to. But new owners, new places, and the experiences of being removed also expanded one's networks and geographical knowledge. Very tellingly, in the cases in which this information is included in the newspaper announcements, 41 percent of female and 30 percent of male runaway slaves had multiple owners, as calculated by Amani Marshall for South Carolina.[232] It must be

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plans before departure with friends and family members, always carefully judging whom they could trust. Consult the account of Mary, which reveals how the suspicion of members of a slaveholding family was slowly raised when several of their bondspeople, all linked to one family, escaped one after another. Adele Petigru Allston to Colonel Francis Heriot, July 1864, Allston Family Letters, in *The South Carolina Rice Plantations as Revealed in the Papers of Robert F. W. Allston*, ed. J. H. Easterby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 199-200.

[228] This also applied to other times and regions. See Daniel E. Meaders, "South Carolina Fugitives as Viewed Through Local Colonial Newspapers with Emphasis on Runaway Notices 1732-1801," *Journal of Negro History* 60:2 (1975): 292; and Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," *William & Mary Quarterly* 38:3 (1981): 418.

[229] James Redpath, *The Roving Editor: or, Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1859), 40-41.

[230] *Daily Picayune*, December 16, 1853. In Richmond, a ten-year-old girl with the name Nancy and a boy called Henry of eight or nine years were believed to be hiding in the city. Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, October 17, 1836; November 8, 1840, UVA. The Richmond Daybook, moreover, features a number of entries on children and young adults from 11 to 19.

[231] *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, September 3, 1821.

[232] Marshall, "Enslaved Women," 103.

assumed that the instances in which previous ownership was not mentioned, was considerably higher.

The mobility of so many bondspeople, as Cory James Young recently remarked, forces us to think about other forms of dominance and repression than the whip.[233] Keeping enslaved people immobilized on a plantation (like in the case of Solomon Northup) was one way to secure an enslaved workforce. This observation corresponds to the one made by Stephanie Camp, who has noted that captivity as the essence of slavery did not end when the nineteenth century dawned. Enslaved people kept on being severely restricted in their physical and social mobility.[234] At the same time, as just demonstrated, a significant part of the enslaved population came to possess high mobility and leeway. This mobility contradicts Orlando Patterson' theory. Patterson contributed a great deal to understanding the essence of slavery and his approach to defining slavery as social death provoked numerous scholarly debates. He emphasized the loss of identity and absolute isolation, which produced total powerlessness on the side of bondspeople.[235] As shown here, however, his theory is more useful for the moment of capture and enslaving, rather than in the context of the second slavery.[236] After generations of captivity in the Americas, the majority of bondspeople were born into social communities. These dynamics were strengthened by that American-born bondspeople outnumbered those born in Africa already before the Revolutionary War.[237] Enslaved people in the Unites States and particularly the mobile slave elite, protagonists of this study, were far from isolated, passive, and immobile, and oftentimes not even tied to a specific plantation or a single master. These people were not controlled by the whip.[238]

In the 1960s, human rights activist Malcolm X famously claimed that there was a distinction between field and house slaves. The house slaves had accommodated themselves in slavery because they realized that they were better off than the plantation hands. "He ate better, dress[ed] better, and he lived in a better house," the activist claimed, for which the house slave would not run away.[239] Although used by Malcolm X as a parable to describe the contrasting attitudes of black Americans towards their oppression by white society in the twentieth century, his statement offers intersections to discuss why people would want to flee slavery while others

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[233] Cory James Young, "'Jim, (alias James Boyd;)': Enslaved Migrant Laborers in the American North," *Activist History Review* (April 15, 2019), URL: https://activisthistory.com/2019/04/15/jim-alias-james-boyd-enslaved-migrant-laborers-in-the-american-north/, accessed April 25, 2019.

[234] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 12.

[235] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death. A Comparative Study* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[236] Joseph Miller has likewise remarked that defining enslaved people as socially dead might have been a utopian vision of slaveholders. Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History. A Global Approach* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 32.

[237] Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 22-23. The one scenario that comes closest to Patterson's social death hypothesis were bondspeople who were sold alone to distant places. Damian Pargas has shown that these people not seldom faced problems of acculturation. This could be two-sided. Some newcomers were essentially strangers and foreigners and were not able to grow used to other forms of working and social life. In other occasions, those already there refused to accept the newcomers and complicated their integration processes. Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 84.

[238] It is important not to forget that slave control did not only take place on individual plantations. Formal and customary law used to supervise traveling widely impacted the leeway and mobility of enslaved people.

[239] Malcom X, "Message to the Grass Roots," in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 10-11.

were hesitant.[240] Turning his argument around, it was precisely enslaved men and women with superior occupations and tasks than field slaves who were *able* to escape. What kept them under control was the same element that triggered their flight when taken away from them: family. Family and kinship could be both a motivation for and a discouragement from escape, and the persistent threat of sale into the domestic slave trade made the preservation of family ties a more pressing concern than the struggle for freedom. This has also been demonstrated by Calvin Schermerhorn, who has concluded that most enslaved people would choose family over freedom when they had the chance to choose.[241] Occasional newspaper announcements confirm Schermerhorn's interpretation. For example, 18-year-old John Simmons or John Pickling from South Carolina markedly decided against freedom and in favor of his family when he executed a successful flight attempt but later returned for his mother who was held enslaved by the same man as Pickling.[242]

The Hiring System as Springboard

Many of the jobs that implied a high mobility were related to slave hiring. Connected to urbanization and industrialization processes, the hiring out of slaves to cities and towns grew exponentially and indeed became a central feature of urban slavery. Bondspeople, mostly men, who worked as hirelings, and more so those with professional skills, became highly mobile. Slave hiring could take two templates: There were bondspeople whose owners arranged for their hire, and there were enslaved men and women who sought jobs for themselves. The latter were so-called self-hired slaves. Historians have shown that slave hiring had existed during colonial times, too, but the dimensions it assumed in the decades before the Civil War in towns and cities were striking: In the antebellum period, between five and 15 percent of the enslaved population were on hire, with an increase towards the Civil War. In later decades, one third to one half of enslaved people were hired at some point in their lives, at least in parts of the Upper South. In the Lower South, fewer slaves were hired, usually below 15 percent, due to the lack of large-scale enterprises and the dominance of mass plantations.[243]

Going further into detail, Claudia Goldin has calculated that by 1860, 62 percent of enslaved men in Richmond were hired. Corrected for bondspeople who were too young or too old to work, this corresponded to 71 percent of the actual enslaved labor force. For women the respective shares were 38 and 46 percent.[244] Richmond was the South's most important industrial city and enslaved labor was used in the manufactories. Although it was mostly men

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[240] In migration studies, the reasons why people would *not* migrate are the focus of much interest. As Ton van Naerssen and Martin van der Velde have emphasized, these decisions cannot be understood without including family relations and social networks. Ton van Naerssen and Martin van der Velde, "The Thresholds to Mobility Disentangled," in *Mobility and Migration Choices. Thresholds to Crossing Borders*, ed. Idem (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

[241] Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 20.

[242] *Charleston Mercury*, February 15, 1856.

[243] John J. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 11-14; Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 132; Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 136; and David R. Goldfield, "Black Life in Old South Cities," in *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*, ed. Edward Campbell, Jr., and Kym Rice (Richmond: Museum of the Confederacy, 1991), 130.

[244] Goldin, *Urban Slavery*, 36.

who were forcedly employed in these sites, smaller numbers of women labored there, too, particularly during one period in the 1850s. Observing wage developments and changing demographics in the factories, Midori Takagi has claimed that when hiring prices for male slaves increased rapidly in the countryside, they were pushed out of the cities. Enslaved women who in their majority labored in households, were as a reaction pulled into the tobacco and cotton factories. Although this was just a brief period, Takagi attributed a liberating effect for women to these new working conditions. Even more "liberating" than working remotely from one's owner was living apart from him or her, and separate housing of bondspeople likewise increased over the decades and grew to be ubiquitous.[245] These experiences let enslaved women partake in the horizon-broadening world of factory work where they expanded their networks, learned about news, and augmented the chances to become freedom seekers or to support other freedom seekers in their endeavors.

Judging from runaway ads, over time, more and more runaways appeared to prefer hiding out with free blacks, enslaved acquaintances, or other more distant knots in their networks rather than with family members. Masters knew about the family situations of their slaves, as often did white business partners and neighbors. They had information about their slaves' family ties into slavery and freedom, knew the names of relatives, and often even places and street names where runaways might try to hide. Precisely for this reason, the closest relatives were not always the best choice to seek permanent refuge with, because masters would know where to look. James, whose owner knew that his mother lived at the cotton factory on the canal in Richmond, believed him to be there in 1840, and he was caught two weeks later.[246]

Professional networks became more relevant and may over time even have outstripped the importance of kinship ties in providing refuge. These contacts clearly benefitted from the hiring system. Industrialization needed a great deal of flexible labor which led to a high fluctuation of workers in the manufactories. The result was a common intermingling amongst many laborers of various statuses, free and unfree, with the latter having an important role in the early industrialization phases. The owner of Lilytand, who ran away in Richmond in 1839, believed him to have "acquaintances working at almost every Tobacco factory in the place."[247] Other bondspeople turned the tables on this strategy. An anonymous bondsman was hired out in Richmond in 1854, and while working as a hired slave "actually pretended that he was a free man and made a contract as such with some man of Richmond County to hire himself to him for a few month" the year after.[248] This man made provisions for a future escape attempt pretending to be free. His long-term planning shows how difficult such an endeavor could be and how thoroughly he prepared for it.

The Christmas break and early-January, a phase in which many of the hiring contracts for the coming year were negotiated, offered windows both for urban slaves deciding to flee and for newcomers to arrive without causing attention, to get lost in the crowd, and to start finding work right away. Refugee John Andrew Johnson also chose Christmas as a convenient

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[245] The downside was that evidently, many factory slaves were underfed and only possessed the most basic clothing. Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 35, 43, 94. John Zaborney has analyzed the slave-hiring system in Virginia and found that the experience of hirelings varied from virtual freedom to the severest oppression, depending on sex, location, occupation, the economy, skills, and individual masters and hirers. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire*.

[246] Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, 1834-1844, April 30, 1840, UVA.

[247] Idem, April 22, 1839, UVA.

[248] County Court Chancery Papers, February 19, 1855, LVA, in Race and Slavery Petitions Project, Series 2, County Court Petitions, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

time for his escape from a South Carolina plantation as well as his arrival in Charleston: "We all had three days' holiday at Christmas, and I, therefore, fixed upon that time as most appropriate for m[y] escape," Johnson claimed later in his autobiography before blending in with the city's day laborers.[249] Evidence that this was the strategy of many is plenty. For example, in Richmond, Lewis ran off on December 25, 1805 from the Washington Tavern.[250] John Simmons absconded in South Carolina on Christmas day 1855. He went to Graniteville on the Railroad to seek employment.[251] John and his wife Mahala also left on December 28, 1859, and Fanny from the opening paragraph likewise absconded in December.[252]

Urban slavery was linked to the hiring system but there were many enslaved city dwellers who worked for and lived with the person who owned them. These urban bondspeople could likewise enjoy great autonomy and mobility. House servants worked closely with the families they served and independently took to the streets to run errands, shop groceries, and manage the house keeping. Enslaved people working as personal servants traveled with their masters, thereby adding to their mobility further interregional, interstate, and sometimes even international contacts. Enslaved Charlotte from New Orleans, for example, made such an experience when she traveled with her master Pierre Blancq to Bordeaux, France, in 1820.[253]

Besides bondspeople who were rented out by their owners, there were self-hired slaves who, spread all over the South, hired out their own time. These men and women usually lived off the supervision of their legal owners, arranged for their own occupations, decided autonomously on the place and duration of their work, and negotiated the payment. It is difficult to estimate the numbers of bondspeople who hired themselves out without the involvement of their owners because the practice of self-hire came to be prohibited in all southern places at varying times. In the nineteenth century, it was generally illegal.[254] Attempting to provide an approximate number, historian Loren Schweninger has estimated that ten percent of all hired slaves were self-hired in Virginia in 1860, but he remarked that these are very conservative estimations.[255] Petitions and newspaper coverage show that legal codes that forbade self-hire were hardly ever followed. For example, in Charleston, where the law to curtail the self-hire of slaves was passed by both houses without division in 1850, a couple of months later, a local newspaper lamented that "it has completely failed. Not one slave less hires his time than before."[256]

Self-hiring furnished bondspeople with remarkable autonomy. Based on his observations, contemporary Robert Russell gave the accounts of one man whose owner had furnished him with a piece of paper stipulating the—apparently non-negotiable—price of $140

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[249] John Andrew Johnson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 24.

[250] *Enquirer*, February 4, 1806.

[251] *Charleston Mercury*, February 15, 1856.

[252] Idem, January 12, 1859.

[253] In Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis. Unfree Labor in New Orleans During the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-2, ch. 2.

[254] Virginia forbade the self-hire of slaves in 1782 and again in 1819, Maryland in 1787, and Louisiana in 1806. South Carolina passed respective laws in 1712, 1740, and 1783. Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 165.

[255] Loren Schweninger, "The Underside of Slavery: The Internal Economy, Self-Hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865," *Slavery & Abolition* 12:2 (1991): 1-22.

[256] *Charleston Courier*, September 12, 1850. Petitions by whites to ask for a better execution of the law as well as newspaper articles testifying to the failure of it are plentiful.

per year and of one young female domestic servant. She also had a fixed price set by her master, which was accepted by the prospective hirer, yet they were negotiating other terms of the contract. The woman refused to work in the garden (the hirer was a market gardener) and was furthermore pleading for other privileges—"her friends and favourites" had to be allowed to visit her. Apparently eventually agreeing on this point, the gardener and the enslaved woman went to "visit her proposed home and see how things looked."[257] This woman seemed to be only limited by the hiring rate and independent in all other aspects of the work relation. Equally autonomous was George Ingram. In 1824, reads a runaway slave advertisement, "a Negro Man, who calls his name GEORGE INGRAM […] very black and likely," in his late twenties, "RUNAWAY From the Eagle Tavern." The subscriber, Fields Kennedy from Augusta, found it "probable he may endeavor to get to Savannah or Charleston. Has a written pass to hunt for a master, signed John D. Walker, with reference to the subscriber, and the price for him mentioned in it."[258]

Ingram and the anonymous woman were not exceptional. Slaves who hired themselves out escaped the constant surveillance of their masters. Many white people who believed that this rendered their lived experiences too close to those of free people, resented this system. Petitions of white city dwellers worrying that this practice decreased the value of slaves and befouled their character were plentiful. *The Charleston Courier* lamented the "unwillingness it produces in the slave, to return to the regular life and domestic control of the master."[259] Elizabeth Ann Yates, who resided in Philadelphia but had her business run by executors, had several slaves hired out in Charleston. At least two of them successfully camouflaged themselves amidst the African American population. In 1824, her son David wrote to Yates that "your servants Emma & Sally have not paid any wages for a long time I am trying to find out where they stay that I may make them pay wages."[260] Perhaps, the two women had already made the step over the—for self-hired slaves very thin—line between bondage and autonomy. Beneficial for them was that slave hiring, in Jonathan Martin's words, divided mastery and hence weakened the absolute domination of the master-slave relation.[261]

Scholars have debated to what extent self-hired bondspeople experienced living and work conditions resembling freedom. Twentieth-century historians have employed terms like "semi-freedom," "'twilight zone' between bondage and freedom," "quasi-freedom," and "virtual freedom" to describe the situation of self-hired slaves.[262] They thereby downplayed the severity of being a slave, regardless of the often improved working conditions in comparison to bondspeople who were more restricted. Turning to Frederick Douglass, the best-known hired slave and refugee, offers a comparison. Being skilled in the trade of caulking, Douglass lived largely unsupervised in Baltimore. He called this arrangement with his owner a "privilege" and

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[257] Russell, *North America*, 151.
[258] *Charleston Courier*, May 9, 1825.
[259] Idem, September 12, 1850.
[260] David Yates to Mother, July 30, 1824, Yates Family Papers, SCHS.
[261] Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 4.
[262] Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, 162-163; Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 135, both in Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 162; Schweninger, "Underside of Slavery;" and John Hope Franklin, "Slaves Virtually Free in Ante-Bellum North Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 28:3 (1943): 285.

used the word "liberty" to describe how he felt.[263] The paragraphs on his hire, however, read like he meant autonomy or leeway rather than actual freedom. Hired slaves were very aware of the fact that they made good money because of their skills—and could be making the same money for themselves. This claim is in line with runaway slave and autobiographer Charles Ball. Ball recounted that he once visited Savannah with his owner where he observed self-hired bondsmen:

> In Savannah I saw many black men, who were slaves, and who yet acted as freemen so far, that they went out to work, where and with whom they pleased, received their own wages, and provided their own subsistence; but were obliged to pay a certain sum at the end of each week to their masters.[264]

Historian Jonathan Martin agrees. Not only because of their earnings self-hired slaves had to cede to their masters he advises caution suggesting that these people still knew and felt that they were enslaved.[265] Thousands of self-hired slaves who escaped prove him right.

Enslaved people with the broadest geographical mobility range were watermen and others working on board of vessels and boats. Washington, a bondsman from Richmond, "had been a waterman on James river for several years" before he escaped in 1837. It was worth $250 to his master to get him back. Black people dominated the steamboat economy. At any time in the 1850s, up to 3,000 enslaved and 1,500 free blacks worked on Mississippi riverboats.[266] For example, John, who was born in New Orleans, ran away from the steamer he worked on—probably on the Mississippi river. And there were many more like him: A "large Negro Man," whose name is unknown, "with one hand cut off close to the wrist, speaks French and English," fled his slaveholder. "He has been running on steamboats on the Red river, but is supposed to be loitering about the city [of New Orleans]."[267] The dimensions of the water business were immense. David Cecelski has claimed that almost all enslaved men who lived on the coast engaged in water-related jobs at some point in their lives. Next to a great many who rafted timber or went fishing, the traffic in the Tidewater (coastal region of North Carolina and Virginia), for instance, was organized by enslaved ferrymen.[268]

Water-related jobs indeed held special importance for men, and African Americans were present in every niche of American maritime life. Enslaved and free, they worked on sailboats, and later steamships, on schooners, and rafts as pilots, clerks, firemen (coal shufflers/stokers),

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[263] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. Written by Himself. His Early Life as a Slave, his Escape from Bondage, and his Complete History to the Present Time* (Hartford: Park Publishing Co., 1881), 190.

[264] Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 368.

[265] Self-hired slaves are also visible in the historical records when it comes to other forms of resistance. As noted by Jonathan Martin, two of the largest slave conspiracies in American history were led by self-hired slaves. Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 162, 178. These were Gabriel Prosser's attempt to march enslaved co-conspirators into Richmond in 1800, and Denmark Vesey's planned revolt in the city of Charleston in 1822. Together with Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, they symbolize the most important insurrections by enslaved people in the United States.

[266] Thomas C. Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi. Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 10.

[267] *Richmond Enquirer*, February 16, 1837; and *Daily Picayune*, April 24, 1853; August 27, 1852. For a very graphic study on how to imagine the physical and social world of the Mississippi, see Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, ch. 5.

[268] David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song. Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), xiii, 31.

and servants.[269] These kinds of voyages obviously furnished them with a broad horizon and many enslaved water workers enjoyed large autonomy. Such was the case with John Scott. After he escaped and his owner sued the captain of the steamboat on which Scott had been employed, a witness stated that he generally did not act as an enslaved man. "I had seen him I was in the Dewitt Clinton last season & Knew him there. he was cook on board the Dewitt Clinton, he seemed to have no master he acted as he pleased & let himself on board any boat he chose," testified Solomon Lynethart, a free black man.[270] Scott's account corresponds to Cecelski's claim that maritime and water life, due to its cosmopolitan nature and linkages to other black Atlantic communities, was much less preoccupied with the legal status of men, of whom a great many were of African descent. Hardly restricted, seamen were able to make enslaved and free acquaintances over long distances.[271] People like Clinton, who acted as free men despite being enslaved, did not cause much attention. This was related to the fact that close supervision of enslaved watermen was not feasible.

Figure 6: Black Oystermen in the Chesapeake[272]

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[269] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[270] McMaster v. Beckwith, April 1831, Docket #2017, Historical Archives of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, EKL.

[271] Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*, xvi.

[272] "Mine Oyster-Dredging-boats in the Chesapeake," 1872, Medium Print Collection, MSA, in Ki'Amber Thompson, "A Brief History of Black People and the Chesapeake Bay," *Ocean Conservancy* (February 4, 2019), URL: https://oceanconservancy.org/blog/2019/02/04/brief-history-black-people-chesapeake-bay/, accessed July 2, 2019.

Thanks to their autonomy, which was admittedly tainted by severe curtailments, hired and self-hired slaves had clear advantages when it came to flight. They basically could just walk away or not return the next day. If they were at sea, they could stay abroad.[273] Depending on the agreements with their owners, self-hired slaves could benefit from a lead of some days, weeks, or even months. Slaves hired out to urban areas had an additional advantage because, apart from living and working under much less supervision, they lived in the cosmopolitan, vibrant environment of cities where domestic and international news, progressive ideas, and cultural offers abounded. Amani Marshall has found that in South Carolina, 30 percent of women and 19 percent of men who were said to be runaways passing 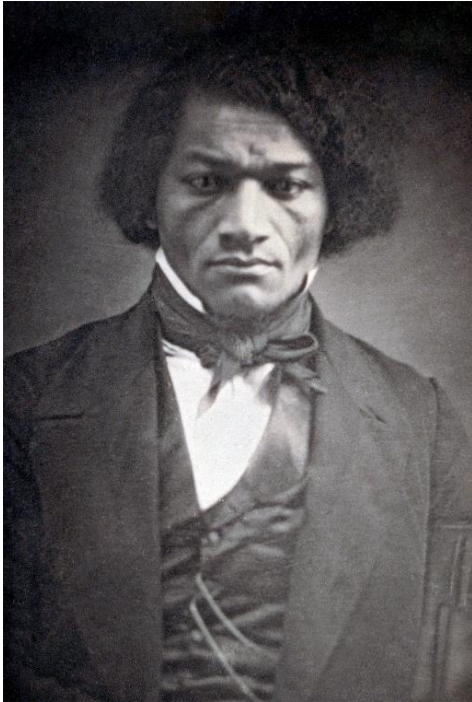for free, had lived in cities or towns before.[274] Frederick Douglass, who was sent from a plantation on Maryland's Eastern shore to Baltimore, recalled that "Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity."[275]

Despite larger autonomy, slave hiring had a flipside. Kinship ties and social networks in general could suffer through dislocation. This was especially bitter when slaves were hired out to distant places. Urban slaves could therefore end up working in the countryside in mines or on coal fields, or building canals. Some enslaved Virginians were even hired out to Florida where they were forced to build the railroads.[276] How slave hire could disrupt family bands is portrayed by the case of Harriet "Rit" Ross from Caroline County, Maryland. Rit had nine children of which two were sold and many others were hired out, amongst them Harriet Tubman, who would later become one of the most prominent activists of the Underground Railroad. The ones hired out stayed as much out of sight of their mother as the ones sold.[278]

Figure 7: Frederick Douglass, c. 1850 [277]

Escapes of hired bondspeople were common, and these accounts often read remarkably banal. Evidence of how careless slaveowners behaved and how ignorant they sometimes were when it came to the opportunities a hire situation opened up for their slaves is plentiful. In 1808, Timothy was committed to jail in Richmond. He had run away from John Jefferson in Virginia

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[273] Enslaved coastal seamen were not only pilots but also captains. Thousands of black seamen emigrated sailing to Haiti between 1790 and 1830. Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 139-145.

[274] Amani Marshall, "'They Will Endeavor to Pass for Free': Enslaved Runaways' Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina," *Slavery & Abolition* 31:2 (2010): 166.

[275] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 31.

[276] Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 107, 165.

[277] Frederick Douglass, c. 1850, Public Domain Image, in BlackPast, "(1845) Frederick Douglass, 'My Slave Experience in Maryland'" (January 24, 2007), URL: https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1845-frederick-douglass-my-slave-experience-maryland/, accessed August 29, 2019.

[278] "Harriet 'Rit' Ross, Caroline County," Biographical Series, MSA, URL:
https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5400/sc5496/008400/008444/html/008444bio.html, accessed September 21, 2018.

to whom he was hired.[279] James Lusk of New Orleans hired his bondsman Dennis out in 1847 as a cabin waiter to John Swon, captain of a steamboat. At the end of the steamboat season, Swon did not return Dennis to New Orleans but dismissed him in St. Louis. Dennis was never seen again.[280] J. L. Marciaq's bondsman Jacko "was a runaway and had escaped from his master on several occasions." Yet, Marciaq still hired him out to work on boats on the Mississippi river, a task that included "running errands in towns while the boat was anchored." Unsurprisingly, Jacko made his escape.[281]

Some masters were aware that hiring and lodging out meant separation from loved ones. In 1830, William Cox informed his boss, Virginia slaveholder William Cobbs, that he had hired out Stephen together with his wife. The background of hiring out a couple was that "under these circumstances there is no danger of his going of."[282] Furthermore, a high number of people wanted in runaway slave advertisements had worked as hirelings at some point in their lives. Laban, a shoe and bootmaker, fled enslavement in 1807. He had "followed the aforesaid business in Richmond for several years, and is well known there" because he had been hired in the city during the previous two years.[283] Diana, who called herself Diana Todd, was "well known in the City [of Charleston], having attended at the parties with Camilla Johnson, from whom she was lately purchased." Sometime before her flight, Todd had hired herself on board a steamboat.[284]

In a petition, Mary Spence summarized the risks inherent of hiring out one's slaves. When her husband died in the 1820s, the widow asked the Baltimore County Court for permission "to dispose of all these slaves at private sale" to avoid "the extreme inconveniency and loss she would sustain by being compelled to keep them." Besides the fact that Spence stated that she did not need the full number of 39 enslaved workers on her farm in Maryland, she was aware that slave hire could lead to considerable disagreement among the parties involved. Additionally, she saw a danger "if they are hired out and dislike their master [hirer], of their absconding from service altogether."[285] Some runaway advertisements, indeed, shed light on slaveowners losing control over their hired-out bondspeople. George Cox from Charleston was such a slaveholder. In 1830, he offered a $5-bounty on Maria:

> She had a ticket from me, authorizing her to engage in a place to work, which she told me she was previously promised. This is to give notice, that she is using that ticket as an imposition; and if she is engaged, or offers her services to any one, that she be taken to the Work House, as a runaway.[286]

Mobile jobs and slave hiring were phenomena much more present in the lives of men than women. Since both were important preconditions to increase the success rate of escape,

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[279] *Enquirer*, June 17, 1808.

[280] Lusk v. Swon, June 1854, Docket #2852, Historical Archives of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, EKL.

[281] Eventually, Jacko was found on board the steamer H. M. Wright and Marciaq sued the steamer, its captain, and owners. Marciaq v. H. M. Wright, May 1857, January 1858, Docket #4645, Historical Archives of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, EKL.

[282] William R. Cox to William Cobbs, January 27, 1830, William Cobbs Letters, LVA.

[283] *Enquirer*, February 6, 1807.

[284] *Charleston Mercury*, November 26, 1833.

[285] Mary C. Spence Petition, Baltimore County, Maryland, November 15, 1826, Race and Slavery Petitions Project, Series 2, County Court Petitions, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Schweninger Collection, MSA.

[286] *Charleston Courier*, October 8, 1830.

enslaved men both tried and managed to flee in larger numbers. Coming back to Ira Berlin's concept of the slave elite, those belonging to this upper echelon were indeed much more present in the refugee population. Or, in other words, the slave elite was better equipped to make an bid for freedom by running away.

Towards a City

Slave refugees who gravitated to southern cities to secure their freedom were either rural or urban slaves. Urban slaves who absconded, most times went to a nearby city or they just stayed in the same city. In the latter case, they decided simply not to report to their owners anymore.[287] Based on their experienced mobility and their corresponding horizons, freedom seekers in southern cities were overwhelmingly from the counties that constituted urban hinterlands. Police records demonstrate that escaped slaves whose owners thought them to be in Richmond and for whom the police was asked to be on the lookout between 1834 and 1844, were in their majority from nearby Virginia counties and from Richmond itself.[288] Between 1841 and 1846, most runaways who found themselves detained in the city jail, had ran off from the close-by counties of Chesterfield, Henrico, Hanover, King William, Goochland, Caroline, and the city of Petersburg. (See figure 8, which highlights the most common places of departure.)[289] Most slave refugees to Baltimore were similarly from counties in proximity to the city, while some came from the city itself or from northern Virginia.[290] Short-distance migration was a way to live a life outside the reach of one's master while at the same time maintaining ties to kin and staying in the place considered home.[291] Charleston and New Orleans, more often than Richmond and Baltimore, attracted refugees from a larger range of distances. New Orleans was the by far largest city in the Deep South and it seems like freedom seekers were drawn to this place from more widespread geographical locations.

It is important to keep in mind that slave flight was for some people not a one-time act and that destinations were not fixed end-points of a short migration experience. There were a number of scenarios flight from slavery could take on, always dependent on the individual circumstances and the reasons for the escape. Pauladore, a "Negro Man" of about 50 years, for instance, ran away but had to be continuously on the move in order to balance his family, jobs, and illegal freedom. In December 1853, Pauladore, "commonly called Paul," was already gone for 14 months. Thomas Davis, who wrote the newspaper announcement, informed that Paul "has lost the first joint of one of his big toes, moves slow when walking." Since he "was brought

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[287] These people were not runaway slaves in the original meaning of the term since they did not run. Flight is in this sense to be understood in the broader sense of escape from their owners' reach.

[288] Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, UVA.

[289] Richmond (Va.), City Sergeant, Mss 3R415661, Section 1, Register 1841-1846, VHS.

[290] Diverse runaway slave advertisements, mostly *Sun*.

[291] Short-distance migration and the upholding of ties with home is one of Charles Tilly's classifications of migration. *Local migration* occurs over short distances and the migrants continue relations with their place of origin. Often, local migrants are already familiar with their destination. Charles Tilly, "Migration in Early Modern European History," *Center for Research on Social Organization* (CSRO) Working Paper #145 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976), 5-6, 8. Speaking to the other side of the same coin, Herbert Gutman has stressed how heartbreaking flight to the North often was when refugees had to leave their loved ones behind. Gutman, *Black Family*, 265-266.

up in the coasting business between this City [Charleston] and Georgetown, between which places he has been sailing for the last 30 years," Paul was "well known." Davis went on that

> Gen. R. Y. Hayne has purchased his Wife and Children from H. L. Pinckney, Esq. and has them now on his Plantation at Goose Creek, where, no doubt, the Fellow is frequently lurking, and may be much of his time in the City [Charleston], or sometimes in the neighborhood of Georgetown.[292]

Pauladore escaped slavery but sought to remain in contact with his family. Like him, many had the hope to be able to visit loved ones on the plantations where they lived or meet them in the cities and towns. Therefore, they often stayed close. Others who had escaped once also remained restless—by choice or by compulsion. There are a few sources that indicate that (mostly) male runaways were moving back and forth between two or several cities and towns. John, for one, fled enslavement in 1826. Although "he was seen on a raft upon the Savannah River, going towards Savannah," his owner additionally suspected that he might be in Augusta and Hamburg.[293]

Figure 8: Origins of Refugees in Richmond

Those states that did not form part of the original Thirteen Colonies and those areas that were far off the East coast, counted much less inhabitants per square mile. City hopping in Mississippi, for one, where settlements were rather isolated,[294] was much more complicated

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[292] *Charleston Courier*, December 9, 1835.

[293] *Augusta Chronicle*, 1826.

[294] David Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 52. Note that nevertheless, Mobile, Natchez, and Vicksburg were expanding urban marketplaces. Daniel H. Usner,

than in the Chesapeake because Virginia was in the antebellum period the only southern state with a system of cities.[295] South Carolina was relatively less populated than the Upper South but had more urbanized areas than the Gulf states. Enslaved people lived in different regions surrounding them with different geographies which either facilitated or hampered flight to an urban center. Additionally, in the Upper South it was less challenging to gravitate towards the cities because the enslaved population of the states was relatively smaller and black people who traveled on the roads and river raised less suspicion. In the Deep South, around half of the population was enslaved, in the Upper South it was one fifth to one third.[296]

Infrastructure mattered, too. The Mississippi river and the riverine landscape facilitated the journey of escapees from the upper counties of Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Missouri. The part water and technology played in the forced migration and subsequent freedom-based migration of enslaved Americans is illustrated by the account of Tom. According to a Committed-ad, he was brought "to the jail of the city of Norfolk as a runaway" in 1848, and described as "a negro man who says his name is TOM or THOMAS." Tom was about 30 years old, "a light bacon color, stoutly made, full face, bushy hair, has a very slight stoppage in his speech, and has been badly whipped." The story Tom recounted to the jailer George Miller reads as follows: "he was born in Middleburg, and sold in the city of Richmond, Va., to a trader and carried to New Orleans [on board of a schooner] some 20 years ago." There he lived with his owner, Mr. Necho, a Frenchman, "six or seven years, and thence escaped to Boston, where he has been following the water ever since until arrested here [in Norfolk] and confined in jail."[297] Assuming that Tom's account was true, he was first displaced 1,800 miles down the East coast and into the Gulf of Mexico (the distance between Richmond and New Orleans is about 1,000 miles airline). Later, he put 1,700 miles behind him by making his way from New Orleans to Boston. There is no information on how he traveled but it is likely that he covered a considerable part of the journey by steamboat over the Mississippi river.[298]

During the 1830s, transportation to the Southwest by ship became increasingly common. Coast ships connected Virginia to New Orleans, river steamboats to Natchez, Mississippi.[299] Before the age of steam—yet still during later times—it was common to walk slaves in coffles to the places where they were to be sold. Eyewitnesses to these coffles stated that trafficked people were mostly chained in pairs, including at night during their rests.[300] While some displaced people tried to run away at the destinations of their forced migrations, others did not

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Jr., "Frontier Exchange and Cotton Production: The Slave Economy in Mississippi, 1798-1936," *Slavery & Abolition* 20:1 (1999): 32.

[295] Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 39.

[296] In the latter region, the enslaved share of the population was declining and Delaware became a virtual free state by the mid-century; Maryland was following. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 82, 99-100.

[297] *Daily Picayune*, March 13, 1849.

[298] There is also no background provided on why Tom returned to slaveholding territory, again making 700 miles after having achieved legal freedom on the free soil of Massachusetts. Given that he was originally from Norfolk and eventually returned there, conjectures that his family was the reason.

[299] Libby, *Slavery and Frontier*, 64.

[300] Ethan A. Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 142-143; and Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 16.

wait and stroke for freedom on the way.[301] Slave traders apparently reckoned that the people they coercively removed from their loved ones would make attempts to get back home. As Charles Ball recalled, one of them, when entering South Carolina, "addressed us all, and told us we might now give up all hope of ever returning to the places of our nativity; as it would be impossible for us to pass through the States of North Carolina and Virginia, without being taken up and sent back."[302]

Virginia as part of the Upper South was at the latest since the 1820s very much affected by the westward expansion of the United States in a way that many slaves ran the risk of being sold and deported into the Deep South, where new sugar and cotton plantations were springing up like mushrooms. Crop market prices and the geography of supply and demand for enslaved laborers shipped hundreds of thousands of enslaved men, women, and children off to uncertain futures. In Richmond, one of the most important centers for slave sale and distribution, slave auctions took place six days a week during the 1840s.[303] By the end of the antebellum period, they were open between nine o'clock in the morning and noon, and between one and five o'clock in the afternoon—every day, as narrated by freedom seeker William H. Robinson.[304]

An example of enslaved people stemming from the departing regions of the internal slave trade were Violet, 32 years old, and her daughter Mary, ten years old. Their mistress Mary Shirer from Charleston claimed that "They are Virginia negroes, whither it supposed they will try to return. They took with them all their clothing."[305] If Shirer was right in her guess, the case of Violet and her daughter was one of the extremely rare ones in which a mother together with her child attempted to return over large distances back to the Upper South. Connected to the gender division within the runaway slave population is the observation by historians that in the antebellum South, when the parents lived on two different plantations, children born into slavery usually lived with their mothers. In case of sale, infants also stayed with their mothers or were sold separately rather than forming a unit of sale with their fathers. Reinforced by the usually higher mobility of men, it is logical that it was mostly the husbands and fathers who tried to reunite their families by running away.[306]

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[301] Damian Pargas has presented a selection of men and women who ran away while in transit of the internal slave trade. Women, interestingly, were not always chained, a fact that might have facilitated their flight while at the same time indicating that women attempted to escape less often. Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 119-122.

[302] Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton, and Indianapolis: Asher & Company, 1859), 36.

[303] Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 135.

[304] William H. Robinson, *From Log Cabin to the Pulpit, or, Fifteen Years in Slavery.* Third Edition (Eau Clair: James H. Tifft, 1913), 46.

[305] *Charleston Mercury*, February 14, 1844.

[306] Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 209-210; Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 357; and Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 51. Louisiana, despite its repressive slave system, insisted on legal codes stemming from the Spanish era which illegalized the separate sale of mothers and their children. Infants up to the age of ten were only to be sold alongside their mothers and, according to Damian Pargas, Louisiana slaveholders largely respected this law. (Children whose mother died were sold off regardless of ties to other family members as were children above ten years.) Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 71.
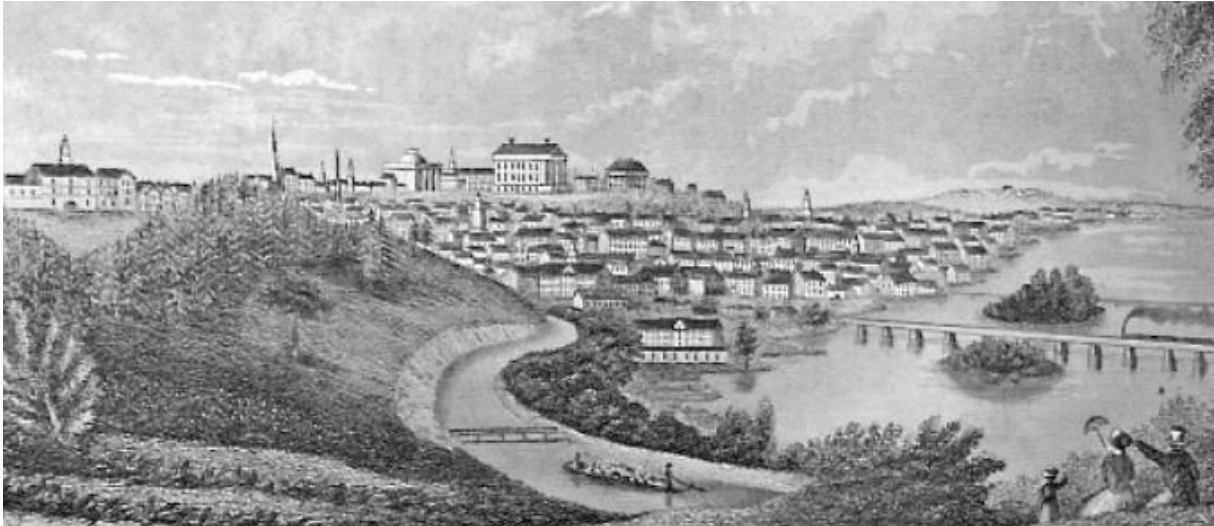
Figure 9: Richmond around 1850[307]

A number of people, who waged an attempt, were caught in transit places on the way and appear in jail dockets and Committed-ads.[308] In 1821, Peter was committed to the jail of Marlborough District in South Carolina. He said that he belonged to Mr. Samuel Stark near Camden and was on his way to North Carolina where he was bought. Together with Peter, Matt was taken up. He evidenced that "it was his intention to go to Norfolk, Va. from [where] he was bought when he was about 10 years."[309] Long-distant migrants were numerically much fewer than short-distance migrants, and the route was almost always from the Lower South back to the Upper South, meaning the reverse direction of the Second Middle Passage. In very few cases, an enslaved person would also flee south- and westwards in pursuit of loved ones; examples of this have only been found for men. Jim was one of them. Calling himself Jim Mason, he ran away from Alexandria, Virginia, in 1809. "A few days before his elopement, his wife (who was the property of a neighbor) was sold to a negro purchaser from the neighborhood of Nashville, Tennessee." His owner James Blake offered $100 to get hold of Mason again and "conjectured that Jim either pursued her [his wife] or that he went off by water and is now in one of the sea-port towns of the United States."[310] Likewise, Dick's wife was sold in 1838. After Dick's escape, his owner assumed that he had run from Kentucky to New Orleans, where she was living then, and tried to pass as a free man.[311]

The destination of migrants was never random, and neither was the route. Gaining geographical knowledge about the landscape of displacement was imperative. Some enslaved migrants succeeded at this, while others did not. John Brown, displaced from Virginia to Georgia, did "not recollect the names of all the places we passed through," yet he did recall the

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[307] Henry Howe, "Richmond in 1850s," in *Historical Collections of Virginia* (Charleston, William R. Babcock, 1851), 304, in *flickr* (2012), URL: https://www.flickr.com/photos/jimsurkamp/6737010773, accessed June 20, 2019.

[308] "Baltimore City and County Jail Runaway and Accommodations Dockets, 1831-1864," in *Absconders, Runaways and Other Fugitives in the Baltimore City and County Jail*, ed. Jerry M. Hynson (Westminster: Willow Bend Books, 2004); and Committed ads in various newspapers.

[309] *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, December 21, 1821.

[310] *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, July 21, 1809.

[311] *Lexington Intelligencer*, July 7, 1838, in Damian Alan Pargas, "Seeking Freedom in the Midst of Slavery: Fugitive Slaves in the Antebellum South," in *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Idem (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 123.

names of the major points of orientation like Roanoke river, Halifax, and Raleigh, North Carolina.[312] Charles Ball revealed in his autobiography how he fought his way back to the Upper South learning about the landscape and using the stars as orientation. He walked from Georgia to reunite with his enslaved family in Maryland, an undertaking that took him one entire year.[313] Architectural historian Rebecca Ginsburg has in this regard directed our attention to the "black landscape," stressing the different geographies and knowledge used by black people. Essentially approaching the black landscape as a counter-geography, she has argued that whites knew surprisingly little about this other world.[314] Enslaved people who escaped, by contrast, had to be familiar with secluded routes and rat runs and greatly benefitted from information about possible supporters. And the geography of the South was changing, both physically and with regards to spaces of freedom.[315]

On their journey to freedom, refugees had to reckon with the intervention of their owners for whom their absconding could mean a real monetary loss. Frank Ball, a formerly enslaved man from Virginia, stated that bondspeople were perfectly aware of the financial consequences of escapes: "Cost 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 the runaway."[316] The amount of the bounty was an indication of both how wealthy a slaveowner was and how appreciated or financially beneficial the runaway was deemed. Advertisements which offered small awards like $5 or $10 must in this light not be read as a relative indifference on the part of the slaveholders to find their runaways but rather as a mirror of their limited financial means.[317] In relative perspective, the reward offered indicated that slaveholders were wealthier in the Upper South or at least more willing to offer high rewards than in the Lower South. In Maryland, bounties of up to $400 for male runaways were not rare in the 1850s.[318]

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[312] Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 17-19.

[313] Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 399.

[314] Rebecca Ginsburg, "Escaping through a Black Landscape," in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 51-66.

[315] On the spatial dimensions of enslaved women's resistance in the antebellum South, see Camp, *Closer to Freedom*.

[316] Frank Bell (b. 1834), Vienna, Va., Interviewer Claude W. Anderson (n. d.), Virginia State Library, in *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, ed. Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 26-27, originally published 1976.

[317] According to Kenneth Stampp's calculations, 88 percent of slaveholders held less than 20 people in bondage, 50 percent held less than five. Families who owned more than 100 slaves numbered no more than 3,000 by 1860. At the same time, more than half of all enslaved people lived and worked on plantations with more than 20 slaves, one quarter with at least 50. Human property was disproportionally concentrated in the hands of the extremely rich, more so in the Lower than in the Upper South. In Louisiana, five sixth of slaves lived on units with at least ten slaves. In absolute numbers, most enslaved people lived in Virginia, in relative perspective, they were dominant in South Carolina. In total, there were 400,000 southerners claiming legal ownership of almost four million people. Most strikingly, less than four percent of adult white men owned the majority of all slaves. Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 28-31; and Oakes, *Ruling Race*, xv, 38, 40.

[318] For instance, *Sun*, August 31; October 15; November 24, 1852. Slaves were also more valuable to rural owners than to owners living in the city. This has been observed by Judith Kelleher Schafer for New Orleans. Schafer, "New Orleans Slavery," 33. Moreover, rewards roughly reflected the fluctuation of slave prices in the republic, which peaked in the 1830s and 1850s. Economic historians have made calculations about the value of antebellum slaves. In the mid-1850s, "prime field hands" cost $1,200 and upwards. Prices were at a peak for male slaves in their mid-to-late twenties because then their productivity was highest. Men were on average more valuable, (women of 27 years of age were priced at 80 percent of men of the same age) and professional skills likewise drove the price up. Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American*

Rewards in newspaper notices furthermore tell us about the difficulties to retrieve a runaway and the attitude of the slaveholders towards slave flight. Bounties often varied for different possible places and increased if the wanted person was found outside the state or when retrieved from the North. When George Stewart, 20 years old, ran away from Baltimore County in 1852, the reward for him being taken in Maryland was $50. If "taken out of this State, and lodged in jail," the subscriber was willing to pay double the amount.[319]

Paying rewards and placing ads in newspapers was both a time and money-intensive undertaking, especially when the ad was operated over a long period of time and in several papers. The Baton Rouge *Daily Advocate*, for instance, charged the following advertising rates in 1857: one square cost $5 for one month, $7 for two months, $9 for three months, and $20 for twelve months. For two squares, the charge rose up to $9, $12, $14, and $30, respectively.[320] These were not the only expenditures. In late April 1854, Lewis, a refugee from Tensas Parish, Louisiana, was jailed in Port Gibson, on the other side of the Mississippi river. His master, Dugald McCall noted in his plantation journal that "It cost me jail fees and other expenses $13.43," to get Lewis back.[321] Around the same time that Lewis was retrieved, Willis was likewise pursued by McCall. Because Willis could not be caught, McCall decided to place an ad: "I sent an advertisement to Vicksburg about Willis to be put in the papers there and at Jackson," he wrote. A month later, McCall got a reaction: "I got a letter from the tailor [jailor] in Vicksburg saying that he had a Negro of mine in jaile, and for me to come after him." Because Willis was in Vicksburg, McCall had to travel there by boat the following day to retrieve Willis from jail. The expenditures of this trip included $10 for the passage, $20 reward, and $10 jail fees adding up to $40.[322] Slave flight was an effective weapon to fight against slavery because it was a matter of expense for those owning slaves.

Freedom seekers could be actively engaged in making it as difficult as possible for their slaveholders to get them back. Many did not surrender to their fate without fighting. Some even went on fighting when all odds seemed to be against them. Pressly from Athens, Georgia, ran away in March 1852 and, as his legal owner stated, "although advertised in papers of Georgia and in one of the papers of the State of South Carolina and a reward of Fifty Dollars offered for his apprehension, no information was ever received." That same year, he "was arrested in the City of Charleston and lodged in the work House as a fugitive." Because he gave his name as Joe Brown, however, he was not claimed and consequently "sold pursuant to the requirements of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston."[323] Pressly took the decision to rather be sold into the unknown than returning to his master in Georgia. He was able to do that because

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Civil War (Chicago: Open Court, 2014), 38-39, originally published 1996; and Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 68, 70.

[319] *Sun*, September 17, 1852. Based on a perusal of 63 newspaper notices between 1840 and 1860, Jeremiah Dittmar and Suresh Naidu have pointed to remarkable differences in reward money. The lowest amount was found for Mississippi, where bounties on slave refugees averaged at $32. The highest median amount was with $125 offered in Maryland; Virginia followed with $110. South Carolina slaveholders placed on average $47 and Louisianans $37. Jeremiah Dittmar and Suresh Naidu, "Contested Property: Fugitive Slaves in the Antebellum U.S. South," Version 0.1, 6-7, URL: http://eh.net/eha/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Dittmar.pdf, accessed May 29, 2019.

[320] *Daily Advocate*, September 24, 1857.

[321] Journal of Dugald McCall, 918 Box 1, Cross Keys Plantation, April 29, May 1, 1854, LaRC.

[322] Idem, May 11, June 5, 6, 7, 8, 1854, LaRC.

[323] Petition by Edward R. Ware, Physician, Resident of Athens, Clark County, GA, November 28, 1855, SCDAH. For more information on the workhouse, see chapter five.

jailers had to rely on the statements of people committed as runaways in order to find out about their owners. Surely, there was room to fact-check parts of the stories they told but eventually, it was up to the refugee whether they decided to reveal their actual origin.

John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger have claimed that there existed a pattern most slaveholders followed from the moment a slave fled to the placement of an advertisement in a newspaper. The first instinct was to wait for a day or a couple of days to see whether the person would return voluntarily. The second step was to try to retrieve the runaway while they were still presumed to be close to home. At the same time, neighbors were notified and the slaveowners would start to pay attention to the capture notices in local newspapers. When an escaped person was not found in time, slaveholders often engaged professional slave catchers with specially trained bloodhounds. If they were unsuccessful, too, a slaveholder would take the step to publish a runaway slave ad, yet because it was expensive and annoying, one third of slaveholders waited with the announcement until one month had passed after the escape of a slave. One in ten waited four months or more to place one.[324]

Public announcements had consequences. A runaway slave ad meant a public mortification in the logics of southern culture. George Washington, out of embarrassment, stopped advertising for his runaway slaves in his own name when he became President of the United States.[325] Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued that a man who was not able to maintain control over his family and property weakened the social order and lost credit within society.[326] When significant amounts of money were at stake, however, economic considerations usually trumped ideology. Dealing with runaways was, hence, a combination of personal honour with profit.[327]

The reluctance to place newspaper announcements suggests that slaveowners did not regard newspaper notices as very efficient, which gave refugees over longer distances a substantial lead. Kyle Ainsworth has speculated that with a two-week start ahead, a refugee who did not intent to return and therefore did not stay close to the home plantation, could be within a radius of 60 to 80 miles—if they were walking.[328] It is more likely, however, that escapees moved faster. With freedom on the line, it is reasonable that a person would at least make ten miles a day, even if they just walked during the night. That would make a radius of 140 miles after two weeks.

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[324] These calculations refer to the 1840s and 1850s. Besides newspaper announcements, slaveholders also had handbills written or printed to be distributed in courthouses, taverns, and post offices. Franklin and Schweninger, 170, 238-239, 282; and Kyle Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835-1865," in *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Damian Alan Pargas (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 201-202. For a slaveholder hunting his own and his neighbors' runaway slaves, see Norwood (Abel John) Diary and Account Book. Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book, No. 1, Suitable for a Force of 40 Hands, or under, by Thomas Affleck. Eighth Edition, Revised and Improved (New Orleans: Thomas Affleck, 1859), HML. Walter Johnson has written about the struggles of runaway slaves while on the run including vivid descriptions of the geography of escape and of the traumatic and dangerous experiences with slave hunters, their horses and bloodhounds. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 222, 234-240. See also Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols. Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[325] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, ed. Ward M. McAfee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205.

[326] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 370-371.

[327] Fields, *Middle Ground*, 6; and Ariela Gross, "Like Master, Like Man: Constructing Whiteness in the Commercial Law of Slavery, 1800-1861," *Cardozo Law Review* 18:2 (1996): 264-265.

[328] Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda," 207.

Moreover, some were able to go aboard boats or ships, and the railroad was since the mid-century a significant tool to travel fast and widely. From the 1820s onwards, railroad projects revolutionized transportation and travel throughout the country. Slave refugees could sometimes benefit from this technology. In his autobiographical essays, William Matthews told that after being severely whipped while working in railroad construction, he escaped and climbed into a railroad car where he hid between cotton bales and went to Charleston.[329] In 1858, an enslaved man was found dead trying to get away on a train: "A negro fellow belonging to Jno. N. Cummings was killed by the carrs at 41 station on saturday night last, It is supposed he was stealing a ride on the carrs going up and fell off." The train ran over him.[330] Although slave flight was expensive for slaveowners, only those fleeing risked paying the ultimate price: their lives.

Given the contextual background of runaway slave announcements and the reasons for slaveholders not to use them or to place them at a much later point in time, those runaways who were advertised for in newspapers were consequentially the least likely to be found—this is why they were publicly wanted in the first place. To back up this observation, a perusal of names of people listed as runaway slaves in the Police Jail of the Third Municipality of New Orleans from February 1839 to March 1840 delivered no matches with electronically searched newspaper announcements during the same period. [331] Consequently, runaway slave advertisements represent only a fraction of men and women who escaped bondage.

Inefficient mechanisms to retrieve refugees were preceded by inefficient mechanisms of surveillance. The paternalistic view of slaveholders was not only a legitimization of the institution, many had actually internalized it. Without this changing attitude the hire and self-hire of thousands of enslaved men and women would not have been possible. Both practices offered bondspeople opportunities to escape and to stay free. Because slave flight was not compatible with the paternalistic understanding of the master-slave relation, slaveowners who considered themselves benevolent providers were often personally offended when their slaves absconded. They considered this act as a deal breaker of the arrangements they made with enslaved people, which was—in their view—a mutually beneficial exchange of labor for protection and care. Refugees could make use of this trust, a fact we can detect in runaway slave ads, in which owners expressed their grievance about slaves who "betrayed" them.

An example was "Jack or Jack Ash, a gardener by profession [who] was sold to a gentleman residing in Amherst county." The subscriber lamented that the "gentleman […] permitted him to come down [to Richmond] last May, for the purpose of visiting his wife and relations, with a promise that his visits should be repeated frequently." In the mindset of slaveholding southerners, this was a major concession that should be rewarded with

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[329] Anonymous, *Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave* (A slave narrative serialized in *The Emancipator* in 1838), October 21, 1838. Originally published as a series with five installments, *Recollections of Slavery* appeared in *Emancipator*, the newspaper of the American Anti-Slavery Society from August to October 1838. Zachary Hutchins, "No Author, Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave," *Documenting the American South*, URL: https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/runaway/summary.html, accessed March 12, 2019. New evidence from the twenty-first century points to James Matthews as the author. Susanna Ashton, "Re-collecting Jim. Discovering a Name and Slave Narrative's Continuing Truth," *Common-Place* 15:1 (2014), URL: http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-15/no-01/tales/#.XH0rieQ1uUl, accessed March 4, 2019.

[330] David Gavin Diary, March 24, 1858, SCHS. Gavin also noted that now, a trip from Charleston to Mississippi took two to three days by train; 25 years earlier it was about 20 days.

[331] New Orleans (La.) Police Jail of the Third Municipality, Daily Reports, 1838-1840 (February 1, 1838 – April 30, 1839), TX205, 1838-1840, NOPL.

unparalleled gratitude. But Ash ran away, thereby harming the generosity of the man who held him captive: He "thought proper to abuse this indulgence by not returning to his master."[332] In the master's worldview, Ash had taken advantage of an unusually generous treatment.

More often, southerners who published runaway slave ads could not make sense of the flight of their slaves. Slaveholders perceived people belonging to the slave elite to be privileged in comparison to "field niggers," and were particularly surprised when they disappeared. It almost seems like they were not aware of the dynamics that accompanied slave flight at all. Advertisements which mentioned that an enslaved person went off for no reason were more than common: Billy, for one, "absconded himself […] without any known cause" from his enslaver in South Carolina.[333] The bondsmen Cyrus and Absolum, 22 and 27 years old, ran off in 1814 "for some cause unknown" to their owner who had hired them in Long Island, South Carolina.[334] The private conversation between the Virginians Lewis Stiff and William Gray in May 1842 speaks volumes about the two different worlds slaves and those holding them enslaved lived in: When Gray's slave Emanuel did not go back to Gray after leaving Stiff's house, Stiff wrote to Gray that he could not think of any reason why Emanuel should not return since he appeared to be so "pleased with his situation and so nice Satisfied with you as a master."[335] For a great many southern slaveholders, betrayal by their slaves was so unthinkable that they stressed the faithfulness and good characters of runaways even in the newspaper ads—after they had run away.[336]

Catching their masters by surprise was an advantage but it did not guarantee a flight without obstacles. In order to protect their property and their slaveholding way of life, planters organized patrols to supervise rural areas and prevent slaves from absconding. Runaway slave Solomon Bayley recounted how, by the end of the eighteenth century, he escaped from a slave wagon whilst on his way to be sold: "When night came and I walked out of the bushes, I felt very awful. I set off to walk homewards, but soon was chased by dogs, at the same house where the man told the waggoner he had taken up a runaway three days before. […] I got down to Richmond; but had liked to have been twice taken, for twice I was pursued by dogs."[337] Slave patrols constituted a constant threat to runaways but planters had little interest in patrolling the roads themselves. Sally Hadden has remarked that men of higher social standing did occasionally participate in the patrols, yet decreasingly so the more the antebellum period went on. Hadden has stressed that patrols loom remarkably absent from autobiographies of formerly enslaved people and that the repeatedly enacted laws rather reflected the wishes of policy

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[332] *Enquirer*, January 11, 1806.

[333] *Charleston Courier*, May 15, 1826. Likewise, Hamilton, who was a term slave in Maryland, ran away two or three times up until the year 1845 without that his owner Claude understood it. Dennis Claude, Jr., v. Negro Boy Hamilton, October 29, 1847, Anne Arundel County Register of Will, Orders and Petitions 1840-1851, 210-211, MSA.

[334] He later filed a petition for compensation because they joined a gang of runaways and were killed by the slave patrol. Petition by Edward Brailsford, November 26, 1816, Legislative Petitions, SCDAH.

[335] Lewis L. Stiff to William Gray, May 25, 1842, Gray Papers, VHS. Franklin and Schweninger have reminded us that black slaveholders also had trouble with runaway slaves. Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 201.

[336] "Hyacinthe, commonly called John Labatitt" ran away in 1822. He was described by his owner J. Menude as a "faithful and much valued servant." *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, July 18, 1822.

[337] Solomon Bayley, *A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley, Formerly a Slave in the State of Delaware, North America; Written by Himself, and Published for His Benefit; to Which Are Prefixed, a Few Remarks by Robert Hurnard* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1825), 4.

makers about how patrollers *should* behave than how they actually behaved.[338] These observations add further explanations of how so many freedom-based slave migrations to cities could be successful.

Passing for Free

Slave refugees in cities had to look unsuspicious. If they escaped from a plantation, they could not wear the uniform outfit of field hands that clearly identified their status and occupation.[339] For these people it was fundamental to change the visible markers of slavery once they ran away and decided not to come back. Runaway slave ads were full of assumptions and observations that escaped bondspeople had changed their clothes, taken apparel with them, or stolen attire of higher quality. For instance, Jules, who was arrested as a runaway slave in New Orleans in 1855, had a variety of clothing with him, suspected to be stolen.[340] Urban slaves had an advantage since access to additional clothing was less restricted there.[341] The social dynamics in the cities were very different from the countryside and urban slaveholders, in order to stress their paternalistic self-image and to hide potential financial shortcoming, usually dressed and fed their bondspeople well. Dennis and Lewis from Richmond, both in their late twenties, were "employed in a tobacco factory for the last fifteen years, in consequence of which their finger nails are much worn from stemming and twisting tobacco." They ran away in August 1831. Both were described as generally dressing well and as having "carried away sundry clothing."[342] John, of a brown color and with bushy hair, absconded six years later and took three suits of clothes with him.[343]

Marks that could not that easily be changed were the visible signs of physical and/or psychological violence. Like in the case of Fanny from the opening paragraph of this chapter, who had lost her upper front teeth, slaveholders instrumented corporal peculiarities and marks like scars, limps, missing body parts, or brandings to increase the chances that somebody might recognize their human property and detain them.[344] Since most permanent refugees attempted to pass for free, they tried to adapt their looks to those of free people of African descent.[345] This was easier achievable for house servants, hired-out slaves and those generally working in superior occupations who often did not look like stereotypical slaves anyways. Essau from Charleston, for one, was said to be "usually genteelly dressed [...] and frequently wears colored

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[338] Besides being an uncomfortable job mostly carried out at night, slave patrols were a confession that slavery was vulnerable because patrols presented a visible debunking of the lie that enslaved people were happy and submissive. Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 74, 105-106, 139-140.

[339] On slave clothing, see Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past & Present* 148:1 (1995): 166; and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 181.

[340] *Daily Picayune*, October 16, 1855.

[341] White and White, "Slave Clothing," 160.

[342] *Richmond Enquirer*, August 19, 1831.

[343] Idem, September 26, 1837.

[344] The branding of slaves in the face with the initials of the owner was a practice which was hardly existent during the antebellum era. By the beginning of the century, there were occasionally some slaves afflicted in this way to be found. More common, but still not that widely spread, was an "R" in the face to demarcate notorious runaways and to prevent them from further attempts to abscond.

[345] Shane White and Graham White argued that there was a distinct African American aesthetic expressed in clothing that included varied material and patterns and vivid colors. White and White, "Slave Clothing," 169.

cloth garters."[346] Likewise, Dave or David, 23 years old, stole a gold watch and three pairs of new boots before he ran away and was shot in the left hand. Jesse Hart, his owner, claimed that "This boy has been my house servant for 18 months, and is always well dressed."[347] Carrying off clothes was also an obvious sign to slaveholders that their bondspeople did not intent to return to them.

According to Shane White and Graham White, the main distinction in clothing of enslaved Americans, however, was not alongside slave hierarchies but between the workday and the Sunday clothes.[348] A Sunday dress or suit would hence be a helpful tool to back up one's new identity as a free person. Seaborn, "good looking and well made," of 18 years, "took with him plenty of good clothes, blanket, a full Sunday suit, with silk hat, and patent leather shoes."[349] Andrew was dressed like a free man when he escaped enslavement in 1820. He wore a "drab colored coatee and gray cassimere pantaloons, but may change his dress as he took all his clothes away with him." It is questionable whether this description was helpful to recover him since the announcement was published three months after his departure and no information was provided about Andrew himself.[350] Dresses reflected social standing and it must have been repelling to white Charlestonians to read an article in the city paper in 1850 that evoked the horrors of the wealthy. The author drew the scenario that "one of these very slaves will flaunt by the ladies in King-street more extravagantly dressed than they," referring to a bondswoman who absconded from the reach of her owner.[351]

Enslaved people who did not look like slaves still faced the challenge to act as if they were free. Besides clothing, they had to speak and move like free black Americans (or whites if they were trying to pass as such) and show the right attitude. Mary Jane, 20 years of age, could have been one of those who attempted to pass themselves off as white persons since she was "remarkably white for a slave." The problem, however, was that she did not sound like a white woman, according to her slaveholder who claimed that she, "when spoken to has the accent of a negress."[352] To be included into the black urban communities it was imperative to distance oneself from enslaved plantation workers.

Joseph Holt Ingraham, an author from Maine, watched such a scene in Natchez, Mississippi. He accounted that on Sundays, black men gathered in small groups "imitating the manners, bearing, and language of their masters." According to Ingraham, they were "astounding their gaping auditors 'ob de field nigger class,' who cannot boast such enviable accomplishments."[353] Acting was everything. In 1833, Penny aka Henny, from 110 Church street in Charleston, decided to move out of bondage. "She is a good looking woman, and so plausible as to deceive most persons unacquainted with her," stated the newspaper notice. A black person received Henny's clothing before she disappeared, and she was thought to be harbored in the city.[354] More information about *how* clandestine freedom seekers deceived other people is available in William Grimes's autobiography. When Grimes lived as a slave in

[346] *Charleston Mercury*, April 12, 1859.
[347] *Daily Picayune*, June 24, 1845.
[348] White and White, "Slave Clothing," 174.
[349] *Daily Picayune*, December 7, 1848.
[350] *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, March 10, 1820.
[351] *Charleston Courier*, September 12, 1850.
[352] *Daily Picayune*, April 11, 1839.
[353] Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West. By a Yankee*. Vol. II (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 56.
[354] *Charleston Mercury*, November 6, 1833.

Savannah, Georgia, between 1811 and 1815, he frequently attended meetings that often went so late that he reached his master's house at 10 o'clock at night or later and broke the curfew. According to him, "the guard never attempted to meddle with me—they always took me to be a *white man*." The richness of his account is striking:

> I have frequently walked the streets of Savannah in an evening, and being pretty well dressed, (generally having on a good decent suit of clothes,) and having a light complexion, (being at least three parts white,) on meeting the guard, I would walk as bold as I knew how, and as much like a gentleman; they would always give me the wall.

Once, Grimes encountered two or three watchmen together. "I was afraid but summoned all my resolution; and marched directly on towards them." When, while walking past, he accidently brushed one of them, "they immediately turned off the walk; one of them spoke and said we ask your pardon sir."[355] Walking like a free person, wearing adequate clothing, and retaining one's composure in delicate situations were essential capabilities.

Since there were slave patrols in the countryside, night watches, and, later, police forces in the cities, slave refugees who did not look like slaves had better chances to make it to their envisaged destinations and to remain unmolested there. Fanny, whose story runs through this chapter, was reported to be of "brown complexion." In Charleston, with its large middle-caste of free black people, most of them with a lighter skin tone than the enslaved, she had relatively good chances to pass for free. In the Upper South, it mattered much less than in the Lower South if a runaway slave was darker or lighter skinned. Their chances for blending in were more or less the same. Due to manumission schemes that were less discriminatory in gender, skin tone, and status than in the Lower South, the free black population in the Upper South was considerably darker in physical appearance. Courts in Virginia and Maryland did not distinguish between blacks and mulattoes and law dictated that everybody with at least one eights of African descent was a "negro."[356]

Regardless of the place, even more advantageous was a skin that allowed one to pass as white.[357] The court case Spalding v. "Missouri" offers valuable clues on how passing for a white person worked. In the 1840s, Durham Spalding sued captain George Taylor, clerk Mr. Twitchell, and other owners of the steamboat *Missouri* for $1,500 for carrying his slave Felix from New Orleans to St. Louis, where he disappeared. The defendants alleged "that a man did work his passage on board of the Missouri bearing name Felix but that he was a white man, or at least passed for such." They went on stating that everybody would have taken him for free man. Felix

> might have some Indian blood or be of Spanish descent, but no one could suppose he had any African blood; he would pass any where for a white man, and a great many white creoles have a darker complexion that he has. He was dressed like a gentleman, nor was there any thing in his manner or appearance, that indicated him to be a slave. There was no attempt to conceal

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[355] Grimes, *Life of William Grimes*, 71.

[356] Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 34, 97. For the legal construction of whiteness in the United States, see Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), ch. 5, originally published 1996.

[357] For a comprehensive account on passing as white beyond the antebellum period, see Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2014).

himself. […] Witness has seen a great many slaves, but has never seen one whose appearance was any thing like that of *Felix*.

Also his previous owner testified that Felix "is a very white person for a slave; that he has blue eyes and straight hair; is well made and of good size, and likely to pass for a white person wherever he is not known."[358]

In general, lighter skin facilitated moving unmolested. After generations of racial mixing, the American South counted many men and women who were enslaved while their African heritage was not visible anymore.[359] Those slaves who had just been imported from Africa had hardly a chance to integrate into urban communities. Their significantly darker skin color, the unfamiliarity with American culture, and language barriers impeded the success of such an endeavor. Nevertheless, African and African American slaves without prospects of passing for free also ran away—but their strategies varied. As a matter of course, African-born enslaved people not assimilated to American culture rarely sought to run to cities and other places where they were highly visibility and exposed to the proximity with whites. Africans rather ran to wilderness areas where they aimed to hide and live an autarkic life. They turned into true maroons.[360] These patterns lived on when Africans continued to be enslaved and brought to the American continents illegally. Likewise, illegal importation of people who already worked as slaves in the Caribbean, for instance Cuba, continued in lower numbers up to the Civil War. It is unclear how many people were affected by these forced migrations, and it is unlikely that those who managed to escape integrated into urban communities. New Orleans might have been the only city where French and Spanish speaking freedom seekers had a chance.

How difficult it was for illegal freedom seekers to take on a new identity is up for discussion. Fleeing was one of the most expressive forms of resistance, yet, as James Scott has outlined, role play by the subordinates did not only occur in acts of resisting but all the time.[361] People who lived as slaves had to wear masks at almost every encounter with white people. The surprised reactions of slaveholders when they learned that their bondspeople had run away "without any reason" speak volumes. An anonymous bondsman, probably by the name of James Matthews, born around 1816, narrated in his autobiography the day-to-day acting enslaved

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[358] Spalding sued for compensation after Felix did not return to him. Ironically, Felix sought refuge in St. Louis, where both his present and his former owner lived. "His former master, *Chouteau*, saw him almost daily in the streets; but the plaintiff was determined not to see him." After the case was reopened in the Louisiana Supreme Court, the new verdict stated "We […] are satisfied that, on account of his color and of his vices, the slave was of very little value at any time. After he had been suffered by the plaintiff to live and act like a freeman, and to go and remain as long as he pleased in States where slavery is prohibited, he must have been utterly worthless." Spalding v. Taylor et al., June 1846, in *Louisiana Annual Reports, Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana.* Vol. I: From the Reorganization of the Court under the Constitution of 1845, to the 31st of December, 1846, ed. Merritt M. Robinson (New Orleans: Thomas Bea, 1847), 195-197.

[359] White Americans often felt uncomfortable when seeing enslaved people who looked like them. John Simmon's master, for instance, had difficulties to find a buyer for him because he had blue eyes and "a complexion so fair as to pass for white." *Mercury*, February 15, 1856.

[360] See introductory chapter. See also Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 59. Also here there were exceptions: 25-year-old Tennant, who ran away in South Carolina in 1822, was African but "from his manner of speaking would not be supposed to be an African: he can read and write, and may forge a pass for himself and his wife," as he had done before. His wife Sussey was 20 years of age and of a "yellow complexion." Informants claimed that "they have made for Charleston or southerly." *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, December 23, 1822.

[361] James C. Scott, *Dominance and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2.

people displayed: "If we hated master ever so much, we did not dare to show it, but we must always look pleased when he saw us, and we were afraid to speak what we thought, because some would tell master."[362]

Acting became a step more challenging when refugees chose not to pass as free but as self-hired slaves. This was, as will be explained in detail in chapter four, often the best option in Charleston. Although the daily lives of enslaved and free black people bore many resemblances, passing as free and passing as a self-hired bondsperson were different experiences. In Baltimore, where African Americans were *prima facie* considered free, settling down, starting a family, and building a life worked relatively well. Passing as slaves required much more organizational effort. When renting a room or an apartment, the owner could ask for a written permit; when questioned about one's master, a convincible story had to be constructed—and remembered; and when having children, a way had to be been found to keep them away from enslavement. Especially the written documents required for slaves had to be constantly renewed and surely some freedom seekers passing themselves off as hired slaves dared not to remain in their living and working spaces for very long. In short, passing for a slave might have required an even more sophisticated planning and support network than passing for free, at least in the long run.

Besides clothing and acting, possessing a pass or freedom papers was instrumental. A perusal of 200 runaway slave advertisements in North Carolina newspapers between 1820 and 1829 showed that 67 people were suspected to be "lurking" with relatives and 48 to be passing as free persons.[363] In line with this research, historians have stated that over the course of the antebellum period, southern states enacted a variety of laws to calm the white population who was concerned about the spread of revolutionary ideas from the Caribbean and the growing free black population. Free blacks were compelled to carry freedom papers and to register their status, a measure that was designed to prevent slaves the possibility of passing as free. Legally, any white man could at any time and place check the identity of any non-white persons he encountered.[364] If the latter could not identify themselves, they would be beaten up, or they could be brought to jail where further investigation about their persona took place.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, African Americans had already become severely restricted in their movement. In the summer of 1800, Gabriel Prosser, an enslaved blacksmith, had planned to stage a slave rebellion in Richmond. The plan was leaked and Prosser and 25 others were hanged. One alleged co-conspirators was witnessed to have complained that he could not visit his wife since it was very difficult for a black man to travel, because "the white people had turned so comical, a man can't go out of his house now but he is taken up to be hanged."[365] After the failed rebellion, the situation for black people predictably worsened. Actually, tightening of laws frequently occurred in times when whites felt especially threatened by black people. The Haitian Revolution was seen as a most dramatic incident, and southerners evoked its horrors over decades to come to strengthen their demands for more

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[362] Anonymous [Matthews], *Recollections of Slavery*, October 11, 1838.

[363] North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements, UNCG Digital Collections, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, URL: http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/, accessed March 15, 2016.

[364] Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 93-94; and Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 153.

[365] H. W. Flournoy (ed.), *House of Delegates, Senate & Virginia State Papers, Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1799, to December 31, 1807, Preserved in the Capitol, at Richmond.* Vol. IX (Richmond, 1890), October 1800, 162, LVA.

repression against free and enslaved African Americans. [366] Documentation was, hence, increasingly important.

There were several ways to obtain a piece of paper that would allow one to travel freely or to pass as a free person. Helping refugees to navigate spaces of freedom, passes were usually written by a slaveholder to grant enslaved persons the right to visit somebody, run an errand, hire themselves out, or live on their own. They could be restricted to a few hours, days, months, or even a year. An example of a slave pass from Charleston reads: "My Boy Mack has my permission to sleep in a house in Brown [?] Alley, hired by his Mother. This ticket is good for two months from this date. Sarah H. Savage. Sep^{ber} 19th, 1843." [367] (See figure 11.) Watchmen were instructed to arrest black people who were on the streets without passes but even without possessing one, it was possible to get away. George Teamoh was

Figure 10: George Teamoh [368]

in Norfolk stopped by a constable, as he accounted, who demanded to see his pass. When Teamoh told him that he had lost it, the watchman said "you must go to jail." In a maneuver to keep himself from being arrested, Teamoh pretended to be "afflicted with small-pox" and the constable shied away from touching him. [369]
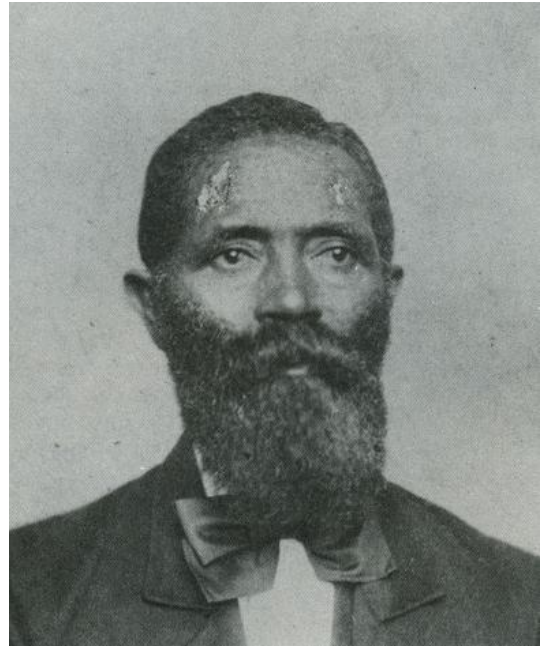
Freedom papers were documents African Americans could obtain if they were born free, manumitted, or otherwise released from slavery in conformity with the law. Usually, they had to register their status with the municipal or county authorities and were handed out a copy of said register. This document included the name, (approximate) date and place of birth, and a physical description. It was affixed with the seal of the respective court and included the signature of the clerk or a high-ranking person in charge. (See figure 12.) From the historical sources it is not always that clear whether the reference is to passes or free papers. When Pompey Jackson absconded from his enslaver in 1840, the public was informed that Jackson "can read and likely may get forged papers to travel with." [370] To travel short distances, he only needed the written permission of his owner, to permanently pass as free, official freedom papers

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[366] For a history of the Haitian Revolution, see David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution," *William & Mary Quarterly* 63:4 (2006): 643-674; and the classic, C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg; and New York: The Dial Press, 1938).

[367] Sarah Savage, Slave Pass, 1843, *Lowcountry Digital Library*, URL: http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:5531, accessed December 5, 2018.

[368] George Teamoh, n.d. (after 1865), LOC, URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Teamoh#/media/File:George_Teamoh_Libary_of_Congress.jpg, accessed August 28, 2019.

[369] Teamoh, *God Made Man*, 74. Teamoh later in life escaped slavery and became an author and community leader.

[370] *Daily National Intelligencer*, 1832.

were helpful, yet from this short ad it remains unclear which of the two Jackson acquired. The former were relatively easy to forge while the latter required some more sophisticated efforts.
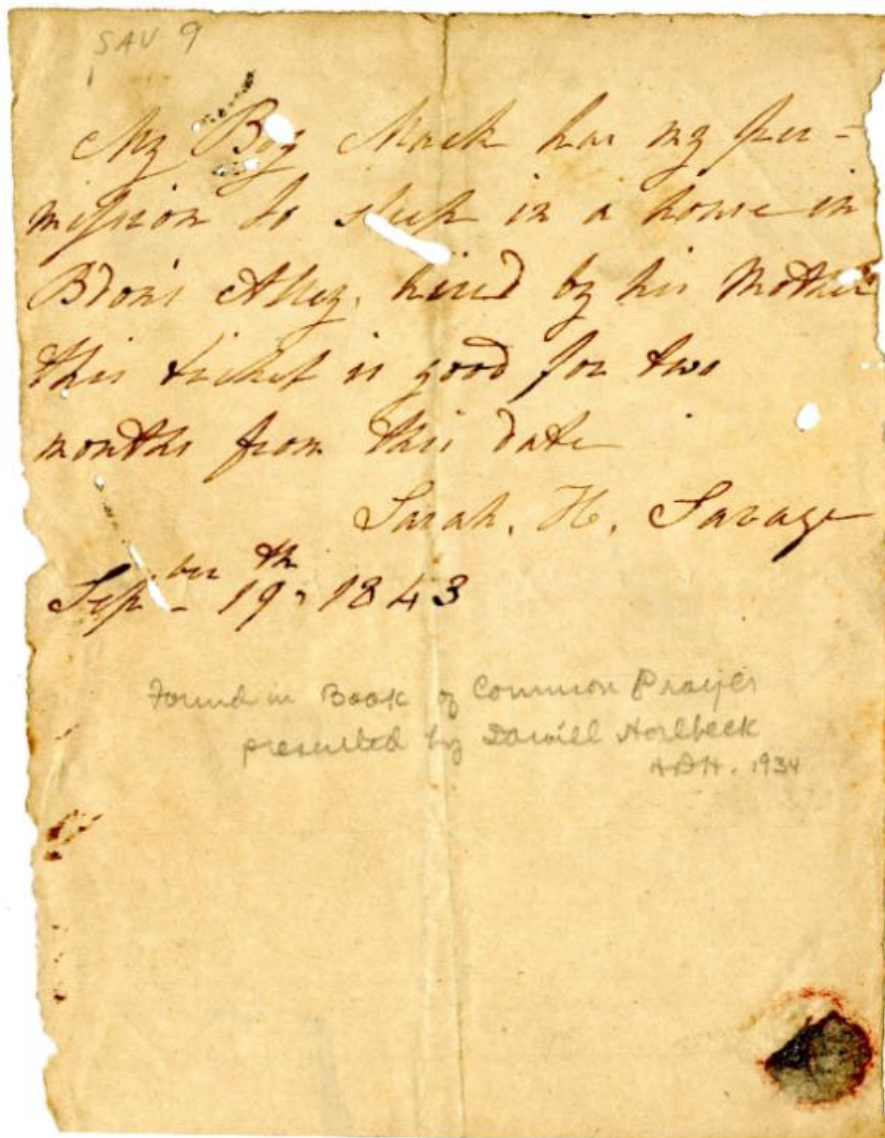

Figure 11: Slave Pass, Charleston, 1843

Attitudes of slaveholders towards people involved in the disappearing of slaves grew more hostile over time. A furious slaveholder set the enormous bounty of $1,000 "for the apprehension and conviction of him who gave my servant boy GEORGE Free Papers, and induced him to quit my service." Making use of his own network, George's owner inquired about "gentlemen" who were on the same train from Columbia, South Carolina, to Aiken, in which George had traveled with a white man who gave his name as John Tyne. George, now 18 years old, "had been waiting on the table in Clark's Hotel the last ten years" and was seen in Charleston only a few days after he left Columbia. He was suspected to go to New York or Boston but "a boy answering his description has been seen in Mobile."[371]

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[371] The slaveholder was so committed to get George back that he also placed the ad in the New York *Journal of Commerce*, the *Augusta Chronicle*, the Mobile *Mercantile Advertiser*, and the Boston *Commercial Gazette*. *Charleston Mercury*, June 23, 1835.
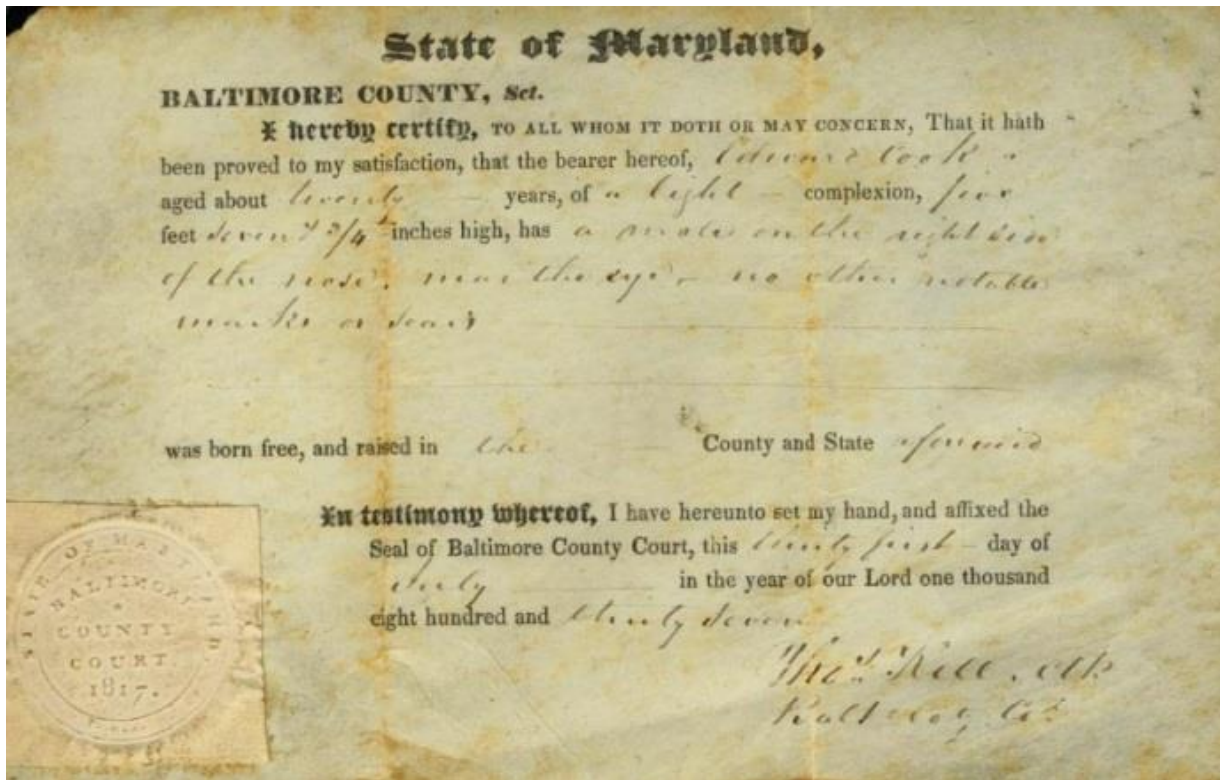
Figure 12: Freedom Papers, Maryland, 1837[372]

Evidence is plentiful that men and women of all legal statuses and skin colors falsified passes for enslaved Americans to run away. Moreover, many black city dwellers could read and write, and reports have survived of urban slaves reading the newspaper.[373] Essentially, everybody who was able to write could use their skills to forge a pass, yet it was important to be able to imitate the writ, style, and language of a slaveholder. Frederick Douglass had always felt motivated to become literate so that he could one day write his own pass. He "continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas."[374] John Thompson, also an author of a slave narrative, mentioned that he himself was once suspected of having written passes for three fellow slaves who escaped because he "could write a tolerable hand."[375] Louis Hughes lived on a plantation where none of the slaves ever got a pass from their master "but the slaves did visit in the neighborhood, notwithstanding, and would sometimes slip into town at night." A fellow bondsman, Tom, who was planning his escape, "had in this way seen the pass of a neighboring slave to hire out; and it was from this he learned the form from which he wrote his, and which opened his way to freedom."[376]

Official freedom papers were forged less often, yet it was nevertheless possible. Joe Sutherland, an enslaved coachman, accompanied his master to the county court house where his son worked as a clerk. Sutherland secretly became literate and wrote passes for other

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[372] Freedom Papers of Edward Cook, Baltimore County Court, Maryland, 1837, URL: http://yeswerise.blogspot.com/2014/12/freedom-for-everyone.html, accessed December 6, 2018.
[373] Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 119; and Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 150-151.
[374] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 44.
[375] John Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave: Containing His History of 25 Years in Bondage, and His Providential Escape* (Worcester: C. Hamilton, 1856), 78.
[376] Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 104-105.

bondspeople. By "going around the court everyday Joe forged the country seal on these passes," as his fellow William Johnson remembered.[377] An enslaved man named Ben, who ran away from D.C. in 1825, could "write a pretty good hand, and no doubt has copied the papers of some free man," the newspaper ad read. His master even had "reason to believe he stole the Stafford County seal and attached the impression of it to his papers."[378] This way, Ben could furnish counterfeit papers with official seals. In a curious case, slave refugee Dennis, who lived disguised as a free man with the name William Mayo, was tried for helping three slaves abscond. The freedom papers under which he passed for free, were apparently so convincing that the Court of Fredericksburg applied the sentence for free persons and sentenced Mayo to ten years in the penitentiary.[379] When freedom papers were forged, it was often difficult for those involved to judge their authenticity.

More often, people passed the originals on to others who used them to get out of bondage. Newspapers frequently published advertisements by free black residents claiming to have lost their freedom papers.[380] Many must have given them to slaves. A bondsman named Tom was believed to use the papers of a dead man, James Lucas, to pass himself as the deceased.[381] Slaveholder Henry Burns advertised for his escaped slave George in 1852 in New Orleans after having received a hint that George might have arrived "9 miles below the city, on Wednesday morning last, from steamship Ben Franklin." Burns claimed that George was in possession of "what purported to be free papers, dated some 17 years since, made in another State, and corresponding nearly with his appearance."[382] A classification of illegal migration into four common forms identifies entry without authorization (in this case exit from slavery without authorization), entry on basis of fraud (for instance through false papers), visa overstaying, and violation of the conditions of a stay (the equivalent of an expired slave pass and not returning after a set period of time). All four criteria were employed by runaway slaves, rendering them undocumented as a consequence.[383]

Sometimes, freedom seekers also stole the papers of other African Americans. William Jackson, a free black man, was brought to court in Charleston in 1858 for "aiding & abetting negro Stealing." Jackson claimed that he had lost his freedom papers in November of the previous year and had learned from the press that a slave called John had used papers in his name to escape and was captured in Richmond. Although there is no way to know with certainty whether Jackson spoke the truth, the evidence in the court case points to his innocence.

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[377] William I. Johnson, Jr., (b. 1840), Richmond, Va., Interviewer Milton L. Randolph (May 28, 1937), Virginia State Library, in *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, ed. Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 166-167, originally published 1976.

[378] *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1825. Thanks to Damian Pargas for sharing this source with me.

[379] The representatives of the legal owner then came forward to claim Mayo as their property and demanded his release from prison. The penalty for slaves for aiding runaways was whipping, not imprisonment. To the Virginia General Assembly, 1848, Petition by Ely Ball and Henry Satterwhite, Petition 11684607, Race and Slavery Petitions Project, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

[380] For example, "Lost – On Friday last, my FREE PAPERS, (they were in a tin box,) somewhere near the old Fair Grounds. […] Jas. Brown, A free man of color." *Richmond Dispatch*, January 16, 1861.

[381] Unknown newspaper, February 1840.

[382] *Daily Picayune*, August 27, 1852.

[383] Demetrios G. Papademetriou, "The Global Struggle with Illegal Migration: No End in Sight," *Migration Information Source* (September 1, 2005), URL: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/global-struggle-illegal-migration-no-end-in-sight, accessed February 2, 2019.

Eventually, John's owner testified against Jackson and he was found guilty.[384] In 1796, Maryland introduced a law which proposed a fine of $300 for free African Americans convicted of handing freedom papers to slaves. In 1818, free people who enticed a slave to run away or assisted or harbored them on the run, faced up to six years in prison and could be convicted to pay a financial recompense to the respective owner. In 1849, this law was sharpened stipulating at least six and a maximum of 15 years for the same offense.[385] Other southern states passed similar ordinances.

In many cases, it was entirely unclear whether a black person was born free or in slavery. Rivan Mayo, for one, was in 1855 registered as a "free man of color" in Chesterfield County, Virginia. This was confirmed by the clerk of the court. His mother appeared to be freeborn, as the correspondence between a slaveholder and his agent reveals. Yet, Mayo was claimed as a slave in Kentucky.[386] Mayo could have been freeborn indeed, or he was a slave refugee from another state. Given that he did not enter the Negro Register before he was 23 years old, both scenarios are plausible. With the growing free black population, white Americans were concerned about how to keep them supervised beyond the master-slave relationship. They designed guardianship laws, like in South Carolina, that foresaw that black people needed white sponsors to vouch for their character. Michael Johnson and James Roark investigated these laws for Charleston stating that they were legally binding for all free black men above 15 years of age. In theory, the guardianship was extensive. It stipulated the written attest to the "good character and correct habits" as well as a registration of the guardianship with the city clerk. No white men would have ever accepted this official relation with somebody they did not know.[387]

Yet, what sounded like an insuperable burden with the attempt to freeze race relations and white authority to the standards of slavery was in practice a very short-lived letter. Enforced in 1822, the law grew to be more and more neglected until many free African Americans were not even aware of its existence anymore.[388] After all, personal acquaintance with whites was a much more secure back-up to proof one's freedom than a piece of paper. This was also true for slave refugees. The longer they remained in one place and the better they were known, the smaller the chances that somebody suspected them to be slaves. The balancing act was to get to that point.

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[384] According to his testimony, after losing his papers, Jackson contacted Abram Jones, another free black man, and "begged him to enquire about them." When Jackson saw the newspaper article about John, he went to speak to his white employer Simon Lucas and together they went to Charleston to get legal counsel at the firm Simons & Simons. He "has ever held himself in readiness to answer any enquiries." Although Lucas "certifies his good character," Jackson was found guilty in June 1858. Francis Weston, the owner of the escaped slave, "being duly sworn says that he has reason to believe that William Jackson, a free person of color has been enticing, and harboring" John. The State v. Wm Jackson F.P.C. Offence Aiding & Abetting Negro Stealing, Enticing a Slave to Run Away, Simons & Simons, SCHS.
[385] Laws of Maryland, 1796, ch. 67, XVIII, in Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, 1796, Vol. 105, 253; Laws of Maryland, 1818, ch. 157, 615; and Session Laws, 1849, ch. 296, 373-374.
[386] Extract from the Negro Register, Chesterfield County Court, January 8, 1855, Gray Papers; and Richard West Flournoy to William Gray, October 10, 1855, Gray Papers, VHS.
[387] Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 43, 45. When they spoke of character, they actually meant reputation. Gross, "Like Master, Like Man," 264.
[388] Johnson and Roark, *Black* Masters, 45.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a profile of urban slave refugees. Their escapes took place at a time when American slavery was becoming tighter and more repressive. Mobility and its extensions (geographical knowledge, social networks, and beneficial environments) were the most crucial features for successful flight. In this context, this chapter has modified Ira Berlin's concept of the slave elite to include—besides skilled bondsmen and those in higher-ranking occupations—enslaved people who enjoyed a higher mobility than the majority of slaves.

These considerations especially take women into account who, either through unskilled yet mobile tasks or thanks to the slave hiring system, were likewise able to expand their knowledge and personal webs of acquaintances. Fanny from the opening paragraph, for instance, was raised in North Carolina, had lived in Florida for some time, and escaped from South Carolina. Her geographical knowledge and life experience extended over at least three southern states. Despite the fact that the vast majority of southern urban refugees were men, women played a much more significant part in this type of slave flight compared to those who escaped out of the slaveholding South. They were better equipped to navigate these internal spaces of freedom.

Although the countermeasures taken by slaveholders must not be underestimated, they were not effective enough to prevent slave flight entirely. Without downplaying the risks and dangers involved in slave flight, it has become apparent that the geography of freedom in the South was growing. The people who deliberately or unconsciously contributed to this growth were of all sexes, racial backgrounds, and legal statuses. A helper could be a fellow slave or a white acquaintance who forged a pass, or a neglectful slaveowner who hired his light-skinned bondspeople out on steamboats. In the urban space, it was likewise the combination of various factors that turned them into cities of refuge. Chapter three will make this the focus of analysis.